

# HEATHER

THE MOORLAND MAIDENS BOOK TWO



MARYSE DAWSON

BLUSHING BOOKS

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## CHAPTER 1



CARLISLE CASTLE, WINTER 1092

Connell Macgregor pushed the greasy strands of unkempt hair from his eyes and peered through the small opening in the cell door, his hands tightly gripping the metal bars. He focussed on the Norman guard currently on duty.

"Ye cannae keep me prisoner forever!" he spat, his lips curling with malice. "King Malcolm will demand my release, ye'll see!"

The guard gave him a heavy-lidded look but didn't bother replying. He'd heard it all before. Connell was, if nothing else, extremely verbal.

Connell kicked the wooden door with frustration before turning his back to the guard. He'd been locked in this stinking, rotten cell for weeks and it was driving him insane. Ever since he'd dared to attack the Normans as they travelled back to Carlisle castle.

Only two of his group had survived, including himself. The other man, Gordon Lennox, was incarcerated in the next cell.

He thought back to the attack, his lips thinning angrily. Once

captured and lying on the ground, he'd clapped eyes on the girl who was amongst the party of Normans. He knew he'd recognised her, and it was only after overhearing the guards speak about the new lady of the castle that he realised who she was. Rhona Canmore—King Malcolm's niece—married to a conniving Norman!

He spat on the floor. Deceitful, traitorous bitch. Did she have no loyalty to the Scottish king? What of her father, Donald—how could he allow such a marriage? Did he even know about it?

At first, he tried to convince himself she'd been taken by force, but it soon became apparent that was not the case. Nay, she had chosen to marry and was now in the hands of the devil. She was blinded by lust. It was obvious. She just needed to be back amongst her Scottish brethren and she would see the error of her ways.

Aye, if he ever escaped this place, he would make it his priority to steal her away.



## PENRITH, CUMBRIA

Something was tickling Heather Ingen's nose. Irritated, she tried to swat it away but persistently it came back. She had been having such a lovely sleep, as well. Sighing irritably, she swatted it again, but this time, she heard a little giggle. Her eyes flashed open and she found Bethoc and Alana on either side of her bed, big grins on their faces and a feather in each of their hands.

"Happy Birthday!" they cried in unison.

The tongue lashing Heather had been about to give them for waking her up soon disappeared, to be replaced with a feeling of elation. Of course, today was her birthday. She was twenty.

She sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes, yawning at the same time.

"Uncle has a surprise for you!" said Alana excitedly.

Bethoc pushed her shoulder. "You were not meant to say anything, Alana!"

"Oh, hush. I did not tell her what it was, did I?"

Bethoc rolled her eyes. "You nearly did."

"Did not!"

"Hush, you two!" Heather chided. "I do not wish to start my birthday listening to you two snipe at each other. Now, leave me to dress, and I shall join you downstairs in a moment."

"Make haste, Heather," urged Alana, her face a picture of excitement.

Heather flapped her hands at them, shooing them out of the room, which they reluctantly did. On her own, she smiled to herself. She loved surprises, and knowing her uncle Donald had something for her special day was exciting.

Quickly, she slipped from the comfort of her warm bed and placed her feet on the cold floor, shivering as she did so. Eww, she hated winter. Padding over to the dresser, she began to wash her hands and face before hastily slipping into her thick winter clothing. After cleaning her teeth with a small cloth, she opened her door and practically flew down the stairs.

Her aunt, Hextilda, was sitting in front of the hearth, sewing, but she quickly laid down her needlework and stood up when Heather entered the room. "Ah, there you are. Happy Birthday, Heather dear. Would you like to break your fast first, or would you prefer to see your surprise?" Her eyes sparkled with merriment, for she knew that Heather would undoubtedly be chomping at the bit to see her present.

"My surprise, of course!" Heather grinned.

"I thought so!" Hextilda walked over to her. "Close your eyes."

Heather shut her eyes tight, but for good measure, Hextilda placed her hands over Heather's eyes before leading her out of the front door. "Now, you may open them!" she declared, dropping her hands away.

Heather slowly opened her eyes and her mouth dropped open

with wonder, for before her stood the most beautiful horse she had ever seen.

"Oh, my!" she gasped. The horse looked around at her and tossed its head several times.

"Her name is Morag," said Donald, stepping forward with a broad grin on his face. "And she is all yours."

Heather walked up to Morag and stroked her nose gently. "She is so beautiful. Thank you so much, Uncle."

He came up beside her and put his arm around her. "She still needs a little breaking in but, with your expertise, you will soon have her tamed to your will."

Morag eyed Donald, as though she knew she were being spoken about, and then snorted. Her uncle smiled. "Aye, she is a little feisty so go carefully. Mayhap just stick close to home, first of all, before galloping off. The enclosure will be far enough for now, methinks."

"Aye. I shall break my fast and then see how she accepts me on her back. Oh, I cannot wait."

Heather was all up for a challenge. She loved riding, something she was good at. Her birthday was starting out much better than she had expected.



THEODORE CHARBONNEAU WAS ACCOMPANYING his brother, Leon, and his wife, Rhona, down to Penrith, to visit with her cousin, Heather.

His face grew wistful as he thought of Heather. He hadn't seen her for months, and their second to last encounter had been anything but civil. He had spanked her for playing a trick on him—feisty little madam.

Ever since, he had found he could think of little else. Her perfect, rounded little bottom draped over his thighs was a sight to behold. Perfect, creamy smooth buttocks set atop slender toned legs.

He'd thought about contacting her when he'd returned to Carlisle, but her uncle had made it clear that he would never countenance a match between a Norman and his wards. Shortly after, Theo had been called back to Winchester by King William and then sent to Normandy, so any thoughts of contacting Heather had taken second place.

It was only on his return to England that he had been amazed to learn that Leon was to marry Heather's cousin, Rhona. Somehow, and his was not to reason why, Donald had capitulated and allowed them to marry. He could not have been more surprised if the sun had fallen from the sky.

The timing had been most fortuitous for him, as he was able to go to the wedding and there set his eyes upon the winsome Heather again. Every now and then, he had caught her looking at him, but he couldn't fathom whether she liked him or not—elusive little baggage.

Since then, and for the past month, he had been living at Carlisle Castle. King William's new fortification had need of many guards to protect it and, along with his brother, Leon, he had been asked to oversee its security.

Rhona had tried to tell him that Heather had feelings for him, but he was not so certain. Mayhap his spanking had made her wary.

Today was Heather's birthday, and without needing much persuasion, he had agreed to accompany Leon and Rhona on their trip down to Penrith to visit with her. Mayhap, today, he would find out where her feelings truly lay. Nearing their destination, they stopped to give the horses a rest, letting them drink from a small brook by the side of a rocky outcrop.

Sitting on one of the big boulders, Theo looked across the moorland. Even in the midst of winter, the scenery was still breathtaking. Leon passed him a cup of mead, and he drank thirstily, smacking his lips with appreciation before handing back the empty cup.

"Have you any victuals, Rhona? I am famished," he asked hopefully.

"Aye, Lisette prepared a small basket for us." She rummaged around in the basket, seeing what was in there. "Hmm, there are goose legs, apples, a pie of some sort, and a hunk of bread. What would you prefer?"

"A goose leg," he said without hesitation. Just as she went to hand it to him, Leon swooped in and grabbed it for himself.

He waved it at Theo, a smug look on his face. "A husband takes priority!"

Rhona tutted loudly before pulling out another leg and handing it to Theo. "There you are, Theo. Pay no heed to your uncouth brother."

He bit into the succulent flesh, closing his eyes with appreciation.

"You missed breaking your fast this morning; did you not?" Rhona accurately surmised.

He nodded and took another bite, savouring the delicious meat.

"You need a wife to look after you, Theo." She added slyly, "Heather would make a lovely wife."

"Aye, she would. If she would have me."

Suddenly, Leon interrupted them. "Look over there." He was pointing across the moorland. "That horse appears to be bolting."

Theo looked in the direction he was pointing. Although far away, it seemed as though Leon was right. The horse was going hell for leather. Even from that distance, he could see stones and mud flying up from its galloping hooves. How the rider remained seated, Theo had no idea.

"It is heading for the river," Leon said, his face grim. "If the rider does not get it under control soon, methinks they will be in trouble."

"Aye," Theo agreed, but as they watched, the horse didn't slow its pace. "I cannot sit by and do nothing. I will gallop down and see if I can stop the beast."



Theo ran to his horse and mounted swiftly, kicking straight into a gallop. Racing across the moorland, he headed towards the unfortunate rider.



HEATHER WAS HOLDING onto Morag for dear life. No matter what she said or did, the horse was intent on bolting. It was her own stupid fault.

After an hour of gentle riding around the enclosure and finding Morag to be accepting of her upon her back, she had decided to take her for a quick ride across the moorland.

Her uncle had warned her not to, but she had confidently told him that she could handle Morag and couldn't he see how docile she was? He had grumbled, but when she had continued, he had capitulated but told her not to go far. A fact she fully intended to obey.

But Morag had other ideas.

After only twenty minutes of quietly walking across the moors and enjoying the views, Morag had been startled by a rabbit jumping across their path. She had instantly reared up, her nostrils flaring, whinnied loudly and then simply bolted across the landscape.

How Heather had managed to hang on, she had no idea. Hunkering low over Morag's neck, she tried her best to pull the reins and bring her to a standstill, but she was unstoppable. Shouting didn't work. Hissed whispers didn't work. In fact, nothing seemed to be working.

All she could do was hang on until Morag calmed. Which didn't seem like it was going to happen anytime soon.

Looking to her left, she could see the River Petterill come into view. The water level was high this time of year and the current was flowing fast. She swallowed hard and pulled right on Morag's rein, trying to, at least, get her away from the dangerous river, but

Morag just tossed her head, yanking the reins from Heather's hands.

"God's bones, Morag! Slow down!" Heather cried, gripping tightly onto her thick mane.

Just when she thought it was never going to end, a rider came into view, approaching from the right. Startled, she looked over to see who it was.

"Theo!" she gasped, instantly recognising him.

He didn't answer; he was too intent on capturing Morag. His mount was larger, and he quickly manoeuvred it alongside, keeping pace. Galloping at breakneck speed, he reached forward until he could grasp Morag's reins.

"Hold on!" he yelled before yanking hard on them. Morag reared up a couple of times but finally came to a halt, her breath escaping her nostrils in great clouds of steam.

Heather quickly dismounted and held a hand to her heaving chest whilst Theo led the two horses over to a tree. Tying them both up securely, he made his way back to Heather.

She stared at him with big eyes. "You saved me."

"Aye." He placed his big hands on her upper arms and, looking down at her, his eyes searched her face. "You are unharmed?"

She nodded, still trying to calm her breathing—not helped by the gorgeous hunk of a man standing in front of her.

Theo dropped his hands and looked over at her horse, noting the way it was trying to nip his own horse in between grabbing mouthfuls of short grass. "Your horse is a little high spirited. What made her bolt?"

"A rabbit. I only acquired her today—she was a birthday gift from my uncle."

"Yet you thought to bring her out here on your own without knowing how she handled?" Theo remarked incredulously, his brow furrowing with disapproval.

Heather bristled, disliking his tone. "I only intended to take her

a little way and only at a sedate pace. I did not know that a rabbit would startle her like that."

"Exactly. You did not know. It was foolhardy of you, taking her out this far and, also, travelling alone. I am certain your uncle will not be well pleased."

Heather planted her hands on her hips and glared at him. "Fie! My uncle allowed me the freedom to take her out." She walked over to her horse and went to retrieve the reins. "I thank you for coming to my aid, but would you please now go back from whence you came? I have no wish for you to spoil my day."

Theo's large hand covered hers and stopped her untying the reins. "Nay, Heather. I will not allow you to ride this beast back. 'Tis too dangerous. You will ride with me."

"I will not!" Heather exclaimed, keeping her hands firmly on the reins.

"Aye, you will."

"You cannot order me about like this," she protested. "This is my horse, and if I wish to ride her, I shall!" she added stubbornly.

Theo shook his head, and, taking her small chin in his hand, he made her look at him. "I will tell you now. If you disobey me in this, then I shall have no option than to take you over there." He pointed at a large tree. "Where I will sit down on that nicely located boulder, and I will smack your bottom until it sizzles! So, what is it to be?"

Heather's eyes had widened as she listened to every word, and her breath caught in her throat—as much from a surge of desire as from shock. Annoyed with the way he affected her and determined to get her own way, she wrenched her face from his hand and glared at him. "You dare to speak to me in such a manner? You have no authority over me, and I will not do as you say!"

"Very well!"

In one smooth move, he placed his hands around her tiny waist and hoisted her up in the air. She kicked her legs and demanded to

be put down, but Theo completely ignored her, striding across the moorland to the very tree he had threatened her about.



THEO WAS ANGRY BEYOND MEASURE. This little madam needed to learn to listen to people. Reaching the tree, he sat down on the boulder and pulled Heather straight down over his firm thighs. She kicked and struggled, but it made no difference. Reaching down, he threw her skirts up over her back and trapped her legs by placing one long leg over hers.

"Let me go!" she shrieked, scrabbling the ground to try and escape.

"Nay. You need to learn that, sometimes in life, you have to obey others. This should be a good reminder!"

He brought his hand swinging down onto her bottom, and she gasped loudly when the first slap impacted. He quickly set up a steady rhythm, alternating between each plump cheek until her buttocks began to turn a nice rosy pink.

"Stop! Stop!" Heather protested loudly.

"Nay, my sweet Heather. Not until I am satisfied you will obey me."

"Ooow!" she wailed as another smack struck her tender bottom. "I will never obey you. You are overbearing, conceited...ouch!"

*Smack! Smack!*

"You only have yourself to blame." He continued, thoroughly enjoying himself. Her cute little bottom jiggled under each stroke of his palm; it was quite a sight to behold and one he had missed.

Finally, he stopped, and laying his hand flat on one heated buttock, asked, "Are you going to do as you are told?"

There was a muffled shriek, more from frustration than pain, but she eventually bit out, "Aye."

He released his tight grip and let her rise, her skirts falling back

into place as she did so. She hopped about in front of him, her face screwed up as she rubbed her sore bottom through her skirts.

Fixing him with a petulant look, she moaned, "It is my birthday, yet you spanked me!"

"Mayhap it should become a tradition? Every birthday, I will spank you." His eyes twinkled with mirth.

"You will do no such thing! I intend to be nowhere near you on my next birthday!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing fire at him. "You can go to the very depths of Hell, for all I care!" She spun around and stomped back to the horses.

"Strong words, my lady."

In answer, she simply tossed her head, her long auburn hair glinting in the sun. Theo felt a stirring in his loins. She was beautiful and headstrong—and would make the perfect wife for him.

Somehow, he would win her hand.