

PRINCE LAIRD AND THE LOVE POTION: AN UNFETTERED FAIRYTALE is a 78,000-word, dual-POV rom-com. It is the second book in the Unfettered Fairytale series.

Prince Laird and the Love Potion
An Unfettered Fairytale (Book 2)

Chapter 1 • A Losing Joust

A severed sausage, skewered on a sharp stick to be roasted over a fire: That was the unfortunate image that came to Prince Laird's mind as he watched the knight being carried past him on a litter, the pieces of a shattered lance protruding from his crotch where there was a gap in his armor. Laird shook his head in a futile attempt to brush off the mental image that had come up unbidden. He found to his great distress that the sausage was now accompanied by the image of an overripe pair of plums, also skewered, which made him shiver. He'd certainly known that jousting could lead to him losing his life. It had never before occurred to him that it could lead to him losing his cock. Or his balls. He shivered again before he could stop himself.

He had certainly seen knights impaled by bits of shattered lance before in the jousting yard. He'd even seen men killed in the game of might. He knew that the gap in a knight's armor between where the breast plate ended and the leg plates began presented a small but dangerous gateway to wretched, potentially deadly injury. A major artery ran up the legs along that gap. But, judging from the less-than-copious amount of blood this knight had been losing, that artery had, thankfully, been missed. Then again, judging from the look of abject pain on the man's face – not to mention his pale white visage and the fact that he seemed to be shivering in unspeakable agony – the wound, while not immediately fatal, had been serious.

Laird was quite certain that he'd prefer to die in a joust than lose his cock in one. And he couldn't speak with complete assurance on the issue, but he strongly suspected that most of the other jousters – should someone care to poll them about it – would feel the exact same way.

He took a deep breath and tried to refocus his energy. He was the next rider up in the joust and would be expected at the tilt as soon as the runners had picked up the pieces of broken lance and a squire had caught the horse – the one that had been carrying the just-injured knight and was now charging about the jousting yard riderless in something akin to equine terror. Laird could hardly back out now. Jousts didn't get called off for injuries. They weren't even held up for outright death. (Only once had he seen a joust halted before a victor was crowned and that had simply been because they'd run out of lances.) Jousts were the ultimate game of male showmanship. They were an exercise in skill. And fearless power. Brute force. To pull out because one feared for the safety of one's cock – one's personal lance, as it were – would make one a laughing stock. It would bring shame upon Laird's own head and that of the entire royal family. No matter that his cock would be safe – he'd never again have the chance to use it as every self-respecting woman in the kingdom would laugh in his face. Or, worse yet, pity him.

Not that it mattered. He seemed, in any event, to be losing the exquisite talent with women he'd long been known for. He had tried over the course of several months and on multiple occasions – and failed miserably every time – to bed the one maiden he currently wanted more than any other

female in the kingdom. Lovely Plié. His brother's wife's younger sister. He'd wanted Plié since the moment he'd laid eyes on her – even though she'd been dressed as a whale at the time, as she was performing in his brother's *Musicale Extravaganza*. She'd been the lead dancer in the chorus of magical sea creatures, and she had moved like a siren. She had undulated like the waves. Rolled and swelled like a body of hot, hale water that flowed only for him. Many a night, she had pounded the shores of his dreams, from which he'd awoken wanting to pound her back out to sea himself. Oddly enough, his desire for her had only been heightened by the one event that usually lessened his interest in a woman: actually meeting her. They'd met at a dinner to celebrate the engagement of his brother, Prince Tagert, and her sister, Aria. Plié had deigned to dance with him that night but had drawn a very clear line on anything more personal than that. She'd made it obvious that he could hold her close and gently manipulate her body until she fell into an ecstatic exhaustion, but only if they were both fully clothed and in a room full of people.

Since the wedding, she'd moved into the castle to be Aria's chief lady-in-waiting, and the temptation of seeing her daily – combined with the cock-blocking effect of her utter disinterest, which had been sharper than any fractured lance – had made his life miserable. But this week he seemed to have made some progress, tiny though it might be. He'd asked if he could wear her colors while he jousted, and she'd bestowed upon him a lovely silk scarf – a sea green color, like the ocean nymph that she was – which he had carefully tucked into the right arm hole of his breast plate. He'd imagined how it would flutter beside him as he drove his horse toward his opponent, with Plié watching from the stands at her sister's side.

Laird shifted uncomfortably on his horse. Thinking about Plié was no way to prepare for a joust. He needed his head about him. And he wanted his cock to be hidden away in safety, not standing at attention as it was wont to do whenever he thought of Plié. Laird watched as a pair of riders from the ground crew brought the terrified horse under control and led it from the arena, the smell of dust intensifying as the horse walked by.

“Up next,” the announcer yelled from the front of the arena. “His Royal Highness Prince Laird!”

Laird rode his horse out into the arena. He could hear the excited roar of the crowd as the people cheered.

“And his opponent, Sir Richard of Norwich!” the announcer yelled.

Laird saw his opponent approach the tilt from the other end of the yard. He knew little about the man although they had spoken on several occasions. Sir Richard had even jousted at the castle before, although Laird did not think they had actually ever met one another at the tilt. What he recalled most clearly about Sir Richard was his sister, the lovely Leonora, who had accompanied Richard to the castle for the tournament a few years back. Laird recalled her long, black hair and the most ladylike way she had gasped when he'd bedded her. A cursory thought flew into his head – had she accompanied Sir Richard again this year and was she sitting, at this moment, in the stands watching both her brother and Laird? And was she wondering which of the two men she should cheer for – the one she was connected to for life by blood or the one she'd been connected to for an evening by lust?

The conundrum was fleeting, as Laird paid it little heed, not having thought of lovely Leonora for quite some time. Even if she was here with her brother, Laird had no desire to revisit their brief romance, even though he'd found no fault in their coupling. It's not as though he lost interest in a woman as soon as he'd bedded her. He'd certainly rekindled old flames before. He just had no desire for her – or any other woman in the kingdom – save one. The thought made him frown but he forced it from his head.

He did recall that Sir Richard was a giant of a man. Tall and broad, certainly outweighing Laird by quite a bit. Not to worry. Laird had unseated many a jousting competitor and had not been particularly worried about this one. Except for the unfortunate image of the skewered sausage, he'd had no fears about this particular joust.

His squire came up beside him and handed him his lance, which he hooked to the arret on Laird's breastplate that helped hold the lance in place. Laird bent down slightly so the young man could lower his face shield, which cut off a good ninety percent of Laird's range of vision. Laird cradled the lance in his right hand, ensuring that it was well balanced over the horse and pointed toward his lefthand side, where it would meet its target. He tilted his head just enough to the right that he could see the flag when it was lowered, but not so much that he lost sight of his target.

He considered for a brief moment making a mercy pass – that is, pointing his lance away from the approaching rider at the last second in a bid to be spared from being hit by the other man's lance. But there were two problems with this strategy. First, once the horses were set in motion, it was entirely possible that the approaching rider would fail to see his request for mercy, given the limited visibility of the helmets both men wore. And second, unless he could come up with a really good reason for making the mercy pass in the first place, it would not spare him from having to make other passes during the match. It would just delay the inevitable. Not to mention that making a mercy pass for the sole purpose of vouchsafing your cock was as potentially embarrassing, if not more so, than simply withdrawing from the match altogether. There, that made three problems with the mercy pass strategy. Laird swallowed. He was going to have to make the pass and simply hope against hope that his cock survived unscathed. He was not a quitter, damn it. He was generally known to be afraid of nothing. And a damn fine jouster, to boot. He'd have been just fine if that blasted image of the skewered sausage hadn't popped into his head. He took a deep breath.

When the flag fell, he spurred his horse into a run, keeping his eyes on the left shoulder of the man cantering towards him. He adjusted his lance one time, then once again as the two men neared one another. He felt his lance hit Sir Richard at the same moment he felt the other man's lance hit him. Both lances broke. As the pieces of his own lance fell away, Laird watched while the sky rolled over his head, coming seemingly from behind or beneath him. That didn't seem right. The sky was above him, after all. Yet, he seemed to be rising up toward it while it was flying out over him. He was still contemplating the oddity of it all when he felt the earth come up from underneath him and hit him squarely in the back.

Then everything stopped.

All motion stopped. His breathing stopped. In fact, all the air he'd just recently held in his lungs had been knocked completely out of him. He even suspected that his heart had stopped, but he wasn't entirely certain how one could judge if such a thing had happened. *Am I dead?* he wondered. And if he was dead, would he have the mental wherewithal to wonder about such a thing?

Then he realized that not everything *had* stopped. Somewhere – at what sounded like a great distance away – a crowd was murmuring. Although among the murmurs Laird thought he heard the occasional shout and quite a bit of laughter. A great cloud of dust rose slowly up from the ground below him and began drifting through the air just in front of his helmet, the visor of which had flown open at some point during his fall from the horse.

The dust was being quite tiresome by insisting on getting into his eyes. He blinked. *Well, I've just blinked, so I must not be dead*, he thought. Then, the face of his squire came into view where it hovered momentarily over his own.

“Ya alright, yer highness?” the man asked him.

Laird tried to speak but the best he could do was another blink.

“Alright. Let's see about getting ya up, then,” the squire said, reaching down toward Laird's hands. The squire pulled Laird's gauntlets off and handed them to someone who was apparently standing somewhere outside of Laird's field of view. Then the squire and another man both reached down and, each one grabbing one of Laird's hands, pulled the Prince up from the ground.

Being pulled up to his feet made Laird's lungs explode. That turned out to be all right, though, because it allowed him to finally draw a breath. He stood for a moment – his hands still being held by the two men – and took another breath, and then another, each one deeper than the last. Dark spots danced before his eyes for a moment, but a third deep breath finally dispelled them.

“Ya alright, then, yer highness?” the squire asked again.

“Quite,” Laird said. He turned his head toward the direction from where the sounds of the crowd were coming, then had the presence of mind to wrench his hands from the grasp of the two men and raise his right arm in a gesture that assured the people in the stands that he was both alive and not the least bit humbled by his fall from the horse. Norwich may have won this pass of the joust, but Laird was still the man on top, he tried to say with a wave. He cast his eyes toward the royal stands, where his sister-in-law and her lovely sister were seated. He winked at Plié and threw her a kiss. It was difficult to read her expression from such a distance, but she didn't appear to be terribly happy. Perhaps she was concerned about his well-being. He hoped that was the case and winked at her again before turning to lead his squire back to the tent at the end of the jousting yard.

Walking in a full suit of armor isn't easy under the best of circumstances, but after the disorientation of being unseated from one's horse and having the breath knocked out of one, it is fraught with additional difficulty. Laird walked slowly, but he held his head high as though

walking slowly was his own personal choice and not a matter of necessity. *Good lord*, he thought. *I've been unseated from my horse by a jousting opponent. The ignominy of it!* Such a thing had never happened to Laird before. He was an excellent horseman and a hale and hardy fighter. He rarely lost at any competition. He was certain, in fact, that if someone tallied up the number of wenches each man in the castle had bedded, Laird would win by a landslide. He was simply the best at ... well, *everything*. Disappointment was such a rare emotion for him that he wondered for a moment how a person handled such a thing. Perhaps he should ask Tagert. Until Tagert had made his royal quest – which ended with him not only rescuing a lovely maiden, but winning her hand in marriage as well, in addition to giving him the balls to finally stand up to their father, King Ripley – his brother had known far more disappointment than Laird had. Perhaps Tagert could give him some pointers? Laird shook his head at the thought. If Tagert were still the insecure, uncertain young man he'd once been, asking him for advice about how to deal with disappointment would have been a great deal of fun for Laird. But given that Tagert had come into his own in recent months, Laird feared he might take a request for advice seriously and actually offer some.

Once Laird made it to the tent, a particularly sweet serving wench pressed a flagon of ale into his hand. He'd bedded that wench on a number of occasions and always found her enthusiastic and enjoyable. She smiled at him now, and the particular smile she bestowed upon him indicated that she was interested in being intimately enthusiastic with him again, should he be so inclined to suggest it to her. He offered her a warm smile in return and chugged the ale back, drinking the contents of the entire flagon in one long gulp. He smiled at her once more – *what was her name, again? Maggie, maybe?* – and handed the flagon back to her before turning to step away so that his squire could remove his armor.

It occurred to Laird that bedding Maggie (or whatever her name was) might be a very pleasant way to put the disappointment of being unseated behind him. Or to at least blunt the blow. He considered taking her out behind the tent and enjoying a non-combative jousting pass with her but, oddly, the longer he mused about the idea the less appealing it became. He knew why without even having to give it a thought: Plié. Since having met her, Laird had found his taste for other women strangely curtailed. It felt as though someone had put blinders on his libido. He still wanted Plié, of course – desperately, even. In the past, however, wanting one particular woman had never hindered his regard for any others. But Plié had somehow put a lock on Laird's lust for other ladies. And since she had, thus far, successfully resisted his advances, it had been quite a while since he'd had the pleasure of a woman. Laird frowned as it occurred to him that his failure with Plié made for two recent frustrations. He's been both thrown from his mount and been thwarted in his attempt at another mounting. He sighed. *How do less-perfect people handle all the disappointment in their lives?*

Being unseated from his horse meant that Laird was out of the joust. Norwich would advance to the next match, and Laird would change into one of his jeweled doublets and join the royal family in the stands to watch the rest of the event. While it stung to have been unseated from his horse, watching the rest of the joust from the stands would give him a chance to sit near and hopefully spend some time with Plié. He grabbed for Plié's sea-green silk scarf as it fell from his

breastplate, catching it handily before it floated to the floor of the tent. He had hoped to still be wearing it when he was honored with winning the joust – he'd imagined taking the stage to accept his prize, then removing the scarf from his armor and holding it to his heart, all the while smiling at Plié, as though she had been his lady luck. But that opportunity was lost. As Laird's mind turned to Plié, his cock took the opportunity to remind him that his most valuable personal lance was still with him and completely unharmed by the jousting mishap. Not to mention, his pair of plums were also unscathed. As recognition of that fact took root in his brain, Laird found himself breaking into a smile. Once dressed, he went to go look for Plié.

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