



Wedding the Highlander (Pine Creek Highlanders Series Book 3)

By Janet Chapman

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Wedding the Highlander (Pine Creek Highlanders Series Book 3) By Janet Chapman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #128326 in eBooks
- Published on: 2003-10-01
- Released on: 2003-10-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

A native of rural central Maine, Janet Chapman lives there in a cozy log cabin on a lake with her husband. Three cats and a stray young bull moose keep them company. The author of the hugely popular Highlander time-travel series, she also writes contemporary romances.

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Chapter One

Pine Creek, Maine, October 22

A shout woke him as he spiraled through the horrific void, twisting and clawing to find something of substance to hold on to. But there was only blinding white light and the terror of knowing his fate was beyond his control.

Michael MacBain opened his eyes, held himself perfectly still, and listened to the silence broken only by his own labored breathing. He slowly sat up and scrubbed the sweat from his face, then untangled his legs from the sheet, threw back the cover, and stood. He walked to the window, lowered the top sash, and took slow, metered breaths of the crisp October air, letting it wash over his quivering muscles.

A full two minutes passed before his heart finally calmed and his head cleared. Michael sighed into the night. All was right with the world, he decided as he stared into the darkness; the moon-washed mountains still cast their shadow over his farm, the stars still shone from the heavens, his house stood peaceful. And his son, Robbie, was safe in his bed, and John was sleeping downstairs.

Michael scrubbed his face again with tired impatience. The dreams were becoming more detailed. And far more frequent.

They started with Maura -- with her funeral. In the dream, Michael would see himself crouched on the hillside, hidden from the MacKeages, watching them bury his woman outside the fence that separated the sinners from the decent.

Ian MacKeage was placing his daughter in unhallowed ground. And as they covered Maura with unholy dirt and the dream progressed, Michael would relive the anger and utter impotency he had felt that day.

She hadn't killed herself -- she'd wandered onto the rotten ice of the loch by mistake because of the snowstorm. She'd been coming to him, running away from her clan to get married, so their child would be born with the blessing of the church.

And from there, the dream would change to his confrontation with Ian MacKeage that fateful day eight hundred years ago. Michael's feelings of heartbreak had been compounded by Ian's harsh reprisals. Michael had walked away, unable to reason with Maura's father.

Aye, it was then he had decided to go to war.

The dream would shift rapidly, this time to a *gleann* not far from the MacKeage keep. Greylen, Ian, Morgan,

and Callum MacKeage were on their way home from talks with the MacDonalds, looking smug in their success at gaining the other clan's aid against the MacBains.

And so Michael and his five warriors had attacked -- and his dream turned into a nightmare hellish enough to curdle a warrior's blood.

The storm descended upon them without warning. The sounds of battle turned into a frenzy of shouting men, screaming horses, and deafening thunder. A godless wind came first, roaring down from the heavens, uprooting trees, and churning up dust that clogged their throats. Lightning sizzled through the air, and the rain started, ruthlessly pounding against them. And the last thing Michael remembered seeing was a small, aged man standing on the bluff above them, watching in horror.

Sometimes -- if he were lucky -- he'd wake up then. His own scream of terror was enough to jolt him from the nightmare, and he'd find himself in his bed, in the twenty-first century, safe but no closer to understanding how ten men and their warhorses could be hurtled forward eight hundred years through time.

Nor, even after living in this modern world for twelve years now, was he any closer to understanding why.

But sometimes he didn't wake up, and the nightmare continued, settling back into a less violent but just as disturbing dream, with him standing on the summit of TarStone Mountain, at sunrise on Summer Solstice eight years ago.

In the dream, Michael was casting the ashes of Mary Sutter, Robbie's mother, onto the gentle breeze, watching it carry her away. He was holding their infant son in his arms, surrounded by the MacKeage warriors who shared his fate, Mary's sister, Grace, and Mary's six half brothers. The priest, Daar, was there as well -- the same man he had seen on the bluff in the storm eight hundred years ago.

Michael rubbed his now dry chest and looked toward TarStone Mountain. Daar was actually a *drùidh* named Pendaär. He lived halfway up TarStone now, hiding behind his priest's robes and neighborly smile.

The four MacKeage warriors were also his neighbors, their ancient war superseded by their need to survive in this modern time. The blood tie of the eight-year-old boy sleeping down the hall now bound them together. Greylen's wife, Grace Sutter MacKeage, was Robbie's aunt. And to the man, the old *drùidh* included, Robbie's happiness came first.

Michael continued staring out the window, but his focus suddenly shifted to the soft footsteps coming into his room, and he waited until Robbie was about to pounce before he spoke.

"Ya best be heavily armed, son," he said softly, still not turning around. "And prepared for the consequences."

The footsteps stopped.

Michael looked over his shoulder and smiled at the boy standing three paces away, his hands on his naked hips and a scowl on his young face.

"A noble warrior does not use a weapon on an unarmed man," Robbie countered, obviously insulted. His scowl suddenly changed to a diabolical smile as he raised his hands and wiggled his fingers. "It was a tickle attack I was planning."

Michael closed the window, picked up his pants, and put them on. He faced his son as he slipped into his shirt. "How about you get dressed instead," he suggested, "and we head for the summit now?"

"Now?" Robbie echoed, lowering his hands back to his hips and looking at the clock by Michael's bed. "But it's only two in the morning."

Michael reached into the top drawer of his bureau for socks. "We might make it by sunrise," he offered.

Never one to need an excuse for an adventure, Robbie clapped his hands. "Can we bring the swords?" he asked.

"Aye," Michael agreed as he sat on the bed to put on his socks. "Dress warm, and bring our packs when you come downstairs. I'll put together some food to take with us and leave John a note."

Robbie was out the door and running down the hall before Michael could finish giving his orders. Michael stood up and tossed the sheet back over the mattress, which was still damp with his sweat.

His shout must have awakened Robbie. And being far too astute for his age, the boy had known his father was dreaming again and had tried to distract him with a tickle attack.

Michael stared at the rumpled bed. This was the third time he'd had the dream in the last six weeks. Before that, he'd relived the horror only occasionally.

It wasn't the dream itself that disturbed him but more its escalating frequency. Michael walked back to the window, rested his arms on the top sash, and stared at TarStone. Were the dreams a precursor to something?

The nightmare retold his past, not his future.

Was another vision about to be added to the sequence?

More importantly, did he hold the power to control the outcome this time? He'd made a new life for himself here and now had a son to guide into manhood. Nothing must come between him and Robbie, not an aging wizard and most especially not the magic.

"Come on, Papa. I'm dressed, and you haven't even packed anything yet," Robbie said from the doorway. "I want to be on the summit by sunrise."

Michael gathered up his sweater from the back of a chair and walked into the hall, gently prodding his son ahead of him. "Do we ride or walk?" he asked.

"Walk," Robbie quickly answered, skipping down the stairs, the empty packs slapping against the banister. "Stomper is too old to wake up this early, and Feather's too lazy." Robbie stopped at the bottom, looked up at Michael, and said in a lowered voice so he wouldn't wake up John, "I'm not up to fighting that stubborn pony this morning. Besides, he doesn't like my sword. I think it pokes him when I'm riding."

"How about the four-wheeler?" Michael asked, his voice also hushed.

Robbie shook his head. "Too noisy. We won't see any of the night animals."

Michael gave his son a nudge toward the kitchen. "You write the note for John and fill our packs. I'll get our swords."

"Can I use Robert's sword?" Robbie asked.

Michael lifted a brow. "You're too tired to fight with Feather but willing to hike to the summit of TarStone

carrying Robert's sword?"

The boy thought hard on that prospect, then slowly shook his head. "Nope. It's too heavy." He suddenly brightened. "You could carry both."

After another nudge to get him moving toward the kitchen, Michael turned and headed to the library. "Nay, son. A warrior carries his own weapon," he said over his shoulder.

Michael continued into the library, came to a stop in front of the hearth, and studied the three swords hanging over the mantel. Two of them were as long as the hearth was wide and flanked a smaller sword designed for a much younger hand. He reached up and took down Robbie's weapon, feeling the balance as he ran one finger along the smooth length of the blade.

He'd had it made especially for Robbie and had given it to the boy on his fourth birthday. Robbie's aunt Grace had been appalled. The MacKeage men had been impressed. Well, except for Greylen. Laird MacKeage had taken on a yearning, almost pained expression as he'd held the small weapon and looked at his three young daughters.

Robbie had immediately named his sword *Thunderer*, which was a loose translation of what Michael called his own sword, and had rushed outside to battle the bushes. Since then, with both amazement and a great deal of pride, Michael had been teaching Robbie the skills of a warrior.

Learning to wield a sword was only a small part of his lessons, but it was the most enjoyable part for Robbie. The boy was unbelievably capable, in charge not only of his young mind but of his quickly growing muscles as well. With the confidence of youth backed by an unusually keen intelligence, Robbie was fast on his way to becoming a remarkable adult.

Still, Mich...

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