

A LADY AMONG LIONS

Written by

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A LADY AMONG LIONS: "NEW BLOOD"

EXT. BORDEAUX - DAY

Bordeaux in 1137 is brightly colored, lush, green and wide with farms, fields and forests. The Garonne River wends its way north where it meets with the Dordogne, bringing fertile land, fish and traders for the market.

Light and clean, the city of Bordeaux bustles with life.

The city's heart is Ombriere Palace, a castle built over time without a plan, surrounded by a Gallo-Roman wall. Large trees that border an avenue between the palace and the Garonne river offer much needed shade.

SUPER:

"Ombriere Palace, Bordeaux, the year of our Lord 1137"

Thirteen-year-old ELEANOR rides astride her silky mare, both of them finely formed and gleaming with strength. Her robes, most unladylike, are hiked above her knees.

Riding a large pony next to her is a smaller replica, her sister PETRONILLA (eleven), also lovely and also unladylike.

They meander away from the stables, beyond the castle walls toward the avenue by the river.

EXT. RIVERSIDE AVENUE - CONTINUOUS

Several older ladies-in-waiting ride large horses with decorum. The girls are far enough in front that their chaperones can not hear them.

PETRONILLA

Who shall we be today?

ELEANOR

You choose.

PETRONILLA

Very well. I shall be Grandmama Dangereuse, running away from her husband to live in the tower with Grandpapa the Duke.

ELEANOR

And I shall be Grandmama Phillipa,
leading an army against the Count
of Toulouse to gain back the title
and defend our lands!

PETRONILLA

She's boring... she never fought in
a real battle. She even gave up
Grandpapa to Dangereuse without a
fight.

ELEANOR

Not true! She was a great ruler in
her own right. Wise, strong,
independent, loyal. Far better for
Grandpapa than Dangereuse.

PETRONILLA

Dangereuse was beautiful - he
risked everything for her. Wrote
poems and songs about her! Phillipa
just retired to an old abbey.

ELEANOR

A new abbey. She gave the money to
build it. And you know why?

PETRONILLA

Yes.

ELEANOR

Because it was founded on the idea
that women are not only equal to
men, but superior - better
managers, better --

But Petronilla has heard this all before. She urges her horse
to gallop and takes off down the lane.

PETRONILLA

(shouts)

I am Dangereuse and I care not what
anyone thinks! I shall give up all
I have for love... for the Duke of
Aquitaine!

With an exasperated laugh, Eleanor chases her sister. The
horrified ladies-in-waiting gasp as the girls disappear
around a bend. LADY CECILLE, middle-aged and motherly, speeds
up to a trot.

LADY CECILLE

Girls! Stop!

A tall lady urges her mount to keep up with Lady Cecille.

TALL LADY

They are worse than boys. The only thing the Duke hasn't taught them is sword play.

LADY CECILLE

Are we sure he hasn't?

(shouts)

Girls, stop this instant! Girls!

The girls race till they have put a good distance between their chaperones and themselves. Eleanor, on her larger horse, pulls ahead and slows down.

Petronilla stops next to her and fans herself.

PETRONILLA

(catches her breath)

No fair. I would have won if I was allowed a proper mare.

ELEANOR

Probably! But Papa said not till your next birthday.

Distracted by the sound of galloping horses, the girls look around, nervously.

Moments later three horsemen fly around a bend and nearly knock into Eleanor, unsteading her mount. Petronilla, who is not holding the reins, has no way to stop her pony as it bolts in fear.

PETRONILLA

Help! Eleanor!

Petronilla clasps the pony's mane, desperate not to fall.

Eleanor dashes off after her. The pony veers wildly as the mare approaches, nearly unseating Petronilla. A skilled rider, Eleanor prevents its escape.

The pony rears, dumping Petronilla unceremoniously into the dirt road. She lands with a thud.

ELEANOR

(stifling a laugh)

Are you okay?

Petronilla rubs her backside. She is covered in dirt. Eleanor jumps down off her horse.

PETRONILLA

I'm fine.

Eleanor pulls Petronilla up. She runs to grab the horses' reins, soothing them as she leads them back to her sister.

ELEANOR

I've told you a hundred times you must always keep the reins in your hands! You must keep control!

PETRONILLA

I'm sorry, but --

Petronilla looks off down the road, embarrassed.

ELEANOR

-- No buts. If you want a more powerful animal, prove you can handle it. You can't count on someone to rescue you. It's your responsibility.

PETRONILLA

But you'll always be there for me!

Eleanor tries to swat her, but Petronilla runs off.

PETRONILLA (CONT'D)

It's hot and I'm dirty. If we gallop a bit further, we could go for a swim before Cecille forbids us.

Eleanor looks back in the direction the riders have gone.

ELEANOR

We should get back to the palace.

PETRONILLA

Please, Aenor? Cecille will never let me on my own, and I'm unbearably hot.

Heaving a sigh, Eleanor puts her hands out to help her sister back onto the pony. She leads her own over to a fallen tree and uses it to help herself climb on.

They ride their horses up a path that leads to a hill. At the top of the hill, they look out over the vast countryside.

ELEANOR

Father told me our land is the most beautiful in the world so our dukes and duchesses have had to be the most powerful to protect it.

PETRONILLA

Protect it later. Swim in it now!

Petronilla dashes down the far side of the hill toward a copse of trees bordering a lake. Laughing, Eleanor follows.

Tying up their reins, the girls strip down to shifts and wade into the water.

INT. GREAT HALL, OMBRIERE PALACE, BORDEAUX - DAY

In a large, airy room, the normal hustle and bustle of castle life takes place. Servants clean. Lords and ladies wander through, fanning themselves. Children play games.

Two teenage serving girls gossip while they clean the hall's high table. They pass the STEWARD, who tests a merchant's barrels of wine.

STEWARD

This does not taste mature.

The wine merchant watches the two girls, his manner lewd.

WINE MERCHANT

It's a young wine, but it is fine. It will age well and, I expect, be full bodied.

The steward sees where the wine merchant's eyes have gone and is displeased.

STEWARD

(points to two barrels)
Take this barrel and that one to the kitchens. Cook will choose.

The wine merchant bows and grabs the wine.

WINE MERCHANT

Yes, My Lord. Thank you.

The room comes to attention.

GEOFFROI DE LOROIX, ARCHBISHOP OF BORDEAUX walks deliberately toward the steward followed by the three horsemen who had nearly knocked into Eleanor.

Geoffroi is late middle-aged, distinguished and highly respected, with a low, booming voice. In the absence of the girls' father, he is their guardian.

GEOFFROI

Have you seen the girls?

STEWARD

Out riding, Your Grace.

GEOFFROI

Have someone bring them to me.
Immediately.

(gestures to the
messengers)

And show these men out.

STEWARD

(bows)

Yes, Your Grace.

The steward and messengers hurry off.

GEOFFROI

(to himself)

God help those children now. God
help us all.

Deeply troubled, Geoffroi looks out over the great hall.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The girls splash each other and giggle. They race from one side of the lake to the other - both excellent swimmers.

ELEANOR

How far can you swim under water?

They have a contest to see who can swim farthest. Eleanor lets her sister win. They pull themselves out onto the sand, relaxing on the edge of the shallow water.

PETRONILLA

It's been lovely since Papa went on
pilgrimage. I know I should miss
him but...

ELEANOR

I know.

PETRONILLA

No one shouts at me. I like when
you're in charge.

ELEANOR

I'm hardly in charge. Father, at least, includes me when he's performing his duties. Geoffroi tells me nothing.

Eleanor sits up, fretting.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

He should let me contribute! Grandmama Phillipa said women are better rulers than men. Less warlike, more intelligent. We are mother to our lands and to its people. It's my duty... I'm ready!

PETRONILLA

They should listen to you. I bet you know more than all those old men. One day, you'll be Aquitaine's greatest duchess.

Eleanor smiles and kisses her sister's wet head.

ELEANOR

Only if Father breaks his promise to marry the Viscountess of Limoges.

Lady Cecille sits on her horse at the top of the hill looking sternly down at the lake.

LADY CECILLE

(shouts)

Ladies, come! You are needed at the palace!

INT. OMBRIERE PALACE HALLWAY- DAY

Eleanor and Petronilla, disheveled, follow Geoffroi through the hall down a maze of corridors to a small antechamber used by court secretaries, two of whom work at large wooden desks.

INT. OMBRIERE PALACE STUDY - CONTINUOUS

GEOFFROI

Out.

The secretaries leave and Geoffroi points to the chairs.

GEOFFROI (CONT'D)

Sit.

The girls do as they are told, glancing at each other, anxious. Geoffroi paces a moment then turns to the girls. Words are said that cannot be heard.

Eleanor's eyes fill with tears, but just as she's about to cry, Petronilla dissolves into hysterics.

Eleanor's mothering instincts overcome her own sorrow. She catches her sister before she collapses, cradling her.

Over Petronilla's head, Eleanor, struggling for self-control, gazes at Geoffroi with an uncertain look of heartbreak.

INT. GREAT HALL, OMBRIERE PALACE - EVENING

The mood is somber as members of the court wander through. A small group of ladies gossip in one corner.

FAT LADY

And now the babes are orphans. God help them.

The ladies quickly make the sign of the cross.

TALL LADY

And what is to become of Aquitaine without the duke to keep order?

Geoffroi walks through the hall with GEOFFREY DE RANÇON, a strong, handsome, twenty-ish lord, and several knights.

GEOFFROI

Quadruple the guards round the palace. The duchess may not leave these grounds.

DE RANÇON

(to the knights)

And no one comes in without approval.

GEOFFROI

She's a lamb in a wolf's den.

DE RANÇON

Not here she isn't. We will keep her safe.

GEOFFROI

Safe? She is unwed. She's thirteen. Duchies have collapsed before...

DE RANÇON
He should have settled her
betrothal long ago.

GEOFFROI
As you tried to do?

De Rançon, shocked that the archbishop knows, says nothing.

GEOFFROI (CONT'D)
Regardless, it is settled now. I am
off to inform Her Grace.

De Rançon stops, stricken. Geoffroi walks away, then turns
back to the young lord.

GEOFFROI (CONT'D)
Be certain I don't have reason to
suspect you a wolf.

Geoffroi and the knights leave the hall. De Rançon remains
still, watching Geoffroi's back.

EXT. GARDENS IN A PALACE COURTYARD - EVENING

Eleanor sits on a bench in a secret garden. The sun sets and
the first stars appear. She watches birds fly past overhead,
listening to their melancholy caws. Geoffroi approaches.

ELEANOR
How did you know where to find me?

GEOFFROI
I've followed you about since you
toddled, Your Grace. I know your
hiding spots.

ELEANOR
You don't have to call me that.

GEOFFROI
Yes I do.

Geoffroi sits on the bench facing the other direction and
gazes skyward.

ELEANOR
I will progress through Aquitaine.
Let my vassals know the duchy is in
good hands. Accept their homage.

GEOFFROI
You will not.

Eleanor looks sharply at him.

ELEANOR
I must establish myself --

GEOFFROI
-- Your Grace, you are to be
married.

ELEANOR
I... what?

GEOFFROI
I have received word that your
father arranged matters before he
died.

ELEANOR
(hopefully)
Geoffrey?

GEOFFROI
No.

Eleanor turns her gaze to her home - if it's not De Rançon,
she doesn't much care who it is at this moment. She has other
issues on her mind.

ELEANOR
I can't just sit here and wait to
be married. I must do something for
Aquitaine. Show them I am in
control! I want to be a great
duchess...

GEOFFROI
All in good time. First you must
learn to be a great wife.

ELEANOR
I don't want a husband... I want to
govern on my own --

GEOFFROI
-- Leave Aquitaine to us. We will
guard it for you.

Geoffroi leaves, ignoring Eleanor's bitter expression as
arguments she'd like to make roil within her.