

# One

Annie d'Inard stood alone on the West Sands of St. Andrews, with one hand raised and clawing at the sky. The helicopter, which was fast disappearing from view, was tugging at her insides, even as it seemed to be taking her very essence with it. When she could no longer see it, she leaned her back against the Aston Martin he had left her, then folded in on herself until she met the ground in a heap. How she would climb into the driver's seat and find her way back to Kingsbarns would remain to be seen.

As the helicopter sliced through the sea mist and lifted away from her, the passenger inside underwent a transformation. The place he was speeding off to, the wife and children he would be reunited with shortly, the very life he had so painstakingly constructed over twenty years—all flashed before him in images, some of them painful, some of them sweet—as though this life were coming to an end. But as the woman he was leaving faded into the misty backdrop, another image captured him: a most critical memory, one that he had managed to bury beneath the safety and predictability of the last twenty years. It was the picture of her, bare chested and dreamy, lying with him in a spring meadow. A stark reminder of what he had lost, the potent emotions that image generated all but expunged the others, which now seemed to huddle defensively, to coalesce into something alien and hostile, as though that part of his past—his life with Janet and the children—was mounting an attack against him.

When the aircraft finally maneuvered for landing, he sighed with resignation. Instead of the relief and warmth he would normally feel upon returning to his home, today Andrew Stuart-Gordon felt thwarted and defeated, like an escapee who had eluded

capture for a few wondrous days of freedom, but was now being returned to the castle in shackles.

Although still a week away, preparations for the upcoming event at Crinan Castle were in full swing, and there was yet much to do. There were thirty-six guest bedrooms to be prepared, countless supplies to be laid in, and untold pieces of silver to be polished. Gardeners and groundskeepers pulled every stray blade of grass and plucked every spent blossom, giving meticulous attention to the more than twenty acres of formal gardens. Cook and her staff were having regular meetings with the catering firm from Glasgow that was to arrive next Friday, replete with refrigerated lorries filled to the brim, and the enclosed, heated tents that would be set up on the grounds. It was a massive undertaking that required constant supervision and attention to detail, and although Janet had only been in charge of it for the past four years, she managed it all with apparent ease.

But this year's celebration of Laird's Day would be unlike any other, and although her deportment bespoke confidence and control, inside she felt as jittery and uncertain as she had the day she married Andrew. And why she was so anxious on that day, only her late father-in-law knew. *Ne obliviscaris*, he had said to her, her Campbell clan's motto, which translated: Do not forget. He had a very particular reason for using that phrase, because he wanted her to remember the choice she had made and would have to live with the rest of her life. But she did not want to think of that, on this of all days, and chose to view it differently—with regard to her birthright—to remind herself that although she was not Andrew's choice in love, she was the one with the right to it, and anything she needed to do to claim that right was justified. She had only to remember that she was the granddaughter of the Duke of Argyll, born to Inveraray Castle and educated at the finest schools. She had been groomed all her life for this role and one even greater; when her parents failed to produce a male heir, she, as the eldest daughter of the only heir, was in line to inherit her father's title. And her marriage to Andrew had been her right as well, something long hoped for, planned for, by both their families. So why she went about her

tasks this day feeling somewhat off balance and with an anxious fluttering in her stomach was something she kept to herself, and was steadfastly determined to overcome.

A business crisis kept Andrew in Glasgow all day Friday and his return late that night went unnoticed. He slept in on Saturday morning, then joined his family for midday dinner. It was an enormous meal set out in the larger of the two family dining rooms and attended by all the important members of the household, including the estate manager and his wife; the head butler and housekeeper; Mrs. Ferguson, the cook; Nanny Whitburn, and the earl's personal secretary, Nigel Bain. This coming together was important to Andrew, and he usually made every effort to be in attendance.

The same meal was always set out in the servants' hall, after which all but a handful of staff were officially off until Monday morning. This weekend's respite was particularly looked forward to by the weary staff, for next weekend there would be no such luxury.

When the meal concluded, Andrew helped his mother with her chair and she excused herself, as was her custom, to retire to her separate abode for a nap. When Andrew's father died some five years earlier, Mary had been mistress of this enormous pile, but custom and respect for the sovereignty of her daughter-in-law had relegated her to a less significant albeit substantial dwelling, the comfortable Nethergate Lodge. Although still on the estate, having her own place afforded Mary the opportunity to run her household as she liked, while keeping close to her beloved grandchildren. And as large as it was by ordinary standards, its twenty rooms were quite manageable and easily maneuvered by Mary and her aging staff.

Andrew walked his mother to the west entrance, where her car and driver awaited her. Standing in the warming sunshine to watch her departure, Andrew and Janet decided not to take their after-dinner coffee in the drawing room, but to gather the family on the south terrace. As they enjoyed coffee and an assortment of delicate sweets, husband and wife glanced at each other frequently, smiling and talking casually in front of their five children, so that none of them had the slightest idea of where their father had been

during the past week, or of how deeply his absence had affected their mother.

Cathy, the younger of the two girls, asked him, "Are you staying home tonight, Daddy?"

He beckoned her to sit beside him, as he answered, "Yes, I am, Cat darling."

"That's good, because I miss you when you're not around, you know."

"We've all missed you, Andrew," Janet added, with carefully disclosed disapproval. "We had hoped to have you home with us this week."

"I know and I apologize for that, but I intend on making it up," he told her. Then he asked the children, "What would you like to do today?"

"Sorry, Father," Donald, the oldest boy, answered quickly, "but I've plans for the rest of the day. As a matter of fact, I'd better be off."

"Where are you off to?" Andrew questioned. Both boys were returning to Eton tomorrow, and he had hoped to have time with them.

Donald avoided his father's eyes as he answered, "Ardfern." Now Andrew understood. "To see that pretty brunette?"

Donald blushed and stood abruptly, while his brother Duncan suppressed a laugh. Donald shot his brother a disapproving glance and gestured nervously toward his mother, saying, "I don't see much of her anymore." That wasn't an outright lie, he consoled himself, just a misrepresentation of the truth. He was, after all, not home often enough to see her frequently.

"Oh? Sorry to hear that," his father offered. "She seemed quite charming. Well then, have a nice evening anyway, and don't be too late. We worry, you know."

"It won't be early," he warned. "Robin Malcolm's just had his yawl refitted at Ardfern, and he wants to take her out for a short run, then back to Crinan harbor."

Andrew lifted his eyes toward the sky before observing, "Should be a nice evening for sailing."

“Yes,” Donald answered, with some awkwardness, “should be.” He didn’t like keeping things from his father, but with the way his mother felt about the girl, he wasn’t about to announce that she would be sailing with them. Hesitantly, he moved toward his mother and kissed her cheek. When he approached his father, Andrew stood and wrapped his arms around him.

As they watched him traverse the lawn headed for the carriage house, Janet commented under her breath, “He’s not fooling me for a minute.”

“Let him make his own choices,” Andrew told her, in that quietly commanding and terribly effective voice he had.

The cup and saucer she held in her hands began to rattle, as she mumbled to herself, “Yes, of course, there’s no sense in trying to keep a Kilmartin heir from doing something that might ruin him, is there?”

Andrew clearly understood her meaning, and he responded with equal clarity. “Our interference is counterproductive. He needs to make his own decisions, and his own mistakes—that’s how he’ll become a man.”

She knew she wasn’t going to win this one, so Janet stood abruptly, asking, “Shall we go for a ride?”

“That sounds the thing,” Andrew answered gratefully. “What do the rest of you say?”

Maggie suggested, “Let’s take out the four-in-hand, Daddy. We’ve not done that in ages.”

“That’s a splendid idea,” her father agreed. Andrew swept Malcolm up in his arms and took Cathy’s hand as they headed for the stables.

Duncan took the reins of the marvelous old barouche, which was more than 150 years old and in perfect condition. It had belonged originally to the twentieth earl and had been used by him to visit the various tenants and different corners of the estate; it was drawn now by four perfectly matched horses, who carried themselves as regally as their occupants. Andrew sat up front with Duncan, Malcolm between them, while the ladies occupied the interior.

"It's not fair to let him drive," Maggie complained. "I can handle them as well, if not better."

Andrew already had a plan. "The gentlemen will take us out and the ladies will bring us in, all right?"

"All right, that's fair," Maggie conceded.

The afternoon was sunny and warm, and the breeze that blew in from the loch liberated the scent of wild myrtle. They took a leisurely two and a half hours for their excursion, following the well-worn lanes that crisscrossed the estate, through forest groves where deer and pheasant ruled and pastures speckled with grazing sheep.

When they returned to the stables, Andrew traversed the length of it to visit his favorite horse, noticing as he did that the stallion nicknamed "Rage" was bucking and kicking at his stall. He took long, angry strides back toward his wife who was now alone in the tack room, the children having already gone up to the house.

The tack room was arguably Janet's most favorite place on the estate. It was large and comfortably furnished, with a small, pullman-type kitchen that was always stocked with fruit and cheese and biscuits. After a long day riding, she liked to relax here in her dirty breeches, stretched out on one of the worn couches, near enough her beloved beasts to hear and smell them. And, too, it provided her shelter from the busy household, for unless it was an emergency, this was one place where she would not be disturbed, called upon by the housekeeper or estate manager to make some decision or other, or Nanny Whitburn to settle something about the children.

So when Andrew violated her sanctuary with, "I see that Satan is still with us," it set her off. But she was happy for the change in tone, for she'd grown weary of the pretense of calm and normalcy they'd carried on for the children's sake.

"And what would you have had me do," she asked him, "run out here the other night with a pistol?"

"Goddammit, Janet, you know that I despise that animal."

"There are a lot of things I despise," she retorted, "but I don't go around killing them." Pleased with her response, she turned her back on him to return a rope lead to its hook.

“That devil poses a danger to everyone,” he insisted, “and most of all to you.”

“He’s not a devil, he’s a stallion,” she corrected. “Stallions can’t help the way they behave. I should think you, of all people, would understand that.” She was even more proud of herself for that one.

Her remarks were not lost on him, but for the moment he was more concerned about the danger in keeping the horse around. “We’ve no such problems with the other stallions, have we?”

She frowned her impatience. “He’s high strung because he misses the chase. He lives to run and jump and he never gets enough of it. And he hasn’t been put to stud enough, either.”

“Then for Christ’s sake, get him a mare he can have a go at!”

“I’m working on that very thing,” she informed him. “I’m trying to locate one with the proper disposition, to temper his in the offspring. When it comes to breeding,” she added, with a bitter grin, “one can’t be too careful in choosing, you know.”

Undeterred by her sarcasm, he continued, “Regardless of that, he’s not a suitable mount for you. I can see something dreadful happening with him and I don’t want to let it get that far.”

She inquired flippantly, “Don’t you?” then walked behind him and closed the door he’d come through. “Shall we have our talk now, since we’re speaking of studs and dreadful things that could happen?”

He felt a sudden fatigue and sank into one of the leather club chairs. “There’s no one about. Now’s as good a time as any.”

She strode casually toward the little kitchen area, asking, “Can I get you something?” as she opened the refrigerator.

“No, thank you,” he answered, watching as she poured a glass of cranberry juice.

Janet didn’t speak again until she had settled on the couch and propped herself with several pillows. The digs she’d already gotten in had emboldened her. “Tell me, Andrew, what’s it like seeing her again, after all these years?”

Something about the manner in which she’d posed that question irritated him, but nevertheless, he answered grimly, “It was like exhuming something that had been buried alive.”

Janet grimaced, then gulped some juice. "What a ghastly analogy; it sounds positively dreadful."

He kept his impatience with her in check. "I mean that it was painful to bury it to begin with, and it's just as painful to bring it out into the light again."

The sarcasm returned with her next question. "And what does it look like now that it's out?" Laughing slightly, she added, "I hope not like something from your grisly metaphor."

Before he answered he fortified himself with a deep breath. "At times it seems brand new, at others it looks hopeless."

"Sounds like quite the predicament," she quipped.

He was reaching the limits of his patience, and scoldingly informed her, "There are questions about her health, Janet."

She dropped her smug expression for the first time since the conversation had begun. "What questions?"

"I tell you this in the strictest confidence—"

"Now really," she bristled. "With whom would I speak about your mistress?"

There were certain things he was unwilling to tolerate, and this was one of them. "Her name is Annie," he said. "Calling her my mistress only demeans you."

Sipping nonchalantly at her juice, she responded with a barely discernible lift of her brow.

His voice deepened with sadness, for saying it aloud made it more real. "Annie may be infected with HIV."

As the words reached her ears, she gave herself a moment to repeat them in her head; they were that unexpected and incredible. "Good lord—good lord!!" she exclaimed, slamming her glass to the table in front of her. "You've not slept with her—please tell me you've not had sex with her!"

"She wouldn't allow it," he answered immediately. "I told you that. We've been together, though, we've been intimate, but safely intimate."

*Was there such a thing?* "Are you certain? Are you certain you were safe?"

"Yes."

“My God, Andrew!” The more it sank in, the more absurdly dangerous it seemed. “Do you think it wise to be with her in any way at all, considering?”

“There’s nothing to worry about,” he insisted. “I know enough about the disease to understand the way it’s transmitted.”

*How could he not see it?* “Nothing to worry about?” she shrieked. “My husband goes off and spends three days with a woman who could be infected with a disease—a contagious, fatal disease, mind you—how could I not worry? I’d have to be a bloody idiot to not worry!”

“Please keep your voice down,” he asked gently. “The children might come looking for us.”

“Keep my voice down?” As her anxiety grew, her eyes reflected it, lighting with the wildness of a madwoman. “Why don’t I just shut the bloody hell up altogether? Yes, why don’t I do that? Just sit quietly by while you destroy our marriage, our family, maybe even your own bloody life, all for the momentary satisfaction of sticking yourself in some diseased bit of ass. Yes, why don’t I do that? That sounds the thing to do!”

Andrew rose from his chair and walked toward his wife. She braced herself when she saw him make a move for her—not that he’d ever laid a hand to her. She braced herself because of the raw emotion she’d discerned in his face; it was menacing and colored with fury as he stood over her, glaring down upon her as though he might lash out.

“Well? What are you going to do?” she screeched. “Tell me to take back what I said? Give me a good smack across the face? Tell me to mind my own damned business? What?”

In the last few minutes he’d been in the presence of the Janet he’d never liked: the one he always avoided, the woman whose bitter, sarcastic tongue had sent him out of his marriage in search of other, softer women. And it wasn’t just the situation with Annie that had brought her out. That Janet was always there, lurking, simmering under the genteel facade.

When he didn’t respond, she demanded again, “Well? What are you going to do?”

The tension between them was so tangible as to be inhaled; it was as thick as the scent of hay coming from the stalls.

“Nothing,” he finally answered. “I’m not going to do anything. It was perfectly foolish of me to even think we could talk about this.” The anger and revulsion that welled up within him made him turn on his heels and leave his wife.

With the sound of the slamming door, Janet felt her heart drop. *Stupid woman, stupid, bloody woman*—she cursed herself. *He wanted to talk with you, he was ready and willing to discuss this with you, but you wouldn’t let him. You stupid, shortsighted woman. You wouldn’t listen, and now you’ve sent him running back to her.*

After a light supper, the family gathered in an upstairs drawing room. Donald was still out and Andrew occupied the middle of the sofa, surrounded by the other four children: Malcolm asleep with his head in his father’s lap, Duncan sprawled on the floor near his legs, and the girls flanking him. They watched a video and Janet joined them only briefly, sitting alone in a chair, staring at the five of them huddled together, and, strangely, feeling like an outsider.

When he retired to his room, Andrew picked up the telephone and dialed the number that he now knew by heart. He knew that her son Marc had arrived and he was hoping to catch her alone, after the boy had gone to bed. When she answered, he asked tenderly, “Did I wake you?”

“Oh no,” she answered, sighing with gratitude at the sound of his voice. “Marc and I just got in from a late dinner. We drove to see Glamis Castle today. How are you?”

“Fine, just fine, darling,” he answered, then questioned, “Why didn’t you tell me you wanted to go there? I’d have arranged a private tour for you. They’re my cousins, you know. My grandmother was a Bowes-Lyon.”

Hearing that, she shook her head and smiled. “No, I didn’t know,” she responded. Throughout the tour, she had wondered if Crinan Castle was anything like Glamis, and upon hearing about the family, she’d also wondered if they were related.

"Is all well?" he asked her now.

She hesitated before answering, looking to see if her son was nearby. "Yes—but I miss you terribly," she whispered.

He sighed before admitting, "That was the second hardest parting of my life, Annie."

The line went intimately silent. After a time, Annie asked him, "How are your children?"

"Getting on. Donald's off sailing this evening and I spent most of the day with the others, who all seem to grow inches each time I'm away. How's Marc liking it so far?"

"He's having a great time, but I think he's most impressed with James Bond's car," she chuckled. "He said to thank you for that."

"I wish you would have let me do more," he told her.

Marc had been in his bedroom searching out something in his suitcases, but he came into the little parlor now.

"You'll call me in the morning?" she asked Andrew. It was little more than forty-eight hours since they'd parted, but he'd already called her five times.

"First thing," he answered. He knew that it was time to end the conversation, but before he could hang up, he had to say it again, "I love you, Annie."

"I know," she responded, "and I thank you for that."

"Marc's listening," he understood.

"That's right."

"Good night, my darling. I'll ring tomorrow."

When he turned off the bedside lamp and closed his eyes, Andrew traveled back in time, back to when he was a student and living at the Whaum. He saw with perfect clarity the details of the room where he had slept. He heard the creaking sound the rafters would make with the wind, envisioned the faded colors of the quilt, the chair near the wardrobe that was always piled high with his clothing. He could even conjure up the musty smell of the old cottage. But of all the memories that visited him on this spring evening, he recalled one more keenly than the others: He felt the emptiness, the unassuageable longing that he suffered at night, lying alone in

his bed, separated from her. It was a pain that could only be endured by focusing on the next day, on the exact time in the afternoon when he would return from his lectures and find her waiting in the garden, her eyes as green and alive as the rose leaves: when they would come together and he would marvelously, miraculously, feel full and whole again.

As she readied herself for bed, Janet dressed in a negligee that Andrew had given her in better times, in times when he slept in her room, not in his. She sat at her dressing table and brushed her closely cropped red hair, hoping against hope that he might come to her tonight, that he might knock on her door and ask if they could try again. When she'd brushed her hair so much her arm ached, she settled into a chair and stared at the door that connected their rooms for what seemed an eternity. She finally turned off the lights after taking a sleeping pill, after listening at the door and hearing nothing, when being awake and alone was no longer to be borne.

## Two

On Monday morning Andrew was up and dressed very early, and Janet caught him just as he was about to leave for Glasgow.

A little timidly, she questioned, "Will you be home tonight?"

His secretary Nigel had already gotten into the Range Rover and her husband was standing alone in the entrance hall, closing his attaché. He betrayed no emotion as he answered, "Yes, but late."

"Shall I hold supper?"

He responded casually, "If you like. I'll have Nigel ring and let you know when you can expect me." He offered her a small, tentative smile.

She lowered her eyes and then looked into his. "Do you think we might try to talk again tonight?"

Her request surprised him. "Do you want to?"

Nodding slightly, she said, "I do. It's just that what you told me about her health—it frightened me so. It's difficult to be rational when one is so frightened."

"I know," he answered, with a heaviness of heart.

Her arms were folded tightly around her middle, and she grasped the sides of her cashmere sweater. "I feel like I'm losing control sometimes. I feel like this whole thing is spinning out of control."

Moved by her frankness, Andrew left his case on the table and approached her. "You've an absolute right to be angry and it's perfectly reasonable for you to be afraid," he quietly acknowledged. "And I fully realize that talking about what's going on is difficult and hurtful, but it's important to include you, exactly so you *won't* feel it's out of your control. I want you to have a say, Janet; whatever happens, your voice should be heard as loudly and clearly as

anyone's." As he finished saying this, he reached out and touched one of her hands.

His touch brought a rush of warmth to her frigid, numbed skin, and her voice relaxed as she responded, "I'll hold supper for you; no matter how late, I'll wait for you."

Smiling softly now, he answered, "Thank you, I'll look forward to it."

A silver tea service had been set in front of him, as was the morning custom, and the chairman and CEO of Nether Largie Incorporated asked his personal secretary to hold off the morning meeting while he made a phone call.

"Good morning, darling, how'd you sleep?"

"Good morning! I slept all right, and you?" Her son was having a bath, so she was free to talk.

"Reasonably," he answered. "How's the weather there? Will it be nice for your touring with Marc, do you think?"

"I haven't been out yet, but it looks like a fine day."

"Listen, darling," he told her. "I'm up against it just now, so I need to make this brief. I want to ask you a question, ask your permission about something."

"Yes?"

"You know I'm to be in New York on Wednesday. I've been thinking that I'd like to try and get together with your husband while I'm there."

She was caught completely off guard. "Why on earth do you want to do that?"

"I've a pressing need to understand what's going on with him," he explained, "why he kept the news about Glenn to himself. I'm very troubled by that, but if you think I'm interfering, I'll let it go."

Annie had been standing but she found herself needing to sit down. "No, I don't think that—I'd like to know the answer to that myself."

"So you don't mind if I contact him?"

"I'd just ask one thing of you," she decided. "Don't tell him about us, if it doesn't come up, that is. I don't want you to lie, I'd

never ask you to lie, but if it doesn't come up then please don't offer it. I'm asking because I think it'd be better if I told him."

"I agree," he said. "And I'll be very careful about how I tackle the subject. He'll understand that I'm asking because I'm your friend, who wants to help bring some clarity to this situation."

Annie laughed nervously, before saying, "You're so consistent!"

"How do you mean?"

"I remember you trying to help patch things up with my friend Adam Wilson, all those years ago."

The memory made him smile. "I owed Adam. If it hadn't been for him inviting you to St. Andrews, you and I would never have met."

"No, we never would have," she realized, "because we lived in completely different worlds."

The idea of that gave him a cold shiver, but he comforted himself with this thought: "I might have met you now, though. You might have come to do the very thing you're doing for me in advertising. I wonder, would we have felt the same attraction we felt all those years ago, if we met today as perfect strangers?"

Smiling to herself, she answered, "Absolutely; it's something in our cells, I think, our chemistry. What do you think?"

"You'll get no argument from me on that."

They laughed together before she thought to advise him, "Better call Mike today, if you've any hope of getting squeezed into his schedule."

"I'll do that."

She was picturing the two of them meeting for the first time, when she added, "I think you'll like him. He's a very impressive, stand-up kind of guy."

"So I've heard." Nigel knocked gently at the office door, a signal that everyone was there and ready. "Look, darling, sorry, but I've got to ring off now."

"Have a wonderful day, Andrew."

"You, too, my love. Give my best to Marc."

Later that afternoon, Nigel Bain placed the call for him.

"Westfield, Brown, Fleming, and Rutledge. How may I direct your call?"

“Michael Rutledge please. The Earl of Kilmartin ringing, from Glasgow.”

“One moment please.”

“Good morning—Mr. Rutledge’s office—”

“Good morning. Lord Kilmartin ringing for Mr. Rutledge.”

“Mr. Rutledge is with a client. May I take a message?”

“This is his lordship’s personal secretary, Mr. Bain. The earl would like to speak with Mr. Rutledge today.”

“Yes, Mr. Bain. May I tell him what it’s in reference to?”

“Yes, Ms. Annie d’Inard.”

Vicky stepped out of character a moment. “Annie—is she all right?”

“Yes, I believe so,” he answered flatly, then added what he’d been directed to say: “The earl is a personal friend of Ms. d’Inard’s and he’d like to speak with Mr. Rutledge.”

Her professional tone returned as she responded, “I’ll see that he gets the message as soon as he’s out of his meeting, Mr. Bain. May I have the number?”

After she’d hung up, Vicky was so worried by the call that she decided to interrupt her boss in his meeting.

He listened intently. “Did it sound urgent?”

“No, not really, but you know how laid-back those Brits are; it was hard to tell.”

“Where do I know that name, that title, I mean, where do I know that from?” he asked her.

“I don’t know” she answered. “I ran through your client file and it’s not in there.”

“I’m finishing up here,” he told her now. “Don’t get me involved in anything else until I’ve gotten back to him, all right?”

“Right,” Vicky said.

As he waited for her to place the call, Mike felt his own anxiety mount. Just before they were put through, Mike finally connected on who the earl was, and he knew he’d never met him.

Andrew’s voice was friendly and somewhat familiar when he greeted him. “Hello, Mike. Thanks for getting back so quickly.”

“Of course,” he responded, thinking how odd it was that he’d called him by his first name. “Forgive me,” he said now, “but you seem to have the advantage. Have we met?”

“On the phone the other day,” he told him. “I picked up when you rang Annie at her cottage.”

It took a second to click. “Andrew? My secretary said you were the Earl of Kilmartin!”

With the ring of humor, he responded, “I’m that, too.”

“Not the same one who runs Nether Largie?”

“The same.”

Mike was overcome with a smile. “Well, I’ll be damned. You didn’t say that the other day.”

“We spoke but briefly.”

“I bought quite a few shares of your company,” he told him now, “when you went public a few years back. I remember reading about you and thinking that you were going to take that business through the roof, and you’ve not disappointed me.” He suddenly remembered that there might be a problem with Annie. “Is Annie all right?”

“Yes, fine, I spoke with her this morning.”

Perhaps it was his stepson. “Is Marc all right?”

“Annie says he’s having a marvelous time.”

“Well, that’s good, that’s a relief.”

Andrew cleared his throat. “I know you’re busy and I don’t want to keep you, but I’ll be in New York on Wednesday and I was hoping I might persuade you to dine with me that evening.”

“Wednesday, Wednesday dinner,” he thought out loud. “I can’t think of anything—can you hold while I check my schedule?” He was back very quickly. “Wednesday’s good; when and where?”

“I don’t suppose you could come to New York?”

“That would be difficult, I’m afraid.”

“Never mind then, I’ll come to you. Pencil me in for eight if that’s all right, and I’ll have my secretary get back to yours with the details.”

“You’re on. I’m looking forward to meeting you.” Mike found himself having to suppress a chuckle. “I’m having trouble connecting the Andrew of the St. Andrews stories with the CEO of Nether Largie.”

“The St. Andrews stories?”

“When Marc was little, Annie used to tell him bedtime stories about when she was in St. Andrews. You were the main character, the knight in shining armor. She never said that you were an earl, though.”

It made him smile to know that; then he had to ask himself: How could he have believed that she’d forgotten him? “She didn’t know,” he explained. “I kept it a secret when I was at university.”

“Really? That sounds like a story in itself. How’d you two get together again?”

“I’m the client she’s consulting for.”

“Well, I’ll be damned.” That bothered him a little, and he wanted to know more, but unfortunately he was pressed for time. “I’ll look forward to hearing all about it when we meet,” he told him.

“And I look forward to meeting you. Cheers, Mike.”

“Cheers, Andrew. See you Wednesday.”

It was just past nine when the helicopter set down on the south lawn of Crinan Castle. Janet had taken the Range Rover to meet her husband and was standing alongside it, smiling warmly as he made his way toward her. When he was near enough to hear, she greeted him with a very deliberate: “Welcome home.”

They dined alone in the small dining room, formally known as the breakfast room, beside a fire and under candlelight. While the footmen were in the room with them, they made polite conversation.

“How are things going with the businesses?” she asked.

“Well enough,” he answered. “We’ve a few problems just now but nothing that can’t be handled.”

“Surely a problem here and there is meaningless,” she observed, “in the overall scheme of things.”

“Yes and no,” he answered thoughtfully. “Since I’ve changed the way the business is run, my attitude has changed, too. I’m of the mind now that every penny counts, and every decline in profits is money out of my employees’ pockets, or money lost that might have gone to some needy person.”

“I can see how you’d feel that way,” she observed, “with so many charities depending on Nether Largie’s largesse. Do you re-

gret having done it," she wondered, "having gone public? I know your father would never have allowed it."

"My father's attitude toward the business was positively feudal," he said, then signaled to the footman that he was finished with his plate. "And no—I don't regret it. It's made for a better company, having everyone who works for Nether Largie own a bit of it. And the charity connection has given me the purpose I needed. Making money for money's sake never quite did it for me."

After they'd been served their cheese course, Janet dismissed the young men. She cast her eyes downward and spoke tenderly to her husband. "That part of you, that giving, generous aspect of you, it's something I've always admired."

He smiled warmly as he told her, "Thank you, Janet. That's nice to hear you say, because lately I've not felt as though there was much about me to be admired, not in your eyes at least."

Now that they were alone, she wanted to tell him, "Since I've had time to mull it over, I understand why you've needed to be with her, in light of her illness and all. It would be totally out of character for you to ignore her at a time like this." She nibbled at her crowdie and oatcake, but kept her eyes on her husband.

When he realized what she was saying to him, he dropped his smile. "I don't want to give you the wrong impression. Annie doesn't know if she is ill; in fact, there's rather a good chance she isn't."

Her brow knitted. "I don't understand. I thought you said—"

"The two men she's been with," he explained, "her husband and her lover, neither of those men appear to have the virus."

Janet was having trouble swallowing the dry oatcake, and she chased it with a large gulp of wine. "I take it she says there's been no one else."

"Yes."

Her softened demeanor was overcome by her skepticism. "And you believe her?"

"I do."

She shook her head and closed her eyes, muttering, "Yes, of course you would."

"She's no reason to lie about that," he protested. "She's nothing to gain from a lie. And if you're thinking that I'm with her now

out of pity," he decided to add, "that's not the case. I'd be with her regardless."

Janet had spent the day convincing herself that it was her husband's compassion that compelled him to be with this woman. Now he sat in front of her saying this was not so, and her mind, which had been calmed by that idea, once again plunged into outrage.

The two footmen had noiselessly reentered the room. One removed their cheese plates while the other served their pudding. Janet and Andrew didn't speak while they were there, except to say thank you.

When they were gone again, she drank more wine and tried to keep from clenching her jaw as she informed her husband, "I've freed up two more bedrooms for this weekend."

He was happy for the change in subject. "Thank you, I appreciate your effort. How'd you manage?"

"I'm organizing dormitories for the children: girls in the nursery and boys in a third-floor drawing room. How old is her son?"

"Fourteen."

"That's what I thought. He'll be in the boy's dormitory."

"I really appreciate all of this, you know. I'm well aware of how difficult this is for you."

Janet set her glass on the table heavily, angrily, spilling some of its contents onto the damask cloth. "Are you? Well then, that makes it all better, doesn't it?"

Her reaction made him realize how foolish he'd been to think they'd moved on. He laid aside his utensils and settled deeper into his chair, saying to his wife, "That was a stupid statement and I apologize for it. I've no idea of how this is affecting you. Why don't you tell me so I'll understand?"

With a grim smile, she said, "I don't think you can. I think I could sit here all night, explaining it to you, and you still wouldn't understand."

He couldn't think how to respond, except to say, "I know how it feels to be terribly hurt by someone."

She almost laughed. "You do, don't you? And isn't it funny, that she's the very one who acquainted you with that feeling. Bloody ironic, isn't it?"

Calmly, he defended, "I was hurt because I had no access to the truth."

Her face flushed with angry disbelief as she questioned, "So that's why you feel so free to deliver your truth to me? You believe you're doing me a service, do you, protecting me in some odd way?"

With a slightly bowed head, he answered quietly, "Yes."

"Well," she fumed, barely able to restrain herself, "let me tell you something about your truth, Andrew. You run me through the gut with it!"

The air that escaped from his lungs was pure angst, and the words that followed were born of unfettered emotion. "What do you want me to do then, lie to you? Will that make it better? Tell me what it is you want," he insisted. "Do you want a divorce? If that's what you want, then do it! You can rake me over the coals, I'll take all the blame, I'll give you everything you ask for and not even make a sound in my own defense—but for Christ's sake, please don't keep punishing me for something I can no more help or change than these scars on my face!"

With the sting in her eyes and swelling in her throat, it was difficult to answer. "No, I don't want a divorce."

"What then?" he demanded. "Tell me what it is I can do!"

*I will not cry*, she told herself, *I will not let the threat of this woman reduce me to tears*. She lifted her chin in an effort to bolster her courage. "You can look at me," she said. "Look at me and see who I am and what we've meant to each other. Look long and hard at that before you go ahead with anything."

Meeting her eyes now, he spoke with more composure. "I am looking at you. I see you more and more clearly every day. I realize how important you are to me, I recognize the sacrifices you've made for me, and I ache for the pain I've caused you. But I won't turn away from her, Janet, I can't. I can't because I love her," he had to say. "I've never stopped loving her."

Once again, his frankness pierced her. "Then promise me something, Andrew," she pleaded. "Promise me you won't let that love blind you to all the other love in your life. Promise me that you'll do everything in your power to keep your eyes and mind open, to keep your heart open, even if it hurts, even if feels like it's killing you."

She was very right about that; it did feel at times as though these emotions might kill him. But if there was anything he understood about himself it was this: "I can't be open to anything if I can't be honest. You've got to give me that if you want the other."

"Then I do!" she nearly screamed. "Keep on with your infernal honesty, then!"

His expression softened and as he spoke, the flickering candlelight cast living shadows across his face: softly dancing, dark images that seemed to reflect what was going on inside of him. "I never wanted it to come to this," he told her. "But I accept and understand something about it that you don't. It's been looming out there all along, waiting for me, waiting to come back, like a storm that blew off the coast that I thought was gone, but it wasn't. It was still out there, churning itself over the water, and then one day it just blew back in, big as life, and there was nothing I could do to get out of its way." He continued to look deep into his wife, but he could find no more words to put to his feelings.

The room became quiet, save the occasional crack of the fire, as husband and wife looked into the other, hoping for understanding and drained from their efforts.

A comforting thought came to Janet in this moment, as she began to see the threat of Annie in the way her husband had just described: like a storm that was bearing down on them. She latched onto that idea, determining that she could survive it if she treated it as such, as something that would blow itself out eventually, something she could weather if she had the fortitude, if she had the tenacity, and if she battened down the hatches, secured the lines, and lashed herself to the main.