

EXCALIBUR'S CHAPEL

Nervously Devon smoothed the wide, bulky skirts of her dress. The fabric was soft and velvety beneath her hands. She pranced in front of the mirror, regarding herself critically from all sides, and couldn't help but take pride in her appearance. The dress was beautiful. Dark-blue velvet lined with silk in the color of the sky on a bright summer's day. Embroidered flowers in silver thread adorned the sleeves and the rim of the low, square neckline. She frowned slightly. Wasn't the neck too low? Showing too much bosom? She made some adjustments and smiled with satisfaction. Yes, this was much better.

The cream-colored, silk shift she wore beneath the dress caressed her naked body when she moved. Her skin tingled in anticipation; Devon wished the public ceremony were over so the private consummation part could begin. She giggled at the thought and a warm blush crept up from her neck to her face. Immediately the neckline of the dress sank a little until cool air caressed the top of her breasts.

The door opened and Devon turned. Bess, dressed in a green gown, walked in, her arms full with freshly plucked flowers. "Here, Devon, you should wear these," she offered. Devon cast a second glance at the colorful bunch in Bess' hands and the next moment the flowers were worked into an intricate wreath that the Earth woman placed atop Devon's auburn head.

Again the door opened and Julia came in. "Are you ready, Devon?" she asked. Devon frowned at the practical attire of the young doctor. That was *not* the kind of outfit she liked to see at her wedding. Devon concentrated, and Julia wore a light yellow dress that complimented her pale skin and made her blue eyes even more pronounced. "Everyone is waiting," Julia continued. She never even noticed the change in her apparel.

Devon threw a last glance at her reflection in the mirror, then nodded. "Yes, I'm ready."

She glided out of the door, Julia and Bess solemnly stepping in behind her. Slowly they walked through the cool hallway, their footsteps echoing hollowly. Thick slabs of gray granite lined the walls and floors, interspersed with sturdy oak beams to support the structure. At the end of the hallway was a tall, wooden door worked with copper. Devon grabbed the shining knob, suddenly a little apprehensive.

All heads turned when she entered and she heard several suppressed gasps of admiration. From the corner of her eye, she caught Magus pat at her eyes surreptitiously with a lace kerchief. Devon grinned inwardly; she had always suspected that the tough woman was harboring a soft spot somewhere deep inside.

Her eyes flitted past the assembly seated in pews of either side of the isle, hardly noticing them. Briefly, her glance rested on her son Uly, who sat on the first row, beaming proudly. Next to him True was glaring down at the pretty red dress she wore.

But Devon's real attention was drawn to the lone man that stood in front of the altar. Her knight in shining armor. Devon chuckled. Make that literally.

His legs were clad in black woolen tights and he wore a long tunic of tiny metallic rings. A sword belt was tied around his waist, the hilt of the scabbarded weapon glittering with rubies and sapphires. Metal plates covered the man's shoulders and stretched down across the front and back of his body in a protective covering. A cone-shaped helmet, the visor closed, concealed his face. That didn't matter to Devon. She knew what was hidden beneath the steel: rugged features with piercing blue eyes, framed by unruly, blond curls.

The man in armor moved his head in her direction; she could barely make out the gleam of eyes through the slits in the helmet's visor. She smiled warmly at him. Today, nothing could spoil her mood. Because today, she was going to get married. And change her name to Mrs. John Danziger.

He gave a start and clumsily began clanging in her direction. A moment's doubt washed over her. Her knight wouldn't move so awkwardly, even in heavy armor, would he?

Just as she forcefully put the thought out of her head, he tripped. His long legs got tangled with the sword hanging from his hips and he lost his already precarious balance. He stumbled and crashed to the stone floor of the chapel.

"John!" Devon exclaimed and hurriedly knelt at this side. "Are you okay?"

A muffled reply came from beneath the now dented helmet.

"What did you say?" Devon asked. "I didn't quite catch that."

His gloved hand reached for the visor and with an effort pushed it up. Devon's heart stopped. The face looking from the helmet wasn't John Danziger's, it was...

"Morgan!" Devon cried in horror and flew up from the cot. She gasped for breath and blinked owlishly at the darkness of the tent. Thank God, she thought and shuddered. Beside her, Uly shifted restlessly on his cot but didn't wake.

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