

Prelude

The king sat at the long table, looking at the six men across from him. Wolf, the most powerful of the lairds was chosen to be the husband of his goddaughter.

As the king looked around him, he decided he was about to do the single most important thing to ensure peace between the kingdom and Ireland. He was going to put the most important person in his life, besides his precious wife, in danger.

His lovely Amanda was the only daughter of the queen's sister. She was taught healing in France. She was a small woman, not more than five foot, with long blonde hair and violet eyes. She was afraid, but she had known from early on, she was to help make peace between the crown and Ireland.

The king was hoping his goddaughter and Wolf would find love. Amanda could be a handful. He knew it would take a strong hand to tame her and not break her spirit. She was many things, but an angel, she was not.

The king held a meeting with the six lairds.

Wolf, with the strongest clan, Aron, the second, Rolland, the wise, Samuel, the playboy, Erich, the manipulator, and Isaac, the record keeper for all the clans—all powerful lairds.

He explained his plan in detail. He wanted a healer from each of the clans to come to Wolf's keep to learn the newest techniques of healing from Amanda. He wanted to blend the old ways with new ways, using the old family healers and the new healers. Each girl would learn from Amanda for six months and return to her own clan to begin practicing what she learned.

Wolf's sister, Melody, was to marry Wolf's most trusted friend, Aron. Both couples were to be married in the same ceremony.

They were married, had a feast for everyone, and later that night, their husbands consummated the marriages slowly and with care. The girls were given medallions signifying that they were healers, protected by both the clans and the king. The women who married into another clan to unite clans were given a ring and were also protected by the clans and the king.

Very early in the morning, all the lairds and soldiers started for home, riding hard. They split up to go to their own clans at the four corners. It didn't take long before Amanda and Melody needed to be taken in hand and their powerful handsome husbands were up to the job.

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Within weeks, Wolf's keep would be filled with five new healers and their guards. Preparations needed to be made. Accommodations needed to be made ready. The first to arrive was Rose, who promptly fell in love with Joffrey, Wolf's second. Next to come was Colleen, a seer and a healer; she came from Rolland's clan. Then came Maria, who brought with her four falcons to breed, so when Maria left, she would leave two falcons at Wolf's lair. Maria had a strong bond with animals.

They all came with guards selected by their lairds to protect them.

They were all strong women but independent and needed strong hands to keep them safe. The guards were all entrusted by their lairds to punish their girls if they disobeyed and put themselves in danger. The guards' most important job was to keep their girls safe.

Wolf's lair was protected by the wolves in the forest. Each girl was taught the special whistle to call the wolves if they needed help. Wolf and Amanda also had a special whistle meant to tell the wolves to attack without mercy. The wolves knew when to attack on their own whistle or not. They took the protection of the all the clan very seriously.

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Three months later...

It was a beautiful summer day. It was early summer; the days were warm and the nights were still slightly cool. Amanda and Wolf had taken a trip to the monastery to observe the work on the new hospital being added.

Wolf wanted to get Amanda away and to himself. It had been a trying few months in the beginning but things seemed to have settled down. There had been months of peace. Wolf felt it safe to take the two-day trip.

Amanda was anxious to see the progress. The king had written her, telling her of a French scholar who was willing to come to the monastery to teach them basic surgery. He would stay at the monastery for four weeks to teach some of the nuns who would be staffing the hospital, as well as the healers. He would teach them to do basic surgery, like removing an appendix. They would learn how to use ether more effectively. They would practice on a pig. He was also bringing more supplies from France—supplies like laudanum and ether.

Amanda had sent word back to the king that the hospital was on schedule to finish in the next week and everyone would work very hard to have everything ready for the scholar to arrive within the next month.

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The sun glistened off the still lake. The water was slightly cool but so refreshing. Wolf had laid a quilt on the ground, along with some cold fruits and bread and cheese for a snack. The horses nibbled on fresh grass while the couple was in the lake, engaged in play of their own.

Amanda's hair was loose from its usual braid, floating behind her in the water as her head was tilted back. Her legs were wrapped securely around Wolf's waist.

Wolf was sucking on his beautiful wife's breast, teasing first one nipple and then the other, gently biting and dragging his teeth across the nipple. His cock was buried deep in his wife's tight sheath, lifting her and dropping her down on his rock-hard cock. His large hands cupped her bottom. The moans from his little wife were driving him on to pound into her.

Amanda's head was thrown back; she could feel the familiar tightening inside her core.

"Faster, Wolf, oh please, more, harder, please finish it." Her squeals of pleasure were getting louder and more anxious by the second.

Wolf reached one hand down to her throbbing clit and gave it a slippery squeeze that sent them both over the edge.

"Ahh, Wolf, ahh," she squealed.

"Shh, little one, you will scare the horses, I have you, Amanda, I will always have you."

He set her back on her feet as he walked to the shore and grabbed the soap and cloth. He walked back and started to lather the cloth.

"It is a good thing Melody made some of your special soap when we visited; I love the smell of the heather on your skin."

He began lathering her hair, massaging her scalp, rinsing. Then, he started with her beautiful face, down her neck and over her slightly fuller breasts, down to her rounded tummy, to her cunny, taking time to make sure it was clean, down her legs before he turned her around and lathered her back, massaging her lower back that seemed to be hurting her more often these days. He finished with her cute bottom, making sure her little star was good and clean, bringing forth a small squeal of surprise. Gently putting his hand on top of her head, he signaled for her to dunk into the water and rinse. She looked like a goddess coming up, the water streaming down her body. He lifted his precious wife in his massive arms and carried her to the shore, laying her on the quilt. He quickly grabbed his soap and cloth and washed in the lake. Then, he lay next to her to let the warm breeze dry their naked bodies.

They had let the guards go ahead to the keep so they could have some time to themselves at their lake.

Wolf knew the wolves were nearby; he could feel their presence. He knew they rarely left Amanda. The wolves had guarded his clan for generations, but these wolves had an affection for Amanda. She helped heal one of their own. Skelp was brought to her as a pup with an injured leg. She nursed him back to health. Skelp's father was the alpha of the very large pack that roamed the forest. They had only to whistle, for the wolves to come to their aid.

He lay on the blanket, gently running his hands over her extended tummy.

"Three months pregnant with my child and, still, you have just this little bump. My child inside, safe and growing." He bent down to kiss her tummy, whispering to the child inside, "Your mommy is getting quite a collection in her journal. She thinks I forget, but she is in for a good punishment when you are safely in our arms, little one." He looked over to his wife, who was smiling.

"Wolf, you worry too much; the nuns said I can ride astride, if that is what I have always done. You heard them say I was fine. I should do as I always have done. If you coddle me, it will make it harder when it is time to deliver."

"The nuns did not say you could gallop like the hounds of hell were after you. They said *ride*. Do not try to get out of this. You will write it down in your journal when we get home, with the other misdeeds you will pay for later."

Wolf looked up into the sky. "Hmm, the falcons are circling over us. You know what that means, don't you? The whole clan knows where we are and, I am sure, what we have been doing."

Amanda's face turned red. Wolf was amazed she still blushed so prettily. He chuckled as he helped her up, folding the blanket and packing the rest of the food.

"Time to go home, little Amanda."

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Joffrey could hear the women laughing as soon as he entered the keep. He knew why they were laughing, too. He could tell by the coos and squeals coming from the circle of women. Women, who, by rights, had much to do, but Joffrey shook his head, smiling as he walked up to his own sweet Rose. He rested his arm around her shoulder, admiring how she looked with little

Blake in her arms. The triplets were three months old now and thriving. Mira held wee Betsey and Colleen held little Brian.

Mira wanted to name the lass Amanda but Amanda protested, saying she had already picked out the name and since it was such a beautiful name, she should keep it, so they compromised. The wee girl was named Betsey Amanda.

That thought reminded Joffrey why he had come. He cleared his throat to get the women's attention.

"I see the falcons about five miles out. I am riding out to meet the Wolf and Lady Amanda. I will meet them this side of the village." The women all turned at his words.

Colleen spoke. "You have much to tell Wolf and we have much to tell Lady Amanda, so hurry them home." They all knew what was five miles away and had a very good idea what was going on there. They all would give them the time they needed.

Joffrey nibbled on the back of his wife's neck, turning her for a goodbye kiss.

"I will be back soon; I am sure they will be hungry and tired."

His eyebrow rose in the same way the laird's did when he expected something. Most of the ladies nodded and left to arrange a special meal as a welcome home. The laird and lady had been gone for over a month to the laird's sister, Melody. The lady, they had been told, delivered to Aron and Melody a beautiful baby boy. Mother and child were doing well. Aron, of course, was over the moon, as was Wolf. His first nephew. It was an easy as they come delivery, with no complications.

A month later, they went to the monastery to check on the progress of the new hospital at the four corners.

Joffrey couldn't wait to meet Wolf again and give him all the news. Truth be told, he was ready to hand the reins back over and spend more time with his wee Rose and make some babies of his own.

The falcons were flying high in the sky over the location where the Wolf and Amanda rode. Somehow, the wolves and the falcons each knew what their jobs were. The falcons kept track of them and the wolves protected them.

As soon as Wolf saw Joffrey, he smiled a weary smile.

"It has been a long journey, brother, please let us eat before we get down to business. Can you meet me in the study after we sup tonight? I know I have used you long enough but just a little longer." With that, Wolf looked down at his wife, wrapped in the quilt in front of him, supposedly sound asleep. Joffrey smiled a loving smile.

"Lady Amanda is worn out, she will be sorry she missed the girls with the babies in the bailey waiting for her."

Instantly, Amanda sat straight up. "No, no, I am not that tired."

Both men laughed. "You are a faker, little one."

Amanda smiled. She loved this man more than her own life. She loved Joffrey and Rose, too.

"Is Rose at the keep or teaching already?"

"She is at the keep and I think they are waiting anxiously for you before they put the little ones down."

Joffrey turned to Wolf. "Jacob is almost ready to move back home. Mira's sister and mam are all waiting to help Mira with the babies. The addition is finished for the babies. The animals and hay are moved and the fields are tended, but Jacob wanted to wait for your return to leave.

Willie will stay in the stable in the room Mica had before he moved in with Tillie. He is learning very quickly, according to Mica. He says he can take more days off now and depend on Willie."

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As they entered the bailey with a friendly wave from the guard of the gate, Wolf and Joffrey heard a loud fracas. Joffrey sighed. "It is the two guards that came with Colleen and Maria. I wonder what is the problem, this time?" a frustrated Joffrey grumbled. They rode hurriedly up to the crowd and fought their way through it, Wolf taking in the fight.

"Hold," he roared. Everything became silent. When Wolf roared, you stopped. The two men, unaware of anything around them, continued fighting. Wolf grabbed one and dragged him away and Joffrey grabbed the other and took him the other direction.

Amanda stood with her wee hands on her small hips. She was barely five foot and lucky if she was a hundred pounds but she was the lady. She shook her finger at the men who stood around and had been watching the fight.

"You men get back to your business. I can nay believe you stood around and watched two men pummel themselves and did nothing to stop it. For shame, do you think me and my girls have nothing better to do than patch ye up because of foolishness? Be gone." She was done scolding. As soon as the crowd dispersed, she turned with her head high, her little nose in the air, and sniffed and walked into the keep to see the babies. Wolf and Joffrey both started laughing.

"Wolf, you haven't tamed the little lady yet?" one of the villagers commented.

"Nay, and I don't think I want to; I love her just the way she is." With that, they took the men to the stable, both of them the worse for the wear, both looking at the ground. To be hauled up by the laird was not good.

"Before I put you in the brig or have you publicly whipped, explain yourself. You first, your name and what caused this. "

"My laird, my name is Kenneth; I come from Samuel's clan of Mccaugh. I have come to guard Maria. I am one of Samuel's elite guards. This..." He pointed to the other guard "This is Michael, from Rolland's clan of McDonald. I overheard him telling some of the village people that Colleen is a witch. I do not think this man is a good guard for her." Before Wolf could open his mouth, Kenneth continued, "Nay, I think he means her harm and not help, and I doona like how he tells tales about her to the village folk. It will cause trouble down the road." Kenneth stood straight and proud, a big man, putting his arms across his chest.

"What do you have to say, Michael, and it had better be good."

Michael looked like an angry bear caught in a trap. "She is a witch, But Rolland sent me to guard her and I will guard her with my life, I don't like her at all, but I am the head of his elite guards and demand to stay and guard her."

Joffrey watched as Wolf called some of his guards. "Put this man in the brig. I will pick some guards to make sure he gets home, with a message for Rolland. Gossip like this gets out of hand too easily, I won't have the girls put in danger. Get him out of my sight until tomorrow. We will send him home. Until we receive another, please, Kenneth, can you handle the two of them?"

"Yes, Laird, I will, and thank you, I don't like the way he talked to her or about her."

Michael was taken away, shouting and protesting all the way.

"I should talk to Colleen and find out more about this. It confuses me why Rolland would send this man who clearly hates her. Bring her to the study after our talk. "

So much for plans, now to head back to the keep and his wife. As he entered the keep, it was already quiet. It had taken over an hour to straighten this mess out. Food and drink were waiting for him. When he asked where his wife was, he was told she was in their room, resting. Grabbing a bite to eat and hurrying to their rooms before his wife fell asleep, he quickly climbed the stairs. Too late, there was his beautiful wife lying on her side, sound asleep. Wolf sighed, shook his head and headed for the tub. He curled around his wife after his quick bath and promptly fell asleep, spooned against her.