

# Protected by the Knight

*Loving the Knight, Book Three*

By

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# Chapter One

"Of course, dove. You are my everything. Without you there is no meaning." Edward performed his lines with the perfection of a seasoned actor. He gripped the supple cheeks of the vixen straddling him. She bit her lower lip, an amazing actress by her own right, as her bright blue eyes burned. They both knew the parts they needed to play.

"What if my husband finds out?" she whispered as if their love had robbed her of enough air to speak at a normal level.

Edward let his hands slide up her torso where he held a breast in each palm. His cock hardened at the dessert that was to come. He'd sampled this treat before and knew it was worth the theatricality required to taste it. "Let him find out," Edward hissed, his lips vibrated against her neck. "Let the world find out!"

She wailed in longing, their scene had reached its climax and now it was time for Edward to reach his. His cock celebrated its near victory. His hands joined the party as he lifted the sultry siren up enough to delve into her silky folds.

*Bang. Bang. Bang.*

Someone knocked urgently at his door. Edward turned his head from the sound and lifted his hips. The woman froze, wide eyes transfixed on the very door Edward was happy to ignore.

*Bang. Bang. Bang.*

"Piss off!"

The woman shrieked. "What if it's my husband?"

Moments from glory, Edward clucked his tongue and shook his head softly. "No, no," he placed a soothing hand on her cheek. "I'm sure it is nothing import—"

"Urgent message from the King!" came the voice from the other side of the door.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," Edward bit the words out, sliding from beneath the beautiful, blonde filly. He watched her slide back and out of sight before yanking the door open, not bothering to cover himself. "What is it?"

A young, very serious looking messenger glanced once at the parchment he held before speaking at a volume loud enough for the entire castle to hear. "The King requests your discreet presence at a secret—"

"Excuse me," Edward interrupted the messenger, leaning one arm up and against the doorway, "if it is a secret, should you be screaming?"

The messenger remained, his mouth wide open, his forehead crinkling as if he was pondering life's greatest questions. Edward looked past the goldfish and spied a smirking figure lurking in the shadows on the other side of the path.

"I am quite busy," Edward said to the figure in the shadows.

Caldwell leaned forward and crossed his arms. "Not anymore."

Some time later Edward had said goodbye to the beauty in his room and was following his brother to the King's chambers. With each step he tried to remember the vixen's name.

"Violet?"

"Elizabeth, you ass. She's married to George, the butcher."

"Are you sure?"

"Of which point?"

Edward scratched his head. Now he remembered, *Elizabeth*. He adored her, desired her as much as he did the rest of them. "Darling brother, it isn't always a person's given name that is important—"

"Only their bodies." Caldwell cut him off with a scowl.

Edward scoffed. His brother had always been the more responsible of the two, but Caldwell was also more delusional when it came to the opposite sex. Caldwell believed in love and the idea that two people could be faithful. Edward held no such illusions. He'd seen too many times what little effort it took to shatter a sacred vow.

"So what is the urgent issue? Need a little chamber room advice for the little lady?" Edward wiggled his eyebrows. He jumped out of the way of his brother's fist, laughing. "Is she getting bored of your moves already?" He popped back, not fast enough to completely avoid a punch to his gut. He bent over, grasping his midsection and wheezing. "I'm here for you," Edward said between gasps, "anytime, day or night."

"Still zero sense of self preservation." Lady Kalista smiled at him over her husband's shoulder. "I'm not sure if it is good to see you haven't changed much these last months."

Edward ignored the hint of concern in her tone. He didn't try to approach her-not that Caldwell would've allowed him. Caldwell turned toward his wife and embraced her as if he'd returned from a dangerous mission rather than from a trip that couldn't have taken more than an hour.

This was why Edward had chosen to stay as far away from the castle proper as was possible, why he ignored Lady Kalista's concern. He'd suffer in the barracks any day if it meant he could separate himself from the constant affection that now filled the castle. First with the king and his new wife, now with his brother-also known as the king's guard-married to the queen's dearest companion. Normally, he would believe it all to be false, fleeting, but he knew that at least for his brother and his new wife, it was true. And he hated being around it. He'd freeze in the barracks before he forced himself to see it every day.

Edward winked at Lady Kalista as his brother growled beside her. So he'd kissed her once. His brother seemed unable to forget it.

"He is waiting in your old chamber," Lady Kalista said to Caldwell. "Be quick about it though, you won't have long before she gets suspicious." She offered Edward a gentle smile before mouthing, "Good luck," to her husband and scurrying up the corridor and out of sight.

Edward draped an arm over his brother's shoulder. "You've done it, I'm intrigued. What is going on?"

Caldwell shrugged out of Edward's hold and led them down a set of narrow stairs. "Not here."

The two knights continued down to a hallway lit only by sconces lining the stone walls. Edward couldn't help but be curious. Yanked from the throes of passion. Lady Kalista's cryptic messages. The way Caldwell kept looking back and forth while taking him to the deepest, darkest part of the castle. If Edward didn't trust his brother so much he'd have a suspicious hand on his sword.

Yet, when his brother stopped and pushed open a creaking door, Edward hung back to let his brother enter first. He hadn't had much time to speculate as to what he was walking into, but he never thought he'd see King Braden standing on the other side of the fireplace, frowning and looking like a criminal afraid of being caught.

"Shut the door," the King ordered, waiting for Edward to comply before continuing in a low tone. "What I am about to ask of you is sensitive. I'm assured you're the man for the job."

Whether you accept or reject the content of this meeting the information herein is to remain confidential."

Any humor Edward had in his expression evaporated as the King continued to speak. He concentrated on his words, narrowing his eyes, seeing the room with perfect clarity. There was a time for joking, but Edward was first a knight. "I understand, your Majesty," he said with a sharp nod.

"You're familiar with my wife's home kingdom, Ceravique?"

"Smaller kingdom, mostly consisting of fields and flatlands, few exports, ruled by the Queen's father King Francois, dismally small army." If this meeting had anything to do with Ceravique then Edward knew who the 'she' was that Lady Kalista had referred to. Queen Georgianna was known to still be loyal to Ceravique and fiercely protective of her father and her brother, Prince Corbin.

"Very good. You'll also recall Georgianna's engagement to Prince Lisben of Covard, Ceravique's neighboring kingdom." Braden's scowl matched his tone. When it came to Covard, Braden was not shy about what he'd like to do to the kingdom. But, Covard's power could not be ignored. Edward wasn't clear how the king had initially avoided war when Georgianna had fled with him. "The situation in that respect has calmed. But now, King Francois is attempting to rebuild his kingdom. One of those ways is by reinstating relations between Ceravique and Covard."

Braden rubbed his cheek in a tired gesture. "From what I've heard, Prince Lisben's cousin, Princess Lotte, has been betrothed to some king in the east. She has a long journey ahead of her and King Francois has offered his castle as refuge where the princess can wait for the eastern king to send his royal guard."

"You'd like me to be a part of that guard?"

"No. In fact, I do not want you to *do* anything."

Edward crinkled his brow. "I'm afraid I may be confused then."

"Eddie, I'm an untrusting bastard. Your brother knows this well enough. I can't help but think this is a trap plotted by Prince Lisben to destroy Ceravique. If Princess Lotte dies while under King Francois' care then Prince Lisben can sit back and let her betrothed do the dirty work."

"You think he plans to murder her? Make it look like the fault of Ceravique?"

"I'm almost sure of it."

"And I am asked to do nothing?"

"You're being asked to make it look as though you are doing nothing. Princess Lotte must survive until her royal guard comes to claim her."

Edward leaned back on his heels. His brother had, from the moment they'd entered the small room, sunk into the shadows behind the king. There was one notable person missing.

"Why is the queen not more concerned?"

Braden let out a harsh exhale and raked a hand through his chin length, dirty-blond hair. "Her concern is deeper than the deepest ocean. Her faith and loyalty however, are just as deep."

A slow smile crept on Edward's face. "She is unaware of your plan?"

"Hence the secrecy."

Edward grinned even wider. In front of him stood one of the most in love men he'd ever met and even he was keeping secrets from his wife, plotting behind her back.

"I accept."

#

Princess Lotte noticed when Covard Forest slowly thinned. The trip had been gloomy and cold. The fresh air still bit at her skin, but as the horses trudged out of the dense forest she saw the beginnings of the wide beautiful fields that Ceravique was known for. Too bad a beautiful landscape could not improve her mood. Lotte sighed and slumped forward in her saddle, her forehead resting against her horse. The chestnut gelding had spent much of the trip with his nose stuck in the bum of the horse in front of him, only following. Not once had Lotte even needed to touch her reins. The closer her convoy grew to Ceravique-where she would wait to meet her royal escort-the stronger the desire to leap off her horse.

There were rumors about the king of Atvia, the man she was to marry. Lotte knew not to lend rumors any credence, but it was fact, not rumor, that she was not the king's first wife. In Atvia a man married as many times as he could afford. The last number she had heard was somewhere in the teens. And the king was very rich.

At least she wasn't likely to get lonely, she thought. Though she wasn't likely to ever be alone again either.

"We'll be there shortly." Sir Dylan Garey, her personal guard, pulled her from her dismal thoughts. He offered a short smile. Lotte was sure he could tell what raced through her mind. Not



only had he accompanied her ever since they left her home for Covard, he had been her protector for as long as she could remember. Dylan had assured her before they set off from Covard that they would have at least three days in Ceravique before the High King of Atvia's royal guard would arrive.

Her stomach squeezed. In three days she would be nearly face to face with that which she most dreaded. "Maybe we could camp here?"

"No, your highness, no reason to." Dylan shot her down. He urged the convoy forward. Her horse followed dutifully behind, his nose almost lost in the tail in front of him.

Lotte bit her bottom lip to keep from pouting. She wasn't a child anymore. So why did she feel so helpless? She'd watched her older sister get married. Only now did she wonder if her sister had felt anything like Lotte did now. The way her cousin, Prince Lisben, had spoken of marriage made it seem like complicated, serious business. More than that, he made it sound permanent, irreversible, final. Lotte brushed her hands against her unused reins. There was so much that she hadn't done, hadn't seen. She'd never even galloped through the famed fields of Ceravique and now she was meant to march straight to the castle where she would have nothing to do but wait for the nails to seal away the coffin of her freedom.

She wrapped her slight fingers around the leather reins and kicked her horse forward, away from the convoy. She galloped forward, surrounded by long, lush grass that shone like gold in the early sunlight. Lotte hadn't thought about her actions. She was surprised at her actions, and loved the feel of wind whipping through her hair. Dylan hollered for her to stop, but her horse shot forward like an arrow, perhaps he was just as tired as she of always following.

With her eyes closed, she let her horse fly. His hooves beat against the grass in a joyful rhythm. When Lotte finally peeked behind she couldn't even see Dylan or the other guards. They were blocked off by the rolling hills that now separated them. Lotte let her head fall back and laughed once towards the heavens.

One moment she was watching the sky bounce, the next she was falling further from it as her horse reared up. Lotte slid back off of her saddle and hit the ground hard. Her back felt damp, soaked with dew. Once she was sure she wasn't dead, Lotte sat up, reaching for the back of her head. There would probably be a bump. *Good.* It gave her an odd satisfaction to know she wouldn't be looking her best when she met her future husband. Glancing around, she saw no sight or sound of Dylan or any of the other guards.

The cause of her wet back and sore behind stood a few feet ahead. He looked back at her with a proud, yet sheepish expression.

It was the same expression that had Lotte bursting into laughter. Her shoulders shook with it. Happy tears welled in her eyes and she brushed them away.

"Are you well?"

Lotte gasped at the image of a man who seemed to have stepped out of air. His black hair was an unruly mass of curls on his head. His dark, piercing gaze made him seem more than a mere man, rather like a fairy prince or avenging angel. He stood absolutely still, and yet she could feel the raw power radiating from his broad, muscular frame.

"Are you real?" she asked.

He smiled and Lotte knew he was no angel. Devil would be more accurate.

"As real as you are." He strode forward and lifted her off the ground as if he had every right to be so close to her. She landed on unsteady feet. He kept his hands on her arms. "And you feel pretty real to me," he murmured in a tone that was undeniably sensual.

Lotte's skin tingled where he touched her. The warmth of his palms shot straight through her body, raking against each nerve. She felt twitchy, more aware of each and every sensation. The way her chest heaved with each breath. The soft breeze that blew a red curl against her lips. Beyond all of that, she felt *him* in a way that was foreign, a way that demanded action, a way that scared her. Who was this man and what type of magic did he possess?

"I can stand now," she said and almost groaned as the man looked at her lips as she spoke. She gathered her bottom lip between her teeth and bit it in a nervous habit.

The back of his hand brushed gently against her cheek. He smelled of the sea, fresh and exotic. He cupped her cheek and silently used his thumb to gently pry her lip from between her teeth. "No reason for that," he whispered. Lotte could feel the breath of his words. His face came closer as if he were in a daze, as drawn to her as she felt to him. His lips caressed the spot she had bitten.

The light contact ignited a force inside of Lotte, like a branch finally snapping under the pressure. Her hands flung up, almost of their own volition, and she dug them into the man's curly dark hair. Using fistfuls of his hair as anchors she deepened the kiss. Instinct had her opening her mouth to him, allowing complete access.

Lotte knew that sharing her first kiss with a strange man in the middle of a field weeks before her wedding wasn't a sane thing to do. Lifting her leg and wrapping it around the man's ass wasn't helping anything either. His fingertips dug into the tender flesh of her upper thigh, binding her against his body. She felt his fierce nudging, proof of his desire, at her stomach.

All common sense urged her to stop, but she was helpless to this dark devil with his hand sliding under her dress and up her leg. Soon, his fingers would discover the absolute proof of her desire. More than that, she wanted his touch there. Ached for it. She didn't know this man's name or where he came from, but she knew that her body called for him.

"Who are you?" the man asked against her lips.

At that exact moment Lotte was a wanton woman, a flame that needed to consume, a siren.

A cold breeze blew past. No, she wasn't any of those things, not really. Her muscles stiffened, no longer pliant beneath his touch.

"No, no no, forget I said anything," the man nearly begged. Lotte already backed out of his grasp, shaking her head as if to clear it as she nervously smoothed the front of her dress. She brushed against her erect nipple and stifled a moan. The devil man saw her expression and grinned. "Why deny yourself this? You want it, your body is proof. Your lips are swollen and red, your breath is coming fast. I bet if you let me continue my exploration I'd find your pussy sopping wet and waiting for me."

Lotte gasped, in equal parts horrified by, and attracted to, the man's vulgar language. Never had she heard such words or been spoken to in such a tone. Behind her she heard horses' hooves approaching. She turned, sure she would see a flustered Dylan riding towards them. But it was her horse that she saw. She ran towards him and used a nearby stone to help her up and into the saddle.

The devil man hollered behind her, asking her name, asking her to stop. Lotte urged her horse forward. There wasn't a doubt in her mind that if she stayed she would lose her virginity in a field to a stranger. She directed her horse back in the direction of where she'd left her convoy.

Some time at the back of the pack would do her some good. It seemed as though when she broke free she didn't make very good choices.

#

Edward's cock was rock hard. That damned witch woman had stepped straight out of his dreams and left him in a nightmare. After watching her fiery red hair disappear on the horizon he had no choice but to continue on foot to Ceravique Castle, a little more irritated now that he'd lost his horse in a bad bet the day before.

Edward adjusted the pack on his back. He'd reach the castle soon and then he could pretend to not be keeping an eye on the doomed Princess Lotte. He hadn't been given much information on the princess, but Edward knew that if she was the cousin of Prince Lisben then she would be about as attractive as a dead fish left to rot on the bank in the summer.

He had no choice but to ignore his cock until his job was done, or at least started. Ceravique was a small kingdom and Edward had always had a soft spot for underdogs. Not to mention a war in Ceravique would mean a war in Harrington. He'd find the princess and make sure she was safe, only then would he look into learning more about his mystery woman.

Edward trudged forward, half hoping he'd be able to dunk himself in a cold river before encountering anyone else.

#

Lotte ducked behind a wall, barely hidden before Dylan walked past in the opposite direction. He'd been in a foul mood ever since her escape hours earlier. When he got like this, Lotte knew from experience that it was just best to stay out of sight, at least for a little while.

She slumped down against the cold stone of the outdoor corridor. There was no one else around and the cold felt good against her heated skin. She'd been flushed since her meeting with her mystery man. Lotte sat down, remembering how his hand had felt on her thigh. She had been possessed, that was the only explanation. So then why was she just as wet now as she was then? She grasped a red curl and weaved it through her fingers, remembering how she'd threaded her fingers through his hair. A wanton shudder spread through her.

This wasn't her, Lotte thought, trying to banish her silly fantasies. She was quiet, obedient, loyal, *and engaged*.

She'd already experienced enough firsts that day, and some things just weren't meant to be experienced. With a sigh Lotte moved to stand up. Her foot caught on an uneven stone and before she could cry out she fell forward. A pair of strong arms caught her. His exotic smell filled her senses.

"Mysterious and clumsy," he murmured. He swung her around so that she faced him, though he did not release her. His hair was windswept and his cheeks were bright from exertion. She remembered that when she'd left him he'd been on foot. He must have just arrived at the castle. "It's better that I found you first." He spoke as if they were already in the middle of a conversation. "Try as I did, you destroyed my concentration."

"I, I'm sorry?"

"Good." He herded Lotte further down the dark corridor. Her back hit cement. His face was partially obscured by shadow but his dark eyes gleamed. He inclined his face forward.

"What are you doing? Someone will see us!"

"And?" her mystery man whispered. "It wouldn't be such an unusual thing for me." He leaned back a fraction. "Why? Who are you?"

Lotte blinked and gathered her lower lip between her teeth. His gaze narrowed on the motion.

"Never mind," he said, "don't tell me. It won't change this." He lowered his head. The moment Lotte realized he meant to kiss her she put her hands flat against his firm chest. Though she didn't apply any pressure he paused and looked at her quizzically.

"You don't know who I am," she said.

"Should I?"

"Do you live here in Ceravique?" she asked.

"No, I'm here to protect the princess." He stopped talking and looked a little shocked. "I probably shouldn't have said that to you." He smiled. "I'm usually better at keeping secrets, but there is something about your face. I forget my mind."

Lotte leaned her head back flat against the stone. As far as she knew she was the only princess in the castle. So who was this man and who had sent him?

He led them down the corridor. Lost as she was in her thoughts, Lotte followed blindly until she realized they were so far down the corridor that she could hardly see him and he was right next to her. A shiver of fear ran up her back.

"Not that I operate on a tit for tat, but I've been hard since you ran from me. I'm here to do something important, but I don't think I'll be able to do that important thing until I get this out of my mind." He bunched her skirts up. Cold air brushed her thighs.

Lotte knew she should have smacked the handsome stranger across the face. He didn't have any idea who she was and yet his hands seemed as comfortable on her body as if he owned it. Her heart beat quickly. A thrill slid through her. She should've been outraged, ashamed. He needed to *get this out of his mind?*

There was so much that she knew she should've been feeling but what she really felt was alive, tucked away in a dark corner with a muscular mystery man pushed against her.

*Three days*, she remembered. In three days her life was over, why not enjoy as much as she could now?

Lotte pushed the man's hands away and pulled at the top of his trousers. She worked at the fastenings, thankful her hands weren't shaking badly enough for him to notice. She'd overheard conversations at home about what a woman could do to please a man. It was always spoken about in barely more than a whisper and in a way that sounded forbidden.

She slid to her knees and looked up at her mystery man's face. Shock quickly transformed to desire. He seemed to know exactly what she had planned and caressed her cheek as she pulled his pants down.

"I don't dare speak for fear of breaking this spell," he murmured.

Lotte examined the iron rod that jutted out in front of her face. She doubted she had the ability to fit it all in her mouth. Tentatively, she explored the tip with her tongue. His moan rang in her ears as his taste exploded on her tongue. Unlike anything she'd experienced, she wouldn't call the flavor good, but it was exotic and unmistakably sexual.

She slid her mouth down his velvet shaft.

"Yes, like that, swallow me whole." His fingers wound in her hair. He used the hold as leverage, guiding her mouth where he wanted. "Take a deep breath," he instructed before sliding even further in her mouth and almost down her throat. Lotte moaned her pleasure and he gasped. "Sweet Lord in heaven, you're going to kill me before you're done."

She bobbed her head, suckling on the tip of his penis before plunging back down. With each thrust it became easier. She was able to relax more. Her tongue swiped at the bottom of his penis experimentally.

"I'm going to cum if you don't stop," he warned.

Lotte sucked again and felt her cheeks hollow. Her mystery man groaned before the first jet of warm liquid burst into her mouth. She wasn't sure what to do at first and by the time she decided to swallow, some of his fluid had dribbled out of her mouth and down her chin.

"Oh my," he said on an exhale. "Next time, I finish in that sweet pussy."

Lotte shivered at his casual use of "next time." He wiped her face with a bit of cloth that he'd torn from his shirt.

"How do you know there will be a next time?" she asked nonchalantly, as if her body wasn't exploding with sensation.

He gently lifted her off of her knees and onto her feet. Once he was finished cleaning her face he placed a surprisingly chaste kiss on her lips. "There will be a next time. I just have to find someone really quick. Then I'll find you." With a mischievous wink and a pat on the bottom he sent her back down the corridor. Lotte heard his footsteps disappear the other way. She knew for a fact he wouldn't find the person he was looking for in that direction because the person he wanted to find was her.