



## The Prince She Never Forgot (Harlequin Romance (Larger Print))

By Scarlet Wilson



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A kiss at midnight...

Ten years ago Ruby Wetherspoon shared a stolen New Year's kiss with enigmatic stranger Alex. A kiss she has never forgotten...

Now a renowned language therapist, Ruby is stunned when her Alex—Crown Prince Alexander of Euronion to the rest of the world!—shows up to ask for her help.

Ruby has never been far from Alex's thoughts, but duty to his country has kept him away. Now he has a chance to make both their dreams come true...



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## **The Prince She Never Forgot (Harlequin Romance (Larger Print)) By Scarlet Wilson Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Scarlet Wilson wrote her first story aged eight and has never stopped. She's worked in the health service for 20 years, trained as a nurse and a health visitor. Scarlet now works in public health and lives on the West Coast of Scotland with her fiancé and their two sons. Writing medical romances and contemporary romances is a dream come true for her.

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'Ruby?' The department receptionist shouted at her again.

Too many things were circulating in her brain. She needed to refer one child to someone else, another to an oral surgeon, and speak to the dietician about another.

She turned round and was nearly knocked over by a giant flower display. Her stomach tied itself up in little knots.

Rena smiled as she tried to hold up the giant display. 'You've got flowers again. Even more gorgeous than the last time. And, oh, *so* expensive.' She looked thoughtful for a moment. 'It's been a little while since the last bunch. Do you realise that, on and off, it's been six years you've been getting these mysterious flowers? Right from when you started here. Surely you must have guessed by now who they're from?'

Ruby shook her head. 'I have no idea. The cards never say anything specific.' She pulled out the latest one. 'See? *"Thinking of you and wishing you well"*'

Rena frowned at the card in her hands. 'Have you tried phoning the florist to find out who sent them?' She was a regular amateur detective and could usually find a missing set of case notes in less than five minutes.

'Of course I have. But these places are used to things like this. They don't give anything away.'

'Well, whoever it is, money certainly isn't an object. These must have cost a fortune.' Rena reached up and touched one of the coloured petals. 'They smell gorgeous.' She frowned. 'Who have you seen lately that could have sent these?' She paused and bit her lip. 'Maybe it's Paul? Maybe he's trying for a reunion?'

Ruby shook her head. 'Paul would never send flowers like these.' Then she smiled. 'Paul would never send flowers full-stop. Which is why we're not together any more. That, and a whole lot of other things.'

Paul could never live up to the memory of Alex. Sometimes it felt like a figment of her imagination. Something so special that only she could remember. The only person she ever spoke to about it was Polly.

She'd tried to forget about him—she really had. She'd even lived with a lovely guy called Luke for a couple of years. But things just hadn't worked out between them, and in her heart she knew why. No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't forget about her mysterious prince.

Rena smiled and touched Ruby's arm. 'Well, you've obviously got a devoted, secret admirer. It's romantic. It's mysterious. I could probably work it into a book somewhere.'

Ruby laughed. 'Rena, you write about murder and mayhem. I'm not sure I want to end up in one of your books!'

She cast her eyes over the flowers again. Stunning. Really stunning. Beautiful tropical colours. Red, pinks, yellows and oranges. Like a burst of sunshine on a rainy day.

She swallowed. The flowers had stopped for a few years. Right around the time when it had been all over the news that Prince Alex had married Princess Sophia of Leruna. A perfect fairytale princess. Dainty and blonde—nothing like Ruby. A baby had followed quickly afterwards. Followed by her tragic death due to breast cancer.

All that crammed into the space of two years. And not a single bunch of flowers over that time.

The coincidence played on her mind. The deliveries had started again around eighteen months ago. Could the flowers have been from Alex all along?

Something coiled deep inside her.

She walked over to the window and stared outside at the pouring rain of London. Another wasted five minutes thinking about her prince.

*Her prince.* What a joke. She'd never used those words out loud and never would. It was bad enough that they circulated around her brain.

Alex might have had tragedy, but he'd also had a life. Promotion for Ruby had come at a price. She'd been working so hard these last few years. Trying to change the lives of children who had been born with speech difficulties. It had left no time for her, no time for relationships, and no time to think about having a family.

The responsibilities of being in charge of a department in one of the best hospitals in London were relentless.

Sometimes she felt like a hamster, running in a wheel that she could never get off.

A porter brushed past, sending the scent of the beautiful flowers to meet her. It brought her back to reality quickly.

There was no point dreaming. She was nobody's princess.

And it was time to get back to work.

She was dashing around like a mad woman. Everyone in this hospital was the same. It had taken five different attempts for him to finally get some directions.

He stopped for a second to breathe. Ten years. Ten years since that night in Paris.

How different his life might have been. If his father hadn't been taken ill he would have met Ruby a few hours later in Paris and taken her sightseeing. That thought still made his stomach tighten.

She looked almost the same. Her dark curls were a little shorter. Her figure was just as curvy. But the expression on her face was more serious. Tired, even. And there were little lines around her eyes.

He didn't even want to look in the mirror lately. Although only ten years had passed since they'd last seen each other he was sure he'd aged about twenty.

The flowers he'd sent were sitting on the desk behind her. She wasn't even looking at them. Everyone else was oohing and aahing over them. But Ruby was too busy. Ruby was focused.

He watched her hurry around; she had a pile of cards in her hands.

'Seventeen new referrals,' she said to a nearby colleague, 'and Caroline is stuck in a traffic jam in the middle of London. How on earth are we going to get all these children assessed?'

He sucked in a breath. He'd never doubted for a second that Ruby would be dedicated to her work. But would it stand in the way of what he wanted her to do?

She tucked a curl behind her ear. It made his fingers tingle. *He'd* done that once.

'Can I help you?' someone asked him.

He shook his head. It was now or never.

He stepped forward. 'One of those referral cards will be from me.'

Ruby spun around to face him. The professional mask fell as quickly as the cards from her hand. His accent was unmistakable; she couldn't fail to recognise it.

'Alex,' she said. Nothing else. Her eyes locked on to his.

'Ruby.'

She tilted her head to the side, as if she were contemplating a million different questions, before sucking in a deep breath and giving a visible little shake of her head.

Ten years. Ten years since he'd run his fingers through those soft dark curls and looked into those chocolate-brown eyes. Ten years since he'd felt the silky softness of her skin, tasted the sweetness of her lips.

Every sensation, every touch, every taste flashed in front of him in an instant.

But Ruby wasn't caught in the same spell that he was.

She bent down to retrieve the cards and he knelt to help her. It was inevitable that their hands touched as they reached out towards the same card.

She pulled her hand away as if she'd been stung. 'Why, Alex? Why are you here?'

It was as if someone had reached into his chest and twisted his heart. There it was. In a few simple words a whole multitude of hurt. No one else would hear it. No one else would understand. But Ruby's deep brown eyes were fixed on his and he could see everything there. She looked wounded. Ten years on and her hurt was still easily visible.

But what did she see when she looked at him? He wasn't Alex the twenty-four-year-old any more—the bachelor Crown Prince with the world at his feet. He was a father. He was a widower. He was Prince Regent. The Prince continually in waiting. And he was desperate.

In his head this had all been so easy. *Find someone you would trust with your daughter. Find Annabelle the expert help she needs.*

It had even seemed sensible to the palace advisors. If they'd questioned his choice of therapist at first, once they'd researched Ruby's qualifications and seen her recent publications all queries had vanished.

But now he was here in the flesh it was so much harder. Now he could see her. Now he could hear her. Now he could smell her. Her light floral scent was drifting around him.

He'd had no idea of the effect seeing Ruby again would have on him. Ten years... Ten years lost. Ten years of what might have been.

'Alex?'

The word jolted him and he smiled. No one called him Alex any more. No one had ever really called him just Alex.

He straightened up and handed her the final cards.

'I'm here because I need your help, Ruby.'

Any minute now a bunch of unicorns would come cantering along the hospital corridor, with exploding rainbows all around them.

She'd dreamt about Alex before. But never like this. Never in her workplace. All those dreams had been set back in Paris. Or in the Euronian palace that she'd looked at online.

But Alex standing in front of her at work, asking for her help... ? She was obviously losing her mind.

He reached out and touched her bare arm. Short sleeves were essential in a hospital environment, to stop the spread of infection. This time she didn't pull away. This time she let the feel of the pads of his fingers spread warmth through her chilled arm.

He was really here.

This wasn't a strange hallucination due to overwork or lack of chocolate.

Ten years she'd waited to talk to this man again. Ten years waiting to ask him what the hell had happened back in Paris and why he'd never contacted her.

Alex—her Alex. *Her prince* was finally standing right in front of her.

He was every bit as handsome as she remembered. Better, even.

Tanned skin, dark hair and bright blue eyes. She'd sometimes wondered if she'd imagined how blue they

were. But she hadn't. If anything she'd underestimated their effects. But, then again, she'd never seen Alex in daylight.

She wasn't imagining any of this. All six foot four of him was standing right in front of her.

Her eyes lowered to where his hand was touching her. Tiny electric pulses were shooting up her arm. She didn't know whether to cry or be sick.

Every part of her imagination had just turned into reality.

In a way, it was a relief. She *had* met Alex. He *did* remember her. So why was that making her so darn angry right now?

He pulled his hand back from her arm and she lifted her head, pulling her shoulders back. *He'd taken his hand away*. And it had left her feeling bereft. Now she was feeling angry with herself. She didn't have a sensible thought in her head right now.

She swallowed and looked him in the eye. 'How can I help you, Alex?' The words were automatic. It was all she could manage right now.

He looked around. 'Is there somewhere we can talk?'

She nodded and gestured with her arm for him to walk down the corridor, stopped at a door, pulled a key from her pocket and unlocked the door.

Her office. It even had her name on the door: 'Ruby Wetherspoon, Head of Speech and Language'. She'd done well. Most days she was proud. Today she had no idea how she felt.

The office was small, but neat and tidy. She pointed to a chair and invited him to sit. It was almost a relief to sit at the other side of the desk and have the heavy wooden structure between them.

'How exactly do you think I can be of assistance to you, Alex?'

Her words were formal, her professional façade slipping back into place. The juggling of the cards on the table-top was the only sign of her nerves. She hoped he wouldn't notice.

'It's not me. It's my daughter Annabelle. She's three years old now and she isn't speaking.'

Ruby nodded automatically. His daughter. Of course. Why else would he come to her?

She had this sort of conversation every day. This one wouldn't be much different.

'Three years old is still an acceptable age for speech development. All children develop at a different rate. Some children have a delay in their speech and language development. Have you had her hearing checked?'

He sighed. She was going back to basics—which was the correct thing for a health professional. But she could tell from his expression he'd heard it all before.

'I've had ten different professional opinions on Annabelle. The latest of which is selective mutism. Her

hearing is fine. Her comprehension is fine. She doesn't seem to *want* to speak.'

She could feel herself bristle. Ten assessments on a child? Talk about overkill. Why not just let her develop at her own pace? She tried to be pragmatic.

'How does she communicate with those around her?'

'She signs.'

Ruby was surprised. 'Proper signing?'

He nodded. 'We have a member of staff who's deaf. She's been able to sign since she was young.'

It wasn't particularly unusual in children who were deaf, or in children who had deaf siblings. But it *was* unusual in a child who could apparently hear and speak.

She lifted her hands. 'Then maybe she thinks that's normal?'

He shook his head.

It was time to ask some more questions. 'Has Annabelle ever spoken? Ever said a few words?'

'Only on a few select occasions.'

Strange... Ruby couldn't help but be a little curious. Selective mutism was certainly unusual but she'd dealt with a few cases before. She'd even published some professional papers on it.

Ruby lowered her voice. 'Does she speak to you, Alex?'

The question was straight to the heart of the matter. It was a natural question for any health professional, but she saw him recoil. She'd seen this before. He felt this was his fault. She'd dealt with lots of parents who felt guilty about whatever issue their child had. Most of the time it was just hard luck. Genetics. A developmental delay. A head injury or similar accident.

She asked the most practical question. 'Does Annabelle have anything significant in her medical history?'

'No. Nothing.'

They sat in silence for a few seconds. She couldn't take it. She couldn't take it a second longer. Her professional façade was slipping. After all this time—just to turn up like this and expect her to help him—just because he asked? Did she have *mug* stamped across her forehead?

She couldn't even acknowledge the flutters in her stomach. She couldn't even explain her feeling when she'd heard his voice and turned to see him again after all this time. It had been like a sucker punch.

It was time to stop being so polite.

Ruby leaned back in her chair. 'I don't get it, Alex. After all this time, why come to me? Why come here? You must have plenty of people in Eu-ronia willing to help with your daughter.'



His brow was lined with deep furrows that marred his handsome face. It made her feel self-conscious. She only had the lightest dusting of make-up on, to emphasise her brown eyes and pink lips. How much had she changed in the last ten years? Would he be disappointed by what he saw?

Why was he here? Why, after all this time, had he been convinced that this was the right thing to do?

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