

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'a' and 'b' in a white, elegant, cursive script font, positioned on a solid black rectangular background. A thin white horizontal line is drawn beneath the letters.

# HUMAN FACE

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## CHAPTER ONE

It was the moon that woke her, shining through the uncurtained casement window and flooding the attic bedroom with cold, pure light.

It summoned Beatrice like a call to worship. She came awake, muttering and groaning as she shifted her bulky body, propping herself up at last with a wheezing groan, then rolled out of bed to sit on the end of it for a moment with her eyes shut, moon bathing.

As the pale radiance washed over her she felt light, light and free, a gossamer thing, purged of the gross burdens of the flesh. But it was drawing her to the window and she stood up, flinching at the chill, then with infinite tenderness bent, crooning, to pick up the little shawled bundle that had lain beside her and padded across the bare boards, cradling it to her shoulder.

There was a film of condensation on the small square panes; she pulled down the sleeve of her thick flannelette nightgown and rubbed them clear.

Overhead, the moon was a bone-white disc in a black velvet sky that was thick with stars; there was not so much as a breath of wind. Below her, the bay was still and steely as a pool of mercury, and in

late autumn some of the trees were black winter skeletons already. The garden was all shades of grey – dark grey, dove-grey, pearl-grey, dirty-white – and though it was almost as bright as day it looked sickly pale, eerie in the moonlight.

She loved the strangeness. It cloaked everything with magic, evoked a different reality, where she could imagine herself transformed – where she could be what she wished to be, not what she was.

‘See, Rosamond, my precious. Wake up – see how beautiful! Come on, I’ll hold you up,’ she whispered, pulling back the cobweb-fine shawl.

The eyes opened obediently, blue and blank above the rounded cheeks that were delicately flushed with pink, staring sightlessly out at the dream-world where a doll could become a real live baby.

‘You mustn’t get cold, though,’ she scolded lovingly. ‘That would never do, my darling.’ She swaddled it again, cradling it in her arms as the eyes shut with an audible click. ‘There, that’s better. I’ll pop you back into bed.’

But she lingered a little longer, reluctant for the moment to pass, though she was beginning to shiver. She was just turning away when a movement caught her eye.

There was a boat pulling out from the pier across the bay, a small motorboat that was, however, being rowed as if to escape attention. The ripples from the oars spread out and out, breaking the mirror surface of the sea with concentric rings.

Her curiosity piqued, she turned to settle Rosamond gently back into bed then swathed herself in the duvet and returned to the window. The boat would arrive in a few minutes: it wasn’t far across the bay.

There was movement below her too. Someone was coming from the house, running across the grass and down the steps to the jetty.

Even huddled in the warmth of the duvet, she felt a sudden chill run through her.

Adam wouldn't like this. He wouldn't like this at all.

Beatrice turned hastily away, climbed back into bed. She didn't want to know, didn't want anything to do with it. She wouldn't tell him, but he would find out. He always did.

As she turned away, a faint wisp of cloud drifted across the moon and a little breeze ruffled the surface of the sea.

Eva was shivering as she ran back across the lawn, leaving footprints in the deep dew that soaked her feet. Behind her she heard the cautious splash of the oars as Daniel rowed back towards the huddle of houses across the bay in the village, dark and silent in the eerie light.

To anyone watching it would have looked like a lover's tryst, and she gave a little, wry grimace. Of course he had talked of love, and the girl she once was might have believed him. Now, bruised and scarred by experience, she suspected that this was just the sort of thing men said when they were wanting something from you.

It had been a risk taking the key from Adam's drawer while he was away but she'd got it back safely, and now the copy Daniel had made was cold in her hand. As she went back into the silent house she found herself almost hoping it wouldn't work. But if it didn't . . .

The hall was bright with the moonlight pouring through the long stair window, and she glanced fearfully up the stairwell that rose above her as she scurried across. *I'm like a mouse*, she thought, *looking for the owl hovering overhead*. But there was no sound from the attic floor.

The back office, where even Beatrice did not go except in Adam's company, lay behind a door below the stairs and Eva winced as it squeaked on its hinges and she stepped into the windowless passage. No one would see her if she switched a light on here but somehow it felt safer to grope her way to the door in the faint light filtering through from

the hall. Even though Adam was away for the night, dining and staying over, she felt a superstitious fear that he might suddenly appear as she fumbled for the lock and fitted the key into it, shouting ‘Treachery!’

*Click!* It turned. Feeling sick with nerves, she let herself in, locking the door behind her before she switched on the light. It was barely bigger than a cupboard, Adam’s office, created out of one of the old service rooms, probably, and just big enough for a desk with a computer on it, a couple of chairs and a large metal filing cabinet.

She went to the cabinet, ignoring the computer; Daniel had told her it would be protected so she wouldn’t get in and that anyway the most important stuff wouldn’t be where an enterprising hacker might find it – on disks if they were lucky, ordinary files if they weren’t. The drawers, when she gave a tug, were locked and she fished in her pocket for the little bunch of metal keys he had given her.

This was treachery, of course – a dirty word. Add that to the list Eva would have to confess to the priest, if she hadn’t stopped going to confession long ago.

Her dream of a better life hadn’t seemed wicked at the time; it had seemed brave, the sort of feistiness Nënë had always encouraged. Her eyes prickled as she thought of her dead mother – what would she think of her daughter now, of what she had become?

Oh, she’d pretended to herself that the relationship with Adam was a genuine attraction. It wasn’t hard, not at first; he was darkly good-looking, charming, and being the director of a charity for refugees surely vouched for his good intentions. But all along, at heart she had known it for what it was, and she had accepted ‘housekeeper’ status on his assurance that he would transform her into a Pole with a National Insurance number, entitled to her place in the West where the ordinary lifestyle represented barely imaginable luxury to someone who had lived in miserable poverty with a drunken father.

Now she was trapped in this weird situation, along with the poor, sad, obsessive woman who treated her with defensive hostility; apart from visits across to the pub, and sometimes to Portree for shopping, she had no life of her own.

She had nowhere else to go, though. She had been patient, waiting for Adam to give her the papers and leave with his blessing, but slowly the chilling realisation had dawned: that was only going to happen when he tired of her and he hadn't, so far. She'd made the big mistake of asking when she might be able to leave; she had seen the flicker of wounded pride on his face and the relationship had cooled rapidly after that. These days she was spending almost every night in her bare little bedsitter, not in Adam's luxurious flat.

Eva no longer trusted him to honour the unwritten agreement. He could just turn her out and then she would have no alternative but to become what at heart she knew she was already. A 'working girl', didn't they call it in Britain? There was a starker word for it back home.

And now she had sold herself, or at least her conscience, to another man. Daniel, too, was showing her a glimpse of the Promised Land; he could give her all that Adam had offered and more, but there needed to be what he liked to call the 'devil's bargain' – do evil that good may come. A Jesuit belief, he'd reassured her, playing on her Catholic education, but she was still uneasy.

Could she trust him, any more than she trusted Adam? And what if Adam found out? No – she daren't think of that, not even for a second. He wasn't going to find out, and then Daniel would spirit her away to her new life. For a moment she let herself dream, holding on to the vision like an amulet against fear.

She took a deep breath and began trying the keys. On the second try one of them worked, just as he had said it would, and she pulled

open the top drawer, her hands shaking slightly. She couldn't see any disks – just files – but he'd given her a list of the sort of information he wanted and she began checking through. When she found one, she took it to the desk and sat down, copying the information into the notebook he'd given her as fast as she could.

It was boring work. There were two more drawers, and eventually the names and figures began to blur and in the unheated room her fingers were becoming stiff. There was one more file she should check, but it was very late; Daniel had waited until he saw Beatrice's light go off before he came across from the village, and after Eva had nodded off to sleep twice she decided to call it a day.

Beatrice never got up before half past seven if Adam was away, and when she did she would go straight to the main office and stay there, so if Eva set her alarm she'd have plenty of time to slip in unseen, finish off and slip out again long before Adam would be back from his leisurely country-house breakfast. With a yawn that almost dislocated her jaw, she put everything back and let herself out again.

The moon had gone down and the hall was in deep darkness. With her hand stretched out in front of her, Eva groped her way across, terrified of losing her bearings and knocking something over that would bring Beatrice out to see what was going on.

She wriggled down into her cold bed, desperate for sleep, but now the eyes that had kept shutting before stayed obstinately open. She was too frightened to sleep. How had her dream become the nightmare she was living now? There was a bird singing freedom somewhere, but listening to it felt like tempting fate and as she lay there the monsters of fear and guilt crept closer, closer in the darkness.

The whitewashed croft houses of the township at Balnasheil, scattered up the low hills rising to the Black Cuillin behind, and the cottages,



huddled by the shoreline, had an embattled look; its tiny bay offered only slight protection against the Atlantic storms that came roaring in across the sea.

It was an ancient settlement, surrounded by the ghosts of its past: the Celtic standing stone; a hut circle from the Bronze Age; sad ruins that had once been houses, still bearing the marks of the fires of their destruction when the brutal Clearances drove their owners into exile.

A close-knit community with a dwindling population, it was set in its ways, polite and cool to strangers. Very cool, when it came to the present inhabitants of Balnasheil Lodge.

The penny-pinching Victorian magnate who had built it across the bay on the rough moorland for the shooting – ‘with walls you could spit peas through’, in scornful local opinion – had styled himself the laird. He had looked for forelock-tugging in vain from the Highlanders, who had only ever considered their own chiefs first among equals and had somehow missed out on the deference gene.

Over the years his successors had been viewed with a mixture of tolerant indifference and quiet amusement – and even sympathy in the case of the Danish businessman who had bought the Lodge, sight unseen, and been so dismayed that he visited once and never returned.

The Human Face charity had been welcomed at first, even admired for its canny approach in making its headquarters here instead of in fancy offices in one of the big cities, but gradually support drained away. They didn’t make use of local businesses; the directors who dropped in occasionally for a drink or a meal in the little hotel were flash and toffee-nosed and the procession of ‘housekeepers’ who came across to the pub that provided Balnasheil’s social scene didn’t help either. The general verdict was that there was something ‘not right’ about it.

Vicky Macdonald had known she was taking a risk when she got a

job at the Lodge doing the cleaning and cooking that the ‘housekeepers’ apparently couldn’t manage. Coming from the Central Belt and not having the Gaelic, she’d been considered all but a Sassenach and was still working out her probation, despite having married one of the locals more than a year ago. She was left in no doubt that she was seen as tarnished by association, not least by her own husband.

This morning, when she said ‘Murdo, it’s time we were away. I’m running late as it is,’ the response was unhelpful.

Murdo John Macdonald – so called to differentiate him from his father, John Murdo – was a big, quiet man, slow-spoken, dark-bearded and dark-eyed. He looked up from his mug of tea and grunted, ‘Seen the weather?’

The view through the kitchen window was just a square of opaque white. Vicky ran her hand through her fair curly hair and sighed. ‘You’ve been out when it’s been worse than that. I can’t afford to be unreliable – we need the money.’

She could have bitten her tongue off after she said it. She’d hurt him; under the heavy brows, his eyes were pained as he looked up at her, and she hurried on, ‘I know you’d prefer I just did whatever the hotel could offer me but when the climbing season was over I was earning next to nothing for months. Anyway, I got really tired of Fiona Ross cheating me over the hours I’d worked and snaffling the tips and I hated having to waitress while Douglas’s ministrations ruined good food. At least this is steady and I get to cook. I don’t want to lose it.’

He didn’t reply, but she saw his jaw set in a firmer line and sighed. Once Murdo John made up his mind, you’d be better working on a project to make water run uphill than trying to change it.

Vicky had been at a very low ebb after her mother died, feeling alone and vulnerable with the only family she had gone. She’d come

to stay in the hotel for a holiday looking for comfort in the beauty and peace of the hills and then, reluctant to return to the stress of her pressured job in catering, she had taken a temporary job as a waitress. Her decision had a lot to do with Murdo John; he was very attractive, in that rugged Highland way, and he had pursued the relationship with a sort of devoted, unthreatening persistence that had soothed her aching sense of loss and won her heart. She'd have been happy just to move in with him, but it was marriage he wanted – marriage or nothing.

'I want to make sure you're mine,' he had said, and, happy and in love, she'd thought it very romantic at the time. And she would be part of a family again.

The problems only appeared when Murdo John lost his job in construction. With the downturn, work slowed to a trickle and then stopped; he'd been making good money for years and now he was dependent on bar work and a bit of fishing. It hurt his pride that he couldn't support her as, in his eyes, a husband should. He lost his self-respect; he felt humiliated, diminished and no amount of loving assurance could shift his view of himself as a failure.

As if in compensation he was becoming more controlling, and now their relationship was showing signs of strain. He hated her associating with the dubious company on the other side of the bay, but she was digging in her toes. Even if he couldn't accept the concept of the New Man, she was a modern woman and no amount of passive coercion was going to make her give in. When the housekeeping job had come up, she'd jumped at the chance and she was keeping it even if Murdo John would all but spit on the ground when she so much as mentioned Adam Carnegie's name.

Vicky didn't like him either – creepy, even sinister, she thought – but she wasn't paid to socialise with him, or with the 'housekeepers'

either, though Eva was all right – a sweet girl, a decent girl, even, unlike her predecessor, who'd been a cold, brassy-looking woman who obviously knew the score and who was using Adam just as much as he was using her.

'Maybe if it clears later,' Murdo John said grudgingly, his tone telling her this was his best offer.

She'd have to settle for that; if she tried driving round by the road, more like a track, that took you up into the foothills and across a narrow stone bridge before it dropped down to the other side of the bay, it would be nearly time to set off home again.

Perhaps the fog would lift as suddenly as it had settled. As they said around here, 'If you don't like the weather, wait a minute.'

'All right,' Vicky said, trying not to sound tight-lipped as she set about making her preparations for their own meal at night. If she had it ready, she could stay on a bit if the fog lifted and work her hours; Beatrice had pointed out to her that not to dock her for work she hadn't done was taking food out of the mouths of hungry children. Vicky could have suggested a few economies the directors could make towards the same noble end, but she didn't. She wasn't daft.

As she chopped onions, her mind was on the odd household across the bay. There had been a bad atmosphere of late and she was trying to figure it out. Last time she'd sensed that, it was because Adam was plainly getting bored with Eva's predecessor, who had left shortly afterwards, but this time wasn't like that. He'd seemed very taken with Eva until fairly recently, when there had been a sudden cooling – a sharpness in the way he spoke to her, no casual arm round the girl's shoulder, no laughter between them any more. And Eva was definitely on edge.

She'd noticed, too, that when Adam was on one of his frequent trips away Eva had been spending time in the pub with a man who'd

been living in a rented cottage in the village for a month or two – a writer researching a book about hillwalking in the Inner Hebrides, apparently.

Eva claimed to be Polish – but then the last girl had, too. Vicky doubted it; when she'd tried to talk to Eva about Poland she'd shown the whites of her eyes and suffered a relapse in the standard of her English. She worried about Eva; she seemed so young and vulnerable and she was in a very unhealthy situation. Her strong protective instincts aroused, Vicky had tried to befriend her, but despite being happy enough to smile and chat, she shied away from anything approaching intimacy. When Vicky had asked how she had come into Adam's life she had clammed up immediately.

If her immigrant status was dodgy she'd be wise to keep Adam Carnegie sweet. And if he found out she was carrying on with someone behind his back, from what Vicky knew of the man, he wouldn't like it – wouldn't like it at all.

There wasn't a lot she could do about it, though. With another sigh, Vicky began peeling the carrots.

Beatrice Lacey looked out of her window with a sinking heart. The view had vanished this morning and she couldn't see anything – not the Black Cuillin across the bay, not the near hill, not even the lawns and shrubs in the garden, only a dense, vaporous blanket wrapping the house in a smothering silence.

On mornings like this she felt she could barely breathe, that she was in exile – a prisoner, even – stifled by the implacable strangeness of this place where she had found herself living, a fairly modest fishing lodge in a remote part of Skye. She hated it here, where the natives spoke another language, at least among themselves, and put up a wall of polite aloofness that barely concealed their dislike.

She'd been so happy when Human Face had been headquartered in Surrey, in what had been her own home until she had turned it over to Adam Carnegie's foundation. She'd had old friends there, a brother, even, and it had been quite a shock when, six years before, Adam had announced they were moving to Skye.

He'd been getting restless, she knew that. For some reason he didn't like her friends, and particularly not her brother. Well, she could understand that; Quentin, with his constant crises, was a problem and even she hadn't been pleased when he too moved to Skye, not long ago, and only a few miles away.

And there were the interruptions to their work, too, like the supporters who wanted to do charity events to raise funds – which, as Adam said, never raised more than a piffling amount that didn't pay for the time they had to spend helping with the arrangements – and the unheralded official visitations, making sure they weren't embezzling all the money. When world poverty was such a colossal challenge, the petty stuff was frustrating.

Certainly, they weren't plagued like that out here in the wilds and once Adam had explained, looking at her with those blue eyes, so dark that they were almost navy, that with property prices the way they were they really ought to liquidate their assets and cut their overheads at the same time, for the sake of the children. And she had agreed, of course: the photographs he had shown her of the refugee children with huge pleading eyes and malnourished infants with grotesquely swollen stomachs had haunted her ever since.

It had given her a pang to sell her house and move but it was a comfort to think that it would put food in a lot more hungry mouths, just as the monthly income from her trust fund did. And it had, most importantly, pleased Adam too.

Another benefit, he'd said, was that at Balnasheil Lodge he could

offer fishing and a bit of rough shooting on the moor that went with it to promising sponsors, and from time to time a group of men would come to be wined and dined and flattered.

Not that she had much to do with them, though, apart from making bookings for flights and transport from Glasgow. Adam had explained that he needed a housekeeper, someone to be a hostess when he entertained, who could charm the money out of their pockets. And it worked: she could see the evidence in the size of the donations they made afterwards.

The ‘housekeepers’ had all been immigrants, struggling to make their way in a hard world, and she’d have been pleased that this was giving them a chance to find their feet if she hadn’t realised that they had – well – other duties. She managed to ignore it, though with pain, telling herself that one day he would tire of the shallow vapidness of these girls. None of them lasted long, and they were easily replaced: she would be here, at his side, long after the current one was gone.

Eva. She didn’t want to think about Eva: Eva with her little pixie face and her bright smile. Though she’d tried to hate her she couldn’t quite manage it. It was lucky Adam had been away last night, because—

She shied away from the thought and fixed her mind on the tasks of the day as she showered and dressed and chatted to the doll while she did her hair and put on make-up; it took her mind off the face she saw in the mirror. She’d got up a little earlier than usual today; several applications had come in late yesterday and she wanted to get on with them. Locking her door carefully behind her, she set off down the stairs from her attic flat to open up the charity office on the ground floor.

On a day like this, with little light coming through the staircase window, the hall looked even gloomier than usual, with its heavily

varnished pitch pine and the brown and orange stained-glass window in the front door.

It was a dark and oppressive house, so unlike her bright and sunny Surrey villa. With its six bedrooms, plus servants' quarters, it was far too big, except when sponsors visited, and it wasn't as if the public rooms were handsome either. It had obviously been thrown up on the cheap by someone who only came in August for the shooting, and in bad weather the draughts whistled through the gaps round the windows. Today there was even a hint of the mist outside creeping into the hall.

Beatrice had reached the last few steps when the door to Adam's private flat on the left of the staircase opened and the man himself – stocky, with thick black hair and strongly marked brows – came out. He was frowning.

Her heavy face brightened. 'Adam! I thought you were staying over with the Lindsays last night. I didn't know you were back.' She couldn't disguise the yearning in her voice.

He stopped and the scowl vanished at once. 'Morning, sweetie! Yes, the company was deadly boring – dear God, once the colonel gets into his stride you lose the will to live. I couldn't face him again over breakfast so I drove back at some ungodly hour in the fog. I've quite a lot to see to anyway before I go off tomorrow.'

She was hurrying down when she saw the dog following him and stopped dead – not that the Dobermann took any notice of her. It never did, never showed any interest in anyone except its master.

It was, she had to admit, an elegant animal – sleek, muscular, its black and tan coat gleaming. She liked dogs well enough, in general – just not this particular dog. She waited, with an almost superstitious shudder, until it had passed.

Adam was going towards the private office, the one she only



went into when they were working together. Her heart lifted. She'd put some papers for him in the box outside the door and they might need discussion.

Those were the happy times, when they talked about the next project. Once, gloriously and unforgettably, he had taken her with him to a refugee camp they were supporting in North Africa. It was the most – and, indeed, the only – romantic experience in her life and she lived on the dream that it would happen again – and perhaps this time she might be lucky with a real baby. It was a long time ago now, though, and she was losing heart.

'Adam,' she called as she went towards him. 'There's a couple of things—'

'Yes?' he said impatiently, over his shoulder.

He didn't sound enthusiastic and she hesitated. If he wasn't in the mood for a chat, there was no point.

'It doesn't matter,' she said hastily. 'I'll see you later.'

He nodded without turning round as he put a key into the lock, then wrestled with it, puzzled. He tried the handle and the door opened.

Adam stopped on the threshold. 'Have you been in here, Beatrice?'

His voice was icy and her hand went to her throat in dismay. 'No, Adam, no!' she cried. 'Of course I haven't! You know I never go to your office unless you're with me. And I keep the key in my bag so no one else could have used it. Perhaps you just forgot to lock it.'

He ignored that. He went into the room, the dog at his heels. It was empty but Beatrice, hovering uncertainly in the doorway, could see that the chair by the desk was pushed back and the edge of a piece of paper was sticking out of one of the drawers in the filing cabinet.

He didn't say anything. She was turning to leave when he said suddenly, 'Where did she go last night?'

‘Go?’ She was flustered. ‘I – I don’t know—’

Adam smiled. ‘You do, don’t you? You’re a rotten liar, darling. I was out with Amber this morning and I saw the footsteps in the wet grass, going down to the jetty. It wasn’t you, was it?’

Beatrice shook her head.

‘No, I didn’t think it would be. Who was she meeting?’

Her heart beating a little faster because he had called her ‘darling’, she told him what she had seen the night before.

‘That’s fine. You’re my good girl.’ He smiled at her and then went to open the top drawer of the filing cabinet as the dog, with a sigh, lay down in the corner of the room. He began piling files onto his desk, as if he was planning to move them somewhere else.

From what he said, from his smile, he should have sounded pleased. But he didn’t, he sounded . . . grim.

Oh God, she mustn’t think about it. With a hollow feeling in her stomach Beatrice went back to the main office on the right of the front door, a large draughty room with too many windows. She always dreaded the approach of winter.

She sat down at her desk in the bay window at the front, switched on the computer and checked her to-do list. Keep herself busy: that was the best thing. There was a flight to be confirmed; she could do that first. Her hands were trembling, though, and in the part of her mind she couldn’t quite silence a voice was whispering, *Not again, not again.*

PC Livvy Murray sat up in bed and looked out of her window with no enthusiasm at all. She lay down again, pulled the duvet over her head and groaned. What was a nice Glasgow lassie like her doing in a place like this? And how long could she stand it before she cracked? After all, she could resign any day she wanted.

The trouble was, Livvy loved her job. At least, she'd loved the job she'd had in Glasgow, until it all went horribly wrong.

He'd said, 'Sorry, doll,' as they took him down, grinning at her stony face and giving her the cheeky-chappie wink that had been his stock-in-trade since they were at primary school together.

*Bastard!* But you had to give it to him, he wasn't one to bear grudges. She'd been the one who'd shafted him, after all, even if he'd shafted her first.

She hadn't known anything about his double life, though perhaps she should have: with the benefit of twenty-twenty hindsight she could see that there were questions she should have maybe asked, but she hadn't. She'd let herself be blinded by the looks and the gallus charm. It was amazing what you could choose not to see if you didn't want to.

When it all hit the fan, at Glasgow HQ they'd have been happy enough to sack chippy, sassy PC Murray, but once she found out what had been going on she'd grassed him up as best she could and was the star prosecution witness. She'd had no problem in court; she'd been totally honest about her own stupidity and she'd come out of it with this as the only stain on her character.

How humiliating was that, though? She'd never been as confident as she tried to sound, covering up the sense of inadequacy instilled by her endlessly critical mother – a mean drunk – with a bright, shiny armour of indifference. She'd had to stand there, in public view, exposed as such a rubbish police officer that she hadn't even spotted the crime syndicate operating right under her nose.

Her bosses couldn't pin anything on her, though they'd tried. Since they couldn't bust her for having rubbish taste in men they'd just moved her – no discussion, no appeal – to exile in the piddling wee police office in this place that would make Troon on a wet weekend

in November seem buzzy by comparison, that didn't do any proper police work and that was going to be shut down any day now, along with a police house that was all but unheated and had so many leaks in the roof that you could barely see the tatty carpets for the basins put out to catch the drips.

Nothing happened here. Nothing. And now Police Scotland was scaling everything down so that in the unlikely event that something did happen, they'd have to call in someone qualified to deal with it and she wouldn't get a look-in even then. The highlight of her week was a Saturday night, when she might be called along to Portree to deal with a rammy in one of the pubs. There certainly wasn't much else to do if she was off on a Saturday around here.

But if the idea was that she'd just resign in disgust, they could get stuffed. Even if she was totally pissed off, she wasn't going to give them that satisfaction. She'd keep her head down for a bit, then she'd start very politely applying for a transfer to a place where the most interesting thing to do wasn't watching the grass growing down the middle of the road.

As Eva Havel slipped along the below-stairs passage, she was shaking so that her legs would hardly hold her up. He'd almost caught her red-handed.

All she'd had time to do was shove the files in the drawer, push it shut and flee when she heard Beatrice talking to Adam in the hall. There hadn't been time to lock either the drawer or the door and all she could hope for was that Adam, secure in his own house, was sometimes a bit casual about locking up himself.

She'd know about it soon enough if he wasn't. Like a frightened animal taking refuge in its den, she headed for her little bedsitter

but before she reached it Marek Kaczka came out of the kitchen, eating a sandwich.

He too was an immigrant but he was much older and he'd been there for a couple of years, living in the gatehouse at the end of the drive and doing maintenance on the house and grounds. He never said much and he wasn't usually in the house unless he was sent for; he looked guilty and made a movement as if to hide his sandwich when he saw her. She just nodded to him as she passed and he went on towards the side door.

Reaching her room, she shut the door and leant against it, her eyes shut. At least he hadn't come along in a towering rage; perhaps, after all, he hadn't noticed. She could get Daniel to fetch her tonight – but then she remembered that Adam was going away the next day, flying to Paris for a conference.

Once he'd gone, she could pack up everything, including the important notebook, and leave quietly so that he would just come back and find her gone. And until then, she would try to keep out of his way.

When she picked up her phone to text Daniel, she saw there were two anxious messages from him already. She hesitated, then tapped out a blandly reassuring reply; she had found the paper files, got the details he wanted. She didn't mention that Adam might have realised what she'd done – he might be annoyed. She could be out of here by tomorrow afternoon.

The fog was starting to clear now, but rain was taking its place, the relentless soft, wetting rain that could soak you to the skin in minutes. She couldn't wait to get away.

It was raining in Edinburgh too, though here the rain had come in on tearing winds, lashing the small windows of the fisherman's cottage

at Newhaven where Kelso Strang lived. Even within the shelter of the stout stone walls of the harbour opposite, the little yachts were tugging at their moorings, rocking on the swell.

He was a tall man, dark-haired and hazel-eyed with a lean, intelligent face, currently disfigured by a neat scar running straight down the right-hand side. His expression was bleak as he stood in the silent house, staring out at the rain.

He'd wanted peace, had believed he was desperate for it, after the surreal, frantic activity of the past few days. He'd told his fussing, anxious family to leave him alone, unable to cope with their grief as well as his own, and at last he'd persuaded them to go.

Kelso had been thankful to see his father out before he said something that would wreck their already damaged relationship. Highly successful professional soldiers are not celebrated for their tact, and though Major General Sir Roderick Strang had made all the conventionally proper noises, he hadn't been able to resist saying, 'Things will be different now, of course. I'm sure I can still find a string or two to pull to get you back into the regiment.'

His tone suggested that there was a silver lining to every cloud. Kelso was digging his nails into the palms of his hands, struggling for control, when Mary Strang flew across the room like a small, heat-seeking missile. 'Leave the boy alone, Roddy. He's not wanting to think about anything more just now. I'm taking you home.'

Like any good soldier, he obeyed the command of his superior officer and left.

Kelso had often thought that if the army found itself suddenly short of a brigadier, his mother could have taken immediate command of a battalion with unruffled calm. She could cope with his father, after all, and sometimes in moments of extreme exasperation he had

muttered the aphorism that any woman could manage a clever man but it took a very clever woman to manage a fool – even though he knew that was not entirely fair.

He'd never been forgiven for leaving the army after a short-service commission, despite being offered another term and promotion, in favour of joining the police force. It had been bad enough that he'd volunteered as a sniper – pukka officers did not sully their hands with the dirty end of the business – but this was, to Roderick, social disgrace as well as being a calculated insult to him personally. And he had blamed Alexa, who should have been happy to abandon her medical career and follow the drum after a soldier husband.

Kelso had tried to explain: he'd enjoyed his time in the army but he'd never intended to make it his career. As an army brat himself, he had no wish to inflict that life on any children he might have – the changes of schools, the friends lost, the constant dislocation, the feeling of always being an outsider.

His father, sensitive to slights as many insensitive people are, took that as a direct criticism. Clearly this was That Woman's influence, corrupting his boy, the son he was so proud of, a graduate from Edinburgh University with a good degree then a top cadet in the Sovereign's Parade at Sandhurst, destined for glory. Their meetings became reduced to special family occasions, when he was, of course, icily polite to her.

Alexa, in her warm-hearted way, had been understanding. 'He didn't have your advantages, remember. He started out in the ranks and he worked his way up to where he finished entirely on his own merits. He feels he handed you success on a plate and you just threw it back in his face.'

Kelso had snorted. 'Rags to rags in three generations, you mean? You're far too generous – he's just a howling snob. And I paid my

dues – surely a couple of tours in Afghanistan entitles me to tell him he can't dictate a life plan for me.'

But Roderick was still at it; he hadn't given up. Yes, it was certainly just as well his wife had strong-armed him out of the house.

Kelso was on his own at last but now he had peace, he didn't want it any more.

The ghosts were all about him, whispering at some times, wailing at others, and worst of all laughing, light-hearted and carefree. It could send him mad.

He fingered the scar running from cheekbone to jawline. It was still tender but healing well, the marks left by the stitches almost gone. A pity life couldn't knit itself together again in that easy way.

Tomorrow he'd go back to the job. The alternative was to look for oblivion at the bottom of a glass – or take a trip up Salisbury Crags and choose the quick way down.