

THE STORY ON THE STONE

“Lilac Anderson! I hope there’s a reasonable explanation for this drawing on your maths jotter.”

This wasn’t the first time. Every day that week she had been given trouble in one way or another. The reason was simple. It was like a stone was ruining her life. She couldn’t help it. Her hand sketched the same simple design on every surface it could, as if it were possessed.

“No miss.” She whispered. Why did she do that anyway? The maths teacher was the last person anyone wanted to cross. Even the teachers were afraid of Miss Anderson. She was quite tall and could fix even the toughest of men in their place, with one of her cold stares. Besides that, she had a disgusting, mimicking tone every time she dared say the name Lilac. Even Lilac hated her name. It was a hippy name. Why would her parents name her after a colour?

“See it doesn’t happen again!” She turned her back on the class towards the board. Lilac rested her head on the desk. It was her only way to escape. But every time she closed her eyes, something told her the same confusing signals all over again.

“The stone. You carved it. I carved it. Only we know where it is and the stories behind it.”

“Freak.” Her classmates hissed as they ran past her. At least it was history next, her best teacher was always patient and kind, but she was no easy pushover. Despite the rumours she studied witchcraft, she was a great friend to all who knew her.

“OK class. Today we are going to look into the Papi stone. This stone was carved around the seventh or eighth century, so probably a pictish piece. These carvings are quite common, and are thought to have been carved by men only. Historians think it is due to men being more superior to women. Of course, today –“

“It wasn’t carved by a man.”

“Assuming that you have no information to back this up, Lilac, I suggest that you listen to scientific fact and keep that mouth of yours firmly closed.”

“It was carved by a girl. MY NAME IS ZAPHEA! I DID IT!” Her mouth was uncontrollable. She was firing out words without even thinking. Something was forcing her into this peculiar rant. But what? Aside from her sister, Moon, Lilac was the last person to ever answer back, especially to a teacher.

“MISS ANDERSON, SIT DOWN THIS INSTANT!

“NO! I’M FED UP OF ALL THESE MEN GETTING THE CREDIT FOR MY PIECE OF HARD WORK!”

“Calm down, Lilac. This isn’t you and you know it. Count to ten. Fall back into your own soul.” Mariella soothed daintily from the back of the class. Instantly, she sat down with her hands over her eyes, letting a veil of brown hair fall over her face. She usually couldn’t stomach Mariella’s sickening voice but today she was thankful for it and the techniques passed down from her psychiatrist.

Mariella slipped a small piece of card onto Lilac’s desk. It read:

Emma Johnson
Psychiatrist Extraordinaire
Reasonable Fees
12 Robert St, Lerwick, Shetland
01950 435 682

Lilac decided to shove it in her pocket and try to ignore it, but it was too late. The school had already sent a letter about her behaviour home to her parents. Two days later she found herself lying on a black leather bed for examination. The woman sitting opposite her was the stereotypical psychiatrist with her suit and her hair scraped back, a pencil behind her ear and a notebook in her hand. She was rallying questions at her with a powerful force, hitting her where it hurt most.

“Where are you?”

“I’m sitting behind a rock.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m carving a stone. It isn’t a ladylike pastime so I’m secretly listening to my grandfather teaching the boys how to do it.”

“What are you carving?”

“Various things. It’s considered unlucky not to add something religious so I’ve sketched a cross and the monks with their airs and graces, patrolling, making sure people worship God.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“I don’t really have a choice and anyway, what has that got to do with anything?!” Zaphea spat, her quick temper getting the better of her.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say that,” Lilac sighed apologetically.

“It doesn’t matter. Continue.”

“Below that, I had to do something personal. I was thirteen. My parents wanted to marry me off to Camrion. He was always a good friend of mine and was very wealthy in our tribe. I liked him but I didn’t want to marry him. Little did I realise he wanted to marry me. But a week later I was at the burn collecting water for my mother when I came across a boy about my age, sitting in the long grass. He was playing the triple pipe. He stopped instantly and smiled at me. He introduced himself to be Taliam of the Kilsymman tribe across the burn. I was always told to stay away from them by my father but I instantly took a great liking to him. We had so much in common. After that, we met under the light of the moon by the burn. I found every excuse to wash the cooking pots. It was hard work but it meant I could see Taliam. We were talking, one day, when Camrion came looking for me. He was horrified and upset. They started to fight, rolling in the peat and splashing around in the stream. All the time, I was begging them to stop. The rest of the tribe heard the noise and came running. My father was furious. He charged forward and sliced them apart with his impossible strength. Taliam was escorted home. I was ordered to choose. Marry Camrion and be miserable, or marry Taliam and be disowned by my own tribe, never allowed to return but be happy.”

“Well what did you do?” asked the entranced psychiatrist, listening intently. “As always, I had no choice but to marry Camrion. I couldn’t think of anything to carve on the lower section of my stone until this incident. If Christ was so wonderful, why did I end up in the mess that I did? So in the end I decided to represent him as a lion looking down upon two figures on each side of a river. I decided to carve creatures that were both man and bird, gripping a head between the tips of their beaks.”

“Why on earth did you do that?”

“Because Camrion and Taliam were as quarrelsome as birds from different sides of the river. The head represents how they both tried to appeal to my head and heart, forcing me to pick one of them over the other.”

“It’s very sad, Lilac, but what happened to the stone.”

“I had completed it and I was quite proud of myself, when father came up behind me. Appalled at the second mark against his word he picked up the piece of stone, as if it were no more than a pebble, and hurled it across the burn. He forbade me to go near it again because it was an interest women shouldn’t persue. I was heartbroken, so I sneaked out one last time to pick up a piece that had broken off when it fell. I hid it to make sure it couldn’t be found.”

“Where is it then, dear.”

Lilac could hear the voice in the back of her mind whispering the same thing over and over.

“Don’t you dare, Lilac Anderson, just don’t you dare!”

Lilac thought nothing of it, completely fasing out Zaphea from her mind.

“Don’t beside the blowhole. You know, down at Broonies Taing in Sandwick?!”

She left the psyciatrist later in the afternoon. She was much nicer than Lilac had expected, and it was slightly bizarre how intrigued she was in Zaphea’s story. Only Zaphea got anxious at the spilling of where the precious missing piece was. It wasn’t until the Friday morning when Lilac’s mother sent her to get the ‘Shetland Times’ that she realised overlooking Zaphea’s warning was the biggest mistake she ever made.

She handed seventy five pence over the counter and observed the front page article.

“LOCAL PSYCIATRIST FINDS MISSING PIECE OF PAPILSTONE.”

Lilac and Zaphea could only stand and stare as the woman they’d opened up to stole their story.