

HER DREAM PRINCE

LOVE AND FAMILY BOOK ONE



NANCY WELLS

BLUSHING BOOKS

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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.

CHAPTER 1



Emily was washing laundry near the stream, daydreaming about a prince who would one day come for her and take her away from the nightmare of her life. In her imaginary world, she was not treated savagely for minor mistakes; she was loved by her prince. Emily was so deep in thought, the banter of other girls was not reaching her ears.

Emily's mother ran away from the cruelty of her father when Emily was only a few months old and died of pox a few years later. Her father died when she was nine and she went to live with his sister, who still blames her for the death of her brother. At the age of twenty, Emily should have enough courage to stand up to her aunt, but knew her aunt would beat all the courage out of her if she so much as uttered a single word in self-defense. Emily had nowhere else to go if her aunt threw her out of the cottage. She was her only living relative.

Emily did all the chores but her hard work was never appreciated. If her aunt ever felt like she had not done all her chores properly, she would hit her with her walking stick. Emily always remained on her guard whenever she was around her aunt, trying

to stay away from her stick as much as possible, but sometimes her luck ran out.

Emily became aware of her surroundings when she heard her name. A small child was running towards her. When the child came near, she realized it was her friend, Willy. He seemed frantic. Something must have startled him.

“Emily, you have to return to the cottage,” Willy said, breathing hard. “I saw the duke entering your cottage.”

The girls started to whisper and nudge one another. There was not a single person present who was not alarmed at the news of the duke entering her cottage. Everyone in the village was aware of the notorious duke. He was cruel and showed no mercy to others. No one had ever seen him talk kindly to anyone. The villagers talked about him in hushed tones, and no one wanted to associate with him. She had never met him but she was scared of him nonetheless. He was rumored to have murdered his own wife.

“Slow down, Willy,” Emily said. “What are you blabbering about? Why is he at my cottage?”

“I have no idea. I came here as fast as I could when I saw him entering your cottage.”

Leaving the laundry near the stream, she ran towards the cottage as fast as her legs could carry her. Emily did not like living with her aunt, but if something happened to her then Emily would be alone and someone might harm her. A young maiden on her own would not be safe from ruffians and riffraff of the village.

When she reached her cottage, the duke was leaving. She stood against the side of the cottage, waiting for him to leave. Emily saw the back of the despicable man when he was about to enter his carriage. He was wearing a dark blue coat with golden embroidery and a tricorne hat with a powdered wig. Emily had never seen his face but she had pictured him hideous in her mind. It was her thinking that all villains looked grotesque and hideous.

The duke turned around and looked back towards the entrance of the cottage. When Emily saw his face, she instantly

believed the myth, 'the devil is indeed handsome'. His eyes, black as his soul, looked directly at her when she gasped. There was no smile or any emotion that could be remotely considered human on his face. Every pore of his body was emitting cruelty. She was like a deer caught in the hunter's trap. She wished to hide from his intent gaze, but fear had made her rooted to her place. When he looked away, she released the breath she was holding.

Staring ahead, holding his hands behind his back, he said, "I want the girl to arrive at the chapel before nightfall. I will be leaving immediately and will not tolerate any delays. The girl is mine. Do not forget that."

With those words, he left in his carriage. His cold and impersonal words sent a chill through her body. Emily was shaking in fear when her aunt came around the cottage. Dragging her inside by her arm, her aunt banged the door shut and looked at her in anger. Emily instantly looked at the ground, afraid of the consequences if she displeased her aunt. Her aunt was not the type of person she would ever want to cross. Her aunt would make her regret it if she showed any defiance.

"The duke asked for your hand in marriage," her aunt said with cold detachment. "You are to marry him this evening."

She did not want to marry the man who might kill her one day. She wanted to remain in the cottage, where she might be beaten for small transgressions, but she would remain alive. She did not want to die.

"I am begging you, Aunty. Keep me with you. I will be good. I swear I will never displease you again."

Kneeling on the floor, she begged her aunt but the woman was not listening to her pleas. There was not even a trace of sympathy on the woman's face for the orphan. Emily was aware of the consequences of her action but this was a life or death situation for her. She had to beg for her life; otherwise, she knew she would not live to see another sunrise.

“Do not play dumb with me, girl. I saw the way you were leering shamelessly at him.”

Her aunt kicked her on her chest and she fell on her back on the hard floor. Scurrying away from the approaching figure of her aunt, she hid behind her cot, trembling and sobbing. Ignoring her state of distress, her aunt went inside her room.



IN THE EVENING, Emily was sweeping the floor when someone knocked at the door of the cottage. Her aunt opened the door and received a package wrapped in paper from a man with blond hair. After closing the door of the cottage, her aunt threw the package at her feet and glared at her.

“Scrub yourself hard and wash away all the dirt from your body. Though I doubt it would do you any good,” her aunt snickered. “You will still remain as ugly as your mama, who ran away and left her ugly babe to me.” Her aunt pointed at the package with her stick. “Change into these clothes and do not waste my time with silly tantrums.”

Emily’s heart was beating fast. The package at her feet was reminding her of her impending doom. She was being forced to marry the man who was feared by all. He killed another person and no one could prove his crime. His wife was a proper lady of high status in society, if he could make her disappear with such ease, then Emily stood no chance against his vile intentions.

“I implore you, Aunty.” Tears were leaking from her eyes as she beseeched her aunt once more. “He will take my life. Let me stay with you.”

“Willing or not, you will be his wife.” Her aunt pointed her stick at her. “One more objection from you and I am throwing you out of my house.”

Emily did not need to be told twice. Her aunt would beat her harshly if she did not do her bidding. Since she was but a girl of

nine, she served her aunt as a slave and this was how she was being repaid. She would always resent her aunt for forcing her to marry him. Emily knew she had no other choice but to do as her aunt instructed. If Emily defied her aunt, she would throw her out of the cottage and Emily would become a penniless beggar. She would be fair game to all the miscreants, criminals and ruffians.

With a heavy heart, she went into her aunt's room. She picked up a dirty rag and a small pot filled with cold water. She disrobed with shivering hands and scrubbed her whole body raw. She did not want to test her aunt's patience; her aunt would not be in a good mood if she left even one speck of dirt on her body. She would beat her mercilessly with her stick as a repercussion for her defiance.

She opened the package and found a beautiful green dress inside. Its material was soft silk and felt good to the touch. The dress was adorned with lace at the sleeves and at the square plunging neckline. The dress came with: a set of drawers, stockings, petticoats, corset and white gloves. She was hesitant to touch any of it. She was afraid she would sully it with her body. The dress was made for a princess and she was just a pauper.

"What is taking you so long?"

Emily jumped at the sudden break in silence. Her aunt strode inside, snatched the dress from her hands and slapped her hard across the face. Emily held a palm to the burning sting on her face. Tears of betrayal were dancing on her lashes. Her aunt was not allowing her even a second of peace to mourn the loss of her freedom.

"I told you to hurry," her aunt said, angrily. The veins on her forehead were popping out. "I do not have time for your tantrums. Change. Now."

Emily put on the drawers, stockings and petticoats in haste. She was trembling, part from fear and part from the cold. Emily could not tie the strings of the corset at her back; she wanted to scream in frustration. Her aunt was getting angrier, then swatted her hands

with the stick and tied the strings so tightly, Emily was not able to breathe properly. To her discomfiture, her bust was visible shamelessly above the plunging neckline of the dress. She was not comfortable when her body was on display for others.

“You may think the duke is beautiful,” her aunt said. “You are probably thinking that he will treat you nicely, but let me assure you, girl, he is the most heartless bastard I have ever seen. He was quite vocal about his hideous crimes.”

As much as Emily hated to admit it, she knew her aunt was right. She should not be deceived by his handsome looks. He would treat her more harshly than her aunt. The thought of what he could do to her gave her the chills. Her future was bleak. There was no prince in her future, only a heartless monster.

“Why are you doing this to me, Aunty?” she asked, sobbing. “Have some mercy on me.”

Emily felt like someone was pulling her towards the gallows. She knew her aunt would not listen to her pleas, but she was a drowning person who would grab at anything to save herself.

“Look,” her aunt sighed. “If you promise me that you will never mention it to the duke, I will tell you the real reason for making you marry him.”

“I promise, Aunty,” she said, eagerly. “I will keep my mouth shut.”

“The duke wanted to make you his mistress, but I refused. I told him I would never disgrace my own child.” Emily smiled when her aunt patted her cheeks. “But he threatened to kill me when I refused his offer.” Emily gasped. “Instead of keeping you in shame, I convinced him to make you his wife. You must understand, he would have killed me and abducted you. I did this for you, my child.”

Emily realized her aunt was a kind woman. She might be strict but she had her best interest at heart. Her aunt was saving her from a future worse than her current situation. She was unaware that

her aunt cared for her like her own child. If the duke had taken her as his mistress, she would be nothing more than a harlot to him.

“Thank you, Aunty.”

Emily had a new purpose now. The life of her aunt depended on her silence. She would have to endure the cruelty of the duke for her aunt’s sake. Her aunt was her only living relative. She was her family. Emily would sacrifice everything for her family.

“You are welcome, my child.” Picking up a comb with broken teeth, her aunt brushed her hair. “Do you know what transpires between a man and a woman on their wedding night?”

Her cheeks were getting hot from embarrassment. The married girls in the village often discussed their husbands. They were blatantly brazen about it too. Even though she never took part in those conversations, she listened to them with curiosity, nonetheless. She had more than enough knowledge about a marriage bed.

“No,” Emily lied. “I have no inkling.”

Emily lied to save herself from her aunt’s ire. Her aunt would reprimand her for her choice of company and probably hit her again. Her aunt might be sweet on her for the moment, but her mood changed faster than the seasons. Emily could not take that risk; she wanted to savor this moment for as long as it lasted.

“Your husband has a right to your body. He will see you naked and touch you. It will be uncomfortable and you will feel some pain, but you just have to endure it until he is satisfied. I assure you it will not last for more than a few minutes if you lay still beneath him.”

The married girls mentioned the same discomfort and that they often thought of their daily chores when their husbands joined them in bed. It took their mind away from the discomfort and the act became bearable for them. Emily knew the duke would relish hurting her. He would make her life a living hell, but she had to endure it for her aunt’s sake.



ELLIOT WAS TRAVELING in his carriage with his friends, Shane and Russell. They needed a ride to one of their most frequented places, a brothel. His reputation painted him as savage and barbaric but his friends were not afraid of him. The brothers were the only friends Elliot had in the entire world. They were extremely annoying, but for some inexplicable reason, he tolerated them. There were times when he worried for his sanity.

“Who is that girl?” one of his friends asked.

“Which one?” the other responded.

Elliot could not tell one from the other. The two brothers looked exactly the same. They were two hellions, who thrived on making people puzzle with their similar faces. Their light blond hair was always styled in a similar fashion and they wore the same clothes, too. Elliot was hoping that one day he might differentiate between the two.

“The one in the middle,” the first twin said. “The quiet one.”

Elliot saw the girl under discussion by the side of the stream. She was the prettiest among the group of chatty girls. Her sun-kissed hair was tied in a messy bun at her nape. She was staring at the horizon, unaware of her surroundings. He could feel her innocence even through the distance. Ever since his wife betrayed him, Elliot had never been attracted to another woman.

“The orphan, you mean. Everyone knows her, Russell. Her father passed away when she was a child and her mother left her, too. She lives in the village with her aunt.”

Elliot liked the girl but he was not going to do anything about it. She had already endured hardships in life. It would be unfair if he entered into her life. His reputation was tainted. He did not want her to suffer due to his past. People would abandon her like they abandoned him if he so much as went near her. Elliot decided to forget about her and keep his distance from her.

“Shane, she is the same girl that was being discussed last night on the tables, right?”

“You are right, she is. I had forgotten about it. Poor girl.” Russell tsked.

Elliot was looking at their faces, waiting for them to explain. They smirked in unison and ignored him. He should have known they would make him stew without offering an explanation. They started to talk about mundane things, ignoring his glare.

“What?” Russell asked innocently when Elliot growled. “Stop looking at me with those smoldering eyes, Elliot. You are making me uncomfortable.” Russell squirmed dramatically in his seat. “Tell him to look away, Shane.”

“Elliot, people might think the worst if you keep looking at my brother,” Shane said. “We have a reputation among the girls of Madam Sabrina. Your interest in him might sully our good name.”

They both guffawed like it was the most hilarious idea in the world. Their voices were grating on his nerves. The urge to punch them in their faces was getting stronger. Gritting his teeth, Elliot curled his hands into fists. If they did not start talking, he intended to punch them in their faces very soon.

“Hey!” Shane pointed to his hands. “Uncurl those fists. Damn you! I will tell you... Rumor is, the aunt is selling her to a gambler who happens to be a sadistic bastard and is known for his violence.”

He did not believe for one second that the aunt might be doing this to harm the girl. There must be an explanation. Maybe her aunt was so poor she couldn't afford to feed two mouths. He had no clue why he felt so protective of the girl or why he wanted to save her. He made a plan to make an offer to the aunt and take the girl as his wife. He would not ask for a dowry. There would be no reason for her aunt to reject an offer of marriage from him. If his reputation made her hesitate then he would hand the girl to Shane or Russell. The girl would be safe if either of them took her as their wife.

Tapping the wall of the carriage, he stopped the carriage. He opened the door of the carriage and looked at the twins.

“Get out,” he clipped.

They started complaining and bickering. They were whining about the long distance to the brothel, but Elliot had no patience for their whining. Grabbing Russell by his elbow, he pushed him out the door. Russell stumbled and then righted his coat while glaring at him.

Elliot looked at Shane and raised his brow. Holding his hands in the air, Shane said, “I am going, man. There is no need for manhandling.”

Elliot instructed his carriage driver to take him to the girl’s house. The girl was a complete stranger but he felt a connection to her. There was something special about her.



THE DOOR to the cottage was open so he went inside. The girl lived in a small cottage with only two rooms. There was an old cot placed in the middle of the first room while a broom and some broken pots were lying to a side. The small place was devoid of a speck of dirt. Someone had cleaned the small place with care.

“How may I help you, sir?” An old woman with graying hair and a walking stick asked from the door of the second room.

Elliot cleared his throat a number of times and adjusted the lapels of his coat. It was more difficult than he imagined. He should have practiced beforehand.

“It’s about your niece, madam. I wish to ask if she is of marriageable age.”

She looked at him with disinterest and then gestured towards the room. He followed her inside where she offered him a chair. The inside of the room was in no better condition than the outside. A cot with bedding and a pillow, a small trunk under the cot, a burnt candle on a broken bureau and a wooden chair were the only

things in the room. Light from the sun was coming inside the room through a small opening in the corner of the room. The woman closed the door and sat on the cot.

“Name your price,” she said.

He was taken aback at her choice of words. She was treating her own blood like cattle. Elliot was disgusted and felt sickened. He had hoped that the aunt would be a loving person, but he was wrong. He did not detect any maternal love in that woman. She was auctioning her own niece and yet there was no sign of remorse on her face.

“Do I need to introduce myself, madam?” he asked, deadpan.

Elliot believed his reputation would give her a pause. No one would want to hand over their daughter to an alleged murderer. Everyone desires happiness for their loved ones. He was not a fool to believe that his name would bring joy to anyone’s doorstep.

“The whole village knows you, Your Grace.”

She smiled suggestively at him. She knew him all along. If she truly cared for her niece, then she would have sent him back the moment he stepped foot in her house. He realized the aunt was not selling the girl out of necessity.

“And yet, you are willing to hand over your niece to me. I am not a kind-hearted man, you know that.”

Holding the armrests in both hands, he controlled his anger. This woman had no heart. She was a witch. This was the kind of person that made him distrust others. How could anyone be so cruel and unkind? She wanted him to buy her niece and treat her savagely. She was taking him for a monster that would eventually murder the girl.

“I am doing this for her own good,” she said, smiling like a witch. “That girl is a clumsy fool who is nothing but a nuisance to me. She lies without shame and rests all day while I do the chores. She needs a strict hand that will keep her in line. Her innocent face is nothing but a farce. She keeps the company of criminals and harlots. She needs someone like you.”

Elliot faltered a little. He did not want a deceiving woman in his life again. If what her aunt claimed was true, then the girl was bound to deceive him with her lies and innocence. Elliot changed his mind about marrying the girl when her aunt described her abhorrent behavior. He did not want the repeat of his earlier life. One deception was enough for him.

“Why would I want to pay for her then? She sounds ghastly.”

“No, Your Grace,” the woman said, quickly. “You could keep her as your mistress. She would satisfy your needs with great pleasure. Like I said, she is friends with harlots. She knows about their trade secrets.”

The woman smiled, lecherously. She was trying to pique his interest in the girl. He felt like he was sitting in a saloon of a brothel, where the madam was presenting her best girls to him.

Despite his doubts, Elliot still wanted to save the girl. He had seen her at the stream. She might lie and deceive but there was no way for her to be a fallen woman. No one deserved to be sold to a gambler. Elliot believed every word her aunt claimed, but he was confident he could teach the girl a lesson if she showed her true self.

“If I marry the girl, you will have no right over her. She will be under my care.”

Elliot wanted to make sure this woman stayed out of his life. She seemed like an interfering sort. He wanted to mold the girl to his liking without the interference of this woman. In a very short time, the girl would be dancing to his beat. He would decide everything for her. Her only duty would be to look after his house and keep his bed warm. He did not intend to go to brothels anymore. He missed intimacy in the act.

“If you can pay the price then you can do with her as you wish,” she said, shrugging nonchalantly.

He wanted to strangle the woman. She was the most despicable creature he had ever encountered. The feeling of possessiveness and protectiveness was overcoming his other senses. He would

never let this woman come near the girl. There was a possibility that she might be lying about the girl, but Elliot had been betrayed once and a burnt person always dreaded the fire. Only a miracle could make him trust another woman.

Taking out his pouch of money, he threw it in her lap. "This would be more than enough to surpass any offer you have already received. I will start courting the girl tomorrow."

With greedy hands, she opened the pouch and a shine came to her eyes. She counted the coins and then looked up at him.

"That will do," she said. "Should you require, I will leave the room for you to sample the goods. Perhaps you might like to taste her before you decide her worth?"

Elliot's blood ran cold at her words. She was treating her niece like a common whore. Flaring his nostrils, he stood up from the chair and strode towards the door of the room. Opening the door, he looked back at her one last time.

"I will wait in the chapel with a priest. I intend to make her my wife this evening."

He did not want to marry her right away, but if he did not give the girl the protection of his name, her aunt would sell her again to someone else. He had no guarantee that the aunt would not let another buyer sample her niece. There was only one way he could save the girl. He would have to take her as his wife immediately.

Just before he ascended the stairs to his carriage, Elliot looked back at the woman to impart his final warning, but then he heard a gasp. The girl was looking at him wide-eyed, hiding behind the wall of the cottage. Her eyes, green like a tree and deep like a forest, had him entrapped in their depths. Elliot was sad to realize that the innocent face of the angel was actually hiding a devil behind its mask. He had been fooled once by such innocence, he was not going to fall for it again.

"I want the girl to arrive at the chapel before nightfall. I will be leaving immediately and will not tolerate any delays. The girl is mine. Do not forget that."

Leaving the cottage, he went to the house of pleasure, run by Madam Sabrina. The brothers were always in the most abhorrent places. Elliot had to visit opium dens and brothels whenever he needed to find his friends. Knocking at the door, Elliot asked for the twins. After waiting for a few minutes, one of the twins emerged from the door. The twin was scowling and looking at him with displeasure. Apparently, Elliot was not forgiven for throwing them out of the carriage.

“What do you want, Elliot? We are not speaking to you until you explain your rude behavior. You cannot throw us out in the middle of the road and then pick us up whenever you desire. We are not your errand boys.”

Elliot looked at the huffing and puffing face of his friend. The twins were the only people in the entire world he considered friends. They knew about his every secret. Elliot would lay down his life for them and they would do the same for him. He had known them ever since they were ten. At the time, they were working as stable boys in his house.

“I am marrying the orphan this evening. You are invited to attend if you desire.”

Elliot knew they would come. The twins were the most honest men he had ever met. They never held grudges against him. They were easy to sway if someone knew the right buttons to press, and Elliot happened to know each and every one of those buttons. He could play his friends like a pianoforte.

Knocking on the door, the twin shouted, “Hey, Shane.” The twin’s lips were twitching. He was dying to say something to his other half. “Elliot has gone mad. Come out, now.”

Shane came out in a state of undress. His coat was missing and his shirt was untucked. His hair resembled a crow’s nest, probably complements of one of the working girls.

“Elliot has always been mad, brother. You just never believed me before.”

“He is marrying the *girl*.”

The twins shared a secret smile. Elliot had known them for a long time. He knew how their twisted minds worked. If he did not interfere, they would make his ears bleed with their nasty remarks.

“Are you coming or not?” Elliot interjected.

“Just tell us the time and place,” Russell said, rolling his eyes.

“Pick a dress and drop it at the girl’s house and then find me a priest before nightfall,” Elliot said, smugly. “I will be waiting at the chapel.”

Elliot turned around and ignored their objections. He knew they would do as he asked. Whining and bickering was just part of their charming selves.

“I am selecting the most expensive dress in the shop and then paying double the amount,” Shane said.

Elliot smiled without looking back at them and left in his carriage.