

The Conqueror's Queen

By

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Chapter One

No wonder she is still unmarried at age twenty, despite all her advantages, Matilda's lady-in-waiting thought. My mistress is a pretty little thing, with her soulful oval face, her great dark eyes and the long brown hair I am braiding now. Not to mention her position, as the Count of Flanders' daughter, and a descendant of the great Emperor Charlemagne himself.

She is also so gifted with her needle that she has covered every stone wall in this castle with her tapestries, which are displayed between the stone columns. Right now she is working on Saint Catherine of Alexandria being torn on a spiked wheel, and a very fine portrait it is, although I could wish that she would choose a more cheerful scene. I don't think any suitor would want to fill his home with those morbid pictures, any more than he would be eager to marry such a prude.

And she *is* a prude, Hilda told herself. She has found a reason to turn down every suitor who comes along, no matter how eligible he seems to be. This one drinks too much, that one eats too heartily, another one is too serious, yet another laughs too loudly, so no one seems to suit her.

This latest suitor, now, he is the most promising of all. Thinking of that, she decided it was her duty to urge her mistress to consider his proposal, at the very least. "I can't help thinking that your ladyship really should consider this proposal more carefully," Hilda told her. "I mean, your suitor *is* the Duke of Normandy; and he has already proven himself to be a brave warrior, even though he is only two years older than you are."

Ignoring her mistress' frown, Hilda raced on, "What's more, I hear from other ladies that he is a strong and handsome fellow as well, two feet taller than you, which makes him six feet high, with a jutting chin, a flourishing black moustache, piercing dark eyes and broad shoulders. So I don't really know why you can't accept him."

"You certainly do know, Hilda," her mistress told her coolly. "As I explained to his emissary when I sent my reply, he is a bastard. William the Bastard is what the whole world calls him."

"That isn't his fault!" Hilda cried. "Forgive me for saying so, my lady, but I don't see how you can blame him for what his father Duke Robert did with his concubine."

"I don't blame him at all," Matilda replied, with a sigh. "I know that his father is the guilty one, to fall in love with a peasant girl when he saw her washing clothes in a stream."

Her voice rose as she went on, “But think of the example he is setting to others—telling them that there is nothing wrong with fathering children outside of marriage—yes, and mothering them, too. Duke Robert’s mistress should have refused his advances, but no doubt she preferred the wealth and comfort that could come from living with him in sin, rather than keeping her honest job as a laundress.”

“And perhaps she loved him, too,” Hilda murmured.

Seeming not to have heard her, Matilda went on, “but no one seems to see anything wrong with breeding bastards, in our modern world. It’s the year 1050, but everyone seems to think that there’s nothing wrong in acting like barbarians. If a well-born lady like myself sees nothing wrong with marrying a bastard, well then, why should anyone else refrain from producing one?”

“And you told all that to his emissary when you sent your reply?”

“I saw no reason to explain my views,” her mistress retorted. “I merely told his emissary that I was too well-born to marry a bastard. And William the Bastard is exactly what the people call him.”

For a moment, Hilda could only stare at her silently. “They call him that, I know,” she finally gasped. “But I hear that he is a true warrior! What if he goes into a battle rage and attacks you?”

“Here, in Lille Castle, one of the strongest stone buildings in all of French Flanders, and filled with my father’s guards? I really doubt that he would get very far.”

“From what I have heard of him,” her lady-in-waiting murmured, “I am not so sure.”

* * *

“I wish she had sent *me* a message like that,” Brihtric said with a laugh, as his sweetheart told him the story. “I would have smacked her bottom... like *this!*”

Hilda squealed, as he grasped her arm, spun her around and brought his hard, square hand down on her bottom.

“And you are supposed to be the English ambassador!” she exclaimed, pretending to pout. “What if my mistress heard about the way you treat me?”

“You will not tell her,” he replied, with a shrug. “You are too fond of my company—and my spankings, too.”

Yes, and your looks as well, she thought, with your blond hair falling down to your broad shoulders, framing your fair, square face and your bright blue eyes, like the pure Saxon you are.

Aloud, she said, “Well, I suppose that my prudish lady is right about one thing, though. We should not be having babies out of wedlock; and I am sure she would dismiss me in a moment if I did.”

“But you will not get pregnant from *this*,” he reminded her cheerfully. “And that is one reason you enjoy it so.”

With these words, he dragged her to the nearest chair, threw himself onto it and pulled her over his knee. Raising her red woolen skirt and petticoat to her waist, he promised himself that soon her plump white backside would match her garments’ color.

“Ow, ow, Ow!” she cried, as she writhed happily, and safely, beneath his punishing hand. As she felt his manhood grow long and hard beneath her, she felt sure that he was enjoying the episode just as completely as she was.

She would have been wrong, though. As he kept soundly smacking Hilda’s bottom, he was thinking of someone else—namely, her noble mistress, Matilda of Flanders—and imagining how much he would enjoy doing the same thing to her. That would cure her prudery, he was sure. It was enough to make him wish that he could give up his ambassador’s status and change places with William the Bastard.

* * *

“William the Bastard!” he shouted, his black eyes flashing dangerously. “That is what the non-Normans say, and it is what she thinks of me.”

“That is what many people call you, and you know it well,” his sister Adelaide answered calmly, as she continued her stitching. “They also address you as Duke William, just as they call me the Countess Adelaide. Why should you care what name foolish people give you? With so many victories to your credit, they should really call you William the Conqueror.

“Besides,” she added reasonably. “You only wanted to marry her so you could ally Normandy to Flanders. You can find another noble Flemish bride, I feel sure. So why are you so angry?”

“*Why?*” he demanded, his tanned face turning red with rage. “Because she said she was too good for me, because I was only a... because our parents had not been married in the Church, even though they had taken vows together.”

“Because you are a bastard, and so am I,” she answered calmly, as she snipped off another strand of thread. “It was foolish and thoughtless for her to call you so, but there is nothing you can do about it now.”

She flinched and pulled away, as he answered in a voice so coldly angry she had never heard it before. “Oh yes there is,” he told her. “And she will be very, very sorry when I do it.”

* * *

He held that thought in mind, to keep his anger blazing, as he spurred his horse across nearly 30 miles to Caen Cathedral on that Sunday morning. She is such a high-born lady, she is sure to be there, he told himself, and I will give her plenty of cause for repentance, when I meet her.

Thinking of that, he clutched the whip more tightly in his powerful hand. He was using it only lightly on his horse right now, since he had a much more satisfying target in mind.

* * *

Matilda started coming down the steps just in time to see him galloping towards her. She had no idea who he was, until she heard her servant Hilda gasping, “My God, it’s him—William of Normandy—the one you called the bastard! My lady, you had best get back into the cathedral where you will be safe from this man, and ask your father to deal with him.”

The stranger was close enough now to show her his grim and angry face. “I think you are right,” Matilda told her lady-in-waiting. She turned and started hurrying back up the steps, while those who were still in the building turned to stare at her.

She was too late, as she realized with dismay, when she saw him leap off his horse and come charging towards her. With only three stairs left to climb until she was safe from him, she felt his strong hand grasping her long brown braids and throwing her white veil to the ground.

Still clutching her hair in his left hand, he held her upright as he raised the whip in his right fist and brought it down across her pale blue skirt. Even through the garment, she could feel the whip smashing down across her trembling buttocks, just as she felt his hot breath on her pale cheek.

Too stunned to cry out at first, she felt her voice return as the leather strap went from her slim buttocks to the even thinner and more sensitive tops of her legs. Her shriek of pain followed

each merciless blow. "Have pity!" she wailed. "I am sorry I offended you, but please have pity on me, and remember that we are in God's house now."

William's answering silence was more terrible than any words could have been. Soon her helpless tears were falling down her pale cheeks, in a silence as terrible as his own.

Even more shocking to her, was the shameful, secret pleasure she felt, leaving her hidden parts as warm and wet as any glass of mulled wine. It was not only the pain that possessed her. Even more, it was her knowledge of the power he was wielding over her, even in this place where all power was much greater than any man's could be.

All too soon, that Heavenly force was coming to her rescue, in the form of a young priest who had raced out of the chapel. "Are you mad?" he shouted up at her tormenter. "How dare you defile the Holy Church this way, with your violence? Do you not know that this is a place of sanctuary, where we are all safe from our enemies?"

"The crowd around you is so shocked and stunned, they could not try to stop you; even though they themselves are sinning, by not coming to her rescue. So I order you to unhand that poor woman at once, or be excommunicated in a moment!"

To her mingled relief and regret, Matilda saw Duke William nod slowly and drop his whip on the stone steps. "I must do as the priest tells me," he muttered in her ear. "But be assured that your punishment is not yet complete."

I do not wish it to be! That thought flashed through her mind for an instant, before she hurriedly forced it away. This was a holy place, she knew, and she had disgraced it with her shocking, shameful feelings. She wondered if she dared even reveal them in the confessional itself, to this fine young cleric who had raced to her defense.

* * *

"I am not shocked easily," William's sister informed him. "But that was really a shocking thing to do. Beating a woman on the cathedral steps, where even the lowest criminal can claim sanctuary. Don't you know you could have been excommunicated for that?"

"I didn't really know anything at that moment," he confessed, his head lowered above his muscular crossed arms. "I only knew what I was going to do to her, and as I rode to Caen Cathedral on Sunday morning, I knew there was only one place to do it."

“Well then, you must apologize,” Adelaide informed him. “And since that woman is obviously driving you to insanity, you must promise never to see her again.” She drew back in sudden fear, as she saw the fire in his black eyes.

“I will promise no such thing,” he told her. “I have made one vow to her already; and that is to punish her as she deserves.”

His eyes glittered cruelly as he went on, “Not in church—not that ever again—but in her own father’s castle!”

For a long moment, his sister could only stare at him in dismay. “You will be surrounded by her father’s armed men!” she exclaimed. “They will cut you down like a dog!”

A dangerous grin spread over his full, firm lips as he replied, “I do not think so. After all, I *am* the Duke of Normandy.”

* * *

“I am the Duke of Normandy!” he shouted at the guards, racing his horse across the drawbridge before they had time to raise it up against him. “You may tell the Count of Flanders that I am here.” And his daughter will know soon enough, he added silently.

The men were obviously undecided, as to whether they should announce this visitor before allowing him to enter, when he obviously outranked their own lord. He solved their problem by spurring his horse to even greater speed.

The household servants were even more confused, when he jumped from the saddle and raced into the hall. “Where is Matilda?” he demanded. “Where is the count’s daughter?”

* * *

“She is in her room,” Hilda muttered to her mistress, “and I think she had better stay here, while I lock the bedroom door behind us.”

“No, do not do that,” Matilda murmured. Seeing her servant’s confusion, she went on, “He would only break the door down, and that would spread the scandal.”

“I can assure your ladyship that it has spread far enough as it is! The whole world knows how he took his belt to your bottom on the church steps, and they are probably well aware that

you have been soaking in a tub of hot water every day ever since. You still find it hard to walk, and if he beats you again, then it will be impossible.”

“Then I might as well face him now, to show him I am not afraid, or he will keep coming after me.”

“If you are not afraid, you should be!” Both women whirled towards the entrance, as he came bursting through it. “I have told Matilda that her punishment is not yet complete, and I intend to finish it now.”

“You have hurt her badly enough, I assure you!” Hilda boldly replied, striding towards him as fast as her skirts would allow. “So I am asking you to please leave this place, like the noble lord you are.”

He answered by laughing harshly. “I am no noble lord,” he growled. “As your mistress chose to remind me, I am a bastard!”

“That is no excuse for acting shamefully!”

“You think I am being shameful? Well, her ladyship will soon be more shamed than I. The most you can do for her is to leave us now, so that you will not witness her humiliation.”

“Yes, Hilda,” her mistress answered softly. “Leave us.”

“But your ladyship—”

Raising her voice, Matilda replied, “I said, leave us! Just as his grace just said, I would not let you witness my shame.”

You would not let me witness your pleasure, Hilda thought, Yes, that is what you mean. I am no stranger to pleasant spankings, and the arousal they cause, and now it seems that you feel the very same way. I fear this beating will be more severe than any spanking I have ever felt; but you must learn that for yourself. Nodding her head reluctantly, Hilda dipped a brief curtsey towards her mistress, and an even quicker one towards the Duke of Normandy, before she fled into the hall.

“You will not suffer all the shame that you deserve,” William assured Matilda, as he pulled the strap from his waist with his powerful right hand. “These stone walls will muffle your cries of pain.”

She gazed at him in silent fascination, matching his angry glare. She did not even try to resist, when he reached down to grasp her braids again and hurled her face down onto the four-poster bed.

“Because we were in public the first time I thrashed you, I did not bare your bottom,” he reminded her. “I spared your modesty that far. But we are alone this time, so I feel no need to leave you covered again.”

As he spoke, he pulled her skirts to her waist, exposing her backside to his gaze. He could not help wincing, as he saw that it was still bruised from his last assault. But his pity lasted only a moment, before he remembered how she had shamed him with her cold, cruel answer to his honorable marriage proposal. The time for honor was gone, he reminded himself, and nothing but the punishment remained.

Holding her down with his left hand, he raised the strap high in his right fist and brought it down with all his force against her bruised bottom.

She screamed and struggled in vain, as the blows kept raining down, harder and faster each time, until she felt sure that he had set her backside on fire, with the flames growing ever higher in a terrible blaze.

At the same time, she was filled with an even more dreadful sense of shame, knowing that her private parts were as hot as her poor, punished backside, and as wet as any marsh.

Soon she would be sitting in a hot tub again, and while that might relieve her physical pain, it would do nothing to reduce her guilt.

That comfort would not come, though, until he had spent all his considerable strength on her whipping. She was sure that that would take a long time indeed...

But then the bedroom door burst open again, and she heard her father exclaiming, “What in God’s name are you doing to my daughter?”

Dropping his strap, William pulled his sword from his side. “No!” Matilda cried. She saw that her father had also drawn his weapon. She stared in horror as the two men rushed towards each other, raising their blades high... until she raced between them.

“No!” she cried again, pressing one hand to each of their brawny chests. “You must not fight for my sake! You must not make my scandal any worse, unless you want the singers to carry the story throughout the world.”

Clenching their swords, both men ignored her, until she stunned them by saying, “Duke William must end the scandal - by marrying me.”

With some satisfaction, she saw them staring at her in shock. “In fact,” she went on, “just to make my position clear, if I can’t marry William, I will not marry anyone at all. Even assuming that anyone else would have me, after my disgrace.”

“And what makes you think I want to marry *you*?” the Norman demanded.

“You sent me a proposal, did you not?” she demanded.

“It was only so I could claim you as an ally,” he told her. “And once I had heard your insulting answer, I quickly changed my mind.”

“Then you had better change it back again; because otherwise you and my father will be eternal enemies, rather than allies.”

For a long moment he was silent, thinking over her words. “I suppose that’s true,” he finally told her. “Very well then, I will be your husband, if your father consents. For one thing, I will have every right to punish you once I am your husband, as even he must agree. So there will be peace between your father and me.”

But there will be no harmony between William and me, she told herself, because I wish only to feel his punishments. I wish I could tell him so. But then, he would scorn me as the lowest harlot in the meanest brothel. Her face hardened at the thought, until her expression was almost as cold as her surprised bridegroom’s.

“But remember that you are cousins, however distant,” her father reminded them. “You must have the Pope’s dispensation in order to wed, and we can only hope that His Holiness will grant one.” His tone of voice told them clearly that he did not hope for that at all.

* * *

“I will certainly not grant a dispensation to that man!” Leo IX told the Flemish cardinal, as he crushed the paper in his hand.

“But, Your Holiness, they are very distant cousins,” the other man reminded him. “You have granted many such dispensations on those grounds before now.”

“Yes, and I am sure I will do so again. But it is not just a matter of Church law nowadays, because the doctors are saying that parents may pass diseases onto their children, which is more likely to happen if the parents are related to each other and therefore suffer the same flaws. Not that that should be a problem for William and Matilda, since they are both as healthy as horses - at least as far as his mind is concerned. At any rate, their kinship is not the real barrier.”

The cardinal sighed, realizing that he was about to hear the true cause, which he himself had already guessed.

“The real barrier,” the Pope went on, “is that the would-be bridegroom is a maniac, who whipped his bride on two occasions before they were even married. We all know that a man must not punish his wife if he is drunk or angry; and this one was filled with rage. So, what if he kills his wife in his fury? Remember that I am her spiritual father. Could I bear the guilt if she were murdered because I had given my consent?”

“I suppose not, Your Holiness,” the other man admitted, with another sigh.

“Not that it seems to matter. From what I have heard of this wild man, he will marry even without my dispensation.”

* * *

Leo IX would have been even more outraged, if he had known that they would still be married without his consent, after the bridegroom had kidnapped him, in a vain effort to win his blessing. Almost as shocking, they were married on Christmas Eve.

The wedding feast and the start of the twelve-day holiday were celebrated at the same time. The bride and groom took advantage of the occasion, with twelve kisses beneath the holiday mistletoe.

Their guests cheered as though the newlyweds had been a normal couple, even though they were all aware of the scandal that had brought the pair together. When the bride and groom unwrapped and exchanged the traditional twelve gifts, the entire group was secretly wondering if one would be a whip.

To make his actions even more outrageous, the bridegroom had actually kidnapped and imprisoned the Pope—in comfortable surroundings, naturally—as a way of forcing him to accept the kidnapper’s marriage.

When William was finally forced to free him with no dispensation granted, His Holiness had remarked that the duke was even more of a maniac than he had thought.

On this happy occasion, however, the duke and his new duchess certainly seemed as innocent as any other newlyweds; and as eager for the time when they would finally be alone together.

In the meanwhile, they tried to take a normal part in the festivities, starting with the appearance of the Lucky Bird, that young man dressed all in green, who leapt over the threshold and danced along the tables, collecting coins for the poor.

As the bride and groom sat down for the twelve-course dinner, they seemed even more eager for it to be over with. They barely touched their food, even though it included the traditional mince pie and pudding, intended to ensure a sweet new year.

Everyone noted how pleased the couple seemed to be, when it was finally time for them to bid their guests good night and leave the dining hall, arm in arm. Some observers were even amused to see that the new duchess' lady-in-waiting and the Saxon ambassador were both leaving together, too.

* * *

“What do you think they are doing now?” Hilda asked Brihtric, as they lay side by side on her bed.

“Probably the same thing I would like to do with you,” he answered, with a grin.

“Well, every bride and groom does *that!* But I wonder if they are also doing something else as well.”

“You mean, like *this?*” he demanded. Grasping her arm and turning her over in one swift, practiced gesture, he raised her skirts to her waist.

“Now we’ve got to count out your spanks,” he told her, as he raised his hand. “There must be twelve of them; you know, for Christmas. So repeat after me... one... two... three...”

“One... two... Ow!” she replied.

“Do you want me to stop?” he demanded, pausing briefly.

“Of course not!” she cried happily, as the spankings went on. Fleeting, she hoped that her mistress was enjoying the evening just as much as she was herself, but hopefully not with a whip.

* * *

Hilda would have been pleased to see that William had not brought his whip with him, after all. His new bride, however, could barely hide her disappointment, when she saw that he had left it behind. No matter, though, she told herself, he still has his leather belt.

He did not seem to be thinking of it, though, as he held out his arms to her and said, in a triumphant tone, “So now you are my wife.”

“So I am,” she answered, submissively lowering her head. Then she raised it again, and he saw the gleam in her eyes as she whispered, “And you are my bastard... bastard... BASTARD!”

(Author’s note: Historians are still questioning where the famous whipping happened: on the steps of Caen Cathedral or in Matilda’s father’s castle. My own answer is: both of the above. I also try to deal with another issue: why should a wealthy and prominent young noblewoman marry a man who had beaten her even once? The reason seems obvious to me, and I hope you will agree).