
Claiming Their Maiden

By

Sue Lyndon

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This book is *Claiming Their Maiden* intended for *adults only*. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults.

Chapter One

Amelia gagged at the smell of blood. She backed away from the gruesome scene, clamping a hand over *Claiming Their Maiden* her mouth. A scream built in her throat, but no sound escaped. Shock set in, causing her whole body to tremble. A chill rolled through her and she struggled to make her legs work. After a few forced steps, she was moving, and fast.

She ran out into the foggy morning to see a dark form drifting through the mist, heading straight for her. Amelia blinked, recognizing the woman who approached by her ridiculous flaring skirts. Only one person in the village dressed so outlandishly.

“Beatrice?” Amelia squinted and her pulse increased.

Sure enough, Beatrice emerged from the fog, a smug smile painted on her face. A sharp sense of foreboding pierced Amelia. This was no ordinary encounter, so early in the morning, and so soon after discovering a crime had been committed. A murder.

“Good morning, Amelia,” Beatrice whispered in a conspiratorial tone. “I trust you *Claiming Their Maiden* found Mrs. Embers’ body?”

Amelia felt ill. “Yes. She’s dead. How—how did you know?” She couldn’t believe the elderly seamstress she’d worked for was dead, let alone brutally murdered in her own shop.

Beatrice grinned and played with a ribbon in her hair. “I entered her shop to see if my new dress was finished and witnessed you attacking the poor woman. I managed to get away and outrun you—barely. I’m lucky to have escaped with my own life.”

Realization dawned, and it was as cold as the mist swirling around them. "You're setting me up," Amelia hissed. "Mrs. Embers would've been your mother-in-law. Why do this?"

"She's meddlesome and has long insisted Rayson take two or three wives. I refuse to share him, especially with you."

"With me?"

"Yes," Beatrice spat. "Mrs. Embers convinced Rayson to include you in our marriage ceremony next week. He was supposed to ask you today. You see, Amelia, I killed a few nasty birds with one stone this morning. Some nastier than others."

Amelia glanced up and down the street. The fog was beginning to lift, and she could make out the outline of Claiming Their Maiden shops and houses from behind Claiming Their Maiden the thick white blanket. The church steeple stood out at the end of the street, reminding Amelia that her word wouldn't hold up against Beatrice's. Amelia was an orphan, and she'd been in trouble with the village elders before for committing petty crimes over the years. In stark contrast, Beatrice was the priest's youngest, beloved daughter, and she'd never been in trouble a day in her life. Amelia had heard rumors that Beatrice was a backstabber, but she would've never guessed the girl was capable of coldblooded murder.

"You're horrible," Amelia said, her temper rising. "Mrs. Embers was a kind woman. She didn't deserve this. And if Rayson wants to take ten wives, it's his right to do so!"

"I hear voices," Beatrice smirked.

Amelia froze, holding her breath. The village was waking up, and the fog lifted more with each second.

"I'll give you a two-minute head start before I scream," Beatrice said, winking. "Run fast."

Amelia had no choice. If she didn't run, a noose would tighten around her neck before the rising sun burned away the last of the fog. Survival instincts kicked in, and she bolted between houses and out of the village. The huge forest swallowed her after a few minutes of running. She stumbled over roots and underbrush, but didn't stop once.

Entering the forest brought her a small amount of relief, taking the edge off her terror. The forest was thick and dark, providing plenty of hiding places. Even though there were lots of places to Claiming Their Maiden hide, the more space she put between herself and the village, the better.

Sickening thoughts swirled in her head as her heart pounded and her chest ached in breathless agony. Poor Mrs. Embers was dead. The Claiming Their Maiden villagers thought Amelia was a murderer, and Claiming Their Maiden Rayson Embers would unsuspectingly wed his own mother's killer. Amelia was an outlaw, and a price had probably already been levied on her head. The Head Elder would rush outside and yell, "Ten pieces Claiming Their Maiden of

gold!” or “Twelve pieces of gold!” Justice was served swiftly in the village, and in Amelia’s opinion, almost never fairly. She shuddered to think how many pieces of gold would be put on her head, and how many bounty hunters would trail her through the forest.

She prayed to the Goddess for their failure, muttering her plea in between heavy gasps.

Branches tore at her arms and scratched her face. Claiming Their Maiden She ran blindly, having never been inside the forest. Deeper and deeper she ran straight into the unknown, tearing her way through a darkness that promised eventual horrors. Try as she might, she wasn’t able to push away the frightening stories about the forest she’d heard her whole life. She’d always yearned to leave the village, but the only escape was through these woods, these reportedly haunted woods that huge, deadly beasts called home. Wolves, bears, large cats, and possibly, a race of barbarian men banished from the villages of civilized men long ago. Were the stories about the forest and these terrible creatures true? She had a feeling she’d find out soon enough. Much too soon enough.

She ran and ran. In her imagination, death was chasing her as she barreled ahead into a place no human belonged. If only people lived in the woods, if only she knew in which direction to run to find an opening in the forest that would lead to another village. A vision Claiming Their Maiden of a huge, hairy barbarian man flashed in her mind, and she again wondered if such creatures really lived amongst the trees. Amelia had seen proud hunters swagger down the street with bears, wolves, and cats, but never a barbarian man. Perhaps if they existed, they avoided village folk like her. She sincerely hoped they were a myth. Contending with the four-legged predators was a bad enough prospect.

When running became complete anguish, Amelia paused to lean against a massive trunk. She fought for air and tried to get her bearings. Shadows danced around her, and she imagined they were the ghosts of the Claiming Their Maiden forest, here to give her a new fright. She didn’t know how to stay alive here, in the wilderness, Claiming Their Maiden but she didn’t know how to stay alive if she left either.

Beatrice had sentenced her to death, despite the head start.

The aching in her chest gradually lessened, and she glanced Claiming Their Maiden around warily. A few rays of sunlight pierced through the trees in the direction she’d been running from, bringing her hope. The forest would be less frightening with a little more light. Just as she latched onto this new hope, a noise stopped her breathing cold.

A rustling in the underbrush. Footsteps and—*oh, no*—a deep growl rumbled through the air, stirring the leaves and shaking the ground. Amelia’s heart leapt to her throat, and she continued to hold her breath, listening and praying. And praying some more.

Anger and fear combined in her Claiming Their Maiden chest. She wasn’t ready to die so soon. Glancing around, she spotted a large tree with numerous branches spaced close together, leading up to treetops concealed by darkness and mist. She swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and lunged for the first limb. The terror Claiming Their Maiden of more growling

reached her, propelling her to the second and third branches, and up and up. Maybe the Goddess would turn her into a bird once she reached the top. It was a beautiful idea, to be able to take flight at the first sign of danger. To be able to fly out of darkness and into light, into hope.

Enough daydreaming, she thought. Keep climbing. Don't stop.

She reached for the next branch, but touched something sticky. Instinctively, she pulled away, yanking her hand out of a web with a pop. *Oh, Goddess. A web. Not just any web—a freakishly huge web.* She wasn't an expert in wild forest creatures, but any idiot knew a giant web meant a Claiming Their Maiden giant spider.

A hiss floated down from above, and a split second later another growl from below shook the tree. She cursed Claiming Their Maiden at her bad luck. An unknown beast on the forest floor and a presumably huge spider wanted to eat her. Bounty hunters were probably chasing her too. And the Head Elder had probably already called for her hanging. Her day couldn't possibly get any worse.

The spider wasn't visible through the branches above, but it hissed again, louder this time. Amelia reached for a small branch, hoping to break it off for use as a weapon. But just as the limb broke free, the tree shook with so much force that she lost her footing.

Falling fast, she screamed Claiming Their Maiden and closed her eyes. She landed. Except she didn't. Not really. It wasn't a hard, bone-crushing impact. The air didn't rush from her lungs, but panic had her gasping as she tried to make sense of what had happened. She tried to open her eyes, but the whole world faded and she slipped into darkness.

* * *

Amelia drifted. Voices reached her ears, but she couldn't discern a single word, let alone a complete sentence. She was warm and surrounded by feathers. Or so it seemed. She had to be dreaming. She saw the village, the little houses and shops passing by. Claiming Their Maiden A flash of a woman's face with eyes blue and more radiant than the sky on the clearest summer day. Her mother? Alarm flickered in those magnificent blues, and pain followed. The eyes closed. Forever. The woman was gone. Dead. Amelia reached out, as if to bring the woman back, but black, fur-covered appendages came into focus next, crawling closer. Hissing.

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