

As if it weren't challenging enough for Rowan Layne to address Britain's Parliament on behalf of the otherworldly, she has alien misogynists gunning for her from England through Scotland in this fourth tale of the Other Worldly series.

Being Alien

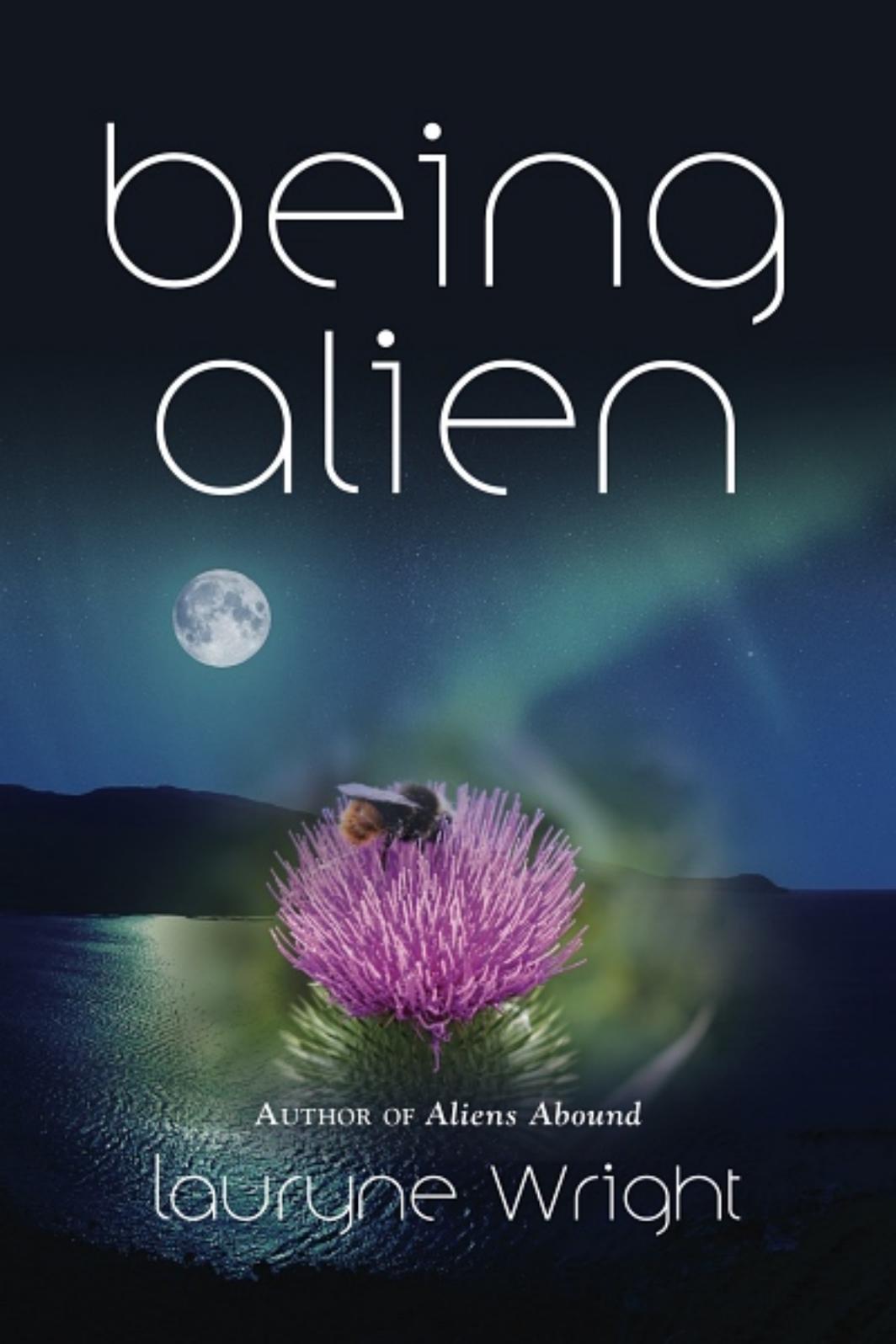
By Lauryne Wright

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being alien



AUTHOR OF *Aliens Abound*

lauryne wright

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First Edition

Chapter 1

As I heard my friend's name called at the ceremony bestowing knighthood, I hardly expected to be transported to another realm.

“Colin Skye MacLeod” echoed through the chamber at Buckingham Palace, yet I was now inside a circle of stones among a gathering of humans—and possibly aliens, because there was no shortage of redheads or smaller creatures who wore green. Different from Greens—Earth's little green men—I'd encountered and made friends with back home.

Home was Las Vegas, Nevada, and I'm Rowan Layne, writer and proponent of alien rights, but not fully alien. I'm a human hybrid, what's known as otherworldly, or OW, in the States. With 83 percent extraterrestrial DNA, I possess the ability to hear an alien species from great distances, namely Red Orbiters—and their observers can hear me when I speak aloud.

No one in the otherworld I'd entered was speaking, though the sound of bagpipes trilled distantly. This place, remote from reality, seemingly of another time, was nonetheless familiar. Taking place in my view was a ceremony with a powerfully built man. He knelt in lush green grass as a gleaming sword tapped his bare, broad shoulders and his flame-red locks fluttered in a hearty breeze bearing voices from the past. Ancient ones. I'd heard them before.

The newly knighted man rose and approached, smiling broadly and looking deliciously capable of rocking whatever world I was in. He drew me in with a hand at the back of my neck for a kiss that plundered, teasing emotions surging within. Or maybe it was hormones.

But it was clearly a claiming, declaring me his own as I was lifted by strong arms.

I came back to present-day Great Britain with an equally powerful man kneeling, his short red locks grown white with age. Head held high as England's queen bestowed the accolade with sword taps to his right and then left shoulder before he stood to receive the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George medal for works of diplomacy.

And how had I not known Red MacLeod had such a cool middle name?

Seated between his two best mates, as Red would call them, I could hardly ask if anyone else had a mystic moment during the ceremony. The experience left me squirming.

Win, born Oswald Winslow, detected my agitation, he being a former CIA spy with eagle eyes and instincts—not to mention a bullet imbedded in his bicep. Plus, he was an occasional intimate acquaintance of mine who'd made me do some squirming in his own right.

“What gives?” he whispered. “Are you hearing voices?”

“Not exactly,” I muttered, cutting my eyes at Bruce Robertson seated on my other side.

He was the Red Orbiter auditory engineer who'd tested my ears to discover hairless cochlea, allowing for my ability to hear high

frequencies not unlike a moth—or his species. Most of whom had red hair and green eyes, and were far too attractive for my sanity.

Bruce was brother-in-law to Raucous Wilde, my Red Orbiter observer sweetheart. I was Rauc's first human, and he was my first alien, though not the last.

My love life was complicated. At a post-middle-aged fifty-eight, you might think I was too old to be juggling men, much less a few extraterrestrials. Win and Rauc were closer to my age, at least. As was Red MacLeod. Though I swear I hadn't kissed him in real life. And yet the half-naked Scot planting a kiss in my Highland tryst highly resembled this present-day version who was previously a Royal Marine, MI6, and US secretary of defense. Hence, my squirming.

Win, Bruce, and I moved into a vestibule to congratulate our newly knighted friend.

“Sir Colin Skye MacLeod! Do I need to curtsy? Genuflect in some manner to honor your magnificence?” I teased. We took turns hugging him, remarking on the impressive medal draped around his neck, a seven-pronged white star with a blue center.

“Looks like you could use it as a weapon,” said Win.

Later, at a private celebration in a pub and after a few ciders with a kick of black currant, I confided to Red what I'd seen during his ceremony, leaving out the plundering kiss.

“You were in Buckingham Palace while the Queen of England performed my investiture, and you had a vision that floated into an alternate reality? Only you, lass,” he said, shaking his head. “What's going to happen when you and I speak to Parliament Friday?”

“It wasn’t just a vision. I could *feel* myself there. I heard things. And Greens were there too, except they were different. They had mouths. And clothes—at least some of them.”

“Did this bloke you thought was me have clothes? Were you naked?” Red grinned. The drunken sot. I hoped Win wasn’t within earshot.

“Knighthood is going to your head, for sure. And, yes, I was dressed and you wore a kilt, but you took liberties with my honor, Sir MacLeod. I think I’ll start calling you Skye. Much better than Red—too confusing with Red Orbiters a part of our world.”

“That’s *Sir* Skye. And I dinna ken what you’re babbling about, lass.”

“Your middle name. I don’t have one. It peeves me.”

“My mum’s people hail from the Isle of Skye. We should go there. Aye, we shall.” Red/Skye took a hearty swig of whisky and leaned in, temptingly close.

“Whoa!” I pulled back, and fell off my barstool. I was doing that a lot lately around men—alien or otherwise.

He scooped me up and plopped me back on my seat. “You seem wary of me, and I’m aiming to find out why.” His gaze took my measure.

“It’s because of what happened when I was inside that Stonehenge-like place. During my Highlander moment.” I fidgeted, not looking into those too-blue eyes.

He tilted my chin, his hand warm and fragrant with whisky and a touch of mint. “What’s got you skittish, lass? Was something upsetting about your vision?”

“I wouldn’t say *upsetting*.” I shifted awkwardly. He reached for my hips to keep me from falling off my stool again. “Although it was a tad unnerving. And it wasn’t just a vision! You’re not listening to me!”

“Pipe down, lass, and we’ll get to the bottom of this.” He chuckled. “Tell me what happened.”

“No,” I grumped, grabbing my pint to retreat.

Red put a hand on my shoulder. “You’re telling a knight *no*? And not one *sir* uttered in the last few moments. What’s a bloke to do for some respect around here?”

I chuckled at his feigned chagrin, relenting. “You kind of manhandled me. Grabbed me by the back of the neck and reeled me in for a lip-lock. Up against your bare and heavily muscled chest. Right there in that circle of stones. And I heard bagpipes.”

His eyes bore into mine, and I thought he might reenact my most unsettling experience. “Did you enjoy it?”

“That’s what you’re asking?” I swatted his thigh. “So *now* you believe it really happened?”

“If you recall, lass, I told you on New Year’s Eve in the moonship that when I kiss you for the first time, it will be in Scotland. We are in England now, so you have naught to fear from me. Your honor and dignity remain intact, as long as you don’t fall off your stool again.” Sir Colin Skye MacLeod winked and hefted his glass in the air. “Oh, aye, I should also be mentioning that your bit of time travel has everything to do with your Scots DNA.”

Chapter 2

Bruce Robertson chose that thought-provoking moment to interrupt Red and me in the pub. “I’ve got to get back soon. Ophelia is at her wit’s end. Ferus put something in his sister’s ear so Janus is howling like a banshee.”

“That’s what you get for naming Ferus after his uncle Rowdy,” I said. Rowdy and his brother, Rauc, were the first Red Orbiters I met, though at the time I didn’t know Rowdy was a spy. Rowdy was his Earth name. His given name, Ferus, meant “wild” in Latin.

“Ophelia is threatening to send our little namesake to her brother as we speak, but Rowdy’s a bit preoccupied,” said Bruce, turning to me. “Speaking of which, my sister’s been trying to communicate with you for hours. She says you must be getting good at blocking out Red Orbiter voices.”

“Genie tried to pop into my ear?” I hopped up from my barstool.

My friend, built like Jessica Rabbit and also a Red Orbiter spy, was pregnant with sextuplets, and Rowdy was the daddy. But Genie didn’t have to carry six babies for nine months. Red Orbiters may have looked entirely human, but females passed round red eggs after five months that hatched in another two months.

Genie was due to drop her eggs any minute now, as it was mid-June and she’d gotten pregnant on the moonship in mid-January while

I happened to be there working diplomatic issues. Alien residents were not happy the US president had launched a missile at their home, a spacecraft masquerading as Earth's moon. The moonship in its place was necessary, because all-too-human dimwits had blown it up playing Star Wars in 1991, although the delicate sensibilities of the world couldn't know this. They thought it was aliens who destroyed it via nuclear war millennia ago.

The main reason I was currently in the UK was because Red and I were due to address Parliament about human aggression in space, as we'd done with the US Congress in late January after the inauguration of our new president—and OW vice president.

I moved into the hallway near the pub restrooms where it wasn't as noisy.

"Genie?" I said aloud, pretending to be speaking into my phone so no one would think I was talking to myself. "Are you there?"

"I'm here, girlfriend!" her voice entered my ear. "Rowdy's flipping out! Says it's all your fault because you said it out loud and made it happen!"

"Said what?"

"All girls. You warned him he could end up with six girls!"

"So you dropped your eggs?"

"Passed. Dropping would be bad. All pink!" Genie sounded pleased with herself.

Red Orbiter gender was revealed by color. If male, the orb eggs were red, if female, a lighter shade closer to pink. It's where the name Red Orbiter came from, though I mistakenly thought it was due to their vessels. A red orb was the first UFO I ever saw.

“Congratulations! Good thing I’m getting better at managing voices in my ears. Can you imagine what it’ll be like when your brood starts talking? Are you picking out names?”

“*Names?* Rowdy’s picking out shotguns! He’s turned into some crazed American human male with this news. And I hope you’re ready to be an aunt again.”

Red Orbiters had lots of honorary relatives, and I was already auntie to Bruce and Ophelia’s triplets, Ferus, Janus, and Roman. It turns out, multiple births were an alien thing.

“Sure, I am. And tell Rowdy to lay off the redneck vibe. Not cool for a Red Orbiter.”

“I can hear you,” said Rowdy in my other ear, trying to sound ominous but for once not succeeding.

I laughed. “Congratulations, wild man. Well done.” I knew he’d be preening with manly prowess, and I heard Genie giggle, so I was right. “Where are you safekeeping your eggs?”

“At our headquarters. Highly secure and inaccessible to humans. Rauc is letting us share his residential space,” said Rowdy.

“I can’t think of any better place to be born than Valley of Fire.”

Genie said, “Don’t forget it’s your favorite spot, so you can’t stay in the UK forever because you have to come back to Vegas for the hatching! Rowdy, male of mine, time for you to butt out. I need private girl talk.”

“Fine,” said Rowdy, surprisingly cooperative. “I hope Rowan can talk some sense into you.” Then he was gone from my ear.

Genie snorted. “That man is relentless. And Ophelia’s got her hands full with three—what am I going to do with six?”

“Yes, but none of them will be male, though I suppose they could still have Rowdy’s devious personality. But not to worry,” I said. “I’ll be there for the baby shower. I feel badly I can’t be much help planning it because I’m here until early July.”

“Are you kidding? O.W. has taken over, insisting the color scheme be six separate shades of pink. He is *such* a queen.” Genie was right. Red Orbiter Vegas mogul Octavius Wynne put Liberace to shame. “Here’s the thing, though. The date keeps getting pushed closer to hatch time—making the shower venue up in the air.”

“It won’t be at Planet Wynne?”

“It was *supposed* to be. But security is better at headquarters than on the Strip. If we have the shower in town, we’ll need to leave someone behind to guard the eggs. I don’t know what to do, and I’m tired of worrying about it.”

Red Orbiters were most vulnerable before they hatched—the only time they were fragile enough to be killed. But Genie was likely also fretting about the first year of Red Orbiter life, when babies aged the equivalent of five human years.

That’s why the Robertson-Wilde triplets were now more than a year old, despite having been born almost three months ago—on my April birthday. They were clearly headed into the terrible twos, and staying on the same spaceship as my critters and I in London.

I decided to go into the restroom because people kept pausing next to me, thinking I was waiting in line. Once in a stall, I didn’t have to keep up the phone charade.

“Genie, the shower will be lovely no matter where it’s held, or when. Any chance part of your stress is pressure from you-know-who over when you’ll tie the knot?”

She snorted. “The second I passed the eggs, he became laser focused and thinks we should marry before they hatch. When did human societal dictates become part of this plan? It’s absurd.”

“Is he stalling the date of the shower to get you to marry him beforehand?”

“Oh *no*, girlfriend! He wants us to do a wedding and a shower all at the same time!”

“Yikes!”

“I told him if he doesn’t stop hounding me, we’ll damn well have one of those Elvis impersonators marry us at a drive-through wedding chapel off the Strip! The baby shower too!”

I started to laugh when Rowdy’s voice slipped into my ear. “Please talk her out of this, Rowan. I’m counting on you.” He sounded far too pitiful for the snarky spy I knew, and it made me feel for him. Not that I’d tell him that.

I said to Genie, “Give yourself time to think this over. You just passed your eggs, so it must be an emotional roller coaster. I’m here if you need me, but I have to get back to the ship because I’m about ready to fall asleep standing up.”

“Okay, we can talk baby names later. But the last name will not be patriarchal. They’re getting both our names, Wilde *and* Robertson!”

“Sounds like a plan. Get some rest, and keep those eggs safe.”

“I’m going back with you,” I told Bruce, now occupying my barstool. “If Janus is screaming, Bodie and Morris are probably agitated. But I want to know more about this Scottish DNA deal. It’s not an alien thing like my hearing?”

Bruce’s lips twitched, reminding me of Rauc, who as the new Red Orbiter leader for North America, couldn’t take time out for this trip.

“No, it’s not an alien thing, or not extraterrestrial. Being alien—otherworldly—holds different meaning for different species,” he said.

“That’s true,” said Win, joining us. “Remember, Greens aren’t alien despite what humans choose to believe. We’re the ones who hailed from another planet. They’re the original Earthlings.”

“And they aren’t the only nonhuman species roaming around, especially here in the UK,” said Bruce.

“But you can’t tell me who they are because it’s this other species’ story to reveal,” I griped, referring to the typical Red Orbiter answer. As observers of life in the universe, they weren’t always forthcoming with info gathered over millennia. I should know. I’d finally finished drafting the much-vaunted book about them and what they did.

“When they’re ready to be known, Rowan, they will engage,” said Bruce. “Consider yourself lucky that you in turn will have the ability to communicate and interact with them.”

“Aye,” said Red, grinning. “It’s the fae way.”

Chapter 3

“So Red knows about this mysterious other species?” I asked Bruce as we took a taxi to the spaceship, parked in an ancient forest.

“Because he grew up in Scotland. Due to his DNA.”

“I never asked him his alien percentage.”

“He is a rare combination. Exactly fifty-fifty.”

“Red’s only 50 percent alien?”

“Yes, predominantly from Cumulus and its moons—Jupiter to you—plus Mars. But what’s rare is the other 50 percent is all Scottish. No other ethnicities in his genetic makeup.”

“There’s significance to that?”

“He can explain better than I.”

“There you go, getting all Red Orbiter.” I shook my head. “Red mentioned time travel. Was that a joke, or is there something you’re not telling me? Wouldn’t that involve physics, one of your specialties, Dr. Robertson?” I referred to his PhD from the University of Edinburgh, where he’d attended with Red.

Bruce grinned, making me recall how I’d practically fallen off a stool in his laboratory the first time I saw him. Mostly due to his stunning good looks but also from the timbre of his tone. I’ve got a thing for Red Orbiter voices, whether up close or at great distances.

“I suppose.” Bruce pondered. “But this is different from our ability to stall aging or pass into other realms.”

Though I would have loved to press him further, I’d had too much cider with black and was jetlagged. We’d flown in from Nevada last night.

“Why do I get the feeling this could be the subject for a whole new book?” I yawned as we left the cab and entered the enormous Epping Forest.

We walked to a remote thicket of trees and stepped onto the dark-pink ramp that extended from the spaceship entrance as we arrived. A large, iridescent craft shaped like a pistachio as opposed to an orb.

“How long can we park here?” I asked as we entered and luckily heard no distressed infants.

Bruce, former naval aviator and Red Orbiter pilot, had initially landed us in the English Channel where we were concealed from curious eyes. The world knew about aliens, but too many humans acted with fear and derision—not to mention violence in the US—to that which they chose not to understand, including rejecting the reality that all humans possessed a percentage of extraterrestrial DNA due to ancestry.

“We’ll stay a few days, then move to another forest before we head to Scotland after you and Red do your thing in Parliament.”

I awoke the next morning to the pinging sound of a text, likely Mom. I could also hear rambunctious Red Orbiter babies clamoring for breakfast. I’d never seen kids eat so much. Maybe because of how fast they were growing.

The text said, “Doodles, did you make it to England??? How is weather??? Cloudy here. Due for rain. Ugh. Will you go shopping today??? (British flag, cloud, umbrella, shopping bags, shoe, kissy face emoji)”

So yes, Mom. Glamorous octogenarian with a penchant for excessive punctuation, emoji, and shopping—preferably for shoes. Oh, and weather reports. She lived in Portland, Oregon, with Dad, who was hard of hearing but could still hear Greens’ electronic communication. My sister, Gwynne, whom I call G, and her husband Phil also lived in Portland. All but Mom golfed.

Doodles was me. It was a childhood nickname that pretty much the entire universe was privy to, thanks to Mom’s inability to refrain from using it in public. Then again, it was possible she and Dad didn’t remember my actual name. Doodles did not golf, but I was a tad concerned it might be expected of me in Scotland.

I quickly answered Mom that I’d arrived across the pond before making my way to the kitchen accompanied by my dog Bodie and Morris the kitty, also loudly clamoring for breakfast. The sound of smacking and crunching assaulted my ears as I approached a feeding table presided over by Ophelia Wilde, mother to Roman, Ferus, and Janus, who were chowing down as they rapidly approached toddlerhood in human years.

Ferus said, “Lady Rowan!” And if I’d already had a mug of coffee in my hand, I’d have dropped it. Ophelia did drop the spoon she was handing to Roman, who offered me the sweetest smile as he chewed.

“When did they start talking?” I looked at Ferus in astonishment.

“Ten seconds ago,” gasped Ophelia. “I need to sit down.” She sat in the only adult chair next to the table designed for the triplets because they made such a mess at meals.

“I know babies might say a few words at this age, but Ferus said my name pretty clearly. Why’d he call me lady?”

“I don’t know,” said Ophelia. “Maybe he sees you as the lady named Rowan. Aren’t kids supposed to say *mom* first?”

“Mom!” Janus screeched at a high pitch. “Ferus is bad! He put cookie in my ear! It hurt!”

“Yes, Janus, I know. Please don’t yell. You will upset the doggie and kitty. And oh my gosh, you’re speaking in full sentences!”

“Didn’t you and Rauc and Rowdy start talking at this age? My sister sure did,” said Bruce, walking in.

“Daddy! Ferus is bad! He put cookie in my ear! It hurt!”

“Those are Bodie’s cookies not yours!” Ferus yelled at Janus. He hopped down from his chair and tottered down a corridor yelling, “No, no, no!” as Bruce chased him.

“I really need coffee,” I said, heading for the fancy machine that also ground beans. “That’s what Ferus put in Janus’s ear? A dog cookie?”

Ophelia snorted, which was jarring coming from the cerebral redhead. “It was one of Genie’s. Why she’s using a chemistry degree to start a dog treat business is beyond me. Red orb cookies.” She shook her head.

“They taste good!” yelled Janus, startling me into sloshing my just-poured coffee.

“Maybe I’ll put my coffee in a flask and take Bodie for a walk,” I said.

“Trying to avoid three new Red Orbiter voices?” said Ophelia. “Or actually, only two so far.” We both looked at Roman, who had yet to speak but still smiled at me.

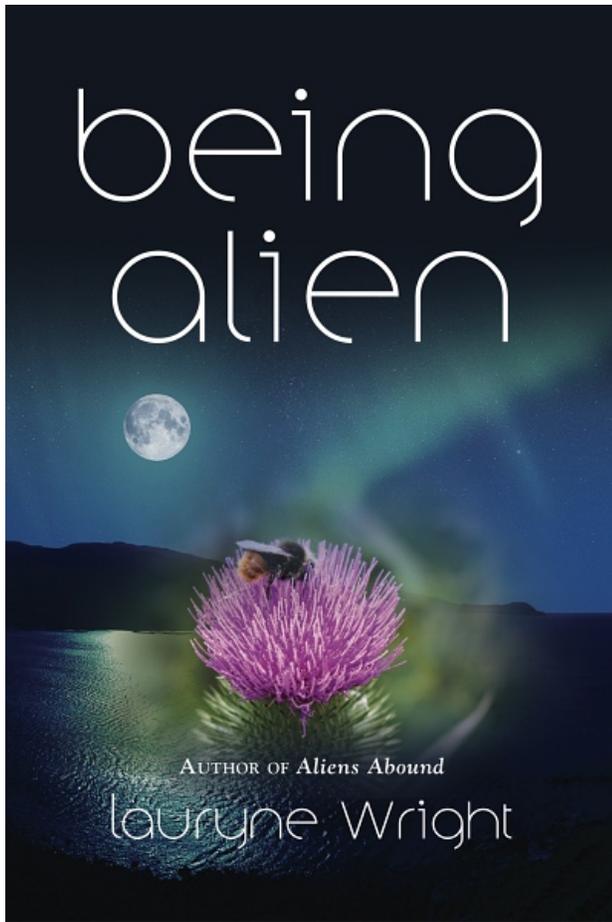
If that child suddenly upped and called me Copper—like his Uncle Rauc did, due to my hair color, derived from a bottle these days—I might start yanking my long curly locks out. Roman was actually named for Rauc, whose real name was Romulus, which he’d said his nephew shouldn’t be saddled with.

Being around young aliens was as bizarre as entering another realm. It didn’t help that Roman looked so much like his Uncle Rauc, with blue-green eyes and dark-red hair.

“Actually, I was interested in exploring the area,” I said, forcing a smile. “London is the world’s largest urban forest!”

I leashed Bodie and was slipping out of the spacecraft, but not before encountering Bruce striding down the corridor with Ferus over his shoulder. The little red-faced, redheaded termagant yelled, “Help is on the way, my Lady Rowan!”

There it was again, but this time *my lady*. Had Bruce also noticed the Gaelic accent coming from his newborn son?



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