

CHAPTER ONE

“Are you sure you want to see my stallion?” Niall asked.

Felicity had to see again what she remembered from the other night when Niall showed his true form—his stallion. At this point, she let the ‘supernatural blogger following a story’ take over, because she didn’t know whether to be shocked, angry, hurt, or all of the above. Sticking with logic in a situation that was anything but logical made it easier for her to handle.

His amber-brown eyes searched hers. Perhaps he was trying to gauge her reaction to see whether she was about to grab a pitchfork.

For some odd reason, she wanted to laugh at the absurdity of the situation. Espe-

cially when she couldn't get the image of Niall, completely gobsmacked and standing in the middle of a field stark naked, out of her head. It brought a whole new meaning to the expression 'horsing around'.

It helped that he looked more nervous than her. *Bloody well serves him right.* He should've been honest with her in the first place. But she understood from the conversations they'd shared how important family was to Niall. He had a sister to think of, and it appeared there was a lot more he probably needed to consider and protect. Outing himself could put his clan in danger.

She tried to hold back her anger to see his side of it. "Oh, I'm sure. I need to see it."

"Well, I hope you're ready for that, love."

Felicity gulped. His voice oozed sensuality—hell, it practically exuded from his every pore—but she couldn't let him unnerve her. She decided to show him how undaunted she was, even though all her bravado was false. Her brain hadn't caught up with the adrenaline pumping through her.

"You didn't exactly deal with it too well

the last time,” Niall said. “But I’ll do anything to show you that you can trust me.”

“Right. Why don’t we repeat the other night? Except this time, I’d like to remember it.” She crossed her arms. Anger was better, or at least easier to deal with, than her other contradictory emotions—desiring him, wanting to wallop him, or simply pretending this was all a dream. “Nice one, really.”

He smiled. “I’m sorry, love. You were so pissed off...” His expression didn’t read that he was really sorry, and it irked the bloody hell out of her.

“You didn’t even give me a chance to process this.” She waved her hand at him. “To get used to the idea of you being able to...to...”

“Turn into a horse.”

Felicity huffed.

“You were actually kind of cute when you were mad and ye humped back to town like you really meant it. If I would’ve told you then, would you have believed me?”

She ignored his comment about being cute and wouldn’t admit he still made her melt with that sexy voice of his—stallion or not. She had to fight the urge to smack him,

because despite her attraction he'd lied to her. Broken her trust. "Right. You knew about my job, about me, and why I came here in the first place. And you still made me forget and let me..."

Make love to you. Fall for you.

She couldn't bring herself to admit her feelings for him, not when she was madder than hell that he'd deceived her. "You let me believe you were human when I slept with you."

Niall reached out to her, but she pulled away. "I was caught up in the moment, caught up in you, and I never led you to believe anything, love. You assumed, when I wasn't ready to share. I had to know I could trust you with a secret that could cost me *everything* if you wrote that story. And you stomped off..." He shook his head.

She could feel herself start to soften at his explanation. The betrayal still burned, but after meeting Maelíosa, she understood. "You're not sorry. That's a total load of tosh. And anyone would've reacted the same way. It's a lot to take in." Absently, her gaze dropped to his crotch. The image of him shifting back to human form, naked, had

planted itself firmly in her brain. *Crap. Crap. No. Crap.* Felicity's face was on fire.

Niall stepped closer. "Is it, love?"

Her breathing hitched. "How am I supposed to trust you?"

"That's for you to decide. You were sent here to write a story about my clan. I was sent here to do a job, too. I have a duty to my father—a duty to protect my people. I can't stop you from writing your story, but I could use your help."

"Is that why you shagged me?"

From the beginning she'd found it hard to accept that he'd really want her, and now there was an obvious motivation. What if he only wanted to get close to her so she wouldn't write the truth and share it with her blog readers? Share it with the world?

Niall balled his hands into fists, shoving them in his pockets. "Eejit."

She couldn't hear what he'd muttered. "Pardon? English, please?"

"Yer gone in the head, woman, if ye think I took ye for a ride for any other reason but this... I wanted ye, Felicity Forrest. Though stubborn woman that you are, you're too big of an eejit to see that!" His

Irish accent grew even thicker when he was angry.

“Again, English?” She knew what he meant, but she was still in a fighting mood, and at this point any ammunition would do. “And which *ride* are you talking about precisely?”

He took a step forward. His eyes darkened, and it seemed like it was part desire, part anger. She stood her ground—still not sure if he was just angry or if he wanted to kiss her senseless in that moment. If it was the second, she wasn’t certain she wouldn’t let him. She couldn’t help it—her body reacted as if it had a mind of its own to Niall’s muscled mass moving forward.

Niall took a step back, now seeming composed rather than cross. His heated emotions made her head spin. “I think ye know which *ride* I meant. Aye, you’re beautiful, and beyond that you’re smart, funny, and when you’re not completely pissed-off, you’re a little bit shy. And I think I like that better. I didn’t sleep with you because of any other reason than wanting you.”

She wasn’t ready to acknowledge what his feelings for her meant. Interrogating him

was an easy way to cover the conflict tearing her in two. “Right. And you swear you ab-so-bloody-lutely had nothing to do with any of this? Swear you didn’t hurt that construction worker? Besides, how can I be sure you’re not behind the púca haunting? That it wasn’t really you all along?”

Niall sighed. “You can’t. Like I told you, we were awakened from beyond the veil. Over the years, people on the island stopped believing in the Old Ways, and in us. Now the veil only opens at Samhain. Something changed that, and I could really use your help to figure out what.”

“Why are you here?”

“My father sent me to find out why this is happening and put a stop to it. We want the same thing. We’re both looking for answers.”

“He’s afraid the world will find out and won’t accept you.”

Niall moved away from her and leaned against the wall in the foyer. “It’s not only that... when the veil is thin, those who don’t believe can’t see its threshold, and once they cross over there’s no coming back.”

“So humans that cross over can’t return? Ever?”

“Not unless they take one of us as a mate,” Niall said quietly.

Mate. The word that had been ringing in her head made more sense now.

Felicity swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat. “You mean you take humans as wives?”

“That’s not what we call it, and it’s much more permanent than your human marriages, from my understanding.”

“How permanent?” she whispered.

“Forever.”

Felicity turned away from him. Suddenly she needed to sit down. There was a bench in the foyer, and she sank onto it, looking at the floor because it was easier than meeting his concerned expression.

“I never meant to hurt you.”

Her head snapped up—she was barely able to choke out her dawning realization. “Is that why you had sex with me? You think I’m *mate* material.” Her voice came out low, and harsher than she’d intended.

Niall’s face fell. “Yes.”

“You can’t possibly be serious.”

Her head was spinning. She could tell by his solemnity that he meant it and he was

waiting to see how she'd handle it. Several seconds passed, and only the sound of bugs chirping outside surrounded them.

Niall broke the silence. "It took half my life to find you. If you choose to be with me, I'll wait the rest of it for you to be okay with all of this. When I tell you I'll do anything to regain your trust, Felicity... I mean it. Even if we can't be together in the end and you force me to find another mate, I'll never regret getting to be with you, love."

Wow. That was deep. No one had ever talked to her like that. And even though they'd just met and she'd only shagged him once, that cosmic connection she felt before seemed to argue with reason. "How can you say that?"

"Because it's true. I've been fighting this from the moment I met you. I never wanted a mate, but I want you." *-You know it's true. Can't you feel it?* His mind touched hers.

Felicity ignored his telepathic message and questioning gaze. "Well, regardless of this *mate* business—because honestly I don't want to talk about it anymore—you were sent here to find out why the veil between

our worlds was lifted. Why tell me all *this* now?”

“I’m running out of time. Someone nearly stumbled across the threshold. If they had, they’d be trapped in our Realm.”

“Oh, bloody hell.”

Niall eyed her curiously.

“It’s not that I don’t believe you...” *Damn.* “And this is my job, but you weren’t supposed to be part of it. You were just...never mind.”

“I was what?”

Felicity sighed. “A fun distraction which has now compromised my investigation. How can I even be objective?”

“I’m not about to tell you how to do your job, but we should be working together instead of arguing over something that has nothing to do with your investigation.”

“Nothing to do with it?” she asked, incredulously.

“You and me—that’s us, and our mating has nothing to do with your blog. Aye, truly. Felicity, this is what you were sent to do. So work with me. Help me find the truth. Help my clan.”

Felicity sighed. He was right. This was

her job, and she'd seen stranger things. But she was disappointed about getting involved with him—it was unprofessional. Knowing that didn't change her physical reaction every time she stood a little too close to him, though—the tingles across her skin.

She almost couldn't believe what she was about to say. "Fine. But don't bring up any of this *mating* business again."

Niall smiled. He almost seemed relieved, and she supposed if he'd told this to anyone else, someone not in her line of work, they'd probably have had a harder time accepting it.

"Are we good then? Or do you still need to see my stallion?"

Felicity paused. She'd been sure before. Now she was unsure again, but she still needed to see. Niall was leaning against the foyer wall, watching her intently. "Yes."

"Well, we should ride over to the construction site and take a look around, since that worker scared the pub out of their wits. No one will be there to disturb us—they only work during the day."

Felicity had to admit it was a good idea. "He said a *púca* charged him and he hit his head on a rock. I'm sure that would've

knocked him out cold. We could look around to see if there's any sign of blood."

"I agree. Even a hard-headed Irishman is no match for a blow like that."

She nodded. "You thought he was lying too."

"Aye. I *know* he was lying."

He began taking off his shirt. Felicity stood up. "What are you doing?"

"You said you wanted to see my stallion, and that we should head over to the construction site and take a look around."

Then he started unbuttoning his pants. Felicity spun around. "You're taking your clothes off."

Niall laughed at her statement of the obvious, and she could've cursed herself for how stupid she sounded.

"I'm kind of partial to these, and I don't want to rip them like the last set."

Oh, dear god. Could she be any more embarrassed? Thankfully she was facing the wall, because the sound of clothes dropping to the floor had her thinking about how he'd made her come more than a few times that afternoon. There were more shuffling sounds, and

she couldn't tell what Niall was doing. Then followed the distinct sound of a zipper.

"Whatever. Get on with it then," Felicity said through gritted teeth.

Niall coughed as if he was holding back a laugh. "Are ye going to stand there all night or would you prefer I go outside and shift first?"

"Yes. Go outside and shift already."

"You don't want to see it?" he teased.

Oh, I want to see it all right. But then she'd have to look at him without any clothes on, and her face probably already looked like an overly ripe tomato. "No, I don't want to see it," she snapped. "Go shift."

"Yes, my lady. Grab the backpack by the door. I'm going to need some clothes after."

Idle curiosity and journalistic rational didn't take away her nerves. The door to the cottage closed with a thud as he went outside.

Damn infuriating man.