

*New York Times and USA Today
Bestselling Author*

TANYA ANNE CROSBY



ON BENDED KNEE

BOOK #3 THE HIGHLAND BRIDES

ON
BENDED
KNEE

TANYA ANNE
CROSBY

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Dedication

To brothers—because I have two of the best.

Praise for Tanya Anne Crosby

“Crosby’s characters keep readers engaged...” – *Publishers Weekly*
“Tanya Anne Crosby sets out to show us a good time and accomplishes that with humor, a fast paced story and just the right amount of romance.” – *The Oakland Press* “Romance filled with charm, passion and intrigue ...” –
Affaire de Coeur

“Ms. Crosby mixes just the right amount of humor ... Fantastic, tantalizing!” – *Rendezvous* “Tanya Anne Crosby pens a tale that touches your soul and lives forever in your heart.” – *Sherrilyn Kenyon #1 NYT Bestselling Author*

Books In This Series

The MacKinnon's Bride

Lyon's Gift

On Bended Knee

Lion Heart

Highland Song

Look for Highland Steel early 2014

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Prologue



Colin Mac Brodie was surrounded by laughter.

People were drawn to him—as Seana was—as everyone couldn’t help but be.

Watching from a safe distance, under the shade of an old elm, Seana sat nibbling on a tart she’d snatched from somebody’s window where it had been laid to cool. She felt guilty, but hunger had driven her to it.

Just now, the children were all oohing and awwwing over some new dagger Colin’s da had given him. The boys were envious and the girls all properly impressed while Colin swaggered before them—as only Colin could—beaming as he sheathed the knife, then drew it from his belt.

Much as Seana would have liked to see it too, she knew better than to join them.

Sudden jeers and laughter caught her attention and she peered up to see that Lagan MacKinnon was looking in her direction. She froze. Seana didn’t like Lagan. He had cruel eyes that were full of anger and envy. And just now, they were filled with hatred directed at Seana.

“Thief!” he shouted and threw a pebble in her direction. It skimmed the dirt and smacked the tree behind Seana and her heart beat faster.

She wasn’t afraid, she told herself.

“Ugly lame witch!” Lagan persisted.

Seana willed herself to remain calm.

They would have their fun and it would pass—as always it did. Lame in one leg as she had been born, Seana was used to the jeers. People seemed afraid of her because of her limp leg, although she didn’t precisely know why.

She held her breath as Lagan stooped to pick up another stone, for it seemed this was far more cruel than usual. She braced herself as he threw it at her, hitting her in the shoulder this time. She didn’t cry out, but tears

pricked at her eyes, and she swallowed the wave of grief that rose to choke her breath away.

“Colin doesna like ye!” Lagan shouted, “Go away, witch!”

Seana felt like sinking into the ground. She didn’t respond, didn’t dare.

They all turned to Colin, teasing him suddenly... about Seana.

“Marry her, Colin!” Lagan taunted, laughing cruelly as he pushed at his shoulder. “Go on and wed the ugly witch!”

Colin pushed Lagan back, and cast Seana a harried glance.

Seana swallowed.

They were only teasing him, she knew as she had oft seen them do, but she realized Colin must not like it.

“She stole that tart from your minny!” one of the girls said to Lagan, casting Seana a disgusted glance.

Lagan’s eyes narrowed upon her. “Thief!” he shouted. “Hobbling wart-faced hag!” He seized Colin’s dagger suddenly, and threw it in Seana’s direction, snickering maliciously. “Go and get it, Colin!”

The dagger barely missed Seana, landing at her side. She blinked, thinking it might have had her eye out.

“Damn, Lagan, ye arse!” Colin railed.

“Go on—get it!” Lagan taunted. But Colin merely stood there, looking at Seana, his expression one of frustration.

Seana’s heart hammered as she met his gaze and held it... och, but he had the most beautiful blue eyes.

He was afraid to come and get his dagger, she realized. But there was no hatred in his eyes, only fear.

Were they afraid that the weakness in her leg was contagious? Seana didn’t understand, but she felt—as she had countless times in her near eleven years—like some vermin to be stamped out.

Swallowing her own fear, she reached out, taking Colin’s dagger into her hands. Amidst laughter and more jeers she stood, though it took some effort to rise to her feet. She straightened her shoulders, faced them, and then took a fortifying breath and walked toward the throng of kids, keeping her gaze fixed upon Colin for strength.

“Look, look!” another boy shouted. “The cripple can walk!”

Seana ignored the laughter and walked straight up to Colin, her cheeks stinging with warmth and her eyes burning with tears she refused to shed.