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A Look Within

By Heather Koelle

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*A Look
Within*

Heather Koelle

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Out of the Mist

While the townspeople slept in the wee morning hours, the fog began moving across the sea, curling fingers reaching for land. It seeped around the little thatched houses bordering the sea. The sheep in the fields started to make alarm sounds as they stood willy-nilly and confused. Ian McMoreland rose with the sun every morning to herd his sheep with the help of Chester, his sheepdog. He sheared the sheep to make wool and sell it. Raising sheep for their wool was Ian's job inherited from his father before him.

But this morning, the sun was covered by a thick mist, not unusual for the highlands of Scotland. The wild Heather beaded with heavy droplets, and the rugged ground was slippery. Ian donned his rubber boots and his warm wool jacket and stepped outside. The fog was so thick he could barely see the shed where he kept his tools and where Chester slept. He reached in his pocket for the flashlight he always carried because Scotland's weather was so unpredictable. The dampness settled into his sixty-year-

old bones as Ian walked toward the shed. He heard Chester scratching at the shed's door, whining.

“Here, boy, Ian is here. I will feed you; then we need to herd the sheep before my breakfast.” Chester bounded happily out into the mist, yapping, then lifted his leg and peed for a long time. Ian poured some dog food into Chester's bowl, and the dog happily chowed down quickly. The man and his dog herded their sheep into two straight lines. The dog races around them, barking while guiding them into one line. Chester herded them to a fresh green patch of grass, and they grazed contentedly. Ian returned to the cottage, barely seeing the direction to his house. Katherine was already up, cooking bacon, eggs, and Hamish. Tea sat in the comfy teapot in the center of the table, along with scones, clotted cream, and jam.

“It sure is foggy out there his morning, Ian,” Katherine said. It should lift soon,” Ian said.” I am surprised it is still this foggy. Usually, it burns off by now.” But the fog crept in, thickening as it reached its tendrils around the cottages, over the fields, and creating a white world where visibility seemed to lessen by the minute.”

Unbeknownst to the MacMorelands and their neighbors, something was moving within the fog. The Villagers could only see the white earth clouds moving quickly over the fields and homes. As the mist increased, the townspeople returned to their cottages. They could not drive their horses and carts into town. They could not tend their gardens or work in the fields. Children could not walk to the one-room schoolhouse down the road a mile. The damp, chilly air permeated the little cottages, and families gathered peat and whatever logs they could find to heat their homes.

The long day moved into the night despite a full moon; there was no light except oil lamps within the cottages. Little by little, these lights were extinguished as the villagers went to bed.

Ian awoke to loud cries coming from the sheep. It was too dark to go out and check them. It would have to wait until morning. Somewhere, a wolf howled in the deep darkness of this strange night. "Daddy, I'm scared," four-year-old Jamie said. His sister, two-year-old Claire, climbed into Ian and Katherine's big feather bed and clung to their parents, shaking with fear. "Daddy, is it the Loch Ness Monster coming to get us?" No, my wee bairns, it is

simply a very heavy mist,” Ian said. He thought to himself, what is out there?

Ian thought he heard an unearthly groaning sound. Like a typical Scot, he believed in fairies and magical or scary things happening for which there was no explanation. He lay awake the rest of the night, hearing thumps and groans as he watched over his sleeping wife and children.

The following morning, The sun shone brightly through the windows of the cottages. People looked out their windows and saw the beautiful clear morning. Ian let Chester out of the shed. He shot out and raced across the field, whining and sniffing, his tail to the ground. Ian walked over to the clearing where the sheep usually stood. It was empty and awash with blood. As Ian returned to the cottage to tell his wife, he noticed many of his neighbors’ shocked expressions. All of their sheep were gone, too.

Gramma Learns a Lesson

My Gramma and I were at our shore house in Avalon, New Jersey. I was probably six or seven years old. We had an old gas stove with a pilot light that had to be lit to get the gas flame. My Gramma was an excellent cook, but she sometimes lacked common sense. This particular time, it almost cost her her life.

It was late afternoon, and Gramma was getting ready to cook dinner. The babysitter was down on the beach with my baby sister. Gramma said she needed an icepick to use to light the pilot. (Why an icepick? I wondered.)

She turned on the gas in the oven and then took me in the car down to the beach to ask the babysitter if she knew where the icepick was. Driving to the beach and back home in Gramma's old black Plymouth took about ten minutes.

Of course, the babysitter had no clue where the ice pick was, so we returned home. By this time, there was a strong smell of gas as we entered the house. Gramma ran to the stove, opened the oven door, bent down, and lit a

match to the pilot light. The explosion was loud, and Gramma backed away, her hair flaming. “Am I on fire?” she screamed. “Yes, gramma, you are,” I said. I grabbed her hand and pulled her over to the sink. I could barely reach the faucet. “Put your head under the faucet, Gramma.” I turned on the cold water and pushed her head under the mean flow until her hair stopped flaming. I ran her hands under the cold water, too. I can’t remember where my father was, but somehow we got a message to him. By then, I had turned off the gas and opened the windows.

The next thing I remember was Gramma’s hands covered in large blisters, which my father was treating for second-degree burns. The front part of Gramma’s gray hair was singed off, as well as her eyebrows. She was distraught but okay. She told me I was a “good little nurse.” To this day, I am still calm in a crisis and seem to know what to do instinctively. Maybe a bit of my father being a doctor influenced me more than I realized.

Megan

Standing by my baby's crib, I watch her sleep. Her little head goes up and down, and her breath is barely audible, not much more than a mouse walking on cotton.

She is my last child, and I want to savor every minute of her.

As I watch her sleep, my mind takes me back to her birth, my husband at my right shoulder cheering me on amid the bright lights of the delivery room. I push for only 8 minutes and feel her body slip from mine as my midwife catches her and puts her on my tummy. I can't see very well without my contacts as Ruth places her there, but I see her open her little black eyes and emit a tiny cry.

An hour and a half later, she is in my room in a tiny crib beside me. I pick her up when she cries and put her on my breast. I hear the little "bulk" as she swallows the life-giving substance that only I can give her.

When we bring her home, her two brothers crowd around me, looking at this tiny baby in their mother's arms. My three-year-old says, "Send her back to the hospital." But

she is here to stay, my beautiful daughter, perfect in every way, just as my boys were.

My three-year-old boy watches me nurse her, her little cheeks going in and out the hulking sound of contentment. It doesn't take much to make a baby content before life gets complicated and our desires become complex.

My baby makes the sounds of innocence, merely wanting food and contentment when she is full—simply wanting her diaper changed so she feels dry and clean. I merely wanted to be held against my chest, hearing the beating of my heart, reminding her of the safest place she had ever been.

I will cherish every moment with my young child because she is my last child and a long-awaited girl. She is now forty-seven years old, with a husband and family. She is the mother of two teenagers, a boy and a girl, and a third surprise child, James, who is now in second grade. I look back on her growing years, which now seem to have passed quickly. From age four, she was a very independent thinker, first manifested in refusing to wear the outfits I laid out for her the night before. "I don't want

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to wear it!’ as she pulled a mismatched outfit out of her drawer. Having two older brothers, she learned to be tough. She could hold her own against any bullying and became a tomboy at an early age.

By elementary school, she enrolled in community team sports: soccer in the fall, basketball in the winter, softball in the spring, and swimming in the summer.

By the time she reached high school, she had played on varsity teams each season, and my husband was in heaven, having an athletic daughter. He paid for pitching lessons for softball and would have “catches” with her starting when she was a little girl.

She broke the high school girls’ softball itching record in her senior year by pitching a “no-hitter.” In addition to her exceptional athletic ability, she was an honor student, and in eighth grade, won fourteen different awards for academics and athletics, as well as civic participation. She reminded me of my father, a brilliant man who won the most awards upon graduation in his school’s history.

She favored her father more than me in looks. The Koelle genes were very predominant, as in my other two children. But, instead of her parents’ dark hair, she had

honey-colored hair with a slight wave and big brown eyes.

I think she intimidated the boys in high school with her brains and independence. She was and is her person and was never boy-crazy. Her first boyfriend in eighth grade, Madhav, once called, and one of us answered. “Megan! Madhav is on the phone!” She said, “Tell him I’ll call him back; I am feeding my rabbit!” (At the time, we had a pet rabbit that she loved caring for.

Her college board scores were through the roof. She got a perfect score in the afternoon math scores and a 650 in English. When we looked at colleges, she wanted a good engineering school, an excellent athletic program, and a social life. These qualifications left MIT out because, although she was accepted there, it was too nerdy, and their sports program was poor.

She finally chose Lafayette, majored in chemical engineering, pledged to a sorority, and played soccer and softball. The college was too far away for us not to be too close, but we could still attend her games. She met her future husband, Pete, while working at Accenture and making big bucks her first year there. One of her friends

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knew him, and they hit it off splendidly on their first date. Pete was charming, had a strong work ethic, and loved her.

Now, 21 years later, they still live in the house they bought in 2001, and Pete and his family of hard Dutch workers completely redid the house from top to bottom.

What a fantastic guy he is! And his parents are strong, simple, hardworking people.

I watch her now, my still beautiful daughter, giving her all to her children, coaching teams, and putting their needs before hers. I am so proud of her, my girl, my best friend, and her thoughtfulness to her aging parents.



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