

# A STERN LORD FOR MY LADY

HER STERN HUSBAND - BOOK ONE



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

## PROLOGUE



The lady sniffed, her eyes now blurry with tears. Her bottom stung, but she didn't have the courage to rub it. She had tried to do so earlier, and that had earned her a second trip on her punisher's lap.

The lord who'd punished her studied her with a faint smile on his lips.

"You have only yourself to blame for it, my lady. I've only given you what you were asking for," he said.

The lady nodded, wiping her tears. He was right. Wasn't she fully responsible for this?

"Turn around and hoist your skirts," the lord knight said in a stern voice.

She widened her eyes at him. Hadn't he, only moments ago, straightened her skirts after the stinging spanking he'd delivered? She glanced at him warily, but he kept the same stern expression upon his face. She did not dare disobey him, so she did as he'd commanded, beginning to ask herself frantically if he meant to deliver further punishment on her bottom. Would he use something other than his hand now? Something that would sting even worse than the sound hand spanking he'd delivered?

Maybe that switch he'd cut from the apple tree in the yard, and which, she knew too well, lay in its corner by the door...

Her lord perused her at leisure. The lady didn't dare turn her head to look at him, but she knew his fine hazel eyes were glancing upon her bottom and upper thighs, which had been thoroughly spanked and must be a good shade of red. Moments passed, and she found herself holding her breath. Was he satisfied with the spanking he'd given her, or would he resolve he needed to spank her again?

"So, my lady," he said softly, after a while which seemed to her like an eternity. "Here we are now. You have certainly been spanked, but the question still remains, have you been spanked soundly enough?"

## CHAPTER 1



*London, 1172*  
*Six weeks earlier*

Bertran FitzRolf stared at the letter he'd read so many times. It held disdainful words and phrases, which cut to the bone. It bore the De Lancre's seal, but the one who'd dictated it had been, in fact, the lord's daughter, Lady Alicia, whose clerk had plainly written her name on top with a flourish. Lady Alicia began by thanking Bertran for his regard. The thanks were perfunctory. The lady then proceeded to give lengthy reasons for rejecting his suit. Chief among those reasons was that he was *naught but a lowly bastard*, unworthy of joining hands with a great heiress such as herself. There were other cutting phrases that referred to Bertran's lowly status, and to his being an upstart, who'd only recently gained royal favour through deceit.

Bertran heaved a deep sigh. He was more saddened than angered. These were grievous insults, but it was not the first

time he'd been called a bastard. It was, indeed, what he'd been at the time of his birth, though his parents had not meant to make him so. In truth, they had been married at the time of his conception, but, as it had turned out, Bertran's mother's first husband, believed to have fallen in the Holy Land, had not been truly dead. He'd returned to claim his wife and had found her remarried to Bertran's father. The Church's position on the first marriage had been clear, and the new marriage annulled. At the time Bertran was born, his mother was no longer married to his father, but had gone back to her first husband, as the Church had decreed. And that first husband would never recognise another man's babe as a son of his blood.

Bertran tossed the letter on the table, casting a measuring glance at his parents, whose grim faces bespoke both sadness and anger. They'd never considered their firstborn son a true bastard. A mere year later, his mother's first husband had passed away, leaving her free to marry Bertran's father, the man she'd come to care for. His parents had gotten remarried, truly and properly this time, and then Bertran's two brothers and two sisters had been born. His father had petitioned the Church to rescind their ruling over Bertran's status, but it had taken years of tedious arguing and pleading, in order to remove the stigma of illegitimacy from his son's name. Bertran had by then gotten used to styling himself Bertran FitzRolf, rather than as Bertran de Morne, and had become accustomed to his position in life. He might have been his father's firstborn, but, as long as the Church had refused to acknowledge it, everyone else apart from his own family had regarded him as a child conceived in sin. Still, Bertran was now no longer considered a bastard. The Church had finally rescinded the former ruling and he was now a true De Morne. However, this seemed to make no difference to the proud Lady Alicia.

"The lady is presumptuous and vain," Bertran said gruffly,

gesturing to the letter. "But her words are not entirely deceitful. The prelates have since relented, but I was born a bastard."

"Don't ever say that!" his mother cried, with a look of deep anguish upon her face.

To this day, his parents were deeply grieved by what had occurred. Bertran had, in truth, not cared that most of his life he'd been called a bastard. *They* had, because they'd suffered and they'd felt it was unfair that their son should suffer unjustly. In truth, Bertran had never greatly suffered. He'd risen in royal favour through his own merit, and was now held in high esteem by King Henry. Even if brief, his first marriage had been to a woman of good birth and considerable property. And he'd recently attempted to contract a second marriage, to one of the wealthiest heiresses in the land, Lady Alicia de Lancres. But, obviously, Lady Alicia de Lancres thought him far beneath her.

"The insult shall not stand!" his father said grimly.

His parents had gone as far as to show Lady Alicia's venomous letter to King Henry, who'd proclaimed himself incensed by the discourteous treatment a mere woman had bestowed on his worthy vassal. Bertran smiled bitterly to himself, knowing that what had incensed King Henry had not been the disdainful way the lady had rejected his suit, but the fact that Lady Alicia de Lancres aimed to marry another, Lord de Jarnac's son, Sir Erec. Lord de Jarnac's lands were vast, and they bordered those held by the De Lancres family. If such a marriage were to occur, the De Jarnac family was sure to rise in power and prominence. Certainly, King Henry did not want it so. He did not want one of his vassals to hold that much wealth and power. Especially not since things were going so badly between him and Queen Eleanor. And especially since the whole of Christendom had been appalled by the king's order to kill Thomas Becket. The king felt under threat, and a De Lancres marriage to a De Jarnac would be a threat. Bertran and his family were unwittingly caught in the king's game.

“The lady will be made to wed you. The king will force her to do so by royal decree. And he will have her pay for the insults she’s delivered,” his mother said, with a set look on her face.

Bertran sighed.

“Mother, I no longer wish to wed her. It’s plain she holds me in contempt. I do not wish to wed a woman who holds me in such ill regard!”

He’d tried to argue with his family, but they seemed set on their course. They had taken true offence at what the lady had written, and they’d enlisted royal support to set things to rights. He could argue all he pleased that he would not wed a woman who thought him unworthy of her. His family and the king had already decided otherwise.

“Nevertheless, you’ll wed her,” his mother said in an indomitable voice. “You’ll wed her after you punish her in front of the court for all to see. They shall all see such an insult to our family will not stand. And they shall all see my son is well able to handle a haughty, wilful wife who thinks herself above him.”

At his family’s behest, the king had also decreed a punishment for Lady Alicia, for her lack of propriety and for the affront she’d brought to his vassal. The wedding was to be preceded by a humiliating spanking, in front of all the assembled court who would thus have occasion to see what happened to women who thought themselves above all authority. This humiliation was, undoubtedly, also intended for Lord de Lancres, who, for a while now, had seemed to favour Queen Eleanor’s plight. But the spanking would be borne by his daughter, who’d shown herself presumptuous and wilful. And now, as her future husband, meant to rule over her, Bertran himself was called upon to deliver this spanking.

“I do not wish to spank her!” Bertran called in vexation.

He didn’t wish to spank Lady Alicia, and he didn’t wish to marry her. In fact, he wanted nothing more to do with her. She had rejected his suit, although, formally, it should have been her



father, not the lady herself, who had final say in the marriage. Still, she'd rejected his suit. Ungraciously so. Bertran wanted nothing more to do with such a woman. The set look on both his parents' faces however renewed his conviction they would not relent.

"She deserves to be punished!" his mother said, looking pointedly at the letter.

Bertran nodded. Here, he could not but agree with his mother. Aye, the lady fully deserved a punishment, not for her rejection of him, but for her arrogant words.

"The king told me he'd have ordered a flogging, if she hadn't been a woman and of high birth," his father said.

Bertran frowned. The king was quick to dispense punishments, wasn't he? Everyone recalled only too well the penance that Henry had been forced to withstand in front of everyone, for the killing of Thomas Becket. The king had accepted to be publicly flogged, as penance for what he'd done. So now he seemed more inclined to humiliate others in a like manner, because the former humiliation must still chafe.

"But there'll be no flogging. Just a well-earned spanking," his father went on. "This is certainly a mild punishment, given the venomous, hurtful things this woman has written about a lord the king holds in high favour. I daresay her pride will be bruised far worse than her bottom."

"I do not wish to spank her!" Bertran repeated, in irritation. "Can't her own father spank her? It will be more appropriate!"

"You are to be her husband, and she's insulted *you*. You should be the one to mete out the punishment!" his mother said pointedly.

Bertran raked a hand through his brown hair. His first wife had been a meek, gentle woman. She'd been a dutiful wife, and had never given him any grief. He'd mourned her sincerely when she'd passed away, three years ago, due to a fever caused by a miscarriage. He was now almost six and twenty, childless, and in

need of a new wife. When his mother had suggested a match with Lady Alicia de Lancres, he'd been somewhat surprised. The lady was above him in wealth, and he'd only recently risen in rank, due to his services to the king. But when King Henry himself had called upon him, suggesting the same match, Bertran had known he'd have to offer his hand to the lady, since it was not only his family's ambition, but his monarch's wish he should do so. So he had written to Lady Alicia's father, not fully expecting his marriage proposal to be considered. The lady was already twenty and still unmarried. It was rumoured she ruled her father's estates with an iron fist, and wished to continue to do so. And it was also rumoured she ruled her father. People said she was wilful, arrogant and haughty. And Bertran had not felt very keen on such a wife. Still, he'd been a dutiful son and vassal, and had attempted to enter marriage negotiations, just as he'd been advised.

"Why would you wish such a woman upon me? A woman who despises me and who's sure to give me grief?" he asked his parents bitterly. "Do you care so much for her lands and dowry?"

His father shrugged, muttering, "Still, her estates and dowry are not to be overlooked. She is perhaps the wealthiest heiress in the land..."

His mother sighed, coming to touch his shoulder.

"You know," she said with a smile, "Matilda of Flanders, King William's wife. You know the rumour that goes about the way they got married?"

Bertran shook his head. Queen Matilda was a paragon of female virtue. Why was his mother bringing her up at this time?

"Rumour goes," Bertran's mother went on, "at first, Matilda rejected William's suit, on account of him being a bastard. A lowly bastard, she called him, unfit to marry a high-born lady such as herself."

Bertran widened his eyes. He had not known this tale.

"And do you know what William did? He came to call upon

her, then took her upon his knee and gave her a good spanking in front of everyone to see. A humiliating public spanking...”

Now Bertran could see where his mother was going. Everyone knew William and Matilda’s marriage had been highly successful, with both spouses genuinely fond of one another. He frowned. His mother was wrong to assume, just because Matilda had made the Conqueror a good wife, Lady Alicia would prove the same.

“Word goes William stormed into Matilda’s father’s castle and whipped her bare behind with a strap, until she, mightily sobbing, took back every single insult she’d uttered against him,” his father added. “And it certainly taught the lady a lesson. She graciously apologised, and accepted William’s suit with a teary, tremulous smile, the chroniclers say. She had, after all, just come to perceive his mettle, and she could already tell he’d make her a worthy husband. No woman truly wants a man who meekly accepts her insults. So there’s no better cure for haughtiness than the one William provided for Matilda. And you’ll administer a similar cure to Lady Alicia.”

Bertran looked at both his parents, in deep annoyance. They seemed to take it as fact that he would relish making a spectacle of himself and of the woman who’d rejected him. He didn’t. He relished privacy, and he didn’t share his parents’ ambitions. He glanced at them pensively, understanding he could, after all, afford to defy them. He was not dependent upon his parents’ estates, having come into property of his own. So he could stand against them. They would be grieved, but they cared for him enough and would ultimately bow to his wishes. But there were not only his parents to consider. There was also King Henry. If Bertran opposed the marriage, the king could assume that Bertran wished to rally with Queen Eleanor. And Bertran knew it would be a mistake. He’d sworn fealty to his king, and he meant to be loyal. Due to Lady Alicia’s foolish behaviour, there seemed to be no turning back from this marriage.

"I'll have to spank her, if I marry her, for all to see," he muttered grimly, knowing his parents had a point. Lady Alicia had insulted him in the worst possible manner.

He would bring shame upon his noble house if he married the lady without making it plain he would not stand for her insults. Besides, the king had already decreed the punishment. The lady's fate was sealed and Bertran would only be carrying out an inevitable sentence. He reasoned now it would be better for her and less harsh if *he* were to spank her, and not one of the king's appointed henchmen. He would only spank to teach her a good lesson, not in order to provide a cruel spectacle.

Both his parents seemed relieved by his reluctant assent.

"It may not be such a hardship," his father told him, with a smile. "After all, you were married for more than two years, and I'm sure you remember how to discipline a woman," he added, ignoring the sudden glare his wife cast in his direction.

Bertran nodded, in some embarrassment, and deftly steered the conversation to other matters, regarding the marriage contract. He felt deep relief when his parents were finally gone, leaving him alone to ponder on what he had to do. He'd not given the truth to his father. He did not remember how to discipline a woman. He'd never disciplined his first wife. She had been a sweet-tempered woman, so she'd never given him cause to do so. But the lady he was about to marry was not a sweet-tempered woman, was she? Now sighing in earnest, Bertran recalled he'd upon occasion heard his friends talk about the discipline they bestowed on their women. He conjured these occasions in his mind, deciding to use them as examples that would help him conduct himself appropriately. They seemed instructive as to the spanking needed to provide an adequate punishment for Lady Alicia.