



Highlander Most Wanted: The Montgomerys and Armstrongs

By Maya Banks

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Maya Banks, the bestselling author of romance and romantic suspense has captivated readers with her steamy Scottish historical novels, perfect for fans of Julie Garwood. In *Highlander Most Wanted*, a reclusive woman content to live in the shadows shows a Highland warrior the true meaning of love.

Genevieve McInnis is locked behind the fortified walls of McHugh Keep, captive of a cruel laird who takes great pleasure in ruining her for any other man. Yet when Bowen Montgomery storms the gates on a mission of clan warfare, Genevieve finds that her spirit is bent but not broken. Still, her path toward freedom remains uncertain. Unable to bear the shame of returning to a family that believes her dead or to abandon others at the keep to an imposing new laird, Genevieve opts for the peaceful life of an abbess. But Bowen's rugged sensuality stirs something deep inside her that longs to be awakened by his patient, gentle caress—something warm, wicked, and tempting.

Bowen seizes his enemy's keep, unprepared for the brooding and reclusive woman who captures his heart. He's enchanted by her fierce determination, her unusual beauty, and her quiet, unflinching strength. But wooing her will take more than a seasoned seducer's skill. For loving Genevieve, he discovers, means giving her back the freedom that was stolen from her—even if it means losing her forever.

“[Maya] Banks has written an emotionally taut Highlands romance. . . . Lush emotionalism, compelling characters and a moving story line will win romance fans.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

From the Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The second book in Banks' Montgomerys and Armstrongs series is a shadowy tale of redemption and recovery." ---RT Book Reviews

About the Author

Maya Banks is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of over thirty novels, including *Hidden Away*, *No Place to Run*, *The Darkest Hour*, and *Sweet Seduction*.

Actress Kirsten Potter has performed on stage, film, and television, including roles on *Medium*, *Bones*, and *Judging Amy*. Her narrations have won AudioFile Earphones Awards, and she earned an Audie nomination for her reading of *Rise Again* by Ben Tripp.

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Chapter 1

"Do you ever wish but for a moment to go back in time?" Genevieve McInnis whispered as she stood in the window of the tiny tower room that had been appointed to her more than a year past.

The summer sun was high and showed no signs of lowering in the sky, and yet she could sense darkness. Knew it was coming. The Montgomerys would not allow the injustice done to one of their own, and now the whole of the McHugh clan—or what was left of it—would pay the price for Ian McHugh's daring.

She should be afraid, but she'd long ago accepted her fate. Her possible mortality. She didn't fear it as she once may have. There were worse things than death, as she'd discovered. Sometimes living took far more courage. Facing another day. Enduring. Those things took strength. Far more than dying.

The wind picked up, blowing cool on her face, relieving the sting of the sun. Her question whispered softly in her ears, as if the wind had gathered it up and carried it back on its wings.

If only she'd never met Ian McHugh. If only she'd stayed in her chamber that fateful day when he'd arrived at court and had become instantly obsessed with her.

But his obsession hadn't been limited to her. He collected things. Women. They were objects he viewed as possessions. He was like a petulant child guarding his favorite toys. If he couldn't have her, then no man would.

It was the same with Eveline Montgomery, a woman who, like Genevieve, had spurned Ian's advances. This time, however, he'd crossed the wrong clan, and he'd paid for it with his life. Graeme Montgomery had righted the wrong done against his wife and had spitted Ian on his sword in front of the whole of the McHugh clan.

And now the entire clan waited with anxious worry for the return of the Montgomerys. Ian's father, Patrick, the laird—as laughable as that thought was—had fled only this morn, because he bore the knowledge that Graeme Montgomery would return to avenge his wife. As Genevieve had prayed that he would.

Finally. Finally, she would have at least a hope of freedom.

Patrick was no laird. Ian had run roughshod over his father from a very early age. Ian made the decisions. Ian bullied his father. Ian had ruled in Patrick's stead for years now. All that was left for it was for Patrick to step aside and name Ian as his successor.

Only now the clan lay in ruins. Many had fled, avoiding the inevitable bloodbath that would surely occur. Others had stayed only because there was no place for them to go.

Such was the case with Genevieve.

Where would she go?

To her family, she was dead. Believed killed in an ambush as her party made the journey to her betrothed. Ian McHugh had swept in, slaughtering every last man and woman accompanying her to her intended husband's holding. He'd borne Genevieve back to his own keep, vowing that no man save he would ever possess her.

It was a vow he'd kept.

She raised her hand to touch the scar marring her left cheek. She closed her eyes to prevent the sting of tears. There was naught crying did for the matter. She was long past the stage of tears and self-pity.

When she'd rebuffed Ian's advances after her capture, as she'd done the first time they were introduced at court, his rage had known no bounds. He'd slashed her face with his knife, swearing before God that no man would ever again look upon her with desire.

He was right. No man could look upon her now with anything but horror. She'd witnessed too many times the instant recoil when she turned her head and the scar came into view.

And in the end it hadn't mattered that she'd refused Ian's advances, because he'd taken what he wanted, over and over, until she had no defense against him. No strength. No power. Just numb resignation.

She hated herself for that. Shame and humiliation were her constant companions, and now that he was dead she wanted only to be free of this place.

But where would she go?

Indeed, where would she go?

She closed her eyes, willing her anxious heart to stop tightening in her chest. Dread was squeezing her breathless, and she knew she was on borrowed time. Her fate—and judgment—awaited her.

The door to the tiny prison that had served as her chamber flew open, and Taliesan limped heavily toward her, her face a grimace of pain and fright.

"Whatever are we to do?" Taliesan whispered. "Surely we are doomed. The Montgomery laird will never have mercy on us. Not after what Ian and his father did to the Montgomery lass."

Taliesan was cousin to the McHugh laird's late wife. The entire McHugh clan consisted of distant relations and a band of misfits that had been pulled into the clan after being cast out of their own. She was the only friendly face in a sea of animosity that emanated from the other clansmen.

Genevieve never understood what she'd done to encourage such hatred toward her. She certainly wasn't here of her own volition. And the rest of the clan well knew it. She'd done no harm to a single McHugh, though the same could not be said for her.

She winced as the words whore and harlot echoed in her ears. The insults were hurled at her on a regular basis, and she'd hardened herself to the pain and humiliation they caused.

She was what Ian McHugh had made her. Nothing more. She wouldn't bear the blame for the actions of another. Nor could she spend the rest of her life languishing in regret for what hadn't been her choosing.

"Have you heard of their approach?" she asked Taliesan.

Taliesan nodded, her eyes darkening further in dread. "Aye, I have. The watchman bore word barely five minutes ago. The Montgomery army approaches, but 'tis worse than we could have imagined, for the Armstrong army accompanies them. They come united."

"Sweet Jesu," Genevieve whispered in horror. "They mean to kill us all."

'Twas the last thing Genevieve had ever wanted. Aye, she'd dreamed of Ian's death. A long, horrible death, and she'd been cheated of that when Graeme Montgomery ran Ian through with his sword. His death was far too quick and merciful for the manner of man he was.

She whispered a heartfelt prayer that her sins wouldn't be the death of them all. All she wanted was a chance. An opportunity to be free. She wanted to live instead of existing in a constant state of fear and humiliation. 'Twas not so much to ask for, was it?

"What do we do, Genevieve?" Taliesan asked in a voice hoarse with fear.

Genevieve squared her shoulders, her spine stiffening with resolve. And pride. "We must see to the women and the children. The men will have to face the consequences of the laird's foolhardiness. 'Tis naught to be done about it except throw ourselves on the mercy of the Montgomerys and Armstrongs and pray they are indeed merciful."

Genevieve swept past Taliesan, and when she stepped just outside the door she turned, her voice cracking like a whip.

"Come, now. Let us gather the others. If we are to face our doom, let it be with pride. Pride that Ian and his father failed to demonstrate. If the men of this clan won't do justice to their name, then 'tis left to the women to stand up."

Taliesan's own features tightened and her chin notched upward. "Aye, you are right."

Genevieve slowed her pace to match Taliesan's awkward gait and pulled the hood of her cloak over her head to hide her face.

She would gather the women and children of the clan into one chamber, and then she would appeal to the sensibilities of the Montgomery leader.

It occurred to her that she owed this clan nothing. That, even now, she should be fleeing and taking advantage of her only chance for the one thing that had been denied her.

Freedom.

But she had no place to go. No sanctuary. No coin or food on which to survive.

Mayhap . . . Mayhap the Montgomery laird would be merciful and perchance would place her in an abbey where she could peacefully live out her days, free of the rule of a man who'd been bent on destroying her.

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