

Chapter 1 : Defy Not the Heart by Lindsey, Johanna | eBay

*"Defy not the Heart" is the story of Ranulf and Reina. Since her father passed away an year ago, Reina de Champeney is the lady of her keep in Clydon and does everything to help her people- including making decisions about her marriage, a power which her father left her with.*

But Ranulf did dismount and lift her down in front of him. He was a man of middle years, robust of health and frame, but only of medium height, which meant he had to look up to Ranulf, far up, a fact no man of rank liked. Since he was studying Ranulf, Reina quickly introduced them. He did not take me for himself but for a Lord Rothwell, who had lied to him, claiming I was his betrothed and had refused to wed him. Naturally, as soon as I informed Sir Ranulf that I had never even heard of this Rothwell, he was honor-bound to bring me home. Rothwell is no different than de Rochefort, and I am glad you answered my summons so quickly, for we need to discuss what to do about my presumptuous neighbor, though I am inclined to let the matter be with my wedding pendingâ€”which we also need to discuss. Does he look like a man who would kill a defenseless woman just to avoid a little skirmish? I cannot tell you how much I had worried over that, and how it eased my mind, hoping you were here to defend against another attack. This is Ranulf Fitz Hugh. Mischievously, she waited a long moment before adding, "I am sure confirmation at this point would not be amiss. Do one of you gentlemen relieve Sir Ranulfs mind. Am I, or was I ever, betrothed to a Lord Rothwell? But as to wedding him, I have had a change of heart. Do you all come inside and we will discuss it over supper, but I really must let my ladies know I have returned safely, and see that my servants have not grown lax in my absence. Simon, do you assume my honor and introduce your men to my guests and make them welcome for me. He was left standing amidst her men, and with the lady gone, the other knights converged on him. But he need not have worried. Her having informed Lord Simon that he and his men were guests and welcome was all that was necessary to assure there would be no antagonistic questioning. We took the letter left here to Sir William, still bedfast but no longer delirious. But when he read the letter aloud, Iâ€™I was so afraid for you I meant to go after you. Sir William refused, but Aubert, that scurrilous cur, caught me trying to go anyway last eventide and ordered this. I will kill him when I get my hands on him," Theo vowed. Do I look as if I suffered from my little adventure? I was in no real danger, which you should have realized. I am too valuable to kill until after I am wed. He brought me back, did he not? You know how I felt about him! Were you given no choice? He was not easy to convince he should have me instead. I cannot leave him alone for long with my vassals. There would have to be a second wedding for their benefit anyway, so I mean to let them think the second is the first. That way, they will not harbor doubts about why I wed him, thinking I was somehow forced to it even though I would say not. That could only lead to distrust of him, which I do not want. I have thought it through and he is actually the better man for Clydon. John and Richard could neither of them devote themselves exclusively to Clydon, but Ranulf Fitz Hugh will. He has no land of his own, no family he will claim, no other obligations to take him away from protecting us. And he is not poor. He will see to all that needs doing, that I have been unable to do. Whether I regret my decision remains to be seen. She knew what he referred to, and gave him a glare for daring to ask. Now stop teasing me or you will find your ears boxed. Her girdele was golden links that hooked just below her waist to hang down to her knees. And for this occasion, Theo talked her into wearing her hair plaited over her shoulders, the braids wrapped tightly with yellow ribbon, the short white headdress covering little. Reina felt the braids made her look younger, which she did not want just now, but Theo disagreed, swearing she had never looked lovelier. Vanity won out, something she did not succumb to often. Theo made sure she realized it, claiming that since her vassals knew her well and would not be affected one way or the other by how she looked, she was in truth dressing only for her new husband, which was natural and as it should be. Whether Reina agreed with that or not, she could not deny she seemed somehow prettier than usual. It was worth finding out if it was true, for Ranulf Fitz Hugh was no doubt displeased that it was taking her so long to return to him. She found him deep in a discussion of crop rotation with Simon and John, a subject he seemed to find fascinating. So much for his displeasure at her long absence. He obviously was no longer worried about letting her out of his sight, and she was of a mind not to make her presence known at all,

to retreat back the way she had come. But before she could slip away, John noticed her and greeted her, and she put on a smile as the other two men then turned to her. That she could see no reaction to her appearance at all from her husband deflated her even more, though she was too adept at concealing her feelings to show it. I only stopped to let you know I have not forgotten you. There are a few more things I should see to ere I join you. You know I am a patient man most times, but not when my curiosity has been aroused. Do you tell us what has happened to change your mind about young de Lascelles. Fie on you, sir. Did you think they would doubt you? He was reluctant because he comes landless, though he has the means to buy a fine estate does it please him to do so. That he is sworn to no other lord is what makes him ideally suited to Clydon. After considering all aspects, and finding naught that you might object to, I went ahead and offered Sir Ranulf contract, which he approved. Is there any reason you might be reluctant to accept him as your liege lord when you know him to be the man I have chosen? She had quick assurances from both men that Sir Ranulf was acceptable to them. They are as aware as we of the urgency in getting you wed quicklyâ€”to a man your father would have approved of. The wedding will take place as soon as all are gathered. And yes, Simon, my father would have found much to admire and respect in Sir Ranulf. You knew him well, and know he valued honesty, honor, strength, and ability, above all things. Sir Ranulf s strength and ability cannot be in doubt, and I have had firsthand experience of his honesty and honor. My father would have been well pleased. The man really was never at a loss for words.

**Chapter 2 : Defy Not the Heart by Amy Blankenship**

*Defy Not the Heart [Johanna Lindsey] on blog.quintoapp.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. Reina seethes with rage over her fate: taken captive by the knight Ranulf -- a golden giant of a man -- who has pledged to deliver her to the nuptial bed of the despised Lord Rothwell.*

The lady herself has no need to frequent the Warhurst markets; her own merchants at Birkenham supply all her needs, so she would not hear any complaints. But Lord Richard would oft-times visit Clydon, and he is a different man when he leaves his little kingdom, a man adept at fooling anyone who does not truly know him into believing there could not be a nefarious bone in his body. He is young, clever, and has been Lord of Warhurst only these four years past. If the lady or her father had ever heard rumors about him, they would be quick to defend him, not believe them. You will yourself doubt all I have said do you meet him, for he has that effect on people, appearing trustworthy and virtuous when he is anything but. All you have said is in doubt, or did you assume I would blindly accept the word of an outlaw as truth? But your tale has put off your hanging for the while, at least until I hear what Lady de Burgh has to say of this. Do I find you have done me no harm, I will then look to the rest of your tale. She had been told Lord Fitz Hugh had come, but told too late to close the gate against him. Not that that would have kept him out, she realized now as his men continued coming, fifty, sixty, still more, and she saw the giant among them, sitting his huge destrier that refused to stand still, staring directly at her. She saw one man she recognized, Sir Eric Fitzstephen. At least he was not dead. But what of the other two who had come with him yesterday? Did their absence mean they had not survived the ambush? God help her, she must have been mad. She had known it not long after she had sent her men to attack those knights. She had sent another to call them back, but it had been too late. If he had not told her Lord Ranulf would give her to him did he but ask, and that he would ask, she would not have been driven by anger to do something so stupid. Of course, she could blame William, too, for proving so difficult and refusing to marry her. Had she been wed already, Searle of Totnes could not have upset her. But she could not blame William. In time she could have convinced him that they were right for each other. Now it was too late. Lord Fitz Hugh might have come with a small army, but could he know for certain what she had done? How could he know if she did not confess? The men who returned yesterday, few in number, would never admit their guilt either. And William, who might be guided by his cursed honor to tell all, did not know. He had not dismounted, had not even drawn near. His voice carried across the yard like a trumpet. She would have to shout or approach him to answer. She preferred to do neither, and for now simply nodded. But of course they had naught to fear of him; at least they did not think they did. These were the men Fitz Hugh referred to. She had only twelve here at Keigh Manor after losing ten yesterday. Before she could nod again to answer his question, Lord Ranulf demanded, "Which of you is William Lionel? He dismounted at last, and Louise paled to see that he really was a giant, and coming straight toward her. She would have run were she not paralyzed with terror that he meant to kill her right then. But as Eric had told him, there was no point in his waiting any longer for the outlaws to emerge from the woods on the east side, when the patrol from Warhurst had done so. A man could easily be driven to murder for want of her, and this knight of hers no doubt saw his chances threatened when he learned why we were there. He should have stayed with his instincts that would doubt any lady first and foremost, simply because they were all deceitful and capable of treachery. And she was lovely, this one, with her corn-silk hair and eyes like sapphire, young, and afraid" with good reason. He ought to hang her, but he supposed his little general would object to that. Tall and handsome, with sooty black hair and keen gray eyes, he supposed the man could easily inspire passion in a lonely young woman. The question was, who wanted whom? He looked the man over more carefully. He was big enough, near six feet, brawny enough, and willing. Ranulf had been denied the fight he had waited half the night and all morning for. Would he have it now? Ranulf's smile came slow and was chilling in its implication. Please, William, I did naught" at least he cannot prove it. And Lady Reina will protect me. Ranulf nodded to Eric to restrain the lady should it be necessary and went to join him. The hope was strong that for once he had a worthy opponent, and William Lionel did acquit himself well at first. His movements were swift, his instincts good, his blade or

shield blocking every swing. But that was all he was able to do. As usual, Ranulf's offensive gave no opportunity for counterattack. His powerful blows continued nonstop until Lionel was brought to his knees by sheer exhaustion, unable to raise his shield even once more. He bowed his head, awaiting the death blow, too done in to overmuch care. He heard Ranulf sheathe his sword instead and looked up with surprise. The giant was grinning, his breathing labored only the slightest degree. William shook his head in bemusement and chagrin. But you do not ask after her fate. Did you love her so little? She might be comely, but she is a spoiled, vain child and much too willful for my liking. I did all I could to show her I was not interested, including begging leave to depart her service. She would not believe me. I can use a man of such convictions in my own service, are you willing. She will be wed to my own man who will assure she makes no more mischief. She may not like it, but she will learn loyalty to her overlord even if her bottom must suffer in the teaching. Ranulf turned away then, tossing his helmet to Kenric. His eyes happened to light on the widow, who was too far away to have heard what was said of her. She was pale, anxious, and fair trembling with fear now that her champion had failed to acquit her through combat. But as he approached to tell her of his decision, he watched her change with her first clear sight of his face. Her expression softened, her body relaxed, her eyes turned sensual in appraisal, and he could almost hear the wheels turning in her mind. He had seen that look too often to mistake it, the look of a woman about to seduce a man to get what she wanted. She could wait until Searle was recovered enough to come here and tell her her fate. She could stew with worry in confinement until then, which was far less than she deserved for the lives she had cost. Had her mischief not led to other discoveries, he would not be even that lenient. Chapter Thirty-five "He, comes, my lady. She ran from her chamber and down the stairs, across the hall, down more stairs and still more, reaching the bailey just as Ranulf dismounted. Hearing him swear most foully was the first indication she should not have been so impulsive. Feeling his whole body jerked by the reins was the second. And then she heard the horse as it geared up to do what it did best, stomp anyone foolish enough to run toward it, including its master. Reina gave a small gasp and let go to scurry out of the way. Ranulf was furious by the time he finally got the animal under control. He walked to his wife and picked her up. Stupid and thoughtless and it will not happen again. I remembered William Lionel, and he is no small man. I was afraid you would fight him and might be hurt. It very effectively dashed her concern and replaced it with chagrin. So, too, did the tight squeeze she got before she was set back on her feet. I was there and had ample men to go up against a mere handful. And as for Lionel, he might be a man of considerable size, but look at me, Reina, and tell me which of us you would place your wager on. You are not invincible. I have been taking keeps and defeating armies for other men these past seven years. Think you I will be careless now that I fight for myself? Do you know how long it has been since I last slept? Come inside, my lord, and you will have what you desire. He wished she had not used those particular words.

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