

MIMI RISER

A close-up, profile view of a man's face and upper torso. He is shirtless, showing a large, ornate metal collar or pauldron on his right shoulder. He is holding a sword with both hands, the hilt of which is visible. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a curtain.

# A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Book I of My Knightly Adventures

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

...Wolfred's jaw drops in shock. I wriggle out of my bra, and he makes a strangling noise in his throat.

I hope this means he enjoys the view. My tits are one of my few attractive features—firm and full, not girly mag centerfold quality, but not bad. I steal a moment to rub my hands over them and squeeze, stirring my nipples into tight peaks. Moby Dick jumps in response, like a stallion straining at the bit, and a deep, guttural groan rumbles out of the man to which it's attached. Music to my ears.

"You can touch me, too," I promise Wolfred in my sultriest whisper. "You can do anything you want with me. Just let me ditch these damn tights and my body is all yours, noble knight."

"A noble piece of shit, you mean. Don't waste it on him, babe. Not with me here."

My spine stiffens.

*Uh-oh...* Who said that?

Clutching my arms over my breasts, I peer about in all directions, but I can't see anyone except Wolfred, whom I'm still straddling, and who looks as spooked as I feel.

Wary-eyed, he grabs me by the waist, hoists me off to the side, and leaps to his feet, wincing a bit in the process. It must hurt to move so fast with a big boner bobbing between one's legs. I snatch my tunic off the ground, struggle into it—crap, I think I just put it on backward—and scramble upright to stand

beside him.

“Where are you? Show yourself!” he demands.

“*Who* are you?” I add.

Malicious laughter answers us.

“They call me *Wicked*,” a voice like ice hisses close to my ear. “I’m your kinkiest dreams come true.”

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MY KNIGHTLY ADVENTURES  
BOOK I:  
A KNIGHT TO  
REMEMBER

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BY  
MIMI RISER

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A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER  
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*For my delightful editor, Catherine Snodgrass,  
a great gal and a savvy professional who's one heck of  
an author in her own right, all of which makes it a  
pleasure and a privilege to work with her.*

# A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

*Across meadow marred with bramble and bush, under a fat, full moon ran Sir Wolfred—on two legs like a man, but hunched over like an animal. At the moment, he was neither and both. A snarl rumbled deep in his throat and the sharp scent of fresh blood filled his flared nostrils. The moon and the blood disturbed him. The band of peasants on his tail disturbed him more.*

*Big, burly lads they were, angry at his theft and armed with pitchforks, yet no match for his bestial side. It terrified him to think what he might do if they caught him. In his present state he could slaughter them all as easily as the stolen sheep whose blood stained his jowls and splattered the*



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

*mail shirt stretched taut over his furred chest. Right well he'd feasted on the poor ram's raw flesh while the man trapped inside him wept at his uncontrollable wolfish appetite.*

*The man in him cared little for meat even when it was cooked. Why should any creature suffer death simply to feed him? Wolfred the man hated killing in any form. 'Twas a pathetic knight he made with such a soft heart. No wonder the court of Camelot had dubbed him Sir Wolfred the Worthless. No wonder, in his shame, he'd sought the aid of Morgan La Fey.*

*Dare he call on the fairy witch's magic again? Three wishes had she granted him. Only two had he used, but those with dire consequences. When he'd used the second wish to undo the first, his predicament had worsened. He feared to use the third wish for anything.*

*Except the safety of his pursuers, perhaps?*

*Safety from him, that was.*

*Ahead, in the distance, loomed Camelot, glowing like gold in the bright moonlight he'd come to despise. A taunting, haunting sight.*

*Wolfred fastened his gaze on the city while his feet pounded rough turf. If he could but win his way to the outer walls of Camelot, he might sneak in through the postern gate, and thereby reach his quarters where he could hide till sunrise, when he would be free of his curse...till the next full moon.*

*But he'd not think of that now. It took what little human mind he had left to keep himself moving forward. The beast*

## **A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER**

*who'd claimed his body wanted to turn and fight, to bare fangs and claws, crunch bones and tear flesh. Wolfred might outrun the thick-limbed farmers, but he knew he'd ne're escape the beast's bloodlust. Without help, those behind him were all dead meat.*

*So be it, then. If he had one wish left, let it speed him posthaste to Camelot!*

*He voiced the desire in a canine whimper. Naught but a rush of air answered him. Then a sudden whirlwind rose up, swallowed him whole and swept him high off the ground.*

*Caught in a mad spin and blinded by dust, he howled. This wasn't what he'd wanted. How could he reach his sanctuary when he couldn't even see it? By all things holy and unholy, what had he done wrong now? Camelot...where was Camelot?*

*And where in heaven or hell was he?*

\* \* \*

Camelot in west Texas, complete with pennants flying, ladies fair, and courtiers bold! Even the occasional knight in shining armor. Real shiny.

I blink from the glare as one rattles past my outdoor booth—or, rather, flaps past. It's Jim Johnson the junk dealer, fighting to hold himself together in a hot, dry devil wind. His kids made his armor for him out of cardboard covered with aluminum foil, and fastened it on with duct tape. But not very well.

With a deft catch, I field one of his shin guards when it

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

blows off and up over my head. Tired and dusty I may be, but I still have good reflexes.

“Want me to stick it back on you?” I ask.

“Hell, no.” He gives me a sour smirk. “Just dump it, Dee. I’m closin’ early today. Had about all the fun I can stand for one weekend.”

Cursing under his breath, he rips off his other shin guard, wads it into a ball, then stomps down the center fairway to the rear exit gate of Crompton’s Craft Show and Flea Market—open nine to six, Friday through Sunday, the third week of every month. Hoots and laughter follow him, although I’m sure the other vendors sympathize with his mood.

I know I do. It’s been a grueling three days of too much sun, too much wind, and too little money. My sales have been way off. I wish my costume was as well. Normally, I’d be working in shorts, sandals, and tank top, but in honor of “Crompton’s Camelot Days,” I’ve braved the heat in ankle boots, green tights, and a thigh-length green pullover cinched in at the waist with a brown leather belt.

I’m supposed to be Robin Hood. I look like the ill-begotten love child of a roller derby queen and Peter Pan. Blame it on genes and rugged living. I come from tall, sturdy stock, and have somehow fallen into an athletic profession. Traveling the craft show circuit isn’t for the faint of heart or weak of limb. Those of us who do it fulltime are called gypsies, which says a lot.

It’s easier, of course, if you have a partner. I meet a lot of husband and wife teams in this business. But “Dee Day

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Designs” is a solo act. Unfortunately. There’s no man in my life to help drive the van that doubles as my house, no extra set of arms to share the never-ending loading and unloading stock.

No one to share my bed, either, which has given me a chronic case of the hornies. But that’s another story.

Since I do my own set-ups and tear-downs, I didn’t dare don a gown for this gig—only if it was topped by a horned helmet, maybe. I might have made a good Valkyrie. But with my Amazonian stature, the damsel-in-distress look was definitely out. Leave that for the dainty gals.

Like the one across the way, the new vendor. What’s she calling herself? Margaret? Megan? Morgan, that’s it! Morgan La Fey. How quaint.

Now *she* could have stepped straight out of a fairytale picture book. All pearly blue chiffon and floral perfume, a dark haired beauty with big, green eyes and flawless white skin. She almost glows. Whatever sun block that woman uses must be a doozy.

Lady Morgan reeks of roses and looks as fair and fresh this Sunday afternoon as she did Friday morning when she laid out her wares—handcrafted jewelry, wouldn’t you know. Which put her in direct competition with me. The sight of her now, standing so cool and calm behind her red draped table, just makes me feel hotter and itchier.

I hate her.

“Whose brilliant idea was it, anyway, to turn Crompton’s into a Ren Faire this month?” I grumble the question to Henry

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

the Eighth, a.k.a. Henry Baxter, who sits sweating in his version of kingly regalia—a purple velour bathrobe and cowboy boots—in the booth to my right.

“Yours, dang it. Don’t you remember?” He glares at me. “*Camelot Days*, my ass. I’m with Jim—outta here.” With a deep grunt, he hauls his bulk out of a sagging canvas camp chair and starts packing his stock into plastic crates.

Sheesh. For a fat man who makes wooden toys for a living, you’d think he’d be jollier. Usually he is, but this weekend of the winds from hell and battling to keep our stands from being blown to Oz has sapped the patience of us all. Except for Miss Newbee Morgan.

I groan as I see her wafting toward me. On her the wind looks good, billowing her hair about her head like an ebony cloud. I have long hair, too—my one concession to femininity—but mine is blond and whipping around me like Medusa’s snaky locks. It’s driving me nuts, and I lost my feathered cap yesterday and broke my barrette today, so I’m at its mercy. In desperation, I capture the mess with both hands and blindly weave it into a single braid, which probably looks like crap but gets it out of my eyes.

Let’s face it, I can hardly look any dumber than I feel. This Ren Faire fiasco *was* my idea. I’d suggested it to Mr. Crompton as a way to lure more traffic to this godforsaken market. Fat lot of good it did. Apparently, small town westerners don’t have much interest in the Middle Ages. I should have figured that. I should stop grabbing at straws and find a real job...

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

A real life.

Aw, shit. At the moment I'll settle for finding something to secure my braid before it unravels on me. Gripping its end with one hand, I bend over to root through the jumble of supplies at my feet. A bit of beading thread, perhaps? A scrap of pendant cord? Why can't I *ever* locate what I need when I need it?

"Will this help?"

Yikes! I jump up like a jack-in-the-box. Princess Perfect startled me. I'd forgotten she was drifting this way. I stare like an idiot as Morgan reaches across my table, a sly smile on her lips and several inches of decoratively knotted, gaily colored cotton floss dangling from her fingers.

"It's a wish bracelet," she says, "but there's no reason you can't use it as a hair tie."

"A wish bracelet?" Oh, *puhleeze*. I resist the urge to roll my eyes.

Still, it's a nice gesture on her part. I think.

I take the bracelet gingerly between thumb and forefinger, and a sudden shiver dances down my spine. For some reason my hand is shaking. Why, I can't imagine.

Morgan laughs—a silky, sultry sound laced with cryptic innuendo. Her green eyes gleam with mischief. *Knowing* eyes, I'd call them. Her look unnerves me.

"Go ahead, Ms. Day. It won't bite. I'd fasten it on for you, but the magic will work better if you do it. Just visualize your *desire* while tying the bracelet in place. According to tradition, if you wear it till it falls off naturally—meaning you mustn't

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

cut it or untie it—your wish will come true.” Without another word, she pivots and waltzes back to her booth.

Strange woman.

I stand holding the bracelet as if it’s the tail of a dead rat. I’m feeling rather strange myself.

“Wait,” I call. “How much do I owe you?”

Hopefully not more than a buck, because that’s all I can afford. Especially for something I’m not sure I want. Mind you, it is a kind of a cute little bauble. Simple but well crafted. I admire the bright colors and how its intricate knots form a spiral. And it would save me a search.

Damn, why does this seem like such a momentous decision? It’s not as though I believe in wishing spells, for godssake. If I did, I’d wish she hadn’t just said “desire” the way she had. If I didn’t know better, I’d swear it was a deliberate taunt, that she’d looked into my mind and seen some of my desires—the dark, dirty, dangerous ones. Desires that haunt my nights and make me go looking for love in all the wrong places.

With all the wrong men.

Desires that shame me and enflame me.

“Not a thing, my dear.”

Egads, the wench startled me again. I hadn’t heard her return. How does she move so quickly and quietly? Those tiny satin slippers of hers barely graze the ground when she walks.

“Um...excuse me?” I gaze at her in confusion, wondering why she’s raised a fist at me. The heady scent of her perfume makes me giddy, and I can’t remember what we were

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

discussing.

“I said you don’t owe me a thing. It’s a gift. In fact”—her fist opens and two more bracelets drop onto my table—“you’d better have a couple extra. Fairies always give wishes in threes, after all. It’s tradition.”

Uh-huh.

Morgan shoots me a wink, and before I can thank her—before I can decide if I *want* to thank her—she executes a neat pirouette and floats back across the earthy corridor that separates our booths.

*Floats?*

I blink and shake my head. No, I did not see that. I’m woozy from the heat is all. It was just the way the wind billowed Morgan’s chiffon gown about her feet that made her *appear* as though she floated a few inches above the trampled path. Yep, that’s it. And I refuse to waste any more time or energy pondering this nonsense.

I scoop up the extra two bracelets—just to tidy my table, you understand—and stuff them into the suede pouch that hangs from my belt. Then I wrap the third bracelet around the tail end of my braid.

“Don’t forget to make a wish,” Morgan calls.

Ha-ha.

“I wish I was someplace far from here,” I mutter. With a sharp tug, I knot the absurd little cotton floss sucker in place. The hell with magic. This is one wish I can grant myself.

Following Jim and Henry’s lead, I drag out the storage boxes from under my table and begin dismantling my jewelry



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

display. In the process, my braid swings over my shoulder; my brand new, funky-dunky hair tie catches on a necklace rack and pulls off.

Well, damn. I wonder if that counts as “natural.” Not that I care. Even if I did, I don’t have time to worry about it.

“Look out!” Henry yells. But not fast enough.

Without warning—there’s never any warning for these things—a man-sized tornado, what we call a dust devil, swoops up in front of my stand and slams into me like a freight train.

Shit!

I go flying backward, spinning through the air, and brace myself for the coming crash when I’ll hit hard-packed earth.

I hit a hard body instead. Ironclad, muscular arms clench my middle, and a howl shatters my ears.

A howl?

On top of which, I’m still spinning! I’m blinded by dust, dizzy, being rocketed skyward, *and* I’m not alone in this blasted whirlwind. Someone is in here with me!

Or something. It feels like a man—an aroused man, I might add—but it sounds like a goddamned wolf.

What the fuck?

I must be hallucinating. Yeah, I’ve been knocked out and I’m dreaming. No way can this be real. I mean, *me* squashed together with a big, bad, horny wolf? I’m no Little Red Riding Hood. I don’t have this kind of luck.

In a close clinch, we spiral up, then drop—suddenly—and separate as we land in what seems to be a deep pool of clean,

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

fresh water.

Splash! Talk about a wet dream.

Down, down we plummet through cool, crystalline depths. The instant my boots touch a solid bottom I push off it. I still can't believe this is real, but I refuse to drown in a hallucination. With a strong kick and a breaststroke, I make for the sunlight I see sparkling on ripples far above me. My traveling companion's head breaks the water's surface a few seconds after I do, but he's several feet away.

We are, I notice, in the center of a small lake in some sort of large meadow. I see wild flowers galore and emerald green grassy banks with a rim of reeds where water meets land. I also see what looks like a—*gulp*—yellow brick road winding off into the distance toward the turrets and walls of very medieval appearing city. I'd appreciate a moment to mull this over, but there's something else I see.

My companion can't swim!

Good frigging grief.

Two swift strokes carry me to his floundering side, and I catch him under his bearded chin with one hand just as he's going down for the third time. Lucky for him this is how I spent my summer vacations when I was in college.

"Relax. I used to be a lifeguard, so I know what I'm doing," I tell him.

He doesn't seem comforted. In fact, he tries to twist out of my grip. Drowning victims do sometimes fight their rescuers—why, I've never been able to figure. I still manage to swim him into the shallows and drag him onto the bank,

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

where he coughs up a quart of lake water, then collapses face first into the grass while I stand, dripping, beside him.

“‘Twould have been better had you let me die,” he moans.

Super. Five minutes ago, inside our whirlwind, he was groping me and growling like a sex crazed beast, and now he wants death. I’m not surprised, actually. I often have this effect on men. On the day we split, my last boyfriend told me I had an intensity that scared him. I knew what he meant, and it scares me, too. But this is hardly the time or place to worry about my “dark side,” as I call it. Hell, I don’t even know what time and place this is.

I have, however, been forced to admit I’m not dreaming. For one thing, I generally dream in black and white, and this sunlit meadow screams with color. It makes my eyeballs want to explode. Everything is almost too vivid, but undeniably real, from the sweet scent of the wild flowers and the buzzing of honey bees to the clingy, clammy feel of my drenched clothes and the sight of Sir Soggy the Sorrowful sprawled out on his stomach before me.

A real knight?

I’d like to think he was one of the participants of Crompton’s Camelot Days, but I don’t recall seeing him there. I’d have remembered a costume this good—not to mention the body under it and his long, brown hair. His mail shirt looks authentic. The muscles it covers look pretty authentic, too. And that accent of his...

Though it makes me doubt my already questionable sanity, I’m inclined to believe this knight is the genuine article.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

With a grunt and a groan, he rolls over onto his back and blinks up at the bright blue sky. “Blessed sunlight,” he whispers, and his hands touch his smooth cheeks.

Wait a minute... *Smooth?* I could have sworn he had a beard, but it must have been some of his hair plastered to his jaw by the water, because there’s no beard on him now.

“Praise the saints,” he says on a sigh. “’Tis a man I am.”

God, yes. And if any saints are listening, they have my praise as well. I’m in danger of drooling as I watch him pull to his feet and gaze about, a dazed expression on his handsome face. *Very* handsome. I mean it, the guy is gorgeous. In the struggle to get him out of the lake, I hadn’t paid much attention to his appearance. Now I can’t stop staring. He has movie star perfect features and eyes bluer than the sky.

Eyes that are suddenly studying me as intently as I’m studying him.

A naughty thrill races through me as his gaze slides down my front and lands on my chest. His eyes widen, and not at my breasts’ size, I’m afraid, though I do have a decent rack. I think he’s surprised by my Robin Hood suit. He would be, I suppose, if he’s from an era when men dressed as men, and women didn’t.

“Bloody hell,” he curses. “You’re a lass!”

I’m so glad he’s noticed. I’d be happier, however, if he’d do something about it—like rip off my apparently shocking garb and ravish me.

“Whom were you expecting?” I ask him. “The Wicked Witch of the West?”

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

Not a bad idea, that. I have to admit I'm feeling wicked at the moment. It's my dark side rising to the fore, the side that likes sex raunchy and rough. There's a part of me that wants to be overpowered and dominated, used hard. It wars with my better nature, which wants a long-term, loving relationship.

Unless I can reconcile these two conflicting needs, I know I'm doomed to a lifetime of loneliness and frustration, because the kind of man who can satisfy my dark desires is no good for the rest of me, and vice versa. What I want, really, is both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—the impossible—a nice guy who becomes a beast in bed. And I don't believe such a creature exists.

Then again, a short while ago I didn't believe in magic, either. But, even if my beliefs have expanded, I'm not looking for love, long-term or otherwise, in this fantasy scene. Magic is one thing; a miracle is something else. On the other hand, I wouldn't say no to a fast, hot fantasy fuck while I'm waiting to return home.

I've figured out how to do that—return, I mean—at least, I think I have. I can wish my way back to Crompton's with one of the bracelets I stuffed into my belt pouch. This is assuming, of course, that the wish I made with the bracelet I tied on my braid is what brought me here. I did ask to be somewhere far from where I was, right? Unfortunately, I neglected to specify *how* far. That must be where I went wrong. Well, how the hell was I to know the damn thing would work?

Mind you, now that I do know, I could kick myself for needing to waste my second wish to get me out of this

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

spot...because I've already wasted the first one getting into it. I still have the third wish, though, and I've decided to use it to manifest a big bunch of money. That's my mercenary side talking. Yeah, I know money can't buy happiness, but it makes being miserable a lot more comfortable.

Thoughts of luxurious living mingle with my libido's cravings as Sir Studly drops to one knee, cavalier style, to kneel before me. Which puts his mouth almost on level with my crotch. My pulse jumps in automatic response, and there's suddenly more than lake water making me wet between the legs.

Regretfully, my chivalrous knight—too chivalrous, I fear—ignores the possibilities of this pose. His eyes are downcast, and his entire demeanor is one of deferential respect. Marvy. I'm beginning to think I imagined him mauling me in the whirlwind the same as I imagined his nonexistent beard. It's obvious this dude is a gentleman. Pure Jekyll without an ounce of Hyde.

Shit. There go my dreams of ravishment.

"My lady," he says, "if you are a witch, I beseech you to return me to my rightful place."

"Which is?" I ask. Considering the medieval city in the distance, I'd hoped this fairyland was his home turf. It looks like his kind of place, after all. But now I realize he's as much a stranger here as I am. Double shit. I suspect I'm about to lose my dreams of wealth, too.

"King Arthur's court, my lady. I am Wolfred of Camelot, at your service."

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Oh, the temptation. He's not just a real knight, but also one from the legendary Round Table. My knees go weak. I can think of too many ways he could "service" me.

His gaze lifts to mine—a beautiful, deep blue plea—and I'm lost. Good-bye, life of luxury. Between my dark side and mercenary side beats the heart of a hopeless romantic. I can't leave one of Arthur's knights stranded here if I have the power to send him home.

Heaving a resigned sigh, I motion him upward.

"Arise, Sir Wolfred." *Before I grab you by the ears and grind your handsome face against my pussy.* "I'm no witch, but I think I can grant your request."

While he climbs to his feet, I open my belt pouch and fish out two sodden twirls of magical floss. One is rose pink and leaf green, a piece of springtime. The other is blood red and black. Satanic colors. I hand him that one, not because it's more masculine, but on the off chance it'll inspire devilish thoughts in his apparently noble mind. Hey, I can hope, can't I?

He holds it draped over his fingers and stares at it, blankly.

Well, it was worth a try.

"That's a wish bracelet," I explain. "You make a wish as you tie it on. Then you have to wait for the bracelet to fall off of its own accord—which is the tricky part, I guess, because there's no telling how long that could take. But I'm pretty sure these things work. If we use them correctly, they ought to get us where we want to go. Eventually. And, while we're waiting, I have tons of ideas for ways to pass the time," I can't

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

resist adding. I'm so bad.

"Wishing? Nay." His blank look turns wary, and a blush stains his cheeks. "'Twas a wish that called up the wind that blew me here, when I did but ask to be sped to Camelot."

I'll bet he didn't stipulate which Camelot, though, because he did land briefly in Crompton's version—not that I care to enlighten him on this score. He might decide our current predicament is my fault. And maybe he'd be right. Maybe if I hadn't made my wish when I did, Wolfred's whirlwind would've left him in the market instead of snagging me and continuing on with us both. Granted, he'd still have been a long way and a long time from home, but he sure would have livened up the craft show.

"My thanks to you, lady, but I pray you keep this for yourself." With a small but oh-so courtly bow, Wolfred hands back the bracelet. "May it serve you better than 'twould me. I've little luck with wishes," he says, grim and hoarse, as though the words taste bitter to him. "In my hands they become curses."

Indeed. Do I smell the scorch of backfired desires? I wonder what else he's wished for that's gone awry, but I don't ask. It's none of my business. Besides, his tense posture and tight-lipped expression imply he wouldn't tell me if I did ask.

All I know is I'm feeling a weird chill. This guy's been burned, and badly. I sense it on a gut level, see pain and tragedy in his eyes. It prickles my back hairs, raises goose bumps on my arms. Some hidden horror haunts him.

I find that very sexy in a man. My weird chill and goose



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

bumps wax into waves of tingling warmth. Yes, I'm a sick chick. I should be ashamed of myself.

I am ashamed. But I'm still thinking of all the ways he might ease his inner ache—or mine, at least—by pounding me into carnal oblivion. I can't help it. I've always been a sucker for the dark, tortured type. Mr. Hyde with angst. It doesn't get any hotter.

However, he's not Mr. Hyde but a knight of fabled Camelot—and not so dark as I'd thought either, or quite so large. I'm almost six foot, myself, and he stands only an inch or two taller. Also, now that his hair is beginning to dry, I realize it's not even close to brown. It's blonder than mine. Like a fall of corn silk it brushes his shoulders, and his mail shirt dances with sparkles in the late afternoon sunlight.

All gold and silver he is. Truly a knight in shining armor. As a rule, I don't go in much for blonds, but I'd fast make an exception in his case. Sir Wolfred of the haunted and haunting blue eyes dazzles me.

I'm enthralled.

In lust.

With heart flutters that warn I'm precariously near *in love*, too.

I'm in deep shit is where I am. I have mentioned my romantic side, right? It gets me in more trouble than all my other sides combined.

Oh, hell, who am I kidding? I hardly know this man. We come from different worlds, centuries apart! He could be married, for godssake. In his era, almost everyone married,

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

and often young. I can just picture his lady, some delicate damsel in a diaphanous gown. The personification of feminine grace. No doubt she's kitten soft and beautiful. I've never met her and never will, but I hope she dies a horrible death. I'm an awful person.

I think I want to go home now.

There are times I really hate being the rugged, outdoorsy type. This is one of them.

Feeling morbid, I loop the pink and green bracelet around my right wrist and knot it in place while silently wishing myself back to Crompton's. I could have tied it in my hair again; it would probably work faster that way. But I'm more concerned that it work, period, so I'm doing things strictly by the book.

I glance at the remaining bracelet in my hand, then at Wolfred. "You sure you don't want this?"

With a sad shake of his head, he refuses. "I dare not."

Damn. The guy tugs on my heartstrings in more ways than one. I have a nurturing side, too—animals and small children spot it a mile away, as if I'm wearing a flashing neon sign that says "soft touch." I'm sorry Wolfred won't let me help him.

On a sudden whim, I wrap the red and black bracelet around my left wrist.

"How about if I make a wish for you?" One handed, with fingers nimble from countless hours of craftwork, I knot the floss ends together. "I wish you comfort and joy, good knight. May you find whatever it takes to bring you peace of mind and happiness."

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

A simple enough wish, and general enough to be safe for him, I think. I punctuate it with a smile.

Wolfred's gloomy expression melts into bemused wonder. For a long moment he does nothing but stare. Then a small, wry grin curls his mouth at the corners.

"I fear such a wish is not possible. Yet forever shall I treasure the tender thought behind it, and hold the memory of your kindness close in my heart. That alone will give me cheer. You are most generous, my lady...and most fair. A bright, winsome spirit shines in your eyes, and your smile be sweeter than the rosy blooms of this field."

*Cough.* I'm tempted to turn around and see if there's another woman standing behind me to whom he might be referring. Many are the things I've been called—but never *fair* or *sweet*. God, he talks pretty. Courtly rhetoric, I realize. The standard flowery speech of his day, and as empty as the polite nothings of my own time, but it still makes me feel like I've just swallowed a boatload of butterflies. I don't know what to answer.

My breath snags as he takes my hand in his and raises it to his lips for a chaste kiss. Chaste for him, I mean. Me, I nearly come in my pants. Liquid heat spirals up my arm and floods out through my whole body.

"Will you journey a ways with me?" he asks. "I must depart for home, yet I like not leaving you alone whilst you wait for your wish to work."

Ever the gallant, isn't he? Lord, at this moment, I'd follow him into hell. There's a little problem here, though—besides

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

my rampaging hormones.

“Ahem...” I clear my throat. “How do you propose to return to Camelot?”

“Walk, if I must. Though I daresay I can buy a sturdy mount in yon city.” He gazes off toward the turrets in the distance while weighing in one hand a small bag that hangs from his belt. A moneybag, I gather, by the jungle of coins.

“I have a month to travel ere the next full moon,” he murmurs thoughtfully.

And cryptically. I can’t imagine what he means, but my back hairs prickles anew. Then his gaze shifts to mine, and he gives me a quick, brave smile that melts my toenails.

“Mayhap ’tis not so far to Camelot as I first feared,” he says.

And mayhap ’tis a great deal farther. My stomach knots at the thought.

I shouldn’t worry. He’s a grown man, a trained warrior. I’m sure he can take care of himself. But I doubt he understands our situation. This land probably looks pretty similar to the one he left. How could he even guess where we are? I’m not certain, myself—although that yellow brick road a few yards away tells me we’re not in Kansas.

And the Dee I go by is a nickname. It’s short for Dorothy.

Honestly, I could just scream.

“Ack!” I do scream as a big, glowing globe drops out of the sky and lands at our feet. It bursts on impact, and—*crack*—there’s a long, lean figure with dark eyes and a thick mane of glossy black hair standing beside us.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

A man.

I think.

He's several inches taller than I am and way prettier—though that might be because he's wearing more makeup than I ever have. He's also wearing high heels, stockings, a black satin thong and corset, and a scarlet boa.

Holy shit. A few seconds ago I thought I was starring in *The Wizard of Odd*. Now I'm in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*?

"Hmm...not your thing?" The man blinks at what I'm sure is a dumbstruck expression on my face. "Sorry about that. Judging by your costume, I assumed you went for cross-dressers. But if you prefer the macho look..."

He snaps his fingers, and, with a flash of light and a thunderclap, his eyeliner and lipstick vanish. His clothes metamorphose into skintight black leather slacks, biker boots, and a silver studded black leather vest with nothing beneath it except a lean, mean expanse of sun bronzed shoulders and chest.

Hellooooo, Mr. Hyde.

God, I'm in trouble.

"This better?" He shoots me a wicked grin, and my mouth goes dry.

Whew. Is it just me, or is it starting to get really hot here?

"What a rare, strange mage," Wolfred mutters, sounding less than thrilled about it. "Stand you back, my lady, till I discover whether he be friend or foe."

My hero. Dr. Jekyll in mail.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

“Oh, I’m friendly. Very.” Mr. Hyde aims his sexy, panther-on-the-prowl grin at Wolfred. “I’m Glenn, the Good Switch of the North.”

“I should have guessed that,” I strain out. Glenn the Good—who I suspect is deliciously bad—is eyeing both Wolfred and me with equal interest. His hungry gaze stirs my own dark appetite. Lordy, I’d love to be the filling in a Jekyll and Hyde sandwich—if Jekyll would cooperate, which I seriously doubt. Wolfred is returning Glenn’s perusal with a sullen, suspicious glare.

“Have a care, my lady,” he whispers. “Methinks this mage is *too* friendly.”

“Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it, tin man.” Glenn chuckles. “The Munchers sent me word of your arrival,” he says to me, with a wink. “You interrupted their bath time. Cautious fellows, Munchers, until they get to know you. They’ve been hiding in the reeds at the water’s edge.”

*Munchers?*

I’m afraid to ask.

“You’re in the Land of the Little People,” he adds, and claps his hands. “It’s okay, boys! You can come out now.”

The lake reeds rustle and part. Dozens of male heads pop into view, followed by broad shoulders and brawny chests as the Munchers rise up from their cover. I feel like I’m about to be besieged by the Oakland Raiders. I wouldn’t mind being raided by a football team, actually. But first things first.

“Um...Glenn...” My eyes narrow. “There is nothing *little* about these people.”

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

“Oh, yes, there is.” He chuckles again.

And I suffer a sudden coughing fit as the Munchers surround us. A bevy of beefcake. A whole herd of handsome, naked hunks.

With dicks no bigger than my pinky finger.

I am *so* disappointed.

“Don’t worry, they make up for it with other attributes,” Glenn tells me. “Show her, boys.”

In unison, the hunks’ tongues flick out, and they lick their eyebrows.

Oh. My. God.

The hot, sticky, steamy potential... My thighs quiver under me and my breath wheezes out in a hoarse rasp.

“Why do you think we call them the *Munchers*?” Glenn asks. A rhetorical question. He knows I know the answer. His feral gaze focuses on a point several inches south of my belt buckle, and his nostrils flare as though scenting my arousal.

“Mmm, I’d enjoy a taste of that, myself,” he murmurs.

As far as I’m concerned, he can have it. They all can! Visions of an oral gangbang flood my dirty mind. I see hard, bare bodies rolling in the soft, sweet grass. Theirs. On mine. All of us slick with sweat and glued together in a wild, erotic tumble. I feel long tongues spearing my cunt and probing my ass, lapping at my throbbing clit and eating me into one orgasm after another, and another...

I’m such a slut.

But I’m also in a very surreal situation—a genuine fantasyland—and, with my wish bracelets, I don’t need any

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

silly red slippers to get me out of it, either. Not that the wish bracelets aren't kind of silly, too, but at least I didn't have to squash anyone to acquire them.

Whatever.

The point is, this is just a temporary fling. And anonymous. None of these guys know me, and I'll never see any of them again once I leave. Why not indulge myself? What's the point of being in *fantasyland*, anyway, if I can't live out a few fantasies while I'm here?

Only one thing stops me from tearing open my tunic, shredding my tights, and spreading my legs.

"Wolfred!" I gasp as he grabs me around the waist and tosses me over his shoulder. *Oof*. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Removing you from harm's way, my lady, as I am sworn to protect all women. 'Tis clear these heathens mean you dishonor."

One can only hope.

"I *want* to be dishonored, damn it."

"Then I fear you are either ill or bewitched, and I needs must protect you from yourself also, till the fever passes."

He locks me in place with one arm over my hips, shoves through the Munchers, and strides with me onto the road. No mean feat, considering my size, but he's built like a tank. I swear his muscles are as hard as his mail. He's got a really cute ass, too, I can't help noticing, since it's right under my nose at present. If he thinks carrying me off caveman style is going to cool my "fever," he's got another think coming. God,



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

I love masterful men.

“Sorry you can’t stay longer,” Glenn calls—and, yes, he’s laughing. The guy does seem to find us endlessly amusing. “But if you’re heading to Garnet City, maybe we can hook up again later. I’m there almost every night. You can find me at Club Wicked.”

*Wicked?* That got my attention.

“Is Garnet City the one ahead?” I holler back. “Is it anything like the Emerald City?”

“One and the same. Just follow the yellow brick road,” Glenn shouts. Somehow I knew he would. “It used to be called Emerald, but we changed the name to match the new color scheme. Most of it is now a red-light district.”

Gee, sounds like my kinda place.

“Bloody hell,” Wolfred grumbles. He quickens his pace, and soon—in a bumpy ride for me as I bounce on his shoulder—the lake is lost behind a bend in the road.

“I beg you be wary of that mage,” he warns in a tight voice. “I trust him not.”

“Whatsa matter?” I snap. “You jealous?”

Yeah, right. Ha-ha.

I don’t mean it, of course. I’m just being bitchy because I’m horny and frustrated, and he’s a large part of the reason why.

I heave an aggravated sigh.

So does Wolfred.

“Aye, I am,” he admits, but so softly I’m not sure I really hear it.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Even if I did, I don't believe it. I might have fallen for him at first sight, but that's me. I'm always lusting after someone; it's seldom reciprocated. And never by guys of his caliber.

"I'm jealous of the looks he gave you. Were I free to, my lady, I'd be giving you such looks meself. Mayhap I'd be more than looking...were I not what I am."

Say what?

Suddenly air is a scarce commodity. My pulse is racing.

He pulls up short in the center of the road, lowers me to my feet, and steps back. Talk about looks. He's giving me a gut-wrenching gaze now—sad and sexy in the same breath. Hot and hurting. It squeezes my heart like a vise. I don't know what's going on here, but I know a man who needs comfort when I see one. It's his loss and my gain that I'm the only person near enough to offer it.

Brazen hussy that I am, I move nearer. "So what's stopping you? Chivalry? A wife?"

God, I hope it's the former. A man's code of honor I'm willing to tarnish, but not his marriage.

"No wife. I'm not fit for any woman." Grim and grimacing, he turns and stalks off into the tree dotted meadow that borders the road.

Where he thinks he's going, I have no idea. I doubt he does either. Who cares? I'm right on his heels.

"You're a knight of Camelot, for godssake. If that doesn't signify *fit*, what does?"

"Oh, aye. A fine, bold knight." With a hollow laugh, he halts under the nearest tree and plops down to sit on a carpet

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

of moss at its base. “’Tis why they call me Wolfred the Worthless.”

“The *what*?”

He winces at my shrill tone. I slap a hand over my mouth.

“Sorry,” I mumble through my fingers. “I didn’t mean to screech.”

“’Tis not you.” The mockery of a grin twists his lips as he leans back against the tree’s gnarled trunk. “Just that I’ve...keener ears than most. Keener eyes, a keener nose...”

Keener everything from what I can see. A glorious specimen of manhood. How could anyone call him *worthless*? They don’t make guys like this anymore. If he wasn’t so goddamned gallant, I’d consider him the perfect lifetime feast for a starving woman like me.

As it is, I still think he’d be a delicious late afternoon snack. Tinned man. Male meat in mail. He makes my mouth water. I’d love to see him in fewer clothes—or no clothes. Where’s a can opener when I need one?

With effort, I rein in my ravenous appetite and content myself by devouring him with my eyes. What a yummy physique.

“You’re stronger than most, too,” I muse aloud.

“Ah, my strength. That at least is honestly earned.”

Which means what? His other abilities, such as his sharp senses, aren’t? There’s a weird thought. Hearing and sight are genetic traits, aren’t they? Inherited. What’s dishonest about that? Feeling an odd prickle, I wait to see if he’ll elaborate.

“Long practice with heavy weapons builds muscle and

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

skill in a man,” is all he says. “At swordplay and jousting, a champion I am. ’Twas how I won a place at Arthur’s table.”

And, boy, does he sound bitter about it. *Why?* I study his profile as he stares off into the distance, seeing God only knows what in his mind’s eye.

“In a tournament, few save Sir Lancelot can best me. But if the battle be real...” He shakes his head. “I play the coward in war. ’Tis not my own death I fear. I dread to cause another’s. I know how to fight, yet I shudder to kill.”

Good Lord, a *pacifist knight*. That’s gotta be a contradiction in terms.

Shock buckles my knees, and down I go—whoosh—as though the ground were a rug yanked out from under my feet. Shit. I feel like an idiot. On the bright side, I also feel firm thighs under my fanny. Bemused, blue eyes blink into mine. Things may be looking up.

I’ve landed on Wolfred’s lap.

“Ahem...sorry.” I cough. “I’m not usually so clumsy.” Or so lucky.

“Nay, lady, the fault be mine for shocking you with a shameful confession.”

Bullshit. I was shocked, true, but not for the reason he thinks. I understand now what haunts him—probably better than he does. The poor guy is centuries ahead of his time. Sir Wolfie isn’t a warrior. He’s a professional athlete! Being the sporty sort, myself, I recognize his mindset, and I approve. Granted, I approved of him even before, but this new development broadens his appeal.

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

I notice he hasn't pushed me off his lap either, or tried to squirm out from under me. Another point in his favor. Cupping his face between my hands, I gaze deep into his eyes.

He gazes back.

So far, so good.

"I'm not shocked. I'm awed by the inner strength that rivals your outer," I say, husky and low, blowing a whisper of warm breath on his brow with the words.

Yes, I'm trying to seduce him. Is it working? I hope.

"You are?" His eyes widen in surprise.

I'm not sure if this is a good sign or not, but I'll take it as one, for the sake of optimism if nothing else. I'm still on his lap, at any rate, and his arms have snaked about my waist.

Hmm, come to think of it, that's a positive sign all by itself. Hot damn.

I press home my advantage by leaning in and locking him between the tree and my breasts. His chain mail chafes my nipples even through two layers of clothing—my tunic and bra—but I like its harsh feel. I would, of course.

"Oh, aye," I murmur, imitating his accent, which I find utterly charming and sexy as sin. Given the choice, I'd rather be on the receiving end of a ravishment, but I'm quite capable of being the aggressor if the occasion demands. My hands slide around the back of his neck, and I lower my head till my lips almost graze his. My eyes half close.

"You enjoy fighting as a sport, but not if people have to die in the course of it, and I don't blame you. There's nothing sporting about killing." I punctuate the statement with a

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

feathery kiss at the corner of his mouth.

A throaty groan rasps out of him. A raw, sensual sound. Promising. Since I seem to be making progress, I plant a second kiss at the other corner of his mouth, but this time I can't resist an added taste. With the tip of my tongue, I trace the luscious curve of his lower lip, then give it a tiny nip. Mmm...

Wolfred jerks beneath me as if a bee just stung him on the butt. Lucky bee.

A desperate edge sharpens his voice, and his chest heaves with short, ragged breaths. Hah, I'm winning. He's almost panting. So am I, for that matter.

"Have a care, lady. You know naught what manner of man I am."

"I know you're no coward. Quite the opposite. I think you're wonderfully courageous to stick to your ideals. You must suffer a lot of ridicule for it, but know this—you're a better and braver man than those who call you 'worthless.'"

"I'm worse than worthless!"

His arms clench around me, and in one swift move, he twists and swings us to the side. Suddenly I'm on my back, trapped between soft moss and hard man—caught breathless and burning in the smoky blue scorch of a wildfire stare.

"I'm *cursed*," he hisses. "You should flee from me. A beast blackens my soul."

No, shit? The gallant Sir Jekyll has a Hyde side, after all?

Oh, be still, my beating heart!

And, no, I'm not thinking clearly. Who could think,

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

period, at a time like this? Electric shivers course through me. Every nerve ending thrums with excitement. He's just said the magic word.

"Beast? I love beasts. Let's free yours now." Growling like a hungry lioness, I reverse our positions—shove, roll, and pin him to the ground. The hell with dainty and feminine. Sometimes being a tall, muscular woman pays off. He can overpower me, I'm sure, but I want him to prove it. Even more, I want him to *want* to prove it. Showing him my strength will challenge him to display his own...I hope. A wrestling match makes for thrilling foreplay.

Especially if we wrestle in the raw—hot, naked skin to skin.

*Rowrrr...* I kneel over him, straddling his thighs.

"Aren't you uncomfortable in these wet clothes? They'll dry faster if we spread them out on the grass. C'mon," I urge. "I'll help you undress if you help me."

Wolfred grapples for my hands as I hike up his mail shirt and tunic. "Only the round face of the moon frees my beast, lady. And believe me, you do *not* want to meet him."

"Oh, yes, I do." I let out a low, naughty laugh. Surely he's jesting. "Moon? What are you, a werewolf?"

I stop short, stunned and staring at what I've just uncovered. A beast indeed. *Wow*. I do adore medieval garments. He's wearing the early style hose. Similar to tights they stretch from toe to waist, but in two separate pieces, without a crotch seam to join them. Hence, one of the best erections I've ever seen is aimed at me, like a bazooka.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

No, make that *the* best. A steel club cased in smooth silk, long and hard and thick as my wrist. More than a beast, a monster. Moby Dick, the denizen of the deep. And me, who's always been a seafood fanatic—I see food, I eat it. Salivating, I lean forward, determined to discover if Moby tastes and feels as good as he looks.

“Aye,” Wolfred says on a harsh breath.

He might be answering my question. Except I can't remember *what* I've just asked him, so I'm going to assume he's giving me permission to wrap my lips around his scrumptious cock and suck his brains out, lick him to the edge of ecstasy—then sit on him and ride him over the brink. My vaginal muscles spasm at the prospect, and slick cream pools in my panties. Which reminds me...

My tights *aren't* the medieval kind. Shit. How fast can I strip?

“Hold that pose,” I tell him, quickly, while fumbling with my belt buckle. “Don't move! I'll only be a sec.”

My belt pops open, and I fling it aside, then yank my tunic up and over my head. This leaves me in a red sports bra, the green tights, and ankle boots. I suspect I look like some kind of depraved and demented, overgrown Christmas elf with a glandular problem.

Wolfred's jaw drops in shock. I wriggle out of my bra, and he makes a strangling noise in his throat.

I hope this means he enjoys the view. My tits are one of my few attractive features—firm and full, not girly mag centerfold quality, but not bad. I steal a moment to rub my



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

hands over them and squeeze, stirring my nipples into tight peaks. Moby Dick jumps in response, like a stallion straining at the bit, and a deep, guttural groan rumbles out of the man to which it's attached. Music to my ears.

"You can touch me, too," I promise Wolfred in my sultriest whisper. "You can do anything you want with me. Just let me ditch these damn tights and my body is all yours, noble knight."

"A noble piece of shit, you mean. Don't waste it on him, babe. Not with me here."

My spine stiffens.

*Uh-oh...* Who said that?

Clutching my arms over my breasts, I peer about in all directions, but I can't see anyone except Wolfred, whom I'm still straddling, and who looks as spooked as I feel.

Wary-eyed, he grabs me by the waist, hoists me off to the side, and leaps to his feet, wincing a bit in the process. It must hurt to move so fast with a big boner bobbing between one's legs. I snatch my tunic off the ground, struggle into it—crap, I think I just put it on backward—and scramble upright to stand beside him.

"Where are you? Show yourself!" he demands.

"*Who* are you?" I add.

Malicious laughter answers us.

"They call me *Wicked*," a voice like ice hisses close to my ear. "I'm your kinkiest dreams come true."

Nightmares he means. And—*oh, God*—I'm so afraid he's right. The gut clenching, give-me-a-heart-attack kind of right.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Hot and cold chills sweep me, frying my flesh and freezing my blood at the same time. My lungs stall and I can't breathe.

I don't think I've mentioned my Dracula fantasies—which are far worse than my Hyde fantasies—but whoever this is sounds just like them. The voice of pure evil calling to the darkest dark within me. A devil man who can drain me dry, fuck me to death.

And who intends to do just that. Literally. Somehow I know it.

"Mmm, yeah," the vampire voice whispers as though its unseen owner is reading my mind. "But what a way to go, huh?"

With a lightning crack and a cloud of sulfurous smoke, he appears before us, all bare, bronzed chest, raven hair, and hard thighs—all burning eyes and razor sharp grin—his arms akimbo and a black cape billowing out behind him like giant batwings. A mean muscled sword stroke of a man in leather and studs. He looks similar to Glenn, actually. But where Glenn looked bad, Wicked looks lethal. Which makes sense, I suppose, if Glenn is supposed to be the *good* force of this land. Everything is relative, y' know?

His gaze sizzles over me from top to toe and back to my face. I'm sure he can see right through my clothes, through my skin, straight into the deepest, dirtiest corners of my soul. Never have I felt so naked, so vulnerable—all my secret lusts exposed and explored, pinned down on a mounting board like wriggling insects for him to dissect.

"Mmm, yeah," he murmurs again. "You'll do very nicely.

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

They'll love you at my little bistro...on the west side of the city."

Wicked of the west? If that's supposed to be funny, I'm not laughing.

"Club Wicked? I've heard of it," I choke out.

"Aw, and here I was saving it for a surprise. Who told you? Glenn? I oughta flog that snitchy switch...but he'd enjoy it too much." Wicked's grin broadens enough to show me the pearly points of two fangs. A vampire in truth, but not just a bloodsucker, I sense. This one feeds also on raw passion and pain. I can tell because right now he's feasting on mine.

"I'll make you the star attraction, babe. Customers will line up around the block to see what I do to you—and participate in the fun, too, of course. Here, have a taste of what's on the menu..."

Glowing eyes bore into my mind. With the look, steamy images swamp me. More than images. Sounds... smells... touch... I'm engulfed by a seething sensory show.

I seem to be the show, in fact.

I think I've just gone insane.

The meadow has disappeared, and so have my clothes. I'm on a circular, slowly revolving stage in the center of a large, crowded room. I'm also immobilized, shackled by wrist and ankle between two pillars, stretched taut in a spread-eagled stance. When I tug on my bonds, they tug back, spreading me wider.

Are we having fun yet?

I'm hyperventilating is what I am. My head's spinning and

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

my skin's flushed. It's hotter than Hades in here. Maybe it is Hades. Flashing strobe lights make the air appear to pulse, and heavy metal music throbs in my ears. An odor of decadence permeates the place—pungent oils and incense mix with the musky scent of sex.

A lot of sex.

As the stage turns, I see carnal action everywhere, an erotic jumble of bodies. Some wear black leather, some only the sheen of oil and sweat. But all are male and built like brick walls. All are aroused and flaunting it. I'm surrounded by a boiling sea of rigid rods and lusty looks.

Men slouch back in their chairs, their pants, if they're wearing any, pooled around their feet and their erections pointing toward a high, hazy ceiling. They leer at me while stroking themselves and each other. Large hands grip thick shafts and pump. Fingers fondle firm balls, rub and squeeze, as grunts and gasps merge with the music.

In the front row, a man slips out of his seat to crouch between the legs of another, merciless intent stamped on his face. He flashes me a wink over his shoulder, then leans in and sucks his companion's cock far into his mouth, deep-throats him. The owner of the swallowed cock quivers and groans.

And I groan with him, wanting to not look, not respond, but hypnotized by the unabashed heat of the sight—trapped wide-eyed, stunned and panting, like a fly in a flaming web.

Two more men—both of them naked and ripped to kill—sink to the floor. One lays on his back, the second braces up on knees and elbows over him, head to crotch in a sixty-nine

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

position. As they begin eating each other, a third hunk with a huge hard-on joins them. He kneels behind the top man, grabs his hips and spears him deep in the ass. Then he pulls out and pushes in again. And again... Together, the trio sets a wanton rhythm of sucking and fucking.

*Ohmigod...* A shudder racks through me. My muscles clench as though I'm right there in the middle of them. I'm afraid I will be soon. While he plunges in and out of hunk two, hunk three's gaze locks on mine, and the glitter in his eyes says: *You're next.*

"Hot stuff, huh?" Wicked's whisper sends a sharp chill knifing down my spine. I hear him close behind me, feel his cold breath on my neck. "They're doing it for you, babe. All of them...all of this... For you and *because* of you. The sight of you drives them wild with lust. They're just trying to return the favor."

He didn't have to explain. I *know* what's happening—and I suspect why. This entire scene, my current bondage and all that goes with it might have been pulled straight out of the smoke filled shadows of my murkiest fantasies. A sick feeling in my gut warns I've brought it on myself, that Morgan's bracelets work better than I thought.

*Visualize your desire*, she said.

And, God help me, I did. So even though I'd simply—and flippantly—wished myself far from Crompton's, my mind was full of dirty sex at the time. I think that's what landed me here, smack in the center of my darkest dreams. I've been granted my *desire*, all right. Except now that I have it, I discover a

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

very strange thing.

I don't want it! Not like this.

With the thought, the scene vanishes—*snap*—gone. It was only an illusion, I realize. In the blink of an eye, I'm back in the meadow and gasping with relief.

But not for long.

"What? You didn't enjoy my little preview of the coming attractions?" Wicked's lip curls in a mocking sneer. "Never mind. I'm sure you'll find the genuine event a much bigger turn-on."

And I'm sure I won't. Just like another Dorothy who went searching for her heart's desire and got more than she bargained for, I've learned something about myself. I know now that some dreams are better off left as dreams, that fantasies in the flesh aren't always as fantastic as we've imagined them to be. I understand what Wolfred meant about wishes becoming curses.

And it's too goddamned late to do anything about it.

Wicked pierces me with a dagger stare, and I'm paralyzed. Literally spellbound. I can't speak, can't move. His arms open wide in beckoning, and his cape spreads out behind him like unfurled wings.

"C'mon, babe. It's *showtime*," he hisses.

A magnetic pull strikes me. Irresistible. I'm about to be sucked into a devil's embrace, flown into the jaws of hell—

"Nooo!"

The cry echoes in my ears, breaking my trance, as a firm, warm grip yanks me back from the brink of damnation.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Shining in gold hair and silver mail, Wolfred steps in front of me, looking like an avenging angel. And playing the part of a human shield.

“Be warned, mage,” he says in a silky soft voice underscored with steel. “I’ve no love of killing, yet I could happily find it in me to cause you enough hurt to make you wish you were dead. Touch her, and you will answer to me.”

“Yeah, right.” Wicked throws back his head and harsh laughter vibrates the air. “Hey, tin man, *I’m* the one who’s protecting her from *you*. Hasn’t anyone explained to you the natural laws of this land? Here the grass is always green, the sun always shines, and the moon”—he grins, showing the points of his fangs—“is *always* full. Look!”

With a broad flourish, he gestures from one end of the sky to the other. For the first time, I notice how low the sun has dipped. Like a big, red ball it’s sinking below the horizon to my right, setting the clouds ablaze. While to my left, a curved sliver of luminous yellow is peeking up over the land. The upper rim of the rising—

“*Full* moon?” Wolfred almost chokes on the words.

He turns sharply to stare at it, and I see horror etched on his face. My breath snags. What the hell is happening?

“Wolfred?” I reach for him, but he stumbles aside.

“No! Stand clear!” His features contort into a mask of hideous pain. His body stiffens and jerks as though in the throes of some sudden seizure. With a bloodcurdling howl, like an animal in agony, he doubles over and crumples to his knees.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

At the same instant, cold hands clamp onto my shoulders, dragging me backward, dragging me away. Wicked's chuckle slides over me like a glacier.

"He wasn't joking about staying clear, babe. Believe it or not, you *are* safer with me. This dude's got serious problems."

Look who's talking.

"What the fuck do you know about it?" Frightened and angry, but most of all worried about Wolfred, I twist loose and make a dash for where he's writhing on the ground.

Wicked catches me in mid-flight—*ouch*—pulls me up short by my hair. "I read minds, remember? I know everything."

Not quite. I doubt he expected Wolfred to regain his feet so fast.

If that *is* Wolfred.

Ooooh, my God...

My heart stops as something in mail struggles up from the grassy turf and balances in a tense crouch, sniffing the breeze and shooting quick glances in all directions. Something that looks like it climbed out of an old monster movie. It's wearing Wolfred's clothes, but its face and hands are covered with grayish brown fur. It has a set of fangs that put Wicked's to shame. And it's snarling.

If I didn't know better, I'd swear I was facing actor Lon Chaney, Jr. in his classic role as the...the... I think I'm going to faint... *The Wolfman*.

"I told you he was fucked up." Wicked shifts his grip from my hair to my middle, locks me against his side with an icy



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

arm clenched around my waist. “He wished for the wild spirit of a wolf, hoping it would toughen up his wimpy no-kill attitude. Unfortunately, he got the rest of a wolf to go with it—four legs, a tail, the whole package. When he tried to wish himself back to a man, he ended up with what you see now. Pretty dumb, huh?”

Wolfred howls.

“I wasn’t talking to *you*, Fido.” Wicked shoots him a scowl.

“The idiot’s actually fighting his wolf side all the time,” he tells me. “Holding it at bay inside himself. He’s got willpower, I’ll give him points for that. It’s only when the moon is full that his inner beast breaks free to the surface—kinda like how a full moon creates high tides in the oceans. Extra gravitational pull on the body’s biorhythms, or some such horseshit. Besides which”—he smirks—“wolves just love howling at the moon. Don’t they, fur face?”

Wolfred’s muscles bunch as though he’s gathering for a leap—at us. A savage growl rumbles deep in his chest.

“Some people have no sense of humor,” Wicked mutters.

His arm tightens around me, and the ground falls out from under my feet. Yikes! What I’d thought was his cape really *is* a pair of giant batwings. I’m being lifted high into the air.

“Wolfreedddd!” I scream. Why, I’m not sure. Except I know I’m going to be devoured soon in any case. And, somehow, the way Sir Wolf will do it seems the cleaner and speedier death.

“Yeah, but my way is more fun,” Wicked says with an evil

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

laugh. He gathers me close to his chest in a no-escape, rib-crunching hold, then levels out into a horizontal line and flaps off toward Garnet City.

Shit.

From below, I hear an enraged howl. When I look down, I see Wolfred far out in front of us, a silver streak racing across the field. He appears to be heading for a wooded area a short distance ahead, but for what purpose I've no idea.

"Hunting," Wicked answers my unspoken thought as I watch Wolfred disappear into the trees. "The wolf in him needs raw meat, hot blood. It's a ravenous appetite we both share. The only difference is I get off on it and he doesn't. The dumb fuck. All he has to do is make it through one full moon night without killing something and he'll starve the bloodlust out of himself. At that point, he'll have tamed his beast, so to speak, and be able to change back and forth at will. But he hasn't figured that out yet."

And right now I'm in a lousy position to enlighten him. In his present state, I doubt he'd listen to me or understand this handy bit of info even if I do get the chance to shout it to him. I can't help looking for a flash of armor, though, while Wicked flies me over the treetops. Man, wolf, or a terrible blend of both, I want to carry Wolfred's image with me to my death.

"Aw, that's so sweet," Wicked taunts. "The honey of heartache. It adds richness to your taste. Honestly, you're the most intriguing blend of flavors I've ever come across. So many emotions rolled into one juicy package. I'm going to

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

love draining you...slowly...drop by drop.”

And I think I’m going to be sick. Cold dread stabs me in the stomach. But something else stabs sharper. *What?* A gleam of magical moonlight in the branches below?

The sight yanks the breath from me, pierces my eyes, pierces my breast. A silver arrow shot straight to the heart.

Wolfred in all his bestial glory—fangs bared and arms outstretched—shining out like a beacon in the top of the tallest tree.

His human body has certain advantages over the canine variety. A full wolf never would have been able to scramble up through the foliage so fast—couldn’t have climbed up at all, come to think of it.

My captor spots him at the same moment I do.

Which means too late.

For the one in the wings.

Snarling and snapping, Wolfred leaps as we swoop over him, and catches Wicked in a clawed grip around the lower legs. His weight drags us downward, and we plummet through dense, leafy green, surrounded by a raucous *snap-crackle-pop* of breaking branches. It’s the Golden Oldies of Horror Show, complete with breakfast cereal commercials. *The Wolfman Meets Dracula* all over again.

I can’t remember if there ever was such a movie, but there should have been. Lon Chaney and Bela Lugosi couldn’t have played this scene with more melodrama or better pizzazz. Call me cautious, but I’m not keen on being caught between them.

I manage to latch onto a lower bough and jolt to a teeth-

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

jarring stop, dangling a few yards above the ground—like a stalled trapeze artist—while Wolfred and Wicked crash to earth in a shower of twigs and dry leaves. Paralyzed—my fingers going numb from strain, and the limb I’m clinging to bowing under my weight—I watch.

Over and over they roll, flattening underbrush and churning up the forest floor—glued together in mortal combat. Muscles bulge as each fighter strains to reach and rip out the other’s jugular. Wolfish growls and vampire curses blister the air.

Dracula has reason to curse, actually. I think Wolfman is winning. He’d have to be, wouldn’t he, with the fangs and fury of a beast and the body and training of a knight? Long practice would make his battle skills instinctual, a natural athletic prowess not to be forgotten even when the wildness within him claims control of his mind. Dracula is up the creek without a paddle.

God, I’m so tempted to let him sink.

I’m not sure if Wicked *can* be killed in the usual sense. Doesn’t being a vampire mean he’s already dead? But I see escalating panic in his expression, enough to realize *he* thinks he’s in serious trouble, and I don’t want any blood—warm or cold—on Wolfred’s hands. I’m afraid my pacifist knight would regret it come the dawn. The big question is what to do about it.

“Get him off me, that’s what!” Wicked darts me a frantic glance. “Jump down here and whack him in the head! You’ll be doing him a favor. Really. Each time he kills, the bloodlust

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

grows stronger. It he doesn't tame his beast soon, he never will."

"You're so altruistic," I mumble. It occurs to me I could whack Dracula in the head, instead, and then try to lead Wolfman away from him. A real iffy proposition. I seem to recall there is some way to kill vampires, but I've never heard of just knocking them out. I doubt I could get a clear shot at him even if there were. And I'm by no means certain Wolfred would follow me under any circumstances.

As I hover in indecision, the choice is made for me.

*Crack!*

Shit.

I jump—but only because my bobbing bough picks this moment to break off in my hands. Whiz! Wham! Before I can scream, I land on Wolfred's back. The force of my fall knocks him aside.

And Wicked is the one who screams.

Because the jagged end of the tree branch I'm clutching has somehow been driven into his chest. Stinking black smoke gushes out of the wound. Yuck...

A wooden stake through the heart. *That's* how to kill a vampire—I remember now. It always worked on Bela Lugosi, anyway. Except I don't think he smoked like this.

Through the sulfurous vapors, Wicked blinks up at me in utter incredulity.

"It was"—I gulp—"an accident."

"Yeah, yeah, that's what you babes always say," he moans. "Whoever would've thought a nice little girl like you could

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

destroy pure evil like me?”

“I’m not little, and I’m not that nice,” I answer.

“Whatever!” He presses his hands to his face. “Oooh, what a world, what a... I demand a rewrite of this fucking script!”

In a horrible hissing and fizzing, he dissolves into nothing, and I can’t find it in me to feel much more than relief. I’m not happy I’ve killed someone—or something—but I can’t say I’m sorry he’s gone. Bemused and silent, I sit staring at a scorched patch of earth, all that’s left of Wicked...while Wolfred crouches close behind me, growling low in his throat and panting hot breath down my neck.

A ripple of fear raises goose bumps on my skin. Fear and more. I can’t see him. I hesitate to turn, don’t dare move a hair, lest he pounce on me—and not in the good way. But...damn...that growl does sound sexy. The body heat emanating off him *feels* sexy.

And, yes, I know his body is currently covered with fur, and I’m treading on questionable ground here. I know I’ve discovered I’m not quite so kinky as I thought I was. But this isn’t *really* kinky.

It’s Wolfred.

A man who makes my heart swell and my knees quiver. Who’s brought so much shining good into my life in such a short time. The finest man I’ve ever met.

Even if he is part wolf.

And may tear me into tiny, bloody bits.

I have to admit I’m as frightened for him as I am for myself. Well...okay, maybe I’m more afraid for me, but I hate

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

to think of him forever at the mercy of his curse when, if he could just make it through tonight without killing, he might master it. For the sake of my life and his sanity, I need to help him control his bloodlust.

But how?

Being me, only one idea comes to mind. Yep, I'm thinking about screwing—ignore the blood and focus on the lust. My hallucinogenic foray into Club Wicked didn't destroy my appetite for sex. It just made me understand I've no taste for *empty* sex. As long as there's some emotional meat to the act, I'm still as horn-dog hungry as they come...no pun intended.

I'm also thinking of my childhood, growing up on a farm. In Kansas. Where else? But at least I didn't have a little dog named Toto. I had a huge, yellow, battle-scarred, one-eyed tomcat who could have eaten Toto for lunch. Blondie, I called him—after Clint Eastwood's character in *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*. (What can I say, I've always been a movie buff.) As I recall, only one thing distracted Blondie from food and hunting: a female in heat. I realize wolves aren't cats, but I assume their priorities run about the same.

So, um...how do I go about acting like a girl wolf on the make? I have a sudden clear image of *doggy style* in my head—so clear the air temperature seems to be soaring into the tropical zone—but I'm wondering if there's any kind of canine foreplay that comes before that. Should we sniff each other's rears or something?

The growling behind me stops, and I hear a ragged inhalation. Then I hear a wolfish whimper, snuffling and

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

snorting, and clawed hands tearing up the forest floor in excited frenzy, as though he's digging himself a firm foothold.

Uh-huh.

Something tells me he's gotten the message. Scented my arousal?

Hell, if I can smell it, to his nose I must be wearing a billboard that screams "Fuck me!" I *am* aroused. Terrified but turned on. A potent cocktail, fear and desire. I'm drunk on the energies of this moment, dizzy with pulse pounding, primitive passion. The call of the wild. Raw, untamed feral force. It surrounds me like an electric current, crackles through me with a blistering sting that burns straight into my core. My inner muscles clench in anticipation and alarm.

With the sun set and the moon not yet risen high enough to shine through the treetops, only the palest light penetrates this small patch of woods. I sit cloaked in shadows—without and within. I'm heading into uncharted territory—rough, alien terrain even for my sturdy, not so nice self—and I know once the journey begins, there'll be no turning back. I'll have to keep him here all fucking night. Fucking. The prospect thrills me and chills me in the same shuddering breath.

I don't know what to expect except a hard, rear entry—over and over again—bracing on my hands and knees while a crazed beast pounds the stuffing out of me from behind.

Hmm...I could handle that, probably.

I'm anything but prepared for the gentleness that swamps me instead.

Wolfred's wolf, it seems, is as gallant as his man. While



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

I've been stewing in my own bubbling juices, he's struggled out of his mail and the padded shirt beneath it. I realize this when powerful arms reach out and spread the latter garment on the ground before me.

I'm stunned. He's just created a little bed.

I'm also confused as all get out—to say nothing of frustrated—because he pushes me down onto the shirt, then curls up on his side next to it. With his back to me. A taut, shadowy shape in gray hose, brownish fur, and a thin, white under-tunic.

I think he expects us to go to sleep. *How*, I haven't a clue. If I'm wired, he's about to snap. His whole body vibrates with tension. His breath wheezes out in something between a bestial growl and a too human groan. He's fighting a horrid battle inside himself, that's obvious. I can only guess why.

He must have heard Wicked say that if he didn't tame his beast soon he never would. Though human speech is beyond him in his wolf state, he still understands it apparently. Thus, he's discovered he has a chance to break his curse. More to the point, he seems dead-set determined to accomplish the feat in one fell swoop. Right now.

Lousy timing, if you ask me.

"I hope you realize you're ruining my one and only chance to be ravished by a werewolf," I mutter. Just a joke, honest. Guilt often triggers my sarcastic side. And I do feel guilty for increasing his stress, giving him lust-lust to fight along with the bloody kind.

An angry snarl answers me. Wolf talk, I deduce, for "that's

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

not funny” or “you’re a sick woman.” Maybe both. In either case, I agree.

“I’m sorry, Wolfred. I didn’t understand the situation. I thought I was helping.”

His shoulders shake with a gravelly growl sort of noise, but I’m not sure what that implies. A wolfy grumble, perhaps?

*::Nay, ’tis laughter. For if that be your notion of help, lady, I pray I ne’re find you against me and meaning harm.::*

Say what?

That was Wolfred’s voice I heard, but not in my ears. He spoke the words directly into my head.

*::Wolf magic. They talk through thoughts to those who can understand. In my beast form, I’m oft able to do likewise.::*

With a quick twist, he rolls toward me. As he does, I swear I see a golden glimmer around him—just a flash of light, just for an instant—but I’ve no time to ponder it. Suddenly, I’m pinned beneath him, belly to belly, thigh to thigh, his face scant inches above mine.

*His face in all its male beauty.*

What the...

“A man’s form be better for other things, though,” he says aloud—which he can do because he *is* a man again, and one with an unmistakable but unbelievable gleam in his blue eyes. “With my wolf fangs in the way, I’d have found it most difficult to kiss you, my lady.”

Holy shit.

My heart slams against my ribs. “Are...are you going to k-kiss me?”

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

“It seems likely.” A tiny grin touches his lips.

My insides turn to mush. “W-when will you know for sure?”

“Mayhap now...”

His mouth presses down and lays one on me—*zap*—a real stun-gun of a kiss. I’m blinded, fried, a smoking cinder—panting for breath when he’s through.

Lord, have mercy... I’m a dead woman is what I am, because he’s not through. He’s only beginning. Like a lava flow, his kiss scorches over my jawline and down the side of my neck. A hot, callused hand slides up under my tunic and cups my breast. It appears he’s a wolf in more ways than one. Whoever would have guessed it?

“’Tis a rare, fine fire in you,” he murmurs, hoarsely, against the hollow of my throat. “In truth, you did help. ’Twas your inner blaze more than aught else that burned the bloodlust out of me, I’d warrant. Such a bright, sure flame—so strong, even when I scented the fear in you with it.”

He stops and braces up on an elbow to search my eyes, search my soul—flattens me with a heavy look of chivalrous concern. “You’re not frightened of me still, are you?”

Nope. I’m just afraid I’m going to awaken and discover this really is a dream. The man melts me. My chest constricts and all I can do for an answer is shake my head no.

“Mmm, mayhap you should be. In helping me tame one beast, my lady, methinks you’ve unleashed another.”

*Whoa...* Methinks so, too. Without warning, warm chivalrous concern boils into deliciously dangerous intent. Not

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

that I'm complaining. I've often thought chivalry was overrated.

A second kiss grinds me into the ground, but this time I kiss back—full force—open my mouth and meet his tongue with my own, match him thrust for thrust.

How we grapple out of our clothes without breaking lip contact for more than a second, I don't know. But we manage it, and Wolfred seems as fascinated by the feel of my flesh as I am with his. Together we run our hands over each other, rubbing and squeezing, exploring naked skin.

He still has some fur on him, I'm happy to note. Man fur. I love a hairy chest on a guy, and he's got a great one—all hard muscle beneath a soft mat of golden fleece. I rake my fingers through the curls and stroke the pads of my thumbs over his nipples, pulling a low groan out of him. When I stroke lower, tracing a narrow line of hair to where it widens again into another thick mat, his groan rolls into a growl. Not a real growl, like a wolf's, but real sexy nonetheless.

His kiss becomes ravenous, almost brutal, and he clutches my ass, digs his knees between mine and shoves my legs open wide. In short order, I'm speared up the middle, stuffed to the gills, spit and roasted—a willing sacrifice to a monster cock.

I'm in heaven.

And it burns like hell.

*Wow...*

No gentle lover, Sir Wolfred, but a skilled one. Hey, he's a knight; he knows how to wield a sword.

A shaft of moonlight stabs through a break in the foliage,

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

bathing us in silver. Wolfred appears to be glowing. I think he is. He feels like a glow. Solid energy. A lightning bolt in the flesh.

One...two...three times he slices into me—hot and hard, fast and smooth—masterstrokes that make me want more. *Electric*. He stretches me to near bursting, steams the breath in my lungs. I've no choice but to grip his shoulders and lock my legs around his waist. Four...five...six times, and a torrid tempo is set. I stop counting and lose myself in the rhythm.

The earth begins to move. Or maybe it's me. I'm the earth—and Wolfred is the axis on which I spin. All existence compacts into this one sensual act. A pressure building...a spring winding tight...a flash of brilliance...

And the night shatters!

Two orgasms rock me to the bone—my own, then Wolfred's right on its heels. With a volcanic shudder, he erupts inside me. As he comes, he throws back his head and howls.

Ooooh, God... He's changed.

I'm facing fanged fury again. A furred body nails me to the ground. Clawed hands clutch and rip at the edges of the shirt on which I'm lying. I appreciate very much that they're not ripping at me.

::*Bloody hell!*:: Wolfred curses mind to mind. He rears back on his haunches and roars out his rage.

I battle to stay calm.

"Your c-climax probably t-t-triggered the change," I stammer. A guess, but a logical one. Right?

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Wolfred howls. I don't think he cares about logic at the moment.

"Hey, Rome wasn't built in a day," I quote to comfort him. "It might take a few shifts before you gain full control. But Wicked said if you could make it through one full moon night without killing, the bloodlust would be starved out of you and you'd be able to change back and forth at will."

*::I want not to change at all! I loathe being a monster! 'Tis a hideous form, this. All who see it flee in terror or seek to destroy me. And well they should.::*

He crouches low and buries his head in his arms, as though he can't bear for me to look at him, which cuts me to the quick. I pull upright to kneel before him.

"I don't want to destroy you. And I'm not fleeing either. In fact"—I lay a hand on his shoulder—"I think your wolfman form is kinda cute."

He flinches at my touch. *::How can you mean that? Methinks you must be mazed.::*

Probably. But it's the sort of craziness that comes from Cupid's arrows. I've been shot deeply, I realize now.

"Methinks it's because I see you with my heart, Sir Wolfred of Camelot... Because I love you."

*::You think?::* His head raises, and his gaze locks on mine. Still a beautiful, soulful blue his eyes are—still Wolfred's, for all the rest of his feral features. Something that I take for a wolf grin curls his upper lip. *::When will you know for sure?::*

Lord, he undoes me. Human or beast, the guy is adorable. I return his grin.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

“Mayhap now?” Leaning forward, I wrap him in a hug. Curiously, I’m not the least bit afraid anymore of his fangs and claws. I don’t care a fig that he’s covered with fur and this feels a little like hugging a gorilla. Whatever his form, he’s Wolfred. If I love him, I have to love the whole package.

A heavy exhale, a growl tinged sigh, answers me. *::By the faith, lady, I daresay we both be mazed...for I love you as well.::* A firm, furry hold closes around me, and he deepens the hug. *::’Tis a true wonder you are—brave and bold as a man yet all woman in my arms. Never have I met one such as you.::*

I believe that; I don’t think they made gals my size in Camelot’s day. But the rest of it...

He loves me? *Me?*

*::Aye. And so much I fear the wolf in me will ravish you in truth.::* With obvious effort, he breaks the embrace and pushes away. *::Stand clear, I beg you. Your scent boils my blood. I’ll not be able to control my beast much longer.::*

That’s a problem? Shock widens my eyes.

“Good God, *why* are you even trying? Take me, you fool!” I’ve always wanted to say that to someone and this seemed the perfect opportunity.

Using my weight as leverage, I lasso him around the neck with my arms, keel over backward and drag him down on top of me. He struggles, but only for an instant.

*::Lady, you are in danger! I shudder to hurt you, but in this form I may not be able to avoid it. I could use you too hard.::*

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

If I'm lucky.

"In case you haven't noticed, Sir Hotshot, I'm no delicate dolly. I *like* the rough stuff."

*::You'd better. For you're about to get it.::*

A toe-curling growl rumbles against me, and the big, bad wolf is loosed. Very bad. The hell with Mr. Hyde. I've decided beasts are hotter. They're so...beastly. Unbridled animal aggression now rules the night. And the knight.

Snarling, Wolfred pushes up, rolls me over and hauls me onto my elbows and knees. The only sign of chivalry in sight is that he manages the move without mauling me with his claws—a bit of feral finesse I barely have time to notice. With a savage thrust, he pierces me. The law of the jungle. The male claiming his mate, his way, and no questions asked or answered. Without preamble I'm swept into a wild hump and bump tango. The original *two-step*: slide out and slam in.

Forget about dancing cheek to cheek. This is the real deal. Cock to cunt—thick and slick. Pure primitive fucking. There's no space here for the finer nuances of sex, no kissing and petting. Everything centers on the action between my legs, the hot friction of a steel rod drilling sensitive inner tissue. A fury of sharp, hard strokes. With each one he drives deeper, filling me, stretching me, straining me—slicing me to shreds.

There's no space for shame either. He's a battering ram breaking through defenses I didn't even know I had. He tears me down and builds me back up. I feel like a phoenix, destroyed and reborn in the same flames—over and over. No contradiction when the flames are love.



## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Which is what I feel most of all.

Love and amazement. I'm consumed by a passion that transcends lust and blasts clean the dirty spots of my psyche. This is the raunchiest, roughest sex I've ever experienced—just what I've always craved, yet so much more. By human standards, I'm being fucked into raw hamburger. But in wolf terms, it's *lovemaking*. What a difference!

I feel the love and it elevates an already awesome act into the dizzy realms of sheer glory. I crumble before its power—topple headlong into an orgasm that frees my soul even as it wrecks my body. The very woods seem to shimmer and shake. I might be literally dying of ecstasy this moment.

And I don't care.

*::Well, I should care, for I do love you, lady. Whate're befalls, I pray you remember that. And remember me...::*

With the thought, he howls—in the throes of his own orgasm, I assume. The sound echoes in my ears. Then I'm howling, too, but in sudden panic because the woods really *are* breaking apart. Oh, no... The ground is dissolving under me. I'm falling...

No, no, *noooo*—

Shit!

In a flash and a jolt I'm blinking up at a glaring Texas sun, lying on my back among the debris of my dust devil demolished stand. A hazy sea of concerned faces swims above me. But not one of them is Wolfred's.

I haven't died after all.

I just wish I was dead.

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

\* \* \*

One month later, I'm still alive and beginning to get used to it. There is, I've discovered, a certain peace that comes with giving up hope. Slowly but surely I'm adjusting to the fact I'll never see Wolfred again.

The sane part of my brain tells me I never saw him in the first place—that my fantasy adventure was all a dream precipitated by having a dust devil dropped on my head. But a bedraggled twist of red and black floss in my hand suggests otherwise, and my heart can only agree.

I remember knotting the bracelet onto my left wrist and wishing for Wolfred's happiness. It took a month for the damn thing to fall off, but it did, and just a few seconds ago. Its fibers had worn so thin, it pulled off in my hand as I stood here fiddling with it.

The pink and green bracelet, on which I wished to return home, ripped off a lot sooner—obviously. It must have happened while Wolfred and I made love, and that's what catapulted me back to Crompton's...where I am now for another fun-filled show, but at least the weather is decent this month.

Lucky me.

In the weeks since my return I've burned rubber and gas searching for the wish bracelets' winsome and wily purveyor. I've hit every craft show, flea market, and Ren Faire on my regular circuit, plus a number that aren't, hoping to meet Morgan La Fey and beg, borrow, buy, or steal the means to rejoin Wolfred. But Lady Morgan's whereabouts remain as

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

mysterious as herself.

According to Henry Baxter, she disappeared from Crompton's shortly after the dust devil blew through, and no one even saw her leave. Henry figures that's because no one was watching her; they were all too worried about me. I was out cold for several minutes, so I hear. Several minutes by this world's reckoning, but enough time for me to fall in love and have my life shattered in another plane of existence.

If I hadn't revived when I did, Henry was going to give me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, he claims. A ghastly thought since he chews tobacco. *Gag.* I scared the shit out of him, apparently. He seems to have recovered from his fright, however—and from our medieval mess of a marketing experiment (to be repeated when pigs sprout wings I've been informed). Henry is his jolly old self this weekend.

In other words, he's driving me nuts.

Along with his usual stock of toys, he's added an assortment of hand carved wooden kazoos. Which he insists upon demonstrating. Off key. There isn't enough aspirin in Texas to handle the headache I have. Right now he's playing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

Thanks a heap, Henry.

To make matters worse, we have another new vendor in the spot across from me, where Morgan once sat. A geeky young guy named Bill, selling Hollywood collectibles. On display in front of his stand are two, big movie posters. One is for—you guessed it—*The Wolfman*. And the other is from—what else—*Camelot*.

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

If Wolfred was worried I might forget him, I don't think that's going to occur anytime soon. Hell, I don't even need outside reminders. His image is burned into my brain, my flesh. He haunts my days and invades my sleep, making love to me in dreams that I awake from drenched in sweat and tears.

"Remember me," he said, as though he knew we were about to be parted. Maybe he'd just seen my wish bracelet fall off and realized before I did what was happening. Or maybe he was thinking we had no future together, regardless. And he'd have been correct. What chance would we have even if I could return to him?

Where would we live? Fantasyland, for godssake? I have a feeling that no one who isn't born to that wacky place stays there for long. I sincerely hope Wolfred has found a way home by now, but I can't quite see me in his era, and I doubt he'd be comfortable in mine.

Honestly, we were doomed from the start. I don't understand how we fell in love so fast at all. Well...I know how I did. Wolfred, however, was just suffering a temporary infatuation, I suspect, and he'd have come to his senses soon. God knows every other man I've been involved with has.

Which means I'm better off with my memories. I left him loving me, and that's how I can always think of him. Quit while I'm ahead, so to speak. Right?

*::Wrong. Wolves mate for life, my lady. And the man in me wouldst do the same. Be wary what you think, for I've mastered my beast—with your aid. 'Twas your love did the*

## A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

*trick. In seeing meself through your eyes, I was able to accept my wolf form, which gained me the control I'd sought. With it I've also gained the wolf mind-talk magic for good. Whate'er my form, I can read what is in you.::*

Huh?

The bottom drops out of me. I know that mental voice, but I can't believe it's in my head now...*here*. I can't believe what I'm seeing. I freeze in place—struck dumb—stand rooted to the ground as a real live knight in shining armor strides down the center fairway toward my table.

I've gone insane, stark raving mad. I'm hallucinating. That's the only explanation.

*::Well, I did tell you that you were mazed.::*

A glorious grin punctuates the comment. Blue, blue eyes capture mine and hold on as their owner approaches.

"Cool costume, mister! But you shoulda been here last month," a little boy yells. "Crompton's ain't doin' Camelot Days no more."

"Neither am I." Looking determined as the devil, and far more delicious, Wolfred invades my booth. "Mind you, I could have returned to Camelot. Mage Glenn offered to send me back after you vanished...but I preferred to wait for the granting of a wish already made."

A warm grip curls around my wrist and he plucks the remains of the red and black wish bracelet out of my hand, stares at it for a pregnant and pulsing moment.

"So I thought." With a flick of his fingers, he tosses the scrap onto my table, then yanks me flat against his chest,

## *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

squashes me breathless in an ironclad embrace. “It did take a while, but ’twould seem your wish for me has finally come true. You asked that I find whate’re I needed to bring me peace of mind and happiness...and I have. ’Tis you.”

“*Me?*” I squeak.

“Aye. I said I could see within you—and ’tis a rare, beautiful sight. I want not to be parted from you again.” While the happy-go-lucky crowd at Crompton’s applauds, he kisses me into a molten puddle of goo.

“Why do they cheer?” he murmurs against my mouth. “Have they ne’re before seen a knight kiss his lady?”

“Not one like you,” I gasp. “Of course, if you really want to give them a show, you could do your wolf thing.”

“Mayhap later.” His hold on me hardens. “Tonight...in bed.”

Whispered words. The images they conjure fry my hair roots. Unspoken promises sweep me in electric waves, but I still have doubts, concerns. No relationship is easy, and this one could be rockier than most. Wolfred will have one hell of a leap just bridging the gap from his culture to mine. I don’t even want to consider the legal ramifications here. How am I supposed to explain him to the authorities?

Um, no, sorry, he doesn’t have any ID. No birth certificate, no social security number... You see, he’s a medieval werewolf knight.

He leans away from me and arches his brows. “What be a social security number?”

“A buncha bullshit,” Henry calls. His standard answer to a

### *A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER*

lot of questions, actually, but his irreverent attitude works for him and I think I'll adopt it for the moment.

"Never mind." I pull Wolfred back into the hug, wrap my arms around his middle and press in close. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Aye, and love will carry us over." His lips graze mine in a wisp of a kiss.

*::Love brought me here to you. Love will keep us together,::* he thinks to me.

A good thought. How we'll make our union work I don't know. But it's sure going to be a hoot and a howl figuring it out.

## MIMI RISER

Mimi Riser has been an actress, model, clown, belly-dancer, jewelry designer, editor and publisher, but her first and foremost love is writing. She specializes in offbeat tales where laughter reigns and good always triumphs—but she makes her characters really work for their happy endings. Her books have been said to read like a snowball rolling downhill, gathering size and speed as it goes. But if you think her stories are crazy, you should see her life. Once devout city people, she and her husband exchanged the hustle and bustle of Philadelphia a lifetime or two ago for the natural, rugged splendor of the rural southwest. They were looking for a simpler way of life. They got it. It ended up being so “natural and rugged,” they spent their first six and a half years there in a hand-built house with dirt floors, no electricity and no plumbing. This has proved helpful for her historicals as she can now write about the “olden days” from personal experience. They have since rejoined the 21st century and enjoy life on the open range with a house full of eccentric cats and a large, wacky dog who thinks she’s a cat, too. Mimi has had five novels published to date along with numerous articles and short stories. Her historical romance, *I Do*, was a “Top Ten Finisher” in the mammoth Preditors & Editors Readers Poll of 2003, and her contemporary comedy, *Every Jack Needs His Jill*, won the poll the following year for the “Best Mainstream Novel of 2004.” *Samantha White and The Seven*



*Dwarves* is her first erotic-romance and was one of the winners in Amber Quill's 2007 Heat Wave contest.

To learn more about Mimi and her writing, please visit her website:

<http://www.mimiriser.com>

\* \* \*

**Don't miss *Samantha White and the Seven Dwarves*,  
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