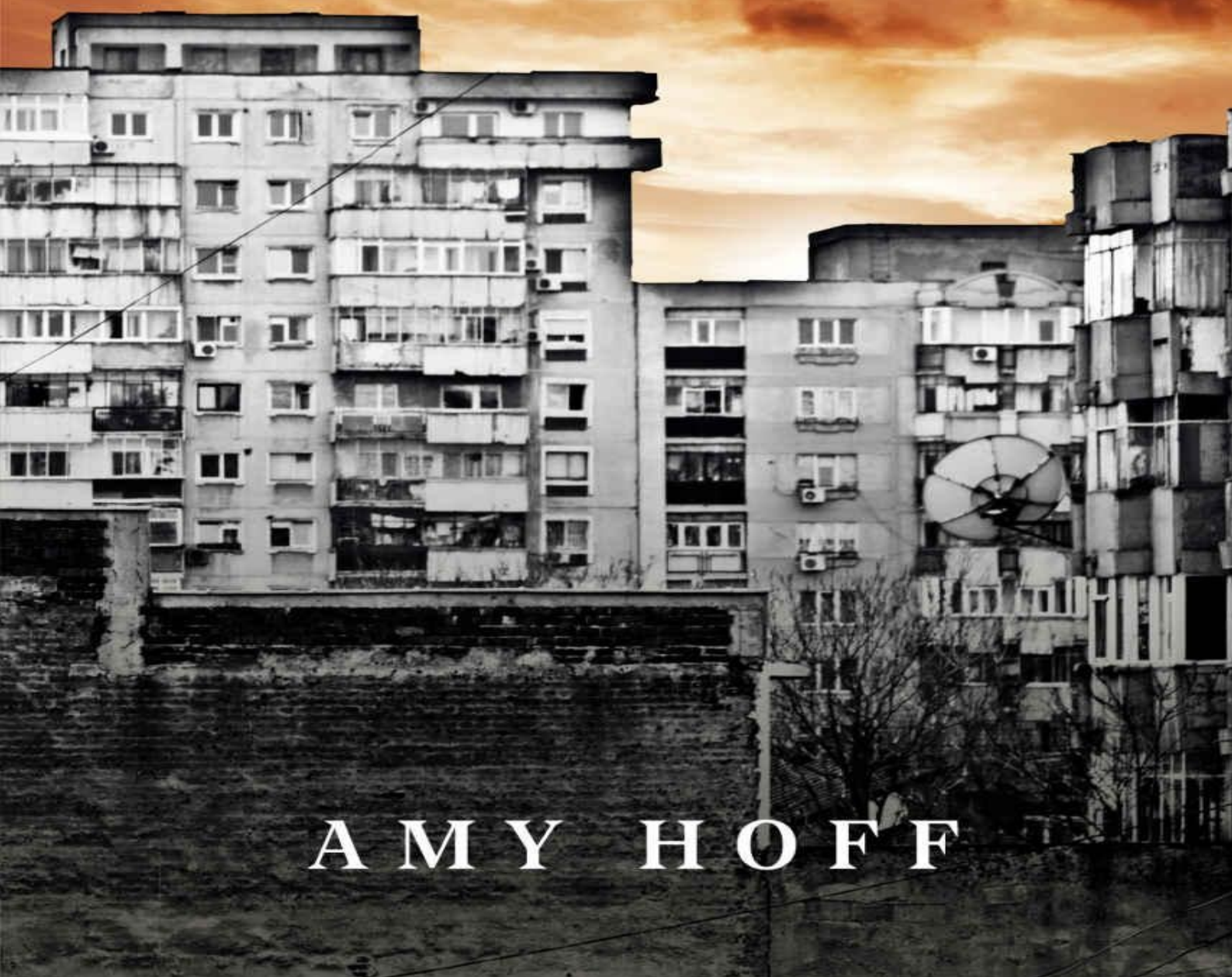


EVEN THE FAERIES HAVE DRUG PROBLEMS

CALEDONIA



AMY HOFF

CALEDONIA

Amy Hoff

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For Alasdair

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The open road, and all the stories and adventure it has provided over the years.

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And finally, Alasdair - my own Dorian Grey.

About the Author:

Amy Hoff has been on the road for years. She used to drive across the United States and live out of cheap motels, collecting stories. When she reached the ocean, she kept going, travelling the world. She doesn't live anywhere; her home is the road, in whatever form that takes. Sunsets off the bow when she was a sailor, flying into Incheon International in Seoul, driving the lonely American highway, walking across borders in the Americas, in Europe, and in Asia. The stories of Scotland are her favourite, and she became a PhD researcher, an expert in Scottish monster lore. She still travels, and is now a researcher of monster folklore worldwide.

Check out the darker parts of any pub, if you are ever washed up on strange shores. You might see her there, looking for stories to tell and be told.

Caledonia

The word *faerie* was once synonymous with the word *monster*.

Prologue

Yesterday, Leah Bishop didn't believe in faeries.

That was yesterday.

“What the hell,” she croaked, because *awake* was definitely not what she wanted to be. She looked at the empty whisky bottle near the bed and smiled at it like an old friend, before the hangover hit her. Then she would hate the bottle and all that it stood for. In her heart, she knew that she would be forgiving and all would be forgotten by the evening, when she'd fall back into its arms. She loved whisky. It loved her back. They were destined to be star-crossed.

She wondered why she was awake. Then, she heard it again. A knock on the door. Leah grumbled, willed herself out of bed, and walked across the floor in bare feet. She pushed her front door open.

There was a very good-looking man standing on her doorstep.

Hell yeah, thought Leah. She started to grin, and then belatedly realised she hadn't brushed her teeth.

“A message for you, miss,” said the man, handing her a packet. “Sign here.”

Leah did as she was told. The man bowed deeply, turned on his heel, and walked down her front drive. He turned left, and vanished behind a hedge. She closed the door and went to make tea in the kitchen. She yawned hugely, watching the milky water turn brown. After the tea had steeped, she carried the mug and the packet into the living room.

She ripped it open. Inside was a stack of paper, with a letter of invitation. CALEDONIA INTERPOL was written across the top, in bright silver professional-looking letters.

The message underneath read:

Dear Miss Bishop,

We have heard many positive things about your unique knowledge and considerable skills. We would like to invite you to work with us in Glasgow, at Caledonia Interpol. You would be given the title of Detective Inspector, and a generous pay rise. Enclosed are the forms and a manual to get you accustomed to your new life, should you take us up on our offer. Please do not hesitate to call me upon receiving this. We do hope you will decide to join us here in Glasgow.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Inspector, Ben A. Donner, Caledonia Interpol

There was a telephone number at the bottom. Leah sipped her tea. She looked around at the emptiness of her flat, and the silence closed in on her like a tomb. She picked up the telephone and dialled.

“Hello?” she asked. “May I speak to the Chief Inspector?”

Leah took the job. She couldn't stay in the same city, not anymore.
Six months it had been.
Six months and counting.
That long?
It felt like yesterday.

She walked out of her house for the last time, and looked out over the beauty of Edinburgh. The castle on the rock above Waverley train station. The Royal Mile, the countless tourists, the history and the somewhat smug feeling that she was living in the most luxurious city in Scotland. She was leaving this beautiful place for the dark, gritty streets of working-class Glasgow. If Edinburgh was Scotland's Paris, then Glasgow was its Detroit. Detroit was cars, Glasgow was shipping, and both now existed in a disused, abandoned state, living off of the memories of better days.

Leah sighed. Nothing in Edinburgh spoke to her heart anymore. As she boarded the train for Glasgow, and the conductor came by for her ticket, she handed it over in quiet triumph. The train pulled out of the station, and she looked up at Castle Rock one last time. In departing, she felt nothing. Edinburgh was now a place of the past. She would not return.

Chapter One

In the early hours of the dawn, the phone rang. Even in her sleep, even after all this time, she still hoped it was him. It never was.

Leah woke up with the fuzzy and familiar taste of day-after-whisky on her tongue. She was confused for a moment, as she sat up on the edge of the bed. She saw the half-empty bottle on the floor, next to a shortbread tin she had purchased in a fit of madness during the night. She stared at the castle and loch depicted on the lid, tiny Highland cattle dotting the landscape, and shook her head at the Scotland she had never known, the one that sold well in all the shops but bore little resemblance to reality. Her Scotland was bookies and rundown neighbourhoods, drug addiction and poverty, loud clubs and council flats; a derelict fantasy of cheap booze, bad cigarettes, and terrible decisions.

The hotel was nothing to speak of. It was a humble affair, a compact white building at the centre of a row of houses. The cracked walls and cramped, hard bed served as a reminder of the city she was in. The bathroom, where the shower ran too cold or too hot, and the general damp of the building made her miss Edinburgh, and her small bright flat. When she had arrived in the city, her new boss had spoken to her on the telephone, informing her that they were in the middle of a murder investigation.

"Right," Leah said aloud to her empty hotel room. "Glasgow." The phone continued to ring. She sighed, then dug under the pillows until she found it.

"Hello," she mumbled gruffly.

"Are you awake?" asked a male voice.

"I am now."

"You'll have to get down here as quickly as you can."

Leah rolled her tongue around in her mouth, to see if that improved things. It didn't. Grumbling, she sat up.

"Be right down," she said. After a shower.

Leah sat at the edge of her cold, hard bed.

She told herself police officers aren't supposed to cry.

Leah walked out of the underground station, willing herself not to have a hangover.

She'd been told that someone would be there to meet her, but the station seemed abandoned. She started to wonder if she'd gotten the time wrong, and checked her watch. 9 AM, St. Enoch Station. That was right, wasn't it? She heard the sound of footsteps behind her, and turned around.

The man standing there was beautiful.

He was slim, with black hair, and huge mournful eyes in a pale face. He was dressed in a tailcoat, pressed trousers, and gloves. His long, royal blue brocade tailcoat complemented the white of his skin. Leah's mouth dropped open.

"Leah Bishop?" asked the apparition, straightening his gloves. His cheekbones could slice apples.

"Yeah...?" she said.

The man bowed, took her hand, and then kissed it. Leah was bemused and puzzled.

"I am Detective Inspector Dorian Grey," he said.

She knew that all detectives were plainclothes officers, but she wondered why he looked like someone from a steampunk convention. Even that wasn't quite accurate, though. This man had an air of displaced reality, as if he had been removed from the Victorian era and placed on a kerb outside of St. Enoch Station at 9 in the morning. His huge eyes watched her, his face impossibly sad. Leah was

reminded suddenly of a childhood pet, and the way her black Labrador used to look up at her with his chin resting on her knee. She then realised what he had said.

“Dorian Grey?” she asked. “Did you make that up yourself?”

“Yes,” said the man, without a trace of irony. He stood there staring, as if he were waiting for some kind of prompt.

“Er...on the phone you said you had something to show me?” she suggested.

“Indeed,” he said. “We'd better go. The chief does not like to be kept waiting, and you know how difficult he can be, given his history.”

“I do?” asked Leah.

“I'd assume so, yes,” said Dorian. “Come along.”

Leah hesitated, having never been told to 'come along' before. If this was her new partner she supposed she would have to get used to his idiosyncrasies. God knew she had enough of her own.

There was a large open square between the two entrances to the underground station, and in the centre of it was a strange building that resembled a castle. Two of its four turrets framed a large clock. The building now housed a coffeeshop, and its many windows advertised the specials of the day.

“This used to be the subway station,” Dorian explained, leading her around the back of the building. He stood in front of a solid brick wall, focusing on it. He took off a white glove, and pressed his bare palm to the red sandstone. Leah stared at him. Suddenly there was a strange sound, the ancient creaking of stone moving on stone, and a tunnel appeared; a tunnel of leaves and plants that descended into the darkness.

Leah turned to look at him very slowly.

“After you,” he said. Leah cautiously took the first step down the stairs. Dorian followed her, and as they descended, she heard the door slowly close. Around them, a phosphorescent light illuminated the staircase and the leaves, giving the impression of a moonlit garden. Uncomfortable with the lack of conversation, Leah spoke.

“So...does the chief let you dress like that?” she asked.

The eyes of small creatures were watching her, bright and black, from behind the leaves. Slight whispering and tittering behind her made her whip around and nearly lose her balance on the stairs.

Dorian looked down at his impeccable clothing.

“Like what?” he asked.

“Er – never mind,” she said. He raised an eyebrow.

“As I was saying earlier,” he said, “we called you in because of your unique knowledge and skills.”

“So you said,” she replied, and wondered what kind of skills she had that would be valuable. She had been told repeatedly that her knowledge was worthless. She sighed.

“That would be Adam, I take it?” asked Dorian, as if she had spoken aloud. Stopping dead, she looked into the wide brown eyes of the strange young man.

“How do you know about him?” she demanded. He shrugged slightly.

“It's in your heartbeat,” he said. “Are you coming?”

Now, she was even less certain about the wisdom of following Dorian, as they continued to descend into the darkness. She watched him: perfect posture, delicate bone structure, like something she had seen in a film, or a painting. He reminded her of wilderness and of the sea, of forest creatures at the close of day, of faithful pets. As if he weren't quite human.

“The reason that we called for you,” he said, startling her, “is because we think a human is killing them.”

“Them who?” asked Leah.

“Perhaps I should say us,” he said. “Killing...us.”

Suddenly, they had reached the bottom of the mysterious staircase. Dorian took out a large silver

skeleton key with a heart-shaped Celtic knot on one end. He inserted it into the lock, turned it twice the right and once to the left. He lifted the huge wrought-iron hoop and the ancient wooden door swung open. Leah looked around herself, and was a bit deflated to see that they were in what appeared to be a broom closet.

“Is this a cupboard?” she asked. Dorian looked at her.

“We’ve had some...budget cuts,” he said.

As he led her down what looked like a normal hallway, her mind was racing. *What is happening? Have I been drugged? Probably not, there's no way...is this real? There is no way this could possibly be real...Is there? Is this magic?*

At the end of the hallway, Dorian knocked on a white door.

The door swung open, and Leah drew a breath. They stood in a Jacobean library, filled with light and life. The room was packed full of books with overstuffed red sofas lining the walls. The room was huge, and the ceiling was so high – *was that a cloud?* – that it seemed to have its own weather. Several walls were made up only of bookshelves stacked so high it was difficult to see them in their entirety. The carpets were red, the walls a tasteful combination of oak panelling and rich cherry mahogany. The three-dimensional latticed windows were large and arched, letting in the silver Glasgow sunlight. There was an enormous fireplace in the centre of one wall where a large fire crackled merrily.

Leah was in love.

Small people – with *wings?* – were deep in conversation beside a teakettle, and various other people of all sizes and descriptions read over each other’s shoulders and lounged on the sofas, or in the armchairs. Near each one of them, a small laptop computer whirred quietly.

In the corner, behind piles and piles of paperwork, seated in front of a desktop computer from the nineteen-eighties with a green-text monochrome monitor, was a giant. The giant looked up over his glasses, caught sight of Dorian, grumbled to himself, and went back to poking at the keyboard with his single fingertip.

Dorian smiled slightly.

“Who’s that?” whispered Leah.

“Your new boss,” Dorian replied.

“Welcome to Glasgow, Detective Inspector Bishop,” rumbled the giant. “My name is Benandonner. I am the chief of police here.” He shifted his great bulk, somehow navigated around the precarious stacks of paper, and walked over to them. Although he was taller and larger than Leah or Dorian, he merely looked like an oversized human to her.

Leah shook his hand, and then looked at both of them.

“Benandonner?” she asked. “Like the giant?”

“No, Leah,” said Dorian. “He *is* the giant.”

The world fell silent as she considered this. Benandonner and Dorian watched her placidly, waiting for her response.

“You expect me to believe that?” she asked.

“Are there magical portals in your world?” Dorian returned, and shrugged. “People were just shorter back then. He truly is the giant who fought Cuchulainn.”

“And who are you? Cuchulainn?” Leah retorted. As far as she was aware, Benandonner was the giant who destroyed the Giant's Causeway to Ireland, for fear of Finn MacCool.

“Don't be ridiculous,” he said. “I am the selkie Dorian Grey. And I *did* make it up myself. Humans cannot pronounce my real name.”

Chief Ben cut in, exasperated, "Can we get down to business?" Dorian nodded.

~~"We think we're dealing with a serial killer," Chief Ben said to Leah, turning to her. "The first in our world. That's why we needed you, Leah – a human. You might find your qualifications in folklore will be useful in this position."~~

"And you've never had to deal with humans before?" Leah asked, thinking, *Am I really having the conversation? Are these people insane? Am I? I've never heard anyone call a Master's in folklore useful before.*

"No," he said, as if this was the strangest question she could have asked. "Do you think the human police have time to investigate supernatural crime? We're too busy policing ourselves."

"Policing yourselves?" asked Leah. "How do you mean?"

"Monsters have killed humans since they came into existence, all over the world," said Dorian. "Humans were viewed as having been created as prey for the faerie people. Interpol was founded centuries ago by monsters around the world that believed in the possibility of a peaceful co-existence. Something had to be done."

"This is Glasgow," added Chief Ben. "Even the faeries have drug problems."

"Well," said Leah, "I don't know how much help I can be, but...I'm game."

Especially, she thought, if you lot are going to pay me. You can call yourself whatever you want, just pay me a lot of money and keep me out of Edinburgh.

"Good to hear," said Chief Ben. "Dorian, can you show her the evidence? I have work to catch up on."

Turning away, the older man grumbled to himself, as he manoeuvred around his desk to hide again behind the giant stacks of paperwork. It appeared that the interview was over, and Dorian indicated to Leah that they should go. He bowed slightly to the stacks, and Leah followed Dorian out of the Jacobean library that served as the base of operations for Caledonia Interpol.

Chapter Two

They walked into another room that was dominated by a large glass wall with photographs. Lines had been drawn from one to the next, with notes written hastily in English, Gaelic, and what almost looked like a mixture of cuneiform and hieroglyphs. She stepped closer. It was Ogham. Pictish Ogham. Not all scholars even knew Pictish, or what the symbols represented; they could only guess. She turned to look at Dorian, who was already writing on the glass next to one of the pictures.

In Pictish Ogham, not English, or even Gaelic.

A part of Leah that had long been silenced was growing louder in excitement and wonder.

What if this is real? That would be more important than pay. *Well*, she amended, *almost*.

Leah walked up to the board and examined the photos of the victims. The killings appeared to have been bloodless. Each face stared at her blankly, and she tried to read the life in their eyes, to conceive of lives lived and now lost. It was difficult.

“They found the fifth body this morning,” he told Leah, indicating the photographs. “Every one of them the same.”

Dorian, while beautiful, had a sinister look to him. His permanently dour expression and the angle of his face and body gave him a sharp and menacing aspect. His huge, sad brown eyes and mournful expressions – and some of his behaviours, like the way he moved his body, turned his head, and looked at people – reminded Leah more and more strongly of the pet Labrador of her childhood.

She leaned forward to look at the photos and instantly recognised several species of Fae from descriptions and woodcarvings. Her hangover and all other things forgotten, she fell into research mode, as the folklorist she had been at university. There was wonder and deep grief as she looked at the creatures she had spent her entire life studying. There was a glaistig, lying on her side, eyes glassy. A joint-halver, its small, troll-like body limp and splayed across the pavement. They lay there with peaceful looks on their faces. The only image in which damage had been done was of a faerie with broken wings. There was, however, a pattern.

“We don't know what killed them,” Dorian said. “The Fae are notoriously difficult to kill. Yet many of the creatures here were very powerful beings. And all of them are dead. We just don't know how.”

Leah leaned in to look closely at one of the photographs. There was a message above the corpses scrawled out in black spray paint.

“*Murdering Reality*,” Leah read aloud. She turned to Dorian. “What does it mean?”

Dorian held her gaze. It was unnerving, as if she was staring directly into history.

“It's an old term, meaning death to humans,” said Dorian. “There are some of us who don't talk kindly to them.”

“You're right,” she said softly. “I think it is a serial killer.”

A breath, soft and gentle, stole across the room and brushed Leah's cheek. She heard it, an audible sigh. Quiet strains of ethereal music wafted through the air and settled around her.

She turned as she heard the door open, and in walked the most handsome man she had ever seen. His large brown eyes were soft. He looked exotic and flawless, his complexion dark, and when he shook out his long hair, chestnut curls tumbled over his shoulder. His soft, insinuating smile reminded her of clean bedsheets and candlelight. Leah did not realise she had been staring. Dorian turned to look at the newcomer and rolled his eyes.

“Turn that down, would you?” said Dorian. “It's ungodly.”

“Sorry,” said the young man, turning his charm directly towards Leah. “Detective Inspector Magnus Grey.”

“Leah Bishop,” she stuttered. “Wait. Did you say Grey?”

He shook her hand, and Leah felt the spell draining away, as if someone had indeed turned down the intensity. She missed it as soon as it was gone.

“Yes,” said Magnus, gesturing towards Dorian. “We’re...brothers.”

“Indeed,” said Dorian witheringly. “Honestly, Magnus, there’s no need to walk around with it...what do they say these days? *Turned up to eleven.*”

“Well,” said Magnus, grinning rakishly at Leah, “The ladies seem to like it.”

“I’m sure they do,” said Dorian, with as much hauteur as he could muster. “Now, is there anything *important* you would like to discuss?”

“Oh, yes,” Magnus replied. “The murderer knows we exist. Not just supernaturals, I mean, but the force itself. We received a message, here at the station, the same *Murdering Reality* phrase. It was hand-delivered, and left on Ben’s desk. There’s more at stake here than the Fae dying. The killer seems to have infiltrated Caledonia. I think we might need to speak to our informant.”

Dorian nodded.

“Agreed,” he said. “Let’s go.”

Leah followed the two selkie brothers through the interlinked alleyways of the city. Whenever the light changed, shadows played across their features, and she was so strongly reminded of seals that she had to blink occasionally in order to view them as men.

Glasgow was dark, and tinged red, with a fine coating of grit. The streets were winding, but not nonsense. This was a city of manual labour, coal, and tears. Leah could sense the sorrow and the darkness, as if it had seeped into the very walls. Sometimes it could be beautiful in its unrelenting hardness.

The three of them stepped into a close situated between two red brick buildings, cool in the afternoon damp. The sounds of traffic could be heard in the distance, but otherwise, it was cut off and private. Leah halted on the staircase.

“All right, stop,” she said.

The two seal-men turned to her, and she saw their eyes glow faintly in the dark. A deep dread suffused her entire being, and a vision momentarily washed over her.

Seals, on a dark Highland beach as the moon comes out, waves crashing against the shoreline.

She stared for a moment, the sudden and unexpected fear fading as quickly as it had arrived, and then spoke again.

“This is a lot to take in,” she explained. “I have to know – why me? What can I possibly offer in this situation?”

“Someone has been killing off supernatural creatures, one by one,” said Dorian. “There’s no rhyme or reason to it. The victims have been of every alignment - good, bad, and neutral. There seems to be no pattern.”

“We think the killer might be human,” said Magnus.

Leah shook her head in frustration.

“Yes, but *why?*” she asked. “What is it about these murders that make you think it couldn’t be a – supernatural?”

“Serial killing,” said Dorian. “It is a human behaviour. Faeries just don’t do that kind of thing. They’ll kill, in war or for rage or vengeance, but there is no method. They aren’t *killers.*”

“We’re monsters,” agreed Magnus, “but we’re not *monsters.*”

“You think I can help because serial killing is *human?*” she asked. “I know nothing about serial killers. I’m not sure I can help simply because I’m human too.”

“It is more than that,” said Dorian. “We needed a human who knows about folklore. Someone who will be able to make connections that we cannot.”

“And someone who is new to all this,” said Magnus. “Someone with fresh insight. We’ve been doing this for a...*very long time.*”

Leah sighed, and looked upwards, where clouds moved across a pale blue sky.

“The note is a new lead, which is why we’re going to speak to one of our informants,” said Dorian.

“Great. Let’s go talk to them,” Leah moved to leave the close.

“We have to wait until nightfall.”

“Why?”

“First,” Dorian said, “we eat.”

The café was sweet and quaint, its chairs and tables carved from wood but in keeping with the form of the trees from which they had been cut. It had a warm and jovial atmosphere.

Leah sat with Magnus and Dorian, who had already spent too long poring over the menu. When the waiter showed up, Dorian and Magnus looked at each other.

“Fish?” they both suggested. They both nodded. “Yes, I think fish.”

“We’d like Loch Fyne oysters as a starter, pan friend salmon as the main, and – shall we order dessert now or later?” asked Magnus.

“Later is fine, sir,” said the waiter. The men nodded, handing over their menus.

“And for you, miss?” he asked.

“Eggs Benedict and Bruichladdich, neat,” Leah ordered, “and er, tea, with tablet, and a glass of water.”

The waiter nodded, and left. Leah was staring at the brothers. Eventually Magnus noticed.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Did you both just order oysters and fish?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Dorian. “I’m glad he’s giving us time because I can’t decide between caviar and smoked trout mousse for dessert.”

Leah started to feel a bit ill.

“What about chocolate?!” she asked, “or...cheese, or...I don’t know, cake?”

Dorian and Magnus looked disgusted and a bit horrified.

“You’re not supposed to feed chocolate to animals!” said Magnus.

The selkies stared at her across the table with their huge dark eyes. For a fleeting moment, she reminded her of horror films where eldritch things watched from the shadows, strange and ancient. She shivered, and the feeling was gone. But not forgotten.

“Aren’t you going to get anything to drink?” she asked. Magnus looked at her, puzzled.

“No,” he said. “We get all the hydration we need from the food we eat.”

“Do you always order the fish?” she asked. Dorian looked at her as if this was the most ridiculous question anyone had ever asked.

“Of course, Leah,” he said. “We’re seals.”

The waiter showed up with a tray full of food. Leah looked at the wonderful meal spread before her with contented joy. Especially the whisky. She wrapped her hands around the mug of tea first.

“Did you hear that?” Dorian suddenly asked Magnus.

There was a ticking, clicking noise, and Leah thought that was what Dorian meant. Startled, she realised it was coming from them. They seemed to be communicating in some other, wilder, language. The ticking became more pronounced, and then the two brothers stared forward, slowly tilting the

heads at the same time, and looked at her. Through her, as though she wasn't even there. Their heads swivelled slowly to the right, and they tilted again. It was like a slow, dream-horror music box windup. Dorian turned to look at her suddenly and she nearly dropped her tea.

"Let's go," he said. "She's just opened the restaurant."

"And you know this...how?" asked Leah.

Magnus turned to look at her then.

"We can hear it," he said. "Seals have excellent hearing."

Leah thought of Dorian's mind-reading capabilities.

"Should have guessed," she said. She set down her tea with a sigh, knocked back the whisky, pocketed the tablet, and left the table.

They walked through the grim twilight of Glasgow. The city's aesthetic didn't improve in the evening, although it had looked all right the previous night, through the lens of a whisky glass. It was a desperate city, with people who didn't know where to look or in what direction to turn. They certainly knew about alcohol, although they didn't seem to know what to do with it once they had it. It seemed as though drinking was temporary – nobody *drank* in Glasgow, alcohol just paid their stomachs a holiday visit, in and out again. As they walked, Leah noticed that Dorian and Magnus shone in the night, like lamps. Dorian's skin was a silver colour, while Magnus's was gold. They seemed to absorb and reflect the night around them.

"Chief's calling me," said Magnus, looking at his phone.

"Go ahead," said Dorian. "We can take care of this."

Magnus nodded, and continued down the alleyway, turning left toward Buchanan Street to head towards St. Enoch.

"Wish we could go back," grumbled Leah, rubbing her arms in the chill damp of the evening and thinking of the warmth at Caledonia. She pictured herself there, with a mug of hot tea, doing research in the large library. Dorian nodded in agreement, and led her down an alleyway. His skin began to shine even brighter. It reminded her of pictures she had seen of jellyfish glowing in the dark.

"What's that?" asked Leah, pointing at the sheen.

"Moonlight," Dorian said, with a straight face. She stared at him.

"Seriously?"

He didn't reply, just turned a corner and went into a dark alley. The faint illumination he gave off was helpful, as it was black as pitch in there. A rectangle of light threw gold into the alleyway.

The beautiful selkie turned, the golden light playing off his cheekbones.

"Welcome to Desdemona's," said Dorian.

He gestured toward the doorway with one perfect white hand, and Leah walked through the doorway into another world.

She breathed in the warm smoke, a shisha smoke haze that cast the warm, low light of the restaurant into a dreamlike wonderland. Rich tapestries hung from the walls, and the floor was littered with red pillows and intricate rugs. The sweet scent of tobacco mingled with spices that made her mouth water as waiters carried plates of food, steaming and hissing, to the various tables. Dancers moved sinuously between the tables, somehow avoiding the waiters and patrons, moving as if they had been poured out of a jar. They seemed as though they were a part of the music, rather than just dancing to it; as if the music breathed life into their bodies, and they might vanish at the end of the song, ghosts of another time fading into a dream. To Leah, it felt very exotic, like the entrance to Faerie.

"No," said Dorian. "The entrance to Faerie is not here."

Leah rounded on him.

“Will you stop doing that?!” she asked, exasperated. Dorian shrugged.

“I can't help it,” he said. “It's as loud as if you were talking.”

“Can you tell the difference?” she asked.

“Yes?” said Dorian, puzzled.

“Then keep it to yourself!” she said. “If I want your participation, I'll ask.”

Dorian bowed slightly.

“My apologies,” he said.

Leah sighed, feathers settling.

“So, who are we here to see?” she asked. Dorian sat down at a nearby table and indicated one of the dancers.

“Her,” he said.

She was tall, and extraordinarily fierce-looking. Her long hair was a shocking ginger colour against skin so white it was almost translucent. Her red lips were an exclamation in the centre of her face, and her green eyes seemed to burn like embers beneath long black lashes. She was not beautiful. She was intense. She was also a *very* skilled dancer. Leah wondered if it was difficult to learn such intricate movements.

Dorian called the waiter over, and he ordered some food in a language Leah did not recognise. A woman “accidentally” brushed up against him, and then apologised, using her hands a bit too freely. Leah surreptitiously scanned the room, and saw that every woman – and a few men – were either staring at Dorian, blushing, or trying very hard not to look at him. The only person who wasn't doing any of this was the woman they had come here to see.

“Wow,” said Leah, after the waiter had left. “I didn't realise I was sitting with a celebrity.”

“Mmm?” asked Dorian, and then looked around himself. “Oh yes, that. The selkie curse.”

“Doesn't look like much of a curse to me.”

“You'd be surprised.”

Leah noticed how women stared at him, came close to him, made up any excuse to touch him. He didn't seem to pay any attention, and that was the strangest thing of all. The set finished, and Dorian rose from the table, gesturing to Leah. She stood up and followed him outside, into a small courtyard. The woman with the ginger hair was already there, lighting a cigarette. She turned, and saw Dorian. She sighed, clearly not welcoming the company.

“So. Murders,” she said, and Leah was surprised at hearing an American accent, “I can't say I can't. I'm a murderer myself.”

She inhaled deeply, the smoke curling from her lips as she breathed out, her bright green eyes hooded. She smiled, slowly. Leah got the sudden, overwhelming impression that she was baiting Dorian.

“Yes, thank you, Desdemona,” said Dorian irritably. “We are aware that you are a vampire. You don't need to go to all that effort.”

“Neither do you,” she said. “What do you want to know?”

“You know things about this city and its happenings, more than any of us do. Want to tell us what you've heard anything?”

She shook out her hair, and made a noise of unwilling cooperation. Dorian folded his arms. She put her red lips around her cigarette and inhaled slowly, enjoying Dorian's impatience.

“Not much. I just know someone's angry but I'm still not sure why. Nobody trusts a vampire. You certainly don't trust me.”

“Our kind does not trust yours, obviously,” he replied. He stood there staring for a moment, and seemed to lose some inner battle.

“Will you keep us posted if you do hear anything?” he finally asked.

“~~Anything you want, gorgeous,~~” she bit out, flicking the butt of her cigarette into the street. She walked back into the club and slammed the door.

“That went well,” observed Leah.

Leah walked home, if a hotel could be called home. She mulled over what she knew, again and again, in her mind. Why use a phrase like *Murdering Reality*, an anti-human slogan, if the killer was human? From what she understood of folklore, faeries were incredibly resilient, if not immortal. How could a mere human kill them?

She walked along the bridge on Great Western Road, breathing in the city and considering various aspects of the case. She wondered how the killer would be able to access Caledonia, given the difficulty of doing so without magic. This meant that someone within the station was probably at fault, or was somehow related to the killer. She paused underneath one of the sodium lamps that made up the streetlights of the city, casting an orange glow that, from afar, made Glasgow look like it was on fire.

Leah suddenly realised she was merely thinking like a police officer about a case, rather than the fact that she had just learned that Faerie was a real place, and that the various monsters she had spent her life daydreaming about were as real and solid as the bridge beneath her feet.

The air was cool and brisk, a light mist settled against her skin. She stopped to look down into the water of the river. She needed to brush up on her monster lore. And she needed a strong glass of whisky. Maybe a bottle.

Definitely a bottle.

Chapter Three

Leah opened one eye and surveyed the land beyond her pillow. She had the vague sense of a residual hangover, and that something very strange had happened. She swung her legs over the side of the bed yawning. Suddenly she started. It hadn't been a dream. She was a detective now – with the monsters of Glasgow. There weren't a lot of things that could make a difference to her at the moment, but *faeries are real* has a way of burning through the worst hangover. She made herself tea, and sat down to stare at the wall for a good ten minutes. She caught her reflection in the mirror, and the scar that, starting from her right eye, swept back towards her hairline. She thought of the pains she had taken all her life to hide it. She thought of her memory of how it had happened, back in her childhood; how no one had believed her, and eventually convinced her she'd imagined it all. It had led to her ultimately pursuing a career in folklore.

Leah thought back on what had happened the day before, and smiled. Outside the window, children were playing, shouting and chasing each other in the rain. She realised she had been smiling since she woke up. The feeling was unfamiliar.

Leah drank down the remains of her tea and set the cup back into the saucer. She started the kettle boiling again. Here it was – her dream, fully realised. Had she been aware that there was a career path of 'faerie police officer' she was fairly sure she would have signed up years ago. She could think of several other scholars who would have done the same.

As she poured her second cup of tea, she wondered about her future: was it time to be smart? All her life, she could see two paths before her, one dark and uncertain, and another where she lived a common life, with security and stability, and she got a watch at the end.

"No," she said aloud to herself. "I want more than a watch. I always have."

Someone knocked on the door.

She crossed the small hotel room and opened the door.

Standing there, in his Victorian splendour, was Dorian Grey. He smiled and offered his arm.

"Care to join me, Miss Bishop?" he asked.

The door closed, and steam rose from the cup of tea, forgotten on the countertop.

They went to a local pub for the last hours of serving. Leah sat across from Dorian at a table near the back. This was the pub of choice for those who worked at Caledonia Interpol; it made them feel comfortable. A subterranean treehouse, by the name of Waxy O'Connor's. The labyrinthine rooms and passageways often reminded them of the land of Faerie – their true home, and their eventual destination, once the human world ceased to be. For now, they walked the earth with humans, but Waxy's was a breath of home.

Dorian was a mystery to Leah. Even in the darkness of the pub, she noticed the sadness behind his eyes, a deep ocean chasm. His composure was as supernatural as he was. His refined attitude, dress sense, and gentlemanly demeanour made him undeniably attractive. Yet, he moved through the world as though he never noticed other people at all.

"I hope you don't mind my asking," she said, "but – it seems you could have anyone you wanted but you're alone. Why?"

Dorian looked up from his drink and flashed a rare smile.

"We mate with humans," he said. "Selkies have two separate purposes, and only two. The first is to find someone who has been disappointed in love, and... *comfort* them."

Leah grinned at the implication.

~~“The second,” he continued, “is to fall in love, with a human. Someone whose heart has been broken can cry seven tears into the sea and call a selkie lover. If this happens, we fall in love, forever.”~~

“Sounds romantic,” said Leah.

“Does it?” he said. “I suppose it must seem that way, to you. However, there is no *getting over it* for a seal-man. Once he has fallen, it is for the rest of his life. He cannot love another.”

“I think I can empathise,” Leah said. “So...who was she, your human?”

“A divorcee,” said Dorian. “She cried seven tears into the sea. She didn't even realise she was doing it. I went to her and comforted her. I loved her, as only a selkie can. As you may know, this does not guarantee the love will be returned.”

“Yes,” Leah said dryly. “I know.”

“Once her heart had mended, she left me,” he said. He looked at Leah.

“What about you?” he asked. “I recognise heartbreak when I hear it.”

Leah stared into her pint for a while. She had expected to run away from her past, everything still being so painful. And yet, with this selkie, the story poured out of her, as if her soul would be cleansed in the telling. Maybe this was selkie magic, too.

“He was...the love of my life,” she managed. “I had never met anyone like him before. I was impressed with him. He was so stylish, you know, so at ease with himself and the world. Musical, great dancer, everything I could ever want in a man. He spent a lot of time away. With work, he said. Then, one day, he just didn't come home. And I found out that he hadn't been away at work.”

Dorian nodded, as though he already knew the story.

“Oldest story in the book, really,” she said, to show she knew it too. “But it's harder when it's your own.”

“Yes,” said Dorian. “The pain never really ends, through the centuries.”

There was a pause. Leah stared at him.

“How old *are* you?” she asked.

“The seal-folk don't mark age,” he replied, “but for your purposes, I was at the court of Louis XIV.” Leah stared at him.

“And what a pompous arsehole he was,” Dorian added.

Leah laughed. He raised an eyebrow.

“Magnificent, though,” he said. Leah shook her head.

“Isn't it difficult, working with a human?” she asked.

“On the contrary, we need humans,” he replied. “Especially humans like yourself, who understand us.”

“I don't think I'll ever understand you,” she laughed, and drank her beer.

“More than most,” Dorian said, following suit. His phone buzzed. Leah watched with amusement as the Victorian gentleman pulled a mobile phone out of a pocket in his tailcoat. He looked down at it.

“Time to go,” he said.

“What?” she asked, suddenly alert. “Is there another body?”

“No,” he said, showing her the phone. “The kelpie that lives in the Clyde is being a nuisance, and we have to get it out.”

Leah grabbed her coat and followed Dorian into the rainy night.

The night was cloudy and dark beside the river. Leah peered over the side of the wall into the water. She could barely see the ripples on the surface.

“Can you see anything?” she asked.

“Not yet,” Dorian said.

Red eyes appeared beneath the water and were gone in an instant.

“Did you –” Leah began.

“– see that?” Dorian finished.

“Yes,” they both said. Suddenly, there was a loud roar, and a cascade of water.

The monster reared out of the waves, soaking them in a deluge. It roared again, exposing rows of shark-like teeth. It looked like a great black dragon with a serpentine neck. The dull lights of the city glittered off of its black scales. Dorian took a step back. Leah planted her feet on the pavement, determined to stay just where she was.

“What now?” she hissed. And the monster began to sway, side to side. It wheezed, and snuffled loudly, water fountaining from its snout. Dorian stared hard at the creature, and then began to laugh. Leah turned to him in astonishment. The kelpie made some hooting noises that sounded almost musical. It swayed back and forth, ululating and whuffling.

“It's drunk, Miss Bishop,” said Dorian. “It's singing along to the bagpipes.”

“It's...what?” Leah said, looking at the monster, which made a *whrrrrrr* sound.

“It's drunk,” Dorian repeated, grinning, “and it's purring. I think it needs to sober up, and get out of the river for now.”

“Dorian,” she said quietly. “This is a *kelpie*, the child-eating monster? Is this...is it safe? Shouldn't we take it out of the river?”

Dorian looked at her and his smile faded.

“You're right, of course,” he said. “It's dangerous, but it has lived in the Clyde since I can remember.”

He sighed, and squared his shoulders.

“Nothing for it, then, is there?” he said.

And he removed his brocade tailcoat, his waistcoat, and his shirt. Leah turned away out of modesty, wondering why she had, and then resolutely turned around again because she pretty much lived for these sorts of opportunities. As a purely aesthetic exercise, of course.

Dorian was in the river. She hadn't seen him move or jump – and she hadn't heard a splash. Still in the shape of a man, he cut through the water as though he were a part of it. He was beside the kelpie a moment, laying a hand on its hide. It roared, startled, and looked down at the man beneath it, baring its great teeth.

“I wouldn't,” Leah heard Dorian say, and then saw a flash of brilliant blue radiate from his eyes.

He guided its head down towards the water, and whispered *drink*. Leah thought she would never get used to that, so often she seemed to forget what he truly was.

The kelpie froze, and became as docile as a lamb, drinking the water as directed. When it had finished, Dorian swam alongside it, guiding it to the stairs along the wall. It placed a claw upon the concrete as the selkie hauled himself up onto the stairs.

Leah wasn't sure how it happened. All she saw was the huge dragon-like head flash downwards at Dorian, and she was suddenly right there, her fist connecting with its snout. The kelpie yelped in surprise and pain. It swung its massive head to look down at her. She stared at it, then crossed her arms. Water sluiced down onto her from the great creature's body, and she was completely drenched. Suddenly, she burst out laughing, and laughed loud, a sound of freedom and wonder. Dorian smiled.

He then pulled the creature up the steps along with him. As it stepped onto dry land, its body folded in upon itself. A white horse stood in its place – the most beautiful Leah had ever seen. It swayed a little, and Dorian looked into its eyes.

“Walk it off,” he said softly. “Do not bother the people of this city, or you will have to answer to us.”

We protect Glasgow. Remember me, and remember her. Be on your best behaviour, or we shall hear of it. *You do not want that.*"

His eyes flashed that brilliant blue again as he stood there, his hand on the horse's flank. The kelpie looked at Dorian for a long time, and then nickered, nuzzling his side. Dorian slapped the kelpie's flank, and the horse went on its way alone, swaying from side to side as it vanished into the distance.

Beautiful and deadly, thought Leah, *both of them.*

Then Dorian beamed at her, breaking the spell, and she smiled back. They both began laughing, and he swept a hand through his wet hair, shaking the water out of it. They walked back to Caledonia, talking about many things.

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