



Scarlet Rose

HIGHLAND JEWEL SERIES

Lady in a Box

Eliza Knight



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by

Eliza Knight

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my ladies—
you know who you are. Cheers!

Lady In A Box

*Inverness, Scotland
December 1647*

SWISH!

Ian gazed wide-eyed at the spot where Donell had stood only moments before. Swallowing hard, he observed his brother's brooch fall to the stone floor, rolling on its edge until bumping into his boot, and lying still. Leaning down, he picked up the brooch. The silver metal was warm against his fingertips.

What in bloody hell had just happened?

One moment, Donell had been telling him he'd fallen in love with a woman from the future and he would be leaving Clan MacDuff in Ian's capable hands.

And then poof! He was gone. Ian scratched his head. Had the outrageous story Donell told him been true? There was no other explanation. All that was left of his brother was the brooch.

Ian slipped the warm metal piece into his pouch and collapsed into his high-backed wooden chair.

So Donell had been telling the truth. Ian was now Laird MacDuff.

A wide smile spread over Ian's face. His brother had been brooding for the better part of three years. The last month when he spoke of the woman, Lainie, he'd smiled, his eyes flashing with emotion.

If only Ian could find a woman who could set his blood ablaze and melt his heart, as Donell had. But he didn't have time for that now. Now he had a clan to take care of.

The clan! What would he tell them of Donell's

disappearance? The warring lately, especially with Clan MacRae, had been fierce. With Donell gone they would surely feel more threatened than ever.

A maid skittered into the room and, seeing his dark expression, immediately turned to leave.

“Nay, lass. Fetch me some ale.” He leaned his head back against the chair.

What could he do? Say?

Taking a swig of the cool drink, he ruminated on every possible explanation to tell his people.

Best to speak with Lachlann. He’d been Donell’s right-hand man next to Ian. He may know what to do.

“I believe ye,” Lachlann said, his face serious.

“Ye do?” Ian was skeptical. The warrior accepted his explanation plain faced without a blink.

“Aye. Me Da used to tell us great stories of such things. We never believed him when we were young, but hearing the tale from ye makes it clear to me now.”

Ian nodded, his fingers rubbing against his temples. His head was pounding, and pain seared across his forehead. “What am I to do?”

“Do? Why, yer Laird MacDuff, ye do what ye want.”

Lachlann’s explanation wasn’t as easy as he made it sound. The people would not just accept a new laird’s law because he said it was so. He would need to prove himself first.

“I dinnae think the people will accept me story as easily as ye have. What could I tell them? The people were already concerned before Donell left. He hadna taken a wife, there was no heir and there’s been so much fighting with the MacRaes. They will surely challenge me.”

Lachlann stood for a moment, started to say something, then stopped and began to pace in front

of Ian. The movement of the man increased the pain in Ian's head. Taking a huge swallow of ale, he hoped it might ease his discomfort.

"Ye are right, so what ye need to do is take a wife. Ease their discomforts. Get her with child so the people have an heir. Donell proved to Clan MacRae he didn't have Sera, so there's nae so much fighting going on." Lachlann spun around, a light in his eyes, and slammed his fist in his hand. "I've got it!"

Ian looked up, startled by Lachlann's sudden outburst. "What?"

"Ye tell the people that in order to keep us safe, and stop the warring, Donell has agreed to marry a niece of MacRae's in the lowlands. No one will look for him there. They will feel safe and secure, and then if ye marry, they will see ye are serious."

Ian nodded, the pain in his head receding. "Aye, call the people."

Ian walked up the steep stairs to his chamber and splashed water on his face. Tucking the brooch into the small chest on the mantle over the fireplace where Donell had kept it safe, he prayed his brother had made it to Lainie.

Finished rehearsing in his mind the things he would say to the clan, he prayed they would accept, no questions asked.

After the eve meal, Ian left the majority of his clan in the great hall. He chewed on a cinnamon stick to take away the overwhelming flavor of ale, and thought about their reaction to his news. They had readily accepted his story, and in fact had planned an informal celebration.

Having drunk more than his share of ale, Ian stumbled into his bedchamber. He collapsed onto the bed as the room began to spin. His head fell to the side, his gaze coming to rest on the chest over the

fire.

The brooch...

Hoisting himself up, he took a deep breath to steady his legs, and concentrated on moving one leg at a time. *Right, then left, then right, then right...no left.* Chuckling at his inebriated state, he somehow made it to the fireplace. He grappled for the chest, dropping it to the floor more than once. Finally he clasped the open wooden box in his hand, and the brooch, warm and inviting, slipped into his palm.

Making his way back to the bed, he again toppled to its softness. There was something so alluring about the brooch. His thumb rubbed over the intricately designed Celtic knots twisting and winding together. Who had made it? It had been in the family for centuries...

SWISH!

Oh, no! There was that familiar sound, the one he'd heard when Donell disappeared. Ian blinked rapidly, and looked about. He was still in his chamber. Sighing deeply, his hand rested on his erratically beating heart. Perhaps it was just the wind. At least he still had—

The brooch! It was no longer in his hand. He sat up and frantically searched the bed, only to have his hand knock into something soft, velvety smooth and warm. Turning his head slowly, Ian encountered a vision.

The most beautiful woman he'd ever seen lay sleeping peacefully in his bed. When had she gotten there? He rubbed his eyes a moment and then looked again. Aye, she was still there.

Hell, he would never drink that much ale again. Now he was seeing things. And smelling things, too.

Her scent wafted around him. Lilacs, and the indiscernible aroma of a woman's satiny flesh. He groaned. Perhaps he had already fallen asleep and this was a heavenly dream. Flashes of memory

assailed him. Donell had believed he was having a dream, too.

His gaze fell on her again. The vixen had the most golden blonde hair. Cut oddly, her hair was short, like a man's. The silky tendrils lay haphazardly over her chin. Without thinking, Ian brushed a strand away, and the woman sighed and rolled onto her back. The sheet slid down, allowing him to see she wore nothing.

His cock rose to attention and his blood pulsed hotly through his veins. Since his room had not changed other than the lady lying beside him, was it possible she had come from another time?

Ian leaned down and brushed his lips on her full, rosy mouth. Lust coursed through him, assaulting him in the most pleasurable of ways.

Leaning again, he nibbled on her bottom lip, receiving a moan from his treasure. He grinned, and slipped his hands under the blankets to stroke her warm skin.

Natalie Blackwood woke to the feel of a stubbly chin grazing her neck and coarse fingertips running up the length of her ribs. She moaned from the delectable sensation. Her eyelids slipped closed, only to pop back open a second later.

Warm green eyes, fringed by dark lashes, captured her gaze. Natalie took in the handsome chiseled features and warm full lips. Lips that only moments before had been on her skin.

"Dinnae be afraid, lass."

*Oh....*His Scottish burr was like a sinful caress. What a perfect fantasy.

"I'm not afraid." She flashed a smile and was rewarded with a devilish wink and wolfish grin from the sexy man.

Natalie glanced about the room, sighing in contentment. An avid history buff and Gaelic

instructor, this was her dream. She didn't think she could have imagined it any better.

"A saucy lady, eh?" He leaned down to nibble along her chin.

"Only for you," she teased, gliding her hands along his arms, massaging his shoulders.

"Aye, only for me."

His lips descended on her mouth, claiming her, his tongue delving in and rubbing against hers. Tendrils of yearning curled their way around her insides. Her pussy pulsed, quickly flooding, waiting for him to plunge inside. He tasted of spices...cinnamon.

His hands slid down the length of her taut abdomen and caressed the curve of her hip. She swayed her hips closer, urging him to continue with his exploration.

"Yer so tiny, me little vixen," he mumbled as his mouth traveled from hers to taste her neck.

His breath was hot against her skin, so real, so genuine. Was it possible she wasn't fantasizing?

His hands gripped her ass, kneading the muscle and flesh, before sliding lower to caress and massage her thighs.

Natalie moaned, and nipped at his neck, letting her hands probe the muscles of his back and chest.

"What's yer name?" he breathed, his lips lowering to capture a taut nipple. He suckled gently, then harder.

What was her name? He was taking away all rational notions from her mind. "Natalie," she moaned.

"Natalie. Verra pretty."

His mouth maneuvered lower, caressing her stomach, his tongue dipping and swirling about her navel, then sliding over to nip at her hip. His strong hands slid down the length of her legs, and back up again.

“What’s your name?” she whimpered as his fingers slid up her thigh to play with the dewy curls at her slit.

“Ian,” he said, plunging his fingers into her wet opening.

Natalie moaned, arching her back and bucking her hips forward. The feel was so tangible, erotic...Thick fingers drove deep within her again and again. His hard cock rubbed against her hip as his mouth captured hers.

“Ye want me.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement. His titillating words inflamed her senses.

“Oh, yes,” she managed, sliding her hands down the rippling muscles of his abdomen.

An eight-pack. This hot Highlander didn’t just have a six-pack. Her fingers played over the muscled ‘V’ of his pelvis until they brushed against his engorged cock. So big...Natalie’s fingers encircled him—not even coming close to meeting around his width.

Ian groaned deep in his throat, his kiss becoming more possessive, demanding. His thumb rubbed against her clit as his fingers continued to plunder her juicy box. Without warning, an orgasm rocked her. Wave after wave of supple warmth coursed through her as she shrieked with pleasure.

Oh, God, he’s talented...

“How much do ye want me?”

Oh, he’s good. His hot words were spoken erotically against her ear as his tongue flicked a lobe. Natalie couldn’t respond, as his mouth was now covering hers for an alluring plundering.

“Tell me what ye want...”

How could she describe it? She wanted everything...“I want your cock inside me.” Before she even finished the sentence he rolled on top of her, his knees spreading her legs.

“Like this?” He loomed above her, a wolfish grin

on his ruggedly handsome face. His thick cock rubbed against her slick tunnel.

Using a skill she'd learned in college, she wrapped her legs around his hips, gripped his shoulders and hoisted, flattening him on his back with her positioned above. As she straddled him, the tip of his cock brushed her clit, ready to take part in their game.

"Where'd ye learn that?" His hands slipped around her waist and down to her hips. From his expression, he really liked her little maneuver.

"A girl never kisses and tells." She winked, grasping his cock in her hand. Should she ask him for a condom? Natalie almost laughed aloud and dismissed the thought. There was no need; she was dreaming, after all.

She ran her thumb over the mushroom tip to tease him for just a moment and then lifted her hips. Easing down, she let his throbbing erection fill her. Her pussy was so wet, so ready. Tremors rushed through her immediately when he shifted.

"Take me for a ride, minx."

And she did. Natalie ground her hips, back and forth, swirled them around, up and down. He was so big, so sexy...

His hands were everywhere on her body, and each place he touched sent a thrill racing through her. Her clit hummed, on the verge of orgasm. With one quick hard thrust of his cock, her body shattered.

Ian quickened his pace, using his hands on her hips to keep the rhythm as she journeyed into bliss. Lifting her off, he turned her over on her belly. She kneeled on the bed as he stood behind her. Before she could catch her bearings, he thrust into her.

Barely recovered from her orgasm, he rocked her body as he plunged deep inside. His balls bounced off her nether-lips, shooting sparks of pleasure through

her. His hands spanned her waist, caressing her lower abdomen. He threaded his fingers through her light sprinkling of hair and then danced along the hardened nub of flesh. Natalie could hardly breathe.

She'd never been fucked like this...the earth shattered as he flew her again to crescendo.

"Oh, Ian!" she shouted between moans and labored breaths.

"Ye liked that, did ye?"

His hips languidly nudged against hers, and he leaned down against her back. He grasped her face, turning her slowly for a searing kiss.

"Yes...they don't teach about this in the history books."

"And why would they? It'd spoil the fun." He laughed low in his throat, and then quickened his pace, pumping vigorously.

Then he stopped, rolled her over, and again spread her legs wide with his knees.

"Let's see if we can take ye to yer happy place again."

This fantasy man was better than ever!

Before she could nod her consent, he thrust in all the way to her core. Natalie wrapped her legs high over his hips and clutched at his shoulders, placing hot wet kisses along his neck and jaw line.

Lord, if the way his hips gyrated in a perfect dance didn't send her—

Masterful! She shrieked, scraping her nails down his back as the most ethereal quaking overtook her. Ian's ravishment of her body increased as his hips pumped in rapid succession. His body shuddered as he came, pulsing, throbbing, and saturating her. His moan was sumptuous, intoxicating.

"You are without a doubt the most delicious figment of my imagination. Will you visit me again, warrior?" She gazed into sultry eyes, her body spent,

sated.

“No need, me lady. I am no imagined warrior, but as real as ye are. Welcome to Clan MacDuff.”

The golden haired Natalie burst into a fit of giggles. With the alcohol he'd consumed and the fantastic sex making his brain go to mush, he was thoroughly confused about her laughter.

“Why are ye laughing?”

She appeared to gain some control as she rubbed her eyes a moment and took heavy breaths.

“Somebody has played a very good trick on me.” Natalie stood and walked around, her tight little body totally nude as she peeked behind the fur covering at the window, into the wardrobe, and under the bed.

Having not found what she was looking for, she stood in front of Ian, her hands on her hips. “Come on now, who hired you? Who set me up? Was it Carrie?” Her index finger came up to tap her chin.

All Ian could do was stare, open-mouthed, his gaze raking over her luscious curves. He'd never seen a woman as well-formed as Natalie. She wasn't tall, about the same height as most women in the clan, but her body...was she a warrior? A horsewoman? She'd never had a child, that was obvious. Her muscles were lithe, and taut, yet curved into a womanly figure. Breasts high and firm, yet round and supple, each tipped with a pink pearl. He reached out, caressing the side of one plush breast, before she slapped his hand away.

“Hey, Mr. Love Machine, can you answer my questions? So, was it Carrie? She is forever teasing me about my love of a man in a kilt, and that I never get laid.” She rolled her eyes and then looked around again. “You really did a great job with the set-up here. Or did a set-designer decorate the place?”

“My *eudail*, I know not what ye speak of. Yer

language is strange to me.”

“You speak Gaelic, too? How sweet of you to call me your darling.”

He lifted a brow. Obviously she didn’t understand the full picture here. He’d better explain.

“Natalie, I dinnae ken Carrie. All I ken is, I laid down fer bed and ye were there. I am Laird MacDuff, and ye are in me chamber here at MacDuff Keep.”

The lass’s eyes grew wide as she gazed at him, almost like a deer caught in the line of an arrow. Then she shook her head.

“Joke’s up Ian, I’ve figured it out. Now where are my clothes?”

Ian spread his hands wide. “Ye were naked when I first laid eyes on ye.”

She rolled her eyes and groaned. “Whatever. I had fun, but I’m done now.”

Before he could catch her, she walked out of the chamber slamming the door behind her, naked as the day she was born.

Natalie stormed down the hall, peeking into each and every door. Where did this set end? She was going to kill Carrie when she got her hands on her.

Yeah, it had been the best sex she’d ever had, and the man himself was utterly devastating. Her body tingled just thinking about him.

But what? So her friend had decided to give her a little gift—well, maybe not so little. A satisfied grin filled her face. Her wildest fantasy had been to be claimed by a Highland warrior. She should be thanking her best friend. In fact, she really should give her an award for a job well done.

How in the world had Carrie pulled this off?

Natalie found the stairs and hadn’t a care in the world for her naked form as she descended the

circular stone steps. Loud noises rose from below. Ah, she'd found the end of the set.

So they had put on a show for her, and an amazing one at that. Well, she'd give them a little show, too. Laughing aloud at the boldness flowing through her, Natalie stepped off the last step when an arm grasped hers.

"Nay, lass. Dinnae go in there. The great hall is full of me men." The expression on Ian's face was serious.

Natalie faltered a little in her steps.

"Ian, the joke is up. You don't have to keep playing along." Why did her voice sound like she wasn't so certain?

"Natalie, it's no joke. Look."

Ian wrapped a plaid tartan he'd carried down the stairs around her body. The rough wool was authentic, from what she'd studied. The colors were those of the MacDuff Clan. Was it possible for Carrie to have known all these details? She could have taken one of Natalie's articles on Highlanders. But somehow Natalie was starting to have major doubts.

Ian steered her around the corner and let her peek into the great hall.

Her breath caught in her throat and her heartbeat quickened. Warriors clad in tartans and leather boots ate and drank with gusto. Some had already passed out and lay face first in their trenchers. Others were sprawled on the floor, passed out and some had curled up with another warm body amongst the rushes. The room spun, and Natalie's feet didn't feel strong enough to hold her.

Her eyes rolled back and she felt herself falling, only to be caught by strong arms lifting her into the air.

Ian stroked Natalie's hair from her face as he adjusted the blanket over her shoulders. He

suspected with her fainting spell, the truth had dawned on her. But now he had some thinking to do.

Sitting down in the chair before the fire, he leaned his head back and studied the ceiling. Her presence meant she was the one. His true love. Marrying her would stabilize the clan, and secure his place as laird. But how could he convince her?

What if she left?

From listening to Donell's stories, he was aware that he could send her back to her time by tapping three times on the brooch. Sadness filled his heart at the image of her leaving. The odd feeling unnerved him. He wasn't one to experience such a thing. He hadn't conceived of settling down for years. In fact, he'd been on a mission to bed as many women who were willing and able.

Glancing toward the bed at the tiny figure nestled in its softness, he sighed. When had he changed? Several instances transpired in his mind. Seeing Donell's happiness had been a rude awakening to what he was missing. Holding the little nymph in his arms had been another. Further still, his emotions were in turmoil about her leaving and he was trying desperately to come up with reasons to convince her to stay.

Perhaps he would keep to himself for a little while that she could return. Maybe she would settle into life within the clan, with him. If she did, he would broach the topic then.

A moan from the bed caught his attention as Natalie's eyes opened and she immediately spotted him.

"Welcome back," he drawled, moving to the side of the bed.

She blinked a few times, twinkles of light flickering in her eyes from the blazing fire in the hearth. Fear and confusion flitted across her face to be replaced by acceptance.

"I always believed I was meant for a different time. I just never fathomed I would be so lucky as to land in your bed." She smiled shyly, rolling over, lifting up on one arm and laying her head in her palm.

Ian felt like he'd been knocked off the bed. This was not the reaction he'd expected, planned for. At once, jubilation raced through his veins.

"Ye are not angry?"

She shrugged her tiny shoulders in a delicate motion, and Ian couldn't help but caress their silkiness.

"What can I do? I am here, and I believe everything happens for a reason. Perhaps my obsession and study of Scotland was a part of life's plan for me."

"Ye will stay then?"

"Do I have a choice?" Her gaze burned into him, piercing his soul.

Ian struggled with what to say. Dare he tell her she could return at any moment? He didn't want to, yet at the same time, he didn't want her not to trust him, either.

Leaning down he brushed his lips against hers, and instant yearning to kiss the rest of her body took over. He need not answer her questions now. Nay, he would distract her for a bit and see if he couldn't get her to enjoy herself once more.

Deepening the kiss, Ian was pleased when Natalie thrust her tongue hungrily into his mouth. She was a fiery lass to be sure. He slid his length on top of her, loving the feel of her supple body beneath his.

Ian ran his tongue down her neck, nipping and sucking along the way. He grazed his teeth over her puckered nipple, reveling in her sweet moans and her nails digging into his shoulders. He paid tribute to her other breast, and growled when she bucked

her hips rubbing her delicious pussy against his cock.

Yes, that was what he wanted. He wanted to taste the juices swiftly gathering between her thighs, making her slick and wet. Sliding the sheet from her body, he kissed a path down her belly, his hands massaging her waist.

Ian nipped the inside of her thigh and was rewarded with her sensual yelp.

“Let us both enjoy each other,” she moaned as he breathed hotly on her vulva, watching her legs quiver with anticipation.

He should have known from this bold one she would have such tawdry notions in mind.

“As ye wish, lass.”

Rolling over he drew her on top of him for one luscious kiss before she sat up, straddling him. Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

“You still didn’t answer my question, Laird MacDuff,” she said, her voice husky with desire.

Ian opened his mouth and then shut it again. His cock ached and pulsed from the tantalizing vision she’d placed in his mind of her wet velvety mouth sucking him.

Natalie laughed, rubbing her sexy ass against his raging erection. “Dinnae worry, me lad, I want me treat first,” she said, mimicking his thick brogue.

Ian growled low in his throat, and reached up grasping her head in his hand. Half-sitting up, he captured her mouth for a torrid kiss. Their lips clashed, slanting this way and that as they devoured each other.

Ripping away from him, Natalie’s gaze burned with surreal hunger. Ian savored and reciprocated her passionate aura. She shoved him back on the bed, sliding her hips forward until her sweet pussy was only an inch from his face. He gripped her hips, tugging her forward until he could consume her. His

tongue darted out to tease her nub before plunging into her slickness.

Ian drove his tongue inside and out. His top lip rubbed and played with her clit. He sucked gently on the sensitive lips surrounding her nub as he drove her body wild. Her sexy mewls of desire urged him further.

Her pussy pulsed and tightened. Ian gripped her hips harder, moaning against her hot wet slit. Her body trembled with the beginnings of climax. Grabbing his hands and shoving them above his head against the wall, her fingers laced with his as she rode his mouth.

“Oh, God!” Natalie arched her back, and her shriek of pleasure echoed off the walls.

Her body convulsed, and fluids rushed from her pussy onto his tongue. Ian drank up her essence until her orgasm subsided.

Scooting her ass down his chest to rest against his raging cock, she laid her forehead against his. “Damn, that was unbelievable.”

Her wicked grin nearly drove him mad as he captured her lips for another tawdry kiss.

Natalie drew away from Ian to gaze into his eyes, now heavily lidded. She reached behind her and stroked his thick cock, her thumbs teasing the mushroom tip. A drop of pre-cum graced the tip and she rubbed the moisture around his sensitive skin. He moaned low in his throat.

Turning herself around, she grasped his cock, sliding her hand up and down. He was magnificent. She leaned down and kissed the tip, letting her tongue tease the hole in the center. Ian grabbed her hips roughly and hauled her back as he once again lapped at her pussy.

Her lips rimmed his cock, teasing him, as she gripped his length with her hand, moving it up and

down. His hips pumped upward, and she laughed low in her throat as she drew her mouth back. She nibbled along his inner thighs and played with his balls, sucking first one into her mouth and then the other.

His moans mingled with hers as he plunged two fingers into her pussy.

She traced kisses along the length of his cock, until finally reaching the top. She sucked him deep down her throat. Bucking his hips upwards, his mouth slipped from her sopping pussy to moan with pleasure. She bobbed her head up and down as her tongue circled his cock, tantalizing him with little flicks as she continued to suck.

“Oh, yes, keep doing that,” he moaned, devouring her pussy once again.

Massaging his balls with one hand, gripping and stroking his cock with the other, she worked his pulsing length into her mouth. As the first tendrils of orgasm gripped her, she sucked harder, gripping and stroking him frantically, until he throbbed and pulsed inside. Her own body peaked and smoldered along with his. She sucked him dry, and then let his cock slide from her mouth.

Ian picked her up by the hips and flipped her onto her back, coming down on top of her.

“Yer mouth works magic.” His eyes glowed, and he grinned wolfishly.

“As does yours, Laird MacDuff.” She could feel his cock growing hard again, and she shivered in anticipation.

“I can’t get enough of ye. I want ye again.”

“Take me,” she moaned, as he plunged all the way to the hilt.

Following another session of hot, tawdry sex in the morning, Ian assisted Natalie in donning a tartan, showing her how to pleat it just right so it

stayed in place.

A satisfied smile curved his lips, and he winked devilishly.

“Now that I’ve got ye all dressed, I just want to rip it off.”

Natalie laughed, feeling more elated than she could ever remember. Was it just the overabundance of orgasms she’d had in the past twenty-four hours? All of those endorphins racing through her blood...or was it something else?

“Not now, Laird of Desire. I need to eat.”

“Yes, well we must replenish yer body. Ye’ll need it.” He winked before heading for the chamber door.

Natalie regarded him with awe. His body was perfection. Lithe muscular legs covered in soft leather boots reached to just below his bare knees. His kilt hung around his hips in neat pleats. A white linen shirt covered the muscles of his chest, back and arms, and part of his tartan was slung over his shoulder.

He wasn’t the only one who wanted to rip clothes off.

“Come, ye must meet me clan.”

“How shall I be introduced?” Natalie was nervous about meeting the people. From her studies she’d learned that clan men and women were very tightly knit, and it was rare for them to let an outsider in.

Ian stopped and turned toward her. His gaze flickered with emotion and then doubt. “I suppose we ought to figure that out first.” Leaning against the door, he crossed his arms over his chest as he studied her.

“Any ideas?”

“I have an idea.” Ian’s gaze was hooded and she couldn’t read what he was thinking.

“Share it.” She smiled, venturing to stand in front of him. Her hands absently caressed his folded

arms until they encompassed her.

"I thought to tell them...ye were me betrothed." He tightened his grip on her as if he expected her to draw away.

For a moment she was scared. This was all happening too fast. Yet again, she wanted it more than anything. She'd dreamed of such a thing happening. Her life's passion had been learning everything she could about his people, and now here was her chance to study them in person.

She looked down at their bodies so closely entwined. Was love possible? Although it had been less than twenty-four hours since they'd met, stirrings of deep emotion whirled inside her. Did he feel the same way?

He still hadn't answered her question about whether or not she could return to her own time. Her guess, since he hadn't said no, was she could. It wouldn't hurt to stay with him, be introduced as his betrothed and see how things turned out.

"Okay."

His eyes sparkled with content, and a slow satisfied smile spread over his full lips. Was it possible for him to look any sexier? He exuded pure masculine strength and confidence.

"For now," she added.

Some of the spark vanished from his gaze, but he didn't say anything. Instead he kissed her lightly on the lips. "Then let us join me people to break our fast."

The hall grew silent as Ian and Natalie walked in. All faces turned to Natalie, gazing in curiosity.

Trying to act as the laird that he was, Ian led Natalie to the table and had her sit beside him, without a word to his people. He wanted to show them she was his and his choice without having to answer to them, hoping this would set a precedent

for his leadership and acceptance of her. Before he sat, he looked at each person.

"Madainn mhath," he said.

"Good morning," the people responded. Their curious glances became frantic with wonder about their guest, who'd obviously come from his bedroom.

"Me people, I would like to introduce ye to me betrothed, Natalie."

Some of the people stared wide-eyed in surprise and others simply nodded. He was a little stunned himself at the ease with which they accepted her.

Lachlann, his man stood, and raised his cup. Ian raised his in return and they swallowed their ale in unison. The people followed suit.

"If ye are betrothed, why not state yer intentions here, now?"

Ian looked at the warrior who'd shouted the suggestion, then quickly turned to see Natalie's face pale before she looked at her hands. Did she know that stating their intentions was as good as marrying? If he repeated his vows in front of witnesses and stated to them he and Natalie were now husband and wife, it was legal and binding. All they'd need to do was have a priest bless the union later.

The grumblings of the people in agreement echoed through the hall. Ian reached for Natalie's hand; her gaze was panicked. As much as he wanted her to be his wife, he didn't want it in name only. He would have to find a way out of this.

He raised his hand for silence. Warm, slim fingers lightly caressed his arm. He gazed down into her eyes. Acceptance filled their depths. She nodded, and once again he sensed she could see into his soul.

Smiling, he placed a feathery kiss on her forehead, and then turning, he clasped each of her hands in his. His people fell silent as they watched and waited.

"I, Ian, now take ye Natalie to be me wife." He squeezed her fingers, winking, hoping to ease her fears. "In the presence of God and before these witnesses, I promise to be a loving, faithful and loyal husband to ye, for as long as we both shall live." *Or as long as we have together*, he wanted to add, but kept that part to himself.

Natalie looked down for a moment, the top of her short hair only reaching his chest. He had the sudden urge to crush her to him, and caress away all of her fears. He couldn't imagine the turmoil she was going through right at that moment. She took a deep breath before returning her gaze to his.

"Tha mise, Natalie, a-nis 'gad ghabhail-sa, Ian, gu bhith 'nam chéile phòsda."

Ian raised his eyebrows, taken aback by her perfect Gaelic. Until then he'd been speaking mostly English with her. She repeated the rest of her pledge to him in Gaelic, and Ian felt his chest puffing with pride.

Was this her way of telling him she was more than ready to wed him, be with him?

Touched by her use of his language, Ian clasped her around the waist, hauling her against him before capturing her mouth for a searing kiss. The clan cheered and howled their approval.

During the light meal of bread, cheese, salt pork, apples and ale, Natalie barely spoke, giving him small smiles and murmuring to the people surrounding her.

His people observed and chatted lively with her. He realized how much he really did want her to stay.

Would she?

When the meal ended, Natalie was unsure of what to do next. Although the people did not question her place in their household as Ian's wife, she was still a little uncomfortable. Despite years of

deep study, actually living in the period she'd coveted so much was completely different.

Ian came to her rescue when one of the women asked if she would like to accompany her through the village to distribute supplies to some of the crofters.

"Perhaps tomorrow. Today I want to show her around meself."

Internally she leapt for the opportunity to travel out to see the crofters, but she wasn't ready yet. This was a brutal time despite all the romanticism some historians and people generally put into it.

The woman nodded and padded off to complete her duties.

"I need to check on a few fortifications and make sure we have enough provisions for the rest of winter. I may go on a hunt. Would ye care to join me?" His gaze raked over her, lending to the possibilities such a hunt could entail.

Natalie refrained from clapping for joy as her body sang. "Yes, I would love to."

"Would ye care to walk about the keep and bailey while I settle a few things?"

He caressed her face and Natalie leaned into his rough palm. His coarse skin rubbing against hers sent a tingle of anticipation running through her veins. She felt like a new bride. And she was! Her knees grew weak, and she had the sensation her feet were floating. Natalie was unsure of how to react. Feeling light-headed she breathed in deeply. Her face must have registered her unease, as Ian's expression became a mask of concern.

"Are ye feeling well?"

"I'm just a little dizzy. This is all so much to take in at once."

Strong arms enveloped her as Ian drew her into his comfortable embrace. She breathed in his scent and was rewarded with his masculine, and all too

pleasant, smell. Peace befell her. She was truly comforted by him.

“There is much we need to discuss, me love.”

His love?

“Ye have no idea how much ye mean to me and me people.”

Natalie turned her head to gaze into his glittering green eyes. How could she mean so much to them? They didn’t know who she was.

“Me duties can wait. Shall we go for a ride now? ’Tis not snowing, will ye be all right going out in the cold?”

“Actually, I could use some fresh air.”

He smiled down at her and brushed a tender kiss on her lips. “As ye wish. I’ll get ye a cloak.”

Ian returned with a wool fur-lined cloak. “This should keep ye warm.”

“Thank you.” She slipped into the thick fabric, and grasped Ian’s outstretched hand.

At the stables, Natalie examined the beautiful horses, and raised an eyebrow when Ian ordered only one to be readied.

He gave her a wolfish grin and a wink. Despite the thrilling chill running through her body, Natalie hoped they would actually talk on this ride. She was missing a lot of information and had some crucial decisions to make based on the facts.

Ian mounted the horse in one fluid motion and Natalie swore she caught a glimpse of his naughty parts before he sat in the saddle. Well, maybe they could talk after they played.

He reached his hand down and helped her to ease in front of him, his strong arm spanning her waist. Flicking the reins, Ian turned the horse and urged him to gallop out of the bailey gates. They didn’t speak for several minutes, both of them just taking in the surrounding and the feel of each other’s bodies pressed close together.

Ian's hand slipped beneath her cloak and massaged the swell of her breasts, easily bringing each nipple to a taut peak. Her sex hummed and grew slick, waiting for what she knew would come...delicious pleasure and abandon.

He nipped gently on her neck and she turned her head to the side as he guided the horse over the expansive terrain.

"I have a story to tell ye. 'Tis no fairytale, I swear it."

All Natalie could do was nod, as Ian continued his assault on her neck and breasts.

"There has been a brooch passed through me family from laird to laird. A couple months ago me twin brother disappeared, only to reappear several weeks later. He told me the brooch has special powers, allowing ye to find yer true love. He told me this and prepared for me to be laird as his lady from the future would be calling him back to her."

Natalie stiffened, and turned her face to Ian. Although it may have seemed like a fairytale to some people, since she'd traveled through time the reality of it was quite clear.

"And that is why you are now laird?"

"Aye." He kissed her lightly on the lips. "I dinnae truly believe him until he disappeared before me eyes."

Natalie nodded. Deep inside she sensed he was her true love. There was a connection with him from the very beginning, something beyond fantastic sex. Even knowing she was in a different time than her own hadn't bothered her as much as it should have. This was because of Ian. He made her feel so comfortable, like she belonged. She realized she wanted to be with him.

Ian told her about the story he and Lachlann had concocted in order to ease the people of Donell's disappearance and how he needed to marry to secure

the clan and his future.

“As I thought on me future, the brooch called to me. Next thing I ken, yer there, smiling at me like a little minx.”

“You weren’t exactly innocent. I remember waking up to the feel of your hands on my skin.”

Ian chuckled and tickled her ribs. “What is a man to do when a beauty such as ye ends up in his bed? And naked, too!”

Natalie laughed, imagining all the things running through his mind.

“Nothing innocent, I know that much,” she teased, rubbing her derriere against his crotch, which was suddenly swollen.

Despite their play and the sensual tension rippling in the air, the conversation turned serious.

“Ian, what am I supposed to do? I feel a strong connection to you, and I know my presence means a lot to the livelihood of you and the clan. But what about me, my friends, my family?”

Ian sighed, placing his chin on her head. The intimate gesture felt so normal, as if they were meant to spend many moments in such tender embraces.

“I ken lass, I ken.” Those simple words held so much emotion, sadness, disappointment and yearning. “If ’tis not here ye want to be, I understand. Me brother did tell me how the brooch worked. I could return ye to yer time.”

Did she want to return? That was the question. Could she risk returning and then not being able to get back? Was it better to have her family think she’d been kidnapped or murdered? No, she couldn’t let them panic.

“Ian, if I do decide to stay, I will have to let my family know.”

He nodded agreement. “Let us enjoy this ride and get to ken each other. No decision need be made

quite yet.”

“All the same, I will give you my decision by tonight.”

Until then, she’d have a lot of thinking to do.

“Where do ye come from?” Ian asked, as he assisted her from the horse.

They’d decided to take a walk along Loch Ness to stretch their legs. Fingers intertwined, they rubbed each other’s hands as they spoke, looking like a love-struck couple.

“I come from the year 2008. I live in America.”

“Ah, so that is yer accent. I have never met anyone from the colonies before.”

“What year is it now?”

He gazed at her as she examined the grounds. “1647.”

She turned, her eyes sparkling, a wide smile covering her lips. “My favorite time period.”

“Ye studied me time?”

“Yes. Scotland and the Highlands are both my passion and my work. I studied your lands, your time, your way of life, the people, your language. All of it is so fascinating to me.”

“I’d like to ken more of yer time.”

Natalie laughed, leading his hand to her lips. “It is much different.”

She started explaining cars, ovens, air conditioning and toothbrushes. Not only were the words completely foreign and confusing, Ian was astonished at their uses. None of it made sense. “And Donell wanted to live this way?”

Natalie stopped walking, turning to face him, her little body pressing fully against him. The look of contentment on her face was heavenly. Her amber eyes filled with emotion. “It’s because he loves her, Ian. When two people are in love, they will endure and learn new things for the other.”

Raw emotion snaked its way around Ian's mind and body, consuming him. He recognized what he was feeling. He'd never before sensed it with any other woman. The need to hold her and never let go racked through him. He was in love. Amazing how swiftly and violently it happened. Just one day. Gazing deep into her eyes, his own emotions were reflected in their depths.

"We are in love," he stated, his brows rising as he came to the realization.

"Yes," she whispered, biting her lip.

Ian was in awe at how overpowering his affection for Natalie was. He leaned in, brushing his lips against hers, breathing in her feminine scent. Eagerly she kissed him back, rubbing her tongue provocatively against his. Growling deep in his throat he heightened the kiss, his mouth slanting over hers again and again. His hands held her face, caressing her smooth cheeks with the pads of his thumb. The world around him cascaded into a cloud of intense lust and love.

Lifting her into the air, Natalie wrapped her legs around his waist. The heat of her sex seeped through the fabric of their clothing. All he wanted to do was rush her back to the keep, up to his room and take her there on the chamber floor.

"Oh, Ian," she moaned kissing him all over his face, nipping at the sensitive skin on his neck. "I want you, now."

Her demand set a fire to his ardor. He wouldn't be able to make it back to the keep. Sweeping his cloak from his back he spread it on the frozen ground. Laying her down their fingers fought furiously to shove their plaids out of the way. Thank God for tartans....

Finding her slick and wet, and arching against his fingers, Ian maneuvered his throbbing cock into position, and then plunged inside. The warm velvet

of her pussy sucked him in deeper. They made frenzied love, nipping and sucking on each other's skin, their moans surrounding the wilderness as he plunged in, again and again. Natalie's hips met each thrust with a keen tempo, until he savored the fiery vibrations of her orgasm rocking her body.

Ian smiled as he stared at her sated and glassy eyes. "I want to take you another way—"

"As you wish." Her voice was throaty with desire, as she repeated his words.

Drawing away from her, the cold air didn't faze his over-heated body.

"How would you like it?" Natalie's gaze was wicked and alluring.

"On your hands and knees," he said gruffly.

A tantalizing smile covered her face as she rolled over and lifted her luscious ass toward him. Oh, how he'd enjoyed this position the last time...Ian slid his hand along her tender flesh and grasped her hips. He entered her slowly, his body coming over hers. He kissed her neck. She pressed her hips back against him.

"Harder," she moaned.

He needed no further demands from her, and drove into her with vigor, reaching around to tease the swollen nub of her pleasure.

Her moans filled the air. Head thrown back, she thrust her hips back against him and slid her hands through her legs to massage his balls. Her hands caressing him were more than he could handle and just when he believed he wouldn't be able to hold out for her any longer, she shrieked, her body trembling violently. Ian didn't hold back, with one forceful plunge he came inside of her, shouting her name.

As they lay in the grass, completely sated from their heady romp, Natalie turned to Ian.

"I want to stay with you, Ian. But, I must go back first."

Natalie paced her tiny apartment in Boston. It had been two weeks and six days since she'd returned, and now she was more than ready to go back. She'd called the museum in Scotland and given them her two-week notice, finishing up her work only days ago. They'd been such a fabulous place to work. She'd visited twice a year and worked remotely from the U.S. the rest of the time. A sad sigh escaped her. Her job had meant so much.

Her heart leapt, nearly bursting from her. Now she'd be living it! Giddiness bubbled up in her chest, and her hands came to her face. She'd asked Ian to give her three weeks to settle things at home, and then he could call her back to his time.

She'd visited with her parents and friends and told them she'd be traveling to work permanently in Scotland. They'd been excited and planned to visit her. Natalie had nixed that idea, letting them know she'd be traveling quite a bit and working on various digs. She wouldn't be accessible for quite some time.

Lucky for her, both of her parents worked and she rarely visited with them anyway. She was an only child, so she didn't have to worry about siblings. Carrie was the one she worried about most. Her best friend had been crushed. Could she tell her the truth? Telling her would be risky.

This was her last night in her apartment and Carrie would be here any minute. Since Carrie's living arrangements had been with her parents, Natalie had asked her to sub-let the apartment. Carrie was ecstatic about the opportunity. The set-up worked out well for both of them. The times Natalie did come back to visit she wanted to have a place to stay and a place to keep her things should she need them.

Maybe she should tell Carrie, and if something happened, at least one person would know. But what

about her parents?

She'd have to deal with them later. When she and Ian had discussed it, she'd told him she would have to visit her family at least once a year. He'd understood, and if they could figure it out he would come, too. She was too nervous to let him, though. The power of the brooch would bind the lovers together. If they were already together, who was to say it would work, and if they were in 2008, what would become of his people?

A loud knock at the door alerted Natalie to Carrie's arrival. Time to do some explaining.

Thunk!

Thunk!

Thunk!

Ian repeatedly threw his *sghian dubh* into the trunk of a tree. The small killing knife fit perfectly in his hand, and he threw it with deadly force. In just an hour, he would attempt to conjure Natalie back.

His nerves were on fire, and every thing he saw or heard reminded him of her. He was snapping at people, brooding. Scratching his head, he realized he was acting just as Donell had before he returned to his woman.

The three weeks she'd been gone were like a nightmare. He worried about her, wondered what she was doing, if she was all right. He'd told his clan she was with her people gathering her things as she hadn't expected to stay with him quite yet. Some rumors had gone about the clan that she was a distant relation to MacRae. They said to keep the two clans from fighting Donell had gone to them and the MacRaes had sent one of their own to the MacDuffs. He let them think what they would—whatever would keep them from questioning him and her sudden disappearance.

A broad smile covered his face as he speared the *sghian dubh* into the bark again. A fine sheen of sweat covered his body from his efforts to distract himself. He needed a quick swim in the loch to clean himself before he beheld her again. Being the dead of winter, the dark blue waters of Loch Ness would be freezing. Maybe the frigid temperature would help take his mind off Natalie for a little while.

Slipping the small knife back into the holster up his sleeve, he headed for the loch. When he finished he would return to his chamber and summon her.

Sweet Lord, he hoped it would work and Natalie appearing before in his time wasn't a mistake...

After taking a quick, freezing dip in the loch, Ian headed back to the keep. He'd had Cook make Natalie her favorite stew and little sweet cakes. After setting it just right on the table in his chamber, he sat in his chair before the fire, the brooch between his fingertips. Sucking in his breath, he rubbed it gently and peered in amazement as the air grew thicker, almost like a fog had drifted through the windows. Its cloudy depths centered in one spot, spinning and swirling until the outline of a woman could be seen. Then right before his eyes, Natalie stood in all her naked glory.

Leaping from his chair, he hauled her into his arms, crushing her to his chest. Their hearts thudded rapidly in the same tune. They were one soul, one being. True loves.

"I missed ye so much, lass," he said, gazing into her eyes.

"I missed you, too." Her voice broke on a sob, but he could tell from the twinkle in her amber eyes it wasn't sadness, but joy.

Ian couldn't take it any longer; three weeks were like an eternity. He needed to touch her, all of her. This was his woman, his wife! He would be with her for the rest of his life. She'd chosen to stay with him.

His heart swelled as he smiled fondly.

“Even though it was just three weeks, I couldn’t wait for the time to pass so I could be with you again.” Natalie brushed her hands down the length of his naked chest.

Gooseflesh followed the paths of her fingertips, and his cock swelled against the fabric of his kilt. He ached for her, yearned with a hunger so profound it would be his undoing if he couldn’t bury himself deep within her slick walls.

“Kiss me, love,” he whispered, leaning down, his lips only an inch from hers.

Natalie stood up on tiptoe and brushed her plush, ruby lips on his. She teased the corners of his mouth with her teeth and slid her velvet tongue along the crease between his lips.

“It’s been so long...” she moaned, her hands expertly removing his kilt.

Naked against the length of her, every part of his body hummed. She rubbed her breasts against his chest, and caressed his cock with her moist sex. His blood boiled from her titillating seduction. Picking her up, he tossed her onto the bed, smiling wolfishly when she giggled. He slid his body over hers with slow sensual measure. Her lush skin against his was ecstasy.

“Too long,” he moaned.

Capturing her mouth for a searing kiss, he nibbled on her lips, his tongue darting in and out. She responded immediately, catching his tongue with her teeth, and then slowly sucked. When she slid her hands along his ribs and lower still to grip his cock, he yanked her hands up, holding them hostage above her head as he nuzzled her neck, nipping her skin.

“Tis my turn to seduce you,” he drawled.

“Two can play this game—” Her words cut off as she sucked in her breath when he pulled a nipple

into his mouth.

Even though her hands were held above her, she was able to send his senses spiraling with kisses along his neck and shoulders. Her legs slid up his thighs and over his hips. She rubbed his buttocks with her heels before crossing her ankles together. Lifting her hips, she teased his cock with her wet and waiting pussy. Two certainly could play this game, and she was especially talented.

Groaning deeply, Ian plunged all the way to her womb. Natalie's throaty moan stroked his insides as he buried himself deep inside her. Still holding her hands above her head, he kissed her on the lips, sucking on her tongue.

The pure pleasure of holding his little vixen beneath him as they drove each other wild was magical. Ian drew out slowly, then drove himself deeper still. Natalie's mewls of delight overcame him as he took her. He gladly partook in everything she offered. Ian was swept away by her scorching heat, her silky skin, her eagerness for ravishment.

When he experienced the first trembling of her orgasm, he quickened his pace and her hips matched his thrust for thrust.

This certainly was heaven, and he couldn't imagine it any other way. He gave silent thanks to Donell and his ancestors who had given him the gift of the brooch and in turn given him his one true love.

"I love ye, Lady MacDuff," he murmured against her lips.

"I love you, too, my Highland warrior."

About the Author

Eliza Knight writes spicy historical romance. While not chasing after her little children, she is writing, reading, researching, and living with her own knight in shining armor. She is a member of RWA, Hearts Through History, Celtic Hearts, The Beau Monde & Passionate Ink. She operates a blog site, History Undressed, where she discusses the wildly fascinating yet not popularly known facts of history.

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