

Royal Reward

**By
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Chapter One

The year of our Lord 1078, Cumbria, England...

Enora stood on the parapet and looked down at the knight below with contempt. He calmly stared back up at her. All she could see were his steely eyes beneath his helmet.

He called again, "Well? Are you going to open the gates, or do we have to break the door down?"

Enora balled her fists together angrily, "You are not welcome, Sir! Take your knights and leave us in peace! We have no need of you here!"

Richard looked up at the feisty young woman denying him entrance. King William had given him this castle as a reward for aiding him through two battles. He was not going to lose it by being denied entrance from this mere slip of a girl, nay, this vixen.

"Last chance!" he shouted up at her.

Enora's guardsman looked at her. "It is no use, my lady... you will have to allow him entrance. We cannot fight him; he has too many men!" He hesitated a moment before continuing, "Also, it would be tantamount to treason... it is the King's wishes, my lady!"

"Yes, I know, Guilbert! But they are not my wishes, are they?" Enora leaned over the top and glared down at the knight, who was still patiently waiting. "Will you promise to be lenient with my guards? I would have no bloodshed!"

"If you let us enter via the gates, then there will be no bloodshed. You have my word of honour!"

Enora snorted loudly, "Huh! Your word of honour... I do not even know you!"

Richard ground his teeth together; forsooth, this was one aggressive wench. King William had given him leave to marry this 'lady,' but he was beginning to wonder if it was such a good idea. Although, if he wanted this holding and the land that came with it, then the lady was also included. At thirty-one years old, he now felt the need to settle down, and he was not going to lose this opportunity the King had bequeathed him.

Trying to get his temper under control, he answered, "As I said, you have my word of honour! Furthermore, lest you forget, this is by order of King William himself!"

She stared at him for a moment longer, and then he watched as she disappeared from the parapet. Finally, the wench had come to her senses! Richard turned to his companion, and confided, "I am beginning to doubt the sanity of this liaison, Guy!"

Guy smirked beneath his helmet, "Oh, I do not know, Richard... she is a feisty piece, I will admit. She would produce fine, healthy sons for you, and the taming would be fun! You know how you dislike the simpering ladies at court!"

Richard nodded. "I suppose you have a point. She looked quite fair, did she not? I shall soon tame that temper of hers. I would not have a shrew for a wife!"

If Enora could have overheard them, she would never have opened the gates. However, as it was, she really had no choice. The King himself had decreed it! So once she had sent Guilbert to order the opening of the main gates, she made herself scarce. As lady of the Castle, she should have been there to greet any new visitor, but in her eyes, this was an intruder, and as such did not warrant her respect. No, if he thought he could simply march in and take over, then he was very much mistaken!

The huge wooden gates slowly opened inwards; the portcullis was raised and the drawbridge lowered to allow Richard, Guy and their one hundred strong army to gain entrance into Beaumont Castle. Enora's men at arms stood back, wary of this unwelcome intrusion into their fortress.

Richard, true to his word, made sure that no one was harmed as his men settled in the barracks, and the horses were stabled. Guilbert waited patiently to introduce himself to what would soon be his new master.

Taking off his gloves, Richard removed his helmet and ran his hand through his unruly mane of dark hair before looking around for Lady Enora. His eye caught that of Guilbert, and marching over, he demanded, "Where is the Lady Enora?"

"She has retired for the evening, my Lord. She is feeling badly."

"What?" he barked.

"She has the headache."

"She seemed fine a few minutes ago! Where is her chamber?"

Guilbert raced after him as he marched into the main hall. "Truly, my Lord, perhaps you should wait until morning. Today has been most distressing for Lady Enora!"

Richard stopped marching and turned to Guilbert, "If I want you to advise me, I will ask. Other than that, I require your immediate compliance!" He snapped his gloves between his hands, making Guilbert jump. "Now *where* is Lady Enora's bedchamber?"

Guilbert decided he had tested this knight long enough. He had tried his best to persuade Lady Enora to greet her visitor, but being the stubborn girl she was, she had not heeded his advice. Now it seemed, she was going to have to greet him anyway. With a resigned sigh, Guilbert led Richard

up the narrow staircase to one of the bedchambers above. Stopping at the furthest door, Richard signaled for Guilbert to leave him.

Guilbert hesitated, loathe to leave his lady in this knight's hands, but at the same time, he was aware that this foreboding knight had been given the King's permission to overtake their castle.

Richard was starting to get angry and ground his teeth, snapping, "I promise no harm will come to her, man, now leave!"

Guilbert quickly walked away, feeling inadequate, but knowing this knight had complete power within the castle.

As she heard Richard's voice, Enora's ears pricked up within the bedchamber. For the love of God, he was just outside her bedchamber! Quickly, she rushed over to the heavy, wooden door and turned the key in the lock, effectively shutting him out. How dare he think he could just walk in like that!

Richard heard the lock turn and smirked, "That paltry lock will not keep me out of your room, Lady. Now open this door, or I will knock it down!"

"Go away... I-I have the headache and need peace and quiet!"

"I will count to three, and you had better unlock the door, or else! One... two... three!" Still the lock did not turn. "Do not say I did not warn you, Lady!"

Putting down his helmet and gloves, he charged at the door, and when his broad shoulder made contact, the lock splintered. The door, as he had predicted, crashed open.

Enora stood there, mouth agape, before coming to her senses and scrambling over to the other side of the room. "Get out! Y-you cannot just come in here like that! Be gone!"

Richard folded his arms and stared at her. She truly was quite a pretty little thing, and was even prettier when angry. Her chest was heaving and her colour high, as her temper rose.

"What are you staring at, you great oaf?!"

"Oaf? I take umbrage at your words, Madam, and I am staring at the so-called lady of the Castle, whom was meant to greet me at the gates. It seems you lack manners and etiquette, my lady! Did your father not teach you any? And I am not an oaf!"

Enora's temper flared even higher. "Don't you dare talk about my father! You are not worthy!"

Her father had died six months ago, hence the reason for this entire situation. Alone, with no guardian, her holdings were vulnerable to invasion from several different enemies of the realm, any one of them a true threat to the crown. King William wanted her married to a knight of his choice, as soon as conceivably possible, thus ensuring the castle did not fall into enemy hands.

Richard's patience was wearing very thin, and he scoffed, "I will talk about whom I like, Lady! It is not for you to give orders to me!"

"Well, that is what you say, not what is true... this is *my* home and *you* are nothing but an intruder!" Enora grabbed the nearest thing to her, which happened to be a candlestick, and threw it at him.

He ducked just in time, as the missile hit the wall behind him. "Do that again and you will regret it!"

At the age of twenty-two, Enora was not used to taking orders, especially after overseeing her castle all by herself for the last six months. Stamping her foot angrily, she picked up her slipper and threw it straight at his head. This time her missile hit the intended target... right on his temple, the heel making a solid thud against his skull.

"That is enough! You have overstepped yourself, Madam!" He rushed round to her side of the bed. Wondering what his intention was, Enora tried to scramble over the coverlet, but she was much too slow for a seasoned knight, and within an instant,

she felt her ankle seized by one of his large hands. She kicked and struggled but to no avail, as he easily pulled her back towards him.

"Get ooooooffff me! You blackguard, you scoundrel... oooh... you...!"

"Stay still, you little vixen!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled her straight over his knees. In moments, she found herself staring at the rushes on the floor in a grip that she could not get out of, no matter how much she struggled.

Then to her horror, she felt her dress being lifted and her undergarments pulled down.

"What do you think you are doing... get your hands off me! Help! Help! AAAOooowwww!" Her bottom suddenly stung, as his powerful hand descended straight onto one cheek. Then again, and again and again. SMACK, SMACK, SMACK!

"So I am an oaf, am I... a blackguard!" SMACK "Any other words you would like to throw at your guest this evening?" SMACK, SMACK!

"Aaaaaooooowwww... noooo... yyesss... you knave... you contemptible pig... oooooowwwwww!"

Enora was embarrassed beyond belief that this... this oaf, had exposed her bare bottom and now was actually spanking her! No one had ever dared do such a thing to her! How could he! Once again, she struggled and kicked, but he wasn't going to budge.

"So, my 'Lady'... are you ever going to throw anything at me again?"

She spoke through gritted teeth, "Noooo... not unless you deserve it!" SMACK "Oooooowwww! That hurts! Let me go!"

"With pleasure!" He pushed her off his lap, and she landed in an undignified heap at his feet. Rubbing her sore bottom, she looked up at him, her eyes blazing pure hatred while he sat chuckling at her discomfort.

"Now, perhaps you would be so kind as to provide food and wine for your guests, as a good hostess should?"

Picking herself up off the floor, Enora furiously adjusted her shift and skirts, and smoothed down her hair before turning back to him.

"I shall provide it this evening, if only for the other guests... you deserve nothing!"

He grabbed her arm as she went to walk past him, "Listen, my lady, we will soon be living together as man and wife whether you like it or not... and I expect my wife to defer to me in every way. That will start from right now!"

She gasped, "I will *not* be your wife! *Never!* I would rather marry a pig!"

Shrugging out of his grasp, she left him staring after her.

"Oh, you will be my wife... sooner than you think!"

Enora had laid out a splendid feast for the head knights and their squires. Richard was sitting at the high board with Guy and several other leading knights, partaking of the sumptuous meal. Enora's chair, next to Richard's, was noticeably empty, and as he sat quaffing his wine, he decided to rectify the matter immediately.

"Excuse me, Guy, I have an errand to run!"

Guy raised his goblet and downed the rest of his wine, tossing a bone to one of the large Irish wolfhounds that had been sitting patiently waiting for a tidbit. "Felix – a song, if you please!" Guy called over to their camp minstrel, who at his command, jumped up off his seat and proceeded to sing a comical song, making the hall erupt with laughter. One of the dogs started howling along to the music, increasing the noise.

Richard exited the hall in search of Enora, when by chance he noticed the resident priest standing in

a corner. Pausing mid-stride, he decided it was time to sort out the wedding arrangements.

The priest looked up from his reverie when he noticed his new lord striding over towards him. "Good evening, my Lord," he greeted him.

"Good evening! I would ask that you make ready the chapel this evening... I intend to wed Lady Enora within the hour!"

The priest gasped, "My lord... 'tis too soon! Lady Enora is not ready... please have patience. You cannot simply walk in here and change everything overnight!"

"Aye, I can... and I will! Now go and make ready!"

The priest was prepared to argue further, but one look at Richard's face told him all he needed to know. This knight would brook no disobedience from anyone. Richard stared at him, his intense hazel eyes boring into the priest's very soul, daring him to disobey his command. Nodding his head in obeisance, the priest walked off to find Enora.

"He *what?*"

"My lady, he asks that you join him in the Chapel in forty minutes, so you can take your wedding vows." Her priest bowed his head slightly, "I am sorry, my lady, but you have little choice! I will leave you now and make preparations for the blessing."

Enora was left seething, as she watched the priest leave the room before erupting in a show of anger.

"Wedding vows! I will never be his wife!" She paced up and down her bedchamber, whilst her maid looked on, twisting her apron in her hands. She had seen Lady Enora in a full-blown rage before, and all the signs were there for it to happen at any moment.

"Wedding vows... how dare he! He comes into my... yes *my* castle, and starts ordering *my* servants around... how dare he! How *dare* he!"

"My lady, he is here under the King's command!"

"King be damned! They can all go to hell as far as I am concerned!" Coming to an abrupt halt, she turned to the maid, and instructed, "Go down to the stables and tell Wilfred to ready my horse. I will not stay here a moment longer; I shall to go my cousin's in Whitehaven until this oaf decides to leave. Without me... he cannot own Beaumont!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes... now leave!" As soon as the maid left her chamber, Enora opened her trunk and took out a heavy cloak to keep out the chill of the evening. Whitehaven was only an hour's ride away, but she would be safe there. Making haste, she left the bedchamber and cautiously tiptoed down the stairs. The noise from the hall was almost deafening as Richard's knights indulged themselves in drink and made merry. Pursing her lips, she drew her hood over her head, so she would not be recognised by anyone. Making her way silently through the kitchens, she hurried over to the stables where, with any luck, her horse would be ready for her.

"Wilfred, is she ready?" Enora whispered to the stable boy. As he went to answer, a dark figure stepped out of the shadows to stand directly in front of her.

"No! He is not ready, my lady!"

Enora gave out a startled scream and stepped back in shock, as Richard made himself known. Holding a hand to her chest, she cried, "How did you... I mean...what are you doing here?"

"Did you really think me that stupid, Lady? Did you think that I would not know you would try to flee?"

He stepped closer to her. She screamed and started to run in the opposite direction. But she was

no match for him; he simply scooped her up with one arm and threw her over his broad shoulder. She beat him with her fists, kicked and struggled, but it was no use. He just strode towards the chapel with her hanging on for dear life.

"Put me down! Let me goooo...!"

Enora was so mad by now, that if she had had a knife, she would have thrust it into him. As it was, she was powerless to resist. When he finally put her down, it was to position her next to him, at the front of the aisle in the small church. Her priest looked concerned at the way this wedding was going, but as was the way of the world, the man had all the rights. Richard kept a firm grip on her upper arm so she could not run away.

"Proceed!" Richard glared at the priest, challenging him to oppose his command.

The priest cleared his throat and began to speak, "We are gathered here today..."

As the priest droned on, Enora silently seethed, grinding her teeth as she tried to think of ways to escape this sham of a marriage.

"Enora of Beaumont, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

Enora gave Richard a disdainful look and pursed her lips, not saying a word.

"She will!"

"What... you cannot answer for me, my lord!" She looked at her priest for reassurance.

The priest shook his head, "My lord, the lady herself must answer!"

Enora looked smug and said nothing. The priest turned to her, "Please, my lady, you must answer... yea or nay?" he implored her.

Richard glowered down upon her, "Need I remind you, Lady, that this marriage is by royal decree?"

She stood impotently, looking from one to the other. It was a hopeless situation. She had to marry to keep her holdings safe, she knew that, but she'd wanted to marry someone of her own choice... not this... oaf! Admittedly, he was a good looking oaf, but nevertheless, not the man of her choice!

"My lady..." the priest implored.

Enora sighed and dropped her shoulders, coming to the realisation that she had little choice in the matter, before finally mumbling, "I will!"

The priest breathed a sigh of relief, and carried on with the ceremony.

She might not be able to stop the wedding, but she was certainly not going to make it easy for him! Quickly twisting out of his grip, she elbowed Richard in the side, before turning to flee once again. Giving a sigh of exasperation, he simply put his booted foot out, causing her to trip straight over it and land on the floor, sprawled out on her front.

Before she could move, he pulled her up and stood her in front of him, this time firmly gripping both her shoulders, so she could not stray.

"Carry on, Priest! Lady Enora is now ready." In her ear he whispered, "Remember what happened to you earlier in your bedchamber? Well... if you carry on with this performance you will receive the same, right here, and in front of everyone gathered!"

Enora gulped. She knew she could not bear that sort of humiliation. Feeling her shoulders slump slightly, Richard grinned to himself. Aye, perhaps there was hope for her, after all!

After the wedding, Richard steered Enora past all the well-wishers, and back into the main hall. Picking up a metal tankard on one of the side tables, he smashed it down several times to get everyone's attention. The noise gradually subsided, until all eyes were on the newly married couple.

"I have an announcement; we are now married. Raise your glasses to the new overlord of Beaumont Castle and his wife... the Lady Enora!"

Richard's men erupted with cheering and clapping, rejoicing at his good fortune. Enora's people, however, remained impassive, not sure how to take this quick turn of events. Their lady did not look happy to be married to this knight, and only time would tell if it was a good match. For now, all they could do was wait and see.

Richard was heartily clapped on the back, and Enora did her best to accept the good wishes of those around her. All the while, she was busily plotting another escape plan. If he thought he was sharing her bed tonight, just because he had forced her to become his wife, then he was going to be sorely disappointed!

"My lady, surely not, tell me you are not serious?"

"Do I look like I jest? Just do as I say, will you?"

The maid sighed. This was another of Lady Enora's schemes, but she had no choice but to obey. Quickly, the maid packed a small bag with a few of her mistress' clothes and other items she would need for the journey, whilst Enora dressed in a thick, woollen dress to keep out the night air, along with her heavy cloak.

Enora took the bag, and glancing around the room to make sure she had not forgotten anything, she hugged her maid. "Now remember, you are not to tell a soul about this... you know nothing... remember that!"

Her maid nodded acquiescence.

Going to the fireplace, Enora pulled down an innocuous looking stone figure and suddenly, part of the wall opened, to reveal a small passageway. Taking her candlestick, she gave her maid a nervous smile and stepped into the dark corridor.

Once inside, she pressed a lever on the wall, and the makeshift door closed, leaving her alone in the eerie passage.

Now that she was alone, she was not so sure it was a good idea! Her father had shown her this passageway when she was little. He had told her that if ever there was a siege on the castle, and she needed to escape, then this was the tunnel to use. If she remembered correctly, the other end opened out to a rocky outcrop about a hundred yards from the entrance to the castle. It was extremely well hidden, and no one, thus far, had ever discovered it. Creeping forward, she gradually started making her way to what she hoped would be the exit.

Richard was feeling extremely pleased with himself. He had accomplished in one day, what he had waited all his life for... his own holdings! And what a holding it was... complete with a pretty wife. A feisty one perchance, but still a wife... who was now, this very minute, being prepared to accept him in their bedchamber. Aye, life could not get better than this! He gulped down a large mouthful of wine and slammed his silver goblet onto the table. Time to turn Lady Enora into his wife, in more than name only!

Guy laughed slyly at Richard, "Leaving so early, Richard?"

Richard grinned back, "Well, Guy. A certain lady awaits the pleasure of my company, and what sort of man would I be, to keep a lady waiting?"

Guy slapped him on the back and raised his goblet, "Here's to the first night of many, eh, Richard!"

Richard laughed and left his friend to enjoy the night's festivities. Taking the stairs two at a time, he made his way to Enora's bedchamber, now their bedchamber. All seemed very quiet. Without knocking, he tried the handle, and to his surprise, it

opened. He had fully expected the door to be locked, and he would have to break it down again. The unfortunate locksmith had already fixed it once today.

As he walked in, he immediately sensed something amiss. The bed had not been turned down, and there was no obedient wife waiting for him. Where the devil had the wench gone now? He searched the room from top to bottom, lest she was hiding, but nowhere was she to be found. Turning on his heel, he left the room and quickly called for his manservant.

"Aaron, have you seen Lady Enora? Or her maid?"

"No, Sir Richard, I have not seen Lady Enora since the marriage ceremony. Her maid is in the kitchens as far as I know... do you want me to go fetch her?"

"Aye, and tell her to come immediately! It is a matter of utmost urgency!"

He strode back into the bedroom and sat down on the bed with his head in his hands. The only answer was that she had run away again. Was the thought of living with him truly that bad? Did he repulse her that much?

His thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of her maid. She looked extremely nervous, and her eyes kept darting round the room.

"You wanted me, Sir?"

"Aye! Have you seen Lady Enora?"

"N-No, Sir, I haven't!" she stammered, "I prepared her for bed, and as far as I knew... she was ready for you, Sir!"

He narrowed his eyes; she was hiding something. "You do realise that if I find out you are lying, then you will be dismissed forthwith!"

The maid looked horrified at this remark. She needed this position; her family would starve if she did not bring in money to the house. Suddenly, she threw her apron up to cover her face and started

crying into it, "I am sorry, Sir... truly I am... I tried to stop her, but she just would not listen!"

Jumping up, he grabbed her by the shoulders, "Where did she go, damn you, where?"

Reluctantly, the little maid walked over to the fireplace and pulled down the secret lever. The door swung open to reveal the dark interior of its passageway. Without hesitation, Richard grabbed a candlestick and entered into the darkened corridor to search for his rebellious wife.

Chapter Two

Enora still had not reached the opening of the long tunnel. Her candle was burning lower, and the chill was starting to seep into her very core. Pulling her cloak closer, she carefully stepped over the debris lying on the passage floor. She startled a few bats, which then proceeded to frighten her by flapping straight over her head. She nearly screamed, but just managed to keep it to a strangled murmur. Putting her hand to her chest to calm her pumping heart, she cautiously moved forward.

She was certain that there were rats in here, as she could hear the tell-tale scrabbling sounds. Her nerves were on a knife-edge, but she could not go back. She would have to continue... surely the entrance could not be much further. It seemed like she had been in there for hours! The passage walls dripped with moisture, and the air smelled dank. Shivering with the cold, she gripped the candlestick tightly lest she drop it. Suddenly, she thought she could see a chink of light ahead. Raising her candlestick, she peered into the darkness. Yes... there it was... just a tiny shard of moonlight... but it was light! Her heart lifting, she quickened her pace. It was then that she heard the footsteps behind her. She immediately blew out her light, flattening herself against one of the passage walls and breathing as lightly as she possibly could. She did not want to make any noise.

Richard was puzzled. He was positive he had seen Enora's light ahead, and now it seemed to have disappeared; surely, she could not have

reached the exit that quickly! As he peered ahead, he was relieved to see some light up ahead; the sooner he got out of this Godforsaken tunnel, the better! Moving onward, he cursed as his foot hit a particularly large stone. Oddly, it had felt quite soft. His instincts on full alert, he stopped and turned around. Holding the candlestick down to aid his sight, he found himself staring at a small, slippered foot. Before he could say 'got you!', the foot made contact with his midriff.

Enora kicked as hard as she could before jumping up to sprint her way up the tunnel. She had no candle, but the light spilling in from the moonlit sky was beginning to fill the tunnel walls as she approached the exit.

Richard quickly recovered, and grabbing his candlestick, rushed after her. He was not going to let her get away with that! Just as she reached the end of the tunnel, exulted, she was well and truly nabbed, her feet lifted off the ground.

"Noooooooo... let me go! Please!"

"Oh no! Not this time!"

"But I do not want to be with you... leave me alone!" She pummelled his chest, but she was no match for his strength.

Putting her down, he simply held her hands behind her back with his larger one and pushed her forward through the exit. "Now, move!"

Once outside in the moonlit night, he did let her go, spinning her around to stare at him. She was too frustrated to speak, but her eyes blazed at him, her temper high.

"You... my lady wife... are going to walk with me to the castle entrance and act like the lady you should be, and not the spoiled brat that you are! Any resistance will lead to you being thoroughly spanked in front of the whole hall!"

Enora realised she had little choice than to obey her new husband, and after a brief hesitation, she gave in and walked over to the drawbridge. The

guard on duty was startled when he looked down upon the newly married couple asking to be let back into the castle. Immediately obeying Richard's barked command, the drawbridge was lowered, with no questions asked; the guard valued his life.

Richard took a firm grip of Enora's upper arm and silently marched her through the hall, up the stairs, and into their now shared bedchamber. As they entered, he pushed her towards the bed and turned to lock the door. Putting the key in his pocket, he turned his gaze upon her. "I suggest you prepare yourself for bed, my lady... *and for me!*"

How dare he! How dare he come into her castle, and... marry her... like she was some kind of possession! It was all too much! Rising off the bed, she launched herself at him and did the only thing she could think of; lifting her hand up, she brought it crashing down against his cheek. He quickly grabbed her hand, so she could attack him no further.

"So still feisty, then, eh? Ever the vixen! Perhaps you need a reminder of who is in charge here, my lady?"

Dragging her to the bed, he pulled her over his lap, and once again, she found herself staring at the floor. This was ridiculous! Now she was over his knee for the second time in one day! She felt the cool air as her bottom was exposed, and then his iron-like hand fell.

SMACK, "Oooooowwww... nooo... stop!"

SMACK, SMACK, SMACK, "Not until you calm down and accept your fate!" SMACK, SMACK. "You are now married, and you will behave as a good wife should!" SMACK, SMACK, SMACK.

As her bottom began to sting for the second time that day, she finally ceased to resist. He felt her relax over his knees and stopped to knead her soft skin. She truly did have a lovely bottom. He felt a stirring in his loins as his hand continued to caress the silky orbs, the heat from them emanating into

his palm. Moving lower, he stroked her supple thighs.

Enora tried to fight the emotions racing through her, but her traitorous body reveled in his soft caresses. He pulled her up off his lap and turned to lay her on the bed; she immediately turned away, her back to him. Her body may have given in, but her mind still raged against him. She had known the man for only a few hours and now, under God's Law, she was expected to share his bed. Well, he would not find a willing participant, of that she was certain! As she heard him undress, she furtively looked over her shoulder. Her eyes widened when she saw his broad, naked shoulders. He looked up to catch her studying him; she quickly turned away, her breathing suddenly shallow and her heart beating a little faster. She felt the bed move as he lay down, and then his hands were on the buttons at the back of her dress. Moving away as though scalded, she scrambled over to the other side of the bed.

"'Twould be a lot easier for you, my lady, if you did not resist! Come hither!" his voice commanded immediate respect, but she was having none of it.

"Nay! I will not do this... this... act!"

"Forsooth, you try me sorely, lady!" Richard snaked his arm out and pulled her, struggling, towards him. Rolling her underneath him, he pinned her arms above her head and stared down into her fiery blue-gray eyes. She stared up into his face, the strong jaw, chiseled nose and finally, those commanding hazel eyes. His hard mouth descended upon her soft, red lips, giving no quarter, as he kissed her soundly. At first, she continued to struggle, but his kissing began to do strange things to her.

Her nether regions began to tingle as she felt his hard, male appendage pulse against her thigh. He broke away and watched as her eyes fluttered open, the pupils dilated, her lips softly quivering.

Releasing her hands, he rolled her onto her side and unlaced her chemise, sliding her dress and undergarments off with practiced ease. Her breasts heaved as he moved her underneath him once again, this time naked. She gasped as his mouth lowered over one of her nipples, the peak hardening as his tongue swirled over the pink tip. His hand moved down over her hip, pulling her lower body fully against him, so she was left in no doubt as to his arousal.

Of their own volition, her hands clasped his head as he continued to tease and tempt her breasts; his own desire increasing as he listened to her small gasps of pleasure. Enora was beyond listening to reason, her sensual nature taking over. She began to moan softly as she concentrated on the wonderful feelings he was arousing in her. His hand parted her thighs, to cup her feminine core. She breathed in sharply, but was lost as his lips claimed her own. His fingers probed between her silky nether lips to find her bud. His finger encircled it and began a feather-light stroking. Pressing one finger into her centre, he knew she was as ready as she would ever be to receive him.

Suddenly wanting to hear her speak her desire, he paused to ask, "Will you now accept me to join with you?"

Enora writhed beneath him. "Yes! Do not stop, please!"

Moving up her body, he positioned himself at her entrance. As he pushed slowly into her, his lips once again crushed down on hers, stifling away her whimpers of pain as he broke through her maidenhead.

He stopped moving and looked into her eyes, "Be still, little one... the pain will be over soon, and only pleasure will ensue!"

Mesmerised by the tone of his voice, she calmed, and as he began to move again, the pleasure did increase as he predicted. She liked

these feelings he was invoking in her, and instinctively raised her legs to wrap around his torso. Richard marvelled at her reactions to him. He had expected her to deny him entry or even for her to swoon, but no, his little damsel was turning out to be quite the temptress.

With solid strokes, he brought her swiftly to orgasm. As she cried out, he let his own pleasure take over, groaning aloud as he climaxed inside her. His body now relaxed, he looked down to find her studying him irritably. He raised his eyebrows. "You find something interesting, my lady?"

"No, I do not! You think to tame me with your strength and dominance, but fie, my lord, you may own my body, but you will never own my heart! You are an overbearing, insensitive bully... and an oaf!"

"So you keep saying! Well, my feisty wife... you are a spoiled, self-righteous little shrew, and nothing will give me more pleasure than to tame you, whenever and wherever, I see fit!"

She gasped, "Shrew! I am not a shrew! How dare you!" She struggled beneath him, trying to break free of his enormous frame. Her petite arms pushed against his chest; she would have had more success trying to move a boulder.

He looked down at her and laughed, "Mayhap there is hope within this marriage! Lie still, my lady vixen. I haven't finished with you yet!"

His lips swooped down, capturing her own, and once again she was lost in sensations as her traitorous body ruled.

Enora woke up to the strange feelings of finding another person sharing her bed, and being naked against the warm sheets. Rolling over cautiously, she turned to face her new husband. He had one strong arm thrown above his head and the other on top of the coverlet, seemingly still asleep.

Moving closer, she pulled herself up on one elbow to study him. He had very dark hair - a little unruly, but it suited him, a strong jaw and shapely lips. She was startled out of her inspection when he suddenly spoke. "You like what you see, my lady?"

She gasped as his arms grabbed her hips, and he pulled her on top of him. His shaft was already hard and pulsing against her thigh.

"How dare you manhandle me like this?!" she cried, struggling within his grasp, but he just chuckled and held her fast.

"I will dare anything, my lady. You are now mine, and I will do what I like!" His words made her even more furious, and she struggled anew.

"Oooooohhh... yooooouuuu!" Before she could utter any expletives, Richard pulled her head down and kissed her soundly, stifling her words. His hands held her arms at her side, so she could not escape; her breasts were crushed against his chest, and her nipples hardened at the contact. As his kiss deepened, she felt a tingling in her belly, and her heart beat faster. Growing angry at the feelings he was arousing in her, she tried again to break free. He laughed and nibbled her bottom lip. As she pulled her face away, he moved lower to nibble her neck. Suddenly, in one swift move, he had her pinned underneath him.

"You cannot escape, Enora!" he smiled down into her eyes, his own full of mirth. Then just as quickly, he released her. "Perhaps I will allow you a reprieve this morning, my lady!" He swung his legs out of bed and stood naked before her, "I have deeds aplenty to do this day. As the new overlord, I want to visit our villeins and would that you accompany me!"

Enora had scuttled to the other side of the bed and was holding the coverlet close to her body to conceal her nakedness. Not that being naked seemed to bother him. She tried to avert her eyes as he strode around the bedroom seeking his

clothes, but could not resist taking furtive glances. He did indeed have a magnificent form, his muscles honed from years of battle and swordplay. His legs were strong, his shoulders broad, his eyes intense. She suddenly realised that he had stopped moving and was watching her scrutinise him once again. That was the second time today he had caught her! Quickly, she averted her eyes, only to hear him chuckle. Huffing, she turned away from him and decided there and then, only to speak to him when spoken to.

Once he was dressed, Richard sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked her soft cheek. "You cannot stay abed all day, my lady. Come now, there is no need for shyness betwixt us!"

She scowled back and knocked his hand away, "There is every need, my lord! I shall get dressed in my own good time and not yours!" She pulled the coverlet up to just under her chin and glared at him over the top. "I shall break my fast with you shortly."

Richard shook his head and looked down at the floor, "This lady surely doth try me", he muttered. Turning to her, he clasped the top of the covers and pulled them straight down to her knees, revealing her naked form in all its glory. Enora gasped and tried to drag the covers back up. "Fie, my lord! Leave me be!"

"No, I will not, my lady, and the sooner you understand that, the better! Now, get out of bed, or I will make you!"

She looked up at him as they both clutched the cover, and saw by the look in his eyes that he meant every word he said. Scowling angrily, she stood up before him, completely naked, and put her hands on her hips defiantly. "So, my lord, will you go now?"

Richard stared transfixed at her luscious form - her pert breasts, her perfect pink nipples thrusting upwards, her slim curvaceous hips, and her slender

long legs. She realised he was now studying her, as she had studied him earlier. Her face began to flush at the look in his eyes, and she hurriedly turned to put on her night robe.

Composing himself, he reluctantly stood up from the bed. "I will leave you in peace, my lady, but shall be expecting you in the hall for victuals shortly. Do not make me have to come and get you!" With that, he turned on his heel and left her alone to await her maid.

Once they had broken their fast together, Richard let Enora show him their demesne. He wanted to assure the villeins and serfs that they would be well protected under his leadership and that he was a fair, trustworthy lord.

Enora did her best to ignore him, barely nodding to the serfs as they rode from dwelling to dwelling. Her whole countenance was of one who did not want to be present; she was acting like a spoiled child. Richard glared over at her for the dozenth time, his temper boiling, almost ready to erupt.

After she cursed at her horse, he suddenly stopped and reached for its reins. Enora looked down at his hands, refusing to meet his gaze.

"What are you stopping for, my lord? Surely you want to carry on seeing to 'your' serfs? Obviously, my total incompetence before you came along has led to them becoming half-starved!" She knew her serfs were well provided for, but having to introduce him to them as their new overlord, when she did not want to, was annoying her beyond all reason.

He closed his eyes for a moment and counted aloud to ten. "Seven... eight... nine... ten! Carry on in that tone, and I will take a switch to your bottom, wench! Stop acting the shrew and behave like the lady you are supposed to be! I am trying to maintain calm amongst these villeins, and you, my

lady, are creating unease with your entire demeanour!"

"I am a lady! How dare you say I am not! Why do you not leave me be... you... you... whoreson!" She snatched the reins out of his hand and kicked her horse hard, straight into a gallop.

Richard's anger exploded, and he saw red. Spurring his horse onward, he galloped after her. His horse was much quicker than hers, and in no time at all, he had caught up. Reaching out, he grabbed the reins from her, and even though she slapped uselessly at his arms, he managed to bring the horses to a halt. Still holding both harnesses, he dismounted quickly and pulled her straight off her horse. She kicked and screamed, but he was having none of it.

"Cease your struggling, wench, else I will make it worse for you!"

"Make what worse... you oaf... you imbecile! Tyrant! Swine!"

"Oh, keep cursing, my lady... every word will earn you more punishment to that lovely derriere of yours!"

She stopped struggling as his words sank in, "What! You cannot mean to spank me again! How dare you!"

Enora was working herself up to a full blown temper, and she struggled passionately to break free. She was determined that she was not going to be subjected to another spanking. He led the horses over to a tree, and tying both their reins, left them to graze. He finally put her down on the ground, where she immediately kicked his shins with her booted feet. Even though he had boots on, he could still feel the small impact and shook his head at her.

"Poor move, my lady, truly a poor move!" Putting both hands behind her back, he led her over to the edge of the forest, where he looked around for a willow tree.

"Ah this one will do... come with me, my little vixen!"

Manhandling her over to the tree, he sought out a very thin branch and snapped it off with one hand, the other hand rendering her immobile. Stripping off the leaves, he swished the thin branch through the air to test it; then sitting down on a convenient log, he pulled her straight over his lap.

She struggled anew at this affront, and squealed with indignation. "You will regret this, my lord!"

"Oh, no, my lady... I think you will be the one to regret your little outburst and your extremely bad behaviour!"

She felt her skirts being lifted, and he forced her further forward until her hands were on the grass. Pulling aside her undergarments, he brought the switch straight down on both cheeks.

SWISH, THWACK, "Yeeeeooooouch!" SWISH, THWACK, SWISH, THWACK, "Aooooeeewww... noooo... that hurts!"

"It is meant to!" SWISH, THWACK, SWISH, THWACK.

She screamed and shouted her outrage as the switch came down again and again.

SWISH, THWACK, "So, are you going to behave as a lady now... my little shrew?"

SWISH, THWACK. Enora bit her lip to stop from answering.

SWISH, THWACK, "Answer me!"

"Yes... Yes... stop, please! It truly hurts!"

"Oh, just one more, methinks... for good luck, my lady!" SWISH, THWACK.

"Yeeeeooooowww!"

He put the switch down and massaged her bottom. She sniffed and reached round to feel the slight welts on her bottom.

"You hurt me... you beast!"

"Now, now, my lady. Remember what happened when last you did swear? Perhaps you would like some more?"

She hastily closed her mouth; she certainly did not want any more of that, it hurt too much. Richard allowed her to rise, whereupon she adjusted her garments to look presentable.

"Now, when you sit on that horse, you will have a reminder of how to behave, every time your horse moves! Remount, and no more rudeness... do you hear?"

She pouted and mumbled a reply, "Yes, my lord!"

As they rode on, Enora seethed silently. However, she did manage to greet her serfs politely now. Just one warning glance from Richard and she obeyed him instantly, her bottom still glowing as a reminder of what happened when she had not.

As they came to the last house, she suddenly perked up, an idea forming in her devious mind. When they both dismounted to see their last villagers, she asked sweetly, "Oh, my lord, would you mind if I just go into the forest... I have a need that I must take care of!" She made a show of looking down at her feet and pretended embarrassment.

He looked at her shrewdly, "Very well... but be quick!"

She thanked him and ran off into the forest, sticking to the narrow track. Once she was out of sight, Richard went over to greet their serfs. Glancing round to make sure she was not being followed, Enora veered off the track, and made her way into a clearing. In the middle sat a tiny cottage with smoke billowing from the chimney. She tentatively walked forward. Old Mother Doole lived here, and it was commonly known that she was a witch. Enora always objected when she heard that... Mother Doole was just knowledgeable about herbs and potions, that was all! Now she was here, though, she started to feel a bit anxious.

As she walked up the path, the front door opened and Mother Doole appeared, "I knew you would come!"

"You... you did?" Enora said weakly, her nerve almost disappearing.

"Aye! And furthermore... I know what you want!" the crone cackled, her wizened old frame shaking with mirth.

"You do?" Enora looked around frantically to make doubly certain that they were not overheard, and then followed Mother Doole into her house. It was dark inside, and it took a while for Enora's eyes to adjust. Blinking rapidly, she managed to focus on the old woman, who was at that very moment searching through several small vials, muttering to herself. Enora's nose wrinkled with distaste as she looked round the small abode, the overbearing smell of herbs making her want to cough. Finding what she wanted, the old crone held the vial up to her.

"What is it?" Enora enquired.

"Why, the potion you wanted, milady! The one to put your man to sleep so you may defer his unwanted attention!"

Enora gasped, "How did you know this?"

"I know everything, milady... and I tell nothing!"

She held out her wizened palm, waiting for payment, the other hand still holding the vial. Reaching into a small pouch sewn into her gown, Enora pulled out a coin and placed it in Mother Doole's outstretched hand, grabbing the vial with the other.

Biting the coin to test its merit, the old hag cackled, "Most generous, milady... most generous, indeed!"

Enora concealed the vial within her pouch, and started to leave, but Mother Doole's voice stopped her, "Do you not want to know its powers, milady?"

Enora gulped and turned to face her once again, "Yes... yes I do... of course, I do! How much should I use?"

"Two drops... no more, milady! Heed this, lest you want his demise upon your hands!"

Enora rushed out of the cottage, the sound of Mother Doole's manic laughter still ringing in her ears. Quickly finding the narrow path, she hurriedly made her way back to Richard, hoping that she had not been gone too long.

As she neared the horses, she did her best to look nonchalant. Richard appeared at the open doorway of the cottage and stared hard at her a moment before speaking, "I wondered where you were, my lady. I was just going to come searching for you!"

She flushed guiltily. "Oh, my clothing got caught by some brambles, and it took me a while to untangle myself... but as you see, I am back! None the worse for wear!"

Seemingly satisfied, he joined her and both remounted, ready for the ride back to the Castle.

For some reason, Enora felt uneasy... it was almost as if he knew what she had done! No... he could not have seen her! Dismissing her fears, she rode quietly back home, taking his own silence for weariness.

Upon their arrival, she hid the potion in her jewelry box and waited anxiously for eventide to come, so she could finally get even with this high and mighty overlord.

Chapter Three

At eventide, Enora made her way down into the kitchens and poured two goblets of wine, placing them on a tray. Making sure none of the kitchen staff were watching, she quickly slid the vial out of her hidden pouch and placed two drops of the sleeping potion into one goblet. Replacing the cap, she concealed the vial back in her pouch. Her heart racing, she took the drinks into the hall, where she was expected to join Richard and the others for the evening meal.

Richard was sitting at the high board, next to Guy, and acknowledged her presence with a nod as she walked towards him. Her hand shook slightly as she handed him his drink. Quickly, she looked up into his eyes, to see if he had noticed, but was relieved that he was smiling at some remark Guy had made. Taking her own goblet off the tray, she placed it on the table in front of her and went to get some food for Richard and herself.

Richard watched her surreptitiously, and as soon as her back was turned, he swapped the goblets.

She came back to the high board and placed several meat dishes and a freshly baked loaf in front of him, noticing with satisfaction that he was quaffing his wine back and had not seemed to notice any change in flavour. Ha! 'Twould serve the lout right! He would wake up in the morning, and just think he had drank too much, and she in turn, would get a night of peace.

She sat down next to him, delicately sipping at her wine, whilst he slyly watched her, a slight smirk

on his lips. Draining the rest of his wine, he called for a refill from one of the serving wenches.

"You drink too slowly, my lady! Come now, drink deeply, for 'tis wine that brings strength to a body... and you will need much stamina this night!"

Enora scowled at him, but did as she was bid; under his scrutiny she could do no less.

He raised his goblet to hers. "A toast, my lady... to a pleasant evening ahead!" His eyes grew dark with lust, as he visually travelled down her body; she flushed and took a large mouthful of wine to still her nerves. How dare he look at her like she was some kind of trophy! She was glad she had given him the potion... the man was no more than an arrant knave!

Suddenly, she felt a bit dizzy, and shook her head to try and clear the feeling. Richard watched her closely and leaned over close to her ear. "You are very quiet this evening... is anything amiss? Do you feel unwell?"

"I-I just feel slightly giddy... it must be the wine! It is slightly stronger than usual..." she looked down at her goblet, puzzled.

"That's peculiar... as if it has something added, perhaps?"

Her eyes shot up to his and she paled. "No... I-I do not think so!"

His eyes grew dark and menacing; she involuntarily moved back in her seat and almost stopped breathing. He knew! Oh my God! He knew! What had she done! What had he done, for that matter? She looked back down at her goblet as realisation sank in. He had switched them!

Her head spun again, and she gripped the table for support.

"Come, my lady... some more wine, perhaps?" As she turned to stare at him in horror he continued, "Do you truly think me so naïve, wench, that I would not have known of your meeting with the witch, and procuring the potion?"

"I did not mean to hurt you... it was only temporary... I would not have harmed you, my lord!"

"You have indeed harmed me... more than you think! You will be punished severely for this, but I want you *compos mentis*¹ when I do! For now, I will take you to your bed!"

She made to stand, but found that her legs would not support her. Instead, she did an unladylike flop straight into his arms, which were already waiting to catch her.

"Not nice, is it, my lady? This feeling of incapacity!"

She only managed a mumble before falling into a deep sleep. Holding the lightweight woman in his arms, he stared down at her angelic face. How could one so comely be so sly? Pursing his lips, he strode through the hall and mounted the stairs to their chamber. He had to admire her spirit, though... that is what would make breaking it all the merrier!

Enora woke up with a pounding headache. As she tried to open her eyes, the sunlight made her squint, and she groaned aloud, pulling a pillow over her face to block it out. Her mouth felt thick and her limbs heavy. Rolling onto her side, she peeked out from under her pillow to see if she was alone. Thankfully, the room was empty. However, there was evidence that Richard had slept next to her last night, as she could see the indentation of his head on his pillow.

Slowly pulling herself up, she plumped the pillows up behind her for support. Raising a hand to her head, she tried to rub away the pain, but it did not help.

¹ *Compos Mentis* – latin, meaning of sound mind, sane.

There was a tentative knock at the door; anxiously she bade the visitor entrance. Her maid entered with a tray of food and drink.

"Sir Richard asked me to bring your breakfast up to you this morning, my lady, as he thought you would prefer eating alone." She laid the tray on Enora's lap, and uncovered the linen to reveal oat stirabout, a small pot of honey and some fresh water.

"He said you would only want a light breakfast as you were unwell last night. Are you feeling better now, my lady?"

She felt chastened at his foresight and mumbled a reply, "Fine, thank you!"

As the maid went to leave, she handed Enora a note. "Oh, I nearly forgot, my lady! Sir Richard asked that I give you this!"

Enora looked at the parchment as if it was contaminated, but the maid thrust it nearer.. "Please take it, my lady. I will be in trouble if you do not!"

Enora sighed and grabbed it, waiting for the maid to leave the room before she unfolded it.

"My lady, due to last night's performance, you will be confined to your chamber for this day. Mayhap it will give you time to dwell upon your behaviour. I will be with thee at eventide. Richard"

Confined to her chamber, indeed! Who did he think he was?! She was certainly not going to sit back and heed his demands.

Determined to clear her muddled head and aching limbs, she added some of the honey to her oats and began to eat with relish. After two glasses of water, she was feeling more like her normal self. Pushing the now empty tray aside, she leapt up off the bed and began to get dressed. She brushed her long brown hair vigorously until it shone. Then, setting her mouth determinedly, she marched over to the door and tried to open it; it was locked! Raising her fist, she bashed loudly on the door and

waited. She heard the lock turn, the large bolt slide over, and then the door opened to reveal one of Richard's knights. "May I help you, my lady?"

Gritting her teeth, she replied, "Yes, you may. Let me pass... I have need to... to see someone!"

Shaking his head, he denied her leave. "I am sorry, my lady, but Sir Richard has ordered that you are not allowed to leave the chamber. If you wish, I can send for someone?"

She clenched her fists together and slammed the door in the guard's face. He stepped back, shocked at her behaviour. Shaking his head, he pitied Sir Richard... that was one shrew!

Pacing the room, she huffed with rage. How dare he! How *dare* he! Richard was the devil incarnate! A heathen, a... a savage! She looked towards her secret door and became even more vexed when she remembered how he had got his locksmith to add a large bolt, complete with padlock, that only had two keys... one for Richard and the other kept by the head guardsman. Oh, it was not fair!

Enora threw herself down on the bed and beat the coverlet, imagining it was Richard's body. Once she had used up what little energy she had left, she rolled over and lay looking up at the ceiling. Her eyes roamed around the room and fell upon her window. It was narrow, but then she was petite. Mayhap she could squeeze through. Yes, that was it! Quickly lifting herself up from the bed, she maneuvered her chair to the window and stood upon it. She looked down at the moat below. Her body swayed as she experienced a tinge of vertigo; closing her eyes, she clutched the wall for support. There was no escaping through that!

Reluctantly, she opened her eyes again to look out to the horizon. In the distance, she could see riders heading their way. They were flying a flag, but she could not see the colours. Jumping down from the chair, she rushed over to the door. It was

her duty to greet them. Surely, the guard would let her out now?

She pounded on the heavy wooden door once again and after a long wait, the guard opened it. "Aye, my lady?"

"There are riders coming... as lady of the Castle, I must insist that you take me down to greet them!"

"I am truly sorry, my lady, but Sir Richard said under no circumstances were you allowed to leave this chamber. I am sure Sir Richard will be there to meet them."

Enora stomped her foot. "Let me out of this room now! How dare you disobey me... your superior!"

The guard shook his head. "I beg your pardon, my lady... but orders are orders!" He pulled the door closed on her and resumed his watch.

Her temper exploded, and she screamed with anger. Picking up a nearby vase, she launched it at the door, swiftly followed by the tray and all of the crockery.

The guard winced as he heard the contents shatter against the door. That was one lady that truly needed to be taken in hand.

Enora paced backwards and forwards in her chamber, growing more and more angry as each second passed. She should be there to greet the visitors... not him! This was her castle, her domain, and as such, it was her responsibility. She ignored the tiny voice in her head telling her that she had not gone to meet Richard when he had arrived. That was a different matter, entirely!

Suddenly, she heard footsteps and voices outside of her room. Rushing over to the door, she put her ear to the wood, to see if she could ascertain who it was. The voices were deep... definitely men's... but she could not quite make out their words. She jumped back as the key turned in

the lock and the bolt was slid open. Backing up towards the bed, she waited with trepidation to see who was entering the room.

Richard pushed open the heavy door with ease, and as he entered, trod on the broken pieces of vase and crockery. He looked down and smirked. "Oh dear, my lady... had a bit of a tantrum, did you?"

She pursed her lips and glared at him before speaking, "No! They just broke!"

He raised his eyebrows. "Just broke! Ah well, you will not mind cleaning this mess up then, will you?"

"I will not! That is the maid's duty!" She planted her hands on her hips and gave him a defiant stare.

"Not this time... you will do it, instead. Either that, or go over my knee for another spanking! It is entirely up to you, my dear, sweet wife!"

She stared at him for a few heated moments, then realising he was serious, she huffily knelt on the floor and started picking up the broken pieces. Within moments, he was lifting her up by one of her arms. She looked at him in surprise. "What now, my lord?"

"Stop that. I was merely testing you to see if you would actually obey my wishes... I am satisfied!"

Enora blinked a couple of times as his words sank in, and then she shrugged his hand off her arm. "You were testing me! You have a nerve!"

"Worked though, did it not, my sweet?!" he chuckled at the outraged look upon her face.

Turning her back on him, she crossed her arms and refused to look at him.

"Do you not want to know who the visitors are, wife?"

God, she hated his mocking voice! Her curiosity was now reaching boiling point and much to her disgust, she found herself turning around to face him.

"Yes, of course I would like to know! I should have been there to greet them... not stuck in this chamber, kept like a prisoner in my own castle!"

"Ah, but if you had behaved as a lady yesterday, then you would not be confined to this room, my sweet. Trying to drug one's husband is not something I take lightly!"

He glared at her, his eyes willing her to deny her deviousness of the previous day. She dropped her gaze from his, unable to do so. Suddenly, she found him directly in front of her, his finger lifting her chin. "Is being married to me such a bad thing, Enora?" he asked softly.

She looked at him, mesmerised. His pupils darkened before his lips swooped down to cover hers. Finding no resistance, he lifted her up and carried her to the bed, where he lay her down on the coverlet, their lips still sealed in a searing kiss. She groaned as his kiss deepened, and his strong body covered hers. She felt his hand upon her breast, bringing her back to reality; she struggled to push him off. Richard pulled away slightly and spoke softly, "Have no fear, my lady. I will not ravish you now; there are guests for you to meet. However, do not expect such leniency tonight, my little vixen!"

"I am *not* a vixen! Get off of me, my lord!" she rolled away and sprung up off the bed, glaring at him. "If you expect me to share your bed willingly, my lord, then you will be sorely disappointed!"

"Willingly or no, my lady, you will do so!" he lay on the bed, his eyes daring her to defy him. Then, he quickly got up and grabbed her hand, bowing mockingly to her. "Come, my lady. Your guests await!"

She glared at him for a moment before exiting the room. The guard stood aside, allowing her to go with Richard. As they descended the narrow stairwell, she asked him who the guests were.

"Sir Edmund of Heathfield. Apparently, he knows you well and would know you are in good health! 'Twould seem he knows of our marriage, my lady!"

Enora paled slightly and was thankful that he could not see her face.

"You have nothing to say, my lady?" he enquired, immediately sensing something amiss.

She hastily reassured him, "Oh no, my lord! I have not seen Sir Edmund for a long time, 'tis all!" Her thoughts were racing through her head. Edmund had promised to ask her father for her hand in marriage, but the words had never been spoken. He had gone abroad to fight, and she had not seen him now for two years. Two long years! And here he was now, three days too late! Or was it too late?

As Enora made her entrance into the main hall, her eyes swept the room for her nearly betrothed, finally catching sight of him as he spoke with two other men. Her heart leapt; perhaps here was her saviour. Somehow he would help her escape this sham of a marriage, surely?

As she walked toward him, their eyes locked, and she searched his face for solace. When she reached him, he bowed before her, taking her hand and kissing it. "My lady."

Enora nodded her head politely. "Sir Edmund."

"All is well with you, my lady?"

She glanced over to Richard, who was watching them like a hawk, his eyes dark and unfathomable, before replying, "F-Fine, thank you, my lord. Your battle went well?"

"Aye. We were fortunate and had few losses. I did not hear of your father's death until only a week ago... I am heartily sorry, Enora."

She dropped her gaze, and then raised her eyes to look meaningfully into his. "As am I, Edmund, as am I! We must speak, Edmund..."

"Speak? Speak about what, my love?" came Richard's deep tones. Unbeknownst to Enora, he

had walked up to them and was now standing directly behind her. She jumped like a startled rabbit. "I-I was just saying that we must speak about th-the sleeping arrangements for his men. They must be settled and catered for!"

"Already done, my love. Nothing for you to worry yourself about!"

She fumed and almost stomped her foot, but held back just at the last moment, not wanting to make a public display of herself. Nothing for her to worry about, indeed! Overbearing oaf! It was usually her duty to oversee the arrangements, and here he was again, sticking his opinion in where it was not needed... or wanted!

Turning to him, she looked up into his eyes, her own flashing, before saying sweetly, "I do worry, my lord. After all, 'tis my castle, and as such, I should oversee the men!"

He chuckled, knowing that he had riled her. "Ah well, my lady, my foresight has given you less to do!" He turned to Edmund. "Come, my Lord, you must be tired from your journey. Sit ye down, and my wife will order some food for us!"

Edmund could feel the tension between the pair, but chose to remain silent and do as Richard had bid. He would find time later to seek out Enora and ask how she truly was. He sensed she was far from happy, but needed time alone with her to ascertain the truth. He had been stunned when he had heard the news that Enora was wed, and to a Norman knight as well. Her father had given him leave to think that one day he and Enora would be married, and then all of these holdings would have been his. 'Twas not fair!

Edmund glanced out of the corner of his eye and slyly watched Richard as he laughed with the one they called Sir Guy. Edmund had been ready to do battle with this new overlord, but he had few fighting men of his own, and would never have been able to overrun this big castle. No, he had other

plans. He would easily win Enora over to his side, and then, with his men already within the walls, he would overpower the enemy and make this castle his own. Enora's marriage would be over... as would the life of Sir Richard.

Edmund sneered to himself as he quaffed his wine. All he had to do now was wait. In the meantime, after his long and tiresome journey, he was ready to partake of food and wine.

The meal went smoothly, with polite conversation between Edmund and Richard. Enora ate sparingly and hardly spoke. Her thoughts were too muddled. As she listened to Edmund speak throughout the meal, she began to see traits in him, hitherto unknown. He was quite arrogant, and on two occasions had been very nasty to the servants. It seemed the more he drank, the louder he was getting, as well.

As the plates were cleared away, Richard called for his minstrel. "Entertain us, Felix! Our guests wish to hear your fine ballads!"

Felix obliged, and with his lute in hand, sang a merry ditty about the ways of a foolish knight and his quest for love. The hall rang with laughter as the song came to an end, swiftly followed by foot stomping and the banging of fists on the tables as the crowd cried for more. As Felix broke out into another song, Enora stood up. "I will leave you, my lords. I am fatigued and must have some rest."

"Certainly, my lady. I will stay a while with our guests." Richard looked at her with hooded eyes. "Do not wait up for me, Enora."

She pursed her lips and refused to give him the satisfaction of a retort in front of Edmund. Wait up for him, indeed! The very idea! Irritating knave!

Turning to Edmund, she nodded her head. "Sleep well, Sir Edmund. I will see you in the morning."

Edmund stood up, if a little unsteadily, and bowed. "Goodnight, my lady. May your dreams be happy ones."

Richard watched her walk away, her back straight, her petite figure almost gliding across the hall. Suddenly, she turned and looked straight at him, almost as if looking to see if he was watching her, which of course, he was. She briskly walked out of the hall. He rubbed his chin as he watched her depart. He would have to monitor her even more closely, now that Edmund was in the castle. The minx was capable of anything.

"Hush, follow me... we must not be overheard!"

Edmund had waylaid Enora on the way down to break his fast. Grabbing her hand, he pulled her through a side door and into a small courtyard before she had time to protest.

Holding both of her hands close to him, Edmund searched her face. "How fare you, my lady? Truly? How goes this marriage?"

She sighed heavily. "Not well, my lord! Richard is an overbearing swine. I should be married to you, not him! Why did the King decree it, why!" she stomped her foot angrily.

Gathering her in his arms, he cradled her head against his chest, trying to calm her. "Hush, my love, hush. We must think of a solution to this farce. If only I had heard about your father's death sooner; none of this would have happened!"

Enora sighed, "Fate has dealt us a bad hand, Edmund. What can we do?"

He looked down at the top of her head and gave an evil smirk. It seemed he would have no problem at all in winning Enora over to his way of thinking. Taking over the castle was going to be child's play. Hiding his smile, he spoke once again.

"I will think of a plan, Enora. In the meantime, act as normal, and as soon as we are ready, I will tell you what you must do!"

She stared up at him, a look of concern upon her face. "You will not harm Sir Richard, will you? I do not want him hurt, just evicted from my home!"

Edmund masked his true feelings and reassured Enora, "Of course not, my love, we will do our best to avoid bloodshed. Just bide your time until I tell you. Now go and break your fast, I will be there shortly."

She pulled away from him and made her way into the main hall, where several dishes were laid out for breakfast. Choosing a light meal of bread, cheese and fruit, she sat down at her allotted place on the high board. There were only a few others at breakfast, and evidence suggested that Richard had already partaken of his meal. She had not seen him at all this morning, but the indentation of his pillow showed that he had slept beside her last night.

Sipping her watered down wine, she thought about Edmund. Something had changed in him, since last she had known him. What was it? His eyes had taken on an almost cruel look. She immediately compared them with Richard's compelling hazel eyes, eyes that bored into your very soul. Shaking her head, she cleared her thoughts. She should not be thinking of Richard's eyes at all! What was wrong with her?!

Taking the last bite of bread, she nodded to the maid to clear the plates from the table, and left the main hall. She needed some fresh air to clear her thoughts and the perfect place was up on the ramparts. Taking the narrow stone staircase up to the first floor, she then went on to the next. These were steeper and even narrower. She reached the top and opened the solid wooden door, stepping out into a bright, blustery day. The wind whipped her hair up as she inhaled the fresh air. She loved being up high; it gave her a sense of freedom. Her father

had scolded her on numerous occasions as a child when he had found her wandering around up here alone, but finally giving in, he had relented as long as one of the guards was watching over her. He had always feared that she would fall to her death; Enora had no such fear.

The wind was very strong, making the trees in the distance sway, their branches bowing under the strain. She could see some of the small dwellings owned by their peasants, and the softly meandering river. She sighed, closing her eyes, and breathed in a huge lungful of air, letting it escape slowly as her body relaxed.

Clearing her hair from her face, she opened her eyes and looked down into the lower bailey below. Several of the knights were training, readying for combat should the need arise. One knight had his shirt off and was battling bare-chested against another combatant, his muscles rippling with every move. Enora's eyes followed his movements as he fought vigorously, finally pinning the other man on the ground, his sword at the man's throat. She heard his deep laugh as the wind carried it upwards, and just as she realised it was Richard's voice, he turned to look up at her. She found herself suddenly short of breath and unable to take her eyes away. Giving a slight smirk, Richard broke their gaze and pulled his sword away from the man's throat, holding out his hand to help him up from the ground. As the man stood, Richard gave him a hearty slap on the back, and laughing, they both walked into one of the guard chambers.

Enora turned and leaned back against the stone wall. Why did this man have such an effect on her? She detested him, did she not? She pictured his muscles once again, and shivered as she imagined his touch upon her skin. Mentally shaking herself, she decided the sooner he was sent away from the castle, the better. The man was an intruder, an interloper... he did not deserve her castle or her!

Stepping away from the wall, she decided to seek out Edmund and see if he had come up with a plan.

Chapter Four

Edmund was at that very moment talking heatedly with one of his fellow knights.

"We must, Oswald; we have no choice. If we keep him alive, he will come back and hunt us down. You have seen for yourself, how he fights so well. We cannot risk it."

Oswald spat back, "No, Edmund. 'Tis unfair. What if the King finds out? You cannot simply dispose of him!"

Edmund looked back slyly. "I do not mean to. It will be done by Enora's own fair hand. She will do anything I say; I know it! In any case, I will not tell her the whole truth. She will simply think that the draft I will give her to pour in Sir Richard's wine is merely a sleeping draught. Little will she know, it will put him out forever!"

Oswald frowned. Edmund's plan sounded foolproof. Perhaps they could pull it off, but what if they did not?

"How do you intend to overpower his men, once he is gone?"

"I will offer them lodgings if they pay allegiance to me. If not, then they are free to seek work elsewhere. 'Tis only fair. One overlord is no different than another... they will have no qualms in turning to me!" he said confidently.

"How will we get the physician to say Sir Richard has expired of natural causes? Surely, he will know he was poisoned?"

"No, this potion is odourless and tasteless. It will merely look like Sir Richard has suffered from heart

failure." He gave a wicked smile. "Then lady Enora will be mine, and so will this castle!"

Oswald grinned back. "'Twould seem you have a fail proof plan, Sir Edmund. When shall we put it into effect?"

"As soon as the lady agrees, Oswald. 'Twill be soon, rest assured! Come, let us peruse the battlements and see how strong a fortification this truly is."

Enora finally found Edmund outside, in the back of the main keep. He smiled warmly as she went to join him.

"My lady. What brings you out here on such a blustery day?"

She glanced at Oswald and then looked meaningfully at Edmund. "May we talk alone, my lord?"

"Of course!" Edmund turned to Oswald. "We will speak later, after we have supped."

Oswald bowed to Enora and took his leave.

Once he had gone, Enora asked, "Have you formed a plan yet, Edmund? We must act quickly! Every day that goes past, Sir Richard learns the layout of the castle, and he trains his men daily! You simply cannot leave it any longer!"

He looked around to make sure no one was watching, and then pulled her towards him. "Have no fear, my lady. I have a plan, already; I just need your help. We must talk where we cannot be overheard. Where can we go?"

She nibbled on her lip. Where would they be safe? "I know, the chapel. Quickly, follow me."

She walked off briskly, with Edmund following swiftly behind. Once inside, they sat side by side on one of the pews.

"Twill look as if we are simply praying, if anyone comes upon us. Tell me, Edmund, what aid do you need of me? Before you speak, I must tell you again

that I do not want Sir Richard to be harmed; merely evicted from my castle! He is not a bad man."

Edmund barely stopped himself from shaking her. The stupid wench, did she truly think that Sir Richard would disappear once he had been evicted from the castle?! What a sheltered life she had led. Forcing a sympathetic look, he replied, "No, we would not do that, my lady. I simply want you to put a sleeping draught in his wine this evening. This draught is special, and to all and sundry it will look like he has died. His heart will slow so it cannot be heard, and even the castle physician will be fooled!"

She clasped her hands together anxiously. "What will you do with Sir Richard, then? You cannot bury him!"

"No, my lady. This state will last for nearly a week, so once he has been put in his coffin, we will simply steal his body and fill the coffin with stones. No one will be the wiser!"

"But where will you take him? And how will you ensure he does not come back to attack the castle?"

Edmund had to think fast to cover up the fact that Richard would, in fact, be dead. "My lady, calm yourself. The potion leaves him with no memory for six months. He will simply wake where we put him, and have to start a new path in his life. By the time he regains his full memory, we will be married, and he will have no claim upon this castle. 'Tis simple!"

Enora did not like this at all. But if she wanted her castle back, then it was the only path open to her. Worriedly, she looked up into his face. "If you are sure that it will not harm him, then I will agree to this plan. Where is the potion? Do you have it upon you?"

Edmund reached into his pocket and pulled out a small vial. Handing it to her, he clasped his hand around hers as she took it. "Be careful, my lady. Make sure the whole vial is put in his drink. Any less and he will not... sleep."

The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. She looked up to the pulpit and the figure of Jesus staring down at them, judging them silently. This plan did not sit well with her, but this was her only choice to freedom. Concealing the small vial in her pocket, she stood up and turned to go.

"My lady, shall we seal our pact with a kiss?"

She turned back to him and lifted her face. Expecting a small peck upon her lips, she was shocked when he pulled her roughly towards him and devoured her mouth with his own. His breath was far from sweet, and again, she found herself comparing him to Richard, who was as fresh as clean mountain air. His hands roamed over her body, and it was all she could do not to pull away in disgust. Finally, he lifted his head, his eyes dark with lust as they looked down at her. "I cannot wait for us to be married, Enora. Use the potion tonight; we must be together soon!"

She nodded consent and hastily retreated to the main hall, leaving him to follow at a slower pace.

In the shadows, behind the altar, Guy dropped his head and silently reviewed the conversation he had overheard. This was an extremely dangerous situation, and the sooner he informed Richard, the better. What luck that he had sought five minutes sanctuary in the chapel! God must indeed be watching over him and his fellow knights. Without further ado, he strode off to find Richard and inform him of this dire plot.

Enora hurried back to her chamber, the vial safely stored in her pocket. How could she give this potion to Richard? Yes, she wanted him gone from her castle, but she did not want him losing his memory for six months! Oh, what a position Edmund had put her in!

As she paced back and forth, she could not help the feelings of guilt that washed over her. Against

all her beliefs, she was finding herself growing steadily more attracted to Richard, and the thought of harming him was playing on her mind deeply. Unwittingly, a vision of his handsome face floated before her, a vision that she quickly compared to Edmund. She shivered and wrapped her arms around her body as an icy chill went up her spine. No, this was wrong. She could not go through with it. Somehow, she would find another way of reclaiming her castle. Pulling the vial from her pocket, she walked towards the fireplace and holding it out in front of her, she went to drop it into the fiery blaze.

This was how Richard found her, when he stormed into her chamber, the door crashing open as he made his entrance known. Startled, Enora clutched the vial and whirled around to see what the noise was.

She was met by Richard's fierce glare, as he stood transfixed, looking at the vial clasped so tightly in her hand.

"So! It is true, then! You would poison me, my lady?"

"No!" She flushed guiltily, and tried to hide the vial behind her back. He shook his head and strode towards her, snatching the poison out of her small hands.

"Too late, my lady! You have been caught red handed!" He held the vial up in front of her face. "Or is this something else, mayhap? A perfume? A remedy? I think not... and I know not!"

Enora moved back a pace as he spat the words at her, words she did not want to hear.

"Stop! It is not like that! I would never have used it... I was going to destr...."

He quickly interrupted her, before she had the chance to prove herself. "Do not say another word! Sir Guy overheard you and your lover, Edmund - every little detail of your dreadful plot... you have

been proven guilty and will be punished accordingly!"

She gasped, "You are wrong! Edmund is not my lover! Yes, Edmund did speak to me and give me this vial, but I would never have used it... I could not!"

He stared hard at her, his jaw clenched and an artery pulsing in his neck as his blood coursed through him. He knew he could not stay another moment in her company; he was liable to do her harm. Swiftly, and without uttering another word, he turned on his heel and left their chamber. She heard the key turn in the lock, and once again, she was imprisoned.

She collapsed to her knees on the rug before the fire and looked into the burning flames. Oh my God! What had she done? Now he believed her capable of this wicked act and had not wanted to listen to her side of the story at all! Who could blame him? Only a day after meeting him, she had tried to drug him with a sleeping potion, but that was so different from what Edmund had wanted her to do. His was a far more heinous crime. What did Richard mean when he said she would be punished? What sort of punishment? Her heart started beating faster as she envisioned him throwing her out of her own home. Surely not? What if he locked her up in the dungeons below; what if he gave her a public flogging?! She buried her head in her hands and wept with fear and self-loathing that she had even accepted the vial from Sir Edmund in the first place. She should have told him then, that it was a foolhardy thing to do. She only had herself to blame.

The sky outside darkened as night approached. Still, no one had been in to see her. She sat motionless in exactly the same position since Richard had left. The fire crackled as a small ember landed near her dress, bringing her out of her reverie. She blinked rapidly to clear her thoughts

and sighed before getting to her feet. This would not do, she was Lady Enora of Beaumont Castle and should act accordingly. Slowly, she walked over to her dressing table and started to re-braid her hair. As she sat brushing out the long tresses, she heard a key in the lock, and the door swung open. She looked up with expectancy and trepidation as Richard walked quietly into the room. In his hands he had a tray of food and a length of rope.

Without a word, he laid the tray down on the small table and put the rope on the bed. She quickly braided her hair into one long plait before turning to face him properly.

"What do you intend to do, my lord?" she asked in a small voice.

He looked at her intently before answering, "What I intend to do with you, my lady, is for me to know and you to find out! You are not in a position to question me. Now eat this meal the kitchens have prepared for you. I will be back at nightfall."

Once again, he turned and left her alone, the lock on the door signifying that she was still a prisoner.

She felt sick to the stomach and truly thought she would not be able to eat a thing, but the smells coming from the tray were delightful, and her nostrils twitched in anticipation. Taking the cloth off the tray, she was met with a delicious meal of tenderly cooked venison in a rich sauce, with poached pears for dessert. She took a bite of the meat and closed her eyes, as it practically melted in her mouth. Before she knew it, she had consumed the whole meal, all washed down with a large glass of red wine.

Giving an audible sigh, she placed her glass on the tray and looked over to the rope on the bed. Why on earth would he want rope? She walked over and ran her hand along the coiled mound in puzzlement. Suddenly, she raised a hand to her mouth, as she yawned with tiredness. Today had

been mentally exhausting, and the only thing she wanted to do now was sleep.

She hurriedly undressed and put on her nightgown before crawling under the soft covers. Sighing deeply, she was fast asleep within minutes. The intoxicating wine made her sleep deeply, though somewhat disturbed.

She dreamed that she was floating on a bed of water. Lilies floated past, and she tried to grab them, but could not seem to move her hands. The flowers were very pretty but were too far out of her reach. It was so frustrating! One of the lilies suddenly fell onto her chest and again, she tried to move her hand to pick it up, but her hands were useless. The lily petals were moving as the wind caught them and they began tickling her. She moaned as her nerve endings tingled in response. She tried to brush them off but to no avail. Suddenly, her eyes shot open, and she became fully awake. That was no lily on her chest, that was Richard's hair... and her hands could not move because they had been tied to the bedpost! She struggled and kicked to try and get him off so she could break free. Richard gave a low chuckle, under his breath.

"It is no use, my lady. Struggle all you want, but those bonds are as strong as can be. You cannot move unless I say so!"

She gasped with outrage, "How dare you! Untie me now! This is barbaric!"

She struggled anew, but only succeeded in chafing her wrists where the rope was holding her fast.

He looked up into her face, and watched as her eyes glittered with rage, the firelight reflecting orange flames in them.

"You truly must learn to accept your fate, my lady! You are lucky I did not throw you in the dungeons or report your deed to the King. On reflection, I decided that perhaps you were indeed

going to throw that vial away, but I am yet unsure. You will therefore remain at my side at all times until I can trust you. However long that takes, is up to you, and you alone. At night, you will lie here beside me in these bonds. I cannot trust you yet not to take a blade to my heart!"

"I would never do such a thing! I have done nothing to warrant such treatment. Let me go, I tell you, let me gooooo!"

She screamed, and he moved further up her body until his large frame covered hers. His mouth came down swiftly, stifling any further screams she may have uttered. His kiss left no quarter, and before she knew it, he was coaxing kisses back from her. Her body tingled all over, and she arched her back as his mouth left her lips and moved down to lave her breasts and abdomen. No man had ever kissed her body before, and the feeling was exquisite. Richard moved lower until his mouth covered her moist core, his tongue skillfully working her into a frenzy. She could not have moved him away if she had wanted to, such were the bindings on her wrists, but these feelings were so blissful that she did not want them to end. Suddenly, her whole body started to tremble as she began to climax; he moved up and pushed himself into her, lifting her legs to aid his entry. They moved together in harmony, as if made for each other, one thrusting and one receiving, until with a groan, he gripped her tightly and collapsed onto her, his head buried in her breasts.

Her chest rose and fell as she looked down at his silky hair. She felt content, and realisation dawned that perhaps she was actually coming to like this husband of hers. Mayhap she could even love him! She doubted very much if he loved her, not after recent events, but perhaps she could make him come to love her?

Richard lifted his head and looked at her. His eyes had taken on a smoky hue, and he looked

more relaxed than he had earlier. "Get some rest, my lady. You will be at my side tomorrow, and will need your strength to keep up."

Enora thought of complaining, but then decided it would be better to drop the matter. She was still tired and needed to rest. He moved off her and laid on his back, next to her.

"What of Edmund, my lord?"

Richard remained quiet for several moments before answering, "Edmund has been dispatched with a quota of my knights to London; they will take him straight to King William. He is lucky I did not slay him then and there!"

She could feel the tension emanating from him as he spoke. Edmund had indeed gotten off lightly.

He continued, "I would have the King know of Edmund's malicious plan. What he will decide to do with him, I know not. Perhaps he will be put into the King's own army; mayhap he will be sent overseas. I care not!"

She swallowed hard. "Y-You are sure that he is safe?" Although she did not truly like Edmund and what he had become, she would not wish any harm on him.

"You worry too much, my lady, about that arrogant knave. Now, sleep!"

Enora rolled over in bed, sighing as she stretched out. Her eyes widened as she realised that the ropes no longer restrained her. Richard must have taken them off sometime in the night, or early this morning. She lifted her wrists up to inspect them, turning over to see if there was any damage. No, they were fine. She looked over at the pillow to see the indentation where his head had been. Perhaps today would be a fresh start, and they could become united? She ran her hand over the dip in the pillow and sighed, wishing he were there so she could touch him in person.

After the events of the previous night, she now realised that life with Edmund would have been unendurable. The love she had thought she had felt for him was just a childhood crush, no more. She realised now, that he was not the man she had thought he was. Richard, however, was turning out to be more of the leader that Beaumont needed, and in fact, that she needed as well.

She sighed happily as she rolled over in bed. This would not do; she must get dressed and show him she was trustworthy. Today was going to be the start of her new life, and she would make it work.

Once she was washed and dressed, her hair neatly braided and her teeth cleaned with a cloth, Enora felt ready to face the day. Taking a deep breath, she walked to the door and grabbed the handle, her face registering surprise when she found it unlocked. Tentatively, she walked out of the doorway and looked left, and then right, to see if Richard's guard was still watching over her. No... there was no one impeding her way at all. Perhaps he finally trusted her?

Humming nervously under her breath, she made her way down to the main hall, blushing softly when she found Richard already seated at the high board. He stared at her intently as she made her way over to her place beside him.

"Good morning, my lady, I trust you slept well?"

"Yes indeed, thank you."

She reached for the oat stirabout and helped herself to a bowl, adding some honey for sweetness.

After they had broken their fast, he told her to get ready for a ride and to meet him in the stables in twenty minutes. Hurrying, she changed into her warmer riding clothes and met him at the allotted time.

Richard had noticed a change in Enora. He could not quite put his finger on it, but the change was there, if only subtle. She seemed more relaxed in

his company, and did not try to challenge him at every opportunity. As they rode out in the fresh morning air, he found he was enjoying her companionship, and in fact, it seemed to him that she was enjoying his company as well.

They rode for a few miles before he stopped, frowning, to rein his horse in and look out into the distance.

"What is it, my lord?" Enora felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise.

"Riders approach, and they carry no banner."

She watched as he withdrew his sword and made ready to receive the unknown horsemen. His face had taken on a fierce expression, and her stomach knotted nervously as she watched the riders approach. There were four men at the front, followed by about twenty more. She felt a sense of foreboding. Looking at Richard's face, she could see that he felt the same thing. He looked back at her, his eyes seemingly assessing her, before turning his gaze once again upon the nearing men.

Enora looked puzzled for a moment, until she turned to see the riders, and then all became clear. Edmund was one of the men. What was he doing here? He was meant to be on his way to London. Her heart started to beat faster, and her palms began to perspire. This could only mean one thing - Edmund had escaped! But why had he come back?

They were almost upon them, their horses galloping, clumps of mud and turf flying up from their thundering hooves. She turned to Richard urgently, and exclaimed, "Richard! It is Edmund!"

"I knowst!" His jaw was clenched, and his eyes seemed to have turned a shade darker as he readied himself to receive the returning antagonist.

Edmund came to an abrupt standstill in front of Richard's horse, his eyes gleaming with malice.

"So, how lucky am I! I find myself in the company of the very man I intend to destroy ... all on his own!" He gave Enora a scathing glance,

dismissing her as a threat, all pretence at showing respect for her now gone.

Richard's countenance remained unmoved. "Try it and you will die!"

"Come now, Sir Richard. My men are many, your men are none... can you honestly say you could fight us all?"

"I have oft' been outnumbered in battle, and my skills are many!" With that, Richard swung himself down off the saddle, and went straight into a battle stance, his sword at the ready. "How did you escape my men?"

"Easily. I had men watching the castle from the beginning. Your guards were easily overcome... although I must say they fought bravely... !"

A nerve in Richard's neck pulsed as fury threatened to take over.

Enora remained quiet, her innards churning as she warily watched Edmund and his men. There were too many for Richard to overcome, and they were too far away from home to sound the alarm. Perhaps if she could break away, she could get help? Gently, she nudged her horse and pulled the reins back, to signal she wanted him to reverse. The animal shook his head, the bridle chinking, as he started to move backwards. Edmund immediately looked up.

"Seize her!"

Enora gasped and kicked her horse hard, pulling the reins at the same time, to try and turn him so she could get away. Too late, as one of his men took hold of her horse, whilst Oswald grabbed her and pulled her straight onto the front of his saddle. She kicked and screamed, but his strength far outweighed her own, and she found herself imprisoned between his arms. Her chest heaved with anger, and she struggled anew. He brought his arm further up her body to try and keep her still, putting his hand within easy reach of her small,

white teeth. She clamped down with all her might and bit into his hand.

"Aaagghh! Get off, you little termagant!" He slapped her hard around the head, to make her let go. Her vision blurred, and her head rang, as the blow almost knocked her off his horse.

Richard saw red and lunged toward the man. "Leave her be!"

Edmund paused. "Ahhhh... so you have feelings for the lady. How interesting!"

Oswald was still nursing his injured hand, whilst Enora sat dazed in front of him, her nerves jarred and her head still hurting from his slap.

"Guard her well, Oswald. If she escapes, your life goes with her!" Oswald knew that Edmund spoke the truth.

Enora felt herself suddenly pulled closer to Oswald, as his arms snaked round her fully, making it hard for her to move, let alone escape. She looked over to Richard, who was still in fighting stance, his eyes pinned on Edmund.

"You hold the lady against her will, you mongrel knight. Set her free this moment!"

Edmund laughed. "On whose command?"

"Her husband and protector. Set her free and we will fight, man to man, knight to knight."

"I am bored with this farce. You are outnumbered, and as such, you will do as I command. Men, seize him!"

Richard suddenly found himself surrounded by several of Edmund's men, a scurvy looking lot. They eyed him warily, having heard of his prowess on the battlefield, but failing to obey Edmund would mean certain death, so they bravely circled this fearsome knight. Suddenly, Richard was rendered powerless as a huge net was thrown over him, leaving him incapable of raising his sword. He struggled, but within minutes, he was overpowered and found himself bound, his wrists tied behind his back. He

tried kicking, but too many men held him down and he was rendered immobile.

"Not so strong now, Sir Knight!" snarled Edmund before turning to his men. "We will go back to camp and attack the castle in the morning!"

Enora's heart leapt into her throat. Attack her castle? He could not mean it, surely not?

"Edmund! You cannot mean to attack my castle! You have no right! It is my home!"

He turned to stare at her, his eyes full of contempt. "Not anymore, my lady. That castle will be mine and so will you. Now, say no more, lest I lose patience with you!"

He turned his horse abruptly and ordered his men to follow him back to his makeshift camp in the forest. Richard had been tied by a long rope to one of the men's horses, and was now being led along with no choice in the matter. He found he had to run to keep pace, the rope biting into his wrists.

Enora looked over at him as he struggled to keep up, and worried her bottom lip. How on earth were they going to escape? For the love of God, she could not and would not let Edmund take her castle.

Chapter Five

When they reached Edmund's camp, Enora looked around in dismay. Their 'camp' was just a motley collection of makeshift branches and leaves thrown together, to create minimum comfort and shelter. Oswald roughly pulled her down with him as he dismounted. Richard had managed to keep up with Edmund, but was now breathing heavily with exertion and he looked over worriedly to see how Enora fared. She gave him a wry smile before she was jostled away and thrust in front of a large oak tree.

"Put yer hands behind yer back... now!"

Enora glared at Oswald. "No! You scurvy pig... scum of satan... aaaooowww!" Oswald grabbed both her hands and thrust them behind her back, tying them securely with twine. Enora struggled, but it did her no good. "You will pay for this, you dog... you pestilent fool!"

"So ye say, me lady, so ye say. But I 'ave the upper hand 'ere, and ye be in no position to bargain. So if I were ye... I would shut me mouth, before I shut it fer ye!"

He leaned very close to her, his eyes full of menace and waiting for any excuse to carry out his threats. Enora swallowed hard and closed her eyes to shut out his vile face.

"Aye, that is better, me lady... much better! We will get on jest fine, if ye carry on like this!" He pushed her to the ground until she was sitting with her legs outstretched in front of her, the oak tree to

her back. Then he tied her hands to another length of rope encircling the tree. She could not escape.

As she heard him walk away, Enora opened her eyes to glare at his retreating back. Never had she wanted to wound someone so badly. Vengeance would be hers. She would make sure of it. She would not allow any of these imbeciles to tread one foot into her castle, unless it was towards the dungeons.

She watched him as he walked over to Edmund and a few of the others. They seemed to be discussing what to do with Richard. Her heart wept as she stared at her big, strong husband, now powerless in the face of his enemy. As she watched, he turned to look at her, and their gaze locked before he was rudely pulled away out of her sight, towards another part of the camp. Her heart was beating rapidly as she saw him disappear. Surely, they would not slay him? Would they? No, he was too valuable a prize; they would need him to get into the castle. Guy would not open the gates, unless he had hers or Richard's permission. Cursing with frustration, Enora struggled within her bonds, trying to break free, but Oswald had tied the twine too tightly, and her struggling only increased the problem. Mocking laughter made her look up.

"Trying to escape, my dear Enora? Not a chance!" Edmund sneered down at her, his arms folded across his chest. "You will make me a good wife... even though you are tainted by 'his' touch. Still, you come from good stock, and have proven yourself worthy of my attentions." He bent down on his haunches before her. "Tis shameful Richard will have to die... but we cannot have him interfering in our lives, now, can we?"

Enora stared fiercely into his face. "You think you have it all, Edmund! Well let me tell you—!"

Her words were cut short by his mouth covering her own, as he attempted to kiss her. She tried to twist her head, but his hands came out and held her

fast. Then he broke free with an evil smile, and let one hand trail down over her bodice to cup one of her breasts, now heaving under this effrontery.

"Such feistiness! Such spirit! You will suit me well, my lady... very well!"

"An old crone would suit you better, Edmund. Leave me be! You will not find what you want with me; I will never succumb to you."

"Oh you will... you will."

He laughed as he walked away, whilst Enora struggled futilely to break free, the rope digging into her skin. Finally, temporarily giving up, she relaxed, gathering energy for the moment she could attempt an escape.

Enora had been waiting for what seemed like hours. Her limbs were aching, and her hands were tingling.

She had been left alone whilst Edmund's men had gone about their business, sharpening arrows, mending clothes and generally bantering between themselves. A couple of them had looked over at her and had made lewd, suggestive comments, but not one had actually dared to touch her. Luckily for her, Edmund considered her his plunder, and therefore, she was unavailable to the others. At least, that was one consolation.

She still had not seen nor heard anything from Richard. She hoped he was faring well. Knowing Edmund and his men, they could do anything to him.

One of the men was cooking a wild boar that another had caught in the forest. Her stomach gave an unladylike rumble, as the smell assailed her nostrils. Oh, she was so hungry. Her mouth watered as she looked at the beast rotating on the spit. If they did not feed her, she would scream the whole way through their meal, until they gave her some. Setting her mouth defiantly, she waited for supper.

She did not have to wait too long before the signal was given for the others to come and eat. Enora watched impatiently as the boar was cut into mouth-watering slices and given to each of Edmund's men. Just as she was wondering where that vile man was, he appeared in front of her with two plates of meat. Her eyes immediately fastened on one, and she licked her lips in anticipation.

Edmund laughed. "I thought so! You are starving, are you not?" He put the plates down on the forest floor and sat beside her. "If I untie you, do you promise not to run?"

She nibbled on the inside of her lip before replying, "I promise."

He reached around and cut through the twine with his knife, releasing the constraints. She brought her hands to rest on her lap and grimaced as the feeling started to come back. She flexed them several times, and tried rubbing them together to ease the pain. Finally, it faded enough for her to pick up a plate of meat.

Edmund was watching her like a hawk, ready to grab her should she decide to make a run for it. Enora found it quite uncomfortable being watched whilst she ate, but she was so hungry that as soon as the meat touched her lips, she was able to disregard him altogether. Once the plate was clear, she accepted a cup of water and sipped it slowly before speaking to him.

"May I walk around a little? I need to stretch my legs and... umm... well, I have needs to attend to!"

Edmund narrowed his eyes. "Do not try and escape, Lady... I have many men in this camp, and several are hidden further in the woods. Do not even attempt it!" He jumped to his feet and held his hand out to help her up.

She hesitated before accepting it; she would rather not, but her legs felt quite weak from sitting in the same position for hours. As she grabbed his

hand, he pulled backwards, and she slowly came to her feet.

He gripped her upper arm and manoeuvred her towards the thicker part of the forest, away from the clearing. The twigs cracked underfoot, and the brambles caught on her dress as they walked deeper into the forest. Enora's legs were feeling much stronger after a while, but his hand was beginning to bite into the flesh of her arm.

"I truly need to be on my own now, Edmund. May I venture over there, where I can be private?"

He turned her to face him, and then leaned within inches of her face. "Know this, Enora. If you run, I will find you... and when I find you, you will be punished!"

He suddenly released her, and she nervously swallowed as he stared at her maliciously. Turning slowly, she made her way behind a couple of large trees and quickly relieved herself. As she stood up, she peered into the dense thicket. Had he truly hidden his men in the forest? Could she risk running? As she turned around, she nearly jumped out of her skin. Edmund was standing not two paces from her, his eyes gleaming with malice. "Do not even think it, Enora. I meant what I said. Another point I forgot to mention... if one of my men catch you, there is no telling what they could do to you... do you understand my meaning?"

Enora almost stopped breathing as she realised what his words meant. Her skin crawled, and she wondered if Edmund had been watching her the whole time. Trying not to dwell on it and give him the satisfaction of knowing he was scaring her, she brushed past him and made her way back to the camp. At least there, she was surrounded by many, and hopefully there was safety in numbers.

Sitting back down in front of the oak tree, Enora held her hands aloft, her gaze mocking him.

"Are you not going to tie me up, Edmund?"

He roughly grabbed her wrists and proceeded to tie her hands together. Then he tied her once again to the huge tree.

"Sleep well, my lady... beware the wolves!"

She shuddered with loathing, watching as he ambled away towards the campfire, where he grabbed a cup of wine and joined his brothers in arms.

After a while, Enora's eyelids began to droop. The warmth of the campfire was just reaching her, and even though she was uncomfortable, she slowly began to fall asleep.

Edmund glanced over several times in the evening, to see her sleeping like an angel. He could not wait to get her into his bed, but the time had to be right. He wanted it to be in her castle, nay... his castle, as it soon would become. Once this wretched Sir Richard was disposed of, then there would be no limit to his actions. All he had to do was get within those castle walls, and the bounty would be his. He smiled as he pictured the wealth within, and then he collapsed onto a makeshift pallet, falling into a drunken slumber.

Richard was not faring so well. Most of the men had taken every opportunity to hit him or poke him with sticks. His patience had long since gone, and he now growled at any who came near. He had had no food or drink since they arrived... a dog would have been treated better. He spat contemptuously on the forest floor and pondered upon Enora's fate. If that knave had laid one finger on her, he would tear him apart with his bare hands.

An owl hooted in the tree above, and he looked up to see an almost full moon. The dying embers of the fire glowed orange in the night air. Most of the men had gone to sleep, and as far as he could see, there was only one guard standing over him. He wiggled his hands, but they were tied securely and would not budge. If only he could break free. He

wondered why Edmund had not killed him already; he must have some use for him... but what?

Just then, he caught something moving out of the corner of his eye. Quickly, he turned to see what it was, but it was gone. Then the guard made a gurgling sound, and Richard's heart leapt into his mouth. Someone had done something to the guard, but was this friend or foe? It did not take long to find out.

"Richard... it is I, Guy. Quickly, lean forward, so I can free your hands!"

He immediately did so, his heart racing upon hearing his best friend's voice. Never had he heard such a wonderful sound. Guy sawed through the strong twine and quickly unravelled it to free Richard's hands.

"We must find Enora!" Richard whispered frantically.

"Where is she?"

"I know not! We have been separated, but I think she is in the camp!"

Guy shook his head. As much as he, too, wanted to save Enora, now was not a good time. He had already removed three of Edmund's men, and it was too risky to move around the camp any longer.

He spoke urgently in a whisper, "See here, Richard, we cannot do it now. We must get back to the safety of the castle. We need to formulate a plan! Come on, let us move!"

Richard was peering around the dark camp, trying to see by the sparse moonlight where Enora could be.

"I cannot leave her, Guy! When Edmund discovers I am gone, there is no telling what he could do in his anger!"

One of the guards was stirring, and groaned as he stretched. Guy and Richard immediately ducked down and crawled into the undergrowth behind the tree.

"It is too dangerous... we must leave. Speed is of the essence! Come!"

With great reluctance and sadness, a frustrated Richard followed quickly behind Guy, as they silently made their way through the forest to Richard's men. They swiftly mounted their awaiting horses and galloped away into the night.

"How did he escape, damnit?"

Edmund was storming round the camp, kicking over the water buckets and hurling any object that happened to be in his way. "What *imbecile* was meant to be guarding him?"

Heads turned to stare at the unfortunate man, who now lay silently next to the tree Richard had been tied to.

"Alan, Kendrick, Athelstone... take your horses and follow Richard's tracks. He cannot have gone far. Leave *now!*" The three men rushed over to their horses, and were soon on their way.

Edmund rubbed his head angrily, hardly believing that his prisoner had escaped. He had been so pleased to have captured him, and now that stupid buffoon of a guard had let him escape! Useless, worthless, peasant!

At least, he still had Enora. Thinking of her caused a stirring in his loins, and he adjusted himself before striding over to that part of camp.

Enora had been rudely awakened by shouting. She had strained to hear what was being said, but it was too far away for her to make out the words clearly. She struggled futilely within her restraints, before giving up and waiting impatiently for someone to come to her. Soon, she spotted Edmund striding towards her.

She glowered at him without speaking as he came to a halt in front of her. Her limbs were aching, and she felt as stiff as a board. She was certainly in no mood for pleasantries.

Roughly, he cut the rope binding her to the tree, and hauled her to her feet, keeping a firm hold on one of her arms. Her hands were still tied behind her back, and she had to lean against him slightly, to keep her balance.

"You are going to stay with me!" he spat.

"What! Why so?"

"Richard escaped last night... and I will not have the same thing happen to you. You are mine, and will stay by my side! If anyone tries to rescue you, they will have to get past me, first!"

"I am not yours!" Enora tried to pull away from him, but he forced her forward to walk in front of him, whilst barking commands at some of the men.

"Dowse the fire! Make ready the horses! We will attack the castle this morning. We cannot give Sir Richard time to plot!"

Enora felt sick to the stomach. If only she could get away, and get behind the safety of the thick castle walls. She was rudely jostled towards Edmund's horse, where he lifted her up and put her on the front of the saddle. With her hands still tied, she looked helplessly at the reins... so near and yet so far out of reach. She almost gave in to tears, mainly tears of anger, but held them in check, not wanting to let Edmund see a chink in her armour. He swiftly mounted behind her and turned his horse towards Castle Beaumont.

"Men! Have your weapons ready! The enemy may surprise us at any time. May God be with us!"

His men let out a roar and as one, began to move forward. Edmund kicked his heels into the side of his horse, and it obeyed immediately, going straight into a gallop. Although Enora hated Edmund's touch, she welcomed it this day, as without his arms as a barrier, she would certainly have been thrown off the horse. She gritted her teeth and hung onto the saddle horn for dear life as they galloped down the forest path, towards the castle.

Little did Edmund know that Richard had set straight to work as soon as he had arrived back at the castle. The place was a hive of activity, men rushing around preparing weapons, women boiling hot cauldrons of oil, ready to throw down upon the enemy if need be. Even the servants' young children were helping, by carrying equipment to and fro from the armoury. Lookouts were posted at every turret, ready to alert the castle when Edmund arrived; and arrive he would, of that Richard had no doubt.

He wondered again how Enora was faring. Thank God, she was strong-willed. He ran his fingers through his hair in frustration as he pictured his winsome wife with that devil, Edmund. If only he had done away with him last time, rather than send him to King William! Now was not the time, though, to dwell on the past - Enora needed him to be focused and ready for combat. If there was one thing Richard knew how to do well, it was fighting.

With the aid of his squire, Richard put on his armour. He intended to have Edmund for himself, so he was taking half of his army outside the castle walls with him, where he would lie in wait along the edge of the forest, ready to spring a trap. When he was fully dressed, he ordered his squire to ready his steed, and made his way towards the small chapel.

Within the thick stone walls, all was quiet; anyone within the chapel would not know that the castle was soon to be attacked. His footsteps echoed loudly against the stone floor as he walked towards the altar.

Kneeling down, he prayed hard for the salvation of his men, and the swift and safe return of his beloved. He sat back, startled at his thoughts. Was that how he thought of Enora now... as his beloved? Realisation dawned, that he did now love this feisty little baggage! He would give his life for her, and if

Edmund had done anything to harm even a tiny hair on her head, then avenge her he would.

Taking one last look at the stone cross, he quickly stood up and marched out, his mind now purely focused on the battle to come.

Guy looked up as Richard approached onto the ramparts.

"The men are ready, Richard. Are you sure you want to risk leaving the castle walls?"

"Aye! I want to personally take Edmund, and a surprise attack will be the best way. I have a feeling he will use blackmail to try and get into the castle, as Edmund is no warrior, and if he can get in by foul means, then he will. Guard the castle well, Guy... and fight to the finish!"

Richard clapped his hand on Guy's back before leaving to lead his group of men to a safe hiding place. Once outside the castle, and safely ensconced at the edge of the forest, he lay back, patiently waiting.

They did not have long to wait. The alarm from the castle went up as the lookouts caught sight of the enemy's approach. News spread rapidly, and the archers prepared to fire; their bows arched, the arrows positioned through the narrow slits.

Richard heard the alarm, and adrenalin pulsed through him as he prepared himself for battle. As one, Edmund's men broke through the forest and charged up to the castle, their horses snorting with the effort, kicking turf up from the ground until they came to a stop in front of the portcullis.

He could see Edmund was at the front, and sitting in front of him was Enora. Richard strained to hear what he was saying.

"Open the gates!"

Guy leaned over, shouting down, "On whose order?"

"Mine! I have Lady Enora here. You will open the gates or she will suffer!"

"Let the Lady go, you cowardly knave. What sort of knight are you, that you hide behind a lady's skirts?"

Edmund fumed, "I demand to see Sir Richard!"

"He is not here! Leave the lady, and begone!"

Edmund withdrew a knife from his sheath and held it up against Enora's throat. "This lady goes nowhere. Her life remains in your hands! Now... *open the gates!*"

Richard had heard enough. He raised his arm, and his men rushed forward, their battle cries echoing in the ears of Edmund's men, who turned around, startled at this sudden attack.

Within seconds, the two sides were upon each other, swords clashing and cries erupting as both sides battled for their lives. Richard honed in on Edmund, who was backing his horse away, acting like the true coward that he was.

As Richard got nearer, Edmund looked up in panic, and wheeling his horse around, began galloping off towards the forest.

Enora was jostled all about and cried out, "*Stop! Stop, Edmund. Please?*"

"Be quiet, woman! Lest I strike you down now! That husband of yours will pay for this insult... with his life! That castle should be mine!" Edmund's voice sounded manic as he spat the words at her.

They reached the edge of the forest and veered in towards the trees, with Richard close upon their heels, ready to risk his own life in pursuit of freeing Enora.

Chapter Six

Richard galloped into the forest, fast on Edmund's trail. He could not let Edmund get away... not this time! That was the mistake he had made first, sending him off to the King. None of this would have happened if he had ended his life there and then.

Richard's mount snorted with the exertion, thundering through the forest path, narrowly avoiding overhanging branches and fallen logs. Where the devil had Edmund gone? He had been right on his trail, but now he seemed to have vanished.

Pulling his steed to a halt, Richard sat still and looked around, listening intently for hoof beats. That was odd; he could not hear anything, apart from the noise of his horse's breathing and the distant battle at the castle. Edmund was nowhere to be heard or seen. He must have hidden; he had to be somewhere nearby.

Dismounting, Richard led his horse slowly forward, his ears listening to every sound.

Further along the forest path, Edmund had dismounted and pulled Enora down with him deep in the forest, behind a dense copse of trees. His horse was well hidden and apart from the occasional crunching sound as it grazed, was being as quiet as they were.

Enora struggled, moving her head from side to side, trying to remove Edmund's hand from her

mouth. Her hands were still tied and were truly beginning to hurt as the rope chafed her skin.

"Be still, bitch. If he finds us, I am dead!" Edmund whispered in her ear, then cuffed her round the head. For a moment, she saw stars and slumped back against him, until she managed to clear her vision. Realising further struggling was futile, she did as he said. She did not fancy another blow to the head, either. Thank goodness she had never married this evil bastard. He had hidden his dark side well when first she had met him; even during her infatuation with him, she had never seen this side of him. Thank heavens, it was Richard she was married to... even though he was a bit too dominant sometimes. Perhaps that was why she had fallen in love with Richard - she respected his dominance because he was not a cruel man.

Her thoughts were brought back to her current situation, when Edmund roughly pushed her forward, his hand releasing her momentarily as he tied a piece of cloth around her head, covering her mouth.

"You cannot say anything now, can you?"

Enora glared at him and wished she could take the smug look off his face. Instead, she found herself being pulled alongside him as he marched them both deeper into the forest. His horse followed alongside.

Richard searched for a long time, but found not a trace of them. He carried on until dusk, and then settled himself down to camp in the forest for the night. He had to find Enora! Making sure the area was safe, he started a small fire to keep warm, and sat back against a solid oak tree. His face was one of despair as he gazed into the flames, watching as they flickered up into the night sky. Where was she?

Enora was currently lying down, feigning sleep. The forest floor was as hard as rock, and it hurt like

hell. She was not used to this hardship; the ground being far removed from her usual soft bed at the castle, and she did not think that she could actually fall asleep. She moved her wrists to see if she could wriggle out of the rope, but it held fast.

She sneaked a look at Edmund; he seemed to be dozing. If ever there was a time to escape... it was now! She decided to wait a little longer. The further she could get from him, the better. Every second would count. He had also tied her ankles together, thinking that would keep her in place, but little did he know that she always kept a little paring knife in her skirt, concealed in a tiny pouch. Never had she needed it so badly as she did now. She slowly slid her hands down to the pouch, all the while keeping her eyes pinned on Edmund. Her fingers closed around the knife, and she silently withdrew it, holding it close to her side. His eyes were still closed, and his chest was rising and falling steadily. Cautiously, she turned the knife around and began to cut through her wrist bindings. The rope was quite thick, and it took her a while to saw through. Her little knife was not made for cutting anything but food, but it was sufficient, and the rope finally gave way. She kissed the knife with appreciation before sitting up and reaching towards the bindings on her ankles. After several minutes of effort, the twine broke, and she was free. After untying her ankles, she quickly concealed the little knife back in her pouch.

Edmund muttered in his sleep, and Enora lay back down, pretending her wrists and ankles were still tied, by placing them close together. Her heart was hammering in her chest, and she closed her eyes to try and calm down. Her thoughts turned to Richard. What was he doing now? Was he thinking of her? Was he still searching for her? How had the castle fared in the battle? She knew it was a strong fortification, but a siege was still a major threat. All

these worries swirled through her head as she lay uncomfortably on the ground.

After a little while, she looked at Edmund again. He had now turned on his side, his face towards her. Was he deeply asleep? There was only one way to find out, and she had nothing to lose. Well, maybe she did... her life. But she would rather have no life, than a life of hell with Edmund.

Slowly, she arose, being as silent as she could. So far, he had not stirred. The night air was not too cold, which was lucky, because otherwise she would be frozen. Edmund had avoided lighting a fire, as he knew it would be a beacon for Richard to find them.

There was a half moon giving her just enough light to see by. Edmund's horse snickered softly as he sensed her movement. She froze, but Edmund seemed to be in a deep sleep and did not stir. Slowly releasing her breath, she looked around. She did not know which direction to go... but the main thing was to put as much distance as possible between her and this odious knight.

Choosing a path, Enora quickly skulked off into the night, before Edmund awoke. It was very frightening being alone in the dark, but preferable to Edmund's company. Goodness only knew where she was going to end up, but hopefully once the sun came up, she would be able to find her bearings. The trees were starting to thin out, and before long she came out onto open land. She stopped, breathing heavily from exertion, and leaned against a tree. The field was softly illuminated with moonlight spilling down, and all was quiet. On any other occasion she would have been fascinated with the peace and beauty, but not tonight. Tonight, she had only one thing on her mind, and that was escape! She moaned softly and rubbed her side, trying to alleviate the throbbing pain there, most likely from a stitch. Once she had rested for a few minutes, it disappeared, much to her relief.

So far, she did not think Edmund was following, as she had not heard any noise. Hopefully, he was still asleep, and would not have discovered her absence. Deciding to skirt the edge of the forest for safety, rather than walk across the open field, Enora resumed her journey.

Richard awoke and blinked rapidly as the sunlight fell on his face. God, he was stiff, he thought, his back and legs aching. The forest floor was most uncomfortable, although he had slept upon it more times than he could remember. He stretched his legs and groaned before pulling himself upright. The fire had burnt down to a few embers, and he stamped them out with his foot.

His horse watched him curiously before whinnying for attention.

Richard looked up and smiled; if there was one thing he was certain of, it was this proud horse of his. The strong stallion, named Shadow, had been everywhere with him, through battles, on long treks, and each time he had proven a faithful companion. Even now, the horse seemed to provide a certain feeling of comfort. Walking over, he patted Shadow's neck before mounting, ready to start searching again for Enora and Edmund. He gently nudged the horse in the general direction he had last seen them.

In another part of the forest, Edmund was just awakening. He opened his eyes slowly, his brain focusing on where he was and why. Rolling over onto his side, it only took him a few seconds to realise that Enora was not where she should be. He shot up off the ground and looked around frantically for her. Where was she? She could not have escaped! He had tied her securely! Without her, he had nothing... no castle, no wife... nothing! Stooping down, he found the severed rope that had bound her ankles and wrists - it had been cut through!

How had she done that? She had no knife... well not to his knowledge, anyway. Bitch! How long had she been gone? Where had she gone? Edmund kicked a tree in anger as he stood there uselessly. She must have left tracks... he looked around carefully, his eyes taking everything in, from the slightly crushed leaves to broken twigs. His eyes fell upon a tiny piece of cloth attached to a branch... it was hers! He was sure that at least he knew in what direction she had gone. He quickly mounted his horse and followed the path Enora had taken. She was his trophy and was not getting away from him... not this time!

Enora walked as far as she could and then collapsed against a fallen log to sleep, completely exhausted. Her dreams were full of mystery and darkness.

When she awoke in the morning, the sun's warm rays were a welcome feeling. Slowly, she got up, her legs aching from the long trek.

Yawning, she rubbed her eyes to clear her vision and ran her hands through her hair. Her braid had become loose during the night, and the usually neat strands felt like a bird's nest. She looked down at her skirt, which was a mass of wrinkles and grass stains. Pursing her lips, she firmly pushed vanity to the back of her mind to continue onward.

After a while, she realised that her mouth was extremely dry; she had not had a drink since yesterday. There must be a stream around here, she thought irritably to herself. She walked on for another half a mile before seeing a glimmer through the trees. A lake! Excellent! She broke into a jog, excited at the prospect of being able to quench her dry throat. She felt weary, dirty, and extremely tired.

She made her way through the trees at the edge of the field, until she reached the water's edge. The

lake glistened where the sun hit its surface. Nothing had ever looked so inviting to Enora's eyes. Stooping down, she scooped up a handful of water and brought it to her parched lips, gulping its cool, fresh taste. Oh, heavenly. Once she had had her fill, she pulled a cloth from her pocket and wetted it to wipe her face clean of grime and dust. She moved it down to her neck and closed her eyes with delight; it felt so nice to be a little cleaner... if only she could take a bath. Her eyes sprung open - why could she not take a swim? The coast was clear. She was sure that Edmund would not appear now; she had come too far, and he did not even know which direction she had taken. The forest was dense, and he should be miles away. Enora surveyed the edge of the lake. Most of it was surrounded by thick forest, apart from the side she had come from, which was mainly open countryside. The temptation was too much to resist. She hated being dirty, and the thought of swimming in that clear, blue water was too appealing to pass over.

She quickly divested herself of her dress, and after looking around again to make sure she was alone, she stripped off her undergarments until she was completely naked. The water was cold, and she gasped as she stepped in. Soon, however, the feel of it on her skin made her forget how cold it was, and she immersed herself up to her neck to swim around. The grime of days of travelling rinsed away. She dove under the water and ran her fingers through her hair, and then resurfaced, shaking the water from her face. It was then that she noticed a horse standing on the other side of the bank. Where had it come from? She looked around, panic stricken, for its rider, but could not see a soul. Quickly, she swam over to a large rock and hid behind it, before cautiously peeping out again. She studied the horse; it was too far away to recognise. Oh my God... what was she going to do? Just then, a hand clamped around her waist, and she was

pulled back against a very large and hard, naked body!

She struggled, but only succeeded in making herself go under the water. She surfaced to hear a low chuckling in her ear, a chuckling she knew all too well.

"Richard! You beast!"

He pulled her to him and kissed her soundly on the lips, forestalling any further complaints she may have uttered. She sighed and melted into his arms, having never been so glad to see him. His arms caressed her back, and she wrapped her legs around his strong torso. She could feel his manhood prodding at her nether regions, and pulling away, she looked him deep in the eyes. Unexpectedly, she positioned herself above his thick appendage and lowered herself upon it.

Richard groaned with pleasure as he entered her soft warmth, pushing upwards into her inviting body. Edmund was completely forgotten as they both concentrated solely on each other and their pleasure. They kissed again, as he brought her to a swift climax, before reaching his own, intense orgasm. Enora came again as his hot seed spilled inside her, and she clung to his broad shoulders for support as wave after wave of intense pleasure washed over her. As she came back down to earth, she looked at him, her love shining plainly for him to see.

"How did you find me?"

"Perchance, my love. I have been travelling since dawn, and as luck would have it, came across this lake. I think Shadow led me here of his own accord; he must have been thirsty." Richard looked over at his horse, which was now happily grazing. Then he turned his gaze once again upon his wife.

"What of Edmund? How did you escape him?"

"I got away last night, whilst he slept. I do not know if he is on my trail or not. Richard, we must be careful!"

"I know... we must make haste to the castle."

"But what if Edmund's men have gained control of Beaumont? What shall we do then?"

"Sir Guy is a competent leader in his own right, and Edmund's small army will be no match for the strength of mine and yours combined. No... do not fear, Beaumont is a heavily fortified stronghold, and it would take a bigger army than his to defeat us!"

Richard pulled her with him as he swam to shore. Together, they walked out onto the bank, both unashamed of their mutual nakedness.

After they hurriedly dressed, he pulled her up in front of him onto Shadow. She snuggled back into him, as he put his strong arms around her to grab hold of the reins.

"Richard... Do you know where we are?"

"No. But I know the castle is north, and I know the sun rises in the east... therefore we head in that direction." He pointed across the field.

Enora sighed with relief, thankful she had Richard now, otherwise, she could have ended up anywhere. With a small kick to his flanks from Richard, Shadow responded immediately and galloped off.

After nearly two hours of hard riding, the turrets of Castle Beaumont could clearly be seen above the treetops. Enora leaned forward excitedly.

"Richard, 'tis Beaumont!"

"Aye, my love... so I see. We will have to approach silently. We do not know if Edmund's men are still nearby."

Richard surveyed the land as they got nearer to the castle. Evidence of small campfires could be seen, but not one person. It would seem that Guy had driven them away. As the castle came into full view, he held back, pulling Shadow to a stop, whilst he looked up at the high walls.

"Why have we stopped?" Enora whispered, puzzled.

"Because, my love, we have to make sure it's our men keeping guard! We cannot simply ride up and possibly expose ourselves to Edmund's men!"

"Oh, I see... sorry!" she grimaced, feeling naïve.

It only took a few minutes to find out that it was their own guards on duty. They both exhaled with relief upon seeing them.

"As I thought, Sir Guy has seen them off. Come, let us go home."

Shadow quickly carried them to the Portcullis, where a much relieved Guy came down to greet them. He helped Enora down, whilst Richard dismounted, handing Shadow over to a waiting stable hand.

"We thought Edmund had captured you! Where have you been?" asked Guy.

"He did not have me, but he still had Enora. What happened to his men? Did you fight them off with ease?"

"Aye, they were no match for our archers. We had dispensed half of them before they knew what was happening, and the others ran off into the woods. Nothing has been heard since. What happened to Edmund? Did you get him?"

"Nay. Enora managed to escape him, but he is still loose... somewhere. We will have to be vigilant; he may regroup and try taking the castle again. Are you ready in case he does?"

Guy looked slightly miffed. "Richard... you know I am always prepared for battle!"

Richard clapped him on the back. "Sorry, my friend. The last few days have been trying, I am not thinking straight." he sighed and wiped his brow. "Come, let us go in... Enora and I are fair worn out."

Enora looked ready to collapse. Her hair was a mess; her body ached, and she was starving. She walked ahead of them into the great hall, where she quickly ordered her servants to make ready a bath

in her bedchamber. Whilst Guy and Richard talked together, Enora went upstairs, and upon seeing the soft bed, could not resist lying down on it. She sighed with bliss as she sank into the welcoming mattress... mmm... there was nothing like her own home and bed, and after sleeping on that forest floor, this was even more heavenly than ever before. She closed her eyes. Oh, she could sleep now, but she must ready Richard's bath that she had promised him. It would not hurt to rest for a few minutes, though... just a quick five minutes. This was Enora's last thought before she fell into a deep sleep.

Richard strode up towards his bedchamber, feeling more relaxed than he had in days. Guy had the castle under control and was ready should Edmund decide to renew an attack.

Hopefully, he would find his wife waiting for him, ready to scrub his back in the bath. He had watched the servants scurrying to and fro with hot water, whilst he had been talking to Guy, so it was with great expectations that he entered their chamber. It was the duty of the castle mistress to bathe her husband, and he had not been afforded that luxury so far, but it was about time. He quite fancied being waited on by his feisty little wife.

When he entered their bedchamber, his face fell. His bath was nicely steaming in the corner, but his wife, on the other hand, was far from waiting for him. She was fast asleep on the bed. He walked up to her and studied her face. She was worn out from her ordeal, but would feel much better after a bath. He shook her gently with his hand on her shoulder. Enora mumbled and then rolled over onto her side.

"Enora, my love... wake up, sleepy head!"

Enora sighed, mumbled some more, and then continued to sleep. Richard chuckled to himself; he knew what would wake her up. He quickly scooped

her up in his arms, and without further ado, put her straight into the bath, clothes and all!

Enora spluttered indignantly as she came fully awake and realised she was in the bath... and soaking wet!

"Huh! What... What are you doing?"

"Waking you up, my sweet. We are both in need of a bath, and you would not wake up. So I thought I would help!"

"Help! You call this helping... you... you buffoon!" She stood up quickly, sloshing water over the sides of the wooden bath. Her clothes clung to her skin, feeling highly uncomfortable.

He marched over to her and began to undo her fastenings, but she slapped his hands away petulantly. "I can do it. Go away!"

"Now, my love... do not be rude! Let me help."

"No! I can do it on my own. I do not need your help! In fact, I have had quite enough of your so-called help!"

"Enora!" He said her name quietly and with warning. A warning she chose not to hear. As his hands came up to help her again, she slapped them away and shouted at him, "*Go away!*"

He quickly spun her around and held her under one arm, whilst his other hand raised her sodden skirt and administered several hard swats to her bottom. The sensation of his hand coming down onto her wet backside was unbearable, and she gasped and struggled within his tight hold.

"Oooooow! That hurts!"

"Do not slap me, then. I am only trying to help you, wench. You are tired and need help, whether you like it or not. Now, do as you are told!" He smacked her a few more times before hauling her up to stand in front of him.

She rolled her eyes and rubbed her tender bottom before resigning herself to having him remove her dripping wet garments. When she was completely naked, she lay back in the bath, whilst

he cleansed her skin with a wet cloth. She realised she was very tired and reluctantly agreed that he was right. She sighed happily at his ministrations, especially when he softly stroked in between her thighs.

He leaned down and teased one nipple with his tongue, while his hand continued stroking her body. Enora moaned contentedly, and then groaned as he moved away, pouting seductively at him.

"Now, you are clean, so out you come!" He reached down and pulled her up out of the water, wrapping a clean linen cloth around her body. "I will not ask you to return the favour tonight, as I can see how fatigued you are. Dry yourself and get in bed; I will order some food for us, and we will have it in here, together."

Happily complying, she put on a nightgown and re-braided her hair before hopping into bed. As she snuggled under the covers, she studied him. His muscles rippled as he moved the cloth over his skin, removing the grime from the day's travelling, and she could not help noticing his strong, masculine thighs as he stood up. He turned to find her eyes upon him, and she flushed delicately at being caught staring at him thus. He smiled back at her before rinsing for the last time, and then stepping out to dry himself off.

She propped herself up on the pillows, while he got dressed and hurried down to the kitchens to get them some food. He came back, bearing a tray of victuals, and between them they devoured the lot before making love and falling asleep, content in each other's arms.

Chapter Seven

The next two weeks passed without incident. Edmund and his small army were conspicuous by their absence, and life went on with relative normality as the community of Beaumont castle prepared themselves for a siege they prayed would never come. Richard was fully aware that Edmund was capable of striking at any moment, and had sent his best men out on patrol in the surrounding countryside, with orders to report back on the slightest element of danger. Rumours abounded as to Edmund's exact location; many believed he had moved further south, but it was only hearsay. Whatever the truth, Richard would not rest easy until Edmund was far removed, preferably to another country.

He shifted on the bedroom chair, as he inspected his Arming sword. It had been his father's, and upon his death had been handed down to him. Made of strong steel, it was honed to perfection and had aided him through several battles. He held the blade up to the light to see the finish, and as he did so, he could not help glancing over at Enora. She was happily humming to herself, while sifting through some material. The castle had many bolts of cloth in its storerooms, and she had brought a few of her favourites up to choose one for a new dress. That reminded him of something.

"Enora, have you embroidered the Coat of Arms on my surcoat yet?"

Enora flushed guiltily before hastily replying, "Err... not as yet. I was going to make a start... uh, later today!"

Richard narrowed his eyes. "No, you were not. Tell the truth! You forgot, did you not?"

"I most certainly did not! I-I just had other things to do. But I assure you I was going to start it this afternoon!" she snapped.

"Do not take that tone with me, Lady! I suggest you put aside that cloth, and start on my surcoat, as I asked. And no sneaking off for an afternoon nap, which you seem to be doing of late."

Enora glared at him before folding up her material. Better do as he said, as the consequences would mean a sore bottom for her, otherwise. As to his comment that she had been sleeping a lot lately, well she supposed it was true, but she seemed to be so tired. She thought it was due to the events with Edmund, but mayhap she should see the castle physician, and take some form of energy potion.

She looked over at Richard and studied his arrogant profile. "I wish I had some potion on me to put you to sleep! Might have some peace and quiet around here, then!" she mumbled huffily, turning her attention back to her material.

After a few seconds, she realised he had gone quiet. Gulping, she looked around to find he had stopped honing his sword, and was now staring intently at her. Oh, no... he had heard what she said! It must have come out louder than she had thought.

His voice was slick, as he fixed her with his steely eyes. "Say that again?"

She stepped back a pace, as she looked at his face. "Errm...I-I...!"

With two strides, he had her captured, her arms pinned to her sides.

"I said... say that again? *Now!* Repeat what you just said!"

She gulped, and her breathing shortened. "It was nothing, just a quip, 'twas all!"

She was hoping against hope that he would let the matter drop, but by the look on his face and his silky tone, he was going to make her repeat herself.

"Just a quip? I think not, Enora. Maybe you need a little reminder of what kind of behaviour is acceptable... and what is not!"

Grabbing her by one wrist, he dragged her over to a chair in front of the fireplace and pulled her straight down over his lap.

"Stop! Unhand me now... you... you beast! Swine!"

He shook his head at her profanities, and his lips thinned with anger. "You... my lady... have to learn to behave, and spouting words like that is not behaving!"

She struggled and kicked as he lifted her skirts to expose her undergarments. Gasping at being thus exposed once again, she struggled anew and tried to pinch his legs through his *chausses*². This earned her a smart slap on each thigh.

"Oooowwww!"

"Stop struggling right now, or I will make this punishment longer."

Her thighs were now stinging, and she momentarily stopped struggling in order to reach behind and rub them better. He slapped her hand away. "No, you do not! Now, let me remove these!"

He pulled down her underclothes until her pert bottom was fully on display. Caressing both orbs

² The predecessor of modern hosiery appeared in 11th century Europe. By the 11th century, when breeches were shortened to the knee, the lower leg was covered by a fitted cloth known as *chausses* or *hose* (probably derived from the Old English *hosa*). These were normally made of dyed woolen cloth, cut to the shape of the leg, and sewn together with a back seam.

with his large hand, he admired her silky, soft skin, before continuing, "So... repeat what you said to me!"

Enora pursed her lips, resolutely deciding not to give in. Ruthless pig, who did he think he was?

"I see you are going to make this difficult. Well, then, you asked for it!"

She winced, waiting for the impact. When it came, it was with full force on both cheeks.

SMACK. "Oooooowwwww!"

Enora struggled to move off his lap. SMACK, SMACK, SMACK.

"Noooooo... please... please... I will tell. I will tell!"

He paused with his hand mid-strike, hovering in the air, just above her left buttock.

"I want the truth, and nothing but. Remember who is in control here!"

She gritted her teeth and muttered, "Who merely thinks he is in control!"

SMACK, SMACK, SMACK. "Oooooowwwww...!" She closed her eyes, as the sting penetrated her nerve endings, and a strangled sob came out.

He rubbed her now rosy bottom. "I am in control, Lady, and you had better not forget it! Now, the words, if you please?"

She resigned herself to telling the truth. Or did she have to? Licking her lips nervously, she spoke to him over her shoulder. "Well, it was just a jest, Richard. I-I was just saying, I wished I had some potion on me to... to... ummm... put me to sleep. I am tired and perhaps I need a long and uninterrupted rest!"

"Now, that sounds to me like you are lying. Do you take me for such a fool, wench?"

His hand descended onto her already tender bottom, several smacks in quick succession.

"Aaaooooowwwww! Stop! Stop!"

A smile threatened to break out on his face, but he dared not let her see. He quite enjoyed having to take her in hand!

"My lady, the truth if you will!"

Enora sighed and gave in. Too many times had she battled wills with him, only to come second best; this time she was going to have to tell the truth.

As she opened her mouth to speak, a loud pounding came upon the door.

"Sire! Sire!"

Richard quickly drew her up from his lap and raced to the door. "What holds?"

"Sire... the keep is ablaze! Burning arrows have been fired from the cover of the forest, and our sentries identified one of the men as Edmund's!" Richard's squire stood before him, anxious for him to come quickly.

Richard turned to Enora. "Do *not* move from this chamber, you will be safer within. Heed my words, Lady!"

He spun around and marched out of the room, his squire following quickly behind. The last he had heard was that Edmund had gone south with his tail between his legs. Since his failed attempt at taking Beaumont castle, it was almost impossible to believe that he would make another attempt so soon! Richard had thought the man might still be in the area, but to attack them yet again?! They had prepared for this, though, and he felt certain that everything was ready for battle.

As Richard mounted the stairs to the keep, he could hear the crackling of the flames and smell the acrid smoke; Guy turned to greet him as he got to the top.

"Richard! It is Edmund! He is back with more men, and they are coming at us from all sides!"

"God! Can this man not accept defeat? Enora is mine... the castle is mine! I swear he will have neither!"

He turned to stare down into the surrounding countryside and forest. The arrows were still coming

at a fast pace, and as quickly as Richard's men were putting out the flames, new ones arose.

"Guilbert! Instruct the archers to fire until we tell them otherwise!" exclaimed Guy.

Guilbert looked over at Richard, who nodded assent, before rushing off to the arrow slits. Richard turned to Guy. "We must go out and meet the enemy, Guy, 'tis the only way. I have given Edmund too many chances, and this time I am going to succeed where I have failed before. 'Tis the only way I can assure myself of his demise."

Some of Edmund's men began to appear from the forest on horseback. They formed a row, three lines deep, their shields in front of them, their swords at the ready. Although a motley crew, Richard knew that this would by no means be an easy fight. Edmund was like a man possessed and seemed set on his mission to overthrow Beaumont. A mission that Richard would not, and could not, let happen.

He continued to plan a strategic attack with Guy, whilst they both kept watch below over Edmund and his men.

In her chamber, Enora was pacing up and down. It was no use; she could not just sit there and not know what was going on. She could hear the clash of swords and the men's cries, and it was driving her insane not being able to see what was happening. How was Richard faring? Had he been hurt?

She paced around her chamber, getting more and more irritable as each moment passed. She had already tried looking out of her window, but could only see the bailey below, with people running to and fro. She had to know what was happening!

If she sneaked a look, then Richard would never know she had left the room. However, if he did find out, then she would be in serious trouble. Enora

threw herself on the bed in a huff and screamed into her pillow angrily, pummelling it into submission. Finally, her frustration spent, she rolled onto her back and looked up at the ceiling.

Eventually, the noises of battle tempted her beyond reason, and she went quietly out the chamber door to run up the stairs to the parapet. As she neared the upper door, the cries became much louder. Her heart started hammering in her chest as she smelled the smoke, and she opened the door to the parapet, feeling more than a little afraid of what she might see.

She cautiously walked out onto the stone, only to find herself staring straight at Guy and Richard, who were deep in conversation. Horrified, she quickly pulled back and hugged herself to the castle walls before they saw her. They were literally only a few feet away from her.

She froze and held her breath. If he found her up here, he would punish her severely.

Enora stepped back one pace and knocked her foot straight into the side of a wooden bucket. She watched, mesmerised, as it rolled around on the stones before coming to a stop in front of Guy. Her eyes widened as both men looked at the bucket, and then turned to see where it had come from, only to find Enora staring back at them.

She opened her mouth to say something, and then thought better of it, before trying to dash back inside. She was brought to a halt by a firm hand landing on her shoulder.

"What do you think you are doing? I cannot believe you have come up here, when I specifically told you to stay in your chamber!"

Richard opened the door and pushed her through it, taking a strong grasp of her arm. "Do you know how dangerous it is up here? Do you? You have not a clue, have you?" He jostled her down the stairs and flung open their door. "Now, get in here and stay in here! If I find you up there again, you

will be in worse trouble than you are already! Now sit!"

He threw her on the bed, and she literally bounced with the force. Her chest rose and fell with anger and humiliation at being treated thus. As she opened her mouth to speak, he stilled her with one raised finger.

"Do not even think about saying anything... not one word! I am angry enough already, do not make it worse!" He stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Enora lay back with relief that he had gone. She had not seen him this angry except when confronted with Edmund. Her bottom tingled at the prospect of seeing him again, as she knew she was in for a hard time... well her bottom was, that was for certain.

Richard hurried back up the stairs towards the parapet. Guy looked at him warily. "You should not be so hard on her, you know!"

"Guy, much as I appreciate you as a friend, please do not tell me how to deal with my wife. That wayward little baggage seems to think she can do exactly as she pleases, and I will not have it! She has to learn to obey my command at all times!"

Guy shrugged - sometimes his friend could be very stubborn and pigheaded, but he knew better than to interfere further! These two loved each other deeply; it was as clear as the nose on the end of his face. He watched as Richard walked away, and then he followed after him, his only thoughts now of how to win this battle and rid themselves of Edmund.

Edmund looked up at the castle and sneered derisively as he watched the arrows fly back and forth. He had now lost all sanity and was on a mission to gain control of Beaumont Castle, if it was the last thing he ever did.

His men vainly fired their arrows up at the castle, trying without success to destroy their enemy. The castle was a solid fortress, and the blazing arrows were having little impact.

Edmund ground his teeth in frustration. How was he going to defeat Richard? There must be a way. The castle must have a weak point... but where? Wheeling his horse around, he began to survey the perimeter. The imposing structure rose high, its massive stone walls seemingly impenetrable.

As he continued around, he came across the postern gate. Concealed behind thick bushes, the top of the gate could only just be seen. Cautiously, he dismounted, tying his horse to a nearby tree. He made ready his sword and warily approached the gate.

Richard had been watching him from a tiny eye slit near the gate. He waited, like a coiled spring, for the moment he could launch his attack, the adrenaline rushing through him as he prepared his mind for battle. Did Edmund truly think them so foolish as to allow the enemy entry through a back gate? Guards had watched Edmund break away from the army, and his every move had been carefully monitored. The heavy weight of Richard's sword in his hand gave him courage, as he waited for him to approach.

Edmund was just about to push open the iron gate, when he was thrown backwards by a man running full pelt at him. Edmund fell to the ground, winded, and then rolled onto his side quickly, knowing his life was now in serious danger. When he stood up, it was to find Richard glaring at him, his sword held out straight in front of him, ready to fight.

They encircled each other, both swords glinting in the sunlight, only their eyes visible through their helmets, glaring hatred at each other.

Edmund brought his sword up, and the battle commenced. Richard was broader of shoulder and a more seasoned fighter than Edmund, but even so, the fight was hard. Steel clashed against steel, as they both fought desperately to win, knowing that the loser would forfeit his life.

Edmund roared and brought his sword down hard, near Richard's shoulder. Richard jumped out of the way just in time before giving a counter attack.

"You should not have this castle! 'Tis mine!" spat Edmund.

"Nothing here is yours. The castle is mine and so is Enora. She does not want you! Admit defeat, and I will spare your life!"

"Never! You are a Norman... you do not have the right to these lands."

Their swords clashed repeatedly, but neither seemed to be weakening, until with one swift move of his sword, Richard's mightier force overwhelmed Edmund, and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

Richard heaved Edmund onto the back of his horse. Pulling on the reins, he walked the horse towards the front of the castle. He could hear the battle still raging, but it was not as fearsome as before. Some of Edmund's men had disappeared back into the woods to escape the folly, but a few more hardened fighters were still battling with Guy and his men.

Bringing Edmund's horse to a standstill, Richard shouted above the din.

"Cease! Surrender your arms! Your leader is defeated!"

Slowly, the fighting abated as each man on both sides stopped to listen. Guy cantered over on his steed.

"So... you have him! Finally, this skirmish is over!"

"Aye. I almost felt sorry for him... almost. Bind him in case he awakens, and arrange for him to be escorted to the King. If he survives the journey."

Guy led the horse over to Edmund's men, and realising they had lost, they disappeared as quickly as they had come.

Richard entered into the bailey via the drawbridge and cleaned himself up with some water from the well. When he had finished, he glanced up to the tower. He had just won one battle... now he had another to begin. This would be a wholly different sort of battle, though... one that had a rather nice outcome at the end!

Enora had been listening intently at her small chamber window, and all seemed to have quieted down. Had they won? They must have, as she had not heard any whoops of triumph from the attacking forces.

She desperately wanted to leave the room, but just the thought of Richard's angry face was enough to stop her from even touching the door, let alone opening it. However, she was becoming more and more vexed as each minute passed and no one came to see her. Just as she was about to commit the ultimate of all sins and reach for the door, it swung open, and Richard walked in.

She quickly dropped her hands as he raised his eyebrows inquisitively. "Going somewhere, my love?"

"No! I was just pacing around the room, 'twas all... wondering how the battle was going? Did you win? What of Edmund?"

Richard's eyes hardened as he heard Edmund's name upon her lips. "Edmund is gone. He nearly died in a fair combat against me... we will have no

more trouble from that quarter. His men have fled and I've sent him to the King."

Enora sighed with relief and sadness, replying, "He could ask no more of you. I am sad he is gone as with the right tutelage perhaps he could have become a better person, but I am happy that we can now live in peace. 'Twas a shame Edmund tried to take something that was not his. I think he always felt he had a claim on Beaumont, ever since he laid forth his love for me, which in hindsight I think was love for Beaumont... not me." She walked up to him and placed her hands upon his chest. "We can start afresh now, Richard."

He looked down at the little vixen, her eyes shining up at him, and held back a chuckle. She truly thought she would be able to get around him, and avert punishment for two misdeeds that day. It looked like she still had a lot to learn... and he would be the one to teach her.

He led her gently by the wrist to the edge of the bed, where he stood her in between his strong thighs.

"Richard, what are you doing?"

He raised his eyebrows. "What do you think I am doing? Have you forgotten already?"

Enora looked down at her feet. She was hoping that he would have forgotten, and now her pulse began to race..

"Look at me when I am speaking to you!" He lifted her chin up with his hands, so her eyes met his. She blinked rapidly, and then looked down at his chest, anywhere to avoid looking at his mesmerising, hazel eyes.

"Surely, you remember what we were doing shortly before Edmund turned up? You were going to tell me something, were you not?" he coaxed.

Enora shuffled and clasped and unclasped her hands nervously. "I... well, that is... I cannot rightly remember!" She flicked her eyes up quickly to see if

he believed her, but his eyes remained steadfast on hers with no expression.

"Now the funny thing is, I remember exactly what you said. I just wanted to see if you would tell me the truth. But since you will not, I am going to punish you, and this will be a double punishment, because you deliberately disobeyed me earlier and left this room!"

"But...!"

He held his hand up, stopping her speech mid flow. "No... you know what is coming, and you know you deserve it!"

He sat down and pulled her across his lap in one swift move, before she had a chance to protest. She struggled as he lifted her skirts, but a sharp smack on her thigh soon stopped any further thought of escape.

His hand began to rain down short, sharp spansks onto each cheek, quickly and precisely. She bit her lip and tried to muffle her cries into his chausses but before long, she was wailing freely as the pain became too much to bear. She tried to slip forward off his lap, but he just hugged her more securely to his side, allowing no further movement. The smacks kept coming until her bottom was positively glowing, and then he stopped to rub it. "Are you ready to say you're sorry?"

Enora moaned as his hand rubbed her sore cheeks. "Yes! I am sorry! I should not have said that, but I was only jesting, Richard, truly... I did not mean it!"

"Hmmm... I am not so sure of that, minx. How about leaving this room, when I ordered you not to?"

"I-I was worried about you... I needed to know what was going on! You cannot just expect me to stay in my chamber, when a battle is going on!"

SMACK, SMACK, SMACK!

"Ooouch!"

"That is exactly what I expect you to do! If I give you an order, I expect you to heed what I say! Ultimately, it is for your own good!"

SMACK, SMACK! "Do you understand?"

"Oooooohhh... yes!"

Enora lay limply across his lap, her fiery backside a reminder of why she should listen to him. He pulled her up and sat her on his lap, kissing her on the lips.

"You know, my little she-devil, I think you and I are going to get along famously... as long as you behave!"

She snuggled into his broad chest, hoping that she would be able to keep out of trouble in future... but fearing it was not in her nature!

