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Love in the Mist

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Chapter 1

# Chapter 1

He stood holding his two handed sword at the ready boldly facing his opponent. A sense of anticipation clung to those around him, all waiting with baited breath to see who would draw first blood. Black curls blowing in the wind, a leather strap all that kept it from his face. Both opponents circling each other, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

From the distance, she was forced to maintain her information was limited. Discerning smaller details was difficult, but she was unwilling to chance moving closer. Despite her, every belief that this was a dream and no one could see her, the realism of it all left a niggling doubt in the back of her mind. It was enough for her to question the safety involved in being too close to the others.

She exhaled letting her breath escape in a loud whoosh of air. Magnificent! Her vantage point in the trees allowed for an unobstructed view above the crowds. Bare to the waist, his chest muscles, glistened, in the early morning sun. Her panting breaths an obvious indication of her bodies reaction to his.

Broad shoulders, burly forearms, well formed pectorals and washboard abs that rippled with each thrust of his sword. God was she drooling? She couldn't see it from this distance, but she knew from previous encounters, there was a light dusting of dark hair that covered his chest. It tapered off to form what Mika liked to call, a trail to paradise, that disappeared into his kilt. His waist narrowed forming trim hips, which his kilt hung loosely on, held in place by a large leather belt. With every movement, he made she couldn't help the slight inhalation of breath... waiting to see if the kilt fell to the ground to expose the rest of his glorious body to her hungry eyes.

His kilt was made of different shades of blue with a thin red stripe that she would recognize anywhere. Its similarities to the arisaid that sat in the trunk, deep in her closet was difficult to ignore. A gift from her great grandmother upon her death. Grand-mère believed it was a symbol of the proud heritage she descended from.

Tasha imagined hearing her grand-mère's voice as she explained its use. "An arisaid is a plaid for females, although it's worn more like a cloak than a skirt. It's the pride of every woman to wear the colors of her clan." Yeah, go figure the men wore a skirt, the women wore a cloak. Can you say ass backwards anyone? The closest description she could give for the dominant colors on the tartan was a cobalt and midnight blue.

He was a MacKay to his very bones and this place she dreamt of so vividly was some sort of ancient MacKay stronghold. Her knowledge of such a place or this man was disturbing at the very least. The confusion she felt each time she awoke, memories of this place lingering in her thoughts,

overwhelmed her. How could she know so many details about a place she had never been?

Her eyes wandered to the faded tower. The discoloration of the bricks told a story without saying a word. That was the original tower, a starting point for this place. The second tower was newer the bricks barely touched by the sun beating down on it. They both sat at the top of a hill overlooking the valley, a silent sentinel against any who might invade the area. At some point in history, an ancestor decided to unite the two towers by building a wall, Three stories high, the wall connected both towers, to form one impenetrable structure. The only windows existed on the third floor.

History had been a hobby of hers for years. She knew during earlier times a royal decree was required to fortify any castle, manse, or stronghold. It had always been her opinion that the kings of the time just liked having that extra control over their subjects. A little greed probably played a part in it as well because she was sure they managed to finagle money out of those who wished to have their people protected with walls.

The clang of metal against metal floated through the air as she continued to peruse the ancient Keep. Normally Tasha found the mock battles exhilarating, today she just felt drained. The courtyard was surrounded by what looked to be a twenty foot high brick wall that had at least a ten feet wide wall walk for patrolling the walls. It boasted smaller towers in each of the four corners, which from her vantage point, looked to be the only access to the tops of those walls. These curtain walls were manned by the soldiers who lived in the barracks near its gate entrance.

The outer courtyard, where the men were practicing their sword play and wrestling, was down the hill from the main structure and to the side of a thriving village. While exploring, she had found several farms on the backside of the hill, along with an orchard. All of this was surrounded by second defensive wall about ten feet high and five feet wide, but instead of using men to guard the wall they had dogs that roamed along its wall walk. The kennel and their trainers were housed in a small building near the large wooden gates. She had noticed that, except for the dense forest that came close to the west wall the entire area was open for miles.

She had been here many times over the last six months watching and exploring, but keeping her distance from the people. Always staying within the confines of the mist shrouded land, never straying beyond its borders for fear of what might happen. Moving back into the sanctuary of the woods as the day became later, and the mist receded from sight. The mist seemed to always linger around the edges of the forest though. It was an odd phenomenon adding a mystical sense to the area.

Today she remained hidden just beyond the wall up in a tree. She used the blanket of mist to hide herself from any who might see her and set up an alarm. Just a precaution in case she found her beliefs inaccurate. She peered at the man with his sun kissed skin as he battled his opponent so fiercely. Odd for a practice session, but what did she know about their customs. The sweat dripping down his chest and arms glistened in the early morning light. Observing him, even from a distance took her breath away. Each swing of the sword like a dance performed so often it had become second nature. His green eyes sparkled with pure pleasure. After over an hour, he showed no sign of exhaustion.

The men in the yard were all yummy to look at with their tan skin and rippling muscles, but there was something special about this man. The bonnet he wore on his head at a jaunty angle with the clan badge proclaimed him chieftain, but it was more than that. She only paused for a moment to wonder why he would wear the bonnet at all. She swore that it was only a common practice of the lowland lairds. She shook her head to stop her mind from wandering too far off the subject at hand. It was irrelevant what kind of hat he wore though she may find it an interesting oddity.

He had his people's respect that was for sure. The children and animals followed him around as if a superhero stood in their midst. He was never cruel and always managed to find time to stop and talk to each person. His smile was sincere, and each time he bestowed it on one of his people her heart raced a little faster. Every afternoon he took the time to play with the children for an hour or so after the noon meal. Despite his groans of protest, each time the children asked him to play, she could tell that he enjoyed it immensely.

She even learned his name. The many girls from the village whispered it often enough as they watched from the shadows. Tavish... Tavish MacKay was the name she too whispered, but only in her dreams each night. She had been watching him for months and, as foolish as she knew it was, she had fallen in love with him. It wasn't just his looks, but the way he treated his people. He gave each one respect, offering them a sense of worth far beyond what most chieftains of the time may allow.

The first glimpse of him arose vivid in her mind even now. His gait, bold and unhurried, as he strolled through the mist shrouded forest, sword slung across his back, his bonnet sitting at a jaunty angle on his head. A single braid on the left side of his head, his black curls bouncing against his neck. She had been so enthralled by the picture he made it took several minutes for her to realize she was following him with more than her eyes. It wasn't until they had come to a clearing that she became aware of what she had done, skulking in the shadows like some peeping tom.

Before she could turn and go back the way she had come, he loosened the belt holding his kilt around his waist allowing it to drop to the ground. For precious moments, she could only stand and stare at the heaping pile of wool on the ground not wanting to believe he had just undressed himself in the forest. Half afraid to look up and take a glimpse of what had been hidden under the mass of wool. By the time her curiosity had won out over her sense of propriety and she dared to take a look at him she felt a small twinge of disappointment. She had waited too long.

He was already waist deep in a small outcropping of the river his hair wet with droplets of water streaming down his back. His sleek back muscles rippled with each movement he made. She had noticed his left upper arm was encircled by what looked like a tattoo, its intricate knots colored in blue ink. When he leaned overreaching into the waters depths, she managed a quick glimpse of a very firm butt a touch whiter than the rest of his body before he righted himself once more. Disappointment had enveloped her as she felt the first stirrings of wakefulness intrude on her dream world. Her last image of him before awaking was of a startled look over his shoulder. Almost as if he'd heard something, but the mist engulfed him completely before she could see more.

Sighing at the memory, she felt again that disappointment of missing out on the whole show. She had never gotten an opportunity like that again. Unfortunately, since that first dream, he remained clothed. There had been a few just misses. Like the time, she found him, water dripping from his hair as he walked back to the Keep. If she had only joined him a few minutes earlier...

The sound of the women grumbling under their breaths brought her back to the present. Looking up once more, her eyes roamed the area trying to pinpoint the source of their discontent. Tavish's mock battle was over. His hair hung wet against his neck and shoulders, rivulets of water ran down his body, a bucket held above his head. The light from the sun reflected off each droplet as her eyes followed its path down his luscious body. Fighting the overwhelming desire to be brazen, stride up to him and explore along his torso with the tip of her tongue. She wished to follow the same path the droplets of water took, sipping the liquid from his overheated flesh.

A flash of red caught her eye forcing her attention away from the man she longed for. Her blood boiled, eyes narrowing as that woman approached. Raven locks bouncing as she danced up beside

Tavish. Boldly running her hands along his bulging biceps, she moved in closer to his body.

“How dare the whore touch him!” She swore under her breath... fighting for the control not to run over there and rip the woman’s hair out of her head until she was bald. Normally he skillfully avoided her advances. Today he seemed to be enjoying her caress, even encouraging it with his flirtatious smile.

Tears slid unchecked down her cheeks as she watched him take that... that woman by the hips and pull her closer to his body. The world around her became blurry, signifying an end to her dream state. Images of him leaning close to whisper something in her ear. Her smiling face and shrill laughter were the last things she noticed before the world around her went black. She woke to the sound of her annoying alarm clock... which weirdly sounded almost like that woman’s laughter.

She knew it was stupid to feel hurt and betrayed by a dream man, but she couldn’t help it. It was her dream dammit. Things should go the way she wanted. Wiping the now drying tears from her face, she sighed heavily. She needed a hot shower and some coffee. If her dream were any indication, she could count on this day being very difficult indeed.

She had arrangements to make, people to talk to. The orphanage had to be her top priority, not some silly dream man. She shook her head at the ridiculousness of her hurt feelings as she moved toward the shower. In the real world, she had children counting on her. She needed to find the funding to reopen that orphanage and get the kids back in their home. The cruelty of the world had already found them so often in their short lives. A home, such a small thing to ask for. They deserved this.

The greed of the city council still angered her even months later. If only charges could be brought against them, but she couldn’t prove they had any knowledge of what was happening. Anyone with eyes could see the disrepair and neglect, but the judge ruled without evidence, she had no case against the council. Only those involved in the actual embezzling were prosecuted.

As she jumped in the shower, her thoughts went back to her dream. Why did she constantly dream of him? The more important question was why she was insane enough to fall in love with him. He wasn't real for crying out loud! “What is wrong with me?” She continued to argue with herself going over the same questions again and again as she finished up her shower.

Grabbing a towel she dried off before getting dressed and heading for the coffee pot in desperate need of a caffeine fix. Though she seemed to stay asleep longer, she always woke feeling as if she’d hardly slept. It wasn't helping her moods during her waking hours.

Her constant arousal helped even less. After all these years of not being interested in men why would fate finally decide to make her horny from a dream man? An apparition turned her on, she really was losing it. Maybe she needed to consider Mika's suggestion of a personal toy...

...excerpt....

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