

ROZ MACLAREN

Forgotten Skye - First Chapter

First published by Evernight Teen 2026

Copyright © 2026 by Roz MacLaren

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters, and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or localities is entirely coincidental.

Roz MacLaren asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Roz MacLaren has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademarks, and registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publishers and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

1	Trigger Warnings	1
2	Prologue	2
3	Vesper	4
4	Ready for more?	16
	<i>About the Author</i>	18

Trigger Warnings

Note: some content warnings may contain spoilers. They are included to help readers make informed choices.

Forgotten Skye contains:

- Themes of dehumanisation, persecution and attempted eradication of a marginalised group
- Hunting scenes (both of animals and humans)
- Derogatory language, including body-shaming
- On and off-page deaths (including of parents and family members)
- Violence (including graphic depiction of murder, blood, threats of violence and weapon use)
- Mild language

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organisations, places, events and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. References to real locations, historical sites and geographic features on the Isle of Skye are used fictionally.

Prologue

They'd been warned.

Setting up a nuclear reactor on the Isle of Skye wasn't something that had gone down well with locals. But it had happened anyway, in spite of the protests and petitions and picketing. And it had been all right.

Until it hadn't.

The sky turned green in 2037. That was the year of the Changing, when the radiation leak altered the world forever. The creatures of Skye turned ferocious, gaining unnatural abilities and features.

And the people? They were never the same again.

Some transformed into terrible mutations, doomed to die out. But others changed into god-like creatures, with unique powers. They called themselves Radiens and declared themselves superior.

A small number seemed completely unaffected by the radiation. The Radiens disdainfully called them Blands and largely ignored them at first. As the years went on, Radiens and Blands

PROLOGUE

found ways to adapt to their new circumstances. Traits were handed down from generation to generation. It wasn't until the hundred-year-long reign of Queen Creyta that the Blands' lives became truly endangered.

For Queen Creyta had made it her life's mission to hunt the Blands to extinction. She cited all manner of reasons, one of the more compelling being the promulgation of a rumour that the Blands' normalcy could dilute the Radiens' brilliance. Alliances of any kind between the two factions became absolutely forbidden.

The world suddenly became a darker, more deadly place. For the Radiens' quest was to hunt the Blands. And the Blands' was to avoid being hunted.

If they could.

3

Vesper

The dead animals appeared in late autumn.

The first was a rabbit, lying perfectly still outside our front door. A breeze ruffled the grey fur and its eyes were half-closed, as if it was drifting off to sleep.

It could have been accidental. It could have just died there, its tiny heart stopping from natural causes.

At least, that's what I told myself.

The bigger animals were harder to explain away. Like the fox, its russet motionlessness taking me by surprise when I went out early one morning. Flies, already settling on its glassy eyes, rose in a black cloud as I came closer.

But it was the deer that made my skin crawl.

The first thing I saw when I left the cabin was its enormous carcass, dangling from the trees. A sharp branch sliced through its throat, suspending it in mid-air. Its grey neck was vivid against the darkness of the trees. Black blood coated its chest, congealing in brittle lumps. Already, the smell of death hung in the air, making my heart quicken.

I was no stranger to dead creatures, but I was used to being

the one to kill them.

“Well. Someone put that there.”

I turned, bursts of adrenaline prickling my body. “Really? I thought the deer climbed up there and impaled itself through the throat.” I hated being crept up on and my terse reply was born out of anger at myself. For not being on guard. For letting my grandfather, my slow, creaking grandfather, sneak up behind me.

A smile spread across my grandfather’s thin lips, causing the wrinkles by his eyes to spring to life. His wispy hair fluttered in the breeze as his watery blue eyes fixed on the deer.

Its head lolled at a sickening angle.

I hoped whoever put it there had the decency to kill it first.

“Someone’s trying to send us a message, I think.” He reached out his fingers and touched the animal’s bloody fur.

My skin erupted into bumps. Fists clenched as I forced my body to stay still, reasoning with myself that if someone wanted us dead, we’d already be six feet under.

“Just breathe, Vesper.” Grandfather’s free hand reached for mine. The touch of his gnarled, age-spotted skin unsettled me, a tangible reminder of the fact that my grandfather was close to ninety and unlikely to see many more winters.

I let the air rattle in my lungs. “If someone knows we’re here, why aren’t we dead?”

“It’s one of life’s great mysteries, isn’t it?” my grandfather said, solemnly. “It looks like they’re trying to scare us.”

My free fist clenched again. I both hated and envied in equal measure my grandfather’s ability to stay calm. I wanted to strap on my quiver, lift my bow, swing my axe, solve the problem—even if that meant killing whoever was doing this.

“Perhaps you could oblige me and fetch the animal down,”

my grandfather said. “We don’t want Teasel to see it.”

Of course. Teasel must be protected at all costs. I gritted my teeth, not just because of the unenviable task of retrieving the hulking great stag, but because of the lengths my grandfather went to in order to protect my little sister.

Lengths I wished someone would go to for me.

My grandfather shuffled back inside the cabin, dead leaves clinging to his feet. I hoped he’d kick them off properly before he went in. He knew how house-proud Teasel was. Not that we had a lot of house to be proud of. Our dwelling was basic at best—a timber shack with a tin roof and not very much else. Even that, Grandfather always said, was going to draw attention to us one day. Looked like that day had come.

With a sigh, I turned back to the deer and forced myself to begin the unpleasant business of getting it down from the tree.

* * *

The forest whispered like it was keeping a multitude of secrets. Every shifting shadow and dancing leaf made me tighten my grip on my axe. I took extra care to step only on stones or hard ground. Avoiding moss that could leave an imprint, or mud that would retain the tell-tale shape of my shoes.

It was the year 2227 and I could only imagine a time when life hadn’t been like this. When our island had still been called the Isle of Skye and people had actually had a good time here. Before the radiation leak hundreds of years back that led to the Changing. If that hadn’t happened, maybe my parents would actually have been around, instead of mutated, mindless Radiens.

If that was, indeed, what they were. I assumed it was, as that

was the only way I could explain to Teasel why they simply disappeared one day. Unless, of course, they just decided they couldn't be bothered with their two daughters anymore.

We both knew there was another reason they never came home. A more likely one. One that meant any hope of ever seeing them again would be crushed forever.

I just couldn't bring myself to say it aloud.

Grandfather never talked about it. I supposed the subject of his daughter's disappearance hurt him too much to speak about, but sometimes I wished he would. It would have been somewhat comforting to know the grief we shared was mutual, rather than wondering if my grandfather even cared at all.

I couldn't shake the feeling of eyes on me, and my skin crawled in response. It didn't help that I couldn't see anything clearly unless it was directly in front of me. I thought longingly back to the days where I had had a pair of glasses, but they were long since smashed and, strangely, opticians were in short supply these days. Only the Blands needed them, and the Radiens definitely weren't about to give us anything we needed.

The trees blurred into differing shades of green, brown and black, like some abstract painting. I hated how damn vulnerable it made me feel. If someone crept up on me, if a Radien was lying in wait for me, I'd be oblivious. Until it was all over.

Take a deep breath, Vesper. Don't lose your nerve. My other senses had kept me alive this long. My brain always filled in the gaps of my vision, telling me whereabouts on my blurry prey I should aim my arrows. My hearing had warned me thousands of times of Poisonrooks or Bloodadders or any manner of mutated creatures that could kill me in the forest.

I walked down the steep hill, pausing every few moments to listen, to stay my breathing and strain my ears to catch the

tinest noise. Without warning, I'd whip around so if anyone was following me, I'd catch them. I did this every time I went to the forbidden town.

Once upon a time, it had been called Portree and, I imagined, it would have been quite charming. The hollowed-out husks of buildings lay in the distance like beached whales as I reached the edge of the forest. On my right, the sprawling graveyard stretched down to the loch. Was it strange to be slightly envious of the sleeping dead? Their troubles were long since over.

There was no cover between our forest and the town, and every time I came here, I was risking my life.

I told myself going at night gave me the best chance of survival. I told myself I'd been here hundreds of times before and never died. I told myself this was the only way to keep my family alive.

But I wasn't telling myself the whole truth. I wasn't admitting the real reason I so desperately had to come here, why my heart stuttered inside my chest.

Business first. The old supermarket remains sprawled in the middle of a former industrial estate. The car park had been reclaimed by nature, with grass and trees sprouting up through the cracks in the tarmac. An ancient shopping trolley lay on its back, covered in moss and with one wheel creaking eerily as it spun. *Just the wind*, I told myself.

Glancing once more over my shoulder, I took a deep breath and hitched my backpack farther up. My fist curled around my knife and every muscle was taut, ready to defend myself, ready to attack.

The supermarket was the first place targeted after the Changing. It was ransacked by desperate people fighting for enough food to keep themselves and their families alive, even if they

were only delaying the inevitable. After the food ran out, people started dismantling the furniture and shelving, stealing boxes and doors and anything they could burn. Anything to keep their fires going a little longer. Everything that could be useful was stripped away long ago. Now, all that remained were a few eerie checkout kiosks and a couple of broken office chairs.

"You're late," hissed a voice.

My heart hammered, spikes of adrenaline flooding my body. I was damned if I was going to betray that Pesto had made me jump, so I hid my fright with a ferocious glare. "What have you got for me, old man?"

Pesto shuffled towards me, the flicker of his lighter flame casting spectral shadows over his face. "Cooked fish. Couple of apples."

"And you'll charge a pretty price for that, no doubt," I said, curling my lip.

"What have you got for me, whippersnapper?" countered Pesto.

I let my backpack slip off my shoulders and took out four rabbits, stiff and cold. "Rabbit meat." I tossed them towards Pesto and he caught them deftly. His thin lips pursed as he held them up to check for faults. I was convinced Pesto could find fault with perfection itself.

"What book did you bring for me?" I asked, biting a hangnail.

Pesto slipped a battered paperback out of his pocket. I almost snatched it from him in my eagerness to run my fingers over the pages. It was an old favourite of mine—one I hoped The Librarian hadn't seen before. "Price?"

"Six rabbits. You can pay me next time."

I rolled my eyes. "You drive a hard bargain."

Pesto just smiled. The end of the world brought out the best in

some people. Pesto was not one of those people. Humanity was reduced to its most basic form, with the fight for survival their main aim, and Pesto shamelessly profited from that instinctive desire to live.

He ran the underground market, which was rather an embellished way of saying he traded essential items in return for whatever we could give him. I wasn't his only customer, although, for security reasons, he would only meet us individually. I'm not sure if this was for our security or for his. Perhaps he thought we would all spontaneously attack him and steal his belongings—though this would have ultimately been quite foolish. We all had a dedicated window of time to meet him and exchange our goods—and Pesto rarely waited if you were late.

Pesto had always liked me. I never asked any questions about how he managed to cook the meat without attracting the Radiens or how he managed to avoid them or how he had gotten that scar on his neck. Perhaps it was Pesto's fondness for me that made him say, just as I was leaving, "They're tightening up security."

I flinched at the words. "Who?" I asked. I already knew the answer, but I wanted to hear it. I wanted to know.

Pesto's watery blue eyes stared into mine. "You're going to make me say it? The Radiens, V. The only people who matter here."

"Can hardly call them people," I grunted.

"You're such a pedant." His gnarled old hand patted my shoulder. "I'm just saying ... watch your back. Family of three Blands got taken last week in Uig."

I swallowed. Uig wasn't that far from here. "What happened to them?"

Pesto's eyes glinted in the dim light. His hand slashed across his throat and I winced, imagining all the creative ways they might have been killed.

"They should have been more careful, then." I forced myself to stare unblinkingly back at Pesto and steeled myself to show no vulnerability. For a brief second, I thought about mentioning the dead animals. The image of their glassy eyes came back to me. Perhaps Pesto could shed some light on that? Or perhaps he would say I was too much of a risk to trade with anymore, if someone clearly knew where I lived. I couldn't take that chance, so I clamped my mouth shut to stop any words leaking out.

Pesto's voice cut through my thoughts. "They've appointed the new Blandhunter. Prince Hunter. He's finally come of age. And people are saying he doesn't mess around, V."

I'd heard of Prince Hunter but never seen him. And I wasn't the least bit worried about him. A spoiled Radien prince, who probably barely set foot outside the castle and had all his meals brought to him by maids, wouldn't last five minutes in the real world.

Even so, something in Pesto's tone made the hairs rise on the back of my neck. I hitched my rucksack onto my shoulders. "Thanks for the warning, old timer, but I'll be fine." I hoped Pesto couldn't see my fingers, tightly crossed together.

Pesto gave me a sharp nod. "Good luck to you. Now get out of here. My next customer's coming."

With a half-smile, I slunk out of the desolate supermarket and took the shortcut, across the disused road to the ruined school. I wondered idly when the last car had driven this road. An ancient solar-powered speed limit sign still flickered, telling non-existent cars to do twenty miles an hour when the schools were out. I always gave that sign a bitter, ironic smile. There

were no drivers to see it and no schoolchildren for them to slow down for. I didn't think there ever would be again.

The ancient school had once been blue and modern, but was now desolate and barren. The paint peeled off it and cracks lined the walls. Just like the supermarket, the doors were long since smashed in. Unlike the supermarket, there wasn't a great deal to steal. Certainly no food. The classrooms had all been stripped of any combustible materials and were now completely empty. But I wasn't interested in them.

I was interested in the library.

Most of the books had long since been burned, but several had survived. My heart skipped a beat, wondering if *he* had sent a message. Would there be a book lying on the desk for me, with a note inside?

I stood in the doorway, listening.

Nothing. The steady drip from a leak somewhere. My own breath, in and out. No Radiens. No Blands. Just the way I liked it.

The library was an integral part of the school and the ancient sports centre, where I sometimes came to train if I was feeling particularly brave. There hadn't been much call for gym equipment, so most of it was still intact, albeit rusty. I would lift the weights, straining my muscles, fighting to get stronger. Because, in this world, only the strong survived.

My feet crunched on the remnants of broken glass and my heart completed an entire somersault when I saw that there was indeed a book waiting on the desk for me.

The Librarian and I had been leaving each other notes for about five years now.

On my first trip to the library all those years ago, I had seen a figure, crouched in a corner. My hand had been on my knife

and I had been ready to sink my blade into the figure's throat, but a soft voice had whispered, "Please let me finish my book before you kill me."

I couldn't see much of the figure. They could have been any gender, any age. All I knew was that they were wearing a black cloak, pulled low over their eyes, and were reading a book by one of my favourite authors.

We had talked for what felt like hours about books and then, when the first rays of sunlight leaked through the midnight sky, I knew it was time to go. Reluctantly, I left—without even getting the figure's name. From our conversation, I guessed they might be a boy—but that was all I knew about them.

Ever since then, we had left books for each other, recommending our favourite authors, trading thoughts. It was the world's most impersonal book club, but some days it was the only thing that made me smile.

I picked up the book on the counter. It was one I hadn't read before by an author I didn't recognise. Inside was a hastily scribbled note. "I think you'll like this one. Your Librarian."

I opened the book that Pesto said would cost me six rabbits and scratched out my own note on the pages. "There's talk of more people dying. If I'm next, thanks for all the books. It's been fun. Watch your back out there. Your Bibliophile."

There was an unwritten agreement between us not to ask for the other's name. I wasn't sure what his reasons were, but I liked the anonymity. This person would never be able to track me down unless I wanted them to. Not that I ever would want them to. I'd probably live my entire life without ever seeing them again. And that was fine. I was unquestionably better off alone.

A soft noise made my entire body tense up. I quickly placed

the book on the counter and hurried out of the library, picking my way back towards the forest and the hut. Grandfather and Teasel were sound sleepers. They wouldn't even have noticed I was gone. They never did.

My heart sang inside my chest and my feet felt ten times lighter in my ill-fitting leather boots. I made a mental note to ask Pesto for some new boots when I could, not daring to think about how many rabbits that would cost me. But what did boots matter when I had a new book to read? When someone out there cared enough to leave it for me?

* * *

The sun had set behind the hut as I finally crested the hill. I stood for a moment, leaning against a tree to catch my breath. The dark green sky was streaked with orange, the first few stars just visible against the emerald backdrop. Darkness had fallen, wrapping the island in shadows. Lights flickered in the cabin windows and Grandfather's bent figure shuffled into view.

The gentle weight of the book in my pocket made my heart skip. I couldn't help smile, savouring the moment when I'd be able to light a lantern and sink into another world.

Making sure no one was in sight, I closed the distance between me and the cabin. As I climbed the steps, I stumbled forward; my foot caught on something. Something bulky and unyielding. Something that made the blood turn to ice in my veins. My heart stopped beating completely, just for a moment, before making up for lost time by hammering quicker than ever.

Whoever left the dead animals had taken it a step further.

A dead man lay on the steps of our hut, his lifeless eyes

VESPER

gawking up at me.

Ready for more?

*That ending has my jaw on the floor and I'm so shocked
and not sure what could even happen next!*

Skyediver 006

Want to see what happens next?

Forgotten Skye is available from Amazon - or a signed paperback directly from me is £10 plus postage to your address.

Just email roz@rozmaclaren and let me know your personalisation request.

* * *

Take a piece of Skye home.

READY FOR MORE?

HOLD IT IN YOUR HANDS

This is *Forgotten Skye* – the Island Edition collection.

Each collection includes:



your signed, personalised paperback of *Forgotten Skye*



your map, individually drawn and weathered by hand



your limited-edition bookmark, only available with this collection



your collectible postcard with character art from later in the series



your letter from Vesper with a sneak peek of *Burning Skye*

£30 plus postage

Email roz@rozmaclaren.com with your personalisation request.

Forgotten Skye - the Island Edition comes to you directly from the island that inspired the story. Alongside your signed paperback, you'll receive:

- a map of the book's locations, each one individually drawn and weathered by Roz
- your limited-edition bookmark, only available with this collection
- your collectible postcard with character art by Jess Rollins to give you a taste of what's to come
- your letter from Vesper herself, with a sneak peek of *Burning Skye* (and, trust me, you're going to want it after the ending of *Forgotten Skye*!)

Reserve your collection by emailing roz@rozmaclaren.com with your personalisation request.



About the Author

Roz MacLaren is a Scottish romantasy author who lives on the Isle of Skye.

Roz wrote her first novel at the age of six. It was terrible and fortunately has never seen the light of day. However, Roz went on to become a professional writer at the age of seventeen and even received a BA (Hons) in Creative Writing. She is always writing at least one novel at any given time – and sometimes she actually finishes them.

Roz takes inspiration from the landscape surrounding her. She writes Scottish romantasy for readers who enjoy having their hearts broken by fictional characters. Her latest series, *The Ruined Skye Trilogy*, is set on a fantasy version of Skye and is traditionally published by Evernight Teen. Four more of her books are due out in the near future.

You can connect with me on:

 <https://rozmaclaren.com>

 <https://instagram.com/rozmaclaren?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA=>

 <https://www.tiktok.com/@rozmaclaren>

