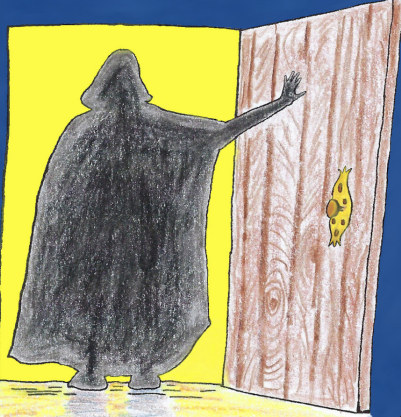


SNEAK PEEK THROUGH CHAPTER ONE!!!



# *The REBEL DUCHESS*

*Book One of the  
Chronicles of Ilseador*



KERRIDWEN MANGALA McNAMARA



***“Lady Genevieve.” Lord Prydeen greeted her, coldly,  
but not correctly.***

***“The proper title is ‘Your Grace’, messir.”  
And if she told herself that a few more times, perhaps  
she could dare to face him.***

A wintry smile passed over the sorcerer's lips – gone as quickly as snow in the Summer. “No longer, I fear. My former master stripped you of your titles for your treasonous activities.”

“My Lord Prydeen! What passes here?” The mild voice interrupted from the direction of the stairs, but was no one Genevieve recognized.

Lord Prydeen's voice was a curious mix of ingratiating and dismissive. “Nothing you need trouble yourself over, Your Majesty. Some rabble found her way up here, clearly to cause some trouble to you. It is my task and my privilege to safeguard Your Highness. We'll be away momentarily.”

Gentle hands cleared away the thongs that had begun to lash her wrists. “Surely you are mistaken, my Lord Prydeen. This is no rabble, but Her Grace, the Duchess Genevieve Stellarine of Elaarwen.”

“Yes, my Lord, the so-called ‘Rebel Duchess’,” Lord Prydeen's voice was growing impatient. “I am taking her to the castle dungeons to have out of her what she knows.”



*THE  
REBEL DUCHESS*

*Book One of the  
Chronicles of Ilseador*



KERRIDWEN MANGALA MCNAMARA

# KERRIDWEN MANGALA MCNAMARA

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, places or people, living or dead, is coincidental.

Also available in eBook and hardcover editions.

McNamara, Kerridwen Mangala

The Rebel Duchess / by Kerridwen Mangala McNamara Indiana:

Rising Dragon Books, 2023

316 p.; 2 maps

(McNamara, Kerridwen Mangala. Chronicles of Ilseador; bk. 1)

Summary: Duchess Genevieve has been leading a rebellion against the evil sorcerer king but now needs to make peace with his successor, help him fight off an attempted coup, and - just possibly - fall in love with him.

ISBN 978-1-960160-05-8 (pbk)

1. Kings and rulers - Fiction. 2. Rebels and Romance - Fiction

ISBN 978-1-960160-06-5 (hc); ISBN 978-1-960160-04-1 (eBook)

*The Rebel Duchess: Book One of the Chronicles of Ilseador*

Copyright © 2023 by Kerridwen Mangala McNamara

Cover art and illustrations by the author

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any format, print or electronic, without permission in writing from the copyright holders.

For further information, email [RisingDragonBooks@gmail.com](mailto:RisingDragonBooks@gmail.com)

ISBN: 978-1-960160-05-8

First Print Edition: February 2023

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## Chapter ONE

### *Caught!*

**G**ENEVIEVE HAD NOT FORGOTTEN THE old king’s pet sorcerer. She *had*, however, assumed he would not be a problem. This was clearly not the case.

She ducked into a rubbish-strewn alley and prayed that one of the doors leading off of it would open to somewhere that was not a dead-end. Unlike the alleyway itself. Genevieve really wasn’t familiar enough with the layout of the capitol to be doing this sort of thing. As her advisors had repeatedly told her. Her chagrined memory replayed the scene of her tossing her head as she assured them that “the Rebel Duchess” could handle anything.

Not that she had *planned* to have to handle anything at all. She was just going to come in as part of the crowds hoping to get a glimpse of the new young king, on this last day of the coronation festivities. Just another gawker from the countryside. She still had no idea how Lord Prydeen had identified her.

The second door on the right opened at her frantic tug, and Genevieve hurried into darkness, pulling the door tightly shut behind her. She could hear people talking somewhere off to her right and the darkness seemed a little less dark in that direction. Perhaps there was a way through the building and back to the main street she had veered off of so abruptly. She needed to get back to the streets to

complete her mission. The inhabitants of the room ahead would be startled, but if she could get past them quickly – before they decided to hold her for a thief – she might make it.

Just as the young woman started towards the sounds, the door behind her crashed open and the sorcerer stepped through.

Lord Prydeen was a master of dramatic effect, some odd corner of her mind noted absently. He stood framed in the doorway, too deeply cowed to see his face, his ankle-length black cloak flapping and curling about him in the sudden cross-currents of air between building and outside. The alley was brighter than the room – so perhaps he merely paused to let his eyes adjust – but in that moment he was more silhouette than shape, more demon than man.

Genevieve could not – *could not* – lead him towards those unsuspecting innocents in the room beyond. Perhaps the completely unexpected would gain her – well, *something*.

She took a deep breath, but carefully did not think too hard about what she was doing – though whether it was because Lord Prydeen was rumored to be able to pull one’s thoughts from the air itself or because she wouldn’t have the nerve if she did–

She spun on her heel and charged directly at the sorcerer, startling him sufficiently that she shoved past him and back out into the dead-end alley. Then to her left and back out to the main street – perhaps she could lose him in the crowd. She had to try.

In her haste, however, Genevieve’s own hood was pushed back, exposing her signature red-gold hair – and confirming what had surely only been Lord Prydeen’s guess about the identity of his quarry.

Fool that she was for not having dyed it.

Thrice a fool for deciding to skulk about the coronation festivities – like any small child playing “Erawan the Kind Robber” – instead of listening to the reports of her spies as the mature, careful, strategic leader of the rebellion should do. That stupid, romantic title – “Rebel Duchess” – really *had* gone to her head, as Rosa had accused her. She would do the Cause no good by being taken by the king’s sorcerer. Even if the new young King Damien lived up to his month-old reputation for fairness, Lord Prydeen would never give her a chance to find out.

No time for this.

Genevieve jerked her hood back up and tried to blend into the crowded market square, trying to outguess Lord Prydeen. Which direction would the sorcerer be unlikely to go? – or which way would he be unlikely to follow? Surely the feared and hated Royal Sorcerer could not make his way through the crowd without causing an uproar that would let her dodge away... though he had before, when she first caught him following her. Could there be *any* safety for her here in the capitol, just six days after Damien's crowning? Surely the old guard was still in place and *no one* (not even the young king?) would dare to gainsay Lord Prydeen.

Abruptly, and entirely on instinct, not daring to look back to measure her pursuit, Genevieve swerved and tore for the royal viewing stand. Damien, if the stories were right – the stories that she had not believed and had come in person to verify – would merely have her executed for a traitor. Lord Prydeen – as she had reason to know – would sell her soul to demons and wring every last memory and secret from her shrieking heart.

The fine bright day taunted her travails, small poofy clouds ambling across a sky as blue as her own eyes. The market square – packed with a crowd of pleasantly frolicking merchants and peasants – impeded her swift progress. The swarms of children playing games of tag nearly tripped her up. The very *joy* of it all nearly derailed her thoughts, for such gaiety could never have been shown in the old king's rule, and part of her could not leave off trying to determine if there was still the undercurrent of desperation that she expected from her previous, and more successfully clandestine, visits to the capitol city.

But the Rebel Duchess knew exactly where the royal platform stood, both due to having marked it well when first she arrived and for the fact that it stood as tall any of the half-timbered two-story buildings surrounding the square. She had hoped to catch a glimpse of the young king from afar when first she arrived, and the royal platform had seemed like the right place to start. She had perhaps stayed still too long, staring too intently at the brilliantly bunting- and flower-clad structure, trying to discern which, if any, of the milling nobles on its three ornately decorated levels was the young

king. Then, as now, the top level was empty, save for a matched pair of guards.

Part of her – the part that had insisted on this mad mission against all rational thought and advice – was certain that, if she could but look into his eyes, she would know if Damien was all that the reports claimed... or if he had been corrupted by his grandfather and Lord Prydeen.

Part of her – if she dared admit it – wanted to believe, even if it seemed beyond belief, that he could have been untouched. That the Cause was won, the need for a Rebel Duchess was done. That the Rebellion could quietly fold itself up and her folk could slip back to their homes, to their lives... though perhaps not the Rebel Duchess herself, recognizable as she was as a symbol...

Yet – how could those two old, evil men *not* have insured that the crown prince was a “fit successor” to the king who had controlled a creature such as Lord Prydeen?

Genevieve had met the prince once, when they were both children. He had barely been of an age for his first pony, and she – a few years older – had just graduated to a mild-mannered horse... and her father’s half-tamed, firebreathing mare that Duke Aldred had no idea she would even attempt to ride. Her father had brought her to Court to make her curtsy to the old king and see her named his Heir. Damien had been but one of a pack of the old king’s grandchildren – a nondescript royal child, good-looking as they all had been, but special in no particular way. They had spent perhaps minutes in each other’s presence, on separate ends of the audience hall that had seemed miles-long to her then.

Now those other siblings and cousins, aunts and uncles, were all gone and Damien – unremarked offspring of an unremarkable parent – had been named Crown Prince, and now King. For him to have inherited would seem to signal that he had done something to earn the old king’s approval – perhaps by being ruthless enough to have ensured no other contenders were available. Certainly, he had made no mark by protesting his grandfather’s policies while the old king lived, no mark of any kind, in fact. Despite all the time Genevieve had spent at Court, she did not recall ever noticing him again.

Yet she could still remember a certain clear-eyed gaze from that long-ago child. A gaze that seemed to recognize and promise to right



all the wrongs that existed in the world. A gaze that had haunted her dreams since she had heard he had been crowned, and had kept her skepticism from becoming outright denial when rumors of the new king's beneficence came to her. And so, she had come to see for herself...

She had reached the royal platform at last, and hunted for a spot to clamber up. Not an easy endeavor, as it was so heavily be-ribboned – in every color, not merely royal gold and turquoise – with bright buntings stretched between triple rosettes made of actual rose petals. An elegantly illuminated sign noted that these were the coronation gifts of the Weavers' and Florists' Guilds – but the small barrel that the sign rested upon was of more interest to her, as it gave her a leg up to the first level, which was filled with younger noblemen. These young men were here to satisfy fathers and mothers who wanted them close to the source of power. They eyed her with interest – her cloak had of necessity been pushed aside to climb and she was dressed in hunting leathers fit tight to her athletic frame – and she in turn ignored them, using the spigoted ale kegs at which they were amusing themselves to give her a step up to the recessed second level.

The older noblemen and -women – and their maiden daughters – on this level looked at her quite askance. Genevieve hoped her hood shadowed her face enough to keep any of them from recognizing her, for she knew no few of them, though she did not recognize the barely-grown girls, nor more than a handful of the hardly-older lads below. These nobles had toadied up to the old king while Genevieve – and her father before her – had sought to protect their people. She knew all too well that they would as soon sell her out to Lord Prydeen as look at her. Even now they were trying to toady up to King Damien, bringing their marriageable daughters to parade before him – an array of maidens scarcely past puberty, for their elder ones had been taken to serve the old king and Lord Prydeen in years gone by, many never to be seen again. They, too, must surely be hoping for better from Damien, yet she saw nothing but avarice in the faces of even the children.

A good-looking young man – unusual only for being the only *young* man on this level of the platform, did someone think the new king's taste ran to boys? – with very dark hair and clear

grey eyes offered her a hand onto the level. Genevieve was not too proud to accept help, even from a scion of one of *these* families. They exchanged a startled look and nearly let go of each other as an electric spark seemed to jump between their hands. Surely it wasn't dry enough today for such things, and so close to the harbor besides.

Putting such irrelevant details aside, Genevieve brushed off her hands on her breeches as she looked up towards the highest level of the reviewing stand, but saw only the pair of Royal Guards – two blondely handsome men so perfectly matched as almost to be twins – decorating that august space. Knights chosen for their beauty, just as were the horses that pulled the royal carriage. She wondered who they were – might they have enough real skill at arms to have faced her in the Battle of Siovale seven years earlier? She'd caught no more than a glimpse of either of them so far, as they turned, watchfully, eyes raking the crowds. Perhaps they were more than merely decorative.

Hopefully the king himself was sitting down and merely out of view. Genevieve needed for him to be there, before Lord Prydeen caught up with her. It was a wild gambit – praise all the Gods at once that Rosa really could handle the Rebellion, since it looked like she was going to have to. Rosa – would never forgive her for getting herself captured and killed. The Rebel Countess – surely that sounded just as impressive. They had known it couldn't last – this would free Rosa to wed and produce the Heir that she needed. Genevieve's own proper title – Lady Stellarine, Duchess of Elaarwen (she dared not think “Princess of the Realm”, though her bloodlines were as good as the king's) – would pass to a collateral line...

No matter. The issue at hand was to get up there to the top level and there was no obvious stair or ladder.

Genevieve dropped her useless disguise of a cloak before it could hinder her further in climbing higher, ignoring the massed gasp from the gathered nobles, and looked for a convenient way to boost herself to the king's level. The balustrade of the king's level – still festooned with those slippery buntings and banners – was more than head-high to her. It was higher than she could hoist herself on arm-strength alone.

That young man was still watching her – looking slightly amused, damn him. Or maybe that was *bemused*. Surely, he had little idea what to make of her and her sudden arrival. But he seemed to come

to a decision and wrenched a ring with a large grey pearl on it off his finger, thrusting it towards her. It was the sort of thing a nobleman might offer a noblewoman to indicate interest – a sort of “let’s get to know each other” offer, not quite a tryst, but more than an offer of acquaintance. The ring would have a house sigil on it, perhaps even a personal seal – enough information for her to find him again later on. A crazy thing to hand to the highly recognizable Rebel Duchess as she attempted to single-handedly besiege the new king’s festival viewing platform. The young man must be completely daft.

And then he bent and cupped his hands as a stablehand might do to help someone into the saddle. The sparkle in his eyes suggested he was prepared to toss her high enough to pull herself up over that balustrade.

Again, the gathered nobles gasped, but this time there were also mutters and a fearful eagerness... and she guessed someone had spotted Lord Prydeen approaching.

There was no time for this. Genevieve stuffed the ring onto her finger – her belt pouch would take too long to open – put her foot in his hands and leapt up in concert with his toss.

And got the – third? fourth? – shock of the day as her reaching hands were grasped from above and an all too familiar voice gruffly said “Young miss, this is the king’s place, you can’t be climbing... up... her–” The voice cut off as and the hands fumbled and nearly dropped her back down, as their owner peered over the edge and then grabbed her more securely and helped her over the balustrade.

The Royal Guard was looking at her in exasperation and some of the same confusion Genevieve was feeling. It was the strangest and least appropriate timing on anything ever – but the touch of his hands had inflamed her with desire. *Not now, not now!* The Rebel Duchess thought frantically. She’d heard of this, but thought it a fairytale... Rosa, Rosa was her love...

“Jason Solway?” she managed to gasp out.

“Genny?” He was as flabbergasted as he was, and if the blush rising in those perfect cheeks was anything to judge, he was suffering from the same reaction. Suffering...

“Here now,” said the other Royal Guard, coming forward from his ceremonial position. “Jase, what’s this all about?”

She looked almost gratefully at the other man, just as gratefully *not* recognizing him as yet another childhood friend. But his familiar behavior towards Jason – were they lovers? Why did that thought make her heart – or something lower than her heart – do flips? And why, oh, why, *was this all happening at once?*

“Stand back, gentlemen,” growled a low, cultured voice.

Lord Prydeen.

Apparently, she wouldn’t have to sort any of this out after all.

The two Guards obediently stepped aside, though she rather thought that Jason only reluctantly let go of her hands, and she could see that the sorcerer had come up a set of stairs at the back of the reviewing stand. A brief surge of wind whipped the cowed hood from off Lord Prydeen’s spotty, balding head, and tossed his long, drooping mustaches. He had not aged well since the old king’s death; his hair had been thinning, but was still full when last she had gotten a good look at him, some months earlier, and the lines around his mouth were graven deeply, where once they had been entirely masked by his whiskers. Genevieve had heard tell that evil sorcerers cast vile spells to keep themselves young – by sacrificing true youths and maidens to demons, some said. She had scoffed, even as she wondered. The old king had lived long past his age, and Lord Prydeen, some said, had not aged at all, even as those noble daughters came to serve them both and were rarely seen again.

“Lady Genevieve.” Lord Prydeen greeted her, coldly, but not correctly. He needed nothing besides himself to emphasize his authority, but he had brought a squad of his personal guards up with him. They fanned out behind him, blocking the path, even to headstrong young women who might push past a sorcerer.

She tilted her chin up – her nose was too snub to properly glare down it, but she was tall enough to try... and the arrogance might mask the tremble that the tumult in her stomach had settled into. “The proper title is ‘*Your Grace*’, messir.” She was actually in line for the throne herself, with all of Damien’s family gone, and ‘Lord’ Prydeen was, after all, a sorcerer of no particular breeding.

And if she told herself that a few more times, perhaps she could dare to face him.

A wintry smile passed over Lord Prydeen's lips – gone as quickly as snow in the Summer. “No longer, I fear. My former master stripped you of your titles for your treasonous activities.”

Genevieve inclined her head. “So, I have heard. But even a Royal Decree does not make a thing reality. Even His – belated – Majesty never put it to the test in *Elaarwen*.”

Something sparked in the sorcerer's eyes. Anger, perhaps? Could such a one as he even feel something as tender as grief? He gestured to his men. “Bind her and bring her.”

Jason bestirred himself to protest, “My lord–!” but the other Guard pulled him back and Genevieve found herself being roughly seized and turned around by hands that made no pretense of not enjoying their task. Even the king's own Royal Guards, it seemed, dared not speak against the sorcerer. Not yet anyways. If only she had waited to see if the young king could consolidate his power; if, indeed, he would continue in the way he had begun!

“My Lord Prydeen! What passes here?” The mild voice interrupted from the direction of the stairs, but was no one Genevieve recognized. She had been turned to face outwards towards the square whilst they bound her, and could not see the speaker.

Lord Prydeen's voice was a curious mix of ingratiating and dismissive. “Nothing you need trouble yourself over, my lord. Some rabble found her way up here, clearly to cause some trouble to you. It is my task and my privilege to safeguard Your Highness. We'll be away momentarily.”

Gentle hands cleared away the thongs that had begun to lash her wrists. “Surely you are mistaken, my Lord Prydeen. This is no rabble, but Her Grace, the Duchess Genevieve Stellarine of Elaarwen.”

“Yes, my Lord, the so-called ‘Rebel Duchess’,” Lord Prydeen's voice was growing impatient. “I am taking her to the castle dungeons to have out of her what she knows. You can make an example of her later on – you must not detract from your coronation festivities.”

“Nonsense, Lord Prydeen,” the mild voice replied. “That isn't how we treat visiting royalty... not to mention that the people would rise in protest and not even you could put them *all* down at once.”

He came around to Genevieve's right side, and before she could register that this was the same young man who had cupped his hands for her boot like any stableboy, he gave her that same enigmatic

smile, and faced the crowd – who had begun to turn as they saw their king. Damien lifted Genevieve’s right hand in his left, holding them high above their heads and called out, “I give you Genevieve Stellarine, the Rebel Duchess!”

It was the sort of moment a Duke’s Heir is trained for and – bemused as she was at the turn of events – Genevieve flattened her palm against the king’s and stood tall before the crowds, the errant breeze tossing her red-gold curls like a mane. She smiled fiercely, trying to think if this would be taken as some sort of inadvertent admission of surrender.

Even as the people roared their approval – and Lord Prydeen fumed behind them – a sudden, strange crackling noise erupted and ribbons of white fire fountained up between their pressed fingers. It wreathed down to wrap their hands and curl around their arms.

For all that she was the reigning duchess of a province, the leader of a rebellion against an unjust king and an evil sorcerer, and had spent most of her life in that struggle... Genevieve was tempted to faint right then and there. This was absolutely the *last* thing she had expected. If she hadn’t seen this happen before, she would have thought it was some new and clever attack by Lord Prydeen.

But she *had* seen this before. And, likely, so had every member of the crowd below.

At least young King Damien looked nearly as befuddled as she felt.

He, however, recovered more quickly than she.

“And your future Queen!” he announced in what sounded like a calm voice.

He pulled her in and kissed her.

And the crowds went absolutely wild.



Keep an eye out for the NEXT book in the  
**Chronicles of Ilseador**  
*The King's Champion*

Available at fine online bookstores everywhere by  
**December 2023**

Or check out another series  
by **Kerridwen Mangala McNamara** in the same world  
(but across the ocean):  
**The Knightess of the Realm** series begins with  
*A Not-So-Sacrificial Maiden*