

*The MacKinnon's  
Kandra  
An Immortal MacKinnon  
Novel Treasa Klöth*



The MacKinnon's Kandra  
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Book and Cover design by Magick Moon Publishing

Other art: Victoria L. Kalisiak/Jenn Park

ISBN: 978-0-9989563-1-2

First Edition: May 2017

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



## **“She Was Fearless.....Until he lay Siege to her Heart....”**

“I am used to being out of doors. To be kept in that room is like torture to me.” Kandra spoke honestly. She needed fresh air and sunshine like she needed food and water.

“‘Tis really so bad for ye?” Lachlan’s face softened at the thought.

“Yes, I am not one of your soft Scottish women. I am a warrior.” Kandra stood proudly in front of him, raising her chin haughtily. She was proud of who she was, even if there were things she hated about herself.

Being a warrior himself, Lachlan knew her feelings. Perhaps it was the warrior in her that intrigued him. Or was it the woman hidden beneath? “Aye, yer nay like any woman I have ever ken.” He closed the distance between them. Lachlan raised his hand brushing his knuckles across her cheek. Though she was a warrior, she had the soft skin of a woman. It was bronzed by the kiss of the sun and gave her an exotic look, “Ye, Kandra of Carlisle, are intriguing’.”

“I am not interested in your opinions, laird.” Kandra drew away with ice in her eyes. Being close to him muddled her thinking. She would not allow herself to lose control again with this man. “I am only interested in the wellbeing of my men.”

“Aye, yer men?” He raised an arrogant brow, “What of ‘em?” He eyed her suspiciously. Being so close to her caused a throb within his loins. He tried vainly to ignore it.

“You have no need to hold them.” She glared at him. “I am all that you require.” Kandra raised a haughty chin.

“Och, lass, ye need to watch what yer sayin’ to a man.” Lachlan shook his head and laughed at her blush of embarrassment. Kandra flushed under his words. “That was not what I meant.” She tried to push past him, but he caught her to him.

“I will nay give ye up easily lass, I want ye far too much.” He raised his hand caressing her cheek as his eyes blazed with passion.

Thank you to all my friends and family, who have supported me through the years.

Thank you to, Tammy, for getting this all started with your faith in me that I could write novels.

Thank you to my mom, my BFF Mindy, my daughters, Alex, and Stephanie for being a part of my editing team and sounding boards.

My Husband, John, for the love through the years! My Dad, Jim, you are sorely missed and will never be forgotten. I love you and miss you, Dad!

Mom, thank you for all the encouragement you have given me through the years! I love you as well. Katie, this was originally written for your Sweet 16! I hope you enjoy the story as much today as you did when I originally wrote it.

Alexandra, my beautiful Amazon daughter, who inspired Kandra and her beautiful looks, her fortitude and grit! Thank you for all of your help! I hope your baby girl grows up to be just like her mama.

My daughters Kassie, and Haillie, my son, Jay and my nephews, and niece always follow your dreams and believe in yourself, anything in life is possible. My Granddaughters, I love all three of you and I hope that you all grow to be successful and have the determination to fulfill your dreams.

Lastly, but surely not least, to my many readers, thank you to everyone who has read and will read this story. I hope you enjoyed it! Without readers, an author is nothing.

Dear Readers,

As a history major myself, I am a fanatic for accuracy in history. However, for this story, I took liberties with people and places. As far as I can find in history, the MacKinnons were never lowlanders,

but islanders/highlanders. Being a MacKinnon through bloodlines helped me to research and write about this amazing clan.

The Stafford family of England never appeared to have lived in Cumbria, however, for this story it worked to make Kandra come from this area. So, please allow me these liberties with history and I hope you enjoy the story, as much as I enjoyed writing it.

For a complete glossary of Gaelic word meanings please visit [www.treasakloth.com](http://www.treasakloth.com)

Slàinte!

Treasa



“Be passive if you wish, but I warn you. I will show you no mercy,” she snarled at him. How could she take him into battle if he’d hesitate to defend himself? She lifted her sword, charging him. He raised his own sword to protect himself. Side stepping, she sliced across his upper arm. Spinning she swept her leg behind his. He fell with a thud onto his back, clutching his arm.

“Kandra!” He looked at her as shock filled him. “You sliced me!” Jonas stared at the blood covering his palm. “You really cut me!” He looked up at her with disbelief.

“I warned you, Jonas, I would show you no mercy.” She towered over him with the tip of her sword pressed to his chest. “If I had been meaning to finish you, I would have cut your leg out from under you.” She glared down at him with ice in her blue eyes. “Then, I would have run you through before you had a chance to think about it.”

“Kandra, I told you to work with him, not maim him!” Raff’s gruff voice came from behind her on the other side of the practice field. “Good lord girl, you cannot be cuttin’ down our own men.”

“I was teaching him a lesson.” She shot over her shoulder as Raff approached her. She lifted her sword tip from Jonas’s chest. “It is no less than you or father taught me.”

“Yes, but that was different.” He scolded, his brows furrowed as he watched the boy gain his feet once again.

“Why was it so different,” she glared at Raff, “because I am a girl?” Kandra spoke in defense, “Now, this girl can best half, or more, of the men in this castle in a sword fight, and you know as much!” She whirled on him raising her chin haughtily.

“You are hot headed and act without thinking. No knight worth his salt would act thus.” Raff countered trying to hold his own temper in check. He’d helped to raise this stubborn young woman. Her father and Raff, himself, had trained her to fight as well as nearly any man he had ever known. He looked levelly into her blue eyes and could read her pride there.

“Then it is lucky I am not allowed into the brotherhood of knights, is it not?” The insult Raff had flung stung, but she wouldn’t let it show. She felt just in her actions. If Jonas pulled back in battle, he’d lose his life for certain. The thought of Jonas dying in battle wasn’t something she wished to think about. “You are finished for the day. Return to the keep.” Raff waved her off in an angry gesture. “Jonas, head in and have Hannah patch you up.”

“Raff...” Kandra frowned at him, feeling her anger beginning to melt away. She hadn’t meant to hurt Jonas seriously. She’d only intended to teach him a lesson.

“Not another word! Go now, before I sorely lose my temper with you, girl.” Raff ground out. He watched her flinch at his words. She’d go sulk then apologize to her brother in the end, and God knew why, but Jonas would be her best friend again and dismiss the whole incident. “I do not want to see either of you until the evening meal is served. Do I make myself understood?”

“Yes,” Kandra bowed her head turning to leave. Guilt and anger filled her.

“Raff, she didn’t mean to hurt me.” Jonas frowned at her departing back. He knew her feelings were hurt and it ate at him.

Jonas knew he should have practiced harder with her. “I should have been more aggressive.”

“That you should have, but she will learn to control her temper, or so help me God, I shall take away her sword!” Raff growled at him. He heard Kandra gasp at his threat, “And I will do it, girl, do not doubt it!” Kandra straightened her shoulders and held her chin high as she marched back to the keep. Once inside, Kandra made her way quickly to her chambers. Closing her chamber door behind her, she began to pace without even bothering to remove her armor. It was lightweight and almost a second skin to her. She rarely noticed it and often forgot all together that it was still on.

Hurting Jonas had been wrong, she knew that, but she would apologize later for her indiscretion. Raff’s wrath was bad enough, but if her father had been home, he’d have been furious with her for injuring one of her own. Luckily, father was in London attending the King and wasn’t expected to return home anytime soon.

Sitting upon the edge of the chair nearest the fireplace, she began to remove her armor. A soft knock sounded at the door.

“Enter,” she called without bothering to look up.

Mary bustled into the room. “I assume you want to bathe before the evening meal.” She moved about the room setting out a bath sheet and soap for her lady. Mary looked closely at her charge for the first time and tisked. “Just look at you! You look like a lady not at all!”

Kandra shrugged a shoulder. “You have known me, the whole of my life, Mary. A little dirt should not be shocking.” She continued to remove the rest of her armor.

"A little dirt?" Mary rolled her eyes, "If you bothered to look at yourself once in a while, in your looking glass, you might be a bit surprised." Mary wagged a finger at Kandra.

Mary was the closest thing to a mother Kandra had ever known. She was more like family than a servant and she always spoke her mind, be it to Kandra herself, Jonas, or their father. Walking over she bent, placing a kiss upon the older woman's cheek. "Thank you."

"Now, what did you go and do that for?" Mary looked up at her large ward. She loved the girl as if she were her very own child. Though she disliked the idea of her little girl wielding a sword, she'd accepted it long ago because Kandra had always dreamt of being a warrior. Being as tall, if not taller than some men made her perfect for the title of warrior.

"I just wanted you to know how much I love you." Kandra told her with downcast eyes.

"What's wrong?" Mary peered her through narrowed eyes.

"Nothing," Kandra turned away fingering the silver backed brush and looking glass upon her dresser. They had belonged to her mother once upon a time. "You are upset about something. What 'tis it?" Mary placed her hands upon her ample hips. "You can either tell me now, or I shall just go pull it out of Jonas later."

"I doubt Jonas wants to even speak of me at this time." Kandra walked over and began picking up her armor then dropped it into the chair, turning to Mary. "I hurt him, Mary. I took a slice out of him. I am so ashamed." Kandra shook her head as tears pooled in her eyes. It was rare for her to cry so Mary knew she was truly upset.

“I am sure he will survive, darling. Your brother loves you, no matter what.” Mary came to her, patting her back to console her.

“I let my temper get the best of me.” Kandra wiped at the tear that spilled down her cheek. She hated crying, it was an aggravating and useless emotion. “You always have. ‘Tis not the first time and shan’t be the last.” Mary smiled at her. Kandra had a wicked temper and the entire castle knew it as well. But then, she was her father’s daughter after all. “You shall take a bath, dress, then go find Jonas, and apologize to him.”

“Do you think he will forgive me?” Kandra appeared so hopeful that it made her look girlish.

“Depends on how big a piece you took out of him and his pride.” Mary smiled. “Men do not like to be shown up, especially by women.”

“I suppose I will have to grovel, will I not?” Kandra gave a weary sigh.

“That you will, Love,” Mary laughed. “Now, we need a bath for you.”



Bathed and dressed in a clean pair of breeches and plain blue tunic, Kandra made her way to the great hall. Jonas would be there, as would the rest of her father’s men. She’d have to drag Jonas off and speak to him in private.

She entered the great hall and sought out Jonas where he sat with Griffin and Ryan, two soldiers in her father’s army. Swallowing her pride, she crossed the hall. Everyone was awaiting her and her brother, to take their seats at the head table so they could begin the

evening meal. However, she was determined to deal with what had happened between her and Jonas first.

Striding over to where her brother sat, Kandra frowned down at him. "Jonas, I wish a word with you." Kandra spoke with authority in her voice.

"Yes, my lady?" Jonas gave her a cold hard look. He'd make her grovel for what she had done to him, he thought with a mild satisfaction.

"In private, please." She scanned the table where he sat. She didn't want to make a scene here.

"Oh, I think here would be a fine place to speak, do you not?" He waved a hand around smiling at her brightly.

"No, I do not wish to speak here." She put her temper in check as she bit the inside of her cheek, but it wasn't easy. "It is a private matter." Kandra spoke between her clenched teeth. "Now, Jonas."

"Since it would seem we cannot start the meal before you have had your say, then by all means," Jonas stood, waving her before him. "Thank you." Kandra led the way into their father's study. She was determined to swallow her pride and apologize to Jonas.

Opening the door, she waved Jonas through it. With an air of arrogance, he sauntered over to one of the high back chairs. Kandra closed the door behind them. With her head held high, she walked over to the desk, leaning on the edge as she faced him.

"This is not an easy thing for me and well you know it, Jonas." She glared at his grinning face. How she would like to swipe that smug look off his face. In a sword fight, she reigned superior, but in a

contest of strength, she was slightly inferior and that annoyed her. They had been raised together, played and fought together. Never had a day passed when she and Jonas had been apart. She took in his golden looks that mirrored her own, so much that they could have had the same mother. They each looked at the other with blue eyes, but where Jonas had eyes like the deep blue of water, Kandra's were like the summer skies. If not for the fact that Jonas was younger than her by a little more than two years, she was sure he would wield a sword better than she.

Though Jonas was her father's bastard son, never had Kandra looked at him as less than her brother, or her best friend. Her mother died shortly after she was born and later her father had turned to a village woman for comfort. When Jonas was three, his own mother had become ill and died. Their father had taken Jonas into their home, but by law Jonas could neither inherit their father's title nor lands.

Jonas watched her struggle with her emotions. This was a hard thing for her. Kandra was beautiful with her golden looks, but her size had always bothered her. Being taller than any other woman that she had ever met, as well as being the height of most men, made her uneasy at times. Men who visited the castle often looked at her strangely, for unlike most females, she hadn't a delicate bone in her body. However, she had a kind, soft heart that she guarded well. He could remember once, when she was eleven and he was eight, the boys from the village had been teasing her about her height, because she stood a full head taller than all of them. They had dubbed her with the title 'Lady Goliath'. Jonas had stood to fight

the whole bunch when his sister had punched the ringleader in the nose. When the fight was over, Kandra had cried while he held her and tried to comfort her. He was one of the only people ever to see her tears flow freely. She was determined never to allow anyone to see her weaknesses again.

"I know you did not mean to hurt me." Jonas stood up and began pacing the room.

"No, I did mean to hurt you..." She held up a staying hand as he began to reply. "I meant to hurt you, so that you would never let such a thing happen again. The thought of losing you, Jonas, is something I care to think about not at all." Her voice sounded strangled as tears shimmered in her blue eyes. "I love you Jonas, you are my best friend, and I could not live without you."

Jonas reached her in two steps, pulling her into a tight hug. "Nor could I live without you, dearest sister." He kissed her cheek. "Besides, if I died in battle, who, pray tell, would you argue with?" He touched the tip of her nose with his finger.

"I am sorry." Kandra laid her head on his shoulder, sighing. She took so much comfort in knowing her brother was always there for her. She couldn't imagine life without him.

"I knew that then, just as I know it now. You need not apologize." He squeezed her shoulder once more. "Now what do you say we go eat, as I am starving." "All you ever think about is food." She rolled her eyes at him as she stepped away.

"And women, do not forget that." He gave her his most charming smile.

“I do not want to think about you and women!” She shook her head in disgust, walking out the door.



Later that evening, the castle was quiet as Kandra and Jonas sat playing a game of chess. Both were intent upon winning.

“Why do we not call this a draw?” Jonas yawned, knowing that neither would win for hours yet. Kandra’s blue eyes twinkled, “Are you conceding to a superior mind, brother?” She knew how to goad him into playing a bit longer.

Before he could answer, the warning bells sounded. Blue gaze met like, both shot to their feet and raced through the castle. Raff met them in the inner bailey. “The village is under attack, but we have no clue as to how many invaders.” Raff jogged alongside the two as they strode for the stables.

“Ready fifty men, send scouts east, north, and west.” Kandra ordered, “Catch up to us as soon as you can.” She reached her destrier, named Hadwin, and began saddling him.

“Do not be foolish, girl.” Raff grabbed her arm, stopping her, “You could be killed if the two of you go alone.”

“We could be killed with, or without fifty men,” Kandra jerked her arm away from him, “Ready the men and follow behind, but go Raff, before more lives are lost.”

Raff muttered under his breath “Foolish damn girl,” but he jogged away from them to assemble the men. Kandra finished saddling her mount at the same time Jonas did. She swung up into her saddle and looked at him. “Ready?”

“Do you not think you should wear your armor,” Jonas raised a blond brow. He hated the thought of her going into battle without it.

“Do you not need yours?” She spurred her warhorse out of the stables. She yelled for the gates to open and raced through them toward the village.

The fire loomed in front of them as homes in the village burned. Screams rent the air. Kandra leaned forward and whispered to Hadwin. The horse sped up and left Jonas's mount trailing further and further behind them.

Jonas filled the air with curses as he watched his sister and her damnable horse race through the night, hell bent on reaching the village.

Kandra pulled her sword from its sheath as she reached the edge of the village. On a full out charge, she met one of the Scottish bandits that was raiding their village. With her sword, she made short work of him, lopping off his head as she passed him. She spied one of the bastards, in the process of trying to rape a village woman that Kandra had known her entire life. Fury erupted. Sliding from Hadwin's back, she thrust out with her sword and impaled the man's back, through the heart, killing him. Ripping the sword from his back, she pushed him off the crying woman.

“It is over, Lindsay.” Kandra pulled the woman to her feet. She hugged the woman to her, “Run for the castle. You will be safe there.” Kandra pulled a dagger from her boot and pressed the hilt into the woman's hand. “Take this with you. Use it if you must.”

“Thank you, m’lady.” Lindsay held a tight fist around the tattered ends of her gown’s bodice. She gasped as a Scot turned the corner coming around one of the huts.

Kandra turned to face the man, “Run, Lindsay.” She flexed her grip on the hilt of her sword.

“I cannot leave you, m’lady.” Lindsay shook her head as a second Scot joined his friend.

“Run,” Kandra glanced over her shoulder at the woman, “Go now,” she commanded. She looked back at the leering Scots. Both men were her height, but held more brawn. “Leave this village, or die, heathens.”

The first man threw back his head and laughed, “Yer a bonnie thing, lass.” He rubbed a hand over the front of his kilt, “I’ll enjoy burying myself betwixt yer thighs.”

“You shall be long dead before that can happen,” she ground out, “You will die like the dogs you are.” She gave them a vicious smile. “And I shall relish cutting you down to size,” she let her sneering gaze drop over the front of their kilts.

The second man growled, “I’ll show ye how a dog is treated, bitch.” He came at her with claymore in hand. The man had no time for a second thought when Kandra took out his leg from under him and slit his throat.

She looked up at the first man, whipping her braid behind her, “Are you ready to join your friend?” He stared at her in disbelief as the blood dripped from her sword. “Bloody hell!” He roared as he charged her. Quickly, he realized his folly as she ran her blade

through his middle and twisted. He died with a beautiful angel of death standing over him.



The bandits had fled the village and Kandra met up with Jonas and Raff. They worked with the villagers, collecting the dead and the wounded. Kandra spent most of her time dealing with stitching wounds of women severely beaten and those that had been raped.

Later after all the fires had been put out and things had settled, Kandra stood in the center of the village with her brother and Raff, "How many dead?" Raff rubbed the back of his neck, "Twenty-three, as well as four children." His heart constricted at the thought.

Kandra gasped in outrage. The decision was made without another word being said. "We ride out within the hour."

"No, it is too dangerous," Jonas whirled on her with a look of outrage. "You shall not leave the castle." "Need I remind you that father left the castle and village in my care." She hated to pull rank on him. But she wouldn't be coddled as if she were merely a woman, and not a warrior. No other woman she knew could fight with her skill, for that matter few men could get the best of her. So as long as she had her sword, she'd have the advantage.

"We leave within the hour. Arthur, go with Raff and help him. I want you, Raff, and ten men assembled, and have pack supplies for fourteen ready." She turned on her heels and began striding away. "Leave twenty men to help the villagers. If needs be, house the villagers within the castle walls until we return." With that, she swung up onto Hadwin's saddle and raced off through the night.

# Chapter Two

*H*er brother, Jonas, was furious with her for her decision to lead the group in pursuit of the bandits. After more than eight days of him not speaking to her, except when necessary, it was beginning to irritate Kandra to no end.

Eight days and seven nights of ridding had turned up nothing. If they didn't find the bastards shortly, they'd have to turn back. They had left Cumbria, and entered Northumbria a few days before. Soon they'd be leaving Northumbria and enter the Scottish borderlands, and the Scots didn't take English presence on their lands kindly.

Frustration filled her as they stopped to make camp for the night. Tired and weary, Kandra unsaddled her horse, and began rubbing him down. Once she finished, she walked over to the nearby stream. Kneeling by the water, she began to drink greedily from the icy stream, then splashed it upon her face. Removing her armor, she dipped a rag into the cold water and began to wash. The sound of a twig snapping behind her brought Kandra to her feet and her sword

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ringing from its sheath. Swinging it through the air, her sword clashed against Jonas's. Muttering a curse under her breath, Kandra stared at him. Pulling her sword away, she sheathed it once more, "What do you think you are doing? I could have killed you!"

"Hardly, I was ready for that move. I know you far too well." He smirked at her. It was a typical move he knew she'd make, so he'd countered it easily. "You should not remove your armor while you are alone." He admonished, shaking his head.

"I can protect myself. You need not worry about me." She raised her chin at a haughty angle.

"I must worry about you, for you are my sister, and I care." He reached out tucking a stray lock of golden hair behind her ear. It was an endearing gesture and he watched her swallow hard. "What's wrong?"

"I do not know what to do, Jonas." She admitted. "We have ridden for more than a sennight, we have left Cumbria behind, and will soon be out of Northumbria, and are nearing the border lands of Scotland. If we do not catch up to them soon, then we have ridden all this way for naught." She turned away from him, staring at the stream. "Do we turn back on the morrow or continue on? I am confused as to what should I do?" She pleaded with him for an answer. He was the only one besides Raff, who she was willing to show her uncertainty to. Kandra crossed her arms over her waist, bowing her head in anguish.

"Kandra, do not despair. I say we ride through the morrow and the next, if we do not come across them, we turn back." Jonas stood with his hands upon his hips, scowling across the stream toward the Scottish border. "Those Scottish bastards need to die for their crimes." Kandra glanced over her shoulder at him. The taut set of his body told

her of the fury that he held just beneath the surface. “Then we ride through the marrow and the next if needs be, and I am sure we shall find them.” She nodded her head and began to turn away, but stopped next to him. “I am sorry, Jonas. I should have listened to you.”

Jonas laid a hand upon her shoulder, “You were right to pull rank, and you know you could never have stayed behind.” He flashed her a knowing smile.

Kandra smiled back with mischief dancing in her eyes. “You are right. I would have followed behind you anyhow.”



They broke camp before dawn then continued their journey. Kandra’s confidence kept them going through the day and into the next morning, she was sure they couldn’t be far behind the bloody bastards.

The riders didn’t stop once they broke camp that morning. Kandra and her men rode until late afternoon before they stopped to rest their horses. Frustrated, Kandra watered her warhorse then sat on a log to eat some of the salted meats they’d brought with them. ‘It is hopeless! We are never going to catch those bloody Scots!’ She thought in frustration as she kicked at the dirt with her toe.

“Do not be so hard on yourself. We will catch them.” Raff came to sit down beside her.

“It is of no use, Raff, we might as well turn back.” Her shoulders slumped in dismay.

“If that is your wish, then why not turn back now?” Raff looked up at the sky as he asked the question.

“Because, I cannot seem to get the sight of those villagers out of my head, I want justice for them. I cannot go home empty handed!”

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Kandra's determination spilled forth. She wanted those bandits with a vengeance.

"Then what do you suggest, my lady?" Raff smiled at her.

"Catch those bloody bastards!" She gave him a cold hard look as fury burned in her bright blue eyes. "Mount up!" She bellowed. Kandra swung up on her horse, looking around at her men, "We cannot be far behind them. We shall catch them!" She placed her helmet back on her head, wheeled her horse around, and set off at a neck-breaking pace.

A roar of enthusiasm and vengeance filled the air from the group of fourteen at her words. Mounting their horses, they charged off after the thieves.

They rode hard and fast for two more hours. However, there was no sign of the bandits. Kandra was about ready to give up. The day was waning and the men were weary. Slowing at the top of the next rise, she was going to turn back when she saw them in the valley below.

Nineteen Scots, mounted, and wearing vibrant colored plaids of red were just below them. The leader rode a pitch colored destrier that looked as if it where at least twenty hands high. The man seated upon the beast, looked powerful and angry. Without a second thought, Kandra drew her sword, charging down the hill toward the leader.

Jonas kicked his horse into motion and tried to follow her. Raff and the rest of the men took up arms and followed.

Kandra watched as the leader spurred his horse into motion. His long, raven black hair flowed behind him as he charged to meet her in battle. She was determined to bring justice to these heathen, Scottish bastards.



The lad had to be insane, Lachlan MacKinnon thought as he spurred his mount into motion. He didn't want to kill the boy, but the lad had charged upon him. Lachlan quickly took in the lad's silver and gold armor, along with the boy's matching helmet. Lachlan sized the boy up as the son of a nobleman. He was an Englishman and Lachlan hated the English, the thought of teaching this whelp a well-deserved lesson pleased him greatly.

Kandra braced herself for the impact of their swords crossing, but she was not prepared for the total force behind their meeting. As his sword struck hers, the clang of metal against metal was thunderous. The Scotsman thrust out his elbow and unseated her in one quick motion. The world spun as she tumbled from her mount. The earth rushed up at her. With a bone-jarring thud, she hit the ground and rolled to her back as the wind was knocked from her body. Gasping she looked up at the blue sky above her.

In her head, she could hear her father's voice telling her to get to her feet. 'Do not just lay there on your back girl, get up and defend yourself!' Her father bellowed loudly in her head. She sighed inwardly, but lying there seemed, oh so much better. Then an image of Jonas came into her thoughts. With great effort, she rolled over, grunting as she gained her feet.

Lachlan shook his head as he watched the boy stagger to his feet. He had to give the boy credit. He was certainly persistent. Dismounting quickly, Lachlan strode toward the lad as the boy still staggered to his feet. He couldn't wait to teach the lad some manners. It wasn't right for him to charge upon them without cause. The lad didn't know whom he was dealing with. Lachlan shook his dark head at the thought. No one within his right mind would take on Lachlan

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MacKinnon, War Chieftain of the Clan MacKinnon, especially on his own lands.

Kandra watched the leader of the thieves, stride toward her. She quickly cleared her head and evened her breathing, but she continued to stagger a bit. As he came to stand over her bent body, she smiled beneath the mask of her helmet. He thought her injured and unable to fight. She'd show him that he had met his match this day.

With claymore in hand, he stopped, looking down at the lad, bent at the waist. "Do ye yield, lad?" Lachlan smiled down at the staggering boy. When the boy didn't answer, or look up he placed his hand on the boy's shoulder and peered at him. In the next instant, Lachlan found himself hitting the ground and saw the boy swinging his sword. In one fluid motion, Lachlan swept the boy off his feet and jumped to his own, trying to gain the advantage. This boy was tricky. Lachlan smiled and relished the fight ahead.

Kandra took the force against her shoulder as she hit the ground once again. Gritting her teeth, she rolled away from the thief, and gained her feet with sword in hand, as the heat of battle fired her blood. Standing at her full height of six feet, she realized that this man was over a full head taller than she. He must be six and a half feet tall, and nearly twice as wide as she with his muscular frame!

Lachlan watched the lad with narrowed eyes and swung his claymore. As steel clashed against steel, Lachlan knew he could out power the boy and that was his advantage. As the boy whirled away from Lachlan's powerful blade with swift agility, he soon realized that the boy may be weaker, but he was much quicker. That could be a huge disadvantage.

Over and over, their blades clashed, as time and again Kandra pared with him and whirled away from him. She could neither out power him or out maneuver him, but she would not surrender. Win or lose, she was in this battle until the end. And damn her, if a Scot would claim victory over her! From the corner of her eye, she saw Jonas making his way toward her.

Lachlan saw the moment of distraction and his opening as the boy looked away. He struck out swiping the boy's arm. Victory would be his, of that he was sure. The lad was good, no doubt, but he was no match for a Scotsman's skill.

Kandra hissed in pain as the blade sliced her left arm just under her shoulder plate. She tried to focus her attention back on the fight at hand. This giant was cocky and over sure of his skill. In a quick movement, Kandra gave as well as she got, when she ran her blade along his thigh as she spun around him. Then to add insult to injury she kicked him in the butt.

He bellowed in an angry roar. The lad was good, but it was time to end this battle. Lachlan swung strongly in several powerful blows, driving the boy to his knees. Swinging his claymore high, he brought it down intending to knock the sword from the boy's hands. Kandra knew how to counter this move just as Raff and her father had taught her. She rolled between his spread legs in a move that surprised him completely. Regaining her feet, she turned to face her opponent and Jonas caught her eye again. As he was heading her way to help her, a Scot came from out of nowhere and sliced her brother from the side across his stomach. Jonas never saw it coming. Kandra's throat locked as a scream choked her, only a small whimper sounded.

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From the corner of her eye, she saw the leader of the thieves swing his claymore toward her. Spinning away, but not quiet out of reach, he sliced along her right side. A searing pain gripped her as she stumbled. The giant swept her feet out from under her and rolled her over placing the blade of his claymore at her throat as her sword met his belly.

“Surrender or die!” His deep rich voice thundered stopping the fighting around them.

Kandra glanced around her at her men who looked on. They would fight to the death if needs be, then her gaze slid to Jonas's crumpled form. She closed her eyes then roared as she threw her sword. Kandra had no choice but to surrender, and now she had sealed their fate.

Lachlan removed the tip of his claymore from the lad's throat, and stepped back, picking up the boy's smaller broadsword, “On yer feet, lad.”

Kandra struggled to her feet and felt the pull at her side. She wouldn't let them see her pain. Turning, she looked to where her brother lay on the ground. A whimper escaped her. Without a word to the giant she raced to her brother's side kneeling. “Jonas,” she whispered as she removed her helmet.

As the long golden braid tumbled out of the helmet Lachlan gasped, as did his men, “She's a lass? She's a lass!” Horror filled his face as his heart seized in his chest. Swearing under his breath Lachlan kicked a rock in anger.

“Oh Jonas,” she cradled her brother's head in her lap and with a shaky hand, she swept his hair off his brow. He couldn't be dead, he just couldn't, her mind screamed over and over as fear seized her. She couldn't lose him, she thought as tears shimmered in her eyes. “Do

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not dare cry in front of these bastards,” Jonas cracked his eyes open as he smiled weakly up at her. Tears pooled in her eyes, “You are not dead?”

“No, if I died then who, pray tell, would you have to argue with?” He reached up, wiping away a stray tear. “Show no fear, do not let them have that.”

“I will not show a thing. I shall make you proud.” Her chin jutted up as she laid his head back down. “Griffin, see to our wounded.”

“Yes, m’lady,” Griffin walked quickly to Jonas first and began to tend him.

Kandra turned back toward the leader of the thieves. Her head was high and her back ramrod straight as she walked. The wounds on her side and arm, along with her bruised shoulder, were on fire, but she wouldn’t show weakness, not to these bastards.

“What are we to do with ‘em, laird?” A tall redheaded man spoke to the giant.

“I have nay decided as of yet, Gavin.” Lachlan watched the lass walking back toward him. Anger filled him, what man in his right mind would allow a woman, nay, a mere lass, to ride with them? Was her father or husband a mad man? Watching her, he realized he could have killed her. The thought of killing a woman, armed or not, staggered him.

“I am Lady Kandra, my father is Lord Stafford from Carlisle in Cumbria.” She announced herself with pride and dignity as if she were holding court. For the first time, she really looked at her nemesis. He was tall and his golden, sun-kissed body was laden with rippling muscles. His midnight, silky, black hair was longer than she had ever seen a man wear it. His hair hung well past his shoulders and down his

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back, with two long war braids down the sides of his face, and other braids scattered throughout his glorious hair, all ending with silver beads. He looked wild and heathen. His magnetic green eyes were breathtaking, as they looked her over from head to toe and back. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen in her life.

“I am Lachlan MacKinnon, War Chieftain to the clan MacKinnon, and laird of the clan MacKinnon of the low lands. And yer on my lands, lass.” He stared down at her through narrowed eyes. “Why in the... name of saints did ye attack us?” His voice was a deep and demanding rumble with a brogue that made her heart beat a bit faster.

Kandra realized her mistake right away. This man was a Scottish lord, not some common thief. “I mistook you for the Scottish bandits that plundered our village over a sennight ago.” She gave him a haughty look. “We have been in pursuit of them since.”

Lachlan looked this girl over. She was as tall as most men, some may call her unnatural, but as he studied her, he realized he would call her more woman than girl. Her hair was the color of spun gold and if the armor she wore told true, she was well formed. Her eyes were summer sky blue and hard, but of her features, it was her mouth that drew him. It was full, with a slightly pouting bottom lip. The word plunder brought the image of his mouth on hers to mind. Pulling his gaze from her mouth, he narrowed his eyes again.

“And this gives ye the right to attack us, Sasunnach?” His voice bellowed with rage. Most cringed when he was angered, but not this young warrior woman, she didn't so much as bat an eyelash.

“I believe I explained that it was a mistake.” Kandra rolled her eyes at him. He was certainly the densest creature she had ever had the

misfortune of meeting, but then what did one expect for a Scottish heathen, even one as gloriously beautiful as him?

“Well Sasunnach, ye seem to have found yerself in more trouble than ye ken what to do with.” Lachlan peered down at her with hard eyes that made her want to shiver. He had no clue as to what he would do with her and her men, but he was certainly not going to shrug his shoulders and walk away.

“I am sure we can come to a reasonable accord, can we not?” Kandra looked impatiently up at him. She studied his masculine beauty as she awaited his response. It was rare for her to have to look up at anyone. This man made her feel small in comparison. Good lord, but any normal women must feel completely dwarfed, she thought with an inward sigh.

As if the Gods were blessing him, Lachlan found an answer to his lack of money problems, and here she stood before him. With the weather destroying their crops in the last few years and the feuding between the clans, it had depleted most of Lachlan’s coffers, or left them completely empty. So, there was no money for much needed seeds to replant and homes to repair. If he ransomed the lass to her noble Da, he would gain the coins he needed to refill his coffers.

“Aye, and here it be,” Lachlan sneered down at her, “Yer to be my guests until yer noble Da arranges a reward for finding yer sorry hide.”

Kandra narrowed her eyes at him, “You are making an enormous mistake. I would release us if I were you.” “Well yer nay me, lass. Ye’ll return with me to my home by yer own power, or by pure force.” He growled down at her. He would enjoy another tussle with this feisty woman if for no other reason than to see if she was as well formed as her armor suggested.

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Kandra had no choice but to concede to this barbaric man's demands. She would find a way out of this for her men and for herself. "Fine, but let it be said that you shall regret this, my lord."

With that she turned, striding to her horse. In one graceful movement, she swung up onto the saddle.

"Pray, lead the way, my lord."

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