

## Chapter 1: Cast Call

The familiar tingle of excitement mixed with fear tickled Rebecca as she presented her pass at the festival gate and walked in. She had only been hired the week before, so she wasn't quite sure what to expect. Oh, she'd been to the Renaissance Festival many times, but always as a patron, never as an actress. In fact, she hadn't even done much acting. She auditioned for the role because she only had to work on Saturdays and Sundays, so she thought it wouldn't interfere with her college classes too badly. Plus, it paid well for only two days a week. During the week, she went to school and studied dance and business – dance because she loved it, business because she thought it practical. She hoped someday to open her own dance studio.

The festival looked so different without the boisterous crowd she'd always seen in it. It looked somehow lonely, but yet there was a peaceful feeling of memories long forgotten and times long gone. She headed down the deep green grass that would soon be gone due to the traffic of the crowds. *No*, she told herself as she inhaled fear with every breath. *I'm not going to be nervous. This will all be fine. I can do it.*

She walked around a corner and saw the picnic area. Signs selling turkey legs, pizza, soup bread bowls, and about anything on a stick caught her attention, but the tantalizing smell was missing, which made her feel more nervous, as if something was really wrong.

She was relieved and panicked to see the arena. At least it wasn't empty. The bleachers were, but the arena itself had horses, knights, the royal family, and Nate Wilson, the program director. *Get a grip. Breathe. Act like you know what you're doing.* She took a deep breath and walked forward.

When she reached the split rail fence that kept the crowd from the actors, Nate called out in a loud voice, "Rebecca! It's good to see you! Come, I'll introduce you."

She climbed over the fence as Nate trotted over to her. "Come, we start the rehearsal in twenty minutes, and you still need to try on your dress."

She nodded.

"But let me introduce you to everyone first," he added. He took her arm and brought her over to where a group of actors stood. He pointed first to a lady with dark curls in a very elegant dress. "This is Charlotte. She plays Queen Beatrice."

"I'm so glad to meet you," Charlotte told her. "We've been looking forward to meeting you. Nate's told us about you. You're going to love working here."

Despite Charlotte's ease with her, Rebecca was still overwhelmed and very timid. "It's nice to meet you, Charlotte," she managed to say.

Nate took her arm and turned her to the king, a blond man with a beard. "King Charles, also known as Kevin in real life."

He smiled at her and nodded, noting her nice petite figure, the ringlets in her light brown hair, and her blue eyes. "Yep, you are as beautiful as Nate said you were. I think you'll do nicely in the part." He gave an approving thumbs up to Nate.

Rebecca blushed. “Thank you,” she said sheepishly.

Nate pointed to two knights in full armor, one in black, one in white, both very broad shouldered, or maybe it was just the armor. “I think you can tell who the Black Knight and White Knight are.”

“I think so,” Rebecca agreed, actually breathing rather normally.

The White Knight pulled his helmet off. Rebecca’s chest tightened as he did. He was hot! Guys like that didn’t really exist outside of magazines, did they? Still, this guy’s blond hair and deep blue eyes were startling, and his body screamed movie star.

“I am Sir William of Chapney,” he announced in a grandiose voice as he bowed to her. “I am the heroic White Knight who conquers dragons, rescues damsels, and sweeps all maidens off their feet.” He took her hand and kissed it as his character would. Then he laughed and dropped the character. “Actually, I’m Trevor, Trevor Bentley.” He paused for a response.

Rebecca blushed. “It’s nice to meet you, Trevor. If I ever need rescuing, I’ll call you.”

“Do, and I’ll come.” He still had a look as if he expected some reaction. “Have you not heard of me?” he asked. “I’m Trevor Bentley.”

Trevor Bentley, was the name supposed to ring a bell? She had heard it before, possibly. The question was where.

“No,” she admitted. “I’m sorry, should I?”

“Of course,” Charlotte laughed. “He’s a model. Everyone’s seen Trevor.” A slight laugh came with her comment.

“You haven’t heard of me,” Trevor noted. “Since you aren’t an adoring fan, perhaps that creates a challenge for me to get you to become one.”

Not much of a challenge. No, he was too handsome to have any girl be a challenge to get to admire him. Rebecca stared and said nothing.

“You are the challenge,” Trevor observed. “You are definitely pretty. Perhaps I’ll have to step up to that challenge.”

She blushed, but her smile could have lit a dark night. “Thank you, Trevor. I think I’ll enjoy giving you my favors in the joust.”

He nodded to her with a slight grin as he took a step closer. “Of course. There is much you’ll enjoy here. I will see to it personally.”

She should respond, but how? She couldn’t say what she was thinking. “Wow! You’re hot!” probably wasn’t the right thing, and her racing heart was very distracting from any rational thought.

Saved! She didn’t have to say anything, for Nate turned her toward a knight dressed in all black.

“The Black Knight,” he announced.

The knight bowed deeply, knelt before her, and extended his hand.

She reached down to shake it, but he took her hand and kissed it.

She smiled. She could really enjoy working here with all these gentleman. There weren't many well-mannered guys on the college campus she lived on. "Have you a name, Black Knight?" she asked.

The knight made no response. She could feel eyes on her and wondered if she'd done something wrong. "I only wish to know your name." Again an awkward silence.

Nate broke the tension with a laugh. "The Black Knight seldom talks, only in performance, and no one knows the black knight's name, except for me," he explained. "The actor I hired wishes to keep it a secret. I'm fine with that. It all adds to the mystery of the event."

The other actors began to murmur. Nate laughed again. "Stop all the speculation. Now Rebecca, go behind the grandstand and you'll see Sandra, our costumer. She'll get you dressed for rehearsal, and do tell her to hurry. She can take forever."

The grandstand around the archway to the backstage seemed bigger than it had to her as a patron. She eyed the railway on the bottom level where the lords and ladies stood to watch the joust, and then the spiral staircases on each side. Her eyes rested on the top level where the thrones sat, knowing the one on the right would be hers. She knew the routine quite well, as she'd seen the joust at the festival before and she'd spent a week memorizing the script. She breathed deeply as she walked through the large opening. Several men on horses could come through it at once.

The backstage wasn't so grandiose. On her left was a stable that housed four horses, and a small medieval style cottage sat

nearby, looking like a true medieval setting. The most out of place items were a Port-a-John and a small storage shed of costumes with boxes scattered on its floor. A plump woman came from inside it.

“You must be Rebecca,” she noted as she sized her up. “Yes, you should fit quite nicely. I did warn Nate that he had to get someone small enough to fit in the costume. I can take it in, but I can’t match the material on this one to let it out.” She grabbed a dress from the small shed. “Nate really needs to have everyone come to my office to do this. It’s such a pain to have to have costumes set up out here.” She then proceeded to pull out a hoop skirt, bum roll, and blouse from the crowded shed. She shoved them toward Rebecca. “Do you know how to put this all on, or do I need to dress you?”

Rebecca looked at the parts to the costume. “I think I can figure it out. I will call you if I need help. Where would you like me to change?”

Sandra pointed to the cabin nearby. “That will do. Richard isn’t in there now,” she explained. “Now do hurry. Nate will be waiting, and I’m sure that this will need some alterations.”

Rebecca stepped into her changing room and got dressed as quickly as she could considering that she had to figure out how to put on a bum roll and lace up her bodice. She glanced around, hoping for a mirror, but the cottage had only a small one on the wall. She did want to see what she looked like. The material was beautiful and she felt like a real princess when she put it on. Hopefully she looked as good as she felt.

As she was lacing the bodice, she tried to pull the blouse under it up some, but unfortunately it wouldn’t raise. She

finished tying the cording and looked down, noticing that she could see down her shirt, which made her uncomfortable, for she was usually very modest. She reminded herself that she often wore dance costumes that weren't overly modest, but that seemed different. There she was on stage, at a distance, a nameless dancer. Here people would be up close, talking directly to her, able to see. She pulled the blouse up as far as it would go and walked out.

"Beautiful!" Sandra called, and she began to tug on the dress and tighten laces. "Absolutely beautiful." She pulled out a jeweled necklace and sparkling tiara. She handed the necklace to Rebecca to put on and placed the tiara on her head. "I will need to teach you to put your hair up properly, but there's no time today," she instructed. "Nate wants to start the rehearsal. She stepped back to get an overall picture and nodded her head. "Very nice. Very nice. You will do."

"Hurry it up!" a voice rang out. "We need to start rehearsal."

"She's coming, Nate," Sandra called back, the annoyance resounding in her tone. "I'm not even fixing her hair. It does take time to dress."

"Send her right out," Nate called.

"Men," Sandra muttered. "They just don't understand."

Rebecca walked back into the arena, aware of the weight of her dress and the dirt in her slippers.

Trevor bowed to her, as it was a habit from so many years of working at the Renaissance Festival. "Wow! You look so hot."

She turned a delightful shade of reddish pink.

Trevor took on his White Knight persona and voice. “Charming, my lady. Your eyes sparkle more than the jewels around your neck.” His eyes went from hers to the necklace. She wondered if he was really looking at the necklace or the revealing bodice and felt suddenly uncomfortable.

“You are too kind,” she replied with a slight curtsy, also playing her part, but the realization that he could see farther down her dress when she did made her straighten up quickly.

“Places!” Nate called out. “Everyone, places.” The actors and actresses quickly obeyed. Queen Beatrice took Rebecca up the stairs to show her where to go.

“Nervous?” she asked.

“Yes,” Rebecca admitted. “I’ve never done this before.”

“Don’t worry,” Charlotte assured her. “We all had a first time, and you will do fine. No one will get angry if you mess up. If you forget a line, someone will cover for you. We’re all used to improvisation.” She laughed. “They will probably stick to the script for practice, but I wouldn’t count on that once the festival starts. They tend to ad lib when there’s a crowd around. Just say whatever comes naturally if they do. Remember that you’re playing a beautiful princess, but even a princess can make a witty or cutting remark. Really you don’t even need to act. Just say whatever you would say in the situation, just say it in Renaissance wording.”

Rebecca felt more at ease. “I’ll try to remember that.” She took her seat on her throne and looked out over the arena. The



squires were in their places, and a herald began to announce the joust.

“Lords and Ladies,” he announced. “The king’s joust is about to begin, so I present King Charles and his beautiful queen, Beatrice!”

The king and queen stood up and waved to the pretend crowd. “Welcome,” King Charles called out. “Today’s tournament is a challenge by our hero, Sir William of Chapney, who is defending my daughter’s honor against an accusation by the Black Knight who has accused her of impropriety.”

Trevor rode out on a white horse with his shining white armor. Rebecca could imagine the crowd going wild.

“Your majesties,” he called out to the king and queen. “I am proud to serve you this day as defender of the lovely princess’s virtue! Such accusations will not go unpunished.” He rode forward. “My dear princess, I will gladly fight and even give my life for your honor, for never have I seen such grace and charm as I see when I gaze upon your beauty.”

Rebecca smiled. “I thank thee, my noble knight, and pray thee win.” She pulled out an embroidered piece of silk. “Wouldst thou carry my favor that all may see my support for thee?”

The White Knight raised his lance, and she dropped the favor over it. “I am honored to carry thy favor,” he said as he took the cloth. “I will have strength through the battle, hoping that at the end I will not only possess your favor, but I will possess your heart.”

Rebecca found remembering her lines to be easy, as they were exactly what she'd think to say in the situation. "If thou canst defeat my accuser, I will give it to thee gladly, along with my hand."

The White Knight nodded to her. "Then I will fight to the death if I must." They all paused, knowing that there would normally be wild cheers from the crowd.

Then the herald announced, "The Black Knight has arrived!"

The Black Knight rode out. His entrance would not be greeted with roaring cheers, but by chilling boos. He rode up by the White Knight.

"I challenge thee," the White Knight called, "To a joust for the honor of the Princess Elizabeth!"

"To the death?" the Black Knight sneered.

Rebecca felt a chill at his threat.

The White Knight met his eyes. "If that's what it takes."

"Then I accept," the Black Knight agreed.

Rebecca couldn't see his face under his helmet, but his voice was threatening enough that she could tell he was scowling. She wondered who he was for a moment, but her thought was distracted as they began the joust, which looked so real that she almost thought it was until both knights stopped to work out a pass and practiced the hit slowly.

After the third pass, the White Knight knocked the Black Knight off his horse, jumped off his own, and drew his sword. The Black Knight followed suit and drew his.

Rebecca again began to wonder who the Black Knight was. Although his strength and talent were unquestionable, his manner was not. He threw dirt in the White Knight's face, pulled a dagger from his boot and stabbed it between the plates in the white knight's armor, and feigned being knocked out so he could take the White Knight by surprise when he came over.

There was a great deal of fake blood dripping from both men. How did they make it look so real? The whole battle seemed to transport her to another place and time, mesmerizing her with the gallantry and crudeness off the battle. "Come on, Sir William!" she cheered. "Don't let the cheating demon win."

The Black Knight knocked the White Knight's helmet off so the crowd could see their hero. Then he took him in a headlock and almost stabbed him, but the white knight flipped him to the ground and the fight continued.

Of course, the White Knight won. The outcome was always the same as the whole event was choreographed. When the Black Knight finally fell dead on the ground, the White Knight jumped on his horse and rode up to the grandstand.

"Well done," Queen Beatrice congratulated. "It is sad that blood has been spilt here today, but I am glad that it was not your own. You fought well."

The White Knight looked up, blood dripping down his face. "It has been an honor to serve."

The queen looked surprised. "Thou art wounded. Dost thou need aid?"

“Nay,” the knight assured her. “The wounds are nothing to me if I have succeeded in winning the princess’s heart.” He looked over at her with his big blue eyes.

Rebecca smiled at him. “Sir William, thou hast won my heart and my hand if thou desirest it.”

The White Knight bowed his head respectfully then looked up at her. “My heart has no greater desire.”

“Then it is settled,” the king announced. “Thou shalt marry my daughter in a week, and I shall make you captain of the guard.”

There were a few more lines, then the Black Knight got up and took his bow. Nate had decided not to just have him carried off, because he wanted the children in the crowd to know that this was all pretend and not be scared that someone had really died.

Nate made a few notes, and told Rebecca that she’d done a fine job. “The real trick to acting is just to be natural,” he explained. “When people try to act the part, it becomes fake. Just be yourself, but with the history and speech of Princess Elizabeth. She can have whatever personality you want to give her, so you don’t have to really act. Just be yourself, but exaggerate it slightly to give more personality to the character.”

That made good sense to Rebecca.

As soon as Nate was done with notes, the Black Knight disappeared. Apparently that was normal and all part of his mysterious overtone.

The White Knight, however, did not make himself scarce. He approached Rebecca. “Might the fair maiden allow her

noble protector to show her around backstage so you will feel at home?" He then went to his normal voice. "I'd love to show you around if you'll let me."

She was shocked. "I would be honored, Sir William."

He smiled. "It's just Trevor. You don't need to be formal with me." He offered his arm to her and escorted her through the proscenium in the grandstand. He first showed her the stables. Two stable hands were attending to the horses.

"The white horse is the one I always ride," he explained to Rebecca. "His name is Storm, and he has more spunk than the others, but I like him that way." He then pointed over to the cabin. "That hut is for the stable boys so they can always be near the horses in case they need something. We often change in there. There is a sign on the door we flip to show if it is available or not." He glanced over and saw that it was presently occupied. "There's really not much to see there anyway. It's a basic hut, nothing like the camper that I stay in. I'll show it to you when we get there."

He took her hand, which made her tingle all over, and led her around to the sheltered area where the cast ate lunch, took breaks, and put their belongings. There were a few lockers so they could lock things if they desired, but many items were just left out because the actors were trustworthy.

Next, he walked her over to the nearby mobile home that was the office. "This is where you'll go to get your paycheck, take care of any..."

"Trevor," a voice called. The office door opened, and a pudgy lady with long mousy hair stepped out. "Nate told me to talk to you. I need you in my office, now!"

Trevor really didn't want Rebecca to be around as he got lectured. "Meet me back at the arena," he suggested. "I'll teach you to ride one of the horses when I get there, if you like."

Rebecca beamed. Learning to ride a horse sounded fabulous. "I can't wait," she accepted. She bounced off happily in the direction of the arena.

When she reached the arena, it was deserted. She walked around for a few moments unsure what to do. A horse neighed. Perhaps that would be something to do to pass the time. She walked under the grandstand. Everything backstage was quiet too.

Her curiosity led her over to the horses. There were three of the four there – the large black horse the Black Knight rode, the white horse named Storm, and a spotted appaloosa. She carefully patted the spotted one on the nose. It seemed friendly enough. She then walked around it, keeping a good two feet between her and the horse for her own safety.

A voice broke her silence. "That's not wise."

Rebecca looked up to see one of the stable boys on a brown horse with white on his legs and nose. The animal was a normal looking horse, but the stable boy was anything but normal looking. His sun-bleached brown hair fell slightly over his deep dark brown eyes as he looked down at her. He had an innocent look, one of a hard working country boy. He had to be hard working, or else he spent time in a gym.

"That's not wise," he repeated. "If you walk around the back of a horse, you should always stay very close. They can't kick you as hard if you are close as they can if they have some room to swing their legs."

That wouldn't have occurred to Rebecca, but it did make sense. "I'm very sorry. I didn't know."

"Quite all right," the stable boy assured her. He jumped off his horse and extended his hand. "I'm Richard. It's nice to meet you."

She looked down at his hand. It seemed pretty dirty, but she shook it anyway. "I am Rebecca. I'm playing the princess now."

He took his horse's reins. "Well, I do hope you enjoy working here. It's not a bad job at all."

"I think I will like it," she assured him. "Everyone has been very nice to me so far. I had taken this job just to bring in some extra money while I'm in college, but I'm excited about it."

He looked surprised. "Oh? So in your other life you're a college student. What college do you attend?"

"State," she answered.

"And what are you majoring in?" he asked.

"Business and dance. I hope to open my own dance studio."

"Dance?" he noted. "I love to dance, but I think I'm better with horses."

"I know nothing about them," she admitted. "But I think it would be fascinating to ride one. I just don't think I'd do well cleaning out the stables."

Richard chuckled. "It's not all that bad. It's all part of the job. If you want to enjoy the ride, you have to clean the stables, take the bad with the good."

Rebecca laughed. "I guess I've always just been a little too girly to want to get my hands that dirty."

"There's nothing wrong with that," he assured her as he picked up a brush and began brushing the horse.

She stepped carefully up to the horse. "What's his name?"

He turned to her. "Her name is Misty."

She blushed. "Sorry."

He didn't look up from brushing Misty. "Quite all right. I doubt she's offended. She's a very gentle horse. Gentle, yet determined. She's as hard of a worker as Thunderbolt or Storm." He pointed to the big white and black horses. "But she has a very gentle side too. I guess it's a quality I like in women, hard working, but still feminine."

With a raised eyebrow, Rebecca asked, "Are you comparing women to your horse?"

"Absolutely not," he assured her. "I am comparing my horse to women."

She decided that this was a good point to change the subject. "So, have you been working here long?"

He stopped brushing and looked up at her. "A few years."

"Do you like it?"

"I do," he answered with a smile. "I too am a college student, so I need the money, and it's a good job. The horses never complain." Then he muttered, "Unlike women."



Rebecca's eyes went wide. "I heard that. So now the horse is better than women. I think my gender has just been insulted. Perhaps you should learn some manners from Trevor."

Richard laughed out loud. "Or perhaps he should learn some from me."

"My, we are egotistical, aren't we?" she scolded. "First you insult women. Then you insult Trevor. Perhaps you are jealous because he gets to play the White Knight and has such great manners that you obviously can't achieve."

He turned back to brush the horse. "I'm sorry my lady. I meant nothing by the comments. I was going to ask if you want to ride her, but I think it best if I quit this conversation while I am behind." He took the horse's reigns and began to walk off with her.

Rebecca fumed, "And now you'll just leave me here alone. Don't worry. I don't want you to give me a ride. Trevor will be here soon, and he will teach me."

Richard stopped and turned to her. "If you delight in such men, then you have my pity."

"Yes, I know. There is much competition for such a handsome and gallant gentleman, so I'm likely to be disappointed, but he volunteered to show me around."

"There is quite a bit of competition," Richard agreed. "Perhaps you should wear your bodice down even lower, or is that as far as it will go?"

She looked down. The peasant blouse had slid down quite a bit. That wasn't so good, but what right did he have to

comment about it? “Are you questioning my standards?” she snipped.

“No,” he assured her. “I can see your standards. They’re very much exposed.”

With a huff, she walked over and slapped his face.

