

Chapter 1

Gabrielle peered from the confines of her buggy. Hedges lined the drive, and flowers budded with the first hint of spring. She sighed, delighted by the beauty of her temporary home.

Margaret, her long time maid, shifted in her seat for the hundredth time. “Are you looking forward to your visit with Lord Hampton? He’s quite a catch, isn’t he? Not only is he a hero of many campaigns against the French, he’s very good looking as well.”

Gabrielle, a little miffed, turned toward her maid. Margaret patted her gray hair and winked. Even though she hadn’t revealed her feelings toward Marshall Hampton, the woman seemed to know.

Gabrielle plucked at a loose thread on her shawl. “I was perfectly capable of staying home. There was no need for Daniel to pass me off to his old friend while he meets up with Duke Wellington. After all, I stayed by myself before. I’ll be bored out of my mind.”

“Nonsense, you and Amelia Hampton have a lot in common.”

Margaret grasped Gabrielle’s hands pulling them from the shawl. “Lord Daniel sent you here because I won’t be there to look after you this time and with Lord Hampton deploying in a month, he thought it would be good for you to be with Amelia. You’ll give each other needed strength.”

The massive double doors swung open as the rig rocked to a halt. Gabrielle’s brown eyes regarded Lord Marshall Hampton as he stepped out into the sunlight, his siblings a pace behind him. She pressed a palm to her butterfly infested stomach. Being this aware of the lord wasn’t safe.

Marshall strode towards the barouche with a smile, and she held out her hand in greeting. He bowed, pressing his lips against her hand. “Welcome, Lady Gabrielle.”

“Thank you. It’s wonderful to see you, Amelia, and Elton again.” A twinge of sadness stirred within her at the memory of their father’s passing. She hadn’t been to the estate since.

He helped her down and turned his attention to Margaret and the driver. Gabrielle removed her gloves, and embraced both Amelia and Elton. A unison of chatter rang in her ear. Casting a glance up, her heart fluttered when she realized Marshall studied her.

Gabrielle brushed a lock of raven hair behind her ear and forced herself to listen to Amelia prattle on about her anticipation of the visit. She glanced toward Elton who blushed scarlet. Oh no, he still held a boy hood infatuation toward her. She smiled back sweetly not wanting to embarrass the young man.

Marshall spoke. “Elton, see to the escorts then please have some servants take Gabrielle’s luggage to her room. Amelia, see that tea is set out.”

Margaret hugged Gabrielle and said, “Don’t give Lord Hampton any trouble.”

“I won’t.”

“I’ll see you in a few months.” Margaret disappeared within the rig and it rattled away.

Marshall offered his arm. Gabrielle tilted her head to hide a blush and slid a hand into the crook. Sweet sensations rushed through her body at the slight touch. “I am very grateful, My Lord, for you allowing me to stay with your family, while you and my brother are deployed.”

“Daniel is my best friend. I wouldn’t turn away his sister.”

Gabrielle stepped inside and glanced around. A cool breeze flowed through two large windows. The chandelier shifted and the candle light threw shadows on the walls. Against one wall, a china cabinet stood. High back chairs, settees, and decorative tables sprawled about the room. “I was only ten the first time I visited. I’m still awed by how the décor blends in such a comfortable manner.”

“Our mother knew how to decorate. Things came alive by her hand.” Marshall led her to a settee and released her hand.

Gabrielle immediately missed the contact. She accepted a cup of tea from Amelia and settled into the seat. Warmth rushed through her body as Marshall claimed the spot next to her.

Amelia slid into a chair, and smoothed her skirts. “How is Lord Daniel? I had hoped he would stop by before heading out.”

“Amelia! Have you forgotten your manners?”

“I’m sorry, Marshall.” Amelia stared at him with wide eyes. “Please, excuse my lack of decorum.”

Marshall set his cup down hard and stood. “I’m going to see what’s keeping Elton.” He walked by Amelia’s chair and gazed down at her. “I will talk to you about this later.”

Gabrielle smiled. She already knew about Amelia’s attraction to her brother. Yet Gabrielle hadn’t revealed her own attraction for Marshall. She felt a little ashamed for not confiding her feelings to Amelia. It had been easy to form a friendship. The same age, they’d grown with their close association.

She leaned closer to the girl and whispered, “He’d planned to, but an early summons came for him unexpectedly.”

Amelia forced a smile and turned her head to reach for the teacup. Amelia sniffled as she sipped at the edge of the pale china. “I pray for the return of both him and my brother.”

“Thank you.”

Marshall and Elton strolled into the lounge. After picking up a cup of tea, Elton plopped down in a chair. “I wish I were of age to be joining Marshall and Daniel.”

Marshall sat down and stretched out his legs. “You shouldn’t wish such things. You’re only fifteen.”

“You said this latest campaign might end the war. Father spoke those same words years ago. Their coalition thought the signing of the Treaty of Amiens would be the answer.” Elton sighed in frustration. “I need to do something to help.”

Marshall regarded his brother. “You have a duty to remain here. The women are within your care. Leave the business of war to those of us who are trained.” He glared at Elton. “Leave the talk of war to when you are not within the company of the more delicate sex.”

“All right, I’m just worried about you and Daniel. Last time you returned with a wounded shoulder.”

Marshall’s gaze bore into him. “I appreciate your concern. Now drop the subject. I’m sure the ladies are appalled by your lack of respect.”

Gabrielle listened to the exchange, and her apprehension grew with the mention of Marshall being hurt. Daniel hadn’t mentioned it although she knew he had known of it.

Marshall turned to her. “Did you have an enjoyable trip?”

“Yes, I did but it was long. I saw the most amazing animals. I even saw a bear. Thank goodness it preferred woods to us.”

“Bears, unless provoked, won’t bother you.”

“I’m glad to know this, Elton.” She held a hand to her mouth to keep back a yawn. “Not that I plan to confront one.”

Marshall stood and held out his hand to Gabrielle. “Let’s leave the talk of bears for now. Amelia will show you to your room. I’m sure you would like to rest from your journey.”

“Of course.” Gabrielle took his hand. “Thank you.”

He brought her hand to his mouth, and his lips brushed her knuckles. “I look forward to seeing you at dinner.”

Still able to feel the tender touch, she smiled.

She glanced back at Marshall. He stepped closer to Elton, a stern look on his face. She hoped he wasn’t too hard on the boy.

Amelia opened the door to Gabrielle’s room. “Elton is having a hard time dealing with Marshall’s deployment for the front lines. He accepted staying to care for father, but he doesn’t believe I need protecting, and he’s right. Marshall hired enough guardsmen to keep a small battalion at bay.”

Gabrielle hid a yawn behind her kerchief, but Amelia’s smile told her she hadn’t succeeded. Sorry.”

“I’d planned to stay and keep you company, but you need to rest. I’ll come back when dinner’s ready.” Amelia hurried to the door, her skirts rustling, but paused with one hand on the handle and a frown on her face. “I believe my brother likes you...which is just as well. You’ll be a good influence on him.” She pulled the door closed with a soft click.

Gabrielle fell back on the bed. She hoped Amelia hadn’t been referring to Elton. His school boy crush became bothersome at times.

Pushing all thought of the brothers aside, Gabrielle closed her eyes and slid into a deep sleep.

Website: www.JoyBrooksAuthor.com

Blog: <http://joybrooks-medievalcastleandkings.blogspot.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PJoyBrooks>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/joybrooksauthor>

Other Books by Joy Brooks

King's Heir - Blurbs

Raised from infancy to be ignorant of his birthright and duty, Rayden is caught unawares when eventually forced into his role as king of seventeenth century Ruar. Rayden intends to refuse that unwelcome responsibility, but his most beloved and loyal companions aim to see destiny fulfilled – no matter the cost to comfort, dignity, or liberty.

Book One in a Three Book Series

King's Reign – Blurbs (EPIC Awards 2017 Finalist)

Rayden is forced to live a life he never intended. As King of Ruar, he finds it is not easy to side step his responsibilities, there are too many injustices to stamp out. Not only must he strive to help the kingdom, he must face his foes, who are determined to stop him from getting what he desires most, his freedom. When turmoil between the parties escalates, Rayden's fight to forge his own destiny becomes paramount.

Fourth Son – Blurbs

Twenty-One year old Grayson has been chosen to be the next Jewell and Master of the Green Stone. The Stone imparts power to control the dragons – all the dragons. As Master of the Stone, Grayson will live for 7 centuries. Bonding with the Green Stone is a torturous and necessary process. Grayson fights to escape that bonding torment and he flees from the certain anguish of losing everyone and everything that he loves over the course of 700 years.

Sword of Virtue – Blurbs

Kidnapped as a baby, Jared lives the next twenty years unaware of his royal heritage. Eventually, persecution and torment arrive with the knowledge of his identity. The legendary, Sword of Virtue, chooses Jared to wield the power of 100 mages, but Jared must first endure agonizing ordeals to prove that he has five of the seven virtues required by the Sword. The life he loved destroyed, Jared is thrown into a world far beyond anything he could imagine.

A Christmas Wish – Blurbs

Katie Holston, raised in foster homes, wants nothing more than a family to call her own. She meets the man of her dreams in Ian Stokely. Being his five year old son's teacher, she is in a position to make her dreams come true. Kyle Stokely confides in Katie his greatest wish for Christmas. He wants his widowed father to be happy again. Ian Stokely has a different view than Katie Holston and his son, Kyle. He wishes to be left alone. Can Katie and Kyle convince Ian to live life fully again?