



Behind the Palace Walls (Royal Secrets)

By Lynn Raye Harris

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Little does Paige know she's been rescued by Alexei Voronov—a Russian prince *and* her boss's deadliest rival. Now he has Paige unexpectedly in his sights, Alexei is prepared to play emotional Russian roulette to keep her close and discover her true motives. But in his splendid gilded palace his game of chance spins out of control and passion takes over....

It's only when she's back home that Paige realizes she's pregnant with the prince's baby....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

USA Today bestselling author Lynn Raye Harris burst onto the scene when she won a writing contest held by Harlequin. The prize was an editor for a year -- but only six months later, Lynn sold her first novel. A former finalist for the Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart Award, Lynn lives in Alabama with her handsome husband and two crazy cats. Her stories have been called "exceptional and emotional," "intense," and "sizzling."

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The scream that split the night arrowed down Alexei Voronov's spine like a river of ice water. His senses throttled into high alert. A light snow fell steadily, dusting the cobblestones of Red Square. To the right, the Kremlin wall bordered the square. At the far end, the Spassky Tower, with its giant clock like Big Ben in London, stood out like a beacon, as did the colorful onion domes of St. Basil's nearby.

But the hour was late, and there was no movement in the square.

Until the scream echoed again.

Alexei swore. He'd been standing in the shadows of the Russian museum, waiting for his contact to arrive, but he couldn't ignore the cry. Though it was probably a fight in one of the nearby clubs, a woman screaming bloody murder while her man fought for her honor, he had to act. It was going to cost him valuable information since his contact wouldn't wait around once he discovered Alexei wasn't there.

Then again, he'd been waiting for the last half hour and the man was already fifteen minutes late. In truth, Alexei had begun to wonder if the other man had changed his mind.

It was possible.

If Alexei's adversary had got wind of his intentions, he might have paid the informant more. Though Alexei had been about to pay him a fortune. Still, he couldn't stand around and wait while a woman needed help.

Just his damned luck to be cursed with a nobility gene, even at the expense of his own best interests. He was ruthless in everything he did—except when someone was in physical danger.

Across the square from the Kremlin, the GUM department store shone brightly. Alexei started in that direction but stopped when he heard a noise. Footsteps? The echo in the empty square made it difficult to pinpoint their direction.

Before he could figure it out, a woman bolted out of the darkness. He had no time to step out of her path. She plowed into him, nearly knocking them both to the pavement.

Alexei caught her close, steadied her as he took a step backward to brace himself. It was like trying to hold a jaguar. She made no noise, but she shoved against him with all her strength, her elbow darting up toward his face. Instinctively he deflected the blow, then spun her until her back was to him, clamping a hand tightly over her mouth.

He could feel the scream gathering in her throat as he dragged her hard against him. If he let go, she'd shatter

his eardrums.

"If you scream again," he said very coolly in her ear, "whoever is chasing you will find you. And I won't get in the middle of your lovers' quarrel."

Why couldn't he, for once, stay out of it? It was later than the appointed time, but his informant could still arrive. A major business deal was at stake, not to mention years of working toward a single goal that was nearly within his grasp. Missing a meeting for the sake of what was most likely a drunken spat was not part of the plan. He could turn around now and be back to the museum in a few strides.

The woman's voice was muffled as she tried to shake her head. It occurred to him she might be a tourist. There were many tourists in Moscow these days, unlike in the old days when he was growing up. He repeated it in English, just in case.

He felt the sharp intake of her breath, knew he'd guessed right. He also spoke German, French and Polish, but English had seemed the most expedient choice since nearly everyone spoke it as a second language.

"I won't hurt you," he said. "But if you scream, I will let him have you. Understand?"

She gave a quick nod as he turned her in his arms again. Her smoky eyes shimmered in the reflected light of the store. Her jacket hood had fallen back, revealing dark hair caught in a thick ponytail. Her features were fine, delicate, though the elbow she'd aimed at his head had been anything but weak. She was strong, this woman. Strong and delicate at once.

Alexei pulled his hand away from her mouth. Her expression was wary but she didn't scream.

"Please help me," she blurted, wrapping her arms around herself to ward off the late April chill. "Don't let them take me."

American.

He shouldn't be surprised, and yet something about her was wholly unexpected. Such as what an American woman who spoke no Russian was doing alone in Red Square at nearly one in the morning.

Don't get involved, Alexei.

He shoved the voice aside and concentrated on her. "Don't let who take you? The authorities? If you've done something illegal, I can't help you."

"No," she said, casting her gaze behind her before turning to him again. "It's nothing like that. I'm looking for my sister and—"

Angry shouts rang through the square. She didn't wait for his answer; she simply bolted into the night as if shot from a cannon. Alexei caught her in three strides, clamping a hand over her arm and spinning her around.

"This way," he said, hauling her toward the department store.

"It's too bright. They'll see us."

"Precisely."

Boots clomped over the cobbles, coming toward them. They had only seconds before the men made it down the hill. The slick snow was hindering them, but not much. Alexei shoved the girl back against one of the huge plate windows. She made a sound of protest.

"Put your legs around me."

Her eyebrows shot toward her hairline. "Let me go! You aren't trying to help at all—"

"Your choice, *maya krasavitsa*," he said, stepping away.

"Good luck."

"No, wait," she cried out as he started down the sidewalk. When he stopped, she let out a harsh breath.

"Okay, I'll do it your way."

Alexei gave her a smile he knew was anything but friendly. "*Speciba*. We will pretend to be lovers, yes? Put your legs around me," he said as he crowded her against the window and pulled her hair free of its confinement. She wrapped her arms around his neck, obeying without argument this time. Alexei cupped her thighs, pushed into the cradle of her hips. His coat was long and hid their bodies from view. If they did this right, anyone seeing them would think they were having sex.

The American bit back a soft moan as he pushed harder against her most sensitive spot. The sound crashed through his veins like a shot of vodka. No matter how he willed it otherwise, his body was reacting.

Chert poberi.

She was small, soft and she smelled like summer in the Urals—a hint of flowers, sunshine and cool water. Anger flashed through him. Her scent made him remember, made him feel. He didn't like feeling. He had no room for feeling.

Feeling made you weak, had the power to break you.

"Kiss me," he growled as the footsteps pounded closer. "And make it believable."

Paige blinked up at the dark stranger holding her so intimately. My God, how had she found herself in this mess? She should have gone straight to Chad the instant Emma came up missing. But she'd thought her sister had simply forgotten the time. And Paige wasn't about to disrupt her boss's evening when he'd been kind enough to allow her to bring Emma along on this trip in the first place.

Chad Russell was one of Dallas's most eligible bachelors. He was cool, handsome and wealthy. And she was his secretary. Or at least she was for this trip, since his executive secretary wasn't allowed to fly longer than three hours at a time per her doctor's orders. Mavis had a clotting disorder that could be fatal if she spent a lot of time on planes, so Paige had gotten this assignment when Chad had to choose a secretary for the trip.

She'd been thrilled, and determined to do the best job possible since he'd chosen her over some of the other secretaries with more experience. No, Chad had enough to worry about without also taking on the problem of his junior secretary's younger sister. He was here to close a major deal, not to track down an irresponsible twenty-one-year-old.

And Paige was here to prove she could handle more responsibility and that she was an asset to Russell Tech.

Lately she'd even thought Chad might be interested in her as more than just an employee. She'd tried not to

read anything into his actions, but he'd taken her to lunch twice—and he'd asked about her personal life, about her sister, about many things other than work. Her heart had pounded the whole time. Chad was everything she'd ever thought attractive in a man. She'd had a small crush on him since the first moment he'd walked into the office and smiled at her nearly two years ago.

Until now she'd never thought it was anything more than futile.

Tonight, she'd let her feelings get in the way of her common sense. She should have followed her instincts and asked for Chad's help. But she was so accustomed to solving her own problems that she'd dismissed her uneasiness and was determined to find Emma on her own. And now she was kicking herself for it.

"There is no time to waste," the stranger growled.

His voice was deep, rich, the rolling of the vowels across his tongue a thing of beauty. His accent wasn't heavy, but it was distinctly Russian.

Paige's heart flipped in her chest as he squeezed her tighter. She had to find Emma. But first she had to survive the next few minutes. And to do that, she feared she had to do as he asked. What other choice was there? The men she'd run from outnumbered them. If they caught her, she might not escape a second time.

Not that she really knew what they wanted. She'd wandered too far from the hotel, gotten lost and stumbled into a group of men who'd frightened her. They'd been drinking, and they'd not been too willing to help. Or not without a price. She shuddered as she thought of the blond giant with the meaty hands who'd told her in thick Russian that he'd help her if she would kiss him.

Then he'd laughed, and the others had joined in. The sound was ugly and made the hair on her arms prickle. But it wasn't until he'd grabbed her that she'd screamed. She'd bought herself a little time with the well-aimed kick to his groin. While the others scrambled to help him, she'd run.

Why she now believed *this* man was truly trying to help ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Susan Spiegel:

Do you have favorite book? If you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to know everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim or maybe goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. These are reading whatever they acquire because their hobby is definitely reading a book. Why not the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, individual feel need book once they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will want this Behind the Palace Walls (Royal Secrets).

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Suzanne Mitchell:

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