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Mists Through Time

author

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Chapter 1

# Chapter 1

*Scotland, Highlands, Dec. 1501*

Tavish growled in frustration as he slammed his tankard of good Scottish whisky down. His temper seemed to be too close to the surface and always ready to boil over these days. The devastation he had felt after watching Tasha, literally the woman of his dreams, fade into the mist had been all consuming. His peoples' need for their laird had pulled him out of his destructive behavior, at least for a short time, but the anger and frustration remained.

Why had she let go of his hand? Had she not trusted in him enough to follow him through the mist? The questions continued over and over in his mind with no end. He had spoken to every man or woman he could find in the Highlands that kent the slightest detail of the mystical. They all said the same thing, she had been tested and failed. There was no way to offer her a second chance. She was lost to him forever, they said, he should find a woman more worthy of his noble blood.

Bah he cared nothing of noble blood or worthiness. He wanted his Tasha. The woman of his heart, the woman proclaimed by fate to be the other half of his soul. The memories were the hardest... especially the look of devastation on her face right before the mist closed around her. No, he refused to believe she had let go on purpose. He knew in his heart that she had loved him.

As if that wasn't bad enough, there were the nightly dreams. They always started out the same. A mist so thick he could barely see his hand in front of his face, sounds echoing eerily as he walked blindly through the forest, bagpipes playing in the distance. Then the greeting would start. He would hear her soft weeping, but when he tried to look for her he only managed to become confused and disoriented. Walking in unending circles for hours, listening to her cries become heart wrenching sobs of despair, begging for him to come back to her.

For the last few days, it had been more than dreams that haunted him. He could swear at times he felt her need of him. He had no way to explain how, but he kent deep inside there was something wrong. He could sense her fear and helplessness. It was like her soul had been crying out for him to help her. He could feel the answering pull from deep inside himself, demanding that he return to the forest.

It had been nearly three months since he had made love to her and yet, she still haunted him whether he was awake or sleeping. At times as he walked through his beloved forest he would swear that he could hear her weeping softly as she called out to him. Something was not right, she needed

him, and he was helpless with his inability to even find her, let alone comfort her in any way.

All this just added to his anger... add to that the petty squabbles between his people. It left him with a short temper and a foul mood daily.

The two latest fiascos were the blacksmith's daughter and the village whore. God, why did it seem to always be daft women that gave him so many problems? The blacksmith's daughter had went and got herself pregnant, but refused to name the father. Then there was Maude, the village whore, she was intentionally causing rifts between the men and their wives.

He knew he would have to do something about both situations soon, but he just wasn't in the mood today. The thought of confronting Maude after everything that happened the last time... it left him cold inside.

His scowl deepened as he watched his brothers walk up to the dais and sit down one on each side of him. "Will there ever be a day ye arnae angry brother?" Conn asked sarcastically. He was another problem that needed to be dealt with. His dour and bitter attitude these last few months were grating on his already frayed nerves. It made a body barely able to bide his presence. Tavish watched as he reached over to grab a peach out of the bowl in front of them.

"Weel that was real smoothe, an' nae combative at all Conny." Ramsey stated with a grunt. "Why nae jist come up tae the dais an' hit him or something? Would probably work jist as weel."

"Enough!" Tavish bellowed, slamming his fist on the table. He turned to look at both brothers in turn. "What the de'il d'ye want?" He had no patience for them this day. Conn's petty bickering would only fuel his anger to a higher degree. He slapped Conn's hand away from the bowl. Those were his peaches dammit. They reminded him of her...

"What do we want?" Sarcasm and anger seemed to drip from every word that slipped out of his mouth.

"Shut up Conny, ye arnae helping anything like this." Ramsey spoke firmly before turning to his older brother. "Since the day we found ye in the woods ye have been angry an' ye cannae deny it. I'm glad ye finally confided in us about what was really going on an' we want tae help."

"We spoke tae some fowk that still believe in the auld ways, but arnae after yer coin." Conn blurted out before Ramsey could work his way to the subject.

Ramsey sent an angry scowl Conn's way before holding up his hand to forestall Tavish's bellow of anger that he kent would be coming. Both brothers kent, that Tavish wouldn't be happy about them interfering, which made Conn's antagonistic behavior even more confusing and annoying. "Wait, afore ye blow up, listen tae what we have tae say. We want tae help ye Tavish." At Tavish's nod, both brothers seemed to sigh in relief.

"I'm glad ye decided tae come tae yer senses..." Ramsey smacked Conny in the back of the head effectively shutting him up before he ruined their chance to speak.

"Weel they all believe the same thing..." Ramsey confided. "There's hope brother. They say that since the window was opened at the autumn equinox, then 'tis verra possible, even more strongly sae, that it will be opened again at winter solstice." At the blank look on his brother's face, Ramsey was at a loss on how to respond. Of all things, he wasn't expecting him to react with indifference, not after all the anger. He took a deep breath and tried again. "Doona ye see? Ye still have a chance of finding her an' bringing her back tae this time. Where, she can then stay by yer side."

Tavish's first reaction had been elation... finally someone telling him what he needed, no wanted to hear. He could finally go to his love and bring her home with him. The reality of the situation was much harsher than the simple answer of bringing her home. What if she didn't want to come with him? Worse even than that, what if she tried to cross over and failed the test again? Could he live that devastation again? Remembering the anguish on her bonnie face, he realized the more important question was, could she? "Thank ye for telling me. I will think on it."

Ramsey and Conn shared a confused look. They couldn't believe what they were hearing spill from their brother's lips.

Ramsey tried again. "D'ye nae understand what I'm saying? This is what ye have wanted for months. I doona understand yer lack of enthusiasm."

"I ken ye doona, but again ma only answer is the same. I will think on it." With those words, he got up and began to walking toward the door. He needed to get away for a bit. Maybe he could go visit some of his tenants. Some of the ones near the border of his lands. Just to check on them of course, it had been months since he had done that.

Conny had no patience for his nonsense, which was evident in his explosive response. Grabbing Tavish's arm he yanked him around toward them. "Ye will think on it? Ye will think on it!? By damn is that all ye have tae say? Ye have been mopping an' bellowing for months. Walking around like a wounded animal. Now ye will think on it? Tae the de'il wi' ye I say! Ye will take yer damn arse out tae that forest an' wait for that woman! I'm tired of yer shite!"

In an attempt to avoid the explosion, he kent was coming Ramsey placed a calming hand on his brother's arm. "What Conny is trying tae say, though he's nae doing a verra guid job..." He threw an annoyed look in Conn's direction. "Ye admitted nae tae long ago that yer dreams aboot her have become more frequent again. Ye have even said, ye have thought several times while walking through the forest that ye heard her greetin."

Tavish nodded his agreement as he sighed heavily. There was no point in denying or hiding anything from them. He had already told them everything else. "I have also had this feeling of late that she is in desperate need of me, but I have been helpless tae do anything about it." Unbelievably just sharing those few frustrated words with his brothers made him feel slightly better. He kent in his heart he wouldn't be complete without his Tasha, but he had to be realistic.

"It seems a useless cause though, brother. I felt the dreams strongly once afore. It was jist a mere month after losing her when the dreams came back full force an' nothing happened. She is truly lost tae me..." At moments like now, he just wanted to give up, letting the despair take him wherever it might.

Ramsey ignored his brother's negative comments. He kent deep inside there was another reason not yet clear to them all on why Tavish hadn't been able to connect with his mate when the dreams became stronger during Samhain. His confidence increased with the knowledge that their bond was strengthening once more. He truly believed there could only be one reason their bond was stronger.

"It must be as the others have sworn. The veil atween our world an' her's is thinning once more. The chance is tae strong for ye tae nae take this seriously brother. Yer life, the future happiness of our clan all revolves around this, but more importantly Tasha's weel being depends on this. How can ye nae step forward an' try? If she needs ye as ye say, then how can ye turn yer back on her?" Ramsey's voice was quiet but firm as he spoke.

He kent he was being slightly cruel by his accusations, but he felt to his very depth that this was the right path for his brother. He had not lied, the future of everyone in the clan revolved around this outcome. The clan needed their leader back and in turn Tavish needed the other half of his soul. To stand up and fulfill his destiny he needed to be whole once more.

"Enough Ramsey, ye have made yer point. I will go each day tae the woods. As it gets closer tae the Solstice, I'll spend as much time as I can spare there. If the veil opens once more as ye believe, I will try tae find her. Yer right, there is something verra wrong an' she needs me. I can feel it. I cannae lose hope now an' abandon her." Looking to Conn, he spoke more confident. A promise to both himself, and his brothers. "I willnae give up. I will fight tae bring her home." With that, he strode from the hall heading toward the forest.

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Maude stood in the dark alcove eyes smoldering. She had heard most of what the MacKay men had said. Standing so far away hidden as she was, she couldn't hear it all though. She understood now why Tavish had rejected her. He was pining for some woman who he hadn't been able to find. She had noticed the activity for the past few weeks. Men, leaving for days at a time. Only to come back grim faced with troubled eyes. Those men reported only to Ramsey, which is what had caused her suspicion. She had hoped she was a witness to some notorious scheme to overthrow his brother. The reality was disappointing on many levels.

After the humiliation she had suffered at Tavish's hands, she had wanted to see him brought low. Hatred filled her gut once more as she thought of the soft snickers of the others after he had sent her away that day. Not just sent her away, but had never even managed to get hard. That had been insulting enough, she had told herself that it was no big deal because she kent ways to make men "rise" to the occasion. He had taken the insult further by teasing her with unspoken sexual promises then leaving her dangling on the edge, unsatisfied and frustrated.

Well she had got even, at least a little bit. Spreading the rumors that he couldn't perform, and that's why he had sent her away, had been wickedly fun. She had kent their laird wasn't a liar. He'd never lie even to protect his reputation. So he hadn't disputed her claims. Her revenge had been working. Clan members were questioning his suitability to continue being their leader. After all heirs were needed to continue the clan and if he couldn't perform then he was less than a man in their eyes.

The women who had snickered behind her back? Oh she had gotten even with them too. She had seduced their boyfriends, husbands, and even some of the women's intendeds were swayed to taste of her... charms. Then of course she had made sure they were caught in the act. Hell, with the blacksmith's daughter she had even gotten a bonus.

She'd heard the rumors the cow was pregnant and refused to tell who the father was. Maude kent who he was, but she held onto that secret, waiting for the right moment to use it for own personal gain. Maybe even a little pleasure, since it caused the girl so much pain. She'd had the most fun with that couple. Seducing him right after the two of them had been together. She had seduced him with promises of showing him how it should be. Of course, what he hadn't guessed was the secluded area

she had lead him to, was the same path that cow took home. Maude had kent it though, and she relished the look of stunned horror on the girl's face when she saw them together.

Then his stupid brothers had gone and ruined it all by confronting him with those other damn men. They were known as the notorious six. Probably some daft women's idea as a way to romanticize them, but they liked using the title, so it stuck. God, how she hated them too. Those men and their noble chivalry made her sick. They could go to the de'il for all she cared. None had ever even looked her way. She was beneath them, in their eyes, so they had never allowed her close. She had always thought they would stay celibate, so their attitude hadn't bothered her too much after a while. Then that stupid cow Mary had caught Kade's eye and all her humiliation, their rejections of her, was brought to her attention once more.

This... this was different though. They had at least never teased her with promises and possibilities, unlike him. Her mind swirled with the snippets of information she had gleaned this day. How could she use a missing women to her advantage? The need for revenge flowed strongly in her veins.

She had been an innocent once until a man had tricked her with lies. That one mistake had molded her life. She was forced from that moment on to fend for herself, surviving with the only means possible, her body. She had decided long ago, she would rather have many men grunting between her thighs while she found her own pleasure. At least then she was free to make her own choices, live where and how she wanted. With one man, she would belong to him, chattel to be used as he wanted, to be beaten when he wanted. No thanks, she'd rather be the whore she was and be free, than one man's chattel to use and abused.

She slipped out of the alcove while the brothers were turned away sneaking through the scullery's entrance. She despised the scullery with the constant heat from all the cooking, but it was the only unmanned exit leading to the bailey. With all the secret plotting and spying she did, she had no other choice but to enter and exit through here.

She had no doubt the answer would come to her. She forced down her excitement as an evil smile twitched across her lips. She had much to think about, but for now she would watch and wait...

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"Did ye see her?" Conn asked annoyed that anyone would dare spy on them in the great hall.

"Och, aye I saw her. Doona fash yerself Conn, I willnae let anyone interfere wi' what we do for Tavish." He smacked him playfully on the back as he laughed. "Ye should ken by now nae one can sneak up on me. I notice everything."

"Och, is that sae? Then tell me who got the blacksmith's daughter pregnant." He asked with a smile.

"Wheesht, I said I noticed everything nae that I gossip like an auld woman." He smacked Conny in the back of the head as he got up from the table.

"Dammit mon I cannae help ma curiosity. Jist give me a wee hint?" Conn's smile was playful, a rarity of late.

Ramsey almost gave in just to keep that smile on his face for a few more minutes. For the first time in months, his hostile mood had lifted enough that Ramsey could glimpse the old Conn peeking out around the edges. Ramsey shook his head. The truth was, no matter how happy his brother might look now, his dark mood would return until he faced the demons of his past.

Ramsey's honor demanded he keep his mouth shut about what he kent until the time came to reveal it to their laird. His ability to convince others to trust him is what allowed him to do his job. No matter how much it made his brother smile, he wouldn't betray that.

He leveled a serious look on his brother, then frowned shaking his head sadly before looking away. As he turned to walk away, a devilish grin twitched on his lips. "Auld woman..." He twisted away before his brother could get a good grasp on his plaid and ran through the heavy doors as they opened. Quickly apologizing, he cut off some the women who worked in the keep as they entered the hall. His bold laughter, followed him out into the bailey.

...excerpt....

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