

The Great Scottish Land Grab

MARK ANDERSON SMITH

(Sample chapters)

BOOK ONE

PROLOGUE—FEBRUARY 1990

Can't pay! Won't pay!

Robert Castle looked from the uncompromising placard to the slim, raven haired girl who was holding it. Normally he would have given the protesters a wide berth, but she was stunningly beautiful and that seemed reason enough to slow and walk towards her.

She was standing in a loose group with six, no seven other protesters; most of a similar age to himself and who had likely never even paid any tax. A small number of people were standing slightly away, but most were walking on—up or down Buchanan Street—on this bitterly cold Saturday in February.

She stopped her chanting as he approached.

“Do you have time for an avowed sceptic?” He asked.

Taken aback, she frowned. “Sceptical about what? The Government’s chances of continuing to oppress the poorest

in society? Margaret Thatcher's likelihood of remaining in office?"

"Sceptical of people's reticence to rise up and fight for a cause even when it will benefit them. Sceptical that this cause is even one worth fighting for."

Robert saw her eyes narrow, a hint of flare in her pupils and quickly continued. "But I am open to persuasion. You look frozen though. May I buy you a coffee, or tea, while we discuss whether I should join you in this protest?"

"You want to join our protest?"

Her tone mocked him and he smiled in return.

"No. But if you will allow me to buy you a tea or coffee then I will stand here beside you for the rest of the day."

"You don't want to join our protest and you're offering to stand with us?"

"I'm offering to buy you coffee." He rubbed his hands together and gave an exaggerated shiver. "I'm offering to listen to your arguments and be open to changing my view on the Poll Tax. Regardless of whether you can persuade me or not, I will then also proudly hold one of your placards and out shout your loudest grandstander."

"Oh, I can persuade you."

Robert held up his right arm in invitation. "We'll see."

Ten minutes later Helen Phillips had warmed up enough to take off her coat but had only half drunk her coffee. Robert nursed his empty mug as he tried to take in her arguments. Eventually he had had enough and held up his hands in surrender.

"I don't agree with you but I would vote for you." He interrupted.

"You... What?! That doesn't make any sense!"

Robert leaned back in his seat. "You're passionate, you're eloquent, you're knowledgeable. I think you are wrong, but at the same time you have good reasons for what you believe."

"You've just contradicted yourself! How can I be wrong if I have good reasons?"

"It's not about your reasons. If everyone benefits from government then it makes sense that everyone who can afford to pay tax to provide the benefits we all receive."

"But that is the problem—hundreds of thousands of people who can't afford it are being forced to pay, while thousands who are richer than you or I can imagine are having their bill cut! That is not just!"

"I agree, but to say that hundreds of thousands of wage earners should have to pay nothing is not just either."

"The rich are only paying a token as it is. Why are you on their side?"

"Because I am rich and because I want to become richer someday. Don't you?"

"Not at the expense of others!"

"Quite right! Do you consider yourself rich?"

Helen glared at him.

"It's not a crime to be well off. It's also admirable to care passionately about anyone who is less well off than you are. Okay, my last argument—if anyone is able to work hard and make a lot of money—why should they be forced to give all of that up to help some people who are lazy? And before you go off on one, I'm not saying that all the poor are lazy, but there are some and perhaps more than even I would want to admit who could do with being forced to work."

“There are far more people out there who are working damn hard every day and only managing to scrape a survival.”

“I accept that.”

“The poorest should not have to give up buying their children clothes and being unable to afford insurance or send their children to good schools or universities to pay such a blatantly unfair tax!”

“I accept that.”

“The rich can and should pay more.”

“I accept that.”

“We're not asking for no-one to pay tax.”

Robert stayed silent.

~*~

Helen sat back in her seat and studied this tall, dark young man. He had listened for so long she thought she had won him over. Right up until he had started flirting with her again: telling her he would vote for her even though he disagreed with what she had been telling him. She didn't know whether to be insulted or complimented.

He was infuriatingly arrogant and sure of himself. She was tempted to storm out but that would imply she'd lost the argument. That the time spent with him had been wasted entirely.

Had it been a mistake to leave the group? They were having such trouble recruiting people to join the protests that when Robert offered to join them it seemed worth entertaining his offer for a coffee.

Robert Castle. The name seemed to sum him up completely. A tall rugged Scot. Thick black hair that he didn't appear able to tame. He stooped a little as if embarrassed about his height. Something she knew a little about having shot up by almost a foot from ages 12 to 13.

His eyes were clear blue yet seemed to present a paradox. There was openness there but also a guardedness. In the way he acted, in what he said, he came across as completely open and honest. He was direct, almost threateningly so but she found it a relief to meet someone who simply got to the point with such clarity.

It wasn't anything he had done or said that suggested the guardedness so why did she see that in his eyes? Eyes that right now were studying her.

He had been right not to agree with her statement. Some of the protestors were calling for an end to Government. They resented all taxes. She didn't want to concede but...

~*~

"Well, I'm not asking for that."

"I accept that."

"You are infuriating!"

"Can I buy you lunch?" Robert asked.

"No!"

"At least another coffee?"

"I don't want your money."

"I'm offering you lunch. No strings attached. Though I should tell you that I want to invite you out for dinner tomorrow night?"

“Why are you flirting with me?”

Robert became serious. “I find you to be the most beautiful woman I've ever seen or met. Intelligent, courageous, compassionate, well spoken, did I say passionate already? I plan to ask you to marry me.”

“I couldn't possibly marry someone who would vote for the poll tax!”

“I would vote for a more just tax.”

“Or someone I had only just met.”

“Then allow me to court you.”

“Court! Hah!” Helen laughed. “You're a dinosaur!”

“Rumbled. I also hold open the door for ladies and, well, I was going to say fight to protect their honour but I've never actually had to do that.”

“Have there been many ladies?”

“I've had three short relationships in the last two years. I confess I'm not a virgin.”

“Short?”

“I'm looking for something more substantial, more meaningful.”

“If you're looking for a virgin bride then I'm not the one.”

“In my eyes you are perfect.”

“And I would have to insist on a vow of celibacy before any betrothal...”

“Consider myself chaste.”

“And how would you keep your hands off me?”

“With great difficulty...”

Helen leaned back. “Campaign with me this afternoon.”

Robert leaned forward. “Would you accept me standing next to you shouting for a fairer tax?”

“I could live with that.” Helen nodded.

“Then I accept your date.”

“Hey!”

Helen leaned forward, a look of mock outrage on her face and he kissed her before she could react. Standing quickly he announced: “Two coffees!” Before walking to the counter.

The whole way he had to force himself to keep from turning back to check she had not run out the door.

Helen finally dragged him out of the cafe at a little after One PM and by the time the sun had set, Robert had shouted himself hoarse.

CHAPTER ONE

As he walked over the summit of Newton Hill, Robert Castle saw the stag. Six feet from hoof to ear and another two feet of antler towering above it. It was only forty yards or so away from him. Robert stopped and—carefully moving one arm behind his back—motioned to Helen to slow down.

The stag was magnificent; and staring right at him. Robert ran through his options: stay where he was, remain still and hope the stag didn’t see him as a threat; back-up slowly and hope the stag didn’t charge; run, and hope the stag didn’t chase.

They were not great options.

There were no trees nearby to run for. Around him in Glen Fyne, there was simply grass covering the ground. Even the small wood they had passed earlier was only of Scottish Fir. No use for climbing and with the branches of the trees all squeezed together there would have been no way to enter the woods anyway.

“What are you looking at?” Helen asked. “Whoa, look at that!”

“Be quiet.” Robert whispered.

“But it’s gorgeous! Have you taken a photo? No, of course not, too busy admiring it. Hold on.”

She dropped to one knee and began rustling around in her camera bag.

“What are you doing? If we scare him, he’ll charge us!”

“Nonsense.” Helen pulled out her Canon Digital SLR and began adjusting the camera settings.

“It’s not nonsense. We’re in his territory and if he charges us, I...”

“It.” She said emphasising the word. “Is not scared of us. You are obviously scared of it and, frankly my dear, that is far more likely to make it charge than if we simply relax, stand here and take a few photos.”

Unable to relax but knowing Helen was not going to be persuaded otherwise, Robert waited while Helen began snapping away. The stag remained still, obviously wary of them, but also unafraid. Its head was erect, its ears straight up and despite a gusting breeze, it remained motionless.

Watching us, watching you, Robert thought. Who is the master here?

“Oh look, there are more of them over on that side of the valley.” She waved over to her right.

Robert put a hand on her shoulder. “That’s enough waving. No matter what you think about relaxing, waving at a stag on his territory is not a wise move.”

Helen gave him an impish smile.

“Can we retreat now?” He asked.

Helen hoisted up her camera bag and turned round. Robert took hold of her arm and stepped backwards, keeping the stag in view. He made it three steps before tumbling to the ground. Beneath him, he felt the contents of his rucksack crush and winced at the thought of what damage he had caused.

“What are you doing walking backwards on a hillside?” Helen was now shaking her head and laughing. “The stag isn’t going to charge us, look.”

Robert lifted his head and they both saw the stag lower its head to point its antlers at them at the same time. Looking at Helen, he saw her face whiten. He hurriedly scrambled up off the ground, grabbed her arm and shouted: “RUN!”

He didn’t look back as they crested the small hill once more and set off down the other side. It had been a lovely walk up but running down, Robert struggled to keep his balance as the uneven ground pushed his feet off kilter.

“Are you okay?” Robert shouted at Helen.

“I can hear you fine.” She shouted back. “Do you think it’s stopped chasing us?”

Robert risked a glance back and saw the stag standing above them, his, no—it’s head and antlers raised high, proudly guarding it’s territory.

“Probably. But I don’t think we should stop just yet.”

“Can we at least slow down? If one of us breaks an ankle we are not going to be escaping anything.”

“Maybe I should leave you behind then...”

Helen wrestled her arm out of his grip and punched him. “It’ll be me leaving you behind in a minute.”

She slowed down and Robert carried on for an instant until he realised she wasn’t beside him. He stopped completely and turned only to see her racing by him.

“Who’s the tortoise now?” She yelled as she passed him.

Laughing, Robert ran after her. She was pulling ahead but he forced himself to go faster until he could almost touch her. A part of his mind warned him they were going too fast. If either of them fell, they could both end up breaking a leg or arm. He tapped her on the shoulder.

“You’re it.” He shouted and then slowed.

Helen glanced back and realised he was no longer there. She slowed too and once he was sure they were not going too fast, he grabbed her and wrestled her to the ground.

“Careful of the camera.” She yelled.

“I’ll buy you a new one.” Robert kissed her before she could say anything else.

Helen resisted the first three kisses but on the fourth her mouth softened and she kissed back. Before he could kiss her again, she pulled back and looked over his shoulder.

“It’s not still chasing us is it?”

“I don’t care anymore.” Robert kissed her again.

“I really need to put this camera away.”

“I said I’ll buy you a new one.”

“With my money?”

“I have money.”

“All your money is mine, remember.”

Robert attempted to unzip her jacket while distracting her with another kiss. Helen slapped his hand away and sat up.

“What’s wrong?”

“Not going to happen.”

Sighing dramatically, Robert sat up. “And here I was thinking we were on holiday.”

“I don’t know what kind of holiday you were thinking of.”

“One where we get to spend a bit of quality time together?”

“Quality time doesn’t always have to mean sex.”

“We didn’t have to have sex. Just a quick roll in the hay.”

After checking it wasn’t damaged, Helen put her camera in its bag. “On a hillside? In a popular walking area? You’ll be lucky.”

Grinning at her, Robert stood up. “That’s what I was hoping.” He gave her a last quick kiss which lengthened and then turned serious before pulling away to see her sigh.

“That’s more like it.” She said.

Robert pulled his map out of his coat pocket. “Where to now then? I hoped we could make it up Beinn Bhuidhe this afternoon.”

“After all that running about? I’ll be happy to head back to the B&B and have a bath.”

“That is tempting.”

“On my own!”

“Disappointing. Ah well.” Robert studied the map. Beinn Bhuidhe was the only Munro within walking distance. He had chosen to try a different route to the one in the guide book, heading up Newton Hill from Glenfyne Lodge. If they circled round though...

“Look at this.” He said, showing the map to Helen. “If we follow the treeline round we’ll reach the Allt na Faing waterfall which takes us on the traditional route up to Beinn Bhuidhe.”

“Is that really how you pronounce it?” Helen asked with a dead pan expression.

“I Googled it. We can basically circle past the stag and the other deer and still reach the Munro.”

Helen gave him one of her amused smiles. “How many of these Munros are you expecting me to climb this week?”

Robert blew out his cheeks. He had been hoping to bag a cluster of four slightly further North before they had to head back to Glasgow but it maybe wasn’t the best time to mention that.

“You know, we have done a lot of walking so far. How about you plan the itinerary the next couple of days?”

He saw her scrunch up her eyes and give him one of those searching looks she sometimes did when she wasn’t sure she believed him.

“And what would tear you away from your ambition, Robert Castle?”

“I’m simply acknowledging that this is as much your holiday as it is mine, Mrs Castle.”

“Speaking of castles...”

Robert smiled. Their ideas of what made a good holiday often diverged completely. The thought of spending

a day, or even worse a week, walking round old buildings filled him with despair. Yet Helen loved to explore museums and castles, abbeys and cathedrals, whenever they went to a new location.

“Yes?”

“Well, I saw in the guide book that there’s a ruined castle on the peninsula... I wondered if we could drive out there later in the week.”

“Sounds like a plan. Would you like to go there tomorrow?”

He took her arm and they set off North, in the direction of Allt na Faing.

“I would like that, yes, and maybe after that we could take the ferry across to Mull and see Duart Castle. It even has dungeons...”

Robert looked up at a blue sky with large Cumulus clouds scudding across. He kept half an ear listening to Helen as they walked but allowed his mind to drift and himself to relax and simply enjoy the walk.

~*~

“Who’s that?”

Robert looked to where Helen was pointing and saw someone walking towards them. The man waved at them so Robert waved back.

“Is that a gun he’s carrying?”

“Shotgun, yes. Must be a gamekeeper.”

“I thought this was public land.”

“It is. I think...”

Robert was suddenly unsure. There had been a deer fence around the wood but that was to protect the wood from the deer. They had followed the fence round until it had started to head down slope and were now following the contour around to the waterfall. "Must be looking after the deer."

"With a shotgun? Maybe he's a poacher..."

"Maybe. You want to ask him?"

They both quietened as the man approached.

"Good afternoon," Robert called.

"You'll need to leave the estate, sir. This is private land here."

"I thought this was public land."

"You're mistaken. This is a private estate."

The man stopped about six feet away. He was holding a double barrelled shotgun, pointed at the ground but Robert noted that the man's right hand was gripping the stock just behind the trigger guard. His left hand was holding the barrel down and away yet it would not take much for him to swing it round and adjust his right hand to the trigger. Triggers, Robert corrected as he focused on them.

Helen put a hand against Robert's arm. "We're just heading up Beinn Bhuidhe. We're not lost are we?" She asked.

Robert saw her smile at the man but her smile was not returned.

"I'm sorry ma'am. You won't be able to head up any further. Now, I'm asking you nicely, you head down to the waterfall and you can take the road off of the estate."

"Don't we have a, what is it, right to roam now?"

“That’s dependent on sticking to normal routes and responsible behaviour. I saw you both on the top of the hill. You can’t behave like that near deer.”

“We did nothing wrong. We chanced upon the deer, took some photos and then realised a stag was ready to charge us. What were we supposed to do? Stand still and let it gore us?”

Helen’s hand tightened around Robert’s arm.

“This isn’t up for discussion. Turn around and head back down the hill.”

“Is there another way we can get up Beinn Bhuidhe then?”

“I’m not aware of routes that don’t cross this estate, now I’m not asking you and I’d rather not have to tell you again. Turn around now. Head back down the valley.”

Robert fought down a desire to laugh at the ludicrousness of the situation.

“Perhaps you could show us on our map where the estate ends?” Helen asked.

“The estate ends at the main road.”

“Wouldn’t it take less time for us to leave the estate if we just climb Beinn Bhuidhe. How big is the estate anyway? We’ll avoid the deer and be off the estate faster.”

“There you go,” Robert gave Helen a grin. “Trust my wife to come up with a sensible solution.”

His grin faded quickly as the man raised his shotgun and pointed it towards them. “You are both trespassing. Turn around and head back down to the road.”

“Robert, I think we better just go.”

“Wait a minute, you can’t just threaten us like that! What’s your name?”

“I’ve asked you, told you and now I’m warning you, turn around.”

“Who owns this estate? Is it you? Someone else?”

“Robert! Let’s go.” Helen tugged at his arm.

Robert took a step backwards. He was simultaneously terrified and furious. “Who owns this land?” He asked one more time. The man simply stared back, his shotgun steady.

Robert turned and put his arm around Helen as they hurried away. “How dare he!”

“Let’s not talk until we’re away from him, please.”

“Okay, okay.”

He took one more look back and saw the man, gamekeeper or something else, standing watching them. His shotgun still pointed in their direction.

CHAPTER TWO

“But this is Scotland. There’s never been a law of trespass! I have a right to roam, don’t I?”

“It is not as simple as that, Mr Castle and never has been. There is very little public land in Scotland. Most of it is privately owned although most large estate owners allow access to popular tourist areas. There are recognised rights of way but no-one has the right to walk wherever they want.”

Robert turned and continued his pacing back and forth in front of the Station desk. He gave the Sergeant an angry glance. “Well, how am I supposed to know where I can and cannot walk? There were no signs. There was nothing to

distinguish the hill from any other that I've walked up hundreds of times. We walked up a hill and were threatened with a gun. I would like to report that as a crime."

The Sergeant calmly watched Robert and then turned to a filing cabinet and pulled out a form. He confirmed Robert's name and began writing.

"Where did the incident happen?"

Robert pulled out his map and showed him. The Sergeant took a copy and then told him to draw the route they had taken.

"Okay, please tell me everything that was said when you were stopped by the man."

Robert recounted the conversation, uncomfortably realising he was already unsure exactly what had been said.

The Sergeant wrote everything down without comment but when Robert finished he stood for a moment, tapping his pen on the counter.

"The land you were on is private property. Based on what you've said a man who may or may not be the landowner asked you several times to leave private land. When you refused, he told you to leave and then ultimately threatened you with a shotgun."

"That's right."

"Why did he ask you to leave the estate?"

"He seemed to think we were threatening the deer. It was ridiculous."

The Sergeant started writing again.

"Wait, he didn't give us a chance to explain. There was a stag at the top of Newton Hill. We took some photos but then I fell and it looked as if it was going to charge at us so we ran. That's all that happened."

“I see. I’m going to ask you to come and take a seat in the interview room while I call the estate owner.”

Lifting the counter, the Sergeant waved Robert through and then directed him into a small room with a desk and four chairs.

“Just wait here.”

Robert watched the door close and suddenly felt claustrophobic. The Sergeant was gone fifteen minutes by which time Robert regretted not taking a newspaper or book to read.

“Well?” Robert asked, standing as the Sergeant came back in the room.

“Please sit down.”

The Sergeant waited until Robert had taken his seat before sitting across from him.

“The estate owner has agreed not to press charges against you.”

“I’m making a complaint against him, what right has he to press charges against me?”

“His estate manager observed you and your wife and became concerned about your behaviour. Despite asking you to leave the estate several times, you refused and became argumentative.”

“Because we had done nothing wrong!”

“Mr Castle, SOAC was introduced to make it clear that both land owners and visitors to the country have rights and responsibilities. From what you have said and the estate manager has confirmed, it was reasonable for him to demand you leave the estate. If you are given a reasonable request to leave private land then you have a responsibility to honour that request.”

“You’re saying he had a right to threaten me and my wife with a gun?”

“The estate manager felt he had no choice but to defend himself.”

“Defend himself? Against what? Do I look dangerous to you!”

“Please, lower your voice, Mr Castle.”

“This isn’t right.”

“You mentioned ‘Right to Roam’ earlier. There has never been a right to roam in Scotland. I strongly advise you to read through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I know what you meant, Mr Castle. How would you feel if someone walked into your garden or home and refused to leave?”

“That’s not the same.”

The Sergeant looked as if he was going to respond then stopped himself.

“I also advise you to avoid returning to the estate. What are your plans for the rest of your stay?”

Robert stood.

“We’ll stay away. Can I get the incident number before I go?”

~*~

The B&B was set back from the main road: an old converted farmhouse that must have once belonged to a wealthy farmer. Two stories tall and with enough rooms to have held several generations of farmers at the same time. It

was painted in the same white as all the houses in Inveraray even though it stood alone in its own grounds.

Leaving the police station, Robert had sat in his car for several minutes before driving off. His initial anger at being threatened had turned to frustration at the police Sergeant's reaction. Robert had a sense that there was something intrinsically wrong with what had happened in Glen Fyne but other than the threat of violence, he couldn't identify what was disturbing him.

Arriving at the B&B he parked the car in the farmhouse's vast courtyard alongside several other cars. The B&B was full as was almost every other in this small town. The good weather had seemingly brought people out to the countryside in their hundreds.

Robert had expected to meet more people earlier in the day when they attempted their walk along Glen Fyne but perhaps others had been warned to stay away. He would have to ask the B&B owner if she knew.

Letting himself in, Robert walked along the hallway, leading into the back of the house and then took the stairs up to their room. It wasn't en-suite—they had to share a shower room and bathroom with other guests on their floor. Not ideal but since it had been the first booking available in Inveraray for these dates, they had booked it rather than spend any more hours phoning round other locations.

He paused by their room door, knocked and called through: "Only me."

Opening the door he saw Helen sitting up on the bed, a mostly empty glass of red wine in her hand. She turned her head slowly to look at him.

“How much have you had.” He whispered after he had closed the door.

“This is my first glass.”

“Cheap date.” He replied with a smile.

“Did you make your complaint?” She asked.

Robert took a deep breath and let it out slowly, then went and poured himself a glass of the wine. “You want a top up?”

Helen shook her head. “No, I could fall asleep right now.”

“We haven’t had our dinner yet.”

She gave him a half smile and he realised she had been crying. “Helen...”

He put down his glass and sat down beside her. Putting an arm around her he gently took her glass and placed it on the bedside cabinet. “It’s all right, nothing happened. We’re safe.”

“I know, but he pointed that gun at us. I keep seeing it. Then we turned away and I thought he was going to shoot us in the back.”

Robert handed her a tissue and she dabbed her face. He thought back to their walk returning to the car and then the drive home. He had talked almost the whole way about the injustice of it, the cheek, the bloody-mindedness of the estate manager. Helen had responded, he thought, but only to what he had been saying. He hadn’t once asked her how she felt, what she was thinking.

“I’m sorry. I should’ve asked you how you were.”

“I was so scared. I thought you were going to do something stupid. Fight him, try and take the gun off him. I thought...” Helen began sobbing.

Pulling her close, Robert held her until she calmed.

“Do you want me to see if I can get some food taken up for you?”

Helen nodded.

“Okay. I’ll be back soon.”

~*~

Helen felt a lone tear fall down her cheek. She abruptly wiped it away. This wasn’t like her. She wasn’t someone who fell apart, who got hysterical.

She held out a hand. It was no longer trembling. Helen tried to remember if she had ever lost it so completely... Then stopped herself. She was going to get over this. She picked up the wine glass and took a tiny sip.

Normally Robert went off and climbed his Munro’s on his own. They holidayed together visiting places where she could enjoy architecture and art while Robert could rest, reading, enjoying the local coffee or laze on a beach.

For several years they had travelled to Europe. Time spent in Prague, Barcelona and Venice had been amazing. Then the recession hit and while they still travelled, they stayed in the UK, exploring cathedral cities and countryside. But always South of the border.

It just had seemed right to try a week in Scotland. Try climbing together. See some of Scotland’s heritage. Helen couldn’t believe she had never driven North of Loch Lomond.

They were only two days into this holiday and had planned a whole week. She wasn’t going to let this one dismal day ruin the rest of her time.

She set the wine glass back down on the cabinet. It hadn't helped relax her. Numb wasn't relaxed, it was dead. She didn't want to feel dead.

Helen curled up on the bed and pulled the comforter over her. Another tear fell to the sheet below.

~*~

Robert found Mrs Jackson in her kitchen. There was a scent of herbs and lamb along the corridor and a large pot of stew bubbling on the gas stove.

"Ah, there you are, Mr Castle. We'll be serving dinner in ten minutes."

He smiled at her. "I was wanting to ask, we had a, uh, fright while we were walking and Helen was quite upset by it. Would there be any chance I could take some food up to the room for her?"

"A fright? What kind of a fright?"

"Well, we went up Glen Fyne this morning, heading up Beinn Bhuidhe, but we detoured a bit and got stopped by the estate manager. He refused to let us past and threatened us with a shotgun."

"The estate manager? You say you detoured, where were you stopped?"

"Near Newton Hill, up from Glenfyne Lodge."

"I don't know Glen Fyne very well. It's not a popular walking route. Most people tend to stop at the Oyster Bar or the Brewery. It seems strange that you would have been stopped though. Did the estate manager say why?"

Robert thought back to his experience at the police station.

“He believed we were behaving inappropriately near a herd of deer.”

Mrs Jackson tilted her head and frowned at this.

“Were you?”

“No. Of course not. We reached the top of Newton Hill and a stag was there—a magnificent creature. We took some photos but when we went to leave I, uh, tripped and it looked like it was going to charge so we ran. The estate manager must have seen us but...”

Straightening, Mrs Jackson weighed up what he had said.

“This isn’t the city, Mr Castle. Landowners have a responsibility to protect the deer on their land. Visitors also have a responsibility. You can’t blame someone for doing their job.”

“But threaten us with a gun? That can’t be right?”

Mrs Jackson turned away to stir the stew. “I can understand why your wife would be upset by that. You can always report it to the police if you feel it necessary.”

“I did.”

“What did they say?”

Robert was beginning to get irritated by all the questions. It felt like he was back at the police station.

“They sided with the estate manager.”

“I see.”

Admitting to himself that Mrs Jackson had more sympathy for the estate manager herself than with them, Robert decided it was time to leave. He was about to turn away when Mrs Jackson started speaking again.

“If I remember correctly, the Ardkinglas estate used to be over twenty thousand acres. I don’t know if you were

walking on that estate or not but large plots of land have been sold off over the years making dozens of mini estates. It is quite possible you were on one of the smaller estates. They often get sold off with sporting rights in which case the estate manager may have been trying to ensure you didn't scare the deer away."

"Why wouldn't he have said that?"

"I'm not the person you should be asking."

She turned back to the stove and spoke over her shoulder. "I'll put food on two trays. You can pick them up in ten minutes."

Robert thanked her and headed out of the kitchen. As he walked down the corridor he thought he heard her saying to herself. "Our land no longer."

~*~

"I can collect our dinner in a few minutes." Robert said as he closed their room door behind him.

Helen didn't respond and he walked over to her side of the bed and knelt by her.

"Helen?"

She made a slight sound.

"Do you want to eat?"

"Not hungry." She answered. Her eyes hadn't opened.

Robert looked round and found a rug on a shelf. After placing it carefully over her, he stood for a moment looking down. Her breathing was relaxed. He brushed some hairs away from her face and then left. They'd only need one plate after all.

She woke first, suddenly, which was unusual for her even when the alarm was blaring. Beside her Robert was still, his breathing slow. She turned on her back and stared at the coving which surrounded the old high ceiling. A sign of wealth when the house had been built. All those extra stones laid for no purpose other than to show how much the family had been worth. Much like their own house.

She thought back to the previous day on the hillside and shivered. Had she ever been that scared? Even her work with the homeless had never left her feeling so wiped out. Drugged up or drunk men and women who threatened violence had just become situations to handle. Not a normal part of the work but not unusual.

Yesterday she had for the first time in her life believed Robert was going to get himself killed. She had been afraid for herself but was utterly convinced that if he did not stop pushing that man he would have been shot.

She reached out a hand and felt him move. She didn't want to wake him but wanted to hold him. To be held.

Robert turned to face her, a puzzled look on his face. "What time is it?" He asked.

"Hold me."

He searched her eyes and then leaned back, drawing her onto him, his arms secure around her. She buried her face in his chest and allowed her eyes to fill up as the emotions she had felt the previous day rose up again.

Robert seemed to know not to ask. He just held her.

After some time her thoughts began to order themselves. She had been enjoying their holiday up till then.

She determined there and then that the previous day's event was not going to ruin their week away. Even if Robert wanted to climb another of those monotonous Munro's... No, maybe not that but they were going to enjoy the rest of their time.

She pulled away and looked up at Robert. "Didn't you say we could visit a castle today?"

He smiled. "You have one right here..."

She gave him a friendly punch.

"I may have mentioned it."

She sat up and wiped her eyes. "Promise me you won't go picking a fight with any of the locals."

He seemed to examine her for a minute, his eyes searching hers. He just nodded in response.

Helen extracted herself from the bed and made for the bathroom. Turning, she looked at Robert.

"Do you think we can put yesterday behind us?"

Robert sat up and ran his hand through his hair. "I want to see a solicitor when we get back."

She considered this and decided it wasn't worth arguing over. "Can we at least not talk about it the rest of the holiday?"

She could see that he didn't want to agree to it but he nodded. "Of course."

"Do you think we can be ready in half an hour?"

Robert picked up his watch and checked the time. "It's not even Six. Breakfast isn't served until Seven."

"We can find a cafe on the way."

He raised his eyebrows. "This isn't Glasgow..."

"I'm sure you'll find somewhere..."

He didn't look convinced but his eyes took on a distant look and she knew he was working through options. She closed the bathroom door and studied herself in the mirror. She didn't wear makeup so there had been no mascara to run. After a quick shower it wouldn't look as if she'd been crying.

She closed her eyes and saw the shotgun pointed at them. She forced herself to examine the scene, to accept it but also to reject it. She was not going to be controlled by fear...

Thank you for reading these sample chapters. You can download the full novel from the following sites:

Amazon Worldwide
[US](#) – [UK](#) – [DE](#) – [FR](#) – [ES](#) – [IT](#) – [NL](#)
[JP](#) – [BR](#) – [CA](#) – [MX](#) – [AU](#) – [IN](#)

Also available from [Apple, Nook and Kobo](#) and available on your Tolino device.

Paperback version of novel available from bookshops [listed here](#).

To sign up to the author's mailing list [click here](#).

First published in Great Britain by Mark Anderson Smith,
2014

This paperback edition published in 2017 by
Mark Anderson Smith

<http://www.dragonlake.co.uk>
books@dragonlake.co.uk

Copyright © Mark Anderson Smith, 2014

All rights reserved.

No reproduction without permission.

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-9929883-7-1

The right of Mark Anderson Smith to be
identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

The poem Saltire Copyright © Alexander Cunningham, 2014

Used with permission

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places,
incidents and dialogues are products of the author's
imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to
actual people living or dead, events or locations, is entirely
coincidental.