



Rosette

Fairy Rose

The Summons

Jo Barrett

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by

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Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

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The water felt so good. She needed this soak. Standing on her feet for twelve hours was too much.

“Wish I’d thought of grabbing a glass of wine before I climbed in,” Lindsay muttered, easing deeper into the steaming water. She really needed to cut back her schedule at the hospital. Maybe she could get Beverly to swap her for Sunday. Then she’d have a long weekend.

She snorted softly at the thought. When had two days become a long weekend?

“It doesn’t matter. A break is a break,” she said, soaping her body with a lavender scented gel. Tomorrow she’d talk to Beverly and then see about getting her schedule changed. She didn’t need to work extra hours, she didn’t need the money.

“But you don’t have anything else to do,” she said with a sigh as she hung the washcloth over the spout. “No close friends, no *male* friends, nobody. But nursing is fulfilling. It’s all I need,” she lied, as she lay back and closed her eyes.

Although rewarding, the work was often grueling. She enjoyed helping people, but sometimes, times when she couldn’t help people, it hurt. And lately there was an awful lot of hurt.

Her thoughts rambled from one case to another until the painful images began to fade and she dozed.

“The water has grown cold, lass.”

With a small screech, Lindsay sat bolt upright in the tub and covered everything she could with her hands. She would’ve snagged her washcloth, although it wouldn’t have helped her much, but it had disappeared, as had everything else. She was no

longer in her bathroom, but in what looked like a castle bedchamber.

"Doona fash yerself, lass. You're safe with me." The thick brogue brushed across her skin following the heated path of his fingers. Across her cheek, down her neck, and perilously close to her breasts. She sank down deep into the chilly water.

He chuckled low adding to the goose bumps already dotting her skin.

"I'm dreaming," she said. "That has to be it." Why else would she suddenly find herself in an antique tub with a very big, very handsome Scot eyeing her like his favorite dish?

He unfolded his large body from the chair sitting by the wooden tub and stood. "Hmm, a dream think you? 'Tis an interesting way of looking at it."

"Yes, a dream. Of course," she laughed, not too pleased with the faint hysteria lacing her voice. But the room, the chill air, the cold water, it all felt so real. "I-I fell asleep in the tub, and you're from that romance novel I flipped through at work the other night when things finally slowed down. Yes, that's it. The hero was a Scottish laird or something. I just dreamed you up, all tall, dark, and—sexy."

He laughed softly. "Thank you, lass. Glad I am that you like my countenance," he said with a slight bow then turned and crossed the chamber. "As to the other, aye, I am A Scot, but I am no laird."

"Oh. Well, the laird part isn't what's important," she admitted. His handsome face, big tone body, long dark hair, and unbelievably piercing green eyes were more than enough. He'd fit into any girl's dream without much trouble. And he was tall, taller than her, which wasn't always the case with her dates. She was no slouch when it came to height, topping out at around five-foot-seven.

"So, uh, where and when am I dreaming?" she asked.

"The where, be the Highlands, the when be the year of our Lord 1745." He lifted a thin towel then came back to the tub.

"Wow, a couple hundred years back. Oh, wait. That novel, it was a historical. Of course, that explains it."

Must have been a really good book, although she couldn't for the life of her remember anything else about it. The man standing beside her stole more than just her breath. Cognitive thought seemed to be a bit elusive at the moment.

"Come, lass. Up with you, afore you catch your death."

"Um, close your eyes."

He cast her a crooked grin. "If that be your wish, but I doona think you would...*dream me up* ta just hold a drying cloth."

She stood and snatched the towel from his hands. "Leave it to me to imagine a smart-ass," she grumbled, quickly wrapping it around her body.

His rough fingers cupped her chin and turned her head toward his. His mouth hovered above hers. "And I called a woman from the future with the body and face of an angel who possesses a mouth full of sass. Things are ne'er as we think, lass." His lips brushed hers with the faintest of touches.

She breathed him in, letting his rumbling Scottish lilt and oh-so-seductive mouth weave a spell around her. Yet one word popped into her mind and refused to be set aside by the gentle pressure of his lips.

"Called?" she murmured beneath his persuasive lips.

He lifted his head from hers. "I've the gift ta summon." He released her face then gripped her around the waist and lifted her from the tub. She slid along his body as he lowered her feet to the cold stone floor.

She bit back her groan of pleasure. "I don't understand."

He drew one hand up, sensuously riding along her side, across her shoulder, to her cheek while the other kept her body pinned to his. He caressed her face and looked into her eyes.

"I summoned ya ta me, lass. Across miles, across time."

"Why me?" She closed her eyes a moment, cursing herself for asking such a stupid question. He was in her dream, *duh!* If she weren't careful she'd ruin what looked to be a pretty interesting night.

"I didna know 'twas you who would come, and from so far. I've ne'er done the like afore." His deep green gaze flowed over her blonde, shoulder-length hair, across her face, then down to her lips. "And you are no' what I imagined."

She cocked a hand on her hip, not liking where this dream was headed. "Gee, so sorry to disappoint you."

He laughed softly. "'Twas no' meant ta be an insult, lass. You are spirited and beautiful, more than I'd hoped for. A man such as meself isna oft' so lucky."

"Such as you? You're not exactly ugly, you know. I wouldn't dream up an ugly lover, I don't think," she half muttered to herself.

With a laugh, he scooped her off the floor and carried her to the bed. "'Tis my station, lass. It wouldna' have won me such a beauty withou' the help of a wee bit of magic or gold. But we are well matched, you and I. Loving you will bring me more pleasure than I e'er dreamed."

"Um, well, don't you think we should get to know each other first?" she asked weakly, hating herself for even mentioning it, but it did seem a bit rash to jump into bed right away. Even if it was just a dream.

"I canna say if the summons will last. Time we may no' have. But I'll be gentle with you." He stripped out of his kilt and homespun shirt in mere seconds and was lying beside her completely and gloriously naked.

"I—uh—" She swallowed hard. He was the most beautiful man she'd ever seen, and she'd seen plenty in her line of work. Although he had scars here and there, his body was tone, tan, and sprinkled with dark hair in all the right places.

He pressed kisses to her shoulder and neck as his strong, wide hand massaged her hip then slowly moved to her breast. "Tell me how ta bring you pleasure," he murmured as he nipped at her earlobe, his deep smooth voice racing over her skin.

"I think you're doing a fine job on your own," she said with a sigh.

He chuckled and lifted his head, his mouth but a breath away. "I will love you, lass. All of you. Your body, your soul, your verra being."

"Oh," she mouthed, but not a sound escaped her lips. She cleared her tight throat. "Then would you at least tell me your name?"

"Roan Douglass," he said, nibbling at the corner of her lips.

"Roan," she said on a sigh. "I'm—I'm—" She blinked a moment trying to remember her own name, he had her so distracted. "Um, I'm—Lindsay Sumner."

"Lindsay," he whispered. "My Lindsay." Then kissed her fully, stealing all thought, all nervousness from her mind. As their tongues dueled she knew he would keep his promise and take her to a place she'd never been before. Heaven.

But dreams had a funny way of fading as the dreamer woke, becoming fuzzy around the edges until they couldn't quite remember what they'd dreamed. And that's how it was when Lindsay

opened her eyes freezing her butt off in an ice cold bath.

“Damn, I need to cut back at w-work,” she grouched through chattering teeth as she dried herself. “That or get a decent night’s sleep.”

She crawled beneath the covers, and curled up into a ball, pinning her hands between her thighs to warm them.

A memory of other hands, a man’s tanned, rough hands on her thighs flashed through her mind.

“Impossible,” she whispered. She hadn’t been touched like that in ages. And never by a man with rough, sun-bronzed hands. The only men she’d ever dated were other nurses, lab techs, a doctor here and there, and they all had soft hands and rarely tanned.

But never one to waste a nice thought, Lindsay grinned to herself and let the image of those hands do whatever they wanted as she fell asleep.

Bright and early the next morning Lindsay woke to a pair of wet panties. She instantly recalled a very powerful orgasm, although the details were vague.

“How odd.” There was a man in her dream, but she couldn’t see his face, and yet she felt him...still. It was a new sensation, one she rather liked, but unfortunately, she had to get to work and didn’t have any more time to dwell on fantasy lovers.

In less than forty-five minutes she was on her way to the hospital, and the first thing on her agenda was to get her schedule changed. Falling asleep in the tub like that had been a warning signal. And that orgasm. She must be really on edge if her body thought she required one of those. And without *help*.

Yep, she needed rest. She needed the time to unwind and relax. To simply breathe. *Although I wouldn’t mind if My body decided to self-combust*

again, she thought with a giggle. It had been a fantastic release, she felt revitalized and ready to go.

"But I do have to cut back my hours," she told herself. It was for her own good, although it would take more than a month to take effect. Schedules were mapped out six weeks in advance. "But what will I do with all that free time once I get it?"

Take a lot of naps, she thought with a grin. A deep warm chuckle slid down her spine, warming more than just her cheeks. She cranked up the air conditioner and turned her suddenly very erotic thoughts back to the road and getting to work on time in one piece.

"Behave, imaginary man, whoever you are," she muttered.

Ne'er with you, lass.

She gasped as she came to an abrupt halt at the traffic light, her coffee sloshing in its travel cup.

"I did not hear a man's voice. I imagined it. I'm just tired, that's all."

She lifted her cup to her lips with a shaking hand and took a generous gulp, having not quite convinced herself it was her imagination.

Several weeks passed and with no more voices, thank goodness, but no more orgasms either, at least she didn't think she had any. If she did they weren't evident when she woke up. But Lindsay figured it was better to be mentally stable than sexually satisfied. A sucky trade-off, but necessary. For the moment, anyway.

"And now with my new schedule finally beginning, I can get the rest I need," she said to herself as she drove home. That would make her feel better, without a doubt. And then after she was rested, she'd try and get back into the dating scene again, which would take care of the other half of the problem.

But two days later she found herself clicking through channels on the television, bored out of her mind.

"I knew this would happen," she grumbled. She turned off the set and lifted the book Bev had loaned her. Her co-worker had known it wouldn't take long for her to start pulling out her hair, and she had wanted to read more by that author she'd read last month, although she couldn't recall why.

Lying back on the couch, she got comfortable and opened the book. She hadn't read more than two chapters before nodding off.

"You've been away ta long, lass," he said, his voice low.

She lifted her head from the pillow and looked around. She was lying on a pile of blankets on a stone floor before a crackling fire with a handsome man stretched out beside her. Her apartment was gone.

"I've been here before," she said.

"Aye, love, many times. Give it a moment and you'll remember." He brushed a tendril of her hair from her cheek.

Other dreams flooded her thoughts, filling her mind with images and countless conversations. This man was her dream lover, the man who brought her more pleasure than she ever thought possible.

"Roan."

"Aye, lass." He leaned forward and pressed soft kisses to her throat. "Och, I've missed you sorely. The days grow ta long for me ta bear without you. Glad I am that you've come ta me so early in the day and withou' my summons."

"I've missed you too." And she did, regardless of the fact that he was just a dream. To Lindsay he was so much more. But why did she always forget him when she woke up?

His hands, those rough, tanned hands, so strong

yet so gentle caressed and stroked her skin. In moments she was naked beside him, reveling in every touch, every whispered endearment.

"I canna wait, love. I need you now," he said, his voice rough.

"Yes," she breathed. To hell with her sanity. She wanted him, needed him, and she would have him, imaginary or not.

The shrill peel of a telephone sliced through the dream.

"No! Doona leave me," Roan called out. But Lindsay was torn from his arms.

With a rapid blink or two, she yanked up the receiver and snapped out a hello.

"Geez. Hello to you too," Bev said.

"Sorry," she sighed. "I was—I fell asleep on the couch." *And was about to have the greatest orgasm of all time till you interfered*, she thought.

Roan's handsome face appeared before her mind's eye and she did everything she could to hold on to it. She would not forget him again. Not this time.

She supposed she should thank Bev for that. By brutally ripping her from her dream at its most intense, she had a better grasp of it all instead of slowly coming awake and losing him in the mist between the dream world and the real one.

"Hey!"

"What? Oh, sorry, Bev. I guess I'm still groggy. What were you saying?"

"Do you want to swap Friday for Saturday? My son has a game on Friday and I've missed too many already."

Swap? That would give her a long weekend since she already had Monday off. Three whole nights with Roan. Unhealthy as it was, she needed her imaginary lover.

She smiled. "That would work out perfect for

me. Thanks.”

“Oh, that’s right. You wanted to go to the Scottish Festival this weekend, right? I’d forgotten all about that,” Bev said.

So had Lindsay. It was on her things-to-do-to-relax list, and now she wouldn’t miss it for the world. She would bathe in some of that lovely Scottish lilt for real before falling back into her dream lover’s arms.

As the afternoon waned, more and more of the dreams she’d had over the last few weeks seeped into her thoughts. She’d been with him before, several times. But why had she forgotten? She’d awakened on occasion with misty images in her mind, but never anything as tangible as what she remembered this time. Had she been pushing them down into her subconscious so she wouldn’t think she’d gone loony?

“Possibly,” she muttered, climbing into bed. Her heart rate increased as she reached to turn out the light. With a flick it was dark, and she lay back against her pillow.

“I’m excited about being with a dream lover. Maybe I need to make an appointment with a psychologist or something.”

But the corner of her mouth lifted as her lids lowered and her thoughts sped down a private road, one where *he* was waiting.

Lindsay grinned as Roan’s fingers danced along her skin. “I was afraid I wouldn’t see you tonight. Not after what happened earlier today,” she whispered.

His deep warm chuckle induced her heavy lids to lift. She was amazed by his deep green eyes filled with desire for her. He seemed so real, so wonderfully male, how could her dreams be so vivid?

“’Twas a painful afternoon, aye. But ta no’ summon you, would be far worse.” His lips blazed a

path along her throat to her breast as one hand slid beneath the sheet and cupped her mound.

She'd made a point of sleeping in the nude tonight, hoping it would make her dream of him, and dream she did.

"Och, love. You're ready for me," he whispered, his breath warming her flesh as his finger slid into the depths of her moist heat.

"I've been ready all day," she said with a groan, pressing her fingers into the flexing muscles of his back. She really should've tried to take another nap, but had been terrified something else would interfere, and terrified she was losing her mind. To want him, need him so much wasn't right. So she'd forced herself to make it through the rest of the boring day without him. To prove to herself she could do it, that she wasn't crazy.

He nipped and sucked at her breast. "You should have come ta me, love. As you did before." His thumb rubbed against the tender nub as he slid another finger inside her.

"I—was—afraid." She was almost there! Another moment and she'd explode.

"You've no' ta fear from me, Lindsay. Now let go, love. Let it take you. I want ta watch your body flush with your pleasure."

"I—I wasn't afraid—of you," she panted, edging ever closer to the precipice. "I was—afraid of me." Then over she went, tumbling and swirling like a feather on a strong wind, winding her way to the bottom. Thoughts of her mental health lost to the exquisite sensations this man gifted her.

Gasping for breath, she opened her eyes and found him grinning. Slowly, he eased over her, and she parted her thighs, cradling him between her legs.

"Tis no' a more beautiful sight than that," he said, brushing his lips across her warm cheeks.

She turned and caught his lower lip between her teeth and teased it with the tip of her tongue. "Only you make me this way. Although it's wrong."

"Nay, 'tis no' wrong ta love you." He kissed her deeply, making her ache inside. Was she truly losing her mind? She had to be to fall in love with a dream.

"What are you thinking ta cause such a mark?" He stroked the spot between her brows.

She forced a smile to her face and wrapped him more tightly in her arms, relishing the feel of his bare chest warming her breasts. "Nothing," she whispered against his lips.

"You doona lie well, but I'll no' pursue it." He shifted and eased inside her. "We've better things ta do this eve."

Slowly and sweetly he made love to her, giving as no man had ever given to her before, and she gave all of herself to him. He was the only man she could be this way with, open and free. She could tell him what she wanted without embarrassment, and he delighted in her requests. And when she turned the tables on him, he was doubly pleased.

Lying sated in his arms, she trailed her fingers across his broad chest, sifting through the dark matt of hair, gently stroking a large scar.

"How did you get this?" She'd never asked before, and had assumed with her work at the hospital, mending broken bodies, tending wounds and seeing so many scars, it was in some way her real life invading her dreams.

He silently took her hand and brought it to his lips. He kissed each finger then pressed one against her palm.

She lifted her head and peered into his deep green eyes. "Roan?"

His dark brows drew together as he looked at her, seemingly deciding something. Then his brow smoothed as his gaze shifted to the canopy above the

bed. He slid his hand behind her head and pulled her to his shoulder on a deep sigh.

"I was but a lad and had been told ta stay behind, ta stay away from the battle, but I couldna. I vowed ta make my father proud and fight for our clan. 'Twas no' long before I was struck down."

She closed her eyes at the thought of him in pain. It didn't matter that he wasn't real, he was real to her and she hurt for him.

"As I lay dying, silently making my peace with God, trying no' ta cry like the babe I was, a woman appeared. Only she wasna a woman like any I'd e'er seen. I asked if she was fey, but she just laughed and said it wasna my time. She said for my bravery, she would grant me a gift, the gift ta summon. I fell unconscious and when I awoke I'd been brought home and tended ta properly. No one had seen a woman. My kin believed me daft from my wounds. I believed it as well until one night, when a favorite pup had gone missing. I feared he'd been hurt or killed, and with all my childish heart, I wished him home ta me."

"And he came?"

"Aye, from the mists floating in off the loch he trotted ta my side. I knew then what the woman meant when she said I had the power ta summon. O'er the years I used it ta aid the Laird of my clan without letting anyone know 'twas my doing that brought their enemies ta their knees before them, or lost loved ones back ta the bosom of their families. It doesna always work, and I wouldna' wish ta be branded a demon or some such, so I told no one. 'Tis a secret that I've no' shared with anyone but you."

She lifted her head from his shoulder. "And what did you wish for when you got me?" she asked teasingly, trying to lighten the mood. He sounded so solemn, and it frightened her.

His gaze bored into hers, the deep green depths

filled with emotion. "My one true love."

She shook her head, confused and saddened. This entire conversation, the man beside her was nothing but a fantasy! A dream her poor work-weary body had conjured up to keep her from going mad from loneliness and fatigue. God, she was far sicker than she'd realized.

His strong rough hands clasped her face firmly. "Tis the truth. I vow it."

She swallowed down the sob begging for release. She'd fallen in love with a dream. A man she could never have, a man that didn't exist.

"I believe you," she said roughly. And she did. He was telling her *his* truth. One her subconscious mind had created for him.

"Och, lass." He pulled her to his chest and held her firmly. "You still doona understand. This is no dream. I am real. *We* are real. I summoned you ta my side."

"Don't—don't talk about it anymore." She would wake up soon enough and he'd be gone.

"Love, look at me." He lifted her chin then swiped away the lone tear sliding down her cheek. "I wished for my one true love ta come to me. And come you have. Through space, through time...through dreams. It matters no' how you came ta be here, only that you are."

She sniffled and clamped her lids closed, holding back the tears. "You know I'll wake up in my bed, in my little apartment as I always do." She opened her eyes and let the tears flow. "Please don't make it harder than it already is."

"Och, doona cry, love. I beg you. 'Tis our last night together."

"Last night? Why? What—"

"Hush, love." He kissed her silent. "My time grows short on this earth, and I've no' wish ta spend it making you weep."

"You mean you think you're going to die?" It was her fault for accepting him as fantasy. Now her mind had found a way of fixing the broken cog in her head. But losing him to reality didn't do much for her heart.

"Tis my time. 'Tis part of the gift the lady gave me. Ta know when the end was near. A battle comes, one I must play a part in. One I willna survive."

"But I'm not ready to let you go," she cried.

"Perhaps we'll meet again, in another time or place. But for now this night is ours."

Lindsay woke with a splitting headache and tears streaming down her cheeks. She'd finally done it. She'd lost her mind completely. First thing Monday she was looking for a psychiatrist. She had to be overworked and overstressed. How else to explain the enormous ache in her chest from a dream?

Or it was real, an inner voice whispered.

"I'm losing it," she hissed and rubbed a tender spot at her neck.

"What the—" She jumped up from her bed and ran to the bathroom. She flicked on the light and gazed at the mirror. Her eyes instantly caught sight of a love bite at the crook of her neck.

"That can't be. It isn't possible," she whispered.

She looked at the rest of her body and found whisker abrasions in various places, tender nipples, and noticed a distinctive ache between her thighs that was unmistakable.

In a daze, she shuffled back to the bedroom. Why hadn't she ever noticed these things before? Had she ever had them before? And if she didn't then why did she have them this time? None of it made sense.

"And he's never given me a love bite before," she muttered, as she sat on the edge of the bed. But

wouldn't she have noticed the whisker burns and the ache between her legs?

Possibly, but then if her memory was correct, they'd never made love that many times in one night before, nor that vigorously.

She dragged herself to the closet and blindly rummaged for something to wear. She had to work Bev's swap although what she really needed was more sleep.

"No," she whispered. He wouldn't be there. She knew it deep down inside, and that fact just might kill her.

Thankfully it was a light day. There were little to no emergencies, which was a blessing because Lindsay didn't think she would've been able to handle anything too complicated. Her thoughts and feelings were all jumbled up. She prayed the long weekend would do her some good. Get her back on track. If not, she'd make that doctor's appointment on Monday.

Back home and incredibly tired, she flicked off the light and climbed into bed, hoping she wouldn't have a single dream about anything or anyone. But that was not the case.

Dark misty corridors surrounded her.

Summon me, he whispered.

She ran through the castle, calling his name, searching for him, but found nothing. No people, no animals, no life at all. No Roan. Then the castle fell to ruins before her eyes like a movie on fast-forward.

She awoke with a start, her body damp with sweat while tears scorched her cheeks.

"This is insane," she cried, rubbing at her eyes. "I have to get out of here." She took a quick shower, then grabbed some jeans and pulled a tank top over her head.

Summon me.

“Roan?” She searched her room, but he wasn’t there. “Of course he isn’t here. He’s a figment of my imagination. And so is his voice.”

She grabbed up her keys and some money and headed for the door. A walk, a very long walk would help clear her head. Maybe she’d go to the coffee shop and grab a super sized latte.

She stopped at the corner and took several deep breaths of air as she waited for the traffic light to change. It was a warm summer day, the sun was shining, life was in constant motion around her. This was good. This would help.

Summon me.

“Stop it!” she shouted in frustration, only to gain a glare from a driver waiting on the light.

“God help me,” she whispered, and grabbed the lamppost to steady herself. She really was losing her mind.

And yet...she touched the evidence on her neck. There had to be something she was missing other than a few marbles.

A flyer fluttered in her face, bringing her back, however temporary, to the real world. She lifted her gaze to the brightly printed words, not really reading it, lost in her own little nightmare, when something made her pause. An image of a Scot with bagpipes stood alongside the heading.

“Annual Scottish Festival.”

She’d forgotten all about it. She’d even teased Roan about it, telling him she thought she should go check out his competition. He was not amused, and made it his mission to make sure she never thought of another Scot, another man ever again. That was when he gave her the love bite.

She touched the tender spot at the side of her neck again. “Could it be possible?” Had he been telling the truth about his gift to summon?

The corner of the flyer chose that moment to

come free of the tape and bat her in the face. She snatched it from the post and read over the information.

Men would be dressed in kilts, tossing cabers, and battling with claymores. The festival itself lasted for nearly a week, which was why she'd put it on her list in the first place. She'd have been able to work it in on one of her off days. But today was the big event day. A full battle re-enactment.

A battle comes, one I must play a part in.

She shook her head as she clutched the paper in her hand. Crazy or not, she had to go, she had to find some way to put an end to the voice, to the dreams...to mend her broken heart.

Huffing and puffing, she jogged to the park, although driving would've been better. But parking was slim in the area and finding a spot would've taken longer than the two-mile hike.

Catching her breath, she forced herself to slow down and weave her way through the crowds, glancing over several of the vendors' Scottish wares. She needed to relax and let whatever happen...happen. She couldn't go grabbing every man in a kilt thinking it was Roan.

Hearing shouts and cheers in the distance, she made her way to the field and watched as men dressed in kilts shouted out war cries as they ran toward one another waving claymores and other weapons.

She hoped she wouldn't have to call on her medical experience today. But there were med units standing by, ready for the regular sort of mishaps that happened on a hot summer day during a celebration like this. She doubted they would need her.

The sound of steel clanking against steel and shouts pulled her attention back to the field of battle. Why did men always want to re-enact the

bloodiest parts of history? Oh sure, watching a quilting bee wasn't exactly exciting, but it didn't involve life and death.

"What am I doing here?" she murmured. This was ridiculous. Roan wasn't here. He was in her dreams, in her very vivid imagination. The mark on her neck wasn't a love bite. It was probably an allergic reaction to something at work.

Oh sure, and the rest of the evidence is just your imagination too, a voice in the back of her mind grumbled.

And Roan had said she'd come to him on her own before. Perhaps, she could bring him to her for a change.

With a moan, she cradled her aching head in her hands. This was ridiculous, but she'd never be satisfied if she didn't at least try.

Clamping her lids closed, she whispered the only words she could think of, and if they weren't the right ones to summon him then so be it.

"Please bring him to me. Please. I love him."

She opened her eyes to nothing but more of the same. Sweaty men, wide-eyed watchers, and apparently an injured re-enactor.

"Do you think he'll be okay, Dad?" a little boy asked his father.

"I'm sure he's fine," the man said.

Lindsay's gaze followed the gurney to the medical tent, then she took off after them. "I'm a nurse, let me through!"

She squeezed through the throngs of onlookers. He said it was his time, he said it would be a battle.

"Let her through," one of the paramedics shouted, and the people parted.

In minutes she was inside the tent, her gaze searching the features of the man lying on the pallet. But it wasn't Roan.

Shaking off her disappointment for the moment,

she quickly set about assisting the paramedics. "Looks like heat exhaustion and a nasty knock on the head," she said.

"Yeah, nothing major. But I could've sworn one of those guys had been gutted."

"You said it. Man, they sure know how to make it look real," the other medic said.

"You guys don't need me," Lindsay said.

"No, but thanks. For a minute there I thought we had a real mess on our hands."

"Sure." Through watery eyes she made her way out of the tent, her heart falling to pieces bit by bit with every step.

"How's the lad?"

"He'll be fine. Just a bump on the head and heat exhaustion," she replied absently.

Lost in hurt and thought, she stumbled a few more steps before the voice, thick with a familiar brogue registered. Her feet felt frozen in place and she couldn't turn around, terrified she was hallucinating.

"'Tis glad I am ta hear it," the voice said, coming up behind her. "I nearly felled the lad before I saw 'twas no' a true battle."

"Roan," she choked out. It had to be.

Strong arms wrapped around her from behind. "Aye love," he said, his lips close to her ear.

Her body shook with so much emotion she could barely breathe. She clasped his arm around her waist. It was solid, warm—and sticky. An odor she was well accustomed to assaulted her nose. Blood.

"You're hurt!" She spun around and searched his body with her eyes and hands, but found no wounds beneath the blood stained cloth.

His large hands captured hers and pressed them to his chest. "I am well...now."

"But this is—"

"Aye, love. 'Tis real, and 'tis mine," he said lowly

so passersby wouldn't hear. "You're summons stole me from the verra hands of death."

"Oh God." Her gaze shot to the field then back to Roan. "The battle, it was your battle." She threw her arms around his neck and held onto him with all her might.

"Lindsay," he said roughly as he buried his face in her hair.

"You're real. You're really real," she cried. "And you're here."

"Aye, love. And verra much alive, thanks ta you."

She lifted her head and cupped his face between her hands. Studying the man through tear-filled eyes, she said, "I'm sorry I didn't believe you. I was so afraid that I'd fallen in love with a dream."

He smiled that crooked smile of his. "And now the dream has come true. I love you, Lindsay. No' time, no' war, no' even death will keep me from you."

"You won't go back? You'll stay?"

"Aye, love. I'm here ta stay. I doona know how I will make a life here in this time, but with you by my side, 'twill be a good one." He cupped her damp cheek. "Will you marry me, lass?"

She smiled through her tears. "Aye."

With a boisterous laugh he lifted her off the ground and swung her around. Neither cared that they were surrounded by a crowd of curious spectators and one lone woman with an ethereal quality about her, wearing a satisfied smile. They only had eyes for one another.

About the author...

Jo currently resides in North Carolina with her patient and supportive family while she juggles her writing career and her position as a programmer analyst. In her early years, she wrote folk songs, poetry, and an occasional short story or two, but never dreamed of writing a book. She didn't even like to read! But one fateful day, she picked up a romance novel and found herself hooked. Not only did she discover the joy of reading, but the joy of writing books. These days, if she isn't tapping away at her computer on a story of her own, she has her nose buried in the latest romance novel hot off the presses, and is enjoying every minute of it.

She participates regularly in a critique group, and attends various seminars and classes, constantly honing her writing skills, determined to squeeze as much time into developing her craft as she does creating new stories about the quest for love. Someday, she hopes to take off her programming hat and write full time. So many of her dreams have already come true. What's one more?

Visit Jo's website at www.jobarrett.net