

Highland Defiance



The MacLomain Series- Early Years
Book One

By

Sky Purington

Prologue

Calm and dusted with the sun's last rosy rays, the sea spoke to her. Did it have any idea of what it witnessed? She wondered. Did she?

"Let's go. No time!"

Mildred ignored the sharp bark from the man leading them and kept a keen eye on the ocean.

"Now!" he roared.

A hand shoved her lower back. Instead of stumbling, she leapt forward with her head held high. They'd not for a second see her appear weak. Chuckles arose behind her. So be it. She'd walked this path a thousand times. She would do so again.

"Cocky lass, aye?"

"Seems it."

"Laird'll give her a good run over, and that'll be the last of that."

"It'll be a sight to see."

"Think he'll do it in front of us?"

"Aye!"

Eyes glued to the sea as she walked, Mildred prayed to wake up, prayed for this nightmare to be over.

Soon.

Very soon.

Suddenly, the man in front of her stopped.

She knew why... always somehow knew why.

The man behind wrapped an arm around her waist and dragged her down. Mildred said nothing. It was the same as it had always been, the way she landed half on the rock and half on him, the way her elbow caught the stone. No need to look down. She knew that it bled.

"Every last one of you will die if you dinnae release her now."

His voice, *always* his voice—deep, dark and unforgiving.

Even with five men ahead of her, their eyes locked. Icy blue, his expression wore that same determined look. A fiery rage seemed to sizzle around him.

Mildred covered her ears.

She knew what was coming.

Even with her ears covered, the loud boom of thunder slammed into her. Dark clouds rolled overhead. The air chilled.

Through it all, his eyes never left hers.

As always, she felt no fear.

One by one, the men crumpled, caught in his strange magic, in his pure power.

As always, they were left alone on the cliff watching one another.

She stood and once more looked to the sea, forlorn and sad.

Because this in when she felt fear for the first time.

As he jumped.

Chapter One

Salem, New Hampshire
1942

Mildred opened her eyes. Covered in sweat, she took long steady breaths. Long ago, she'd learned not to panic upon waking. It served no purpose. With a quick swipe, she removed the tear that had fallen down her cheek and sat up in bed. She clenched her hands for a few moments and willed the tremors to subside. Waking this way had become far too regular.

"The same dream then?"

She pushed up the window by her bedside and gulped in fresh morning air. Resting her arms on the windowsill, she propped her chin on folded hands and responded to her older sister, Irene. "Yes."

"You really should tell mother about them, dear."

"Mmm hmm."

But she wouldn't.

Irene sat and rested a hand on her shoulder. "Happy Birthday, Mildred."

With a sad sigh, she worked at a smile. Why couldn't he have let her be for one night? One single night. But what would it have been like if she'd awoken without having seen him? Probably worse.

Enough with these depressing thoughts. The world was fraught with enough drama without her adding to it. No matter how handsome and intense, the man from her dreams was only a figment of her overactive imagination.

Mildred shook off her current mood and cocked a brow at Irene. "How was your date with Timothy last night?"

Irene laid back and rolled her eyes. "Total flat tire. I had Phillip in my sights by the end of the night."

"That bad?"

"Worse. If Timothy told me one more time what a hard-boiled guy he was, I was going to plead ill. If he's all that special, he should do his country a favor and enlist."

"I told you to pass on that one."

They smiled as their younger brother Jonathan joined them. Sitting on the other side of Mildred, he shook his head and winked at Irene. "But I think you enjoy the game too much."

"That she does." Mildred leaned over and gave her brother a peck on the cheek. "Truth told, you're no better."

His thick, dark brown hair in disarray and expression properly wounded, Jonathan shrugged. "Can't change who I am."

Irene clucked her tongue. "So you admit it."

Jonathan grinned. "Always have. Always will." His merry blue eyes danced. "All the ladies are keen on me."

Mildred grinned. Her brother and sister were both very attractive and had never had any qualms about it. But they were humble too. Half the reason she adored them. Jonathan would be turning eighteen tomorrow. Irene was twenty-two.

"So I've made a decision," Jonathan said softly.

Both sisters went on alert. Their brother never got serious. With his eighteenth birthday looming, Mildred put a hand over her stomach, prepared for the worst.

Irene stood abruptly, her sea green eyes dark. "Don't you dare say it, Jonathan. Don't you dare, I tell you."

Jonathan's eyes met Mildred's before they went to Irene. "You must understand."

"I need not understand a thing." Irene looked at Mildred, dismissing him altogether. "It's time to get dressed. We're due at the factory within the hour."

Mildred blinked away tears before they could form and took Jonathan's hand. "She just doesn't want to hear it is all."

"Well, it needs to be said to you both before I tell Mama."

"Mama should always be told first, not us," Irene snapped.

Mildred sighed. "Oh, stop it, Irene. We've always shared with one another first. You're just afraid."

Irene frowned. "Of course I am. As you should be."

"He will do as he pleases." She squeezed his hand even though her heart broke. "It is our job to support him, to love him."

"Well, Lord knows I love him." Irene plunked down on the bed and put her hand over theirs, voice direct. "You're going to enlist, aren't you?"

Jonathan nodded. "I am."

"Hell." Irene closed her eyes for several moments then met his. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"Yes," Jonathan whispered, emotion in his voice. "I've no doubt."

Irene gritted her teeth and squeezed their hands briefly before standing once more. "Fine then." She took a deep breath, looked around the room aimlessly before she came to some sort of internal conclusion and straightened her shoulders. "You will do what you can for this war from that side, Mildred and I from this side. Come now, Mildred, get dressed, time to go to work."

Mildred didn't have a chance to respond before her sister left the attic where they roomed.

"She handled that quite well I think," Jonathan said.

"But not me." Mildred yanked her hand away and stood, hands on her hips. "You're a fool!"

"So you saved how you really felt until she was gone." Jonathan came to his feet, standing several inches taller than her. "Why do you always do that? Why do you show her one thing and me another?"

Furious, she spun away and started throwing clothes from her dresser drawers. "Because I can handle it better than she can."

"Can you?" He dodged a shirt thrown his way.

"Yes."

"Every single time I do something you don't like you pull this. I should just call you on it from the beginning."

"There's nothing to call me on." She whipped a pair of socks at him. "I'm right every time, and you're wrong!"

"You're behaving like a child."

"I'm behaving like a sister."

He dodged a wadded up pair of pants. "Mildred, please stop."

"Now. Stop. This is insane." He jumped in front of the dresser before she could grab more weaponry.

Why should she stop? Her brother was about to offer himself up to be killed because that's all that would happen to him. He wasn't nearly mature enough to handle what the war would throw at him. She'd never been so furious in her life.

"Step aside," she growled.

He peered down his nose at her. "I will not."

"You will."

"No."

Fury made blood rush through her veins. "Move!"

"What's all the commotion up here?"

They turned toward the top of the attic stairs and said at the same time, "Nothing, Mama."

"Nothing is always something." Their mother appeared, shaking her head. "Some things never change."

It took all she had not to tell her mother everything right there and then. But she didn't. She would never give away her brother's secrets before he meant to tell them. But she'd sure as heck let him know how she felt. Crestfallen didn't begin to describe her current emotions.

Jonathan put on his brightest smile and crossed the room. "I was simply telling her what I thought about her latest beau."

Mama's brows lowered. "Now who is this?"

Jonathan linked arms with her and led her back down the stairs. "Oh, you know the fella, comes up to her nose if an inch."

Mama said, "Really? That seems a bit off, does it not?"

"Oh yes."

Jonathan's voice faded as they traveled downstairs. While she dearly loved her mother, the woman was a bit pliable, especially when it came to her son. Probably because their Da was away so long...still.

Mildred plunked down on her bed, frustrated. Not because of Mama's easy-to-sway attitude but because Jonathan wasn't using his head. Yes, the war was fresh, but men were already dying. She chewed her nail and glared across the room. There had to be a way to stop him.

Unlikely lass. When a man is set to go to war, he will.

With a sharp intake of breath, she stood and spun. "Who's there?"

Nobody responded. But she'd heard a voice clear as day. *His* voice, the one with the Scottish accent, the man from her dream. Mildred stormed around the room and looked behind everything she could find. She was about to lift Irene's mattress but stopped. *I'm going insane.* Jonathan's news got to her, and now she was letting the man from her imagination give her advice.

Hmph. Not going to happen. Grumbling, she pulled on some pants. As she buttoned up her blouse, she threw her blankets over her bed with a spare foot. Socks and shoes on, she cinched her hair in a blue bandana and flew downstairs.

Irene's arm reached out at the bottom floor. "Stop."

Before she could say a word, her sister continued. "I know you're more upset than me, Mildred. And I know every time you get upset with Jonathan you take it out on the car. I'm driving."

"I do not. Anyways, I need a—"

Jonathan came around the corner and shoved a muffin into her hand. "Here's breakfast. Let's go."

Even though she tried to beat them to the car, she lost. They piled into their thirty-six Chevy and were off, Irene driving. She really would've liked to drive. It let her blow off steam. Sitting in the backseat, she ignored the muffin.

"How can you think I'm hungry?" she spat at anyone willing to listen.

"Eat," Irene said. "Jonathan's irritated me enough. Don't you add to it."

Jonathan winked over his shoulder from the front seat, took a bite of muffin and said around a mouthful, "See, I'm eating."

Mildred tore off a piece and shoved it in her mouth, eyes narrowed.

The car bounced down the dirt road, and Jonathan chuckled.

But she didn't miss the way his eyes skirted between his sisters or the way his expression grew serious when he thought he was off the hook. Jonathan was about to join a terrible war, one that had been festering for far too long. Adolf Hitler was a tyrant and soon her baby brother was about to take up with the ranks of his enemy.

Blink away the tears, Mildred. Stay strong. But it was so darn hard. Their lives were quickly spiraling in a direction that would split apart the family. It had been the four of them for so long. Now she knew Irene was considering entering nursing and the war. Jonathan would be leaving too. It would just be her and Mama. If Da returned, that'd be something, but it'd been so long since his last message.

"Oh, stop brooding back there." Jonathan nodded outside of the car. "Your fan club is waiting for you."

As usual, she'd got lost in thought. They'd just arrived at the steel mill in Manchester. Her 'fan club' consisted of two men, both dear friends. She, Jim and David had been childhood friends and remained close.

The minute she stepped out of the car, they were shaking their heads.

"Upset with Jonathan again?" Jim asked.

"Irene's got her going this time," Jonathan provided as he hopped out.

Or maybe it's me.

Mildred stopped short. It was the man from her dreams again. Spinning, she searched. Nobody was there but her friends.

"You're nothing but a ghost," she whispered.

"What's that?" Jim asked.

With a sharp shake of her head, she responded, "Nothing. Just talking to myself."

Irene shot her a sharp look and started to walk toward the factory with her brother. Doing her best to paste a bright smile on her face, she locked arms with Jim and David, and they started toward the factory.

Both were of similar height at about six feet tall. Jim was the most handsome of the two with enigmatic eyes and a strong build. Or at least he'd always seemed more attractive, most likely because his personality was outgoing, his mere presence so consuming. He had a way of owning a room when he walked in. Nothing seemed to scare Jim, and she'd always found that appealing. She supposed David was good looking too with sandy blond hair and gentle green eyes. But David was quiet and reflective. While she loved him for those qualities, they didn't particularly draw her.

"So I suppose he's entering the military," David said softly.

It didn't surprise her at all that David had figured that out even though he'd been told she was mad at Irene. With a heavy sigh, she responded. "Yes."

"It's admirable," Jim declared. "I might do the same!"

David frowned and shook his head. "Not what she needs to hear right now, Jim."

"It's fine." She cocked a brow at Jim. "What, you'll really leave your horses to fight a war?"

He appeared properly wounded. "If need be. Of course, I would."

"It's hard to imagine you going to war," she murmured. The truth of it was the idea had made her chest tighten a little. He possessed so much life. The thought of him dying seemed such a waste.

"He won't go," David said.

Jim narrowed his eyes. "I just might."

Mildred rolled her eyes. "Don't you two start. This morning's been ripe with enough drama already." She eyed her brother and sister and said louder, "Besides, my gripes with them."

"They're purposefully ignoring you." Jim grinned. "But I'm not. Will you be going to the fair tonight, Mildred?"

She cast a sly grin his way. "Only if Bess is. I love to watch her chase you."

"I bet you do." Jim pulled her a little closer. "But she never quite catches me, does she?"

Mildred winked. "Keep on like you have been, Jim Seavey, and she will."

There was no mistaking the attraction between Bess and Jim, even if it was more on her side. He liked her. Mildred knew it. And that was just fine. They'd make a good couple.

"Did you notice that there are more and more women employees and fewer men," David mentioned. "The war's heating up."

Mildred eyed the brick mill they walked toward. David was right. She'd noticed. They'd all noticed. Could it be that a year from now she'd come to work and all the men would be gone? Off to war? She glanced at Jim, David and then Jonathan. A shiver ran down her spine. Would all of these carefree young men that'd made up her life be gone?

Well, don't let the thought haunt you, lass. Such is life.

Mildred stopped, and her friend's arms fell away.

"What is it?" David asked.

Jim looked from the mill to her and said, "Oh, stop worrying, Mildred. If we go to war, we'll come back." He smiled and shrugged. "At least I will."

David put his hand on her shoulder. "Mildred? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Who are you?" she whispered in her mind.

"Mildred?" David repeated.

"Yes." Mildred worked at a reassuring smile. "I'm fine, David. It's okay."

Jim put his hands on his hips and shook his head. "Then stop looking so damned white." He took her face in his hands and leaned in close. "Fear has no place in this war. You need to ante up, my friend. Succumb to your emotions or fight them. Choose your battle. I'd suggest fighting them. Set them aside. They can't be a part of any of this. Best way to get through any war."

It wasn't an easy pill to swallow. But she knew he was right. It seemed Jim was much like the man from her dreams. With only a wobbly smile to offer, she pulled away and nodded toward the mill. "Best we go to work then."

Nobody said a word as she strode toward the building. In fact, she didn't hear the fall of their footsteps behind her. When Mildred turned back to urge them to follow, she froze. The world had started to blur. Stumbling, she shook her head.

Something wasn't right.

"Are you okay?" David asked, brows bunching together.

Of course, she tried to answer. But it felt like she was melting. The air seemed to soften. Panicked, she reached out. Concerned, Jim came to her first, David right behind. Their faces seemed oblong and warped.

"What's happening to me?" she whispered.

As if the gods heard, everything started to swirl around her, almost as though a tornado had suddenly appeared. The air started to smell sugary sweet moments before everything dropped away. The car, her siblings, her friends, they all vanished only to be replaced by darkness and suction. Petrified, she crouched and held her head to her knees. A loud roar filled her eardrums.

The Germans must be dropping a bomb!

Mildred looked up and tried to warn everyone. But it was pitch black, and they'd vanished. Her muscles tightened. She screamed. This couldn't be happening. In a crouched, defensive position, she rode out the wind and warp happening around her.

Eventually, the wind became a light breeze.

Was this post bomb fallout?

She slowly raised her head and inhaled a tentative breath. Not to a world gray with bomb residue but to one calm and peaceful and... green? Mildred didn't move but squeezed her eyes shut. Lord, was she dizzy.

"It took you long enough, lassie."

Mildred released air softly through her teeth and refused to open her eyes.

It was the man from her dreams.

Again.

Someone moved. She knew it. Their steps drew closer until his deep voice said, "Your clan waits for you."

She didn't move, didn't dare.

He crouched. "Why are you so blasted defiant?"

I can handle this. I have to handle this. A dream is a dream after all; no matter if she thought she was going to work. No matter if she wondered at her sanity. So she decided to crack one eye open at a time.

Piece by piece, the man in front of her appeared.

He grinned. "Quite handsome, aren't I?"

Her eyes popped open. Handsome? *Extremely*. His black hair was tousled, his startling light blue eyes merry, his chiseled face astounding.

"No," she said automatically and buried her head again.

"Oh." He plunked down beside her. "'Tis a thing sometimes, the shock of my good appearance."

Mildred breathed deeply and hid her grin. Arrogant. But she couldn't help but enjoy this dream. It was the first of its kind. She peeked out from beneath her arm and said, "You're awfully full of yourself."

"Nay." He looked ahead and shook his head. "I stopped being that way years ago."

Still from beneath her arm. "Being full of yourself?"

"Aye." He leaned back and stretched out his legs. "Turns out the lassies dinnae like it."

Mildred lifted her head slightly. "Why not? I find it rather becoming."

"You would."

"I would?"

"Of course."

"Why is that?"

"Because you're arrogant too."

She sat up straighter. "Am not."

"Are too." He tilted back his head. "Do you feel that?"

"What?" But she already did. A cool wind blew through the forest and brushed her cheek. For the first time since she'd arrived, Mildred looked around. There existed no steel mill looming in the distance waiting for her to make parts for planes created for war. There existed no stream of people trudging into a plant determined to do their job.

Her friends and siblings had vanished.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Her eyes darted to the man beside her then back at the forest. "Yes, but I don't understand."

"Cannae you be happy with what is in front of you?"

She heard his accent and saw the forest and shook her head. "No, I can't."

"Too bad." He jumped to his feet and held out his hand. "M'lady."

Mildred looked up, still barely familiar with everything and shook her head. "No."

He ignored her and pulled her to her feet. Stunned, she looked up...and up. It was then that she truly realized the stature of the man talking to her. With shoulders easily twice as wide as hers, a height at least eight inches taller and a frame rippled with muscles, he was overwhelming.

Her eyes drifted over his face. That face. One she'd dreamed of since she had been a little girl. Perfectly proportioned, with a straight nose, square chin, and straight brows, it'd always been overly alluring.

And those eyes...like the clearest blue sky sharpened by sunlight.

"Well, what about my attire?"

Her eyes rounded. Yes, his attire was... amazing.

"You're wearing a..." She glanced away and cinched her lips before looking at him again, brows up. "You're wearing a skirt." Mildred paused a minute to get her bearings in front of such a good looking fellow. But things must be said, so she gathered her courage and looked him dead in the eye. "Are you aware that you wear a skirt?"

With a shocked look, he peered down. "It appears that I am."

Mildred breathed deeply through her nostrils and nodded solemnly. "So I'm the first to tell you."

He looked to the sky for guidance then into her eyes. "It seems you are."

"Well, I'm sorry about that, but honestly it'll get you in trouble, even in my dream."

"Even in your dream?" he asked.

"Yes." She looked around. "You never know how things will work in my mind." Mildred peered up at him and tried her best to keep her breathing even. "No matter how strong you look."

He nodded in agreement. "I am verra strong."

Mildred smiled. She couldn't help herself. "Of course you are."

"And you are verra young."

Taken aback she said, "I just turned twenty. That's not so young."

His eyes suddenly searched hers. "I know you dinnae believe in men in skirts. Tell me then, do you believe in magic?"

Her nerve endings tingled. The forest seemed to shimmer. Of course, she did. "Absolutely not."

"Then how are you here?"

Mildred ignored the compelling scent of his skin and the direct look in his eyes and said, "I'm not here. Neither are you."

He moved closer. She stepped back.

“Rest assured, I am here, as are you. Right here, right now. In Scotland.”

For a split second, she tried to look to the sea as she had in her dream.

It was not there. *Thump. Thump.* Her heartbeat increased.

Mildred’s eyes returned to him. “It is a dream,” she said. “I’m so sorry.”

She swore that his eyes glowed bright blue for a second before he said, “Nay, ‘tis not a dream.”

As Mildred looked around at the forest, she tried not to panic, tried to wake up. She whispered, “It is a dream. It *has* to be.”

His gaze seemed to freeze then slowly travel over her as if he saw her for the first time. As if he savored every inch. “Nay, Mildred.”

Her eyes rounded as she tried to get a grip on reality. “I never told you my name. How did you know my name?”

Though his eyes continued to study hers, his deep voice cut through her misconstrued thoughts. “Because I am him.”

“Him who?” she whispered.

He gently took her hand. “So sorry that I didnae introduce myself before. I am Adlin, Chieftain of the MacLomain Clan. The lad from your dream. The one who will take you to your betrothed.”

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About the Author



Sky Purington is the bestselling author of over thirty novels and several novellas. A New Englander born and bred who recently moved to Virginia, Sky was raised hearing stories of folklore, myth, and legend. When combined with a love for nature, romance, and time-travel, elements from the stories of her youth found release in her books.

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