

'Let's start at the beginning Mr Campbell. Can I call you Donald?'

'Aye.'

'Can you tell us when you first met Mr Grafton?'

'Yesterday.'

'But you'd spoken to him before. On the phone?'

'Aye. Business.'

'So, although Mr Grafton bought your farm, you hadn't met him until yesterday?'

A shake of the head. PC Ferguson had warned that Donald Campbell was quiet, unresponsive. Taciturn, he'd said. DS McCann had told him he needed to study harder for the sergeant's exam instead of spending his time reading the thesaurus. McCann didn't think eloquence was helpful. Especially with suspects like Campbell.

'He'd never visited the farm before he came to shoot yesterday?'

Campbell stayed silent. This wasn't going to be easy. This wasn't the 'No Comment' defence that some wee neds used because they'd seen it on the telly. This was what Campbell was like. Uncommunicative. Inarticulate, Ferguson might say. Dumb.

'So yesterday, you went out deer stalking with a man you'd never met before and he ended up dead.'

No answer again. Campbell's smell filled the interview room. Damp. Animal shit. Poverty. But McCann couldn't see guilt in his eyes, couldn't see much at all. Maybe taciturn wasn't the word. Thick might be better.

...

*Donald looked out over the moor, first with the naked eye, then with his binoculars, sweeping slowly across. The early morning rain had cleared and the sun was breaking through, colouring the heather in green, purple, gold. No sign of deer.*

*He turned his head this way and that, feeling the wind on his cheeks. He took a small bottle from one pocket and lifted it to shoulder height, pressing it so a puff of powder blew in the air. Wind direction confirmed.*

*He nodded and walked on.*

*Grafton followed in silence.*

*He'd spoken a lot earlier, asking about their chances of finding deer, about the land, expressing dismay at his Mercedes' sat-nav's ineptness and awe at the beauty of the landscape.*

*He was quiet now. His chatter slowed and stopped as they walked up the steep hill. But he wasn't as red in the face now, that wasn't what was keeping him quiet. It was the stillness, the focus of the hunt. The need to be attentive, listen.*

...

'Did you, at any point during the day, discuss the sale of your farm to Grafton?'

'We sold it to Innovative Properties.'

'And Mr Grafton is CEO of this company. Are you telling me the sale never came up, even though you were together all day?'

'We were stalking.'

...

*They found deer beyond the wood, by the lochan.*

*Donald had placed a high seat by a small stand of trees that had been gnarled and twisted by the wind. Grafton had climbed up and after long minutes, spotted the deer. He whispered to Donald, pointed, then climbed down, so excited he almost fell off the bloody thing. Donald had seen them five minutes earlier.*

*They both shot. Grafton lifted his rifle slightly, missed. Donald's shot hit. Through the sight, he saw its chest colour with bright red blood. Heart.*

*The deer lashed out its hind legs, then shivered and staggered for fifteen, twenty metres before dropping.*

...

'How did the sale make you feel, Mr Campbell? Wasn't it upsetting?'

McCann stared.

'The farm had been in the family for generations. You were its. Pause. 'Custodian.'

A flicker of something – Guilt? Anger? Anguish? Then it passed and he looked blankly at the wall.

...

*Donald garroched the deer, talking to Grafton as he did, explaining each step.*

*'It's necessary to prevent contamination of the meat.'*

*He turned the deer so its head faced downhill, pulled the front leg until the skin around the breastbone was taut. He pulled a long sharp knife from its sheath.*

*'First you expose the aorta and heart.'*

*He cut it into the flesh.*

*It bled freely.*

*He worked efficiently, quickly, making the minimum number of cuts to reduce risk of contamination.*

*Grafton watched in silence. When the garroching was complete, Grafton unclipped a pocket in his jacket, pulled out a hip flask and spun off the lid. He took a sip then offered it to Donald.*

*Donald took a nip. Warmth, peat, honey. A burn left in the throat. Better than he usually drank.*

*'This is why we want you here, Donald.'* Grafton gestured around them. *Donald's land, the land his family had owned for so long. Land they'd clung to, scraped a living from.*

*'We need your expertise, your connection to the land.'*

*His land. The land he loved. The land he hated.*

*He sipped the good whisky again, looked across the moor, then down at the dead deer.*

*The sale of the farm should've freed him but he was just as tied as ever. He had a title. Estate Manager. The sale agreement guaranteed the family were consulted about changes of use. The company were modern. Interested in combining innovation with tradition. Donald's mother could swear with the best of them. But 'modern' was one of those words she said with a special disdain. Diversification. Qualifications. Catriona.*

...

McCann wanted to push Campbell more, get him emotional, pick at his wounds...

*'Did you do all the negotiating with Mr Grafton's company?'*

*'Aye.'*

*'You took the property out of your family. You ended hundreds of years of tradition.'*

Campbell stared at McCann.

*'Didn't you want to pass it to your own children, like your parents did before you?'*

...

*Catriona. Those years of exchanging a few words in class, being in her company but not with her. That wasted time.*

*Then the night he went to take Davie home from the pub and she asked for a lift. He dropped Davie off first though her house was closer. Davie never noticed, too busy telling Donald his latest plans for going to London. His cousin had a mate with a couch.*

*Davie stumbled out of the car. 'Wait,' Catriona said, and she clambered over between the front seats. She rested her hand on his shoulder as she climbed through, settled into the passenger seat, turned to Donald and smiled. 'Let's go.'*

*He wanted to stay there all night. Her smile in the streetlight.*

...

*'And now that you've sold the estate you're still here. Still in the same old house, chasing deer on a damp moor.'*

McCann saw disdain in Campbell's eyes now. Hatred. He had him where he wanted him.

*'Didn't you ever want to leave?'*

...

*Catriona left. She kept in touch, and when she came home to see her parents they met up.*

*His mother never liked her. And when she came home talking of sustainability and diversification, she started to hate her. She drank green tea. She was just using Donald, toying with him because he was naïve, daft.*

*Donald brought Catriona to the moor. They watched the deer, didn't shoot them.*

*They talked.*

*Out here, out of the house, on the moor, away from his mother, Donald talked about his idea.*

...

*'You had different ideas didn't you? Controversial ideas?'*

*'Maybe.'*

McCann made a show of flicking through the documents on the desk.

*'Wolves?' he said with disdain. 'Really?'*

Campbell stared.

...

*His mother blamed Catriona for the wolf idea but it was always Donald's. He read, watched documentaries, researched. They were beautiful, intelligent.*

*Catriona bought him one of those tacky T-shirts with a wolf howling at the moon as a joke.*

*It was the last gift she gave him.*

*He wondered if she kept the gifts he gave her now she'd moved on, made a life in Glasgow with someone else.*

*Reintroducing wolves could work. He'd make it work. They'd keep the deer numbers down. With proper management they'd remain within their territory. Predators don't stray if their territory provides what they need.*

*Donald thought about suggesting it to Grafton while they walked. Grafton would probably agree. For all his expensive gear, his money and power, Grafton wanted Donald to like him. Maybe it was the connection you feel out here, when there was no-one else for miles, the evolutionary instinct, to trust others. Or maybe this was business.*

*What had Grafton said to him on the phone? I'm in the people business.*

...

'You were forced to sell.' Another showy check of the papers. 'To pay for your mother's care. She's in a home, isn't she?'

'Aye.'

'A dear business.'

*They sat in the garden when he visited.*

*She reached out her hand.*

*He had so much to say, things to get off his chest. Things he hated her for.*

*'Donald,' she said.*

*Her hands so thin but still so strong.*

*'Tell the laddie.'*

*Her eyes closed. He waited in silence until the Polish girl told him it was time to go.*

*She never called him Donald. He was always Donny. Donald was his dead father's name.*

...

'Okay Mr Campbell, you're not telling me much. Let me tell you what I think. I think you killed Grafton. I think you took him out stalking so you could murder him. He took your family's farm so you took his life.'

McCann left the silence for Campbell to fill. Footsteps in the hall.

'But if you killed him in a fit of anger, a moment of rage, then that's different.'

Campbell shook his head.

More footsteps. Christ, McCann would kill for a coffee but he had to keep the suspect under pressure. Keep him in the room.

He sighed.

'Okay, let's go over what did happen.'

...

*They came over the ridge and there, walking slowly towards the river, there was a stag. About 300m away downwind. Donald stopped Grafton, waved him to kneel.*

*Grafton's shot. He'd paid for the privilege.*

*The shot was good. Donald had his sights set on the hilar, the kill zone. He saw the bullet hit, the fur redden. A pause, then the stag reared up and ran.*

*Donald shouldered his rifle, beckoned to Grafton. There'd be a blood trail to follow, hoof marks, broken foliage. It might run for miles.*

...

'Grafton shot the deer.'

'Then?' McCann leaned forward in his chair, impatient now.

'I heard his gun go off again.'

'But you didn't see what happened?'

'I was watching the stag.'

'So, you're saying was just a horrible accident?'

A shrug.

'Do you really expect us to believe that the gun just went off and blew Mr Grafton's face away? Really?'

'I don't expect anything.'

And that was it. Campbell just sat there, his clothes soaked in blood from Grafton's body. Christ, there was nothing of him, but he'd carried Grafton's dead body all the way to the Land Rover before driving him to the village police station. Christ, at least he didn't garroch the poor bastard.

But he'd carried him back. A guilty man wouldn't have done that. Surely. A stupid, strong man but not a guilty one.

Maybe it was an accident. Maybe.

'Interview paused.' McCann got up. He needed coffee.

...

*Donald stood over Grafton's dead body. The .308 bullet had entered just below the left eye. Instant death.*

*Donald reached into Grafton's pocket, pulled out the hip flask.*

*As he sipped he looked in the direction the stag had run. No sign of it now. Only the heather, its purple echoed in a dark cloud lit by sun, a smir of rain below.*

*Donald would return to the moor, follow the stag's trace into the hills to find its corpse, though by the time he did, it would have been picked clean by birds.*

*Still, he'd find it.*

*He swigged the whisky. It was going to be a long walk back through the heather and bog.*

*But this was Campbell land. It was the right thing to do, to take Grafton back to the village and on from there toa wherever he belonged.*

*Donald put the hipflask into his pocket then bent to lift the body. He kept careful eyes on the ground he walked on so as not to stumble.*