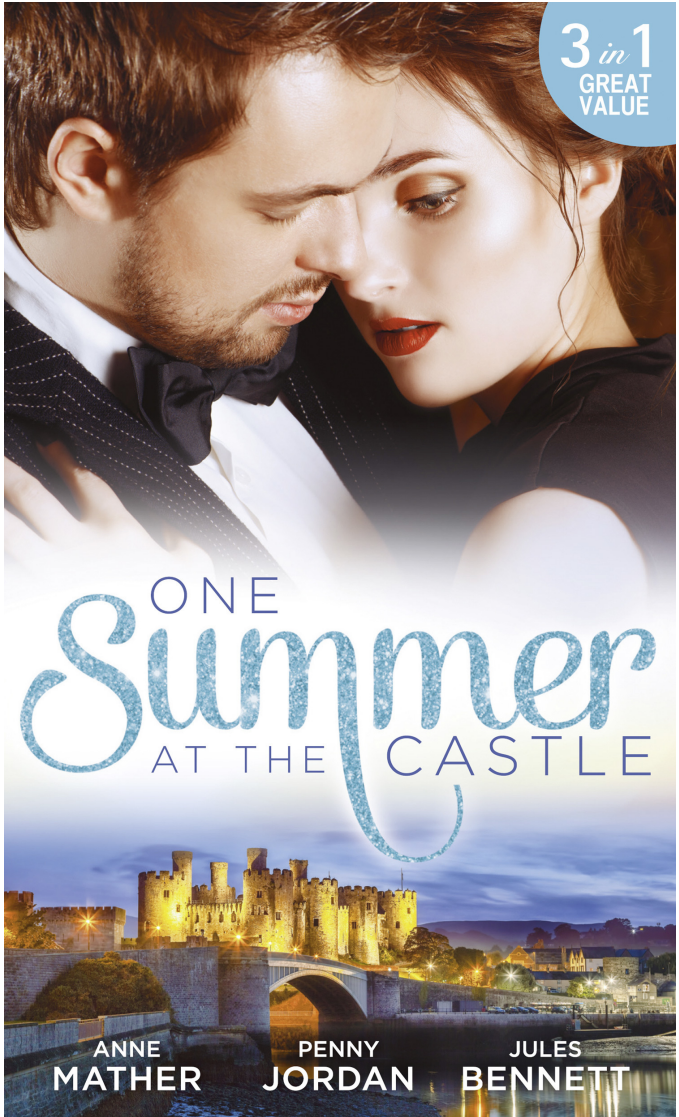
3 in 1
GREAT VALUE
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JULES
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Anne Mather
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One Summer At The Castle: Stay Through the Night / A Stormy Spanish Summer / Behind Palace Doors

Аннотация

Stay Through the Night by Anne MatherLiam Jameson is a world-famous writer of paranormal thrillers. But fame has its price, and now Liam lives reclusively on a remote Scottish island. Then Rosa Chantry knocks on his door and throws his world upside down. His desire for her is strong, but his conviction that he cannot satisfy a woman is stronger. But Rosa is persistent, and so is Liam's need for her. She is determined to ease his fear that the past has robbed him of his power as a man…A Stormy Spanish Summer by Penny JordanFelicity Clairemont has come to Spain to claim her inheritance. Unfortunately that means spending time with the Duque Vidal y Salvadores – and the darkly handsome Spaniard has always made it plain how little he thinks of her. The last time Vidal saw Fliss he desired and hated her with equal measure. But now honour demands he must help her. As

the truth about Fliss's family comes flooding out, and the power of their attraction takes hold, can Vidal admit how wrong he's been about her…?Behind Palace Doors by Jules BennettTheir marriage has all the makings of a romantic movie: a beautiful Mediterranean setting, a handsome prince and fantastic sex – and it's all fake!When Prince Stefan weds Victoria, the marriage is only to secure his crown. But it doesn't take long for buried passions to erupt…

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One Summer at the Castle
Stay Through the Night
Anne Mather
A Stormy Spanish Summer
Penny Jordan
Behind Palace Doors
Jules Bennett



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Stay Through the Night

CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS COLD. Much colder than Rosa had expected, actually. When she'd arrived the night before, she'd put the cold down to the drizzling rain, to her own feelings of anxiety and apprehension. But this morning, after a reasonably good night's rest and a bowl of Scottish porridge for breakfast, she didn't have any excuses.

Where was the heatwave that was supposed to sweep all of the UK through July and August? Not here in Mallaig, that was definite, and Rosa glanced back at the cosy lounge of the bed and breakfast where she'd spent the night with real regret.

Of course part of that unwillingness to part with familiar things was the knowledge that in the next few hours she was going to be stepping into totally unknown territory. An island, some two hours off the coast of Scotland, was not like visiting some local estate. That was why she was here in Mallaig, which was the ferry port for the Western Isles. In an hour she'd be boarding the boat—ship?—that would take her to Kilfoil, and she still didn't know if that was where Sophie was.

Fortunately, she'd brought some warm clothes with her, and this morning she had layered herself with a vest, a shirt and a woollen sweater. Feeling the chill wind blowing off the water, she guessed she'd have to wear her cashmere jacket as well for the crossing to the island. She just wished she'd packed her leather

coat. It was longer and would have kept her legs warm.

Still, at least it was fine, and she could survive for two hours, she told herself, leaving the guesthouse behind and walking down the narrow main street to the docks. Crossing the already busy car parking area, she went to the end of the jetty, wrapping her arms about herself as she gazed out over the water.

For all it was cold, the view was outstandingly beautiful. The island of Skye was just a short distance away, and she wondered if those purple-tipped mountains she could see were the famous Cuillins. She didn't know. In fact she knew very little about this part of Scotland. Despite the fact that her grandfather Ferrara had been imprisoned near Edinburgh during the war, she had never been farther north than Glasgow. She did have aunts and uncles and cousins there, but her visits had been few and far between.

Now, she realised she should have been more adventurous when she had the chance. But she'd gone to college in England, married an English boy and lived in Yorkshire for most of her life to date. It was easy to make the excuse that she hadn't ventured very far because of her widowed mother and younger sister. But the truth was she wasn't an adventurous sort of person, and Colin had always been happiest spending holidays in Spain, where he could get a tan.

Of course she couldn't make Colin an excuse any longer. Three years ago, when she'd discovered he'd been cheating on her with his boss's secretary, Rosa hadn't hesitated before asking for

a divorce. Colin had begged her to reconsider, had said that she couldn't destroy five years of marriage over one solitary lapse. But Rosa knew it hadn't only been a solitary lapse. It wasn't the first time she'd suspected him of seeing someone else, and she doubted it would be the last.

Fortunately—or unfortunately, as far as Rosa was concerned—they'd had no children to be hurt by the break-up. Rosa didn't know if it was her fault or Colin's, but she'd never been pregnant. Of course during the turmoil of the divorce Colin had blamed her for his unfaithfulness. If she'd spent more time with him, he said, and less at that damn school with kids who didn't appreciate her, their marriage might have stood a chance. But Rosa knew that was only an excuse. Without her salary as an English teacher Colin would not have been able to afford the frequent trips to the continent that he so enjoyed.

Anyway, it was all in the past now, she thought ruefully. And, although sometimes the things Colin had done still hurt a little, on the whole she was getting on with her life. That was until the phone call yesterday morning that had brought her on this possibly wild goose chase to Kilfoil. But her mother had been desperate, and frantic with worry, and Rosa had known she had no choice but to do as she wished.

She sighed, resting her hands on the bars of the railings, staring out across the water as if the view might provide the answers she sought. What if her mother was wrong? What if Sophie wasn't on the island? Would there be some kind of inn

or hostelry there where she could spend the night until the ferry returned the following day?

She'd been told the ferry booking office opened at nine o'clock, and that she should have no trouble getting a ticket to Kilfoil. Apparently the majority of the traffic from Mallaig was between there and Armadale, the small port on Skye where they all disembarked.

But that wasn't the ferry Rosa needed. She would be boarding the one taking tourists and backpackers to islands farther afield. Dear God, she thought, it sounded so remote, so inaccessible. For the first time she half wished her mother had come with her. It would be so good to have someone she knew to talk to.

Liam drove the Audi into the car park and swung his legs out of the car. Then, holding on to the roof with one hand and the top of the door with the other, he hauled himself to his feet and looked around.

The wind off the water was knife-sharp, but he didn't notice it. He'd been born in Hampstead, but he'd lived in Scotland for the past ten years. Ever since his first book had been such an astounding success, actually, and he was used to the climate. A famous Hollywood director had read his book and liked it, and had optioned it for the iconic blockbuster it had become. But that had been when his life in London had gradually—and ultimately violently—become impossible to sustain.

He ran a hand down over his thigh, feeling the ridge of hard

flesh that arced down into his groin even through his worn jeans. He'd been lucky, he reflected. Of the many wounds he'd had that one could have killed him. Instead, although the knife had severed his femoral artery, causing an almost fatal loss of blood, and sliced through enough nerves and sinews to leave him with a permanent weakness in his left leg, he'd survived. It was his attacker who'd died, turning the knife on himself when he'd been confident he'd achieved his objective.

Liam grimaced, determinedly shoving such thoughts aside. It had all happened a long time ago now, and since then none of his books had aroused such a frenzied response in his readers. He took a deep breath of cold sea air, glad that he'd chosen to drive back from London overnight to catch this morning's ferry to the island. There wouldn't be another ferry until Thursday, and he was impatient to get back to Kilfoil and to his work.

Locking the car, he flexed his shoulder muscles and stretched his legs, feeling the stiffness of driving almost non-stop for ten hours in his bones. He had pulled off into a service area around 3:00 a.m. for coffee, and slept for twenty minutes before resuming his journey. But it wasn't the same as sleeping in his bed.

His attention was caught by the sight of a lone woman leaning on the railings at the end of the jetty. It was her hair that had drawn his eyes: deep red and wildly curly, it refused to be controlled by the ribbon she'd tied at her nape. But she seemed hardly aware of it. She was gazing out towards Skye, as if she

hoped to find some kind of answer in the mist gathering over the rain-shrouded hills.

Liam shrugged. She was obviously a visitor, dressed for summer in the Highlands, he thought ironically. But, while they had been known to have temperatures well into the eighties, at present the northerly breeze was creating a more predictable sixty-five.

Jack Macleod, who ran a fleet of sailboats that he hired out to tourists, hailed Liam as he left the car and started across to the ferry terminal. 'Now, then, stranger,' he said, grinning broadly. 'We were beginning to think you'd changed your mind about coming back.'

'You can't get rid of me that easily,' said Liam, hooking his thumbs into the back pockets of his jeans, his chambray shirt parting at the neck to reveal the dark hair clustered at his throat. 'I got back as soon as I could. Spending too long in overcrowded cities doesn't appeal to me any more.'

'Didn't I hear you'd gone to London to see the medic?' Jack asked, regarding his friend with critical eyes. 'Nothing serious, I hope.'

'A check-up, that's all,' said Liam quickly, not wanting to discuss his private affairs in public. He was aware that their voices had attracted the attention of the woman at the quayside, and she was looking at them over her shoulder.

She sensed their awareness of her interest and looked away, but not before Liam had registered an oval face and unusually

dark eyes for a woman of her colouring. Of course her hair colouring might not be natural, which was probably the case, and although she was tall she was much too thin.

'You'll be getting this morning's ferry,' Jack was continuing, unaware of Liam's distraction, and he forced himself to concentrate on what the man had said.

'If I can,' he agreed, accepting Jack's assurances that Angus Gallagher would never turn him away, and when he looked back towards the jetty the woman was gone.

Rosa went back to the bed and breakfast, collected her things and was back at the terminal building in time to book her passage to Kilfoil. She supposed she looked like any other tourist, in her jeans and trainers, with a backpack over her shoulder. The other backpackers, queuing for their tickets, didn't give her a second glance. Unlike the two men she'd seen earlier in the car park. Well, one of them, anyway. He'd certainly given her a thorough appraisal.

And found her wanting, she was sure. She'd definitely sensed his disapproval. But whether that was because he'd found her watching them, she couldn't be absolutely sure.

Whatever, he had been attractive, she conceded, remembering his height—well over six feet, she estimated—and the broad shoulders filling out his crumpled shirt. She guessed he was one of the fishermen who, in increasingly smaller numbers, trawled these waters. He hadn't looked like a tourist, and the man who

had been with him had been wearing waders, she thought.

Still, she was unlikely to see either of them again—unless one of them was the captain of the vessel she was hoping to sail on. Maybe someone on the ferry would remember a pretty blond girl travelling out to Kilfoil the previous week. Dared she ask about Liam Jameson? She didn't think so. According to his publicity, the man was reputed to be a recluse, for goodness' sake. So why had he been attending a pop festival in Glastonbury? For research? She didn't think so.

Her mind boggled, as it always did when she thought about what her mother had told her. Sophie had pulled some stunts before, but nothing remotely resembling this. Rosa had thought her sister was settling down at last, that she and Mark Campion might move in together. But now that relationship was all up in the air because of some man Sophie had met during the pop festival.

Rosa got her ticket and moved outside again. The rain that had been threatening earlier seemed to be lifting, and the sun was actually shining on the loch. A good omen, she thought, looking about her for the ferry she'd been told would be departing in three-quarters of an hour. Pedestrian passengers would be embarked first, before the vehicles that would drive straight onto the holding deck.

She saw the man again as she was waiting in line at the quayside. He had driven his car round to join the queue of traffic waiting to board. Unexpectedly, her pulse quickened. So he was

taking the same ferry she was. What a coincidence. But it was unlikely he was going to Kilfoil. According to Mrs Harris at the guesthouse, Kilfoil had been deserted for several years before a rich writer had bought the property and restored the ruined castle there for his own use.

Liam Jameson, of course, Rosa had concluded, unwilling to press the landlady for too many details in case she betrayed the real reason why she was going to the island. She'd told her that she planned to photograph the area for an article she was writing on island development. But Mrs Harris had warned her that the island was private property and she would have to get permission to take photographs.

She lost sight of the man when she and her fellow passengers went to board the ferry. Climbing the steep steps to the upper deck, Rosa shivered as the wind cut through even her cashmere jacket. God, she thought, why would anyone choose to live here if they had the money to buy an island? Barbados, yes. The Caymans, maybe. But Kilfoil? He had to be crazy!

Still, she could only assume it gave him atmosphere for his horror stories. And, according to her sister, they were shooting his latest movie on the island itself. But was that feasible? Had the story Sophie had told Mark any truth in it at all? Rosa wouldn't have thought so, but her mother had believed every word.

If only Jameson hadn't involved Sophie, she thought unhappily. At almost eighteen, her sister was terribly impressionable, and becoming a professional actress was her

ambition. But although she always maintained she was old enough to make her own decisions, she'd made plenty of bad ones in the past.

If she had met Jameson she would have been impressed, no question about it. His books sold in the millions. For heaven's sake, Sophie devoured every new one as soon as it came out. And all his films to date had been box office successes. His work had acquired a cult status, due to an increasing fascination with the supernatural. Particularly vampires—which were his trademark.

But would he have been attending a rock festival? Stranger things had happened, she supposed, and Sophie had certainly convinced Mark that this was a chance she couldn't miss. Why she hadn't phoned her mother and told her, why she'd left Mark to make her excuses, was less convincing. But if she had been lying, where in God's name was she?

Thankfully, there was a cabin on the upper deck where passengers could buy sandwiches, sodas and hot drinks once the ferry sailed. Rosa stepped inside gratefully, finding herself a seat near the window so she could watch the comings and goings on the dock.

It didn't take long to board the remaining passengers, and the queue of automobiles soon disappeared below. They must be loaded in the order they would disembark, Rosa reflected, wondering if the man she'd seen was familiar with the routine.

The ferry was due to sail to Kilfoil first, then the other islands on its schedule. Rosa was glad. It meant that Kilfoil was the

nearest, and as the boat slipped its mooring lines and moved out into the sea loch she hoped it wouldn't be too far.

The island of Skye seemed incredibly close as they started on their journey, and for a while other islands hemmed them in, giving an illusion of intimacy. But then the body of water widened and the swell caused the small vessel to rise and fall more heavily on the waves.

Rosa hunched her shoulders and glanced back at the group of people gathered at the snack bar. She wished she'd bought herself a drink before it got busy. As it was, she wasn't totally sure she could walk across the cabin without becoming nauseous. She'd never been a good sailor, and the bucking ferry was much worse than the hovercraft she and Colin had once taken to Boulogne.

'Are you feeling okay?'

Guessing she must be looking pale, Rosa turned her head and found the man from the car park looking down at her. So he had boarded this ferry, she thought inconsequentially, noticing that the rolling vessel didn't seem to bother him. Apart from donning a well-worn leather jacket over his shirt and jeans, he looked just as big and powerful as she'd thought earlier. The shirt pulled away from the tight jeans in places, to expose a wedge of hair-roughened brown skin.

Sex on legs, she mused, momentarily diverted from her troubles, but he was waiting for an answer and she forced a rueful smile. 'I didn't expect it to be so rough,' she confessed, wondering if he was aware that her eyes were on a level with his groin. She

endeavoured to look anywhere else than there. 'I suppose you're used to it?'

His eyes narrowed, thick black lashes veiling irises that were a clear emerald-green. God, he was good-looking, she thought, noting his tanned skin, his firm jaw and his mouth, which was oddly sensual despite being compressed into a thin line. But then he spoke again, his voice harder than before, and she was diverted from her thoughts by the realisation that he didn't have a Scottish accent.

'Why do you say that?' he demanded, and Rosa blinked, unable for a moment to remember exactly what she had said.

But then it came back to her. 'Um—I just thought you seemed familiar with the area,' she confessed awkwardly, wondering what was wrong with that. 'Evidently I was mistaken. You're English, aren't you?'

Liam scowled, cursing himself for the impulse that had driven him to ask if she was all right. She'd looked so damned pale he'd felt sorry for her. She was obviously out of place here. No waterproof clothing, no boots, even the pack she'd dumped beside her looked flimsy.

'We don't all speak the Gaelic,' he said at last, and she shrugged her slim shoulders.

'Okay.' Rosa quelled her indignation. At least their conversation was distracting her eyes from the restless sea outside. 'So,' she said at last, 'do you live in the islands?'

'Perhaps.' He was annoyingly reticent. And then,

disconcertingly, 'I hope you don't intend to go hiking in that outfit.'

Rosa gasped. 'Not that it's any of your business.'

'No,' he conceded ruefully. 'I was just thinking out loud. But I couldn't help noticing how cold you looked earlier.'

So he had noticed her. Rosa felt a little less antagonistic towards him. 'It is much colder than I'd anticipated,' she admitted. 'But I don't expect to be here long.'

'Just a flying visit?'

'Something like that.'

Liam frowned. 'You've got relatives here?'

Rosa caught her breath. He certainly asked a lot of questions. But then she remembered she'd been going to ask if anyone had seen her sister. If this man used the ferry on a regular basis, he might have seen her. And Liam Jameson. But she preferred not to mention him.

'As a matter of fact, I'm hoping to catch up with my sister,' she said, trying to sound casual. 'A pretty blond girl. I believe she made this crossing a couple of days ago.'

'She can't have,' he said at once. 'This ferry only leaves every Monday and Thursday. If she made the crossing at all, it had to have been last Thursday.'

Rosa swallowed. Last Thursday Sophie had still been in Glastonbury with Mark. It had been on Saturday night that he'd phoned to tell her mother what had happened, and that had resulted in Mrs Chantry phoning Rosa in such an hysterical state.

‘Are you sure?’ she asked now, trying to assimilate what she’d learned, wondering if Liam Jameson had a plane or a helicopter. He probably did, she thought. Why should he travel with the common herd? He might even have a boat that he kept at Mallaig. It had probably been naïve of her to think otherwise.

‘I’m sure,’ her companion replied, his gaze considering. ‘Does this mean you don’t think your sister’s here, after all?’

‘Maybe.’ Rosa had no intention of sharing her thoughts with him. She took a deep breath. ‘Is it much farther, do you know?’

‘That depends where you’re going,’ said Liam drily, curious in spite of himself, and Rosa decided there was no harm in telling him her destination.

‘Um—Kilfoil,’ she said, aware that her words had surprised him. Well, let him stew, she thought defiantly. He hadn’t exactly been candid with her.

CHAPTER TWO

LIAM WAS SURPRISED. He'd thought he knew everything about the families who had moved to the island after he'd first acquired it. Having been uninhabited for several years, the cottages had fallen into disrepair, and it had taken a communal effort on all their parts to make the place viable again. In the process of rewiring the cottages, reconnecting the electric generator and generally providing basic services, they'd become his friends as well as his tenants. These days Kilfoil had a fairly buoyant economy, with tourism, fishing and farming giving a living to about a hundred souls.

He wanted to ask why she thought her sister might be on the island, but he knew he'd asked too many questions already. Okay, she intrigued him, with her air of shy defiance and the innocence with which she spoke of his island. Unless he missed his guess, there was something more than a desire to catch up with her sister here. Had the girl run away? Or eloped, maybe, with a boyfriend? But why would she come to Kilfoil? As far as he was aware, there was no regular minister on the island.

Rosa saw him push his hands into the back pockets of his jeans, apparently unaware that the button at his waist had come undone. She was tempted to tell him, except that that would reveal where she was looking, and she hurriedly averted her head.

'About another hour,' he said, answering her question, and

then, as if sensing her withdrawal, he moved away to approach the bar at the other end of the cabin. It was quiet now, and, watching with covert eyes, she saw him speak to the young man who was serving. Money changed hands, and then the young man pushed two polystyrene cups across the counter.

Two?

Rosa looked quickly away. Was one for her? She dared not look, dared not watch him walk back to where she was sitting in case she was mistaken.

'D'you want a coffee?'

But no. He was standing right in front of her again. 'Oh—um—you shouldn't have,' she mumbled awkwardly, but she took the cup anyway. 'Thanks.' She levered off the plastic lid and tasted it. 'Why don't you sit down?'

Liam hesitated now. This wasn't his usual practice, buying strange women cups of coffee, letting them share his space. But she looked so out of place here he couldn't abandon her. She might be a journalist, he reflected, eager to get a story. But, if so, she'd been very offhand with him.

Nevertheless, she seemed far too vulnerable to be alone, and much against his better judgement he dropped down into the empty seat beside her. Opening his own coffee, he cast a sideways glance in her direction. Then he saw her watching him and said hastily, 'At least it's hot.'

'It's very nice,' Rosa assured him, not altogether truthfully. The coffee was bitter. 'It was kind of you to get it for me.'

Liam shrugged. 'Scottish hospitality,' he said wryly. 'We're well known for it.'

She gave him a sideways look. 'So you are Scottish?' she said. 'You must know this area very well.' She paused. 'What's Kilfoil like? Is it very uncivilised?'

Liam caught his breath, almost choking on a mouthful of coffee. 'Where do you think you are?' he exclaimed, when he could speak again. 'The wilds of Outer Mongolia?'

'No.' Despite herself, her cheeks burned. 'So tell me about the island. Are there houses, shops, hotels?'

Liam hesitated, torn between the desire to describe his home in glowing detail and the urge not to appear too familiar with his surroundings. 'It's like a lot of the other islands,' he said at last. 'There's a village, and you can buy most of the staple things you need there. The post and luxury items come in on the ferry. As do the tourists, who stay at the local guesthouses.'

Rosa felt relieved. 'So it's not, like—desolate or anything?'

'It's beautiful,' said Liam, thinking how relieved he'd be to be back again. 'All these islands are beautiful. I wouldn't live anywhere else.'

Rosa's brows arched. 'Where do you live?'

He was cornered. 'On Kilfoil,' he said reluctantly. And then, deciding he'd said quite enough, he got to his feet again. 'Excuse me. I need to go and check on my car.'

When he'd gone, Rosa finished her coffee thoughtfully. She wasn't totally surprised by his answer, but she couldn't help

wondering what a man like him found to do there. Could he be a fisherman, as she'd speculated? Somehow that didn't seem very likely. A thought occurred to her. Perhaps he worked for Liam Jameson. Or the film crew, if they were making a film on the island.

She should have asked if there was a film crew on the island, she chided herself. But then, if she had, she'd have had to explain why she was really here. No, it was wiser to wait until she got there before she started asking those questions. She didn't want to alert Jameson as to who she was.

She couldn't help the shudder that passed over her at the thought of what she had to do. Her mission, she thought wryly. Goodness, what was she letting herself in for? But surely if there was a film crew on the island the people in the village would know about it. Whether they'd tell her where Liam Jameson lived was another matter.

The journey seemed endless, even worse than the three train journeys she'd had to make to get to Mallaig. Then at least she'd had some scenery to look at. Apart from a handful of mist-strewn islands, all she could see now was the choppy water lapping at the sides of the ferry.

She sighed and glanced at her watch. If what the man had said was true, it shouldn't be long now. Glancing towards the front of the vessel, she glimpsed a solid mass of land immediately ahead of them. Was that Kilfoil? She hoped so. She'd call her mother as soon as she stepped onto dry land.

Lucia Chantry would be desperate for news. Sophie was her baby, and although she knew as well as anyone that her daughter could be selfish and willful at times, Rosa had never been left in any doubt as to who was her mother's favourite. Sophie could do no wrong, whereas Rosa was constantly making mistakes. Not least when she'd married Colin Vincent. Her mother had never liked him, and she hadn't hesitated to say I told you so when Colin turned out to be such a jerk.

The ferry was slowing now, cutting back on its engines, preparing for its arrival at Kilfoil. As it eased into its berth, Rosa got to her feet, eager for her first glimpse of her destination. It was certainly unprepossessing, she thought, just a handful of cottages climbing up the hillside from the ferry terminal. But the overcast sky didn't help. She was sure it would look much more appealing in sunlight.

Fifteen minutes later she was standing on the quay, watching as the few cars heading for the island rolled off the ferry. Glancing about her, she saw the road that wound up out of the village and the dark slopes of a mountain range behind.

The island suddenly seemed much bigger than she'd anticipated. But what had she been expecting? Something the size of Holy Island, off the coast of Northumberland, perhaps? And if she did find Sophie here, if she hadn't been lying, how was she supposed to get her to come home? If her sister was starstruck, she wouldn't be influenced by anything Rosa said.

Rosa had just located a sign that said 'Post Office' when she

saw a dusty grey Audi coming up the ramp towards her. The man who'd bought her coffee was at the wheel and she turned abruptly away. She didn't want him to think—even for a moment—that she was looking for him.

To her relief, the big car swept past her, but then it braked hard, just a dozen yards up the road, and she saw its reversing lights appear. It stopped beside her and a door was pushed open. The man thrust his legs out, got to his feet with an obvious effort and turned towards her.

She noticed he was favouring his left leg, something she hadn't observed on the ferry. But then, the rolling of the vessel would have precluded any observation of that kind. She'd been decidedly unsteady on her own feet.

Liam, meanwhile, was cursing himself for being all kinds of an idiot for stopping the car. But, dammit, she still looked as if a puff of wind would blow her away. And she certainly wasn't interested in him. He'd noticed the way she'd deliberately turned her back on him. So what was he doing playing the knight errant again?

'Got a problem?' he asked, forcing her to turn and face him.

'I hope not,' she said tightly, wishing he would just go away. But, on the off-chance that he might be able to help her, she ought to be more grateful. 'Um—I was looking for the Post Office, that's all. I wanted to ask where Kilfoil Castle was.'

'Kilfoil Castle?' Liam was wary now. 'Why do you want to know where Kilfoil Castle is? It's not open to the public, you

know.'

'I know that.' Rosa sighed. Then, giving in to the urge to trust him, she added, 'Do you happen to know if there's a film crew working there?'

'A film crew?' Now Liam was genuinely concerned. Had he been wrong about this woman all along?

'Yes, a film crew,' repeated Rosa. 'I understand they're making a film of one of the Liam Jameson's books on the island.'

Like hell!

Liam stared at her, trying to decide if she was as naïve as she looked. 'Why would you imagine Liam Jameson would allow a film crew to desecrate his home?' he demanded bleakly. 'Movies have been made of his books, I know, but they're not filmed here.'

Was it just his imagination or did her shoulders sag at this news? What was going on, for God's sake? Had she expected to find her sister on the set? 'I think you've made a mistake,' he said gently. 'Someone's given you the wrong information. I can assure you there's no production team at Kilfoil Castle or anywhere else on the island.'

Rosa shook her head. 'Are you sure?'

'I'm sure.'

'You're not just trying to put me off?'

'Hell, no!' Liam gazed at her compassionately. 'I realise it must be a blow, but I don't think your sister's here.'

Rosa's brows drew together. 'I don't remember saying that

I thought my sister was with the film crew,' she retorted defensively.

'No, but it doesn't take a mathematician to put two and two together.'

Rosa bit her lip. 'All right. Perhaps I did think Sophie might be with them. But if she's not, then perhaps she's somewhere else.'

Liam gazed at her. 'On the island?'

'Yes.' Rosa held up her head. 'So perhaps you could direct me to Kilfoil Castle, as I asked before. Is there a taxi or something I could hire if it's too far to walk?'

Liam blinked. 'Why on earth would you think your sister might be at Kilfoil Castle?' he asked, trying not to sound outraged at the suggestion, and his companion sighed.

'Because she apparently met Liam Jameson a few days ago, at the pop festival in Glastonbury. He told her they were making a film of his latest book in Scotland and he offered her a screen test.'

To say Liam was stunned would have been a vast understatement. It was as if she'd suddenly started talking in a foreign language and he couldn't make head or tail of what she was saying. For goodness' sake, until Sunday morning he'd been in a London clinic having muscle therapy to try and ease the spasms he still suffered in his leg. Besides which, he'd never been to a pop festival in his life.

Realising she was waiting for him to say something, Liam

tried to concentrate. It was obvious she believed what she'd just told him. Her look of uncertainty and expectation was too convincing to fake. But, dammit, if her sister had fed her this story, why had she believed it? Anyone who knew Liam Jameson would know it was untrue.

But perhaps she didn't. Certainly she hadn't recognised him. And, taken at face value, it wasn't so outrageous. Two of his books had been filmed in Scotland. But not on Kilfoil. He'd made damn sure of that.

'Liam Jameson does live here, doesn't he?'

Rosa was wishing he'd say something, instead of just staring at her with those piercing green eyes. They seemed to see into her soul, and she shifted a little uncomfortably under their intent appraisal. He probably wasn't aware of it, but they were making her feel decidedly hot.

'Yes,' he said at last, when she'd finally managed to drag her gaze away from his. 'Yes, he lives at Kilfoil Castle, as I assume you know. But there's no way he could offer your sister a screen test. He isn't involved in film production. If she told you he was, she was wrong.'

'How do you know?' Although Rosa was prepared to accept that he might be right, she was curious how he could be so certain about it. 'Do you know him personally?'

Liam had been expecting that. 'I know of him,' he said, curiously reluctant to tell her who he was. 'He's—something of a recluse, and to my knowledge he's never been to Glastonbury.

Your sister sounds quite young. Jameson is forty-two.'

'Forty-two!' If he'd expected her to know his age, too, he'd been mistaken. She hunched her shoulders. 'That old?'

'It's not so old,' muttered Liam, unable to prevent a twinge of indignation. 'How old is your sister?'

'Almost eighteen,' answered Rosa at once. 'Do you think Liam Jameson likes young girls?'

'He's not a pervert,' said Liam sharply, and then modified his tone as he continued, 'And, let's face it, you don't have any proof that it was Jameson she went off with.'

'I know.' Rosa blew out a breath. 'But where else can she be?' She wet her lips, her tongue moving with unknowing provocation over their soft contours. 'Anyway, if you'll give me those directions to the castle, I'll go and see if Mr Jameson has an answer.'

That was when Liam should have stopped her. He should have explained who he was, and how he knew Jameson had never been to Glastonbury, but he chickened out. He'd gone too far with the deception to simply confess that he was the man she was looking for. And his innate sense of privacy made him a victim of his own deceit.

'Look, I think you're wasting your time,' he said carefully. 'Jameson has never been to a pop festival.' He caught her eyes on him. 'As far as I know.'

'You know an awful lot about him,' said Rosa curiously. 'Are you sure you're not a friend of his?'

'I'm sure,' said Liam, wishing he'd never started this. 'But I do live on the island. It's a small place.'

'It doesn't seem very small,' said Rosa unhappily. 'And I'm not really looking forward to meeting this man, if you want the truth. He writes about horrible things. Ghosts and werewolves—'

'Vampires,' put in Liam unthinkingly.

'—stuff like that,' she muttered, proving she hadn't been listening to him. 'That's probably why Sophie was so impressed by him. She's read everything he's ever written.'

'Really?'

Liam couldn't help feeling a glow of satisfaction. No matter how often he was told by his agent or his publisher that he was a good writer, he never truly believed it.

'Oh, yes.' Rosa sighed again. 'Sophie's mad on books and TV and movies. She wants to be an actress, you see. If this man has been in contact with her, she'll be like putty in his hands.'

'But he hasn't,' said Liam. And then he amended that to, 'You don't really believe he has?'

'Perhaps not.' Rosa had to be honest. 'But, if you don't mind, I'd rather hear that from Liam Jameson himself.'

Liam scowled, scuffing the toe of his boot against a stone, aware that at any moment someone could come up and speak to him and then he wouldn't have any choice in the matter.

'Look,' he said reluctantly. 'Why don't you just get on the ferry again and go home? If your sister wants to tell you where she is, she will. Until then, it would probably be wiser for you not to

accuse people of things you can't know or prove.'

Rosa shivered. 'Get on the ferry again?' she echoed. 'I don't think so.'

'Well, it doesn't call here again until Thursday, like I said.'

Rosa tried not to show how dismayed she felt. 'Oh, well, there's nothing I can do about it now. And Liam Jameson's the only lead I've got.'

Liam blew out a breath. 'Okay, okay. If that's your final word, I'll take you.'

'Take me where?'

'To Kilfoil Castle. That is where you want to go, isn't it?'

'Well, yes. But do you think Mr Jameson will agree to see me?'

'I'll make sure he does,' said Liam drily. 'Let's go.'

'But I don't even know who you are,' Rosa protested, the idea of getting into a car with a strange man suddenly assuming more importance than it had before.

'I'm—Luther Killian,' muttered Liam ungraciously, waiting for her to recognise the name of his main character. But there was no reaction. Her sister might read his books, but she definitely didn't.

CHAPTER THREE

ROSA hesitated. 'Um—is it far?' she ventured, drawing a sigh of impatience from the man beside her.

'Too far to walk, if that's what you're thinking,' he said shortly. 'There's always old McAllister, of course. He runs a part-time taxi service, if it's needed. I can't vouch for the reliability of his vehicle, though.'

Rosa glanced down at her bag which, even looped over her shoulder, was heavier than she'd expected when she'd packed it the previous day. 'Well, all right. Thanks,' she said, not without some misgivings. 'If it's not out of your way.'

Don't do me any favours, thought Liam irritably, reaching for her bag and opening the rear door of the car. He tossed it onto the seat and then gestured for her to get into the front. His leg was aching from standing too long and he couldn't wait to get off his feet.

'You didn't say if it was far,' she ventured, after he'd coiled his length behind the wheel, and Liam shrugged.

'The island's not that big,' he said, which wasn't really an answer. 'Don't worry. It won't take long to get there.'

Rosa hoped not, but the island did seem far bigger than she'd imagined as the Audi mounted the hill out of the village. They emerged onto a kind of plateau that stretched away ahead of them, very green and verdant, with small lakes, or lochs, glinting

in the intermittent rays of the sun.

Away to their left, the mountains she'd seen from the quayside looked big and imposing. Their shadowy peaks were bathed in cloud cover, but the lower slopes changed from grey to purple where the native heather flourished among the rocks. Here and there the scrubland was dotted with trees, sturdy firs that could withstand the sudden shifts in the weather.

'This is Kilfoil Moor,' said her companion, nodding towards the open land at either side of the road. 'Don't be fooled by its look of substance. It's primitive bog in places. Even the sheep have more sense than to graze here.'

Rosa frowned. 'Are you a farmer, Mr Killian?'

A farmer! Liam felt a wry smile tug at his mouth. 'I own some land,' he agreed, neither admitting nor denying it. Then, to divert her, 'The island becomes much less hostile at the other side of the moor.'

'And have people—like—walked onto the moor and been swallowed up by the bog?' asked Rosa uneasily.

Liam cast her a mocking glance. 'Only in Jameson's books, I believe.'

Rosa grimaced. 'He sounds weird. I suppose living up here he can do virtually as he likes.'

'He's an author,' said Liam irritably, not appreciating her comments. 'For God's sake, he writes about monsters. That doesn't mean he is one!'

'I suppose.'

Rosa acknowledged that she was letting the isolation spook her. A curlew called, it wild cry sending a shiver down her spine. A covey of grouse, startled by the sound of the car, rose abruptly into the air, startling her. She made an incoherent sound and her companion turned to give her another curious look.

'Something wrong?'

Rosa shrugged. 'I was just thinking about what you said,' she replied, not altogether truthfully. 'I think I agree with you. Jameson wouldn't have brought Sophie here.'

'No?' Liam spoke guardedly.

'No. I mean—' She gestured towards the moor. 'I can't imagine any man who lives here going to somewhere frantic like a pop festival.' She paused. 'Can you?'

Liam's mouth compressed. 'I seem to remember saying much the same thing about half an hour ago,' he retorted.

'Oh. Oh, yes, you did.' Rosa pulled a face. 'I'm sorry. I think I should have listened to you.'

Liam shook his head. He didn't know what she expected him to say, what she expected him to do. But if she hoped that he'd turn the car around and drive her back to the village she was mistaken. He was tired, dammit. He'd just driven over five hundred miles, and there was no way she was going to add another twenty miles to his journey. If she wanted to go back, Sam would have to take her. Right now, he needed breakfast, a shower and his bed, not necessarily in that order.

Or that was what he told himself. In fact, he was curiously

loath to abandon her. He felt sorry for her, he thought. She'd been sent up here on a wild goose chase and she was going to feel pretty aggrieved when she found out he'd been deceiving her, too.

The awareness of what he was thinking astounded him, however. This had always been his retreat, his sanctuary. The one place where he could escape the rat race of his life in London. What the hell was he doing, bringing a stranger into his home? For God's sake, she wasn't a teenager. She was plenty old enough to look out for herself.

'Anyway,' she said suddenly, 'I'm still going to ask him if he knows where she might be. I mean, if they are making a film up here, he will know about it. Where it's being made, I mean. Don't you think?'

Liam's fingers tightened on the wheel. Why didn't he just tell her who he was? he wondered impatiently. Why didn't he admit that he'd kept his identity a secret to begin with because he'd been half afraid she had some ulterior motive for coming here? She might not believe him, but it would be better than feeling a complete fraud every time she mentioned his name.

'Look, Miss—er—'

'Chantry,' she supplied equably. 'Rosa Chantry.'

'Yes. Miss Chantry.' Liam hesitated now. 'Look, I think there's something I—'

But before he could finish, she interrupted him. 'Oh, God!' she exclaimed in dismay, and for a moment he thought she'd realised who he was for herself. But then she reached into the back of

the car, hauled her pack forward and extracted a mobile phone. 'I promised I'd ring my mother as soon as I reached the island,' she explained ruefully. 'Excuse me a minute. I've just got to tell her I'm all right before she begins to think she's lost two daughters instead of just one.'

'Yeah, but—' he began, about to tell her that there were no transmitters for cellphones on the island when she gave a frustrated cry.

'Dammit, the battery must be dead,' she exclaimed, looking at the instrument as if it was to blame for its inactivity. Then she frowned. 'That's funny. There's no signal at all.'

'That's because we don't have any mobile phone masts on Kilfoil,' said Liam mildly. 'The place was deserted for years—apart from a few hardy sheep—and although things have changed a bit since then, we prefer not to litter the island with all the detritus of the twenty-first century.'

'You mean I can't ring my mother?'

'No. There are landlines.'

'So do you think Liam Jameson will let me make a call from the castle?'

'I'm sure he will,' muttered Liam, aware he was retreating back into the character he'd created. 'Don't run away with the idea that the island's backwards. Since—since its modernisation, it's become quite a desirable place to live.'

Rosa arched brows that were several shades darker than her hair. 'Is that why you came here?' she asked. 'To escape the rat

race?'

'In a manner of speaking.'

'And you like living here? You don't get—bored?'

'I'm never bored,' said Liam drily. 'Are you?'

'I don't get time to be bored,' she replied ruefully. 'I'm a schoolteacher. My work keeps me busy.'

'Ah.' Liam absorbed this. He thought it explained a lot. Like how she was able to come up here in the middle of August. Like why she seemed so prim and proper sometimes.

The moor was receding behind them now, and they'd started down a twisting road into the glen. He pointed ahead. 'There's the castle. What do you think?'

Rosa caught her breath. 'It's—beautiful,' she said, and it was. Standing square and solid on a headland overlooking the sea, its grey walls warmed by the strengthening sun, it was magnificent. 'It's very impressive,' she breathed. And not what she had expected at all. 'But how can anyone live in such a place? It must have over a hundred rooms.'

'Fifty-three, actually,' said Liam unthinkingly. And then, with a grimace, 'Or so I've heard.'

'Fifty-three!' Rosa shook her head. 'He must be very rich.'

'Some of them are just anterooms,' said Liam, resenting the urge he had to defend himself, but doing it just the same. 'I'm fairly sure he doesn't use them all.'

'I should think not.' Rosa snorted. 'Is he married?'

'No.' Liam had no hesitation about telling her that. It was in

the potted biography that appeared on the back of all his books, after all.

'Well, does he live alone?' Rosa was persistent. 'Does he have a girlfriend? Or a boyfriend?' she added, pulling a face. 'These days you never know.'

'He's not gay,' said Liam grimly. 'And he has household staff who run the place for him, so he's hardly alone.'

'All the same…' She was annoyingly resistant to his opinion. 'I bet he has to pay his employees well to get them to stay here.'

Liam clamped his jaws together and didn't answer her. He could have said that several of the people he employed were refugees from London, like himself. He did employ locals, where he could, but the islanders only wanted part-time work so they could pursue their own interests. The Highlanders were an independent lot and preferred fishing and farming to working indoors.

They approached the castle through open land dotted with sheep and cattle. Rosa saw shepherds' crofts nestling on the hillside, and more substantial farm buildings with whitewashed walls and smoking chimneys. A stream, which evidently had its source in the mountains, tumbled over rocks on its way to the sea. And in the background the shoreline beckoned, the sand clean and unblemished and totally deserted.

Rosa knew that anyone who'd never seen this aspect of Scotland wouldn't believe how incredibly beautiful it was. The sea was calm here, and in places as green as—as Luther Killian's

eyes. And just as intriguing. Though probably as cold as ice.

The castle itself looked just as splendid as they drew closer. Although obviously renovations had been made, they'd been accomplished in a way that didn't detract from the building's charm and history. Only the square windows, that had replaced the narrow lattices once used for firing on the enemy in ancient times, were out of character. But the heavy oak front doors looked just as solid a defence.

There were outbuildings set back from the main house, with a cobbled forecourt edging the stone steps in front. They approached over a wooden bridge spanning a dry ditch, which might once have been a moat, and parked on the forecourt to one side of the studded doors.

One of the doors opened immediately and a man and several dogs stepped out into the sunlight. The dogs—two golden retrievers and a spaniel—bounded down the steps to greet them, their tails wagging excitedly.

To the accompaniment of their barks of welcome, Liam swung open his door and hauled himself to his feet. Once again, his leg had stiffened up and he cursed its weakness for spoiling one of the true pleasures of his life. He had always enjoyed driving and had a handful of expensive cars in his possession. He preferred them to the helicopter that his agent had insisted was essential, and leased the aircraft to the local air ambulance service more often than he used it himself.

Steeling himself against the pain, he left the car and strode

towards Sam Devlin, the man who ran Kilfoil for him with such consummate skill and efficiency. 'Liam—' began Sam, only to break off when his employer raised a warning finger to his lips. 'It's good to see you again,' he amended, his grey brows drawing together in confusion. 'Is something wrong?'

Liam glanced back significantly, and now Sam saw Rosa getting out of the car. 'Do we have a visitor?' he asked in surprise. He knew, better than anyone, that Liam never brought strangers to Kilfoil.

'We do,' said Liam in a low voice, after shaking hands with the older man. 'She's here because she wants to ask Liam Jameson where her sister is.'

'What?' Sam stared at him. 'But you're—'

'She doesn't know that.' Liam sighed. 'It's long story, Sam, but now's not the time to share it. Just play along, will you? I intend to tell her who I am, but—not yet.'

Sam grimaced. 'But why bring her here—?' he began, and then broke off when the young woman left the car and started towards them. She was slowed by the snuffling of the dogs, but she was too near now for them to continue their conversation. He collected himself with an effort. 'Welcome to Kilfoil, miss.'

'This is Sam Devlin, Liam Jameson's second-incommand,' said Liam smoothly. 'Sam, this is Miss Chantry. Rosa Chantry, isn't that right?' He looked to her for confirmation. 'Perhaps Mrs Wilson would be kind enough to provide Miss Chantry with lunch.'

'I'm sure she'd try,' Sam agreed drily, but Rosa couldn't impose on her host in that way.

'Actually,' she said, 'if I could just have a quick word with Mr Jameson—?'

'Mr Jameson's—tied up at present, Miss Chantry,' said Sam, with a wry look at his employer. 'If you'll come with me, I'll show you where you can wait.'

'Oh, but—do you think he will see me?'

Rosa addressed her words to Sam now, even though Liam had assured her he'd arrange it himself.

Sam looked at his employer blankly. 'I think it's—possible,' he said, gaining a nod of approval. 'Um—why don't you follow me?'

Rosa hesitated, turning to the man who'd driven her here with a grateful smile. 'Thanks for the lift,' she said. 'Goodbye, Mr Killian.'

Liam inclined his head, aware that Sam was staring at him, open-mouthed. 'My pleasure,' he replied, realising he meant it. He turned away as Sam pulled himself together and led her into the castle. She wasn't going to be so pleased when she discovered who he really was.

Meanwhile, Rosa was experiencing an unwarranted feeling of regret that she wouldn't be seeing Luther Killian again. He had been kind, in spite of her ingratitude. She wished she'd asked him where he lived now. After all, whatever happened later, she was going to be stuck on the island for at least another couple of days.

She followed Liam Jameson's man into the castle with some

reluctance. Despite her desire to speak to Jameson and get this over with, it was a little daunting being faced with such surroundings. Although the hall they entered via an anteroom was brightly lit by several wall sconces, and the huge fire that was burning in the grate, it was intimidating. With its lofty ceiling and tapestry-hung walls, it reminded her that the man she'd come to see made his living from scaring his readers.

'We only use the hall as a reception room,' Sam Devlin offered, as she hovered just inside the door. 'The rest of the castle is much more cosy. It would be impossible to keep the place warm otherwise.'

Rosa could believe it. 'Does Mr Jameson live here all the year round?'

Sam seemed to consider his words before replying. 'Mostly,' he said at last. 'Except when he's away on business or pleasure. Now, please come this way.'

To Rosa's surprise, and trepidation, they crossed the hall to where a winding flight of stone stairs led to an upper floor. Although the stairs were carpeted, Rosa viewed them without enthusiasm. She'd assumed the man was going to show her into one of the rooms that opened off the hall.

'Wouldn't it be easier if I just waited here for Mr Jameson?' she asked.

'I'm afraid not.' Sam was polite, but resolute. 'This floor of the castle is given over to kitchens and storerooms, as well as providing living quarters for the full-time staff.'

'I see.' Rosa was reassured by the idea that there were other people living as well as working here. Luther Killian hadn't told her that.

With no alternative, she followed the man up the stairs, realising as she did so that this must be one of the towers she'd seen from the road. She wasn't good with spiral staircases, but happily it opened out onto a narrow landing, with windows in an outer wall that gave an uninterrupted view of the bay.

'Oh, isn't that wonderful!' she exclaimed, pausing at a window embrasure and gazing out at the view. The windows overlooked the front of the castle, with the little bridge they'd driven over just below her. And she saw, with some surprise, that Luther Killian's car was still parked in the same spot. Frowning, she glanced round at Sam Devlin. 'Um—Mr Killian's still here.'

'Is he?' Sam didn't sound particularly interested, and then Rosa remembered Killian had said he'd speak to Liam Jameson himself. He might be explaining the situation. If so, that would be something else she had to thank him for. Maybe she'd ask Sam Devlin where Killian lived before she left.

But thinking about leaving reminded her that she still hadn't phoned her mother. 'Er—do you think I could make a phone call while I'm waiting?' she ventured, and Sam shrugged.

'There's a phone in here,' he said, opening a door into what appeared to be a library. 'Make yourself at home. I'll ask Mrs Wilson to provide some refreshments.'

'You will tell Mr Jameson I'm here?' Rosa reminded him,

wondering about the rather curious look that crossed his face at her words.

'I'll tell him,' he agreed, remaining on the landing. 'If you'll excuse me…?'

Rosa nodded, trying not to feel apprehensive when he closed the door rather firmly behind him. Well, she was here. She'd reached her destination. And if the circumstances were not what she'd expected, it wasn't her fault.

Turning, she surveyed the room with determined confidence. One wall curved, as if it was part of the tower she'd just climbed, but all the walls were lined with bookshelves. There was a granite-topped desk, strewn with papers and a laptop computer, and several leather chairs.

Rosa wondered if these were Liam Jameson's books, but there were obviously too many for that to be so. Approaching one of the shelves, she drew out a bulky tome, hand-carved in leather. But the title, Vampire Myths of the Fifteenth Century, made her hastily push it back again.

But she was wasting time, she thought, noticing the neat black instrument set at one end of the desk. She had to call her mother. Mrs Chantry would probably be biting her nails by this time. Particularly if she'd tried to ring Rosa herself.

As she waited for the connection, Rosa perched on the edge of the window seat. The walls were thick and the sills were broad, plenty broad enough to provide a comfortable seat. Glancing down, she saw that from this angle she could see the gardens at

the back of the castle, and a couple of huge glasshouses, set into the lee of the tower.

Obviously the place was self-sufficient, she thought. And, despite her initial reaction, Rosa quite envied Jameson for living here. It was peaceful in a way very few places were these days.

Then, her mother answered. 'Rosa? Rosa, is that you? Have you found Sophie? Is she all right?'

'I haven't found her.' Rosa decided there was no point in prevaricating. 'There isn't a film crew on the island, Mum. Sophie must have been making it up.'

'Oh, she wouldn't do that.' Mrs Chantry was so gullible where her younger daughter was concerned. 'If she's not there, then Mark must have made a mistake. Scotland's a big place. They must be filming somewhere else.'

'But where?'

'I don't know, do I? That's for you to find out.'

'Perhaps.' Rosa was non-committal. 'I may know more after I've spoken to Liam Jameson himself.'

'You mean you haven't spoken to him personally?'

'How could I?'

'Well, for heaven's sake, Rosa, what have you been doing?'

'Getting here,' retorted Rosa indignantly. 'It was a long journey, you know.'

'So where are you now? Sitting in some bar in Mallaig, I suppose. And who told you there's no film being made on the island?'

'As a matter of fact, I'm on the island at this moment. I'm at Kilfoil Castle. And I'm pretty sure that nothing's going on here.'

Her mother snorted. 'So if Jameson's not there—'

'I didn't say that,' Rosa interrupted. 'Haven't I just said I'll know more after I've spoken to him?'

'So he's not with the production?'

If he ever was. 'It would appear not,' said Rosa trying to be patient. She heard the sound of someone opening the library door. 'Look, I've got to go, Mum. I'll ring you later. As soon as I have some news.'

She rang off before Mrs Chantry could issue any more instructions. Then, getting up from the window seat, she turned to find Luther Killian standing just inside the door. He'd evidently changed. The crumpled shirt and jeans he'd worn to travel in had been replaced by a long-sleeved purple knit shirt and drawstring cotton trousers. Judging by the drops of water sparkling on his dark hair, he'd had a shower as well.

Rosa knew her jaw had dropped, and she quickly rescued it. 'Oh, hi,' she said, a little nonplussed. 'I thought you'd gone.'

Well, she'd thought he would have by now.

Liam's smile was guarded. 'Is everything all right at home?' he asked, guessing what had been going on. He pushed the tips of his fingers into the back pockets of his pants. 'You look—surprised to see me.'

'I am.' Rosa didn't think there was any point in lying about it. 'Have you spoken to Liam Jameson? Has he agreed to see me?'

'He has,' said Liam drily, finding this harder than he'd expected. 'I'm sorry to disappoint you, Rosa, but I'm Liam Jameson.'

Rosa stared at him aghast. 'You're kidding!'

'No.' Liam pulled a face, and then, abandoning his awkward stance, he crossed to the desk and went to stand behind it. 'I didn't intend to deceive you. Not initially. It just worked out that way.'

CHAPTER FOUR

'YOU'RE NOT SERIOUSLY going to allow her to stay here until she can get a ferry back to the mainland, are you?' Sam Devlin was dismayed. 'Man, you know nothing about this woman. How do you know this wasn't just a ruse to get into the castle?'

'I don't.' Liam finished the plate of bacon and eggs Mrs Wilson had cooked for him and reached for his steaming mug of coffee, sitting on the gleaming pine table beside him. He took a mouthful of the coffee, the third cup he'd had that morning, and sighed his satisfaction. 'But, in answer to your first question, she's leaving this morning. As soon as she can get her belongings packed.'

'Well, that's a mercy,' said Sam briskly. 'I could hardly believe it when Edith told me she was staying the night. Not but what the lassie seems honest enough. It's just unlike you to invite a stranger into your home.'

'I know.' Liam could hear the edge in his voice, but he didn't appreciate Sam telling him what he already knew. 'Anyway, I doubt if you'd have wanted to drive her back to the village last night.'

Sam sniffed. 'You could always have called McAllister out. He gets little enough work as it is.'

'Well, I didn't,' said Liam shortly. 'And, for your information,

I don't think she has an ulterior motive for being here. For God's sake, she didn't know who I was until I told her.'

'So you say.'

'So I know.'

'All right, all right.' Sam backed down. 'But I'm always suspicious when supposedly innocent strangers turn up out of the blue. I mean, who would be stupid enough as to believe you'd allow anyone to make a film on Kilfoil?'

'Her teenage sister, perhaps?'

'But you have nothing to do with film production.'

'I told her that,' said Liam mildly.

'So why did you bring her here? Couldn't you have convinced her you were telling the truth and sent her on her way?'

'She wanted to come,' said Liam flatly. 'She insisted on speaking to Liam Jameson in person.'

Sam shook his head. 'This was when you were masquerading as Luther Killian?'

'If you want to put it that way, yes.'

Sam snorted. 'Well, I don't know what you were thinking of, Liam. For God's sake, you're not a teenager. You're a middle-aged writer of horror fiction. You should have known better.'

'Gee, it's so good to know what you think of me,' drawled Liam drily. 'Why didn't you add with more scars than Ben Nevis and a gammy leg into the bargain?'

Sam's gnarled cheeks had gained a little colour now. 'Och, you know what I think of you, man. Surely there's no need for me to

mince my words.' He paused, and when his employer didn't say anything he continued fiercely, 'If you were the type who played around with the lassies, Liam, it would be different. But you're not. You never have been. Sure, I know you've had the odd fling now and then, but you've never brought your conquests home. Not since Kayla—'

'Don't go there, Sam.'

Liam came to life now, and the older man hunched his shoulders at the reproof. It was years since he'd even thought about Kayla Stevens, thought Liam grimly. The woman he'd been intending to marry before the disastrous attack that had almost killed him.

They'd met at a launch party his publisher had thrown for him when his first book had made number one on the bestseller lists. Kayla had been a struggling model, hired out by her agent for such occasions to add a little glamour to the mix. She'd seemed out of place there, too innocent to be forced to earn a living in that way. Liam had felt sorry for her—much as he'd done for Rosa Chantry, he thought now, scowling at the memory. But he'd eventually learned that Kayla had always had an eye to the main chance.

Although she'd hung around the hospital for a while after the attack, the idea of getting hitched to a man who was badly scarred, who might be impotent or paralysed, and who would definitely need a lot of care and understanding to recover, hadn't appealed to Kayla. Six months after returning Liam's ring, she'd

married a South American polo player with enough money to keep her in the style to which she'd become accustomed. The fact that without Liam she'd never have had the opportunity to meet such a man didn't even compute.

Sam was looking dejected now, and Liam took pity on him. 'Look, this isn't about what Kayla did, right? It's about helping someone out. Rosa's mother doesn't know where her younger daughter is. I expect she's pretty worried by now.'

'So why doesn't she go to the police?'

'And say what? That her daughter's gone off with another man and her boyfriend's jealous? Sam, teenagers are notoriously unpredictable. She'll probably turn up in a couple of days and deny the whole thing.'

'So why did you get involved?'

Good question. 'I've been asking myself that,' admitted Liam sagely. 'I don't know. Because my name was mentioned, I suppose. According to Rosa, her sister's a big fan. Maybe I was flattered. In any case, she's leaving today.'

It was the sunlight that awakened her. When she'd finally gone to bed—some time after midnight, she thought—she'd been sure she wouldn't sleep and the moonlight had been comforting. But she must have been more tired than she'd thought, both mentally and physically. Otherwise, why would she have accepted that man's help?

Discovering that the man she knew as Luther Killian was

really Liam Jameson had knocked her off balance. And angered her, too, she admitted. He'd had no right to lie about his identity, however desperate he was to retain his anonymity.

The fact that he must have been equally stunned to learn that he was supposed to have met her sister at a pop festival and offered her a screen test made it marginally excusable. But she wouldn't have come here at all if he'd been honest with her from the start.

Pushing back the duvet, Rosa swung her legs out of bed and padded, barefoot, to the windows. The floor was cold beneath her feet, but she thought she'd never get tired of the view. She was on the second floor of the castle and her windows looked out over the headland. She had an uninterrupted view of the restless sea that broke against the rocks.

It was so beautiful, the sun already tingeing the tips of the waves with gold. But there were clouds on the horizon, brooding things which threatened rain later. Perhaps this afternoon, she considered, wondering where she'd be sleeping tonight.

The realisation that it must be later than she'd thought occurred belatedly. Or perhaps it was the appetising aroma of warm bread drifting to her nostrils that reminded her she hadn't eaten much the night before. She turned with a start to find there was a tray resting on the chest of drawers standing by the doorway. Someone had evidently put it there. Was that what had woken her?

She'd been resting her bare knee on the wide sill, but now

she straightened and headed back to the bed, where she'd left her watch. Snatching it up from the nightstand, she saw it was already half-past-nine. Good heavens, she must have slept for at least eight hours.

She hesitated, torn between getting washed and dressed or investigating the contents of the tray. The tray won out, and, deciding that whoever had put it there deserved to be compensated, she picked it up and carried it back to the window seat.

A flask of what was obviously coffee invited her to try it. There was milk and cream in small jugs, brown sugar, and a basket of warm rolls. These were what she'd smelled, she realised, touching them reverently. Warm rolls, giving off the delicious scents of raisin and cinnamon.

Had Liam Jameson arranged this for her? More likely Mrs Wilson, she thought, remembering how rude she'd been to her host the afternoon before. But learning that he had been Liam Jameson all along had been so humiliating. When he'd told her he was the man she'd been waiting to see, she'd felt hopelessly out of her depth…

'You?' she'd said stupidly. 'You're Liam Jameson?' She shook her head. 'You can't be.'

He was annoyingly laconic. 'Why not?'

'Because you don't look anything like your picture,' Rosa protested, remembering the young man with a moustache and goatee beard she'd seen on the back cover of one of his novels.

This man's face was clean-shaven, if you didn't count the shadow of stubble on his chin.

'Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I really am Liam Jameson,' he said. 'The picture I think you're referring to was taken about twelve years ago.'

'Then you ought to have it updated,' she snapped.

As if!

Liam shrugged. 'As I believe I told you earlier, I'm a fairly reclusive soul. I prefer not to be recognised.'

'That's no excuse.' Rosa was trying hard not to feel too let down. 'So, what about Sophie? Do you know where she is?'

'Of course not.' The exasperation in his voice was unmistakable. 'If I did, don't you think I'd have told you?'

'I don't know what to think, do I?' Rosa's nails dug into her palms. 'You bring me here under false pretences…'

'Now, wait a minute.' Liam didn't know why her words stung him so much. That was, in effect, what he'd done. Taking a different tack, he went on, 'Would you have believed me if I'd told you who I was? You've just accused me of not looking anything like my picture.' He paused. 'If you must know, I felt sorry for you. You'd obviously been sent on a wasted journey, and whatever I'd said you would still have been stuck here for three more days.'

Rosa lifted her chin at this. 'There was no need for you to feel sorry for me, Mr Jameson.'

'Wasn't there?' Liam couldn't help but admire her courage.

He'd obviously judged her too harshly when he'd thought she had no spirit. 'So—what? If I'd told you who I was, you'd have just booked into a bed and breakfast and waited for Thursday's ferry? You wouldn't have been at all suspicious that I might not have been telling you the truth?'

'Well, I would have asked you about Sophie,' said Rosa, her shoulders slumping. 'You should have told me who you were,' she added again. 'Who is Luther Killian anyway? Someone who works for you?'

'You might say that.' A trace of humour crossed his face, and she was annoyed to feel herself responding to his charm. 'Luther Killian is the main character in all my novels. Which just proves that you're not a fan.'

'I've told you, Sophie is the one who reads your books.' She shook her head bitterly. 'You must think I'm such a fool.'

'Why would I think that?'

He had the nerve to look indignant, but Rosa was way past being understanding. 'Because I was too stupid to suspect anything,' she retorted. 'Even when it became obvious that you knew too much about him not to be involved.' She took a deep breath. 'Why did you do it, Mr Jameson? Were you just playing a game? Did making a fool of me turn you on?'

Now, where had that come from?

Rosa was still gazing at him, horrified at what she'd said, when someone knocked at the door. There was a moment when she feared Liam Jameson was going to ignore it, but then he turned

and strode across the room. Once more, he was dragging his leg, but Rosa was too dismayed to feel any compassion for him. God in heaven, he would think she was no better than her sister.

The housekeeper was waiting outside. She was carrying a tray of tea and sandwiches, and Liam let her into the room with controlled politeness.

'This is Mrs Wilson,' he said, his voice as cold as she'd heard it. 'Enjoy your lunch. I'll speak to you later.'

But in fact he hadn't. When Mrs Wilson had come in to collect the tray again, she'd offered the news that Mr Jameson was resting. He'd apparently asked the housekeeper to provide a room for her, where she could freshen up and so on. And that was how Rosa came to be here, almost twenty-four hours after her arrival.

Not that she'd ever expected to stay the night. When she'd had as much of the tea and sandwiches as she could stomach, with her conscience making every mouthful an effort, she'd ventured downstairs with the tray, hoping to run into her host. But the only person she'd encountered was Sam Devlin, and he'd taken some pleasure in telling her that Mr Jameson was indisposed and wouldn't be able to speak to her that afternoon after all.

Naturally, Rosa had blamed herself for Jameson's condition, sure that her behaviour had contributed to his malaise. But when she'd asked how she could get back to the village, Devlin had reluctantly admitted that his employer didn't want her to leave

until he'd spoken to her again.

'Mr Jameson suggests that you might like to spend a little time exploring the grounds of the castle,' he'd said tersely. 'I can come with you, if you like? Or, if not, you're free to relax in the library. There are plenty of books to read, and Mrs Wilson can supply anything else you need.'

In the event, Rosa had agreed to go for a walk, though not with Sam Devlin. She'd a managed to convince the dour Scotsman that she wouldn't get lost, and she'd spent a fairly pleasant hour wandering through gardens bright with late summer flowers, with only the dogs for company.

Back at the castle, and not knowing what else to do, she'd retreated to the library. Though not to read. She'd seen what manner of books were on the shelves, and, while she was sure Jameson only used them for research, she'd had no desire to give herself nightmares.

She'd been a little disturbed when Mrs Wilson had informed her that supper would be served at seven in the dining hall. She'd never expected to stay for supper and she hadn't been wholly surprised when she'd ventured downstairs again, after washing her face and combing her hair, to find that she was eating alone.

'Mr Jameson has suggested you spend the night,' Mrs Wilson had explained gently, much less antagonistic than Sam Devlin had been. 'He says he'll see you in the morning. Will that be all right?'

Of course Rosa knew she should have refused, that accepting

anything from Liam Jameson was putting herself in his debt. Which was definitely something she didn't want to do. But she also knew that she owed him an apology, and much against her better judgment she'd agreed to stay.

She sighed now. Whether she'd wanted to or not, she'd accepted his hospitality, and sooner or later she was going to have to make her apologies and take her leave. So, was her reluctance just embarrassment, or was she, as she suspected, curiously unwilling to say goodbye?

She shivered. How ridiculous was that? Liam Jameson meant nothing to her, and she'd made sure he would be glad to see the back of her. And what a way to repay his kindness. Okay, he should have told her who he was right off—but would she have believed him as he'd said?

She considered. On the ferry, she'd told him very little about why she was coming to the island, and even after they'd disembarked she hadn't exactly welcomed his help. By the time she'd confessed why she was really here, he'd already let her think he only knew Liam Jameson, not that that was who he really was.

The situation had definitely not been conducive to confidences, and she had to admit she'd been too anxious to get to her destination to listen to reason. Was that really why he'd kept his identity from her, as he'd said? It certainly made more sense than what she'd accused him of.

Not wanting to think about that scene in the library, Rosa finished her coffee and one of the warm rolls, and then went to

get a shower. A glimpse of her tumbled hair convinced her that she couldn't face Jameson in her present condition. She needed to have herself firmly under control before she encountered him again.

The bathroom was just as elegant as the bedroom where she'd slept, with a free-standing claw-footed tub and mirrored walls. The fluted glass shower could have accommodated at least three occupants, and the windows were made of clear glass.

The idea that anyone could look into the bathroom as she had her shower sent Rosa immediately to the windows. But there, on the second floor of the castle, there was no danger of being observed by anyone. Open spaces stretched in all directions, the nearest dwelling at least a mile away.

Stripping off the man-sized tee shirt she'd brought to sleep in, Rosa was caught for a moment by her reflection in the mirrored walls. Long legs, small breasts and a bony frame did not make for beauty, she decided ruefully. Okay, her complexion was fair, her eyes were dark and she didn't suffer from freckles. But her mouth was too wide, her nose was too long and at present there were frown lines between her brows.

She sighed, losing patience with herself and stepping into the shower. What did it matter what she looked like? Liam Jameson was not going to be attracted to her. Goodness, she'd thought he was gorgeous when she'd believed he was Luther Killian. Now she knew who he really was, she would not have been surprised if Sophie had fallen for him.

Sophie!

Rosa felt ashamed of herself. Here she was, thinking about Liam Jameson, when she still had no idea where her sister was. She would have to phone her mother again, she thought, knowing Mrs Chantry would be waiting for her call. Hopefully her mother would realise that Rosa wasn't free to use Liam Jameson's phone at random. Particularly when the call she needed to make was long distance.

Emerging from the shower a few moments later, she quickly grabbed one of the luxury towels from the rack and wrapped it about her. Then, after cleaning her teeth, she went back into the bedroom to dress.

To her surprise, and dismay, the tray had disappeared in her absence. Remembering that she hadn't bothered closing the bathroom door, Rosa hoped she hadn't been seen. But if she had it would only have been Mrs Wilson, she assured herself. There was no way Liam Jameson would have collected the tray himself.

And if he had, what of it? she asked herself bitterly. It wasn't as if she was the kind of woman men spied on. Unlike Sophie, who, with her spiky hair and rounded figure, was always being pursued by one man or another. And it now seemed as if her involvement with Mark Campion was on the skids as well.

Thankfully, there was a hairdryer lying on the period dressing table in the bedroom. Like the bathroom, the bedroom was an attractive mix of ancient and modern. The cheval mirror was Victorian, and the chest of drawers was even older. But, although

the bed was a four-poster, the mattress was reassuringly twenty-first century in design.

It took a little while to dry her mass of hair, and then even more time to secure it in a French braid. If the severe style and the high-necked navy sweater she chose to wear with her jeans owed anything to a desire to stifle any trace of femininity, she refused to acknowledge it. It was important to appear confident, however insecure she might feel.

She was quite familiar with the stairs that led down to the lower floor by this time. The dining hall was on the floor below, not far from the library. But the dining hall, with its mahogany-lined walls and long refectory table, was empty, the epergne of roses in the centre the only sign of life.

She wondered if it was worth going down into the reception hall, but she doubted she'd encounter her host there. If, indeed, he was up and about. But she remembered there had been a desk and a computer in the library. Perhaps that was where Jameson wrote his books.

She tapped at the library door first, before venturing inside. But, although she listened intently for any movement from within, the room seemed eerily quiet. Now, why had she used that adjective? she chided herself. She hadn't felt any unusual presence in the castle. It was just her imagination working overtime because there was nobody about.

There was only one way to find out. Reaching for the handle, she turned the knob. She sensed she wasn't alone only seconds

before someone spoke behind her. ‘Looking for me?’ enquired Liam Jameson in a hollow voice, and she almost jumped out of her skin.

CHAPTER FIVE

'I—YES. YES,' she said, dry-mouthed, her breathing quickening uncontrollably. She swung round to find him propped against the wall to one side of the heavy door. Then, seeing his mocking smile, she forgot all about the promises she'd made herself. 'Did you do that on purpose?' she demanded hotly.

'Do what?' Liam adopted an innocent expression, but he could tell from her face that she knew he had.

'Try to frighten me,' she exclaimed, pressing a hand to her chest, where her heart was beating wildly. 'Honestly—' she endeavoured to calm herself '—you almost gave me a heart attack.'

'I'm sorry.'

But he didn't sound particularly sorry, and Rosa recoiled instinctively when he leant past her and pushed open the door. 'After you,' he said, apparently unaware that his hand had brushed the side of her breast as he did so. Her breast tingled, and Rosa stiffened, but he seemed indifferent to her response.

However, Liam wasn't indifferent, and he was glad when she turned and went ahead of him into the room. For God's sake, he thought, annoyed with himself as much as her. She was behaving like an outraged virgin and he was experiencing the kind of reaction that would have been pathetic when he was a teenager.

What was wrong with him, for pity's sake? He had no interest

in repressed spinsters. Women who knew little about sex, and what they did know scared them rigid. When he needed a woman, he preferred one who knew the score.

All the same, a little voice inside him taunted, it might be amusing to see how she'd react if he came on to her. It was years since he'd used sex as anything more than an infrequent necessity, with good reason. And just because Rosa Chantry intrigued him, it was no reason to think anything had changed. She'd be just as horrified as Kayla had been when she'd seen his injuries. But it would have been so nice to pull the pins out of her hair and feel all that fiery silk spilling into his hands…

Once again he steeled himself against that kind of madness. Despite the ache between his legs, he was determined not to give her another reason to accuse him of upsetting her. Hell, he didn't need that kind of aggravation, but if that childish plait and masculine outfit were intended to deter any thoughts of a sexual nature they were having quite the opposite effect.

He closed the door behind him, leaning back against it, struggling to gain control of his sudden need. Rosa had hurried across the room, meanwhile, obviously wanting to put a safe distance between them. Then, when she felt she'd achieved her objective, she turned to face him.

'I—was looking for you,' she said, linking her hands together at her waist, unaware that it was a particularly protective stance. 'I wanted to thank you.'

'To thank me?' Liam couldn't think of anything she'd want to

thank him for, but Rosa's lips had tightened.

'For allowing me to stay the night,' she informed him primly. 'You didn't have to do that.'

'Ah.' Liam was relieved to feel the restriction in his trousers easing, and he straightened away from the door. 'No problem.' He waited a beat. 'Were you comfortable?'

'Very comfortable, thank you.'

'Good.' Liam came further into the room. 'I'm sorry I had to leave you on your own all evening. I'm afraid I fell asleep, and didn't wake until after midnight.'

Rosa was tempted to say, How appropriate bearing in mind his occupation, but she didn't. She was still intensely aware of him, and inviting that kind of intimacy wasn't sensible. 'It's all right,' she said instead. 'Your housekeeper looked after me. I slept really well.'

'You weren't afraid I might turn into a vampire in the night and ravish you?' Liam couldn't resist the urge to tease her and she flushed.

'Only briefly,' she retorted, surprising him again. 'But I'm fairly sure vampires don't ride ferries or drive cars in broad daylight.'

'Luther Killian does,' he said at once, and Rosa gave him an old-fashioned look.

'Luther Killian doesn't exist,' she said. 'Or only in your imagination, anyway.'

'You think?'

Rosa shook her head. 'You're not telling me you believe in vampires, Mr Jameson?'

'Oh, yes.' He nodded. 'There have been too many reports of sightings, both here and in Eastern Europe. And if you went to New Orleans—'

'Which I'm not likely to do,' she said tightly, realising she was letting him distract her from her purpose. She ought to be asking him if she could use his phone again, instead of indulging in a discussion about mythical monsters. Shrugging, she made a face. 'I know very little about such things, Mr Jameson. But I imagine it makes good publicity for your books.'

Liam caught his breath. 'You think that's all it is?' He was indignant.

'Well, I don't know, do I? I know nothing about vampires.'

'You know they don't normally go out in sunlight,' he reminded her, and she sighed.

'Everyone knows that.' And then, unable to resist it, 'Except Luther Killian, apparently.'

'Ah, but Luther is only half inhuman. His mother was a witch before she met Luther's dad.'

Rosa couldn't help smiling. 'And he converted her, I suppose?'

'Vampires always convert their victims,' agreed Liam, closing the space between them. 'D'you want me to show you how?'

Rosa backed up. 'I know how, Mr Jameson,' she mumbled, not sure if he was teasing her now or not. 'Please—' She held out her hand in front of her. 'I'm not a character in one of your books.'

'No,' he conceded flatly, aware that he was in danger of allowing their relationship to develop into something it was not. He turned back towards his desk, hearing her sudden relieved intake of breath as he did so. 'You're obviously not a believer.'

Rosa sighed now. She didn't want to offend him, for heaven's sake. 'A believer in what?' she asked, much against her better judgement, and he turned to rest his hips against the granite surface.

'In the supernatural,' he said carelessly, folding his arms. 'What was it you said on the way here? Ghosts and werewolves—we call them shapechangers, by the way—and things that go bump in the night.'

Rosa shrugged. 'And you are?'

'Oh, sure. Anyone who has encountered evil in its purest form has to be.'

Rosa frowned. 'Are you saying you've encountered evil?'

Oh, yes.

For a moment Liam thought he'd said the words out loud, but the expectant look on her face assured him he hadn't. Thank God!

'I suppose we all encounter evil in one form or another,' he prevaricated, having no intention of discussing his experiences with her. He'd already stepped too far over the mark, and he backtracked into the only avenue open to him. 'Luther certainly has.'

'Oh, Luther!' She was disparaging. 'Who's only a character in

your books.'

'The main character,' he corrected her. 'He's what you'd call an anti-hero. He kills, but his intentions are always good.'

'Isn't that a contradiction in terms?' she exclaimed at once. 'How can anyone—or anything—that makes a living killing people be regarded as good?'

Liam shrugged, and as he did so Rosa caught a glimpse of something silvery against his neck. It was either a birthmark or a scar of some sort, and her mouth went dry. It occurred to her that it might have been made by someone's—or something's—teeth.

Oh, God!

'I suppose that depends on your definition of good and evil,' he replied, diverting her. 'Isn't ridding the world of genuinely wicked individuals worthy of some respect?'

Rosa struggled to regain her objectivity. 'And that's what your books are about? Some—some vampire bounty-hunter working to make the world a better place?'

'A safer place, anyway,' agreed Liam drily. 'Don't knock it. You never know what you'd do if you were faced with primal evil.'

'And you do?' She sounded sceptical, and Liam had to bite his tongue not to tell her exactly what had happened to him. 'Come on, Mr Jameson. We both know you've lived a charmed life.'

Liam had to tuck his fingers beneath his arms to prevent himself from tearing his clothes aside to show her the kind of evil he'd encountered. 'Maybe,' he managed tersely. 'But I haven't

always lived in Scotland, Miss Chantry.'

'I know.' She'd relaxed a little now. 'I read about you on the Internet. Didn't you used to work at the Stock Exchange, or somewhere?'

'It was a merchant bank, actually.'

'Whatever.' Rosa shrugged, glad of the return to reality. 'I imagine you had a fairly good salary. Then you made a lot of money with your first book and bought your own castle. How difficult was that?'

Liam pushed himself to his feet. 'If that's what you want to think,' he said, turning to shuffle the papers on his desk. 'Which reminds me, I have work to do.'

Rosa felt ashamed now. It wasn't anything to do with her how he lived his life. 'Look,' she said, taking a step towards him, 'I'll admit I know nothing about you, really.

And—and if you say you know how it feels to face real evil, then I believe you. But—'

'But you don't believe me,' said Liam sharply, swinging around again, and Rosa was uneasily aware that there was barely a hand's breadth between them now. 'You're humouring me, Miss Chantry, and I don't like it. I don't need your endorsement.'

Rosa licked her dry lips. 'I was only being polite,' she protested. 'It's not my fault if you're touchy about the veracity of your books.'

'Touchy about the veracity—' Liam gazed at her angrily. 'You haven't the first idea what you're talking about.' He dragged a

calming breath into his lungs and tried to speak naturally. 'Let's just say I have had some firsthand knowledge of evil. But I'd rather not discuss it. Okay?'

Rosa lifted her shoulders. 'I had no idea.'

'Why should you?' Liam wasn't at all sure he liked the look of sympathy in her eyes any better than the disbelief he'd seen before. 'Forget it. I have.'

Though he doubted he ever would.

Rosa hesitated. 'I didn't mean to suggest your books weren't believable,' she persisted, laying a reckless hand on his sleeve. 'I'm sorry if I've offended you.'

Offended me?

Liam expelled a strangled breath. Although he was wearing a warm sweatshirt, he could feel the touch of her fingers clear through to his skin. The muscles in his arm tightened almost instinctively, the tendons heating and expanding much like those other muscles between his legs.

'It's not important,' he muttered harshly, concentrating on anything but the feminine scent of her skin. But then he lifted his lids and encountered those anxious brown eyes, and he felt as if he was drowning in their soft depths.

Hardly aware of what he was doing, he lifted his hand and brushed his thumb across her parted lips. Moisture that had gathered there clung to the pad, and he didn't think before bringing his thumb to his mouth to taste her.

For her part, Rosa was almost paralysed by his actions. She'd

never dreamt that an innocent attempt to comfort him might have such a disturbing result. Her whole body felt hot and trembly now, and she was aware of him in a way that she hadn't been before. Or was she only kidding herself? She'd been aware of him right from the start.

When her tongue emerged to circle her lips it was because they'd suddenly gone dry, not to absorb any lingering trace of his scent. Although she did. She heard him suck in a breath and wondered what he was thinking. Dear God, this wasn't meant to happen. But she knew that Colin had never made her feel anything like this.

When he spoke, however, his tone was harsh. 'I shouldn't have done that,' he said shortly. 'I'm sorry.'

Now it was Rosa's turn to take a gulp of much-needed oxygen. 'It—doesn't matter,' she said, glancing behind him at the telephone. 'Um—' She had to calm down, she told herself. 'I was wondering if—'

But that was as far as she got. 'It does matter,' he said, raking back his dark hair with a frustrated hand. 'For God's sake, you must think I'm desperate for a woman!'

Liam saw the way his words affected her almost before he'd finished speaking. The fact that he'd been trying to reassure himself that his emotions weren't involved here was no excuse. He realised, belatedly, that what he'd said could be taken two ways, and he wasn't at all surprised when she turned on him.

'I'm sure you're not,' she retorted stiffly, wrapping her arms

tightly across her slim body so that her small breasts were pushed upward in an unknowingly provocative way. 'And I'm not that desperate for a man, either.'

Liam suppressed a groan. Didn't she realise he hadn't intended to offend her? Evidently not. He scowled. Now it was up to him to defuse the situation he'd created, and one look at her face convinced him that it wouldn't be easy.

'Look,' he said persuasively, 'that wasn't intended as an insult. On the contrary. I wouldn't like you to think I expected any payment for my hospitality, that's all.'

Rosa gave him a disbelieving look. 'We both know what you meant, Mr Jameson,' she said tightly. 'I'm not a fool. You don't have to tell me I'm not the type of woman someone like you would find appealing.'

Liam felt a twinge of indignation. Despite the warning voice of his conscience, which was telling him not to continue with this, he resented the contempt he'd heard in her voice. Who the hell did she think she was, making uninformed judgements about him? She didn't know him. She knew nothing about him or his tastes in women. Yet she was implying he was some moron who could only think with his sex.

The fact that that was what he had been doing was not something Liam chose to consider at that moment. 'Be careful, Miss Chantry,' he said unpleasantly. 'I'll begin to think you were disappointed that I stopped when I did.'

'How dare you?'

Rosa didn't think she had ever felt so furious. Her hand balled into a fist almost automatically, connecting with the hard muscles of his stomach before she had time to reconsider. She suspected she'd hurt herself more than she hurt him, but it didn't matter. He had no right to ridicule her. Not when, for a heart-stopping moment, he'd made her feel so good.

Liam was surprised at the fierceness of her attack. 'You need to control that temper of yours, Miss Chantry,' he panted, annoyed at his shortness of breath. 'What the hell's the matter with you? What did I say to warrant that response?'

'You know what you said, Mr Jameson.' Rosa was trembling, but she refused to back down.

'Yeah?' Some evil demon was urging him on. 'And wasn't it true?'

Rosa stared at him, wondering how she could ever have been attracted to this man. 'You have a much inflated opinion of yourself, Mr Jameson,' she said icily, keeping her voice down with an effort. It would have been so much more satisfying to shout at him. 'If I allowed myself, just for a moment, to give in to you, it was simply because I felt sorry for you. I mean, it can't be much fun living here on your own, with only your female staff for diversion.'

The outrage Liam felt at being unknowingly but callously reminded of Kayla's defection brought a crippling wave of anger sweeping over him. Forgetting that he'd been in the wrong here, that her insults were just a counterattack to his sarcasm, he

grasped her wrists and twisted them behind her back. 'You're just a mine of bitterness, aren't you, Miss Chantry?' he chided scathingly. 'It's no wonder you've never been married. No decent man would put up with a spiteful bitch like you.'

Rosa gulped, the instinct to correct his bald assumption overwhelmed by the alarm she felt at finding herself locked in his savage embrace. She tried to break free, but with his hot breath almost stifling her, and his thigh wedged aggressively between her legs, she was helpless. They were both breathing rapidly, and for several seconds a silent battle ensued.

But it wasn't really a battle, Rosa acknowledged weakly. She was at his mercy and he knew it. Though, strangely, he didn't appear to appreciate his good fortune. On the contrary, when his eyes encountered hers, she saw they were filled with a mixture of confusion and regret.

'Hell,' he said harshly. 'This was not meant to happen.'

'So let me go,' said Rosa a little breathlessly, not entirely immune to the appeal of those green eyes no matter what he'd said.

This close, she could also see that silvery scar she'd noticed earlier. She quivered in spite of herself. How had he really got that?

'Yeah, I should,' he agreed, distracting her, his gaze dwelling on her mouth with an intensity that felt practically physical. 'But you know what?' He shifted against her and she was almost sure she could feel him hardening. 'I don't want to. Now, isn't that the

damnedest thing?'

A knot twisted in Liam's stomach as he watched her reaction to his admission. Had she any idea that a wave of heat and need was drumming through him, making what had begun as a desire to punish her into an insane urge to show her what she was missing? He could feel her trembling, even though she was doing her best to hold herself away from him, and the breasts he'd admired earlier were now surprisingly urgent against her woollen sweater.

'Please,' Rosa said unsteadily, probably hoping to appeal to his better judgement. But Liam only heard what she said as if from a distance. He'd captured both her wrists in one grip now, and brought his free hand round to rub his knuckles against one of those button-hard nipples. He felt her shuddering recoil with a pleasurable rush of blood to his groin.

God, she was responsive, he thought incredulously, wondering how long it had been since she'd had a man. If she'd ever had one, he appended, though he didn't quite believe she was a virgin.

Nevertheless, he wished he'd met her in other circumstances —wished he hadn't antagonised her by being cruel about her unmarried state. Because he was attracted to her, no matter how he might deny it. She wasn't beautiful, of course, but she had a fey charm that appealed to the romantic in him. And there was no denying that he could imagine, only too easily, all that glorious hair spread over the pillow on his bed.

Rosa's legs were beginning to feel as if they wouldn't support

her weight for much longer. Liam had turned his attention to her other breast now, covering it with his hand so that the hard peak butted against his palm. The sensation it caused made her feel dizzy, though not as dizzy as getting naked with him would feel, she thought crazily.

Wetness pooled between her legs and she was disconcerted. What was wrong with her? She'd always known, even when Colin was making passionate love to her, that some part of her had stood apart and watched what was going on with a certain objectivity.

But she couldn't be objective with Liam. When he looked at her as he was looking at her now, she couldn't even think straight, let alone anything else. She felt weak, possessed, consumed by needs she'd hardly known existed, so that when he bent his head towards her, her lips parted instinctively for his kiss.

However, although his mouth skimmed the curve of her neck, and the roughness of his jaw grazed her cheek, he didn't kiss her. Well, not on the mouth, anyway. With a feeling of dismay she felt his sudden withdrawal. He let go of her wrists and she stumbled, hardly aware she'd been relying on his support until it was taken away from her.

Then, as she struggled to regain her balance, he turned his back on her and leant on his desk.

CHAPTER SIX

LIAM, MEANWHILE, was hoping she hadn't realised why he'd had to turn away from her. Letting her go hadn't been easy, and his body still wouldn't accept what his mind was telling it to do. Instincts as old at time were demanding satisfaction, but, although the temptation was great, common sense insisted that he had to take control.

Dammit, he reminded himself, apart from the fact that he hardly knew the woman, did he really want to expose himself to ridicule again? Yet when she'd been in his arms, when he'd been breathing her scent, feeling her slim body moving against his, it had been all too easy to delude himself that this might work. All the pheromones in his body had responded to her and he'd so much wanted to bury himself inside her. To find out if she was as tight there as he imagined she would be.

Which, he acknowledged grimly, was crazy. Did he want her to go away from here and tell all her friends what a monster he was? A monster who couldn't keep his pants zipped, he thought bitterly. Yeah, the tabloids would have a field-day with that one.

Of course eventually he had to look behind him. Without the slightly unsteady sound of her breathing he wouldn't have known she was still there. But she was, and she deserved some explanation. Though what he was going to say he wasn't sure.

After checking himself to make sure there was no

embarrassing bulge in his pants, he turned to face her again. Her face was still flushed, he noticed, giving her an unexpected beauty, but she was doing her best to behave as if he hadn't just made a complete prat of himself. God, he thought, he didn't need this. He had a book to write, for pity's sake.

Rosa steeled herself as he turned. If he intended to blame her for what had happened, she had her answer ready. She hadn't asked him to touch her, and he'd had no right to treat her with so little respect. Heavens, he still thought she'd never been married. Goodness knew what he might have done if he'd known the truth.

If only there was some way to get away from here. If she had a car, for instance—or the use of a phone—she wouldn't have had to stand there like a fool, waiting for him to remember he had a guest. As it was, she was dependent on him for a phone, both to ring for transport and to call her mother. She disliked being beholden to him for anything after what had happened.

Liam sighed. This was a new experience for him, and he didn't like it. He didn't like it one bit. When he needed a woman, he found one who knew what she was doing. He'd never brought any woman here before, never done anything to violate the atmosphere of his home.

Until now.

Swallowing his pride, he said stiffly, 'I know you're not going to believe me, but I don't do this sort of thing—'

He would have continued, but Rosa broke in before he could say anything else. 'You're right,' she said tersely. 'I don't believe

you, Mr Jameson. I may be naïve, but you can't tell me you've never taken advantage of a woman before.'

'Dammit!' Liam caught his breath. 'I didn't take advantage of you,' he exclaimed impatiently. 'If I had, you'd know it, and you don't.' He paused. 'And call me Liam, for God's sake. You don't know how ridiculous you sound, calling me Mr Jameson after what just happened. You may still be a virgin, but I'm not.'

That was unforgivable, but he'd had it with trying to humour her. And it wasn't as if she hadn't played some part in the affair. Some part in his downfall, he amended grimly. He wasn't going to forget this in a long time.

'Oh, I'm sure everything about me seems ridiculous to you,' Rosa retorted, stung by his unfair criticism. 'But for your information I have been married, Mr Jameson. I divorced my ex-husband over three years ago.'

Liam stared blankly at her. 'You've been married?' he echoed disbelievingly.

'For five years,' she agreed, glad she'd been able to shock him at last.

'You don't look old enough.'

'Well, I am. I'm thirty-two, Mr Jameson. Quite old enough, I assure you.'

Liam was surprised. And disgruntled. He'd put her down as being no more than twenty-five. But he was most disturbed by the way this news affected him. If he'd known how old she really was, and that she'd been married…

But he mustn't go there. Wasn't it enough that he'd made a bloody fool of himself and created an awkward situation for himself into the bargain?

'Look,' he said, tight-lipped, 'let's agree that we've both made some mistakes here. I shouldn't have grabbed you, I admit. But you shouldn't have made me so mad that I forgot what I was doing.'

Rosa wanted to argue that she hadn't been the one who'd brought her here, that if he'd been honest right from the beginning none of this would have happened. But a reluctant awareness that she hadn't exactly put up much of a fight kept her silent, and when she finally spoke it was to say, 'Would it be all right if I used your phone, then?'

Liam knew a most inappropriate desire to laugh. Her words were so unexpected, so prosaic, as if all they'd been doing for the past half-hour was discussing the weather. But he had the sense to realise that humour would definitely not go down very well at this moment, and with a careless lift of his shoulders he said, 'Why not?'

'Thanks.' Rosa hoped she sounded sincere. 'I just want to ring my mother again.'

Liam arched dark brows. 'And tell her your sister's not here?'

'Yes.'

'Okay.' He nodded towards the desk where the phone was situated. 'Be my guest.'

Rosa hesitated for a moment, feeling awkward now. 'Um—

perhaps I could ring for a taxi at the same time?' she ventured. 'What was it you called that man?'

'McAllister?'

Rosa nodded.

'No need.' Liam started for the door, trying to hide the fact that his leg was protesting at the sudden activity. 'Sam's driving over to the village later this morning. You can go with him.'

Rosa wasn't sure she wanted that. Sam Devlin hadn't exactly welcomed her here. 'If it's just the same to you, I'll call McAllister,' she murmured, wishing she didn't have to ask. 'I don't want to put anyone out.'

Liam paused now, half turning to face her, his brows drawing together above those piercing green eyes. 'What's Sam been saying to you?'

'Oh—nothing.' And it was true. 'I'd just—prefer to make my own arrangements.'

Liam regarded her broodingly. 'So you don't want any advice on where to stay?'

'Well—yes.' Rosa hadn't thought of that. 'That would be useful.'

'Okay.' Liam reached for the door. 'I'll have Sam give you an address.' He pulled the door open, trying not to drag his foot as he moved into the aperture. 'Take your time. There's no hurry.'

'Oh, but—'

'Yes?'

His response was clipped, and Rosa, who had been about

to ask if he'd injured his leg, changed her mind. 'You—haven't given me Mr McAllister's number,' she said, with sudden inspiration, and Liam frowned.

'I can't remember it off-hand. I'll have Sam give you that, too. After you've rung your mother.'

And wasn't Sam going to wonder why she'd refused to drive back to the village with him? But, 'Okay,' she said weakly. 'Thanks.'

'No problem.' Liam was eager now to put this unfortunate interlude behind him. 'Have a good trip back.'

'Oh—' Once again, Rosa detained him. 'I mean—I will see you again before I leave?'

It had been an inane question, bearing in mind that he'd just wished her a good trip, but, conversely, now that the time had come, Rosa was curiously loath to leave him.

Liam sighed, leaning heavily on the door for support. 'You're not going to tell me you'll be sorry to go, are you?' he asked flatly. 'Because, quite frankly, I'd find that hard to believe.'

Rosa met his mocking gaze defensively. Then, to her dismay, she found herself saying, 'I suppose you'll be glad to see the back of me?'

Liam took an audible gulp of air. How was he supposed to answer that?

'Pretty much,' he admitted at last. Then, seeing her expression, he added, 'You're too much of a distraction.'

'Oh, right.' She gave him a scornful look. 'What you mean is,

I've wasted too much of your time already.'

Liam shrugged. 'I didn't say that.'

'You didn't have to.' Rosa turned towards the desk. Then, picking up the receiver, she said, 'I hope your leg's better soon.'

Liam blinked, but she wasn't looking at him now. And, although he was tempted to ask her what she knew about his injuries, he kept his mouth shut.

The door closed behind him and Rosa breathed a sigh of relief. The sooner she left here, the better. Despite what she'd thought before, he was dangerous to her peace of mind.

Her mother answered on the second ring, and when she did Rosa was instantly aware of the anticipation in her voice.

'Sophie?' Mrs Chantry said eagerly. 'Oh, darling, I hoped you'd ring back.'

Back?

Rosa was stunned. 'You mean you've heard from her?'

There was a moment's silence. 'Rosa? Rosa, is that you?'

'Who else?' Rosa could hear the edge in her voice but she couldn't help it. 'What's going on, Mum? I gather you've heard from Sophie?'

'Well, yes.' Her mother sighed. 'She rang yesterday evening.' She made a sound of excitement. 'You can't imagine how relieved I was.'

Rosa could. Sophie could do anything and their mother would forgive her. Even if, as in this case, she'd been telling a pack of lies.

'So where is she?' Rosa asked, forcing herself to be patient. 'Did she tell you that?'

'Of course.' Mrs Chantry sounded indignant now. 'She's in Scotland, as she said.' She paused, and then went on breathlessly, 'She's having a wonderful time. Everyone's been so kind to her, and there's every chance she'll get a part in the production. Isn't that amazing?'

'Unbelievable, certainly,' said Rosa drily, wondering if her mother was pathologically foolish where Sophie was concerned. For heaven's sake, who was going to employ a starstruck teenager with a very minimal acting talent?

'I might have known you'd say something like that, Rosa.' Mrs Chantry sounded irritable now. 'Just because Sophie isn't on the island, as you expected, you're taking your frustration out on me. Well, Scotland's a big country. It's natural that a production like this would need a less confined location.'

'It wasn't my idea to come to the island,' Rosa pointed out, aware that she sounded peeved. 'It was your idea, not mine.' She paused. 'Did you tell her where I was?'

'Not exactly.'

'You mean you didn't.' Rosa gritted her teeth. 'So where is she?'

'I've just told you. She's in Scotland,' said her mother testily.

'Where in Scotland?'

'Ah…' There was a pregnant pause. 'Well, I'm not precisely sure.'

'But you said you'd heard from her.'

'I have. I did.' Mrs Chantry sighed. 'But you know what Sophie's like, Rosa. She was so busy telling me all the exciting things that have happened to her that she forgot about giving me her address.'

'I'll bet.'

'Oh, don't be like that, Rosa. Can't you find out where she is?'

Rosa sighed. 'How am I supposed to do that?'

'Well, you said Liam Jameson was there, didn't you? He'll know.'

'Mum…'It was growing increasingly hard to be patient. 'There is no film production. Or, if there is, Liam Jameson doesn't know about it.'

'Have you asked him?'

'I—er—'

Belatedly, Rosa acknowledged that that was something that they hadn't discussed. When she'd found out Sophie wasn't on the island, that there was no film crew working there, she hadn't thought to ask if he'd given permission for a film to be made elsewhere.

But wouldn't he have told her?

Yet he hadn't told her who he was until he'd had to.

She'd been silent for too long, and her mother said sharply, 'You have spoken to him, haven't you?'

Spoken?

Rosa stifled the hysterical sob that rose in her throat at her

mother's words. Yes, she'd spoken to him all right, she thought. Though that was a poor description of what had happened between them.

'Yes,' she said, her voice a little hoarse. 'I've spoken to him, Mum. He was very—nice, actually.' And that had to be the understatement of the year!

'And he insisted he'd never seen Sophie?' Mrs Chantry sounded anxious now, and Ross wished she hadn't been so brutal. 'Oh, I wish she'd taken her phone with her to Glastonbury. But Mark was taking his, and I was so afraid she'd lose it.'

'I—I don't think Jameson's seen her,' Rosa murmured weakly, hating the thought that her mother was going to start worrying all over again. 'I—I'll ask him again.'

'Oh, you're a good girl, Rosa.' Now that she thought her daughter was softening, Mrs Chantry was prepared to be generous. 'I knew I could rely on you. And don't forget to find out where the film is being made.'

Rosa put the phone down with a feeling of utter bewilderment. Speaking to her mother was like butting her head against a brick wall. Mrs Chantry only heard what she wanted to hear, and now that Rosa had agreed to speak to Liam Jameson again she was prepared to wait for developments.

Rosa swore—something she rarely did, but right now she felt it was justified. Wait until she got her hands on her younger sister, she thought. Sophie would regret putting them through all this trauma.

Yet if Sophie hadn't disappeared Rosa wouldn't have come here, wouldn't have met Liam Jameson for herself. And, while that was something she might live to regret, right now the prospect of seeing him again was causing her heart to beat so madly it felt as if it was in danger of forcing its way right out of her chest.

But where had he gone?

She crossed to the door and pulled it open, only to fall back in surprise when she found Sam Devlin just outside. Had he been listening in to her conversation?

But, no. Something told her that the burly Scotsman wouldn't be interested in anything she had to say, and this was confirmed when he said brusquely, 'Yon McAllister's on his way from the village. He should be here in about half an hour. Would you like me to carry your bag down for you?'

'Oh—no.' Rosa was taken aback. But she should have known that Sam would waste no time in sending her on her way. 'That won't be necessary.' She paused. 'Actually, I wanted to have a word with Mr Jameson before I go.'

'I'm afraid that's impossible, Miss Chantry. Mr Jameson is working, and it's more than my job's worth to disturb him.'

Rosa doubted that very much. From what she'd seen, the two men had a good working relationship, and it was extremely unlikely that Liam Jameson would risk that by threatening to sack Devlin if he was disturbed.

'It would only take a minute,' she said persuasively. 'I want to

ask him something.'

'I'm sorry.'

Sam wasn't budging, and Rosa stared at him in frustration. If only she knew where Liam's office—den?—was. Evidently he didn't work in the library, as she'd thought at first. But in a place of this size he could be anywhere.

'Tell me what you want to ask him and I'll deliver your message when he's free,' Sam suggested, but Rosa had no intention of trusting him.

'It's personal,' she said, but although she held the man's gaze for a long while, hoping to shame him into helping her, ultimately it was she who looked away.

Then another thought occurred to her. 'You could give me his phone number,' she said with inspiration. 'I'll ring him later.'

'I couldn't do that, Miss Chantry.'

'Why not?'

'Mr Jameson doesn't give his private number to anyone.'

'Then give me yours,' mumbled Rosa ungraciously. 'I'll let you know where I'm staying, and Mr Jameson can ring me.'

Sam looked as if he wanted to refuse, but perhaps he realised that that would seem unnecessarily anal. Besides, he couldn't really know that Liam wouldn't speak to her if he went and asked him.

However, when he spoke it wasn't what Rosa had expected. 'Mr Jameson knows where you're staying, Miss Chantry,' he said, and now Rosa noticed the scrap of paper in his hand. 'He asked

me to give you this address.'

'Oh!' That stumped her. 'Thanks.' She took the paper from his outstretched hand and looked at it almost resentfully. 'Does Mr McAllister know where this is?'

'Everyone knows where Katie Ferguson's guesthouse is,' declared Sam scornfully. 'This isn't London, Miss Chantry.'

'I don't live in London,' retorted Rosa hotly. 'I come from a small town in North Yorkshire, Mr Devlin. Not some teeming metropolis, as you seem to think.'

'I'm sorry.' Rosa was sure he didn't mean it. 'I naturally assumed—'

'You shouldn't assume anything,' said Rosa, enjoying having him on the defensive for a change. She glanced down at the paper again. 'Thanks for this.'

Sam gave her a polite nod of acknowledgement. 'I'll let you know when the car arrives.'

'Thanks,' said Rosa again, and without another word Sam closed the door on her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'HAS SHE GONE?'

It was later that morning, and Liam had just emerged from his study having spent a rather fruitless couple of hours trying to concentrate on characters who suddenly seemed as unconvincing as cardboard cut-outs.

He'd found Sam and Mrs Wilson in the kitchen on the ground floor of the castle, enjoying a coffee break, and he'd accepted a cup from the housekeeper with some gratitude.

He wasn't in the best of moods, however, and his temper wasn't improved when Sam said cheerfully, 'Aye, she's gone, Liam. Not but what she didn't ask to speak to you again before she left.' He gave his employer a knowing look. 'I told her you were working and couldn't be disturbed, but I don't think she was suited.'

Liam scowled. He'd just burned his mouth on the hot coffee, and Sam's announcement was the last straw. 'You did what?' he demanded harshly. 'Why did you tell her that?'

'Well, because you never like to be disturbed when you're working,' said Sam defensively. 'Don't tell me you expected me to come along to your office and break your concentration just because some lassie with more bluff than sense asked to see you?'

'I beg your pardon?'

Liam's scowl deepened, and Mrs Wilson made a hasty exit

through the back door, murmuring something about needing some greens from the garden. Meanwhile, Sam stared at the younger man belligerently, although his face reddened with colour. 'I think you heard what I said,' he muttered defiantly.

'And who appointed you my guardian?' exclaimed Liam, equally unprepared to back down. 'I know you didn't like me bringing her here. You made that plain enough. But this is my house, Devlin, not yours.'

Sam straightened. He had been lounging against the drainer as he chatted with the housekeeper, but now he stiffened his back. 'I thought I was doing you a favour, man,' he protested. He lifted an apologetic hand. 'Obviously I was wrong. I'm sorry. Rest assured, it won't happen again.'

He turned and thrust his cup into the sink, but when he started across the room, evidently intending to leave Liam to it, Liam stepped into his path.

'No, I'm sorry,' he said roughly, ashamed at taking his frustration out on the older man. 'Forget what I said, Sam. It's not your fault I'm in a bloody mood.'

Sam hesitated, still looking upset, and Liam cursed himself anew for distressing him. Dammit, Sam was right. He probably would have complained if Sam had interrupted him. He was letting a woman he might never see again ruin the long-established relationship he had with his steward, and that was stupid.

'I mean it,' he grunted, holding out his hand. 'Take no notice

of me. I've had a pretty useless morning, and I'm ready to blame anyone but myself.'

Sam's jaw clenched, but he took Liam's hand and shook it warmly. 'Yon lassie's to blame,' he said staunchly, but Liam wasn't prepared to go that far.

'Well, she's gone now,' he said neutrally, taking another mouthful of his coffee and finding it more to his taste. 'McAllister turned up, I gather?'

'Aye. In that old rattletrap he calls an estate car,' agreed Sam, relaxing now. 'How it passes its MOT test, God knows!'

'I don't suppose it does,' said Liam, hoping it hadn't broken down between Kilfoil and the village. He was remembering what Rosa had said about the dangers of the moor, and to imagine her walking into one of its treacherous bogs was enough to bring another scowl to his lips.

But he wasn't about to bring that up with Sam, and, finishing his coffee, he said, 'I'll see you later. I'm going to take the dogs out.'

Sam arched his grey brows. 'Shall I come with you?' He eyed his employer's injured thigh with concerned eyes. 'You don't want to have another of those spasms when you're out on the cliffs.'

Liam hid his impatience at the other man's fussing, and said evenly, 'The physio says I should get plenty of exercise. He says that spending too long at my desk is probably the reason why I'm still having problems.'

'Even so—'

'I'll be fine,' Liam assured him tersely. 'But thanks for the offer.'

After collecting a coat, and the dogs, Liam emerged into the open air with a feeling of relief. The animals were just as glad to escape the confines of the castle, and they ran about excitedly, chasing every cat and bird in sight.

Liam didn't intend to go far. There were clouds massing on the horizon, and unless he missed his guess they'd have rain before nightfall. Knowing how quickly the weather could change in these parts, he had no desire to risk getting caught in a storm. He could be soaked to the skin in minutes. It wasn't as if he could run for cover, either. Thanks to his attacker, his running days were over.

Even so, he went out onto the cliffs, trudging through knee-high grasses that were an ideal hiding place for small rodents and birds of all kinds. The wind, blowing off the ocean, lifted the thick dark hair from his forehead and made him wish he'd worn something warmer than the ankle-length waterproof coat that flapped around his legs.

His thigh did move more freely as he exercised it, but he didn't think he was up to negotiating the cliff steps down to the cove this morning. Climbing down necessitated climbing up again, and that was probably a step too far.

He was considering turning back when Harley, the younger of the two retrievers, scared up a rabbit. The terrified creature must have been hiding in the gorse bushes that grew near the edge of

the cliff, and when Harley started barking it shot away across the headland, making unmistakably for the gully that ran down to the beach.

Naturally, Harley gave chase, pursued by the other dogs, and although Liam shouted himself hoarse he soon realised he was wasting his time. The dogs weren't going to come back until the rabbit had been rousted, and it was at that moment that he felt the first heavy drops of rain.

He swore loudly, limping across to the edge of the cliffs. He could see all three dogs from this vantage point. The gully was a lot easier for a dog to negotiate than the steps, and, although there was no sign of the rabbit, the dogs were having a whale of a time racing along the sand, splashing in and out of the waves breaking on the shore.

'Dammit!' He swore again, but although he tried every way he could to get them to come back they weren't listening to him.

What price now his arrogant assertion that he didn't need Sam's help? he thought grimly. The man might be fifteen years older than Liam, but he wouldn't have thought twice about going after the dogs. And, unless he wanted to return home with his own metaphoric tail between his legs, Liam knew he'd have to do the same.

It wasn't too bad going down. Although the rain was getting heavier, his determination kept him going—until his boots sank into the damp sand. The dogs came to him eagerly now, barking and leaping around him, as if their aim had been to get him down

there all along.

'Home,' ordered Liam grimly, ignoring their welcome, and at last his tone had some success. Or maybe it was the rain, he reflected wryly. It was certainly quite a downpour, and even the dogs preferred a dry coat to a wet one. Whatever the reason, all three of them obeyed his command, charging up the steps ahead of him, standing at the top, panting and wagging their tails with apparent pride at their achievement.

However, Liam found it much harder to follow them. The steps were slippery now, and every now and then, he was forced to clutch at handfuls of turf to prevent himself from sliding backwards.

His thigh ached, and halfway up he had to stop and allow the spasms in his leg to subside. God, he should have swallowed his pride and gone back to the castle for help, he thought bitterly. The way his muscles were feeling now, he'd probably undone all the good that treatment he'd had in London had achieved.

The dogs had disappeared by the time he finally reached the clifftop. Which was par for the course, he thought, panting heavily. He just hoped they'd gone back to the castle. If they hadn't, hard luck. He wasn't going looking for them. He was just relieved that Rosa Chantry wasn't still there. He'd have hated for her to see him like this. Dammit, he still had some pride.

It rained all day Wednesday.

Rosa, who was confined to Katie Ferguson's guesthouse,

stared out at the weather with a feeling of desperation. She felt so helpless. Where was Sophie? she fretted, the inactivity putting her at the mercy of her fears. All right, she'd said she was okay, and Rosa had to accept that. But something about this whole situation didn't add up.

Still, she could do nothing until the ferry arrived the following morning, she consoled herself, rubbing a circle in the condensation her breath had made on the glass. The guesthouse was cosy, her room small, but comfortable. But there were no other guests with whom she could have passed the time.

She glanced across the room at the table beside the bed. Two paperbacks that she'd bought at the post office-cum-general store resided there. One was a historical romance with a Scottish setting that she'd hoped might distract her from her troubles, but it hadn't. The other was a Liam Jameson.

The postmistress, a rather garrulous Scotswoman, had gone on at some length about the quality of Liam's writing. She'd read everything he'd ever written, she'd said, even though she didn't usually enjoy that sort of thing.

'But his characters are so good, aren't they?' she'd enthused. 'That Luther Killian! My goodness, I'd never realised that vampires could be so fascinating.'

Of course Rosa had had to admit that she hadn't read any of Liam's books, and that was when she'd discovered how Sam had explained her presence on the island.

'Why, I was sure you'd have read all of them, seeing as you

work for his publisher and all,' the postmistress had exclaimed in surprise. And when Rosa had looked confused she'd added ruefully, 'Och, old McAllister told us who you were. When Sam Devlin called him out to Kilfoil, he said a young lady from Pargeters had been visiting Mr Jameson.' She'd nodded at the rain. 'It's only a pity you're seeing the island in its worst light. It's really quite beautiful.'

Rosa had admitted then that it hadn't been raining when she'd first arrived. But, not wanting to contribute to any more gossip, she'd paid for the books and made good her escape.

However, she wondered now if Sam had told Mrs Ferguson the same story. It seemed possible, although her landlady was much more reserved, and she hadn't questioned why Rosa should have been visiting the castle.

Rosa sighed. Nevertheless, it was because of Liam that she'd found it impossible to read his book. She couldn't help associating Luther Killian with the man who'd created him, and the fact that Liam hadn't bothered getting back to her was a constant thorn in her side.

Not that she'd told her mother that. She'd rung Mrs Chantry on Tuesday evening to let her know where she was staying, giving her the phone number of the guesthouse as if she'd never stayed anywhere else. She'd promised she'd be speaking to Jameson again the following day, leaving her mother with the impression that another interview had been arranged.

Fortunately Mrs Chantry hadn't questioned that, and Rosa

hadn't talked for long. Apart from anything else, she'd been conscious that Mrs Ferguson could come into the small hallway where the phone was situated at any time, and the last thing Rosa wanted was for her to suspect that her reasons for being here weren't what she'd heard.

All in all, it had been a miserable couple of days. The rain had started soon after she and Mr McAllister had left the castle the previous morning, and his old estate car had taken for ever to cross the moor. Then, coming down into the village, they'd skidded onto the grass verge, so that Rosa had been relieved when she'd arrived safely at her destination.

Leaving her seat by the window, Rosa crossed the room and picked up Liam's book. There was still an hour to fill before supper, which appeared to be served early in the Highlands. And another couple of hours after that before she could reasonably retire to bed. She had to do something.

Of course what she ought to do was hire old McAllister's cab again and drive back to the castle, if only to keep the promise she'd made to her mother. Liam wasn't going to ring her, either because Sam hadn't given him her message or because he chose not to, and this might be her last chance.

But the idea of chancing another ride in the elderly estate car filled her with unease. And, apart from that, she didn't really have a reason for seeing Liam again. Not a genuine one, at any rate. Wanting to spend a little more time with him just didn't cut it, particularly after he'd admitted that he'd be glad to see her go. So

she might as well resign herself to another night at the guesthouse and a trip back to the mainland tomorrow afternoon.

But the following morning Rosa awakened to the sound of the wind howling round the walls of the old building. Snuggling under the covers, she wished she didn't have to get out of bed. It sounded more like a gale than anything, and she could just imagine being on the ferry in such a wind. Goodness, she'd felt sick coming here, and the water had been reasonably calm then. Now it was going to be as choppy as a bathtub. Or rather the ferry would be as helpless as a bathtub in a turbulent sea.

Rosa sighed, but there was no help for it. She had to get up. Mrs Ferguson had told her that the ferry usually arrived at about half-past-eleven and then left again at half-past-twelve, calling at the nearby island of Ardnarossa before returning to Mallaig.

Which meant at least another hour on her journey, thought Rosa dismally. Another hour in weather like this! She was going to be so seasick. She wished she dared feign illness and stay until the following Monday, when the ferry came again.

But it wasn't in her nature to lie, and she owed it to her mother to get back to the mainland and try and find out from the Scottish Tourist Office if they knew anything about the company Sophie professed to have joined. It was a doubtful proposition, but it was the only one she had at the moment. And right now the idea of being back on the mainland again sounded pretty good to her.

However, after washing and dressing and packing her bag, she went downstairs for breakfast to find Mrs Ferguson waiting for

her.

'I'm afraid you won't be leaving today, Miss Chantry,' she said apologetically. 'This storm has suspended all sailings, and the ferry won't be leaving Mallaig until it's blown itself out.'

The relief Rosa felt was paralysing. 'You mean, I'll have to stay here until the wind's dropped?'

'Well, until it moderates, at least,' Mrs Ferguson agreed with a regretful smile. 'I'm sorry.'

'It's not your fault.' Rosa was ashamed to realise she could hardly contain her relief. 'So—um, when do you think the storm will blow itself out?'

'Not before Saturday, at the earliest,' said the landlady sagely. 'And even then there's no guarantee that the ferry will come. We're just a small island, Miss Chantry. They may decide to wait until the regular sailing on Monday.'

'Monday!' Rosa thought ruefully that you really should be careful what you wish for. 'I see.'

'Of course, if there's an urgent reason why you need to get back to the mainland, you could always ask Mr Jameson. He might be willing to have his pilot take you in his helicopter. I mean…' Mrs Ferguson seemed to be considering the situation '…he is the reason why you're stuck here, isn't he?'

'Y-e-s.' Rosa drew the word out, knowing that her reasons for being here and the reasons Mrs Ferguson had probably been given for her being here were mutually exclusive. 'But I don't think that's a good idea.' As the landlady looked as if she

was about to protest, she added swiftly, 'Don't helicopters have problems in bad weather, too?'

'Not like ferries,' Mrs Ferguson assured her. 'I'm sure that by tomorrow you'd have no trouble at all.'

Wouldn't she? Rosa doubted that. There was no way Liam would lend his helicopter—a helicopter, for heaven's sake!—to her. It was just another indication of how stupid she was being in wanting to see him again. His way of life was so incredibly different from hers.

However, she refrained from making any comment, and the landlady bustled away to get her guest's breakfast. Mrs Ferguson was probably thinking she was considering it, thought Rosa, with a grimace. When in fact what she was really thinking was that this might give her another opportunity to speak to Liam again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FAT CHANCE, thought Rosa on Friday morning, having spent yet another day watching the rain. She had borrowed a coat from Mrs Ferguson and gone out for a while on Thursday afternoon, but it hadn't been much fun. The rain had been bad enough, but the wind had been unforgiving. It had torn back the hood of her coat and had left her hair at the mercy of the weather.

She'd even made another attempt to read Liam's book, and had been enjoying it until Luther Killian said something that Liam himself might say. It had brought back the memory of their encounter in all its disturbing detail, and she'd had to put the book aside and do something else.

Looking out of her window now, Rosa saw that it was going to be another wasted day. The wind hardly seemed to have eased at all, and although the rain seemed lighter, it was still coming down.

She could see the harbour from her window, the small boats that were moored there straining on their lines. No doubt the fishermen whose boats they were, were cursing, too. At least her incarceration didn't affect her livelihood.

Or Sophie's, she thought uneasily. But her sister would be all right, she assured herself. She was probably sitting in some luxury hotel at this moment, having a late breakfast with this man she'd taken off with. Okay, he wasn't Liam Jameson. But perhaps

he'd told her that he was. Yet somehow she knew Sophie was too savvy to be taken in like that.

So where was she? Although Rosa was fairly sure Liam didn't know, perhaps he might have an idea. Anything was better than sitting here, twiddling her thumbs.

She shook her head impatiently, aware that she was only looking for excuses to go and see him again. After all, whatever happened, her mother expected her to do it. Predictably, it was the first thing she'd asked Rosa when she'd phoned home the previous evening.

'But why haven't you seen him?' she'd demanded, and Rosa had explained about the storm. Then she'd hurried on and asked if Mrs Chantry had heard from Sophie—which she hadn't—to avoid the comeback. After all, it was her sister who was supposed to be in trouble here, not her.

Personally, Rosa thought her sister was keeping quiet deliberately. Now that she'd alerted them to the fact that she could phone, she was probably afraid they'd trace her call. Which left Rosa with the unenviable task of finding another way to locate her.

Her mother was woefully ignorant of her elder daughter's circumstances, however. 'Surely there must be some other way to get back to the mainland?' she'd protested, when Rosa had told her that the ferries were suspended until further notice. 'What about aeroplanes? They're not grounded, are they? Or you could find another boat.'

Rosa had been stunned at her foolishness. 'There's no airport on Kilfoil, Mum,' she'd told her frustratedly. 'And what other boat would you suggest? A fishing trawler, perhaps?'

Mrs Chantry had tutted impatiently. 'So you're telling me there's nothing you can do until the ferries start running again?'

'As far as getting off the island is concerned, yes,' said Rosa shortly. 'Believe me, I don't like it any more than you do.'

But was that strictly true? Rosa asked herself now, aware that the knowledge that Liam was just a dozen miles away was some compensation. If the ferries had been running she'd have been several hundred miles away by now, and any chance of seeing him again would have been denied her.

She frowned. Well, she couldn't stay in her room all day. She'd had her breakfast, and once again the books she'd bought held no appeal. There must be some other way she could get out to the castle, she thought, her pulse quickening at the thought. At least it would give her something to do. Even if that old grouse Sam Devlin refused to let her in.

Mrs Ferguson was dusting the sitting room when she went downstairs and, feeling a little awkward, Rosa stopped in the doorway. 'Um—I was wondering,' she said, and the landlady looked up expectantly. 'I was wondering if there was a car I could hire for the day.'

'Do you not know McAllister's number?' The woman frowned and put her duster aside. 'I think I've got it here somewhere—'

'No.' Rosa interrupted her, and when the landlady halted

uncertainly, she added, 'I didn't mean a taxi, Mrs Ferguson. I wondered if there was a car I could hire to drive myself.'

The woman frowned. 'Well, it's not much of a day for sightseeing.'

'I know that.' Rosa sighed. 'As a matter of fact, I'd like to drive over to see Mr Jameson again. There—er—there's something I forgot to ask him.'

'Ah.' Mrs Ferguson nodded. 'And you're not keen to have old McAllister drive you, is that it?'

'Well…'

Rosa felt her face turn red, but the landlady was smiling. 'Yes, I can see you're not impressed with his driving, lassie.' She laughed. 'I have to admit, I'd think twice about getting in his vehicle myself.'

Rosa relaxed. 'So—er—is there a car I could hire?' she asked hopefully. 'I'm willing to pay.'

'Och, you can take my car, Miss Chantry. It hardly gets used, anyway. It's not very grand, mind you, but it's roadworthy.'

Rosa gasped. 'Oh, that would be wonderful!'

Mrs Ferguson laughed again. 'Don't say that until you've seen it, lassie,' she advised. 'Come along. I'll show you where I keep it.'

The car, an ancient Ford, was kept in a shed at the back of the guesthouse, and Rosa saw at once that the landlady hadn't been exaggerating when she'd said it wasn't very grand. It had to be at least twenty years old, and was covered in dust into the bargain. Mrs Ferguson had to wipe away a handful of spiders' webs before

she could open the door.

But the engine started after only a couple of hiccoughs, and Rosa stepped aside as the woman reversed it out onto the street. One good thing—the rain quickly cleared the dust from the chassis, and Rosa saw that the wipers worked. All in all, it was exactly what she needed, and she couldn't thank the landlady enough.

'Och, it's nothing,' said Mrs Ferguson, surrendering the driving seat to her guest and stepping back into the shelter of the shed, out of the rain. 'You drive carefully, now. The roads can be treacherous in the wet. I wouldn't like you to go skidding into a bog.'

Rosa thought she wouldn't like that, either, but she refused to be daunted. She couldn't be a worse driver than old McAllister if she tried. And there was no hurry. If she took all morning to get there, it wouldn't matter.

The first indication that driving Mrs Ferguson's car wasn't going to be a sinecure came when Rosa reached the first corner and tried to turn. The wheel was like a dead weight in her hands, and she realised that it had no power steering. Of course, she thought impatiently, wrenching the car round manually. The installation of power steering in small cars like this was a comparatively recent innovation.

It made driving much harder, and her arms were aching by the time she'd negotiated the twists and turns down to the harbour. It was easier once she was driving up the road out of the village,

but she wasn't looking forward to the journey across that lonely stretch of moor.

The rain hindered visibility, too, and once or twice she was sure she saw ghostly figures rising out of the mist. But it was only the skeletal trunks of trees worn bare by the winds that raked the boggy scrubland. Nevertheless, she was glad she didn't have to drive across here in the dark.

At last she reached the road that wound down into the glen where Kilfoil Castle was situated. She couldn't see the castle, of course. The driving rain made that impossible. But now and then she glimpsed a farmhouse, and the unmistakable presence of livestock. She even saw a farmer herding some cows into a barn.

She relaxed. She'd made it. The only problem now was getting in to see Liam himself. She had the feeling Sam wouldn't be too pleased when she presented herself at the door. But he must know she hadn't left the island. Surely he might expect that she'd try to see his employer again?

She drove over the small bridge and parked in the same place Liam had used four days ago. Four days! She was amazed. Was that really all it was? She grimaced. Sometimes it felt as if she'd been here half her life.

She got out of the car, closing the door with care. No one had come to meet her, and she was curiously loath to announce her arrival in advance. Squaring her shoulders against the squally wind that blew in off the ocean, she crossed the forecourt to the

double doors.

There was no bell, but she'd hardly expected one. Knights of old hadn't needed such things. In the books she'd read, the knight's lady would be watching for her spouse from one of the narrow windows in the solar, or perhaps a vigilant guard would warn of a stranger's arrival. The portcullis would be lowered to protect those within the castle—

'Miss Chantry!'

Rosa had been so absorbed with her thoughts that she hadn't heard the door being opened. But now the housekeeper stood there, regarding her with obvious surprise.

'Oh, Mrs Wilson.' Rosa knew she should have been better prepared for this encounter. 'Um—how are you?'

'I'm very well, thank you.' The woman cast a nervous glance over her shoulder. 'Is there something I can help you with, Miss Chantry?'

'I hope so, yes.' Rosa smiled. 'Is—er—is Mr Jameson about?'

It was a stupid question. Rosa knew that as soon as the words left her lips. Where else would he be?

'Mr Jameson?'

The housekeeper sounded doubtful, and she hurried on, 'Yes. I mean, is he working this morning? Or could I have a quick word with him?'

'Oh, I—' Once again Mrs Wilson looked back over her shoulder. 'I'm afraid that's not a question I can answer, Miss Chantry.' She hesitated, and then went on, 'You'd have to ask Mr

Devlin.' She nodded. 'I'll get him for you.'

'No, I—'

Rosa started to say Sam Devlin was the last person she wanted to see, but it was too late. The woman had already turned and hurried away, leaving Rosa to cool her heels on the doorstep like some pushy double-glazing saleswoman.

She could have invited her inside, Rosa thought, disheartened. It wasn't as if she hadn't been inside the castle before. For heaven's sake, she'd spent a night here. Why was she being treated like an intruder?

Because that was what she was, she'd decided, when she heard Sam Devlin's footsteps crossing the hall. She'd just nudged under the overhang, in a rather fruitless attempt to keep dry, but she stepped aback almost instinctively when the man appeared.

However, Sam was surprisingly more charitable than the housekeeper. 'Och, come away inside, Miss Chantry,' he exclaimed, stepping back to allow her to enter the huge hall. 'It's a wretched morning, to be sure. You'll be wishing this storm would ease, no doubt. I dare say you're eager to get back to the mainland?'

'Yes.' Rosa had little option other than to agree. 'Um, I'm sorry to trouble you again, but I still haven't spoken to Mr Jameson.' She paused, and then went on rather recklessly, 'You did give him my message, didn't you?'

'What message would that be, Miss Chantry?'

Rosa sighed. She should have known his charity wouldn't

stretch that far. 'Well, that I wanted to speak to him again,' she said stiffly. 'If the ferry hadn't been delayed, I'd be gone by now.'

'So you would.' Sam regarded her consideringly as he closed the heavy door. 'But, contrary to what you believe, Miss Chantry, I did tell Mr Jameson what you'd said.'

'Oh. Oh, I see.' Rosa felt foolish now, and her face burned with sudden colour. 'What you mean is, Mr Jameson didn't want to speak to me, is that right?' She swallowed her humiliation. 'Well, that's all right. I realise now I shouldn't have bothered him.' She turned back to the door. 'Thank you for telling me.'

'Wait!' As she fumbled with the latch, Sam spoke again. 'Look, Miss Chantry,' he said, and now he sounded a little embarrassed, 'I didn't mean to imply that Liam had refused to speak to you. As a matter of fact I don't know what he might have done if—if…' He hesitated, as if he didn't want to go on, but courtesy demanded it. 'If he'd been able,' he finished at last. Then, after another pause, 'He—er—he hasn't been too well since you left on Tuesday. And that's the truth.'

Rosa was dismayed at the effect his words had on her. 'Is it his leg?' she asked, realising she was stepping onto unknown ground, but anxious enough to take the risk. She linked her cold fingers, pressing them at right angles to her chest. 'Please—tell me.'

Sam frowned. 'You know about his injuries?' he asked warily, but Rosa wasn't brave enough to claim that.

'Just—just that he seems to be troubled at times,' she admitted, shifting from one foot to the other. She stared at him.

'Doesn't he?'

'Perhaps.' Sam was noncommittal. 'But as it happens he got soaked when he was out with the dogs on Tuesday afternoon, and since then he hasn't felt very sociable.'

'You mean he got a chill?'

Sam was evidently unhappy talking about his employer behind his back. 'Something like that,' he admitted at last. 'As you've learned to your cost, the weather here can be unpredictable.'

'You don't mean it developed into pneumonia?' exclaimed Rosa, aghast, and Sam gave a helpless shake of his head.

'Och, no,' he said half impatiently. 'Nothing so dramatic. Just a—nasty cold, is all.' He paused, and then added ruefully, 'Liam's no' a good patient, Miss Chantry.'

'Do you want to tell me what the hell's going on?'

The unexpected sound of Liam's voice caused them both to start in alarm, and Sam instantly looked as guilty as hell. 'God, man,' he protested in a shaken voice. 'Do you have to scare us half to death? I didn't hear you.'

'Obviously not.' Liam left his position at the foot of the tower stairs and walked heavily towards them. He noticed that Rosa was looking as if he was the last person she'd expected to see, and that annoyed the hell out of him. This was his house, dammit. Who had she expected to see? 'What's happening?'

Rosa gazed at him in total confusion. After what Sam had been saying, she'd imagined Liam weak and vulnerable, worn out by coughing and sneezing and blowing his nose.

But the reality was much different. In his usual tight jeans, the fabric worn almost white in places she wasn't supposed to look, and a long-sleeved silk shirt, the colour of which exactly matched his eyes, he looked darkly disturbing—and just as dangerous as Luther Killian, she was sure.

'Miss Chantry—' began Sam, but Rosa knew she couldn't allow the older man to take the blame for her intrusion.

'I came to see you,' she broke in quickly, allowing her arms to fall to her sides. 'Mr Devlin was just telling me that—that you hadn't been well.'

'I just told her you had a cold,' exclaimed Sam swiftly, and Rosa wondered at the look that passed between the two men at that moment. 'That's all.'

'Yeah.' Liam accepted his explanation. Whatever faults he might have, Sam was excessively loyal. He wouldn't talk about Liam's private affairs with anyone.

He returned his gaze to Rosa, noticing that she was shivering now. But whether that was because she was only wearing a light jacket or because he'd frightened her, he couldn't be sure. 'Well, Miss Chantry,' he said pleasantly. 'You'd better come with me.'

Rosa's eyes were wide and anxious. 'All right,' she said, giving Sam a grateful look. 'Thanks for your help, Mr Devlin.'

Sam stiffened. 'It was my pleasure, Miss Chantry,' he insisted. Then, as she started after Liam, 'Will you be wanting a lift later?'

'Oh, no.' Rosa gave him a tight smile. 'I borrowed Mrs Ferguson's car. But thanks, anyway.'

Sam nodded, then, addressing himself to his employer, he added, 'Will I ask Mrs Wilson to bring coffee?'

'Sounds like a plan,' agreed Liam, and Sam gave her another searching look before disappearing through a door below the tapestries at the side of the hall.

'You've made a conquest,' remarked Liam drily, gesturing for her to precede him up the stairs, and she frowned.

'I don't think so.'

'I do. Sam's not usually so talkative, believe me. Not with women, anyway.'

Rosa shook her head, starting up the stairs. Following her, Liam was intensely aware of the rounded curve of her bottom swaying with every step she climbed. She might be slim, but she was shapely, her legs long and graceful beneath the close-fitting woollen pants she was wearing.

He also noticed that she'd attempted to pile her glorious hair into a knot on top of her head this morning. But, as usual, the wind and rain had hampered her efforts. Already strands of dark red silk coiled seductively on the shoulders of her jacket, and he was tempted to pick one up and allow it to curl about his fingers.

But he refused to go there. The end result of such an action was not one he wanted to explore, however appealing his own satisfaction might be. Besides, although he was fairly sure she'd been a willing recipient of his attentions earlier in the week, once she'd seen the ugly scars that marred his body she'd probably run as fast as Kayla had done.

Rosa, meanwhile, hearing the sudden hoarseness of his breathing, decided that Sam hadn't been exaggerating when he'd told her Liam had had a cold. He sounded as if he was struggling for breath, and she felt ashamed for doubting him.

They reached the top of the stairs at last, and Liam went ahead along the narrow landing. They passed several doors, including the library and the dining hall that Rosa remembered from her previous visit, and stopped before a door at the end of the hall.

It opened into a large living room. Because of the lowering skies, lamps had been lit on tables and cabinets, several tall uplighters adding illumination to a room that was both beautiful and homely.

A pair of plush suede sofas flanked the carved façade of the fireplace, and bookshelves filled with novels and magazines filled the space beneath the long windows. Raw silk curtains, in the same warm caramel colour as the sofas, were drawn back to display the fury of the storm outside, but Rosa guessed that in fine weather the view would be breathtaking.

Underfoot, a huge Turkish rug in shades of blue and green complemented the heavy-textured wall coverings, which reminded her they were in a castle, not a millionaire's mansion. Though the distinction escaped her.

'Go ahead,' said Liam, stepping back to allow her to enter, and Rosa hesitated.

'My shoes are damp,' she murmured, glancing down, and Liam arched sardonic brows.

'I can see that,' he said with a shrug. 'So take them off.'

'You don't mind?'

'Why would I mind?' Liam queried mockingly. 'Take off anything you like.' He paused, aware that she was looking at him warily now, before adding smoothly, 'Your jacket? It's wet, too.'

CHAPTER NINE

ROSA didn't quite know how to take his flippancy, but she bent and removed her low-heeled shoes, placing them just outside the door. Her jacket she took off, but folded it over her arm. Then, with a strangely fatalistic feeling, she stepped into the room.

The carpet was soft and warm after her damp shoes. She hadn't realised how cold her feet were until she felt the warmth of the room enveloping her from head to toe. She was aware of Liam following her, and when the door closed behind him she swung round with an almost guilty feeling of relief.

'This is a beautiful room,' she said, needing to say something, if only to show he didn't intimidate her. 'The whole castle is beautiful. You're very lucky to live here.'

'Am I?' Liam lifted her coat from her arm and gestured towards the sofas. 'Well, why don't we sit down and talk about it?'

Rosa didn't have an answer for that, but, after watching him drop her jacket onto a chair by the door, she decided she had nothing to lose. Moving round the end of one of the creamy sofas, she perched rather nervously on the edge of the seat.

Liam came to join her, and once again she couldn't help noticing how he dragged his left leg. But she wasn't here to ask personal questions, she reminded herself, though her desire to keep her cool took a bit of a tumble when he chose to sit beside

her.

'Okay,' he said, and she was forced to turn in her seat to face him, which caused her to slip a little further back on the cushions. 'So,' he said, 'you've changed your mind?'

'Changed my mind?' Rosa was nonplussed.

'About this place only being good enough for sheep and cattle,' remarked Liam mildly, his green eyes intent on her confused face.

'I didn't say that.' Rosa's cheeks turned pink.

'As good as. I seem to remember you asking me if it was even civilised.'

'That was before I'd seen it,' Rosa protested defensively. 'Anyway, that's not why I'm here.'

'I didn't think so.' Liam leaned back, resting his right ankle across his left knee. 'Sam told me you'd wanted to speak to me before you left on Tuesday morning.'

Rosa stiffened. 'But you didn't consider it important enough to get in touch with me?' she exclaimed impulsively. 'Even though you're evidently much better now.'

'Oh, I am. Much better,' agreed Liam drily.

Rosa regarded him warily. 'So—were you going to get in touch with me or not?'

'Not,' he declared softly. 'I thought it was for the best.'

Rosa swallowed. 'Whose best? Yours, I suppose?'

'Mine, yes. And yours.' Liam watched her with unwilling interest. He didn't need this, he told himself, even as he added, 'I

don't think we have anything more to say to one another, do you?'

'Well, obviously I do.' Rosa knew it would probably be wiser if she got to her feet and got out of here before she said or did something unforgivable. 'There's something else I want to ask you about Sophie.'

Her sister!

Liam only just prevented himself from using a word that wasn't acceptable in mixed company. But hadn't they dealt with her sister's disappearance to distraction already? He didn't even know the girl, but he disliked her intensely.

Dropping his foot to the floor, he leant forward, allowing his hands to hang free between his spread thighs. Then, in a controlled voice, he said, 'What about her?'

Rosa moistened dry lips. 'I—forgot to ask you if it was possible that a film was being made in another part of the Highlands.'

Liam turned his head to give her an incredulous look. 'Well, sure,' he said. 'People are always making films in this part of the world. So what? You think now that your sister might really have hooked up with a guy from a film production?'

'It's possible.' Despite the disbelieving look in Liam's eyes, Rosa knew a twinge of optimism. 'And I think you might have told me about the probabilities of these other productions.'

'Say what?' Liam was indignant. 'What the hell do they have to do with me?'

'Well, they're your books, aren't—?'

'Whoa!' Liam halted her there. 'You think I'm talking about an alternative production of one of my books?'

'Well, aren't you?'

'Hell, no.' Liam gave an exasperated snort. 'I was talking about films generally. For God's sake, if I'd thought they were making a film of one of mine elsewhere in the Highlands, don't you think I'd have told you?'

Rosa's shoulders sagged. 'So they're not?'

'No.'

'You're sure?'

Liam gave a half-laugh. 'Well, let's put it this way, I've signed no contracts.'

'You mean they haven't paid you?'

'If you want to put it like that.'

Rosa gave a heavy sigh. 'What other way is there? I'm sorry I've wasted your time.'

'Hey, don't say that.' As suddenly as before, Liam changed his mind about her. 'You've certainly provided a pleasant distraction on a particularly dull day.'

'I'm glad I've amused you.'

Rosa's voice was thick, but when she would have pushed to her feet Liam's hand on her thigh prevented her from rising. 'Don't go,' he said, his fingers registering the warmth of her flesh beneath the fine wool trousers. She was quivering, and when her eyes widened uncertainly, he added swiftly, 'Mrs Wilson is bringing us some coffee.'

Rosa's mouth was dry. But, in spite of everything, she knew that this was really why she'd come here. Oh, she'd wanted to ask him about Sophie, too. But she hadn't held out much hope in that regard. What she'd needed to know was if the instant attraction she'd felt between them was just a figment of her imagination.

It didn't feel like it at this moment. The fingers gripping her leg were both strong and oddly possessive. And when she lifted her head and looked into his eyes she saw a reflection of her own thwarted desires.

Dear heaven, she thought incredulously, he did want her. She just wished she had the first idea of what she was going to do about it.

The knock at the door was timely. Liam released Rosa at once, rising to his feet as the housekeeper obeyed his summons and came into the room carrying a tray.

'Sam said you wanted coffee, Mr Jameson,' Mrs Wilson murmured, her gaze flickering quickly over his guest's bent head. 'Where would you like it?'

Liam's lips twitched a little at the woman's unknowing innuendo, but he gestured towards the low table that was set between the two sofas. 'Just here's fine,' he said, wondering if her interruption was fate, trying to bring him to his senses. Mrs Wilson set down the tray and straightened. 'Thanks.'

The door closed behind the housekeeper with a definite click, and, because anything else would have looked strange, Liam subsided again onto the sofa beside Rosa. But he avoided looking

at her, saying instead, 'Help yourself.'

Rosa made no move to do so. She merely stared at the tray as if it might provide the answers she sought. A steaming jug of coffee, two porcelain cups, a cream jug and a sugar basin. Such ordinary items, yet they represented the difference between an increasing awareness and the coolness she now felt from Liam.

'I'm not thirsty,' she said at last. 'And I think I'd better go, after all.'

Liam's jaw clenched, and before he could prevent himself he asked, 'Do you want to?'

No!

Rosa turned her head. 'I don't know,' she said weakly.

Liam groaned, and, forgetting what he'd told himself since the moment he'd laid eyes on her, reached out and slipped his hand behind her nape. Then, before he could change his mind, he pulled her towards him.

And she came, seemingly willingly, her lips parting beneath his with a sensuality he hadn't expected. He'd intended to keep this light, inconsequential, but when her mouth opened he plunged his tongue into that wet, heated cavern without giving himself time to think.

She tasted hot and sweet and immensely desirable. Before he knew what he was doing, his hand had slid from her neck to the sensitive hollow of her spine. She arched towards him and he felt her taut breasts nudging his chest. And, God help him, his hand slipped lower, cupping the provocative curve of her bottom.

She jerked uncontrollably, but she didn't draw away, and he urged her back against the cushions behind her. He was kissing her now with a wild abandon that he hadn't felt since who knew when. If he'd ever felt this way, he conceded with unwilling honesty, as he ravaged her mouth again and again.

But this was not what he'd intended, he thought, in a rare moment of coherency. Not what he'd intended at all. He didn't indulge in one-night-stands with needy divorcees who were looking for no-strings sex. Besides, he hardly knew her. And she knew nothing of the monstrous scars that lurked beneath the expensive civility of his clothes. Hadn't he learned to his cost that women were not to be trusted? If he didn't want to scare her half to death, he should stop this. Now.

Rosa, however, knew nothing of his private misgivings. And, while she doubted anything lasting could come of it, she was ready and willing to take whatever Liam had to give. Her marriage to Colin, the pain she'd suffered when she'd discovered he'd been cheating on her, seemed a distant memory. Colin had never made her feel like this. Their relationship had been one of convenience, she realised, not passion.

She moved, slipping her hands about his neck, letting her fingers curl in the hair at his nape. His hair was only lightly tinged with grey, but thick, and virile. Like the rest of him, she thought a little breathlessly, feeling the unmistakable pressure of his arousal against her stomach.

The fight Liam was waging against his own needs was rapidly

fading. When her tongue came to twine with his, he felt the blood thundering through his veins. He sucked on her lips, bit her tongue, felt his head spinning with the gnawing hunger inside him. He wanted her, he thought savagely. He wanted to bury his aching shaft in her wet heat.

His hand stroked her jawline, and when he lifted his mouth to take a breath his thumb brushed sensuously across her swollen lips. Her tongue appeared, laving his thumb as he bent to bite her earlobe, and he felt his arousal straining at his zip.

Her hair had come loose during their lovemaking, and he couldn't resist twining the fiery strands around his fingers. He brought them to her lips and kissed her through the silky curtain, heard her give a moan of ecstasy as he did so.

God, this was getting heavy, he thought, dragging his hand away—but only as far as her chest. He couldn't resist cupping her breast through her sweater, but when he bent to take one hard nipple into his mouth she shook her head and guided his hand to the hem of the jersey.

Beneath the woollen garment her skin was smooth and unblemished. Unlike his own, he thought bitterly. When he peeled the sweater up to her chin, he found pert breasts, almost bursting out of her half-bra. The sight of all that creamy flesh was a harsh reminder of his own scarred torso, and with a groan of anguish he buried his face between her breasts and said hoarsely, 'I can't do this!'

Rosa was breathing rapidly, her chest rising and falling swiftly,

matching the sexual cravings he was inspiring in her. There was a wetness between her legs, and a pain stirring deep in her belly. As well as electric shocks that sparked along her nerves and left her aching, restive and wanting.

'You want me,' she protested, not knowing where she found the courage to say such a thing to him. God, only a few days ago she'd been convinced he could never be attracted to her. Yet here she was, telling him he wanted her, when he might easily be playing her along.

However, he didn't deny it. 'That doesn't matter,' Liam declared grimly, but when he put his hands on the cushions at either side of her head to lever himself away from her she wouldn't let him go.

'It does matter,' she insisted, cupping his face in her hands and forcing him to look at her. 'I'm not expecting a lifelong commitment here. I just want to—be with you. Is that so wrong?'

Liam groaned. 'It's not wrong—'

'Well, then?'

'You don't understand,' he muttered, and this time he succeeded in pulling away from her. He drew her sweater down again, hiding those luscious breasts from his hungry gaze. 'I'm not what you think.'

Rosa gazed at him, narrow-eyed. 'If you're going to tell me you're not normal, then—'

'I'm not a vampire,' Liam assured her harshly. 'But just take my word for it. This would never work.'

'It doesn't have to work.' Rosa struggled into a sitting position and stared at him appealingly. 'I like you, Liam. I have ever since you spoke to me on the ferry. I know I'm not sophisticated or glamorous, but I thought—I really thought you liked me, too.'

'I do like you,' muttered Liam savagely. 'This has nothing to do with liking or disliking you. It has to do with me. Only me!'

Rosa knew when she was beaten. She'd given it her best and Liam had shot her down in flames. She didn't know what was going on here, but she didn't believe half of what he was saying. For some reason he'd changed his mind about her.

Was he afraid she might expect something he couldn't give? Even now? Hurting, she had to deliver one final taunt—if only to salvage something from the wreck of her self-respect. 'It's always about you, isn't it, Mr Jameson?' she demanded, wrapping her arms about her suddenly chilled body. 'You're completely self-motivated, aren't you? Self first, self last, self everything!'

The injustice of that statement almost choked him. He'd been thinking of her, for God's sake! And of himself, too, he admitted, and how he'd feel when she saw him and turned away. But mostly of her, mostly to spare her the ugly patchwork his attacker had made of his body. It wouldn't occur to her that the reason he wore long-sleeved shirts and sweaters was because the man had almost chopped his arms to shreds.

Realising he would regret this, he got to his feet and faced her. Then, as she gazed up at him in sudden alarm, he tore his shirt open. Buttons popped and danced across the floor, and he

realised he'd probably torn them off. But he didn't care. In that moment all he wanted to do was show her the proof of what he'd been saying.

Rosa got to her feet as he dragged the shirt off his shoulders, her breath catching in her throat when she saw the scars on his arms and chest. Someone had attacked him—with a knife, she guessed—and he'd raised his arms to defend himself.

So this was what he'd been hiding, she thought, wondering if he thought they detracted from him as a man. The scars were old, and in many cases fading. But the memories they'd left with him were still strong enough to tear him apart.

Oh, Lord, she fretted, ashamed that she'd made him do this. Not to mention accusing him of having lived a charmed life. But did he really think she'd be repulsed by his appearance? For heaven's sake, she was ashamed of herself, not him.

'I—I didn't know,' she began, wanting to reassure him. 'I'm sorry, Liam, I—'

'Not half as sorry as I am, believe me,' he snarled harshly. 'But, as you say, you didn't know. I suppose that's some excuse.' He snatched up his shirt and shoved his arms into the sleeves. 'But now you do, and I want you to go. I'll get Sam to show you out.'

'But, Liam—'

'Don't,' he said, limping heavily to the door. 'Believe me, I've had all the sympathy I can take.'

Rosa fretted about what had happened all the way back to

the guesthouse. She didn't think about the rain, or the fact that the roads were slippy and she had to be careful she didn't skid into a bog. Her own safety meant nothing to her at that moment. She didn't even notice the stiffness of the steering wheel. All she could think about was Liam's face when he'd wrenched off his shirt and shown her those awful scars. She didn't think she'd ever forget the torment in his eyes.

It was only when she pulled up outside the guesthouse that she realised it had actually stopped raining. Even the wind seemed to have eased a little, and she could actually walk up the path to the door without getting blown off her feet.

Conversely, the knowledge that the storm was waning didn't cheer her up. The ferry would come and she'd leave the island. She'd never see Liam again.

'Is everything all right?' Mrs Ferguson met her in the hallway of the guesthouse, her brow creasing when she saw how drawn Rosa looked.

'Yes. Yes, everything's fine,' lied Rosa, knowing she couldn't discuss what had happened with anyone. 'Thank you for the use of your car. I must pay for the petrol, though.'

'Och, that's not necessary.' Mrs Ferguson clicked her tongue dismissively. 'I don't want anything for the tiny drop of fuel you'll have used. Like I said before you left, it will have done the vehicle good to have an outing. When my husband was alive he used to like to go bird-watching all over the island, but since he died I've scarcely had a use for it.'

‘You’re very kind.’ Rosa forced a smile. ‘It—er—it seems to be brightening up.’

‘Yes, I thought so myself,’ agreed the landlady, glancing out of the door. ‘But you’re looking a little peaked, Miss Chantry, if you don’t mind my saying so. Are you sure you didn’t find the journey too tiring?’

Tiring!

Rosa stifled the sob that rose in the back of her throat. ‘Just —a bit,’ she said, hoping that would satisfy the woman. ‘I’m used to power steering, you see.’

‘Power steering?’ Mrs Ferguson sounded impressed. ‘And what would that be when it’s at home?’

‘Oh—’ Rosa wished she hadn’t said anything. ‘It just makes it easier to steer,’ she explained, without elaborating, and with that she headed towards the stairs that led to her room.

CHAPTER TEN

THE REST OF THE DAY was an anticlimax.

After refusing Mrs Ferguson's offer of lunch, Rosa holed up in her room, wondering if she'd ever feel normal again. The events of the morning seemed unbelievable in retrospect. Had she really almost been seduced by a man against his will?

She simply wasn't the kind of woman things like that happened to. Her marriage to Colin Vincent and his subsequent betrayal had left her distinctly suspicious where men were concerned. Yet from the beginning she'd not had that feeling with Liam. Perhaps because she'd never expected that he might be attracted to her.

Even now, she hardly knew what he felt about her. Not enough to trust her, she acknowledged, wishing she'd had a chance to convince him she didn't care about his scars. Were they the reason he lived here, miles from any of the people he worked with? She wished she knew him better, wished she could show him that she—

She—what?

Rosa shivered. What was she thinking? She wasn't in love with him, for heaven's sake. In lust, maybe, and she very much regretted the way she'd had to leave the castle. But she hardly knew the man. Certainly not enough to trust him with her love.

Nevertheless, that didn't stop her from regretting what had

happened. She still didn't know what he thought of her—if he imagined she was used to doing that sort of thing.

She wasn't.

Rosa quivered. She couldn't ever remember behaving so shamelessly before, even with Colin. But then, the feelings she'd had for Colin had been nothing like this, and that was something else she regretted.

But had she really asked Liam to have sex with her? Had she really promised him there need be no commitment on his part, other than to take her to bed and make mad, passionate love to her?

Her face burned at the memory. Burned, too, at the realisation that she'd meant it. That she meant it still. She wanted him. Wanted to be with him. And something told her it would have been an experience she would never forget.

But it wasn't going to happen. Liam had made sure of that. In one devastating move he'd shown her exactly how damaged he was. Not just physically. His physical scars had healed. It was the other scars he carried beneath the surface that worried Rosa.

Because it was that sensitivity, which seemed to be as raw now as when the attack had happened, that had caused him to turn away from her. She was no psychologist, but she'd gamble that someone else was responsible for the protective shell he'd built around himself. Someone had hurt him, and she didn't believe it was his attacker.

So who? It had to be a woman, she decided painfully. A special

woman. A woman he'd been in love with. Someone he'd been relying on to support him through his ordeal…

The phone rang downstairs and Rosa tensed. Not that she expected it to be for her. Liam wasn't likely to try and get in touch with her again.

Nevertheless, her heart leapt when Mrs Ferguson called, 'It's for you, Miss Chantry.' And then sank again when she added, 'It's your mother.'

What now?

Rosa felt the weight of her own inadequacy descend on her as she hurried down the stairs to take the call. Yes, she'd asked Liam about the film, she rehearsed silently. But, no, she had no further news to give her mother.

'Hello, Mum,' she said, picking up the receiver, injecting a note of optimism into her voice. 'You'll be pleased to hear the storm's over at last. I'll be leaving the island on Monday at the latest.'

'Will you, dear?' Mrs Chantry sounded strangely agitated. 'Well, that's good.' She paused. 'Will you come straight home?'

Rosa frowned. 'I thought I might contact an information centre on the mainland and find out if they know—'

'Sophie's not in Scotland,' broke in her mother swiftly. And then, before Rosa could object, she added, 'She's been in London, but she's home now.'

Rosa was stunned. 'In London?' she echoed, blankly.

'Yes.' Her mother didn't sound as if she was enjoying this.

'She's been with some man she met at the pop festival. Some musician, I believe.'

'You're not serious!'

'I am.' Mrs Chantry sighed. 'I'm sorry, Rosa.'

'But why did she tell Mark she was going to Scotland?'

'I don't know.' Clearly her mother would have preferred not to go on with this. 'To put us off the scent, I suppose. She knew I'd have worried if I'd known she was with some guitarist with a pop group. What with all the drug-taking that goes on and—'

'But you were worried, Mum,' Rosa reminded her. 'My God, when you rang me last Saturday night you were practically hysterical.'

'Oh, I wasn't, Rosa. You're exaggerating. Good heavens, we all know what Sophie's like. She's so impetuous!'

'So irresponsible,' muttered Rosa darkly. 'Is she there? Put her on. I want to speak to her.'

'You can't.' Before Rosa could argue, Mrs Chantry explained her reasons. 'Mark called a little while ago, and she's gone round to his house to try and patch things up with him.'

'Well, he's a fool if he believes anything she tells him,' said Rosa irritably. For heaven's sake, was she the only one in the family with a lick of sense? 'I can't believe you're letting her get away with this. If it had been me at her age, I'd have been grounded for a month!'

'Well, it's no good me going on at her, Rosa,' declared Mrs Chantry unhappily. 'She's going away to university soon enough,

and if I play the heavy she's not going to want to come home at all.'

'Oh, Mum!' Rosa groaned. 'You can't let her blackmail you. She ran off with a musician, a man she'd only just met, who she knew nothing about. He could have been a—a white slaver for all she knew.'

'Oh, Rosa.' Mrs Chantry gave a little laugh now. 'White slaver, indeed!' She waited a beat, and when Rosa didn't say anything she added firmly, 'Anyway, she's learned her lesson. She says he dumped her when she refused to go to bed with him.'

And believe that if you will, thought Rosa cynically. But all she said was, 'Did she tell you why she went with him in the first place?'

'Oh, apparently he said he could introduce her to some people he knew in television,' said her mother, relaxing a little now that she'd delivered her news. 'She shouldn't have believed him. I told her that.'

'And where did Liam Jameson come in?' asked Rosa shortly. 'Or hasn't she told you that?'

Her mother hesitated. 'Oh—well, that might have been my fault.'

'Your fault?' Rosa was confused. 'How could it be your fault?'

'Well…' Mrs Chantry was obviously searching for words. 'I evidently jumped to the wrong conclusion.'

'I don't understand.'

'No.' Her mother sighed. 'No, you wouldn't.' There was

another pause, and then she said reluctantly, 'Well, you know how much Sophie likes Liam Jameson's books?'

'Yes.'

'And how she'd said how great it would be to star in one of his films?'

'You're kidding!'

'No. No, I'm not.' Mrs Chantry spoke indignantly. 'She has said that. Heaps of times. And—and when Mark rang and said she'd run off to Scotland with some man she'd met at the pop festival—'

Rosa groaned. 'I don't believe this!'

'It—it's true.' Her mother sniffed pathetically. 'Mark did say that she'd told him that this man was going to introduce her to all the right people, and—'

'And you put two and two together and made fifteen,' said Rosa shortly. 'Mum, why didn't you tell me this before I left?'

'Would you have gone if I had?'

No!

Rosa blew out a breath. 'Possibly not.'

'Probably not,' declared her mother tersely. 'I know you, Rosa. If you'd thought I was just clutching at straws, you'd never have approached Liam Jameson.'

And wasn't that the truth? thought Rosa, an unpleasant little pain making itself felt in her temple. 'Oh, Mum,' she said wearily, 'I wish you'd told me just the same.'

'And have you tell me what a stupid woman I am?' demanded

Mrs Chantry. 'I thought you'd be glad to hear your sister was home, safe and sound. Instead all you can do is grumble about both of us!'

Rosa knew it was ridiculous. She was thirty-two, for goodness' sake. But her eyes filled with tears at her mother's harsh words. They were so unjustified, so unfair. She hadn't complained, not really. But Sophie was totally selfish and her mother refused to see it.

'I'd better go,' she said, hoping the catch in her voice wasn't audible to anyone else. 'Mrs Ferguson's probably waiting to use the phone.'

Which was unlikely, she conceded. Apart from this call, the phone hadn't rung at all while she'd been in the guesthouse. Evidently people in Kilfoil tended to do their gossiping face to face.

'All right.' If Mrs Chantry suspected that the reason Rosa was ending the call was because she'd been a little unkind, she wasn't prepared to admit it. 'I'll expect you when I see you, then. Take care.'

'Bye.'

Rosa replaced the handset and scrubbed an impatient hand across her eyes. She was not going to cry, she told herself, even if the day had just gone from bad to worse. She had to focus on the future, on getting home to her little flat in Ripon, which suddenly seemed very far away. School would be starting again in a couple of weeks, and she had lessons to prepare before then.

Liam always stayed at the Moriarty Hotel when he was in London. It was a small, select establishment, known to only a few people, and they, like himself, reserved a suite of rooms year round, so that it was always available whenever it was needed.

It was one of the perks of being successful, he thought, as he drove south on the motorway. He could stay there completely anonymously, which suited him very well.

Not that he intended staying more than a couple of nights there on this visit. He was due to spend a few days at the Erskine Clinic in Knightsbridge, undergoing some further therapy on his leg.

Ever since August, when he'd been caught out in the storm because of the dogs, he'd been having an increasing amount of discomfort in his thigh. The local doctor thought he might have torn a ligament, and rather than wait for it to get better, which might not happen, Liam had been forced to seek relief.

Of course Sam thought he was crazy, driving to London. His opinion was that Liam should have used the helicopter. But helicopters tended to advertise one's arrival, and that was the last thing Liam wanted to do.

He'd left Scotland behind a little while ago, and now he was some miles beyond Penrith, heading towards the service area at Tebay. He might stop there, he reflected. He could do with a cup of coffee and the opportunity to stretch his legs. And to look at the map, he conceded, not prepared to consider why he should need to do so. His route was familiar enough, goodness knew.

South on the M6 as far as the M5. then east on the M40 until he reached the outskirts of London. What could be simpler?

He parked near the service buildings at Tebay and went inside to use the facilities and buy a coffee. Then he carried it back to the car and pulled his map out of the glove locker.

Less than a mile farther on there was a turn-off for Scotch Corner. Well, for Kirby Stephen initially, but it eventually intersected with the A66 east, which in turn intersected with the A1 at Scotch Corner. And about twenty miles south of Scotch Corner was the small Yorkshire market town of Ripon.

Ripon!

Liam swallowed a mouthful of his coffee, wincing at its bitter taste. Now, why would he want to know how to get to Ripon? Okay, he'd found out from Mrs Ferguson that that was where Rosa Chantry lived, but so what? It was nearly two months since he'd seen her, and after the way he'd behaved he doubted very much whether she'd want to see him again.

He didn't even know why he was still thinking about her. He was too old to believe that their association had been anything more than a brief infatuation with sex. He'd wanted her, yes, but experience had taught him that you didn't always get what you wanted. There was no doubt that she'd been horrified when she'd glimpsed the ugly patchwork beneath his shirt. And she hadn't even seen the worst of it. It was a mercy he could still function as a man.

He tried to excuse his interest by telling himself he was

concerned about her. Had she found her sister yet? Was she safe and well? Surely she must be. Despite searching the Internet, scanning every newspaper published in the Ripon area, he'd never read anything about a Sophie Chantry being missing. Wherever she was, she wasn't making news, and that was usually a good sign.

For Rosa's sake, he hoped so. He couldn't believe that in this day and age, with all the publicity there was about the dangers of young girls going off with men they knew nothing about, her sister should have behaved so foolishly. She was either completely naïve or completely stupid. Remembering what Rosa had told him, he'd put his money on the latter.

He folded the map and put it back in the glove box, and then sat for a while drinking his coffee. What now? Was he going to get back on the motorway and drive directly to London, as he'd told Sam? Or was he going to make a detour to the north-east?

He considered. A glance at his watch told him it was three o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon in October. By his reckoning, it would be five o'clock before he reached Ripon, if that was where he intended to go. How did he know she'd be home from work? Or even alone? Was he willing to take the risk just to satisfy a whim he'd probably regret later? He knew the answer, and he tossed the empty cup into a rubbish bin. If he didn't see Rosa again he'd never know how he really felt.

Happily, traffic was fairly light, and he arrived at the outskirts of Ripon soon after a quarter to five. There were plenty of cars

heading out of town—probably commuters, making their way home, he decided. Now all he had to do was find someone who could tell him where Richmond Road was.

A policeman was patrolling the narrow street beside the cathedral, and although there were yellow lines warning him not to stop Liam pulled in beside him. Lowering the nearside window, he leant across the seat. 'I'm looking for Richmond Road,' he said ruefully. 'You couldn't help me, could you?'

The policeman looked as if he was about to point out that this was a no waiting area, but then seemed to take pity on him. 'Richmond Road,' he said thoughtfully. 'Yes.' He turned. 'You've just come past it. It's that way, just off Winston Street.'

Liam stifled a curse. This was a one-way street, and he'd already discovered that the town centre was a maze of similar thoroughfares. How the hell was he supposed to retrace his steps?

'It might be easier if you parked and walked back,' suggested the policemen, apparently aware of his dilemma. 'I could give you directions, but at this time of the afternoon—'

'I understand.'

Liam gave a brief nod and rolled up the window again. Was he being a damn fool? he wondered, driving back into the market square. All this fuss, just to find a woman who might not even be willing to speak to him. He dreaded to think what Sam would say if he found out.

He eventually found a car park just off the market square. And, because most people were heading home, he had no

problem in finding a space. Then, hauling his woollen overcoat out of the back seat, he locked the car and pocketed the keys, pushing his hands deep into his coat pockets as he trudged back towards the cathedral.

A bell tolled and he realised it was already half-past five. It had taken him longer to find her house than to drive from Scotch Corner to Ripon. And he still had about a five-hour journey ahead of him, if he was planning to reach London tonight.

Fortunately, it was a dry evening, though it was cold. The wind swept along these narrow streets, and his hip and leg became stiff and taut with pain. He should have stayed with the car, he thought. Walking any distance in his present state was madness. And all to see a woman he barely knew.

He found Richmond Road without much difficulty. It was a street of semi-detached houses, and it was still light enough for him to see number 24. He glanced at the note he'd stuffed in his pocket. It said number 24b. But there was no 24b. No 24a, either. Had she given Mrs Ferguson a false address?

He frowned. Then, deciding the only thing he could do was knock at number 24 and ask for directions again, he opened the front gate and walked up the path. That was when he saw the intercom pinned to the wall beside the door. It had been too dark for him to see it before. Evidently 24b was an apartment; likewise 24a.

He cast a glance at the windows. There were lights upstairs, so someone was home. But was that apartment 24a or 24b? He

wouldn't know until he rang the bell.

'Yes?'

The voice that answered his summons was unmistakable. Liam disliked the way it danced along his nerves and curled its way around his heart. For God's sake, what was the matter with him? Even Kayla had never made him feel like this.

'Rosa?' His voice was a little hoarse suddenly. 'It's me, Liam Jameson. May I come up?'

Silence. Liam wondered what he'd do if she refused to speak to him. Break down the door? Walk away? He hoped he didn't have to make that decision.

'Push the door,' she said at last, and with a feeling of relief he heard the sound of the buzzer that released the latch.

Inside it was dark. He could just make out a hallway, leading to the back of the house, and a flight of stairs to the first floor.

As if she thought he might have some doubts about which apartment was hers, a light suddenly shone down from the top of the stairs. Rosa was standing on the landing above, looking down at him, and with a deep intake of air he closed the door and started up.

She looked different, he thought, and then realised she'd had her hair cut. Now it swung about her shoulders, still a fiery mass of curls, but softer, more feminine. She was wearing loose-fitting black trousers and a green blouse of some silky material that tipped off one shoulder as she moved. She looked good, he thought grimly. Too good to be spending the evening watching

the television. Alone.

His leg stiffened as he mounted the stairs, and for a moment he couldn't move. Hoping she wouldn't notice, he said tightly, 'Sorry if I'm intruding.'

Rosa frowned, and he was almost sure she was going to comment on his momentary paralysis. But then he was able to move his leg again, and she stepped back into the lighted doorway behind her. 'You're not intruding. Come in.'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'THANKS.'

Liam was very relieved to reach the landing. He didn't think he could have climbed another step, and he was already wondering how the hell he was going to get back to where he'd left his car. Perhaps he could call a cab? One thing was for sure: he didn't think he could walk all that way again tonight.

Meanwhile, Rosa was wondering what he was doing here. She tried to tell herself it could have nothing to do with what had happened before she left the castle, yet what else could it be?

He must have got her address from Mrs Ferguson. She could imagine that lady's surprise at such a request. She must have wondered why he hadn't contacted his publisher. Unless, for some reason, he'd told her the truth.

Her eyes darted about the room as he entered, trying to see it through his eyes. It was a comfortable room, a through dining and sitting room combined. But it was shabby, and nothing like the luxurious apartments he was used to.

She snatched up a discarded pair of tights she'd left draped over one of the dining chairs, and removed a magazine from the chenille couch. 'Why don't you sit down?' she invited, aware of the laboured way he'd climbed the stairs. 'You look—tired.'

'Don't you mean beat?' suggested Liam drily, but he did subside onto the couch with some relief. 'I'm a bit stiff, that's all.

I've been driving since early this morning.'

Rosa's eyes widened. 'But it's Tuesday!'

'So?'

'I thought the ferry only ran on Mondays and Thursdays.' She shook her head. 'Oh, of course. You probably used your helicopter?'

Liam slanted a glance up at her. 'How did you know I had a helicopter?'

Rosa straightened. 'Mrs Ferguson told me.' She paused. 'When—when I was stranded on the island, she suggested asking you if you could help.'

'Ah.' Liam nodded. 'The kindly Mrs Ferguson.' He shrugged. 'Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I spent last night at Jack Macleod's.'

'Who?' Rosa had never heard of Jack Macleod.

'The man you saw me talking to that morning we took the ferry to Kilfoil,' he reminded her, resting back against the cushions and pushing his hands into the pockets of his coat. 'Or am I the only one who remembers that?'

Rosa moistened her lips. 'No. No, I remember,' she said defensively. 'Is he a friend of yours?'

'A good friend,' agreed Liam. 'He lives in Mallaig, and when I first bought the island he offered to put me in touch with the people I needed to renovate the castle and the cottages. His grandparents used to live on Kilfoil, and he was a great help. We've remained friends ever since.'

'Oh, I see.' Rosa absorbed this. Then, 'I suppose Mrs Ferguson gave you my address?'

'She did.' Liam regarded her from beneath lashes any woman would have died for. 'I hope you don't mind.'

'Why should I mind?' Rosa realised she was still holding the magazine and the tights she'd picked up when he arrived. With an absent gesture, she crossed the room to dispose of them into a drawer before turning down the gas fire. The room seemed overly hot suddenly, and with her back to him she added, 'Can I get you anything? A drink?'

'A beer would be good,' he said, not really wanting anything at this moment. The pain in his leg was just beginning to subside, and the last thing he wanted was to have to walk on it again. 'Um —did you find your sister?'

Rosa straightened and turned to him, the blouse sliding off her shoulder again to reveal the black strap of her bra. 'She was here when I got back,' she confessed wryly. 'She'd been in London all along.'

'London?' Liam was briefly diverted. 'What the hell was she doing in London?'

'Making out with a musician she met at the pop festival,' replied Rosa, with a grimace. 'He apparently dumped her when she refused to sleep with him.'

Liam looked doubtful at this, and Rosa had to continue. 'I know. Incredible, isn't it? But my mother believes everything she says.' She sighed. 'Sophie can wrap her round her little finger.'

Liam stared at her. 'So where did I come in?'

'Oh—' Rosa's cheeks reddened. 'That was my mother's fault. When Mark—he's Sophie's boyfriend—phoned her to tell her Sophie had gone to Scotland with some man who was going to help her get into the movies, she immediately thought of you.'

'Why, for God's sake?'

'Well, like I told you, Sophie's always been such a fan of yours. I suppose she needed something to focus on, and you were it.'

'So it was your mother who sent you to Kilfoil?'

'Mmm.' Rosa nodded. 'But Sophie had said she was going to Scotland. That part was true.'

Liam shook his head in disbelief. 'Dare I ask why?'

'To put us off the scent?' Rosa shrugged. 'Looking back, I must have been a fool to believe anything my mother said. But she is half Italian, and she was practically hysterical when she phoned me.' She pulled a rueful face. 'Now—a beer.' She started towards the kitchen. 'Is that all?'

Not nearly, thought Liam, but he assured her that it was, watching as she went into the adjoining room. She walked quickly, and he realised she was nervous. He wondered why. Was she expecting someone else. A man, maybe?

That thought irritated him beyond reason. God, he couldn't believe how much he'd wanted to see her again. It added to the sense of impatience he was feeling at his own weakness. Dammit, he hadn't come here for her sympathy. He'd wanted to test her, but not in this way.

Gritting his teeth, he hauled himself to his feet again and made his way across the floor to the open doorway. Then, propping his shoulder against the jamb, he said, 'Do you live alone?'

Rosa jumped. Having acknowledged how tired he was, she'd expected him to stay on the couch. She'd already extracted a bottle of beer from the fridge, and had been about to decant it into a glass, but his appearance had startled her.

'Um—yes,' she said, concentrating on unscrewing the cap. However, when she would have poured it into the tumbler she'd taken from the cupboard, Liam stopped her.

'It's okay,' he said. 'I'll drink it from the bottle.'

Rosa looked doubtful. 'Are you sure?'

'I'm sure,' he said, holding out his hand, and with a shrug she passed the bottle to him.

He didn't move from the doorway, however, and she found herself watching as he carried the bottle to his lips and took a hearty swallow.

The muscles in his throat moved as he drank, the mark she'd seen when she was at the castle the only pale scar on flesh that was both brown and supple. And, just watching him, she felt again the flicker of desire—of awareness—that had been so unfamiliar to her until she'd met him.

Liam lowered the bottle suddenly, and turned to look at her. And, just like that, her limbs turned to jelly. It took an actual physical effort to look away from those jade-green eyes and say, albeit a little breathlessly, 'Why don't you go and sit down again?

You can't enjoy anything standing up.'

'Don't you believe it,' said Liam provocatively, setting the bottle down on the unit beside him and holding out his hand. 'Come here.'

Rosa swallowed. 'Do you need some help getting—'

'No!' he exploded angrily. 'I don't need your help. Not in that way, anyway.' He gave her an exasperated look. 'Just come here, will you?'

Rosa hesitated, but eventually she left the support of the fridge behind and approached him. 'Now what?'

'Like you don't know,' he retorted softly, catching her wrist and bringing its sensitive network of veins to his mouth. 'Kiss me.'

Rosa's breathing faltered. 'Liam—'

'Just do it, dammit,' he demanded harshly, and without another word she stepped closer and reached up to brush his lips with hers.

Liam gave a frustrated snort. 'Is that the best you can do?' He used his free hand to trace the shape of her jawline, allowing his fingers to move into the fiery glory of her hair. 'Kiss me, Rosa. Like you mean it. I didn't drive all this way just so you could give me a beer.'

'So why did you?' Rosa looked up into his strong face, resisting the urge to brush her own fingers across his lips. 'Drive all this way, I mean?'

Liam's eyes narrowed. 'Guess.'

Rosa took a breath. 'Because you wanted to see me?'

Liam's expression was sardonic. 'Gee, you have a real way with words.'

'So you tell me what to say,' she exclaimed, at once defensive and excited. 'Why did you want to see me? As I recall it, you couldn't wait to get rid of me before.'

'Yeah.' Liam made a mocking sound. 'That's what I let you think, didn't I?'

'Wasn't it true?'

'Hell, yes, it was true.' He tugged gently at a handful of hair. 'It's still true.' He grimaced. 'But I find I'm not quite as heroic as I thought I was.'

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