

Maggie and Max

— A Highland Adventure —



Stewart McKie

Demo Book

Maggie & Max
STEWART MCKIE

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*DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER MARGARET MCKIE
Speed bonny boat like a bird on the wing, over the sea to
Skye.*

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Preface

Maggie and Max is a short children's adventure story set in Scotland and outer-space. I hope you enjoy it. Stewart McKie

CHAPTER 1

Scotland? Really?

Will I have to wear a kilt?

Sunlight streamed through the kitchen window as Max loaded the dishwasher. He moved with the mechanical efficiency of someone who'd rather be anywhere else—which was exactly how he felt.

"Do we really have to go to Scotland for our summer holiday?" he asked, not bothering to look up at his mother.

His mother, who stood at the sink rinsing plates, tried to sound cheerful. "Why not? It'll be an adventure."

"All my friends are going to cool places," Max complained. "Australia. The Seychelles. Namibia."

"Well, we're going to Scotland," his mother said firmly. Max slammed a plate into the dishwasher harder than necessary. "Will I have to wear a kilt?"

His mother smiled slightly. "Scottish people only wear those on special occasions. You're safe."

"What about porridge? Do I have to eat it for every

meal?"

"No one will force you to eat porridge, Max."

"Scotland sucks," Max muttered.

His mother's hand froze on the tap. She turned it off slowly, dried her hands, and placed them gently on Max's shoulders.

"Max," she said quietly, "you know it's been difficult since your father died. I need this. Some peace. Some quiet. A chance to just... breathe. Do you understand?"

Max hugged his mum. For a moment, he was just a kid who missed his dad.

"I guess so," he said softly. "But Dad would never have taken us to Scotland."

He let go his mum and shoved his earbuds in before she could respond, cutting her out. His mother watched him, hurt flickering across her face, before she turned back to the sink.

* * *

The evening rain pattered on the station platform as Max and his mother dragged their wheelies toward the waiting sleeper train to Scotland. Its windows glowed warmly against the darkness. Other families boarded around them, their excited chatter filling the air.

Max walked several paces behind his mother, earbuds firmly in place, music shutting out the world.

* * *

Golden morning light filtered through the train window when Max woke. His mother sat on her lower bunk, watching the Scottish lowlands roll by—endless moorland, ancient stone walls, sheep scattered like white dots across the hills.

Her face was peaceful for the first time in months.

Max leaned over the edge of his upper bunk, still groggy with sleep. "Where are we?"

"Scotland," his mother said simply.

Max squinted at the barren landscape. "Looks like the moon."

He disappeared back into his bunk. His mother's smile faded slightly.

* * *

Wind whipped across the harbour as they struggled with their bags towards the ramp of a car ferry. Seagulls wheeled and cried overhead. The salt air was thick and bracing.

Max's hair whipped into his face. What a desolate place. How could anyone live here?

As the ferry sailed away from the harbour, they leant on the stern rail, watching the mainland recede into mist. The wake churned white and furious behind them. Seagulls swooped and dove, their cries piercing the hum of the ferry's engine.

The wind caught his mother's hair. She closed her eyes, breathing deeply, looking more relaxed than Max had

seen her in a long time.

Max watched her relax, then looked back at the disappearing land.

Something shifted in his expression—maybe the first hint that this place was different from what he'd expected.

CHAPTER 2

The Island

No' much happens here

The ferry horn blared as they approached a tiny port—just a wooden pier, a single building, and one battered taxi waiting like a loyal dog.

Everything was smaller, quieter, more remote than Max had imagined possible.

The taxi driver, Mr. McLeod, was a weather-beaten man in his forties with eyes that twinkled with secrets. He spoke with a musical lilt that made ordinary words sound like poetry.

"So you'll be taking the croft for the full month?" he asked as they climbed into the back of his taxi.

"Yes," Max's mother replied.

"You know there's no' much to do here except walk and fish?"

"Yeah. We know," Max said, rolling his eyes.

"I just want some peace and quiet," his mother said earnestly.

"Well, that you'll get," McLeod said. "No' much happens here. And there's no one around for miles. Just the way some folk like it."

As they drove along the coastal road, they passed a fenced-off military base. Concrete buildings bristled with antennae and satellite dishes. At the centre sat a massive white dome that seemed to pulse with secret purpose.

Max's eyes widened. He sat up straighter. "What's that place?"

"Och, that's just the airbase," McLeod said casually.

"What do they do there?" Max's mother asked.

"Well now, I don't rightly know. They keep it all very hush-hush. Something to do with monitoring air traffic and suchlike."

"A secret base," Max said, genuinely interested. "That's actually kind of cool."

His mother shot him a warning look, but Max barely noticed. He was already imagining what secrets might be hidden behind those fences.

* * *

The taxi pulled up to an isolated stone cottage, an old croft, perched above a dark loch that mirrored the grey sky. The landscape was stark, beautiful, and utterly empty.

"Here we are," McLeod announced.

They climbed out. The silence was profound—no traffic, no neighbours, just wind through heather.

McLeod unloaded their bags and handed Max's mother a key and business card. "You'll find all the supplies you ordered on the kitchen table. That's the house key and my card. Just ring if you need me to take you anywhere."

"There's mobile signal here?" his mother asked hopefully.

"Aye. One of the benefits of having the military nearby."

"And there's broadband in the cottage, right?" Max asked.

"There's no internet here."

Max's face fell. "What about a mall? Internet café? Anything?"

"Just a wee supermarket near the base."

Max turned to his mother with a look of betrayal. "What am I supposed to do for an entire month?"

"You could go on some fine rambles in the heather," McLeod suggested kindly. "There's lots of wildlife about. And you can fish and row on the loch."

Max's mother brightened. "That's perfect! You can learn to row. Then you can try out for the school rowing team next term."

"Right," Max said skeptically. "And who exactly is going to teach me to row?"

"Well now. There's my daughter, Maggie," McLeod said.

"She's a champion rower." He pointed toward the loch.
"That's her boat there, on the shore."

Max could see a small wooden rowing boat lying upside down on the stony beach.

McLeod climbed back into his taxi and drove off. The engine sound faded quickly into the vast silence.

"This is perfect," Max said sarcastically. "No malls, no internet, and I have to hang out with some random girl."

He grabbed his bag and trudged toward the cottage, already counting the days until they could leave.

About the Author

Stewart McKie

Stewart McKie PhD writes screenplays and children's books, including the Hytte Troll series.

As a child he lived on the Royal Artillery base on Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) so maybe that has something do with this story coming to life.

Glossary of Terms

Croft - a small cottage that used to be occupied by a crofter and his family

Loch - a lake in Scotland

ISS - the International Space Station