

# The Laird of Loch Fyne

Brandy Grandberg



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*The Laird of Loch Fyne*

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For my husband, Garritt, with love.  
Thank you for being my rock and believing in my wild adventures.

# Chapter 1

*Scottish Highlands, 1593*

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A shrill scream woke him as he lay still, violently gripping the bed linens at both sides. Terror flooded every inch of his sweat-drenched body before realizing it was once again only a dream—a dream that had randomly plagued his mind for the past twenty-two years.

With his heartbeat slowing to a normal pace, Ian MacLachlan unsteadily rose from his bed, donned his robe, and poured himself a cup of ale to ease his nerves. Still trembling from the awful nightmare he knew all too well was real, Ian shuddered at such thoughts, thoughts he wished would simply go away.

The Highland wind howled outside, a true mimic to his own mood. It was never easy reliving his mother's death all over again. Once was enough. Unfortunately for him, fate didn't agree. The servant's loud cry for help, the pool of blood, his father's frantic rampage at the sight of seeing Isobel dead at the bottom of the stairs—it had been too much for a lad of only six years to bear. Even as a grown man, the images of his lifeless mother still haunted every dark crevice at the back of his mind. He often wondered if his brother was troubled by such nightmares. Isobel's death was something they rarely spoke of. Reid had only been four at the time, not old enough to retain as many horrible memories of that dreadful night as himself.

On that unforgettable evening, she'd happily tucked him and his brother in to bed, humming a soothing lullaby as she did nearly every night.

*Pleasant dreams, my little warriors.* She'd always called them that. It was an endearment both Ian and Reid had come to cherish.

After blowing out the candle sitting on the bedside table, Isobel had kissed both boys on their foreheads and walked out of the room, quietly closing the door behind her. Her footsteps, light, yet able to be heard on the stone floor of the hallway, had stopped. Complete silence had enveloped Ian's surroundings, his breathing coming to a halt. The sound of his mother's alarming scream had stirred the still night air, causing him to bolt out from under the covers and to the hallway. Rubbing his eyes, Reid had slowly pattered behind, not nearly as curious.

Ian's tiny feet had carefully took one step at a time down the spiral staircase, his only assumption being she'd probably seen a rat and it had taken her by surprise. Isobel had never liked rodents scurrying about the keep, especially at night. As he had neared the bottom of the stairs, the more concerned he had become as one by one every face turned and focused their attention on himself and Reid.

"Mama!" Ian had cried, budging his way through the mass of people, his little body barely able to keep up with the amount of hands trying to hold him back. "Wake up, Mama!"

Shaking her unresponsive body with all his strength, Ian had willed her to move. Little Reid had hovered over Ian, not at all understanding why his brother seemed so upset.

"Mama be fine, Ian. She wake up soon," he had innocently said, placing a comforting hand on his big brother's shoulder.

As tears had streamed down Ian's face, his trembling hands had grasped at his mother's arm, hoping he was mistaken and she would respond.

“No...she’s not going to wake up, Reid,” he had whispered, looking around only to find pity pouring from every pair of onlookers’ eyes.

Wanting nothing more than to shake off the grim memory, Ian ran his hands over his face and walked to the window of his bedchamber. With the help of torches and the added moonlight pouring down from the night sky, he was clearly able to see all guards posted outside the gates of the inner bailey. Squinting at the sight of a man hurrying toward the keep with one of his guards and a wooden cane in tow, Ian’s brows furrowed together, not at all liking what he was about to encounter.

“Damn!”

He’d told the old man time and time again he didn’t wish to be bothered unless absolutely necessary.

“I swear, he has no sense at all,” Ian grumbled as he sat in his chair, unhappily placing his boots on his feet. “Probably wishes to speak to me of fairy magic or something of the sort. I’ll show him what he can do with his wee magic. Can’t believe he’s troubling me in the middle o’ the night like he is.”

Not having the patience to wait for a knock on his bedchamber door informing him of his unexpected visitor, Ian rushed out of his room in a rage, slamming the door as he left. Whatever guard decided it would be all right to let the man pass would surely pay in the lists tomorrow. He’d make sure of it.

Strumming his fingers on his desk in the solar, his unshaven chin propped up with his other hand, Ian concluded he’d had more than enough of Gilmore’s droning one-sided conversation. Blowing a strand of dark hair out of his tired eyes, Ian stared at the old man, grunting his disapproval.

“Well, aren’t ye goin’ to say anything, laddie?”

Ian cleared his throat. “Address me as laird, Gilmore. Ye know I’m no longer a child.”

Shaking a weathered finger Ian's way, Gilmore's beady, blue eyes searched out Ian's stoic expression.

"You will always be Duncan MacLachlan's eldest son. Do ye have any idea how many times I watched your mother change your dressings as a babe?" Gilmore shook his head, his eyes becoming distant as he searched out memories from the past. "She was such a gentle woman. Loved the two of ye lads with as much attention a mum can possibly give her bairns. I don't want to see her greatest accomplishments buried alongside their father."

"You don't know for certain my father was murdered. Hell, the man was getting old. He said himself his heart was sick."

"His heart was sick the day your mother died and that wretched woman moved in and took her place."

Ian couldn't help agreeing. Gilmore did have a point. Lorna was a devious woman, not one to be trusted. As a young woman, she was only tolerated around the keep because she was Isobel's cousin. In his opinion, the day she married Duncan was the day his father gave up on life. At least one good came out of a loveless marriage: Niall, their half brother.

Ian stood to stoke the fire across the room. It was chilly, and he was more than tired of talking nonsense with a man most villagers feared. Ever since he was a child, Gilmore had supposedly been cursed with the second sight. He was otherworldly and dealt in the devil's realm as most would say. What people didn't realize was that the majority of the time his premonitions ended up being true to his word, not something to ignore. Even Ian, being rationally open-minded, was having a hard time believing Gilmore's harsh revelation.

"Did ye see any markings on the person? Anything that might identify them?" he asked, plopping himself back into his chair with a thud, barely a hint of a smile lining his exhausted face.

Gilmore wiped the back of his shaky hand over his forehead, his eyes nervously wandering back and forth from Ian and to the fire.

“Nay, dear boy. I saw only you and Reid in yer beds, barely a breath of life left in ye both.”

Ian sighed, rubbing his hands over his face. That wasn't good enough.

“I really don't know what to say, old man. What am I to do? I'm no' going to worry endlessly over something I have no control over. Ye don't even have the slightest idea as to who may be wishing to end our lives.”

“*Wishing* to end your lives? Dear boy, it will happen. Don't ignore what I'm saying just as yer father did, for it shall be the end of you both.”

Ian pushed himself away from his desk and called for the guard waiting outside his door. It was true; his father had ignored Gilmore's crazed warnings to a point where he avoided the old man at all costs. Duncan MacLachlan had never been one to tolerate the unknown visions of his dear friend.

Pacing the floor, wanting nothing more than to escape the meaningless conversation, Ian ran his fingers through his hair while muttering on about the old man accomplishing nothing but wasting his time.

“Show him out,” he demanded, his guard not at all surprised. “Never again will you travel to the keep in the middle of the night only to upset me. I don't believe a word of what you've said is true. It was only a dream ye had, *not* a premonition.”

“But—”

“Out! I want to hear nothing more about it . . . ever!”

Gilmore's eyes grew large, every line on his weathered face creasing with disappointment. Tapping his cane on the stone floor, he quickly rose to leave.

He'd meant no harm but only wished to warn Ian and his brother of the serious danger that lurked within the shadows of their everyday lives. They would surely die. It was inevitable. Displeased and overly

exhausted, Gilmore solemnly wandered into his tiny cottage nestled deep within the woods. Spying his ancestral chest filled with all things wizardly and magical, it seemed as if it were practically calling to him, begging for his attention. His eyes sparkled mischievously, clicking his tongue with pure excitement.

“If ye won’t heed a word I say, ye stubborn boy, I’ll find a way myself. Just you wait and see.”

Rummaging endlessly to the bottom of the chest filled with numerous books, bowls of all sizes, cloth, and various herbs, Gilmore chuckled as he finally found the book he’d been searching for. Holding it in his trembling hands, eyeing every intricate detail, he blew off a thick layer of dust, revealing its majestic appearance. Having been placed in his family’s care generations ago, it had been years since it had last been opened for its use.

The book contained numerous spells and sorcery recipes for devising just about anything a person could imagine. His eyes impatiently scanned the seasoned pages as he searched for one spell in particular: the spell of protection. He knew it existed. He’d been told of it many times as a young lad.

As page after page passed, he quickly became irritated, nearly spilling a goblet of wine all over his much-needed treasure. Nearing the end of the book, his agitation almost to a point of no return, his fingers aimlessly found exactly what they searched for.

“Aye,” he muttered, his grin crooked. “This is what’s needed.”

Knowing the spell of protection was meant to do good, Gilmore was also aware there could always be ramifications when dealing with the magic realm. He had no idea what the spell would conjure up for protection. All he knew was that the spell would travel as far as it needed in order for its purpose to be effective. They would be saved; that he was sure of. He just didn’t know at what cost.