

THE HAUNTING OF KULAH

By

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CHAPTER ONE

The Isle of Kulah, spring 1945

I heard the cuckoo this morning, but kept the news to myself. It's a bad omen. We women don't need any more sad news. Poor Margaret is in a terrible state since the mail boat came in last week. No letters from her boy Neilac and the newspapers full of his ship being torpedoed on a convoy to Russia.

'No news is good news,' said Simple Sam.

I thought Margaret's sisters were going to throw him off the cliff. Kate had him by the hair and Christina threw a punch like a prize-fighter before I pulled her off.

'He doesn't know what he's saying,' I tried to reason. 'He's only mimicking his mammy's old words.'

'Should have drowned him at birth!' Christina screamed. 'Why does Our Lady let a fool like him survive and take away our Neilac?'

It was no good pointing out that daft Sam was right; until word came through that Neilac MacRaitt was either drowned or saved, why think the worst?

But we do. We're worn out by war; sick of our own company and the lack of our men-folk.

There's a visitor come to Kulah. He's beyond call-up age, so they say. I've been too busy over at Ostaig nursing old Seamus to see him. He's lodging down at the pier, though the house is half derelict since Donald-the-Pier went off to war. My girls tell me he has a camera.

It's a fine day. The sea is almost calm. I wonder if Tormod is out there and if so, is he leaning on the railings with his bulky arms, smoking? Or below in his hammock reading *The Sunday Post*? Or at action stations perched up high behind the gun, screaming at the pain in his ears from the din?

Cuckoos don't live on Kulah, but today I, Flora Gillies, heard one. Soon there will be bad news.

CHAPTER TWO

Present day

As the ferry stole into the bay, Ally Niven had the uneasy feeling that someone was watching her. She was on deck, scanning the rocky shoreline of Battersay for any signs of life. A scattering of squat grey houses clung on limpet-like, dwarfed by an ancient ruined fortress that glowered in the evening light. Not a soul was about.

But someone was staring; she could feel the prickle of discomfort down her back. Ally forced herself to glance round. Two women, laden with shopping, were chatting away in Gaelic. She had a sudden panic that she wouldn't be able to understand a word people said. Why on earth had she chosen such a remote place to escape her unravelling life? The metal gang-planks began to judder into action. The harbour closed about them like scaly arms. Engines revved on the car deck.

'She lives over there.' A deep voice came from the shadows behind.

'Excuse me?' Ally turned sharply, pushing strands of auburn hair out of her green eyes.

A tall man stepped forward and flicked a cigarette overboard, next to the no-smoking sign. He was scruffy and unshaven, with unruly dark hair.

'On the far point over there. Not that you'll see her – she's as hard to spot as a sea otter.'

Ally stared up at him. Was he one of the ferrymen? She hadn't a clue what he was on about.

'I'm sorry – who does?'

'They all try to see her – all the tourists.' His rugged face was disparaging.

'I was just enjoying the view.'

'The view?' His mouth twisted. His disbelieving tone irked her. 'Well, make the most of it. You might not see it again for days.'

As the man disappeared down the metal stairs, Ally felt wrong-footed. 'I'm not a tourist,' she shouted after him, 'I'm here to work.'

If he heard her above the thrum of the engine, he chose not to answer.

One of the shoppers shuffled past her on the narrow deck, laughing with her friend. Ally's heart squeezed. Was it only three nights ago she had been in London sharing a bottle of wine with her friend Rachel, toasting her post-Lucas life? *He cheated on*

you, forget him, he's low-life'. They had drunk to her new job as cook on Battersay and Ally had faked excitement. Rachel had joked, *'Good job they don't know you only make lasagne!'* She wished Rachel was there now with her cheap plonk and teasing optimism.

The younger of the women, with a tight ponytail and frameless glasses, turned and said in English. 'Don't forget your jacket; it's on the bench.'

'Oh, thanks!'

'And don't worry about Mr Moody;' she said with a jerk of her thumb, 'he's like that with most folk.'

Ally shouldered her one large bag, glad that she'd resisted Rachel's huge case on wheels, and offered to help carry the women's shopping. They declined but she stuck to them as they filed off the small ferry behind half a dozen vehicles: two cars, a builder's van and three campervans. In one she recognised the family from Carlisle that she'd chatted to on the big Calmac ferry from Oban to Barra. The parents were breezy outdoor types and the three small children wore matching yellow cagoules even though it wasn't raining. The pang of envy for the excited family had caught her by surprise.

The flurry of activity brought a handful of people to the quayside to tie up ropes or greet travellers. Ally peered ahead, wondering if someone might have turned up to meet her with a sign bearing her name. *'Babe, this isn't Heathrow,'* she could hear Rachel giggle. Her instructions from Dr Rushmore of the Sollas Community were vague, merely to report to their village hall the following day and ask for Calum. She looked around for a taxi. An ancient minibus belched blue exhaust fumes.

'Alec the Bus will take you down to Sollas,' the friendly woman with the ponytail told her. She laughed at Ally's look of surprise. 'You'll be the lassie from London who's cooking for the tourists?'

'Yes,' she smiled, 'I'm Ally Niven.'

'Ishbel,' she replied, 'and this is Morag.'

Middle-aged Morag, plump and puffing from the walk up the steep jetty, merely nodded.

Alec, a gaunt, grey-haired man with startlingly blue eyes in a weather-beaten face, took her bag and welcomed her aboard. Morag sat up front – perhaps she was his wife? – while Ally sat in the middle row behind two youths in overalls who kept glancing round. As the bus lurched away from the harbour, she scanned the place for

shops or a café or pub, but in two minutes they were passing the signpost that marked the limits of Bay and out into empty landscape. A single track road bucked and dipped over moorland that was cratered with rocks like a moonscape.

This was madness. She appeared to have ended up on Scotland's most far-flung island on which to lick her emotional wounds. What did she know about this place? Virtually nothing, except what the job advert had said: Battersay was Catholic and Gaelic speaking. Usually Ally would buy a pile of travel guides before setting off travelling – Lucas said she was way too organised – but this time she had deliberately not researched the island. She wanted to feel her way in and not come with any preconceptions; she wasn't a tourist. This was a bolthole.

Five years ago – before her mother died and left her with a huge gaping void - she would have retreated to the Yorkshire Dales to get over her heartbreak. Her mum would have fed her home cooking, taken her on brisk breezy walks and knitted her something garish with cows on to make her laugh. Her mother had never met Lucas but Ally could still hear her saying, *'that lad doesn't deserve you. Plenty more fish in the sea.'*

The Dales were solitary but accessible: not like here. From London it had taken two days of trains, buses and ferries. She could have got to Australia quicker. This wasn't a place for a thirty year old; she wasn't a loner and she'd go insane in a week.

As they reached a summit, Ally glanced back. The small ferry was already retreating out to sea. She swallowed down panic that she was now well and truly marooned on this tiny fragment of the Outer Isles. But this is what she'd wanted, wasn't it: to get as far away from Lucas as possible?

The three campervans were tailing the bus and with the windows open she could hear high-pitched singing wafting through the still air. She calmed herself with practical thoughts; she was here to cook. It was just for high summer – Battersay's brief holiday season of two to three months – but it would give her a breathing space to get her head around what had happened with Lucas and to decide what to do next. That's what Freya, her understanding boss at *Lara's* magazine, had said. *'For God's sake take the rest of the summer off and sort yourself out. Honestly, we'll manage.'* She worried that they might replace her, but she'd hardly been able to face going into work – sweats, palpitations – in case she ran into her ex. Her doctor had urged her to speak to a counsellor but she'd off-loaded on Rachel and Zoe instead. One had

suggested a change of scene, the other castration for Lucas. The first seemed more practicable.

Ally wondered where Mr Moody had gone. She hadn't seen him disembark. Was he really called Moody or was it a local nickname? He hadn't sounded local; more posh Lowland Scots. Edinburgh University had been full of them when she'd studied there ten years ago: before London and journalism and Lucas. Why had he started going on about some woman as if she should know? An oddball, that was for sure, but handsome with it. Dangerous to think such thoughts though; another man in her life was the last thing she needed.

Ally felt queasy at the rollercoaster bus ride. They passed a woman in a blue headscarf walking in the middle of nowhere, but Alec the driver did not stop. He dropped Ally outside an ugly square cottage; a former coastguard's lookout with a tin roof.

'Home sweet home,' he announced.

In the dying light, she couldn't see another house in sight. Her stomach knotted.

'Where will I get the key?'

'It won't be locked. But if you want to bolt the door against the tartan bogeyman, there's probably a key under the mat.' Alec chuckled at his own joke, called a farewell and with a toot of his horn he was gone over the next ridge.

In dismay, she surveyed the front door which was bleached silver where the red paint had peeled away. It was stiff to open. Musty damp greeted her; a tiny porch, a gloomy sitting-room at the front, a kitchen and narrow bathroom at the back. Ally smothered thoughts of her tiny bright second-floor flat looking onto a bustling high street. She tried a switch. Bare strip lighting flooded the kitchen with harsh white light. At least there was electricity.

A note on the Formica-topped table read, "Food in fridge. Come along to shop tomorrow and Calum will take you to the hall and show you the ropes. Sleep well – extra blankets in trunk in bedroom if you need them. Cheerio, Shona Gillies."

What shop? And bedroom? Ally wondered where that could be in this glorified hut that had no staircase. But she warmed to Shona Gillies immediately and her spirits lifted. The woman had put a carton of milk, a loaf of bread, butter, cheese, bacon and a jar of homemade jam in the fridge. Ally's eyes stung at the unexpected kindness.

After a thick cheese sandwich, she found the bedroom via a pull-down ladder that led through a hatch into the loft space. An orange nylon bedspread glowed in the

final rays spilling in from the skylight. Ally forced the window open. Sea air, warmer than that inside, wafted in. She would unpack later.

Outside, a smudge of sunset sunk into the sea. She walked up to the rise where Alec's bus had disappeared. Mist veiled the rising moon, but it gave up enough light to show that the land beyond levelled out into two sandy bays, back to back. Then the land reared up again into a craggy promontory – where the man on the ferry had pointed - with a stunted lighthouse atop. In the shadowy dunes, a handful of tents were pitched and two campervans had parked up for the night. Soft lights glowed through canvas. The Cagoule Family: Ally was comforted at the thought of them close by. The narrow road petered out at three or four croft houses; Sollas presumably. It was still and calm and she could hear the splash of some sea creature from far off. Midges began to swarm in the stillness so Ally kept moving, tempted to walk the beach in the dark.

Half way down to the shore she heard someone right behind her: a long drawn-out sigh. She whipped round expecting to see one of the campers. Nobody there. Ally's heart punched. She stood stock still and listened but the only sound was the faint murmur of the sea. It was just her nerves after the endless journey and weeks of sleeping badly. She breathed deeply, allowing her heart rate to slow. It had sounded so human, so unhappy; like the way she had moaned and moped around the empty flat through recent long solitary nights. *Oh my God, perhaps it was me?*

Ally hurried back indoors. Silence hung about the cottage like a presence. She would ring Rachel and tell her she had safely arrived. Suddenly she was desperate to hear another voice. But there was no signal on her mobile. In mounting alarm, she walked through the house searching for contact but it made no difference. The silence was smothering.

Ally doubled back and searched under the mat for the key. She attempted to lock the door, but it was too stiff, or it was the wrong key. *Don't be ridiculous! Who's going to bother you here?* She tried to talk herself out of her panic. Hauling a large frayed armchair out of the sitting-room, she shoved it against the unlocked front door. *As if that's going to keep anyone out.* Feeling foolish, Ally retreated into the loft and pulled the ladder after her.

CHAPTER THREE

The noise brought her bolt upright in the pitch dark. What was it? Ally gulped for breath. It sounded as if someone was attacking the corrugated roof with hammers. She groped for the light switch. Rain was spattering in at the open window, wetting her clothes strewn over a wooden chair. Ally leapt out of bed, jamming shut the skylight. The temperature had plummeted. Outside was utter blackness. She pulled out two blankets from the old tin trunk and wrapped herself in both. They smelt musty like old people's wardrobes. There was no way she could sleep with the din of rain overhead, and now she was chilled through.

With Lucas she had never been cold; he had given off heat like a fire. She smothered bitter thoughts of who her ex might be lying beside tonight. She hadn't seen him for a month, had deleted him from Facebook along with his mobile messages – first pleading then angry – and (at her friends' insistence) changed the locks at the flat. *'You can never be too careful,'* Rachel had warned. *'Don't trust a man with a temper,'* Zoe had said.

Before she left London, she had bought a new mobile. Apart from her brother Guy who lived in Madrid, only friends Rachel and Zoe - and Freya at work - had her new number. Still fuming and hurt, she vowed to be out of contact for the rest of the summer. Yet, huddled in this bleak strange place, Ally felt a treacherous yearning for her former lover. Annoyed with herself, she flicked on her mobile but there was still no signal.

Silence awoke her. The room was awash with a blue-grey light. Relieved it was dawn; Ally pulled on clothes, clambered down the ladder and made a pot of tea from her supply of Rooibos. There was no view from the kitchen window; the house was wrapped in mist. Taking a mug of tea outside, she felt disorientated. Cloud had descended over the island like a fire curtain, thick and impenetrable. It was impossible to tell where the land finished and the sea began. Only the sighing of the waves below told her she was close to the cliff edge. There was another sound like deep breathing that made her call out, 'Hello! Is someone there?'

Suddenly a huge black crow flapped out of the mist. Ally ducked and it landed on the cottage roof squawking aggressively. Almost invisible, it kept up a loud and ugly cawing. Unnerved, she hurried inside.

It was still barely eight by the time Ally had taken a shallow tepid bath and dressed in jeans, warm sweatshirt and trainers, but she set off for Sollas to see if she could pick up a phone signal.

Sticking to the road, she found the community hall and a small shop just beyond the camping area. Both were locked and deserted. She noticed an outside tap for the campers but none were yet stirring. She decided to explore a little further, taking out her digital camera and snapping wild flowers in the mist: giant bluebells and purple thistles glistening from the previous night's rain. Ally always felt purposeful taking photos and it helped shake off her jittery mood.

As she crouched by the roadside, a van came hurtling out of the fog. She jumped clear as the vehicle braked and skidded to a stop just beyond. It reversed back.

'Sorry,' Ally said, leaning in the open window, 'didn't hear you coming.'

A fair-haired man in a bright yellow t-shirt grinned. 'I'll get you next time. You Ally Niven by any chance?'

'Yeah.'

'I'm Calum. Jump in.'

She liked him at once. He chatted easily about the weather and asked her about life in London. She told him she worked in catering. That's what she'd put on her application to the Hall Committee. No point admitting to being a journalist – even though her subject was mainly food – if she wanted to impress them as a cook.

'Long way to come to make soup and ham sandwiches,' he joked.

'Yeah, but I fancied a change.'

'From a stressful job?'

Ally hesitated. 'More than that - from city life – the commute – all that sort of thing.'

He flicked a look. He had amazingly long eyelashes. 'It's not paradise here, you know.'

'I'm not looking for that.'

'Good, cos some folk think if you go far enough away you leave your troubles behind. You don't, they're just the same troubles with a different view.'

Ally quipped, 'just a view would be nice.'

Calum laughed and pulled up outside the white-washed village hall.

Inside it was wood-panelled with stag's antlers over the door. A long hatch, which had been cut into the wall, was hung with blue gingham curtains that screened a well equipped and newly decorated kitchen. While they brewed up a pot of tea, Ally helped Calum carry in a crate of sliced bread, boxes of fruit and a sack of potatoes from his van. He chatted as he worked: his wife Shona would be down shortly to open up shop next door, they had twin seven year old boys who were away staying with Shona's parents on nearby Barra, Alec the Bus was his uncle, and there was a Co-op in Bay where she could buy alcohol and Rooibos tea.

'Is there a public phone?' Ally asked. 'My mobile doesn't work here.'

'Missing city life already?' he teased. 'Aye, there's one in Bay, but you can come down to ours and use the phone any time. We're the house with the screaming dog and the barking kids.'

Ally surveyed the contents of the cupboards and decided to make lentil and carrot soup, potato salad, ham risotto and sandwiches.

'They'll want cheese and ham toasties, burgers and chips,' Calum warned her. 'And tray bakes. Shona usually makes brownies and flapjack to sell. The last girl to work here was a vegan. We made a loss. She lasted two weeks.'

'Okay, point taken,' Ally smiled. 'How many do you expect in today?'

'Saturday's always busy. There are about twenty campers at the moment – and another ferry in at midday from Barra – we'll get the tourists staying in Bay. And some of the locals will probably come in for a coffee to have a look at the incomer,' Calum grinned.

'Is there a bloke called Moody on the island?' Ally asked as she scrubbed vegetables. Calum shook his head. 'Must have been Ishbel's joke then,' she said. 'He was on the ferry yesterday – tall, dark, tatty waxed jacket – bit strange.'

Calum snorted. 'Och, that'll be John Balmain the painter. He's got a gallery of sorts north of Bay. He's harmless enough when you get to know him – but not many do – he doesn't encourage it. Shona'll give you the gossip on that one.'

The dank weather brought in the tourists all day and once the café was opened at ten, Ally never stopped till she closed at six. The Cagoule Family greeted her like an old friend which made Ally feel part of the place already. In the early afternoon, a small woman with short black hair and lively brown eyes in a round face, dashed in.

‘Hi, I’m Shona. It’s time you had a break. Get yourself home for half an hour. Cathy’s minding the shop for me.’

‘No I’m fine. I’d rather stay here,’ Ally assured, thinking of the creepy cottage. ‘I love being busy.’

Shona stayed to help and when she left, she sent teenager Cathy to lend a hand. Cathy had badly dyed blonde hair and heavy eye make-up accentuating pretty hazel eyes. She showed no interest in the piles of washing up, preferring to linger over clearing tables and chat to the customers. Shortly before closing, a curly-haired young man in gum boots and working clothes came trudging into the hall. He stood awkwardly by the hatch trying to catch Cathy’s attention as she joked with a couple of cyclists. He smelled of fish and engine oil. Ally had the impression the girl was deliberately ignoring him.

‘Hi, can I get you something?’ Ally smiled.

He shot her a hostile look and shook his head. Cathy laughed at something one of the men said. At this the young fisherman marched over and tugged her arm, muttering something. She shrugged him off.

‘Can’t you see I’m working? I’ll see you later.’

He turned on his heels and stomped loudly out of the hall. Cathy glanced after him. She smiled an apology to the cyclists. ‘Local boys have no idea how to treat a lassie, eh?’

Later, as they cleared up, Ally asked, ‘who was that who came in before?’

Offhandedly she answered, ‘Oh, just Donny.’

‘Boyfriend?’

Cathy pulled a face. ‘Kinda.’ She stared out of the window at the departing cyclists and waved. ‘I can’t wait to get out of this place and see a bit of the world. I mean those guys there – I could fancy one of them – couldn’t you?’

Ally said, ‘Too skinny for my liking.’

Cathy gave her an interested look. ‘You got a man then?’

‘No.’

‘Why not? You’re dead pretty.’

Ally laughed. ‘I’ve just got rid of one, thank you very much. I’m in no hurry to find another.’

‘Just as well,’ Cathy giggled, ‘cos Donny MacRait’s about as hot as they get on Battersay.’

‘Looked like he’s carrying the worries of the world.’

Cathy grimaced. ‘He’s always moaning on about something – fish or money or worrying about -’ Abruptly she broke off. Ally waited for her to continue but she didn’t.

They washed up in silence for a minute or two. Ally recalled how, as an eighteen year-old, she couldn’t get away quick enough from rural Yorkshire and her mother’s fussing love. She’d taken off to Spain to work in a bar against her mum’s wishes. Their relationship – always intense after her father’s early death – had been turbulent for a couple of years and then calmed into adult friendship. She felt the familiar ache of her mum’s loss and quickly focused on Cathy.

‘Maybe you should try going somewhere else together?’ Ally suggested. ‘Do a bit of travelling.’

For a moment, she saw the yearning flit impatiently across the girl’s face. ‘No chance,’ Cathy said. ‘He’ll never leave his precious boat and his smelly fish and all this.’ She waved her tea-towel dismissively. ‘MacRailts have always lived on Battersay and always will – his old man drummed that into him years ago.’

Ally saw how the subject rankled so changed it. ‘I was expecting to meet Dr Rushmore of the Hall Committee but he hasn’t been in.’

‘Dr Ned? I think he’s away.’

‘Is he a medical doctor?’

‘Suppose so. Think he’s retired. Into all that herbal stuff.’

‘What’s he like?’

‘Not bad looking for an old man. But don’t get your hopes up; he’s got a wife, Mary.’

‘And you’ve got a one-track mind,’ Ally said with a playful nudge. ‘Rushmore’s not a local name?’

‘No, they’re incomers. Did up Sollas House. They’re a bit hippy, but nice enough.’

Calum returned to lock up. When they emerged outside, Donny was waiting in a pick-up truck, engine running. From Cathy’s earlier chatter, Ally knew that the girl lived in Bay with a squabbling bunch of younger siblings and a mother who worked at the Co-op. Donny’s home was a static caravan at the head of the beach that ran below Ally’s cottage. ‘Doesn’t get on with his folks,’ Cathy had said, ‘and it suits him to have his own place.’

They roared off. Calum offered her a lift home but Ally preferred to walk. The mist was finally lifting and revealing fingers of land and knuckles of rock beside a glinting sea. By the time she reached the cliff house, the sky was a deep azure and the sun warm on her face. *See, this place isn't so bad, is it?* The view was hazy but beautiful; a crescent of white sand cut like a scimitar at the incoming tide and blue-green sea rolled out over the horizon.

A swim! That's what she needed. Twenty minutes later, Ally was running into cold waves, shrieking her head off and falling about in the shallows. A dark head popped above the water a few yards down and then disappeared. It resurfaced nearer and she realised with delight that it was a seal. It bobbed playfully around her for a couple of minutes then vanished.

Ally dried off and went for a run along the beach. Later, after heating up some of the leftover soup, she went out again with her camera, amazed at how light it still was even after ten o'clock. Skirting the village of Sollas, she was drawn towards the isolated promontory where the artist Balmain had said some woman was living. Climbing up to what she thought was a small lighthouse, she was surprised to discover a giant pale stone statue of a woman in a long skirt and shawl. Ally stood arrested; there was something fascinating yet disturbing about the monument. The face, corroded by the elements, was featureless and her robe pockmarked. Clutching her leg was the weathered remains of a stone child. They were a strange, forlorn pair. Perhaps they were religious – Madonna and Child? – this being a Catholic island. But why put them here so far from the main township, gazing out to sea?

Ally had an urge to touch it. She closed her eyes and ran a hand over the smooth cold stone. Abruptly her palm scraped against the jagged folds of the disintegrating child and a jolt went through her like an electric shock. She jerked away, feeling dizzy. A wave of nausea rushed through her as noise thundered in her head. For a moment she thought she would fall, and then the faintness and the roaring in her ears subsided.

Ally gulped a lungful of sea air; it was the precipitous view giving her vertigo, nothing more. *It's just stone, for goodness sake.* She turned her back on the sinister statue. Part of her wanted to rush back to safety and part of her – the nosey braver Ally – wanted to hurry on and discover who it was who lived out here. *'They all try to see her – all the tourists.'* Why should a reclusive woman be a tourist attraction? Something nagged at the edge of her memory, but she couldn't think what.

A night breeze was rising as she came over the final crag. A mournful sight greeted her: tumbledown stone cottages, long abandoned, huddled in the lee of a sheer cliff that reared up out of the sea. Peering through the gloom, Ally could see that one still hung onto its turf roof like a shaggy haircut. Could this be someone's home? It didn't look habitable.

On walking closer, she saw that there was glass in the tiny, deep-set windows and a narrow pathway had been beaten down through the thistles and bracken to the door. Ally stopped. What would she do if a stranger suddenly appeared? What if she was deranged or dangerous?

Ally took quick photos and withdrew to a rock above the grassy enclosure to watch. But neither sound nor movement came from the crude cottage, or wisp of smoke from its chimney. She stood up. Then she heard it; the soft moan of a woman, just like the night before. Ally stiffened and listened. It came again, closer this time, like an anguished sob. She looked about but could see no one. Night was closing in and shadows were growing out of rocks and hummocks. Heart hammering, she scrambled up the slope into the dying light. The next time she turned around, the small glen was in darkness and the bothy impossible to make out. The wind lifted her long auburn ponytail and whipped it into her eyes.

Ally hurried home along the opposite ridge that would take her back to Sollas - to people and life. Down to her left she caught sight of a large stone house nestled in trees beside a small strand of white beach. Warm light poured from an upstairs window and she caught the whiff of a scented peat fire. Sollas House perhaps? It looked cheery and welcoming and she had to resist the urge to run down and bang on their door.

By the time she got back to her cottage, Ally was shaking off the anxiety that had gripped her since touching the statue. She was being idiotic. Even if a woman had been there, she wouldn't have come to any harm. And the strange moaning was just the way the wind blew through the bracken and rushes. She was over-tired. Tonight she would sleep like the dead.

Drinking a final glass of water at the kitchen sink, she glanced out of the window. A hooded face was staring in. Ally screamed and dropped the glass.