

Stay of Silence

*Give me again all that was there,
Give me the sun that shone!
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,
Give me the lass that's gone!*

*Sing me a song of a lass that is gone,
Say, could that lass be I?
Merry of soul she sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.*

*Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone.*

–Robert Louise Stevenson (adapted by Bear McCreary)

My home is the spot where I stared off into oblivion. My eyes burned. Sunlight blinded me. Everything glittered, still wet, and miraculously the sun had come out. The dark clouds slowly pushed away. The Atlantic Ocean opened up and drifted away. Slowly the mountains swam away. I stood on a hill, just one spike out of a flat ground, and I looked out to the ocean. I was too far up, and the tide was too far out now. I couldn't reach it.

The waves no longer echoed. The wind had disappeared. All oozed into each other, creating one great mixture of rainbows. It had rained all day. Thankfully the sun came out, which Scotland wasn't known for, especially this far north. I didn't realize I could miss the sun so much. Yet I welcomed the warmth. Somehow it got silent. I thought I might hear children of the Isle of Skye to come out so they might play. But I guess it was getting late. One couldn't tell by how the sun blazed. There was barely any nighttime here during the peak of summer; it was the peak of summer now.

Sun peeked through the dark blue clouds, saying hello one last time before disappearing over the horizon. My parents, back home in Minnesota, got the sun now. This small sliver of sun shined spiritually over Kyleakin.

Silence sounded. I thought I might hear my friends behind me. They stood on the spike of rock too. However, the loud voices I once heard had been replaced by pure silence. The slight breeze picked up a piece of my hair, but there wasn't a sound. My hair turned golden in the blaze. My eyes turned to the hair and then back out to sea. More sparkles fluttered.

"Sophie!"

I jumped, almost falling off the spike of rock. "Shit, Chloe."

"Sorry." She moved around me, climbing upward.

"Chloe, could you not?" I asked. "You're going to give me a heart attack."

Where she began to climb on old ruins that once belonged to the Viking princess Mary. The castle of *Caisteal Moal* used to belong to the Mackinnon Clan of Kyleakin. Saucy Mary, a hero among these parts, defended the land and became a true Scotsman. Her true occupation

of the time was that she would toll the ships coming into the harbor, and with all the sailors around, she had been known to entertain herself and others. Upon the hill of *Beinn na Caillich*, which is not far away, her body remains with her face home of Norway. Rocks were placed on top of her, called a cairn, and it sits straight on top of the mountain. Many locals refer to this as Nipple Mountain, which is not too far from the Penis Mountain, also known as *Man of Storr*.

There was nowhere else to go but up, and Chloe went.

"Chloe, no. You're going to kill yourself."

She laughed. "I'm only going exploring. Come on."

"No." I wasn't going to die, though this wasn't a bad last sight.

"Come on," Chloe egged on.

"No."

"Yes."

"Chloe, let her do what she wants," Marin said, moving past me. "Mama Bear doesn't have to kill herself if she doesn't want to." She started to climb up. "She can just have a heart attack." I received the nickname *Mama Bear* shortly after arriving here and meeting these other two study abroad students, whom preferred to do dangerous things like being close to the edge of mountain that had over a two thousand foot drop, which happened exactly three hours prior to coming to Kyleakin.

Marin followed Chloe, and soon they were at the top of the structure. Their eyes went out to sea too. Marin looked and pointed at something.

"Do you see otters?" I called up to her.

Otters were supposed to hangout under the bridge. None of us had seen any yet. Though, some local said to not go near the otters. And if we were dumb enough to ignore the advice, we needed to count them and watch the colors. *Rìgh Nan Dobhran*, or King Otter, was known to travel with seven black otters. He was the strongest otter, the strength of 100 otters put together, and his jaws are fearsome. You knew it was him by his fur gleaming silver. Of course, *Rìgh Nan Dobhran* would always be known for having a jewel embedded in his skull, which has magical powers.

"No," Marin responded.

"She's looking for *Kelpies*," Chloe giggled.

"You love them too," Marin shot back.

"Not as much as you do," Chloe said. "You're obsessed with horses."

"*Kelpies* are evil horses, Marin. You shouldn't go near them," I said. *Kelpies* are the most beautiful shapeshifting horses that will drown you if you get on their backs by jumping into freshwater. My friends and I were close to the sea. No *Kelpies* were here.

"They need love and care, Mama Bear," she said to me, "like you do."

I rolled my eyes.

"But I'm not looking for *Kelpies*. I'm looking for *Selkies*."

"What?"

"*Selkies*," Marin began, "are beautiful seal—"

"Seal?" I asked.

"Seal," she confirmed, "folk that come ashore at night. In the bays, they wait for the sun to go down, and then they turn into beautiful humans and dance on the sand. Men come and

watch them. If their seal skin is stolen, *Selkies* are forced to marry their thief and stuck on shore for the rest of their lives.”

“Naked?”

“Yes.”

“Of course.” I went back to the edge of the cliff and looked back out at the tide. Slowly, it started to slide in again. I wouldn’t have minded that life. I swam all day and came back to shore to dance. Nakedness I preferred to avoid, but shit happened. We never speak of what happened those nights.

“*Selkies* have to escape the *Nuckelavee*,” Marin said. Both of my friends swung their legs over the wall and descended down. I had learned that they were both good climbers; at the same time, it was just a drop down. They wouldn’t hit water; they would hit rock. They would be dead.

I stopped. *Would I get a refund?*

It was best to ignore them, so I went back to the edge and sat down. If the tide was in, it would be two hundred feet below where I sat. I let my legs dangle off. The wind had picked up. Even though it was beautiful, my concerns rested on Marin and Chloe. To calm my heart, I scanned the swelling tide. I didn’t as much search for *Selkies* as I looked for a *Nuckelavee*, easily remembered for the one eye, gaping jaw and disease. He would claw after you, over sand, mountains and roads. As he came from the ocean, the only that would stop him is fresh water. However, that was when *Kelpies* would show up. They would “rescue” you, only to drown you. This did calm my heart.

The person I was before I came here, to this very spot on the spiked rock in the Isle of Skye, liked cities. Edinburgh had been perfect. London was the goal. The more, the better was the idea. I wanted the people and the activities. I wanted the noise that never stopped. I wanted the floating lights in the sky that never stopped. I wanted the city that never stopped. I wanted the hustle and bustle, the ability to see everything and everyone. I would never be bored. Now, I wanted to stay. Cities were too loud. Even one other person speaking was too much. I listened to the wind. I watched the waves. If I stayed still enough, I would become part of the island too. I wouldn’t have minded.

The little village of Kyleakin of Kyle of Lochalsh was spread around me. It was just one island with many others around. The island was connected to mainland Scotland by a sky bridge, just crossing over the Atlantic Ocean. Hues shimmered on the water. The Isle of Skye took up most of the Highlands of Scotland, though people referred to this exact spot as Skye. It was because everything was so vast. It was like I could touch the sky always, and I like to think that is why it was named Isle of Skye. The sky just kept going like Skye did. Though waters were plentiful, lands was never ending. This land was fought over for many years, between the Vikings, Scotsmen and eventually the English. I knew why, and it was because of the beauty.

“Mama Bear!” Marin screamed. The voice echoed in the open area.

Immediately I jumped up. Panic burned through my veins. I didn’t remember exactly where they went, but I propelled myself forward. The spike of an island wasn’t large enough to have gone ten feet, and I skidded to a stop at the end. Marin and Chloe looked up at me, laughing. My two friends stood on a little, naturally made platform, where they could easily climb up and down.

“You bloody shits!” I yelled at them.

Marin frown. "That's gross."

"She called me a bloody asshole yesterday," Chloe said. "I think she likes the British swear words."

I growled. "You guys almost gave me a heart attack."

Marin climbed up and gave me a hug. "I'm sorry, Mama Bear."

"I don't believe you." Walking over to the edge, I looked over the water. It had gone back to silence, which they rudely interrupted. The tide was coming in. "You guys ready to go?"

Both of them shrugged. They had climbed up and down on everything. They had nearly scared me shitless by their deaths. They had done their exploring, and they were done.

I wasn't.

My friends moved to go down the hill slowly while I stayed. This time I stood. I watched as the sun dipped lower and lower behind the horizon. I thought of my home, where it continued to get sunlight. I wished for more sunlight here, so I might bathe in it. But even if it rained, I would bathe in it. Nothing felt more alive than this one piece of rock. Nothing felt more freeing than this one rock, which had been climbed over numerous times. Nothing felt like home more than this rock. And I wanted to stay in silence. I wanted to live.