

ERYN HAWK

Och,  
Mess!

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Och,  
Ness!

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*To my family, who've held my hand and supported me even though they don't quite understand my obsession with fictional men. Or monsters.*

*p.s. Gran, please don't read this one.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is written in UK English and uses Scottish dialect throughout. There is a glossary provided at the back for any words or phrases that may be difficult to decipher.

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## PROLOGUE

*THREE MONTHS AGO*

*H*e slept; his breaths steady and even, and his body beautiful in its stillness, yet his mind raced, thoughts swarming like bees in their hive.

*Restless.*

*I wanted to reach out and touch him to ease his lucid imagination; to hold him, to bring pleasure and keep him safe, but he was too far. Instead, I plucked at the string between our two incomplete souls, sending a vision of great, wild beauty and a sense of quiet.*

*Peace.*

*I'd felt his presence before, but never so vividly, so starved of connection. There was a change—something that called out to me—an instinct, a raw desire, the sweetest plea. I ached to have him near, beside me, with me always.*

*Come to me.*

*Mo chridhe.*



# CHAPTER ONE

## *PRESENT DAY*

**I**t was odd seeing it in person; the place my mum had grown up, where she'd taken me as a child when I was too young to remember. It still felt somewhat familiar, but I supposed that was from the stories she had told or the memory of a photograph she had shown me time and time again. It was of us; Dad behind the camera, she'd said, beaming with love as Mum posed with me, a bundle in her arms, in front of sparkling, dark-blue water surrounded by luscious hills.

*Loch Ness.*

I'd always meant to return, to experience it as a fully-fledged, bill-paying adult, but life never failed to stick its nose in—in the last several years, especially. Between marrying myself to my work and Mum's illness, the journey was swept aside. I held some regret that she was no longer around to join me, but now that I was finally here, overlooking the loch I'd heard so much about as a kid, in some way, it felt like she was.

I wished I could say that discovering my roots was the only reason for my return, but the truth was, Scotland called to me. And, yeah, maybe roots did have something to do with



that, but I'd felt a tie to this place for as long as I could remember. It ran deep in my blood, like an instinct, a rope around my heart luring me in. I used to peg it down to the connection I shared with Mum. We were close, and I thought it was a projection of her yearning for home, and even when she'd died, I suspected the feelings I still had of Scotland were me chasing the sense of *belonging* I'd had whenever she was near.

But then came writer's block.

It was something that had never fazed me before. Usually, it'd last a day or two, and then I'd be straight back at it. But three months had come and gone. Three bastard, shitting months, I'd been staring at a blank page, tearing my hair out, and I just *knew* it had something to do with this bloody feeling. I wasn't one for superstition, but I was too consumed with thoughts—even *dreams*—of a place I'd only visited through fairy tales and an old Polaroid for it to be pure coincidence.

Whatever it was, it held my soul captive, and considering my whole life was centred around the books I produced, it was impossible for me to kick up my feet and wait for a reprieve. Or a miracle. Whichever came first.

I lost count of the people who'd told me to see it as a sign to take a break—and Christ knew I was long overdue for one of those—but not working, even a tad, rubbed me up the wrong way. So, I decided to kill two—or three—birds with one stone: settle the longing that had me in a chokehold, give my family the illusion I was taking care of myself, and hopefully, find a spark of inspiration.

Apparently, there was nothing like a change of scenery to get the words flowing, and what a breathtaking scene it was.

I'd arrived an hour ago, and after driving most of the night, it was a relief to see my destination was worth the leg cramp and numb arse. I rented a little holiday cottage beside the loch, and it was nothing short of perfect. It was minimal and cosy, slightly smaller than my own apartment, but that added to its undeniable charm. It had the usual necessities, a kitchen, an en suite, and a living room, but the bonus feature was, without a

doubt, the untamed fiery-orange and red ivy sprouting up the exterior stone walls and the patches of grass boxed in by bushels upon bushels of wild purple heather.

And, of course, *that view*.

I had unpacked—well, I'd thrown my suitcase in the wardrobe, closed the doors and resolved to deal with it later—and now, I stood on the patio, leaning against the wooden railing, just taking it all in. Everything around me was in shades of blue and green that I hadn't even known existed; there were flowers and trees that were foreign in the overcrowded city of London. I had even spotted a deer on the bank on the opposite side of the water, just a flurry of tawny fur as it darted through the woods—my hitching inhale in response had almost choked me. It was truly nature at its finest, and no petty compliments would ever do it justice, nor did the many songs or poems written about it. The utter stillness and quiet were surreal, and the sense of calm that cocooned me was like nothing I'd ever known.

Coming here was already a better idea than I had expected. I couldn't explain it, but as soon as I pulled up to the gravel outside the place I would call *home* for the next few weeks, I felt a ten-ton weight tumbling off my shoulders. It was as if I had been deprived of breath, and suddenly, I was free to let it go. Like a puppet with his strings cut, learning he could actually walk.

Perhaps it had been a coincidence, after all? I'd become so overwhelmed with work and missing Mum that it had driven me to distraction—maybe even a little madness? But I certainly wouldn't admit that everyone had been right, and all I needed was some time off.

I'd take that to the grave.



The village was a real chocolate box if ever I'd seen one. It was tiny and charming but still had everything I would need

for my three-week trip. The guest book in my cottage had also told me that the city of Inverness—plus loads of towns along the way—wasn't too far, so I wouldn't be stuck.

I didn't expect to have much reason to venture out, though. Not unless I needed inspiration from other historical sites or landmarks, but from what I'd already seen, this place had plenty.

It was still early afternoon, so a walk around the square to suss out my surroundings seemed like a plan. Maybe I'd find somewhere for tea, somewhere quiet and homely, and then I could head back to my digs to sleep off the twelve-hour drive. I was used to long days and nights, but not in a car. I wasn't built for it after living in London most of my life and using the tube. Had I organised my time better, taking a train probably would've been wiser, but it didn't matter now. I was here, and once I had a full belly and a kip, I'd be right as rain.

I couldn't see many people roaming around, but it wasn't a complete ghost town either. It took less time than I anticipated to get from one side to the other, but I liked that—nothing beat simplicity. As I made my way through the streets, I spotted a fruit shop, a butcher's, a chemist, a local mini supermarket, a cafe-slash-ice cream-slash-sweetie shop, and several takeaways, pubs, and restaurants. There was no big Tesco—or even a *Sainsbury's*—in sight, but there was all anyone would need for the general day-to-day.

I strolled at a leisurely pace, taking a gander in the windows, studying menus, drooling at shelves filled with jars of colourful, old-fashioned sweets, and promising myself to return later in the week.

Or tomorrow.

Strawberry bonbons were a particular weakness of mine, and it would be a real shame to leave here without sampling the whole jar.

I strode straight past a quaint little shop nestled in the corner of the village square but stopped dead when a memory hit me of my nephew, Sammy, pleading for me to bring him “sumfin Sco'ish” from my trip. I sighed fondly at the vision of

his toothy grin as he stared up at me as if butter wouldn't melt, his grubby hands tugging at my jean leg, then I doubled back to take a peek inside.

Trinkets, odds and ends, postcards, sweets, and novelties you often found in any touristy gift shop filled the window. Usually, there were a million of these shops in towns like this, so I was amazed it was the only one of its type I'd come across, but I supposed with a place this small, another would've been a clutter.

I tended to avoid these kinds of shops, they were overpriced and just...naff, but needs must, and if I headed home to London empty-handed, I'd never live it down. I'd also be better knocking it off my list now rather than later 'cause, who knows? I could be too busy writing my next bestseller to come back.

I snorted. *Fat chance.*

I scoured around for the entrance, but the only door I spotted was for the shop adjacent. Nope, not a shop, I soon realised, but a Loch Ness Monster Museum. How I'd managed to successfully turn a blind eye to that, I hadn't the foggiest. It was huge. There was even a giant, green Nessie poking out of the wall to prove my obliviousness. There was no mistaking it; it could probably be seen from space, but I must've subconsciously ducked my head at the right moment to ignore its existence.

After a quick nosey around, I noticed the buildings were connected, and it didn't look possible to get into the gift shop without going through the museum. I grumbled under my breath. I really didn't fancy listening to someone jabbering on about a mythical creature for an hour purely so I could use the gift shop at the end—not when I was this knackered, anyway. It crossed my mind to order Sammy something online and pretend I bought it here, but I knew for a fact that wouldn't slide. I was a soft git when it came to my nephew, and I'd feel guilty for lying to his little cherub face, so I had no choice but to grit my teeth and bear it.

Unless I snuck in?

I'd merge with the wall, shuffle along, quiet as could be, until I was in the shop. It looked pretty close if the entrance and the window distance were accurate. I could be in and out before anyone was the wiser. *Or...* I could grow a pair and just waltz right in. I doubted it was an obligation to stay for the tour, especially with no other gift shops around—what a waste of business that would be in a tourist town. But I always felt awkward having to refuse.

It wasn't anxiousness that had me bouncing from foot to foot; I wasn't typically a nervous person—I kept to myself, sure, and enjoyed my own company over leaving my house, but I would mingle if I had to. It was the awful feeling I'd get in my gut at the thought of anyone being disappointed in my refusal. I'd been told numerous times before that I was a people pleaser, and I hadn't really given the assumption much credit until now.

Bugger it. I kept my eyes on the ground as I braced my hand against the door handle. I'd just be careful of my steps and not draw too much attention to myself, and it'd be grand.

The bell above the door had other plans.

I winced at its mocking jingle, my gaze snapping upward as I half-expected a swarm of sales folk to bombard me, but there was none. There was, however, a group of tourists congregating in the middle of the room. I barely resisted the urge to groan as a few of them instinctively cast a curious glance my way before focusing back on the tour...the tour that was happening right in front of the entrance to the gift shop.

I clammed up, and the thought of stuttering through an excuse didn't seem worth it. I *could* try my luck another day, but the chances of bumping into a crowd of people regardless of when I came back were too high for my liking. I'd get Sammy something from the petrol station on the way home, and he could lump it.

Before I could twist around and bolt, the group drifted to the next artefact, and I caught sight of the tour guide at the front, facing everyone else, his arms doing a graceful dance as he spoke. I paused, doing a double take, brain short-circuiting

as I was hit with a sensation of familiarity. Like I'd met him before, but I knew I hadn't. I couldn't have.

*Could I?*

My brow creased as I tried to conjure up an answer to where I could've seen him, but there was no way I'd forget a face as pretty as his if we'd met in the flesh. There was every possibility I mistook him for a celebrity; the snow-pale skin and charming ginger freckles across his cheeks wouldn't look out of place in a movie.

Nor would the rest of him, really.

From this distance, I could tell he was *at least* a head taller than me, and he was definitely younger. Though he dressed like a fifty-year-old professor in his brown and green tweed dress pants and waistcoat, tan brogues, and silver pocket watch, he couldn't be more than twenty-two. It suited him, though. The style. It didn't seem try-hard or pretentious; the air he gave off was confident and educated, and his outfit reflected that.

He was sure of himself. I could tell by how he stood, but it wasn't in that infuriating, cocky way. More like he knew his worth, was aware of his attractiveness and used whatever he could to highlight it.

I couldn't blame him.

To tie it all in, perched atop his straight, freckled nose was a pair of round wire glasses—what my dad would've called “jam jars”—and they fit his boyish face perfectly, adding that finishing touch to his academic aesthetic. It made me smile, and it was at that second, while I was too bewitched to move, that the angelic stranger's gaze met mine.

Wide emerald eyes, so green they were almost inhuman, pierced my very soul.

Forget the movies—he was like something out of a fantasy novel, one of those fairy folk who danced under the moonlight with wildflowers in their hair. I latched onto that visual, imagining the dark-orange waves in a mess on top of his head,

entwined with tiny, white buds. Effortlessly cute and naturally wicked.

Beautiful.

“Welcome.” His long lashes fluttered, and his lips curled with an enchanting smile that lit up the room. “Are ye here fur the tour?”

*Fuck.*

“Oh, er.” I broke from my trance, blinking in a fluster as I glanced back at the door, calculating my escape. I internally cursed myself for being so easily distracted. “I thought I could —” I pointed to the giftshop. “I’m just gonna go.”

I wasn’t even given a chance to shuffle my feet before his voice had me frozen again. It was so rumbly but also smooth like honey and whisky—and that Scottish lilt just made it even sexier. “Don’t be daft; come in. We’ve only started.”

*And there goes my next hour.*

Museums weren’t my jam, and despite coming to Loch Ness, I wasn’t a believer in its most famous legend. I had nothing against fairy tales and folklore; I was always interested to learn the myths and stories carried around by different cultures—I was a storyteller myself, after all—but this was all a bit too gimmicky for me. I’d also grown up hearing more than enough from my mum, so I didn’t think a museum tour had anything new to offer.

But he pinned me to the spot with those sparkling eyes, and my objections evaporated on my tongue. As predicted, I didn’t have the heart to say no to him, but conveniently, there was also a nag in my head that sounded suspiciously like my sister, poking fun at me for being a boring old fart. The pettiness in me wanted to prove her wrong, even if she wasn’t there to witness it, so, *fine*, I’d take the bloody tour.

Not that there was any doubt when I couldn’t seem to tear myself away from this lad’s presence—or that persistent prod of *knowing*.

To think I’d come in here for a souvenir for my nephew, believing I was clever in my sneaking, but instead, I found a

man—or maybe a magical Fae creature—who was more beautiful than I’d ever seen, and just agreed to traipse after him in the very museum I’d hoped to avoid.

*Kill me now.*

There wasn’t a large group, maybe eight or so others besides me that trotted like lambs behind their shepherd, ducking through a web of tunnels that led to dimly lit rooms decked out with Nessie “facts”. I loitered at the back, mostly because I was the tallest—except for our guide—but if it also kept me out of the firing line for questions as much as possible, that’d be smashing.

Everything was set up to resemble the loch but *underneath*. The walls and floors were painted like rocks and soil, and the ceiling glittered blue as if we were staring up at the surface of the water. It was a bit outdated, but it wasn’t like any other museum I’d been to, so I gave it top marks for originality.

I hardly tuned into the tour itself, only absorbing bits here and there, which I knew was really ignorant of me, but it couldn’t be helped. I was too distracted, unable to focus on anything other than our guide and the husky sound of the words flowing from his plush, pink mouth without even hearing their meaning.

The trek around the museum passed by quickly because of that. Too quick, really. Not that I was particularly interested in learning any more—as we’d already established—but I wasn’t against the idea of hearing this gorgeous lad talk all day. He was passionate and animated and really bloody funny. From what I had picked up, he didn’t take himself too seriously and wasn’t afraid to be blunt. He was cheeky underneath that English teacher’s exterior. It was refreshing, and I felt myself smiling more in that last hour than I had in a long while, drawn to him like a moth to the flame.

By the end, the rest of the tourists filtered away to none, some taking a gander around the giftshop—buying some tablet or a stick of rock after humming and hawing at the *I Heart Loch Ness* t-shirts—before thanking our guide and leaving. I



stayed, my steps slow and light as I zig-zagged through the rows of novelties and knick-knacks, absently grabbing a few things for Sammy as my gaze strayed to the handsome stranger every so often.

He was behind the counter now, getting on with his work, a sharpie in his left hand and a roll of white labels in the other. He probably hadn't realised I was still in the shop, pretending to browse through the postcards. It was almost mindless how my eyes sought him out, bold in their surveying and tracing the broad line of his shoulders, down the curve of his lean figure to his slim waist. The tweed trousers he wore did exceptional things for his arse. And *his legs*. Christ almighty.

He had legs *for days*.

“Can I help with any'hing?”

I flinched. His back was still to me, and he hadn't even looked up from his hands to peer over his shoulder. It was as if he sensed my presence. Or there was a camera somewhere? But when I glanced around, I couldn't see any red lights—my observations must've made more noise than I thought.

I strode to the front of the counter, into view, and held up my wallet. “I didn't pay.”

The lad's brilliantly green eyes finally lifted from his task, and I could've sworn both his fingers and jaw flexed before he plastered on a polite grin—showing off his pearly white teeth. “Ah.” He reached for the till, pressed a few buttons, and the total flashed on the screen—much cheaper than I had expected. “I've gave you a discount since you didn't get the full experience.”

“You're sure? I don't mind—”

“Don't worry about it.”

I gave an awkward smile. “Well, thank you. It was, eh... fun.”

The lad snorted, seeing right through my lie, but he thankfully didn't call me out on it. “Pleased to hear it.”

I went to give over the cash but remembered my other hand was still full. “Oh, shit. These too, please.”

“I hadn’t even noticed,” the lad said with a chuckle that made my cheeks heat. “Had ye been quicker, you could’ve tried yer luck.”

I laughed uneasily and placed Sammy’s gifts on the counter to be added up. I paid the new price and accepted the brown paper bag with a smile when the guide handed it to me.

There was a beat of silence then, thick and heavy, my feet refusing to carry me out of the shop. I was nailed down, and he was looking at me with those intense eyes, head tilted, probably expecting me to ask a question or buy something else since I was hanging around. He was patient, seemingly *amused*, but he didn’t prod me for an explanation as to why the hell I hadn’t left yet.

My lips formed words before I could stop them.

“I’m Grayson,” I blurted, hand thrusting toward him. “Or Gray, if ye like.”

He took my offered hand, his long, thin fingers slotting neatly around my thicker ones. He had soft skin, reminded me of lily petals, so pale and speckled with embers of brown and orange. “Hamish,” he said kindly. “It’s very nice to meet you, Grayson.” *Jesus*, my name rolled off his tongue like a growl. “Haven’t seen you around. Where ye from?”

“England,” I croaked, my throat running a little dry. He gave me a look over the rims of his glasses that translated in my ear as “no shit,” so I stuttered, “Oh, er, Shoreditch. It’s in —”

“London, aye.” He continued to write prices on the stickers but kept his attention on me. It was as if his pen moved with muscle memory, scribbling numbers without a glance. “How long ye ‘ere for?”

“Couple of weeks.”

He nodded. “Needed a break from city living, did ye?”

“Something like that.” He didn’t need to know that I’d come here because my usually overcrowded head was empty, and it had been months since I could do the one thing that actually brought me joy. “It’s nice here. I’ve been meaning to visit for years but never got the chance until now.”

“It’ll be a lot quieter than yer used to, no doubt.”

I breathed a laugh—*more than you know*. “You got that right.”

“What’re your plans for the rest of yer trip?” he asked, and it was said with a genuine and friendly interest, so I didn’t know why my idiot brain interpreted it as anything else.

“Why? You got some suggestions?” It was an attempt at flirting that I hadn’t mentally prepared for, so the words grew nervous on my tongue and, instead, came out stilted.

Hamish smirked as if he knew exactly how I’d meant it to sound. His clever fingers paused as he raked his eyes over the whole of me, his voice like rough velvet as he said, “A few.”

I cleared my throat to hide the spike in my breathing. “I’m all ears.”

“Well, since you enjoyed the museum so much...” Hamish dropped his task to slide a pamphlet across the counter, snapping me right out of my wandering imagination. “*Here.*”

There was now a note of dry humour in his voice, and I realised as soon as my gaze landed on the *Nessie Hunts* in bold font that he was making a joke at my expense. Despite the very mild disappointment—and what the fuck was that about?—I found I didn’t mind. In fact, it made me feel all warm and toasty to have earned that level of acquaintance, but still. That was *not* what I expected, and he knew it. Was that his sales technique? Flirt with the customers until they parted with their cash.

It almost worked, I’d give him that, but a Nessie hunt? No, thank you.

“I—”

“I take a group out on the loch every morning,” Hamish powered through my refusal, obviously sensing it was coming with the way his lips curled devilishly. “I’ve a couple spaces left, if you’d be interested?”

I clenched my jaw. Christ’s sake. Of course I was interested now that I knew it was actually *him* at the head of the event. “It’s a boat tour?”

“Naw, didn’t I tell ye? I can part the water like Moses.” I glared at his sark, but the corner of my mouth ticked upward. Smartarse. “Aye, it’s a boat tour. It’ll only be a few hours out of your morning, and who knows? You might catch sight o’ the beastie.”

He winked, and my heart stuttered. Jesus, had the change in scenery flicked a switch in me? It was longer than I cared to admit since I took an interest in someone—or *something* that wasn’t my laptop or notepad—this quickly. Actually, I wasn’t certain I ever had. It was...odd but not as unwelcome as it might’ve been if I was hunched over my desk.

Is this what I’d been missing?

Guess a Nessie hunt was on the cards, after all.

It wasn’t exactly my idea of a fun day out, and I couldn’t give a toss about the *beastie*, but I guessed if the little outing gave me more time in this beautiful lad’s presence. Well, I was willing to pretend. I’d also get a richer view of the town and hills from the loch, and that alone would be worth listening to more fairy tales.

“Why the hell not?” I relented, stepping toward the counter as I fished out my wallet again. “How much do I owe you?”

Hamish held up his hand, stopping me from taking out my cash. My brow furrowed. “It’s no often I convince a disbeliever to join us, so it’s my treat.”

“Oh, you don’t—”

“I insist.” His tone brooked no argument, so I gave him none—I reckoned I’d be the loser if I did. Besides, stepping outside for a couple of hours to do something that required zero brain power wouldn’t do any harm.

Not that it was getting much use anyway.

I stuffed my wallet back into my pocket. “That’s— Thank you.”

Hamish nodded, then reached blindly under the counter. The slap of the black ring binder on the wooden top made me flinch, but luckily, the lad was too busy flipping to the centre page to notice. He scribbled something down on the sheet— my name, probably—before his gaze lifted to mine again.

“You’re all booked in,” he said, dropping onto his elbows. The way he swayed his hips and arched his back had to be an unconscious decision. I couldn’t let myself imagine he did it to tempt me, not in these jeans. “Be down at the fisherman’s hut by eight.”

I blinked. “The fisherman’s hut?”

He pointed to the window with his pen, and I followed his line of sight. “You see that red post?” I nodded. “Take the steps beside it. They’ll lead ye down to the waterfront. You’ll see the hut.”

“Sounds simple enough.” Getting out of bed before eight, though? That sounded less simple. I couldn’t remember the last time I was alive before noon. I’d have to remember to set six alarms, just in case.

Wouldn’t wanna miss my date with Nessie.

“Oh, and wear something warm,” he advised, that wicked smile returning with vigour, and I might’ve melted into the floor if his following words didn’t have me regretting my decision. “It can get a wee bit chilly.”



## CHAPTER TWO

**A** *wee bit chilly*, he'd said.

It was fucking baltic. My arse was numb, frozen to the bench I sat on, hunched over and shivering like a shitting dog. I almost wished the boat would sway and jostle—seasickness seemed a welcome alternative to cramming my tight fists under my armpits to save them from turning blue—but the ride was slow and smooth. Even the rumbling vibration of the engine was hardly enough to distract from the unforgiving bite in the air.

Clouds of white fog billowed around me, my breath turning to ice with every puff—or so it felt. I was only grateful my nose wasn't running because icicles hanging over my top lip would have been *so* attractive.

*Not.*

Hamish was laughing at me. I could feel the little devil's amusement, even if it was internal. He'd had that knowing glint in his pretty green eyes since the boat left the dock, his face alight with a secret smile that had made my cheeks a fraction warmer, but it was, unfortunately, no match for the bitter weather.

He stood at the bow, microphone in hand, entertaining the group with stories of Loch Ness and its introverted monster in that husky Scottish brogue. Or, at least, that's what I guessed he was talking about. I couldn't exactly hear over the chattering of my teeth—which was a crying shame because I'd have listened to him reciting the Lord's prayer though I hadn't a drop of religious blood in me—but every so often, his gaze caught mine, and I'd manage to zone in for long enough to bask in the witty and charming way he played the crowd. Until my ears threatened to fall off, and I had to burrow deeper into the woolly nest of my knitted scarf, much like a turtle sinking into its shell.

“...and coming up on the right is Urquhart Castle—or what's left o' it.”

Like an army of well-trained soldiers, everyone turned, and there was a smattering of gasps and camera clicks. I craned my head, curious to see if it differed from all the pamphlets and postcards—though, even before my eyes focused, I already knew it would. And I was right.

While a picture showed the perfect angle with flawless lighting, nothing beat experiencing places like this through your own eyes. Once one of the largest castles in Scotland, now a ruin—a husk of the magnificence it once was—but that didn't take away from how aesthetically pleasing it looked, sitting on that low cliff.

I knew a little of its history, mainly about the importance it held during the Scot's struggle for independence. Historical sites had always interested me, learning of all the ghosts who'd once walked those halls, alive with a purpose lost to time. It never failed to have the strings in my heart knotting a little or the back of my throat burning an empathetic flare. So much had transpired under that roof which no longer stood, and visualising it was genuinely fascinating.

“...*but* you'll have to buy yourselves a ticket if ye wanna learn more.” Hamish winked, and a slew of chuckles drifted from the small crowd.

He had them in the palm of his hand.

The tour-slash-hunt continued at its leisurely pace, the boat looping around the loch as all eyes fixed on the murky water for any signs of the monster. There were a few false alarms along the way; a well-positioned log peeking out of the water's surface had a woman screaming at the far side of the deck—thankfully, my ears were already numb, or the ringing would've finished me off.

I spotted a heron. It swooped down, dipping its beak into the centre of a ripple to pluck out its unsuspecting breakfast. It wasn't quite a prehistoric lizard, but it also wasn't something I'd ever witnessed either—pigeons were about the extent of the wildlife in central London.

I scanned the hills, the crisp orange leaves blanketing the trees and dots of snow already gathering at the highest peaks. It really was a beautiful place. Paradise, some would say, and they'd be right. Unlike in the city, there were no buildings towering toward the sky, no queues of traffic on the roads, and no roaring crowds. There was just peace and simplicity nestled among nature. I could envision a life here, making a home. It was an odd sensation and probably had everything to do with the connection I had with my mum, but even saying it in my head sounded *right*.

If only I could get used to this weather.

“You alright?”

I startled, my gaze snapping toward the source of the murmur in my ear—it might've been more of a purr, actually. I hadn't noticed Hamish's approach, but there he was, smirking down at me, breeze blowing his fiery locks into a wild, carefree mess on top of his head. He was undeniably pretty, and I wanted to run my fingers through that hair and tug until his pale, freckled neck arched and a moan escaped his lips. I glared instead because that took way less energy and was probably a more acceptable reaction.

That was also the first time I noticed he only wore a cardigan.

My glare intensified.



“I’m freezing my bollocks off.”

Hamish snorted at my grumble and lowered himself onto the bench beside me. I was embarrassed to admit my breath hitched when our thighs touched. He was a furnace. “You are aware ye came to Scotland, aye?”

I huffed, dragging my eyes away from staring at his legs. They were some nice legs and, apparently, warm as fuck, but I couldn’t dive headfirst into them for comfort, so there was no point teasing myself. “Yes, *Scotland*, not the Arctic.”

It was common knowledge to anyone in the United Kingdom that Scottish weather wasn’t for the faint-hearted, so it shouldn’t have been a shock that my duffle coat was about as much use as a paper bag. But to be fair to myself, I hadn’t planned to be on a boat in the middle of autumn, so it wasn’t my fault I forgot to pack my gloves, hat, king-size duvet, and portable heater.

“Och, a bit o’ fresh air is good for you,” he joked, chuffing a rich, throaty sound when I shot him a flat look. “It’ll be better on the way back; the wind’ll be behind us.”

Thank Christ for that small mercy. “Oh, goodie. I might actually be able to enjoy the tour, then.”

Hamish laughed at my moaning, but it was flat and accompanied by a slight head shake that scolded me better than his words ever could have. “Are ye sure you’re no Scottish? ‘Cause yer acting like a right crabbit old git.”

A strange sensation crept over me. It was as if a plug had been pulled on the sole of my foot and everything was draining out. *Shit*. Had I pissed him off? ‘Course I had. I was huddled over, face like a smacked arse, whinging about the weather when he’d only been trying to do something nice. Granted, he clearly delighted in my torment, but he didn’t *have to* invite me, yet he did, and now I was gliding over the loch on a fishing boat, taking in the scenery.

*For free.*

My chest felt unbearably tight. It wasn’t the first time my early-morning grumping had ruined everything, but for some

reason, it was the first time I actually felt guilty about it.

*Well done, Grayson.*

I floundered. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—”

Hamish grinned like a fiend, the dimples in his cheeks popping, and I didn’t know if I wanted to jump overboard or kiss him. “I’m havin’ you on.”

I blinked, debating if Nessie would appreciate a pretty Scotsman for her lunch, but decided it’d be a terrible waste. I let an exasperated—fond, if I was being honest with myself—sigh-hiss past my teeth. “Prick.” He bumped my shoulder in retort, that mischievous chuckle bubbling in the back of his throat.

I nudged him back harder.

“And, actually, my mum was Scottish, so *there ye go*,” I mimicked the accent, but it was a wee tad rusty. I did succeed in making Hamish laugh, though, so I counted it as a win.

“Ah, that explains it, then.”

I rolled my eyes at his blatant amusement. “Shouldn’t you be guiding the tour?”

“Nah.” He shook his head, reclining casually against the bench back, arm spread behind me. “I like to gee everybody a chance to bask in the scenery without my voice droning on in the background.” I wouldn’t complain, and *droning* wouldn’t be my choice of a descriptor. “I’ll pick it back up toward the end—or if we spot Nessie.”

“You don’t sound confident?” I teased as he scanned the water, seemingly lost in thought.

“He’ll be milling around somewhere.”

“*He?*”

Hamish’s attention returned to me. “Aye.”

His answer was so matter-of-fact that it made me fumble. I may not have listened or absorbed any of the tales, but surely it was common knowledge that the alleged monster was female.

Wasn't it?

"I thought Nessie was a *she*?"

"Oh? You met her, have ye?"

I glared at his mocking. "No, but it's what everybody says."

"Well, then, they must be right."

My eyes narrowed at the sarcasm dripping from every syllable, and when he fixed his gaze forward, not saying anything else—probably because he hoped it would wind me up—I sighed loudly. "Fine, I'll bite. You clearly disagree."

He shrugged. "Who can say for sure? There are theories, of course, but most stories agree that Nessie is the only yin of its kind. It's out there, living its life, alone until the time comes he—or *she*—has to move on."

"Move on? Like...die?" He nodded, and I couldn't believe I was even entertaining this. "But then there would be no more Loch Ness Monster?"

He leaned in as if whispering a secret. "Unless it leaves a piece o' itself behind."

I felt my face scrunch in confusion. "A piece of...Give birth, you mean?" He nodded again, and I mulled it over, lingering on what he'd said about the creature being the only one of its species. Did that mean— "So, you think it could possibly mate with itself?"

"Why not? Have you heard of another beastie besides Nessie?"

"No, but..." I trailed off, my brow furrowing. "So, what makes you think *he* and not *she*?"

The corner of his mouth twitched with mischief. "It's a wee hobby o' mine—to go against the crowd."

I snorted.

*Rebel.*

“So, you don’t think today’s Nessie is the same one from the first-ever sighting?”

“Nah, I don’t.”

“Not that I believe in any of this, by the way,” I clarified, coaxing an incredulous brow raise from Hamish. “But that’s some pretty cool theories.”

He hummed, and that smirk would be the death of me. “I’ve time to make ye a believer yet.”

There was an implication in those words, a casual claim on my company that made me giddy. I didn’t know what about him had me blushing like a virgin, but here I was, hoping my flush from the cold disguised how I was actually warming up under his approving gaze. Despite having only met him yesterday, I felt like I was already forming a bond with the lad. There was just something about him, something that had want coiling in my belly and my heart racing, but even deeper than that, he made me feel comfortable...safe, even.

Hamish was exactly my type, or what I supposed would be my type if I had the luxury of being picky. I wasn’t exactly drowning in offers, but if I wasn’t mistaken—and my radar wasn’t acting dodgy—the twinkle in his eyes wasn’t just a trick of the sunlight.

He was definitely interested, and I was more than willing to take him up on it.

The lull in conversation gave my thoughts a chance to wander, to fantasise, and it dawned on me that I had no reason to deprive myself of the chance of a little fun. I was on holiday, after all. Well, *technically*, I was in this quaint loch-side village, attempting to haul my sorry arse out of writer’s block, but plans changed. And who knows? Maybe spending a few weeks in Hamish’s presence would spark all the inspiration I needed.

I gathered my nerves, licked my lips, and parted them to ask the lad if he...what? If he wanted to have sex with me? *Shit*. I hadn’t thought far enough ahead to have prepared a pickup line, but I needed to because Hamish tilted his head, his

eyebrow cocked expectantly. Was my love life really so lacking that I'd forgotten how to ask someone out?

Apparently.

Dinner. That was a timeless option, was it not? There was a decent-looking pub near my cottage; it looked cosy and intimate. They did food, I was sure. I couldn't say if it was any good, but I'd already thought about trying it out tonight, so it'd make sense to ask Hamish to tag along...as my date.

Yeah, that would work.

And it sounded...really nice, actually.

"Hamish?" I angled my body toward him, wanting to gauge his full reaction. He hummed in response. "Would you \_\_\_"

"Excuse me, young man?"

Ah, bugger.

The timid interruption came from a woman, probably in her mid-seventies. She was small and hunched over with white, permed hair and a kind smile tugging at the edges of her wrinkled lips. "Sorry to bother you, dearie, but would you mind showing Agnes and me where Culloden is on our map? We canny make heads or tails o' it."

Oh, yeah, because the massive *Culloden* wasn't a dead giveaway.

I glowered at the old lady and her companion sitting several benches away, her nose inches from said map. I shouldn't have; they didn't deserve my aggro, but I aimed it at them anyway because *fuck them*. I didn't mean that, and when she smiled at me, too, I felt rightfully like shit. I was being childish. Besides, it was my own fault—snooze, you lose, and all that—but...ugh.

Hamish, of course, didn't miss a beat. He beamed at her, no hint of irritation in him as he rose to stand with more energy than anyone should have at nine a.m. "Not at all," he chirped, sweeping an arm towards the far side of the boat. "I'm here for whatever you lovely ladies need."

*Charmer.*

The one who'd spoken gave Hamish a playful pat, scoffing in that sweet old lady way that was both scolding and gleeful. Her hand even flexed as if to stop herself from reaching out and pinching his cheek. She reminded me of my granny.

Hamish urged the woman to walk in front of him, all gentlemen-like, as I tried my best not to pout at the loss of his company—though I wasn't given the chance to sulk too hard. I'd half-expected the apologetic look he threw at me, but I certainly hadn't prepared for the fingertips, featherlight and full of promise, trailing over the shell of my ear and along my nape as he passed. I even felt the touch through my scarf, like an invisible brand blazing into my skin. My mind went blank, and I bit my lip to stifle the groan tickling my throat.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

He was already at the far side of the boat by the time I got my act together, dazed eyes staring longingly at the enticing swell of his arse. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but whatever it was, it enthralled his newest fans, both of them gazing up at Hamish instead of where he pointed on the map. I couldn't blame them; he was extremely distracting.

I tore my eyes away, ducking my head to stare at my boots. I had never been described as particularly awkward, but Hamish seemed to throw everything I ever knew about myself straight to the bottom of the loch, along with my pride. I was so out of touch. Had I really shut myself away for so long that I'd lost my ability to chat someone up?

It was embarrassing, but luckily, my tenacity was still fighting fit. I had no desire to give in; I'd just need to gear myself up before trying again—I didn't fancy making a stuttering tit of myself twice in one morning.

Patience might not be my strongest suit, but I'd wait until the end of the tour to ask him out—not that I had any other options. That meant I had less than an hour to devise an appealing script and settle the unusual buzz of nerves whirring in my chest.

I could do that.

No problem.



As it turned out, forty minutes was plenty of time to talk myself out of propositioning Hamish. What could I say? He'd sent me another of those breathtaking grins, and I'd wimped out.

I truly and utterly bottled it.

Almost as soon as the boat had touched the dock, I was striding down the gangway, waving a hurried goodbye in the vague direction of the man of my dreams before marching on my merry way—cursing myself with every step.

*Fuck, fucking, fuck.*

To be clear, running away wasn't me giving in—though it looked an awful lot like it—but I needed to recharge. I was freezing cold and *still* cranky about being awake before twelve, so not in the best state to be making rash decisions. I genuinely was at a loss as to what had me so flustered. I'd never have made these pitiful excuses or acted bashful while I was in uni. Sure, I was now thirty-two, and a lot had changed since those days, but Christ.

Where had all my confidence gone?

I stopped in at the pub I had thought to take Hamish, mostly for convenience—my stomach bordered on eating itself, and the pub was barely two minutes from my digs—but also because I was apparently a masochist and wanted to torture myself by imagining what it would've been like to hold his hand across the table.

The place had the atmosphere I expected, homely and welcoming. It wasn't very spacious, with only a few tables dotted around, but with it being before twelve, it was pretty much dead. The strong, lingering scent of beer and the roaring heat from the log fire was, in that moment, what I imagined

heaven would be like—but that probably had everything to do with the ice-cold numbness slowly melting away.

I settled at the empty table closest to the fireplace, and time merrily ticked by. As soon as the kitchens opened, I'd ordered a steak and ale pie and a pint of John Smith's to wash it down. I didn't drink often, if at all. The last time was for my thirtieth, and before that, I couldn't remember. I liked to keep a clear head for writing, but since that sentiment was no longer aiding my cause, I guessed I could afford to indulge.

The food was delicious, homemade, rich, and hearty—definitely date-worthy. And with that thought in mind, one pint turned to two, then three, then...I couldn't say how many followed. By the time I left that quaint little pub, and my deep conversation with the barman, Tim, the sun was sinking in the sky, and I may've been a *wee bit* buzzed.

It wasn't quite night-time, but it was autumn, so darkness came in the late afternoon. I usually hated it. This time of year always pissed about my whole sleeping schedule, but for today, I could pretend it was bedtime and feel less ashamed of being half-cut at four on a Tuesday.

*When in Rome.*

I sauntered back to my cottage, taking the scenic route along the waterfront to delay my return to the weighted duvet and soft pillows that beckoned me.

That was when I saw it. The fleeting shadow at the far side of the loch that I would've missed had I gone straight home. I stumbled over my feet to a halt, scouring the distance for any sign of whatever had caught my eye. It was near dark—my detour having coincided with the sunset—so even if there was another movement, I couldn't paint a clear picture of what I saw, but my nosiness wouldn't let me turn away.

Especially not when two green, almost fluorescent, orbs suddenly appeared through the darkness.

I gasped, my heart skipping a beat. Panic rose inside my gut. My initial hunch was that someone was stranded, drowning in the icy water, but it couldn't be. I heard no



screaming or splashing, even dulled by the vast space. Maybe a fishing boat? But surely its lights would shine over the loch like a beacon. I wanted to move closer, but my feet were glued to the pavement, so I squinted as if that would somehow grant me night vision.

With my eyes watering, I finally blinked, and the floating emeralds were gone—if they'd even been there in the first place. I blew out a laugh that tapered into a groan as I stared at the loch, the water calm and silent, albeit a smidge blurry.

I really shouldn't have had that last pint.



## CHAPTER THREE

*The water rippled as I dipped my toes, wading further in without a care. Ice should've bit at my feet, freezing my body stiff, but there was no sensation on my skin besides comfort.*

*Warmth.*

*I peered out, eyes seeking—for what, I didn't know—but pitch black returned my stare. I felt no fear. I was safe, standing at the mouth of paradise, but something was missing. I was hollow inside, like a lock without a key, a void craving to be packed full.*

*There was a flutter in my chest, dropping deeper, a strange-yet-welcome tether blossoming, flaring to life. My heart thundered at the sound of water stirring around me, droplets raining down, pebbling onto my cheeks as the scent of salt and brine invaded my nose.*

*The ache in my belly grew hotter and hotter, cramping around the emptiness, throbbing with a different kind of need. I glanced upward, each breath more laboured than the last, as a pair of familiar emerald eyes emerged from the darkness, looming above me.*

*Home.*



I sighed into my pillow, the effort to lift my head feeling like too much to handle. The sun was too bright, too cheery, and those birds chirping at the window could fuck away off to Hell.

It was a good night.

But *never again*.

I squinted up at the curtains, cursing my past self for not drawing them before face-planting onto the bed. It had been years since I was last hungover. Mostly because I hardly drank, but even on the odd occasion I did, I would never go overboard. I didn't think I'd gone particularly crazy last night—or, more accurately, yesterday afternoon—but maybe my tolerance was now shot to shit.

Or Scottish beer was much stronger than I was used to.

Not only were my insides roiling and my temples pounding, but the memory of a dream lingered in my brain. It felt as if I'd seen it before, and I couldn't shake off the notion. It was a strange sensation, like *déjà vu*.

I knew it was just my imagination running wild. I'd spent the whole day exposed to the cold Scottish air and constant chatter of the loch's monster, so it was no surprise that delusion had followed me to bed. But I still wished I could explain it. Maybe it had something to do with the tether I had felt to this place before I arrived?

Or perhaps I'd just drunk more than my fair share, and the whole evening was best forgotten.

I rolled onto my back, slinging my arm over my head to block the sunlight, but the change in position brought my attention hurtling to the comical tent in the covers. Of course, I'd woken up hard—as usual—but the longer I zoned into the sensation between my thighs, the more urgent the need became. There was an ache in my belly I couldn't ignore, my

balls already drawn up as though the brush of a feather would be enough to set me off.

I whipped off the covers with a sigh and wandered into the bathroom, yawning and stretching as I went. I was aiming for the shower—a wank as I washed sounded like the least effort—but caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror as I passed. My feet decided to stop moving as I studied myself in the reflection: the bird’s nest, the dark, ungroomed stubble, the remnants of drool on my lips, and the hooded eyes still heavy with sleep.

I wasn’t unattractive, but the *just-tumbled-out-of-bed* look wasn’t doing me any justice. I’d never be described as a mountain by any means, but I had broad shoulders and some height about me, which I’d been told was pretty sexy. There were no abs you could scrub clothes on, and my stomach wasn’t overly toned—nor were my arms—but I was strong when it counted, and I’d had no complaints yet.

Not that I’d care, anyway. My dick was generously sized, so I’d always have that in my favour.

Speaking of which, I lowered the waistband of my boxers, and my rigid length sprung free, having not flagged an inch, the tip wet with precum. The cool air hitting my flushed skin was a relief in itself, but wrapping my fingers around the shaft was exactly what I needed. I groaned, the low sound vibrating in my throat as I swiped my thumb over the slit, gathering the bead of slick before rubbing the sensitive spot right below the head.

I combed through the thatch of dark curls on my chest, tugging lightly to feel the pricking sting. I dropped my head back and let out a strangled gasp, my hips punching forward, chasing the friction of my loose fist as I pinched and pulled the hair rougher and rougher. My head spun, and it was no longer my own hand roaming over my skin. The fingers I imagined were thinner and paler.

Freckled.

*Shit.*

I tightened my grip, gliding my hand up and down in sure, steady pulls, flexing my wrist on every upstroke. Goosebumps rose to the surface of my skin, giving an extra tingle of pleasure that had me moaning wantonly. I clutched at the rim of the sink to steady myself, watching through dazed eyes for the changes to my expression in the mirror.

The image staring back was blissed out and shameless with lust, the rhythm now faster and sloppier, the glass fogging from my laboured pants. There was a determined pinch to my brows, my lips hanging open as the familiar pulse in my cock beat in time with my erratic heart. Fire licked up my spine as my stomach clenched hard...

And I could've sworn that those green eyes appeared through the condensation.

“Fuck,” I growled, smacking my free hand against the bathroom wall as my balls throbbed and jets of cum striped the sink. I leaned forward, forehead pressed to the cold surface of the mirror, fingers wringing out the last of my orgasm, stroking and squeezing until my toes curled with the overstimulation.

I blinked to clear the blur of prancing white spots as I ran the tap, washing away the cum. Normally, I would've gagged at the idea of wanking right next to my toothbrush, but I found I didn't give two shits at present. That was how I came to the conclusion that I was probably not yet wholly sober.

Plus, the fact I was *still* harping on about those fucking orbs.

I sighed.

I needed a shower.

And maybe some breakfast.



*Lunch* was five hours later, after a nap and two litres of water. Thankfully, the symptoms of my “just a few” in the pub had

buggered off at the realization I was staying in bed and not attempting to live my life and go about my day.

I decided on the small cafe that tripled as a sweetie and ice cream shop instead of a pub or restaurant. I didn't want to risk the pungent scent of spilt alcohol ruining my appetite, and it wasn't quite teatime, so I wasn't looking for anything fancy. It wasn't busy either; there were plenty of free tables, which was a bonus—the thought of having to take my food back to my digs wasn't all that appealing.

The bell above the door jingled as I entered, and the smell of freshly ground coffee and sugary sweet pastries hit me at full pelt. My stomach grumbled, and it took every ounce of willpower in me not to nosedive straight into the cake display case.

“Grayson.”

I followed the familiar cadence of that gruff voice, spinning around to see Hamish sitting at a booth in the far corner. I hadn't spotted him 'cause of the angle of the door, but now that I had, I could already feel my pulse spiking. And seriously, if I went home with blood pressure issues, I'd know whom to blame.

There was an empty plate on the table beside him, an open newspaper laid out in front, and a mug clasped in one of his hands with a teabag string hanging over the lip. I didn't know what to do, but hovering in the middle of the room like a spare part probably wasn't it, so I wandered closer, greeting him with a smile and an awkward half-wave. “Alright. No work today?”

“Aye, just taking my break.” He reclined in his seat, arm resting on the back of the chair beside him. I barely stopped myself from checking him out. “I forgot to bring lunch wi' me, so thought I'd close up for an hour and come here.”

“Fair play.” He looked good out of his work habitat. *Relaxed*. It wasn't that he seemed uncomfortable in our last two encounters, but it was nice to see him in an everyday setting, drinking tea and reading the paper like a regular person.

Not as the tour guide.

“I’ve still got twenty minutes or so left if you’d like to grab yer food and join me?” he asked, signalling to the empty seat across from him.

I tried not to sound too enthusiastic when I agreed. “Sure.”

The kid at the counter called me forward, and I ordered a sandwich and cappuccino—a few bonbons may have rolled their way onto my tray, too—before carrying it all over to Hamish’s table. He was engrossed in an article as I unloaded several sugar packets into my coffee, and I couldn’t help but peek at what had him so invested.

The heading said it all...

*IS THE BEASTIE BACK IN TOWN? NEW SIGHTING REVEALED.*

Despite my opinions, my curiosity got the better of me. “Another sighting?”

Hamish glanced up at me and, taking advantage of my casual interest, swivelled the paper around to face me, letting me take a gander. “Apparently so. Spotted a few days ago.”

I studied the black-and-white page, not bothering to read through the article. The picture itself was a pretty decent attempt at Photoshop, I had to say. The snap was grainy and dull—to distract from the cut-and-paste job—and the three spread-out humps sticking out the surface of the loch looked *almost* convincing.

If they weren’t completely out of focus.

I had to laugh. With technology today, how come every photo of the “monster” seemed to be taken via a butter knife?

“Wow,” I mumbled, unimpressed. “They really captured her likeness.”

Hamish snorted at my dry tone and slid the paper back toward himself. There was a moment or two of silence, so I sipped my coffee, groaning at the perfect sweetness before Hamish spoke again. “I gotta ask...” I looked up from my

mug. “How come a man wi’ Scottish blood doesn’t believe in auld Ness?”

I blew out a long breath and sat back. *How indeed.* “It’s a tourist attraction. All those years ago, a log was placed in the loch for a laugh, and the public went wild for it. The council saw the reaction and decided to make bank. I don’t blame them, but that’s all it is—a fable to bring in cash.” I shrugged before adding, “It’s an interesting fairy tale, and I don’t dislike the stories or the culture it holds. I’ve just heard it four hundred times.”

“That’s understandable,” he said, folding over the paper and taking a swig of his tea—smirking against the mug in a way that had my belly fluttering. “And you’re entitled to your wrong opinion.”

“Am I?” My response was soaked with sarcasm. “I appreciate that.”

He held up his hands in mock surrender of my bland glare. “All I’m saying is, how can ye know there’s nothing down there?”

“It’s scientifically impossible.”

“Ah, *science*, is it? And what about the supernatural? Magic? Have ye never entertained the possibility that there’s more out there?”

‘Course, it would be naive to think we’d discovered everything. But magic? Come on. “Sure, but—”

“Ness could be an alien for all we know.”

I shook my head and picked up my sandwich, nibbling at the soft granary bread and swallowing. “You’re just making shite up now.”

“Am dead serious,” he countered, feigning offence, grinning at my dry stare. “What if Ness isn’t the beastie we all expect?” He gasped dramatically, and I knew whatever was about to fall out of his pretty mouth was a wind-up. “What if he’s a merman?”



“Och, yer arse,” I scoffed, my face scrunching up in disagreement. “I’ll accept a giant snake, I’ll even entertain a dinosaur, but the Loch Ness Monster is no a bloody mermaid.”

Hamish’s face morphed with a smirk. “Watch it. Yer Scottish is showing.”

I froze mid-bite of my sandwich, it slowly dawning on me what I’d said—and *how* I’d said it. I wanted to hang my head and cringe, but I laughed under my breath instead—it just *had to* be the topic of Nessie that brought it out of me. “My mum would be pleased someone noticed her efforts.”

For thirty years, I’d lived in London, fully immersed in the English way of speaking, but it clearly didn’t disguise the influence Mum’s broad accent had on me growing up. All those phrases and exclamations that my father never used, nor anyone else I met. Just her. It was rare for someone to point it out, mostly because I subconsciously kept it hidden for ease, only really coming out when I was heated or comfortable enough to let my guard down that far.

Obviously, I hadn’t been in that situation too often...until now.

“Aye, I’ve noticed a wee twang popping out now and then,” he said with a smile. “Usually, when your emotions are high, or you’re deep into the conversation—still wouldn’t mistake ye for anything less than a London boy mind, but it’s there if ye know what to look for.”

“Mhm.” I absently pried open the paper bag full to the brim with bonbons and popped one onto my tongue with an indulgent sigh. I called up a distant memory. “When my sister and I used to get into disagreements, she’d mock me relentlessly when I slipped up. I knew as soon as the accent came out, it was game over. Still do, really.”

Hamish’s brows knitted together. “Yer sister doesn’t have the accent?”

“Not at all,” I said. “She didn’t seem to pick it up from Mum, for one reason or another. I suspect it’s ‘cause she was a right daddy’s girl growing up.”

“Are you and her close?”

“Oh, yeah. We’re even more so now because of my nephew, Samson.”

The love I had for the boy must’ve shown on my face as Hamish smiled fondly. “You adore the wee lad.”

“I do. He’s a great kid.” I rifled for another sweet, picking up two instead and chewing on them slowly, one in each cheek, savouring them. “A mischievous little shite, at times, but it gives him personality.”

Hamish studied me with an expression that radiated mirth, his lips thinning as if biting back the urge to laugh. “Does he share yer sweet tooth?”

My fingers stilled halfway back to the bag, my eyes wide like a naughty child caught with his hand in the cookie jar. I flicked a glance at my coffee, too, which I’d loaded up with sugar, and huffed lightly, dropping my arm. “I dare say he probably does.”

“Hm. What’s that out there?” Hamish pointed out the window, and in my distraction, he, fast and sly as a whip, reached out and snaffled a bonbon out of my bag, flinging it into his mouth with a smug grin. “I canny believe you fell for that.”

I gaped at him, scoffing in playful indignation. “You know, you little thief, where I’m from, it’s rude to touch a man’s bonbons without asking.”

He licked the dusting of sugar off his fingertips, and paired with the smouldering eye contact, it was suggestive, in the least—downright erotic, at most. “Well, I’d certainly share my sweets wi’ ye anytime ye asked.”

I swallowed thickly and hesitated. His body language was an attempt to seduce me, urging me to take the leap and go for what I wanted. I could see the expectation in the raise of his brow and in the darks of his eyes, simmering with heat.

So, why wouldn’t the words form?

Right then, someone walked into the cafe, the jingle of the door snapping me out of it, and I lost my nerve.

Again.

*Bollocks.*

Hamish was amused, the look on his face oddly reminding me of a cat playing with a mouse. He turned his wrist, exposing the watch hidden under his sleeve. “I better head back,” he sighed, and I detected his reluctance. “But it was good getting to know a wee bit more about ye, Grayson.”

I wanted to pout at how quickly those twenty minutes had flown, wishing he could stay for longer. I enjoyed his company immensely. An undeniable connection felt like it was forming between us, and despite the uncharacteristic nerves I was experiencing, I was at ease when he was around. All my worries and stresses were entirely relaxed. I could be myself, and as cliché as it sounded, it felt as if I’d known him forever.

And, of course, I was fiercely attracted to him—that was as plain as the nose on my face. More and more so each time he crossed my mind or we met.

I still couldn’t seem to ask him out, though.

“Likewise.”

He stood, donning his jacket—that was way too light for the weather—before downing the dregs of his tea. “There was one ‘hing that stood out to me about you, though.”

“What?”

Hamish placed his cup back in its saucer, both hands now resting on the table next to me as he leaned in closer—his breath ghosting my cheek. “For someone who doesn’t believe, you’re awfully sure on what the beastie *isn’t*.”

I opened and closed my mouth, searching for an argument, but the intense, smoky musk of his aftershave wafting past my nose disarmed me entirely. By the time I’d devised a witty retort, the bell above the door announced his exit.

He had a point.



I set the pint of milk along with a “share” pack of jelly babies on the counter to be scanned. The young girl behind the till greeted me with a polite smile and didn’t even blink at the still-damp hair and puffer-jacket-over-pyjama-bottom situation I had going on.

No sooner than I’d gotten out of the shower after settling into my digs for the night and switching on the kettle to make a cuppa had I realised there was no milk. I’d cursed myself and debated just going to bed without—or taking my coffee black until morning—but no, that wasn’t happening. It was a ritual by now to have a coffee before bed, and after twenty-odd years, I wasn’t about to break that habit. So, I’d huffed and puffed, scrubbing haphazardly at my hair with the towel before declaring a massive “fuck that” to getting changed and wandering down to the shop in my PJs, coat, and white trainers.

With no socks.

The lass handed me my change, and I thanked her. I didn’t take the offer of a bag, just shoved the milk and sweets into my deep pockets before pushing my way out the stiff shop door. It was a cold evening—but it was Scotland, so, of course, it was. My breath curled through the air like smoke as I sheathed my hands into my oversized sleeves and started the short trek back to my cottage.

I hadn’t made it ten paces before a tall figure stepped out in front of me. “Shit, sor—”

I stopped dead.

Why hadn’t I gotten dressed again?

Hamish’s pretty eyes crinkled at the edges when he realised who he’d almost bumped into, his gaze wandering from my head to my toes. The uptick of his eyebrow and the teeth biting into his bottom lip said everything his mouth didn’t. “Are ye following me?”

I snorted at his playful accusation. It would seem that way, or it was a welcome case of divine intervention. “Ran out of milk.” I patted the oblong bulge in my pocket. “You just finished work?”

“Aye, had a late one the night.”

No shit. It had to be way past nine by now, and while I felt a small sense of relief that he’d been at work and wasn’t leaving a lover’s house, the lack of street lighting gave me a sudden and strange feeling of unease. “Let me walk you home.”

“Och, yer fine,” he dismissed, pointing in the vague direction of my cottage. “I’m only down the road.”

“Please?” I rubbed the back of my neck; I had no doubt he’d done this numerous times before, but the churning in my stomach was getting worse. “We’re going the same way anyway, and I’ll feel better knowing you’re home safe.”

“And who’ll see you home safe, my brave knight?”

“I’ll be fine.”

His eyebrow cocked, and I got the distinct impression he was hankering for a rise out of me. “And I won’t?”

“Jesus Chri—” I pinched the bridge of my nose. “Stop being difficult, and just let me take you home.”

Hamish’s grin rivalled the Cheshire cat, and I rolled my eyes with a huff. “Aye, alright then.”

I nodded and came up beside him, brushing his shoulder unintentionally with mine, my heart skipping a little when he didn’t step away. We strolled in comfortable silence, side by side, through the street. There was hardly anyone else around except for the few people who left the pub and the restaurant as we passed, but nothing more. It felt...unusual. London would still be bustling at this time of night, but this was a nice, calm change of pace.

Especially with the right company.

Hamish hadn’t been joking when he’d said he didn’t live far. We’d barely been walking ten minutes before he slowed to

a stop. “This is me.”

“Oh.”

From what I could see of it under the mix of moonlight and motion sensor wall lamps, Hamish’s home was exactly what I’d have envisioned for him: a magical fairy cottage with a thatched roof that was more rounded than straight-edged, wood panelling, and window shutters. It had been plucked right out of a storybook. There was no other explanation for its whimsicalness.

Then again, I was convinced Hamish belonged in the pages of a book, too, so it fit.

Much like where I stayed, it was beside the loch, but if I’d thought mine had a prime view, this was on another level entirely. It practically sat in it—or *over* it. There was a grassy slope down to the pebbled waterfront, so close that had there been no lighting at all, I guarantee I would’ve tumbled arse over tit. Even with the lighting, there was every chance it’d still happen.

The night was young.

I turned to say my goodbyes to Hamish, my mouth open and words already formed on my tongue, but something moved in my peripherals. I did a double take, staring at the spot until my eyes watered, begging me to blink, and sure enough, there was something in the distance, gliding aimlessly across the loch.

A reminder of last night came rushing back to me. “What the fuck is that?”

“What’s what?”

My feet were already staggering forward before Hamish replied. It was like I was being reeled in by an invisible force, sliding down the dirt to investigate. It took me a few seconds to register that Hamish hadn’t followed, so I pointed to whatever was still floating on the water’s surface, praying I wasn’t imagining things. “Over there. Something’s moving.”

The shape was long with a thicker rear and seemingly slithered along like a serpent, dipping slightly at the front

before resurfacing. Was...was it the monster? I could scarcely believe I was even entertaining the idea, but I was apparently running short of any other explanation. My mind was unhelpfully blank, my brain empty of all rational thought as my body rooted in place.

Could it really be Nessie?

“That’s a pile o’ leaves, ye daft shite,” Hamish called out, snapping me from my daze, and my face instantly grew hot.

I glanced over again, squinting for better focus.

And yes. It was, in fact, a massive pile of dead leaves.

*Bugger.*

“I’m loving this enthusiasm,” he chuckled, and despite my embarrassment, I couldn’t help shaking my head and huffing out a laugh alongside him. “It was only hours ago ye were telling me you didn’t believe.”

“It’s all your bloody stories. They’re making me see things.” I trudged up the bank, taking Hamish’s hand for balance when he offered it. I obviously hadn’t forgotten what I’d seen last night—or what I *thought* I saw.

Those bright green lights, whether real or a drunken vision, had stuck with me, and it was playing on my mind. I couldn’t explain it, but I was starting to think maybe there was *some* truth to all the supposed sightings. I wasn’t quite at the stage of calling the news to tell them I’d discovered the beast, but there could be *something* lurking in the loch.

A giant glow-in-the-dark fish, perhaps?

“Are you free tomorrow by chance?” he asked, cutting through my musing. Tomorrow, I’d planned on taking a jaunt over to Inverness to see what it was all about, but it could wait.

“I’ve no plans.”

“Museum’s shut on Wednesdays.” He shrugged. “Wondered if you’d fancy spending the day wi’ me? I could show you the best place for a picnic.”

I blinked. “Like...a date?”

“If ye like.”

I couldn’t explain the giddiness I felt at that second, even if I tried; it was strange and wonderful all at once. I hoped my surprise—and the smile that crept onto my face—didn’t look manic, but I supposed the heat on my cheeks would probably even it out. “I’d— Yeah, I’d love to. I’ve actually been meaning to ask if you wanted to go to dinner with me, but I bottled it every chance I got.”

He didn’t even bother trying to stifle his amusement. “I noticed. Thought I’d better make the first move myself before I died of auld age.”

I shot him a flat look. “You’re such a cheeky little brat.”

He smirked as if to further prove that statement correct. “What d’ye say to combining our plans—picnic in the afternoon and dinner later on?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Braw.” He smiled. “Now, I know you’re no a fan of mornings, so how about twelve o’clock outside the museum?”

I nodded—I’d already discovered that I was willing to sacrifice sleep to spend the day with this lad, so anytime was good for me. “Sure.”

“Alright. Well, I’ll see you tomorrow.” There was a beat of silence, a split second that felt like minutes, where we stood and stared at each other, breathing slowly and in sync.

I wanted to lean in and kiss him, to count his freckles with my tongue and see how far down they went. My body even swayed toward him ever so slightly like a magnetic pull, but it was too soon. Was it? “Eh, yeah.” I cleared my throat. “See you tomorrow.”

I caught Hamish’s lips twitching with knowing, and it was the second—possibly third—time I’d wondered if he could read my mind. He didn’t say another word, just swayed his hips as he walked up his path to his front door. He was teasing



me, that much was clear, so I humoured him, stuffing my hands in my jacket pockets as I fixed my eyes on the display.

It wasn't until his keys jingled in the lock that I returned to Earth. "Wait, what do I bring?"

"Just yer handsome self," he flung over his shoulder with a wink. "And wear comfortable shoes. There's quite a bit of hiking."

The door snicked shut.

Hell's teeth, I must've liked the lad more than I let on. First, it was an early morning boat tour, and now, *hiking*? What was happening to me? And what would I agree to next?

Cross country?

Cliff diving?

*Camping?*

I shuddered at the thought.



## CHAPTER FOUR

“**F**or the love of fuck, please tell me we’re nearly there.”

Hamish chuckled, not even sounding one bit out of breath, while I was puffing and panting like a dog in heat. “Aye, no far,” he assured me, and I would’ve celebrated if I had an ounce of energy left. “Just over that wee dip.”

His *wee dip* was like his *wee bit chilly* the other day—a total understatement. But I powered through, determined to see this “perfect spot” Hamish had raved about. I also didn’t want to disappoint the lad. He seemed delighted to be out and about and at one with nature, so who was I to piss on his parade? That, and the fact that his infectious smile would persuade me to climb Mount Everest if he asked.

My complaints were just something else to do with my mouth other than heave.

Hamish’s long legs ate up the gap between us, and the end of the scenic trail and my pride pushed me to stay hot on his heel. As soon as we reached the top—or what Hamish had pointed out as the top—I bent over, hands on my knees, catching my breath, eyes blurry from sweat. But once my vision cleared and my gaze flicked up, the pain was forgotten.

I had to blink just to be sure I wasn’t hallucinating.

“Oh, wow.”

It was unbelievable. Miles and miles of trees and babbling brooks, all trickling down the banks like waterfalls. Fluffy white clouds hung over the distant hills, almost kissing them with their closeness. I could see the castle with tiny dots clambering over the aged ruins from here, then there was the sleepy little village and the boats gliding up and down the loch, water foaming behind them. I'd thought it was a grand sight from the ground, and it was, but nothing could have prepared me for the view of Loch Ness from above.

Had I not expended all my breath on the way up here, that scenery would've demanded it.

“Bonnie, isn't it?” Hamish's soft voice brought me out of my daze, and I nodded absently.

“It is that.”

Hamish shucked off his backpack and began setting up the picnic. I'd never been on a picnic, and if I was being truthful, I was pretty excited about it. Now that my lungs weren't threatening to burst, and my throat wasn't burning, I could say with one hundred percent honesty that Hamish had been right. The hike was worth it. I might've been a little giddy from the sudden respite, but the view was breathtaking, and as Hamish laid out all the food he'd brought on the blanket he'd spread across the grass, I knew I'd have walked twice the distance just to experience this.

Well, maybe once and a half.

“Come, sit yer arse down.” Hamish patted the space beside him. He was already sitting with his legs crossed, looking like a picture of pure relaxation in the rare Scottish sunshine. “Would ye like a ham and cheese piece or pasta salad?”

I hurried away from gawping at the view to kneel down on the plush blanket next to him. “Em, pasta, please.”

Hamish handed me a rubber fork and a matching Tupperware dish with what appeared to be chicken-mayo pasta. Opening the lid to take a proper look confirmed it. I wasted no time shovelling it in, sighing with appreciation at

the first forkful, which made Hamish preen. It might've been a simple dish, but it was seasoned to perfection, and it brought back some fond memories of when Mum used to make it for Penny and my packed lunches.

Hamish settled down with his sandwich, and we ate in peaceful silence. There were plenty of other things laid out that took my fancy: a selection of fresh fruits, cheese and crackers, some bite-sized cakes from the bakers, and even a few familiar white baggies that I recognised came from the sweet shop. "You went to Betty's?"

"Aye. I thought after dragging ye up here, you'd deserve a wee sweetie as a reward."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say something corny like "You're reward enough," but I scoffed down another bite of pasta instead—while smiling like an absolute goon.

Once my dish was empty, I moved on to picking at some cut-up apples and grapes, then I tasted a cake or two just to be sociable as I basked in the calm and quiet. It was sunny but not warm, so I shuffled closer to Hamish to leech off his body heat. Christ knew, he always ran abnormally hot, which made me wonder if that'd still be the case if he were sat here naked. And *fuck*, that just opened up a whole thought spiral that I hadn't needed to go down in the middle of a picnic.

"Look, a rainbow," I mumbled through a mouthful of fondant fancy, grateful for the timely distraction.

It had been raining earlier that morning, according to Hamish, but it dried up before we'd set out. I'd asked him what his backup plan had been, and when he'd replied, "A picnic, but wi' raincoats," I had never been more relieved that I was a late sleeper. Luckily, the blanket he brought was thick and made to withstand the unpredictable Scottish weather, so even though the grass was damp, it wasn't soaking through.

"Did ye know," Hamish said wistfully as he stared up at those colours arching overhead. "That some folks believe rainbows are a sign of loved ones watching o'er ye?"

I'd heard that somewhere before, probably from Mum, among all her other superstitions. I had to laugh. She'd have liked Hamish with his imagination and his Nessie theories. Christ, they would've nattered for hours if the Loch Ness Monster was the topic of conversation. "Yeah, em...it's a nice thought."

I gazed over at Hamish as he lounged on his back across his side of the blanket, seemingly engrossed in the pastel sky. His cheeks had a sun-kissed glow to them, pinkened in the slight chill but illuminated and soft-looking. His orange waves were glinting like amber, and his eyes, *my god*, his eyes were surreal. He was magical, Fae or fairy, it didn't matter, but he had bewitched me, stoked a desire inside me that I'd forgotten was there.

He must've sensed my attention on him, but even when he peered over at me, I didn't shy away. "What?"

"Can I kiss you?"

He propped himself on his elbow and raised his chin towards me, his eyelashes fluttering. "Aye."

I shuffled closer and cupped the side of his face as I dipped down, slowly slotting our lips together in a gentle kiss. It was almost chaste, but still managed to make my head swim and dick perk up. I may have even groaned against his mouth, pressing in harder when he smirked. I wanted more, so much more. It took everything in me not to pin him to the ground and kiss him breathless, to unbutton his jeans and palm his length to see what he looked and sounded like sobbing with pleasure, but I restrained myself.

Barely.

When we parted, Hamish bumped his nose against mine, and it was so delicate, so intimate, that I felt stripped bare. "I'm a fan of the stubble," he whispered against my lips before retreating, a mischievous grin dimpling his cheeks. "I'll bet it feels wonderful in all the right places."

I groaned, shaking my head. "You're the devil."

To take my mind away from how the front of my jeans had grown a little snug, I scoured over what was left of the spread. We'd devoured most of the savoury, and though it was a test of strong will to ignore the remaining cakes and sweets, I decided it best to quit while I was ahead. The thought of going back down that hill with a full stomach made me queasy. Plus, if we were having dinner later, I didn't want to go overboard.

Actually, that reminded me...

"Where would you like to go for dinner tonight?" I asked as he stacked the leftovers back into his bag, leaving the bottles of water out. "If that's still on the cards?"

"Course it is! And I hope ye don't mind, but I booked us a table at the Loch's Inn." He grinned indulgently. "It's a favourite o' mine."

"No, that's perfect. I've been wanting to try it out." The Loch's Inn was slightly further out from my cottage, so I hadn't bothered to venture out to it yet. But from my Google search, the menu looked fantastic, and if it was Hamish's favourite, well, I trusted his judgement. "And, er, thank you, by the way."

"What for?"

"The picnic? The...*everything*?" I laughed, but it fell flat. In truth, I wanted to give more than just my presence. I'd never done the whole *date* thing, but shouldn't I be making more of an effort? Being more involved? "I mean, you've planned all of this, and I'm feeling just a tad useless."

"Och, no at all," he insisted. "I asked you out, so it's only right that I make the plans." I hummed in acknowledgement, but it mustn't have hit the right note because he nudged me playfully and added with a teasing lilt, "But if ye really do feel awful about it, you can foot the bill."

A smile split my face, and a weight lifted from my chest. "Deal."



It was dark by the time we left the restaurant, and I would be a liar if I said I hadn't smiled when I felt Hamish's hand slipping into mine. It was the only occasion I'd cursed the short distance between my cottage and the village square. I didn't want the night to end, and when we reached my front door, I had to drop my eyes to the gravel to hide my disappointment.

A finger tapped the underside of my chin, vying for my attention, and once my gaze met his, Hamish brushed his lips against mine in the softest kiss. It was over before I could truly process it, and Hamish was stroking the side of my face, staring down at me as if he didn't want to leave. "You better get inside," he urged, his voice low and growly, and after another moment of relishing his touch and warmth, I reluctantly stepped away.

Hamish lingered on the path, chuckling as I struggled to dig out my key from my jean pocket and unlock the door. I turned to say goodnight but instantly changed my mind when he smirked. We'd had a lot of fun, and I couldn't help but think it would be a shame to leave it there. A waste, really, when Hamish stood there looking like the sweetest treat. I wanted to entice him inside and devour every inch of him, fuck him senseless, and hear him moaning my name in that sexy Scottish brogue. And judging by the way he gravitated towards me, almost prowling up the path with intent, I guessed he wanted the same thing.

I bounced on the balls of my feet, thankful that the dim lighting probably hid my blush and even more grateful for Hamish's confidence where mine seemed to lack. "Fancy coming in for a cuppa?"

Hamish shot me a look that suggested the last thing he was interested in was tea.

And I couldn't agree more.

"Aye, why not."



My back slammed against the front door, having barely shut it behind us before Hamish was on me, lips crashing down onto mine, his tongue seeking. He was feral, a fox pouncing on its prey and taking charge.

And I'd never gone from soft to iron-stiff so fast in my fucking life.

Hamish paused for breath, taking off his glasses and setting them atop the unit in the hallway—for safekeeping, I assumed. “Let’s hope I dinnae leave without those.”

Taking advantage of the opportunity, I grazed my knuckles across his cheekbone, admiring the cluster of hidden freckles now visible to me. “You look different without them.”

“Is that a good or a bad thing?”

My thumb travelled downward, sweeping over his kiss-bruised bottom lip, my gaze following the motion. “I’m convinced that nothing about you could ever be a *bad thing*.”

Hamish’s eyes narrowed, but he smiled, making my heart skip. “Smooth.”

We ripped at each other’s clothes, throwing every piece in its own heap as we staggered into the living room. It was my turn to press Hamish against the wall, and I did so as soon as his shirt was peeled off his broad shoulders.

“You’re so pretty,” I murmured, drinking in the sight of him. My gaze skimmed over his lean chest and trim waist that led to curved hips and a valley of red curls peeking out from the waistband of his briefs. “But I knew you would be.”

Hamish’s grin turned smug. “Yer no too bad yourself.” And then we were kissing again, losing our boxers in the midst, parting only for a second.

My lips trailed down the arch of his neck, mouthing at those cute little marks that I’d waited forever to count. He tilted his head back to give me more access, grabbing handfuls



of my arse to draw us belly to hip. “Had I known my freckles made ye this horny, we’d have done this sooner,” he groaned with a note of that cheekiness I adored. “*Christ*, yer a big boy, aren’t ye?”

I cursed as he rut forward, grinding his dick into mine, the height he had over me making it so much hotter. I was so lost in the overwhelming sense of relief that I missed his hand snaking between us, his long fingers gripping us both with a tight fist. “Just feel how different we are,” he purred, and I let my head sag against his shoulder as I basked in each lazy stroke. “Seriously, what do ye feed on? Yer twice the size!”

I snorted. “And I’m now realizing, no matter what you say, it turns me on.”

“I’ve got that Highland charm,” he snarked, and I couldn’t disagree. “I’m gaggin’ to ride ye.”

How I’d managed not to come right then was beyond me.

Straightening up, I stepped back when his hand fell away. “Let’s move this to a more comfortable spot, then.” I crowded Hamish further into the room, but before we could reach the sofa, an important thought clicked in my mind. “Shit’s sake,” I sighed. “I don’t have any Johnny’s...or lube.”

Hamish’s face lit up with an impish grin. “Would ye think me an awful tart if I said I’d brought my own?”

“Fuck, no—unless you’re into that kind of thing.” I winked, and Hamish didn’t deny it. I filed that detail away for later. “Where are they?”

“Bag. Side pocket.”

“Smart little bugger,” I teased, unzipping the pouch and rummaging blindly for what we needed. “I probably should be offended that you think I’m so easy, but truthfully, I’ve been thinking about bending you over all bloody day.”

“It pays to be prepared.” He shrugged. “And next time, dinnae hesitate. I’m no opposed to being fucked in the woods like an animal.”

My cock pulsed at the thought. “Oh, next time, is it?”

Hamish crossed his arms over his chest and tipped his head back, sighing skyward. Dramatically. “If you hurry up and get yer cock in me, aye, maybe you’ll get another go.”

I nearly tripped over my feet in my rush back to him.

Hamish snorted, and I grimaced. “Yer no very graceful, are ye?”

“It’s been a while.”

“Well then, why don’t you sit back...” Hamish nudged me roughly onto the couch, straddling my thighs before my bare arse even hit the cushions. “And let me play the leader, hm?”

“Fine by me.”

Hamish claimed my mouth as he guided my hands to his chest, a wordless request for them to roam over his naked skin, to touch and squeeze and worship. I obeyed the silent command, greedy to feel every inch of him under my fingertips. Too soon, he broke the kiss, his lips red and glistening with spit. I chased after his mouth, not yet satisfied with my exploration, but he smirked down at me, assertive and sure.

“Enough o’ that,” he crooned. “Touch me, and I’ll open up my hole for yer cock.”

*Fucking Christ.*

Again, I submitted eagerly to his will, pinching and biting at his nipples as he popped open the bottle of lube, coating his fingers, before looping his arm around to prep himself. For *me*. The sound he let out was obscene, and my accompanying whimper couldn’t have been any less so.

He grew more and more impatient, shameless with lust, his bicep strained, and the tendons in his beautiful neck stretched as the lewd squelching picked up in momentum. His cock twitched against mine, sliding through the wetness leaking from the tip. The friction was a delicious torment, and the pressure in my spine heightened; it could no longer be ignored.

Hamish looked like the perfect temptation above me, and if I needed any more proof that he was some kind of magical

creature sent from the wilderness to turn my brain to mush, then there it was. I was a weaker man than I anticipated, and the need to have him was too much to bear, so I reached around and stuffed two fingers in alongside Hamish's. We moaned together; him, no doubt, at the burning stretch, and me, because of the silky, velvet heat hugging my fingers, sucking me in. He must've used half the bottle of lube; he was soaking wet, the slick dribbling into the well of my palm.

"You're so hot inside," I gasped in awe. "Like a furnace. You're going to melt my cock like a bastard candle."

Hamish's gruff chuckle tapered off into a wanton groan. "So, there's a chance it might actually fit, then?"

"Oh, honey, it'll fit."

"Fuck, say that again."

"*Honey?* You like that?" His head bobbed, expelling little punches of breath as he rocked onto my fingers, eyes screwed shut, lips parted. "You taste like honey, you know. So tooth-achingly sweet, like pure sugar. I can't get enough."

I dragged my tongue up the centre of his chest, licking ribbons into the blushing flesh. My mouth gravitated to his nipple, latching on, my teeth grazing the puffy bud as I pressed my thumb into the crease of his thigh, and crooked my two fingers—as well as his—inside his sopping hole.

Hamish grit his teeth, eyelashes fluttering open as his free hand tangled itself in the hair at my nape. "If ye keep doing that, I'll come before you're even in me."

"Can you come twice that fast?" I'd half-expected a no or a shake of his head. It was rare to manage a second time in one go, but Hamish nodded dumbly.

And he just couldn't get more perfect, could he?

I tugged at his rim, stretching him wider as I lapped and sucked at his sensitive nipple. Hamish came just like that, with our fingers buried inside him and my mouth working his raw skin. He was ethereal as he drowned in his passion, choking out his moans as he shot his load over my chest and trembled through the shocks. His cheeks were rosy pink, the green of

his eyes fully encompassed in black. I thought he'd need to take a breather and slow right down until he was ready to go again, but it seemed as if his desire only doubled, his determination shadowing his heated expression.

Hamish withdrew his fingers, and I did the same as he tore open the condom packet and rolled the slippery latex over my cock. The kiss of his fingertips against the source of my torment felt unbelievable, and I had to bite my lip to stifle the embarrassing whimper gathering on my tongue. Hamish hovered on his knees, notched my length against his hole, and seated himself in one, fluid glide.

“Christ,” he hissed, clutching my shoulders to the point of pain. “I can feel ye in my throat.”

I laughed, but it was stilted, focusing on not blowing my load as soon as he started moving. It was tentative at first, with his palms flat on my pecs, he rose halfway before dropping his weight back down. Once he had a proper feel of my size and his body had relaxed to accommodate, he sped up, lifting and sinking again and again, wild and desperate. His dick perked up gradually, going from limp to hard as nails when I planted my feet solidly on the carpet and used the leverage to buck up to meet his undulations.

“You feel so good, m’eutail. I’m so fucking full,” he muttered, and I’d be sure to ask him what that word meant when I wasn’t reeling with sensation. He took one of his hands from my chest to rest it low on his stomach, and I knew the very second that he pressed against the slight bulge. His back went taut, and the moan that tore out of his throat was fused with a whine. “That’s it, right there. Don’t stop.”

I forced more power into my thrusts, really drilling my heels into the ground so I could hit that spot over and over with brutal precision. But I could scarcely handle the way he tightened around me, his hole strangling my cock, hungry for my release.

I wasn’t going to last.

Watching—and *feeling*—Hamish bounce on my cock was fucking euphoric, and in that moment, nothing in the world

compared. I almost feared that I'd never experience this level of pleasure ever again. I closed my eyes against the insistent throb in my belly, but fingers grasped my chin with a strength I'd foolishly underestimated, startling them wide open again.

"Keep them open," Hamish demanded, his voice a low, resonant purr. "I want to see how yer pretty eyes sparkle when you come."

And I was a goner.

I might've been a little bit in love.

My fingers dug into Hamish's hips for purchase, and I shoved up hard, snarling through clenched teeth as my orgasm slammed into me, knocking me senseless. Hamish threw his head back, lithe muscles tensing, nipples prickling with goosebumps as he cursed his pleasure to the ceiling. He stroked his cock, grinding down on me until he wrung every last drop of cum from my balls and re-coated my chest in his own spend.

"Fuck, you're unbelievable," I groaned, sagging into the sofa when he finally collapsed against me in a shivering heap, sated and breathing heavily. "Your arse especially."

Hamish huffed into my neck, "Glad ye think so."

I brought my arms around him, pinning him close, wanting to savour the warmth of his body, inside and out. I nuzzled his shoulder, planting soft kisses on the flushed skin, lazily following the constellation of light brown freckles to the sensitive spot behind his ear. "You're so beautiful; did you know that?"

"You've said."

I hummed. "You deserve to hear it more often."

He leaned back, staring down at me, cupping my face in his hands, thumbs caressing my stubbled cheeks. For a long moment, we just locked eyes and didn't say a word, but then he lowered his lips to mine, kissing me, gentle and sweet. I sighed happily, chasing the taste of him on my tongue, the faint earthy-tartness of strawberries, but the simple delight was short-lived.

He lifted up from my lap, hissing as my dick slid from his well-used hole, and backed off the sofa. I couldn't pretend I wasn't miffed at the loss of his weight on me. "You alright?"

"Course," he assured me as he gathered his clothes from the floor, slipping effortlessly into his briefs and jeans. "But it's late. I've work the 'morrow."

A thrum of panic swelled in my chest. "Did I say something wrong?"

"What? No, no at all. I— I had fun the day." He tugged his sleeveless cardigan over his shirt, and a part of me preened at how dishevelled he looked, but the other part was too busy worrying about what had caused such a one-eighty. "But, eh, I don't think we should take this further. Relationship-wise."

*Ah.*

I straightened. "O-kay?"

"I mean, yer only here two more weeks," Hamish sped on. "It'd be silly to get properly involved for such a short time—and long-distance ain't my thing."

There was something else, a deeper motive for why he was suddenly dodging about like a thief in the night, but I wouldn't pry. He obviously didn't want to tell me. It hurt a bit to admit, but I understood his reluctance. I liked the lad, we clicked, and our chemistry was electric, but I'd be going home soon, and while the thought of leaving was already dampening my mood, bringing sentiment into whatever this was wouldn't be practical.

Despite what I'd felt in the heat of the moment, this was a holiday fling, and nothing more.

But still.

"No, I get it. This was just a bit of fun." I scrubbed my hand across the back of my neck as he tied the laces of his boots, flushing for an entirely different reason than the after-sex glow. "But that doesn't mean we can't still see each other while I'm here, right? I really enjoy spending time with you, Hamish, and selfishly or not, the last thing I want is to lose your company or friendship."

Hamish turned to face me. “Don’t be daft,” he agreed enthusiastically—which cut my worries by half. “I’m rather fond of yer company, too, and I wasn’t joking when I suggested a fuck in the woods.”

I laughed, and though his eyes hinted at regret, he grinned at me so honestly that I knew it wasn’t directed at what we’d done. “I can get behind that.”

He leered, and I was already rolling my eyes at his saucy wink. “I’d hope it’d be me you get behind.”

“Do you really have to go?”

“Aye.” His smile faltered, and it was as much an apology as a refusal. He slung the picnic bag over his shoulder. “But I’ll see ye again soon.”

“Tomorrow, probably,” I added without skipping a beat. “I’m realizing, in a village the size of a big Tesco, that I’d have to lock myself in my room if I didn’t want to bump into you.”

That got a laugh—a rich, unrestrained laugh that I’d probably hear in my sleep tonight. “Tomorrow, then.”

I nodded, and he swept out of the room. I sat there on the sofa, alone, with my flaccid dick out and my pubes still sticky with lube and cum, contemplating the crushing disappointment I felt as the front door snicked shut.

*Well, shit.*



## CHAPTER FIVE

I woke up sweating, my hips mindlessly churning against the mattress, feverish with need. I panted into my pillow as arousal coiled, hot and insistent, below my spine. My cock had its own heartbeat, every single nerve sending a beacon of sensation, and I knew without looking that I'd soaked the sheets.

I'd dreamt of the loch again. Not the miles of murky water, but whatever hid underneath it. I hadn't been dipping my toes like last time; I was sinking, down and down into the black depths, but not drowning. Something smooth and thick had wrapped around my calf before dragging me under the surface. There was no fear. No panic or dread, just a willing sacrifice, a surrender.

And a strange desire that I couldn't explain but needed to be satisfied.

I slid my arms under my pillow, bunching my fists into the fabric as I rose to my elbows for better purchase. Nothing mattered except chasing an end to the maddening itch that wouldn't relent, grinding down faster and harder, groaning in frustration as it seemed to build and build with no relief in sight.



Desperately, my thoughts clung to the fantasy of a presence hovering in the abyss behind me...a great, looming entity that I hadn't been able to make out in the darkness but I could *feel*. There was a pressure cradling my body, safe and secure like a lover's embrace, grounding me, even though I was floating. Then something had traced down the knobs of my spine, a slickness I'd known wasn't from the water but something seeking, *claiming*. And when the tapered tip had probed at my hole, wriggling past the rim of tight muscle, I'd cried out, the sound garbled and the water bubbling around me.

It was odd and vivid, and even now, as I fucked my crumpled bedding, the sensations were branded onto my skin, lingering. The way my body had welcomed the phantom intrusion, loosening instinctually, giving me nothing but the feeling of fullness and toe-curling pleasure. I had stirred awake just as that slippery length had slid all the way in, reality breaking through the dream, leaving me with fragments of the illusion.

I balanced on one arm and snaked the other underneath my body, fingers tightening around my cock, stroking frantically, desperate to come. But when I finally did, it was disappointing at best. It didn't explode like the anticipation had let on; it fizzled out, leaving me wanting. Filling me with the need to sob.

Irritated, I flopped onto my back, letting out a long, worn-out sigh as the daze whittled away. Why was my hand suddenly not enough? I could probably blame Hamish for that. But shit, what the bloody hell was happening to me?

I'm not saying the dream wasn't hot, but that was *new*, even for me. In my line of work, it was typical to have a search history full of the weird and wonderful; things that I'd get funny looks for if I asked anyone other than Google. Nothing much fazed me anymore. I'd researched tentacles and the like more than once for porn *and* anatomy purposes, and while, yeah, they were pretty sexy, I didn't think they'd left a lasting impression.

Had my pent-up sexual frustration—which I hadn't even known I had until last night—merged with the last few days of hearing Nessie *this*, Nessie *that*, and given my imagination a pass to just go crazy?

Probably.

It was the most logical explanation. Dreams were often a scramble of nonsense, so I'd try not to dwell on it too hard—lest I give myself a raging case of blue balls.

Christ, one night of passionate fucking, and I was hornier than teenage me when I'd just discovered what my dick was for.

But unlike then, there was nothing I could do about it.



I was in a strop. I'd gone from mildly grumpy to having a storm cloud above my head within hours, so I'd stayed inside most of the day, not wanting to subject anyone to my horrendous mood. I didn't know why I took that as a signal to open up my laptop for the first time since I got here, but after three naps, a piss-poor lunch, and another go at relieving my frustration—it hadn't worked—I went ahead and opened it anyway.

That was three hours ago.

The cursor flashed on the empty page as if it was laughing at me, emphasizing my failure with every condescending blink. I wanted to chuck it out the window and listen to it smash into a million pieces against the pavement in retaliation, but I didn't. Future less-crabby me wouldn't appreciate it. I switched it off instead, packing it away in its case so that it was no longer in my line of fire. I slumped back into the sofa cushions, looking down at my naked torso and the boxers I still hadn't changed from this morning.

My lip curled with distaste.

Was I seriously wallowing in self-pity because of *a dream*? Or was it because I was secretly—not-so-secretly—miffed that Hamish rejected the idea of a relationship? No, I wasn't going to dig myself into a rabbit hole about that. It was a logical move; have fun while I was here and then go our separate ways. There was no point in getting attached when we'd probably only manage to see each other twice a year—what with our work and the distance. It made perfect sense for Hamish to nip it in the bud now before either of us got too interested. I understood.

So why did it still sting?

I sighed. I'd stooped to a new low, clearly. I probably should've cut my losses, called it a day, and slept it off, but the stubborn part of me wouldn't give in. I was still convinced I could pull my head out of my arse and do something productive with the rest of my night—*what* exactly, I was intrigued to know. With Hamish fresh in my thoughts, perhaps I could call in on him? See if he was willing to help lighten the mood with his clever tongue.

No. Booty calls weren't the answer.

Not tonight, at least.

All I needed was a shower, some decent food, and fresh air—or that would be a start. I'd keep Hamish on the back burner, just in case.



After dinner, I bought a torch and some sweets at the local shop and wandered down to the waterfront. I took my notepad with me, too, in case the pebbles and moonlight sparked any inspiration. I parked my arse on the bank, the grass being a much better seat than the rocks further down. I positioned the torch between my knees, opened my book to the first blank page, and with my pen in hand, rested the tip against the paper.

Nothing happened.

Of course, it didn't.

Maybe I'd run out of imagination? For ten years, I'd been an author, so the fountain of ideas was bound to run dry at some point. I had expected another thirty years, at least, but to be in a place like this and drawing a blank made it clear to me that something had turned itself off. I wrapped my arms around my knees, hugging them tight as I fixated on the dim dot from my torch in the distance.

I'd come to Scotland for a break, not to beat myself up over something I couldn't control, but it still felt shite. I honestly thought coming here would somehow magically kickstart my muse, be the bullet up my arse that I needed to recover my flow, but apparently not. I was less than a week into my trip, so it was probably way too soon to admit defeat, but I was close. If a miracle didn't happen soon, I was packing up and going the fuck home.

My torch flickered, snapping me to attention, and I noticed something blocking the beam of light. A silhouette drifted past as water broke around it. My brow furrowed, and I grabbed the torch, aiming it in the direction the mass was floating, but it was gone. All there was left were ripples and a motion in the surface of the water that seemed to be sneaking away. I was on my feet in an instant, tripping over a mound of sand in my hurry to follow whatever the hell that was. It was probably a fish or another pile of leaves, but the pursuit of *nothing* was infinitely more attractive than sitting here moping.

The current led me to a bend in the loch, and with a quick scan with my torch, I noticed a small crack in the rock formation ahead—a cave. I could've sworn I'd walked this far in daylight *twice* and never spotted a cave entrance before. Sure, it was pretty well disguised by the cragginess of the cliffs, but was I really so oblivious to my surroundings?

I didn't bother with a mental risk assessment; I just rapidly ducked my way inside.

I'd curse my unusual lack of self-preservation later.

My boots crunched into the sand instead of pebbles, and my awed gasp echoed off the high walls. There was much

more space than what the entrance suggested. It was on the side of a cliff, but I hadn't quite expected a tiny wee beach. Sand and water met in the middle, and though the only light source came from my torch and the filtering of moonlight, I knew that the water was clear, the sand was golden, and the cave walls glittered like diamonds. It was a beautiful, secret hideaway, the perfect spot for peace and contemplation—and writing. It was too dark to unfold my notepad now, but nothing could stop me from returning tomorrow to see this hidden gem flooded with sunlight.

Maybe it would finally bring all the inspiration I needed.

“Tomorrow,” I promised, the corner of my mouth tugging upward. I stepped away, turning to the entrance, pondering if I should leave myself a trail to make sure I found the place again.

A roaring crash had me subconsciously spinning back around.

The water parted in front of me, and something immense sprung from below the depths. I clapped a hand over my mouth to stifle my cry, but I lost my balance. I was stumbling, my arse hitting the ground with a dull thud. The sand softened the blow, but my arse still throbbed, and the shock was suppressing all my senses. My notepad and torch had scattered, but the circle of yellow light pointed straight to the source of the commotion.

I stared.

And stared some more.

It was... No, it couldn't be.

This was it. I had finally gone mad.

The creature—which looked an awful lot like Nessie but I wasn't yet wholly convinced—didn't move an inch. Its muzzle just hung over me as if it was giving me a minute to gawk and process. Or it was sizing me up, debating if it could swallow me whole or if I'd be a two-bite situation. I didn't even want to consider the answer to that. It was a *fantasy* creature; not much was recorded on its fucking eating habits.

The beast's wide nostrils flared, and I wouldn't lie and say it didn't make my stomach fall out of my arse. I might've even stopped breathing as it lowered its neck, inching closer and closer to my face until I could feel the warmth of its breath against my cheeks. I cringed as its nose hovered above my head, its soft huffs parting my hair and tickling my scalp. Was it...smelling me?

I tried to swallow, but my throat was too dry. I had always wondered if I'd be a fight-or-flight kinda guy in the face of danger, but apparently, I was neither. I was frozen to the spot, and worse than that? My body was reacting to the creature's closeness—to the puffs of air against my ear—in ways I couldn't control. Mortified, I slammed my thighs together to hide the growing bulge in my jeans, but with the way the beast inhaled deeply once again, I guessed my reflexes weren't quick enough.

The creature jerked back, putting a foot of distance between us, and tilted its head in what was unmistakably a "sizing-up" gesture.

Guess I was to be dinner, after all.

*Bugger.*

"Eat me whole, eat me whole, eat me whole," I chanted, my eyes screwing shut as I braced for whatever pain was to come. All I could do now was pray to whoever listened that it was quick. I wasn't a religious man, but if there was ever a time for divine intervention, I'd appreciate it now.

The beast snorted, and I peeked at it, wondering what the fuck was taking so long? But it was still in the same spot, watching me, assessing. For several minutes—which felt like hours where a creature that may or may not be planning on eating me was concerned—I banked on making a run for it, but then it hefted itself further out of the water and pissed all over that train of thought.

I crawled backwards until I bumped into the cave wall as the creature's whole body settled on the sand. "Holy fuck," I gasped, and the beast *barked* in response.

It wasn't as huge as I'd imagined—if it *was* the legendary beast. It was still pretty big, but it was no dragon. If I had to guess—since there was no other creature of its kind to go off—it was a hybrid between a plesiosaur and a snake. The depictions I'd seen weren't far off, but its body was thinner, not bulbous like on the museum sculptures. It had the typical flipper-like arms and back legs, and a tail that was tapered instead of flat at the tip and was about the same length as the rest of its body.

Its skin glistened with water droplets, darker than I'd imagined, and some ballsy part of me wanted to reach out and pet it—my arm even lifted from the ground before I realised what I was doing. As if sensing my intentions, the beast dipped its head, making a noise in its throat that was hilariously dog-like, and my fingers twitched in mid-air.

Painfully slowly, I extended my arm, my gaze flicking between my hand and the beast, not making any sudden movements. The creature huffed—and I could've sworn it rolled its eyes—before lurching forward, closing the gap. I flinched, eyes widening in surprise, but then my brain caught up with my touch, really *feeling* the texture of its skin, and all the tension in my body seemed to melt away.

The laugh that escaped my lips was relieved, stunned, and manic all in one. I couldn't pick an emotion. I was speechless as I stroked its snout in long, curious drags.

The Loch Ness Monster *was* real.

And it was *here*.

The beast felt slick—almost slimy—and velvety smooth. As it moved closer to the light streaming from my torch, I saw its skin wasn't as dark as it first appeared, more of a forest green, while its belly was slightly lighter. The creature's eyes drifted shut as I petted it, only for them to open a second later, pupils glowing an even brighter shade of green.

Blood rushed past my ears as an involuntary shudder ran from my chest to my toes. I felt a shiver deep inside, like something right and true passing through me. The beast's eyes were familiar and held an awareness in them that was damn

near human-like. It hadn't all been a dream or drunkenness. This was what—or *who*—I'd seen that night. This was the source of those emerald orbs that had stared back at me over the pitch-black loch.

Fucking *Nessie*.

Its tail swished out of the water, cutting through my musings. “You like that?” I chuckled lamely, my tongue poking out to wet my lips as I patted harder. The creature blinked. “Christ. You're one bloody magnificent beast, aren't you?”

It began to vibrate, a seemingly happy purr resounding from its chest, but on a much louder scale, as its backend jolted forward. Its tail had a mind of its own, curling and whipping through the air in an agitated dance. On impulse, I glanced underneath its body, tracking the movement, and my jaw smacked against my chest.

*Oh, it was happy alright.*

Its cock jut out from a large, puffy slit in its flesh, visibly throbbing against the sand. How I'd missed that thing slinking out of its cavern, I didn't know, but it was *there*, and my focus was glued to it.

It reminded me of a tentacle without the suckers or a whale's dick—I'd researched a lot of shit; it was a writer's thing. It was long, pink, and narrowed to a point at the end. It was so big and thick. If I had to compare, it would be the same length and girth of my leg, from knee to foot. It also flicked and twitched like a tongue, not quite as flexible as the beast's tail, but it was definitely information to file away for later. There were no balls—or none I could see—and it leaked with a copious stream of a lube-like liquid, but instead of being turned off or repulsed, my mouth watered.

*My mouth watered!*

This was strange. *Unbelievably* strange, even for me, but I couldn't stop—I didn't *want* to stop. I wanted to explore and touch. What was happening? I was losing my mind. There was something about this creature that called to me, something that



grabbed onto a baser, more instinctual part of my soul. I didn't understand it, but after the dream I'd had last night and seeing the effect I clearly had on this monster of myth, my dick fattened in my jeans.

I could blame it on fear or a messed-up cross of wires, but truthfully, I wasn't afraid. Why wasn't I frightened?

That feeling of *rightness* I'd had the first day I got here was flaring in my chest even more intensely than before. It was the danger. This was something new and exhilarating, a thrill that my life had been sorely lacking thus far, so could I really be surprised that instead of running for the hills, I was... excited?

Excitement didn't seem a strong enough word for how I felt at that moment. I was truly bewitched, caught in its thrall, and judging by the creature's shudder and groan as I trailed my fingers down its neck, it was under the exact same spell.

It? No.

*He.*

I guess Hamish had been right, but my discovery was more than that. This creature wasn't just some mindless animal; that much was blatantly obvious, with the intelligence staring back at me through those huge green eyes. I sensed it. There was more to the monster than what appeared, something I couldn't quite figure out, but as soon as I recovered a single working brain cell, I would.

Without warning, the tip of the beast's tail curled around my ankle and tugged, dragging me underneath his bulk, my legs sprawling wide. A flicker of nerves finally made itself known, but as I gulped in a lungful of the beast's familiar, briny scent, I relaxed. It soothed me, and I lay in the shadow of his massive body, wet sand up my back, heart pounding in my throat, and I submitted to whatever the fuck he wanted. His neck coiled and twisted like a snake, his snout cradling the side of my face, and the touch was so gentle, so reassuring, that I couldn't help but lean into it.

The beast's prick slithered and drooled, leaving a trail of slickness as it slid over my crotch and stomach with intent. I groaned at the heavy pressure against my hard-on, despising the barrier my jeans made between the skin on skin. The creature's next surge forward was firmer, more urgent, the echoing rumble in his chest—that vibrated deep into my bones—sounding like a wordless plea, and I knew exactly what he wanted.

He wanted to *mate*.

The Loch Ness Monster wanted to mate *with me*.

An alarm went off, a monotonous drone in the distance that I would've ignored, but it was enough to startle the beast. He moved quicker than I expected a creature of his size could, darting back into the water with a mighty splash, disappearing below the surface before I could blink. The wave he left behind clapped like thunder against the cave wall, and I half-expected his head to break through the sloshing white water and peer back at me one last time, but there was nothing.

The monster was gone.

What in the bastarding-Hell was happening?

I couldn't think straight, my dick was so hard that it hurt, and my brain was mush. I was in a daze, and all I knew was that I'd wanted him to fuck me, even though his sheer size was intimidating, and my hole protested at the thought, I'd still been ready to try. I scrambled to rip open my jeans, fumbling with the slime-covered buttons and zipper, fixating on getting off while the beast's eyes and his purpose were still fresh in my mind. I gathered the leftover slick onto my palm and wrapped my fingers around my burning skin.

My release was instant.

But not nearly enough.

My muscles seized, back bowing and legs shifting in the sand as rope after rope of cum erupted from my cock, but I just gritted my teeth and kept stroking, forcing through the raw sensitivity. It was filthy and depraved, I knew that, but I couldn't care less. My clothes and skin were drenched with a

mix of spunk, sweat, and monster precum; my dick was too slippery to grip tightly, but my pace didn't falter. It *couldn't*. I was too close to all-consuming relief that stopping or slowing down now would probably kill me.

I fucked up into my fist, chasing the promise of gratification that I hadn't reached this morning. My hole clenched on nothing, and I was tempted to shove my fingers inside. Christ knew I was wet enough, but there would be no point. Not when all I could imagine was how that beast would've split me in two had he stayed.

And I would've loved every second of it.

I sobbed when I came again. It was dry but exactly what I needed. I may have even fainted a little. The pleasure was so intense, bursting from a place deep inside me, that I couldn't control the pitiful noises cascading off my tongue or the way my body convulsed. And it wasn't until I collapsed against the cave wall, boneless and shivering, that I realised my eyes were actually watering, tears clinging to my lashes.

I'd never done that before—cried during sex *or* came twice—and as I slumped there, the fog clearing with each erratic breath, it dawned on me that tonight had been nothing but a whole load of firsts.

*Shit.*

What the actual fuck was I playing at? Anyone could've walked in here and seen me wanking over the Loch Ness Monster—the Loch Ness *fucking* Monster! Jesus. Writer's block was taking its toll even worse than I'd thought.

I tucked myself back into my jeans, grimacing at the feeling of soaked fabric on my sensitive skin—luckily, I didn't have far to walk. I snatched up my discarded notepad and torch, scanning the beam from one end of the cave to the other. Water trickled down the stones, but other than the ripples, it was perfectly calm, as if nothing had happened—maybe it hadn't?

I shook my head and left the cave with more questions than answers, trudging back to my cottage, my feet heavy. I

was sated, sexually, but I couldn't concentrate on that sensation right now, not when the voice in my head was screaming, "What the Hell, Grayson?"

I wasn't ashamed. Surprisingly, I was more startled by the knowledge that the monster was *real* rather than what we'd almost done—which might've been more cause for concern. But what should I do about it?

Forget?

Tell someone?

No chance. The thought of sharing this with the outside world made my gut churn. I didn't want anyone to know about what I saw or experienced. It wasn't for fear of disbelief, I didn't give a toss if anyone thought I'd gone mad, but after that one encounter, a protective side of me had reared its head. In my heart and soul, I wanted to be sure the creature was safe and undisturbed. Humans could be cruel, and I dreaded to think what would happen to such a magnificent beast if they caught him.

My lips were sealed. Besides, selfishly, I also wanted to keep it to myself. It was something for me and *only me*. There was a reason Nessie had revealed himself to me and no one else for thousands of years, and I'd love to find out what that reason was.

On my own.

Except there was one person I couldn't shift from my mind. I trusted Hamish. It might've been too soon to admit that, but I did. He would've loved to have experienced this—minus the sex part, maybe—and I felt I owed it to him to at least say I was no longer a non-believer. I wanted to tell him about the way the beast had looked, especially its eyes, and the *awareness* in them. I had a hunch that wasn't the only thing human about the monster under the loch, and Hamish would listen to my theories, probably chime in with more of his own.

But maybe that wasn't the best idea either. Hamish was a Nessie enthusiast, after all, and while I didn't for a minute

think he'd do anything to harm the beast, I expected he'd search for him.

And I had a funny feeling the creature would *know*.

I let out a bone-deep sigh as I unlocked the door to my cottage. I wasn't going to risk my chances of never seeing the monster again. It had left an impression on me, an imprint of sorts that I couldn't shake off—nor did I want to. I needed to figure out why I was so connected to the beast, but I was still reeling from adrenaline or desire, so the fact I couldn't spare a thought to anything other than keeping the creature safe was probably normal.

I snorted.

Less than an hour ago, I was flat on my back in the sand, hankering to be shagged raw by the literal Loch Ness Monster. You know, just a typical Thursday evening. Yeah, there was nothing remotely *normal* going on here, it was beyond bizarre actually, but in all honesty, it was about time my life picked up the pace a bit.

I hadn't quite anticipated a sprint from the word go, but here we are.



## CHAPTER SIX

“I’ve figured it out,” I announced as I pushed through the museum door, the bell rattling above my head.

Hamish was standing by the shelf at the far wall, pricing ornaments of little kilted men with bagpipes and fluffy highland cows and didn’t even bother looking up at my brash entrance. “Good afternoon, Grayson.”

I stopped in my tracks.

Oh, right. *Pleasantries*.

I’d spent most of the morning debating if I was even going to come here, and then I spent the whole walk trying to decide what I was going to tell Hamish. In all honesty, I just needed to talk to *someone*. I was going absolutely nuts in my cottage, rolling last night over and over in my head.

One thing was certain, I didn’t want to share the fine details, but after hours of reliving those intelligent green eyes, seeing them sparkle even when I tried to sleep, I’d reached a conclusion that I suspected Hamish would be willing to hear. So, I’d practically ran here once my eyes had opened without much thought in my head other than figuring out what the hell had gone on last night, but Hamish clearly wanted to see me squirm first.

“Afternoon,” I greeted with a nod, and for the first time in forever, I didn’t know what to do with my hands. Or my feet. Or my whole body, really. “Are you well?”

“Aye, quite well. You?”

“Yeah, good.”

There was a split second of awkward silence before he took pity on me, peering over with that cock-sure, teasing grin set in place. “Come on, then. What exactly have ye figured out?”

*Thank God.* I was about to burst. “How Nessie has been able to stay hidden all these years.”

Hamish continued on with his work, fingers busy, but I could tell I’d piqued his interest. “Oh?”

“They’re human,” I blurted, and Hamish’s back stiffened, probably from my volume. “Well, partly, at least. A *shifter*—like a werewolf or something.”

Hamish snorted. “You ‘hink Ness is a werewolf?”

I glared flatly at the side of his head. “No, of course, he’s not a werewolf.”

Hamish’s eyebrow cocked. “Oh, *he*, is it now?”

I froze. *Shit.* A slip of the tongue. I couldn’t tell him how I’d come to the conclusion that Nessie was, in fact, male. No matter Hamish’s interest in the beast, admitting I’d still been scrubbing his cock juices out of my jeans this morning was probably a step too far. “Eh, yeah, I’m following your lead.” I flapped my hand about. “*Anyway*...the human thing! That’s my theory, and I’m gonna try to prove it.”

“That so? Well, good luck to ye.” Hamish stuck the last few stickers on the ornaments in quick succession. I meant to ask how long he’d worked here ‘cause every task seemed as easy as breathing to him—especially those price tags, I’d have ended up with more glued to me than on the gifts—but then he turned to face me, hands on his hips, and I forgot about it. “Might I ask how you came to this conclusion when you were so sure the beastie didn’t exist but a few days ago.”

My cheeks flamed as another memory of last night flashed in my mind. There was a hint of a smirk in Hamish's voice, and it made me even more jittery. "Gut feeling."

"Mhm."

There was an odd, uncomfy feeling settling inside me, which I slowly recognised as *guilt*. We weren't even a couple. Hamish had made that perfectly clear, but it still felt a little insensitive to be thinking about someone—*something*—else when we'd literally only slept together two nights ago. I knew I couldn't carry on fumbling down that route, I'd end up creating issues and anxieties where they weren't needed, but I couldn't help it.

Not with both encounters so vivid in my mind.

"Ye get up to much last night?"

*Fuck's sake.*

He was just making polite conversation, but I bit my tongue to hold in my nervous snort. "Not much." I shrugged, aimlessly twirling the postcard stand to distract my wandering thoughts. "Went for tea in the Poachers, then had myself an early night."

"Ah, good, good."

I peeked over at Hamish just as a small smile crept onto his face. I had a notion it was a smile that I wasn't meant to see, a private moment of approval for my answer. Why was he happy to hear that I'd had a quiet night? Or was it the implication that I'd been alone that had him grinning? I tried not to hope for the latter. I didn't need any more reason to torment myself with *what if's*, but I couldn't deny it made my belly flutter and my own lips curl—hopefully discreetly—towards the ceiling.

Even if I did still feel a little skeevy.

I cleared my throat. "You know how we agreed to no relationship? But we're not closed off to the idea of *getting together* again," I said, and Hamish hummed. "Does that mean..." Ugh, how should I word it without making him think



I slept around? Not that it mattered since we *weren't together*, but I wanted to be clear on the rules.

Last night, something had taken over me, but I wouldn't have changed a thing regardless. My intentions were clear, even if I was a little lust-driven, but seeing that smile on Hamish's face sobered me up. For some reason, I wanted his explicit approval in case it happened again.

I hoped it did. But not at the cost of hurting Hamish's feelings.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but does that mean we can't still try it on with other *people*?" I used the word loosely. "I just—Well, I..."

"Och, you poor fool. Hush before ye hurt yerself," he chuckled, and I relaxed, my shoulders sagging at the melodic sound. "If ye can find anyone else in the village worth shagging, knock yerself out."

I snorted. "There's no one as good as you, I'm guessing?"

"That's no what I meant, but aye, that too." He winked. "Naw, we're just having some fun, so I'm no arsed who else you sleep wi'."

Why was his casualness bothering me? It shouldn't. That was the whole point of asking him because I wanted his approval, but now that I had it, the lack of jealousy had me feeling slightly deflated. "Okay."

"You got someone in mind?"

*Something*, more like. "Not really, I just wanted to be clear."

Hamish nodded and another of those grins passed over his lips, but it was more of a smirk that time. "Yer on holiday. Let loose. *Go wild*."

There was a note to his tone that made my pulse quicken, but he was just a sarcastic little shit, and I was being strangely paranoid. I gave a pointed cough and smiled. "Alright, then. How about you come over to mine tonight? I could make dinner." By the way Hamish snuck a sideways glance at me, I

guessed it would only be ‘dessert’ on the menu. “Or not. Whatever you want.”

“As tempting as that sounds, I’ve somewhere to be tonight,” he said, but I didn’t even get the chance to feel defeated before he added, “But I’m off the ‘morrow if yer no busy?”

I chuckled, the sound coming out gruff and sultry—*what in the Hell?* “Oh, honey. I’m here whenever and *however* you want me.”

Hamish’s gaze swung to mine, eyes darkening, and a petty smugness swelled in my chest. It took everything in me not to smirk when his jaw popped and hands flexed because now I knew that no matter what he did tonight, he’d be doing it thinking of me.



I had planned on a quiet night in. Really, I had. But I couldn’t settle. Every time I sat or lay down, I was reminded of the emptiness inside me, of the *longing*. It was persistent and too obvious to ignore. It wasn’t the *wanting* to visit the creature again that had me moseying down to the waterfront in search of his cave, but instead, it was a raw, unapologetic *need*.

I brought a blanket and an extra torch with me tonight. It was a full moon, and the great white sphere seemed to hang in the sky at the perfect angle, casting its beam through the cave entrance, but I couldn’t rely on its light. I’d ventured out later than last time, and clouds floated dangerously close to blocking out the silver glow, so I levered my torches in the sand, resolute on not missing a single thing, and then, I waited.

There was nothing but the gentle huffs of my breath and the whistle of wind outside for the longest time, but I didn’t move from my nest in the sand. I tucked the blanket over my legs and stuffed my hands into the pockets of my coat, prepared to wait all night if it was asked of me. I shivered with anticipation, my belly already clenching at the thought of what

might happen. The tug in my belly demanded that I stay put, relax, and be patient.

*He was coming for me.*

The water broke, and the beast emerged from the waves, his front legs landing with a *thud* on the sand. Even though I'd expected it, I still flinched—a natural human response to something colossal lunging at me, I liked to think. Thankfully, I was already on my arse, so there was no risk of tumbling this time. My heart took its time to cease racing, beating away in pseudo-fright as the beast seemed to study my set-up, and the snort he let out sounded almost...*pleased*.

“You’ve returned,” a voice boomed, and it took me way too long to process that it had come from the beast.

He...spoke?

For all the love that was holy, please say I hadn't accidentally sniffed something and was just hallucinating. “Y-you can speak?”

”Telepathically.”

Sure enough, his mouth hadn't opened or moved. It was all happening inside my head, that inhuman, whisky-smooth voice with an ancient Scottish lilt that had travelled through the ages. And that detail made me even more sure of what I had come here to find out.

“You’re human, aren't you?” I asked. “Obviously, not right now, but...”

The beast dipped its great head. “I can take a human form, aye.”

“I knew it!” I beamed, triumphant. “And it's good to know I haven't descended into total madness.” I chuckled softly. “A wee bit of madness is fine—I'm a writer, after all—but Christ, you're actually real.”

Nessie huffed, and it sounded suspiciously like a laugh. “I'm real.”

“Why didn't you talk to me yesterday?”

“I wanted to give ye the chance to process,” he said, his voice deep and growly, yet oddly gentle and unlike anything I’d ever heard before. “I would’ve spoken had there been no interruption.”

I paused, letting that sink in. “So, you thought I’d need to wrap my head around the *talking* thing but not the *being mounted* thing?”

The creature averted his eyes, and if it wasn’t a totally insane assumption, he seemed to look ashamed. “Last night progressed quicker than I had anticipated. But the smell of yer lust waylaid my control. I hadn’t prepared for it. You appealed to my baser urges, and I couldn’t resist.” He gazed at me again, an apology in his eyes. “I’m sorry if I startled ye.”

“Not nearly as much as it probably should have,” I responded, swallowing thickly, and a sliver of boldness took over me. My blood was already beginning to sing, my skin prickling with sensation as if the beast’s mere presence had flicked a switch. “And what about now? Are you holding yourself back or have you had your fill of me?”

Nessie rumbled, the sound vibrating right through me, and my cock gave an eager twitch. His nostrils flared as he lowered his snout close to my face, his breath hot and familiar. “I could never have enough of you, mo chridhe,” he purred, huffing and inhaling my scent. “I’ve thought of nothing else but claiming yer body, making ye mine. And you smell so good, so willing to be taken that I’m struggling to think of a reason why I shouldn’t.”

I breathed deeply. “I can’t either.” Something primal and *right* sparked in the air between us, the knot in my stomach tightening as the beast’s eyes simmered their perfect emerald.

I needed him.

Right the fuck now.

I whipped off my blanket and scrambled to my hands and knees, crawling under the monster’s bulk until I was faced with its cock. The thick, dripping length was already extending from its slit, and saliva pooled on my tongue.

Oh, god, was I really about to suck off the Loch Ness Monster?

Yes, yes, I was.

*Christ almighty.*

I'd had some questionable hook-ups in the past, but did I ever expect to have a hard-on for the literal Loch Ness Monster? No. No, I did not, but I was tethered to this beast in a way I didn't yet understand, and I was always willing to try anything once.

And since the creature had spoken to me and confessed he was *partly* human, it wasn't completely strange, right?

*Fuck it.*

I gave a tentative lick, tasting the liquid oozing from the swollen slit at the base. It was a heady mix of sweet and salty, nothing like human precum and even more addicting. I lapped it up, encouraged by the monster's echoing growls and my own eagerness to please, working my way up to taking it into my mouth. There was no way in hell I would manage to swallow more than the very tip, but if I got my hands involved, I wouldn't need to.

I let my jaw fall slack and stuck out my tongue, praying my teeth were out the way as I just went for gold. I was already here, on my knees and gagging for it, so there was no point in any more fannying about. The texture I expected from feeling it in my hands was smooth and slimy, but it was hotter in my mouth, insanely so, practically scalding my palate as I bobbed forwards and back. I hadn't taken enough to choke, but the pointed crown nudged the back of my throat, lingering right on the cusp of setting off my gag reflex.

The monster nosed at my clothed arse as I built up a steady rhythm, its tongue trying to wriggle under the waistband of my jeans before discovering they were skin-tight. Nessie huffed in frustration. "Take them off."

Withdrawing with a lewd *pop*, I wrestled with my trainers, trousers, and underwear, clumsy in my hurry to get back to sucking. I whipped off my jacket and shirt, too, for good

measure, now completely bare and too turned on to be self-conscious about it. Giving my aching jaw a small reprieve, I grabbed hold of the thick shaft, my hands nowhere near touching as I massaged and stroked. It was messy and lacked any sense of style, but Nessie groaned, thrusting forward into my grip, so I guessed it did the trick.

I dived back in, slurping and hollowing my cheeks around it, guzzling down the gathering puddle of drool and pre-cum, but some still escaped, flowing down my chin. The beast's forked tongue probed at my hole, wriggling past the tight ring to hook and tug, and get me loose and pliant for fucking. It felt like I was being tickled from the inside, and I could no longer concentrate on moving my head, so I just suckled and moaned as the monstrous appendage opened me up.

I lost time, zoning in and out of consciousness, dizzy with the rush of blood draining from my brain to other parts of my body. My dick dangled between my thighs, heavy and untouched, impatient for friction, but luckily, the beast was clearly just as needy. Nessie retracted his tongue as his tail slipped around my waist and, with inhuman strength and agility, manhandled me into the position he wanted. I was on my back as the beast hefted out of the water fully, resting his weight on his front legs, its backend dropping low, prick level with my hole.

Highlighting his neck's length and flexibility, it wormed under his body, wedging into the gap beside me. "Hold yerself open for me," he rumbled, and I dopyly tucked my hands under my knees, folding them as far as I could.

The beast purred in approval. "So obedient."

I flushed red but couldn't argue with his assessment, and I couldn't really think straight anyway as the tapered tip of his cock nudged my entrance and pushed inside. My limbs tensed and tremored with the effort to keep still as I was stretched thin. I grit my teeth against the burn, fingers pinching the skin of my knees for a distraction. There would be no going back from this. I was ruined, I could already tell. The way my insides parted to accommodate would never be achieved by anyone or anything else, and I didn't want it to. It wasn't even

that far in, only the tip, but it was enough to flip my whole world upside down.

The beast huddled close, his snout caressing my face, making soft, comforting mumbles against my ear. “Breathe, mo chridhe. Ye’ve taken me so well,” he praised, and my belly clenched. “I’ll no move ‘til yer ready.”

The pain dulled, and the feeling of fullness took over. I relaxed, inhaling and exhaling until my muscles were no longer taut and shaking. I dared a glance down, and the sight of my rim bunching around Nessie’s hot pink cock had my own length bobbing against my stomach and a moan tearing from my throat.

If I didn’t get release soon, I was going to explode.

“Fuck me.”

With a grunt, the beast began to move, gradually rocking forward, very careful not to hurt or crush me. I didn’t know the extent of the creature’s control, but restraining itself from rutting hard and fast into the vice of my body must’ve been torture. I was grateful, though. As much as I wanted to be pounded into the sand, I knew I probably wouldn’t live to tell the tale.

I ground down, unsure but desperate to come, trying to take more of his cock inside though it had nowhere left to go. I was full to the brim, and it was hitting every single nerve-ending, but I was greedy. I wanted to feel him everywhere, stuffing every space, blanketing every inch of me. “Please.”

Nessie’s abnormally long tail wove under his body and slinked up my thigh, pinning my hips to the sand. “Your body is at its limit, mo chridhe.”

He was right. If I took any more, it would hurt like a bitch, but— “I need *more*.”

The beast’s neck tilted, and his endless tongue slithered past his pointed teeth, aiming for my cock as it throbbed, painfully flushed and drooling against my stomach. “I’ve got ye,” his voice thrummed in my head, tender and laced with desire. “I’ll give ye exactly what ye need.”

I cried out as it coiled around my shaft and began stroking lightly, the two points acting as separate tongues, gliding and licking in different directions, working to turn my every thought to mush. My eyes rolled to the back of my head, my mouth falling lax as the sensations overwhelmed me. Everything was so wet and *good*, and I nearly missed the weight creeping over my chest until something slick and smooth flicked against my tongue.

I blinked, and the tip of the monster's tail was grazing my bottom lip. "Open wider," he rumbled, and I obeyed without question. "That's it. Let me inside both yer wanton holes."

I keened at the feeling of his leathery tail wrenching my jaw wide, kissing the back of my throat. *Now*, I was crammed full, and it was exactly what I needed, that extra push to have me hurtling over the edge.

I was complete.

"Come, mo chridhe," he hissed, voice strained and rough. "Give yerself to me."

I let out a muffled shout around my mouthful, and spilt onto the creature's tongue, seizing up as shock after shock flared through me. The beast's snarl was thunderous as his cock fattened, pulsing deep inside, and only when my belly expanded, did he slide out and rut against the cradle of my hip, showering my torso with the rest of his cum.

Claiming me thoroughly, inside and out.

That thought had another disorientating buzz of pleasure firing in my core, and it was too much to bear. My vision blurred at the edges, and everything went dark.



I woke unhurriedly to something wet brushing over my raw skin, soothing the delicious ache. I blinked my eyes open fully, and Nessie's head was between my thighs, licking up the river of cum flooding out of my abused hole. I clenched down on



instinct, but I knew it would probably be a few days before I closed up completely. Not that I cared. It meant I'd feel the phantom sensation of him inside me for a little longer.

“Well, that got hot very quickly,” I croaked, barely recognising the sound of my own voice. “Definitely not complaining. Just an observation.”

Nessie snorted. “I told ye, I can't help myself around you.”

“Neither can I, it seems.” I grinned lazily, and I didn't know how, but I had the faint impression that the beast smiled back. It might've been the surge of feel-good endorphins making me doolally, but he was radiating satisfaction.

Or maybe I was projecting.

The monster nuzzled the side of my face, his sleek skin rubbing against my heated cheek, and it felt as close to a kiss as I imagined he could give. “I don't wish to leave ye, but I can't stay,” his voice echoed in my head, and it was full of regret. “It's a couple of hours til morning, and I can't risk it. Believe me, I'd sleep beside ye if I could.”

“I know,” I assured him, pressing my lips to his nose. The moment was sickly sweet and far more loving than I believed I was capable of, but it felt like the most natural thing in all the world. “I'll see you again?”

“Aye,” he promised, and it helped quell my disappointment in having to part so soon. “Perhaps sooner than ye hope.”

Before I could ask what he meant, the beast brushed my temple once more, and with his tail, pulled the blanket back over my sticky, naked body. I draped the tartan layer around my shoulders, and the beast—clearly content with my comfort—slunk back into the water. “Oidhche mhath, mo chridhe.”

I had no clue what that meant, but it curled against my ear like a farewell. “Good night, my beastie.”

A devastating sense of loneliness came over me as he disappeared into the murky depths, but it was overshadowed by the buzz of fulfilment. I shuffled back until I rested against the cave wall, the rocks cooling my heated skin. I only felt a bit embarrassed by the snail trail I left behind in the sand,

mostly at the thought of someone finding the cave and possibly sitting in a mix of mine and Nessie's cum, but I had the suspicion that this alcove wasn't visible to just anyone. It was too magical, with its glittering walls and sand as soft and golden as fine brown sugar. Or that was the illusion I was feeding myself to save the mortification of ever being discovered.

I let my head loll back, eyes closing for a second to listen to the twinkle of water echoing off the high ceiling, the delicate *drip, drip, drips* as I basked in the lingering thrums of pleasure, my body, deep to my very bones, relaxed for the first time in months. I had never felt this level of pure bliss before. And I wasn't just talking about the sex, though that had definitely played a part. It was coming here to Scotland that had flamed the fire in me that had been slowly dwindling out. More than that, it was a rebirth, a reinvigoration. I felt alive. I'd known it from the second I'd stepped out of my car on that first day, and I knew it for definite now...this was where I was meant to be.

My lashes fluttered open, and I clutched the blanket around me tighter, shivering a little from the gradual comedown of adrenaline. The sense of feverish urgency and desperation I'd had before was completely gone now that I was sated, and all that was left were the aftershocks of exhilaration but also bewilderment.

There were so many questions warring in my head that I didn't have the answers to but *needed*. Was I really tied to an ancient mythical creature? And why wasn't I in the slightest bit alarmed by it? I didn't know what to address first.

I was leaving this place in a fortnight, but I couldn't go without knowing who had claimed me and why I had felt owned by them the second we'd met. I had followed the urge, come all the way to Scotland to find a key to the empty space inside me, and I think I had found it, and I didn't for the life of me want to let it go.

I might've been blinded by lust, going from A to Z at lightning speed, but since meeting this creature, everything has fallen into place. It was mad, *insane* really, but people fell in

love at first sight all the time. Why should I look at this any different?

The supernatural clearly existed, so human rules no longer applied, right?

This was hands down the craziest thing I'd ever done, but the thought of walking away made my heart ache. I'd achieved what I'd set out to do, discovered my whole reason for the gravitational pull to this place, and all that was left was unmasking the man behind the beast.

I launched to my knees, intent on going straight back to my cottage to research the shit out of every single Loch Ness legend ever written, but instead, I winced as my muscles protested, and a massive glob of cum dribbled down my thighs. I sagged back against the cave wall again, chuckling under my breath. Okay, fine, I'd do all that *after* a nice, long soak and a one-hundred-year kip.

I had waited this long for answers; I could wait another twelve hours.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

I could not wait.

As soon as the sun filtered through my curtains, I was out of bed, pulling on my clothes and striding toward the museum—with a hitch in my step of the well-fucked variety. I needed answers. I needed to know who I'd given myself so freely to last night and would do so again in a heartbeat.

The only person I trusted not to laugh in my face—not maliciously, at least—was Hamish. He would listen to me, but not only that, I'd wager he knew everyone in this little village and would be one of the best people to help join the dots. The most frustrating part? The answer was probably staring me straight in the face, but for some reason, I just couldn't put my finger on it. I could picture their face in my mind, the voice, the eyes, but it was fuzzy, blocked by an invisible shield, so I had no choice.

I had to seek assistance in the hunt.

I was pacing outside the shop, hands clenching and unclenching at my sides, when Hamish sauntered around the corner, keys jingling in his hand, only momentarily surprised to see me on his doorstep. "You're up early."

I stilled. "Couldn't sleep."

“Oh?” He opened the door to the museum and punched in the numbers to switch off the security system. “Suppose you’ll want to come in and tell me about it?”

“Please.”

His expression softened somewhat as if he noticed in my eyes everything I wasn’t saying. “Get yerself in here, then.”

I waited as Hamish switched on the lights. My palms were sweating a bit. I was nervous about admitting what I’d seen, what I’d *done*. But I knew if I wanted to find my mystery lover, I’d have to suck it up and brave it.

Hamish propped himself against the counter, arms crossing over his chest. “So, what is it ye want—”

“I met Nessie,” I blurted out, incapable of harbouring the secret any longer. I needed it out of my system and fast.

“...Right?”

Well, that was *not* the reaction I had expected.

Hamish cocked his eyebrow in expectation, and I stuttered, the wind leaving my sails. “And, eh, yeah...remember I had that theory about him being human? Turns out, I was right, but I just don’t know *who*.” I looked up, and Hamish’s stare pierced right through me, so I rambled on. “T-that’s why I came here ‘cause I thought my best chance at figuring it out would be you. I need your help, Hamish.”

He considered me for a moment, face expressionless, giving nothing away before saying, “And why does this mean so much to ye?”

“Because...” I paused, nibbling the inside of my cheek. “I can’t stop thinking about it. It’s driving me crazy. I want to know *who* I’ve been meeting and *why* I can’t get them out of my head. Why I— Why I care for them like it’s the only thing in the world that matters to me.”

The corner of Hamish’s mouth twitched. “You’ve met more than once?”

“Yeah, twice.” There was a long silence, and I couldn’t hack it. “Why don’t you seem shocked? I’m talking about

meeting the *literal* Loch Ness Monster here! Do you not believe me? ‘Cause if you don’t, tell me now so I can leave and die of mortification sooner rather than later.”

Of course, he didn’t. This was a stupid idea. I shouldn’t have—

“Aye, I believe ye,” he said sincerely, and I floundered. “I had suspected you’d seen the beastie. I haven’t known anyone to switch their opinions that quick.”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

He shrugged. “Wanted to give ye the chance to process.” That was fair, not that I’d needed that much time, apparently. “So, who’re yer suspects?”

“Someone old.”

Hamish snorted at my confident answer, and I huffed—it had taken me all night to come up with that. “What makes ye think that?”

“Well, I’m assuming the creature has been around for donkeys, so it would make sense.”

His lips thinned as if biting back the urge to laugh. “*Or...* the beastie is a magical creature, and it can appear whatever age takes its fancy?”

I blinked.

“Good point.” I mulled it over for a second. “Okay, then if age doesn’t matter, all I’ve got to go on is that it’s a *he*, could be young or old, and has a Scottish accent.”

“Mhm, that narrows it down.”

I frowned at his unhelpfulness. “Okay, thinking logically, it has to be someone who’d never come under the radar, yeah?” I muttered, mostly to myself, since Hamish seemed to be having a field day just observing. “Someone who could hide in plain sight.” I took several aimless paces to the left before returning to my original spot.

Hamish hummed along.

“So, who has the perfect alibi? Who could go about their business without—”

I froze in my tracks.

*I wanted to give ye the chance to process.*

That was the same thing the beast had said to me last night.

Gears cogging, I faced the owner of the *Nessie* shop and the man who ran the *Nessie* boat tours. The one person in town who could inconspicuously lead everyone on a wild goose chase—or a wild *Nessie hunt*.

Our gazes locked.

Hamish’s eyes flashed, and clarity suddenly hit me like a pissing freight train.

“Well, that was entertaining.” He snorted at my gaping mouth situation—followed closely by an accusatory glare. “Thought you’d have guessed last night, but either yer no very perceptive or my tongue really is that good.”

Bit of both, really. “*Or* you put a shield up so I couldn’t figure it out?”

“Aye, that too.” Hamish smirked, and I frowned in confusion.

“Why?”

He tilted his head, and it looked so much like how the creature had moved, graceful and sure, that I couldn’t believe I hadn’t spotted the resemblances before. “Why what?”

“Why did you reveal yourself to me?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” My response must’ve been written plainly across my face because Hamish sighed. “Because I like ye, Grayson. I like ye *a lot*. Well, it’s—it’s more than that, but...”

I already knew there was something more at play, something beyond the realm of logic. It had felt too *right* not to be, and now that I knew Hamish’s true identity, I couldn’t go without an explanation any longer. I had an inkling from

my endless research hours ago, but I wanted him to say it. “Tell me.”

Hamish hesitated, but after studying my resolution, he set his jaw and said, “Do ye believe in soulmates?”

I exhaled through my nose, relieved I may not be completely shy off the mark. “I didn’t.”

“What about now?”

“All things considered, it wouldn’t be the most outlandish thing I’ve discovered this week,” I replied sagely, and Hamish huffed a laugh, the sound heavy with doubt. “I’ve been drawn to this place for as long as I can remember and couldn’t for the life of me figure out what it meant. I thought it was just the Scottish blood in me raging to come home.” I smiled, meeting Hamish’s eye. “But now that I’m here, now that I’ve met you—*the whole of you*—being your soulmate is a much more credible answer.”

The tension in Hamish’s shoulders relaxed as if a small part of him had braced for rejection. “It’s a bond—a tether forged by magic. I didn’t realise it ‘til the first time ye stumbled in through the door to the museum.”

I scoffed, belligerent. “I didn’t stumble—”

“I didn’t think I could ever trust anyone else,” he continued, staring into the distance as if recalling an old memory. I felt a tightness in my chest at the solemn look on his face. “Until you came along, and it was like something in my heart snapped into place.”

“You came to me.”

“Hm?”

“You came to me in my dreams,” I said with more conviction, only now realising how close to a fairytale my life had become. “For years, I’ve been dreaming of the loch, the scenery around it, but recently they’ve gotten more... *personal*.” I stepped into his space, gazing up and grinning at my own obliviousness. “Those bloody green eyes. I don’t know how I didn’t figure it out sooner.”



Hamish's brow creased. "It wasn't intentional," he mused. "I can only communicate telepathically as the beastie, and I don't remember much of my dreams, but since an important piece of me was clearly missing, I would've reached out subconsciously—my soul knew I needed ye before I did." With one hand resting on my hip, he grazed the side of my face with the other, tucking a stray hair behind my ear as he smiled down at me. "I know I should probably be sorry for disrupting yer life, but I canny say that I am."

I leaned into his touch, closing my eyes as the heat of his palm seeped into my skin. "I must admit, the writer's block has been a pain in my arse, but I think I needed you, too."

Hamish snuck his arm around my back and pulled, bringing us chest to chest. He kissed me then, slow and sweet, but I had to pull back, evading his lips when he chased after me. "You said we couldn't be together?" I accused. "Why didn't you just tell me all of this?"

"Och, I don't know. It was amusing watching you figure it out." I sent him a dirty look, and he jabbed his fingers into my side, making my scowl crack with a tight-lipped chuckle. "You got fair excited, and I didn't have the heart to spoil yer fun."

I squirmed in his unrelenting hold. "Stop tickling me, you arse."

"But yer so cute when ye try to resist." He finally gave it up, and I dropped my head onto his shoulder, catching my breath. "In truth, while there is a bond between us, I wasn't sure if I could trust ye yet. I knew I wanted you, and you wanted me, but I've been burned before." Hamish's fingers combed through my hair as I listened to his confession. "When you didn't mention your meeting wi' the beastie, that was when I realised you were safe. I should've known it anyway because ye were different from the start, and from the very first day, you already meant more to me than anyone ever has. But—"

"You had to be sure."

Hamish's chin tapped my head as he nodded.

“I understand. I’m glad you took your time.” I straightened, lacing my fingers through his and squeezing. “I’ll never give you reason to doubt me. Your secret is mine; I swear it. I really like you, Hamish, and, well, I don’t think it’ll take much for me to love you. I want to give this—*us*—a go, unless...”

“Aye, me too,” he agreed, and my heart leapt, the smile on my face making my cheeks ache. “I wasn’t sure I could cope with the long distance, had we invested ourselves. I’m possessive by nature, but now that I’ve had ye, I won’t lose you o’er something so trivial.”

“We’ll make it work. I promise.”

Hamish cupped my jaw, his mouth fanning over mine. “Glad to hear it, mo chridhe.”

I closed the gap between us, capturing his lips, wasting no time in licking along the seam for entrance. It was deep and passionate, and I melted into him. He took charge, and I was putty in his hands. I would’ve let him do anything to me right then as long as he kept entwining his tongue with mine. He tasted like sugar and tea, milk and honey, and I’d live off the essence of him if I could.

Just as my head began to swim, dizziness creeping in, Hamish withdrew. I wasn’t responsible for the pitiful noise that came out of me. “I know, m’eudail, but we have to stop now, or I’ll no be able tae help myself.” My stiffening dick agreed to disagree. “And I think we should talk a wee bit before you get yer cock in me.”

I groaned, blowing out a laugh. “As much as I hate your logic, I do have a lot of questions.”

Hamish nuzzled my nose with his, then pressed a featherlight kiss to the tip, and my knees almost gave way. “Thought you might. Let me lock the door, then ye can ask me any’hing ye wish.” He peeled away from me to turn the key in the lock. I knew the shop wasn’t officially open for another hour anyway, but it was good to have the extra privacy in case anyone tried their luck.

Instead of sauntering back to me, though—as I thought he would—he wandered over to the ledge of one of the tour boat displays. “Come here,” he beckoned, patting the space beside him, and I went willingly, perching on the statue’s base. He took my hand in his. “So, what would ye like to know first?”

I wanted to know so much, everything and anything he was happy to give, but firstly, “What do those names you keep calling me mean?”

Hamish seemed amused by the question, even if the slight flush to his dimpled cheeks suggested nerves. “M’eudail means *darling*.” He kissed me, quick and tender, the words curling off his tongue like smoke. “And mo chridhe means...”

“What?”

“*My heart.*”

And *my heart* might’ve just combusted. That’s what he’d whispered into my ear last night? God almighty, he had me in such a chokehold. “Stop it; you’re making me blush.”

“Good, yer so pretty when you do.”

I rolled my eyes and barrelled on with my questioning. “How long have— how old are you?”

“Three-hundred and ninety-two.”

My brows shot up to my hairline. “Wow. I knew you’d be older, but you look a good six years younger than me.”

Hamish aimed a mischievous smirk my way. “Plus, the rest.”

“Cheeky brat.” I bumped his shoulder playfully, and his responding gruff chuckle gave me the confidence to pry a little deeper. “So, are you the only one of your kind?”

“Aye. There have been others before me, but there’s to be only one beastie at a time.” I couldn’t detect any sadness in his tone, but my heart still clenched for him.

That was until he grinned devilishly and signalled over himself. “Couldn’t have this much perfection in more than one being at the same time, or the people would riot.”

*Cocky bastard.*

I scoffed at his sarcastic deflection. “How gracious of you,” I mocked, shaking my head. “So, I’m guessing you’re not immortal?”

“No, but I *can* live for as long as I choose.”

I frowned. “Has it not been lonely?”

“Nah, I’ve met some fascinating people along the way. Besides, how could I be lonely when I’ve got a mate?”

“Three centuries is a long time to wait for your soulmate.”

He winked at me. “Aye, but you were worth it.”

“Smooth.” I sent him a dry look—even though my belly fluttered. “And no one has ever asked how you’ve managed to look so young for all these years?”

“I can age myself, and when the time comes, I’ll change my human form enough so people recognise my features but suspect I’m just the son of the previous owner.” *Made sense.* “The Macleod family have successfully run this shop for over a hundred and fifty years.”

I did a quick mental calculation. “So, you’re the son, the father, the grandfather, *and* the great-grandfather?”

“Aye, and I’ve only been Hamish for ten years or so—the unmentioned son who finally returned from uni after so many years,” he explained. “First, I was *Douglas*, then *Iain*, and after that, *Fergus*.”

It was hard to imagine him as anyone other than Hamish. The man I’d touched and kissed. *Fucked.* I cleared my throat. “Who were you before that?”

“I never gave myself a name—or if anyone asked, I’d make it up on the spot.” He rested back against the hull of the boat display, and I angled myself to him. “I spent more time in the loch then and only took human form once or twice a year. It seemed pointless to burden myself.”

I nodded in understanding as I pondered my next question. Something Hamish had said earlier had stuck with me. I didn’t

know what reaction to expect, but he has been forthcoming so far, so it was worth a try. “You said you’ve been burned before. What did you mean?”

Hamish smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes, so I held his hand tighter. “I met a man. He told me he loved me and said he would’ve married me had it been allowed, so I revealed myself. I knew I shouldn’t have trusted him, but I—” He cut himself off, sighing, but I could connect the dots. “I made a mistake, and it nearly led to my capture.”

I grit my teeth to stifle my anger. “What happened to him?”

“Well, luckily, his accusations were seen as nothing more than the ravings of a drunkard, and he was sent off to war, but it was a close call. *Too close*. I knew it was no longer safe to be the beastie all the time, so I had to figure out a way to hide.” He swept his arm out. “And this was it.”

“I’m sorry that happened.” I smoothed my thumb across his knuckles for comfort, and Hamish shrugged.

“It was a long time ago.”

I tilted my head, curious. “Why didn’t you use the shield like you did with me?”

“That was only something I figured out I could do recently,” he admitted. “Having you near has unlocked powers I never knew I had.”

I nodded absently, staring down at where my hand was clasping his. They were so different—in size, colour, and shape—but not nearly as apparent as in his true form. I wondered if he had preferred his life before. If he longed to return to the days of only being human every so often. It’d been a hundred and fifty years, so the guy would be long since dead, and surely, Hamish knew the area inside and out, all the best spots to stay away from hunters, where he could live the rest of his life as the monster.

Unless there was now something else holding him back.

“Don’t you wish you could be the creature more often? Or go back to how it was before?”

“I did in the beginning.” He sighed wistfully. “I missed it, but not so much anymore. I enjoy being human, and if I’m careful, I can still be the beastie for a few hours here and there.” I nodded absently, and a finger tapped the underside of my chin, urging my gaze upward. “And now that you’re in the picture, I’ll take whichever form delights ye most.”

“*You* delight me—the beast *and* the man,” I assured him, though, judging by his smirk, he already knew that.

“Then you have no reason to pity me, mo chridhe. I’m happy.”

“It’s not pity.” I shook my head, searching his eyes for any hint of regret. “I just don’t want to be another reason you’re stuck in human form if you don’t want to be.”

“I *do* want to be. For you and for myself.” He snatched my jaw, craning my neck when I tried to lower my gaze again, my face a hair from his. “And now that I know for certain that the creature doesn’t repulse ye, I can change whenever I please.”

I shuddered at the warm ghost of his breath as he rubbed his cheek over my stubble, purring like a content cat. The low rumble of his voice and the controlled power behind his grip had my cock perking up with renewed interest. “I think I’ve asked all my questions,” I said, and Hamish’s approving hum vibrated against my lips. “So, can we shag now?”

“Ah, a romantic,” he teased. “How lucky I am.”

“You’re lucky I’m curious, or you’d have been on your hands and knees already.”

Hamish leaned back, his eyebrow cocked and his expression growing dark and hungry. “That so?” He shot to his feet and tugged on my hand. “Come on then, big man.”

I glanced around, mildly scandalised. “What? *Here?*”

“I don’t fancy Mrs Hudson o’er the road getting a nosey at my arse, so we’re going through there.” He gestured to the tunnel leading further into the museum.

And Jesus fucking Christ, I was excited.

I followed him, ‘cause of course I did. I’d follow him—and the enticing sway of his hips—to the end of the world if he asked. Also, I wasn’t exactly keen on the idea of Mrs Hudson seeing Hamish naked, either. That pleasure was for me and me alone.

Hamish dragged me to the first room, the one with the massive Nessie statue bursting out of the wall, the base of it covering a good quarter of the floor space. It was definitely not an accurate depiction, but I was glad of its size for what we intended.

Our clothes found themselves ripped open and scattered around, too lost in the moment to care where they landed. Hamish reached up to take off his glasses, but I stopped him.

“Leave them on,” I begged, swooping in for a kiss to silence whatever teasing remark accompanied his self-assured grin.

Hamish descended on my lips again and again before withdrawing for breath. I tread backwards, careful of my steps, as he prowled after me, all naked and gorgeous. “Fun fact,” he said, and it seemed fitting given our surroundings. “I can shift at will and only as far as I like.”

His eyes brightened to that luminous emerald, simmering like beacons as I’d seen in my dreams. Patches of green skin flowered across his legs, chest, and neck, and his tongue, long and split, slithered from his mouth like a snake—or *a Nessie*. He stood in front of me, toe to toe, grinning filthily as he guided my hand around to his arse, and I gasped.

He was wet.

*Soaking* wet.

I wasn’t sure what magic-type ‘self-lubrication’ fell under, but I was praising its existence. I’d read about it once, but like most things I researched, I never imagined it would ever be a reality—the universe proving me wrong seemed to be my life’s recurring theme.

“Jesus Christ,” I bit through my teeth, circling Hamish’s already soft, pliant rim with my fingers.

This had to be one of the hottest things I'd ever encountered.

"He's got nothing to do with it," he hissed smugly, and before I could come up with a witty retort, he gestured to the statue behind me. "Sit back."

Hamish lowered himself to the floor, kneeling between my spread legs as his hands roamed over my thighs. He bent forward and pressed a kiss to the tip of my cock, a playful quirk forming on his lips when it twitched in response. He took my balls into his mouth next, one at a time, sucking then releasing with a rough *pop*. Before I could call him out on his teasing, he swallowed me down, opening wide and taking me in until his nose bumped the coarse thatch of hair at the base.

"*Fuck*," I cursed, scrambling for the lad's shoulder, my fingers dimpling the skin underneath. It would probably bruise, but Hamish just hollowed his cheeks, and when he swirled the split edges of his tongue around the leaking slit, peering up at me through those thick lashes with a challenge in his eye, my hand moved to his red curls without thought, gripping just tight enough to sting.

Hamish moaned around me, and that was all the permission I needed to thrust shallowly into his throat, meeting each bob of his head.

"You look so good with your mouth full of my cock," I murmured, voice heavy with arousal. I barely recognised it as my own, especially not the words coming out as I fucked his mouth harder, itching to make him choke and drool. "You've no sarky remarks now, have you?" I snorted at Hamish's glare. "I should've fucked your throat days ago."

I was so close to coming already; the sight of him on his knees and how he used his monstrous tongue had my belly clenching and toes curling—*anything* Hamish did was incredible, but that tongue was pure magic. "*Shit*, you're gonna make me come, baby," I warned, hips stuttering. Hamish was going to have to stop right this second if he wanted me to fuck him.

He tripled his efforts.



“Goddammit.” Three deep and dirty grinds, and I stilled, my balls tingling as I grunted my release and coated the back of Hamish’s throat.

My thighs trembled and cock throbbed as he kept suckling until I was drained, then he licked me clean. His eyes watered when he pulled away, standing again to kiss me, sharing the salty tang of my release with a flick of his dexterous tongue.

I felt Hamish’s hand sneak down my body then cup my sac, startling a hiss from between my teeth. “Get hard again for me,” he purred, a knowing expression on his smug face, and memories of the other night came hurtling back to me. “I know you can.”

Yeah, I could. My cock even gave a feeble throb to prove it, but not so soon after getting my soul sucked out of me. Safe to say, I needed a second to recharge.

Maybe even a whole minute.

“Straddle me,” I said, and he did so with a gracefulness I was envious of. I grabbed his arse cheeks, giving them an essential squeeze before flipping us around, laying Hamish out on the base of the—really imposing—Nessie model.

I nipped and peppered open-mouth kisses down his lithe body, paying particular attention to his freckles and the patches of green skin. It was crazy-hot feeling the contrasting textures under my lips, side by side. His pale human flesh was soft as silk, and the beast’s was more tough but smooth like leather. It was gorgeous. *He* was gorgeous. And I could hardly believe, after the last few months I’d had, that I would ever get so lucky.

I dropped to one knee, letting Hamish’s legs dangle over my back. His heels dug in whenever I nibbled a sensitive spot, low, throaty moans echoing deep in his chest. I could listen to him forever, could spend hours and hours discovering all the places to touch and ravage to entice those delicious sounds. And I would, one day, if he lay still long enough to let me.

“You’re a fidgety wee bugger, aren’t you?”

“What do ye expect?” he grumbled as I sucked a mark onto his belly. “Yer givin’ me hickeys.”

I hummed and laved my tongue over the bruise to soothe it. “Just marking you up. Do you not want me to?”

“I didn’t say that,” he mumbled, and I could tell he was mulling over the idea of wearing the brands of my teeth. “But I’d prefer ye marking my prostate wi’ yer prick.”

I snorted. “Is that even possible?”

“Only one way to find out.” He used his leverage on my back to lift his arse off the plinth, but I just gripped his thighs and forced him back down.

“Not yet,” I responded casually, and Hamish opened his mouth to protest, but whatever gripe he’d prepared disappeared as I licked a sloppy, wet stripe up the underside of his cock. “I’ve missed a spot.”

I was hard as nails—I had been since I knelt down and saw how drenched he was for me—but I wanted to test how long it would take before he whinged again. Craving a taste, I lapped at the slick coating the inside of his thighs. It was honey-sweet with a musky trace that was purely *Hamish*, and I would’ve gladly drunk down every last drop, but the lad writhed with impatience.

*Not long*, it would appear.

“I can’t wait any longer,” he complained, his hips straining up to entice me. “I need ye now.”

“Such a brat.” I nosed along his hip bone and down to the nest of pale orange hair at his cock, inhaling the delicious scent of him. “You don’t happen to have any Scottish flag condoms lying around, do ya?”

Hamish slid his legs off my shoulders and spread them wide in invitation. His hole twitched, eager and empty. “Fuck me bare,” he demanded. “I want yer come dripping out of me.”

I gripped my balls to stave off the impending orgasm, glaring up at him. “You’re the devil.”

He grinned.

I rose on shaky legs, anchoring my feet for balance. I used Hamish's slick to lube up my cock—*gently*, so I didn't blow before I was even in him. "You sure you want my dick?" I teased, deeply satisfied with the snarl pulling at his lips and the growl under his breath. "I could finger you inst—"

"Thalla gu taigh na galla," he spat, tongue flicking out like a reptile ready to lunge on its prey. I didn't need a translator—or a genius—to tell me he was agitated.

I chuckled at his petulance and lined myself up. "I haven't a clue what that meant, but I'm guessing it wasn't very polite."

"I'll be putting a curse on ye next if ye don't—" His sentence cut off with a guttural groan as I slid into the hilt.

It felt ten times more intense, tunnelling into Hamish's tight body than before. At the risk of sounding like a sap, it was like coming home. It could've been our tie, the acknowledgement of the soul bond that had me hunching over as if I'd been punched. Or maybe it was because this time meant more to me than *just* sex. It was a claim. Hamish was mine—not just a casual fling, not "the one that got away". He was *mine*.

And I was already well and truly *his*.

"Don't hold back," Hamish rasped. "Give it to me."

I hauled him closer to the edge and placed my palms flat on the bench for purchase before giving in. I dragged my cock almost all the way out and slammed back in, my hips connecting to his arse with an obscene, wet smack. I drove into him over and over, each thrust more punishing than the last, hitting all those spots inside that made him expel those pretty little grunts and moans. "That what you wanted, you needy little brat?"

He nodded. "Uh-uh."

I swooped in to steal a messy, uncoordinated kiss. It was more teeth than tongue, dirty and ravenous, but it spurred me on. Straightening to stand, I hooked Hamish's leg over my shoulder and gripped the other under his knee, prying it wide. I

stared down at the man—the *creature*—I adored as I pounded ruthlessly into his slick, greedy hole, thanking whatever deity was responsible for guiding me to him.

He was perfect, and I was never letting him go.

It wasn't long before I lost control, coming deep inside Hamish as he painted his stomach and chest right along with me. The aftershocks spiked through us both, drawing out the pleasure until we had nothing left to give. Hamish shivered as I pulled out of him slowly, watching as my come flooded out of his red, swollen arse. Fuck, it was pretty, and something primal and possessive stirred in me at the sight.

To distract myself from tongue fucking another orgasm out of him, I rolled onto my back. Hamish was sprawled across the wooden plinth, glasses fogged, looking thoroughly wrecked and sated, and I preened at the state of him. I was a panting, sweaty mess myself, but I was happy, *content*—and maybe a little amused. “I can't believe we just fucked on a life-size model of you.”

Hamish threw his head back and laughed unrestrained, and right then, I knew that when I fell, I'd fall *hard*. “We fucked in a cave, m'eudail.” He beamed at me. “So, aye, ye can.”

I hesitated before nodding mindlessly in acceptance of the facts, smiling one of those *you-got-me-there* smiles. “You're right; I can. And I'd like to do it again.”

“Och, and yer calling *me* needy?”

I propped myself on my elbow and hovered over him. “Yes, you are.” I kissed his cheek, the tip of his nose, and his lips. “And I wouldn't want you any other way.”



## EPILOGUE

*SIX MONTHS LATER*

**I**t had taken a grand total of three days after leaving the comfort of Hamish's arms—with a plan to visit every month—before I decided I couldn't hack the distance between us. London didn't feel right anymore. It seemed lacking in vibrance and life, but what else had I expected? My heart had always belonged in Scotland, so it was only natural that, now I'd seen it for myself and fallen for its wildness, nothing else would ever compare.

I wanted to build a home there. I'd miss my family, of course, but it was where I was meant to be, and I knew they'd never begrudge me that happiness. In fact, after telling my sister about my trip and Hamish—minus the Nessie parts—she even offered to ship me off and pack my bags herself.

That was all the persuasion I needed.

Unfortunately, the handover of my apartment wasn't as quick as I hoped, but as soon as those affairs were in order—and with Hamish's sound input—I used my savings to buy a cottage in the very same village where I'd spent the best three weeks of my life. It was beautiful. Perfect even, with its cute picket fence and pebbled path. I had fallen in love as soon as

Hamish had sent me the listing, knowing instantly that it was the one.

I couldn't have been more chuffed with the location. It sat atop a small hill, surrounded by all types of wildflowers, with a prime view of the loch. It was relatively private, with a glorious garden that was the perfect hideaway for writing, and best of all, it was a hop, skip, and a jump away from Hamish.

Which I guessed was intentional—probably some sort of protective instinct or subconscious need to have me nearby.

I couldn't find fault in that.

It was late afternoon, and we were both half-naked, unpacking the last few boxes of knick-knacks after having spent most of the day christening the bed, the sofa, and the shower—just every surface, really. It was fun being with Hamish like this, seeing him relaxed and comfortable, crying with laughter at my stupid jokes, and ordering me to “get on wi' it” so we could go back to bed. I was grateful there was hardly anything left to do. Except for putting away the kitchen stuff and the seemingly endless piles of tea towels.

I cursed past me for not taking the extra time to actually hawk through the shite and bin anything I didn't need. I had been in such a hurry to move and start a new chapter that I'd brought absolutely everything I'd gathered over the last twenty-odd years. And seriously, what had I been thinking? No sane person needed fifty-seven tea towels.

“I think I might have a fetish for kitchenware.”

“Ye think?” Hamish held up his hands, each of his fingers slotted around the handle of a mug. I winced, not knowing how he managed to hold so many without dropping them. I peeked over his shoulder, into the cupboard he'd been stashing them...and it was already full. “You're a wee bit of a hoarder, my sweet.”

“Not a hoarder,” I grumbled, pouting up at him. “Just a lil sentimental.”

He smiled fondly at me and set about rearranging the stacks of cups so the rest would fit. I emptied the box I was

working on—the last one, thank the almighty—before folding up the cardboard and setting it aside with the other recycling.

I breathed a relieved sigh. “And we’re done.”

“Aye.” Hamish sidled up beside me, and we stood in peaceful silence for a moment, just appreciating our efforts.

Tonight would be the first night we’d stay in the cottage, and I was so ready for it. I was ready to sleep in my new bed in my new home, with Hamish snuggling into me. I’d stopped over at his for the last few days while all the big furniture was being added to the empty rooms, and it was great. I loved every second of waking up to his adorable freckles and bright eyes, but this felt different. Like a new adventure or some shit, and having watched those bare walls and floors turn into a cosy wee home made it that much more exciting.

Not that there was anything particularly *wee* about it. It was actually pretty spacious.

And way too much for me alone.

“This space is a lot for just one man, don’t ye think?”

Hamish nodded absently, scanning every square inch of the room now that it was officially finished. “Aye, it’s a decent size for a cottage, I’ll give it that.”

I couldn’t keep my eyes off him, standing there—all tempting—in the middle of my new kitchen in nothing but his tartan joggers with his sex-ruffled hair and hands on his hips, looking like he *belonged*.

My pulse raced, and my palms started to feel a little clammy.

After months of talking every day on the phone or Facetiming, the midnight chats, the wake-up calls—which were often ignored and then returned at a more reasonable hour—sharing our greatest achievements and worst fears, our goals, our history—and the *hot-as-hell* phone sex—I could say with one hundred percent certainty that he did, in fact, belong here.

With me.

In *our* home.

I didn't care if I sounded rash, 'cause what this gorgeous creature and I shared was special, something more potent than any type of bond I had ever formed with another—it was bloody *supernatural*—and I saw no point wasting precious time when I already knew that he was *it* for me.

He was my soulmate.

I swallowed thickly and took both of Hamish's hands in mine, demanding his full attention. The light filtering through the blinds cast a pastel rainbow across the side of his face and down his bare chest as he turned, and my breath stuck in my throat.

Right then, I'd never been so sure of anything in my entire life.

“Move in with me?”

“What?”

“I love you,” I admitted, watching his brows rise a fraction above his glasses and a pretty blush creep onto his freckled cheeks. “I'm sorry if it's too soon, but I do. I think I've known it for a while.” I let out a soft snort, shaking my head. “I moved to Scotland to be near you, for Christ's sake.”

The corner of Hamish's mouth ticked upward. “Ye really want me to live wi' you?”

“Yes, I do.” I squeezed his hands tighter, bringing them to my lips. “Jesus, Hamish, my knee is twitching with the need to get down on the floor and ask you to marry me—I'm that fucking serious.”

Hamish threw his head back and laughed. It was lovely, so gleeful and carefree, and my heart damn near exploded. He wrestled his fingers from my grasp and looped his arms around my neck, drawing me close to capture my lips with his. “Of course, I'll move in, ye dafty.” He kissed me again, but with more passion, more claim. “We can talk about the other thing once you've actually lived wi' me.”



I gripped the backs of his thighs and hoisted him into the air, supporting his arse as he circled his long legs around my waist. He clutched at my shoulders as I spun around, cheering like a loon. “Och, you know what? I wouldn’t even care if you were a slob, I’d still want you. No matter what.”

He chuckled again, and I drank in every note. “I’m actually very neat, thank you very much. But I’ll keep that in mind.” His smile was infectious, and I couldn’t help twirling again just to hear the musical bursts of his joy. He cupped my jaw, bringing me to a standstill, my gaze locking on *those eyes*—so green, so beautiful.

“I love you too, mo chridhe.”



I sat at my new desk, laptop open to a fresh page, waiting for me to fill it. The cursor blinked as I centred the text at the head, a dreamy smile spreading across my face.

*NESSIE’S HEART by Grayson Cole.*

## GLOSSARY

**Mo chridhe** - my heart; a Gaelic term of endearment.

**M'eudail** - darling; a Gaelic term of endearment.

**Aye** - yes.

**Wi'** - with.

**Johnny's** - condoms.

**Canny** - can't.

**Doolally** - temporarily deranged, bat shit.

**Piece** - a sandwich.

**Why no?** - why not?

**Crabbit** – bad tempered, in a bad mood.

**Och** - an expression of surprise, contempt, annoyance, impatience, disagreement, etc.

**Wee** - small.

**Bonnie** - pretty, beautiful.

**Yer** - your or you are, depending on the context/usage.

**Daft(y)** - foolish, stupid, silly.

**Dinnae ken** - don't know.

**O'** - of.

**Thalla gu taigh na galla** - go to hell, get lost, get to fuck; a Gaelic insult.

**Oidhche mhath** - good night; a Gaelic farewell.

**Git** - an unpleasant person.

**Knackered** - very tired.

**Gee** - give.

**Tae** - to.

**Naff** - tacky, unfashionable.

**Fur** - for.

**Tablet** - a confection from Scotland, made from sugar, condensed milk, and butter.

**Yin** - one.

**Digs** - lodgings, place to stay away from home.

**Braw** - good or pleasing, depending on the context/usage.

**Tea** - dinner or cup of tea, depending on the context/usage.

**Howk** - dig or rummage.

## AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading Och, Ness! If you enjoyed Gray and Hamish's wee story, please consider taking a moment to leave a review on Amazon, Goodreads, or your social media platform of choice.

Want to know what's next for the Wet 'n' Wild series?

Novella two will follow a burly Scotsman on a quest to find love, and a young selkie Prince, who's been banished to the surface world for a crime he didn't commit.

The best way to stay up to date with this standalone series of novellas is by checking out my Facebook, Instagram or signing up to my newsletter [here](#).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to everyone who had a hand in the making of Och, Ness! Especially Sarah Honey, who came up with the title after I spent days scrolling through the dictionary! I know for a fact I wouldn't be at this point if it wasn't for the constant love and support. I've met so many wonderful people, and I appreciate you all so much!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Eryn Hawk currently resides in the UK with her three kitties—and three humans that aren't so bad when you get to know them. Her days are spent mostly writing or reading monster smut, but when she doesn't have a notebook in her hand or laptop on her knee, she can be found exploring castle ruins or chilling in front of the telly with some Chinese food.

If you'd like to keep in touch with Eryn, you can find her mostly on Instagram. Or join her private Facebook group, Eryn Hawk's Nest, where you'll find news of latest projects, giveaways, and plenty of monsterfucker memes.



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