

Bloody hell, what?

Lucinda Emilia Foster Farquhar-MacDonald waited with growing impatience. The rain hammered down. The wind blew through her protective clothing as if it was made from tissue paper. She could only imagine what it was doing to her make-up.

Gone were those days when as plain old Lucy Foster she had presented "Luxury Interiors" to an ardent viewing public. That was how she had met Torquil. She had always fancied a double-barrelled name. He had been a push-over.

Her husband lay at the top of the rise, above her. Beside him lay Robbie Grieve, their Ghillie, watching the stag through his binoculars. Torquil used the more powerful mono-scope.

Robbie's deep baritone voice came down to her in a low, quiet rumble that always gave her a rush:

'Aye, that's him all-right, sir. See the wee bent bitty on his right antler, a' twisted frae fightin'. Poor auld devil. Startin' tae go lame in his left foreleg tae. He'll no' last oot anither winter.'

'Hmm. It's nearly half a mile, what?' squeaked her husband's high soprano voice: it always squeaked like this when he was nervous.

'Wid ye be wantin' me tae tak' him doon then, sir?'

'No, no, of course not. Where's the fun in that, what?'

'Aye, just so, just so.'

Lucinda studied them. Her tall skinny husband, almost shapeless, like a chopped off boa constrictor, with his big nose, long ears, huge drooping lipless mouth and sad dull eyes set in a slack-skinned face. Her eyes flipped to Robbie: a real man; powerfully built. Fit, strong, and full of slow energy, as well she knew.

"If only..." she thought for the millionth time since she first met Robbie that first day, when Torquil had bought "Castle Duthal" as her wedding present, five years earlier.

"CRACK"

'Bugger, the stupid beast moved, what? But no, he's hit!'

"CRACK"

Robbie had fired a back-up shot to put an end the animal's suffering.

'There ye go now, old son.'

Bloody hell, what?

'Listen here, Grieve, there was no need for you to interfere. I was just about to finish him off, what?'

'Aye, sorry about that, M'Laud, just a natural reaction, ye ken.'

'Well, he goes in the book as mine, what?'

'Aye, sir. Yours in the book. Ah'll see tae it masel'.'

'Right, good, what? I'll just leave you to it, to tidy it up, what? Got to get the little woman out of this bloody maelstrom, what?'

"So I'm the "little woman" again," she thought, fixing her smile. Not as bad as "tootsie pie" or "glamour pussy" or "little turtle dovey". He fired these epithets around like grape shot, seemingly unable to detect her cold anger. She had tried reasoning with him time after time. Occasionally he had promised, but it never stuck.

And the worst, the most demeaning of all:

"Right my little bundle of fluff, time to repair upstairs for conjugals, what?" as he persisted in saying after every dinner party.

She had even tried withholding his "conjugals" in January. Surprised when he seemed to accept it too easily, she had waited for a delayed reaction. The next morning she overheard him say on the phone to one of his ski-ing friends, "Stefan, things are a bit 'dry' on the old 'conjugals' front at the minute. The luscious Lucinda is in a bit a mood. Hormones, no doubt. Fancy a few weeks in the fleshpots of San Moritz."

By evening he had gone, without even a good-bye, leaving her high and dry with a houseful of his cretinous friends to entertain. But it had been a good thing. She had put herself in the path of Robbie. He had been wary at first but she soon had it working well. At forty-three he was a career bachelor, he revealed, but obviously well experienced. He had given her back her youth.

And now she and Robbie had their plan.

'Right old bean, shall we leap into the Landie and canter down for a bit of afternoon delight before din-dins? Put ourselves outside a few G&Ts, what?'

'Torquil darling, would you mind awfully. But I so enjoy the walk home over Ben Duthal. Won't you come with me, please.'

Torquil seldom walked if he could be driven or carried. He drove badly. That was why she was here, as his chauffeur. He had pounced after lunch, as she knew he would:

Bloody hell, what?

"Do you good old sausage, blow the cobwebs, ventilate the parts, what?"

Robbie had met them at the foot of the steep single-vehicle track, leaving his own Landie behind to drive the three of them up that last tricky bit.

'Walk, in this? But bunny bots, I thought you didn't like the great outdoors, what?'

'Oh but I *do* darling, I do, very much. Now that you've so kindly shown me the hidden beauty of these mountains and the intriguing rustic pleasures to be found in them, I have become a convert. Oh, *do* come with me, Torquil darling, *please*.'

'Absolutely not. Look, it's almost four, time to get ready for dinner, what.'

'No, Torquil darling, I've set my mind on this.'

She watched his eyes. Although he was the twenty-third richest man in Britain he was not bright. Dim really. And, as she well know, he was not used to being opposed, not when they were alone, and certainly not when there was a third party.

He swung round and barked at Robbie Grieve:

'Use the radio. Get Miller and Graham to deal with the carcass. You go with Lady Lucinda, make sure she doesn't come to harm, what?'

He whirled around and left them, without a farewell.

They watched the Land-rover snake very slowly down the steep path, its hill descent control system whining.

It reached the hairpin bend.

It did not make the turn.

Robbie had switched off the anti-lock braking system.

The heavy vehicle slithered to the edge of the three hundred foot precipice.

He made the fatal mistake of taking her out of the ultra-low forward gear, seeking reverse.

The vehicle hung for a few seconds.

The driver's door began to open.

The Landie tipped forward.

Bloody hell, what?

Lord Torquil Angus Edward Roskill Farquhar-MacDonald plunged to his death.

Lucinda slipped her arm around Robbie's waist and pulled him close.

She smiled as she imagined her husband's last words.

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