



## A Royal Christmas Proposal (Royal Babies)

By Leanne Banks

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Treat keeps telling himself that he's not into Ericka and her little family. She's stuck-up and a royal—hardly his type! Despite his best efforts, the former football player finds himself charmed by the sexy single mom and her adorable infant. This Christmas, all Treat wants in his stocking is the royal twosome he's sworn to protect!

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## **A Royal Christmas Proposal (Royal Babies) By Leanne Banks Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Leanne Banks is a *New York Times* bestselling author with over sixty books to her credit. A book lover and romance fan from even before she learned to read, Leanne has always treasured the way that books allow us to go to new places and experience the lives of wonderful characters. Always ready for a trip to the beach, Leanne lives in Virginia with her family and her Pomeranian muse.

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Princess Fredericka hoped her brother wasn't going to be impossible.

She knew she had made more than her share of mistakes. She'd been a wild child when she'd been a teenager and terrified her family with her antics. Everyone had breathed a sigh of relief when she'd gotten married, because she'd appeared to calm down. In many ways she had, but she'd learned things didn't always turn out the way one expected. She'd managed to make the best of what life had dealt her. Ericka knew her brother Stefan, the ruling prince of Chantaine, however, would have a hard time seeing her as a competent single mother to her adorable son, Leo.

She resisted the urge to fidget as she waited to be invited into her brother's office. She nodded at staff members as they hung holiday greenery and put candles in the window. Ericka suspected the Christmas decorations had been ordered by Eve, her brother's wife. Ericka barely remembered seeing Christmas decorations when she had been growing up in the palace. With the exception of the huge Christmas tree in one of the formal rooms, one might not have known the holiday existed. Of course, the deep chill between her mother and father hadn't helped matters.

Her father, Prince Edward, had been a philanderer and an absentee father and husband. Her mother had felt trapped and bitter. Ericka remembered wishing only that she could run away. She'd done exactly that in more than one way, which was why she suspected this was going to be a messy discussion. Stefan was extremely protective.

The door to Stefan's office finally opened. "Your Highness, Princess Fredericka, please come in," Stefan's assistant said.

She nodded. "Thank you very much," she said, then entered her brother's office while the assistant left the room. "Stefan," she greeted, walking toward her brother. She noticed a wisp of a couple gray streaks on the sides of his dark hair. The burden of his position was obviously weighing on him.

She kissed his cheek and he kissed hers. "How are you?" she asked.

"I'm well," he said. "I'm more concerned about you and Leonardo."

Ericka smiled. "Leo and I are great. I'm happy to be back in Chantaine after spending the last year with Tina in Texas."

"You could have spent the last year here in Chan-taine," he said, and rounded his desk to sit in his chair.

Ericka sat in the chair across from her brother, watching him as he tented his fingers and studied her. "I think

it was good to be with Tina in Texas during my pregnancy and delivery. She and her husband were supportive, and it was fun having their daughter, Katarina, around. She's quite the spitfire. Little ones put everything in perspective."

"True," Stefan said, giving a serious nod. "I think it would be best for you and Leo to live at the palace."

Ericka's stomach twisted and she bit the inside of her lip. She hated to go up against Stefan but knew it was necessary. "I think not," she said. "I've found a lovely gated cottage and a nanny. I think this will be best for Leo and me."

Stefan frowned. "But what about security? You and Leo need to be protected. That would be much easier within the palace walls."

Ericka shook her head. "The palace isn't the place for me. If you think about it, it's not the place for most of us. None of your siblings live here. I apologize for how this may sound, but the palace feels claustrophobic. I don't want that for Leo."

"He's a baby," Stefan said. "How will he know?"

"Babies sense more than you think. He would sense my tension. Leo and I need our own place. As I said, I have found a wonderful nanny and I've arranged for therapy for his hearing disability."

Stefan pressed his lips together. "Is there any chance you're wrong about his hearing? He's so young."

"No," she said, remembering the grief she'd suffered when she'd learned her perfect Leo couldn't hear. The doctors had tested Leo before she'd left the hospital with him, and many more tests had followed. "He has a hearing disability and I'm determined to make sure he gets the best treatment available."

"I can't believe you don't think living in the palace would make your life easier," Stefan said. "And your son's life safer."

Ericka shook her head. "Don't try to guilt me into doing things your way, Stefan. I have to follow my best inner guidance. I have to be my own expert. I'm counting on you to be supportive."

Stefan sighed. "This situation is going to put a lot of pressure on you. I hesitate to bring up the past, but—"

"You're talking about the time I spent in rehab in my teens," she said. Ericka couldn't blame any of her family for being concerned, but if she'd successfully survived her most recent humiliation, she could handle anything. "I'm lucky I learned to avoid chemicals early on. I haven't had a drink in nearly a decade. I learned to wake up every morning and make the decision that I'm not going to drink or use drugs that day."

Stefan nodded. "It's obvious you've come a long way, but I still don't want you to be overwhelmed."

"I'm going to be overwhelmed at times," she assured him. "I have a baby. Being a mother is new. But I'm a Devereaux and I'm not the weak link you may have once thought I was."

"I never said you were the weak link," he said with a dark frown.

"Well, maybe you just thought it," she said gently with a smile and lifted her hand when she could see he

was going to protest. "It doesn't matter. You'll soon see there's more to me than you thought. I'll be very happy in my cozy cottage."

"Okay," he said reluctantly. "As you wish. However, I insist on providing you with security. You'll have a guard within the next couple of days."

Ericka made a face. "If you insist," she said. "Just make sure whoever you choose is low-profile or they'll get on my nerves. No one too pushy."

"I do insist, and I'll make sure you have the best security possible. You're working for the palace, so protection is more than appropriate. The new rules specify that if any of the Devereaux family is working for Chantaine, they shall be given security. You're taking over the coordination for the conference for The Royal Society for A Better World, although I don't know how you expect to do it with a baby and no husband," he said.

"Single mothers have been accomplishing great things for ages," she said. "I'll have a nanny and two sisters willing to help."

"Along with Eve," Stefan said of his wife. "She would kill me if I didn't offer her assistance."

Ericka smiled still amazed at the change Eve had wrought in her brother. The two were soul mates. Her happiness faded a little when she thought of her own future romantic prognosis. She wasn't sure her soul mate existed. Brushing the thought aside, she knew it was silly for her to waste one moment on any ideas about romance. She had no time or energy for a man in her life right now.

"You're always welcome at the palace if you should change your mind."

"Thank you, but I won't," she said. "Now shall we cover a few issues about the upcoming conference?"

Stefan shot her a smile that held a hint of approval. "Down to business already?"

"I've been ready," she said, and powered up her tablet.

Two days later, Stefan sent Ericka a text message informing her that one of his assistants would be bringing her security detail to her for introduction. Ericka frowned at her phone in response. This wasn't the best time. She was tired and hadn't even taken a shower yet. Leo hadn't slept well and had been fussy throughout the night. Even though Nanny Marley was more than able to care for Leo, Ericka had wanted to soothe him. Ericka was finding it more difficult than she'd planned to turn Leo's care over to someone else.

Silly. Ericka had never considered herself overly nurturing, but Leo had provoked powerful changes within her. Of course now that sunlight streamed through the windows of the cottage, Leo slept peacefully.

Yawning, she pulled her hair into a topknot and quickly changed clothes. She dashed to the bathroom to splash water on her face and brush her teeth. The introduction with her security detail shouldn't take any longer than five minutes. After that, she planned to sneak in a little nap before working. Before Leo, Ericka would never have considered meeting someone without being turned out to as close to perfection as possible. Having a baby had changed her priorities.

A knock sounded at the door and she rushed to answer it. Leo was already being treated for his hearing

disability with infant hearing aids, and Ericka never knew what sounds might awaken him.

Spotting her brother's assistant through the glass window beside the door, she opened it. She immediately caught sight of a man standing just behind her brother's assistant. He stood at least as tall as her brother-in-law from Texas. Over six feet tall. How was this subtle? she wondered. He would stick out like a sore thumb in Chantaine. What had her brother been thinking?

"Hello, Your Highness. Rolf here," her brother's assistant said as he made a quick bow. "I'm here to introduce you to your primary security detail. Mr. Montreat Walker."

Ericka nodded toward Rolf then turned to Mr. Walker out of politeness. "Mr. Walker."

He gave a half-hearted dip of his head. "You can call me Treat," he said in a Texas twang.

"Oh, really," she said, thinking he was not a treat. With his stubborn chin and too-broad shoulders, he looked as if he would be a pain in her derriere. "Mr. Walker," she said then turned to Rolf, who appeared to be cowering from both her and Mr. *Treat* Walker. "Thank you so much for stopping by. I'll be in touch with Stefan."

"I'd like to check your home security system first," Mr. Walker said.

"Excuse me," she replied, unable to hide her disapproval.

"Yes," the overly tall, overly muscular, overly American man, said. "I've been hired to protect you. I need to make sure your home is adequately secure."

"I have a security system," she told him.

"Then you won't mind me checking it," he said.

Actually, she would, but she couldn't say that. She shrugged and opened her door widely. "Don't wake my baby."

He lifted his eyebrows for a half-beat then stepped forward. "I'll do the best I can, but I will need to test your alarm system."

Ericka stared at Rolf. "Please tell my brother I'll be in touch," she said.

"Yes, Your Highness," he said before he dipped his head and walked away.

"I'm a done deal," Mr. Walker said to her. "Your brother has made his decision."

Ericka tried to look down her nose at him, but he was too darn tall. "Nothing is a done deal."

Mr. Walker shrugged. "Good luck. I'll check your system."

Ericka frowned at him as he swaggered through the hallway. "I told you not to wake my baby."

Mr. Walker paused and turned to look at her. "How strong is his hearing disorder?"

Ericka could have cried at his question. If only she knew how extensive his hearing loss was. Even the doctors had told her the measurement for his hearing disorder could change. "Profound. He's been awake most of the night."

Mr. Walker nodded. "I'll check the house. I'll have to test the alarm system some time. You let me know when I can do that without startling him."

If only he *could* startle Leo, Ericka thought. If only she could make a sound that would startle him. Ericka stared after Mr. Walker, hating him and liking him at the same time. What could he possibly know about having a child with special needs? Nothing, she suspected. His life had probably been perfect. No troubles. No trials.

Leo's future was full of trials. She stiffened her back. She needed to cushion her child in his infancy and make him strong for his future years. Her job was to provide the perfect amount of support and hope. Whatever that was.

A flash of fur passed between them.

Mr. Walker frowned. "Was that a cat?"

"Yes. The doctor said Leo would benefit from a pet."

He frowned in confusion. "A cat? Don't they sleep twenty-three out of twenty-four hours a day?"

"Sam is awake much more than that, plus he watches after Leo."

"You mean, he stalks your baby," Mr. Walker said.

She blinked. "He does no such thing. Sam protects Leo. He's probably studying you right now to make sure you won't hurt the baby."

Mr. Walker lifted a dark eyebrow. "This is one more challenge for implementing a sound security system."

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Graciela Tubbs:**

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**Stanley Roman:**

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**Charles Wright:**

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