

A Knight to Remember

By

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Chapter One

Okehampton, Devon 2015

Thick, white mist swirled quietly around the graveyard, snaking its way between the cold, grey tombstones, enveloping everything in its slithery path. The church clock mournfully rang in the hour, deep chimes resonating into the early morning silence.

A large rook protested and hastily took to flight, beating its ebony wings as it disappeared into the curtain of mist. Desolate cries faded across the empty graveyard.

Suddenly, the quiet was broken with the sound of footsteps. A girl appeared like a whirlwind, running up the gravel path, her breathing heavy. Voices whispered and bounced, disturbed at the intrusion. Misty figures swirled around the stones, their ghostly bodies rising into the air before sinking into the church walls...

* * *

Jenny ran through the graveyard, nimbly avoiding falling over any of the large headstones as they loomed out of the fog. Looking ahead, she could finally see the church rising imposingly before her, and with light feet, she ran around the side, stopping to lean against one of the stone walls to catch her breath.

She frowned and slowed her breathing, trying to hear if anyone was following her. Had she outrun him? Cautiously, she peered around the corner and looked out into the graveyard – so far, so good. Should she stay put for a while or risk moving? Her small teeth worried her bottom lip as she tried to make a decision.

It was all rather silly, really. Here she was, a grown woman of twenty-two, hiding like a naughty six-year-old! She almost laughed aloud at her predicament, but quashed those thoughts rapidly as she envisioned what would happen if she was discovered.

Seth had told her in no uncertain terms that if he caught her stealing apples from his garden again, she would be spanked soundly. He was her cousin, and most of the time they got on like a house on fire; other times such as this, friendship was far from his mind.

She huffed under her breath. It was just like him to blow a gasket at a minor offence. It

was only four goddamn apples, for goodness sake! Okay, that made twelve all together, if you took into account the others she'd stolen last week...but they'd looked so delicious hanging from the huge tree that she couldn't resist. What did he do...count every one? He had plenty – well, he did have, until she'd helped herself. Jenny sniggered and then gave a startled yelp as a dark figure appeared at the far gate. Seth's voice rang out, a hint of anger in its depth, "*Jenny!*"

His voice sent ripples of mirth through her. She loved antagonizing him, and had done so ever since she was knee high; it was just the devil in her sneaking out.

The fun was in the deed, though – she didn't actually reckon on getting caught! Butterflies swirled in her stomach as she looked around for a place to hide. Her gaze settled on the church door. Inside the thick walls of the church seemed a pretty good idea right at that moment. She ducked low and began to make her way silently towards the large wooden door.

Suddenly, an icy cold wind appeared, eerily swirling the mist around her, whipping up her hair and sending goose bumps up her arms. Jenny hesitated as a feeling of uncertainty rushed over her. She shivered and hugged her arms around her body to keep warm. As she reached the church door, the wind seemed to intensify until her teeth were fairly chattering from the cold. She grabbed the rusty latch and lifted it quickly, intent on getting into the warmth of the dark interior and away from Seth's threatened punishment.

The door moved inwards and Jenny quickly stepped in, closing it behind her. She moved forward and came to a sudden halt, her mouth hanging open in shock. The church was full of people! She hadn't heard a word outside, in fact, the whole churchyard had been extremely quiet earlier...surely she would have heard someone? Perhaps the wind had hidden the noise, but then why would so many people be gathered at such an early hour? It was only Wednesday and prayers weren't held until Sunday.

She stood stock still, hoping to remain unnoticed. Unfortunately, most of the congregation *had* noticed and were staring at her with interest.

Jenny noted their attire. Their clothes seemed of a medieval theme. Standing at the altar were a man and woman. The woman was dressed in a long, burgundy dress and was holding a posy of flowers; a priest was standing before them, reciting from a book that he held between his hands. Oh no, how embarrassing...she'd walked in on a wedding! Trust her! Several people were still watching her, and she felt herself flush uncomfortably.

She swallowed hard and whispered, "I-I'm sorry! I didn't mean to intrude."

The priest frowned and gave a brief nod to a large man seated in the front row. He was dressed in medieval armour and seemed positively massive. Either that or his costume was overly padded. He stood up and marched towards her. His countenance was grim, and instinctively Jenny felt herself backing away. He reached her in mere seconds, though, and with one strong arm, manhandled her over to a pew on the back row, growling, "Be seated, wench!"

Wench! Who the hell did he think he was? Wench, indeed! Jenny tried to pull her arm away, but he gave her such an intimidating look that she flinched in surprise. Did he think she'd interrupted their wedding on purpose? Stupid man! Jenny pursed her lips and decided not to make a scene. She'd wait until the wedding vows had been exchanged and then make a hasty exit. At least, she was safe from Seth in here. The knight was so large that she was easily hidden from Seth's view should he decide to look for her inside.

As the priest's voice reverberated around the small stone church, Jenny studied the congregation. The church was well over half full, and every last one was dressed in similar clothing. Some costumes looked a bit worse for wear; surely they could have found a better fancy dress outlet, unless they were meant to be peasants, in which case, they fit the part perfectly. Jenny sniffed disdainfully; if she had to come to a medieval wedding, she'd sure as hell choose better costumes than those!

The knight shifted position, and one of his powerful thighs brushed her own. She felt a frisson of electricity run through her and almost gasped aloud. She looked up to find him staring at her, an inscrutable look upon his face. She studied his strong features unashamedly. If he could study her then she sure as hell could study him! He had unruly dark hair that fell to his shoulders, a neatly trimmed beard and eyes that were so dark brown, they almost looked black. He certainly looked the part for his costume.

He arched one eyebrow and leaned down to whisper in her ear, "Emboldened wench, do not stare thus unless thou wouldst take the consequences!"

Jenny blinked a couple of times and then pursed her lips angrily. Arrogant man! This was just great. She had to sit listening to the chauvinistic musings of a man dressed as a knight. Seth didn't seem quite such a bad alternative now.

Angrily, she went to rise, only to be brought straight down again by the knight's large hand on her shoulder.

"Be still," he growled quietly.

"*Get off me!*" Jenny hissed, trying to shrug him off, but he was too strong. She sat there for a few minutes, fuming impotently. How dare he keep her from leaving! She felt his hand relax its grip and deciding she had only one option, she quickly brought her elbow forward and then swung it with full force straight into his side. Taken off guard, he gave a muffled "Oomph!" giving Jenny the opportunity to leap up, intent on escape.

As fast as she could, she ran up the aisle towards the small side door and her exit to freedom. The priest, after giving her an irritated glance, carried on reciting the marital vows, and the congregation continued to watch the wedding progress. Jenny grabbed the door latch and wrenched the door open. Quickly, she ran out into the graveyard...only this wasn't the same graveyard!

She stopped dead in her tracks. Something was wrong. As her mind tried to take in the scene before her, she felt herself grabbed from behind and upended over one strong, masculine thigh. Next thing she knew, there was a stinging pain on her bottom as a hand descended in rapid succession onto her jean-clad backside.

"Ow! What are you doing?" she squealed, wriggling under the onslaught to her tortured backside. She looked over her shoulder to find it was the huge knight spanking her.

"Get off me, you brute!"

"Nay, wench! No one runs away from Stephen de Bressard, and certainly not such a lowly wench as thee."

"Stop calling me wench, you arrogant asshole!" She bit into his thigh and tried to stand up, but the knight had other ideas. He wrapped his arm more firmly around her waist and hugged her into his body, allowing no room for escape.

His iron-like hand slapped down again and again until Jenny was fairly doing a jig, lifting her feet up and down to try and escape the stinging swats. With one last resounding slap, the knight finally pulled her upright. Jenny had tears at the corners of her eyes and quickly put her hand round to rub her sore posterior.

"You had no right to do that. You rotten bastard!" she moaned.

"Watch thy language, wench! And my name is de Bressard, born in wedlock. I am no bastard! Thou art lucky I do not throw thee in yonder mire!"

Jenny gasped. This was one truly arrogant son-of-a-bitch! Deciding, however, that she didn't want to go in the mire, she backed away. The sooner she put some distance between

herself and him, the better. He was a madman! She wiped the tears away and looked round the graveyard. Her brow furrowed as she noticed several things: there were fewer graves, the far gate had disappeared, and some of the trees were smaller...where had the ancient oak gone? How could such a large tree just simply disappear?

"Whither goest thou, wench?"

Jenny turned to look at Stephen, almost as if seeing him for the first time. She assessed him from head to toe and then, without answering him, she marched across the churchyard to where the exit gate had once been. The path outside that should have led to a small tarmac road was gone. In its place was just a dirt track.

This was wrong! Where was Seth? Jenny began to panic. Her mouth suddenly went dry and she licked her lips nervously. Turning back to face Stephen, she marched up to him.

"What...I mean why...oh, godammit! This is ridiculous!"

Stephen's face had a sudden look of anger on it and he was just about to reply when the wedding party appeared amidst cheering from inside the church. He none-too-gently pulled her back from the main path so they both stood on the grass, leaving plenty of room for the congregation to move past.

Jenny stared again at their attire. Everything looked so authentic. She gulped, not wanting to admit the truth as her astute mind tried to take in all that had happened in the last half hour or so. As the happy couple moved to the end of the churchyard, the priest stopped them and raised his hand. His voice echoed around the now still air. "May you both be truly happy, in this, the year of our Lord...1277!"

Stephen just managed to catch Jenny in time as she fainted backwards into his arms.

* * *

Jenny was having a lovely dream. Seth had arrived with a fruit basket laden with every apple she could think of – Granny Smith, Cox's Orange Pippins, Golden Delicious, even the coveted Jonagolds off his tree. She smiled at him as he handed her a Jonagold and placed it before her lips. As she went to take a bite, the smell of the apple penetrated her senses and she grimaced. The smell was horrendous, like no apple she'd smelled before. She tried to pull the apple away but it seemed to get nearer. She tried to shake her head, but still the smell wouldn't go away.

"Eugh! Stop, stop!" Jenny cried and pulled back, but someone had a grip on her head.

Her eyes sprang open as she realised she wasn't dreaming anymore.

"Ah...she awakens." A wizened old woman smiled gently down into Jenny's face. "Fret not, my dear. Thou art fine now; just relax." She pulled back the small vial of smelling salts she had in her hand and replaced the lid, all the while watching Jenny with interest. "Thou art not from around these parts, art thou?"

Jenny sat up and ran a hand over her face. "I-I'm from Okehampton. Where am I now?"

She looked around. She was in a bedroom – a very large bedroom. Tapestries hung upon one wall and the others were bare stone. A small aperture on the far wall allowed a slither of natural light to penetrate the cold room; other than that, the only light came from two candles sitting on a low table in the corner. Jenny shivered as the old woman replied.

"Why, thou art still in Okehampton, my precious. Whereabouts dost thou live? I do not recall seeing thy face afore."

"Mill Street, down by the Okement River."

"Cannot say I hath heard of such a place. I hath been all along the Okement, but I cannot recall seeing a mill. Is it new?"

"Well, no. It's been there for years."

The old woman shook her head, clearly perplexed. "What name doth thou go by?"

"Jenny Peverel."

"Peverel? Then thou must be related to Hugh Peverel. He has been gone two years now, on the crusades. What relation art thou to him?" She looked curiously at Jenny's clothes as though she didn't believe Jenny was related to the Peverels. "Art thou wearing some peculiar new fashion from London? The new king, Edward, has such a passion for trend-setting."

Jenny paused – crusades? What crusades? Then it hit her. The priest had said the year was 1277. She started to tremble. "What year is this?"

The old woman tittered aloud. "Wherefore, that fall must hath addled thy mind. 'Tis 1277, of course!" She leaned forward and plumped the pillow behind Jenny's head. "I think thou should get some rest. I will bring thee up some broth anon, or mayhap thou will feel able to dine in the hall."

Jenny was still in a state of shock. She watched the old woman walk to the door and called out, "What's your name?"

"Annie." She gave Jenny a smile and left the room.

Once she'd gone, Jenny sat there in silence, contemplating recent events. Someone must surely be having a laugh at her expense. No one could really travel back in time, could they? She looked around the room, this time more carefully. There were no light sockets, no lamps, nothing to show any hint of modern technology. She clambered off the high bed and walked over to the small table with the candles. There was one book, a bible. She picked it up and examined it. The cover was a deep burgundy with ornate gold writing – a beautiful work of art. She flicked the pages open to reveal hand-written characters. It was difficult to read, and after a couple of sentences, Jenny placed it back on the table, giving up trying to decipher the words.

She looked around the room, agitated. Where the hell was she? Her eyes fell on the small, narrow window. If she could look out there, then perhaps she could get her bearings. Quickly, she went over to a wooden chair at the end of the bed and moved it beneath the window. She clambered up, and standing on tiptoe, she could just see the edge of some fields. Other than that, there was nothing to indicate her whereabouts.

"Get thee down!" barked a deep voice. Jenny almost fell off the chair in shock and would have, if not for two large, male hands that grabbed her around the waist and then deposited her on the floor.

Stephen glared down at her. "Do not stand on chairs, 'tis dangerous! Did thy mother not teach thee anything, wench?"

After the initial shock, Jenny quickly came back to her senses. "Will you stop calling me that?"

Stephen gave her a hard look. "I shall call thee what I like – wench!"

Jenny crossed her arms belligerently. "If you call me wench again...I shan't answer you! You can go fuck yourself, for all I care!" This big bear of a man seemed to bring out the worst in her, and his arrogance was driving her nuts.

With one stride, Stephen was on her. Jenny found herself suddenly upended and five solid swats landed on her rear. She squealed indignantly, but her shrieks did nothing to deter his palm from inflicting a stinging pain to her backside.

As he let her down, she rubbed her sore bottom and winced. "Ow! That hurt. You're a bully!"

Stephen gave a wry smile. "Give me no reason to spank thee and I will cease. Until thou learneth respect for thy superiors, I will continue to administer punishment. It is entirely thy

decision." He stared at her, one eyebrow raised.

Jenny sat down on the edge of the bed and crossed her arms, her bottom lip pouting as she realised she wasn't going to win any arguments with the overbearing man.

Stephen cleared his throat and looked at her intensely. "Annie informs me thou art related to Hugh Peverel. How so?"

Jenny thought quickly. "I...er...I'm his first cousin, once removed!"

Stephen frowned, as if he was not sure what relation that was. He sat down on the edge of the bed and she scooted back.

"I will not hurt thee, wench. I just want thee to know that if indeed thou art related to Hugh, then I will offer thee my full protection. However, if thy words prove false, I will make thee suffer."

Jenny gulped. Her bottom was already on fire, and she knew what suffering he would administer. "I don't lie! My name is truly Peverel, Jenny Peverel!" There, that was one truth she could be sure of. She licked her lips nervously as she watched him.

"Show me thy hands!"

"What?"

"Thy hands. Show them to me."

Jenny gulped. What did he want to see her hands for? Tentatively, she placed them palm upwards in front of him. He grabbed them none too gently in his large ones, sending an electric shock up her arms.

Slowly, he turned them over, inspecting them thoroughly. "Thy nails art neatly clipped, thou hath no signs of calluses, thy skin is soft. Thou art no lowly maid."

He released her hands and she let them drop to her side. "Very well, Jenny Peverel. I will accept thy declaration of honesty but heed my warning. I will not be made a fool of." His eyes darkened and Jenny, for one moment, felt quite afraid.

He stood up. "We dine within the hour in the main hall. I will send Annie up with some decent clothing. My sister left some of her clothes here, and thy figure seems the same. Put them on; it is not decent for a woman to wear men's attire." He gave her jeans a scathing look and walked towards the door.

Jenny leapt off the bed and stomped her foot. "They are not men's clothes. They're...they're...fashionable," she finished lamely.

"Fashionable or not, thou will not wear them in my presence. Do I make myself clear?" His jaw hardened and his eyes challenged hers to disobey him.

Jenny clamped her lips together and nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Arrogant man!

Satisfied, he left, leaving Jenny on her own in the darkened room. She sat down on the bed and chewed her bottom lip nervously. What on earth was happening here? Had she fallen down and bashed her head without knowing and was now in a coma? Was she having a nightmare? She reached down and pinched her arm hard, yelping in pain as her arm turned red. No, she had definitely felt that!

Annie interrupted her thoughts, when she tapped on the door gently and then entered.

"Here we are, my love. Sir Stephen asked me to bring thee some clothing. I 'ave two dresses for thee to choose from. Not sure which one will suit thee, but either one will look better than those men's hose thee chose to wear."

Jenny rolled her eyes and sighed, giving up on pointing out that they were not men's trousers. Going with the flow seemed her only option right now.

Annie was still waffling away and Jenny tried to focus on what she was saying.

"Flavie is a wonderful woman, I am positive thou wouldst like her."

"Who's Flavie? That's an odd name," declared Jenny.

"She is Sir Stephen's sister. Flavie is a French name, which is natural, seeing as how the family is of French descent. Thou doth not know much, doth thee, girl?" Annie stated, looking at her as though she had two heads.

"Well, no. I've...er...been living quietly," Jenny defended herself. "Where's Flavie now?"

"She married Sir Henry de Raleigh and lives over yonder in Bideford. Verily happy she is, too. Has two children now, Simon and Edward. More's the pity Sir Stephen is not wed."

Jenny kept her thoughts to herself. She wasn't surprised at all that he wasn't married. What sort of woman would want that arrogant pig for a husband? She wouldn't be able to breathe in the wrong direction without having that large paw of his descend on her backside!

She turned to the dresses and looked at them both. One was navy blue and the other a deep green velvet, both edged with gold. As Jenny took her jeans off, Annie's eyes widened as she saw the tiny panties she was wearing.

"Lord preserve us...what are those?"

Jenny looked down at her silky red panties and back up to Annie's face.

"They're...er...also the new fashion. Very comfortable, too!"

Annie pursed her lips. "Thee could catch thy death of cold in those," she grumbled. "Come and put a dress on; try the blue one first."

Jenny removed her top and held her hands up for the dress to be lowered. She wasn't wearing a bra, so thankfully there were no more questions as to her modern attire. The dress felt soft against her skin, and it fit like a glove, moulding her curves as though made for her.

"Perfect, thou art respectable. I think thou should burn those hose, they art not fit for a lady!" She eyed the jeans and Jenny immediately grabbed them, holding them protectively against her body.

Those jeans had cost her an arm and a leg, and she wasn't about to part with them, certainly not by burning them.

"I'll keep these, but I promise not to wear them whilst I'm here." She placed them under her pillow and turned back to Annie, who was holding out a pair of soft leather slippers.

"Put these on, they will keep thy feet warm."

Jenny's boots were on the floor next to the bed. Annie made no comment about them, and Jenny thought it wise not to mention them. Instead, she slipped her feet into the very comfortable slippers and wiggled her toes, admiring the neat workmanship.

"What time do we eat?"

"Very soon." Annie's face softened. "Take a walk around the castle, I will come find thee when 'tis ready." She opened the door for Jenny to walk past her.

Perhaps she would be able to find out where she really was if she had a snoop around. Jenny walked out of the bedroom door into a dark corridor.

"Take this, "Annie handed her a candle, "The corridors get quite dark this late in the evening and thou dost not want to trip down the stairs. If thou goest in that direction, 'twill lead thee up to the turrets, and thou can see the river Okement. 'Tis a lovely view."

Jenny thanked her and hurried off towards the stairs. The candle didn't throw off much light and the stone walls seemed quite eerie in the dark. She reached the top of the stone stairs, pushed the thick wooden door open and stepped out into the late evening sun.

Down below, she could see the river meandering its way along the perimeter. She could see a few small dwellings but nothing else...no streets, no tall modern buildings, no cars, just fields and cattle. She turned to look along the rest of the castle. As she did so, she gasped aloud.

This was Okehampton Castle. In her time, it was a ruin but now it was in all its finery. Her eyes feasted on the perfectly rounded towers as the setting sun glowed orange against their surfaces. It was magnificent; a masterpiece of construction. She touched the wall, running her hand over the hard stone. It was real, but how could it be so? How could she be standing on a castle and be in the year 1277 when she should be in 2015? Somehow, she would have to find her way back, but she must err on the side of caution until she knew how it had happened...