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# THE VISCOUNT'S PROTECTION

The Highland Viscount - Book One

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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A single tear slid slowly down Cam's cheek, and she swore quietly. Her heart was pounding, and she was truly terrified, something she hated admitting to herself. It was barely four o'clock in the afternoon, but it might as well have been midnight for all that she could see. She shivered and pulled her jacket more tightly around herself, intensely aware that at any moment another car might slam into her. Please God, at least let it be a car! She tried to will herself away from the image of a huge truck or bus plowing into her own little rental car, and she made a tiny hiccupping sound as she fought the urge to give in to her fear.

It had been a crisp and bright January day when she'd set out that morning from John o' Groats, a small village on the far northern coast of Scotland, so she'd been taken by surprise as the fog had moved in. She'd read about the changeable Highland weather and the dangerous fogs that regularly descended on the area, but being from Dallas, she wasn't experienced with just how dangerous a heavy fog could be. Maybe this is what English people called pea-soup, but putting a cute name on it didn't

make it any less terrifying. She could see nothing, absolutely nothing.

She was stopped on what she hoped was the edge of the road, but no one coming would know she was there until it was too late. The thought of a horrendous crash was bad enough, but what if her little car were to go flying over the cliff and into the sea? For one of the few times in her life she wished she'd listened to her mother's warnings before taking off on her own.

Camilla Gordon, known since childhood simply as Cam or sometimes Cammie, had come to Scotland almost on a whim. She'd recently ended her marriage with her college sweetheart, and since she'd also just finished her second masters, she was a bit at loose ends. Then, suddenly, an article she was reading about Scottish noble estates and their traditions inspired her to make this trip. Both of her parents considered themselves of Scottish descent, so she'd always planned a visit there 'someday'. Of course, when she'd imagined driving around Scotland, it had been lush green hills and muscular highlanders in kilts that she'd envisioned, not being stranded on a lonely road surrounded by the thickest fog she'd ever seen, even in the movies.

She was getting no reception for her cell or GPS, so she was simply a sitting duck for whatever vehicle should happen along the road. A second tear slid forlornly down her face as she shivered and tried to figure out how best to endure the approaching night.

Suddenly there was a subtle change in the light inside her car, and it took a minute for it to register with her. Or had it really happened? Was her mind simply playing tricks on her? She peered out the window but could see nothing except a heavy curtain of fog, but then almost immediately she experienced the same flutter of hazy light. Nervously she double-checked that the doors were locked, all the while wishing fervently that she was back in Dallas with her tiny gun tucked into her purse. She didn't

even have her pepper spray, which was restricted the same as handguns in Britain.

The fog behind her car seemed to have dim light mixed into it now, making it obvious that some kind of vehicle was back there, and, although she couldn't be sure, there didn't appear to be any flashing lights, so she assumed it wasn't the police.

*Tap-tap-tap.*

A sharp rapping on the window inches away caused her to jump and emit an involuntary gasp. If she'd ever needed help, it was now, but she had no way of knowing if this was help or more danger. She hesitated and then, in a quivering voice which betrayed her fright, answered, "Yes?"

"Do you need help, Miss?" came a deep masculine voice.

Cam hesitated again. Who was this stranger now standing inches away right outside her window? Was he a rescuer or the final act of her present horror show?

"Miss?"

She had to admit he didn't sound like a modern-day Jack the Ripper, but then how would she know? What does a Jack the Ripper sound like? Her hesitation continued.

*Tap-tap-tap.*

"Miss, are you all right?" It was a bit more insistent now.

Cam sighed and took the plunge.

"I'm lost and can't see anything to find my way."

She hadn't been lost before the fog rolled in, but it had been some time since she could see any road signs, making her quite sure she'd long ago missed her turn-off.

"Where are you heading?"

"Kinbrace."

It was the stranger's turn to hesitate, but then he continued.

"I'm sorry, Miss, but you are indeed quite lost, at least as far as Kinbrace is concerned. Perhaps I can help you find an alternative for this evening?"

Cam sighed deeply, wishing with every fiber of her being that

she was back home in her cozy Dallas condo sipping a glass of wine.

“Is there maybe a B and B near here?” she asked in a tremulous voice.

“It’s rather sparsely settled along this road, Miss, and when this kind of fog rolls in, the few lodgings there are fill up quickly.”

“Do you think the fog will go away again tonight?”

The man hesitated again and then answered almost regretfully. “One never knows. It’s possible, but it’s equally possible that it will stay for a couple days.”

“Oh.”

The sound of defeat in the woman’s voice touched the man.

“Do you think you could roll your window down a bit so we might talk more easily?” he asked.

Back in Dallas, Cam would have been leery that the stranger would stick a gun through the opening if she lowered the window, but here in Scotland the good news was that if *she* couldn’t have a gun, probably neither could he. Also, she had to admit that so far he’d been perfectly nice.

Hesitantly she pressed the button and lowered the window about six inches, allowing each of them to see the other. Cam was almost startled at the handsome man she found herself looking at, one of those ‘Highland hunks’ she’d imagined for years. He looked to be in his mid-thirties, tall, with strong features and dark penetrating eyes. He looked every bit capable of handling whatever might need handling.

For the stranger’s part, what he saw softened him even more. The woman’s face looked frightened and had telltale signs of tears on her cheeks. She was younger than he’d imagined, maybe thirtyish, with auburn hair and blue-gray eyes—a gentle face that made a man want to put his arms around her and protect her.

“My name is Devon Sinclair. My family home is about fifteen minutes away, and I’d consider it an honor if you’d allow me to provide you with shelter for the night. There’ll be warm food and

a good fire, and afterwards your lodging will be separate from my own quarters, so you'll have all the privacy you want."

Cam hesitated. How could she simply go home with a man she'd never met before, but then again, how could she not? Wasn't the alternative to spend the next who-knew-how-many hours in her car on a godforsaken foggy road?

She looked at her hands and then back at his face, which had been accumulating moisture while he stood in the elements.

"I'm Cam," she replied simply. "Cam Gordon."

Devon was surprised at the name but too well brought up to show it. In his world Cam was a man's name, but she sounded American, and he knew that many Americans went by nicknames, meaning that Cam might well be short for something a bit more traditional.

"Well, Cam, may I offer you lodging for the night?"

"I don't want to be a bother to you," she demurred, still feeling torn.

"The bother will be if you *don't* come with me," he replied, a hint of amusement in his eyes. "I don't imagine sleeping well knowing I've left a lady in distress on a cold foggy road. You'll be doing me a favor."

If Cam hadn't been so uncomfortable she might have been silently swooning at this point, but she was still partially stuck in the I-hope-he's-not-Jack-the-Ripper mode. Still, a fire and warm food sounded almost worth dying for.

"All right. Thank you."

"Good. Let's transfer your things to my car. Can you pop the boot?"

Cam hesitated but quickly recovered as she remembered that boot was Scottish for trunk, something her rental car brochure had told her. She felt around and found the latch to release the 'boot'.

"Stay here until I've moved your bags," said Devon as he turned and disappeared into the fog. In several minutes he was

back and tried to open her door, but it was still locked. A look of amusement flashed across his face, but again he said nothing and waited until Cam unlocked it before opening it and then extending his hand to help her out. He walked her back to his car and opened the passenger-side door, yet again offering a hand as she slid into the comfort of a large Bentley. Cam wasn't much of a car person, but she had two brothers who were, and she recognized that this was a very upscale car, perhaps a good sign. Jack the Ripper probably wouldn't spend several hundred thousand dollars on a car that would call attention to himself.

Devon moved Cam's little rental car as far off the road as possible and placed a warning triangle behind it, then returned to the Bentley and slid behind the wheel. Cam leaned back in the soft leather seat, her head cradled by the support.

"You can adjust the heat however you'd like," offered Devon as he carefully pulled out onto the road and started off. Cam was surprised to notice that she could see a bit better through his front window than she had been able to in her own little car. Not well, but a tiny bit better.

"Is the fog lifting?" she asked hopefully.

"Unfortunately, no."

"But I can see better in this car."

Devon smiled. "I expect this car is fitted better to deal with fog. I have double LED lights in my fog panel, and I also have rooftop lights for this kind of situation."

"I've never used fog lights before," admitted Cam, looking sheepish.

"You weren't using them this afternoon?" asked Devon, surprised.

"I don't think so. I'm not sure that car has special lights for fog."

Again Devon looked amused. "I'm sure it does. No self-respecting car hire agency would send a car out into the Highlands without them. No wonder you couldn't see anything."



“Okay, now I feel like a total idiot.”

“No need, I assure you. Consider this a lesson learned, and thank goodness you stayed safe while learning it.”

Even with an array of fog lights the going was slow, and they drove almost half an hour before Devon turned off the road. “This is us,” he announced as he pulled up to a massive set of gates and pushed a button on his visor, causing them to start slowly opening. An ornate arch over the gate said simply ‘Strathmore’.

*That's interesting, Cam thought to herself. Is this a farm or some kind of gated community?*

Devon drove in and followed the small road for several more minutes before pulling into a parking area in front of a large two-story stone house.

“Here we are, safe and sound,” he announced simply as he turned off the engine and popped the boot.