

THE DEVIL'S WOLF

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Warriors

Presented by TWIN STAR BOOKS

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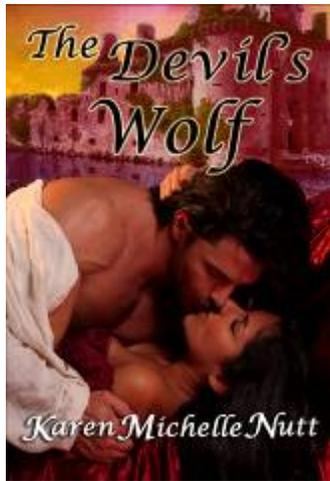
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The Devil's Wolf

(Historical Romance)

Lady Catrione Johnstone knows of the Devil's Wolf and his ruthless exploits. However, the myth is nothing like the man. In his arms, she forgets he is her enemy. Will the magic of love bring peace to the feuding clans or will it only inflame the hostilities?



Chapter One

15th Century Scottish Border

"The Johnstones took Archie!"

Waylon Maxwell heard shouts and turned, spotting Reid Halliday, with his fiery locks whipping behind him, as he ran down the hill. "He's been taken, I say," Reid shouted again.

Waylon left one of his men to secure the livestock they managed to secret away from the Armstrongs. The herd would be safe within the hollow of the four hills of Devil's Beef Tub, but he didn't want the creatures wandering off.

"Say ye, cousin. What are ye shouting about?" He met Reid halfway.

"Archie's been accused of killing Two-left Feet, Billy Johnstone over a lass. The Johnstones plan on making an example of Archie. They bound him and dragged him off to Lochwood forest."

Waylon pursed his lips together in frustration. "A damn fool my brother is," he grumbled. "I told him time and time again no' to let his roving eye wander far. Blessed saints, a Johnstone lass of all things. Doesnae the young fool know there's a feud between us?"

Reid sighed. "When it comes to the heart, Archie tends to forget who is the enemy."

"Ach! What nonsense. Archie's love consists of a quick lift of the lass' skirt."

"Maybe, but he only takes what a lass offers."

Waylon frowned at Reid's poor excuses to defend his brother. Archie inherited the Maxwell's dark looks and devilish grey eyes, but throw in the carefree way Archie had about him and the lassies went wild with want to be near him. His brother's lighthearted ways proved a damn nuisance more times than not.

"Are we going to give a counter attack?" Reid looked ready to lift his sword to defend his brother. He only had to say the word.

"This isnae livestock. 'Tis my fool brother they've taken and they'll have his head before the night is through. Archie killed a Johnstone, our enemy. I should leave Archie to face his crimes and be done with it."

"But he dinnae kill Two-left Feet. The man tripped and hit his head on a rock. It was self inflicted suicide if ye ask me."

Waylon rolled his eyes at his cousin's logic. "And how is it ye know what happened?"

"Uh...uh... ye see--"

"Ye were there whoring alongside my brother, werenae ye?"

Hot waves of shame washed over Reid's face, making him look like he was about to burst into flames. "I dinnae want him to go alone."

"Of course ye dinnae."

"The deed is done, Waylon. I am sorry for no' having more sense, but we cannae let the Johntones torture Archie." He shook his head. "If only I'd thought to capture a Johnstone so we could ransom Archie back."

Waylon scrubbed his hand over his face in frustration, but then a thought occurred to him. Maybe Reid didn't have such a bad idea. "We ride tonight." He placed his forefinger and thumb between his lips and whistled two sharp shrills. His gallowway lifted his head and whinnied in response before it trotted over. The shaggy pony was nothing to look at, but he was sure-footed, loyal and fast—important factors for a reiver's way of life.

"What plan do ye have spinning in yer head, Waylon?" Reid followed along side him.

"Kidnapping a Johnstone. With the laird secreting Archie away to the forest, Lochwood is vulnerable to a raid."

"Aye and only a daughter to defend the pele tower."

Waylon's lips curved. "Aye, the daughter is who I have in mind to take. Easy pickin's." He turned toward his men of two hundred strong and announced his intentions. "We ride to Lochwood this night. A young lass needs our comfort."

Reid's lips spread into a wide grin. "And what will ye do with the lass?"

"She can bow down to her new laird or suffer the consequences. I care no' what she chooses. I will have her in my keep before the night is over and then we'll see if William willnae negotiate Archie's release."

"Aye, his daughter for yer brother. The lass is William's weakness. He dotes on her, giving her freedom most men would be wise no' to give a young lass. Feisty, too she is, with hair as dark as night and eyes the color of the Scottish sea."

"I care no' of her attributes." He took his pony's reins, leading the beast behind him as he walked.

Reid kept pace easily beside him. "But mayhap ye should. Wouldnae it serve William right that ye made him kin?" Reid chuckled in jest.

Waylon stopped in his tracks and whirled on Reid, his sword drawn, the tip of it pointed at his cousin's throat. "I have no wish to be tied down to any woman, be her a Johnstone or a Maxwell."

Reid swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down. "Aye, of course. I thought perhaps ye could see an end to the feuds. William willnae call us out if ye are married to his only child. And ye said time and time again that reiving will have to eventually stop."

By the grace of blood Waylon was a reiver, but he hoped for more for his sons ... that is if he decided to take a wife. He fancied himself sitting near a roaring fire in his keep with his own livestock to tend to and not that of his neighbors' in Devil's Beef Tub.

He knew no other way of life, but he would at least like to have the opportunity to find out if he could make do. He was tired of bloodshed, the late nights, the hiding out in the cold night air. He'd like to try an honest life without a feuding clan breathing down his neck. Farming, trading with the Celts came to mind.

For the time being, the Johnstones demanded his attention and he would be forced to deal with them.

Waylon lowered his sword. "If the Johnstone wench is comely as they say, I may consider. What good are lands if I have no heir to leave them to when I've gone." He chuckled and hit Reid on the back.

Reid held his own. He stood two inches shorter than Waylon's six-three stance, but he outweighed the young laird by far. "'Tis true what they say about the lass."

"Tell me more of what ye heard, cousin. I want all the details and we'll need to find Heuy so he can earn his keep as March warden."

Chapter Two

William Johnstone neared fifty years of age, but the graying hair didn't portray a decrepit old man. He stood tall, trim with broad shoulders and muscled arms from wielding a sword for over forty of those years. He married young, loved with all his heart and grieved when his wife died of a fever, leaving him with a child to care for by himself. If Catrione had been a son, the situation would have been different. A son could fight beside him learn the trade of reiving, but a daughter he knew not what to do with her.

Catrione possessed his stubborn pride and she could hold her own in a sword fight. He saw to it that she could defend herself if he could not be there to do so. He gave her too much freedom and now he'd pay for his indulgence. She wanted to marry for love. He should have put his foot down, demanding she marry whom he deemed a good match. It baffled him still how he'd agreed to her terms before he realized he had done so. She had him wrapped around her finger and she used the advantage to obtain what she wanted. "I have to put her in her place. Aye, put my foot down and demand she listen to reason."

"My laird?" Donal, his second, looked up from where he sat by the fire.

William waved his hand in dismissal. "Only thinking out loud." He walked away and toward the prisoner. As much as he loved his daughter, he hated the Maxwells with the same passion. Archie Maxwell looked up as he approached. The dark-haired man with his boyish charm irritated him even more. The Maxwell pup thought he could wander onto his lands and take his women. Then kill his men and not be held accountable for his actions. Well, he would soon learn he couldn't charm his way out of his clutches this time.

"Good eve, laird William." The man had the gall to sound pleasant when he'd been tied up hand and foot. His mouth spread into a wide, even smile.

"You won't be so cocky come tomorrow when we hang you."

His smile disappeared in what seemed a demure expression. "I dinnae realize I was being cocky. My apologies." He nodded.

"What game do you play, Archie Maxwell?"

"No game. I have no wish to quarrel with ye or anyone for that matter. I am a lover no' a fighter."

"Aye, and your nether parts has put you in this situation. Perhaps you should have rethought your philosophy of life."

"Never. To have a woman in my arms, kiss her, make love to her..." He sighed lost in his own reverie. "Perhaps it has been too long for ye, laird William, that ye've forgotten the feel of a woman beneath ye."

William's hand snaked out whacking Archie on the side of the head. The young man flew to the side unable to brace himself with his hands tied behind his back. William crouched down beside him satisfied to see the smirk wiped off Archie's face. "You will pay for defiling a Johnstone."

"My laird," Donal walked up behind him.

"What is it?" William snapped.

"The March warden, Heuy Maxwell and his men are here to speak to you."

William stared at Archie. "Don't think we will negotiate for your release, whelp. I'll see you dead before that happens." He stood, leaving Archie to think about his fate.

Chapter Three

The shouts and screams of pain were deafening. Catrione paced her room, feeling helpless. She should be out there defending her home, her people. She stilled her movements when her door flew open and her priest entered.

"They have broken through our defenses, my lady Catrione," Jon Luc, her priest, told her as he shut the door to her chambers. "Waylon Maxwell and his men, one hundred strong."

"How did they hear of my cousin's death so fast?"

"Word travels, my lady, when there is so much to gain. They took Waylon Maxwell's brother, not cattle and this would not set well with him. It is the reivers way of life to retaliate."

She knew the life well, lived it too. "Can we hold the Maxwells off until word reaches my father?"

"We've sent the best runner, but I fear your father is too far away. We are on our own and with half the men gone, we will not last the night."

"We must try or die in the process." Catrione strode to her trunk that sat at the end of her bed and threw open the lid. Moving a few gowns to the side, she pulled out a jac, inspecting the quilt, and hoping the three layers still covered the iron plates.

Jon Luc walked over to her, looking over her shoulder as she prepared. "What are you doing my lady?" Fear laced his words.

"I am preparing to receive our company." She eyed him closely. "You'd be best to arm yourself also. They have no morals and your robe will not save you. Surely, you know this."

"You cannot be thinking you will war with the Maxwells. You have heard the rumors."

"Of Waylon Maxwell, nicknamed the Devil's Wolf, who cares not who crosses his path? Oh, I am delighted I am to meet the blackguard so I may send him back to his maker in hell." She pulled out the basket hilted broadsword and swung it."

"Dear God in heaven." Jon Luc made the sign of the cross. "You're mad if you think I shall allow you to go up against such a man as the Devil's Wolf."

Catrione turned on him, pointing her sword. "Listen priest, you shall do what I command. When my father is absent, I am laird at Lochwood and I will protect it as such. Now leave my chambers at once so I may dress the part."

Chapter Four

Castle Lochwood stood perched in upper Annandale, in the valley of the Annan River. The pele tower wasn't heavily guarded since William of Lochwood believed Waylon would go after him to save Archie. The fool would rue this day.

Waylon sent Huey Maxwell, their March warden, with a small party to meet with William. Come tomorrow, Huey would have delivered his message: "I have yer daughter at Caerlaverock. If ye would like to see her alive, I suggest ye release Archie into Huey Maxwell's hands." Waylon wished he could see William's face when Huey read the proclamation.

Waylon made his rounds making sure the pele tower was secured. The people of Castle Lochwood put up a good fight, but in the end Waylon's men had proved too many for them to handle.

"We have secured the post, but we have yet to find lady Catrione," Reid informed him as he took off his helmet and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Unless the lady has the ability to make herself invisible, she is here. I suggest ye find her." Waylon knew his response was delivered in a curt manner, but it irked him that his men couldn't find one hapless lass.

"Aye, we'll find her, mi'laird."

Waylon was about to turn away, but Reid cleared his throat, drawing his attention. "What is it? Say what ye must and be quick about it."

"We are secure where it matters, but there is still the chapel."

"The chapel?"

"Aye. In the courtyard, ye may have seen the squared off building—"

"Fine, fine, the chapel. What about it?"

"There is a young warrior and a priest who refuse to surrender."

"Then make them." He waved his hand in dismissal.

"Uh...Some of the men are reluctant to cut a man down in—"

"In what? Ye try my patience Reid."

"The chapel is sacred ground, mi'laird."

Waylon made a growling sound in the back of his throat and his eyelids fluttered as he tried to muster restraint. "I'll take care of the matter myself." He stormed out into the

courtyard and to the pathetic building masquerading as the chapel. Without pause, he threw open the wood doors.

His gaze swept the room of wood benches arranged in two rows. An altar sat as the focal point of the room with a small crucifix displayed upon it. He spotted the old priest, frail and hunched over, already looking defeated despite his attempt at bravery. Waylon's gaze shifted to the skinny lad standing beside the priest. The youth wore a helmet that nearly covered his face, leaving only his smooth hairless chin as witness to his age. Waylon had to give the lad credit. He stood tall and held his sword like a fearless warrior. Waylon would loathe having to kill him, but if the lad forced his hand there could be no other way.

"Come now lad, the fight's over," he coaxed.

The priest's hunched shoulders sagged further and he dropped the dagger he gripped in his hand, but the lad refused to be intimidated.

"It'll never be over until every last one of you is dead." He waved his sword in the air as he spewed his threat.

Waylon's brows lifted. The lad's voice hadn't even changed, but it still rumbled like a distant thunder.

"Brave words, I do say, but all within the keep has laid down their weapons."

The lad hesitated, but then straightened his back. "You lie."

"Now why would I?" He moved forward with careful steps. He didn't believe the priest would interfere, but he sensed the lad was unpredictable. "Come now, put down yer sword so we may talk freely."

"Talk? Do you think I do not know who you are?"

"Who is it ye think I am?"

"The Devil's Wolf." He spat on the ground. "You slay all in your path and eat the young for breakfast."

If the situation wasn't so grim, he may have laughed. He had heard the rumors, but had ignored them. It was better the enemy feared what they thought he could do than know the truth. "Now, now, is that any way to greet yer new laird?"

"I will never swear fealty to you."

"Nay? We will have to see about that." He lunged forward, but the lad anticipated his move and blocked it with one of his own.

Waylon was impressed. He had underestimated the lad. He thought to disarm him and be done with this charade. "So ye insist on playing, do ye?" Waylon would participate in the lad's game for a while, but in the end he would win. They paced, each sizing up the other. Out

of curiosity to see what the youth had in him, Waylon would allow the lad to make the next move.

He didn't make Waylon wait for long. He leaped forward swinging viciously, his sword slicing the air with vengeance. Waylon was forced to retreat as he defended himself from each blow. The look in the lad's eyes told Waylon his intent. The lad wished to kill him. Waylon swung his sword sending the insolent child back.

The lad jumped onto the wood bench giving him height and an advantage as their swords clanged together. The lad was light on his feet and agile as a cat. Waylon would have to work to put an end to this.

"Come now, ye tire," Waylon spoke to distract.

"It is you who tires, Devil's Wolf." The boy swung his sword again with ferocious intent.

Waylon barely deflected the blow. His eyes narrowed. "Enough! Ye will end this now or I will."

"Hah! We'll see who ends what." And he came after him again.

Waylon backed up blocking every swing feeling the jolt up his arm. Whoever taught this lad to fight was good. If the lad lived long enough, he'd make a fine warrior. The lad swung again, the tip of the sword sliced through Waylon's leather jacket hitting flesh.

The lad gasped in shock and stepped back.

Waylon glanced at blood oozing from the cut, a flesh wound only. His pride stung more for allowing the youth to take him unawares. "Now ye've done it." Waylon leveled his gaze on the lad. "We are done here." He charged the lad, lashing out mercilessly. The lad was wearing down, but he refused to surrender. With swirl of Waylon's sword he swung up, flipping the weapon from the lad's grip and pushing him down. Waylon was upon him, his sword at the lad's throat.

"Stop!" the priest shouted, running forward. "Please, I beg of you do not kill her."

"Waylon's gaze riveted to the priest. "What say ye? *Her?*"

"Do not listen to the old man. He is senile," the lad claimed. "Do what you must and be done with it. Slit my throat. I am ready to die an honorable death."

"No, I say," the priest begged. "Forgive me, my lady." His gaze turned toward the lad. "I cannot stand by and see you slain."

"Mi'lady!" Waylon took hold of the helmet that hid the lad's face and yanked it off his head.

Waves of dark tresses came tumbling out and wide sea-green eyes met his with alarm.

Waylon's mouth dropped open. He had been about to slash the throat of a mere lass. "By all that is holy, are ye mad?" He yanked her to her feet. His gaze took in the length of her

and he reprimanded himself for being so blind. Every curve stood out now that he knew the truth. He pursed his lips together. "The lady Catrione, I presume?"

She refused to answer and Waylon turned to the priest for confirmation.

"Aye, she is the lady of Lochwood." He bowed his head.

Reid entered the church as the priest made the introduction. "Mi'laird..." He stopped dead in his tracks lowering his sword. "Where is the lad?"

"There was never a lad." He pushed Catrione away from him, disgusted with her attempt to deceive him. "Take her. Bound her if ye must. but I want to ride now!"

"But mi'laird—"

Waylon's fierce glare silenced him.

"Aye, right away."

Waylon stormed out of the chapel without a backward glance. By the saints, he could have killed the fool lass, slain her before he'd known. He pulled off his helmet and ran his hand through his hair. To imagine, he'd considered taking this hellcat for his wife. He must be dimwitted to even consider such a ploy.

Then he remembered how fearless Catrione stood in the chapel, waiting to face her enemy. Braver men cowered beneath his gaze, but she confronted him with courage befitting a warrior. He wasn't sure how he felt about a woman who could swing a broadsword with ease.

"Unhand me, you insolent mongrel!" Catrione screamed her grievances, adding a few more colorful words to describe Reid.

Waylon leveled his gaze on Catrione. Her feet dug into the ground and her free hand pounded into Reid's arm. His man's grip held firm and he continued to drag her behind him.

Waylon looked skyward. "What have I gotten myself into?"

Chapter Five

Catrione fought to be free of Reid. She would not allow a Maxwell to kidnap her. God only knew what they would do to her. She would rather face death than be defiled by her worst enemy. She sank her teeth into her captor's arm.

Reid let out a curse and released her.

She spun on her heels and ran headlong into the devil himself.

"Going somewhere?" Waylon gripped her shoulders. "If I dinnae know better, I'd think ye dinnae care for my company."

She met his gaze and inhaled sharply. His eyes were gray as a winter storm and just as cold. She could only contemplate what he had planned for her and she had a vivid imagination. "Let me go and I'll speak in your behalf to my father. Perhaps he will not sever your head from your shoulders."

"That's verra generous of ye."

"Aye, it is." She thought he would let her go, but the brute ignored her plea. He gripped her hand and headed for his mount. "You must leave me here." She fought to be free of his grip, but it was like a steel vise.

"Oh, I think no', mi'lady. Ye will come with me."

"I don't understand. Why do you do this? Surely you know it will end badly for you."

He stopped suddenly causing her to collide into him. He steadied her and his gaze pinned her down. "Yer father took my brother as hostage. To play his game, I thought it wise to have a hostage of my own."

"This is not but a game to you?" she screeched. How she despised her father's endeavors. Fighting, stealing, cheating, she couldn't take it anymore. "Keep your petty feuding between the men and leave me out of it."

"I'm sorry to say, I cannae do that. Ye will come with me quietly or..."

"Or what?" She poked him in the chest with her free hand. "Or what you bloody barbarian?"

He didn't give her the satisfaction of an answer, but yanked her forward the rest of the way to his mount. She tried to drag her heels, but the man was made of steel determination and won in the end despite her efforts of clawing at him.

She should have known the Devil's Wolf wouldn't feel pain.

He lifted her as if she were no heavier than a bundle of heather. She tried to jump back down, but the man seemed to read her mind on every move and kept her within his grasp.

There had to be a way to escape. Her gaze riveted to the bare flesh exposed at his wrist. She lunged forward and bit hard. She took great glee when the wolf yelled. Her triumph proved short lived as he grabbed her hair and yanked her head back. Tears sprang to her eyes. He shook her, forcing her to look up at him.

"Ye do that again and I'll bite ye back. I swear, I will." He snapped his jaws at her and she flinched expecting his teeth to sink into her flesh.

"My laird! My laird!"

Waylon glanced at Jon Luc who ran toward them, but his firm grip on her didn't lessen. "What is it, priest? Do no' try my patience."

"Please, I pray you will let me come with you. For my lady's sake," he added.

Waylon looked ready to refuse.

"I will help to keep my lady in line."

Catrione opened her mouth to scream then bit down on her lips as she realized the priest might be her only salvation, her chance for escape. She stopped struggling and held her breath as she waited.

Waylon narrowed his eyes at her and loosened his grip on her hair, but she knew by all means he'd grab her again if she made a wrong move.

"So be it," Waylon said. He glanced at the red-haired man standing to his right, the brute who had dragged her out of the church. "Reid, take care of the priest. He goes with us."

"Aye, Mi'laird."

Reid, she'd remember his name and make him pay for working with the Devil's Wolf.

"What are ye planning, my wee lassie?" Waylon's deep voice startled her out of her dreams of revenge. He caressed her cheek with the back of his hand and she jerked away.

"Your demise," she spat.

He irked her further by throwing back his head and roaring with laughter.

Chapter Six

"He did what?" William shot to his feet, his bellow silencing the camp.

Heuy waited for William to gain control before he repeated the proclamation. "Waylon Maxwell will gladly meet with you to discuss a trade. Your daughter for his brother, Archie."

William fumed, pacing in frustration and berating himself for being the fool. He never imagined the Devil's Wolf would retaliate by stealing his daughter away. If he had, he would have waited at home for his bold arrival, and sliced the man in two for daring to make such an attempt.

Jaime, the Johnstone's March warden spoke up. "Do you wish to meet and settle this matter?"

He whirled on the March wardens, both standing there and spewing words as if they meant nothing more than how his day fared. "Aye, you imbeciles. He took my daughter. I want her back. So help me if he has touched one hair on her head, I will cut him to pieces, slow and long until he screams for me to end it. Then I'll feed his remains to the wolves."

"That reminds me. There is one more request," Heuy, the Maxwell's March warden spoke as if he hadn't heard William's tirade.

"What more could there possibly be?"

"The Devil's Wolf wants his brother treated as he would treat your daughter. If Archie is harmed in anyway, your daughter will suffer the consequences."

William felt the heat boil in his veins and he clenched his hands into a fist. "Leave!" William pointed behind him. "Leave this instant before I forget ye are only the wolf's messenger."

Heuy bowed. "As you wish." He turned and left with the other Maxwells who had accompanied him.

William looked over to Donel. "He took my daughter. It is my fault. I left Catrione unprotected."

"No one would have thought the Devil's Wolf would be so bold."

William rubbed his face in frustration. He should have married Catrione off years ago. If he had, he wouldn't be worrying about her now. He looked over to where Archie Maxwell sat against the tree.

The son of the devil had the nerve to smile. "I never thought my brother would steal a lass." Archie chuckled as if he were tickled over his brother's ploy. "Once he sees the fair Catrione, it'll be over for him."

"What are you nattering about, fool?"

"Love, laird William. Love always wins. Love is the aphrodisiac for the soul, making it come alive. It's magical, giving us the chance to become immortal."

"Pray tell how in God's name does love make us immortal?"

Archie's lips curved wider. "Children. Within them, a part of us lives forever."

"Do not speak more! Will someone gag him?" He pointed a finger at Archie. "I've heard enough from the blathering imbecile for one night."

Chapter Seven

Castle Caerlaverock stood tall with the huge gatehouse near the Solway Firth. The equilateral triangle of stone impressed Catrione. The Maxwells may be barbarians, but they were cunning as well. They forged a broad moat to keep the enemy out and with the east tower and the south curtain wall, they would have the advantage of spotting an approaching raid party.

Catrione knew there was no escape, but still she held onto the hope her father would come for her and end the miserable wolf's life.

Waylon Maxwell was a barbarian, of the worst kind. Kidnapping a defenseless woman proved the worst offense. Well, maybe she wasn't completely defenseless, but that was beside the point. The Devil's Wolf hadn't known she could defend herself when he came to claim her.

She thought back to when she first laid eyes on him. *Holy mother*, he had set her knees shaking when he burst into the chapel demanding she throw down her weapon. She knew him to be a fierce warrior who had battled much. She heard her father's men talk. The Devil's Wolf came with blood on his hands. He appeared invincible, like a god come down to wreak vengeance. When he leveled his stormy gray eyes on her, she feared fire would spew from their depths, eliminating her where she stood.

A chill ran through her even now at how his thunderous stance made her quake.

In the chapel, when he discovered he fought a woman, his gaze turned murderous at her deceit. His hand gripped the sword tighter as if he readied for the deathblow, but something curious shifted in his gaze. However, before she could decipher the meaning, his hand seized her arm. He shoved her at one of his men as if she were nothing more than plunder acquired from his reiving. "Reid Halliday," she uttered the man's name beneath her breath like a curse. His hair matched his given name, red as a fire's flame. He will suffer at her father's hand along with the Devil's Wolf.

As soon as they arrived at Castle Caerlaverock, the Devil's Wolf dismounted and dragged her along behind him. The Devil's Wolf ordered Reid to bring her to this room, placing her under guard.

Here she stayed, not knowing of her people's fate. Questions aplenty plagued her. The Devil's Wolf had secured Castle Lochwood to kidnap her, but to what purpose? Were the people of Lochwood allowed to live?

Reivers were unpredictable. She knew this first hand since her father saw fit to raid himself. Quarter was given at the reiver's whim.

Frankly, she didn't care one way or the other who held what lands or cattle. She only cared that the violence stopped. She wanted peace and to know her people would have food and safety.

Brave men lost their lives when the Devil's Wolf brought his force with him to her home, but she had no way of knowing how many perished. She'd been locked in the tower all day, waiting to hear her own fate.

Surprisingly, she wasn't mistreated. She'd been given plenty of food and was allowed to bathe. She had removed the battle garb she had worn when she fought, replacing the attire for a gown one of the ladies brought up to her.

The room was sparsely decorated with only a bed, two chairs and a table. The tub she'd used to bathe had been removed after she was through with it. There was one slit window that gave her a view of the mote below and endless land beyond.

She should have killed the Devil's Wolf when she had the chance. Now as a prisoner, she could only hope he would grant her a swift death.

Chapter Eight

With the stronghold secured and his men on lookout, Waylon felt better about the situation. He had no doubts where his actions tonight would lead. Catrione's father would seek revenge once he got wind that his daughter was his reluctant guest. However, Laird William was the least of his troubles at the moment.

Waylon ran a hand over his face as he inhaled deeply. He glanced toward the steps that lead to where Catrione was being held. He didn't relish the thought of what he must do, but there could be no other choice. He set the plan in motion and he must see it through.

He glanced at Reid who waited for his command. "Bring the priest to me at once."

"Aye mi'laird." Reid hurried to do his bidding.

He paced his chambers from one end of the room to the other. He changed out of his battle garb, but still kept his sword. He may be back at Castle Caerlaverock, but he must not let his guard down.

His gaze landed on the tapestry adorning one of the far walls. Light from the fireplace danced on the woven threads like flickering flames threatening to devour.

The heavy wooden framed bed sat on the opposite wall. The ropes were pulled tight. He had a feather mattress and fur coverlets for the cool nights. He could not think of the last time he slept in his bed. He often time slept outdoors during the reiving months.

"M'laird?"

Waylon turned toward Reid. The priest stood next to him as straight as his hunch figured allowed.

"Ye will do as I bid, priest," Waylon ordered.

Jon Luc looked puzzled, his eyebrows furrowing over the bridge of his nose. "What do you bid me to do?"

"You shall hear yer lady's sins."

"She has asked for me?"

"No' exactly." Waylon didn't elaborate more. "Ye will follow me now," he ordered the priest and headed toward the turret stairs. Waylon led the way with Jon Luc following and Reid taking up the rear of the procession. As they went, Waylon told the priest what fate awaited Catrione.

Jon Luc inhaled sharply at the news. "Are you sure you do not want to sleep on your decision."

"I do no', priest. Now hold yer tongue until called upon."

Waylon hoped the hours of solitude had softened the woman's disposition. Reaching the door, the guards stepped aside. He didn't knock before he entered, seeing no need for formalities since she was his prisoner.

Catrione stood at the window and whirled on him as he entered with the priest close on his heels. Her eyes, like the turbulent sea washed over him, drowning him with her hatred. Yet, she couldn't have looked more breathtaking and incredibly feminine with her delicate bone structure and smooth, cream-colored skin scrubbed clean from her bath. He had only seen her grimed with dirt and sweat, dressed to the hilt like a seasoned warrior, but now she wore a gown of rich cloth, and her hair left unbound was washed and combed to shine like a raven's wing.

"Stand guard, but do not enter unless commanded," Waylon instructed his men before he closed the door.

Waylon pushed the priest forward to speak.

"My lady, I am to hear your sins so you may be pure in soul." Jean Luc told her as he warily looked over his shoulder at Waylon.

Chapter Nine

So that was the way it was going to be. Catrione wondered if her life would be spared. She had her answer.

She squared her shoulders and met the Wolf's bold stare. He was even more massive than she had remembered. His shoulders were wide and his arms bulged with muscle formed from wielding a broadsword. He was cleaned now without the berserker look about him. Not a bad looking man for an enemy. His features were strong. His hair dark with streaks of auburn and brown, thick and wavy, and worn to the length of his shoulders. His eyes were so gray, dark and threatening like a storm filled sky raging overhead. Those eyes assessed her, his gaze too bold to be proper, but it didn't matter. She would not have to endure his looks for much longer.

She met the Wolf's gaze. For the Johnstone's name, she would die well.

"Father," she didn't look at the priest but kept her gaze on her enemy. "I have no sins to confess." She watched the Wolf's one brow arch up at this, but she didn't care that he thought her a liar. "I have no regrets." She lifted her chin. "I would gladly cut off the heads of my enemy if I were given back my sword."

"My lady, please..." The priest looked over his shoulder nervously as if he wondered if the Devil's Wolf would retaliate. "My lady, I—"

"Enough." Waylon silenced him with a wave of his hand. "The lady does not feel the need to confess, then let's get on with it. I doonae have all day."

She sputtered shocked by the callousness of his dismissal. "Oh, by all means let's get the business at hand over with." She threw up her hands. "Unbelievable! I would not want to detain you from the murder and pillaging you have planned for the day. Where would you have me?" She glanced around the room. "Should I lay my head over a chair so that you may cut it off swiftly or should I just bow before you and let you do your business?"

* * * *

It took Waylon a second to realize what the woman babbled about, but then it became clear. A slow smile spread across his face. "My dear lady, what I have planned for ye is far worse than death." She didn't flinch but stood there tall and regal, ready to accept her fate. *Hmm, impressive*, she further surprised him. "Ye my dear, will become my wife this day."

Her mouth opened and closed without a word leaving those luscious lips.

"The lady has lost her tongue, I see."

Her eyes narrowed. "I would sooner die than marry a murdering Maxwell."

"That can be arranged later, but for now ye will abide by my rules."

"I will not."

Did this woman not realize, she as the prisoner, had no rights? In two strides he had her in his grip. "Ye shall do as ye are told."

She tried to twist away but his grip held. "Now on yer knees, mi'lady. The priest awaits to bless us."

Her eyes blazed with fury. What passion this woman held. Such a shame they were sworn enemies. He may have enjoyed the prospect of marriage and the chance to tame her.

"This will not be legal," she spat. Her expression plainly told him he could go to hell.

"Aye, it will be legal, before God and all."

She cut him a dark look, daring him to prove it. "I don't believe you. I want—"

"Enough! I grow weary of yer prattling, woman." He leveled his gaze on the frightened priest. "Begin, now."

"I will not agree," she continued to resist.

On their way up the steps, the priest implored Waylon to be kind to Catrione, that she was a gentle creature who cared deeply, but for the life of him, Waylon could see nothing of this gentleness in her nature. Perhaps it was only her dislike for him that made her a shrew. Dammit, he needed her compliance.

Then he knew what he must do to gain it. Her inquiries about her people proved she wished no harm to come to them. He would put it to the test.

"Mi'lady, if ye doonae agree, I will make an example of the prisoners."

"What do you mean? What prisoners?" Her eyes widened, her gaze fastened on him with unease.

"Did ye think ye were the only one we took hostage from Lochwood? Every minute that ye deny me, I will have one of yer people put to the sword." He was happy to see her pause, fear momentarily crossing her features. So she did have a heart after all.

"You bluff."

He lifted one brow ever so slightly. He moved to the door and yanked it open. "Reid, go below and bring me one of the prisoners from Lochwood. My lady needs to see proof that I doonae lie."

"Aye mi'laird." Reid turned to leave.

"Wait," she called.

Reid looked to Waylon for direction.

Waylon held up his hand. He looked at Catrione awaiting her reply.

Finally she met his gaze once more, lashing him with her hatred. "Marry me, you son of the devil, and may you rot in hell for this deceit."

"Such endearing words, mi'lady." He placed his hand over his heart. "I am beside myself with pleasure that ye hold me in such high esteem." He bowed to her in mock pretense. Her eyes were cold as shard glass as she glared at him. He addressed the priest once more. "Say the words, priest."

The ceremony took less than five minutes, words that rang false of uncaring promises, which neither one meant, but the deed was done.

Waylon unrolled the parchment, he been carrying, and placed it on the table, ironing it smooth with a heavy hand. "We both must sign the document," he told Catrione.

Waylon did the honors first, dipping the quill tip in ink and scrawling his signature in bold script. He looked at Catrione for her to do the same. "Do ye know how to pen your name? If ye are uneducated—"

Her hand snaked out, grabbing the quill from him. "My father paid an English tutor handsomely for my schooling. I can pen my own name. If it is not there, my father will know I have been forced." Her hand stilled and her lips slipped into a smug smile as she met his gaze. She believed she found a loophole and means of escaping her predicament.

Foolish lassie. He smiled, too. "Have it yer way then." He gripped her hand, forcing her to sign her name. She fought and yanked, but he succeeded.

"No one will believe that messy scrawl is mine." She folded her arms against her chest.

"Trust me my dear, it will suffice." He sprinkled sand over the document to ensure the ink would dry and not smudge. He then turned toward Jon Luc and leveled his gaze on the man. "Now, leave us." He dismissed the priest with a wave of his hand.

Jon Luc hesitated, obviously reluctant to go. He glanced at Catrione then back to Waylon. "Surely you will give her time to know her husband before you consummate the marriage."

"She will know me well enough before the night is through."

"But—"

"Leave priest."

"I will be fine," Catrione assured John Luc though her eyes flickered warily to Waylon.

"You are sure?" Jon Luc asked and she nodded. He took Catrione's hand, giving it an encouraging squeeze before he faced Waylon. "You have made a sacred vow this day, see to it that you treat this lady with gentleness."

"I assure ye, I will treat her as I see fit. Now go."

John Luc hesitated again, chewing on his lower lip. Obviously seeing there was no way he could delay the inevitable, he left the room.

Waylon turned to face Catrione who glowered at him with blazing contempt. The sooner he made her his wife in every way, the sooner he could return to his own chambers and be done with her temper tantrums. He started to remove his leather jerkin.

Her gaze riveted to his as she took a step away from him. Her arms crossed over her breasts like a shield.

If he didn't know better, he might believe worry darkened her features, but he wouldn't fall for her pretenses. She was a lady, yes, but she fought alongside her clan in battle. The men were too friendly in their stories, knowing more about Catrione than deemed appropriate. She may be of genteel birth, but she in no way could still be a virgin.

She was long past the marrying age and yet her father made no match for her. Some men were picky that their brides be untried. He didn't care who warmed her bed before him as long as he remained the last man to bed her from this day forth. "On the bed with ye. I would like to be done with this as soon as possible." His clothes done away with, he wanted hers removed as well.

Catrione's face flamed red as her gaze slid over his naked form. She stumbled back, hitting the table before she stood still, her gaze clashing with his. "I am not a whore to be ordered about."

"No? I have heard the men praise ye as being one of them. That kind of closeness can only mean one thing."

"Friendship proves I have given myself freely? Please my laird, are you not close with your men?"

His gaze narrowed. "What are ye asking me?"

"Only if you hold yer men dear? Do you share a dram with them or a meal? Do you find friendship among your men?"

"Ach. Of course I do."

"Should I worry about your virtue?"

"They are men. I assure ye, I am fond of them, but I prefer a woman's touch."

"You show restraint then. You can call a man friend and not sleep with him."

"Nay, 'tis a preference. Now stop with yer mindless prattle." He approached her again and she backed away. "On the bed." He pointed, angry that she still hadn't complied. What difference would it make for her to add one more man to the list she already bedded? He was her husband now, and she would obey him.

"What is the rush?" She hurried to the other side of the room, using one of the chairs to shield her.

"Ah, well ye see mi'lady, I need ye with child as soon as possible so yer father can find no reason to null the marriage." In two strides he yanked the chair away from her and grabbed her arm, ignoring her protests. He threw her on the bed, before he followed suit, pinning her down and pulling at her gown.

She fought to stop him.

Finally he grew tired of the struggle and took out his knife.

She gasped at the sight of it and fought him with more fervor. He brought the weapon down and she closed her eyes as if she thought he'd kill her. She would be disappointed. He tore the material as he cut away her clothing with no more effort than when he skinned a deer. She grabbed at the remnants of her dress to keep her covered and he was just as determined to remove them.

"Stop. Stop, I implore you," she begged.

Something in her voice made him pause and look at her, to really see her. Her labored breathing made her breast rise and fall, two peach colored orbs bare to his gaze. His body tightened in response. She was his enemy, wife...most importantly a woman and it had been far too long since he had taken care of his needs. "Why do you delay the inevitable?"

"I..." Tears pooled in her eyes. "Please..."

"Please what?" She trembled, but he wasn't entirely sure it was from pleasure.

His gaze locked with hers and he knew the moment she felt his arousal firm against her thigh. Her eyes widened and her body tightened like a bowstring. Why was she afraid of him? He tempered his haste for the moment.

"What is it ye want?" He touched her smooth skin, her nipples becoming hard beneath his caress. Her lips parted and he leaned down to kiss her. He hadn't planned on wooing her. He wanted to treat this as a chore to be done with, but now...

She tasted so sweet. Her lips were smooth, luscious when not spouting her vicious retorts. He slipped his tongue into her mouth and heard her sharp intake of breath before she seemed to accept the intrusion. He moved his hand down her flat stomach and lower, his hand seeking her warmth. She struggled to be free and he held her down, his eyes flashing anger as he glared at her. "I thought to be gentle with ye, but I see that it isnae yer way."

"Please, don't do this."

He roughly pulled her legs apart, while she mauled his face like a wildcat. He grabbed her hands and pinned them over her head. Still she struggled, but he no longer listened to her pleas and maneuvered himself between her legs, thrusting inside her warmth and making her his. His triumph proved short lived at her cry of pain. He stilled his moves, shocked by the discovery and horrified by what he'd done. He released her hands and

stared at her. Her eyes were tightly closed, long lashes glistening with tears. "Why dinnae ye tell me ye were untouched?"

Her eyes flashed opened with unbridled anger. "How could I tell you anything? You were so determined to think the worst of me."

They stared at each other for a long time until she realized he was still on top of her, inside of her. "Get off of me." She pushed at him. "You did your deed now leave me."

He didn't move. Her innocence astounded him further. She thought the act done? He would be honored to teach her the pleasures of the body, but first he must win her trust. "My dear, I have yet to complete my duty." Fear entered her eyes again, making him angry for evoking such an emotion. He'd never taken a woman by force and yet he had done so now, and on his wedding night of all things. He tried to convince himself she was one of the spoils of victory, but looking at her, seeing her panic, her uncertainty made him feel like a monster. If she had been used maybe he could have justified his actions, but she had been untouched. Be it pride, be it whatever the hell it was, he didn't want her to think he was...what? A barbarian? She already thought him that. He brushed her hair away from her face, searching for a way to put her at ease. He met her gaze. "It willnae hurt anymore."

Her brows furrowed and her voice was laced with suspicion. "How do you know?"

"Does it hurt now?"

* * * *

Catrione realized he spoke the truth. The pain had ebbed away replaced by a different kind of ache. "No, but—"

His forefinger pressed against her lips to silence her. Then without a word he lowered his mouth to hers, covering it and taking what he wanted. She tasted her fill, too. Then he moved to her neck, to her breast, suckling on them as a babe would for nourishment. She found it strange what he did to her, and yet she had no willpower to stop him. Something awakened in her and she wanted more, but she didn't know what her body craved.

The Devil's Wolf seemed to know. He moved his hips against her. She stiffened, fearing there would be pain again, but he put her at ease with his caresses, distracting her as he nibbled on her earlobe and kissed the hollow of her neck. Then pleasure like she had never felt before spread through her veins. He moved again, slowly with a rhythm that matched her own. His lips found hers and she returned the caress. Her hands gripped his back, willing him to go deeper. Wanting... wanting... She gasped in surprise as his movements caused a flutter of sensations to fill her, making every nerve spasm with pleasure. She grasped him tighter, yearning for more, not wanting him to stop, and praying the sensation would never end.

His body tensed and her gaze traveled over his face in alarm. His brow furrowed and his eyes were squeezed shut as if pain racked his body. He let out an anguished cry before he fell upon her, heavy and unmoving.

She had difficulty breathing with his weight crushing her. If it weren't for his heart hammering against her chest, she might have believed him dead. She pushed at him to be free of him.

Humiliation washed over her in waves. How could she for one second enjoy his touch? "Get off of me."

* * * *

He pushed himself up and looked down at her, seeing her anger spark when only moments ago she held onto him, wanting him. He rolled away with a smile, amused how she could go from one emotion to the other in a bat of an eye.

She scrambled to the other side of the bed, pulling the furs around her body still flushed from their lovemaking.

He threw his legs over the side of the bed and stood. He donned his clothes, intent on giving her some privacy. He turned his back, a mistake he wouldn't make again. In a flash, she jumped on his back like the hounds of hell beating and scratching him.

"Ouch!" She bit his neck. He flung her down on the bed, straddling her and holding her hands above her head. "What was that for?"

"You loathsome beast!" She spat at him. "Be gone from me now. You did your worst and you have no need to see me again."

His brows rose. He then let his gaze wander down the length of her naked body still flushed from their lovemaking. His body hardened again. If he didn't believe his life would be at risk, he'd take her now. He sighed with regret. He would have to wait until his hellion cooled her temper.

He met her gaze with a smile, pressing his maleness against her, having great pleasure in seeing her eyes widen in surprise. "A man's needs are plentiful, but I can manage elsewhere with a more willing partner."

"Then go find her and never come back. I will not stop you."

"Dear, dear wife, ye fail to understand my position. My duty is to get ye with child."

"But I thought ..."

"What? That one time would be enough? Perhaps." His shoulder lifted in a shrug. "But I cannae be sure. We will have to couple often to ensure ye carry my wee bairn within yer womb." His smile widened when her gaze clashed with his, startled and upset. "Doonae worry, I will make it pleasurable for ye each time. I love to hear ye cry for more."

She struggled to hit him, but his hands still held her captive.

"Doonae move so, or I'll be forced to take ye again." He freed a hand, but kept both of hers secured over her head. He wondered down the inside of her leg, his fingers entering her tender folds.

That stilled her attempts to squirm away. She bit her lower lip as his gentle touch coaxed her to open up for him. "Damn you."

"Aye, I know." He kissed her brow. His fingers left her and her hips moved toward him, seeking what he denied her. "I'd take ye again, but ye will be sore. I'll give ye a day to recover then we will take a tumble again. Aye?"

"Never." She clenched her teeth, obviously berating herself for not having control over her body.

"Tsk, tsk, never is such a nasty word." He released her then. He took the sheet, but threw the fur over her, covering her body. "I will send yer maid in with a bath."

He was almost at the door when she threw the candleholder at him, barely missing his head. He turned to look at her. "Would ye like me to stay?"

"Get out!"

He bowed in mock pretense. "As ye wish, mi'lady."

Waylon hummed as he strode down the winding stairs to meet with Reid. His cousin stood as he entered the hall and walked toward him. "Mi'laird—" His eyes widened. "By the saints, what happened to ye? Ye're wounded."

Waylon's hand flew to his neck feeling the wet stickiness where Catrione had bit him. "Aah aye, a present from my wife."

"Maybe next time ye should feed her first." He slapped him on the back.

"May so." They walked side by side as they talked. "The lady is mine." He handed Reid the sheet.

"She was a virgin?" Reid stared at the bloodstained covers.

Waylon chuckled. "It would seem so. Her father will know she is mine now. I'll present the sheets as proof that I have taken her maidenhood."

Chapter Ten

Catrione's heart lurched when the door to her prison opened. "Jon Luc." Her shoulders sagged in relief.

"My lady." The priest's gaze swept over her. Heat burned her cheeks and she knew she blushed. "He did not hurt you, did he?" Jon Luc asked.

She'd like to say he had, but in truth, he'd done far worse. He released a primitive force inside of her with the passion of a true kiss. She touched her lips at the memory of the way her husband had teased, tasted, and plundered her mouth. He made her feel as if she were burning from the inside out and if he touched her one more time she'd burst into flames.

Her gaze met Jon Luc's and realized he waited for a response. She cleared her throat. "No, he did nothing that would prove my demise." She didn't think dying of embarrassment counted. She turned away from him as she composed herself. "How did the people of Lochwood fare? Do not spare me the details. I must know everything."

"They fared well, my lady. Laird Waylon showed mercy. He came to retrieve you and left the others be."

She whirled on him. "I said to not spare me the details."

"I speak the truth."

Catrione's brows furrowed. "He has not made sport of spearing the old? Drowning the babes?"

Jon Luc shook his head. "No, my lady. He took very few prisoners and only those to serve you and give you comfort. They have been treated as if they were Maxwells."

Catrione stood stone still, speechless at what her priest revealed. This wasn't what she expected. How could she nurture her hatred if the man didn't follow what she knew of him? "He is trying to fool us in some way, have us trust him before he makes his move."

"I think not my lady. I believe he is an honorable man."

She harrumphed. "He is a reiver. He kidnapped me! Forced me to marry him." Not to mention what other things he made her do.

"Hmm, yes. He could have taken you without care, but he did not. He married you before God."

She turned her anger on him. "So this gives him leave?"

The priest sighed. "It makes me take pause. Perhaps we have misjudged him. He has odd ways. I've seen this with my own eyes."

"Speak clearly."

"He has taken stock of his land and has asked for those who know the ways of farming."

"*Farming?* Does he hope to become a gentleman farmer?" When Jon Luc didn't answer, Catrione laughed. "He will go mad. What reiver can sit idle for long?"

"I believe he is hoping to put an end to his thieving ways."

"Then we are doomed, Jon Luc. How will he put food on the table? The other Graynes will see him soft and plunder our goods."

"My laird is no coward."

"Your lord? In a few days time, he is now your laird."

"Do not be cross with me, my lady. You need a strong husband and I say he is capable."

"We shall see about that when my father demands a Day of Truce. Now get out. I've heard enough."

Jon Luc left her as she wished. She couldn't believe her ears. The Devil's Wolf had surely cast a spell of enchantment. The border lairds thrived on violence and no kind of magic would ever change their way of thinking.

Chapter Eleven

As promised, Waylon gave Catrione a day to rest. On the following evening, he marched in with servants carrying platters to be set on the table. He then ordered her maidservant away.

Catrione folded her arms against her chest. She would be strong and not let him touch her no matter how his recklessly handsome features made her heart beat like a drum in her chest. She didn't care his dark strands glistened in the firelight or how he filled out his clothes as his muscles strained against the finery of the fabric.

"Sit, mi'lady." He had already done so, sampling the food laid out before him. "Come... or do ye have other things on yer mind?" His gaze shifted toward the bed and he wagged his brows in invitation.

She felt her cheeks burn. "You're disgusting." She walked over to the other seat and plopped down, folding her arms across her chest once more.

"Whatever do ye mean? I am trying to be accommodating."

"Then do so by choking on a chicken bone, will you now."

"Now is that any way to be talking to yer husband?"

"Husband? Hah! You... you do your business then disappear. Where have you been?" she blurted out wishing she could have bitten her tongue. The man's arrogant smile grated on her nerves.

"Missed me, did ye."

"I most certainly did not. I only wish to know what my enemy is planning."

"Enemy is it? And here I thought we'd moved past such petty arguments."

She hated how his prolonged stare sent a rush of desire coiling through her.

"Are ye no' hungry?" His hand waved to the feast before them. "Do ye see something ye want?"

She couldn't be sure, but she had a sneaky suspicion his questions held a double meaning. "No, I see nothing I want."

"For shame," he sighed and broke the intense gaze. "Cook has outdone himself. Maybe later." He sat back in his seat. "How do ye fare?"

"As well as any prisoner, I suppose."

"I mean are ye still sore?"

"Oh." She squirmed in her seat. Damn the man for being so bold, but then maybe she could use it to her advantage. "Yes, I am. Your brute force nearly killed me dead. I can barely walk."

His mouth twitched as if he forced himself not to smile. Maybe she'd overdone her complaint.

"Well then, we shall have to do other things."

Alarm skittered through her. "What other things?"

He slid back his chair. "Come here."

"No."

He sighed. His eyelids closed in a deliberate blink before he met her gaze. "Doonae tempt me to use force. Ye willnae like it, my sweet wildcat, if I do."

"I already don't like it."

"Come here!" His voice boomed, making her jump.

Maybe she shouldn't provoke him into action. She stood, forcing herself to walk toward him, but making sure to stay out of his reach.

"Closer."

She took another step.

"Closer."

She took another small step but it proved the end of her game. His hand whipped out and grabbed her, forcing her to sit on his lap. He placed his strong hands on her waist, holding her still.

"Much better." He decided for both of them. "Now undo your laces."

"What?"

He nodded his head toward her bodice. "The laces."

"Well, I never ..."

"Ye will now."

"I most certainly will not."

"So be it then." He whipped out his knife so fast she didn't even have time to blink. In one full sweep, he had cut the ties away, letting her gown come free.

Her hands flew to her garment, trying to hold it together and failing miserably. "You horrible beast. Now look what you've done."

"I asked ye nicely, but ye dinnae comply."

"You ruined my gown. The second one, I might add."

"Aye, but clothing is a bothersome distraction for what I want to do."

She tried to stand, put some distance between them, but he pulled her back onto his lap, tearing the already damaged garment further.

"Let me go."

"Be still."

"I want you to leave."

"I fear I cannae do what ye ask."

"Aye, aye, I am aware. I am a pawn in your games. Use me until I give you a child. Pray tell, why did you marry me before God only to mock the union? For let me assure you Devil's Wolf, this is a charade of the worst kind."

"Very good questions, my dear. Though ye are the enemy, I do wish for my heir to be legitimate. So ye see, marriage was of the essence. Besides, yer father started this."

"He most certainly did not. Your brother killed my cousin."

"Billy was a clumsy fool and tripped over his own two feet, saving us the trouble of bashing his head in."

"Why you—"

Waylon's lips slid over her mouth, silencing the words that threatened to escape. She struggled but a moment. His lips, tongue, and devil hands clouded her mind. She groaned with want as her breast pushed against the palm of his hand, his thumb and forefinger capturing the tight burning peak. A tiny moan caught in her throat. His hand moved aside her torn garment trailing his burning touch between her legs. She whimpered into his mouth and damn him if she didn't feel his lips curve. She didn't care. She wanted him to touch her. Her thighs opened almost with their own volition and he stroked between her legs, probing the bud that throbbed with need. She clutched his shoulders as pleasure washed over her in waves.

"Now we can make this easy, Catrione, or we can make it difficult. 'Tis totally up to ye, but mark my words, mi'lady, I will have an heir from ye."

"I hate you." Though her words held no conviction, as he continued to entice her.

"That is yer right, but ye can use your emotions when we couple. You will find passion, be it for love or hate it does no' matter—passion adds spice." He moved his hips against her as he whispered in her ear. "Do ye feel my need for ye?"

She wiggled free from his caress and tried to slap him, but he caught her hand.

His firm grip held her still as he bestowed gentle kisses at her wrist where her pulse beat erratically. How could she despise the man and want him all the same.

"I will give you what you want, but you will never have my heart, Devil's Wolf."

A low chuckle vibrated from his chest. "I doonae want yer heart, mi'lady, only a child and nothing more."

She nodded, though it bothered her more than she cared to admit. He'd been born a Maxwell and she hated him for the fact. So why should she care in the least if he should grow to love her? But she wanted love. Her father had promised she could marry for love, and now look what had happened? He might as well have arranged a marriage when he could have done so.

* * * *

Waylon couldn't help but notice the flutter of emotions crossing her face, as if she were battling with her own demons. Maybe she was at that. He couldn't be considered her idea of a husband, when she believed he would kill anyone who crossed his path. "What thoughts plague that pretty little head of yers?"

She glanced at him, with those turbulent green eyes. He hadn't noticed before how they were framed with dark, thick lashes that were so long they curled back.

"I was supposed to marry for love." Her voice caught and she took a deep breath, obviously wishing she hadn't revealed her secret. She tried to pull away once more, but he wouldn't let her go.

"Love is for fools. Mi'lady, ye are too cunning for such a fantasy."

"And what did you expect from a marriage? This? Wed to a woman who hates you?"

He smiled, his hand sliding down her back. "Nay. I had in my mind a subservient wife who would obey my every command."

"You speak of a slave then, or a simpleton."

"Perhaps simpleton would be better. The less speech the more time we could spend in bed." He nibbled at her ear, knowing right where she liked to be kissed.

"Surely you jest. I... Oh..." She lost her train of thought and leaned into his caress.

"As ye were saying, milady." He tried not to smile as he ruthlessly played havoc with her new found passion.

She placed a hand firmly on his chest. "May we strike a deal?"

His hand stopped its slow climb up her leg, and he looked at her with brows raised. "Ye are in no position to make deals."

"Just hear me out."

"I'm listening."

"My father forced your hand. I know this is why you made this rash mistake. Obviously I am not what you wanted, and you most assuredly are not what I would have chosen."

"Lass, stop yer flattery."

She ignored his sarcasm. "My father—"

"Is a fool," he finished. "Women doonae choose their husbands."

"Usually they aren't kidnapped and forced to marry either."

"I'm sorry for the harshness of it, but I saw no other choice."

She nodded. "Perhaps I'll give you that. You feared for your brother's life and with good cause. However, I would like to give my request."

"If ye're determined, go on. Out with it then."

She met his gaze, held it so he wouldn't turn away. "If I give you a child, you must set me free."

"We're married in the church. Ye would damn our souls?"

She lifted her chin ever so slightly. "I am not sure you even have a soul."

His low chuckle vibrated in his chest. "Ye may be right, but what of yers?"

"Let me worry about my own salvation."

He remained silent as he thought over her request. She was indeed a comely wench, but he could find a more accommodating woman to warm his bed. He could see no reason why he wouldn't be glad to let her go, but he wanted an heir and one that wouldn't be poisoned by Johnstones wanting revenge. He posed a question for her. "And what of the child? I will want my son beside me."

"I would like the child with me until it is time to be fostered out."

Did her stipulations matter to him? Probably not. He had no need for a wife, just a child. He would have a better chance of reaching his goal if he didn't have to fight an unwilling wife. "If I am to agree to this, ye will come willingly to our bed at anytime I choose."

"Only if you don't..." She hesitated and worried her lower lip.

He took her response as a *no*. "Ye do realize I doonae have to listen to any of this. Ye are my wife and I can take what is mine."

"Do you think I don't know this?" She turned away from his hard stare.

"Then what? Speak plainly then."

"I only ask that you don't hurt me."

He raised his hand to her chin, moving her head, forcing her to face him. "It will never be like that first time. Dinnae ye know pleasure later?"

"Aye, but..."

"I willnae hurt ye. Do ye believe me?"

"I..."

"Look me in the eyes and know the truth."

She searched his gaze for a long moment before she nodded.

"Let me hear ye say it then."

"You won't hurt me."

"Good, we understand each other then. So do we have this deal, Catrione?"

"I do believe we've come to an accord."

He curved his lips. "Stand."

"What?"

"Stand."

She clutched her gown as she came to her feet.

"Now, drop yer hands."

She hesitated.

He lifted his brows in a challenge.

She put her hands down letting the gown fall open exposing her breasts to his view. The dress beyond repair slid down to her rounded hips. A deep flush stained her cheeks and she dropped her gaze.

"Take the rest off."

Her eyes flew to his in anger, humiliation there plain for him to see. "Devil's Wolf, I will come willingly to your bed. I have said so, but please I am still your wife, not your whore. I expect you to treat me as such." Her voice broke, but still she held his gaze.

Without a word, he rose from his seat and came to her. He stood very close. His gaze traveling over her with a slow slide of his eyes, seeing her perhaps for the first time, and in truth, the lass took his breath away.

He then leaned down cupping the back of her head as he kissed her, warm and soft, with gentleness that made her knees weak, but he held her tight. He would not let her fall.

He kissed a trail down her neck, before he tore the rest of the gown from her body since it was ruined anyway. He lifted her up and brought her to the bed. He removed his clothing and fell beside her. He touched her, teased her, making her ready for him. She wanted to hate him, this he knew, but once he ignited the flame of passion in her, a silent truce was met and she ceased to fight him.

As he moved in and out of her in a slow seductive dance, her trusting gaze never left his.

"I forgot to ask mi'lady... what happens if ye fall in love with yer barbarian husband?"

She didn't answer at first, her hand moving along the flank of him, timidly running her fingers over the hard planes of his body. She wrapped her legs around him, pulling him closer. He groaned in pleasure, and his eyelids lowered on their own accord. Whether she knew it or not, she wielded power over him as well.

"What if you fall in love with me, Devil's Wolf?"

His eyes flew open and he smiled. "It will never happen."

"Nor do I see me falling for you. My body may deceive me, but I know my own mind. I will not fall for the enemy."

He met her gaze with amusement and admiration. "We shall see. I'll have ye know, I love a challenge, wife." He thrust inside of her, making her gasp with surprise and pleasure.

"You will not win." She moved with him in perfect time until they tumbled over the edge of fulfillment.

He moved to lie next to her. He breathed heavily, his body still rigid with need. He wondered how this small slip of a lass could affect him so.

Her hand slid over his damp skin as she turned toward him. "Will you be leaving now?"

He pulled her close and buried his face in the hollow of her neck, reveling in the feel and scent of her. "Nay. I believe I shall stay tonight."

* * * *

While the Devil's Wolf slept, Catrione took her fill of the man who was her husband. Scars longed healed marred the otherwise perfect torso of muscle-toned flesh. Her fingers lightly fingered the healing wound she had given him in their fight in the chapel. A fierce warrior, but gentle as well, knowing how to please a woman.

She shook her head. She must continue to loathe him, but how could she when he showed her such magic. If only he would give her his heart as well, but he didn't want love. He wanted revenge. He wanted sons. She would do well to remember she was only a vessel for his heir, and a pawn as well in his game to win back his brother. Once she was with child, he'd have no use for her. She frowned, not liking the notion one bit. She wouldn't allow herself to have tender feelings toward her enemy. She pulled her hand away as if his flesh burned her.

She let out a cry of alarm when Waylon reached out and pulled her to him.

"Why did ye shy away? I liked the feel of yer gentle hands."

"I..."

He looked at her, his boyish gray-eyed gaze made her forget her pledge. She caressed his dark stubble chin. "I didn't want to wake you."

He chuckled. "Ye may wake me with yer caress anytime."

His hand covered her breast and her nipples hardened, sending a warm shiver down her spine. Why did her body continue to betray her against her will?

"Who taught ye to wield a sword?"

"What?" She shook her head, hoping to clear her thoughts and not concentrate on his hand making her skin tingle.

"Ye are gifted with the sword. Who taught ye?"

"My father."

"Hmm. Yer father has strange ways. He tutors his daughter, teaches her to fight like a warrior and promises she may marry for love."

"My father is a good man."

"Says ye, but he kidnapped my brother with an oath ensuring torture and death."

"I don't pretend to understand the ways of men. The Maxwells and the Johnstones have been at each other's throats for as long as I can remember. What you did, kidnapping me, will only intensify the feud. It troubles me to know the fighting will never end."

He sat up in bed, leaning on his elbow and forearm for support. "Both families are stubborn in their beliefs. Ye'd think we were highlanders." He looked at her, his gaze sliding over her. "When we meet yer father to speak of our grievances, what will ye tell him of us?"

"I will tell him the truth. You kidnapped me and forced me to marry you. I will not lie."

"And what if ye are with child? Will ye have yer husband executed before our son draws his first breath?"

A day ago, she would have been pleased to have his head severed from his body, but now... He showed her such gentleness, such wonder she had thought not possible from such a fierce man. Even her priest thought him good. Didn't he say all fared well? Waylon had shown mercy when he didn't have to do so. Her husband proved to be a complicated man.

"Catrione?"

"I do not wish you dead." There she had said it, but he wouldn't let the matter go. He reached for her, lifting her chin so she looked at him. His thoughtful gaze probed her as he weighed her words and the truth behind them.

"I must tell ye my intentions."

"We had a deal," she said hurriedly.

"Aye, but until ye are with child, I willnae give up what is mine so readily."

She turned her head, shrugging away from his grip. "So I am a possession to you, something you own."

"Ye are my wife," he said as if this explained everything.

"You forget. I want a husband who will love me and you, dear Wolf, seem incapable of mustering such an act."

"Ye want love. I say ye are confused what love means. I will provide for ye. Yer coffers will never be empty and I will protect ye from harm's way. Why cannae this be enough?"

Against her will her eyes filled with tears. "And when you tire of me, what will you do with me then? I am a Johnstone, an enemy; surely I rank beneath the lowest of low in your eyes."

He caressed her arm before leaning down to kiss her thoroughly as if to convince her what she meant to him. He leaned back, his gaze touching her. "Ye underestimate yer worth." Then he kissed her again until she forgot what they'd been arguing about. He took her under his spell, where feuds and hatred didn't matter, only pleasure existed.

Stroke after sensuous stroke, he took all she had to offer and demanded she give more. She met his challenge and lifted her hips, losing what little control she still possessed. She clung to him desperately as the tidal waves pushed her into rapture and with a long ragged groan he followed her into the abyss.

They lay there in the afterglow and she could feel the racing of his heart. He moved to the side and curved his body protectively, commandingly around her. She felt warm and contented, realizing she fit perfectly in his embrace.

Then fear clutched her, coiling in her stomach with unease. In a few days, he could be gone from her life and— What was she thinking? Isn't that what she wanted? Didn't she want to be free from him?

"I would like ye to join me in the hall tonight." His voice broke through her reverie.

"What?" She needed to stop her foolishness and focus.

"Join me tonight in the main hall."

He could demand she do so, but she realized he wanted her consent. This would be an important step, proclaiming she accepted Waylon as her laird. Did she wish this? He confused her until she didn't know what she wanted.

Her gaze met his. He waited for her response, but he wouldn't for long. She must make up her mind quickly. She supposed standing by his side for a night wouldn't prove troublesome. "I would be honored to join you, but..." Her lips twitched as she watched his eyes narrowing. "It seems Devil's Wolf, all my garments are in tatters."

He chuckled and pulled her near. "We will rectify the matter. As lovely as I find ye without yer clothes, I doonae want to share yer beauty with my clan."

She rolled over to look at him. "Your clan? What of my clan? Clan Johnstone?"

He looked at her and caressed the worried lines between her brows. "We are one now, Catrione."

She loved the way her name rolled off the tip of his tongue.

"Would it bother ye so much, Catrione, if this is the way it will be from now on?"

"I believe you are strong enough to protect the keep and all who reside."

"I thank ye for yer confidence." Sarcasm dripped from his words.

"I truly mean it, but I cannot erase years of believing the Maxwells are my enemy. How will your clan feel about their lady being a Johnstone?"

"Perhaps 'tis time for a change."

Chapter Twelve

Catrione promised to join Waylon in the hall and she would not go back on her word.

Waylon sent a maid to help her with the gown he'd chosen for her to wear. Her husband had a good eye and chose a dress that suited her figure perfectly, hugging all the right places. Her gaze wavered over the colors and textures. The overdress of dark green flattered her raven locks and brought out the color of her eyes. The garment fell away at the waist to expose the white petticoat beneath. The cuffs at her elbows were pleated and shaped to curve around her elbow. The chemise had ruffles along her neck with matching ruffles at her sleeves. It was perfect in everyway, but the garment didn't pose a problem. Waylon wanted her to wear the Maxwell badge.

Her hand swept over the bold carved emblem pinned to her overdress. She chewed on her lower lip. If she didn't wear it, he would surely take offense.

The light knock on the door drew her attention. "Enter."

Reid stepped in dressed in his formal wear. His red locks brushed back away from his face. "I am to escort ye to the hall, mi'lady."

Her husband waited for her and she worried about an adornment no one will even notice.

"Do I look presentable?" She glanced at her attire then to Reid.

His gaze slid over her, his face flushing as red as his hair.

"Well?" she asked, impatient for an answer.

He cleared his throat. "Ye are a bonny lass, mi'lady. May I say, the Maxwell's badge looks well on ye."

"Hmm." She supposed he meant his statement as a compliment. "Shall we? I don't believe my husband likes to be kept waiting."

He chuckled. "Indeed no'. Ye've come to know him already."

She followed Reid downstairs. When they entered the hall, the room fell silent as all eyes turned toward her. She lifted her chin. She would not be made a fool and stood proud.

Waylon sat at the long table and he stood as she entered, making his way to her. She watched the faces of people who were conditioned to hate her because she carried the blood of the Johnstones. In all rights, she should hate them also, but she saw only men, women, and children looking back at her with trepidation. They feared what she would do, what her clan may do in retaliation of their laird's rash actions. In this they had a common worry.

"Behold my wife," Waylon announced, facing his people. "Treat her as ye would me."

They bowed in respect with soft murmurs of welcome.

Waylon looked at her and offered his hand. "Mi'lady?"

She took his hand and there were cheers and slamming of tankards.

Her brows drew together. "I don't understand," she whispered as they walked over to the long table. "They seem pleased."

"Aye, and so am I, wife."

Her gaze met his, wondering if his words rang true. His smug smile proved it well enough that he did.

His gaze swept over her. "Ye wear the dress I gave ye and ye've adorned it with the Maxwell's badge. In their eyes, ye have accepted me as yer husband."

"But it was all I had to wear and you wanted me to wear the badge, did you not?"

He chuckled and leaned down to kiss her cheek. The cheers roared again and she felt the heat rise in her face. "Waylon, I do not wish to deceive them."

He didn't answer her.

She stared at him. His face was too handsome for his own good, but it was the expression in his eyes that had her curious. "What? Why do ye look at me so?"

"Do ye realize ye called me by my given name?"

"I most certainly—"

He covered her mouth with his, drowning out her words. "Doonae ruin the moment, wife." He kissed her again. "Let me cherish how my name sounded leaving yer sweet lips."

"I've changed my mind."

"Aboot what?"

"You are not the Devil's Wolf, you are the *devil*."

His chuckled rumbled from his chest, not at all offended. Matter of fact, he looked overly pleased she called him devil. "Is it because I tempt ye so?" He played with a loose tendril of her hair.

"You tempt me to forget myself," she told him in all honesty.

"Aah, but that isnae so bad, I think." Her gaze riveted to his and caught sight of his wolfish grin before he turned away.

She found she couldn't suppress the smile that twitched at her lips and finally gave up trying. As she expected all along, her husband proved incorrigible.

The delicious aroma of lamb stew tickled her senses and the sweets served for dessert made her mouth water for more. Her cup never ran dry and the conversation proved entertaining. Catrione relished in her freedom from her room and loathed to think she would have to return to them soon.

Waylon leaned near. "Why the long face?"

"Must I be locked away after tonight?"

"I have no wish to treat ye as a prisoner, but the choice is yers."

Her brows furrowed. "And what choice do you put forth?"

"That ye give me yer word, ye willnae try to escape and that ye willnae leave the courtyard or go beyond the gates without an escort. This willnae be forever. Only a precaution for now until I settle matters with yer father."

She turned in her seat to peer at him. "You will trust me to follow these rules?"

"As long as ye give me nay reason to doubt ye. Aye, I'll trust ye."

She nodded. "As you wish."

"Wife, I do believe our union will flourish."

"At least until I give you a child," she muttered beneath her breath, but he heard her.

"I willnae go back on our pact. A child then—"

"Freedom," she finished for him.

He looked like he wanted to say more, but they were interrupted by a new arrival.

* * * *

"Laird Waylon, a message," Huey, the Maxwells' March warden said as he strode forth. When he stood before Waylon, he bowed in respect before turning to present Jaime Johnstone, the Johnstones' March warden.

"Speak," Waylon commanded, wishing the March wardens hadn't interrupted the celebration, but he must know William Johnstone's intentions.

Jaime Johnstone cleared his throat before he spoke loud enough for all to hear in the grand hall. "Laird William of Lochwood wishes for a Day of Truce to be held three days hence where upon he will discuss your marriage to Catrione Johnstone and if there be reason to have such marriage annulled."

Waylon nodded. "Ye may tell yer laird I accept the Day of Truce, but the marriage will stand fast. I willnae have my bairns born bastards. Ye will also tell him that Archie have better no' be damaged if he wishes to trade his daughter's happiness for my brother's freedom."

The March warden nodded. "I will return to my laird with your message,

"See that ye do."

Waylon waited until the Johnstone's warden left the hall before he turned toward Catrione. Her expression betrayed her, but he would not make excuses for his rashness. "I said what I must."

"I do not fault your concern for legitimate heirs, but I cannot condone the manner of which you demanded it."

"Doonae worry so. I ken well what I'm doing."

"At least one of us does. I warn you, you should not anger my father. He does have a temper."

"They doonae call me the Devil's Wolf for naught."

"You are indeed a formidable opponent."

"I am glad ye believe so."

She pinched the bridge of her nose and shook her head. "How did I find myself in such a dilemma?"

Her question was rhetorical and he treated it as such as he reached for his tankard to quench his thirst.

"I know the answer well enough," she murmured with a curse. "Men."

"Did ye say something?" He lifted a brow and peered at her.

Her gaze met his. "My father will fight you to the death."

His shoulders lifted in a nonchalant shrug. "I am up to the task, or is it yer father ye worry for, my sweet Catrione?"

"I know you don't believe me, but I don't want you or my father harmed."

He took her hand. "So, ye soften toward me, have ye?"

She yanked her hand away. "Do be serious and not a pompous arse."

"Mi'lady, ye do spew such lovely endearments. I dare say ye must spend many hours confessing yer sins. No wonder ye need a priest close at hand."

"Why you—"

He leaned over and covered her mouth, stifling her reprimand until she no longer cared.

* * * *

The man did know how to distract with finesse. When the tankards slammed on the tables, he let her up for air.

"See how pleased all are tonight? Doonae spoil their fun."

She wanted to ask him how happy his people would be when he died at her father's sword. She pursed her lips together as another thought flitted across her mind. What if it were her father who fell? She choked back a sob.

Waylon took her hand again. "I've distressed ye, I see. How about I make ye another pact."

"What now?"

"I will do my best to make the Day of Truce a day without bloodshed, but ye must realize yer father will have a say in the outcome as well."

Again her husband surprised her. She squeezed his hand. "I appreciate your gallantry."

He lifted her hand to his lips. "Perhaps ye will show me how ye appreciate me in the comforts of my chambers." His devilish gaze swept over her.

She was truly lost if her traitorous heart turned over at a mere glimpse of his smile. When she left his care, she would miss the way his stormy colored eyes made her feel like the only woman in the room. It was unfortunate he pledged to never fall in love with her, but it didn't mean she couldn't enjoy her husband's attention for now. "The longer I'm with you I am convince you will corrupt my soul."

He chuckled as he leaned close, his voice low and only for her ears. "I take it that is yer way of saying, aye." He claimed her lips, but Catrione feared he'd claimed her heart as well.

Chapter Thirteen

Waylon wanted to show Catrione the lands, immerse her in his world and hopefully entice her to want to stay with him. Wishful thinking on his part, but he would not give up hope until she left his side.

They stood overlooking the land. They could see the forest from where they stood.

The wind blew cool and she pulled her cloak closer around her. "You do not care for the reiver's life, do you?" Catrione's bold appraisal of him made him feel vulnerable.

His gaze met hers, when he gauged his response. "I will do what must be done to survive, but aye, I long for a simpler life." She didn't look at him with contempt, but with warm regard. He leaned near her if only to breathe in the sweet scent of her skin and hair. He pointed to where the sheep grazed on the mudflats in the distance. "The sheep have no' a care. They would be happy with saltmarsh and to roam wild on the coastline."

"Is that what you'd like to do? Raise sheep?"

"No' just sheep."

This drew her attention and she turned to gaze at him again. "What then?"

He took her hand and led her closer to where his men worked cutting through the trees and bushes. "They're clearing the land so we may grow crops," he told her.

One of the men leaned down to where the brush and grass were piled in neat lines surrounding a portion of the forest. He struck the flint and a bright light flickered then grew. The man jumped away lest the flames consume him also.

"Your man started a fire." Her fingers dug into his arm with worry.

"Be still." He patted her hand in reassurance. "Ye doonae need to panic, mi'lady. The fire is controlled to burn where the wood proves too dense."

The blaze grew, licking and devouring the tall trees as if it were a hungry beast with an endless appetite.

She clutched her hand to her throat. "It is terrifying to watch. Yet, I find I cannot look away as if the flames have enchanted me in some way."

His arm draped over her shoulder, drawing her near once again. "I have often time thought the same. The flames do work a sort of magic. Once the fire burns itself out, the ash nourishes the soil, making it fertile. We'll begin planting at the end of the reiving season. We will have a rich crop to show for our troubles.

Her gaze found his. Her sea green eyes were beautiful in the afternoon light or perhaps it was only the way her gaze touched him without contempt that made them so irresistible. "What will you grow?" she asked.

She didn't mock him with her words. Her interest proved true. He could see it in the way she held his gaze, waiting for him to reveal his intent. "We will have wheat and barley."

From their walk of the grounds, some of her hair came free from its confines. He tucked the wayward strands behind her ear and his hand brushed against her cheek in a caress. Her skin felt cool and smooth to his touch.

"And the fierce storms will not destroy the crop?" Her voice lowered to a hoarse whisper. Her eyes darkened as she leaned into his palm.

"Doonae fash yerself. We will collect the wheat before the fierce sea storms can spoil it."

"Hmm. You have it all figured out." She stepped away from him for a moment with her hands fisted on her hips. One finely shaped eyebrow quirked up. "You are nothing as I thought you would be, Devil's Wolf."

His lips curved into a wide grin. "Ye arenae what I expected either."

Her gaze drifted over him, his body heating with each visual caress. She stepped forward, so near their bodies nearly touched. Her hands grasped his forearms as she leaned up on her tip-toes. "Thank you, for this day." She kissed him, her tongue sweeping between his lips in invitation.

His hands gripped her waist, drawing her closer. "If ye keep this up, I will think ye want me to take ye to bed."

She kissed the side of his mouth and murmured, "What are you waiting for?"

Chapter Fourteen

Catrione greeted Jon Luc with a smile. The priest entered the chambers with hesitation. She understood his caution. She now resided in her husband's solar, his private chambers.

"Do not fear the Wolf's den," she teased. "You are welcomed."

"I must say, my lady, you look well." His words confirmed how please he was to find her in good spirits, but he still eyed her closely for any signs proving otherwise.

She wore a gown of rich indigo with the Maxwell's badge pinned to the bodice with pride. She had many such lovely gowns courtesy of her generous husband.

Jon Luc glanced at the door behind him to ensure they were alone. "May I speak frankly, my lady?"

"Of course." She waved her hand at him to continue. Her steps brought her closer to the peat fire burning bright in the hearth. She lifted her hands to warm them.

"The Maxwell is treating you well?"

Her gaze found his. "Can you not tell?" She turned to face him.

"I should like to hear it from your lips."

She chuckled. "Jon Luc, you need not worry. I have been treated with the utmost respect and he makes me feel..." A flash of memory of her body arching up to meet Waylon's made her wonder what she should call the passion her husband inflicted, and made her respond like a wanton woman.

Her gaze shifted to the large bed they shared only hours before and in the middle of the day no less. Heat burned her cheeks at what she had done to him. *What he did to her*. She pursed her lips together. Her soul could be damned before she'd confessed the intimacy she shared with Waylon to the priest.

Her gaze met Jon Luc who stared at her, waiting for her to finish the statement. She squared her shoulders and drew in a deep breath. "My laird, Waylon treats me as if he cherishes me." There, let the priest come to his own conclusions.

Jon Luc's smiled with a nod. "I suspected the Wolf could be tamed, but it appears he has pacified you as well."

Her brows drew together, wondering what he meant by his odd statement, but he didn't elaborate.

"We meet with your father in three days, my lady. What will you have me say about your marriage? He will ask."

She chewed on her lower lip in indecision. Her father will think her weak. Waylon Maxwell was her enemy and she surrendered to him with nary a fight.

"My lady?"

"You will say nothing, Jon Luc. I said my vows before God. I cannot take them back now. The Day of Truce will decide what is to become of the marriage. I will have no say either way." She threw up her hands, anger spurring her now, but she wasn't sure why. Did she fear her father would make her return home with him or was it she feared she would never see Waylon again?

Jon Luc's soft voice drew her attention. "My child, you must make a decision of where your loyalty lies."

"I love my father, priest. Never doubt my loyalty to him."

He nodded. "But do you love Waylon Maxwell as well?"

Chapter Fifteen

Three days passed in a blink of an eye and they now stood before Catrione's father. The Day of Truce with its pretense of civil intent was where the clans ate and pretended to be merry. Men jousting and participated in friendly games of strength, while the women traded stories, but the true matter for this meeting of the clans was to be decided and lives would be changed forever.

Laird William was tall, hair sprinkled gray, and with eyes as chilling as frosted ice. "What makes you think you are worthy to marry a Johnstone and live to tell the tale, Devil's Wolf?"

"I am of the Maxwells and 'tis I who give honor to Catrione, saying she is worthy to be my wife."

William's eyes narrowed but he let the claim slide. His gaze leveled on his daughter. "And how do you fare, sweet Catrione? Last I saw you, you were waiting for your one true love. Have you found him with the Devil's Wolf?"

Waylon's body stiffened beside Catrione, and she knew he worried what she would tell her father. "I've been told true love is for fools."

William nodded. "However, you seemed quite set on finding it. Have you changed your mind, then?"

Catrione glanced at Waylon and knew this was her opportunity to be free of him. Only now she wasn't sure she wanted freedom if it meant he would never hold her in his arms. If it meant she would never hear his laughter or see him hold their child.

She knew Waylon would make a good father. She'd seen it in the eyes of those who followed him. Her husband was strong, fierce, but with a kind heart to even the balance.

She turned back to her father. "Laird Waylon is brave and honest. He will keep me safe. I could do no worse."

William tilted his head and eyed her closely as if looking for some sign of deceit. "Hmm..."

He may have said more, but Jaime the March warden for the Johnstones came forward to speak to him.

Catrione stood by Archie as they waited for the outcome of this farce to play out. Waylon's brother was a pawn in all this, too, though his fate was more severe since death lurked within reach. It surprised her that he didn't seem worried in the least. Archie stood with confidence, whistling softly under his breath, a lively tune that did not befit the situation. He realized she watched him and his gaze found hers. His mouth curved into a smile, and he had the audacity to wink at her.

"Why, I never," she said looking away.

"Oh come now, lighten up. We are family now." His gaze roamed over her. "I say my brother did well. For once the rumors were true. Ye are indeed a comely lass."

"And you sir, are too bold."

His large shoulder's lifted in a shrug. "'Tis a curse, I know," he said with a sigh, indicating his regret.

Despite his boldness, Catrione found his cheerful attitude difficult to resist. "Are you not worried?"

"What will happen will happen. And ye? Ye look beside yerself, but I wonder...hmm... Who do ye wish to win? Is it yer father with hopes of returning home or will ye pray yer husband's strength will prove enough to keep ye at Caerlaverock?"

Her gaze wandered over to where Waylon stood, so dark and dangerous, but she knew the true man. She felt it in the way he caressed her and in the way he treated the people around him. She could love this man. "*Oh God.*" Her hand flew to her mouth as the truth sunk in. Without realizing it, she'd fallen for her enemy.

"Aah, ye care for him." Archie lips curved into a wide smile. "Ye can end this, mi'lady without bloodshed. Ye only have to say the word."

But it was too late. Heuy Maxwell came forward to address the crowd. Both clans gathered around to see who would win in the battle. "The rules of combat," he announced loud and clear as he twirled his long dark mustache. "To avenge his daughter's honor, Laird William of Lochwood has the right to draw his sword in a fight to the end. If Laird Waylon of Caerlaverock wins, he will see his brother free. He has stated, he will allow Lady Catrione to decide where she will reside from this day forth. No matter the outcome."

Catrione's gaze riveted to Waylon. His storm gray eyes didn't shy away from her. He would let her decide, He would set her free if it was her wish. "A true man of honor," she murmured.

"This only gets better." Archie chuckled.

"What do you mean?" Catrione hissed beneath her breath, wishing he would be quiet.

"My brother is in love with ye, too. How utterly delicious." He sighed, thoroughly enjoying this. "The magic of love never ceases to amaze me."

Catrione closed her eyes willing this madness to stop, but the first clang of metal forced her to realize the horror had already begun. The crowd cheered. The Johnstones for her father and the Maxwells for her husband. She had to stop this before it ended in bloodshed.

She pushed her way forward only to be stopped by Reid.

"Where do ye think yer going?"

"I must speak to my father... to Waylon."

"They are fighting to the death. Now is no' a good time."

"It is the only chance I'll have." Before Reid could react, she relieved him of his sword.

Reid lunged forward, intent on securing his weapon, but Archie pulled him back. "Hey!"

"Let the lass go. She knows her mind. A true match for my brother, do ye no' think?"

Catrione plowed forward, stepping in front of Waylon and facing her father who had lifted his sword to strike.

William saw her a second too late and couldn't pull back, his sword slashing down. Waylon reacted and pushed her out of harms way as he brought his sword hand up to take the blow. The edge of William's blade bit into his arm. His weapon fell from his grip as he crumpled to one knee.

"No!" Catrione screamed and ran to Waylon's side. She cupped his face. "Don't you dare die on me."

The crowd had grown quiet, but now whispers spread as they speculated what would happen next.

Waylon's wolfish grin told her the wound he suffered was not fatal, but there was so much blood. Her hand gripped his forearm for a closer inspection. The slash bled freely, the blood wetting her fingers. She swallowed the lump in her throat. "We need to bandage this now." Panic laced her words, but she didn't care.

"Catrione, 'tis all right," Waylon assured her. "'Tis only a scratch. See the bleeding slows as I speak."

A shadow crossed over her and she looked up to see her father frowning down at her. "You stand in the way, Catrione. This is a fight to the death. There is no patching wounds."

"I can't allow this to happen," Catrione spoke up, surprising everyone, including Waylon who eyed her with open suspicion. "You can't fight for my virtue, Father, when I accept Laird Waylon as my husband." She reached for Waylon's good hand and she felt comfort in his grip. He stood, bringing her to stand beside him.

"Tell me, Catrione, and honestly because your words weigh heavy on my decision. Does the Devil's Wolf treat you well?"

Catrione turned and met Waylon's gaze. "He is very attentive."

William remained silent as he looked to his daughter then to Waylon. "Attentive, indeed." He didn't sound happy with her response. "He is the enemy, daughter, or have you forgotten?"

"He is no enemy to me." She met her father's gaze and didn't waver.

"I see," he said. "It seems my dear, you've a husband who is a warrior and an ample lover as well. Perhaps you found true love after all."

She didn't respond to her father's statement, but hurried on with her request. "Father, will you give us your blessing?"

William pursed his lips together, but then he harrumphed with a shake of his head as if he could not believe his ears. "Very well, if this is what you truly wish, Catrione."

"It is." She nodded.

William closed his eyes in a deliberate blink, drawing in a deep breath as he did so. Then he leveled his eyes on Catrione and Waylon. "I say the marriage stands. However," he narrowed his gaze on Waylon, "Devil's Wolf, if I hear my daughter is not happy with her decision I will seek you out and finish the deed started this day."

Waylon wrapped his arm around Catrione, pulling her against him. "Then a truce has been made."

William sighed. "Aye, for now I suppose it has." He turned toward Archie. "And take your brother, before I have every lass in my keep carrying his seed. I have no desire to have more Maxwells as kin."

"As ye wish," Waylon bowed.

Chapter Sixteen

When they were alone, Catrione worked to bandage Waylon's arm.

"Ye could have been killed." Waylon's voice broke the silence.

She tied a knot on the bandage and looked up. "Aye, and ye could have been, too."

"Why did you intervene?" He shook his head. "Ye could have gone back to Lochwood this very day. Ye could have been free of me."

She shrugged. "Perhaps I am exactly where I wish to be."

She turned away, but he grabbed her arm, pulling her back. With his forefinger, he tilted her chin so her gaze met his.

"Are ye then? Are ye where ye should be?"

"It would seem, Devil's Wolf, ye stole more than ye thought the day ye kidnapped me."

"Is that so? And what treasure do I possess?"

"My heart." She spoke with quiet intensity, her gaze never leaving his.

For several seconds he only stared at her, believing she jested, but her lips never curved into a smile. Then he realized she spoke the truth. "A heart is a precious gift to be sure."

"Aye, and see that ye don't trample it." She tried to pull away again, obviously hurt by his response.

He didn't let her go. She looked at him meeting his gaze with defiance. What a strong-willed lass, he took for a wife. He could live with that. It's the living without her he could never do. He cupped her face, tracing her delicate fine bones with his fingertips. How desperately he had wanted this woman at his side and today she gave her heart freely to him. "Ah my sweet, ye had my heart from the moment I pulled the helmet from yer bonny head."

"Waylon..." Tears glistened in her eyes as she leaned against his palm.

"Do ye know what ye do to me when ye say my name? It's like a powerful incantation and I am at yer mercy."

She sniffled back her tears with a chuckle. "Then.... Waylon..."

He growled in raw appreciation, making her truly laugh, a sweet sound to his ears.

"Take me home and show me how much you love me."

"Yer wish is my command, mi'lady." He buried his fingers in the tangle of her hair. The naked desire in her eyes was all he needed to know how she felt about him. He crushed his mouth to hers, taking what she offered and giving her the same.

Chapter Seventeen

Nine months later...

Waylon picked up the screaming bairn and stared in disbelief as it kicked and hollered. "This is no' a son, Catrione."

She chuckled. "I am aware."

He looked at her then back to the screaming baby. "At least she is strong. Look how she howls."

"Like the Devil's Wolf."

He harrumphed as he hugged the child near, replacing the blankets around her. The baby latched onto his finger. "She has a strong grip, too."

"So we can keep her?"

Waylon looked at her in alarm. "Keep her? Of course we'll keep her. She's my bairn, is she no'?"

"Most certainly."

He rocked the child and her howls began to taper. "She's a fine lass, Catrione. Ye did well."

"Thank you, Laird Wolf."

He strode over to her and sat down on the edge of the bed before he handed her the bairn. "I will do well by her, but..."

"But?"

"Mayhap when ye are well enough... we could perhaps try for a son."

"I would like to have a son, but what if we have only daughters?"

Waylon sighed. "It would be my luck to have a houseful of lassies, but... I shall love them anyway."

Catrione leaned against him with a small smile touching her lips. "I love you, dear Wolf."

He kissed the top of her head. "I'll love ye forever, mi'lady."

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Michelle Nutt resides in California with her husband. Though her three children are grown and starting their own adventures, she still has a houseful of demanding pets. Jack, her Chorkie, is her writing buddy and sits long hours with her at the computer.

When she's not time traveling, fighting outlaws, or otherworldly creatures, she creates pre-made book covers to order at Gillian's Book Covers, "Judge Your Book By Its Cover".

Whether your reading fancy is paranormal, time travel or contemporary romances all her stories capture the rich array of emotions that accompany the most fabulous human phenomena—falling in love.

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OTHER TALES BY

KAREN MICHELLE NUTT

Lucca (Warriors for the Light, Book 2)

Lucca Marlowe is half human, half angel, one of the Nephilim. Banished for crimes against one of his fellow brethren, the elders bind his glamour and wings, casting him to the human's realm.

Angels and demons demand he do their bidding. His estrange father resurfaces after centuries of being absent and he's brought a friend from Hell. To make his life more complicated, he fears he found his soul mate in a human female. Only Juliet Romeo has a secret that will bring the wrath of Heaven down upon their heads.

It's a race against time to find out who will end up with his soul.

Time Travel Romances

Two Worlds Collided (Rock Star Romance)

Evie Reid, on a whim, agrees to travel back in time to 1997 to change bad boy Bellamy Lovel's path of destruction. She's smart with a college degree, but she's still fan-girl crazy for the rock band, *Civilized Heathens*. Evie knows despite all Bellamy's smiles and enthusiasm on the stage, he's destined to end it all on one lonely night in a hotel room unless she can change his path.

Bellamy isn't keen on having Evie as his personal assistant, hired by his band mates to watch over him, and keep him on schedule. However, there is something about the woman that sparks his interest, despite his best to ignore her. When darkness threatens to consume him, he realizes she may be the only light that will chase the shadows away.

Lost in the Mist of Time

Dougray Fitzpatrick has buried one wife and vows to never love again—but destiny has other plans for this 16th century Irish Lord. During a battle, a mist separates Dougray from his men and casts him into the future. Dougray must return to Dunhaven and to his century, but Aislinn Hennessy follows him into the mist, leaving him no choice, but to take her home with him.

Conspiracies, feuds and unexpected violence are commonplace threats, but along the way, Aislinn and Dougray discover a surprise neither one expects: a chance for love even when they're *Lost in the Mist of Time*.

A Twist of Fate

Arianna memory is lost when she suffers a blow to her head. It's 1814 and she's married to Captain Keldon Buchanan, a man who despises her. The more Arianna learns about her life, the more she realizes why she's chosen to forget it. Keldon doesn't trust his wife, but he finds his heart softening to the woman his wife has become. If he didn't know better, he'd swear he's married to another woman and he's fallen in love with her.

Creighton Manor

Zachary Creighton, a gambler with one goal: to win back Creighton Manor. Marriage is not part of the plan, but since he is found with Gillian in his room, reputations are at stake, his included. To keep peace with his reluctant bride, he makes a bargain with her. He needs a tutor for his nephew Tyler, and she needs a roof over her head until they can annul their sham of a marriage. However, Zachary finds himself falling for Gillian's oddly charming ways despite the fact the woman claims to be from the future. The gamble is trust, but will the stakes prove too high for Zachary to risk it all and win Gillian's heart?

Storm Riders

Storm Riders must step in and repair the rift before the dimensions collide. Samantha Skelley and Denny Randeli are sent to 1879 Bodie, California, one of the wildest towns of the west. It should have been an easy snatch and rescue, but Ace McTavish is determined to put himself in harms way. Samantha and Denny are forced to help him with his plans before they take the next storm ride home.

Echo of Time

A short Irish paranormal time travel romance...

Kendra O'Reilly felt a connection with the Blarney Castle as if the echoes of the past could still be heard. The guide tells her a story about the Blarney Stone being the ancient Lia Fáil, one of the magical gifts from the god-like race, the Tuatha Dé Danann. To wish upon it, one will see where his or her destiny lies. Kendra wishes to find her one true love. She never thought she'd be whisked back to fifteen-century Ireland to find him.

Cian MacCarthy, the Lord of Blarney not only possesses the gift of Irish eloquence but he also has visions of the future. He's waited for Kendra's arrival, knowing she is his soul mate. Now all he has to do is convince her she belongs at his side.

Otherworldly Tales...

End of the Road (Rock Star Romance)

Lars Gunner, the frontman for Silent Plaids, died 23 years ago and his death was ruled an unfortunate accident. Despite the fact he can't recall what happened to him in his last moments of life, he is convinced he was murdered. He has been trapped in limbo until his daughter, Cecilia, unearths his journal and is able to see him. She seeks help from Kaleb, a psychic, but as they resurrect the past, the secrets and lies surrounding Lars' rock and roll life just may be the death of them too.

Magic of the Loch

Michaela and Alan vow to take what time has to offer, but another threat loomed. A sinister shape shifter with a vendetta against Alan is making Loch Ness his personal hunting ground. Now he's threatening Michaela. Alan must discover who the shifter is and stop him before it's too late.

The Gryphon and His Thief

Some Treasures are Priceless...

A long time ago, a Gryphon shifter's duty was to guard and protect the people of the tribes, but Darrien Andros failed to keep his human wife safe from harm. Cursed for the crime, he must guard everything in the Museum of Cursed Antiquities forever, never to truly live and never to die. Centuries have passed, but when he encounters a thief, who uncannily resembles his dead wife, he is convinced he has a second chance.

Twilight's Eternal Embrace

If Bram cannot find a way for Adryanna to survive the bleeding ritual, their romance is doomed. They seek help from Sheerin, Bram's cousin, who believes he's found a way for the Lathe Sith to survive, but others in the Oiche Sith clan do not wish for them to succeed.

Stake and Dust (Stake and Dust Series, Book 1)

Derek Hayes and his family are preternatural hunters. *Stake and dust* is their motto, but Derek has a difficult time accepting his sworn duty when Sloane McBride, his ex-girlfriend from high school, is the one he's been sent to eliminate. Once infected from a Nosferatu bite, there is no turning back. Sloane has been bitten and she will eventually change.

It proves a race against time when Derek puts aside his core beliefs and teams up with Sloane. The Nosferatu wants Sloane for his own, Derek's brothers are hunting her, and every second brings Sloane closer to changing into the very fiend they want to kill.

Flowers and Fangs (Stake and Dust series, Book 2)

Derek Hayes and his family are preternatural hunters. *Stake and dust* is their motto, but Derek has a difficult time accepting his sworn duty when Sloane McBride, his ex-girlfriend from high school, is the one he's been sent to eliminate. Once infected from a Nosferatu bite, there is no turning back. Sloane has been bitten and she will eventually change.

It proves a race against time when Derek puts aside his core beliefs and teams up with Sloane. The Nosferatu wants Sloane for his own, Derek's brothers are hunting her, and every second brings Sloane closer to changing into the very fiend they want to kill.

Soul Taker

A vampire, a werewolf, and a Necromancer are a most unlikely team, but Garran, Harrison, and Isabella plan on putting a kink in the *dubbed* Soul Taker's plans. It's personal now. One of their friends has fallen victim to the Soul Taker's charms, but to stop him from hurting anyone else, their efforts may involve raising the *dead*.

Magic of the Loch

Michaela and Alan vow to take what time has to offer, but another threat looms. A sinister shape shifter with a vendetta against Alan is making Loch Ness his personal hunting ground. Now he's threatening Michaela. Alan must discover who the shifter is and stop him before it's too late.

Autumn Moon

Jairec's holiday in San Francisco turned into a living nightmare when he's attacked by a *chiang-shih*, a Chinese vampire. He has until the end of the Moon Festival to convince Autumn, an herbalist, to hand over the elixir of life. Without it he will become the white-haired demon for all eternity.

Unbelievable Finds

Mr. O'Grady's Magic Box

Aubrey Jules, a reporter from *Unbelievable Finds* is sent to investigate a box, which is reputedly older than time and crafted by the wee folks.

Mr. O'Grady, owner of the bed and breakfast in Dana Point, California, convinces Aubrey to wish for a soul mate.

When Ian Quinn, who abandoned Aubrey ten years ago, walks in she's convinced the faeries have a wicked sense of humor.