



FALCONSTONE

Mel
Keegan

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DreamCraft, Australia

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Chapter One

“Mail call!” October sunlight, hot and strong, fell in through the open door as Bruce Carson swung back up the drive from the box at the gate. “Got a packet for you, Scott — I had to sign for it.”

Scott Lennox had heard the characteristic whistle of the ‘postie bike’ minutes before, as the postman stopped at the Carson house. Bruce paused in his systematic destruction of the shrubs lining the drive. The tang of cedar and eucalypt accompanied him into the house. He dropped the dusty work gloves by the door and waved a large yellow envelope in Scott’s direction.

With a muttered curse, Scott dislodged the big tabby cat and peeled himself off the couch. Two blankets slithered onto the floor. The cat spat at him, but Scott was intent on his spine. Every night he spent on that couch, his back protested more urgently. But beggars, he thought philosophically, could seldom be choosers. Bruce and Beck had offered the couch, and Scott was not about to complain.

He rubbed sleep out of his eyes and swore again as he saw the time. The spring sun was high already. Bruce had begun to whack the garden two hours before while Scott slept on after another sleepless night. Blame the Internet, he told himself ruefully. That, and the third vodka cruiser to take the edge off the pain lingering in his spine. Twelve weeks, and he was still not fully healed. The prognosis was less than optimistic, leaving Scott on his friends’ couch while his wheels began to spin.

The envelope carried Royal Mail priority labels, and a UK return address. Bruce headed out to the kitchen for coffee and shortbread while Scott peered at the name of Ormondroyd and Warburton LLC, Solicitors, York. Curiosity cleared his head, and he padded barefoot after Bruce as Beck said too loudly,

“Keep your muck out of the house, unless you want to clean this floor!”

“It’s only dust,” Bruce remonstrated.

“Then you can bloody sweep it,” Beck said sharply. “I’m out the door to work in fifteen minutes.”

It was Bruce's day off, and the overgrown jungle separating house from street had been demanding his attention for months, since Bruce had all the mechanic's natural enthusiasm for gardening. Scott felt a fleeting prickle of guilt as he joined them, surveying Bruce's thick, brown hairy legs in the gray shorts and outsize boots, the faded blue teeshirt with long rips in hem and shoulders; and beside him Beck — fully made up, red-blond hair too-perfect, ready for some trendy cosmetics counter at the mall. Scott had never been interested enough to remember which.

Three months, Scott had been out of work while his back seemed to refuse to heal properly. The chances of him returning to his old job were slim. A certificate in landscape gardening was of little use when a man's spine refused to do the heavy physical labor.

"Morning, Beck," he said dutifully. "You got scissors there?"

"In the drawer, where they always are," she intoned. "I'll be late if I don't get my skates on, and the manager's already on my case." But she passed him the big kitchen scissors — chicken shears that would take off a man's finger — from the cutlery drawer, while Bruce pulled a stool up to the breakfast bar. Beck gave the envelope one semi-curious glance as she filled a water bottle from the filter. "What you got there, Scottie?"

"Dunno," he admitted with a last yawn. "Looks official. International rush job. Bruce had to sign for it."

He felt through the packet for the contents before cutting into it. The satchel contained two smaller envelopes, easy to cut around. He withdrew the larger, thicker envelope and dropped the satchel onto the counter by Bruce's coffee and a pack of Scottish shortbread left over from the previous Christmas.

"Well, tell me about it later," Beck muttered, on her way by. "I need to *git*." She swiped her bag from the dining table and dropped a kiss on Bruce's stubbled cheek. Car keys jingled, hooked over one finger as she checked her phone. "See you tonight, love. Be in about six."

Then she was gone, leaving Scott with a wistful feeling. For the hundredth time he envied Bruce the stability and permanence of a long, happy marriage. Not that Scott envied him Beck. She was a lovely woman — all three of them had slogged through high school together; they were the same age, from suburbs not ten kilometers apart — but even as teens Bruce and Beck always knew they would be married when they won their freedom.

Now, as then, Scott Lennox knew only that he had been gay since he was twelve years old ... and life partners were as difficult to find as one-night-wonders were so easy, they became a way of life, a difficult habit to break.

The screen on the front door rasped shut behind Beck, leaving the house quiet save for the *thud-thud* of hi-fi bass from the next house, the muted roar of traffic from the main road, the gull-like cries of a squadron of black cockatoos in the trees along the bike path. Scott tore open the thick envelope and set the contents on the counter. A few laser-printed sheets, stapled in one corner; a two-page letter on expensive company stationery.

Big, dark, curly-haired, smelling of cologne and shampoo, Bruce read over his shoulder. Moments later he grunted in cursory sympathy. "Hey, sorry, mate. That's a bloody shame. Your Uncle Hector's dropped off the twig."

"Thanks ... don't worry about it," Scott mused, eyes scanning swiftly though the body of the solicitor's letter. "It might bother me if I knew who he was, but I never heard of him."

"And he probably never heard of you." Bruce slurped coffee. "This says the lawyer had to use a freakin' private investigator to track you down. Why the hell would they do that? Bugger. Are you in trouble?"

How much strife could a man get into, Scott wondered, without actually doing anything to bring trouble down on himself. He might have been injured at work and scored enough from the compo claim to be comfortable for years while his back healed properly; but no, with the notorious Lennox luck, Scott had to fall off a ladder in his own backyard, cleaning his own gutters, which overflowed like Niagara Falls in the midwinter rains. July spiraled down into a haze of pain while work went to hell and his job went to a little weasel called Corey Philippoussis, who had been trawling for it since the day he made the critical discovery. The boss nursed a deep ambivalence for gays —

"I'm not in any trouble," Scott protested, "unless you count being half bloody crippled with this spine, thirty-four years old and wondering which bloody TAFE course I should get myself into, to slither back into gainful employment before I hit forty. Then, right on cue, my lease expires and I'm bugged if I can find a place I can afford when I'm not earning."

"Christ, that's bad enough," Bruce agreed, "without having a pack of lawyers after you. They used a private investigator. Is that even legal?"

"It was just to track me down and confirm who I am," Scott mused, reading on through the letter. "Uncle Hector's last male next of kin." He looked up over the letter. "This says Hector Robert Lennox was actually my father's cousin. I suppose I'd have called him 'Uncle' if we'd ever met."

"Too late now," Bruce said with acid humor. Oblivious to the clean

floor, he brought the big, liter coffeepot to the bar, poured a mug and pushed it at Scott. "Get that into you. It's still hot."

And strong, black, sweet, as Beck always made it. Her tar-like coffee usually made Scott cringe, but this morning he drank it without noticing the bitterness, as the letter — signed 'Roger D. Warburton' — got down to business. His pulse gave a wayward skip as he read. "Looks like Uncle Hector left me something in his will. Well, not me specifically, since he didn't know me from a hole in the ground. But the will specified it should go to the surviving *male* next of kin."

"Which would be you." Bruce whistled. "So, what'd he leave you? Something you can sell, get yourself out of this crap you're in?"

The solicitor had been thorough, Scott thought. This Roger Warburton made mention of Daniel J. Lennox, Scott's late father. Scott could remember the day, the hour, when two policemen knocked on his door with the news.

No point racing to the hospital, they said. The head-on crash was instantly fatal, and suddenly Scott, an only child, was alone. Both his parents were in that car, on the Duke's Highway, heading east out of Tailm Bend on what should have been a long weekend in Mount Gambier. Suddenly Danny and Alice Lennox were gone, leaving behind a houseful of possessions for which Scott had no use, a very modest bank balance, enough insurance to cover the cremations ... and an empty place where his support crew had been.

He was just twenty-two years old when he signed the documents, dated them: 2006. He walked out of the funeral home into a hot, desiccated January afternoon, feeling like a boat adrift in a storm. Twelve years later, the memory still smarted like an open wound. Bruce and Beck had been there for him then, and they still were. Scott owed them, and knew he did.

He gestured with the letter, looking up over it into Bruce's dark brown eyes. "This says Hector left me some kind of house, and a portfolio. Stocks and shares."

A piercing whistle, and Bruce lifted the letter to sneak a look at the rest of the sheets. "They've sent a copy of the will. Does it say how much it's all worth?"

"Uh ... nope." Scott skipped on through the body of information. "They're just droning on about inheritance taxes. God, if they try to hand me a bill —!" It was laughable. He collected the documents, envelopes, satchel, followed Bruce into the lounge and watched him plunk onto the couch.

The cat hopped up onto his lap and began to purr even while it glared at Scott. The room was companionably dim, with blinds half-

drawn to keep out the growing October warmth. Summer was shaping up to be a beast, after a winter with too little rain. Bruce looked up at him expectantly.

“So what do the lawyers want from you?”

“I’m supposed to go up there and ‘make arrangements’,” Scott quoted. He dumped the whole sheaf of paperwork into Bruce’s lap and turned away, glaring at his own reflection in the brass-framed mirror over a fireplace that had been bricked over for decades.

He was tanned, with dark hair cropped almost too short, blue eyes, high cheekbones, a pair of small gold hoops in his lobes. He liked to think he looked a little younger than his age, but working in the sun had already brought in lines around his eyes. Time was still on his side, but only just, and Scott sighed.

“A trip to England?” Bruce whistled again. “Now you’re talking, man! I mean, they’ll be covering the costs, won’t they, out of the inheritance.”

“Twenty hours jammed into a can like a bloody sardine,” Scott groaned, “with some kid kicking the back of my seat every twenty seconds till they arrest me for murder as soon as the plane lands! Oh, joy.”

But Bruce had torn open Ormondroyd and Warburton’s second enclosure in the satchel, and he blinked at the e-ticket printout. “Uh, this says first class, mate, right through from Adelaide to someplace called Newcastle. Obviously not the Newcastle in New South Wales. All you need to do is confirm the flight date — which is dead easy, first class never fills up fast — and show up with your bags. You got a passport?”

Scott had, since the holiday in India, three years ago, a trip intended to confirm him and Tyson as a life-long couple with loose marriage plans. The disaster assumed epic proportions in Jaipur, and by the time they saw Mumbai they might have been booked into the same hotel room, but they did not catch a glimpse of each other before checkout. Rebellious, defiant, Scott struck up a transient friendship with a doe-eyed young man called Sunil, who was eager, skilled — and bloody expensive in bar bills, restaurants, random shopping, though Scott was beyond caring. The sex was worth every damned dollar, if only for its high vengeance quotient.

Ever thoughtful, Tyson had Qantas rearrange the seating to put him in a different part of the plane, and within four days Scott arrived home from work to find a half-empty house, most of the DVD collection missing and a stack of overdue bills on the cutting board, held down somewhat ominously, by the Chinese hatchet.

"First class e-ticket," Bruce was saying. "They wouldn't shout you a first class ride if there wasn't some serious cash up for grabs." He scanned the letter, looking for any mention of firm figures, and shook his head. "All this says is, there's enough *assets* to cover the inheritance taxes and run the house. Relax, you won't get a bill." He glanced up from the papers. "There's a phone number here. You want to call 'em?"

"I'd better," Scott mused. "Christ, what time is it in England?"

"Who the hell knows?" Bruce rummaged in his shorts pocket and produced his phone. His thumbs flew over it while Scott waited. "It's ... 2:35am. Means they're eight and a half hours behind us, by the clock. You'll have to call 'em tonight, maybe seven-ish."

"You mind?" Scott gestured at the landline, on the bureau with the silk flower display, the church wedding pictures, the Taoist statuette. "Long distance."

"Hey, you just came into money," Bruce scoffed. "Remember your poor relations when you get friggin' rich, won't you?"

He was still chuckling as he slapped the paperwork back into Scott's hand and headed out to tackle the overgrown garden. Scott read every word again, and a third time, but the details were sparse. A big house, a stock portfolio, enough to cover the enormous taxes incurred when someone died leaving valuable property.

How much would be left? Enough, he wondered, to float a business, put his talents and skills to work? A landscape gardening business, designs and solutions by Scott Lennox, heavy manual work performed by employees. The idea was tantalizing.

It all came down to what Ormondroyd and Warburton meant by a *house* ... what condition it was in, how much the property might be worth, how plausible it would be to get a decent price in the current cash-starved marketplace. Scott rubbed his face hard, still trying to wake up. These were not easy questions, but the solicitor would have some of the answers, and then —

Right on cue, his abused spine gave the day's first massive pang. He looked down at the rumpled sweats and singlet he had slept in, raked his nails through three days' accumulation of stubble, and swore at his reflection. He propped the last will and testament of Hector Robert Lennox, ticket and letter, between the landline and the blue glass vase of silk roses, and marched into the bathroom.

With Beck at work and Bruce busy, he had the luxurious facilities to himself. Not for the first time felt the stirrings of genuine guilt for occupying their couch weeks longer than he had intended. He hit the taps for hot water, turned his back to the scalding stream, and began to frame questions for Ormondroyd and Warburton.

What Scott knew about the English side of his family was scant. Daniel, his father, rarely spoke of them, and since he married a girl from Hobart, Scott's mother had only ever known the few scraps Daniel chose to pass on. Danny Lennox had a much older sister, Scott remembered, but 'Auntie Shazz' married a Texan and disappeared into the wilds of America when Scott was very young. The family lost touch. Sharon never sent an email, much less a card at Christmas. The solicitors could surely have tracked her down, but in any case the Lennox will stipulated a male heir, as if it were vitally important the property should remain in the family.

If he strained his memory, Scott recalled a single mention of his father having two uncles, a James and a Robert. It was the third son of that brood, Charles Lennox, who came out to Australia in 1960, and married a woman he had met on the six-week voyage. Charles and Linda were Scott's paternal grandparents, but he had only the haziest recollections of them. Enough to remember how 'Gramps' dropped dead without warning just weeks after his fiftieth birthday, of a series of catastrophic strokes — and the widowed Linda Bigelow promptly remarried. She was somewhere in New Zealand now, and the feud between her and Daniel drove them apart until the crash, east of Tailem Bend. Scott knew nothing of his paternal grandmother, and had never cared to ask.

His maternal grandparents were still in Tasmania, but he had not visited since he was a teen. The only time he saw them again was at the memorial, a sad little gathering where just seven people turned up to remember Danny and Allie Lennox. Three of them were Scott himself, Bruce and Beck Carson, who had known Scott's parents well enough since high school.

Such thoughts made grim companions at 5:00am, with a change in the weather and the reek of jet fuel sharp on the air, heavy in the sinuses, as the taxi cruised into the rank outside the international terminal. Full daylight was an hour away, and rising humidity made rings around the big arc lamps. Rain would come in off the gulf waters before noon, if Scott was any judge.

He had always hated airports. They were places where a person traveling alone was made painfully aware that he was *alone*. Or she, he thought fairly as he paid the driver. But seldom did he see anyone else traveling without companionship, and his willful memory returned constantly to India, when he and Tyson fell out over a host of such stupid, trivial things —

The way Tyson wouldn't quit cruising everything in a pair of tight trousers, even though he and Scott had talked over wedding plans. The way Scott packed a suitcase, with the 'delicates' crushed in the corner and the aromatic socks tossed in on top, and how Tyson could always be relied on to go two vodkas over the top and turn cranky, which was a dumb thing to do, especially when the wrong bar crowd had been glowering at the openly gay couple for half an hour.

In retrospect, Scott chastised himself for not trying to save the situation. An apology here, a soft word there, and he might still be with Tyson. Or more likely Tyson would have confirmed what Scott had discovered the hard way: that he was an air-headed flirt with no sense of the value of money, no conscience about spending cash that didn't belong to him, and possessed no skerrick of self-control when the vodka hit his bloodstream —

Grumbling soundlessly, he lugged his baggage into the vast, echoing wilds of the terminal and cast about for any open counter. As yet all were closed, while security guards lounged through the end of the graveyard shift. But passengers had begun to kibitz in small, quiet clusters, and in half an hour the throng would resemble a grand final crowd. By six it would be a zoo. Scott gritted his teeth and looked for a place to sit down, hurry up and wait.

Ten minutes on the phone with Maggie Warburton, of Ormondroyd and Warburton, had filled in only a few of the blanks. "Really, Mister Lennox, I can't tell you very much over the phone," she apologized in a voice rich with regional overtones. After too much television, Scott knew an educated northern accent when he heard one. "If you can tell me when you're arriving, we'll have the documents waiting for you."

"I'll call you again, when I've talked to the airline," Scott had promised.

"Excellent. When you've made the arrangements, looked over your property, come to whatever decisions, we'd be delighted to continue to act on your behalf. Mister Lennox, it's almost impossible to feed this through a phone. You have our email and fax on the letterhead. Just send your arrival information, I'll make sure someone's there to meet you."

"I, uh, thanks," Scott said lamely, painfully aware of how far out of his depth he was floundering.

"Trust Ormondroyd and Warburton to make things as simple as possible," Maggie said smoothly. "It's quite the legal maze, but my father's the finest representative you'll find in York, if you're dealing with estates, properties, houses, land, staffing issues. We've handled

numerous cases like this, which is why we were assigned to the Lennox estate. We've handled every aspect of the Lennox inheritance, and estate management, since your uncle's death."

So Scott gave her his Gmail address and mobile, jotted down Maggie Warburton's office email and private line. Only a handful of *assignments*, he guessed, would have access to that private line: he was already among the chosen few, which felt extremely odd. With promises to inform her of his travel plans, he hung up. Bruce and Beck were watching, unblinking, expecting heaven knew what.

Next morning, with a sense of complete unreality, Scott called British Airways and set his departure date. He sent the itinerary to the printer and drove over to the Colonnades mall for enough luggage to get him there and back.

October was almost spent. Department stores and boutiques alike displayed only summer gear, beach towels, kaftans and sarongs, all jostling for space with Christmas wares and garish Halloween junk. But November in the northern end of England added up to *cold*.

Twenty minutes' research on a variety of tourist websites gave him the bald facts, before he checked the weather forecast for the Scottish border country, and swore lividly. Freakish November weather lay on the English horizon. Unseasonal snows were being sucked slowly down from Scandinavia by some equally odd low-pressure cell over the Atlantic.

So he would pack just enough, he decided — jeans, jacket, sweater — then hit the mall when he got to York, where the stores would be stocked for winter, not summer. And donate the arctic survival gear to the Red Cross before he parked his bum on a plane headed south.

Home in time for Christmas? He had no way of being sure.

He was thoroughly out of his depth, way over his head, when the flight was called. First class passengers boarded along with anyone in need of assistance, minutes ahead of the stampede for the cattle car.

He filed along with an elegant troupe trying to look like celebrities, already wondering what the hell Scott Lennox was doing in first class. There was, he thought with grim satisfaction, a first time for everything.

Chapter Two

The English cold hit him in the face like a physical slap as he stepped out through the glass doors into a wind-swept vastness of tarmac and, beyond, the season's dormant fields. Other passengers rushed by as he took a deep breath of the first fresh air he had tasted since the first leg of the flight boarded. First class or not, a twenty-four hour journey left the human brain so jetlagged, Scott might have been on Mars as he surveyed the deep overcast, the grayness of the morning. A few premature seasonal decorations inside the tall glass panels seemed forlorn, serving only to underscore dismal weather the locals didn't seem to notice.

Then again, very few of them had walked out of an Australian spring yesterday, Scott allowed as he slung his bags over both shoulders and cast around for his bearings. Maggie Warburton promised someone would be here to meet him. He had emailed a photo; if the Ormondroyd and Warburton underling had seen it was another question.

A short taxi rank formed up to his right, only meters from the doors, and Scott groaned as he considered the fare, Newcastle to York. He should have researched the public transport, and kicked himself for the mistake. Trusting Maggie Warburton was likely to cost him dearly.

Muttering the kind of language that would have aroused his father's ire, he had turned toward the taxis when a horn honked from the stop-and-drop. A blood scarlet Toyota Camry had pulled in just short of a sign saying, in large letters, 'No Parking, Set Down Only.' Scott hustled as a woman leaned out to wave. The wind and background noise of idling jets just on the other side of the terminal building almost carried her voice away, but he caught his name.

Cold flushed her cheeks and she dove right back into the car. The boot popped, and he stowed his bags, grateful to slide into the Toyota's sudden heat. He held both hands to the vents for a moment while she said,

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mister Lennox. Traffic — they're

digging the road up on the approach to the airport. Something about the water mains, not sure what. I'm not local." She offered her hand. "I'm Maggie Warburton. We spoke on the phone."

"Call me Scott. I thought I recognized the voice." He took her hand for a moment. "I didn't expect you in person."

She ran up the seatbelt, tripped the indicator and began to watch her mirror — a short, rotund woman who might have been forty, with a pink complexion, dark hair tipped in red-blond, clad in a voluminous charcoal sweater over black slacks and suede boots. An impressive mass of bangles clattered as she threaded into the steady stream of cars and taxis headed for the gates. He watched scarlet talons that matched the Camry, and weather-beaten, hard-worked hands, as she drove.

"I'd asked one of the secretaries to come over and meet you," she said easily, "but he called in sick this morning, some kind of virus doing the rounds." She angled a curious glance at him. "Your first time in England?"

"Yeah, but my dad was Aussie by a fluke," Scott mused. "He could easily have been born here. The Lennox side of the family's only been in Australia since 1960."

"Just short of three generations." Maggie swung out of the airport gates and headed into sporadic southbound traffic. Bleak open fields stretched away on both sides of the road, a checkerboard of green and brown. "You won't know too much about England, then."

"Only what you see on TV," Scott admitted. "The UK side of the family could never be bothered to keep in touch ... not that there was much family left. Can't be, if I'm the only heir. The last Lennox standing, am I?"

She sighed. "The last male, at least. This is the way families unravel, and it's sad. Over three or four generations, a tribe can dwindle away to just a handful. Since there's been no communication, I assumed you wouldn't know much about the Lennox family. I did a little research; I hope you'll forgive me."

Scott held his hands to the vents as the somber landscape rushed by. The late October sky was swiftly lowering, the sun angle reminiscent of the middle of the South Australian winter. Many trees already showed skeletal forms while others hung onto a last flutter of parched autumn plumage. "Nothing to forgive," he said unconcernedly, "unless you turned up a lot of skeletons rattling in the clan closet. Anything you want to tell me would help me get my bearings."

Traffic was light, and Maggie divided her attention between him and the road while the city raced up to meet them. "The first thing I'll do is apologize about this weather. I've never seen it so bad in October.

They're saying it's a freak effect of global warming, something to do with extra moisture in the environment and unpredictable changes in the wind direction, or something."

The heater had already thawed the ice from Scott's fingers, and he waved off the apology. "Don't worry about it. It's happening everywhere. The weather's getting very weird at home. So, the Lennox family —?"

She had taken the car wide around the roadwork, which closed one lane with two trucks and several signal-flare yellow, treaded machines, and now accelerated smoothly. "I dug back as far as your great-grandfather, Geoffrey Douglas Lennox, born in March, 1912. He made quite a fortune in shipping on the Clyde, though his stake money seems to have ridden on a horse's nose. A mare called Rosie Malone romped home at a hundred to one. The next you knew, your savvy old grandfather invested in shipping, between the world wars. 1940-44, he built corvettes, which German U-boats sank almost as fast as they could be launched. Even before those days, vast fortunes were made in the 1930s. It sounds immoral to say Geoffrey Lennox got stinking rich in the middle of the Great Depression, but there it is."

"Immoral? Getting rich is more of a miracle," Scott said acerbically. "There, uh, isn't much of the money left, is there?"

"There's enough," Maggie said shrewdly. "Most of it's tied up in the portfolio at this moment, of course, but the terms of Hector's will do permit your broker to convert to cash an after-tax amount equal to the inheritance taxes, which I'm afraid are considerable. You'll be able to keep Falconstone, at least until you decide what to do with it."

"Sell it," Scott snorted.

She angled a glance at him. "Don't be in too much of a hurry. If you put it on the market at this time, in its current condition, you'll take a bad beating."

"Falconstone." He tried the name on his tongue. "A country house, then."

"Now, there's an understatement," Maggie Warburton said cryptically. "Not that it's any of my business, of course, but ... aside from the patriarch, Geoffrey Lennox himself, your family hasn't been famous for making smart business decisions. You won't know how Great-grandfather Geoffrey detested his three sons?"

Scott actually chuckled. "Do I sniff a juicy scandal? Why don't you regale me?"

"Well, Robert, his firstborn, wrote off a motorcycle at the ripe old age of twenty. Obviously, he died unwed and childless — which probably wouldn't have been different if he'd lived." Maggie hesitated.

"By all accounts, Robbie was homosexual." As if she thought she ought to apologize for the observation.

"Wouldn't surprise me," Scott said, reluctantly amused. "I guess the gay gene must run in the family."

It took a moment for the sense of what he had said to percolate through, then she glanced sidelong at him again. "You —?"

"Yes," Scott said without hesitation. "Sorry if it bothers you."

"It doesn't bother me at all." Maggie relaxed visibly. "You just never know, even now, if someone's going to take umbrage. I didn't like to say too much about your Uncle Robbie before sounding you out. He did have a partner, a lad called Derek, a fellow-student from his Oxford days." She gave him a sidelong, quizzical look. "You Lennoxes have exceptionally good brains ... some of you actually use them. Anyway, Robbie and Derek wrote the most exquisite love letters, which of course Derek kept after Robbie was killed. They turned up in an attic after Derek passed away, only about ten years ago. His friends allowed some of them to be included in a very sad, very charming book, do you know it? *Lost Loves*, an account of gay relationships between World War I and the swinging sixties — when it all hung so far out, stodgy old British law was forced to jog to keep up."

"Sorry, never heard of it," Scott admitted. "I do read a fair bit, but it's usually something with ... a bit more pace. So Geoffrey Lennox was still alive when the *Lost Loves* book was published."

"Oh yes. And Derek's surviving friends made sure he received a copy! Of course, the old man had been utterly scathing about Robbie and Derek, never acknowledged poor Derek's existence, much less the relationship. Wouldn't even permit him to attend the funeral." She shrugged, sighed. "So sad. It was the 1950s. Things were ... different."

"Very." Scott watched the Newcastle streets slide by as Maggie headed up the long approach to the road bridge over the choppy, gray-brown murk of the Tyne. "My dad mentioned another uncle. James, was it?"

"That's right. Stupid, ambitious, arrogant James. Bankrupt before he was twenty-five. He could never snatch so much as a penny out of the old man's grasping hands, so in protest he set about drinking himself into oblivion. He passed away in 1984, leaving four venomous ex-wives, hordes of ravening in-laws, and no progeny. Or at least, none legitimate. There *might* be a daughter out there, in Paris at this time."

"Lucky for me," Scott said dryly, "the third son would have been Charles, my own Gramps. According to my father, he landed out in Australia in 1960, give or take ... dropped dead with a series of massive strokes when he was only fifty. Smoking for forty years might have had

something to do with it." He frowned at the parklands as the Toyota left behind the river, and Maggie headed on south.

"Geoffrey despised every one of his sons, even your grandfather," she said thoughtfully. "Robbie grew up gay. James would have burned through the entire fortune in a decade, or less. Charles was levelheaded and safely hetero, but he and the old man seem to have fought like cat and dog over business, money, education, the young man's associates, even his women friends. Staff gossip is invaluable, and a few of those maids and valets are still alive! I visited a retirement home in Harrogate, spent an afternoon drinking tea and chatting. Apparently, young Charles and his father would bellow at each other like rutting buffalo — in the end, still little more than twenty, naturally Charles fled to the ends of the Earth to get away from Geoffrey. I'm rather afraid the old buzzard had the last laugh."

Scott frowned at her. "Gramps dropped dead when I was a kid. One day he was there, the next, whoosh, gone. No warning."

The dark, blond-streaked head nodded. "Exactly. Charles passed away far too young, in 1991, leaving two children: your own father, Daniel, and his big sister, your Aunt Sharon. The old man outlived all three of his sons, *and* his only grandson." A cynical smile tugged one corner of her mouth. "You know Geoffrey Lennox lived to be a hundred and two, don't you? What an innings! But I suppose it's one of the occupational hazards of being extremely long lived. One tends to bury one's siblings, spouses and offspring."

The Lennox patriarch's great age came as a surprise, and Scott gave a low whistle. "Born 1912, you said?"

"And died at last back in May, 2014," Maggie affirmed. "By that time, Geoffrey had made his peace to one degree and another with the last surviving son of his brother, George, who'd lost a battle with cancer thirty-odd years before. Hector Lennox, George's only male heir, at least carried on the family name, wasn't a hopeless lush, bankrupt, or — I'm sorry — gay. Gentlemen of your grandfather's generation were frequently unforgiving of the, uh, latter."

"You don't need to sugar coat it," Scott assured her. "I'm old enough to remember the hassle being gay was even twenty years ago. Christ, coming out to my own parents was a circus, even though they supported me. For the first couple of years, something gave 'em the idea they had to protect me from myself. But after they got over the shock, they were great."

Memories sprang unbidden from dark places inside his skull, where Scott rarely ventured. Pleasure and pain coiled around each other like mating serpents, impossible to tell where one began and the

other ended. He indulged himself for just a moment and then shook himself back to reality, an act of willpower. "The truth is, being gay can still be a bloody hassle," he told Maggie. "How good life is depends on the company and the place. Which was probably always true. Geoffrey would've like to round us all up and drown us? I guess *we* got the last laugh. Look who inherited in the end."

Still, knowing his illustrious ancestor would have scorned him, disowned him, stung like a hornet. Scott thought fleetingly of his job, which had passed to the little weasel, the moment the boss could find any legitimate excuse to lay off the gay he'd never felt comfortable with. Some things never changed. Possibly never would.

"I suppose you're right," Maggie mused. "I'm pleased to say you'll find things are fairly tolerant in this country now ... though I have to admit, York isn't quite the thriving gay action spot you might have hoped for. There's a bar I know, and a club, I think, but ... oh, you'll find them soon enough. You'll certainly have a lot more luck if you try Leeds or Middlesbrough. They're not as far away as you think. Nowhere's far from anywhere in this country. Not like Australia, eh?"

Scott could have told her he'd already touched down on enough web pages to know the region's allures and limitations better than she did. York itself had a single gay bar, serving a city of two hundred thousand people. If Scott had needed a quiet warning to be discreet, that was it. He said nothing, kept the smile in place as Maggie steered her thoughts back to business.

"Anyway, your Uncle Hector inherited the lot just four years ago. There's a handful of Lennox women, your cousins and aunts, scattered between South Africa and Canada. None of them contested the will, and it wouldn't have done them any good to try. Geoffrey was absolutely specific, damn the old misogynist. He named Hector his heir years before he passed away, so any contest would have been an expensive waste of time — lucrative for solicitors, of course. Contested wills are green pastures to us." Her brow creased. "Within three months of Geoffrey's passing, Hector had sold the house in Hillhead — one of the poshest parts of Glasgow, where Geoffrey spent his last years — and invested most of all the available cash he could raise in Falconstone. I only wish I knew why."

A black flag ran up fast, and Scott stifled a groan. "Okay, lay it on me. What's wrong with Falconstone?"

"Well, it's very old," Maggie said slowly. "It's National Trust listed, which means it's protected, and this may or may not be good for *you*. Broadly speaking, it means you can't refurbish it past a certain point, much less redevelop it. At the same time, it's quite run down. It

wasn't worth nearly the price Hector paid for it. In fact, he was robbed. I'd have to say it was all very weird. He seemed to be desperate to acquire the house for some reason I haven't been able to discover." She shrugged eloquently. "If you like, I can keep digging."

"Please do," Scott invited. "So, it's a dump that'll need a lot of work before I can ask a decent price for it?"

"Not quite a dump, but it does need significant work. Otherwise you can expect to be fleeced at market." Maggie paused to negotiate traffic as she picked up the southbound A1 and put her foot down hard. "Now, when Hector bought it, a very old lady, a Mrs. Chisholm, the widow of a well-known MP, had lived there for many years. Apparently the house went up for sale when she moved to a nursing home in Leeds. I believe she's actually still alive, though she'll be in her late nineties now. If the resident housekeeper can be trusted, Mrs. Chisholm has a nasty case of dementia. Too little maintenance was done on Falconstone in far too long, with the result that ... well, you'll see for yourself soon enough."

Again, Scott groaned. "Not what I'd wanted to hear."

"I can imagine." Maggie sighed. "Hector Lennox probably intended to renovate the property eventually, but he didn't own it long enough, or live long enough. It's back on the market so soon because he suffered a massive coronary heart attack. He didn't make it to hospital. In fact, I do believe he'd been dead for some time when the body was found." She made a face. "It's all rather morbid. His will also specifies that the house will pass to his nearest male Lennox heir, some pact of honor Hector entered into with the old man. But it was a damned close thing: you're not merely the last to bear the Lennox name, Scott. You're one of only four people left in the world with identifiable Lennox blood. The other three — all women — are somewhat aged."

"Auntie Shazz, who married the Texan and disappeared off to America when I was learning to ride a little bike with three wheels." Scott yawned deeply.

"Yes. Then there's a lady in Cardiff, a Mrs. Piggott, Hector's younger sister, who's undergoing chemo for one of the nastier cancers. The Piggotts aren't short of money. They had one daughter, born with some birth defect, died in infancy. And we traced an elderly widow living in Brighton," Maggie added, "a cousin of Hector's whose maiden name was Lennox. She had no children." She shrugged. "Then there's you."

Scott indulged in a quiet sound of humor as he set his head back on the rest and closed his eyes. "Sorry. Nothing's actually funny, but ... to me, 'Brighton' is the suburb with the wind harp on the long jetty, just across from the Esplanade Hotel." He pried open one eye to look at her.

"Green gulf waters, yellow metropolitan beaches, riprap and the new dunes stabilizing, surf lifesavers, shark-spotting planes ... Adelaide."

She graced him with a smile. "Your home town. Why don't you get some sleep? You look like you're in the middle of last week with jetlag. We're a couple of hours out of York. We're going in through Darlington and Boroughbridge, it's faster to stay on the motorway. If you want the scenic tour, we can arrange something later. I'll wake you when we get close ... *now* what's funny?"

"Darlington," Scott admitted. "The suburb where they're still building the new expressway, just down the hill from Flinders Uni, where I *almost* studied. I was going to do marine biology, till I had a look at the job market. Took all of three minutes to work out it'd be one hulluva lot easier, not to mention quicker, getting an actual job if I chickened out and did landscape gardening at TAFE. So, forget the whole academic thing, and Flinders ... up the hill from Darlington."

"Yes, you Lennoxes *do* have brains, it runs in the family. And Adelaide," Maggie Warburton guessed wryly, "must have been settled by the English."

But Scott's thoughts had begun to unravel. He was asleep before he could frame a coherent reply. Must send postcards, he told himself. Bruce and Beck would get a smile out of the local map.

He woke with a start when the Toyota pulled up sharply, throwing him into the seatbelt. Maggie Warburton was as fluent in blistering curse words as any Australian, and before Scott was properly awake she dropped the car into reverse and backed away from the truck which had stalled just short of a major traffic island. Plowed fields stretched away to left and right while the low building line of an old, old city rose dead ahead.

Still cursing, Maggie waited for her chance and went around fast, threading into sparse traffic on Shipton Road. Scott yawned, rubbed his eyes, peering at red-roofed houses on his left, a narrow strip of park or greenway on the right.

"Sorry, didn't mean to shake you up," Maggie apologized, "but we're almost home. My father kept the old offices, near the hospital and football ground. We'll be there in five minutes."

"Your father — Roger Warburton," Scott remembered. "He wrote the letter."

"Signed it," she corrected smartly. "I did the research and wrote it, but as usual the boss takes the credit. Which he'd say is only fair. He founded the practice thirty years ago, with that friend of his, Freddie

Ormondroyd. Dear, daft old Freddie retired to Jersey some time ago, so now it's Roger and me, and Freddie's useless kid, Frank. Same age as me, but Frank pops in just enough to keep the family finger in the pie. The bloody man seems to live on a golf course unless it's actually snowing." She regarded the low, yellow-gray sky doubtfully. "Speaking of which, I don't like the look of *that*."

"Snow?" Scott recoiled. "It's only October."

"It'll be November in less than a week — and all bets are off," Maggie informed him. "You packed warm clothes, I hope."

"Some. I'll find a department store tomorrow." Scott shifted in the seat, painfully aware of his spine. His back had begun to demand a mattress. If it was denied, he knew the price he would pay. "I need to find a hotel."

She shot him a guilty look. "Did I forget? You're booked into a B&B on St. Peter's Grove. It's an easy walk from our offices, but I'll deliver you. Look, sign the documents this afternoon, then get some rest. You can hire a car tomorrow. I'll show you the road out to Falconstone, introduce you to the staff. You've plenty of time. The documents will take at least a week to process. Local government doesn't break too many speed records, but we'll do what we can to shake them up."

"Staff?" Scott echoed. "You mean, as in wages? I'm covering payroll?"

"Earnings from the stock portfolio cover it, plus our fees." Maggie turned left into a narrow street lined with buildings that must have been centuries old. "You have a housekeeper, Mrs. Bretton, who lives in. There's also a groundsman, something like a gamekeeper. Arthur Gurney, Art to his friends and enemies alike. He's a rather disagreeable customer, but good at what he does, and you can trust him. A gardening contractor comes in when he's needed, but at this time of the year everything's almost dormant. It'll be spring before you have to worry about much maintenance in the grounds, and Gurney will keep down the vermin."

"Vermin? Sorry, it's starting to sound like there's an echo in here." Scott caught himself roughly. "Foxes, I suppose? I don't have a problem with foxes. They'll keep down the rabbits for you."

"You'll have a problem with the feral cats," Maggie told him. "The woods are infested, and some of them are huge. According to Gurney, some of them are the size of Scottish wildcats. They kill every bird they can get to, which is a pity. In season the local woods, such as they are — and there's little enough left! — should be full of songbirds."

Scott knew enough about feral cats to accept the necessity for Art Gurney, groundsman, gamekeeper. Australia's national parks were

similarly besieged, with the native wildlife often being driven to extinction. He said no more of it as Maggie parked outside a three storey, red brick house which had been converted into offices. The name of Ormondroyd and Warburton LLC, Solicitors, shone on a polished brass shield by the oiled-oak door.

Poised on the curb, he glanced over the dark brickwork, windows made up of tiny glass panes, an arched doorway. Looming over the roofs to his right, he glimpsed the pale, ancient, twin square towers of the cathedral, York Minster itself — the only landmark he was likely to recognize. Every brochure showed it, every webpage seemed to pivot around it.

The late morning cold struck to his bone marrow as he followed Maggie inside. Humid warmth greeted them, but Scott kept on his jacket while she pressed deeper into the house in search of her father. He inspected wood paneled walls, potted aspidistra, antique chairs. Framed horse racing photographs of an earlier age, winners with names like Arkle and Nicolous Silver and Mill House checkered the walls. He wondered if Roger Warburton or Freddie Ormondroyd might be the veteran punter.

A door clicked open and voices issued from within. Maggie looked out, beckoning. "Everything's ready for you, Mister Lennox."

It was *Mister* Lennox now? Moments later Scott was unsurprised, when the senior Warburton took his hand, shook it formally, ushered him to a chair. The man was over seventy, robust, ramrod-backed, hair the color of steel wire — reserved, unsmiling, in an impeccable indigo three-piece suit. Scott angled a look at Maggie, but she answered with a minute shrug: *it's his practice, his business, his call.*

Go figure, Scott thought as he took a cup of tea, two biscuits in the saucer, only then realizing how famished he was. Warburton returned to the leather chair behind the vast teak desk and screwed the cap off a fountain pen. Everything here seemed so old, Scott could have stepped back half a century.

"All the details are in good order, Mister Lennox." Warburton's voice was deep, gruff, much thicker with the accent of the north than Maggie's own. "As per the will's explicit instructions, the stock portfolio has been passed into the hands of a brokerage in London. Mister Hector Lennox used to prefer to manage it himself, but unless you have any objection, Chan-Wylie Financial Management will put the funds to work efficiently."

"No objection I can think of." Scott forced his tired mind to function. The tea was too sweet, but he drank it gratefully as he skimmed the documents. "I'll be the first to admit, I don't know one damned

thing about the stock market. Even if I did, any brokerage I'd know would be in Australia. You've checked out this Chan-Wylie?" He glanced up at Maggie, not her father.

"They're solid, with a sound reputation since '79, no major catastrophes, enough quick recoveries to leave you confident, but not suspicious." She drew up a chair. "They'll provide monthly and quarterly reports, if you want to monitor the performance of the portfolio."

"I wouldn't know what I was looking at," he confessed. "I've spent fifteen years in landscape gardening — ask me about grevilleas, the bulk price for pine mulch, and the theory of retaining walls. I can tell you now, I'd prefer to turn the whole lot, house, portfolio, everything, into cash. I've an ambition to fly solo, get into business for myself, but it takes serious funding."

He watched Warburton's brow furrow. "Aye, well, you'll need to be patient if you want to go that road," the old man said slowly. "Mister Lennox, your uncle, had it written into his will that neither Falconstone nor his stock portfolio can be realized for a period of two years after transfer of title."

Two years? Scott sat back, knuckling his eyes. "That long?"

"Enough time," Maggie offered, "to put some clever money into the house, get it back up to spec before you try to get a decent price for it. You'll do much better in the long run. Till then, the will does permit you to draw on surplus income from the stock portfolio. Anything that's left after the house is maintained, the staff paid, taxes covered, is yours. No strings attached," she added.

"Well, that's something." Scott returned to the documents, skimming the legal jargon and beginning to wish he had an interpreter.

"There'll be income enough to keep the house and staff right, and sort out the problems," Warburton promised. "Two years from now, you can look at selling and expect to get a good price. If you do decide to sell, that is."

"Why wouldn't I?" Scott sketched his signature at the foot of four documents and sank back heavily into the chair.

Warburton seemed to bristle. "You haven't even seen it yet. Maggie, let's have those photographs."

The last thing Scott wanted was to pore over photos and floor plans. He wanted a meal, a schooner or three of something potent, a few hours' sleep. And if there should be a gay bar or club in the vicinity, a little companionship would be welcome. It was four weeks since he had tangled his limbs in that kind of athletic activity, and that night his spine signaled clearly — *not yet, you bloody idiot* —

Not so easy to explain to the twenty-something that pain was really

not a turn-on for some, and if he wanted to make himself useful, the horse liniment was in the bathroom cabinet. The look on the kid's face was priceless, but he was decent about it. Jonno, or Johnny, or ... Scott didn't remember. It all happened on the Saturday evening when Bruce and Beck drove up to the Clare Valley for an anniversary party. Jonno had asked the eternal question with quirked brows and tilted hips; four hours later they didn't bother to exchange numbers as he went on his way.

Fleeting, touch-and-go relationships were all much the same: simple to set up, difficult to remember. Sometimes all Scott recalled a week later was a chance word, a laugh, some random part of a gym-tortured, waxed and polished young body, most of which started to look alike as time blurred them together. Thinking of Bruce and Beck, he sighed, flexed his back muscles, trying them one by one while Warburton pressed on relentlessly.

"She's a beautiful old property, Mister Lennox, set in the middle of forty hectares of your own private land."

"Before you get excited," Maggie said quickly, "remember, you're zoned rural. Don't even ask about selling out to a developer for ranks of townhouses. You've seen the map. You're smack in the heart of the North York Moors National Park."

Not a national park as Australians thought of them, Scott remembered. This was a vast region stretching from Guisborough in the north to Kirkham Abbey in the south, and from the flyspeck village of Osmotherly on east to the ragged coast. The region was protected from industrial or residential development, but it was extensively farmed, studded with villages as well as numerous historic sites and ancient houses.

"Aye, your nearest village is Thornton," Warburton informed him, "five or six mile south. What'd that be in kilometers, Maggie?"

"Ten or so," she judged. "There's trails over the fields and moors, right-of-way paths through the fields, but it can be a nasty walk, especially in winter. Your forty hectares are mostly open moorland, some stands of timber here and there. Again, protected. I'm afraid you can't cut it."

"Why would I want to?" Scott searched for a smile. "Where I come from, we're all about revegetation. Our hills were clear-cut back in the colonial days, the gold rush. Now, the top soil's so thin, the rocks bust right through. You can just about graze livestock through paddocks full of stones, but erosion's a huge issue."

Warburton seemed surprised, impressed. "You're a landscape gardener, you say? Then you might get a bit more out of Falconstone than you're thinking. She's got lovely grounds, in season."

"*Had*," Maggie said sharply. "Come on, Dad, be fair. The whole place has gone to hell. Hector Lennox did nothing with the grounds or the land. He had a contact to keep the grass down. Mick Dunstable's lads prune the roses and clip the hedges, that's about it. The only thing Hector ever cared about was the house. Heaven alone knows why, because he never troubled himself to give it the maintenance these old properties need. And it wasn't because he was short of cash. He was loaded. There's still a very healthy wedge left after the inheritance taxes are paid."

"She makes a point, our Maggie does," Warburton admitted. "Falconstone isn't what she used to be. But she could be again."

"I'll take a look at it," Scott promised dutifully, pushing up to his feet with a cursory glance at the color printouts Warburton had arranged on the desk. The long shots showed a large, impressive house, but his tired eyes refused to take in details. Tomorrow, he told himself. First — food. Then sleep. He turned deliberately toward Maggie. "You said something about a B&B?"

Chapter Three

Against the odds, the sun shone as the rented Ford Mondeo ran north-east out of York. Scott stuck to the tail of Maggie's Camry while the country lanes grew narrower, the villages further apart, the landscape bleaker. Autumn was rapidly winding down toward winter. The further north one traveled, the sooner winter arrived. This was not a place to be lost, he thought — not when mobile phone coverage was known to be spotty and the overcast could be so dense, figuring which way was north came down to guesswork.

He frowned at the rise of the land, rolling hills, valleys, sudden dark escarpments, forlorn farmhouses, white-walled cottages scattered seemingly at random. The last hint of blooming heather showed in a stubborn tract of purple here, a hint of violet in the shadows, but the brilliance of August and September had faded long before.

The landscape was picturesque, he decided, but often so featureless, only one bred and born in the area would know where he was at a glance. "Be aware," Maggie had informed him before they drove out, "you won't get phone coverage within five kilometers of Falconstone itself. It's a notorious dead spot. There aren't enough people in the area

for it to be worth putting in the relay towers, and the ones serving York and Scarborough seem to fade out before they overlap.”

So uploading photos was out of the question, even if Scott’s mobile had worked in this country — which it didn’t. “There’s a landline at the house, surely,” he had said. The remark won him an odd look. No need for her to say it: *this is the twenty-first century, and you’re not in Antarctica now.* “We’ll just have to do things the old fashioned way, won’t we?”

They passed through Thornton without stopping. Scott took in the lines of gray-brick, slate-roofed cottages, the humpbacked bridge over the rush of the Todd Beck. Rain in the uplands had it running fast, brawling in the deep streambed that bisected the old pit village. Everything he saw was heritage listed, or it would have been gone long before, with housing projects springing up like toadstools in its place. The pub was open, and a café, but so late in the season many doors carried ‘closed for the season’ signs.

Maggie headed north through Thornton, slowing only for a few black-faced sheep straggling across the road, before she took a pot-holed, unkempt lane between deserted fields. At three o’clock the sun was already low. Scott reminded himself how far north he had come, how early twilight would fall, even if dusk lingered much longer than he was accustomed to.

In six weeks, around the year’s shortest day, the sun might be above the horizon for seven hours — so different from home, he felt the alien’s natural unease, and a sudden desire to pick up a phone, hear Bruce Carson’s voice, or Beck’s. The longing to have someone waiting for him snatched the breath out of his throat.

Black wrought iron gates set in a crumbling stone wall loomed on the left of the road. Rust drooled from the uprights; weeds overgrew the lower bar, apparently wedging the gates wide open. The nail-polish scarlet Camry turned in, and Scott followed. In the shelter of the walls a few sycamores and chestnuts blazed, orange and russet in the sun, but the birches were already almost bare. The next big wind would strip everything to bones, leaving the woods along these low slopes desolate.

Somewhere to the east, almost fifty kilometers away, the North Sea battered against dark cliffs, and this land’s winter winds arrowed directly from Scandinavia. He tried to imagine the landscape under a blanket of snow, and a shiver took him unawares. In January, the moor could be isolated as some glacier in Norway.

Lonely. The word slithered through his mind unbidden as he surveyed the windswept slopes. Tires crunched through gravel as he left

the bitumen, and to the left of the gates a red-brick cottage hunched back in a stand of near-skeletal trees. It seemed close to derelict. The empty sockets of its windows stared blindly as if it kept watch over the gates, to hold out intruders —

Or to keep something in? Scott felt the prickle of his hackles, the quickening of his pulse, and mocked himself. Jetlag did weird things to the brain. Half his mind lingered in a time zone on the other side of the world, leaving him off-balance as he took the car up the long curve of the drive.

Clouds shrouded the sun as he passed by a knot of larches for his first glimpse of Falconstone, and he swore softly. The house stood pooled in shadow, dark, austere. The Toyota offered the only color in a landscape that had faded out almost to monochrome. Maggie parked before wide teak doors with brass lion's head knockers the size of his fists, but before Scott could make much of Falconstone a tall, rangy man in green anorak, faded denims and gumboots stepped into his path.

The man beckoned, pointing at the open doors of a coach house set back a little from the main house, and beyond a straggle of rhododendrons where a tall, shaggy black horse stood with his head down, tethered to a rusted iron post. Scott slid the car into dusty shadows, taking the only space left between a battered Land Rover and a dismembered tractor.

Ancient beams hung low overhead, nails jutting at odd angles. Harness brasses, tools he did not recognize, rabbit skins, bundled herbs, nets of apples and onions dangled at random. He stepped out into a smell of earth, old wood, iron, the dust of ages. A deep cold embraced him, like the hours after midnight when frost came even to the gentler hills of home.

Late afternoon cloud shadow raced over the forecourt and gardens, and he stepped eagerly into the sun. He zipped his jacket to the throat, pushed both hands into his pockets while the groundsman peered critically at him. What had Maggie said? A disagreeable character. Scott pasted on a smile.

"Art Gurney, is it?"

"Aye, it is." Gurney was fifty, taller than Scott by half a hand's span, with a face like a greyhound, long, thin, with pointed chin and nose. His ears stuck out like cab doors beneath a county cap, and he smelled of *horse*. He didn't offer his hand, nor did he offer to get Scott's bags, much less help Maggie with her own.

The man turned his back on Scott, brusque to the point of rudeness, and paced back around the ragged line of rhododendrons. Only for the horse did Gurney show any attention. He drew his hand over the

shaggy neck, patted the animal's immense shoulder as he passed by.

So this was Falconstone. Scott deliberately struck out at right angles from the house, determined to get a good look at the exterior before he was herded inside. It was old, he thought, even by the standards of Europeans, to whom the word meant dimensions more than it could to any child of the colonies. Australians barely knew what 'old' meant.

The gray stone walls were ivy-clad, but this late in the year every leaf had fallen, leaving the house shabby, disheveled. The tiny diamond panes of leadlight windows winked in the grudging daylight, and someone had slapped a fresh coat of paint, some brown, some green, apparently at random, over deteriorating woodwork.

The whole house was hushed, still. A north wind stirred through the larches, but the chill creeping the length of Scott's spine on light fox paws had nothing to do with the cold. He thrust both hands deeper into his pockets, looking up at the second storey windows, where a lamp burned in one room. Above, the casement windows of an attic level protruded between slate tiles more than half overgrown with moss. The TV aerial on the eaves seemed as out of place as a smart phone at Gallipoli.

"Scott? It's cold — come on in, there's tea and cake," Maggie called from the door. She had a duffel in one hand, an overnight bag slung over her shoulder, while Art Gurney studiously ignored her.

A disagreeable customer? Annoyed, Scott strode toward them and tossed his keys at the groundsman. "Bring in my bags, Gurney." He had no experience with giving orders to staff, and half expected the groundsman to throw the keys back with a snapped 'Get 'em yourself.' But Gurney fielded the keyring smartly, accorded him a glare and stepped out.

Maggie snorted a chuckle. "You won't get much service out of that one, but he's looked after the hectares belonging to Falconstone for more than twenty years."

"Don't tell me the bastard lives here." Scott blinked as his eyes struggled with the house's late afternoon gloom. Three lamps burned on sideboards beneath prints of Turner's and Constable's moody landscapes, but the light was low enough to blind him for a moment. Everywhere was dark wood, red curtains, gleaming brass, the smell of wood smoke and furniture polish.

It was a moment before he saw the housekeeper, standing at the foot of the long, steep staircase: a tiny woman, deceptively thin but straight backed, with hands slightly gnarled by arthritis and gunmetal hair shorn in a ruthless crop not much longer than Scott's own. She

wore a sweater and cardigan over a tweed skirt, and athletic shoes, and regarded Scott Lennox critically, though she spoke to Maggie. "You're late, Miss Warburton. We've been expecting you since noon."

The accent was not quite local, Scott thought, but not far away. His ear was still too foreign to pick the fine differences. "That'd be down to me," he said. "I needed to hit the stores — just got out here from Australia, and it's bloody cold, if you don't mind me saying so. Clothes, you know."

"Aye, I can imagine." The housekeeper peered up at Maggie, waiting for introductions.

"Mrs. Edith Bretton," Maggie intoned, "Mister Scott Lennox, the new owner, from Adelaide. Hector was his father's cousin."

"The last of the Lennox men." Mrs. Bretton looked him up and down.

Was she seventy, seventy-five? With a pink-powdered face like a relief map of the Pennine Chain and the bright, sharp eyes of a raven, disquietingly direct. They seemed to probe Scott to his bone marrow, as if Edith Bretton saw right through to the middle of him, leaving no secret.

He lifted his chin, perhaps a small expression of defiance. If her gaydar was turned on she would guess the truth, and he was damned if he would say one contrite syllable, in his own house, in the twenty-first century. If Edith Bretton belonged to a generation that took umbrage, the country must be full of less prejudiced housekeepers, eager for the job.

The door slammed behind him with a *thud* he felt through his bones, and he flinched involuntarily. Sweat prickled as Gurney dropped the bags unceremoniously at Scott's feet and handed back the keys.

"I'll be away, if you're not wanting aught else," he said baldly. "You're bloody late, and it's a half-hour ride home. I've still got me dogs to take care of."

Then he didn't stay in the house. Good. Scott lifted a brow at the man, hunting for a way to seem friendly. "Where do you live?"

Gurney gestured northwest. "I've a croft on the moor, t'other side of the valley. It's not far, but from here you can't see it for the woods. If I'm done, I'll be off. The dogs have been locked up too long."

"You should've brought them over," Scott said, offering the olive branch. "I get along well with dogs. They'll be welcome any time. You won't stay the night?"

But Gurney's thin mouth compressed. "Aye, well, Falconstone'll not have dogs on the property. That's well known, that is ... and as for

staying the night —?" As if the suggestion was ridiculous. He cocked his head at the housekeeper. "You need anything, Edie?"

She shook her head, waved him off. "Away home with you. I'll ring if you're wanted, Art."

The groundsman hesitated only a moment, frowning at Scott as if much remained unsaid before he swung open the door. Through the narrow windows to the right of it Scott watched him fetch up the tall black horse, a heavy-set gelding growing bearlike with his dense winter coat. Gurney swung up into the saddle with an easy grace Scott appreciated. He rode well, as if he'd been in the saddle all his life, and the horse stepped out smartly, scattering gravel from bright-shod hooves.

"That's Dougal," Mrs. Bretton announced, "seventeen hands high and a bit more, descended from the warhorses that charged at Waterloo. Not a scrap of fear in his whole body, that horse. Twenty years old and strong as a bull." She looked up at Scott. "There's nobody with you, then? No Mrs. Lennox arriving tomorrow?"

Oh, she knows, Scott thought ruefully. "No, there's no Mrs. Lennox."

"Widowed, divorced?" Mrs. Bretton needed.

Maggie barked a laugh. "Don't pry, Edith. None of your business, is it?" She gestured with her bags. "I'll be staying the night. I wanted to show Mister Lennox around, and it'll be far too late to drive back. I don't like to be on the moor roads at midnight." She gave an animated shudder. "I hit a sheep once, two or three years back. It's a bloody awful experience. I don't care to do it again."

"Aye, I thought as much." Mrs. Bretton turned away to the stairs. "When it got so late I opened up a second room. I've put you in the front. The heating's on, but it's still bloody cold ... it'll be a raw winter." She panted lightly, leading the way up wide, creaking stairs where the smell of old brocade, lavender and beeswax smarted in Scott's sinuses.

From the windows on the half-landing he caught a last glimpse of the horse, cutting diagonally across the grounds, beyond a line of bare sycamores. "Art Gurney doesn't seem to think much of me."

"Aye, well, don't let it worry you," Mrs. Bretton said fairly. "He don't think much of anybody but himself and them dogs — three big Alsations, more fangs than brains — and that horse."

"Tell him there's no need to lock them up," Scott insisted. "They're quite welcome on the property. I grew up with dogs, big ones. They don't bother me." He glanced back and down at Maggie, a few stairs lower. "Hector had a rule about not allowing dogs in the house, did he?"

Maggie only shrugged and nodded at Mrs. Bretton. "Edith?"

The older woman paused to catch her breath at the top of the second flight. "He did. A right queer 'un, that Hector Lennox. No offence." She flicked a glance at Scott.

No offence for maligning his ancestor, her previous employer? Or for the casual employment of the loaded Q-word? Scott couldn't hazard a guess which. "None taken. Strange for Hector to be so fussy about his floors and carpets, when he couldn't be bothered putting a lick of paint on the old place."

"Or fixing the drains, or the electrics, or the bloody roof," Mrs. Bretton huffed. "It weren't his floors that bothered him. He were scared bloody rigid of dogs. Even little 'uns. They were the one animal he couldn't bear. Didn't mind rats and beetles, but dogs —? *Phobic*." She spat the word, as if it were an insult.

"Phobias don't often make sense to people who don't share them," Maggie allowed. "They're irrational, after all."

Mrs. Bretton seemed not to hear. "One time, couple of years back, me niece came up for a visit, brought her Jack Russell. Snappy, yappy thing, aye, but little enough that a boot behind it'd shift it." She seemed to jerk out of some reverie and blinked at Scott. "It died. Poisoned, like as not, though Art swore he hadn't set baits. He never does. Hates poison and traps as much as I do. A bullet's quick and clean, and Art's a bloody good shot. No, the only bastard who'd poison a dog here were the old bugger. Your uncle."

Warning flags fluttered again. "You didn't like him," Scott observed.

She only shrugged. "It's not my place to like or not. Forty years, I've looked after Falconstone, since me husband died. I were here before Hector Lennox even knew the place existed. I'm here when he's dead and gone." She shook her head slowly. "But Artie makes a point ... Falconstone still won't have dogs inside its walls. Couple of mongrels strayed in just last week." She looked away. "Dead."

"Christ. Poisoned?" Maggie wondered.

"Not according to Art. He doesn't lay bait in the woods — doesn't need to. He'd rather shoot. Dogs just die here. Art won't bring his own, not within a mile of Falconstone, even though bloody Hector Lennox is long gone. You remember the electrician you sent, Miss Warburton, when the power went off in the west wing? He arrived out here with a collie in the back of his van."

"I know that dog. Charlie Parker always has one." Maggie's mouth twisted. "Don't tell me something here killed Domino!"

If *something* had, Scott was about to indict Art Gurney, who was

surely the only one with the authority to work with poison on this property. Before he could say so, Edith Bretton made cutting, negative gestures. "Domino, is it? Border collie, nice little thing. Till she went stark, raving mad, right there in the back of the van. Had to be restrained. The vet had her for weeks, there weren't nothing he could do for her. Him and Charlie talked about putting a bullet in her ... then one day she just settled down. Whatever were wrong, it wore off, nobody ever knew what caused it. But, aye, Art's right. Falconstone won't have dogs here, not in years. Not even now Hector Lennox is feeding the worms."

With that she walked on, leaving Scott with the oddest sensation of having been slapped. The fine hairs rose on his nape, as if the house's chill had found his marrow. He shook himself hard and gave Maggie a curious look. "How much do you know about this Gurney? If he's poisoning dogs, he'll be off this property so fast, he'll be dizzy. You can hire somebody else to keep down the vermin."

"Actually, Gurney's all right," Maggie said quietly. "He's been here a long time, and never a complaint about him, except for his manners. He won't bow and scrape. He's not a servant. Half the reason he's doubtful about you is, he's still wondering if you've come here to play 'lord of the manor' games. *Mister* Arthur Gurney won't play."

"I wouldn't ask him to," Scott said tartly, blowing on his fingers. "Why is it so freakin' cold in here? I thought she said the heating's on."

"It is." Maggie pushed by, along walls dressed in stained pine planks. Several large paintings had been removed, leaving odd, blind rectangular stains, marking the places where they had hung for countless years. "Some of the art's been sent out for cleaning," she explained distractedly. "Most should be back in a week or two. Some pieces are well over a century old, and so thick with grime, you could barely make out the pictures. But they're originals, well worth the cleaning. You've got a Wright of Derby and a John Herring, that I know of, among other lesser known local artists."

Scott wouldn't have known one from the other, but was not about to admit his ignorance. An Internet connection — or a county library — would fill the gaps. He followed Maggie into a spill of amber lamplight from a pair of adjoining doors on the south side of the house, and looked into a large, quaint bedroom dominated by a wide brass bed with emerald green quilt, bolster, pillows.

Polished floorboards, pocket-sized fireplace where the hearth was occupied by the plain steel vanes of a well-worn radiator, a Persian carpet that had seen much better days, tallboy and dresser. Everything belonged to an earlier era. "Antiques," he muttered, only then struck

by a thought that made his nape prickle again. "This isn't Hector's room, is it? That is, he died in this house, didn't he?" A choking sound from Maggie's direction told him, the possibility had not occurred to her.

"For the love of anybody's god," the old housekeeper remonstrated. "I wouldn't put you in that room, would I? Aye, it were cleaned, top to bottom, *and* we got a new mattress in. But it don't feel right. Never did." She nodded toward the west wing. "His lordship were in the big bedroom, right up against the chimneys. Warmer in winter, y'understand."

"And your own rooms, Edith?" Maggie wondered

"In the back, over the kitchen, same reason." Mrs. Bretton gave the rooms a swift inspection and stepped out. "I go to bed at ten ... old bones need their rest. But the kitchen hearth'll be alight till midnight and I'll leave out the makings of supper. Tea and coffee's always on, and cake. Miss Warburton knows where to find it. Electricity's working, right across the house; electric blankets in the linen cupboard, if you want 'em. Breakfast's whenever you like — eggs, bacon, sausage, tomatoes. We eat in the kitchen, where it's warm. Costs too much to heat the whole house. Least, that's what the old skinflint used to say." The black, raven's eyes brooded on Scott. "You might think different. Supper's at seven: steak and kidney pie, apple cake. You're not a vegetarian, I hope."

And if I was? Scott wondered. Fat chance of phoning out for gluten-free vegan pizza from Falconstone. "The menu sounds fine. I won't get in your way, Mrs. Bretton, and I don't think I'll be here long. I just need to look around, go through a list of things with Miss Warburton, then you can get back to your routine."

"Aye, well, don't rush." Almost reluctantly, the housekeeper relented a little. "It's been too bloody quiet up here since the old bugger died. I do like time to meself, but it's been just me and me cats. A laundry lad comes up from Thornton twice a week, the gardener comes out to cut the lawns twice a month. Otherwise there's only been Art Gurney ... and you saw for yourself, he don't care for the house."

"I can't say I blame him." Scott chafed his hands. "It's damned dark, and is it always this cold? You sure the heating's working properly? I'll take a look at it, if you like."

She seemed astonished. "You could. It's just a boiler in the cellar. Hot water pipes, running round some of the walls. The pipes get hot enough, but the heat don't travel far."

"I've noticed." Scott summoned a mocking grin. "If we do find some crazy American billionaire to pay a good price for this dump, you

can expect big changes. You won't find an American celebrity freezing his nuts off nine months in the year, for the fun of playing 'lord of the manor' in a freaking mausoleum — pardon the French."

In fact, Mrs. Bretton cackled with laughter. "I'll go'n see to that tea, will I? There's coffee cake, scones and cream. Kitchen, fifteen minutes."

"We'll be there," Scott promised.

She disappeared down the back stairs, the servants' access, the quickest way through to the kitchens which would be warmer, brighter, far more welcoming than the house's dim, stern frontage. Scott dumped his bags on the foot of the bed, tried the mattress and gave a grunt of approval as he found it firm, new, while the brass frame was surely a century old. Older.

He gave the room a critical look, tried the radiator — yes, it was on, but any heat it gave out seemed to dwindle to nothing as he stepped away. The window looked down on a garden that must once have been handsome. In the fast-fading afternoon light he saw the gnarled stubs of hard-pruned roses, low yew and box hedges, the classic shape of an Elizabethan design. A smell of old dust rose from the curtains. He shook one, watched the air fill with swarming motes, and sneezed.

"So." Maggie's voice startled him. "What do you think? It's quite a house."

He turned his back on the view. "I think it *was* quite a house, a long time ago. But ... not my style."

"She'll be back on the market, then." Leaning in the open door, Maggie did not dispute the decision. "We'll take a look around, you can identify what you want done on a broad scale, sign the authority to proceed. Do you want me to continue to look after things? I can certainly order the tradesmen in. When the time comes to sell, I'd recommend Kumar and Brooke in York. In fact, Jay Kumar ought to come out as soon as we can get him here. He should spend a full day at least; itemize exactly what needs to be done from the professional perspective, to get you the best possible price. Thorough work takes time, so you need to get started early." She flashed him a smile. "Sorry if I'm taking charge. Dad and I have handled several estates like this, from bereavement to handover, or eventual sale. It can be overwhelmingly complicated for the beneficiary."

"No — I'm damn' glad you're doing this," Scott said quickly. "Jay Kumar, you said? Sounds like a plan to me." He shoved both hands into the hip pockets of his jeans and cocked an ear to the house. "I can hear the plumbing, for a start. That's not a good sign."

"Not necessarily a bad one," Maggie mused as he stepped out of the bedroom. "Let me show you around a little while Edith gets set up

for tea. Falconstone is pre-Elizabethan, so any modern amenity you can think of — plumbing, the electrical system, gas — was added *much* later. You'll have noticed how the wiring was actually slapped right onto the walls, disguised by running it up and down corners and along skirting boards. The walls are solid stone, no cavities. The water piping was installed around 1890, gas around 1930, that's all I know about it. It all rattles and gurgles because it's an afterthought, with pipes laid under the floors, in the ceilings."

"Pre-Elizabethan," Scott echoed as they walked the length of the upper hallway, past multiple closed bedroom doors and windows looking down on a courtyard behind the coach house. "What's that mean, time-wise?"

"It's actually Tudor, meaning all of the sixteenth century and a few years more on either side of it," Maggie told him. "You'll also notice, the architecture changes from one part of the building to another. The east wing is the original part of the house, much older than the rest. The west wing was added on in the Georgian era — say, 1820, give or take. The kitchens were redone while Victoria was on the throne, something like 1870. The frontage was rebuilt just after the Great War; 1919, I believe. Little's been added since."

Away from the occupied rooms, the air became dank and Scott's nose wrinkled on the faint, 'boaty' smell of mildew. "You could have a leaky roof. Something in here's been wet recently."

Maggie buttoned her jacket and turned up the collar. "Nothing would surprise me about this place! A lot of the rooms have been closed up for years. Most of the furniture's under dustcovers. Whatever your uncle wanted with Falconstone, it wasn't gracious living or an abundance of guest rooms. He neglected *everything*, which you can't afford to do with property of this vintage. On your behalf we authorized a couple of jobs, just to keep the house viable until you could come to some decision about it. The work had to be done, but I have the reports and receipts for you. It's all in order."

She needn't have been so defensive. Scott had come to trust Ormondroyd and Warburton implicitly. Carpets were rolled, he saw, either taken up for cleaning or just returned and not yet relayed. The bare timbers where they had lain were worn, dull. The house rambled like a labyrinth through a winged pattern but Maggie seemed to know where she was going. He followed her down a narrow, dark and steep flight of stairs at the west end, smelling dust and must, and a sharp new-cement smell.

"The floor plan's a letter 'H,'" she was saying. "It was common in the Tudor era: H for Henry. Later, Elizabethan houses were often

designed to an 'E' plan." Her nose wrinkled on the astringent smell of fresh cement. "We put in a damp course just a few weeks ago. Winter's coming, and you'd be rotten up to the windowsills by spring. There was no time to lose," Maggie told him before he could ask. "The whole structure could warp too far to be saved. Your uncle didn't seem to give a damn. He let Falconstone atrophy almost to the point of no return. Heritage listed or not, nobody cracked the whip to make him take responsibility for maintenance. Odd, don't you think?"

"Bloody weird," Scott agreed.

They were on the ground floor now, well away from the frontage. He had lost his bearings. An outside window showed only steel gray twilight and bare trees, just enough daylight to outline an insulated wire stapled to the wall opposite. He followed it, found a switch beside a door, and tried the lights.

Naked bulbs glowed fitfully, illuminating a wasteland of shrouded furniture and rolled carpets, folded music stands, and in the midst of the clutter, the peculiar magnificence of an uncovered, brightly polished ebony Steinway baby grand piano.

Silence lay like a layer of dust over the music room. He stopped a half-pace inside, hand still on the light switch. Deep cold lapped around his legs. He felt the oddest sensation, so far away from the inhabited wing, that he was absolutely alone.

And not alone.

Somewhere, not quite close at hand, a soft voice sighed. It must have been the wind under the eaves, but it had the timbre of a human voice. His eyes swept the room, he almost expected to see someone in a corner — perhaps the person who had taken the cover off the piano, a visitor who shouldn't have been here but couldn't resist.

But there was no one. Scott looked back and saw Maggie out in the hall, examining the paintings stacked along a blind wall, oblivious to the sighing voice. For the second time he shook himself, physically forced himself to walk into the music room. He lifted the lid on old, worn yellow ivory keys, tried a few chords. The instrument was so far out of tune, it was unplayable. Why would anyone bother to polish it, if it was unplayable?

"It's an antique," Maggie said from the door. "Steinway and Sons, circa 1930, worth a small fortune. In fact, there are some very nice pieces in this house, and nothing in the will that says you can't sell the contents. Hector Lennox's stipulation was only that the house itself wouldn't go to market for at least two years, hence the proviso regarding the stock portfolio, which pays its running costs."

Her voice seemed to reach Scott from a great distance, with a

hollow quality. He found himself at the window, looking out into a garden where the moss lawn must have been planted when the first Queen Elizabeth was a girl. Yews imprisoned it, equally as old, and beyond lay a neglected knot garden in the shape of the fleur-de-lis. It would be lovely in summer, he thought, with the trees in leaf, roses blooming.

The night wind was on the rise, tossing the skeletal birch and chestnuts. It found its way through some gap between the leadlight panes, like a chill breath on his face, though the glass was clean and the latches new, modern — unhappy grafts on the old building, like an unwanted intrusion. Falconstone had a timeless quality that denied change. Anything new seemed invasive. He drew his fingers over the diamond-shaped glass panes, feeling their cold. The wind rattled the window, sighed under the eaves as if —

As if Falconstone had a voice of its own; and it was breathing.

The chill rushed upward through his arm and shoulder, he caught his breath as it raced into his chest, and snatched his hand from the window. The shiver coursed on into legs and feet, and Scott felt some prickle at his nape, a sensation as old as humankind.

Someone's watching me. Fight or flight.

He spun back into the room, half expecting Maggie Warburton or Mrs. Bretton, wondering why he would be poking through parts of the house that were closed up. But the room was empty, still, just the corner of a dust cover on a couch twitching as it caught some draft he couldn't feel.

"Nervy, Scott?" His voice echoed hollowly in a room designed for its acoustics. "Get a grip, mate. It's just an old house, and the wind." But his scalp prickled uncomfortably as he made his way out and snapped the light off behind him.

Maggie had returned to the paintings, and looked up as he appeared. "I think you're in luck. There's a John Constable here, an original, not one of the well-known paintings, but I *know* Constable. I'd swear this is genuine. I'll have an appraiser come over and validate it, if you like. You're looking at a good figure here, unless I miss my guess."

"Do that." Scott shrugged deeper into his jacket. "And get that real estate guy over here, soon as you can. I want this organized fast."

She regarded him with a frown. "You really don't like Falconstone."

"I ..." Scott hesitated. "I don't think Falconstone likes *me*. I suppose it's too late to find a hotel for the night? Is there a B&B back in Thornton?"

"There isn't, I'm sorry. And it's already dark," Maggie said doubtfully. "I wouldn't drive the moor at night, Scott, not if I had a choice. I told you, I hit a sheep ... it's not something you want to do, if you can

avoid it." She tilted her head at him, brow creasing. "What is it, what's wrong?"

"I dunno," Scott admitted. "It's just this bloody place."

"It's only an old house. They all have their own sounds and atmosphere, it's part of their charm." She took his arm. "Come down to the kitchen. Tea, coffee cake, Edith said. You know what you need?"

A small hotel, several stiff drinks, a warm body in his arms, a vibrant human being, hard, male, supple, urgent, reminding Scott Lennox that he was still alive, still a man. He needed it long and slow, until every cell shook off this cold and torpor and his blood began to pump properly. What he needed was about six feet tall, blond or brunette, blue eyes or brown — Scott had never had any real preference; tattoos and earrings optional, with a predilection for the oral and the patience to do it right. He needed something that lasted longer than a wild night, with a little genuine emotion simmering when the blaze of healthy lust wore off, perhaps enough honest affection for the affair to spin out into a month, or six, or —

"There's a decanter in the library. Get yourself a snifter. Then you can tell me what the hell you think is wrong." Maggie tightened her grip on his arm and steered him away from the music room. The lights turned out behind them, leaving a dank, hollow emptiness that followed, creeping on Scott's heels and bringing with it a chill he could not shake, like a breath on the back of his neck.

Chapter Four

"Intruders," she said succinctly, after she heard him out.

She didn't tell him he was imagining things, or call him a superstitious fool — which Scott would have flatly denied. He had always been the skeptic, never willing to give a moment's credence to Beck Carson's New Age nonsense. Beck amused herself with Tarot cards and crystals, candles and incense. She did some kind of meditation, had eccentric friends who lit bonfires, dressed in robes and chanted. It was harmless, and even as a teen Beck had been far enough 'out there' to embrace the New Age. Bruce didn't care either way, but to Scott it had always been so much amusing nonsense. Just another way to kill time.

"We could have squatters," Maggie guessed. "Gurney hasn't seen anything, has he, Edith?"

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