

A close-up, slightly blurred image of a woman's face and neck. She is wearing a thin chain necklace with a round, light-colored pendant that has a green symbol on it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

Aliyah Burke

A scenic view of a rugged, moss-covered cliff edge overlooking a deep blue ocean under a cloudy sky. The cliff face is textured with green moss and grey rock.

Faith's Tears

Red Rose™ Publishing

Faith's Tears
by Aliyah Burke

Red Rose Publishing

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To Clarke and Valan,

I miss y'all so much.

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"Do you know a cure for me?"

"Why yes," he said, "I know a cure for everything. Salt water."

"Salt water?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said, "in one form or another, sweat, tears or the salt sea."

~Isak Dinesen

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Chapter One

Isle of Skye

Faith smiled as she opened the door to her hotel room. She had never imagined Scotland would be so much fun, despite the draw she'd felt to come here. She'd gotten up early and taken a lovely walk immersing herself in the sights and smells of the pre-dawn morning surrounding them. Then she'd spent a bunch of time with Sean exploring some of the local attractions, she'd fallen in love with a bunch of the Celtic jewelry they saw.

He'd cried off early saying he had a headache but told her to keep exploring. And so she had. Faith had found a lovely secluded area off the beaten path, leading to a rock outcropping that overlooked the smooth dark water of the Sea of Hebrides. She had taken some time to herself.

The room was dark and she kept quiet thinking that Sean must still be sleeping. Her fingers tightened around the bag holding the soup she'd brought him to eat. A low moan reached her ears and she padded quietly toward the door of the bedroom. It swung in on silent hinges and the light filtered past her to land on the bed. Her gasp of shock filled the room as the bag fell from nerveless fingers, dropping to the carpeted floor. The thick liquid seeping through the bag and into the carpet.

Sean was in bed, but he wasn't alone. His naked butt rose and fell as he thrust between the near translucent thighs of the woman in the bed with him.

"Sean?"

He looked at her over his shoulder. His face was covered by a sheen of sweat and the passion in his eyes cooled to be replaced by insincere concern. "Faith, baby," he stuttered. "It's not what it looks like." His caramel body rolled off the pale one of the woman beneath him and he grabbed a sheet to cover himself.

"What exactly do you think it looks like?" she snapped. Her gaze speared the woman who tried to blend in with the crisp whiteness of the bed linens. Faith recognized her as the daughter of the inn's proprietor.

Sean stood and stepped toward her, reaching out one hand. She backed away, and narrowed her eyes at him, astounded by his audacity. Like she'd want his damn hands on her. "Please, I was sleeping, she just slipped in. I thought it was you," he babbled.

"Shut up, Sean. Don't insult me." Faith glared at the young girl. "Enjoy him. I sure as hell don't want him anymore. I'll send for my things." With all the dignity she could muster, Faith Henderson walked out of the room.

As she heard the finality of the door behind her closing she bit her lower lip, so hard the metallic tang of her own blood filled her mouth. Keeping the threatening tears at bay, she moved to the front desk to speak to the elderly lady who stood there cleaning the counter.

Before she could say a word, the woman shook her head and clucked her tongue. "You'll be leavin' us then dearie?"

"Yes ma'am. I'm sorry, I truly love it here, but..." Faith didn't even ask how she knew what had transpired.

"I tell you what. You stay at my cottage up the road tonight, and then tomorrow we'll find you another place."

"I couldn't impose." Tightening her fingers around her purse, Faith sent the woman an encouraging smile. "I'll be fine."

"Nonsense. That lass is nothin' but trouble. Not sayin' your man was any better, but she is nothin' but trouble. Ever since her ma passed..." she trailed off. "I'm done here for the day, so you'll come with me and I'll have them bring your stuff to my home."

Faith gave Mrs. Macleod a grateful nod. "Thank you."

"Faith!" Sean's deep voice reached her from the hallway. "Faith, wait. We need to talk about this."

"Out the back, dearie. Let's go. Mr. Ackers is already here." The gray-haired lady placed a hand on her arm and led the way into the back of the inn.

"Faith!" the call came again. At her slight hesitation, Mrs. Macleod tugged on her arm and kept them moving.

The air left her lungs in a rush as she stepped outside into the late Scottish afternoon. Her body shuddered as the events rushed past her. She allowed herself to be pulled along and she sniffled back her tears as Mrs. Macleod showed her to a small room.

"You can stay here, Faith. Why don't you take a walk, or a nap. I'll send for your things and get to work on making some dinner."

"Thank you," she sobbed.

"There, there, dearie. He wasn't worth it and isn't worth your tears." She enclosed Faith in her embrace.

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Suddenly embarrassed, Faith stepped out of her arms and tugged on her clothing. Mrs. Macleod smiled and tipped her face up to meet her gaze. "Take a walk, Faith. Allow the spirit of the Isle to work its magic on you."

"I'll be back in a while." Faith headed to the door.

"Take your time, dearie. I'll be here whenever you decide to return."

Faith sent her another smile before walking to the door. Without conscious thought, she headed for the back of the small home and toward the path that followed along the jagged coastline. The breeze that flowed up off the Sea of Hebrides dried the tears that fell from her eyes.

Scenarios on how she could have handled the situation with Sean moved through her mind. She could have yelled, fought, any number of things. But she didn't. She never did. Faith was the good one, the quiet one, the one who never did anything impulsively, never did anything wrong.

Other people she knew would have probably beat the shit out of both of the cheaters. But she never did. Confrontations weren't her thing. It's not like she didn't care, because she did, but Faith had long accepted that she was non-confrontational. She would nurse her wounds in private. Coming upon the outcropping she'd discovered earlier, Faith sat down on the rock, dangling her legs over the edge, the height not a concern. She'd never been scared of them before. No point in being scared of them now.

The waves crashing into the rocks below her sent up a cold spray up to splash on her bare legs. She shuddered as another surge of tears threatened. One by one they slid down

her face only to be swept away by the wind and dropped unimpeded into the sea. After a bit, she got to her feet and headed back toward Mrs. Macleod's home. The wind stopped and shifted direction seconds before her feet left the wooded path to step on its graveled counterpart.

A cold chill flowed over her, goose bumps popped up all over her skin. Without thought, her hand reached up to grab the pendant she always wore around her neck. As her thumb ran over the familiar and worn markings she felt her body release the sudden tension it contained. This necklace had had that effect on her ever since the day it was placed in her hands by a tall young man named Rowan.

For the longest time, the markings had stumped her until she took it to a professor to ask him what they meant. It was beautifully crafted out of a piece of willow wood and it had a silver chain. There was a symbol on the back from the Celtic Ogham alphabet that was the letter "R" burned into the wood.

The front of the pendant had the Nordic rune for water, called Logr or Laguz by some, in deep green, and something in black the professor had called a bindrune and the closest translation he could come up with was, *"To win the love of a woman"*. And placed all around the edge of the circle were more small symbols, two different ones and they alternated all the way around.

She was told they meant, *"Protection against evil forces"*, and the sign of magic, somehow they were made out of pearl. The professor had offered her a great deal of money for it, but there was no way she was going to sell it. Not to anyone.

Feeling better, Faith took a deep breath, placed the pendant back under her shirt to lie against the warmth of her skin, and continued on to the cottage. Mrs. Macleod welcomed her with a brilliant smile. "Feeling better I see, lass."

"Much," Faith said with a smile of her own.

"'Tis the magic of the Isle," she said with a firm nod.

I don't believe in magic. "Yes, ma'am," Faith responded.

"I know these things," she reiterated.

Faith stared at Mrs. Macleod as she gestured to the kitchen table before she moved back to the stove and stirred the contents of the large black pot. Without protest, Faith ambled over to sit down. "Can I help with anything?"

The woman glanced over her shoulder and stared at her. Faith was struck by the myriad of emotions in her medium brown eyes. There was more than just motherly sympathy; there was a vast amount of wisdom and even a hint of humor there.

"Well, normally I'd say no, but we're not at the inn and so here, you're family. Go to the counter there and pour the batter into that tin after you line it with parchment. I've got the beef stew covered." She gestured with the spoon and turned her attention to the stuff before her.

I'm family? Faith got up immediately with a contented smile and walked to the counter where she found the roll of parchment paper she would be using. Before long, she was scraping the bowl with a spatula making sure she got all of the batter out and into the loaf pan. The smell was making her mouth water, and it hadn't even been in the oven yet.

"Anything else?" Faith asked as she put the dishes she'd just washed in the drainer and wiped her hands on a nearby towel.

"No, lass. We're good here. Just sit down 'n keep an auld woman company."

"Thank you for your hospitality, Mrs. Macleod."

"I liked you from the moment you walked into the inn, Faith Henderson. And I know the magic of the Isle will heal your heart."

More of that magic talk. She smiled. "Scotland is too beautiful to let me dwell on Sean." Despite her words, a lance of pain shot through her at the memory of his betrayal.

"The Isle of Skye has much to offer those who open their eyes to see it. And I think you are one of those."

The wind picked up and rattled against the cottage. Faith looked out the window and saw the moon had begun to rise and the last light of day was retreating.

"Can I ask you a personal question, Faith?"

"Go ahead," she answered immediately.

"What brought you here? To the Isle especially? I mean as opposed to going somewhere like Edinburgh."

Faith wrapped her fingers around the mug of coffee she held and ran her tongue over her teeth before answering. "To tell you the truth, Sean wanted to go there, he'd have preferred not to come here at all. It was my decision to come here. When we were deciding where to go, the moment I saw this on the map, I just felt like I had to come here. I can't explain it."

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Mrs. Macleod put a cover on the pot simmering on the stove and claimed the seat across from her holding a cup of coffee in her hands. "And have you had experiences with anything Scottish before?"

Rowan Kilgour. The memory of his name alone brought a smile to Faith's face before she could stop it. "No, not really. In high school there was a student who was from here. Well, Scotland in general, I am not sure where exactly." Her smile grew wider as his dark brown eyes stared down at her in her mind's eye.

"Ahhh, a young lad then."

Composing her face, Faith met the amused stare of Mrs. Macleod. "He was nice."

The older woman nodding knowingly. "I know that look. Even to this day, he brings you fond memories."

"He does. He was a senior when I was a sophomore. His parents were military and so he left after that year, but, his memory remained with me from that day." Faith wasn't sure why she was being so candid with Mrs. Macleod but it felt good to talk about Rowan.

Mrs. Macleod got up and dished them up both bowls of the steaming rich beef stew and placed a large chunk of warm bread beside them as well. Then she looked at Faith and said, "Tell me more about this man."

"I met him, officially, on a Sunday. I was walking into town and had cut through the park, he was standing near his truck listening to some music with a group of seniors. When some of them teased me, he defended me. Then he escorted me

into town the rest of the way. He was very gentle. There was a quiet strength about him."

"And how handsome was he?" Her hostess asked with a smile.

"Very," Faith responded with a grin. "Oh so handsome." She closed her eyes and immediately his image appeared to her. "I remember him as being tall, well compared to me many people were tall. Strong, he played most sports we had and he had dark brown eyes and hair that was so dark it was almost black."

"Och, he sounds yummy."

Faith laughed. "I thought so. Most of the girls at school did. But I don't remember him going out with any of them."

"Not even you?"

A burst of laughter escaped. "Oh no. I was just a sophomore, and not a very popular one at that. But ever since that one day in the park, it was almost like he appointed himself my guardian. No one bothered me again." Faith polished off the rest of her dinner. "I haven't seen him or heard from him again, not like we were going to be pen pals or anything. But before he left, he stopped by and gave me an amulet, a farewell gift he said."

"An amulet?" Mrs. Macleod asked as she rose to take the gingerbread out of the oven and set it on the table between them.

"Yes, ma'am." Faith pulled it out from where it sat beneath her shirt. "This one."

Something foreign flashed in Mrs. Macleod's eyes as she looked at the pendant Faith held. Her hand reached out

toward it but didn't touch it; she pulled back before she did. "And there's a mark on the back as well." It wasn't a question.

How'd she know that? "Actually there is." Faith turned it so she could see. "I was told this was—"

"Ogham for the letter 'R'," Mrs. Macleod interrupted her, wrapping shaking hands around her mug.

"Yes. I took it to a professor and had him translate the front as well, since I didn't understand it. So he told me."

"I wonder if you truly know what it means for you," she said softly.

The tone so low, Faith wasn't even sure she heard her correctly. She decided to answer her anyway.

"Kind of. I mean, I have the translation but I can't figure out why he would give me something with those meanings." Faith bit her lower lip. "I used to create one, but, it makes no sense. I haven't spoken to him since the day he gave it to me and that was over fifteen years ago."

"But you still wear it," Mrs. Macleod stated.

"Makes me feel safe, you know kind of like he's still watching over me. I know it's silly but it gives me courage at times."

"Not silly at all. It makes perfect sense to me." Mrs. Macleod cut two slices of the hot gingerbread and placed them on plates for each of them. "It will make more sense to you."

"Perhaps." Faith took a bite and groaned in pleasure. "This is so delicious. The whole meal was just absolutely wonderful. Thank you for allowing me to stay in your home."

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The smile Mrs. Macleod sent her was kind and yet Faith sensed there was something else in it, concern perhaps. Her eyes drifted back to the amulet around her neck and Faith fought back the urge to hide it from her gaze. It was like the woman knew more about it than she was letting on. And part of her wanted to ask, but part of her was steadfast against doing just that.

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The hunger grew within him. She was near and she'd called him, he couldn't ignore it any more than he could ignore the beating of his heart. Moving slowly he strode across the beach and headed for town as darkness gave way to the first light of morning. The moisture covering him dried in the wind.

He fought down the urge to go find her now, claim her, the second her tears hit the sea he knew. Knew it was her and she was calling him. Pleasure rippled along his skin as he imagined seeing her again in person. Seventeen years was a long time. *Too long*, he thought as he continued on his way. Would she remember him?

Entering a small establishment that served breakfast he picked a table that faced the door and was by the window so he could watch the street. The day had progressed along as

he walked to this town and it was already bustling with people.

"Morn," a waitress said. "What can I get ye?"

"Coffee please. I'm not sure what I'll be eating yet."

"Right away and take your time." She sashayed away.

He chuckled as he turned his attention from the over-exaggerated walk to look back out the window. She was pretty enough, but he was waiting for one woman and only her. The tinkling of the bell over the door pulled his attention away from the view outside the diner and his breath caught as he found himself staring into a pair of brown eyes he hadn't seen in many, many years.

Mrs. Daracha Macleod stood there holding his gaze before waving a greeting to someone behind the counter as she strode over to his table and sat down without invitation. Her eyes narrowed as she said in a low tone, "Rowan Kilgour."

"Aunt Dara," he responded. "It's been a long time."

She remained silent as a cup of coffee was placed in front of her. Once they were alone again, she spoke, "Since you went off to America and gave your pendant to a young girl."

"You knew I gave it away, I told you that. Why the frown?"

"I've seen the woman you gave it to, Faith Henderson." Her gaze was straightforward and cold.

His body prickled at the mention of her name. "You've seen her? So she is here." He smiled and tamped down his need to run off and grab her into his arms.

"Why her?"

His eyes narrowed dangerously. "What exactly is that supposed to mean?"

His Aunt Dara didn't seem at all intimidated by his glare, instead of backing down she responded in kind. "No hidden meaning, why her?"

"Why do you care?"

"Because I like her and I don't want to see her hurt."

That stopped him short. *Hurt? I couldn't ever hurt her.*

"Why would you think I'd hurt her? I love her, I could never hurt her."

Disbelief filled her eyes and in that moment, Rowan knew why she was asking. His uncle had not been faithful. He had slept around more times than he could count and Aunt Dara had formed her opinion of the males of his kind. And it wasn't a good one.

Reaching across the table, Rowan covered her hand with his. "I swear to you, Aunt Dara. I will *not* hurt her. I've waited this long for her, I'm not about to do something stupid. I've waited a long time for her to return to me."

Aunt Dara arched a brow at his words. "I did a lot of swearing myself when I saw her take the pendant from under her shirt."

"She's wearing it?" Rowan couldn't stop the grin. "I didn't think she'd wear it." Still, that bit of information made him extremely proud.

"Gainnes Jewelry."

"I'm sorry?" He blinked and tried to focus on his aunt instead of visions of Faith.

"That's where she is. Gainnes Jewelry."

His breath caught in his throat and his pulse increased. She was so close. Ignoring the rest of his coffee, he tossed

some money down on the table, smiled at his aunt, and headed for the door. Before he opened it, he turned around and strode back through the establishment and pressed a kiss to his aunt's cheek, her surprise obvious. Then he walked out and headed up the street to Gainnes Jewelry.

Rowan almost tripped over his feet when he saw her walk out of the store and step into the street. The morning sun shone down upon her, glinting off her hair which now had dark copper highlights in it. Even though he hadn't seen her in many years, Rowan knew her like he knew himself.

Her skin, a stunning shade of rich cloves, shone with good health. She had kept her figure but there were decidedly more curves available to his naked eye, she didn't downplay her looks anymore. He was both grateful and disconcerted by that. She wore slip-on shoes, white shorts, and a t-shirt.

He licked his lips as his eyes continued to relearn her form. He'd missed her so much, not seeing her every day, not hearing her voice in the halls had been painful. They'd even had the same lunch period and he'd spent many a day watching her through lowered lids admiring the serenity she portrayed amongst the chaos of the lunchroom. She'd sat with her friends and he'd been witness to her brilliant smiles, husky laughter, and the dimple in her right cheek that he wanted to lick more than anything.

Shifting his weight, he walked toward her hoping his erection would dissipate by the time he reached her. Before he got to her, another man stopped beside her and reached for her arm. Rowan's eyes narrowed as he watched her pull away and the man follow. He could hear her breathing

accelerate and the man's low angry words. He could feel her displeasure and hurt toward the man.

Rowan moved until he was beside her and then he spoke. "Hello, Faith."

The man glared at him, but Rowan was unconcerned with him. All that mattered was Faith. Her light brown eyes met his and his heart caught in his throat. Recognition was there instantly and a smile turned up the corners of her mouth. Not enough so he could witness her dimple, but it was better than a frown or no recollection at all.

"Rowan," she sighed in a way that made him think of bedrooms and her exhausted and sweaty from making love. Then she looked down as if embarrassed by her actions.

He pulled her into his arms and shuddered as her familiar and long missed scent embedded itself back into his pores. "It's so good to see you." Rowan drew back and brushed his lips against the softness of her cheek and bit the inside of his cheek to keep his moan contained. "You look wonderful." Her eyes met his.

"Who are you?" the man demanded.

Now that she was in his arms, Rowan had no inclination of letting her go. He ignored the question and asked her one of his own. "How are you doing?"

"Faith!" Her name was said in a disapproving tone.

Rowan watched defiance flash in her eyes before it was totally masked. "This is a man I went to school with, Sean. Rowan Kilgour." Faith hesitated briefly before she removed herself from his arms, and looked between the two men.

It hit Rowan then. What if she had a man? The thought made him frown and snap his gaze to the man who had been touching her. He was good looking enough, but in his eyes, Rowan saw a darkness he didn't want anywhere near Faith.

"We have something to discuss, Faith, and I think it should be done in private." Sean reached for her again.

Rowan felt her withdrawal and hesitation rather than saw it. Immediately he stepped forward, blocking her from the one she'd called Sean, his protective instincts as strong as ever with her. Black eyes glared at him, and all Rowan did was arch a brow. For a moment, Sean held his gaze and then backed down. He kept his eyes on him as the man stomped off, his displeasure obvious. Then he turned to face Faith.

"Are you okay?" he asked, cupping her cheek with one hand.

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Chapter Two

Faith couldn't believe it. He was here, right before her, flesh and blood. Rowan Kilgour. He'd aged very well, if possible he appeared even handsomer than she recalled from her memory.

His body looked just as strong, but she could still sense the quiet serenity she'd always felt coming from him. His thick dark brown hair was unruly and moved in the early morning breeze. It touched the collar of his shirt. A shirt that covered a powerful chest, hugging his biceps and torso like a lover, like she'd done in her many fantasies about him.

The charcoal gray color blending nicely with his natural sun kissed skin. Her gaze traveled lower and took in the tight blue jeans he wore which were molded to rock-solid thighs. With a mind of their own, her eyes dwelled upon the zipper of his pants, until she realized what she was doing and jerked her gaze away. And up.

His eyes, that reminded her of dark chocolate mousse, burned with a passion and intensity she couldn't recall ever seeing from him before. He blinked one time and she was met by the eyes she recalled from her past, friendly and slightly protective.

"Done checking me out, Faith?" he asked in a teasing tone.

She felt the blush race up over her skin. Licking her lips, she held his gaze and nodded with more bravado than she felt. "You've grown up nicely."

"As have you," he purred in a low seductive tone that sent shockwaves along her synapses. Faith was nervous. She was torn between fight and flight. As if he sensed her confusion, he stepped closer and reached for her hand. "Come have a drink with me. Or breakfast, if ye've nae eaten."

"Coffee would be nice," she muttered as she tried not to collapse in a puddle at his feet. His sexy voice with the Scottish accent had always affected her, and now it only seemed to tug more on her. She felt the moisture pool between her thighs. *If only things were different.* "I wish I could, Rowan, I truly do. Unfortunately there is something I really have to take care of." Faith sighed and looked over to where Sean stood a distance away staring at them. "This has to be done."

"Does that man have something to do with the fear I'm detecting in your voice?" Rowan spoke quietly, for her ears only.

"Is it fear?" she asked, not really requiring an answer. "I don't know; I'm just ... just..."

"Are you sure everything is okay?" he asked, gathering her into his arms and holding her against his chest.

She sobbed once, twice, and a third time before the tears just fell. Faith didn't care this was a man she hadn't seen in years, didn't care she was standing in the middle of the street in a town in Scotland, it just felt right to let go. In the back of her mind, she heard him speaking to her in a quiet tone, words she didn't understand but her soul did.

Pushing back, she furiously wiped her hands across her face. "I am so sorry; I don't know what came over me." Faith

looked up and she shivered from the intensity of his stare. It was more raw and primal than she'd ever seen a look on a man. Despite the tearstains on her face, her pussy convulsed, almost bringing her to her knees. *Jeez. Get your mind out of the gutter. He's just a man like any other.* The moment she thought it, she knew it wasn't true. Rowan Kilgour wasn't like any other man she'd ever met. He sent her a smile that made her wonder if she'd blabbed that out loud.

"Yes you do. You know why you feel so safe in my arms, Faith. Don't lie to either one of us about it."

Worrying her lower lip, Faith couldn't hold his gaze. There was too much truth in them and she wasn't ready to face it yet. She placed her hands on his forearms and tried to get him to let go of her. Electricity jumped from his skin to hers and she nearly yelped from the surprise of it. His words both soothed her and scared the hell out of her.

"I have to go. It was really good to see you, Rowan." She stepped back even further so he was no longer touching her. "Goodbye." Skirting around him, she headed off toward where Sean waited, her heart feeling heavy and empty the further she moved from Rowan.

This isn't goodbye, Faith. The words skated across her skin and she fought down the urge to look over her shoulder at the tall handsome Scotsman she walked away from.

"Faith, wait!" Sean's voice reached her and she realized she'd moved past him as well.

Without any intention of waiting for him, she kept on up the street and as she rounded the corner Faith broke into a run. She headed toward the one place she knew Sean

wouldn't find her, for he didn't know where it was. As she ran to the edge of the rock, she gasped for breath. There was no need for her to clear anything up with Sean, he'd made his bed and he could lie in it. The thing that was concerning her now was her reaction to seeing Rowan Kilgour again. And his words of that she knew why she did what she did.

He's right. You know why you allowed him to offer comfort. She couldn't explain it, it was like when he touched her for the first time in a long time she felt complete. Like he was the other half of her soul.

"That's just crazy," she muttered. "It makes no sense at all why a man I haven't seen since I was a sophomore in high school could have that affect on me."

"If it helps, you have the same affect on me, Faith," a deep voice flowed up from behind her and wrapped her in its sensual softness.

Faith didn't jump, it was as if her body had already known he was there. "Seventeen years is a long time, Rowan."

"I know," he said in a graveled voice. "Trust me, *leannan*, I am well aware of how long it's been."

Squeezing her eyes tight, Faith wet her lips with her tongue then opened her eyes. She refused to turn around, unsure if this was just another dream or a cruel hoax. "What do you want, Rowan?"

"You know what I want. The same thing I wanted when I first laid eyes upon you. You, Faith. I want you."

He said it with such finality and conviction, for a moment, she almost believed him. "Then why didn't you come get me?"

"I had to wait for you to call for me." His footsteps echoed throughout her body.

"I didn't call you. I didn't even know you were here." She felt him sit beside her and watched as his jean-clad legs entered her peripheral sight.

"I've never been away, Faith. Not while you've been wearing my pendant."

How'd he know? She gulped. "It was pretty."

"Look at me, Faith," he commanded in a low rumble. When she did he continued, "Why don't you ask me why I gave it to you."

She had a feeling she already knew. "Why did you?"

"So everyone would know you were mine."

Faith bristled. "I don't belong to *anyone*, Rowan Kilgour. It'd serve you well to remember that."

"How is it you feel comfortable enough to argue with me, but don't feel worthy to do it with anyone else?"

"What are you talking about?"

His eyes were a mixture of kindness and amusement.

"How you let people take advantage of you and you never stand up for yourself."

"I do so stand up for myself," she insisted.

He shook his head. "And with Sean, you just let him go without a fight?"

She frowned. *How did he...?* "How do you know anything about that?"

"You experienced it, I felt it," Rowan stated bluntly.

He reached out and traced along her jaw line. Faith drew back and sent him a glare. "Now you're just talking crazy."

"No. I'm telling you the truth. The pendant, you've found out what it means?" With two long fingers he skimmed along her skin sending shockwaves through her, under the chain and he pulled the charm out from under her shirt. His eyes never let go of hers.

Suddenly it felt like she was sitting in the middle of a desert instead of along the crags. She gulped and tried to form a word, but her mouth was too dry. It took three tries before she could answer. "Yes. He said something about protection, love, and water."

A sexy grin filled his face and she bit back a whimper as her body responded. "Just something? Not anything like winning the love of a woman?"

"Why would you give me something like that?" she asked watching how he ran his fingers across the pendant. It was as if the pearl shone extra hard just for him. "And do you want it back?"

"No, this is for you." With care, he placed it back against her skin. Then his fingers moved around to the back of her neck and he drew her closer. "So long," he whispered, "so long I've waited to feel your lips on mine." Then he kissed her.

His lips were gentle as he moved them over hers. A yearning she'd never felt before sprang up in her lower belly. Faith moaned in the back of her throat as his tongue slid between her lips and stroked hers. He tasted like nothing she'd ever experienced. It flowed through her and embedded itself in her soul.

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Faith's Tears
by Aliyah Burke



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Rowan forced himself to remain in control of his emotions. The sweet taste of her sent him into overdrive. She was more than he'd ever imagined she would be. The husky mewls she emitted were driving him crazy. His entire body was harder than the rock they sat upon. Deepening the kiss, he placed his other hand along the side of her face.

Nothing he'd been told had prepared him for this. He'd been told many things, but from the moment he'd met Faith Henderson the knowledge she was going to be the only one for him had made itself known. He didn't and couldn't understand how his uncle could have cheated on his aunt; since he met Faith there'd been no other woman for him. He spent most of his time out at sea, just waiting for the moment to be reunited with her. And now he had been.

When she began to slide her tongue along his, his cock jumped in the confines of his jeans. Moving toward her, he pressed her back against the rock and groaned in pleasure as her soft form cradled him. He positioned himself between her spread legs and ate her whimper as he thrust against her juncture. The spicy smell of her arousal filled his nose and permeated his skin.

A low growl rose in his throat as her hips undulated beneath him. Her fingers were sliding through the hairs at the back of his neck. Full breasts pushed against his chest, their

softness crying out to him. With one hand he traveled down her side and pulled up the shirt she wore. Rowan slid his hand back up, loving the feel of her silken skin beneath his palm.

"Please," she gasped.

He could feel the burn that had overtaken her. And he knew she could feel the passion raging within him as well. Rowan tugged off her shirt and his cock surged again as he looked at her breasts contained in the simple white cotton bra. No frills on her, but nothing had ever taken his breath as fast as seeing it against her rich skin. He kissed the valley between them before swiping his tongue across the exposed parts of the mouthwatering globes.

Covering her mouth with his, he plundered the depths searching all recesses as his fingers undid the snap on her shorts. She arched to meet his touch as he moved his hand down the inside of both pants and underwear. He purred in pleasure as his fingers slipped through the hair covering the heat he was searching for. She moaned as he trailed them across her damp slit.

"Rowan," she begged. "Please."

He looked at her, her skin flushed with pleasure, nipples visible through the white of her bra. "Lift your hips, Faith." She did and he removed her shorts. Her underwear were plain as well, nothing fancy, just white high cut bikini ones. Her long legs were as smooth as water gliding across his skin.

Rowan bit the inside of his lip as he tried to control the desire raging through him. She looked so perfect lying there. He pressed a kiss to her belly before moving up across her

breasts until he reached her mouth again. "Mine, Faith. You. Are. Mine!"

She shivered beneath him and it didn't take him long to strip out of all his clothing. Then he turned his attention back to the woman lying on the sun-warmed rock. He flicked open the clasp on her bra, groaning in pleasure as it fell away leaving her breasts exposed to his gaze. The nipples looked like chocolate kisses and he wanted to taste them.

Faith whimpered as he covered one with his mouth and sucked on it. Her back rose up, pressing more of her breast into his mouth. The hands in his hair tightened and held him there. He laved at it with his tongue, swirling around the pebbled tip and grazing it with his teeth. Her gasps and purrs were music to his ears. He moved to the other breast and gave it the same attention he'd showered upon the first one.

"Rowan, please." She pulled his hand out from her panties and led it to her belly. "I'm burning, please. Make it stop."

Releasing her nipple with a pop he rose up from her body and stared down at her. "I will, Faith. I promise." He slipped her underwear off and licked his lips. A patch of black hair was neatly trimmed over her glistening pussy. "You're so fucking hot, Faith." Rowan dragged his hand across the dampness that shone in the sun. Her hiss of pleasure made him shudder.

Lowering himself over her, he placed the head of his cock at the entrance of her pussy. He had to force himself not to slam into her. She spread her legs wider and he groaned as the tip of his erection slipped into her heat. Slowly he pushed

in until he was encased totally inside her. Heat. Velvet heat wrapped around him.

He dropped his head so their foreheads touched. "Perfect." Rowan shook with the need to dominate the succulent woman beneath him. "Are you okay?"

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Was she okay? Faith had never felt this full before. It wasn't just his size, it was more than that. She felt him in her soul. What he was feeling as he sat buried inside her. It increased her awareness exponentially.

"Perfect," she repeated his word back to him. Dragging her eyes open she watched him staring down at her. His eyes swirled with emotion, they were the usual dark brown but there were flecks of silver in them. She'd never seen that on him before.

His lips brushed over hers. Once. Gently. He withdrew until only the head was left inside her and then he slid forward. Her synapses went haywire. *Was it possible to die from pleasure?* If it was, she'd be willing to give it a go.

In and out Rowan moved. Slowly and very deliberately. So many times she was on the verge of exploding in pleasures when he would slow to a stop. From the soles of her feet to the top of her scalp it felt like she was on fire. It was as if flames flowed through her veins.

He thrust into her, placing his head by her ear, he muttered things she couldn't understand. His accent heightened her arousal, his touch skyrocketed it. Everything about him increased her pleasure; his smell, and the feel of his skin against hers.

Rowan moved faster, she dug her fingers into his bared shoulders and latched her legs around his lean waist, arching her hips to allow him deeper penetration. She bit her lip as he powered into her.

The intense feeling began in her feet and swept up through her, overtaking her as it erupted. As he continued to drive deeper and deeper into her, Faith screamed to the air, "Rowan!" Pleasure skated over her as he grunted low in his throat and came with a powerful rush. She could feel his seed filling her womb.

Their hearts were pounding in rapid succession as he collapsed on top of her. Skin was covered in sweat, cooling them off was the breeze blowing over them from the Hebrides. Faith closed her eyes and just enjoyed the feel of him on top of her. This was unlike anything she'd experienced before and she knew that no other man could give her the feeling of such completion.

"There will be no other man for you," he growled by her ear. "By the gods, Faith, I won't share you."

"What are you talking about?" she demanded wondering how he knew her thoughts.

"I thought my explanation very clear, Faith." He pulled out of her and kissed her before rolling off of her body.

"I didn't say anything out loud for you to need to say anything." She reached for her shirt and tugged it on after she refastened her bra. It didn't take her long to finish dressing and she refused to look in his direction as she shoved her feet into her shoes.

Faith felt him behind her before he even put his arms around her. "Faith," he muttered against the side of her head. "We need to talk about this."

Her body went cold. Stiffening, she found the strength to jerk away from his touch. "There's nothing to say. No need. I know this was a onetime thing and if you'd been thinking it through you wouldn't have done this at all. I've heard the speech, I don't need it from you, Rowan. Please don't tell me this was a pity fuck."

She gasped from the speed in which he spun her around back to face him. Faith noticed he was dressed as well, but it was the angry set of his jaw and body that gave her pause. His eyes were as hard as the rock they stood upon.

"A pity fuck?" he seethed. "Is that what you think of me? That I stayed away from you all this time and now I want a pity fuck?" Rowan stepped closer and lowered his face to hers. "I didn't tell you that I wouldn't share you with any other man for nothing. Damn it, Faith. I thought I was doing you a favor by staying away from you. I thought you deserved a chance to live your life, experience things."

"I don't understand," Faith said quietly.

His entire form seemed to relax. "I didn't want to force you to grow up before you were ready to." Rowan stroked the side of her face. "We're meant to be, Faith. I knew that the

moment I laid eyes on you. But, I also wanted you to be able to go to school and go through the early stages of your life without me hovering over your shoulder. And I did, as much as it killed me to feel your reaction to another man's touch. But no more, no man will touch you again."

"I ... you ... you barely talked to me. Didn't pay any attention to me. Why would you think we belong together?" *I feel like I stepped into an episode of The Twilight Zone.*

"I watched you way more than you think. I wanted to mark you, tell others you were mine, it was so hard not to. But the pendant marking seemed to do the trick. For the most part." He frowned and stared down at her. "It tore out my heart when another man dared to lay his hands on what was mine."

Faith shook her head. "That's the second time you've mentioned knowing that someone touched me. How is this possible?"

"Because of the pendant I gave you. It joined our souls, allowing us to feel what the other is as well as reading thoughts."

Pursing her lips, she cocked her head and looked up at him. "Is that why you said what you did earlier? You could read my thoughts? And can I read yours?" She sighed and added, "And why isn't this making me totally freak out?"

His deep chuckle flowed over her, and instead of irritating her, it actually made her feel much better. "You know that what I speak of is the truth."

Faith couldn't explain it. Somewhere deep down inside her she knew he was right. Still, it was one thing to know it and

something completely different to come to terms with it. "This is all a bit much, Rowan," she said with a sigh. "I mean I'm standing here listening to you talk but really, you *knew* I was the one when I was a sophomore and you couldn't tell me because you wanted me to experience life, but all this time, you've been able to feel what I feel but you couldn't come "claim" me until I called for you. Does that about sum it all up?" She lowered her hands from where she'd made the air quotes.

He licked his lips, an action which gave birth to heat in her belly. He had the cutest, most sensual, bow shaped lips she'd ever seen on a man. *I just want to lick them.* His grin told her he'd picked up on that.

Lick them if that's what you want. His deep silvery voice flowed through her mind. Caressing her. Tantalizing her.

She gasped at the pulsing her pussy did at his words. His eyes never left hers and his lips didn't move but it was like he'd whispered in her ear. Goosebumps popped up all over her skin and she tried to hide her shivers but failed.

"Listen to me, Faith. There are some things we need to discuss. Some things I have to explain to you."

She shook her head. "You don't owe me any explanations, Rowan. Really. I mean, even with the trick of whispering so it is like it's in my head, you still don't have to explain yourself."

"I think you'll change your mind," he said softly.

"Why do you say that?" Faith questioned as he stepped flush against her.

"Because of what I'm about to do."

"What's that?"

"This." His mouth landed over hers with a ferocity that hadn't been there before. One hand landed on the back of her neck and as his tongue mastered over hers she felt her skin under his palm heating up.

She whimpered and tried to pull away from him as it began to hurt. His fingers tightened in her hair and his hand refused to move and wouldn't allow her to move either. Faith pushed against his chest and found it was like trying to move a mountain. His free hand rested on the small of her back keeping her flush against him. The intense heat snaked across the back of her neck and she shut her eyes against the pain.

Rowan's mouth gentled and the heat across her skin slowly dissipated. As his lips left hers, Faith opened her eyes. His eyes were colored silver with brown flecks and as they started at one another they changed back to dark brown like she recalled.

That's freaky.

"What the hell just happened?" she demanded, stepping back from him.

"I marked you. I'm sorry it hurt, but I wasn't going to let you go without my mark on your any longer."

Reaching for the back of her neck, Faith sighed with relief when she found her skin smooth and familiar. "What did you do to me?"

"Marked you."

"The heat?"

Rowan touched the side of her face. "I'm sorry I hurt you."

Her eyes narrowed. "What is this mark thing you keep mentioning?"

His gaze burned hotter as he stared at her. "It says you're mine."

There rang such arrogance in his tone and Faith longed to knock him down a peg or two. Clenching her jaw, she sneered, "I *belong* to no man. And I never will." Without another word, she spun around and marched away, ignoring her body telling her how wrong she was. Faith refused to look back, although she did feel his eyes burning a hole into her back.

Don't do this, Faith. We've been apart long enough.

The voice in her mind was darkly sinful and created all sorts of images in her mind. Her steps faltered as the urge to run to him and engage in a repeat of what they just shared flowed through her. Her hands balled into fists before she regained her lost stride.

Stay out of my head, Rowan Kilgour! She yelled at him in her mind, not positive he would hear her. Masculine laughter filled her head before she heard him again.

You're so fucking hot when you stand up to me, leannan.

His phrase caused heat to well up inside her. Her pussy throbbed and she had to bite back a moan. Her nipples hardened and her heart rate increased. Swallowing, Faith kept going. More amused laughter echoed inside her mind as she continued on.

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Chapter Three

Rowan stared after her long after she disappeared from sight. Everything about her intrigued him. He hated how she'd thought he'd slept with her out of pity.

"Damn woman has no clue how desirable she is," he muttered as he walked to the edge of the rock and stared down at the water.

Out in the water, he saw a seal bobbing among the waves. Without thought, he headed down the near non-scalable descent. As his feet touched the damp sand there was another man waiting for him.

"Rowan," the man said by way of greeting.

Rowan stared back at the man before him. He had some gray in his black hair, giving him a distinguished salt and pepper look. His body still in good shape and didn't show him as being in his mid-sixties.

"Lachlan," he said.

"Didn't think you'd be returning here," the response came.

"Or you. What are you doing here?" Rowan asked.

"What's with the questions and the hostility? I'd think you'd be more excited to see your uncle."

"Ecstatic," he replied sarcastically. "Why are you here?"

"I want to see the woman who managed to pull you from the sea."

His uncle's philandering history reared up before him.

"Stay away from her, *Uncle*," he warned.

"Surely you don't think I'd poach on your territory, do you?"

"Your record is less than clean, Uncle. Head my warning, I'll forget you're family if you so much as look at her sideways."

"I won't bother her."

"You do and it won't just be me you have to answer to. Aunt Dara thinks very highly of Faith."

Something foreign flashed in his uncle's eyes before it was masked by humor. "Dara's here? I thought she lived in Aberdeen."

"She lives here now." Rowan looked up toward the rock where he'd loved Faith and was filled with the need to see her, hold her, and be surrounded by her gentleness.

Faith? Faith? Faith, answer me, damn it!

Rowan frowned. There was no response.

Faith!

Damn it, Rowan Kilgour. I told you to stay out of my head. I'm busy trying to enjoy my fucking vacation!

Rowan smiled. His body responded to her husky tone in his head. *I could get used to this, leannan. Your voice is so damn sexy, I just want to strip you down and love you from head to foot.*

Leave. Me. Alone.

For now, leannan. Only for now.

Rowan fought down another smile as he returned his attention to his uncle. "Anything else, Lachlan?"

His uncle shook his head and sighed. "Don't hate me for what I've done."

"I don't hate you. I don't understand how you could have done what you did, but I don't hate you. Goodbye, Lachlan. There's somewhere I have to be." Rowan turned and headed for the sheer cliff side he'd just descended earlier and began the long climb back up. There were some things he had to take care of before he saw Faith again.

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Faith stood over her final bag. She truly didn't wish to leave Mrs. Macleod's house. It was so cozy here and friendly. The seaside town was a place she could easily spend the remainder of her vacation exploring.

"Faith?"

She turned to the door and put a smile on her face when she saw the kindly face of Mrs. Macleod watching her. "Yes ma'am? I'm almost done, it'll be just another minute."

"Stay."

"I'm sorry?" Faith asked, setting her shirt in the duffle bag. "Stay?"

"Yes. Stay here for the remainder of your vacation if you want. Please consider it. I love having you here and would be honored if you would stay with me."

She didn't know what to say.

"Please, Faith. I know you booked a full week at the inn. Stay here. Be *my* guest, be part of my family. I work during

the day so you can just come and go as you please." Mrs. Macleod closed the distance between them and said, "Faith. This place is good for you."

"How can I ever repay you for showing me such kindness?" Faith questioned.

Mrs. Macleod wrapped her arms around her and squeezed. When she stepped back, she whispered, "Just be strong." Then she left the room.

Faith sat down on the edge of the double bed and smiled. *Could this day get any stranger?* With a decision made, she got up and headed out to the kitchen where, Mrs. Macleod was peeling apples.

"Will you stay?" Mrs. Macleod asked.

"On one condition," Faith said.

"What's that?"

"You let me help you out around here."

Mrs. Macleod pursed her lips, glanced down at the apple in her hand, and nodded. "Deal. Now help me peel this bunch of apples."

"Gladly," Faith remarked as she walked to the sink and washed her hands before rejoining Mrs. Macleod at the table.

"And you have to stop calling me Mrs. Macleod. You can call me Aunt Dara."

"Yes ma'am." She flushed. "I mean, Aunt Dara." Grabbing a knife, she began peeling an apple. "What are we making?"

"Apple and Bramble Crumble."

"Bramble?"

"Blackberries I think you call them."

"Sounds delicious."

"I think you'll like it."

As the crumble was put into the oven, Dara looked at her and said. "Go on with you and go explore. I've got everything under control."

Faith smiled, grabbed her purse and headed out the door with a wave over her shoulder. She glanced up at the fluffy clouds that floated overhead as her steps took her back the short distance to the town where she wanted to visit more shops.

It was early evening as she walked into a shop/post office combination only to be met by a myriad of looks. Not suspicious ones more like surprise and amazement. Her heart rate tripled before she realized it was all okay. The proprietor smiled at her and welcomed her into the shop.

Leannan, *are you okay?* Rowan's voice echoed in her mind.

Her pulse slowed down only to speed up courtesy of his silvery sexual voice. *Yes.*

You're scared. What's wrong?

I'm fine, Rowan. Get out of my head. Faith walked up to the man behind the counter and smiled at him. "I'd like a coffee please."

"Of course, lass. Have a seat at a table and I'll bring you some immediately."

"Thank you." She walked past a display of postcards and picked out a few to send back to family and friends.

The older man brought her a large mug of coffee and set it down before her. Then he placed a large muffin beside her as well. "Here you go, lass. I'll just add the postcards to your bill if you'd like."

"That would be wonderful. Thank you, especially for this muffin as well," she responded picking up the cup and taking a small sip of the hot brew. It felt so good going down her throat. She broke off a piece of the muffin and placed it in her mouth and it melted like butter.

Oh damn, this is good. She followed the bite with another swallow of coffee. Faith looked out the window she sat by and smiled as she watched waves crash on sharp rocks. *Life doesn't get much better than this.*

Oh, but it can.

Faith shook her head to try and control her body's reaction to Rowan's voice. It didn't work. Moisture pooled between her thighs and she squirmed on the red vinyl seat. Her skin prickled and her nipples hardened to almost painful points. Determined to pretend he wasn't turning her into a walking sex addict, she dug in her purse for a pen and began filling out the postcards.

When the man stopped by later to refill her coffee, he said, "Name's Angus, lass."

"I'm Faith."

"Pleasure to meet you, Faith." His gaze moved over her. "Are you staying long?"

"Rest of the week." She glanced outside and smiled at the creatures she saw resting upon the rocks. "What are those?" she asked glancing back to Angus.

"Seals." He looked out the window and back at her. "Seals just waiting for a maiden to come close enough so they can carry her away."

Faith chuckled. "Really? I'll make sure to stay away from them then."

"Safest if you do, lass. It's safest if you do."

"I'll remember that," she said with a smile as he took his leave and saw to some of the others that sat there drinking coffee and chatting amongst themselves.

Sean was waiting outside the shop when she left. Faith swallowed as she stared at him. "Get out of my way, Sean."

"Hear me out, Faith. Don't be like this, come back to the inn. I'll forget about this whole thing."

She gaped at him. Faith knew her mouth moved but no sound came out. He would forget? Him? The one who did the cheating? Taking a step back she glared at him, still unable to form any words. When he grabbed a hold of her upper arm, she found them.

"Get your hand off me, Sean." She jerked her arm, trying to free herself from his grip.

"Don't be like this. That was nothing. Just forget it, she didn't mean anything." He maneuvered them off the main street and out of the way of prying eyes.

"I can't believe you think that makes it any better." Faith pulled again. "Let go of me."

Faith? I'm coming to you. Rowan's voice immediately calmed her nerves. It was as if he stood beside her sending her silently his strength.

I'm okay, Rowan. I can handle this.

I know you can. But I'm still coming.

Rowan's belief in her made her feel invincible. "We're finished Sean. It ended the moment I walked through that

door and saw you with that ... whore." She narrowed her eyes at him and hissed, "Now, take your hand off me before I scream."

Sean looked startled at her vehement outburst and did as she'd commanded. He licked his lips and shook his head. "Would it make you feel better to sleep with another man? If so, go do it and put this whole thing behind you. We came here together and we're leaving together."

"We aren't leaving together. We aren't doing anything together anymore." She rubbed her arm. "And if you really want to know the truth, I have slept with another."

Sean's eyes narrowed and he lowered his face to hers. "You bitch! It was that one you said you knew from school wasn't it?"

"Yes it was. Now, if you'll kindly get out of my way, I have to help prepare dinner." Not giving him time to respond she shoved past him.

"I'm not letting you go, Faith," he whispered menacingly after her. His words made her belly clench.

She never looked back, just glanced up at the sky and sighed. *What is it about today that has turned my life upside down?*

Dinna fret, leannan. Everything will be revealed to you. Are you doing okay?

Just confused. I'm okay. Faith sat down on a rock outside Dara's cottage and cradled her head in her hands. *So confused.* She got up and walked inside the small house. Her nose was bombarded with the wonderful smells of food that floated on the air.

"Faith?" Mrs. Macleod's brogue reached her before she stuck her head out of the kitchen. "Everything alright lass? You look frail."

Sending the older woman a semi-forced smile, she shook her head. "I'm fine. Just let me go put this with my stuff and I'll be right back to help you with dinner."

A knock came on the door as Faith was pulling out dinnerware. Mrs. Macleod went to answer it. Faith's skin broke out in goose bumps. *What is wrong with me?*

"Faith," Mrs. Macleod said, "you have a visitor."

Frowning, she placed the plates on the counter and headed for the living room. Air left her lungs in a rush. Standing in the doorway near Mrs. Macleod stood Rowan. Taller than life, powerful, sexy, and so much more. A thick lock of brown hair fell forward over his forehead and she longed to reach up and push it back. Licking her lips, she opened her mouth only to shut it when he spoke.

"Hello, Faith. I told you, I would be back." Sinfully smooth and arousing, his voice flowed over her.

Unsure, she glanced between Rowan and Aunt Dara. Dara had a glower on her face as she looked at Rowan. "I'll set another place for dinner. I'm assuming the two of you have things to discuss," Aunt Dara announced before she disappeared.

"What are you doing here, Rowan?"

"Our place is with one another. Can't you feel it?" He stepped toward her and she was helpless to resist as he drew her into his arms. His lips caressed her temple sending shockwaves throughout her body.

"I don't know what's happening to me. I feel different."
She inhaled the scent that seemed to float around him. It was the crisp scent of the sea.

"What you are feeling is your heart telling you what your mind may not be ready to accept."

"Why does it hurt if I'm not close to you?" she blurted out.

"The mark. I feel the same way," he told her.

Shoving away from him, she glared up at him, determined to ignore the silver flecks in those dark chocolate mousse eyes. "Take the damn mark off then. I leave in a few days, I can't be feeling like this all the time."

"You marked her?" Dara's voice was sharp and unforgiving.

Faith noticed a faint blush skim across his skin. "Yes, Aunt Dara. I told you, Faith is mine and I won't share her with anyone." Despite the tint his skin held, his words were hard with conviction.

"Wait? You know each other?"

Dara sent her a sympathetic smile. "Och, lass. There's so much for you to learn. Dinner will wait, Rowan, you explain everything to her. And I mean everything."

"Aye." Taking her hand, Rowan tugged her to the door. "We'll be back soon, Aunt Dara."

Faith didn't have time to say anything before she and Rowan were out of the house and he was leading her up the path and to the road.

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Faith's Tears
by Aliyah Burke



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Rowan wasn't sure of the best way to handle this. He could feel the tension and uncertainty pouring off Faith's body as she walked beside him. He'd allowed her to pull away from him but he was pleased she was at least walking with him willingly.

"I believe you have a hell of a lot explaining to do, Kilgour," she snapped.

"So I do," he amended.

Placing his hand at the small of her back, he guided her to a small playground and gestured to a bench. She sat and shot an impatient look at him. Rowan carefully sat down at the other end and turned so he faced her.

"Everything I told you earlier was true, about the mark, being joined, all of that."

"None of it makes sense, Rowan," she said. "Logically speaking you can't 'join' with a person, much less because of an amulet."

"There is magic in the world, *leannan*. Surely you believe that."

"Magic? Are you serious? Rowan, come on. What kind, like white magic, black magic, witches, warlocks, spells, or fairy dust? No. I don't."

He couldn't believe it. The other half of his soul didn't believe in magic. Was this possible? "Magic exists everywhere, Faith. It's all around us."

She nodded, lips pursed in blatant disbelief. "This doesn't explain anything. What is going on here? And why am I involved?"

"You're involved because you were the one created to match my soul." He took her hand and interlaced their fingers.

"You are really serious about this aren't you," she stated, staring at him in the waning light.

"You have no idea, Faith. I've waited so long for you. I know this is new and probably scary but trust me, we'll get through it together." He kissed the back of her hand. "Let me show you the Isle tomorrow, spend some time with me."

"Tell me something, Rowan."

"Anything, *leannan*."

"If you are magic, or have magic, what is it you are, or do?"

"I'm a selkie."

Her eyebrows rose and she stared at him blank faced. "What exactly is that?"

"The best thing that will ever happen to you, lass," another voice broke in.

Rowan narrowed his eyes as he saw his uncle standing there, leaning against a tree arms crossed over his chest. "Lachlan," he growled.

An evil gleam sparked in his uncle's eyes as he pushed away from the bark and moved toward them. "Be nice, nephew, and introduce me to this lovely woman."

Faith tightened her fingers on his and her words skated through his mind. *Who is this man?*

My uncle, Lachlan.

He's creeping me out. He keeps staring at me like I'm a piece of meat and he's a hungry wolf.

I won't let him hurt you, leannan, I swear it. Rowan felt a growl of anger well up within him. He'd warned his uncle.

"My name is Lachlan Kilgour," his uncle said in a smooth voice, and Rowan knew he was turning on the charm that usually would get him any woman he wanted. His dark eyes were fixed firmly upon Faith and Rowan despised him for it.

"Faith," she responded indifferent to his applied charm remaining coolly polite instead of gushing all over him and only shaking his hand briefly.

"So, you're the lass to drag this nephew of mine out of the sea."

"Excuse me?" Faith questioned.

"Lachlan," Rowan warned.

His uncle paid him no heed. "I bet the sex with him was unlike anything you'd experienced before. We selkies are known for pleasuring women. *Lots* of women."

He could feel Faith's uncertainty. Glaring at his uncle, Rowan stood and helped Faith up before they walked away without another word. "Pay him no mind, Faith. He's just a bitter old man."

"That may be," his uncle hollered after them, "but I am honest. Selkies are sexual by nature. We both know it, Rowan and you shouldn't lie to her about it. One woman won't keep you satisfied. What's she going to do when the sea calls you home?"

Rowan tightened his grip on Faith's hand and stopped walking. "He's wrong, Faith. You are all the woman I need." He tipped her face up toward his. "The sea will never be as much of a home as you are." Lowering his head, he placed his lips on hers. Slowly his tongue sought entrance into her mouth.

You are my everything, leannan.

She whimpered and pressed against him, her fingers gripping his shirt, pulling him closer. *Rowan!* Her back pushed her breasts further into him and his cock throbbed with desire. There was no one else aside from them.

Their tongues dueled with one another. His hand slid across the softness of her shirt and held her closer. His skin prickled and he longed to lower her to the ground, or take her against a tree, he just wanted to be buried deep inside her velvet heat and in a world where nothing was wrong. Faith's responses to his touch were electrified and Rowan had never been so close to shaming himself fully clothed.

Slowly he released her mouth, but continued to place small butterfly kisses all around it. When he stopped, he glanced down at her, nearly drowning in her light brown eyes, and whispered, "Let's get going."

She nodded before loosening her death grip on his shirt, stepping back and slipping her hand into his. "Dinner should be ready for us," she announced and Rowan picked up on the slight tremor in her voice. He knew she was desperately trying to digest everything she'd just heard and not lose her cool.

They walked and his uncle still followed behind, never ceasing in his litany of reasons that Faith would be hurt if she had a relationship with Rowan. Each step, each accusation that poured out of his uncle's foul mouth incensed him further. His free hand clenched into a fist and just before the cottage, he spun around and bit off in a cold voice, "Shut up, Lachlan! Or I will shut you up."

"Why so feisty, Rowan? Am I getting to close to the truth for you? She needs to know what's in store for her."

He dropped Faith's hand, spun around and punched his uncle right in the face. With a crunch, blood spurted and Lachlan Kilgour fell back onto the ground. Eyes narrow with rage, Rowan leaned over the prone body of his uncle. "Unlike you, Lachlan, I have it in me to be faithful. There will *never* be another woman for me. And if you keep spouting off like you're doing, I will kill you." He could hear the surf pounding the crags below them with increased intensity.

Faith laid her hand on his arm and immediately he was calmer. "Don't do this Rowan. Please."

Glancing down he saw the blood covering his knuckles and frowned. This was no way to protect Faith. He wanted to hold her, but refused to sully her with his uncle's blood.

"Let's go inside," he said softly, ignoring the adult lying on the ground, blood still running from his nose.

She was silent as she walked beside him. Rowan could feel her slight trembling but she didn't say a word as he reached out and opened the door for her to Dara's cottage. Apparently her expression told Dara all she needed to know. For his aunt glared at him and pulled Faith into her arms, muttering softly

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and rubbing her back. Rowan headed for the sink to wash his uncle's blood off his hand, his anger at the man still flowing high and strong. He remained in the kitchen among the wonderful smells of the food that just waited to be eaten and sent an inquiring thought along the link to Faith.

Are you okay, leannan?

Just confused. Are you coming back into the living room?

A smile teased the corners of his mouth. Her desire to see him was easily picked up on. And it made him feel like he was on top of the world. Instead of answering, he wiped his hands on the towel one more time and walked into the living room to see Dara and Faith sitting on the couch, knees touching, and holding hands.

"Time to eat," Dara said and stood.

Rowan immediately took Faith's hand and once she'd regained her feet, tucked her against his chest, wrapped his arms around her, and kissed her temple. Looking over her head at his aunt, he mouthed 'thank you' to her as she turned and walked into the kitchen.

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Chapter Four

Faith sat in the open window of her room. Dinner had been interesting, her mind wheeling around most of what Lachlan Kilgour had been spouting earlier. Her mind was a jumbled mess and the odd thing was it actually comforted her to be able to speak with Rowan in her mind.

Freaky, but comforting. She stared at the moon as it rose above the towering trees around the cabin. The cold breeze from the Hebrides flowed over her and cooled her flushed skin.

Inside she hurt, she wanted to be with Rowan and it was driving her crazy. Every move she made, her body responded as if he were there with her. She was primed for a long night of loving and all by herself. Dara had made sure he left. Shifting on the windowsill she whimpered as her clit throbbed, crying out desperately for attention. Each breath she took pressed her tight nipples against her bra, teasing and tormenting her.

"Might I hope that whimper is for me, *leannan*?" Rowan's deep sensual voice poured through the night.

"Rowan," she gasped, surprised and yet not to see him there.

He leaned in and brushed their lips together before leaning against the windowsill beside her. "I thought we should finish our talk."

Talk? She didn't want to talk. Taking his chin in her hand, she turned his face toward her and kissed him. Faith poured

all her pent-up sexual energy into her kiss. He opened his mouth and allowed her entry; she slid her tongue along his before thrusting it deep. She stroked along the roof of his mouth loving how he tasted. A heavily addictive masculine taste.

She could feel the power rippling along his skin, but he never took over, just allowed her to set the pace. His hands cradled the side of her face and he turned more into her. Faith wanted him naked, wanted him slipping in and out of her. Without conscious thought, she reached for him in her mind. *Rowan. I need you.*

All you had to do was tell me, leannan.

She lost control of the kiss. Rowan dominated her and she felt herself melting under the assault his tongue made on her mouth. Flames licked along her skin that the night air did little to cool. Her belly quivered with need and her pussy throbbed insistently.

"Inside," he rasped. "Get inside, Faith."

A low moan of frustration escaped her but she listened to his directive and scrambled off the sill and headed through the dark room to sit on the bed. Her gaze never left him as he vaulted up in through the open window. His body so large it seemed to block out the moon behind him. As he moved toward her, he pulled off his shirt and dropped it on the floor, she heard his shoes hit the floor and the sound of his zipper being lowered made her body thrum with desire. Faith swallowed and tried unsuccessfully to slow the rapid beating of her heart.

Framed by the gentle moonlight, Rowan's face appeared before her as the bed dipped underneath his weight. He moved over her, pressing her back into the double mattress. His lips teased her jaw as he murmured in Gaelic.

"We need to get you undressed, Faith."

She smiled softly as he pulled off her oversized t-shirt leaving her only in panties.

"You're so wet for me baby," he crooned as his fingers trailed over the juncture of her thighs and teased the edge of her panties.

Spikes of pleasure rocketed through her. Her hips moved against his fingers, but a low chuckle escaped him and he refused to let her keep contact. She hissed in frustration. He clucked at her as he reached up to the top of her panties and drew them down. Faith lifted her hips and bit her lip as the anticipation nearly crippled her. She wanted him inside her.

His warm naked body covered hers and she squirmed beneath him. "Rowan," she whispered, not wanting to wake up Dara.

"Yes, Faith?" he asked, teasing her with the head of his cock.

"Please," she panted. "I need ... I need ... I..." Slowly, ever so slowly he pushed forward and filled her up. "Ohhh," she moaned.

Rowan released a groan as well. Faith tightened her muscles around him, wanting to keep him there forever.

In and out. Rowan began to move within her. Slowly at first, a nice erotic pace that kept her on edge the entire time.

A long slide in and a leisurely slide back out until just the head of his dick was left in her wet body.

"So tight and wet," he praised as his hips continued the unhurried thrusts.

A fire raged within her, desperate to be put out. But she was pinned beneath his weight and he didn't seem inclined to pick up his pace at all. Her hands landed upon his back and she dug her nails in as the fire burned hotter and hotter.

Rowan!

Yes, leannan? Do you burn for me?

There was something sinfully hot about not only hearing but also feeling the sensual heat of his voice moving through her body. His mouth was on hers, kissing her like she was his last chance for life.

Yes. Rowan, please.

Tell me what you want.

His mouth moved down to suckle upon one breast and she jolted up with a gasp. "Yes, oh God, yes."

Tell me what you want. His mouth was relentless as it tugged and pulled on her nipple. *You taste like chocolate, baby. The finest in the world.*

Forming a word was nigh impossible for her. Her body screamed for release and yet Rowan kept her just on the edge, not quite allowing her to find it. "Please," she muttered.

In and out he stroked. Faith tried to arch her hips into him but he shook his head and chuckled, the vibration tantalizing her nipple even more. Then he moved to the other one and paid homage to it as well.

Slow, leannan, we do this nice and slow. I want to make love to you.

Faith grunted in frustration. She didn't want slow. She wanted to be allowed to reach her peak. Her toes began to curl as the pleasure spread. Rowan kept switching his attention from breast to breast. Moving her hands from his shoulders to his head, she pulled on his hair.

His eyes were a gorgeous mix of silver and brown, the colors blending it was hard to tell where one started and the other ended. He kissed her lightly before whispering, "Tell me what you want, Faith. If you want it faster, say so."

"Faster, Rowan. Stop torturing me, please. I need to come."

"All you had to do was ask, *leannan*."

He moved faster. She groaned happily. New pleasure washed over her. He lessened his weight allowing her to move with him and in seconds they had a perfect rhythm going.

In. Out. In. Out.

Rowan left her breasts and moved back up to her mouth. He nibbled along her lower lip. Faith shut her eyes and dug her fingers into his shoulders. She undulated her hips and encouraged him onto greater speed. He complied in seconds.

"Oh. Oh. Oh!" she panted as he drove home into her.

Low grunts from him echoed in her ear as he continued to plunge in and out of her wet pussy.

Come for me, leannan.

His command echoed throughout her body and she did just as he had ordered. She buried her mouth into his shoulder so

her cry of release would be muffled. Faith came in a shower of bright light and brilliant colors. She felt Rowan thrust twice more before he erupted inside her. He collapsed on her and she loved the feel of his weight on him. Turning her face she pressed a kiss to his cheek.

Rowan pulled out of her and rolled to the side, cradling her against his chest. Pressing his lips to her forehead, he closed his eyes and just enjoyed the moment. Ever so slowly their breathing found its way back to a normal speed. Stroking her skin with his fingertips, he learned the shape of her outline. Faith sighed and snuggled deeper into him.

"I have to leave before Dara wakes," he whispered. "She'd skin me alive if she found me here."

"What's a selkie?" she asked quietly.

"It is one who can shift from human form to that of a seal." He waited tensely for her response.

"Okay," she responded.

"That's it. Just okay? Nothing else you have to say about it?"

Faith yawned. "Not at the moment." She draped a leg over his and kissed his chest.

Unsure of what to think, Rowan just brushed his lips over her forehead. He'd expected a lot of reactions but her falling asleep wasn't one of them. Closing his eyes, he muttered in Gaelic, "You are my woman, Faith. And I'll never let you go."

Her soft snore was the only response.

Rowan remained there as long as he could and just before he knew his aunt would be waking, he slipped out of the

cottage. He didn't stay away long for he was back and waiting for Faith by the time breakfast was ready.

"Good morning, Rowan," Faith said with a slight blush.

He grinned at her and winked. Today she wore loose jean shorts and a sweatshirt. Her hair was pulled up in a ponytail, leaving a tendril hanging down on each side of her face.

"Morning, *leannan*," he responded. *I'd love to take you over the kitchen counter, Faith. Have my dick plunging deep into that wet pussy of yours as you scream out my name.*

He watched her shiver and he smirked.

Stop it, Rowan! She snapped in his head.

Rowan couldn't help it. He loved seeing her flushed and aroused. *Are you wet for me, leannan? Are you craving the relief only I can give you?*

She glared at him across the table all the while keeping up a conversation with Dara. *I'd be pleased about you staying out of my head, thank you very much.*

I'd appreciate being buried balls deep in your pussy.

Faith narrowed her eyes at him. *Don't play this game with me, Rowan. I can play dirty too. I've been good and not telling you how delicious you look. Or how much I'd love to have your cock in my mouth.*

Rowan shifted in his chair. Damn, she's good. His erection pressed against his jeans at the image her words gave him. Reaching for his juice he swallowed a healthy amount as he shook his head at her. *Not nice, leannan.*

She didn't respond, just got up and walked to the counter for more bread. Aunt Dara's voice grabbed both of their attention. "I can't believe you marked her, Rowan."

"She's mine," he replied easily, watching Faith's body tense as he said that.

Faith looked over her shoulder and looked at his aunt. "You can see the mark?"

"Yes, lass. It matches your pendant, the markings that are on the edge." Dara held up her arm, exposing her wrist and Rowan knew Faith could see the mark on her skin. "Although, it stands out more on my pale skin," Dara added.

Rowan watched Faith walk over and look closer at the thing that bound his Aunt Dara to his lecherous, philandering uncle. He kept his eyes on Faith the whole time, gauging her reaction. She smiled softly at his aunt and retook her seat.

That man who claimed to be your uncle, is he the one who did this to Aunt Dara? She ate a bite of her eggs as she asked.

He knew he couldn't lie to her no matter how much he longed to deny his uncle. *Unfortunately yes, leannan, he is. I see.*

That was it. That was all she said.

After breakfast was cleaned up, Rowan took Faith to the car he'd rented and held the door for her.

"Where are we going?"

"I'm taking you sightseeing. Just get in the car, Faith," he said.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked again as they left the town and headed out into the country.

"Kilmuir. Duntulm Castle to be exact."

She was silent for a bit and he thought her sleeping or absorbed in the landscape when she questioned, "Is it true, what your uncle said? About all the women?"

"For him it was. Not for me." He pulled off the road into a passing place and waved the other car by.

"And last night, were you serious about that whole shifter thing?"

Rowan looked over at her but she was steadfastly keeping her gaze out the window and away from him. They rode in silence except when he pointed out items he thought she may be interested in. When they reached the parking lot for the castle, he shut off the engine, got out, and opened her door for her.

She was quiet on her way up the muddy trail toward the castle remains, but he could feel her excitement. "Yes. Faith, will you look at me?" She turned toward him, her gaze full of uncertainty. Her light brown eyes met his and he just couldn't find the words. "Just be careful here, even though areas are marked off it can still be dangerous."

"Sure thing." Faith put her attention back on the place he'd brought her to see.

He walked beside her as they explored. Each passing moment, Rowan fell deeper in love with her. Her joy at being here was obvious and it was infectious. Every smile, every sparkle in her eye made his heart clench. And yet, he knew she was still worried about what had happened between them. Catching his breath, he watched as she stood with some other tourists and chatted with them.

Looking around, he found Faith standing alone looking out over The Minch unaware of other things around her. Walking softly, he approached her. Stopping behind her, Rowan slid his arms around her and rested his chin on the top of her head.

"What are you doing, *leannan*?"

"Saying goodbye."

His heart skipped a beat. Goodbye? "Why are you saying goodbye?"

"I don't think I'll be back here. And it truly is beautiful."

Rowan wasn't sure what to say. After a few moments he spoke quietly, "Come on, I want to show you some more places." He held her hand on the way back to the rental car.

He showed her Kilt Rock and the three hundred foot high Mealt Waterfall. In a secluded area of the waterfall, Rowan made slow love to Faith. On the ride back to his aunt's cottage, he asked, "Are we okay, Faith?"

She turned in the seat and faced him. "If not for all this magic talk, Rowan, I would think I was dreaming. Being here, seeing this beautiful place with you, has been more than I could ever have hoped to experience. Even now my body desperately wants to be near yours, I hear your voice and I want you. I don't understand what it all is but this is my best vacation ever. For that ... I thank you."

Rowan reached across the interior of the car for her hand. "You are mine, Faith. Just as I am yours."

She pulled her hand away. "Until what? Another woman grabs your attention? Or cries seven tears into the sea? Yes, I asked about selkies today and according to everything I was told, your uncle is how you are."

"Not all parts of lore are true. My uncle is the way he is. Not because of what he is, aside from an asshole. If that were the case," he glanced at her, "Sean would have been faithful." Rowan regretted it the moment he said it. Making her feel bad wasn't on the agenda.

"I suppose you're right."

"This isn't ending after your vacation is over, Faith."

"I have a life to get back to, Rowan. A job. Bills."

He pulled up to the cottage and shut off the engine. "I can take care of you."

Faith didn't wait for him to open her door. Instead she got her things and got out. Rowan caught up with her at the front door.

"Faith?"

"Thank you for today, Rowan." She smiled at him, diminished the distance, and kissed him. Her touch was light and she placed one hand over his beating heart. "Sleep well."

Rowan stood in silence as she entered the cottage and closed the door on him. For a moment, he debated following her, but he realized it may not be best. Faith needed some time to come to grips with what was happening.

Goodnight, leannan.

What does that word mean? Her question came quickly.
I wondered how long it would take you to ask. It means sweetheart or lover.

Cocky aren't you?

He smiled. *You'd know.*

Arrogant ass.

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And all yours, Faith. He felt her laughter through to his soul. Dream of me, leannan.

Good night, Rowan.

Rowan blew a kiss in her general direction and headed for the path leading to the water.

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Faith lay in bed, wide awake and stared at the clouds that floated by in the night sky. She ran over everything she heard about selkies and tried to imagine Rowan as one of them. Was such a thing possible? She dealt with facts, numbers, things she could see and follow the logic of. Not make believe, legends, and magic.

And yet...

Here she was, able to talk to him in her head. Even though it made no sense, there it was. Reaching for the pendant, Faith closed her hand around it. Her thumb traced over the Ogham letter on the back. Why her? What reason did Rowan have for picking her? He had his choice of any woman.

Because you are my life's breath, Faith. Stop doubting yourself and your worth.

Grinning in the dark, Faith lay on her side and continued to stare out the window. *Don't you have anything better to do than eavesdrop on my private thoughts.*

Not when I'm not with you. There are things I'd love to be doing to you right now.

Her body responded, telling her it was ready for Rowan to make good on his word. *Where are you?*

Looking out over the sea. He was silent for a moment before he added in a more serious tone. *Get some sleep, leannan, I'll see you in the morning.*

Goodnight. Faith closed her eyes and burrowed into the down pillows. The cool breeze flowed over her and she sighed as she waited for the sandman to visit her.

The next morning Faith found Rowan waiting outside for her, sitting on the bench out in front of his aunt's cottage. Her heart beat erratically as her eyes skimmed over his casual attire. He had on a polo shirt and his biceps strained against the material. Nobody had the right to wear jeans the way he did. He looked poured into them and all it did was make her want to strip them off and have her way with him.

His dark chocolate eyes sparkled as he grinned at her. "I'm all yours, *leannan*, if that's what you want to do."

She flushed. "Stay out of my head, Kilgour."

He rose out of the seat and moved toward her. Flowing just like water, knowing nothing could stop it. She licked her lips but held her ground. Rowan stopped before her and tipped her face up for a kiss. He tasted like rich coffee. Purring she arched against him. This truly was what fairytales were made of.

"Ready to go, Faith?" he asked stroking the side of her face with his knuckles.

"And where are you spiriting me off to today?"

"Thought you might like to hike around in Cuillin Hills."

Faith leaned into him, loving how he easily supported her. "I just want to spend some time with you. I'm going home tomorrow." She could feel him tense at her words.

"Let's go," he said in a low tone.

As he drove, Faith watched him. Watched how the morning sun glinted off his hair and kissed his skin. Without thought she grabbed a hold of the pendant and skimmed across the markings she knew by heart.

"Is it true you can create storms?"

He glanced at her briefly before putting his eyes back on the road. "Yes."

"Have you done it?"

He nodded. "Yes. And not for a long time."

She just licked her lips. What could she say?

"You don't believe any of this do you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "I don't know what to believe."

"Do you believe how I feel about you?"

Faith reached for his hand and intertwined their fingers. "Partially. I want to but there is a part of me that isn't quite there." As she watched, his shoulders fell dejectedly.

"I love you Faith. I have since the day I laid eyes on you. And I will love you for all eternity."

Tears pricked her eyes and her heart skipped a few beats. That was a phrase she hadn't been expecting. For all eternity? Faith kissed the back of his hand unable to say anything.

Hand in hand they walked and explored Cuillin Hills. Faith took numerous photos of the area, of Rowan, and of the two

of them. This was a vacation she never wanted to forget. At least not the part that included Rowan Kilgour.

Rowan moved behind her and pressed against her, allowing her to feel his erection. She smiled even as she shuddered with anticipation, her pussy crying out for his touch.

"I want you, *leannan*," he whispered before his tongue traced the outer shell of her ear. "I want you right now. Right here." He gently bit her earlobe. Faith couldn't have refused him if her life depended on it. Her legs were almost mush and the way he kept grinding into her had put her on the fast track to total surrender.

"Yes," she moaned, dropping her camera and pressing back into him. Her body burned for him.

Rowan undid her jeans and pushed them over her hips and to the ground. She shivered thanks to the breeze. Or perhaps it was the lips trailing along her collarbone. His large callused hands skimmed over her belly and headed to her panties. Long fingers teased her pussy through the damp material.

"You're so wet for me, *leannan*."

"Touch me," she rasped, her hands gripping his forearms.

"I am."

"Rowan—" Her moan of frustration turned into one of satisfaction as he slipped two large fingers under the bikini underwear and into her wet channel. Her eyes rolled back into her head and her muscles felt like jelly. His strength held her up.

In and out his fingers plunged. Each stroke sapping more and more of her strength. In her hear he muttered things she couldn't understand. It didn't matter it was his voice that did.

"Please," she begged, needing more.

His arm was around her waist and he removed his fingers and turned her toward him. His mouth landed upon hers with a ferocity that took away what little breath she had left. Faith heard the rip and felt her panties fall away, but Rowan didn't stop the assault on her mouth. He swept through it like Niagara Falls, touching all he could and not stopping for anything.

She gasped as he lifted her up and lowered her back upon his rigid cock. She sighed into his mouth as he filled her. Faith looped her arms around his neck and sank her fingers into his hair. Her legs locked around his waist, allowing deeper penetration. Up and down he lifted her, each stroke bring her closer and closer to euphoria.

He pulled away and stared directly into her eyes as he continued to pump within her. "I love you, Faith." She bit her lip, not wanting to talk about that right now. He slowed his thrusts and took one hand, laid it on the side of her face. His eyes were brown with silver swirls and so gentle and full of love. "With everything I am. I hope you believe me on that. And I will always come back to you."

"Rowan—"

"Shhh, Faith. I don't expect you to say anything, I just wanted to tell you."

His thumb swiped across her lower lip. It was no longer a desperate need to grab a quickie in the woods, his words

turned it into something much deeper. A joining of souls. His hips picked up speed and soon she was once again hovering near the pinnacle she sought. She rested her forehead against his and stared in his eyes as he piloted her to a mind-blowing orgasm. Tipping her head back, she released a scream to the air and shuddered around him. Moments later, he exploded within her.

Panting and out of breath, he carefully placed them both on the ground. The soft grass cradling their exhausted bodies. He stared at her, a small smile on his face. "You're going to kill me, Faith." Grabbing her hand, he placed it on her heart. "Feel how fast it's beating."

Leaning in she kissed him. "I need to get dressed." He moved a hand over her bare butt cheek and winked at her.

"Are you sure? I kind of like you like this."

Stifling a laugh, she smacked him on the shoulder. "Stop."

Rowan was more of a hindrance than anything as she tried to get dressed. Her underwear was useless but he seemed overly determined to keep her pants down.

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Chapter Five

Rowan led her out onto an outcropping, similar to the one by his aunt's house, but this one didn't drop onto the beach but directly into the sea. Together they stood looking out over the Loch. He kept his arms around her, not willing to let her go for anything.

"Thank you, for sharing this with me, Rowan."

"Spend the night with me." He glanced down at her while he waited for her answer.

"Yes. But I need to get word to Dara."

"We'll call her." He brushed his lips over her temple and said, "Let's get going."

"Where are we staying?"

"On the Outer Hebrides, Western Isles. We have to catch a ferry." He loved the sparkle in her eyes as she smiled at him.

He kept an eye on her as he drove them toward Uig to catch their ferry. Her skin glowed in the late afternoon sun. Once they were on the ferry, she remained out on the deck, allowing the air to kiss her face as they headed across. She watched everything, absorbed it all as he drove them toward the bed and breakfast they were staying at. He'd called his aunt on the ferry and explained the change in plans. So now, all that needed his attention was Ms. Faith Henderson.

"I think each part of Scotland that I see is more beautiful than the last," she said on a sigh.

"Would you consider living here?" he asked.

"I would love to live in Scotland, but that's not going to happen." She looked out the window at the jagged coastline.

"Never say never, *leannan*."

With a chuckle, she reached for her hair and took down her ponytail, shaking her head so it cascaded around her face and the interior of the car smelled like sugar cookies. His cock jerked in his jeans and Rowan swallowed to keep his mind on driving them to their destination. Finally the small bed and breakfast came into view and he pulled into a parking space and shut off the engine.

They were walking up to the door when she grabbed his arm. Surprised he looked down at her and had to fight the urge to kiss her pouty lips. "What?" he asked instead.

"I don't have any clothes with me."

"Well, I guess I'll have to keep you out of those so they don't get any dirtier." He winked and grinned, which earned him a smack in the chest.

"Be serious, Rowan."

"Oh I am, *leannan*, I most certainly am." He grabbed her around the waist, pulled her close and kissed her until she sagged against him. Wrapping his arm around her waist, he led them inside and got them checked in.

They had a light dinner and headed out for a walk. They stood near the edge of the cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, a small beach down to their right. Off in the distance storm clouds rolled toward them. His arms settled around her, drawing her into his chest. "Thank you," he whispered.

"I just have to be back in time to make my flight."

A growl of anger grew in the pit of his belly and rose up his throat. How could she still be talking of leaving? Didn't she understand they wouldn't survive separated? Dropping his hands he stepped back from her and walked closer to the edge.

"Why are you thinking this is just a vacation fling?" he asked as he stared out over the ocean.

"Because she knows I'm not letting her go." A low angry voice answered for him.

Rowan turned in a flash and his heart dropped as he recognized the man standing there holding a gun pointed at Faith. It was Sean.

Faith spun when she heard the cold malice of Sean's voice answer Rowan's question. She blinked rapidly a few times to make sure she wasn't imagining him there. He was and he was holding a handgun. His eyes were bloodshot and wild looking.

"What are you doing here, Sean?" she demanded. Fear for Rowan rushing to the surface.

"I told you, Faith. I wasn't letting you go. But if you are so determined to leave me, I'll make it so no one else can have you either." He ran a hand over his forehead before shaking his head and waving the gun. "Uh uh. You stay over there, Scotsman," he sneered.

Faith's heart skipped a beat when Rowan ignored Sean and stepped in front of her. *Rowan what are you doing?*

Protecting you, leannan, like a man should protect his mate.

I don't want you hurt. She pulled on his arm, trying to get him to move back but he was like a rock and wouldn't budge.

"Step away from her," Sean growled.

The sound of a cocking gun filled the air and Faith whimpered in fear. *Please do as he says, Rowan. I don't want you hurt and I don't think he'll shoot me.*

Leannan. His voice was a low rumble in her mind.

Please, Rowan.

"All right. Just don't hurt her." He put his hands out to the side and slowly stepped away from her.

"Further," Sean ordered.

Faith watched Rowan move further away from her. Her heart pounded erratically and her legs felt more like jelly than anything else. Rowan kept his eyes on Sean as he inched away but she could feel his presence in her mind and it offered comfort.

"Better." Sean kept the gun more on Rowan than her, but she was looking up the barrel a time or two.

"You don't want to do this, Sean." She tried to reason with him.

"I think I do. I don't like being left, Faith. I tried to give you a chance to come back, but instead you shack up with this ... this..." He waved the gun toward Rowan and she bit the inside of her lip so hard she tasted the metallic tang of blood.

"I made a mistake," she said ignoring the hurt that shot through her at those words. "I just wanted to get you back for what you did. Please, Sean, you have to know that." She walked toward him.

Faith! Stay away from him.

I can't let him hurt you, Rowan.

An evil smirk filled Sean's face and he moved toward Rowan. The gun aimed directly at his chest. "I think you need to leave her alone."

"I can't do that," Rowan said. "She's mine. I love her." Thunder rumbled above them and rain began to fall. The waves crashed harder into the crags and on the beach.

Are you trying to provoke him? she demanded.

Anything to keep his attention off you.

"She doesn't love you. And she'll never be yours," Sean hissed as he kept approaching Rowan, pushing him back toward the edge.

"Oh she's mine. She's mine in ways that she'll never be yours," Rowan taunted him. *Run, leannan, get out of here.*

I won't leave you.

Go!

Rowan ... I...

Get to safety, Faith. "I've loved her more thoroughly and completely than you could even begin to imagine."

"You bastard," Sean ground out.

Faith backed up slowly and quietly. She looked at Rowan but he was keeping his eyes on Sean. *Rowan?*

I love you.

She turned and began running.

"Hey! Faith get back here," Sean yelled. "No!"

A shot rang out and with a scream, Faith turned around. Pain lanced through her chest. Rowan's face was filled with

pain. She could see the red blood staining his white shirt, spreading out further and further.

"Rowan!" she hollered and began running back toward him. Sean turned to her and raised the gun again. As if it were in slow motion, Faith watched as Rowan reached out for Sean, gripped his wrist and fell back over the edge taking Sean and the gun with him.

"Nooooo!" Lightning jagged across the sky as her shriek reached the heavens. Scrambling toward the edge, Faith flopped on her belly and looked over. Nothing but waves crashing against the rock. She didn't see any sign of either of them.

Rowan? Rowan? Answer me. There was nothing. She couldn't feel his presence either and it created such an emptiness within her.

The skies opened up and released a torrential downpour. She lay there for a moment, hollering their names. Straining to see through the darkening night and rain. Nothing. Clambering to her feet, Faith ran all out back to the inn and yelled for help. The inn's proprietor told her that they couldn't go looking in the storm and it was very unlikely that they would have survived the fall.

Unable to accept that, Faith ran back out there but went to the beach instead and tried to see if she could see anything from there. She was soaked, the wind whipped her wet hair around stinging her eyes.

"Rowan!" she screamed his name until she was hoarse. She waded out into the freezing water and pounded her fists on the choppy surface. The rain washing away the tears that

streamed from her eyes. *I never got to tell him I loved him.* Teeth chattering, Faith went back to the beach and sat beside a large piece of driftwood. She wrapped her arms around her legs and sat there in the downpour.

Faith cracked her eyes open and slowly moved her stiff body. The rains had stopped and she was still on the beach, in the same position. Standing, she looked over the water. The cold wet sand sticking to her in places she didn't want to think about. A blue mist seemed to hover over the calmer surface. She searched desperately for any sign of him but got nothing.

Turning her back on the sea, Faith headed for the path to lead away from the beach. At the foot of it, she faced the sea one more time. The fog rolled away allowing her to see some dark shapes bobbing in the water. Her heart sped up until she realized it was a pod of seals. A tingling sensation ran up her spine and she took a step closer to the water. One dark head broke away from the rest and headed in toward shore. Another seal followed.

The waves crashed up against the rocks that were further out in the water but lapped gently against the sand. The fog had moved away so that she could easily see the surface of the water. The early morning over the Atlantic was a beautiful sight but to Faith it hurt. She tucked a damp sandy strand of hair behind her ear as the first seal dipped below the waterline.

When it came back up her heart caught in her throat. No longer was it a seal. Her mouth dropped open as a shirtless Rowan Kilgour strode through the water toward her. All he

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had on was a pair of skintight black pants. The cold water didn't seem to bother him and his sliced through the last few feet until his feet hit the sand. He stood there, water running off his body and being soaked up by the beach.

Her mouth moved but no sound came out. The morning light gleamed off his wet half naked body, making his skin appear golden. Faith's knees began to knock as she tried to make sense of what she was seeing. She moved toward him, slowly at first until he looked at her and she stared straight into those eyes of dark chocolate mousse and argent flecks. At that moment she knew.

"Rowan!" she screamed as she ran all out toward him, throwing herself at him and crying with relief as his familiar and strong arms encircled her. Legs anchored around his waist, she cupped his face in her hands and began kissing him. All over, cheeks, lips, nose, eyes, anywhere she could reach.

"I told you, I'd always come back to you, *leannan*." He kissed her, his tongue sliding into her waiting mouth. He tasted like heaven, he tasted like her future.

"I thought I lost you," she sobbed. "I thought I lost you before I got a chance to tell you I love you."

His thick lashes dropped down before he jerked his head to stare at her. "You love me?"

She nodded. *I love you, Rowan Kilgour.*

"And what I am?"

"What you are, is the man that I love. Nothing else will ever change that," she vowed.

"*Ta gra agam ort, leannan.*" He kissed her lightly. "I love you, too." Rowan put a hand over the pendant and kissed her again. Her chest grew warm, but she didn't struggle, just trusted in what he was doing to her. The heat subsided and Rowan stared into her eyes and said, "Marry me, Faith."

She looked down and came face to face with a silver pearl ring. On the band, she could make out all the markings that had been on the pendant. There was a message inscribed on the inside of the band. It read: *beyond eternity, leannan, I will love you.* Inlaid in the pearl was the Ogham letter R and another one she didn't know. Faith reached for her chest and didn't feel the necklace there anymore.

"Yes. It is so beautiful." She sighed as he slipped the ring on her finger. "But ... where'd the necklace go?"

He brushed their lips together. "Things aren't always what they appear to be."

That's putting it mildly. "What is this new mark? I don't recognize it."

"That is an 'F' for you, Faith." Rowan kissed the hand wearing the ring.

"Is this a dream, Rowan? Are you really here? Or am I imagining it?"

"I'm flesh and blood, *leannan*. And I am right here before you."

She leaned into him, holding him close and fought back the tears. "How did you survive?"

"I am more powerful in my other form. As soon as we hit the water, I shifted. I'm sorry I couldn't come to you sooner. The healing took longer than expected."

"I was so scared. I didn't know what to do. I tried to get help, but they said it was too dangerous to try a rescue attempt with the storm. So I came back here and waited. Don't leave me again, Rowan."

"Never, *leannan*, never. My place is beside you." He put her on her feet and smiled down at her. "No matter where you want to go, I'll be with you every step of the way."

"What do you do, Rowan? What about your job?"

"I don't have one. I'm disgustingly rich."

"How?"

He winked at her. "Sunken ships."

A noise behind him cause her to look around him. She gasped. There were five more people standing on the edge of the water. All the men were very handsome and the two women were absolutely beautiful.

One of the women, a tall dark haired woman, wearing next to nothing, stepped forward. "Is this the one, *macan*?" her question flowed across the air like velvet.

"*Sedah, màthair*." He put a hand on Faith's back, his touch immediately calming her. "Faith, this is my mother, Mairead Kilgour."

She swallowed before sending her a nervous smile. It's not like she was clean and at her best. There was dried sand all over her and even in her hair. "It's nice to meet you, ma'am."

Mairead moved toward her, each movement elegant and beautiful. "You love my son," she said, staring at her with eyes like Rowan's.

"Yes, I do." Faith didn't even hesitate to agree.

A serene smile filled the elegant woman's face. "Welcome to the family, *nighean*."

Rowan? What did she call me?

Daughter.

Tears pricked her eyes for the umpteenth time today.
"Thank you."

The slim arms that surrounded her were surprisingly strong. "Take care of my baby."

Faith hugged her back all the while she smiled. A great many words came to mind when she thought of Rowan. Baby, wasn't one of them. "I'll do that."

Mairead let her go and looked at her son. Faith watched as they spoke rapidly in Gaelic. The love they shared was obvious as she kissed his cheek and turned back to the water. By the time his mother reached the edge, Rowan was beside her. Together they watched as the five people walked back out into the Atlantic. One minute they were there and the next five seal heads poked up and they swam off.

Faith shook her head in disbelief. She had so many questions to ask she wasn't sure where to start. Glancing at Rowan, she witnessed a bit of sadness in his eyes. Sadness which vanished when he looked at her to be replaced by infinite love. He smiled at her and cupped her cheek in his hand which despite the fact he was shirtless was warm.

"Ready to go?"

Snuggling against his palm she asked, "Where?"

"Well, I figured you'd want to clean up before we catch a plane."

We? "We?"

"Yes, we. You said you wanted to go home, and so we shall."

Wrapping her arms around him, she kissed him. Her tongue danced with his and their bodies pressed closer and closer together. Faith purred and arched against him, moaning when he lifted her off the ground. The kiss was hungry as her legs locked around his waist. Questions could wait until later.

Her eyes closed as he walked them back up the path and she didn't open them until he stopped. They were in front of the bed and breakfast. He opened the door and walked in, ignored the stunned looks of those who happened to be there and headed for the room he'd secured for them. Without slowing he strode to the bed and lowered her on it.

Lying on her back, Faith looked up into the face of the man above her. She pushed back a wet lock of his hair and trailed her hand down his cheek. "I love you, Rowan."

"And I you, *leannan*."

"Love me," she said, tracing his lower lip.

"Beyond eternity," he whispered as he helped her out of her clothing.

As he slid his erection deep within her, Faith knew her life would never be the same. She didn't care, as long as she was with Rowan.

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by Aliyah Burke

Rowan lay there holding Faith. This was heaven. Even if he was never allowed to skim across the water again, he wouldn't trade anything for the woman in his arms. "*Ta gra agam ort*, Faith." There was no response from the woman beside him, but he hadn't expected any, she was exhausted and sleeping the sleep of the dead draped across his naked body.

Seventeen years it had taken but finally she was his. Rowan leaned over and kissed the top of her head. He'd just had to wait for her to need him. All he needed to complete his destiny was ... Faith's tears.

The End

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by Aliyah Burke

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