

Devious Maidens

A Medieval Collection

By

Maryse Dawson

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A Revelation

Devonshire, England, 1121

"I swear to thee, Aldus, if she speaks to me thus again, I shall..." Guarin Devilliers swore under his breath and stared angrily down into his goblet, one hand gripping the stem tightly.

Aldus patted him on the back sympathetically. "Thee will do what, exactly, my friend?" He raised his eyebrows and paused, waiting for Guarin to respond. When he said nothing, Aldus continued, "Thou knowest thee cannot say anything, 'twill reveal our true identities. We are here by the king's command; 'tis our duty to continue our secret mission as planned."

"Aye, but she tries me sorely, Aldus!" He rubbed his forehead and closed his eyes. "Hath thee ever met such a demanding wench?" He looked up, searching his friend's face.

"Nay, Guarin. In all truth, I hath not. That wench is in dire need of a strict husband—a taste of a leather strap wouldst soon hath her obedience."

Guarin smiled, picturing Lord Drewett's daughter, Meriele, shrieking as he applied a strap to her bottom—and what a saucy bottom she had. She may possess the temper of a shrew but she had the face and figure of an angel. Aye, a firm hand on her backside would soon alter her behaviour.

He sighed wistfully and finished the rest of his drink. "I seek my bed, Aldus. If I am to endure another day listening to Lady Meriele's verbal tirade, I shall need all the sleep I can get."

"Aye, I shall join thee. These past three weeks hath been most tiresome."

Together, they strolled from the Great Hall to the stables and their allotted beds. Posing as travelling carpenters, they were only given the most basic of accommodation at Castle Lydford. Crawling beneath the coarse blanket, Guarin folded his arms beneath his head and spoke quietly to Aldus. "Did Hilda speak any more to thee?"

In the dark, he couldn't see Aldus's face but by the tone of his voice, he knew he was smiling. "Aye, now there is a wench who needs no taming."

Hilda was one of the serving maids and Aldus's charm had already worked in his favour. "Aye, Aldus. Lady Meriele and Hilda are akin to chalk and cheese," he agreed, thinking upon Hilda's sweet disposition compared to the fiery Meriele.

Aldus chuckled. "'Tis no wonder Lady Meriele remains a maiden. She may be fair of face but I pity the man who wouldst marry her. What a handful she wouldst be."

Guarin laughed aloud. "Aye, albeit a pretty handful. Her husband would hath to carry a wide belt with him to tame her—only then, would he be assured of her obedience."

"Aye." Aldus's low rumble of laughter filled the stable, causing the horses to whinny softly. "Even the horses find it amusing. Mayhap, they hath been on the receiving end of her acid tongue."

"Methinks none hath escaped her vitriolic outbursts," Guarin muttered.

"Of all the missions the king has assigned to us—this hath tested us the most, my friend."

Guarin heard Aldus shift on the straw, making himself more comfortable before continuing, "Ah, well, we must keep in mind 'tis only for a short while longer. The armoire is nearly finished and we hath found naught to prove the king's doubts. All is well, I am certain."

"Aye," agreed Guarin. "I hath heard no talk amongst the inhabitants regarding a rebellion against the king. Lord Drewett doth seem a fair man. He treats his servants with kindness and his

knights speak of him with the greatest respect. Methinks the king's fears are unfounded. Now, let us sleep. I am exhausted!"

Guarin lay on his back and thought about the past three weeks they had been in the castle. King Henry had sent him and Aldus, both loyal knights, to secretly seek out any word of betrayal against the Crown. The king had heard word that mayhap Lord Drewett's allegiance to him was not as strong as he had thought. So, posing as carpenters, they had asked for work within the castle. Lord Drewett, after studying their false letters of recommendation, had agreed for them to fabricate an armoire for his daughter's chamber.

And that was when they had come up against the stubborn will of lady Meriele.

It seemed as though every day she made a new demand. One day, she wanted ornate carvings, the next, she did not. The list was endless. In betwixt catering to her demands, they also had to find time to befriend some of the castle inhabitants, in search of information. She was making their work harder than it need be.

Guarin turned onto his side and prepared for sleep but a vision of her impish green eyes entered his mind. He grimaced. Not only did she interfere in his work but now she would invade his dreams! He sighed heavily and thought about the troublesome wench. She may be a handful, as Aldus had stated, but still, she intrigued him. She was small of stature and fair of face, with vivid green eyes that could flash with anger one minute and melt with softness the next. He had watched her surreptitiously when she sat studying a book in her chamber whilst they worked, noticing the soft tendrils of blonde hair escaping from her tightly bound plaits and the way her delicate fingers would turn a page.

Aye, he admitted, he was attracted to her, even with her fiery temper. If she was his, she would soon change her ways. He finally drifted off to sleep, wondering how she would react if she knew who he really was.

* * *

The next morning...

Guarin and Aldus had only been at work for a half hour when Lady Meriele stormed into her chamber and planted herself in front of them, her hands on her hips. They stopped what they were doing and stared back at her with guarded expressions.

She raised her chin imperiously and narrowed her eyes. "I wish to speak plainly."

Guarin's jaw tightened at the tone in her voice and his hand twitched, almost of its own accord. He waited silently for her to speak.

"Upon thy leave yester eve, I inspected the armoire and I am not pleased. Not pleased at all!"

Guarin ran a hand over his neatly trimmed beard and counted to ten before looking from her to the armoire. "What dost thou dislike, my lady? Thou gave us thy specifications and we hath worked accordingly."

"Nay, I told thee I wanted it bigger." She walked towards her bed and stretched out her arms. "It should be as long as my bed."

"Aye, my lady, 'tis true, thee did say as much...but I distinctly remember telling thee that an armoire of those dimensions wouldst not fit in this corner, as it would be too large. Hence the reason we hath made it smaller."

Meriele stamped her foot. "I want it bigger!"

Aldus could see Guarin beginning to seethe and quickly stepped in. "My lady, if we were to enlarge it, 'twould not fit here." He pointed to the far wall. "'Twould hath to be placed elsewhere, and as far as I can see," He paused, looking 'round her chamber. "There is no other place but here."

Meriele glared at him, her mouth thinning as her temper threatened to spill over. "I want it bigger. Dost thou defy me?"

"Nay, my lady, but—"

"Then, do as I bid!" She turned on her heel and stormed back out of the chamber.

Silence ensued. Guarin's jaw was set so tight he thought his teeth might break. Taking a deep breath to calm himself, he turned to Aldus incredulously. "Can thou believe thine ears?"

"Aye, unfortunately. That is one spoiled wench."

Guarin shook his head. "What is the point in making an armoire so large 'twill not fit in the chamber? 'Tis madness!"

"As well, it will delay our departure. The sooner we report back to the king, the better."

"I am of a mind to leave it unfinished. 'Twould serve the spoiled wench right!"

Aldus shook his head. "Nay, the king said under no circumstances are we allowed to reveal our true selves. 'Tis our obligation to finish it as any other carpenter would do so." He paused and scratched his head. "Think on it as a test of thy mettle."

Guarin threw his hammer down on the floor and rubbed his hands together, his face full of determination. "Then there is only one solution! I will seek word with her father. Surely, he will see sense, even if his daughter will not!"

"Shall I accompany thee?"

"Nay, remain here. If the wench returns, tell her I hath gone to acquire more tools." He strode out of the room in search of Lord Drewett.

Lord Drewett, upon inspection of Meriele's chamber, agreed that Aldus and Guarin were indeed correct and his daughter was being unreasonable. He also informed them that Meriele's outburst was not unusual and they had best come to him, if they had any more problems. She was rather, as he had put it, prone to speaking her mind, regardless of the outcome. Something he was trying to advise her against but having little success.

For the next few days, Guarin and Aldus worked like fury to finish the armoire. Guarin had waited expectantly for Lady Meriele to loudly object over his actions, but she made no appearance. Later, Aldus learned from Hilda, much to their relief, that she had gone away for a few days, leaving them in peace to finish their mission.

With the armoire complete, it was put into place in the chamber and Guarin and Aldus packed up their tools, ready to depart.

Aldus looked at Guarin sheepishly. "Give me an hour or so, Guarin. I promised to meet with Hilda. She wishes to show me her assets."

Guarin laughed and slapped him on the back. "I reckon thee hath seen plenty of Hilda's assets already, my friend. But go. I will ready our horses and meet thee by the stables anon."

Aldus grinned and quickly disappeared to search out Hilda. Guarin flung his tool bag over his shoulder and made his way down to the stables.

With the horses readied, he sat down just inside the stable door and waited for Aldus to arrive. Just as he closed his eyes and laid his head back against the wall to catch a few minutes' rest, he heard someone calling his name.

"Guarin? *Guarin?*"

He groaned, recognising Lady Meriele's voice and cursed under his breath. He had hoped to get away without seeing her again but, as luck would have it, it seemed she had returned just in time.

He peered out from behind the stable door to see her walking briskly towards him. Her face was set angrily and it took no guesses to realise why—she'd seen the armoire!

Standing up, he presented himself in the doorway and steeled himself for her verbal tirade he felt certain was heading his way.

Meriele quickly spotted him and came to a halt in front of him. Huffing loudly, she folded her arms. "I go away for a few days and return to find thou hast ignored me! My father hath informed me that thee dared to go behind *my* back and ask his advice about *my* armoire!"

Guarin raised one eyebrow and looked at her shrewdly. "Aye, he speaks the truth. I did."

"The armoire is too small, therefore until 'tis made to my liking, I refuse to pay thee!" She looked at him smugly, her eyes challenging him to object.

Guarin smiled slowly in return and withdrew a pouch of coins, dangling it in front of her. "Thy father hath already paid us," he stated mockingly.

"Give it to me!" She jumped up, trying to grab it from him, but he merely laughed and held it out of her reach.

"Nay, my lady. Thy father is satisfied with our work. It matters little what thee think."

"Thou lout!" Meriele prodded Guarin's chest with her finger. "Knave! Insolent dog!" She prodded him twice more and glared up at him.

His eyes flashed angrily in response. "Prod me again, lady, and thee will take the consequences!"

Meriele gasped. "Thou wouldst threaten me!"

"Aye. Our job is done. Today, we take our leave so hinder me not!" His voice held a note of warning as he stared at her intently, but Meriele was used to getting her own way. No one told her what to do! With a determined set to her jaw, she deliberately raised her finger, and eyeing him purposefully, she prodded him even harder.

Guarin struck so quickly that Meriele's scream was hardly heard as he bundled her into the stables and shut the door.

"Get thy hands off me!" Meriele ordered as she tried to prise his hands off her waist, but he was far too strong.

"Nay, lady. Thee hath made me suffer intolerably this past month and now 'tis time to return the favour."

"What dost thou mean? What is thy intent?" Her voice held a note of panic as Guarin dragged her over to a straw bale in the corner.

"'Tis thy turn to suffer, my lady. Thy rudeness cannot go unpunished." He sat down on the bale of straw and quickly drew her down over his lap.

* * *

She scrambled to get off but he held her down. "Unpunished? What doth thou mean?" She gasped with shock as she realised what he was about to do. "How dare thee! I am thy superior; put me down this instant!"

"Superior? Nay, lady, not this day. Today, we art equal."

Meriele felt a sudden rush of cold air as he raised her skirts. She was so shocked that, for a minute, she lost her voice. But then, as his hand fell upon her soft buttocks, she found it again, emitting a loud shriek as pain filled her senses.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Aow! This is out...ooh...rageous!" She kicked her legs in an attempt to break free, but he quickly locked his large thigh over both of them, stalling further movement.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Ignoring her protests, Guarin continued to smack her bottom, one cheek and then the other, without so much as a tiny break, until her posterior was smarting unbearably.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Thou art cruel!" she gasped in between smacks. "I shall tell my father of thy actions! He will hath thee locked in the dungeons for this insolence!" she panted loudly as she tried to gain control of her sanity.

"Nay, thee will not tell a soul, my lady. From the moment we started work, thou hath been rude and thy behaviour akin to a spoiled child. If thee tell of this, then I shall make it known throughout the land what a troublesome wench thou truly art." *Smack! Smack! Smack!* "See if thee can find a husband then, my lady."

"Thou art a devil!" she said angrily, screwing her face up as his hand made contact once more.

"Aye, and like a devil, I shall bring fire to thy backside!"

Smack! Smack! Smack!

His smacks suddenly intensified and Meriele shrieked loudly in response. "Prithee I beg thee, stop!"

"Nay, 'tis about time thee were held responsible for thy actions. I will stop when I deem it right to do so, not when thee orders me to."

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Meriele demanded again for him to stop but he continued at the same pace, ignoring all her protests. Her bottom was on fire and was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. How dare he do this to her! He would rue the day he stepped foot in Castle Lydford. But what could she do? She bit her bottom lip as she thought upon his words. Did she truly want people thinking she was spoiled? She hoped to make a good marriage and mayhap, if the carpenter put word around that she was troublesome, it would deter possible suitors.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Ooh, desist! It doth hurt!" She tried beating her small fists into his boot but it made little impact. If anything, it seemed to spur Guarin on to smack her even harder.

Three more smacks ensued, harder than the previous ones.

Before long, Meriele forgot everything but the pain in her bottom. When Guarin finally let her go, she sprung up, as though she had been burnt, and stepped well away from him, rubbing furiously at her backside. She scowled at him from a safe distance.

"Thou art detestable!" she griped.

"Then we art in mutual agreement, for I find thee the same. Now, be gone, my lady, afore thy mouth says something to place thee over my knee once again."

"Ooh!" Meriele seethed impotently. Mustering the best of her dignity, she spun on her heel and stalked out of the stables. Hopefully, she would never see the unbearable carpenter again. For a moment, a smidgen of longing filled her heart but then she quickly beat it away. What did she care if she never saw him again? Aye, he was handsome and, on more than one occasion, had

found herself unable to tear her eyes away from his muscular arms as he worked. But the man was an ogre and had dared to spank her! Nay, 'twas best he continue on his travels, well away from her life.

* * *

Winchester Castle...

King Henry looked at Guarin and Aldus as they dismounted. "So, art my fears confirmed?"

"Nay, Sire." Guarin replied. "We heard and saw naught amiss. Lord Drewett is as loyal a subject as Aldus or I."

King Henry visibly relaxed. "Then, all is well. Come inside and warm thyself by the fire. I wouldst know everything."

Once settled in the Great Hall, with platters of food and flagons of wine brought upon the king's request, Guarin and Aldus told him about their mission. When they had finished explaining to him, he congratulated them.

"I commend thee both. Thy knowledge of carpentry hath worked to our advantage. Lord Drewett suspected naught?"

"Nay, Sire," Aldus responded. "To him, we were two simple carpenters looking for work."

"And thy work? He was pleased with it?"

Guarin flashed a look at Aldus before continuing. "Aye, Sire, he was." His daughter might not have been, but they would keep that to themselves. King Henry need not be bothered with such a trivial matter.

King Henry stood up, indicating for them to remain seated when they went to rise. "Prithee enjoy the food and partake of the wines and ale. I shall speak to thee anon."

When they were alone, Aldus looked at Guarin. "That was one mission I care not to repeat."

"And I as well!" Guarin raised his goblet and took a deep draught of the fine wine as he convinced himself that he would never see the green-eyed wench again. Yet why did that thought make him feel so miserable?

* * *

Meriele lay in bed and tried to sleep but it evaded her. The same as it had for the past week since the detestable Guarin had left. Horrible, odious man! She pursed her lips and stared at the ceiling. If he was so odious, wherefore could she not stop thinking about him? And why did she keep remembering the feeling of lying over his lap whilst he spanked her? Every time she thought of it, a tremor of excitement coursed through her. What was wrong with her? Did she hanker after a man such as him? Of course not! Mayhap, she was coming down with a fever. 'Twas the only explanation for her strange thoughts.

Cross with herself for dwelling on such an arrogant man, she huffed and turned over in bed. She wanted a knight, a bold knight to sweep her off her feet and keep her in the comfort she was accustomed to—not some lowly carpenter fit only to sleep with the horses.

Yet there was something about him, something strong. He had not the air of a servant but seemed more akin to a leader. She finally drifted off to a troubled sleep in the early hours of the morning.

* * *

A few weeks later...

"Daughter, come hither. I hath good news!" Lord Drewett beckoned Meriele over as he stood near the dais in the Great Hall.

"What news, Father?" Meriele enquired. He was holding a letter and smiling.

"We are to hath a visit...from the king!"

"The king!" Meriele gasped. "Wherefore? When?"

"Calm thyself, daughter. He is to visit in a week's time, just before Christmas." He patted her hand. "Thee will hath plenty of time to prepare."

"By the rood—only a week! 'Tis not long enough, Father! I shall require a new dress and...oh God's bones...what chamber shallt we prepare?"

"Worry not; King Henry is a learned man. He willst not expect our castle to be as lavish as his."

"I will worry, Father. There is much to do and so little time." She rushed off, leaving her father chuckling under his breath.

* * *

Meriele steadied her nerves as she walked down the corridor towards the Great Hall. The king had already arrived, along with several of his knights, and was inside with her father. Licking her lips nervously, she stepped inside as the guards opened the door for her.

The king was easy to spot in his surcoat sporting the royal colours. He was talking to her father. As she walked towards them, her eyes flicked over the king's knights. Suddenly, her breathing stilled and her jaw dropped. It was Guarin! What was he doing here and why was he dressed in a surcoat and why—

"Meriele!" Her father interrupted her thoughts. "Let me introduce thee. Sire, my daughter, Meriele!"

Meriele immediately curtsied and plastered a smile on her face. She was still in shock but did her utmost to hide it.

The king smiled back at her, his eyes missing nothing. "My lady, 'tis a pleasure." Without taking his eyes off hers, he called over his shoulder. "Sir Aldus and Sir Guarin, come hither."

Meriele's eyes widened as her two 'carpenters' stepped forward. "My lady, thee will forgive my actions but, as I hath already explained to thy father, I had to be certain of thy father's loyalty to the crown. Hence the reason these two knights were sent undercover as carpenters."

Meriele looked up at Sir Guarin and felt her legs turn to jelly. The man she had dreamed about for the last two months now stood before her once again, only this time, truly as equals. There was laughter in his eyes as he bowed eloquently before her.

"My lady."

Aldus did the same.

Meriele, for once, was silent.

"I can see thou art a little shocked, my lady," King Henry noted. "Rest assured, their carpentry is of the highest standard. They both trained in the profession in their youth and, even though fate deemed they would become knights, their work is not inferior. I trust it was to thy liking?"

Meriele glanced at Guarin and found him studying her curiously. She cleared her throat. "I thank thee, Sire. 'Twas most beautifully made."

"Then, all is well." He patted her hand. "Willst thee join us, my lady?"

"Mayhap anon, Sire. I need to oversee the kitchens for our repast. Willst thou remain with us long?"

"Nay, my lady. We leave on the morrow. I wish to spend Christmas with my family."

Meriele curtsied and, after glancing briefly at Guarin, quickly left the hall. The man was unsettling her and she needed to escape.

* * *

That evening...

"May I hath this dance, my lady?" Meriele turned 'round to find Guarin before her.

"Oh, 'tis thee!" Her voice hinted at disappointment but Guarin ignored it.

"Aye, my lady. Come, dance with me." He reached for her hand and, before she could object, drew her amidst the other dancers. Not wanting to make a scene, she quickly stepped in time with the music. As they passed each other during the dance routine, she couldn't help but notice how agile he was.

"Thy face shows surprise, my lady."

"Aye, I didst not think thee could dance."

When the music ended, Guarin held her back as she went to walk off the dance floor. "Not so fast, my lady. Look above thee."

Meriele looked up and gasped. It was the kissing bough. They were directly beneath it.

"Nay, my lord, I think not!"

"Aye, my lady! 'Twould be rude to ignore such a tradition." He pulled her towards him and kissed her soundly on the lips before she could protest.

Meriele tried to resist, but as his firm lips ground into hers, she found herself naturally melting into his arms. It was as though no one else was present—only the two of them. When he broke away, she opened her eyes slowly in wonderment. No one had ever kissed her like that. Somehow, it seemed so right.

"Wouldst thee allow me to court thee, my lady? I find since we were last together that I hath thought of little else."

Meriele was startled, for she, as well, had thought only of him. "But I thought thee detested me. After all, thee didst spank me."

"Nay, my lady, I do not hate thee. Thee deserved that punishment, and if I think thee hath need of a spanking again, I will do so."

She licked her lips, which had suddenly gone dry. Here stood a man who would take her in hand when needed. The thought did not alarm her, on the contrary, it excited her. She smiled and looked back up at the kissing bough. "Mayhap, thee should kiss me again and I will think upon it."

Guarin raised an eyebrow before lowering his head and sealing their fate with a sensual kiss.