

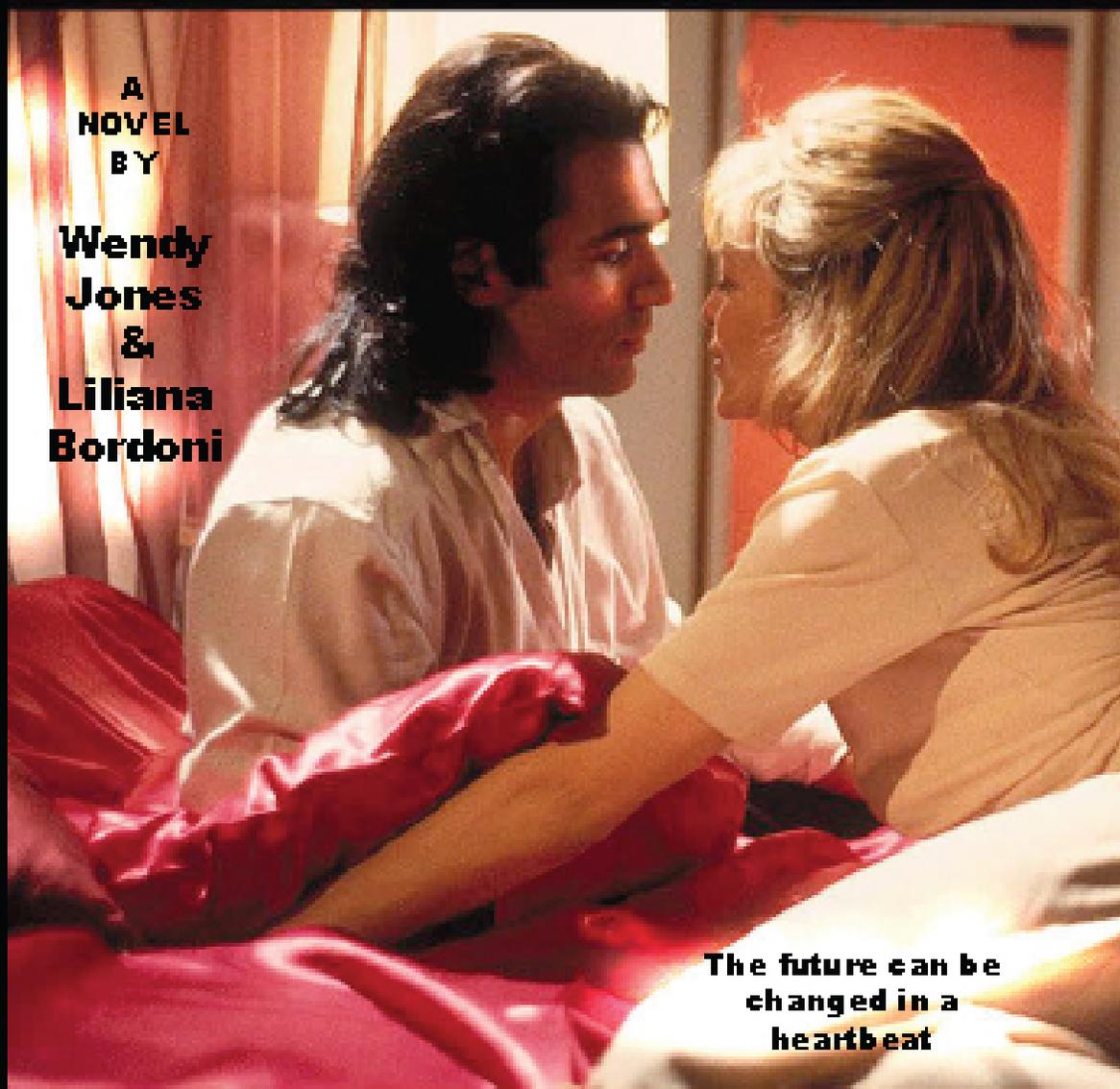
HIGHLANDER

IMAGINE

FOR LOVE'S SAKE

**A
NOVEL
BY**

**Wendy
Jones
&
Liliana
Bordoni**



**The future can be
changed in a
heartbeat**

Highlander Imagine: For Love's Sake

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It's the night of October 23, 1993

Tessa and Richie are staring down a gun barrel.

In a moment, they will both be shot!

Imagine how everyone's life might have changed if
Tessa had survived.

He's coming for me, Duncan!

Duncan threw his arms around Tessa – the woman he loved more than his own life – as if by this act and his force of will alone he could somehow halt the impending nightmare which was unfolding around them.

She released him and, reaching up, threaded her fingers through her Highlander's hair which had fallen to his shoulders.

“I finally understand what you have felt all these centuries – what it feels like to have another human being trailing you for your head. But now it's my fate that's coming to a head and I must act. You can't sense his presence, and there is nothing you can do to stop this.”

Highlander *Imagine*: For Love's Sake

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Highlander *Imagine* Series

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A NOVEL BY

WENDY LOU JONES
&
LILIANA BORDONI

RK BOOKS



Follow Solo

Chapter One

The quiet beeping of an infusion pump by her bed roused Tessa once again and she opened an eye. Surgery had ended hours ago. The anesthesia had worn off in recovery. A sterile, monotonous, dove-pastel wallpapered room, with white curtains that were partially pulled on the off side of her bed, greeted her sense of sight once again.

Did you really expect to see something different this time? This is the room the attendants brought you to after your surgery. You're supposed to be resting not critiquing the décor, her subconscious mind replied a bit snarky.

Something is different this time, her conscious mind thought back in counterpoint. *Light—reflecting from somewhere.* Turning her head brought an unexpected ache to her side and she winced. *The window—it was dark before. There is light now—it's finally morning.*

The flood of light that greeted her eye was painful and she shut her eye tightly against the photonic assault. *Even light hurts now—why can't it be gentle?* She needed something gentle by her side – not the infusion pump which beeped intermittently, not the IV lines which she was tethered to—she needed Duncan's touch.

Sleep—try to sleep, the subconscious echo droned once again. *Sleep will make it all go away.*

“No—I don't want to go there again—not again.” She moaned, almost a whisper, as she began drifting off once again.

An explosion—then another! Two shots rang out in rapid succession, the space between them measured in a fraction of a heartbeat—her heartbeat. Over and over again the scene replayed with crystal clarity—like some macabre clip from an internal horror movie she could not shut out. But this wasn't a movie. It was her life, and it had just about ended. The shooting, only hours old, was happening once again.

The boy, scarcely a teenager, shaking and uncertain, shouting, demanding their money—anything!

“*What? Is this it?*” she heard herself speaking to herself in her thoughts. “*A holdup going bad—he's terrified—there's death in his outstretched trembling hand.*”

Tessa, you have always had a comeback to what life throws at you. Why didn't you just—a half-dozen shoulda coulda woulda's surfaced, then a hundred more. Throw something—hit the ground—attack him—I could've done so many things.

“*No you couldn't—there wasn't time. There never is. There wasn't time—time is your enemy. It always will be.*”

No, wait!

A flash of light from the barrel—the explosion! *Richie was closer to him than I was. He must have seen his finger tighten on the trigger.* His arm had suddenly been in the way of a bullet that had already been fired—suddenly reaching out to knock her to the ground, and suddenly pierced. The bullet, aimed squarely at her chest, had struck the outstretched arm. That first shot had hit his arm, shattering the thinner ulna bone, and was deflected before it had struck the right side of her chest and arm. The second shot had hit Richie in mid-motion, catching him squarely in the chest. Richie had collapsed against her, throwing them both to the ground.

An explosion! This time, it wasn't the gun but her world. *My world is exploding around me.* Blood splattered her face and her clothing. Stunned, only half-hearing and half seeing as the teenager ran, she felt the slick wet sensation of blood covering her arm and hand.

Am I bleeding? Was I hit? There was pain in her chest, her side, and in her arm as she

struggled in vain to sit up.

“Richie?” Her voice was just a thin whimper. *Had she felt him gasp?*

Richie was partially draped across her—blood running from the gaping wound in his chest and arm was mingling with hers.

Her shock benumbed brain fought through the pain and she propped partially up on her uninjured arm as Richie’s head slid to her lap. She heard him draw his last mortal breath.

“*Time is your enemy,*” she heard another half of her submerged self-chide. “*It can never be your friend—you are mortal—you are dying.*”

No, Richie was there, he saved my life! I’m alive, here and now. Whoever you are, you can’t take that from me. I’m alive I say!

In another room and in another place, Duncan sat with his face in his hands. His mind was also rewinding the horror of what had happened only hours ago.

Duncan wiped his face once then flipped the computer on. *This was too close,* he thought. Close enough for all his fears to surface again. A 400 year-old pain was arising from deep inside his heart with the force of an iceberg finally freed after centuries of being hidden below the frozen water. But that was Tessa. The same Tessa that made him feel young every time he looked at her, every time he touched her. *She is going home with me now,* he reassured himself. A timid smile crossed his worried face for a microsecond at the thought of what was to come. *Better focus on what you have to do here and now.*

‘Access denied,’ the computer returned once again.

How he hated those two words! *What password could a lunatic like this man have used? Come on—Tessa will be waiting by the car. I want to get her as far away from this place as I can—focus, Duncan, focus.* He typed in another combination then hit the return. *This will happen again and again,* his mind replayed an all too familiar phrase he’d told her before all of this had begun.

“I know,” had been her simple acceptance of a life she could only be a temporary guest to.

Then, why can’t I accept it now? he reminded himself. He knew why. This time, it had been too close. This time, he had admitted to himself that it was not a question of *if* I lose her, but merely *when* I lose her. And he was too tired. Maybe the loss of Darius was just making him feel nostalgic. *Tessa is waiting—focus—you are wasting precious time.*

An explosion, then another! Two shots rang out in rapid succession, the space between them measured in a fraction of a heartbeat—Duncan’s heartbeat. An icy chill shot down his spine. *Run, move, do something,* his mind had prodded.

Hands, Tessa thought as she lay in her hospital bed. Her inner vision shifted. *Hands, reassuring hands are here. Hands reaching out to touch me, to heal my spirit, to make my world whole.* Warm thoughts flooded her mind once again. *Her Highlander was by her side – Duncan MacLeod.* Carefully lifting Richie from across her, he was laying him beside her.

“Duncan, he’s dead. It all happened so fast. Richie—”

His hands were moving swiftly to examine her. She saw the worry clouding his features.

“Shh, please don’t try to move or speak, Tess. I’ll get you to a hospital as fast as I can,” he said. As carefully as he could, he was scooping her into his strong grasp.

“But Richie—”

“I’ll get him in a moment. Let me get you settled in.” With the utmost care, he lowered her

into the seat and secured her, then popped the trunk and fetched Richie.

“What are you doing with him, Duncan?”

Closing the hatch, he quickly swung into the car. “Richie will become an Immortal now. We all knew he was destined for this someday—just not this way—and not so soon.” Duncan shook his head. “He’ll come back eventually, and he can’t be seen like this at the hospital. You need help now—we can’t wait for him.”

Because you won’t come back, the unspoken words were mirrored in her thoughts. This added a silent period to the end of her cold fear.

“Time,” the voice chimed in her thoughts, erasing the image only hours old.

Leave me alone, she snapped to her unseen mental specter. *Duncan is here, with me. My world and my time. I have time with him now.*

“You are mortal”.

“Get out!” she moaned audibly.

“Are you in pain?” The male voice queried quietly.

She opened her eyes to slits. She was in pain, but not the kind an injection could ever make go away. The center of her world had been fractured by a bullet this night, one whose lethal trajectory had been deflected by a soon-to-be Immortal; one that had threatened to forever separate her from her Highlander, her unswerving gentleman, her patient immortal lover. No one could ever understand that kind of trust, intimacy, and the secret he had shared with her – the one she too now had the burden of guarding so ardently with him. Her pain was for an Immortal. *Oh God, Duncan, where are you? I need you so much right now.*

Looking up to the young male nurse she forced a wan smile. “Yes,” she replied weakly. “I do ache. I could use something to help me rest more comfortably.”

He obliged her with an injection into her IV line.

Maybe I can get some uninterrupted sleep, at least for a while.

“Time,” the faint echo sounded.

But the voice was too late to catch her as the drug took effect.

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