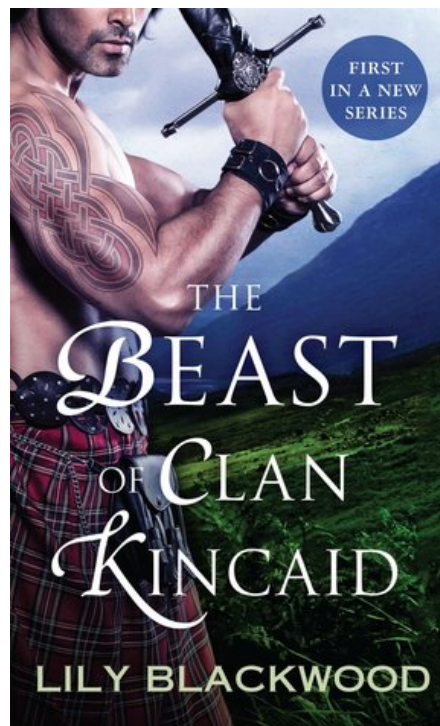




## The Beast of Clan Kincaid

*Lily Blackwood*

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# The Beast of Clan Kincaid

*Lily Blackwood*

## **The Beast of Clan Kincaid** Lily Blackwood

*A Highland warrior battles to reclaim his birthright in the first of a new series filled with seduction, revenge, and soul-stirring passion...*

They call him the Beast—a hardened mercenary whose heart seems as cold as his icy blue gaze. They do not know his true name: Niall Braewick, son of the Laird of Kincaid. It has been years since he escaped into the forest the night his father was murdered. Now he has returned, ablaze with a vengeful hunger. He will gain the MacClaren chief's trust, gather his clan, and take back his lands. And take the MacClaren's daughter as well...

Though he pulled her from the river, saving her life, Elspeth has been warned to keep her distance from her father's hired warrior. He is a barbarian—a shame, as he is far more compelling than the lechers and fools competing for her dowry. Little does she know that, like the castle itself, she is a prize Niall intends to claim...but will he extract blood for blood and possess what is his, or will his enemy's beautiful, innocent daughter tempt him to forsake his dream of conquest?

## **The Beast of Clan Kincaid Details**

Date : Published May 31st 2016 by St. Martin's Paperbacks

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Author : Lily Blackwood

Format : Mass Market Paperback 291 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Beast of Clan Kincaid for online ebook

### Becca says

EDIT: I originally gave this four stars, but it's been almost a week and I'm still talking about it, thinking about it, and recommending it to everyone. Thus, despite my one quibble, I'm still giving this 5 stars because it's an excellent debut worth reading.

SECOND EDIT/UPDATE: I have since discussed this with one of my friends and confirmed via an author page on Amazon that Lily Blackwood ALSO writes as Lily Dalton! Woo hoo! I am so excited that she wrote another winner especially after I loved Never Surrender to a Scoundrel! :)

See my original review below:

The Beast of Clan Kincaid is an excellent debut for new author Lily Blackwood. Except for one area (which I will discuss shortly), this was a full five star read and I will definitely be picking up the other books in this series.

From the very first page, this story grabbed my attention and for the entire book, I was hopelessly hooked. I loved the intrigue, the forbidden love, the clan dynamics, and the Gaelic phrasing that Blackwood had sprinkled throughout the story.

This plot is not a new one, but Blackwood made it a fresh and enjoyable read. This series is about three brothers who have been exiled after the death of their parents due to a betrayal from two neighboring clans. After 17 years, the brothers are back, each seeking revenge and a path to reclaim what is rightfully theirs. The Beast of Clan Kincaid is about the eldest brother, Niall, who became a mercenary known as the Beast during his time away from his land. Now he has returned to seek revenge on the Maclaren clan who is currently residing in Niall's family home. He plans to infiltrate their ranks, gain their trust, and then turn the tables and reclaim his birthright with bloodshed if need be. All of this goes swimmingly except for one thing: Niall has a hopeless attraction to the Maclaren's eldest daughter Elspeth.

Niall is a mysterious character who struggles to remain aloof, but shows cracks in his armor where Elspeth and her five year old tomboyish sister Mary are concerned. Niall is alluring to everyone in the Maclaren clan for his strength as a warrior, his good looks, and his sound strategic advice, and quickly infiltrates their ranks. Elspeth is being forced to wed in order to bring a strong alliance for her clan against another clan, the Alwyn, who are increasingly becoming belligerent. Elspeth recognizes her duty, but has trouble focusing on her choices due to her attraction to Niall. Blackwood expertly builds the tension between Elspeth and Niall, creates the mood of intrigue regarding what decision Niall will make and what actually happened to his clan, and develops a host of realistic secondary characters.

What I liked:

- Niall--despite the deceit regarding his true heritage, he is still a forthright character who doesn't take advantage of others and while he does burn for revenge, he doesn't seek unnecessary bloodshed. Plus, he is attractive and Blackwood does a great job early on establishing an air of sexiness and mystery about him.
- Elspeth--she is a character with spine who tries to retain her identity and not be a doormat, but realistically recognizes her duty to her clan and seeks to balance her own desires with the welfare of her clan. She protects her honor, cares for her sisters, and overall is a nice character of strength. The story mostly focuses on Niall, but I liked that Elspeth had a quiet dignity to her that was clear in every scene.
- Gaelic phrases--these were more common at the beginning and I wish there had been more throughout. Blackwood would drop in these beautiful phrases with a translation and I really liked the flavor they added to

the story; hopefully there will be more in future books. There was occasional use of dialogue with the Scottish bur, but I found it realistic and thought the addition was nice. Overall, it was refreshing to not just see nae, ye, and lassie everywhere. That gets old and makes the dialogue seem simplistic. Blackwood did a nice job setting a scene, but not bashing you over the head with the dialect.

-Plot--I liked the mystery of the age old betrayal and the lack of knowledge of what really happened. I did not know how everything would play out and I felt that Blackwood had paced everything perfectly.

-Secondary characters--there were many characters that populated the story and kept things fresh. There were many characters with hidden agendas, surprising changes of heart, and flashes of wisdom. Blackwood created a deep story where each character added to the plot and didn't feel thrown in for a pitch for the next book.

What I didn't like:

There isn't a list here. There was just one problem I had, but considering the genre we are in, it's a biggie: the sex scenes. This was the only area where Blackwood struggled. It was like she couldn't decide what level of heat to write about and also threw in some extra scenes that were not only unnecessary, but I thought made no sense within the fabric of the plot. It was such a letdown to get to this point after Blackwood built such exquisite sexual tension to get to a sex scene that is just a hodgepodge of graphic phrases, followed by purple prose, followed by-God forbid-italics, all written in choppy sentences. It made me sad. To be honest, it almost felt like Blackwood was forced to add in the scenes for the publisher when the story didn't really need them at all. In fact, the book would have been better off with no sex scenes instead of the 3-4 really bad ones.

My advice to Ms. Blackwood is this: You are a great storyteller and there is definitely a future here for you in the genre. For the first 60% of the novel, you OWNED IT. Your writing was original and the story was gripping. I was hooked from the very first paragraph. If you don't want to include a graphic sex scene, don't; your stories are good enough without them (Lynn Kurland doesn't write them either and her stories are gorgeous). If you want to include hot sex scenes, there are plenty of examples out there. If you decide on this, own it; don't shy away from describing things in detail and drawing out the scene, and for all of our sakes, don't use italics all over the place. If you feel the need to use multiple words in italics, then you need to rewrite somewhere. Finally, if you don't want to be graphic, but you want to have a little something in there, then keep it brief and focus more on emotion and other sensual images rather than using graphic words and actions to set the scene. Whatever you decide will work, but stick to it. It was painful and very unromantic to read scene after scene that is graphic but with no foreplay or focus on emotion. Elspeth is a virgin in this story and would not be enjoying the feeling of sex with limited foreplay, or having sex against a door, or being with Niall after he betrayed her entire family. It just didn't work for me. You can do this, just stick to what you want to write and blends best with the rest of your story. End advice.

Aside from the sex scenes I described above, I thought this book was excellent. I am already looking forward to the next book in this series and have already signed up for Blackwood's author newsletter. Blackwood writes a gripping story with likable characters, nice setting, and an interesting plot. She is a welcome new voice to the genre and one I will be continuing to watch. I recommend this one.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for the chance to read and review.

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**Tink Magoo is bad at reviews says**

What I love in books is the building anticipation and though in this book I knew what was going to happen it took nothing away from my feelings when it actually did.

Loved Niall and loved the story.

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### **Mei says**

I must say that for a debut novel it is really good!

I enjoyed the easy way the story is told: it flows really well.

The MCs are nice, but their falling in love was like a literal falling from high cliff: too quick and feeling, at least on Niall's part, like insta-lust.

Still it didn't detract from my enjoyment because the story is interesting and believable: revenge, hidden identity, falling in love with the enemy... all that is very well relayed!

I'm looking forward to the next book! :)

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### **Stacey is Sassy says**

#### **Will *The Beast* choose love or revenge?**

I love historical romances and Scottish Highland ones are definitely some of my favourites. Strong men who are loyal, protective and passionate who go along their merry way until the one wee lass throws their world off kilter. In *The Beast of Clan Kincaid* that is exactly what happens the minute Niall lays eyes on Elspeth. Oh, there's drama, damsels in distress and fighting to get through before this couple can come together and there's also the slight problem that Niall has plans to kill Elspeth's father. She might not be so keen on that. But love is love and family is family so what's a guy and gal to do?

Niall's family died seventeen years ago when they were murdered by a rival clan. In that time, he has been plotting revenge on the family who murdered them and stole his home. In those years, Niall has amassed fortune and favour with the King as his mercenary. Niall's true identity is not known past the name that was given to him because of his skills. He is widely known as *The Beast*. Determined to have his clan come back together and his home returned to him, he unwittingly manages to get invited into that home. The MacLaren wants to hire him on to protect his property. What better way for his plans to come together than to be able to overthrow from the inside? There's only one slight problem...he's got the hots for the daughter of his enemy.

Elspeth is living in her version of hell. Her stepmother, Bridget, doesn't like her and those feelings are well and truly returned. Elspeth busts Bridget making out with one of her men at arms. Elspeth knows her father is ill, but that shouldn't mean that Bridget should take it on herself to find pleasure elsewhere. Bridget decides to make Elspeth's life hell by finding her the most despicable marriage prospects. Elspeth knows it's her duty to marry, but the two men chosen as prospects are gross, despicable and definitely unsuitable. She may also have a wee bit of a crush on the big, sexy *Beast* that has come to protect her home. That same *Beast*

saves her life more than once which makes him even more appealing. Plus he kisses really, really well.

*The Beast of Clan Kincaid* was a great story that kept my interest from start to finish. We start with the very sad story that set Niall on his path for revenge. You cannot help but sympathise with him and want him to find his happiness. When he starts to question his path and whether his feelings for Elspeth are more important than revenge, you know that his feelings are real. Elspeth tries so hard to be the dutiful daughter, but she is also so tempted by a man who is not a suitable candidate to be her husband. The two of them fight so hard against their attraction. Each time they push away from each other you know that they are hurting themselves as much as the other.

This was a perfect example of why I love highlander romance. Niall's devotion to Elspeth was strong. What is sexier than a fierce and strong man who can't breathe if his loved one is not safe...and he admits it openly? Aaah...I love it. There was a sexual tension that jumped off the pages and when the couple finally come together it was very intense. The banter between the couple was lively and entertaining and Niall's way of dealing with Elspeth's sister was very sweet.

My only negatives would be that I found at times it felt like the story jumped a bit. One minute we're in Niall's mind and the next it is Elspeth's and it's hours or days later. It was at times a little frustrating the use of Scottish terms that were not explained. I admit some were explained but other weren't. I don't mind foreign words used in the books I read, as long as a definition is available without me having to go searching for answers.

This was the first story I have read by this author and definitely will not be the last. I can't wait for the next one, especially after reading the little snippet at the end of *The Beast of Clan Kincaid*.

To pre-order *The Beast of Clan Kincaid* from Amazon - <http://amzn.to/1XrA4vr>

**I'm an Aussie chick who loves to read and review romance, drink coffee, be a *Style Setter* and stalk David Gandy. To see more of my reviews, fashion, food and pervathons -**

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## Jenny says

Wow i cant believe this is a debut novel! Amazing book, amazing hero. Niall has sworn that he will seek vengeance against the people who killed his mother, father and two brothers and many members of his clan. But when he meets Elspeth the daughter of his enemy he must fight the feelings she arouses in him. He loves her deeply but he's decided to avenge his family and so he suffers because how can he destroy the father of the woman he adores? Elspeth is a perfect heroine. Sweet, innocent loyal to her clan and to her family. Her heart breaks when she finds out her father is a murderer and her husband married her for revenge.

I couldn't put this book down. One of the best Scottish historicals I've read. My only problem is that I needed a cute epilogue! Pregnant heroine or baby in epilogue is a must for me!

## Jen Davis says

I guess I'm conditioned to expect every book with "beast" in the title to be some kind of Beauty and the Beast retelling –or at least for the hero to have some kind of beastly demeanor or appearance. None of these is the case here, so if you are looking for any of those scenarios, you can move along.

Niall is called "the Beast" because he is a dangerous mercenary. He's also the rightful laird to the family lands that were stolen from his father nearly 20 years ago. You see, his parents were betrayed and murdered by two clans they thought were their allies. Niall and his brothers escaped and went their separate ways in order to stay hidden. Now that Niall is grown, he is ready to reclaim his birthright.

Elsbeth is the eldest daughter of the MacClaren chief. And from the moment she and Niall cross paths, they are drawn to each other. She has no idea who he really is or why he has entered her family's land. She only knows she wants him more than any man she might be forced to marry for a political alliance. Niall knows his secret and his plan will devastate her, and at first he tries to keep his distance, but it's only a matter of time before their attraction is something they're unable to ignore.

The premise, itself, was ok, though it didn't tread any new ground. My problem with the book was that it felt very superficial. The characters had no depth, nor emotional resonance. Niall wanted his family lands back, but I felt no real anguish or grief... or even rage. Elsbeth was totally bland. She was a dutiful daughter, who is falling in love for the first time with a man who ultimately reveals an earthshattering deception. But the angst was virtually nonexistent. The betrayal, weak. Even the sexual tension was meh.

The story wasn't bad, but it was ...benign. And predictable. Even what I suspect was supposed to be a big reveal about one of the side characters, I saw coming from nearly the beginning of the book.

This is the first in a new series. I imagine the future books will feature Niall's brothers, but I don't think I'll be back. I didn't dislike the book, but it didn't make me feel anything either.

Rating: B-/C+

*\*ARC provided by publisher*

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## Sissy's Romance Book Review says

I received an eARC, from NetGalley and the publisher, in exchange for an honest review.

'The Beast of Clan Kincaid' by Lily Blackwood is book one in the "Clan Kincaid" series. This is the story of Niall Braewick, and Elsbeth. This also was the first book by Ms. Blackwood and I thought she did a great job for her first book. I just can't wait for the next one.

Niall 'Beast' was once the son of the Laird of Kincaid but at a young age he saw his father murdered. Niall went into hiding until he was able to come back for revenge and to take everything back. Niall is pretending to be someone else to work his way to his revenge...but he wasn't prepared for his feelings for Elsbeth. At first Niall didn't know who exactly Elsbeth was. But once he did his plan was to stay away as much as he could from her..but he can't fight the feelings.

Elsbeth has been told to stay away from her father's hired warrior..Niall. Which seems to be impossible after he saved her and her sister life. Since Elsbeth is the older daughter and her father is very sick he is after her to marry.

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## **Melanie A. says**

### **5 STARS!**

***There was nothing more attractive than a competent man.***

### **LOVED! LOVED! LOVED!**

Yay! *The Beast of Clan Kincaid* had it all! Strong writing, a fast moving plot full of adventure and intrigue, and characters that I fell in love with.

Seventeen years after he was forced to flee his home, Niall, son of the Laird of Kincaid, is back to reclaim his birthright and to get vengeance on the man who murdered his parents: the Maclaren chief. Keeping his identity a secret, Niall puts his plan into action, but doesn't count on falling for the chief's daughter, Elspeth.

As you can imagine, there were a lot of half-truths and deception going on in this story . . . but one of my favorite things about it was how the relationship between Niall and Elspeth was genuine.

***The words were a compliment, and how wonderful they made her feel. She flushed, and everything inside her - her heart and soul - felt feather light and aglow.***

It was both sweet and explosive between them.

***Remembering the fire in her eyes and the color high on her cheeks, his heart beat harder and desire twisted, tight and insistent, in the pit of his stomach.***

Elspeth made for a great heroine; kind and loyal yet underneath she had a spine of steel. I could really get behind and identify with her.

***"Sometimes," she said quietly, turning to face him, her back to the stone wall, "I feel like running away and doing as you did, getting on a ship and sailing off to take my chances with the world."***

She took her duty seriously, but she still managed to stay true to herself. There were a few scenes where she was forced to stand up to those in authority that had my heart absolutely thumping with nerves for her - I loved that!

And Niall? Amazing. Somehow the author was able to balance his quest for revenge with his feelings for Elspeth all while juggling her character's integrity and honor. Such good stuff!

I completely believed in his portrayal as a man who others would look to for leadership. Honestly, he was a total turn-on, LOL. We're talking serious book boyfriend material here, especially if the first quote at the top of this review is appealing to you. :D



So, if you're looking for an in-depth historical novel, keep browsing.

But if you're into a fabulously entertaining love story full of betrayal and divided loyalties, CHOOSE THIS ONE! :D

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## **Maree Repa says**

Five Amazing Stars

The Leader of Clan Kincaid

I was absolutely thrilled now to read the first debut book, Highland Warrior. Written beautifully by Lily Blackwater. This extraordinary and passionate Scottish romantic adventure. I simply couldn't put down.

Looking outdoors from the castle.

Fierce people sat quietly, while Warriors awaited. while the animals screamed. Young boy, Niall Braewick this day he was ready to fight. He had crushed Ragnall who was his father and the Laird of Kincaid. He was standing brave without any armoured protection at the celebration between both these two different adjacent clans.

They were here to fight, to protect their land, their people. They all had to escape to safety. Niall kept the rest of his family were still safe. Although the rest of his clan were now facing death outside. They all stood proud to protect their home here as the Clan Kincaid. They would not give up.

I completely adored this marvellous book. Such a wonderful, magnificent romantic tale. Which I completely loved!!!

\* I recommend this book to everyone!

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## **Esther says**

Netgalley for an honest review.

Rating 4.25

Well all I can say is WOW!! Very much amazed by this first time author.

We begin with an intense and emotional scene in the first chapter. Niall is twelve years old when his Father surrenders to two smaller clans, MacClaren and Alwyn, that tricked and betrayed his Father's trust. His two younger brothers Faelan, who is eight and Cull, age five are also present. The three boys watch as their Father, who is strong, proud and honorable, surrender not only himself but the castle to these once faithful vassal clans. A plan is formed by their Father and his men to save the boys and they escape from the castle unharmed. During their escape they hear the sounds of battle and cries of death. They are told that their parents have been murdered (one of his Father's men escaped the battle to inform them). The plan is escalated

due to the boys now being in much graver danger now, so all three boys go separate ways with guardians to watch over them with the hopes of reuniting soon.

We pick up in the next chapter seventeen years later. Niall is washing in a river near his castle, his guardian, Dearth is with him. Niall has become a well known mercenary and has been hired by Conall, a man who serves Chief MacClaren. As Niall is bathing he witnesses a beautiful woman walking after a small child, the child was chasing after a puppy who is going a little wild. The three end up in the river with the woman almost drowning, but Niall comes to their rescue.

This opening scene introduces us to Elspeth, the oldest daughter to Chief MacClaren. Niall and Elspeth's are introduced by Conall after the rescue. The two are intrigued and attracted to each other fairly quickly. Not a insta love/lust though.

Niall's come to claim his castle back and seek revenge for his family. He's searched for his two brothers with no success, most believe they are dead. Niall's plan is to gain the trust of the Chief and when the time is right, kill him and reclaim his castle. What Niall hadn't planned for was Elspeth, his attraction for her and his need for revenge being strongly tested. He needs to avenge his family and make those who killed them, pay for all the pain they have caused. Elspeth also has come to a point in her life that her father believes she needs to marry for the sake of the clan and strengthening alliances. Her Father begins a process to see who is best suited. Elspeth is in turmoil as she begins to fall for Niall and her duty to her clan/Father are in conflict.

Niall is one heck of a hero, I mean I loved him. He was alpha, sweet, strong and also had depth and character. Elspeth is wonderful also, she is strong, sweet, funny and loving to her family. She had deep loyalty and strong convictions, as well as being beautiful. The process of their relationship is well developed, deep and is multi layered. I will say that I thought their back and forth "Do I love her/him" was a little drawn out towards the end but not bad. At times there seemed to be a few lines that were a little too cheesy and over the top, but again not bad. A few issue with a couple scenes that didn't add up, as in how did he know that or he/she couldn't have been their that quickly. Nothing major though.

The betrayal and which clan did what is part of the story and mystery. What has happened to the other brothers. What really did happen that terrible day and who's responsible. The pacing in this story is wonderful, I didn't want to put this book down. I was drawn into the setting and time period from the get go. I was immersed into the life of Niall and Elspeth, living their fears, emotions and love. The two had good chemistry and the love scenes were good but not great, something for the author to work on (felt it need something but couldn't put my finger on what?). The secondary characters are fantastic, each one was so likable and well developed. Her sisters are wonderful and would love a story written for each. And yes, Cull and Fallen, so excited for their story.

What a great first book, high praise for Lily Blackwood. I will be looking forward to your next book with great anticipation. Fallen's book can't come quick enough.

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~\*\*Anna\*\*~ A Romance Reader says

\*4.5 stars\*

Loved it!! One of the best HR I've read this year. I loved Niall and Elspeth. She's so fierce and I admired her so much. He's a warrior with vengeance on his mind, but he's so loving and gentle with Elspeth. Their

chemistry is off the charts too! So much passion and love.

I can't wait to read Magnus's book next.

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### **Tina Haigler says**

This book was amazing! In all honesty I didn't think I was going to enjoy this type of book at all but as soon as I started reading I was riveted until the end. It was the right amount of action, badassery, scheming, vengeance, sadness, turmoil, romance, and sexiness. I was honestly blown away. I actually read the ending 3 times and each time it made me emotional but in a good way. I can't wait to read the next two books! Well done!

P.S. This book was hot and steamy! Whew! \*wipes brow\* Cold shower alert! \*fans herself\*

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### **Story\_girl says**

#### **4.5 stars**

Once again a book to which 4 stars simply does not do justice...But I'm helpless...

This is an amazing start to a series by a new author. This book definitely stands out from most highland romances I've read.

Love, revenge, betrayal...This book certainly does not lack in the drama content. I was rooting for Niall throughout to win and claim what was rightfully his. At the same time he loved Elspeth and was torn between not wanting to hurt her and having his revenge. Well ....it worked out quite well and I'm most satisfied with that ending.

Lily Blackwood has a new fan!

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### **WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says**

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

After his father was betrayed, Niall and his two younger brothers were spirited away and split up to preserve the Kincaid Laird bloodline. Seventeen years later, Niall seems to be the only surviving one and has come home to take back what is rightfully his.

Elspeth's been saved by the mysterious mercenary three times and each encounter only adds fuel to her attraction. However, her clan is relying on her to make an advantageous marriage to protect them against another clan and a lonely mercenary won't do.

Niall and Elspeth both try to deny their growing feelings but neither can give the other one up. They each want to do right by their clan but following their hearts will be dangerous.

The first in a new series by a debut author, the prologue grips you right away as a delicious blend of danger

and vengeance is relayed. The set-up of Niall coming back home to avenge his family and then falling in love with his enemy's daughter, who doesn't know his true identity, creates an enthralling tale. Unfortunately, I felt the attraction was rushed between our leads and it left me with a feeling of insta-lust.

Our beginning introduction of Elspeth has many scenarios that combine together to give a very shiny heart of gold persona; she's the woman you *want* to say something bad about, because her goodness is slightly annoying, but she's just too darn sweet to do it. Her inner battle over feeling like she was betraying her clan with her attraction to Niall had depth and felt real. Niall captured my attention right away with his inner turmoil and secrecy to take his lands back but when he meets Elspeth, he slowly becomes all about his lust and attraction for her. His feelings were excessive, that he would suddenly become so wrapped up in this woman, who he barely knows, when for seventeen years he has been preparing for his vengeance. I understand and like romance but wanted a more natural progression of feelings, with more time and interactions, for the torment of it all too really shine through.

***"I tried to forget you," she whispered against his lips, her hands touching the bare skin of his torso.  
"I tried to let you forget me, but I cannot."***

A lot of the story was devoted to Elspeth and Niall wanting each other and then saying they felt guilty because of their commitments, over half of the story is their back and forth. I don't consider this a slow read, per say, but this did make the story feel like it had some repetitiveness. Elspeth doesn't learn of Niall's true identity until the last 20% of the book and then it is glossed over pretty quickly, she forgives him in a day. Some of the lust, guilt, rinse and repeat should have been cut for the juicy betrayal/how do they live together now drama this scenario could have produced.

Secondary characters did a pretty good job of filling out the story with Dearth, Niall's clansman who spirited him away, Elspeth's half sisters popping in and out, and Magnus, a childhood friend of Elspeth. Bridget was Elspeth's step-mother and started off a Cruella de Vil and then contrary to a few hints (or what I perceived as hints) she does a 180. Now, if I'm right about the hints, it's misdirection by the author for future shock but since it wasn't cleared up in this story, it left the character feeling very confusing and forced. This does take place in Scotland in the 1300s but other than a couple mentions of a kilt, swords, and castle, I can't say I felt completely transported to the time.

As I mentioned, this is a debut book and as such, it is pretty strong. The author's writing style is highly readable and her story and character ideas are engaging. I just personally felt the relationship was rushed and some insta-lust was at play. The overall tone also was pretty gentle, there are a couple sex scenes but they did have a tendency to feel dropped in. If you're looking for an amiable read and wanting to give a new author a try, then this would be a good choice.

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## Julie says

The Beast of Clan Kincaid by Lily Blackwood is a 2016 St. Martin's Press publication. I was provided a copy of this book by the publisher and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Any historical romance set in Scotland and featuring Highlanders is going to tempt me. But, then I started seeing a few reviews trickle in for this book and I had a feeling this one was going to be better than I could

hope for.

All I can say is, I was not disappointed, and understand why this book generated so much commentary.

When I say this story grabbed my attention from the very beginning, I'm not just repeating an overused phrase. I'm serious! A bloody battle that leaves a little boy alone in the world, sets the stage for a taut, suspenseful tale of vengeance and justice, and a fine, emotional love story, as well.

After seventeen years, Niall has returned home to reclaim what is rightfully his. He infiltrates his enemy's domain under the guise of being a mercenary. While his plan works beautifully, he never anticipated what might be a truly tragic twist of irony, as he falls hard for the enemy's beautiful daughter, Elspeth, and she falls in love with him.

Elspeth has no idea who Niall really is, which only adds more suspense to an already difficult situation. Naturally, I knew this could not end well. It's that feeling you get when you have no choice but to sit by and watch as events hurl toward an outcome you are helpless to prevent.

Elspeth's role is to marry advantageously, doing her duty to her clan. She knows the time has come to make a decision, especially since her father's health is failing and there is an uneasiness among the clans that her marriage would soothe.

However, since her choices are far from pleasant, she doesn't wish to marry any of them, duty or not. Of course, it greatly complicates matters for her when she falls hard for Niall, which leaves her torn over her love for him and her duty.

The difficulty for me, as a reader, is that I liked Niall and Elspeth, respectively. I understood Niall had to do what was right, in his eyes, and sadly this meant Elspeth could become collateral damage. Elspeth is a strong willed woman who stands up to the old traditions and dares to defy them, all while attempting to do what is right for everyone, despite the very painful personal sacrifice of her happiness.

So, it's hard to pick a side, as I am sympathetic to both characters. The author does a fabulous job of devising such a scenario, while adding intense intrigue into the mix as various men plotted to win Elspeth's hand in marriage. It is utterly fascinating, but infuriating as well, since women were often used as a bargaining chip.

The set-up, a dire as it appears, sets the stage for an epic kind of love story, which is right up my alley. While the attraction between Niall and Elspeth is evident in their first encounter, their love builds over time, as they continue to meet in the most unusual of circumstances. Yes, all of this occurs in a short span of time, but that was not uncommon in this era of time, and I thought it added an element of urgency to the story, since Elspeth is running out of time, and her time with Niall is growing short.

But, a stunning plot twist will change things drastically, adding even more emotion to the story, and perhaps a little controversy, but will also open the door just a little for the whole sad truth to come out which gave me a tiny sliver of hope for this couple. Niall is certainly a noble, fair, and honorable man, and Elspeth saw that in him, despite finding herself once more torn between Niall and her family.

This story is a quick read, but is constructed well, for the most part. I wondered at times about the sudden change in personality with some characters, without explanation, other than perhaps the growth of a grudging respect, but other than that puzzling change of heart, the characters were all well drawn, with even pacing that kept me engaged and emotionally invested in the story, which came with a very surprising twist at the end that is very special, setting up the next installment in the series quite nicely.

Overall, this is a rousing, sensual, and emotional Scottish romance that kept me entertained from start to finish and was quite enjoyable.

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