

Knight

**Monica
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**My Lady's
Protector**

Pentacles

**MY LADY'S PROTECTOR - TAROT:
KNIGHT OF PENTACLES**

BY

MONICA M. MARTIN

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My Lady's Protector - Tarot: Knight of Pentacles
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DEDICATION:

For *H.*, my constant inspiration...

MY THANKS:

I thank God for my vivid imagination and good fortune.

I'd like to thank Stefani and Martine, for giving me the opportunity to work with eXtasy Books.

To Ansley, for editing.

My readers: Thank you for supporting me. Enjoy.
M. xx

TAROT CARD: KNIGHT OF PENTACLES

Unwavering – Stubborn
Cautious – Unadventurous
Thorough – Obsessive
Realistic – Pessimistic
Hard-working – Grinding

The Knight of Pentacles represents Sir Ambrose's character. I've added some of these elements to the storyline as well. I hope you enjoy my interpretation.

PROLOGUE

ANJOU, FRANCE, 1186

THE SUMMONS

“O ooh!” Ambrose stroked her luxuriant curls, his eyes on her pretty mouth, which presently drew his iron-hard erection into its velvety recesses, her lips brushing his groin. Her ample breasts pressed against his thigh, her fingers sinking into his ass. “Oh, yes!” He was in paradise. He loved to watch a mouth pleasure him, it added to his rapture tenfold.

She stroked his aching cock with an adept tongue, whirling and flicking it over the engorged head before swallowing him again. “Harder, wench,” he ordered thickly. “Suck harder!” She complied, and his hips pumped rapidly, his eyes feasting on her greedy mouth.

The sharp knock on the door put a halt on his rapturous journey. “Who goes there?” he called, his tone fraught with irritation.

“Tis I, Charles, Sir Ambrose.”

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She stopped, and Ambrose groaned in frustration. She stood on tiptoe and traced his lips with her tongue, her hand moving to caress his aching cock. He stroked the petals of her hairless pussy and pinched her erect clit between thumb and forefinger. She sighed, her sinuous form undulating and her eyes begging. He pushed two fingers inside her and pumped hard.

"Sir Ambrose!"

Damn it!

"What is it?"

"Lord Henry will see you now, Sir Ambrose."

"I'll be but a moment!"

"Yes, Sir Ambrose."

He picked her up and carried her to the canopy-covered bed. Setting her down, he entered her from behind and fucked her hard, his balls slapping against her. "Oooh, you feel good!"

"My lord!" his page called from beyond the door.

"One damned moment!" he shouted back.

He knew he was being selfish, but he needed relief and he needed it now. She had the foresight to see to her own pleasure, stroking her clit with the fingers of one hand and gripping the bed with the other. She cried out with every abandoned thrust, letting him know how much she liked it. Soon her pussy shuddered around him and she screamed out her orgasm for the entire keep to hear. He pulled out, not wanting to spill his seed inside her. Louise turned and took his cock in her mouth, sucking him until he

exploded.

"Thank you..."

* * * *

Henry gestured enthusiastically. "Come forward, man."

The young baron stepped onto the dais and sank down on one knee, his inky mane touching the stone floor. "I am your humble servant, sire."

"You may rise, Sir Ambrose." Henry waved at the bench beside him. "Sit, we have much to discuss."

"Thank you, sire."

Henry didn't miss the strained smile, or the worried look.

"No point wasting a man's time, so I'll come right out and speak what's on my mind, and you yours." A swift nod answered his words.

A pretty maidservant hurried over and poured mulled wine. Sir Ambrose drank with vigor, hastily setting the drained goblet aside.

"Leave us, wench." The maid bobbed and hurried away. Henry couldn't help but smile. "Relax, 'tis not such a difficult task..."

Sir Ambrose waited until the maidservant was out of earshot before he spoke. "This young widow is known for her wild and unruly behavior." He turned and quickly surveyed the hall. "Her dealings with the pagan religion are an abomination to *God*, sire. I—"

"Your duty to God and country is precisely why I chose you, Sir Ambrose. You're more stubborn and thorough than I am. These qualities will aid you with

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such a taxing wench. All you have to do is escort her to her betrothed in Leicestershire, England. In return, for her safe delivery, I'll give you two hundred gold pieces, enough funds to pay your debts and sustain Évreux Castle and lands through these difficult times...."

Sir Ambrose blushed. "That's rather generous of you, sire."

"I'm of no doubt you'll earn every piece of it, man," Henry said, meaning every word. Sir William had lost the wench after two days in his protection. Rumor had it she drugged him, stole his destrier and made a wild dash to her father's estate. Lord Rufus dragged her, kicking and screaming, to Anjou.

"I wish I could hand her over to Philip, but she's in my jurisdiction, not his." Henry sighed. "Lord Robert is the only vassal who wants her as his bride, a pity he resides in England. To be frank, I'd not wish that man on any woman..."

"Forgive my bluntness, sire, but I don't blame any man for rejecting such a distressing wench."

"I imagined you would, that's why I didn't waste my time offering you her hand."

Henry gave Sir Ambrose a pointed look and he shifted nervously, smoothing his trim goatee. "How old are you?"

"One and thirty, sire."

"She is four and twenty, well-heeled and beautiful."

"So I hear tell, sire."

"Hmm...imagine what charms lay between those lily-white thighs..."

"I'm trying not to, sire."

"Too fine for the likes of Lord Robert. A wench like her could benefit from your gentle guidance." He slapped Sir Ambrose's back. "And you certainly could benefit from her adventurousness..."

"What a pity she's taken, sire." The sarcasm wasn't lost on Henry.

"Ha! You have no sense of adventure."

"I'm certain the Lady Rhiannon will give me a taste of that, sire."

Henry followed Sir Ambrose's gaze. "Of that I've no doubt." Both men rose to their feet. "Then you agree?"

"Yes, only because I need the funds, sire."

"Accepting the Lady Rhiannon's hand would not only solve your financial dilemma, but make you richer than you ever dreamed."

"I want a compatible bride, sire."

Henry cleared his throat. "I'd not be adverse to you seducing the wench, see if she's acceptable...if you get my meaning."

"No insult intended, sire, but I'd never dream of bedding another man's betrothed, no matter how precarious the vow."

The willowy, silver-haired female hurried toward them, her sable and silver bliaut bunched in fisted hands. Two guards in red and gold livery flanked her, their flushed features telling.

"She is a mouthwatering temptress, is she not?"

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Sir Ambrose snapped out of his stupor and nodded in reply, clamping his mouth shut. There were no known words to adequately describe her appearance. Sunlight and moonlight, shimmering silver and gold, warm and cold... She bowed low before Henry and uttered a formal greeting in honeyed tones, finally displaying a dimpled smile and flashing white teeth.

Lord, have mercy! How would he manage with such a charming creature in his company for nigh-on four weeks!

"Lady Rhiannon, your escort and protector, Sir Ambrose, better known as Lord de Évreux," Henry was saying.

"'Tis an honor to make your acquaintance, my lord." Her bold gray eyes swept over him and her cherub-like lips twitched. No doubt, she'd just measured him and found him wanting.

"Sir Ambrose, if you please."

"Ah, the chivalrous one. Whatever you wish," she uttered flippantly. Her flawless beauty could be likened to an angel's, but her personality was a different matter altogether. She held out her hand, one pale brow lifting.

Ambrose sank into a low bow, took her proffered hand and kissed its whiteness. "'Twill be a delight and an honor to serve and protect you, my lady."

She had the gall to laugh at his statement. "Come now, we both know you're not here to serve me, Sir

Ambrose." She snatched her slender fingers from his grasp.

He added ill-mannered to his list of negatives. "Enlighten me."

"You're serving your liege lord, not I."

"Well, yes, but—"

"And you are being well-paid for it, I presume. Hmm?"

"Well, that's none—"

"Lost for words, Sir Ambrose?" She cocked her head, arching her swanlike neck.

"Huh?"

"Your hearing seems to be off, too."

"If the *lady* stilled her tongue long enough, I would have answered."

She smiled, her eyes dancing with genuine amusement. He groaned inwardly. Henry's hearty laughter almost deafened him.

I don't need this! Damnable woman's testing my resolve.

He knew he looked foreboding as he loomed over her, jaw clenched, his eyes burning bright gold, as they did when he became aggravated. She appeared enthralled, her sapphire eyes burning into them, her mouth agape. *Damn you!* He stepped back and combed his fingers through his hair, sweeping it off his forehead before turning away.

"I *am* a tolerant man, but I'll not be subjected to your sharp tongue a moment longer." He deliberately flashed a brilliant smile, his eyes raking over her contemptuously. "There are many ways to make a woman compliant..."

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"I..." Desire flashed through her eyes and her cheeks colored nicely. "S—Sir Ambrose, p—please forgive me, these trying times have soured my disposition."

"Since this journey is a long one, a civil tongue will benefit you greatly, Lady Rhiannon."

"I'll guard my tongue in future."

He studied her closely, doubting her words.

"I say this in all earnest."

"I'm not Sir William—"

"I can see that."

"I'll not be so easily influenced by your *ah...* charms. 'Tis my duty to escort you safely to your betrothed, Robert of Leicestershire, and that's precisely what I'll do."

"I'm not a simpleton, Sir Ambrose, I understand entirely. I—"

"I pray to God that you do."

"I most certainly don't need you to pray for m—"

"For you would loathe the alternative," he added, as though she hadn't spoken at all. "For *your* obedience, I'll be most gracious in return, my lady."

"I am well aware of your knightly reputation, Sir Ambrose. Many maidens would vie for the opportunity to garner your more amorous favors and ultimately a lifelong place by your side. Rest assured, I am not one of them. Save your graciousness for one more appreciative."

She opened her mouth to say more, but he held up a silencing hand and spoke. "And if you choose *not* to

obey me, I'll be forced to chain you like a slave for the duration of the journey." Her mouth dropped open. "Am I making myself clear?"

"Perfectly."

Henry clapped his hands together. "Well, I'm relieved you've both decided to be civil."

"I am a man of my word, sire. While Lady Rhiannon is under my protection, I'll guard her with my life."

"Ah, my loyal subject."

Lady Rhiannon fixed a smile on her lips, the look in her eyes guaranteeing confrontation. Ambrose wondered whether he got more than he bargained for.

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CHAPTER ONE

ENGLAND

A KNIGHT'S DUTY

Rhiannon pulled back the flap and peered through the opening, an exasperated sigh leaving her when Louise materialized, carrying a bundle of silk garments. Rhiannon resented the girl's presence, since she'd hounded her morning, noon and night, leaving no opportunity to escape during the past eleven days. She silently cursed and commended Sir Ambrose for his choice in watchdog.

"My lady," Louise bobbed quickly, her raven curls bouncing. "Sir Ambrose wishes your presence at dinner and then later at the festivities." Her dark eyes glowed at the mention of his name, which always made Rhiannon feel ill. No man was worth such adoration.

"I don't wish to attend."

"H—he insists, my lady."

Rhiannon wanted to throttle Louise. Instead, she settled for rolling her eyes heavenward. "I'm feeling out of sorts, tell him that."

"No, I will not!"

"You will not?"

"Sir Ambrose's orders are to bathe and dress you," Louise held out the silk and velvet garments, "and you're required to wear these, my lady."

It was on the tip of Rhiannon's tongue to tell his servant he could order anything he liked, but it didn't mean he was going to get it. Fortunately for her, the voice of reason cautioned loudly. "I'm going to take some air. Place the clothing on my pallet. I'll be back in a while."

Louise bobbed again. "As you wish, my lady."

Rhiannon stepped into the crisp air, a shiver running through her. She moved into the crowd, gazing about with appreciation. The colorful pavilions stood out in bold relief against the misty green backdrop and just beyond the campsite, a picturesque village nestled. She contemplated an evening of song and dance with Sir Ambrose... As though her thoughts had conjured him up, she caught sight of him amidst the crowd, his companions flanking him.

The throng parted before them as they moved toward his blue and yellow pavilion. He wore an azure surcoat over his mail suit, emblazoned with an armed griffin embellished with gold thread. It reached past his knees, the side slits opening up to his

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thighs every step he took. He rose head and shoulders above his English companion, Sir Rupert, and utterly dwarfed Charles, his page. He angled his head, his hair falling over the left side of his face.

You are very appealing, sir. She'd come to the conclusion that she wanted him, after just two days in his company. She fleetingly wondered whether his sudden appeal stemmed from his indifference to her and grinned impishly. *I do like a good challenge, Sir Ambrose. 'Tis time to find out how dutiful you really are.*

* * * *

Ambrose rose to his feet when she entered his pavilion. Louise bowed and swiftly departed.

"Good evening, my lady. I trust you are well rested?"

"Sir Ambrose." She inclined her head. "I am indeed."

"Excellent." He produced what he'd hoped was a genial smile. Surprisingly enough, he'd come to enjoy her company. The fact she was a beauty did torture him somewhat; a small price to pay for her companionship, nevertheless.

She removed her sable mantle and handed it to Charles, his page, bestowing him the warmest of smiles and making Ambrose a little envious of the boy.

Charles bowed awkwardly, complimenting her profusely.

"You are most kind, young sir." She laughed, a

soft, tinkling laugh that warmed Ambrose's insides. Almost everything she did had this affect on him, much to his utter dismay.

"You may go, Charles." Ambrose watched the boy leave, pondering his decision, and whether it was wise to be alone with her. He quickly dismissed his misgivings as preposterous, priding his sense of duty. He turned back to find her looking him over and speculated on whether the white tunic and brown hosen met with her approval.

"Taking dinner with you is becoming quite a habit," she said, brushing past him, a firm breast making contact with his arm.

"'Tis better to have the company of a lady than not." He fought the desire that ripped through him. Suddenly remembering to breathe, he inhaled deeply, catching her intoxicating floral scent.

"I fear I'm beginning to like your company a little too much, Sir Ambrose."

"Your flattery is meaningless, my lady." His eyes fixed on her hungrily. Her golden-yellow and ivory bliaut floated about her curvaceous hips, which swayed from side to side as she moved, her silk-wrapped braids emulating them.

"Really?" She turned and faced him. "Entirely?"

"Hmm... Not entirely." He managed a polite smile, careful to hide his discomfort. "You look beautiful in that gown."

She cocked her head. "Fortunately for me you have good taste, Sir Ambrose."

Ambrose knew she resented him for confiscating her attire, but to claim he chose what she wore

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irritated him. "I know you're used to men fawning over you, but I don't have time to choose your garb, Lady Rhiannon. You owe thanks to your maidservant, not I."

She scowled at him. "Must you always provoke me?"

"I am not trying to provoke you, my lady."

"Oh?" She sounded as though she didn't believe a word.

"Shall we?" He motioned to the feast laid out on an exquisite carpet, embroidered cushions strewn on either side.

"Yes, let's, before you say something more untoward and I slap your handsome face."

"I deserved that, I'm sorry," he said, managing to surprise her entirely, gathering from the look that she gave him.

"You're forgiven this time, sir."

"You are indeed gracious, my lady." He waited for her to seat herself and then sat opposite. The roasted game and vegetables smelled delicious, making his mouth water. He piled their platters high and then poured mulled wine, handing her a goblet.

"Mmm..."

He watched her eat, fascinated by her luscious lips. He imagined them gliding over his skin, her tongue too. He knew they'd feel like warm velvet against his cock, their suction drawing him in. His penis stood to attention, causing him great discomfort. He groaned inwardly. Realizing his thoughts had strayed onto the

forbidden path once again; he forcibly shoved them aside and focused on his food, eating with vigor.

They made polite conversation, which took his mind off his pressing financial obligations and lightened his mood somewhat.

"Have you ever been married, Sir Ambrose?"

Her question surprised him and he almost choked on a piece of leek. "Well," he coughed, clearing his throat, "no, I haven't."

"Any particular reason why?" She licked her lips and he groaned inwardly.

"Well...I don't rightly know. I've not found a woman who possesses the qualities I'm looking for..."

"You speak as though you have a choice."

"Of course!" He laughed. "'Tis my prerogative."

"How fortunate for you." He couldn't blame her for her bitterness.

"I'm sorry."

"Describe the appropriate lady." She watched him closely, making him dreadfully uncomfortable.

"In order to do that I must be frank, and such words aren't fit for a lady's ears."

"I'm no virgin, Sir Ambrose, you can enlighten me. Point of fact, I'd find that rather refreshing..."

"Don't tease, you may not like the consequences."

"Oh, but I'm not mocking you, sir." She sighed deliberately. "We are friends, are we not?"

"As you wish." Ambrose took a fortifying drink and then set the goblet down. "She must be everything a traditional wife should be and more..."

"More?" Her brow rose, her big eyes taunted, and her smile seduced. What an enchanting creature she

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was!

He poured wine as he formulated an answer. "She must enjoy knowledge...reading, writing, and such. I desire a learned woman by my side, not some ignorant damsel."

"And must she have a certain look?"

"Beauty comes from within, my lady." He caught her gaze. "Appearance means naught, as I have no preference when it comes to such matters."

"None?" Again, he had the impression she didn't believe him.

"I am not blind, a beautiful woman will always catch my eye. But that does not mean I desire to marry her."

"Hmm...I see. Tell me more?"

"She must enjoy uninhibited relations." He shrugged when her mouth dropped open. "You wanted to know everything."

"Yes. Please go on."

"Relations between a man and wife are very sacred indeed and in my opinion, eternal. In short, she must be my twin soul." She frowned. "She must be my complement, and my equal."

"You're rather intense, Sir Ambrose." Lady Rhiannon shifted, straightening her legs and smoothing her silk skirts. "And you believe such a woman exists?"

"Indeed." He flashed her a beaming smile to get her full attention. "That's why I remain unmarried." His laughter blended with hers.

"I see."

He lay on his side, resting on his elbow, his cheek propped up against his palm, his hair cascading over his arm. Most women liked the way he looked and he knew just how to get their attention. She admired his sculpted features and olive complexion. His chin beard seemed to fascinate her. Her eyes moved over his long tunic and brown hosen. Her rigid nipples pressed against the fabric of her gown and her eyes glowed with desire.

She looked as though she wanted to lunge at him and eat him for dinner. He secretly wished she would. She licked her beautiful mouth and he stifled a groan. "Tell me about your departed husband, my lady?" he asked, jarring her out of her reverie.

"You don't know?" Her look was searching.

He rolled unto his back and stared at the ceiling, a frustrated sigh leaving him. "Would I ask if I did?"

"Forgive me."

"I want to understand," he said.

"I was ten and eight and Lord Conrad was seventy years old." She visibly cringed. "He was a dreadful person in all respects, but he had wealth and my father found the notion of uniting our families too appealing to resist. I was merely a pawn in their game."

"I am s—"

"You can't imagine what it's like to be a woman, to have almost no rights...be at your husband's mercy. Four years in his company and I prayed for death to take me, but God didn't hear my prayers. Mother Superior would have said that God had other plans

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for me."

"Such marriages should be *outlawed*," he uttered.

"I was relieved when he died, and I don't care how that sounds. I hated him with a passion. Foul creature, he was!"

"Tell me." He turned and met her gaze.

"Oh, no." She burst into tears.

"I'm here." He reached out and took her hand in his. "I'm here," he repeated soothingly, gently squeezing her palm.

He listened to her talk, pitying the girl she once was and admiring the woman she'd become, and he fell just a little in love with her as her story unfolded.

"Now can you see why I have no wish to marry Lord Robert?"

Feeling for the girl, Ambrose tried to be diplomatic. "Lord Robert is far from old and one can only speculate on whether he's depraved."

"He is six and fifty, over twice my age! He's known for his cruelty." She paused. "Some say he murdered his last wife, is that not enough to dissuade you from your course?"

"These are simple folk stories, nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about."

"And you presume to be God?"

Ambrose felt shock ripple through him. What if she was right, and Lord Robert was a murderer. Could he live with himself if she perished at his hands?

"Don't choke on your thoughts." Her words stung.

"I wish I could help you, but I—I can't, 'tis out of my hands."

"You are only my *protector*, after all."

Ambrose cleared his throat. "'Tis not that simple."

She pulled her hand from his and rose to her feet.

"I am tired and need some rest. Please escort me back to my tent."

"Aren't you attending the celebrations with me?"

"I fear my festive mood has deserted me, along with my *misconceptions* of you."

He rose to his feet, regret lashing him mercilessly.

"If that's what you wish." He watched her don her mantle. "I'm sorry..."

She smiled sadly. "I know you are. 'Tis a pity your stubbornness overcomes you." She turned and moved to the entranceway.

"I am what I am, and I can no more change that than I can the rising of the sun, my lady."

"An unfortunate fallacy indeed."

"Can you never be pleased? Why must a woman strive to mold a man into something he's not? Is it some form of torture devised as punishment, because we don't crawl into some vacant corner and die? Remember this important fact, we are our *mother's* prized possessions... Don't judge all men harshly because of one *fool* you've chanced to know." He threw his cloak over his shoulders and stomped outside.

They made their way through the campsite, faint sounds of music and the murmur of voices drifted from surrounding tents. Small fires dotted the area making it easier to navigate.

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Lady Rhiannon shivered, pulling her mantle tightly around her. He felt her sadness and for the first time in his life, he was utterly powerless. She gave him a sideways glance, and he belatedly covered his remorseful expression.

"Why can't you see my side? Why must you be so blind?" she asked brokenly. Ambrose wordlessly shook his head.

They stopped in front of her pavilion and Louise magically appeared, blurry-eyed and disheveled, with a beaming smile on her face. She pulled back the flap and waited in silence.

Ambrose took Rhiannon's hand and kissed it. "I am sorry, my lady.

"I am too, Sir Ambrose. "You have yourself a wondrous night."

He forced a smile. "Thank you. I intend to dance and sing 'til dawn." He released her hand, turned, and walked away.

Rhiannon blinked back the tears and hurried inside. Pitiful just wasn't her thing!

"Are you all right, my lady?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Did Sir Ambrose upset you?"

"No, but then, that would be none of your business."

Louise frowned. "You like him?"

"No." Rhiannon flopped down on her pallet.

"He is rather appealing."

Rhiannon turned and eyed the maidservant

suspiciously. "Why do you say that?"

Louise smiled. "You're the only one I know who doesn't find him so."

"Louise, I don't have time for your starry-eyed blathering. Please extinguish the candles and get some rest."

"As you wish, my lady."

CHAPTER TWO

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Ambrose couldn't get Lady Rhiannon out of his mind. All night her image haunted him—he saw reflections of her everywhere.

A fine time to become obsessed.

He gazed in the direction of her darkened tent, imagining her lying there in a peaceful slumber, her bedclothes awry and her long limbs on display. He yearned to explore her silken flesh with his fingers, his mouth, and his body. He'd had visions of them coupling since first seeing her and hadn't managed to shake them. Worse, they'd grown positively wild. *You are an alluring temptress, my lady.*

"She is unreachable, my lord, but I am not."

"Any man with a full purse can reach you, my dear lady."

"You're being unkind. They must appeal to me, also." She laughed.

Ambrose turned and gazed down at Louise,

promising himself this was the last time he bedded her. She lay on her stomach, her chin resting on her hands and her riotous sable curls tumbling over her shoulders. "You are indeed beautiful."

"Thank you." Her obsidian eyes glowed at his words. His gaze skimmed over her naked flesh and his cock began to rise, proving he was human after all.

"Why, pray tell, aren't you with Sir Rupert this night?"

"He is entertaining a whore from the village."

"And Lady Rhiannon?"

"You know I wouldn't dare leave her alone, Charles is guarding her."

Ambrose sighed. "I should send you back."

"Why? Don't you trust your protégé?"

"Mind your tongue, Louise."

"I'm not your servant, remember? You paid me to play peasant to your exalted prisoner, not you." She smiled. "If you want me to play servant for you, that will cost you much more..."

"You'd make a lousy servant, but a wonderful whore."

"Yes, so I've been informed many times." She stroked her curls, angling him a look. "I love the touch of a man, it drives me wild. Why shouldn't I profit from it?"

"You are well endowed, so why don't you just find some fool to marry and end all this?"

"I've not made enough riches to do that, and besides, I want to marry a poetic and just man, like *Saladin*." She grinned. "Don't look so horrified, Sir

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Ambrose, my mother was Egyptian nobility after all."

"Ambition is a wonderful thing, but the Sultan of Egypt, as gracious as he is, wouldn't allow you to clean the steps of his home."

"I said *like* him, why must you always amuse yourself at my expense?"

"I know you mourn the loss of your husband, but consider your daughter's future."

"I am. The nunnery's the best place for her, heaven knows I couldn't give her such an education." He nodded in understanding. "I want her to be all that she can."

"Forgive me."

"'Tis done, now allow me to take your mind off your beautiful prisoner."

"She's no such thing."

"I beg to differ, all that is missing is bars."

Ambrose felt himself color. "If she'd only stay put, there'd be no need to treat her so."

"I can't believe you passed up the chance to marry her."

Ambrose shrugged. "She's too disruptive for me."

"So let me ease your ah...frustrations, then." she stated, her tone seductive.

"And what if I have no use for you tonight?"

"I'm certain I could entice you." She rolled over and uncurled her well-formed limbs. "Relax and you'll see..." Arching her back, she moved her hands up over her ribs and cupped her breasts. Pinching her nipples, she let out a sigh.

Christ in heaven! His cock steeled.

"I know how much you like to watch." She spread her legs and stroked her inner thighs, then parted her nether lips, sinking her middle finger deep inside. Juices dripped down over her ass and he wanted to lick them up, but stilled himself, observing her display. She dipped two fingers in her pussy and pumped hard, her husky moans growing louder. She was a great performer — he couldn't deny that.

"Cease pleasuring yourself."

"Now?" Her fingers didn't stop.

"Yes, now." He knew she was about to climax and enjoyed her frustration. "Undress me."

* * * *

His hands moved over her breasts, pinching her tight nipples, his eyes locked with hers, watching her expression. She clasped the nape of his neck and drew his mouth down to hers. "I've wanted you since I first laid eyes on you, my love."

My love!

"Nooooooo!" She awoke with a start, her eyes darting around the darkened tent, her breathing rapid. "'Twas only a dream! Thank God!" she whispered.

She sat up; her eyes growing accustomed to the darkness. Louise's pallet was empty and upon quick inspection, she saw the maidservant was nowhere in sight. *Finally, a chance to escape!*

Rhiannon climbed out of bed and peeked outside. Charles sat, head bowed between his legs, snoring.

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She glanced about, saw Sir Ambrose's pavilion flooded with light and frowned. *Please don't be awake!*

She closed the flap and went about collecting available provisions in a blanket, relieved she had the foresight to store bread, wine, and cheese from lunch. She rummaged through Louise's personal affects and grinned broadly upon finding a pouch containing several pieces of silver and a crimson bliaut of silk. "Thank you for your generosity. I'm certain you're capable of stealing more." She tied the blanket and slipped from the pavilion and into the night. "Time to find a horse," she murmured excitedly.

She wove her way through the campsite, careful not to awaken anyone. Three men guarded the horses and so she dismissed the notion of stealing one, until she saw Sir Ambrose's destrier tied by his pavilion. Quite obsessive, it surprised her that he left his horse unattended. *What are the chances of stealing your treasured steed?* She grinned, imagining his expression when he found that she had not only escaped, but also with his most prized possession. She turned and hurried toward his pavilion, her heart pounding painfully in her chest.

"Yes, take it all!" She froze.

He's awake! She should have known. She crept closer and peered inside, her breath caught in her throat.

He was beautiful, his taut body glowing in the candlelight, every muscle perfectly defined, his hair floating about his hips. Louise knelt before him,

sucking on his cock, her hungry mouth swallowing it easily. His hands were in her hair, guiding her as he watched his shaft slide in and out.

Rhiannon was powerless to move, her eyes fixed on the scene. While she dreamt of him in her bed, he bedded Louise! For some inexplicable reason, she felt hurt! She angrily brushed the tears from her eyes, wishing to God that she'd never met him, hating herself for feeling so weak.

Louise stopped sucking on him, rose, and lay back on the pallet, her arms resting above her head. "Come and fill me," she whispered, opening her legs. Sir Ambrose climbed between her legs, his mouth sliding over her thighs, stopping at her hairless sex. Rhiannon imagined it was she he was pleasuring, and fire burned the pit of her stomach. His mouth devoured Louise and she sobbed out her pleasure, eventually climaxing in his mouth. He moved over her and entered her, thrusting slowly.

Damn him! You don't need him! She turned, about to untie his magnificent steed when Sir Rupert grasped her arm.

"Did you enjoy watching Sir Ambrose bed that wench? Are you wet? You're disgusting!"

"Let go of me!" she hissed. All her hopes washed away when she looked into his dark face.

"If I were to do that, you'd take my dear friend's horse and leave."

"I can pay you."

He looked her up and down, his dark eyes cool. "You have nothing I want, little witch."

"I—I have silver," Rhiannon added, hoping to

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tempt him.

"Keep it. I'll not betray a friend for a few pieces of silver."

"What are you going to do?"

"Come with me." Sir Rupert dragged Rhiannon back to her pavilion without another word.

Charles stood to attention, relief shining in his eyes. "I thank you, Sir Rupert. "

"Don't thank me, boy, thank God she didn't flee, for Sir Ambrose would've flailed your hide."

Charles visibly flinched. Sir Rupert pushed Rhiannon at the open entrance. "Get inside, woman."

She stumbled and fell face-first, smashing her head on something hard. She tried to focus, but blackness pervaded her and she lost consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

HIS PRISONER

Ambrose gazed down at Lady Rhiannon, cursing himself for neglecting his duty, vowing it would never happen again. He gently swabbed the angry gash at her temple with a damp cloth.

"'Tis unseemly to have her stay in your sleeping quarters. What will your men think? Worse, what will her betrothed believe?"

"Christ, man, she'll have her own pallet and Louise to sleep beside her at night."

"Yes, but —"

"I challenge any man who accuses me of bedding the wench."

Sir Rupert shifted uncomfortably. "I am your friend, and as your friend, I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision."

"If you believe my intentions are indecent, then to hell with you! I am her protector, and protect her I will!"

"I don't believe that your intentions are untoward."

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Furthermore, she tripped, it wasn't deliberate... Don't become all consumed with guilt, she'll not die."

"I know." Ambrose sighed. "I know." He knew his behavior was extreme, but couldn't let go. Did he want to lose her? The answer was a resounding *no*! Could he give her to another man? Would he ever forgive himself for letting her go, when he had the chance to love her? Was he a fool? Would he ever find another who melted his insides the way she did? When was too late *too late*? And was he too late?

"My friend, did you hear me?"

"Forgive me, what did you say?"

"There are whispers about the time you spend in her company." He eyed Ambrose earnestly. "I beg you to r—"

"What whispers?"

Sir Rupert combed his fingers through his mop of dark hair. "They feel you've become obsessed with her."

Ambrose nodded, but said nothing.

"Are you?"

"In all honesty, yes."

"Christ!" Rupert paced back and forth. "She's unsuitable."

"Utterly." Ambrose grinned. "But she's remarkable..."

"Oh?" His friend raised his brows. "I see you've fallen in love with the wench."

"She makes me feel alive, and by God that feels extraordinary! I'd forgotten what it was like to live

life until she reminded me...yes, I admit that I love her, I didn't realize it until now."

"Please *remember* she's taken, my hopeless friend."

Henry's words came back to him and Ambrose wondered what he would do if he chose to belatedly accept his offer. *"Accepting the Lady Rhiannon's hand would not only solve your financial dilemma, but make you richer than you ever dreamed. I'd not be adverse to you seducing the wench, see if she's acceptable... if you get my meaning."*

"I'm not a fool," Ambrose said at length.

"For your sake, I hope not."

* * * *

Rhiannon awoke with a throbbing headache. She sat up cautiously, wincing when she touched her temple. She fell back against the pillows and moaned in pain.

"Try to rest. You stumbled and gave yourself a large bump and a small wound," Louise explained.

"What an inane comparison," Rhiannon muttered peevishly.

"'Tis the only one I have," Louise answered.

"'Tis dreadfully painful."

"Nothing life-threatening, mind you. You'll live, Lady Rhiannon."

"I'm certain I will." It was only then she realized they were in motion, and that she and Louise were in a canopy-covered cart of sorts. "What is going on?"

"Because of your state, you couldn't very well travel on horseback and Sir Ambrose thought it fitting you travel in this conveyance 'til you are well enough

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to ride."

"I see." Rhiannon began to recall the events prior to her accident, casting a sideways glance at Louise she wondered whether she knew about her little excursion, but dared not ask. "Where are we?"

"Somewhere in Oxfordshire."

"Oh! How long have I slept?"

"You have caused Sir Ambrose grief for the past three days. He has been fraught with worry."

"My God! I've slept for three days?"

"Yes, you have."

"But this can't be!"

"Don't fret, you've got at least a week to make another escape attempt." Louise laughed at her. "Considering you have Sir Ambrose watching over you, in all likelihood you'll fail."

"I don't understand."

"You're to sleep in his pavilion."

"Oh." *How am I ever going to bear it!*

"Oh, indeed."

Rhiannon had a hard time not imagining him naked and barely feet from her, without climbing into bed with him! "Tis improper."

"I'll be with you most nights..."

Rhiannon groaned, her headache worsening. "Sir Rupert pushed me and I stumbled," she uttered lamely.

"We know."

"If it weren't for that barbarian, I'd be free, but instead I have injuries and am now a virtual

prisoner!"

"You brought it on yourself."

"I didn't ask to be married off to some complete stranger. All I ask for is a choice."

"I know, and I'm sorry for you."

"I don't need your pity."

"I know this, too."

"I'm sorry I stole your money and your gown. I really am."

"'Tis perfectly all right. I have them back, no harm done."

"I—I don't usually do such things, 'twas an act of desperation." Louise looked uncertain. "As was the theft of Sir William's horse, which was only a means of travel for me."

"I understand."

"Tell me about you, Louise, why are you a servant?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Why are you here *pretending* to be a servant?"

Louise straightened her woolen bbliaut, her eyes fixed on the dull gray fabric. "I am the widow of a poor baron. I have one daughter, Marie, she lives in a nunnery, and I do many things...to pay our way." She looked up and smiled at Rhiannon. "I am like you, I have no wish to remarry, not because I despised my dead husband, quite the contrary. I want my daughter to have the life I couldn't afford."

Rhiannon admired and envied Louise all at once. "I wish I had your strength."

Louise reached out and clasped her hand. "You do, my dear. Look deep inside you and you will find it."

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Instead of trying to run away, stop and see what you have, what you feel, and what you truly desire..." She gave her a meaningful look.

"I—I don't understand."

"You will, and then perhaps you'll change your destiny..."

"Sir Ambrose?" she whispered and Louise nodded.

* * * *

Sir Ambrose entered the pavilion. "How was your bath?"

"Very relaxing." She blushed and he smiled.

He sat and patted the cushions before him. "Please sit with me, my lady."

"Very well." She came forward, sat opposite him and straightened her blue and white brocade gown.

"You seem much improved today. How is your head?"

"'Tis much better, thank you." His concern touched her.

He held out a beige pouch, dangling it from his index finger. "Louise bought this powder from some pagan woman in the village this afternoon. She asked me to give it to you for your aches. You add it to your wine, but don't take too much, as it will cause some embarrassing affects, she warned."

Rhiannon reached out and took the fabric pouch. "Thank you." She gasped when he caught her hand, her eyes darting to his.

"I've been meaning to ask you something..."

"P—please do." His touch did alarming things to her emotional state.

"Tell me why you did it," he asked, his thumb stroking along her wrist.

"Why I did what, pray tell?"

"Tell me what you experienced while you watched me couple with her."

Rhiannon felt the color drain from her face. "I—I didn't mean to watch..."

"But you did." He pulled her closer. "Did you wish it were you?"

"I... Please release me."

"Not until you answer the question."

"No. And please stop taunting me!"

He let go of her. "You simply came to steal my horse, is that it?"

"I—well yes, I did, only because yours was unguarded."

"Hmm..." His mouth twitched slightly.

"And I was checking to make certain you wouldn't catch me out."

"To see whether I slept?"

"Well, no, I heard you speak and..." Her words trailed off. "I don't rightly know why I did it. And yes, I wished it were me."

He nodded. "Thank you for your honesty." He poured her some mulled wine. "I'm sorry to be the one who delivers you to Lord Robert."

"Then why deliver me at all?"

"I gave my word to my liege lord."

Rhiannon sighed loudly. "Why must you be so rigid? Why can't you see what this means to me?"

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Don't you care what happens to me?"

"I see, and I care. " He shifted uncomfortably. "'Tis out of my hands."

"Is Louise important to you? Do you love her?"

He grinned. "You're jealous."

"No!" She shook her head.

"My dear Rhiannon, I pay Louise for the privilege of her ah...company. I don't love her." Relief rushed through her and she couldn't hide it.

"Then you're plain selfish."

"I am poor and I need the funds Henry has offered to support my people. I wish there was another way, but there isn't."

Rhiannon took a deep breath and regained her composure. "Sir Ambrose, do you like me?"

His brow rose. "Of course, you're a delight. Why wouldn't I?"

"Do I thrill you? I mean *really* thrill you."

His eyes moved over her breasts and she felt her nipples harden. "I've imagined doing unimaginable things with you." He paused to clear his throat. "Yes, you excite me beyond words."

"Then why don't you ask Lord Henry for my hand? I am well-heeled," she added optimistically.

Sir Ambrose looked as though she'd just smashed him in the gut. *He's wondering what in God's name I'm up to now.* She knew he didn't want to hurt her feelings by informing her he'd already refused Henry, but in his defense, he didn't know her then. She hoped the offer held immense appeal now. She wasn't

heartened when he raised his goblet and hastily drank.

"I hear tell, Henry wanted you to take my hand, but you refused."

He coughed, choking on his wine.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, indeed."

"But now you know I'm not some evil witch," she smiled.

Sir Ambrose studied her closely. "Is this some kind of ruse?"

"Of course not."

"Why would you want to help me?"

"You'd be helping me, too! I know I'd make you a good wife. I'd be forever grateful to you for saving me from Lord Robert."

"And do you like me?"

She shrugged, averting her eyes. "A little."

He chuckled. "I don't believe you, you'll have to show me."

"P—pardon?"

"Kiss me on the cheek."

"Now?" Her look was incredulous.

"Yes, now."

"But that's improper."

"Just a peck."

"I don't know..."

"Very well," he sighed. "I can't agree to this i—"

She lunged at him, knocking him flat on his back. Her mouth moved over his and she buried her fingers in his hair. He shuddered when her tongue darted into his mouth and parried with his. Her body

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trembled and she moaned when he stroked her breast through her gown.

He drew away, grinning up at her. "You kiss well, but I fear liking me is not grounds enough for marriage."

"I care for you, you big oaf, that's why you should marry me! I—I think I may be in love with you!" She began to sob. "And I consider you very appealing..."

"I fear I'll have to marry you now," he whispered, wiping the tears from her eyes. "And, my lady..."

"Yes?"

"I think I may be in love with you too."

"Make love to me, Ambrose."

He shook his head. "Not until we're married."

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "Why must you be so conscientious and unyielding?"

He kissed her mouth. "And why must you be so damned intoxicating and wild?"

They both laughed.

"Let's pray Henry understands..."

"Oh, let's!"

EPILOGUE

ÉVEREUX CASTLE

WEDDED BLISS

“Thank you for giving us a second chance, Henry.”

“I’ll not forget him,” Rhiannon added.

Ambrose closed the doors behind them, the racket in the crowded hall muted. “Alone at last!” He picked her up and swung her around raining kisses over her face and neck. She laughed, clinging to his neck for support. “Time to torture you, since you took great pleasure torturing me all day, my lovely bride.”

“Oh, please do!” she giggled.

“Assist me.”

He began to disrobe. She helped him out of his tunic and unlaced his undershirt. She planted kisses over his chest and belly, her hands caressing the hard planes of his body. “You’re beautiful, like a Roman statue.”

“And what does that leave for me to say to you,

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my exquisite silver-haired goddess?"

"Wondrous." She stroked his bulge through his hosen.

"Arrgh! I want those lips on my cock," he growled.

She knelt down before him and unlaced his hosen and his braies, and then pushed them down. He stepped out of them and kicked them aside. Her mouth was on him, her tongue gliding over his swollen head. He groaned. Hot and wet, her mouth sucked and stroked, drawing him deep inside, while her fingers played with his balls. In no time, he felt about ready to explode, withdrew, and pulled her to her feet.

He kissed her neck as he pushed her chemise off her shoulders. She shuddered when his mouth followed the path of her gown. "You are graceful and you taste delicious, wife." He pressed her back onto the edge of the bed and she rested on her elbows. He loved her pink-tipped breasts with his tongue and teeth. He spread her legs and resting her feet on his shoulders, cupped her ass. He bent and drank of her hot nectar, his tongue stroking and dipping deeply into her sacred pool.

"Oh!" She buried her fingers in his hair. "Don't cease what you're doing. Mmm!" She arched up to meet his mouth and he greedily devoured her. Two of his fingers plunged deeply as he played over her aching clit with his tongue, flicking at its pink hood while relishing in her soft gasps of delight. She spilled over his tongue and fingers, her muscles tightening

when she climaxed.

He moved up her body and swiftly entered her, a groan leaving him. "I love you," he whispered in her ear.

"And I—I love you, husband," she answered in a voice filled with poignancy.

They moved in unison, slow and unhurried, their mouths and hands gently exploring.

Ambrose drew back and gazed into her eyes, pumping into her rapidly. Her mouth hung open and sweat dotted her upper lip. He licked it off, and then his teeth captured her lip and tugged. He thrust harder still, her breasts bouncing every time he slammed into her body. Her labored breathing became heaving moans and her body tightened around his pounding cock. Her nails raked his back and he groaned.

"More," she whimpered, arching up to meet each brutal thrust. He obliged and they climaxed together.

He rolled over, pulling her with him, his arms cocooning her, his mouth drinking from hers. "You are my complement, sweet Rhiannon, and I'll love you beyond time.

She sobbed, "And I you, my beloved protector." He lovingly kissed the tears from her eyes.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I was born in 1970, in a small town called Longreach, which is located in Outback Queensland, Australia. I write Historical, Contemporary and Paranormal Romance. (Blush) I'm a hopeless romantic, as you'll see when you read my books. Although, I do like a little bite and a whole lot of spice as well, there's no point in missing out on the good bits. Is there? I'm certain you know what I mean. I'll admit to being a little eccentric. :-) What writer isn't? Mmm...?