

"TANYA ANNE CROSBY WRITES
REMARKABLE LOVE STORIES."

Lisa Kleypas

New York Times Bestselling Author

TANYA
LANNE
CROSBY



LION
HEART



TAN
GANNE

江苏 (Jiangsu) 图书馆 (Library)
藏书章 (Collection Stamp)

LION
HEART

An Avon Romantic Treasure



AVON BOOKS

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

AVON BOOKS

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

10 East 53rd Street

New York, New York 10022-5299

Copyright © 2000 by Tanya Anne Crosby

Inside cover author photo by Clay Heatley

ISBN: 0-380-78575-7

www.avonromance.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Avon Books, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

First Avon Books paperback printing: July 2000

Avon Trademark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. and in Other Countries, Marca Registrada, Hecho en U.S.A.

HarperCollins® is a trademark of HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Printed in the U.S.A.

WCD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

HE TOOK HER PRISONER . . .

The illegitimate daughter of a penniless English baron, Elizabet is determined never to relinquish her cherished independence. Forced to seek a husband in the Scottish highlands, she prepares to take flight—but is taken captive instead by a rugged clansman who awakens Elizabet's sensations as nothing ever has before. And suddenly a headstrong miss who craves freedom finds herself becoming a slave to her own torrid desires.

THEN HE SET HER HEART FREE

Broc of the MacKinnons is only interested in doing what is best for his clan—and if he can avert a feud by holding a high-spirited Englishwoman hostage, Broc will do so gladly. The fact that his enchanting prisoner is as breathtaking as a Scottish sunset only firms his resolve. But their newborn passion could be his undoing. For keeping the exquisitely kissable Elizabet poses a serious risk to Broc's life and future. Yet letting her go poses an even greater risk to his heart.



“Tanya Anne Crosby writes stories that light the darkest corners of history with the warm, glowing beacon of love.”

PAMELA MORSI

*Other Avon Romantic Treasures by
Tanya Anne Crosby*

LYON'S GIFT
THE MACKINNON'S BRIDE
ON BENDED KNEE

*If You've Enjoyed This Book,
Be Sure to Read These Other*
AVON ROMANTIC TREASURES

THE DANGEROUS LORD *by Sabrina Jeffries*
THE MAIDEN BRIDE *by Linda Needham*
THE MOST WANTED BACHELOR *by Susan Kay Law*
MY TRUE LOVE *by Karen Ranney*
A TASTE OF SIN *by Connie Mason*

Coming Soon

THE HUSBAND LIST *by Victoria Alexander*

ATTENTION: ORGANIZATIONS AND CORPORATIONS
Most Avon Books paperbacks are available at special quantity discounts for bulk purchases for sales promotions, premiums, or fund-raising. For information, please call or write:

**Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.,
10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022-5299.
Telephone: (212) 207-7528. Fax: (212) 207-7222.**

Prologue



Descended of the powerful sons of Mac-Alpin, the MacKinnon laird seemed invulnerable behind his veil of authority. But Broc knew better. The innocence of youth had been stripped from his child's mind; he no longer believed any man invincible.

His da was dead, his minny too, and he'd come to Chreagach Mhor a poor relation seeking refuge.

He stood tall, his father's enormous battle-scarred sword tucked into his belt, answering all of the MacKinnon's questions without shedding a tear, though he wished more than anything he could run away and find a quiet spot to patch his bleeding heart.

Though the MacKinnon had welcomed him with open arms, Broc knew he would never feel

wholly part of this clan. His own kinsmen had been murdered, their lands razed, and he felt like a beggar now standing before the MacKinnon laird.

"The lad is welcome to remain," the MacKinnon assured Broc's escort. "My wife's kin will always have a place among us. And I shall keep him safe as though he were my own."

The old woman cried out in gratitude. "Praise ye, good sir!"

Auld Alma had assisted nearly every birth in the MacEanraig clan for as long as Broc could recall. She, too, had been left homeless, without family, but Broc knew she wouldn't remain in the MacKinnon's care. Nay, Alma would return to sweep up the ashes. She would bury every poor soul she had helped bring into this world, and afterward she would remain to keep their graves.

"God will smile upon thee for this kindness!" she assured the MacKinnon.

Chreagach Mhor boasted the only stone keep in all of Scotia. Its laird seemed more a king than a simple chieftain, but his manner was far from imperious as he responded to her grief-stricken blessing. He smiled down at them from his seat upon the dais. His only son, Iain, sat on his lap, and the MacKinnon's fingers were laced in the boy's hair. Though Broc's throat grew thick at the sight of them, he didn't turn away.

He met Iain MacKinnon's gaze directly.

"And ye, too, may have a warm bed should ye choose to remain," the elder MacKinnon told Alma. "There is room enough. If not within the keep, surely elsewhere. We would welcome ye."

"Nay, sir." Alma shook her head adamantly. "But I thank ye anyway. I am auld, and my place is with my husband." Her eyes filled again with tears.

The elder MacKinnon nodded soberly and said nothing more. He knew, as Broc knew, that her husband was dead. They were all dead but for a few.

Clutching the hilt of his father's sword, he lifted his shoulder, catching a fat tear with his tunic. Och, but he wasn't a wee bairn anymore. He shouldn't weep. It was his duty to be strong. If only his heart would stop squeezing him so awfully. Another tear slipped past his guard, and he quickly swiped it away.

Dirty Sassenachs.

Anger dried his eyes.

He'd known them by their armor, bright silver shielding their bodies from their legs to the top of their heads. Like flawless mirrors, their helms had shone under the midmorning sun.

No Scotsman wore that costume of cowards.

No Scotsman worth bearing the name murdered wee bairns and expectant mothers for the sake of greed.

The pale-faced demons had come and gone as quickly as a sudden tempest. Broc had been too busy skipping stones into the loch to fight beside his family. He had shunned his duties that morn, had stolen away to play, and he would regret his childish decision for the rest of his years.

By the time their screams were heard, it was too late. From a distance, he'd first spied the smoke curling into the sky. And before his eyes, their homes had been reduced to ash. Never in his life had he felt such a rage. He'd run after them, trying to stop them, but the scoundrels had mounted their horses and ridden away like the cowards they were. His father had said they would not stop until all of Scotia was under King Henry of England's rules. As long as Broc lived he didn't think he would forget the scorched smell of his village as he'd come upon it. In his nightmares he would envision the slain bodies of his kinsmen lying limply among the mounds of ash that were once their homes.

In his heart he would dream of vengeance.

His little fist tightened upon the hilt of his father's heavy sword. Though he could barely carry it now, someday this very sword would exact vengeance for his mother's life and honor. There would never be room enough for other devotions. He would give his labors and his gratitude to the MacKinnon, but his heart would remain dark, lit only by the fires of revenge. Ven-

geance, like a glittering torch through a dark wood, would guide his way.

He would not be distracted by women or drink.

He would not be placated by holding a young bairn on his knee.

He didn't deserve to be surrounded by grandchildren in his old age.

He'd failed his mother.

He'd failed his kinsmen.

Aye, *they* had killed her, but he was as responsible as they were. He should have fought alongside his family.

Another tear rushed down his cheek.

He was big enough to defend his minny! He was big enough to defend his home! He should have died beside them. If it took the rest of his days to redeem himself, he would somehow find a way. He wasn't some weak, whey-faced Sas-senach girly boy! He was big for his age, they said, and would grow up to be bigger and stronger than most.

And someday he would avenge his minny and his da.

Someday he would make the English pay for their murdering ways!

Iain MacKinnon slid down from his father's knee and came toward him. He was younger than Broc, though not by many years—perhaps five to Broc's seven, though Broc couldn't be cer-

tain. He came and stood before Broc, looking him square in the eyes. His expression was sober and somehow as dignified as his da's. He nodded and said, " 'Twill be alright, Broc Ceannfhionn."

Broc didn't think it true, but he didn't say so. He narrowed his eyes at the name Iain had bestowed upon him—Broc the Blond. No one had ever called him such a thing, but it didn't seem such a bad thing to be called. He nodded back, thanking Iain wordlessly for his words of comfort. Five was just too young to know anything at all. When the boy was seven at least, he would better understand.

"You can share my room," Iain offered. "I'll even show you where it is."

Broc peered up at Alma. He wanted to go with her, instead, to help put all the ghosts to rest.

She reached out to catch his chin, lifting his face. "Sweet Broc, ye'll do well here," she predicted.

Another tear slipped past his guard.

"Forget the anger, child," she advised him, "and remember the love. Make your sweet minny proud!" she commanded him. "Find ye a good woman to cherish and give her strong bairns. Let your father's blood live long in your veins and those of your children! You are the last of the MacEanraig clan, lad."

He swallowed hard, realizing he'd never see her again. His last tie to his kinsmen would be

severed the instant she walked out the door.

But his da would want him to be a man.

He gazed at her tender countenance one last time, his eyes stinging sorely, but he didn't shed a single tear as he turned to follow Iain MacKinnon from the hall.

He would remember Alma's words always, but he never once looked back.

Chapter 1



A blackbird chased its mate across the sunlit sky. The pair fluttered together into a nearby tree, chirping merrily as lovers are wont to do.

Broc felt somehow empty at the sight of them. It was the second time during the span of the day that the feeling had come over him. He couldn't quite put his finger on what troubled him. He was restless.

It was a beautiful summer day with every tree a verdant green. The scent of something delightful but elusive hung in the air like an invisible mist, teasing his nostrils. Something like sweet pollen mayhap, though he couldn't name the flower of its birth.

He stopped to watch the birds upon a branch overhead. Furious little creatures, they struggled

together as though battling. His brows drew together as he watched them pair off.

God's truth, it seemed everything and everybody was mating except him.

And he was the last of his clan.

It hadn't much bothered him before today. He hadn't allowed it. But after Gavin's sermon at Colin's and Seana's wedding, he found himself remembering an old woman's blessing.

Find ye a good woman to cherish and give her strong bairns. Let your father's blood live long in your veins and those of your children! You are the last of the MacEanraig clan, lad.

The echo of her voice had faded through the years. But her words had come back to haunt him.

They left him strangely bereft.

If someone had asked him only a few months before if Colin might ever wed, Broc would have laughed in their face and shaken his head with absolute conviction. But his best friend was now a married man, and Broc had never seen Colin so joyful. He was pleased for the both of them. And yet . . . in the aftermath of their nuptials, he found himself obsessing over an old woman's last words to him and craving something he couldn't name.

He turned away from the birds and continued on his journey home. In times past, Merry, his dog, would have been at his heels, and he might

have had to drag her barking away from the damned tree.

He missed the sweet mutt.

He sighed and pushed her memory away, only to be besieged by another more poignant.

Always it hovered on the edge of his consciousness—the sound of his parents laughing together.

The two of them had been deeply devoted to each other, and his da had so obviously cherished his mother that as a child Broc had felt enriched by their love. But as happy as his childhood had been, despite the hardships, his memories were tainted with the hideousness of their death.

He could never think of them without remembering the other. . . .

He had no idea that he had stopped again, nor that he sat upon the ground, but he was left reeling by the images that accosted him. Even after all these years his kinsmen's faces haunted him. He plucked a woodland flower from the soil and crushed it in his fist, his gut burning with remembered rage.

God help him, it was better never to open one's heart at all, better never to be left so defenseless. The little boy he had been was long dead now. The man he had become was far stronger alone. His devotion was reserved for God and his clan, the clan that had embraced

him as a child and made him one of its own. Aside from the clan, he didn't want to cleave to anyone.

A wife would be nought more than a burden—one he couldn't afford.

A dog's growl startled him from his reverie.

For an instant, he forgot Merry was dead and mistook the sound for that of his old companion. He turned, expecting to find her black eyes watching him, and instead saw a strange, overgrown hound instead. The animal's teeth were bared, but something about the eyes seemed docile and harmless, mayhap even afeared. Its coat was bedraggled, wet and dirty, mayhap from a trek through the bog. It was in desperate need of a bath, food and a warm place at someone's feet.

It was just so that he'd found Merry. He'd had to win her over, as well. The memory brought a wistful smile to his lips.

But then he thought about the way she'd died and how much it had hurt to lay her to rest, and that empty feeling returned.

It was too damned difficult to lose the things you loved, and it seemed to Broc that everything he loved most, he lost.

Some part of him wanted to rise up now and brush himself off, walk away from this beast, but he didn't. He sat there, making no move either to leave it or approach it.

The animal's bright eyes stared back at him.