

CHAPTER ONE

✧ The Tale Begins ✧

Five weeks earlier

Whiteadder Water, near Foulden

England/Scotland Border

They had been waiting for them.

Hidden by a grove of black, shadowed trees beneath a crystal-cold night sky following a violent rain storm, the *reivers* from Scotland never had a chance. The English overlords from Berwick Castle had been alerted by their patrols that a raiding party of Scots was heading away from the coast after having ransacked an English settlement.

The English patrols had kept track of the *reivers* as they'd headed inland, sending word to their lords at Berwick because they knew that the castle, held by the House of de Wolfe and a garrison for the English king, would send a highly-trained squad of men to intercept the Scots. Rumor had it that they had a woman with them. Based on the accounts of the village that had been raided, the woman had been a spoil of war.

Fearing it was an Englishwoman that had been abducted fed the bloodlust of the English from Berwick. By anticipating the movements of the *reivers*, the English had been waiting

for them as they'd passed through a lesser-traveled road heading south. Once the group passed into England, those in the trees swooped on them.

The Nighthawk had found his prey.

The fight had been chaotic. Somewhere along the line, the *reivers* had picked up more men. So by the time they hit the trees where the Nighthawk and his men were waiting, they had nearly doubled in number.

But it was of little matter; the men waiting in the darkened trees were English knights of the highest order, men born and bred for battle. Sons of de Wolfe, de Norville, Hage, and a few others rushed to the road to engage the Scots, who had been startled by the confrontation. Mostly, the *reivers* were men who raided and ran. They didn't necessarily go looking for a fight.

But the English did.

The *reivers* were well-armed and, quickly, the English found themselves in a heavy battle. But they, too, were prepared for the fight with a myriad of weapons. Beneath the three-quarter moon, maces struck, swords chopped, and flails swung. Men were grunting with effort, groaning in pain. Because the *reivers* wore cloaks covering their dirty bodies, the English were aiming for the cloaks as sort of a broad target-practice. Hitting a cloak meant hitting a Scotsman and, soon enough, the Scots began to go down. Some of them were even running off, heading north from whence they came. But most were scattering as the English gave chase.

The Nighthawk wanted no man left alive. He wasn't known for his mercy in a fight. Sir Patrick de Wolfe was the man known as the bird of prey, mostly because he was cunning, swift, and merciless, all glowing attributes as far as the English were concerned. But as far

as the Scots were concerned, the man was a vicious predator and someone to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, on this night, there had been no avoiding him.

He was out for blood.

One man's blood in particular. Patrick had led the charge from the trees into the group of raiders and he had singled out the man in the lead, the one that seemed to be driving the rest of the group. That was the man he wanted to subdue because he was sure if he eliminated the leader, the *reivers* would fall apart. But the man he'd singled out had proved wily. He'd kept himself buried back in the roiling mass of men during the battle but Patrick hadn't lost sight of him. It had been something of an effort to kill others in order to get to him, but like a dog with a bone, Patrick hadn't let go. He'd gone right for him and when the man realized he was being pursued, he'd broken off from the group and headed back the way he'd come.

Patrick's heavy-boned war horse was fast because the animal had enormous strides so he could cover a good deal of ground in a charge or in a chase. He put that talent to work as he closed the gap between him and the man he was pursuing, which made his target panic. Things began flying off the horse to lighten the load on his strained horse, including a large burden that went flying off, landing somewhere along the side of the road. Patrick wouldn't have thought anything of it except he swore he saw a pair of legs as it went flying. *A man*, he thought, although they'd been slim legs. *Mayhap a woman*. In any case, he couldn't think about it now. He had a target to catch.

It hadn't taken him long to catch his victim because the man's horse simply wasn't faster than Patrick's. He caught up to the man, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him off of his horse. As the man struggled and kicked, Patrick dragged him back to the outskirts of the

skirmish where two of his knights waited. He tossed the man to the knights, massive men with powerful bodies and powerful weapons. The last he saw, Kevin Hage and Apollo de Norville had made short work of the prisoner, acting upon Patrick's standard order in a situation like this.

Leave no man alive.

With the leader evidently killed, the fighting had died down a great deal with dead *reivers* on the road and only a few others showing futile resistance. Patrick could see one of his knights, Sir Hector de Norville, in a fairly nasty fight with a big Scotsman. Patrick kept an eye on the fight, not wanting to help Hector because the man would undoubtedly view any assistance as an insult. The de Norvilles were arrogant that way. So he backed off, looking around to see if there was any other clean-up he could help with.

And then, he saw it.

Back down the road where his target had thrown the body off his horse, Patrick could see something moving in the moonlight. The man who had been thrown was staying close to the ground, crawling away from the road. Patrick spurred his war horse towards him. He didn't want the man to get away so he was fully prepared to take a second hostage. Reaching the edge of the road, he could see that the figure had entered the tree line. It was quite dark in the trees at this time of night and, frustrated, Patrick didn't want to lose his quarry. Dismounting his steed, he charged off into the bramble.

The trail wasn't difficult to follow, mostly because of the sounds. He could easily follow simply based on the sounds, which were decidedly female. Intrigued, he plowed through a hedge, across a creek, and through a bramble of trees on the other side. There was quite a bit of foliage, making it difficult to see in the three-quarters moon, but he happened to catch

a glimpse of something moving off to his left, along the ground, and he grabbed it. The object turned out to be a foot. He yanked hard.

With a scream, a woman was pulled from the bushes she had been trying to hide beneath. Patrick couldn't really see her, but he knew it was a woman because men didn't make that kind of sound, -high-pitched and breathy. Once he'd yanked the woman free of the concealing leaves, he grabbed her arms and hauled her to her feet.

"Name, woman!" he boomed.

The woman was very light in his grasp, small, with fragile bones. He could feel it in his grip. She was gasping with fright.

"Bri-Bri-!"

He shook her, hard. "Speak!"

"P-please do not hurt me!"

A Scots accent, he thought with disgust. It was faint, but detectable. He'd heard stronger. Surely she was complicit to whatever the *reivers* had been up to. Although merciless in battle, he wasn't one to kill a woman, no matter if she was the enemy. Therefore, without another word, he bent over and threw the woman upon his shoulder easily, marching back the way he had come.

The battle on the road had died down considerably by the time he returned. There were at least two dead men along the side of the road that he could see. Still more men, wounded or dead, were lying on the actual road itself. He could see his knights milling around, making sure their enemies wouldn't rise up again to attack them. The wounded were being put out of their misery. They were still feeling the rush of battle, their movements edgy and their voices sharp. When men on the road tried to move, they were kicked back down.

Patrick made his way across the road and over to his knights, dumping his load onto the ground next to the dead. She landed with a grunt.

“Secure this one,” he told the knights. “She will return with us.”

It was a surprising command given the fact that they didn’t normally take prisoners. As the knights moved in to do his bidding, the young woman held up her hands.

“W-wait!” she cried. “P-please, m’lord – I am not with them! T-they took me from Coldingham!”

That terrified plea gave Patrick pause. Having heard there were captives among the *reivers*, he was coming to wonder if there wasn’t some truth to that rumor.

“Coldingham,” he repeated. “The priory?”

“Aye, m’lord.”

“What is your name?”

“B-Brighton de Favereux, m’lord.”

Patrick’s gaze lingered on her. He couldn’t see much in the moonlight, but one of the things he could see was an enormous pair of eyes gazing back at him. He could make out the shape of a delicate face, but little more.

“These men abducted you from the priory?”

“T-they did, m’lord.”

She had a bit of a stammer in her speech, but it was hardly noticeable. She had a rather sweet voice, somewhat husky. The more she spoke, the more he realized that the Scots accent wasn’t too terribly strong, either, at least not enough to offend him. It was just a hint of a lilt.

“Can you prove this?”

The woman faltered. She looked down at herself as if searching for some proof upon her person. Then, she lifted her arms.

“Y-you can see that I am wearing the garb of a postulate, m’lord,” she said. “If it is proof you seek, it is all I have to offer.”

Patrick snapped his fingers to his knights, pointing to the young woman, and they swarmed on her, checking out what she was wearing beneath the dirty, smelly cloak. They pulled at it and sniffed, inspecting the fabric. When Kevin lifted his head to Patrick and nodded shortly, that was all Patrick needed as confirmation.

“She will return with me,” he commanded quietly. “Make sure there is no one left alive and then gather the men. We must return.”

The knights were on the move, one of them physically lifting the lady off of the ground and carrying her away while the second knight went forth to carry out the remainder of Patrick’s order. Seeing that the battle was finished for the most part, Patrick followed the knight carrying the lady. When the man set her to her feet, Patrick was standing right next to her, waiting.

“So the Scots violated the sanctity of the priory,” he said quietly. “That is not their usual target. What was their purpose?”

The woman was flustered and unsteady on her feet. “I-I do not know. They did not say.”

“Then how did they manage to wrest you from the place? It is fairly fortified, as I recall.”

The woman shook her head. “I-I do not know, to be truthful,” she said. “I-it was at Matins that they came. We were moving from the church to the cloister when they swept through. I could hear shouting, with men on horses racing through the garden. Sister Acha was running towards me and calling my name. Before I could go to her, men took me from the

abbey. I believe they took Sister Acha, as well, because I saw a man on horseback claim her. Y-you must make sure she is safe, m'lord. Please."

Patrick turned in the direction of the road where there were several bodies on the ground. He had a rather ominous feeling that a nun might be among them. Word of a dead nun spreading among the English would put every Scotsman on the borders at risk for the priests of the north would rally the vengeance cry. English lords would take up that cry and send out men whose sole job would be to exact revenge on behalf of the church. Patrick had seen that before. Now, the circumstances surrounding the raiding Scots was taking an ominous turn.

"You will remain here," he told her. "Do not move. My men, who do not know you, might mistake you for an enemy. Stand here and wait for me to return."

The woman simply nodded her head, nervously, pulling the smelly cloak more tightly about her as Patrick headed off to the road.

Still muddy from the storm they'd had only a few hours earlier, Patrick began to move through the dead on the ground. He counted at least twelve of them and there were probably more who had fled and were cut down by his men. In fact, none of his men were on the road any longer, either lingering on the edges of the road or missing altogether. He knew those men must have gone after *reivers* who had fled so he wasn't concerned about them. But the litter of bodies on the road *did* concern him; he was concerned there was a wounded or dead nun among them.

His concern was well-founded. Bunched up between two dead Scots was a tiny body. He thought it had been just a cloak at first, perhaps something that had fallen off of one of the men in the heat of battle, for it sincerely looked to be just a piece of clothing. But he poked

it with his boot on a hunch and heard it groan. Bending over, he rolled the body onto its back.

A small face, covered in mud, was the first thing he saw. Then, two eyes became evident, although it was difficult to see because of the darkness of the night. He could see eyeballs glittering and that was the only way he knew the eyes were open. In fact, he might have thought the person to be one of the *reivers* except for the fact that he or she was truly tiny. That seemed odd to him somehow. He couldn't help the sense of foreboding in his heart that continued to grow.

"Speak," Patrick said quietly. "Who are you?"

The person, sunken cheeks heaving in and out, took a few gasping breaths. "Bridey? Is she injured?"

It was a woman. His heart sank. That was when Patrick received confirmation that he had, indeed, happened upon the other woman in this equation. It was clear that she had been badly injured in the fight that had gone on, a helpless victim torn between the *reivers* and the English knights.

"Are you from Coldingham also?" he asked.

The woman tried to move her head but she couldn't quite manage it. "Aye," she muttered. "I am. Is Bridey well?"

"You mean the other woman? She is well."

That seemed to ease the old woman a great deal. In fact, she let out a hissing sigh that was long and unsteady. Then it seemed as if she didn't draw another breath for a very long time after that. Patrick thought she might have passed away, in fact. But she resumed

breathing after a time, reaching up a weak hand to grasp at him. She ended up grabbing the hem of his wet, muddy tunic.

“Time is growing short, my lord,” she breathed. “Thou must listen to me. It is important, for the sake of Bridey.”

Patrick shifted so he was kneeling beside the woman, one mailed knee in the mud. He wasn't particularly interested in a deathbed confession, for he had a good deal to attend to already and listening to a nun's final words was not among those tasks. But something in the woman's glimmering eyes caused him to take pause. For in spite of his deadly reputation, Patrick was a man with a heart. It was close to the surface, unlike others, which was something of a dangerous trait. He wasn't as hardened as most when he probably should have been. Therefore, a dying old woman had his attention. He tried not to feel foolish for it.

“Quickly, now,” he said with quiet firmness. “Tell me what you must.”

The woman didn't let go of his tunic. “Brighton de Favereux is the woman in your possession.”

“She gave that name.”

The old woman tugged on his tunic. “That is only what others must know of her,” she whispered. “They must never know the truth. To know the truth about her would cause strife and war as thou cannot comprehend. I have been with her since her mother brought her to Coldingham, and it 'tis I who have tended her every need. Bridey is as a daughter to me, my own child.”

Patrick was torn between curiosity and impatience. “You are her nurse,” he said. “I understand. What is this truth you speak of?”

The old nun gasped as if suddenly in pain. For a few long moments, she didn't say anything and Patrick wondered if this was, indeed, her end. But she eventually took another breath, steeling herself. Her grip on Patrick's tunic tightened.

"Thou art English," she murmured. "It is now thy duty to protect her. The child that was given unto me was the daughter of Lady Juliana de la Haye and Magnus Haakonsson, King of the Northmen. Her real name is Kristiana Magnusdotter but she was given the name Brighton de Favereux to conceal her identity. Lady Juliana, a daughter of the House of de la Haye, was given over to the Northmen as a hostage, to cement a peace between the kings of the North and Clan Haye. Lady Juliana was meant for a Northman king but she lay with Magnus, then a prince, and beget his child. She was sent home in shame because of it. When the child was born, Lady Juliana was forced to her to bring the child to Coldingham in order to protect her. No one must know of the child's existence for it can only bring the Northmen down upon us. If they know she is here, they will want her back. She must never go back."

Patrick had to admit that he was quite astonished at what he was hearing. In fact, it was too incredible to believe. His brow furrowed. "Sister, I am not a fool," he said steadily. "I do not believe in these wild tales and rumors. But the lady will be protected until she can be returned to her family. You have my promise."

His response seemed to seize the old woman up. Her other hand came up to grip his tunic, pulling at him, as her eyes widened, her muddy face taut with panic.

"Nay!" she gasped. "Thou must not return her to her family! They wish to forget of her existence! And thou must not permit Clan Swinton to take her, for they shall only ransom her and barter her as one would cattle. Please... thou must protect her, good knight. Deliver her to Jedburgh or Kelso. The church is the only safe place for her."

The woman was starting to make an impact on him. Her sense of urgency, of fear, was palpable and as much as he didn't want to admit it, the sense was infecting. He could feel it. He tried to shake it off.

"The church is *not* safe for her if the raiders could get to her," he pointed out. "Are the Scots who abducted you part of Clan Swinton, then?"

"Aye. Somehow, they have discovered her true identity."

"And they came to take her?"

"Aye."

Patrick was increasingly confused about the situation. A Northern princess hiding amongst the postulates at Coldingham Priory? And a rival clan to Clan Haye coming to abduct her, to ransom her? It made absolutely no sense to him but, somehow, he believed it. As wild as the tale was, he believed it. He doubted a dying nun would lie to him but, still, it was a fantastic tale.

"Then I promise you that she will not come to harm as long as she is within my custody," he said quietly. "She will be safe."

"Swear it upon thy oath, sir knight."

"I swear it."

The old woman's grip abruptly loosened and she sank back into the mud as if all of her strength had suddenly left her. She lay there, her eyes gazing up into the dark sky as if seeing her heavenly reward above, waiting for her. Her features, so recently tight with fear, eased tremendously.

"Then I am content," she murmured, although he barely heard her. "God will reward thee, sir knight. Bridey is a sweet and lovely soul. Pray thee be kind to her."

With that, she took her last breath and was gone. Patrick found himself looking down at the woman, wondering what on earth he'd gotten himself in to this night. If what the old nun said was true, the *reivers* this night were far more than a simple raiding party - this had been an organized band of Scots looking for a prize. That being the case, it was also fairly likely that if they knew of the girl's identity, as the nun suggested, then he could take her to any of the priories along the border but, sooner or later, someone would try to come for her again. *Clan Swinton*, the old nun had said. Ancient rivals of Clan Haye. Nay, they wouldn't give up if they wanted the girl badly enough.

So he found himself in an unwanted quandary. He didn't want to be responsible for a prize between clans but his sense of duty, and now a promise to a dying woman, had put him in that position. This wasn't what he needed, not now. He was due to leave Berwick soon, to go to London to assume a post as part of the king's personal guard. It was a prestigious post and one he very much wanted, one that brought great honor to his family. It wasn't every knight that was asked by Prince Edward to assume the post as a personal Guard of the Body to King Henry, a position coveted by many but offered to few.

He had been the lucky one.

Wealth, admiration, and distinction would be his. His mind and ego had blown up around what was to come. But now... now, Patrick felt as if he was at the precipice of something that might keep him rooted to the north. He couldn't simply dump the woman on his father and then run for London. Nay, that would be cowardly of him. But he didn't want to remain in the north and defend the prize he'd taken from the *reivers*, either, as if it were his responsibility to do so. In truth, now it was.

God's Bones, why had he agreed?

Damn that old woman!

Using the old, muddy cloak worn by the nun, Patrick wrapped the small form up tightly in it and carried her over to the nearest knight. Sir Hector de Norville was directing some of the men-at-arms as they rifled through the bodies, turning to see Patrick approach. Tall, muscular, and sinewy, Hector was a congenial and intelligent man, married to Patrick's younger sister, Evelyn. He pointed to the bundle in Patrick's arms.

"What have you found?" he asked. "Were there valuables with this group?"

Patrick shook his head. "Nay," he said. Then, he nodded his head in a motion that suggested Hector follow him. Hector did and, a few feet away from the men-at-arms, Patrick came to a halt and faced Hector. "These men raided Coldingham Priory and came away with two women from what I've been able to deduce," he said quietly. "There is a young woman, who seems uninjured, and then this old nun, who was mortally wounded in the fighting. The nun needs to be taken to the nearest church so they can dispose of the corpse."

Hector pulled back the muddy cloak to see the old woman's dirty, white face. He covered it back up. "God's Bones," he hissed. "A dead nun is never a good thing. The English around here will frown greatly upon her death, Atty."

Atty was what the knights called Patrick, who had been a quiet child with a speech impediment. Unable to say his own name, it had come out as "Atty", which was now a term of endearment among the family. Patrick no longer had the speech impediment. The little boy who'd had it had grown into a mountain of a man, but the nickname had never gone away. Now, it was part of him. Hearing that affectionate name come from Hector along with the very same thoughts he'd had about the dead nun and the displeased English somehow

hammered home the seriousness of the situation, in more ways than one. With a heavy sigh, he nodded.

“I know,” he said. “Where is the nearest church?”

Hector cocked his head thoughtfully. “St. Cuthbert in Berwick is the nearest one I can think of.”

“Then have one of the men take the body there. Tell them... tell them we simply found her dead along the road. Tell them no more than that. If we do, we may have more trouble than we can handle.”

Hector understood. “I will do it myself.”

Patrick nodded. “Good,” he said. “I cannot tell you the rest of what the old nun told me, not here, but I will when we return to Berwick. An interesting tale to say the least.”

Hector cocked an eyebrow, interested, but said nothing. That time would come. Obediently, he took the dead woman from Patrick’s arms and headed off in the direction of his steed.

Patrick watched the man walk away, trying to push aside what the old nun had told him, but he couldn’t quite manage it. His thoughts turned towards Lady Brighton. *Bridey*, the nun had called her. Perhaps Lady Brighton could shed some light on the situation, but not here. Not now. They had to clear out and return to the safety of Berwick Castle before they found themselves set upon by more Swintons or any of the other clans in the area. The southern part of the Scots border was full of men eager to slit an English throat. Even though Patrick was half-Scots through his mother’s side of the family, he was all English in training and mentality, and he had no desire to engage in any more battle this night.

“Patrick!”

The shout came from off to his left, over where several English were piling together the Scots dead. He could see one of his knights heading in his direction and, even though the night didn't illuminate the man's features, he knew who it was simply by the shape and size of him.

Sir Alec Hage, the eldest of the Hage brothers under his command, was broad-shouldered but he was also quite tall, which made him a rather intimidating character. With his father's dark blonde hair and his mother's amber-colored eyes, he possessed none of the Hage characteristic cool and all of his mother's fire. He, too, was half-Scots through his mother, who happened to be a cousin of Patrick's mother.

In fact, Patrick was related to all of the Hage and de Norville knights because their mothers were all cousins. Alec also happened to be married to Patrick's younger sister, Katheryn. It made for a rather big family and there was little delineation between cousins and brothers. As far as Patrick was concerned, they were all his brothers.

"Swinton bastards," Alec said as he drew near. "Every one of them."

Patrick nodded. "I know," he said. "Who told you?"

Alec pointed off to the group of dead. "They did before I slit their throats," he said. "Did you know they raided Coldingham Priory?"

"I did."

"They would not tell me why."

Patrick waved him off. "I think I know," he said. "Pile the dead and return to Berwick. Once we arrive, gather the knights. I have a need to speak with them."

Alec couldn't help but sense something serious behind that request. "What is it?"

Patrick shook his head, his expression guarded as he glanced around at the dead and wounded. "Not now," he said, slapping Alec on the arm. "Return to Berwick in a hurry. Do as I ask."

Alec didn't question him again. There was something mysterious afoot but he didn't press; he knew that he would be told soon enough. Therefore, he went about his duties as Patrick continued on to the spot where he left the abducted postulate. He could see the young woman in the darkness, sitting on the cold ground. The more his gaze lingered on her, the more he thought about what the old nun had said.

A Northman princess....

He could still hardly believe it even as he looked at her. Was this woman truly the daughter of Magnus, King of the Northmen? Being this far north in England and situated along the coast, he'd dealt with a few threats from Northmen, but very few. They mostly traveled far to the north, along the coast of Scotland and into the outlying islands. A few of those islands were still ruled by Northern kings and they battled the Scots for control constantly. Nay, there wasn't much of a threat at Berwick. Their threat came from the Scots. But having a king's daughter in their midst might change their luck.

"D-did you find Sister Acha?" the young woman asked anxiously when he drew within earshot.

Her question jolted him from his ominous thoughts. "I found her," he said. "She was mortally wounded and has since passed on. One of my men is taking her to St. Cuthbert in Berwick so they can attend to her."

He probably should have couched the news more tactfully because the woman's face screwed up in grief as she struggled to bite off her tears. "S-sweet Jesus," she breathed,

crossing herself reverently. "I-I had hoped not to hear that news. I had prayed so dearly for her safety. S-so... dearly...."

Patrick realized he should have been kinder in telling her that the woman who had raised her since birth was dead. "I am sorry," he said, feeling a stab of remorse. "But I have ensured that she will be tended to. And I promised her that I would look after you and I intend to do just that. We must return to my home."

The young woman wiped her face furiously, wiping at the tears from her eyes and the mucus from her nose. "W-why can I not return to Coldingham?" she asked. "That is *my* home."

Patrick reached down and grasped an arm, pulling the woman to her feet. "No longer."

She looked at him with great concern. "W-why not? Why can I not return?"

He began to walk her in the direction of his charger, pulling her with him although she wasn't moving very well. She seemed to be resisting. "Because it would be foolish to take you back there," he said. "The Scots found you there once. They will find you again. We are, therefore, going to Berwick Castle."

That seemed to cause the woman to dig her heels in even more. "B-but I do not wish to go there," she insisted. "P-please, Sir Knight... I simply want to return to Coldingham."

Patrick paused, turning to the woman in the darkness. It seemed to be growing colder, he thought, for their breaths were hanging heavy in the air. More than that, the mood was cold between them as well. She was no longer grateful he had saved her from the Scots, now wanting to go back where she came from. He wondered if she would be foolish enough to fight him on it.

“Lady, I will *not* return you to Coldingham, so you will kindly stop asking,” he said flatly. “I promised your nurse that I would ensure your safety and that means you will not return to the priory.”

She was puzzled. “B-but I do not understand *why*... why would the Scots return for me? Why do they want me?”

She was asking the question as if she truly had no idea of what was really happening. Patrick was coming to think that the young woman didn’t realize she had been the target of the raid. Based on what Alec had told him, that the Clan Swinton men had admitted to raiding Coldingham, and also based on what the dying nun had told him about the lady’s identity, he was more convinced than ever that the old woman hadn’t been lying to him. There were strange forces at work here, all of them directed to this rather confused young woman, and he was fairly certain this wasn’t the place to tell her. He needed to get her to safety and then he would seek his father’s advice on what to do with her. It was truly the best solution he could come up with at the moment.

“You must trust me, my lady,” he said, his voice quiet. “I cannot return you to Coldingham and arguing with me will not make it so. Know your place, be obedient, and do as I say for now. To go against my wishes would not be in your best interest.”

There was a threat in that statement and, fortunately, the young woman seemed to understand that. She simply lowered her head and shut her mouth, wiping at her eyes now and again and he knew she was still weeping for her nurse, for the situation in general. Truth be told, he didn’t blame her. The entire circumstance had been somewhat shocking for them all.

With an enormous hand on her arm, Patrick pulled her over towards his war horse, an animal amongst many war horses that the knights were now mounting. The contingent of knights escorted their commander and the lady hostage back to Berwick Castle, for on this night, the battle was over for the moment as the *reivers* were quelled and their prize wrested from them.

But as Patrick headed back towards Berwick with the lady seated behind him on his horse, he was seriously coming to wonder about the events of this night and how they might affect his plans for the future.

He was about to find out.