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<sup>the</sup>  
*Locket* of  
DREAMS

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BELINDA  
MURRELL

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RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

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*Lulu Bell and the Arabian Nights*

*Lulu Bell and the Magical Garden*

*Lulu Bell and the Pirate Fun*

*For the remarkable Mackenzie women in my family:*

*My grandmother, 'Nonnie' Joy Mackenzie-Wood*

*My mother, Gillian Mackenzie Evans*

*My sister, Kate Forsyth*

*My daughter, Emily Charlotte Jane Murrell*

*My niece, Eleanor Joy Mackenzie Forsyth*

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## *Glossary of Scottish Words*

Bairn	child
Bannock	flat bread made of oatmeal
Banshee	small fairies with long white hair, which foretell death if seen
Bonnie	beautiful
Brownie	shy household fairyfolk who help humans in return for food
Burn	small river or brook
Changelings	fairy babies left in place of human babies
Crofts	small farms rented by crofters or tenant farmers
Dun	tower or castle
Elfame	fairyland
Eilean	island
Gae	go
Ghaistie	ghost
Gillie	highland laird's hunting attendant
Glens	valleys
Gorm	blue-green colour of the Scottish hills
Guid	good
Hame	home
Kelpies	fairy water-horses
Ken	know
Knowe	round hillock where fairies dwell
Kirk	church
Selkies	sea-creatures that transform from seals to human form
Sporran	bag, often made of sealskin decorated with silver, worn with a kilt
Trews	tight-fitting traditional Scottish trousers

A fragment of my grandmother Nonnie's favourite poem:

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.*

John Keats, 1818

# 1

## *Sepia Memories*



Sophie and Jessica bent over an old photo album looking at faded sepia photographs of bridal veils, orange blossoms, waxed moustaches and babies in christening gowns that swept the floor. Motes of dust danced up from the black pages and floated in the sunlight streaming through the open window.

Jessica wrinkled her nose at the faint smell of aged, dry paper. She brushed her hand over a photo of a young couple laughing up at the camera. The girls' grandmother, Nonnie, stood beside the antique cedar table pouring tea from a china teapot.

'Nonnie, who are they?' asked Sophie, pointing to the joyful faces.

Nonnie peered at the photograph and a wistful smile crossed her face.

The young woman wore a tailored suit with a fur collar, the straight skirt nearly brushing her ankles. A small hat

perched on her neat curls and her face gleamed with fun, lips painted with a dark lipstick. The man, tall and proud, slung one arm protectively around her shoulder while he cradled a pipe in his other hand.

‘That is me with your beautiful papa,’ Nonnie replied, her voice catching. ‘I was twenty and Papa was twenty-two. That photograph was taken a few weeks after we met. I had only known him a short time but we both knew we would marry.’

Sophie and Jessica gazed up at their grandmother, fascinated. Nonnie looked so beautiful and so fragile in the old photograph. They could see the same narrow shoulders and straight back, the same curls, although now streaked with grey, and a hint of the same mischievous smile.

Jessica wriggled beside her sister. ‘How did you meet Papa?’

Nonnie laughed as she poured milk from a chubby jug into the fine china teacups.

‘I went to a party on a boat with my friends. Actually, I was escorted by a young man whom I had been seeing for some months.’ Nonnie pulled a little face. ‘Your papa jumped aboard at the last moment, just as we were casting off. He came straight up to sit beside me and seemed so fun and carefree that everyone else seemed dull by comparison.’

Nonnie passed each girl a cup of fragrant milky tea, balanced on a delicate saucer.

‘He had no money but so much *joie de vivre* that I couldn’t help but love him.’ Nonnie blinked rapidly, her eyes shining. ‘We were married a few months later, and as they say, the rest is history,’ she laughed. ‘Your mama was born a year later.’



Nonnie gazed at the photograph fondly, memories crowding the room. The girls' grandfather, Papa, had died the year before, leaving a gaping wound in all their lives.

Sophie jumped up from the sofa, fetched the forgotten rack of toast and carried it over to the table. She and Jessica munched on buttery toast with homemade jam. Two pale faces, lightly sprinkled with freckles, one framed in blonde hair, one dark. Sophie was twelve, Jessica was ten.

Both were staying at their grandmother's apartment for the school holidays and were dressed in their summer best, hair scraped back, bodies scrubbed, their pretty dresses hiding scratched knees and bruised shins from climbing trees.

As Nonnie told them tales of her wedding and youth, they felt as though they were absorbing the air of another era, a softer, more romantic era. An era with no money troubles, no family worries, no school problems.

'Nonnie, who is this?' Sophie asked, pointing to a photograph of a stern-looking matriarch in a stiff lace collar and silk skirts.

'That was my great-grandmother Charlotte Mackenzie, so your great-great-great-grandmother,' Nonnie replied. 'She was the first one of my family to come to Australia, about one hundred and fifty years ago. She was a remarkable woman.'

Nonnie bent and ruffled Sophie's hair.

'She was a bonnie Scot who came to Australia as a young girl about the same age as you, Sophie,' Nonnie continued. 'She was a feisty lass with red hair and green eyes. My mother told me she was considered a real beauty in her day. As a young woman, she had half of Sydney's men madly in love with her.'

Sophie smiled up at her grandmother, imagining herself as a bonnie lassie with half of Sydney at her feet.

‘Charlotte Mackenzie eventually fell in love and married a handsome young Welshman called William Thomas and raised a merry tribe of children.’

Jessica and Sophie gazed at the photo of Charlotte Mackenzie, trying to imagine her as a beautiful young girl.

‘Actually, Charlotte’s story is rather romantic and quite mysterious.’ Nonnie settled down at the table, pulling her cup of tea towards her. ‘Charlotte Mackenzie was the daughter of a wealthy Scottish laird who owned a beautiful estate on an island off the west coast of Scotland.

‘The family had an ancient castle called Dungorm, which was stormed by the English when Bonnie Prince Charlie was hiding there during the Jacobite rebellion. The castle was blown to smithereens but the prince escaped with the help of the Mackenzies.’

Sophie felt a shiver of excitement tingle up her spine. Her family had once owned a ruined Scottish castle. Her family had hidden Bonnie Prince Charlie from the English.

‘The family was very wealthy and built a beautiful, grand home on the island, near the ruins of the castle,’ Nonnie explained. ‘Then a terrible tragedy struck the Mackenzies. No-one really knows what happened because Charlotte would never speak of it, but Charlotte and her sister, Eleanor, were orphaned and sent across the world to Australia to live.

‘My mother told me stories of a wicked uncle who deprived the girls of their inheritance. She believed the estate of Dungorm should rightfully have gone to Charlotte.’

Sophie and Jessica glanced at each other, their eyes burning in excitement. Nonnie smiled at their enthusiasm.

‘But it was all such a long time ago,’ concluded Nonnie. ‘No-one cares any more what happened to two young Scottish girls.’

‘We care,’ retorted Sophie warmly. ‘I’d love to know what happened.’

Nonnie was silent for a few moments, her face thoughtful.

‘I have a box of Charlotte’s things,’ Nonnie began. ‘Would you like —’

‘Yes, yes,’ Sophie and Jessica chorused loudly. ‘Please, Nonnie,’ they added, belatedly remembering their best manners.

Nonnie returned a few minutes later carrying a dark timber box, its lid and sides ornately carved. She set it on the table, gently wiping the dust away.

The box was slightly larger than a shoebox. Its lid was carved with a striking depiction of a stag, its antlers held proudly aloft. A rising full moon circled its head and antlers, while flowers and plants curled around the border.

Words were carved within the border of the lid. Nonnie ran her finger along the words. Across the top was carved *Luceo non Uro* and on the bottom, the English translation.

‘*Luceo non Uro*, which is Latin. In English it means “I shine not burn,” which is the Mackenzie clan motto.’

‘What does that mean?’ asked Jessica, wrinkling her brow.

‘It means that the Mackenzies try to do their very best in everything they do — to shine, but not to burn out or be consumed,’ replied Nonnie. ‘It’s a worthy aim to have in

life. Would you like to open it? I don't think anyone has opened it for fifty years.'

Sophie gently turned the tiny golden key, which grated creakily in the lock. Together the girls lifted the lid and peered inside. A rectangle of faded violet silk lined the box, in which a jumble of different objects nestled together.

One by one the girls lifted the objects out and examined them curiously. A small polished red pebble. A dried and dusty twig. Crumbles of tiny parched brown leaves. A tiny arrowhead shining like freshly burnished silver. A torn swatch of faded green-and-blue tartan. A coil of long, heavy chain and a heart-shaped gold locket.

'That is heather, the national flower of Scotland,' Nonnie explained, pointing to the dried twig. 'In summer the moors of Scotland are covered in a purple haze of heather bells. I think that is probably my favourite colour in the world.'

Nonnie carefully opened the delicate locket to show them the plaited twist of red and black hair. 'It's a love lock. In the old days before photographs, people used to keep a lock of hair inside a locket as a memento of their loved ones.'

'I wonder whose hair's in the locket? Some of it is red — do you think it might be Charlotte's?' wondered Sophie.

'It could be,' agreed Nonnie.

'Why did Charlotte keep a pebble in her treasure box?' cried Jessica, wriggling with enthusiasm. 'What was the tiny arrow used for?'

'Why were Charlotte and her sister sent away?' begged Sophie. 'What happened to their parents?'

'What happened to Castle Dungorm?' Jessica asked, words spilling over themselves. 'Maybe if it really was Charlotte's we could claim the castle for our family!'

Nonnie held up her hands and laughed. 'I told you it was intriguing, but it all happened nearly a hundred and fifty years ago. I'm afraid we'll never truly know the answers to all those questions. It must forever remain a mystery.'

The girls' minds churned with questions that couldn't be answered.

'Come on, girls,' said Nonnie. 'It's a beautiful day. Why don't we go out for a walk?'

That night Sophie lay in bed wearing her long white nightdress embroidered with tiny daisies that Nonnie had given her for Christmas. Sleep eluded her as images of castles and Scottish heather jostled inside her head. These were chased away by thoughts of her home and her own family problems.

*No, don't think of that; think of castles,* Sophie told herself.

Jessica was asleep in the other bed, breathing deeply and evenly. Sophie tossed and turned, her blonde hair sticking damply to her face and neck.

At last Sophie pulled back the covers and slipped out of bed. She tiptoed to the chest of drawers and opened the dark wooden box with the stag carved on the lid. She could feel the curve of his antlers with her fingertips.

A gleam of light filtered through the partially open door, hardly enough to see by. Using her fingertips she rummaged through the box and found the cool, slippery gold of the old locket chain.

Sophie weighed the heavy chain deliberately in her hand. She traced the engraving on the heart-shaped locket, then quickly, guiltily slipped the chain over her head and inside her nightdress. She didn't know why she felt the urge

to wear the old necklace. It just seemed to have a magnetic pull on her.

She wondered about Charlotte and Eleanor Mackenzie. *What was their life like? What did the castle of Dungorm look like?*

Cradling the locket in her palm, Sophie quickly felt sleep sink upon her, snuggling around her like a soft, cozy doona.

She felt her body melting then sliding down a steep tunnel, falling faster and faster, hurtling towards sleep. She shot out of the darkness into a blinding, dazzling vastness of light, with nothing below her. Sophie felt momentarily afraid as she fell but then she realised she was no longer falling but flying, soaring above a deep-green earth.

Far below her she saw two figures moving across the landscape. Her curiosity prickled and she turned her body to swoop towards them. Sophie felt as light as a feather, her body gliding on puffs of breeze.

As she dropped lower she realised the two figures were girls, galloping on ponies, their red hair and long green skirts flying in the wind. It suddenly occurred to Sophie that the two girls, with their veiled hats and full petticoats, looked liked old-fashioned children out of an aged book.

## 2

# *Nell's Fall*



‘Giddy-up, Rosie,’ the older girl cried, kicking her heels into the side of her grey mare. ‘Race you to the top, Nell!’

Nell responded with a shriek and a flourish of her riding crop. The two girls rode side-saddle, dark-green velvet skirts flapping over their horses’ flanks.

The horses galloped down a steep green hill, leaving muddy hoof prints in the spongy turf, their riders whooping with delight. At their heels loped a shaggy black-and-white dog, its tongue lolling, one ear pricked and one flopping over its eye.

At the bottom of the hill, an icy burn tumbled and splashed its way over the grey rocks. The horses barely slowed as they clattered through the shallow water and galloped up the sheer bank on the other side, the dog close behind.

A great clod of mud flew up from Nell’s horse’s hooves

and struck her sister, Charlotte, on the cheek, splattering her bodice.

Charlotte smeared the clod away with the back of her gloved hand and whispered in Rosie's ear. 'Come on, girl. Let us show them what you can do.'

Nell's horse slowed slightly on the steep slope, sides heaving and clouds of steamy breath snorting from her nostrils. Rosie's ears pricked with excitement and her stride lengthened, gradually outpacing the horse in front of her.

'Whoo hoo,' shrieked Charlotte, crouching over Rosie's neck, her hands tangled in the horse's mane. She leant forward, reins flapping as the wind stung her cheeks and whipped her breath away.

Charlotte felt as if she were flying; the horse's hooves barely seemed to skim the earth.

Over the crest of the hill they galloped, ducking under a low-lying branch, the leaves whipping Charlotte's burning cheeks. At the top, the horses thundered to a stop, their sides heaving and steaming. The black-and-white dog flopped gratefully on the spongy heather.

Over the hill erupted a stunning vista. The girls didn't speak; their eyes roamed the familiar landscape as joy pounded through Charlotte's body. She could never tire of this view.

Rolling hills of emerald-green grass were crisscrossed with grey stone walls and studded with bright-yellow broom and tufts of snowy-white thrift. To the right stretched a steel-grey loch fringed with lichen-spotted rocks, its surface ruffled with the breeze.

A grand mansion of golden stone faced the loch, smoke curling from its many chimneys, its slate-roofed turrets jutting against the sky.



Even further to the right was a small island, quite close to the shore, its surface scattered with the crumbling remains of an ancient stone castle, Castle Dungorm. In the distance the loch opened up to embrace the endless swell of the sea.

‘We had better head home, Charlotte,’ called Nell, breaking Charlotte’s reverie. ‘Nanny will be wondering where we are.’

Charlotte nodded reluctantly. It had been a long winter and today was the first spring day the girls had been able to escape the army of people whose sole aim in life seemed to be to keep them indoors at their schoolbooks.

‘Come on, Floss,’ Charlotte called to the dog. ‘Time to go home.’

Floss panted in agreement, her tongue dripping.

In silence they picked their way down the hill, scanning the ground for rabbit holes, enjoying the faint warmth of the sun on their faces and the fresh scents in the air.

Both horses were skittish and edgy after long months in the stable. Rosie pranced and snorted at every imagined threat. As the bank steepened, she started, refusing to move forward. Charlotte held on sternly, calming the mare with her voice and hands.

‘Walk on, girl, enough of your nonsense,’ Charlotte chided. ‘You have been down this way a hundred times before.’

The horse tossed her head sheepishly, sidestepped and cavorted some more, then finally skipped forward. By this time Nell was way in front, cheekily waving at Charlotte from the bottom of the hill.

‘See you at home, if you can catch me!’ Nell shouted as she urged Bess into a canter.

Scenting home and a warm, dry stable, Nell's horse, Bess, pricked her ears and leapt into a gallop. The flying hooves kicked up thick brown mud, which splattered the horses' flanks and the long velvet skirts trailing behind.

Charlotte's eyes streamed with tears from the freezing wind. Wind whipped her hair, her face burnt and her heart raced with the excitement of the chase, a joyous cry welling from her throat.

Charlotte gained on Nell as they raced around the shore of the loch. Nell glanced over her shoulder, cheering Bess on, but Rosie effortlessly caught up. Neck and neck they galloped, sailing over a dry-stone wall, manes and ringlets flying, leaving Flossie to lope behind.

With an alarmed squawk, a pheasant flitted from its nest right under Bess's hooves. The chestnut reared and bucked in fright, then bolted, flinging Nell to the ground.

Charlotte screamed as Bess galloped away, stirrups and reins flapping wildly. She reined in her own horse, nearly flying over Rosie's head as she slid to a stop.

'Nell, Nell — are you all right?' Below lay the motionless body of her sister crumpled in the grass. Charlotte sobbed as she slithered off her horse. Flossie whined pitifully, licking Nell on the face and pawing her gently.

'Nell, can you hear me?' she begged. 'Nell, please answer me.'

Charlotte's voice rose in panic. The smell of crushed grass and wet mud filled her nostrils, making her stomach heave. She knelt and rolled her sister gently over. Crimson blood welled from the side of Nell's mouth, a stark contrast to the pale white skin. Charlotte stifled a scream.

Her heart in her mouth, Sophie flew closer. Was Nell

dead? She hovered uncertainly, then wondered if she could somehow get help. Perhaps if she followed Bess, the horse would lead her back to the girls' home and she could alert someone to come back with her.

Sophie zoomed away, leaving Charlotte bent over the motionless body of her sister.



Overtaking Bess, Sophie soared through a stone gateway that led to the stable courtyard.

A young stableboy sat rubbing oil into a saddle girth. He jumped to his feet as the sound of galloping hooves echoed through the cobbled gateway. The chestnut pony skittered and shied, hooves slipping on the muddy cobbles.

Sophie flew up to the boy.

'There's been an accident,' Sophie cried. 'Nell's fallen.'

The boy ignored her completely, as if she hadn't spoken, interested only in Bess.

'Duncan. Duncan. Coom quickly,' he yelled. A weather-beaten gillie shuffled from a stall; his plaid and kilt were mud-stained and he had a stiff brush in his hand.

'Och, Bess,' Duncan scolded. The mare looked sheepishly at him and slithered to a stop, thrusting her snorting muzzle into his gentle, gnarled hands. He stroked her, keeping his voice low and soothing.

'Quick, Angus lad. Luiks like the wee lassie has taken a tumble. Saddle up the grey mare for me and call Hamish in. Tell Hamish to fetch me laird and some o' the house lads. And best tell Mary to make ready.'

Young Angus ran to do the old gillie's bidding. Sophie turned to Duncan, and clutched his arm.

‘I know where Nell is,’ she shouted. ‘I can show you.’

Angus shivered as if her touch was cold, but did not answer, stooping to pick up the saddle Angus had abandoned. It was as though Sophie did not exist.

The courtyard was quickly filled with the shouts of running men swiftly saddling horses. Alexander Mackenzie, Laird of Dungorm, strode from the house. Tall and imposing in his blue-and-green kilt, he had the assurance of one used to commanding.

Angus the stable lad stood at the head of a large black gelding as Laird Mackenzie swung his leg into the saddle and signalled his retainers to join him.

A gaggle of stableboys, gardeners and footmen followed, with four dogs excitedly sniffing at their heels. The old gillie, Duncan, set his grey mare to a trot and they headed out of the courtyard, through the chilly tunnel and out into the open countryside.

‘Duncan!’ Laird Mackenzie called. ‘Does anyone know where the lassies were riding today?’

‘Well, my laird,’ grunted Duncan, ‘I am no’ exactly sure as the wee lassies saddled the horses wi’out Angus.’

Laird Mackenzie swore. ‘When I find those lassies they will feel the back of my strap,’ he roared. ‘How many times have I told them they must always ride with one of the grooms! Those girls are wild.’

‘Och, but wild lassies wi’ a guid seat, my laird,’ replied Duncan dryly.

‘Well, they won’t be able to sit on them for a while,’ retorted their father, repressing a proud smile. ‘Hamish, you take some of the men and head towards the village. Duncan, Angus and I will search to the north, while the

others search south. Sound a horn or whistle if you find them. Cameron, you stay here and harness the carriage, ready for when I send for you.'

The horses galloped off in different directions, with the dogs and men running behind. Rain began to fall in white sheets, obliterating the view.

Waving and gesturing, Sophie tried to steer the searchers towards Charlotte and Nell, but they still could not hear or see her so she abandoned them and flew back on her own.



Down below, Sophie could see Charlotte huddled beside Nell, trying to shelter them both under her cloak. Rain was falling in pelting torrents. Sophie alighted beside Nell and took her hand.

Nell shivered violently at the touch, then groaned and rolled over, her right hand clutching her left shoulder.

'Nell, thank God you are alive. Are you hurt badly? Talk to me!' Charlotte pleaded.

Nell groaned again, rolling on the ground. She coughed and spluttered, spitting out blood.

Charlotte knelt by her side, wiping the blood away with the skirt of her petticoat, nearly shaking Nell in her anxiety.

'Please speak to me, Nell,' she commanded. 'Where do you hurt?'

Nell shook her head groggily.

'All . . . over,' she finally whispered. 'My . . . arm hurts . . . and my shoulder.'

Charlotte sighed in relief, then leapt to her feet.

‘Come on. We’d better get you home so that Nanny can have a good look at you. Can you stand?’

Nell shook her head.

‘No. I . . . feel . . . dreadful.’

‘You will be fine,’ Charlotte cried. ‘I will bring Rosie over to that stump, you climb on and I will lead you home.’

Charlotte grabbed Nell under the armpits to haul her to her feet. Nell screamed as a white pain seared through her arm, her body shaking with tremors. Flossie whined anxiously, trotting around them in a protective circle.

‘Oh, I am so sorry. I did not mean to hurt you! What should I do?’ Charlotte said, panicking. ‘Nell, if I ride back for help, will you be all right until I get back? Flossie will guard you.’

Nell looked up at her with eyes dilated with pain. Charlotte thought for a moment, discarding several plans.

‘Nell, I cannot lift you onto Rosie,’ Charlotte decided. ‘You will have to stay here while I go back for help. I will be as quick as I can, I promise.’

Nell tried to lift her head but nearly swooned with the effort. She bit her lip and nodded slightly.

Charlotte pulled up her skirt, loosened her petticoat and pulled it off. She folded it into a rough pillow and slipped it gently under her sister’s head.

‘I will fly like the wind,’ she promised, stroking Nell’s forehead.

Charlotte leapt into the saddle and urged Rosie into the fastest gallop of her life. Through her mind ran images of Nell lying alone and injured, possibly dying.

Sophie felt torn between staying with Nell, or following Charlotte. She stayed beside Nell and Flossie until she

heard the distant call of a horn echoing plaintively over the hills and loch. Sophie zoomed towards the sound. She could see Charlotte galloping over the moor, and a horde of horsemen flying towards her.

‘Papa, Papa,’ Charlotte cried thankfully, nearly tumbling from Rosie’s back into her father’s arms as they reached each other. ‘Nell is badly hurt. Her head is bleeding and I think she may have broken something.’

Laird Mackenzie hugged Charlotte to his chest.

‘I pray Nell will be all right, my lovely. Where is she?’

‘Near the wall, down by the loch,’ Charlotte replied.

‘Good. Angus, fetch the carriage. Find blankets and send for the surgeon. We will meet you on the road.’

Nell was lying curled up, whimpering in pain. Her face was white and icy cold. Her dress and hair were saturated.

Alexander Mackenzie leapt from his horse.

‘Och, my darling, what have you done?’ he whispered softly.

He felt her forehead and ran his hands over her arms and legs, gently feeling for damage. He tenderly lifted her head and removed the petticoat pillow.

‘Duncan, do you have your knife?’

‘Aye, my laird.’

He used the knife to cut the petticoat into a wide strip to make a sling to immobilise Nell’s arm.

Nell winced and shuddered but barely opened her eyes. As her father removed his jacket and covered her, Duncan quickly followed with his rough wool coat.

Charlotte shivered with wet and cold and anxiety. A trickle of water ran into her collar and down her spine.

‘Papa, will Nell be all right?’ she asked tremulously.

‘I think she will survive,’ he reassured her. ‘Let us get her back home and in front of the fire.’

Laird Mackenzie carefully gathered Nell up into his arms, avoiding her injured side, and strode off towards the road, followed by the subdued and damp riders. They were soon met by Angus bringing the carriage.

While Laird Mackenzie and Duncan struggled to make Nell comfortable, Charlotte went to stand by Angus, burying her cold, wet fingers in the carriage horse’s mane.

‘Is Bess all right, Angus?’ Charlotte asked in a small voice.

‘Aye, but ’tis a wonder she was no’ hurt as well,’ Angus muttered. ‘What were ye lassies thinking? And more than likely ’twill be me that gets a licking o’er your antics, no’ ye.’

Charlotte looked at him imploringly, her eyes wide with shock.

‘I am sorry, Angus. I did not mean for you to be in trouble.’

‘Och, Miss Charlotte,’ he whispered. ‘I were only jesting. Do no’ fret, lassie, Miss Eleanor will be fine, ye’ll see.’

Laird Mackenzie called to Charlotte impatiently from the carriage, cradling Nell’s head in his lap. Charlotte scrambled into the vehicle beside him.

‘I am very sorry, Papa,’ Charlotte cried impetuously, clutching her father’s sleeve with both hands. ‘I did not mean for Nell to be injured; and please, please do not punish Angus. He did not know we were going riding. We crept out while he was wheeling the stable waste out to the kitchen garden.’

Laird Mackenzie gazed carefully at his eldest child. He loved her dearly but was sorely worried by her mischievous streak.



‘I should punish Angus with a good lashing,’ Laird Mackenzie declared. ‘One of Angus’s jobs is to look after you girls while you go out riding so that you are safe. A thrashing will teach him to remember his responsibilities; and his punishment will remind you to behave as befits your rank.’

Charlotte sobbed, her face pale and streaked with tears.

‘Please, no, Papa,’ Charlotte begged. ‘I promise we will never ride out without Angus again.’

‘You are not a crofter’s urchin,’ Laird Mackenzie continued sternly. ‘You are a Mackenzie of Dungorm, and that role brings with it much responsibility. We must look after every person, every animal, every plant and every clod of earth upon this land.’

Charlotte nodded slowly, her face grave.

‘I think it is time you learnt about this responsibility,’ Laird Mackenzie added. ‘Tomorrow you can ride with me around the estate to study what is required of the Mackenzies of Dungorm.’

‘Yes, Papa,’ murmured Charlotte, her eyes aglow with pleasure at the thought of riding with her beloved papa. ‘But what about Angus?’

Laird Mackenzie pulled her to him and kissed her forehead gently. ‘Angus will suffer a severe tongue lashing from Duncan, but I trust he will not be harmed.’

Soon after, the carriage trundled into the stable courtyard with Nell inside, wrapped in blankets and held in her father’s arms, with Charlotte huddled next to them. The grooms led Rosie and the laird’s tall hunter. A flurry of activity greeted their arrival.

An older woman, her grey hair piled under a lace cap,

darted from the front door wringing her hands. 'Where's my puir wee bairn?'

'Here she is, Nanny,' replied Laird Mackenzie soothingly, 'suffering nothing worse than a broken arm, I trust.'



Sophie floated above the scene, watching the bustling activity with interest. No-one seemed to be able to see her. She floated down to the carriage and watched Nell being lifted out and carried up to the house, Charlotte clambering after.

Charlotte turned suddenly and looked up as if she felt the stare of a stranger above her, but she looked right through Sophie as if she were a wisp of mist. Sophie ducked instinctively, shooting behind the carriage and hiding.

Charlotte hurried after her sister, her shoulders hunched with misery. Sophie did not follow but watched in fascination at the activity outside.

Horses were tied to grooming bars, unsaddled, brushed and combed; their hooves were picked; then they were led into the cool darkness of the stables. Sophie could not resist stroking Rosie, her grey flanks wet with sweat. Rosie rolled her eyes in fear and sidled away from Sophie, snorting and shivering.

'Whoa, bonnie girl,' soothed Angus. 'Are ye seeing wee ghaisties again?'

Sophie's attention wandered from the stable yard to the house itself. She decided to explore, her body following her mind's suggestion by zooming through the air, around the corner of the house and round to the front.

The house was grand and huge, a rectangle of warm,

golden stone. Rounded turrets guarded each corner, topped with grey slate roofs. Wide, gracious windows overlooked the expanse of lawns, hedges and flowerbeds rolling down to the grey waters of the loch.

From here, the view of the loch and island was spectacular, the partially ruined keep of the castle soaring against the leaden sky. Sophie flew towards the island, skimming above the water, droplets of salt water soaking her night-dress.

She floated above the tumbledown rocks of the castle ruins, choked with weeds, and spiralled around the tower keep, climbing higher and faster so the golden stones blurred. Then she was speeding up through the grey clouds, the mist damp and clammy in her nostrils, through the black tunnel, back to the warm cocoon of her own bed.



The next morning Sophie woke early, her dream vivid in her memory. She jumped out of bed eager to tell Jessica about it. The locket bumped against her chest. Quickly she took it off and slipped it back inside the wooden chest. Her hands felt sticky and sweaty.

‘Jess,’ called Sophie softly. ‘Are you awake?’

‘Mmmm?’ answered Jessica sleepily.

‘I had an amazing dream last night,’ Sophie continued. ‘I dreamt about Scotland and Charlotte Mackenzie and the castle of Dungorm.’

Jessica rolled over, her eyes slowly focusing on her sister.

‘And Charlotte’s sister Nell fell off her pony and broke her arm.’

‘Sophie?’

‘Yes?’

‘What’s that all over your nightdress?’ asked Jessica, pointing at Sophie.

Sophie looked down where Jessica had pointed. There was a large splash of what looked like dried mud. Sophie picked at it in shock, the mud crumbling off beneath her nail.

‘It’s mud,’ Sophie answered in surprise.

‘How did you get mud all over your nightie?’

‘I don’t know.’ Sophie turned her right hand over to examine the dried flakes of dirt.

Then she noticed something else. Her hand was covered in short white hairs. She sniffed her hand. The smell was unmistakeable: salt, sweat and horse. Her hand was sprinkled with fine white horsehairs. Sophie sat down suddenly on the edge of Jessica’s bed.

‘I dreamt I could fly,’ she finished in wonder.

‘That’s nice,’ Jessica muttered, rolling over and pulling the pillow over her dark head. ‘But why did you have to wake me up to tell me that?’

# 3

## *Eilean Dungorm*



All day Sophie kept having flashbacks to her ‘dream’ of the night before. Had it been a dream? It had seemed so real. Yet she could fly and no-one could see her, as if she were a ghost.

The mud on her nightdress was definitely real, as were the horsehairs on her hand. But they couldn’t be; it wasn’t possible to travel back in time. *How had it happened? Could it somehow have been the old locket? Was it magic? Could it happen again?*

Nonnie had taken the girls out shopping, then for afternoon tea to her favourite café. Jessica was chattering nonstop, telling Nonnie about her friends at school and a trick they had played on the music teacher.

‘Sophie?’ asked Nonnie, interrupting Sophie’s reverie. ‘Are you all right? You’ve hardly said anything all afternoon, and you haven’t eaten a morsel. Are you worrying about your father’s job?’

Jessica stopped eating her banana cake, dropping her fork with a clatter.

‘No. I mean, yes,’ replied Sophie, her mind reluctantly switching back to the present.

Sophie thought of the last few months, when their world had been turned upside down. She didn’t really want to think about it. She smiled brightly at Nonnie and Jessica. ‘Did Jess tell you she scored an A for her science project, building a boat out of recycled material?’

‘I made the hulls out of plastic bottles, lashed with twine, and the sails out of plastic shopping bags,’ added Jess, bouncing up and down. ‘We had to race the boats across the ocean pool at Manly and mine won by metres. It ran over Lucy’s boat and sank it.’

That evening Sophie hurried through her dinner, brushed her teeth, changed into her freshly washed night-dress and kissed Nonnie goodnight.

‘Ready for bed already?’ laughed Nonnie, hugging her tight. ‘That’s not like you, Sophie darling. You must be exhausted. What about your usual litany of excuses?’

‘I do feel tired tonight,’ Sophie fibbed, her heart pounding with excitement.

Nonnie frowned, feeling Sophie’s forehead with her hand.

‘Do you feel all right, darling? You look a little flushed. I hope you’re not coming down with a fever or something.’

‘No, I’m not sick. Just a little tired; it’s been a busy day,’ Sophie assured her grandmother, not wanting her to worry.

Sophie hugged Nonnie again and raced to her room. She opened the chest, took out Charlotte Mackenzie’s locket

with trembling fingers and slipped it around her neck and inside her nightdress.

She climbed into bed. Jess came racing in after her and bounced up and down on her bed.

‘What should we do tomorrow?’ begged Jessica. ‘Nonnie says we could go and see a movie, and we haven’t been to the movies for *months*. We could see that new spy film, or the 3D one, although I think Nonnie would rather see that boring one. What do you think? Or we could go to Chatswood, or the library, or if it’s a beautiful day we should really go to the beach.’

Sophie hid her head under the pillow in frustration.

‘I’d like to go to sleep, if you would just stop talking,’ groaned Sophie impatiently.

‘*Sophie*,’ complained Jess. ‘This is important.’

‘Why do you have to be *so* annoying *all* the time?’ asked Sophie, glaring at Jess.

‘I’m not annoying, I just asked you a simple question about going to the movies,’ huffed Jess. ‘You’re the one who’s being annoying.’

‘Could you just be *quiet*?’ barked Sophie, turning her head to the wall. Jessica threw her pillow at Sophie, hitting her on the back. Sophie threw it back again forcefully, hitting Jess square in the face.

‘Yow,’ yelled Jess, rubbing her screwed-up face. ‘That really hurt.’

‘Well, you threw it first,’ retorted Sophie, a trifle guiltily. ‘If you’d just left me alone, it wouldn’t have happened.’

‘*Sorry*,’ grumbled Jess, turning her back and pulling off her jeans. ‘*Princess Sophie* needs her *beauty* sleep.’

‘Hmmp,’ snorted Sophie, rolling over and hitching up the doona.

Sophie tossed and turned, trying to forget her irritating spat with Jessica and make her mind slip into sleep. She thought about Charlotte and Nell, and the contents of the box. *Where did the box come from? Was Nell all right after her fall?*

Of course, sleep took a long time to come. Finally she felt the familiar sensation of her mind slipping and sliding away from consciousness down towards the comforting darkness of slumber.



The light was pale and soft, the sun sailing slowly through a cloud-scudded sky. Down below, Sophie could see a small dinghy being rowed by Angus, the stableboy she recognised from last night, or was it yesterday?

In the boat were a number of passengers, who Sophie recognised as Charlotte, Nell with her arm in a sling, the Laird of Dungorm, Flossie the dog and a striking woman holding a green parasol to shade her pale face. Between them were a huge wicker basket and a pile of tartan rugs.

Sophie swooped down on a gentle breeze and followed the boat, scrutinising each of the passengers in excited curiosity.

Flossie the dog saw Sophie’s fluttering white nightdress and barked loudly, leaping to her paws to stand in the stern of the boat, one ear pricked and one ear flopping over her left eye.

‘Shh, Flossie,’ soothed Charlotte, patting her thick ruff of fur. ‘What can you see, a seagull?’



Flossie wagged her tail but continued to stand watch in the boat, her hackles raised. Sophie dropped back a little, not wanting to antagonise the black-and-white dog.

The two girls in the boat wore bonnets trimmed with coloured ribbon, white dresses that reached their mid-calves and had long full sleeves, black stockings and buttoned-up boots. Nell had her arm cradled in a sling but seemed quite recovered from her ordeal.

‘Mama, look, a seal,’ called Charlotte, pointing into the loch.

A small brown face with twitching whiskers peered at the boat, its brown eyes curious and alert. The seal glided towards the boat, on its side, one flipper raised in the air like a sail. It splashed the water hard with its flipper, sending droplets of water flying towards the boat, then dived under the hull and disappeared.

‘I wonder if that’s a selkie,’ cried Charlotte. ‘You know, a sea person hidden in a sealskin. Nanny tells us stories about selkies all the time.’

Alexander Mackenzie snorted in disapproval. ‘Nanny fills your head with too many fairytales,’ he retorted, but his smile was indulgent.

‘Alexander,’ reproved the girls’ mother gently, ‘Nanny is a wonderful woman and a great help.’

‘Eliza, the girls are old enough to have a proper governess now,’ Alexander replied, obviously repeating a well-worn argument. ‘A governess who will not fill their heads with nonsense.’

Eliza sighed, stretching her back.

‘We have discussed this before, Alexander,’ she said evenly. ‘The last governess knew hardly more than the

girls do. She taught them nothing but needlework, dance steps and pianoforte.'

Charlotte and Nell rolled their eyes at each other, pulling faces at their shared memory of the governess.

'At least I can teach them most things they need to learn,' Eliza continued. 'It is important in this day and age for girls to be well educated. When they are older, they will go away to school, a good school. But until then I will direct their education myself.'

The Laird of Dungorm smiled at his wife lovingly, admitting defeat.

'Let us not argue about this on such a beautiful and special day,' Eliza said, smiling at Charlotte and squeezing her hand.

'Yes, it is my birthday,' crowed Charlotte, tossing her copper ringlets.

'As if we could have forgotten,' replied Nell, pulling a face. 'You must have mentioned it at least fifty times today.'

'So, for my darling girl's twelfth birthday we will have a delicious picnic on Eilean Dungorm with all your favourite treats, a sail on the loch and a special supper, and have I forgotten something?' asked her father with a mock frown.

'Presents!' squealed Charlotte, pointing to a mysterious bundle partially hidden by the rugs in the bottom of the boat.

'Charlotte, not so wild,' reproved Eliza mildly. 'Remember, you are a lady and should behave like one now you are a very grown-up twelve-year-old.'

'Yes, Mama,' agreed Charlotte dutifully, 'but when can I open my presents?'

Eliza laughed, shrugging her shoulders gracefully. ‘After our picnic luncheon, you *enfant terrible*,’ she replied, kissing Charlotte on the cheek. ‘If you can wait that long.’

Angus the stableboy pulled strongly, riding a small wave up onto the shingle beach of the island, Eilean Dungorm. He held the boat steady while the laird climbed out and solicitously helped out Eliza. Eliza climbed out awkwardly, gathering up her heavy silk skirts.

Sophie flew ahead – her bare feet skimming the top of the waves, the water splashing her toes – then alighted on the beach.

Charlotte and Nell scrambled out, not heeding their father’s outstretched arm, and ran up the beach towards the ruins of the castle. Flossie the dog jumped out eagerly, woofing happily, and chased them up the shingle.

Angus pulled out a small anchor and secured the boat, then gathered up the heavy basket, parcel and rugs and slowly followed his master and mistress towards the ruins.

Angus spread one rug over a low stone wall that formed a perfect bench, then flung another over a flat slab that formed a natural low table.

‘Thank you, Angus,’ Laird Mackenzie said kindly. ‘We will not eat for a while. Could you keep a watch on Miss Charlotte and Miss Eleanor, please?’

‘Yes, m’ laird,’ Angus mumbled, bobbing his head, and scampered after the girls. Sophie floated along behind, looking around the island in awe.

Charlotte, Nell and Flossie were exploring the ruins of the castle, climbing over the piles of fallen rocks, brushing past tall pink hollyhocks and crushing yellow buttercups

under their boots. Sophie hung back, cautious of Flossie, who turned to stare at her constantly, barking loudly.

‘Look, Angus,’ Charlotte called, pointing to a bird soaring above the tower. ‘A sea eagle.’

Creeping up the side of one wall could be seen the ruin of an old stone staircase. Another staircase wound up inside the stone keep, crumbling and dangerous. The girls ran on towards the shore on the other side of the island, facing towards the west and the loch’s narrow opening to the sea.

Angus and Flossie, then Sophie, followed close behind. Angus picked up several flat pebbles and expertly skimmed them across the water, where they jumped six or seven times before sinking into the depths.

‘Can you show me how to do that, Angus?’ begged Charlotte, as her stones sank without a skip. ‘Please?’

Patiently Angus showed the two girls how to skim stones across the water.

‘Ye must practise,’ he encouraged quietly. ‘Tis easy once ye know how.’

Sophie watched the children curiously. She wondered if she could skim a stone too. She bent down and touched a pebble. It felt cool and smooth under her ghostly fingers. Sophie tried to pick it up. Nothing happened. It was as if the tiny pebble weighed a tonne. It was immovable. Sophie gave up in annoyance.

Charlotte squealed and jumped with excitement when one of her pebbles skipped once before sinking.

‘Did you see the seal, Angus?’ asked Charlotte. ‘Do you think it could be a selkie?’

‘I do no’ know,’ Angus answered seriously. ‘My mam saw selkies when she was a lass.’

Angus sat down on the shale and stared over the loch as though seeing magical creatures no-one else could see.

‘Truly?’ asked Nell, plopping down beside him. ‘What did they look like? Was she frightened?’

Flossie stretched out with a sigh, while Sophie floated a little closer to listen.

‘It was here on Eilean Dungorm, one midsummer eve. She was gathering oysters and cockles for supper when she heard a strange sound o’ fighting and wailing.’

The girls leant forward in anticipation. Angus always told a good story. Charlotte wound her hand in the thick fur of Flossie’s ruff. Sophie sat down beside them on the shingle.

‘Mam crept behind the rocks as quiet as a mouseling,’ Angus continued. ‘And there on the beach she saw a family o’ seals squabbling and fighting. They were so busy crying and wailing that they did no’ spy my mam. She crept closer and then she saw the seals using their flippers to peel off their fur coats as easily as you would peel off your own jacket.

‘The seals tossed their dark fur coats in a pile and stretched and lolled in the sun. Under their sealskins they looked just like humans, the maids with long black hair and the menfolk strong and lithe, but with no human clothes.’

The girls squirmed in embarrassment at the talk of naked bodies, but Angus continued.

‘My mam crept to the pile o’ pelts and stretched out to touch one. She said they looked as soft and fine as French velvet. She had heard that if you take the pelt o’ a selkie they can ne’er go back to the sea.

‘In the old days the fisherfolk used to marry a selkie lass or laddie quite often by stealing their pelts and hiding them so they could no’ go back to the sea. I fancy my mam

thought she could catch a handsome selkie man and wed him.

‘But it all came to naught. One of the selkie women saw my mam and rushed at her, screaming in rage, wielding a branch of driftwood. My mam turned and ran, dropping the pelt.

‘The selkie woman hurled the driftwood after her and it struck her on the arm, wounding her sorely. My mam ran on, dripping with blood and dropping her basket o’ shellfish.

‘She was in sore trouble when she went home, but she could no’ resist taking one last look at the beach. All the selkies were gone, with their fine fur pelts too. The only thing left to show was the scar on my mam’s arm. She still has it to this day.’

Angus lapsed into silence, signalling the end of his tale. Sophie sighed. Charlotte and Nell were enraptured, gazing out to sea searching for the lost selkies.

‘Perhaps it was this very beach,’ breathed Nell.

‘Did your mam ever see the selkies again?’ asked Charlotte.

‘No, although there are other folk in the village who have stories o’ meeting the selkies,’ Angus replied. ‘Make no mistake, the selkies and wee folk do no’ like to be seen, but they are here all around us.’

Angus was not much older than Charlotte, but he had been earning his own living for several years, which gave him a bearing far more mature than his true age.

‘I wonder if we could find some selkies,’ Nell exclaimed. ‘Come on, Charlotte, let us creep up on the next beach and take a look.’

The girls jumped up and raced to the boulders protecting the next stretch of shale. They tiptoed closer, peering over the boulders hopefully.

The beach was empty. A few seagulls rose screaming from the rocks, frightened by the intrusion. Angus wandered up behind them. Sophie flew, chasing the seagulls and flying with them, high in the sky.

A faint call sounded from the ruins.

‘Tis Mama,’ Nell cried. ‘It is time for luncheon.’

Reluctantly Sophie followed them, torn between the thrill of chasing seagulls and a desire to see what the Mackenzies were doing.

Back at the picnic camp, Eliza was sitting with her charcoals and sketchbook on her lap, shading a sketch of the tower of Dungorm. Laird Mackenzie was reading from a leather-bound book of verse by Robbie Burns.

O My Luve’s like a red, red rose,  
That’s newly sprung in June;  
O My Luve’s like the melodie  
That’s sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I;  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a’ the seas gang dry.

Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun;  
O I will luve thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o’ life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve  
And fare thee weel awhile!

And I will come again, my luv,  
Though it were ten thousand mile.

He bowed with a little flourish and snapped the book shut.

‘And I will luv thee still, my dear, while the sands o’ life shall run,’ he repeated softly.

Charlotte glanced at Nell and rolled her eyes affectionately. They were used to their father lapsing into quotes from his favourite poet. Nell laughed.

‘Is it time for luncheon?’ Charlotte interrupted.

‘Indeed it is, my love,’ agreed Eliza with a smile. ‘We cannot have the birthday girl fainting from starvation.’

Eliza began to unpack the cane basket, spreading out dishes and platters on the tartan rug. There was a dish of roast chicken portions, flavoured with rosemary and honey. Tiny wedges of sandwiches with various fillings – cucumber, chopped egg and pale pink wafers of ham – were arranged on a silver platter.

Another plate held tiny meat pastries and sausage rolls still warm from the oven, while a glass side dish held a crisp spring salad of cherry tomatoes and cucumbers.

Angus unpacked the silver cutlery and bone china plates, handling them extremely carefully. Eliza served out various dishes for each person. Angus retired to a distant rock, just within earshot, to eat his own rough package of food.

The Laird of Dungorm said a blessing over the meal and they all began to eat.

‘What a feast for the birthday girl,’ said Alexander, helping himself to a second serving.

After everyone had eaten their fill, Eliza pulled out the



mysterious package, peeling off the checked cloth that had disguised it.

‘I think it might be time for a little surprise, Charlotte, what do you think?’ Eliza handed the rectangular package over with a smile.

‘Oh, thank you, Mama.’ Charlotte jiggled with excitement as her fingers eagerly picked at the knotted ribbon. The package was wrapped in pale-blue paper tied with silver ribbon.

The paper fell away, tearing slightly with her impatient fingers. Sophie gasped involuntarily. She recognised the object revealed on Charlotte’s lap.

It was a timber box, highly polished and ornately carved with a border of wildflowers. On the lid was carved a beautiful stag, powerful and mysterious, gazing straight out of the wood. Its antlers were held proudly aloft against a round moon.

Charlotte ran her finger along the ridged words carved along the border of the lid.

‘*Luceo non Uro* – I shine not burn,’ she read softly. ‘The Mackenzie clan motto.’

‘Once a Mackenzie, always a Mackenzie,’ reminded her father.

Charlotte carefully turned the tiny golden key and opened the box, to find it lined with delicate violet silk.

‘It is to keep all your treasures safe,’ Eliza said. ‘And to remind you how much we love you.’

‘We asked Dughald the shepherd to carve it for you,’ Laird Mackenzie added. ‘He worked on it all last winter. He used the ancient oak tree that blew down in the village during the autumn storms.’

His voice dropped to a whisper. 'The box has a secret too. I will show it to you later.'

'Oh, Papa,' Charlotte said, frowning impatiently. 'Show me now!'

'Later.' Her father winked. 'When we are alone and there are no prying eyes. The Mackenzies are good at keeping secrets.' He gestured to Eliza, Nell, Flossie and Angus as if they were a horde of foreign spies.

'Show me too, Papa?' begged Nell. 'Pleease?'

'No, my love,' answered Laird Mackenzie. 'This particular secret is just for Charlotte, on her birthday. You must wait for your own birthday for your surprise.'

Charlotte, Nell and Eliza laughed happily.

'Thank you, Mama,' cried Charlotte. 'Thank you, Papa. I will treasure my box always.'

Eliza cut the cake, decorated with strawberries and whipped cream, and handed it out on pretty china plates. Angus tidied up the mess, carefully packing everything back into the wicker hamper. The girls ran off to explore the island once more.

'Alexander, can you believe our baby Charlotte is now twelve years old?' asked Eliza, watching the girls play. 'Even little Nell is ten. Where have the years flown?'

'I do not know, but they have been very happy years,' replied Laird Mackenzie, taking his wife's hand and kissing it. 'Let us hope all goes well with this baby too. Perhaps we will be blessed with a boy this time?'

Eliza stroked her belly, with a smile of deep contentment.

'Yes, that would be wonderful.'

Laird Mackenzie stretched out in the sun to rest his eyes.

Eliza picked up her charcoals and sketchbook and began to draw once more. Under her pencil grew the towering ruin of the Castle of Dungorm, guarding the loch, weeds growing in its ramparts and its barbican shattered on the ground.