

THE SECRET OF DUNHAVEN  
CASTLE





# THE SECRET OF DUNHAVEN CASTLE

A CATE KENSIE MYSTERY



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*A Novel Idea Publishing*

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*For my mom, Stephanie  
Happy Birthday!*



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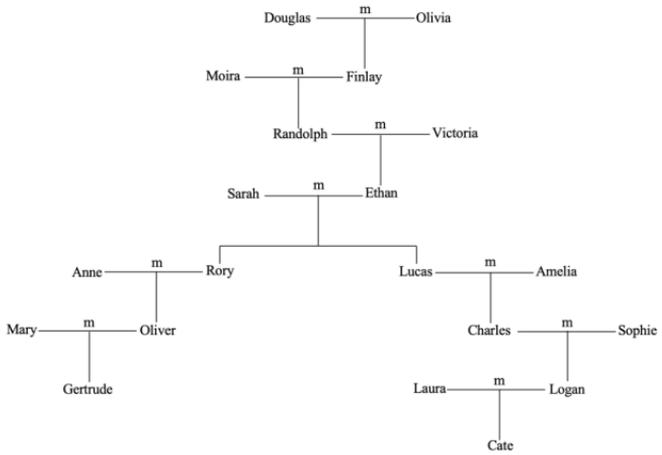
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## MacKenzie Family Tree





## CHAPTER 1



“*A*nd so despite all the stories you’ve heard, Paul Revere never shouted ‘The British are coming!’ in his famous ride,” Dr. Catherine Kensie said concluding her final lecture for the week. Cate was one of a handful of history instructors in the tiny and declining Department of History and Classics at Aberdeen College, a small liberal arts institution in the central United States. She had been at the college for the past few years after finishing her doctorate in history. In her early thirties, she looked little older than some of her students and was often mistaken for one. The effect was most apparent when she appeared in class after hours spent researching in the library. Like many female students, her dark hair was swept into a haphazard bun held by a pencil, a few pieces escaping to frame her blue eyes, glasses pushed on top of her head and sporting a pair of jeans and boots.

“We’ll end there today remember that you have your final term paper due on the American Revolution next Thursday!” she shouted over the rustling of students packing laptops and

notebooks into their bags in a mad dash to scramble out of the lecture hall.

“Please see me in my office hours if you need to discuss this further...” Her voice trailed off as it became clear that no one was listening. It was late on a Friday afternoon and students were in a rush to end their week and start their weekend.

She sighed as she began stuffing her notes into a folder and packing all her materials into her tote bag. Once she had everything collected, she started up the steps towards the back entrance of the lecture hall. A quarter of the way up she paused, sighing again. She returned to the lectern and picked up her keys, which she often forgot as her mind swirled with her lecture ideas and research topics, and pocketed them. “I’d forget my head if it wasn’t attached,” she mumbled before beginning the climb up to the exit again.

Once at the top, she pushed open the door to the waning warmth of a bright spring day. Despite the late afternoon hour, the sunlight was still bright, almost blinding after being in the darkened lecture hall. She shielded her eyes against it as she fumbled in her bag for a pair of sunglasses. Pushing them onto her face she started her walk across campus to the History Department’s main office. She enjoyed the heat of the warm spring sun on her face and the sound of newly grown leaves rustling in the gentle breeze. Aberdeen’s campus, with its central manicured lawn that connected its various buildings, was most beautiful in the spring.

The campus was a collection of neo-classically designed buildings, giving it an “old college” air. While compact rather than sprawling, it had plenty of green space which contrasted the light tan stone of the buildings. Cate headed toward one of the smaller buildings across the lawn, which housed several of the liberal arts departments, including hers. On a late Friday afternoon, Cate was almost alone as

she made her way across campus. She saw a few students heading to cars or dorm rooms after a late class, but many were already gone for the weekend.

When Cate arrived at the History department's main office, she found the door locked. Given that it was after 5 p.m., most others, including the department secretary and other office staff, were long gone. Cate was used to it; she often taught the early and late classes that other faculty preferred not to teach. A perk of being a tenured or tenure-tracked faculty member was to be more selective of the courses one taught including their scheduled time, the course material or the general makeup of the students expected to take the course. Since she was only an instructor without tenure, nor was she tenure-tracked, she was on the bottom rung for schedule selection so she got whatever was left over. She didn't mind much. She loved her job teaching history and didn't mind being alone in the office. Cate dug into her pocket for her keys and rooted around for a moment trying to find the right one. A voice startled her from behind. "Still here, huh?"

"Oh!" She grabbed her chest, shutting her eyes for a moment before turning around. "Brian, you startled me. Yes, I'm just finishing up for the week."

Brian, the building's custodian, was pushing a vacuum toward her. "Was just about to vacuum in the main office, here, let me get that door for you. I'll wait 'til you're done in there!" He unlocked the door and pushed it open, holding it for her to enter.

"Oh, thanks," she said, "you don't have to wait, I'm just going to grab my mail and be out of your way!"

"No problem, have a great weekend, Cate!"

"You too!"

The afternoon sun shone through the back windows warming the office and illuminating it enough to find her

way to her mailbox without needing the overhead lights. Collecting her mail, she glanced through it, discarding a few unneeded items like book advertisements and conference announcements. An envelope marked with the Dean's office return address peeked out from the rest of the mail. She stared at it a moment then decided to open it at home and shoved it into her tote bag. It most likely was a response to her request to transition her full-time instructor position to a tenure-tracked position. With the recent retirement of a tenured colleague, she hoped they would grant her request. She had been here several years, with an unwritten understanding that she could transfer to a tenure-tracked position as soon as one became available. While the tenure process was demanding, the promise of job security made it worth it. Her current position meant that she required a renewal letter annually. The stress of waiting to find out if you had a job from year to year was taxing.

After clearing out her mailbox she left the office, waving another goodbye to Brian as he vacuumed. She walked across the parking lot in front of the building heading towards the back of the lot where her car was parked.

Throwing her bag into the backseat, she climbed into the car. She turned the key and there was nothing. Great, she thought, come on! The car refused to start even after jiggling the key and trying again. As she slumped back in her seat, she sighed. "Okay," she said after a moment, "I know you can do it, come on now." The third time was the charm, the car sputtered then came to life. "Oh, thank you!" she said exasperated. She buckled her seat belt before pulling out of her space and onto the road. She didn't have far to drive; she lived on the outskirts of Aberdeen.

Aberdeen was a college town with Aberdeen College at the heart of it. She had grown up in the Midwest, so Aberdeen had a familiar vibe because of its Midwest loca-

tion. However, small town living was new to her, since she had grown up living much closer to a mid-sized city. Her apartment was not within walking distance but she picked it because it allowed pets and she needed a place where her beloved Riley was welcome. Riley was her little black and white dog, her best friend and the only family she had in the world. She had found Riley shortly after she had moved to Aberdeen when she needed a friend the most. Her parents had died in a car accident only a few months after she graduated, leaving her alone in the world and reeling with grief. Always an introvert, Cate became even more so after the death of her parents. She had found the little fluffy ball of fur in a local shelter after the tiny puppy had been abandoned on its front door. She had fallen in love with him the moment she saw him and adopted him that day. The two had been inseparable ever since. She smiled as she pictured his little black face with its white streak up the middle waiting for her at home.

A five-story rectangle with no distinguishing features faced her as she turned onto her street and glanced up at her building. It wasn't glamorous, but it was home. Her apartment was average and nondescript, just a hallway with a kitchen to the left, living room to the right, and her bedroom and bathroom straight ahead. She pulled into the parking lot and headed to the back of the building. Luck was on her side and she found a space near the building, pulled into it and climbed out of the car. She grabbed her bag from the backseat, locked the car and walked through the back door into the building.

Her four-room apartment was on the third floor and she preferred the stairs on most days, so she began her two-story hike up. After pulling open the door she found the hallway deserted. Good, she thought, I can make it straight in with no interruptions. After her long day, which began with an early

morning class and ended with a late one, peppered with meetings, research and student appointments in between, she was exhausted.

She didn't get farther than a few steps down the hall toward her door when she heard another door being unlocked. She closed her eyes as though that would stop the inevitable from happening. Taking a deep breath, she opened them and continued down the hallway. As she predicted, the unlocking door noise belonged to an elderly neighbor of hers. The door popped open the moment Cate was near it. Cate smiled at the woman but said nothing, trying to hint to her she didn't intend to stop for a conversation. It didn't work.

"Katie, oh, Katie, just the person I wanted to run into!" Mrs. Kline said, standing in her door way.

Cate loved the way she pretended that this was a chance meeting. It was one that happened nearly every other day at the same time. "Hi, Mrs. Kline," Cate answered. She bit her tongue, resisting reminding her that her name was Cate, not Katie.

"How are you?" Before Cate could answer, she continued, "I hope your day was better than Wiley's, he barked all day, dear. I think he's just frustrated being stuck in that apartment."

Cate sighed to herself. "Riley. His name is Riley. You know, sometimes he just barks at his toys when he plays, he thinks it's fun," Cate said, explaining Riley's supposed barking for the umpteenth time. Riley wasn't much of a barker so she figured Mrs. Kline's description of Riley's constant daily barking might be a stretch.

"Oh, no, dear, no, this isn't playful barking. That dog of yours just barks and barks, sometimes I'm ready to call the police! Oh, but I would never do that, I know you take good care of Wiley."

Cate wrinkled her nose at the last comment but let it slide, particularly the incorrect reference of Riley's name. "Well, at least it sounds like he's quieted down now, I don't hear any barking."

"No, he's been quiet now for hours, I think he tired himself out."

Cate held back from rolling her eyes. She was tired and wanted to get home but she knew the conversation wasn't finished. Mrs. Kline wanted something, and it wasn't just to complain about "Wiley".

"Well, I guess I should go check on him," Cate said, attempting to end the conversation.

"Oh, before you go, dear," Mrs. Kline began. Finally, let's get to the point, Cate thought. "I was wondering if I could trouble you for twenty dollars. It's just until my daughter can get to the ATM for me, I've run out of cash. I'll get it back to you just as soon as she can replenish my slush fund."

"Sure," Cate said, digging into her bag for her purse. It wasn't the first time Mrs. Kline had asked to borrow money, it probably would not be the last. Cate felt a bit sorry for the older woman. She knew that her daughter rarely came by to visit, let alone replenish her so-called slush fund, and she thought the woman probably didn't have much money to begin with. Cate didn't mind helping her out, even if she complained about Riley all the time. "Here you go, Mrs. Kline, why don't you take forty dollars just in case your daughter doesn't come by soon."

"Oh, oh no, dear, I wouldn't want to short you... but, well, I mean if you are offering." She took both bills from Cate's hand, then added, "you know I'm good for it."

"Of course, Mrs. Kline, I know you are," Cate fibbed as she couldn't remember ever being paid back before.

"Well, I had better let you get to Wiley, dear. Have a good night!" Mrs. Kline was already closing her door. Cate gave

her a tight-lipped smile and a nod. She continued down the hall to her apartment.

She arrived at her door with no further interruptions, shoved her key into the lock and opened it. She rushed inside and immediately shut it behind her. As usual, Riley was standing in the hall ready to greet her, his feather-like tail wagging excitedly. "RILEY!" she exclaimed as he rushed over to her. She dropped her bag on the floor near the door and bent down to grab him. "I missed you, buddy!" she said, scooping him up into her arms and giving the fur on his head a quick tousle as he licked her face.

She carried him down the hall and into the bedroom while he snuggled against her. It seemed Riley missed her as much as she missed him. "Let me just change my clothes, buddy, and we'll go for a quick walk," she promised him as she set him down on her bed. Riley, knowing the routine, laid down to watch her as she changed from her work clothes to a pair of sweats, t-shirt and hoodie. Riley sat up just as she was pulling on her tennis shoes, knowing it was almost time for his walk. Riley loved his walks, especially on warm sunny days like today. Unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of green space around the apartment building to walk in and he had to wait all day for it, but he loved it just the same.

"Okay, buddy!" she said as she stood up, "let's get your harness, leash and go!" Riley jumped down off the bed and raced over to the doorway, heading straight for the entry table where Cate kept his collar and leash. Cate fastened his harness around him, attached his leash and scooped him into her arms to carry him down to the small green space outside.

The sun was already beginning to lower in the sky but was still warm and bright on her face as she watched Riley frolicking around on the grass. He smelled every blade as if it were the first time he'd ever set his nose to it. She let him explore for about twenty minutes before she collected him to

return to the apartment. While sad to leave all the wonderful smells of the outside, she knew Riley was more excited to eat his dinner.

Pushing through the door of her apartment again, she set Riley down and locked the door behind her. The little dog sat as she removed his leash and harness while saying, "Ready to go get your dish, Riley?" He danced on his hind legs. "Come on, buddy!" she said and headed to the kitchen.

Riley danced behind her watching for his little blue bowl to appear in her hands. When it did he stood on his hind legs in anticipation as Cate shook some kibble into the bowl from a bag. "Hungry today, huh, buddy?" she said as she filled the bowl and set it in front of him. He made short work of the food and was soon at her side again as she prepared her own dinner.

"I got a letter from the Dean today, Riley, we can read it after dinner. I hope it's good news!" she said, looking down at the little pup. Since she lived alone, she was used to talking to him as though he could understand everything. He stared upwards at her as she cooked a scrambled egg at the stove. "If it's good news, maybe we can find a place of our own! We'll get a big yard for you to play in and a little dog house for shade in the back!" Riley's eyes gleamed as he listened, tilting his head from side to side.

She finished her cooking and sat down to eat. Riley curled up near her feet, waiting for her to finish her dinner. She forced herself to eat slowly as she contemplated the contents of the letter that was burning a hole through her tote bag. If administration had granted her request she would have a lot of work ahead of her to achieve tenure but she would finally be on her way to a permanent position. She could settle, no longer having to wonder if she would have a job from year to year. As she had promised Riley earlier, they could buy that permanent place to live. And she could begin

to feel like she belonged somewhere after feeling so lost following her parents' deaths. She imagined a small house with a big lawn and a picket fence, Riley running around in the front yard, his floppy ears flying in the wind as he romped. It brought a smile to her face and as she finished her last bite she reached down and gave his furry head a scratch. "I hope," she murmured and picked up her plate and utensils, clearing the table.

As she cleaned up her dinner dishes, she noticed her answering machine blinking, showing a new message. She hadn't noticed it earlier; she pressed play to hear the message.

An unfamiliar voice filled the air, a man with a British accent. "Dr. Kensie," he began, "this is William Smythe from Smith, Smythe and Smithton. I apologize for the departure in the plans detailed in my letter; however, my connecting flight has been delayed at JFK so I will arrive later than expected in Aberdeen and cannot meet you at your office as planned. Unfortunately, as I mentioned in the letter, my return flight leaves tomorrow morning, so I will still need to meet with you tonight. I apologize for the lateness of the hour that I will arrive, around 8:30 p.m. I plan to come straight to your residence unless you'd prefer to meet elsewhere, in which case, please leave a voicemail on my cell phone." The man left his number as a perplexed Cate stared at the machine.

"What in the world is that about, Riley? What letter?" Cate thought she had better check before reading her letter from the Dean. Someone named William Smythe would soon appear at her home and she had no idea who he was or what he could want. She checked the time, it was around 6:30 p.m., she had about two hours before his expected arrival.

She scooped up Riley and headed to the couch, grabbing

the letter from the Dean and her laptop out of her bag on the way in. Once settled on the couch, with Riley curled up next to her, she opened her laptop. "Let's see who this William Smythe guy is, Riley," she said, typing his name and company name into the search bar. She got a list of results. Clicking on the first one, she saw that Smith, Smythe and Smithton was a large law firm in London. That would explain the British accent, Cate thought. William Smythe was at the top of the page that listed the firm's attorneys. He was an older man, standing straight as a rail in his expensive suit. He had a pale, chiseled face with an aquiline nose ending in a small mouth that seemed set in a perpetual scowl.

"Well, there he is, Riley. William Smythe. We know who he is and what he does, but I have no idea what he could want. Maybe a case of mistaken identity. Whatever it is, it must be important to have a British attorney coming all the way to Aberdeen on a Friday night. And what letter? We didn't get any letter from William Smythe, Riley. I guess time will tell. Speaking of letters, let's see what this one says."

After closing her laptop, she picked up her letter from the Dean. She studied the envelope for a moment, as if trying to read the contents without opening it. Cate sighed, "Moment of truth, buddy, let's see what it says." She flipped the envelope over and slid her finger under the flap and popped it open. Her hands shook as she pulled the letter out, unfolded it, and scanned it. Her heart sank as she saw the words "unfortunately", "sorry" and "regret". She let the letter fall onto the coffee table as she sunk her head into her hands. After a moment, she retrieved it and gave it a thorough read.

*Dr. Kensie:*

*The Dean's office has received your request to change your current position of Instructor to a tenure-tracked position. Unfortunately, we regret to inform you that this is not possible at*

*this time. We are sorry that we cannot accommodate your request and acknowledge and appreciate your work for Aberdeen College. We encourage you to continue your hard work and apply at a later date.*

It was signed by the Dean of the college, or rather, as she took a closer look, the signature had been stamped by her secretary. She sighed again, setting the letter down on the coffee table and reached over to stroke Riley. He looked at her quizzically with dark eyes. "Sorry, buddy," she said deflated, "looks like I got your hopes up for nothing. No house yet, but hopefully we won't have to move." I think I'll get my contract renewed, I hope anyway, she thought to herself.

Cate sighed, rubbing her temples as she set the letter down. Sometimes she wondered why she continued to stay at Aberdeen College. Despite all her efforts, Aberdeen never felt like home to her. She could answer that question quickly though. There weren't that many tenure-track academic positions in her field and despite the number of applications she flooded the limited market with, she hadn't been offered anything better. She had been told many times from her department chair that a tenure-track position was in the cards for her at Aberdeen, but at each opportunity, there had been some reason it never happened.

No matter how much she tried to convince herself that things weren't that bad, she couldn't help but be depressed. The retirement of her colleague was the break she thought she needed to convince administration to offer her a permanent position. She didn't see when they would ever grant her request if not under these circumstances.

Cate flipped on the television and navigated around on Netflix to find a distraction. There wasn't anything that she would solve tonight, although she'd most likely lay awake

trying. With the spring term nearly over and summer right around the corner and no confirmation of a summer or fall schedule she would have to do some fast thinking on what to do to pay her bills.

After a while she settled on watching re-runs of an old favorite TV show, *The Office*, and settled back to begin her weekend. She absentmindedly stroked the fur down Riley's back. It soothed her as much as it soothed him. "We'll figure something out, Riley," she said as she stroked him and let the TV show numb her mind.

After a few episodes, she started to doze off. An early morning class paired with a late afternoon class was taking its usual toll and sending her off to an early bedtime. She checked the clock across the room, 8:15 p.m. What an exciting life I lead, she thought to herself, here I am falling asleep on my couch before 8:30 p.m. on a Friday night. "I'll be lucky if I'm awake when this guy shows up, Riley," she joked. At hearing his name, the little dog next to her roused from his sleep.

"Well, Riley," she said, "let's go take a quick walk before our visitor arrives!" Riley followed her into the hallway by the door while she fitted his harness and leash onto him.

"Okay, let's do it!" she said as she opened the door. With her attention focused on Riley, she nearly ran straight into the man who had been standing outside her door. Stifling a startled scream, she jumped back as Riley began barking at the stranger looming outside the door.

## CHAPTER 2



“Oh my gosh,” she stammered, “I’m so sorry, I didn’t see you there! Riley, shh, shh, no barking!”

“Not a problem,” he said rather disingenuously in a crisp British accent as he smoothed out his black, well-tailored suit. “Are you Dr. Catherine Kensie?” He glanced at Cate then focused his energy on frowning at the small dog barking at his feet.

“Yeah, I’m Cate, eh, Catherine. Yes, I’m Dr. Kensie,” she continued to stammer while picking Riley up to quiet him. Cate recognized the man as William Smythe.

“Please allow me to introduce myself.” He produced a business card. “My name is William H. Smythe, Esquire, I am an attorney with Smith, Smythe and Smithton, LLC in London. As I stated in my letter, I represent the estate of Lady Gertrude MacKenzie.”

She took the business card and gave it a cursory glance, her mind trying to focus out of its startled daze and into the situation at hand. “Yes, I got your call, but I never received the letter you mentioned. You’re a little far from home, aren’t you?” she said half serious and half joking.

“Oh, my apologies if you did not receive the letter. We sent it to your business address; your personal address was a bit harder to track down and Lady MacKenzie did want the matter taken care of in a timely fashion. Also, again, I apologize for the lateness of the hour, but I’ve come straight from the airport and given my early flight tomorrow morning, I’m unable to meet at any other time. As I said, I am here representing the estate of Lady Gertude MacKenzie. May I come in to speak with you further in a setting offering us more privacy?” He motioned towards the interior of the apartment.

“Ah, I’m sorry, I don’t have any knowledge of a Lady Gertude Mackenzie or anyone from London, what does this have to do with me?” Cate asked, still not fully understanding what was going on and how it pertained to her. Riley continued to offer protective growls and as menacing of a stare as he could muster for a ten pound dog.

“Actually, Lady MacKenzie was from Scotland, I am from London. As I’ve stated several times, Dr. Kensie, I would like to discuss Lady MacKenzie’s last will and testament with you. Although, I would prefer to do so in private.”

“Sure, but I still don’t know Lady Mackenzie from Scotland or from anywhere. I really don’t see why you’d need to discuss this with me, I’m not even acquainted with this person. Oh, or did you have a history-type of question? I have done some consulting in the past, I could help with that if that’s what you need.” Cate was rambling, it was her tendency when she was nervous. She had no idea what this man wanted from her, she assumed that perhaps he had made some sort of mistake, but he clearly knew her, so perhaps he hadn’t.

The man seemed to be impatient. “Dr. Kensie, please, if you wouldn’t mind, I would prefer that we discuss the business in private.” He motioned again into the apartment as he

glanced around the hallway. Cate remembered her "chance" encounter earlier with Mrs. Kline. She pictured her standing at her peephole with a glass pressed against the door, trying to make out every word. Maybe it was best to move the conversation inside.

"Oh right, yes, come in, please. Sorry, I didn't mean to keep you waiting in the hall, sorry," Cate rambled again, nervously tucking her hair behind her ears with one hand, while holding Riley with the other. She motioned to the inside of her apartment and stood back from the door. She glanced into the hallway before shutting her door. Now Mrs. Kline was probably judging her for inviting a man into her apartment on a Friday night. She shut her door from any prying eyes. Riley gave a protective growl as the man crossed the threshold. Cate shushed him.

"We can head into the living room if you'd like, please make yourself comfortable," she said, motioning to the couch. Mr. Smythe sat down rather stiffly on the couch, teetering on the edge as though he hated to touch it. Cate positioned herself in an armchair adjacent to the couch with Riley still in her arms. "Can you tell me what this is about now, Mr. Smythe?"

He removed some file folders and a small bag from his well-polished briefcase and set it on the coffee table. "Yes, as I said earlier and in the letter which you did not receive, my firm and I represent the interests of Lady Gertrude MacKenzie of Dunhaven, Scotland. Specifically, I am the executor of the late Lady MacKenzie's will."

"I have no idea what this is about. I'm not aware of any Mackenzies so unless I'm being sued by one or you need me to provide a consult on something, I have no idea what's going on," Cate answered, still confused.

"Immediately following the death of Lady MacKenzie, I was to track down her closest living relative in order to

execute the instructions within her last will and testament,” he continued, while pulling several papers out of a crisp manila folder. He paused and looked at her directly.

Cate’s eyes darted around the room, as if searching for an answer. Not finding one, Cate answered, “Okay...” prompting him to continue speaking.

“You are Lady MacKenzie’s closest living relative and therefore her heir,” he said, as if annoyed that she hadn’t grasped the concept yet.

“What?!” Cate exclaimed. “You must be joking. No, I think you may have made a mistake. I don’t... I don’t think I have any relatives, or at least none in Scotland.” No, this couldn’t be real, Cate mused, me, the heiress to a Scottish lady?

“I’m quite sure no mistake has been made, Dr. Kensie. We will, of course, verify your identity with a DNA sample, but I am confident that will be a mere formality.”

He continued, “Subject to the DNA verification, you will inherit the bulk of Lady MacKenzie’s estate which includes her title, Dunhaven Castle, the grounds on which it resides, its contents, a sizable sum of money to maintain the estate, and one gold timepiece. One of the stipulations of the inheritance is that you must live at the estate on a permanent basis, it is not to be sold.”

Cate was speechless. She tried to make sense of it but her head was still spinning. This must be a mistake; she didn’t have any relatives. Her parents never mentioned any relatives, certainly none in Scotland that lived in a castle. “Uh, um, uh,” she stammered, “Castle? Is this a joke, am I on camera?” She glanced around the room, half expecting to see someone filming this for a reality television show.

“I can assure you this is no joke,” he said, his face straight. It didn’t look like this man could even tell a joke, Cate thought, remembering her earlier attempt to joke had fallen flat.

She swallowed hard, trying to collect her thoughts. "Okay, so, this Lady MacKenzie, she was a relative, MY relative, and she left ME everything she owns?"

"Outside of a few odds and ends, yes. She was a distant relative, an only child, and she never married, nor had any children. You were identified as her closest living relative to whom the bulk of the estate along with her title was left, pending a DNA verification, as I've already said."

"The details," he continued, matter-of-factly, "are here in this folder along with information about and pictures of the estate for you to review. As you can see," he said opening the folder and producing a few photographs, "the property is in excellent condition and has been quite well maintained. Additionally," he shuffled through to grab another piece of paper, "the current estimated sum is sufficiently large enough to continue to maintain the estate with ease for several generations." He pointed discreetly to a large number marked near the bottom of the page.

Cate's eyes widened. "Whoa, is that dollars?" she said, surprised. The amount seemed to Cate as though it would support more than a few generations.

"No," he said stiffly, "it's in pounds."

"Oh, right," she replied, sheepishly.

"Along with the property, you'll inherit the title carried with the estate, Countess of Dunhavenshire. And, lastly, the gold timepiece which can only be imparted to you directly from myself once your DNA has been verified. If you wouldn't mind, I would like to collect the sample and leave you to enjoy the remainder of your evening."

"Wait, wait, wait just a second," Cate shook her head as she responded, "how do I know you are legitimate and not going to use my DNA for, well, something else."

He set his jaw. "I'm not in the habit of collecting DNA samples from nearly unemployed history professors."

“How did you...” she began before being cut off by Mr. Smythe.

“The letter you left on the table. My apologies that your request didn’t work out the way you hoped but if you wouldn’t mind, I would like to finish my job and retire for the evening.”

“I don’t mean to hold you up, really I don’t, I just, I think, that is, I can’t, well, to be honest, I’m just really in shock,” Cate stammered. “I’ve never heard of Dunhaven, or a castle, or a Scottish relative and I’m just a little stunned that this woman would make it a point that you search me out so that I could inherit her... house, I mean, her castle and estate.” Cate rambled on, letting her thoughts spill directly from her brain to her mouth.

“Dr. Kensie, I can understand your surprise,” he said, sounding as though he had never been surprised in his life, “but I can assure you my only intention is to execute the last will and testament as specified by Lady MacKenzie. That execution has led me to you after an extensive investigation into the MacKenzie lineage. Of course, a DNA test will confirm easily that which we believe to be true. If you will allow me to collect the sample, I can be on my way.”

“Oh, right, sure, yes, of course. Gee, you must be working overtime on triple rate to collect this on a Friday night as it is.” Cate made another attempt at humor to help ease the tension. He ignored it again, intent on the task at hand. She watched him open the small bag and remove a tube and a cotton swab. He handed it to her and watched her swab the inside of her cheek. Handing it back, he deposited it into the plastic vial and returned the vial to the bag. He stowed it in his briefcase and began to close it.

“So, I can’t get the watch of all things before my DNA is verified, that’s funny,” she again tried to joke.

He gave her a stern look. “It was quite an important item

to Lady MacKenzie and comes with careful stipulations to be given only to her closest living relative, so, no, you cannot.”

She pinched her lips together, this guy really had no sense of humor at all. “Of course, sorry,” she finally answered, after her embarrassment passed. He stood up as did she, setting Riley down on the chair behind her.

“The DNA results should be returned within two weeks. Once verified, I will contact you again to discuss the details and finalize paperwork. Should you need to contact me, I am staying at the Marriott tonight and will be back in the office on Monday.” He stuck his hand out.

She accepted and shook his hand a little slowly. “Okay, well, thank you, I think. And you’ll let me know either way?”

“Yes, good day.”

“Right, good day or night or whatever.”

She walked him to the door and closed it as he left. Returning to the living room she sunk onto the couch. Riley looked on curiously from his perch on the armchair.

“Oooooof.” She let air slip out of her mouth. “Riley, what in the world is this about? It looks like we may have a bit of a mystery on our hands!”

## CHAPTER 3



The bright morning sun shone through Cate's bedroom window. Since it was Saturday, Cate hadn't set an alarm clock, instead relying upon her trusty pal, Riley, to wake her early. True to form, Riley had bounded onto the bed and began to shower Cate with kisses in the form of licks to her face. Cate opened her eyes and blinked a few times while they adjusted to the bright morning light.

Cate yawned. "Good morning, buddy," she said sleepily. She rubbed Riley's head as she turned to look at the clock. It was ten minutes to seven; Riley was right on time.

She lay in bed for a few more minutes before getting up to begin her day. As she lay there, she contemplated the events of the night before, wondering if she had maybe dreamt it all in the haze of a long week. The folder on her night table confirmed that it was real. The thought of how strange it all was struck her. Before she let her mind slip further into pondering it, she decided she had better get up.

With a sigh, she got out of bed and headed straight into the bathroom for a quick shower before pulling on a pair of jeans, a t-shirt, and a pair of tennis shoes. After taking Riley

for a short trip outside, she headed for the kitchen, making a quick bowl of instant oatmeal for breakfast and giving Riley a bowl of kibble.

She tidied the apartment then ran some errands, returning around 9 a.m. "Let me put the groceries away, Riley, then we'll head to the park," she said cheerfully.

With her morning routine out of the way, it was time to enjoy her weekend. The first stop was the Saturday morning trip to the park with Riley. Aberdeen boasted a large park near a pond as one of its amenities. Cate and Riley enjoyed visiting it almost every Saturday, regardless of the weather. Today the weather was on their side. The bright sun had no plans of being shut out by clouds and promised to send temperatures soaring into the high seventies.

As Cate unpacked her supplies, Riley ran into the hall to wait by the door for his weekly trip. Cate found him guarding the door so she couldn't leave without him. After securing Riley's harness and leash, she pulled on a ball cap and hoodie for the cool morning air. She grabbed her keys, headed out the door and down to her car.

Within ten minutes, she was pulling into the Aberdeen park's parking area. Riley stood at the window, tail wagging furiously. "Who's excited to go to the park?" she asked as she slid her car into an empty spot. Riley glanced to her then back out the window, tail still wagging. His eyes darted around watching people, birds, and other animals. Cate scooped him up and exited the car. Still carrying him, she walked to the gravel pathway leading from the parking lot further into the park before setting him down on the ground. His nose was immediately glued to it, taking in all the scents. They walked together down the path for about ten minutes before they came to their favorite spot near the pond. Aberdeen College stood in the distance. The picturesque campus stood tall on a hill behind the pond, adding to the

beauty of the pond and its landscaping. Cate stopped there, leaving the path and making her way onto the grassy area with Riley in tow.

Riley bounded through the grass next to her. As she slowed to a stop he also stopped beside her, staring up at her expectantly. She glanced down at him, "Yes, I brought it," she said, smiling. She removed his leash then stood up and produced a small, blue ball from her pocket. Riley danced on his hind legs, daring her to throw it. "Ready?" she asked. Riley offered a small bark in response. Cate threw the ball into the distance, Riley bounded after it. When he found it, he snatched it up and raced back to Cate, dropping it at her feet. She picked it up and threw it again, watching Riley race off after it. They played for about twenty minutes until Riley brought the ball back and laid down in the grass rather than bark to demand another toss. Cate settled onto the lawn next to him. "Tired out, buddy?" she asked him. He responded by laying his head on his front paws with a big sigh.

Cate stretched her legs out in front of her and lay back on her elbows. She stared at the silhouettes of the buildings of Aberdeen College in the distance wondering, as she had so many times before, if she would have a job there in the upcoming term. Suddenly the thought struck her she may not need a job there in the upcoming term. Her thoughts turned to her curious visit the night before. She had trouble believing that she would actually inherit a Scottish castle and all its trappings. Still she couldn't help but imagine what it would be like if she did. No more worrying about being able to pay bills from term to term, a permanent place to live, an incredible yard for Riley to play in, it all seemed too good to be true. She pictured Riley romping around the gardens shown on the estate pictures or roaming through the gigantic house with her, exploring it. "What do you think, Riley?" she asked the small dog,

“would you like to live in a castle?” Riley looked quizzically at her before setting his head back down on his paws. She smiled then sighed; it was a nice dream, but just a dream. She couldn’t imagine the DNA test confirming her as the heir. Surely if this was legitimate someone would have told her before that she had relatives; relatives with a castle; relatives with a castle in Scotland! She pushed the thought from her mind, no sense dwelling on it when it was likely never going to materialize. “Come on, buddy, let’s finish our walk around the pond,” Cate said, as she reattached Riley’s leash.

She climbed to her feet and Riley did the same. They made their way back to the gravel path and continued their journey at a leisurely pace, allowing plenty of time for Riley to stop and explore. The rest of the walk took an hour and a half. Back at the car, Cate opened the passenger door, allowing Riley to climb in. After securing his seatbelt to his harness she made her way around to the driver’s side and climbed in. “Should we get some lunch, Riley?” she asked.

They stopped at one of their favorite roadside shops. Cate ordered a hot dog and nachos and ordered Riley a doggie dish of ice cream to enjoy while she ate. They found a shaded picnic table near a grassy area and sat down to eat. Cate’s mind kept returning to the strange visit from last night, wondering if it could be true. She didn’t know much about her family, but she thought there wasn’t much to know. Her parents hadn’t talked about relatives much, but she thought that was because she didn’t have any living relatives. If there was a connection between her and this Gertrude MacKenzie, wouldn’t someone had told her? It seemed like a large detail for her parents to conceal. Had there been a family fight resulting in a rift? She couldn’t answer any of these questions. If there were any information available, it would be in the box of her parents’ things that she had in her closet. She

resolved to check there when she returned home. She hoped to find a clue to point to a potential resolution.

Cate's mind focused almost continuously on her potential inheritance despite her reluctance to get too excited before anything was confirmed. It would be a long two weeks.

Cate's thoughts turned from wondering if she was the heir to what she would do if she inherited this property. Moving to a foreign country, even one where the customs may not be that different like Scotland, was a big step. Would she like it there? Would Riley? What if it was sheer misery living in the Scottish countryside? Or what if the castle was drafty and musty and she and Riley had to walk around bundled in sweaters and coats all the time to keep the chill off? Thoughts about the horrors of living in a rural castle shot through her mind faster than she could process. She shook her head and took a deep breath. She was panicking, possibly over nothing. First, it probably would turn out she was not the actual relative and second, someone had lived there for her whole life and had survived it into a ripe old age so it couldn't be THAT bad.

Still, Cate wasn't so sure she would just move. She looked around her. Aberdeen was familiar to her; she had lived there for a few years. Although it never felt like home, she figured this would always be her perception no matter where she lived after her parents' deaths. What did she have holding her here, she wondered? A job going nowhere, a small apartment with a lonely, pesty neighbor and, her eyes fixed onto the small dog next to her, Riley. Riley was the only thing of importance to her and he would move with her. Maybe she would move if she had the chance, she thought, it would solve a number of her problems.

Cate finished her meal and cleaned up after herself, stacking Riley's little plastic bowl and her cardboard hot dog container onto the nacho plate and dumping them all in the

trash. She took a few last sips of her soda and pitched the cup. "Okay, Riley, let's head home!" She fastened Riley's seat-belt to his harness and climbed into the driver's seat. "Let's see if we can solve some of this mystery when we get home, Riley."

Despite her curiosity, she took the long way home, enjoying a little more of the spring day. By the time they arrived in her building's lot, Riley's big morning was catching up to him and Cate carried him up to the apartment. Her hallway was quiet, Mrs. Kline would avoid her for a few days, having gotten what she needed to tide her over until the next request. After entering her apartment, she removed his harness and set him on the couch. He nestled into the cushion, his eyes heavy. Cate made her way to her bedroom and over to her closet. She pulled the chain to turn on the light and reached for the small box containing what she had kept of her parents' things. On her tiptoes she teetered trying to pull the box down. Inch by inch she worked it until it nearly toppled onto her. A few items toppled over the top of the box and onto the floor. She bent over to retrieve them, a wave of sadness washing over her as she saw the picture of her with her parents at her college graduation. She stared at the two smiling faces on either side of her. No matter how much time passed, the grief sometimes still hit her like a brick wall. She looked at the photo for a moment more, this time with fresh eyes. Were you hiding something from me, Mom and Dad, she pondered? Not getting a response from the photo, she put it down, picked up the box and headed to the living room to join Riley on the couch.

She placed the box on the coffee table and, settling herself next to Riley, she opened it. The next few items included death certificates, a few news clippings about the crash, and a select few other family photos. After setting those aside she

dug deeper, finding a few other personal effects from her parents including her mom's jewelry box and her dad's wallet. She went over each with a fine-tooth comb, pulling out every item, searching for any clue linking her to anything even remotely related to Scotland or any Scottish relatives. She found nothing. The last item in the box was an old photo album, one from her childhood. She took it out and began to page through it. She searched every photo for clues, people who she couldn't identify, locations that might have been a relative's house. Again, she found nothing that gave her any insight. Closing the book she set it down beside her, sighing. The search yielded nothing because there was nothing to find. Lost in thought, she let her head fall back onto the couch behind her.

Afraid of falling asleep, she pushed everything aside, picking up her laptop. Cate decided some work on her current research project might help clear her mind. With the journal article she was working on open on her screen, she lost herself, as she always did, in her work.

After a time, Riley stirred next to her and climbed up, standing on his hind legs to reach her face. He nudged her with his nose then gave her a lick. She laid her head back and stroked his fur, her thoughts turning from her work to Riley romping around a grassy yard in Scotland. "Well, Riley, you may not get to live in a Scottish castle, but at least it should provide us with an interesting two weeks!" she joked. Riley wagged his tail and gave her another lap with his tongue. She picked her head up to look at the little dog, stroking his fur again. For the first time in hours she noticed the time. "My goodness, Riley, it's nearly six o'clock!" she exclaimed. "I bet you are hungry!" Riley wagged his tail at her.

"Let's head in for your dish!" At the sound of the "d-word" Riley leapt from the couch and dashed into the kitchen. Cate followed, retrieved his bowl and, filling it with kibble, fed the

little guy. Likewise, it was time for her to eat so she opened a cupboard and pulled down a bowl. In another cupboard, she reached for a box of cereal and poured a hearty amount into the bowl. With a small splash of milk over top, she got a spoon and dug in. "Another wild Saturday night, Riley!" she said to the pup.

After dinner she cleaned up her parents' things, placing them back in the box as melancholy washed over her. She returned the photo to the box and placed it back on the shelf in her closet. As she was returning to the living room, she spotted the folder from William Smythe on her night table. She grabbed it and took it with her. Opening it, she picked up the photographs of the property, studying them for a moment. Riley peeked over her arm at the photograph then at her. He spent a moment studying her face then decided another nap was in order and stretched out next to her on the couch. Cate picked up the business card William Smythe had given her. She considered calling him and asking if he had any news. Patience was not her virtue. She decided against it, figuring he would have let her know if he had any updates. He didn't seem like the type of person who let things sit. She was going to have to wait until he contacted her. She replaced the business card and photographs and closed the folder, choosing to watch a little television before heading to bed.

Sunday rolled around bringing a dreary day with rain falling most of the time. Cate spent the better part of the gloomy day grading papers from her European History course. Riley contented himself chewing on one of his favorite bones or chasing one of his balls around the apartment. She finished the day off with an evening of reading, cuddled with Riley in her favorite armchair by the window. Although her book was an excellent read, she stared out at the rainy day, daydreaming of a life in Scotland.

## CHAPTER 4



Monday morning came before Cate was ready. Her alarm screamed its arrival, ripping Cate from a pleasant sleep to the reality of an early morning class. She drowsily rose from her warm nest, showered, ate, and walked Riley before heading to campus and delivering a lecture on the Elizabethan era. After wrapping up her first class, Cate headed back to her office. Sitting down at her desk, she flipped the page of her calendar to show this week's events. Outside of a few student appointments, it looked like she had an easy week. This meant she could catch up on some end-of-semester work and maybe some sleep, she felt exhausted. She pulled her laptop out of her bag and opened it on her desk, preparing to record the grades she had worked on yesterday.

As she entered the first grade, she heard a knock on her door. Assuming it was a student, she shouted "Come on in!" in a loud voice, not looking up from her laptop.

"Got a minute?" a voice answered her. She recognized the southern drawl of her department chair, Dr. Jeffrey Goldstone.

Startled, she looked up. The tall man stood in her doorway, leaning against the doorjamb. His tan suit was a little rumpled, as though he had slept in it. The color matched his hair except the parts around the temples, which were graying. His dark brown eyes were fixed on Cate. "Jeff, oh, yeah, sure, I was just entering some grades, come on in."

He entered the office and took a seat across from her desk. "How have you been?" he asked.

"Good, how about you, Jeff?"

"I can't complain. How's the little mutt?"

"He's doing good, enjoying the nice weather." Cate knew Jeff wasn't here to inquire about Riley.

"That's great, that's great." He smiled at her and paused before continuing. "Hey, I have a question for you."

"Sure," Cate answered, glad to get to the heart of what Jeff wanted.

"We have an event coming up this Saturday, I need someone to cover it. There is nobody better than you, Cate. You're a great representative for the department. You up for it?"

Cate considered the request. Was there no one better than her or hadn't anyone else volunteered, Cate wondered? Saturdays were sacred time for her and Riley. The Saturday events were open houses for prospective students. They occurred about four times per semester. Cate had already represented the department on three of those four occasions, she felt as though she had put her time in. If she was such a great representative for the department, it would be nice if they committed to her in the form of a permanent position. The recent request denial still stung her, and she wasn't in the mood to do any favors for a department that wouldn't recognize her worth after years of service. Still, she would like to continue to be employed, so she felt badly turning

down the request without more consideration. She hedged. "Let me look at my calendar and get back to you."

"Sure," Jeff said. "Yeah, just let me know. Like I said, we'd love to have you represent us." He got up to leave. He headed for the door and as he reached it he turned back around. "Oh, I almost forgot. I think," he added a stress to the word as though struggling to get it out, "I may be able to get you some summer classes. I'm still working on fall, nothing definite yet but I'm doing my best." He waited for her response.

She was annoyed. He didn't get the answer he wanted so he would dangle the employment carrot in front of her nose. Cate knew this song and dance well, they did it every year. Though they rarely got rid of their untenured employees because they were more economically efficient. She struggled to keep her composure as she answered, "Thanks, Jeff. I appreciate that. I assume they copied you on that letter from the Dean about my permanent position request."

"Yeah, I saw that. Tough break, kiddo. I was behind you all the way, I don't know what they were thinking. Anyway, I hope to get you something in the fall and you can put your request in again."

"Yeah, thanks, Jeff. I appreciate that," she said without meaning it.

"Hey, no problem," he answered. "Let me know about this Saturday as soon as you can, okay? Have a good one!" He rapped his knuckles on her doorjamb as he left and disappeared down the hall.

Cate breathed deeply as she sat back in her chair. This was the third time they had turned her down for a permanent position. She was beyond frustrated, she did as much work as everyone else in the department if not more but did not receive the same perks. They were taking advantage of her. Her position was being held over her head to eke more

work out of her than was fair, work that no one else wanted to do. It was a job, and it paid her bills, she thought, as she took another deep breath. She spent a moment more weighing the pros and cons of her situation then resolved to make a final decision later about the Saturday work request and continued with entering her grades.

By the time her next lecture rolled around, she had only gotten about halfway through the stack. After finishing that class, she grabbed some lunch at the campus food court and took it back to her office to finish recording grades before her afternoon classes began. She finished them all before giving her two afternoon lectures. After finishing her last class, she gathered her things and opted to go straight to her car rather than stop at her office. She wanted to avoid another run-in with Jeff while she continued to consider giving in to his request.

When she arrived home she dumped her stuff, changed clothes and took Riley out for his walk. As she watched him frolicking in the small patch of grass, she replayed her conversation with Jeff from this morning. The more she reflected on it, the madder she became. She had already given up three Saturdays earlier to cover department events for a department that didn't want to make her a permanent member. But they had no issue asking her to chip in like a permanent member and then some. Most other departments on campus did not use their non-permanent faculty to cover events unless there was an emergency. And after three denials for permanent status, she began to realize the position they had more or less promised her would never materialize. She felt like a horse in a race trying to catch the dangling carrot. A carrot they may never let her catch because it was cheaper for them if she remained untenured. Her reluctance on putting her foot down was the steady

income and the chance of becoming permanent, even though that chance seemed to be becoming more and more remote. Although grateful to have a job, she was upset about being used by the department. She elected to make the decision later after she had time to let her emotions run their course.

The remainder of her evening was quiet. After feeding Riley and herself, she settled in for the night by streaming a few episodes of her favorite comedy show and, after taking Riley out one more time for the night, headed to bed.

When she awoke the next morning she still didn't have a clear idea on a final decision about the weekend work so she decided to avoid work colleagues to the best of her ability for the day. She packed herself a lunch and spent her free time doing research in the library.

After finishing her morning lecture, she headed straight to the library. She settled at a table near the back. Cate was surprised at how empty the library was considering how close to the end of the term they were. Students must not have been fully committed to studying for finals yet. It also helped that it was a warm, sunny spring day with temperatures set to rise into the low eighties. Most students were taking advantage of the nice weather before hitting the books. Opening her bag, she removed her notepad and spread out the research she had already done. In need of additional resources, she went in search of more materials.

She found the books she had intended to study next and returned to her table. Cracking open the first book she leaned in, pen in hand, preparing to take notes. After glossing over a sentence or two, she found herself lost in thought, ruminating about whether the library held any answers to the history of a certain Scottish castle. She pulled out her laptop and decided a simple Internet search might give her a start. Connecting to the library's Wi-Fi, she ran a

search on Dunhaven Castle. She found a limited Wikipedia article on Dunhaven Castle featuring a picture of the castle itself along with some basic information about when it was built and other details. It offered no clues on how she was connected to it.

Pushing back from the table, she headed for a computer that could help pinpoint materials for her search. She ran the name Dunhaven Castle, Lady Gertrude MacKenzie, Dunhaven and a few similar related searches. They turned up little to nothing other than a one line reference in a text called *Scottish Castles: The Complete List* and a brief mention in a text called *The Mysteries of Scotland*. The second reference seemed intriguing even if it didn't provide her with much information but the library did not have access to the text. Cate considered asking for an inter-library loan but she figured by the time she got it she would no longer need it having already determined her connection or lack thereof to the castle. She checked her watch and found it to be shortly after noon. The rumblings in her abdomen further confirmed the hour. She headed back to her table to eat her lunch while continuing her research.

After finishing her lunch, she continued her readings and note-taking for another hour before cleaning up her area, returning the books to the book cart and gathering her notes, packing everything into her bag. She took a quick look around to be sure she had collected everything and headed towards the library entrance. When she exited, she found the air had warmed up several degrees. Students dotted the lawn connecting the campus buildings while they enjoyed the weather by studying, relaxing or playing Frisbee. Cate made her way from the library to Smith Hall for her single afternoon lecture. After delivering it she called it a day and headed home to retrieve Riley for a quick trip to the park, sure that he would also like to enjoy the warm weather.

As she suspected, Riley was thrilled to take a long walk around the pond at the park, prancing down the path with Cate and stopping now and again to explore something that caught his eye, or more specifically his nose. After the walk, Cate grabbed something to eat rather than have to make dinner. After a quick bite, she headed back home and spent the evening organizing her research notes. It was a mindless task that allowed her to focus on what she would have to tell Jeff when she saw him tomorrow. She knew she couldn't avoid seeing him for another day so she had to make her final decision. After an hour of work, she still wasn't sure how she would answer. She decided to sleep on it for another night. Stretching and yawning, she left her notes sprawled on the table, took Riley for one last trip outside and headed to bed.

Wednesday morning brought a cool rain. The crisp smell of rain and fresh flowers permeated the campus as Cate made her way to her early morning class. As she finished her lecture, she faced the reality that she would have to speak with Jeff. An idea crossed her mind, and she decided she would go with it so she made her way to the department's main office.

As she entered, she saw Molly, the department secretary, had not arrived yet but Jeff's door was already open. He was in his office as she suspected. Perfect, she thought to herself, time to enact my plan. Cate made her way over to the open door and knocked on it, popping her head into the office. "Hey, Jeff, got a minute?" she said, smiling.

"Oh hey, sure, kiddo, come on in," Jeff answered after looking up from his laptop. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Mind if I sit?" she asked, taking a seat before he could answer. "Hey, we're getting really close to the summer term, have you made any progress with getting a commitment from administration on summer courses for me?"

She watched Jeff as he hesitated for a moment before answering her. He stared at her, trying to read her face. She tried to keep her expression as blank as possible. She noticed how he weighed the answer he was about to give, suspecting she was up to something. "No," he said, "I haven't locked them down yet but I'm trying, kiddo, I'm trying." He winked.

"Really?" Cate played surprised. "Wow, the term is nearly upon us and they still haven't made final decisions, how frustrating."

"Yeah, yeah it is," he answered, thinking his answer had sufficed. "But you know how it is."

"Yeah, I'm beginning to understand," she laughed. "Well, let me know as soon as you have an answer if you could." She stood to leave.

"Oh, I will, kiddo."

"Thanks!" Cate took two steps toward the door.

"Oh, ah, Cate..." Jeff began. Cate stopped, a small smile spreading on her face before she regained her blank expression and turned around to face him.

"Yeah?"

"Did you check on your availability Saturday? I meant to ask you yesterday, but I didn't have the chance."

And here it goes, Cate thought. "Yeah, I did, sorry, I'm not available." Cate had decided just before the conversation that if they couldn't commit to her for another semester, she couldn't commit to them. If this Saturday event was the deciding factor between her continued employment or lack thereof, then so be it. She would not continue to do more than her share of work only for them to hold her hostage at the end of every term.

"Aww, shucks," Jeff said, "that's too bad. Well, thanks for checking anyway."

"Sure, Jeff. Anytime!" Cate turned on a heel to leave but was stopped again.

“Oh, ah, Cate?” Jeff said as she turned around again, “I wouldn’t count on the summer term courses. I mean I’ll fight like hell for you but I think it’s a losing battle.”

“Thanks for the heads up,” Cate said, not surprised. Of course he would make her feel as bad as he could. He hadn’t gotten his way so now she would suffer right along with him. It made her sad that her colleagues would treat her this way, but she had expected this.

A mix of emotions coursed through her as she made her way back to her office. She was proud for having stood up for herself but saddened and frustrated that she had spent years trying to be a good faculty member within the department and had never gained much respect from her coworkers. In the end, she was happy with her decision, concluding that if she would have caved in, she would have felt worse than she did right now.

She looked around her office. Maybe I should spend some of my office hours cleaning out my stuff, she thought to herself. She concluded that she didn’t have to just yet. While Jeff wanted to play hardball and make her sweat, he would have at least a class or two that no one in the department wanted because it was at a bad time or bad location or freshman only or some other point of contention that most other faculty members were unwilling to accept and that he’d need her to cover. With that settled, she cracked open her laptop to do some work.

The rest of her day was uneventful with just a few student appointments, two lectures and a quiet evening at home. The remainder of the week was the same. She didn’t see or hear from Jeff; he was great at avoiding her when he didn’t need something.

When Saturday rolled around, Cate took pleasure spending the morning hours at the park with Riley knowing she had this time because she had refused to take on the

extra work. Celebrating her independence and what she hoped was not the end of her career, she spent part of Sunday at the park, ending her weekend with some quiet reading at home as she watched the sunset from her armchair while Riley cuddled with her.

## CHAPTER 5



Cate groaned as her alarm went off Monday morning. The dreaded finals week was here. Mountains of grading, sobbing students begging for another chance, late nights, early mornings, endless emails, it was the week of the semester that every faculty member hated. “Can’t get it finished if I don’t get it started,” Cate said to herself as she climbed out of bed.

She showered, made breakfast, walked Riley, and headed to the office. Her cell phone rang just as she sat down at her desk. Not recognizing the number, she answered it anyway, figuring it wasn’t a telemarketer calling at 8:12 a.m.

“Hello?”

“Dr. Kensie,” a voice answered her in a crisp British accent. “This is William Smythe. We spoke ten days ago regarding the estate of Lady Gertrude MacKenzie.”

“Mr. Smythe, yes, I remember.” How could she forget?

“The results of the DNA test are in and confirmed by a second party. I am back in the States. Would it be possible to meet for lunch today? I can come to you.”

“Uh...” Despite ten days of wondering, Cate was dumb-

founded by the request. "Sure, sure. Today around noon is fine. I'm at work, Aberdeen College. We can meet in the Terrier Café's faculty lounge. It should be quiet there and we'll be able to talk."

"Perfect, I will see you at noon, Dr. Kensie."

"Great. I'll see you then. And, oh, please, call me Cate."

"Goodbye, Cate." The phone clicked. Cate ended the call and set her cell phone down. The DNA results were in and confirmed, she assumed they confirmed that she was the heir to the MacKenzie estate. But how could that be? It made little sense, her parents wouldn't have kept this from her. Did they not know? That seemed improbable. Still, William Smythe did not seem like the type of man who would make a lunch date with a professor at a local liberal arts college to break the news gently that she wasn't inheriting a castle. It still didn't seem true. But if it was, what was she going to do? She had to decide what to do about this castle. Perhaps Mr. Smythe would have some instructions or suggestions. Maybe it was left to her to dispose of, perhaps they didn't even want her moving there. But the will stipulated that she must live there. So, if it wasn't left to her to sell she'd have a big decision on her hands. She checked her clock. It was 8:24 a.m., less than four hours until the meeting. She'd have to wait until then for more answers.

She worked through the morning, trying to keep her mind focused, preparing grade books for dispatching grades, organizing paperwork from the semester, tying up loose ends on her course websites. Peppered in were a few student appointments. Time seemed to drag. It didn't help that, on average, she checked her watch every five minutes. Finally, it was 11:30 a.m. Close enough. By the time I walk over and get us a table, well, I'll still have to wait fifteen minutes, but oh well, she thought.

Cate made her way to the café, it was a buffet style cafe-

teria with many unique options. Cate paid for two meals telling the clerk at the front that she was expecting a guest. She left his name with the clerk, asking her to send him back to the faculty lounge when he arrived. "He'll be easy to spot," Cate said, "he has a British accent."

Cate entered the faculty lounge at the back of the cafeteria and found it deserted. She selected a table in the back corner to give them privacy in case someone joined them. Setting her keys down on the table, she exited into the main café, made herself a hearty salad, grabbed a glass of water and headed back to her table. Still finding herself alone, she made a start on her salad. She had gotten about two bites in when the door to the faculty dining area opened. She recognized William Smythe, wearing another crisp black suit, he looked out of place against the backdrop of students in sweats and yoga pants. He carried his impeccably polished briefcase. Scanning the room, he caught site of Cate. Still, Cate waved as though he might not see her. He strode across the room taking a seat across from Cate. "Dr. Kensie," he began.

"Cate, please," Cate interrupted him. "You can help yourself to some lunch, the food here is rather good!"

"Thank you," he said. "Perhaps I'll make a salad, if you don't mind my doing so before we conduct our business."

"No, not at all, please help yourself." He was so formal. He left the dining area and returned with a small salad and a glass of water. Unfolding his napkin across his lap, he took a small bite of food then set his fork down.

"Let's get down to business," he said flatly. "As I mentioned during our phone conversation, we have confirmed your identity through two separate DNA tests, you are the heir to the MacKenzie estate, as I suspected."

"Mr. Smythe, I have to tell you I'm really surprised by

this. No one told me anything about any Scottish relative before.”

“I can assure you, whether or not you heard about it, you are Lady Gertrude MacKenzie’s closest living relative and her rightful heir. There are stacks of paperwork to complete; my firm will handle most everything outside of a few signatures needed from you. I’ll collect some of those from you today, the rest when you arrive in London and the final few when we make the trip to Scotland. I assume you’ll need some time to get your affairs stateside in order. Do you have an estimate on when you expect that you’ll be able to move? I assume you have a valid passport and my firm will complete any paperwork needed for you to live in Scotland.”

He said it all so matter-of-factly, as though he had discussed this with Cate before. Cate paused before answering, not sure where to begin. This was a huge life change, moving to another country, giving up her career, it was all so overwhelming. The man stared at her, waiting for her reply. He took another small bite of food as he waited. “Um,” Cate began, buying herself some time, “again, I’m sorry, I’m just a little overwhelmed. Ten days ago I hadn’t even thought of moving, let alone to another country. I’m just catching up with you here.” Although she had been over it so many times in her head, it still seemed overwhelming.

The man seemed to soften a bit. “Please take all the time you need, however, I would like to begin the paperwork on my end if you wouldn’t mind signing the forms I have for you today. I assume that you will take up residence at Dunhaven Castle as required by the terms of the will?”

“Yes, of course,” Cate blurted out without thinking. Within an instant, her second-guessing set in and she followed up with, “Well, I mean, I think so.” While it was a big step, quitting her job and moving to a new country, what was holding her here, she thought.

“Perfect, at the conclusion of our lunch, I’ll just need your signature on a few forms.”

“Sure, absolutely. I don’t want to hold you up at all, I just need a day or so to get things in order. I should be able to give you a better estimate then.”

“Of course, Cate.” He said her name in a forced, awkward way. “I plan on traveling back to London this evening, but you have my contact information, please let me know when you have an idea so we can prepare for your arrival.”

They finished their salads while discussing a few minor details about the will. As they finished, Mr. Smythe dabbed the corners of his mouth with his napkin before setting it aside on his plate and pushing both aside. He snapped open his briefcase and drew out a tidy green folder. Opening it he pulled out several papers, each with flags showing where signatures were required.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to wrap up the signatures I mentioned earlier,” he said as he paged to the first signature flag on the top document. “There are several documents here, the first retaining my law firm as your legal counsel in this matter. Please review the document and sign where indicated when you are ready.” He handed her the first paper along with a very nice pen that he withdrew from his suit jacket pocket.

“Mr. Smythe, I have one question.”

“Of course.”

“How sure are you that this will pan out?” Cate’s panic was resettling in her mind. She didn’t want to go through this just to be left jobless and homeless.

“Very. We have the verification that you are the legal heir, Lady MacKenzie had no other, closer relatives. Even if someone filed a challenge, I am certain that it would have no merit.”

“And it’s not a conflict of interest that you were Lady MacKenzie’s executor and legal counsel as well as mine?”

“Absolutely none. The document there states that you would retain my firm only for this matter, although we hope to continue our representation of the MacKenzie family at your discretion, of course. My firm has represented the MacKenzie family for generations. Lady Gertrude was not only a top client but also a very dear friend. We handle most of the day-to-day business of the estate along with accounts payable. We kept Lady Gertrude apprised of the estate affairs quarterly. We can adjust that to a schedule of your liking.”

Cate took a moment to look over the form. It looked like standard legalese and seemed to state that the firm of Smith, Smythe and Smithton would represent her in only the matter of resolving Lady Gertrude MacKenzie’s estate and would resolve all issues relating to this matter. She wondered if she should have another attorney look over the paperwork before she agreed to sign but she couldn’t see what she had to lose as the terms set forth in the contract seemed to be standard, including the fee for the work. Taking a deep breath and pushing the last remnants of panic from her mind, Cate signed the document.

“Excellent. This second one allows me to act as your agent in all matters regarding the estate including, but not limited to filing motions on your behalf to retain ownership of accounts, property, and handling the transfer of titles.” Cate scanned the document then signed.

“Finally, this document stating that I have provided you with a current copy of Lady MacKenzie’s final will and testament for your records.” As he spoke he slid a copy of the document over to Cate. Cate read the final form, glanced through the document he had given her and signed.

“Excellent,” he said flatly, as he gathered the signed papers off the table and stacked them neatly in the folder. Closing it,

he placed it into his briefcase. "Well, that will conclude our business for today. I expect you have many details to attend to, if you have questions or need assistance with any arrangements, please reach out. I will pass on your contact information to my assistant, Gayle Pearson. She will also reach out to you via email within the next few days, I'm sure. When you have an estimated arrival in London, please let us know so we can prepare."

"Yes, I will, thank you. I hope to have that information for you soon."

"Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you. Good day, Cate." Again, he spoke her name as though he hated to use it, although he sounded sincere in wanting to hear from her again. She watched him cross the room and disappear through the door. It closed, slowly shutting out the din of the cafeteria. Cate sat for a moment trying to process what had just happened. It felt as though it wasn't real. If the document had not been sitting in front of her, she would have wondered if she had dreamt the whole thing. She sat for another moment before gathering her things and leaving. Back in her office, she found herself unable to concentrate on much work. With no pending student appointments and nothing keeping her there, she called it an early day.

She remained lost in thought while she walked to her car. Random items that needed done ran through her mind along with the incredibility of the entire situation. She was still numb with shock. She drove home with her head still somewhat in the clouds. When she arrived at her apartment, she set down her bag. Riley greeted her in the hallway, happy to see her as always. Bending down to pet him she held his little head in her hands and exclaimed, "Riley, it looks like you'll get that yard after all!"

## CHAPTER 6



The next few weeks will be a whirlwind, Cate surmised. Her alarm had gone off a few minutes earlier. As if on autopilot, she turned it off and sat up, prepared to start her daily routine when the thought struck her that she was an heiress. It hit her like a bolt of lightning and she sat dumbfounded for an extra minute before climbing out of bed to begin her day. She still couldn't believe it was happening; it still didn't seem real. Regardless, it was happening and was real and details needed to be worked out. Cate never imagined she would move to be honest. She expected to stay at Aberdeen College for quite a while, if not for the duration of her career. She never expected that she would relocate to another country!

Cate didn't have any obligations on campus until noon when she was scheduled to proctor a final, so she took the morning to create a list of things that needed attended to before her move. The prospect of an international move was overwhelming to her, but Cate was a meticulous organizer, so she used those skills to calm her nerves. After she finished jotting down the things that came to mind she had her work

cut out for her. Her lease on the apartment was up at the end of the month, making the decision on when to move easy. Given that timeline, she had about three weeks to get everything together. Glancing through the list, it was a tall order, but she figured she could pull it off.

Cate got a jump-start on a few things before heading to campus. She grabbed her laptop, setting it on the kitchen table, opened it, and began checking her email. She found a few emails waiting for her, most of them unimportant. A few were student emails that she answered. As she was about to close her laptop and move to another task, she saw a new email pop into her inbox. It wasn't from a name she recognized and she was about to leave it for later when she noticed the subject line read MacKenzie Estate.

Cate clicked to open the email and scanned through it.

*Dear Dr. Kensie,*

*Please allow me to introduce myself; my name is Gayle Pearson. Please call me Gayle! I am the administrative assistant for Mr. William Smythe, Esq. Having spoken with Mr. Smythe earlier this morning, I understand that you will be joining us on this side of the pond! I wanted to reach out and discuss your arrival plans whenever you may have them. I will assist you with any plans to help make your move easier. Also, I can help you with setting up your travel arrangements. Once you have a more concrete idea of your schedule, please let me know and I will be happy to take care of the details. You can contact me via email or my office phone: 044 1901 456789. I look forward to hearing from you, Dr. Kensie!*

*Sincerely,*

*Gayle Pearson*

*Administrative Assistant to William Smythe, Esq.*

*Law Firm of Smith, Smythe and Smithton*

The email cemented in Cate's mind the reality of her situation. What was like a dream was becoming her reality. Cate suddenly became anxious. What was she doing? In three weeks, she was moving to a foreign country having never even traveled outside of her own country before. What if she was making a terrible mistake? A sense of unease swept over her, she had made such a snap decision yesterday in the café; it was unlike her. Cate took a deep breath and pushed aside her rambling thoughts. She was panicking, plain and simple, because she felt overwhelmed by everything she had to do. She had made a decision, and she planned to stick to it. Besides, she didn't have a lot of choice, if she wanted the inheritance, she had to move. And who wouldn't want to inherit a Scottish castle? It provided her with the security of a home and the means to maintain it for a lifetime. Settling her mind, Cate read the email again. Unlike the straight-laced, uptight Mr. Smith, Gayle seemed warm and inviting. Cate sent a quick response before heading to campus.

*Hi Gayle,*

*Thank you for the email. Please call me Cate! I hope to have some solid dates for you soon but my rough plan is to travel near the end of the month. This will coordinate well with my lease expiration and give me some time to wrap up some affairs on my end. Once I have some specific dates in mind, I can let you know. Mr. Smythe said that I would first come to London to complete some paperwork and then on to Scotland. Do you know how long I would spend in*

*London before going on to Scotland? The information would help in planning my arrival.*

*Thanks so much!*

*Cate*

Cate gave it a quick re-read and sent it on its way before closing her laptop. She checked the time; it was around 9 a.m. With the six hour time difference, that would make it around 3 p.m. in London. Cate hoped Gayle would receive it before leaving the office.

Cate decided she would get ready to head in to give her final. After a quick shower, she tossed on a pair of jeans, a striped top and a blazer. She took Riley for a short walk before gathering her things and heading to campus. On her way, she stopped at the local home improvement store to pick up some boxes and packing tape. She bought about two dozen to start with and stowed most of them in the trunk of her car. The others she put in her backseat, intending to use them for some things in her office.

She arrived at campus with about an hour to spare before the final exam commenced. She headed to her office, boxes in tow. Looking around she mentally started cataloging what she needed to do before she left. Although her office wasn't large, she had several things to clean out and box up. Since she had some time before the final, she started organizing some materials. She began by gathering some of her personal effects, packing them into a box together and marking its contents on a paper that she stuffed into the top. Thankfully, she didn't have many personal effects. What she had a lot of was books. She looked at the stuffed bookshelf and wondered if the four remaining boxes were enough. Most

likely not, she concluded, but she could get a start. She thought packing them by topic might make the most sense but she soon gave up on that idea and resorted to packing them by what would fit together and what, when combined, wouldn't make the box too heavy for her to carry. Two boxes in and it was like she was playing a live game of Tetris.

Cate checked her watch, it was twenty minutes to noon. She figured she better get to the lecture hall to give her final. Leaving the boxes behind, she gathered her tote bag and the stack of finals and left the office. After making her way across campus, she entered the lecture hall and found it filled. She hadn't seen this many students in the room since the first day. A nervous tension filled the air as she made her way to the front, setting the stack of finals down along with her bag.

"Good afternoon, everyone," Cate said loudly. "Is everyone ready?" A few groans answered her. "Remember, no text books, notes, cell phones, copying neighbor's papers allowed. If you have questions during the exam, please raise your hand. Once you have completed the exam, please bring it to the front of the room and then you are free to leave and begin your summer break." This elicited a chuckle from a few students. She began passing out the exam papers. "Just relax and think everything through, you'll be fine. Good luck!"

When she had finished passing out all the papers, she made her way back to the instructor's desk at the front. Before sitting down, she scanned the room. She pulled out her laptop and her list from this morning, prepared to busy herself with planning until she could begin grading the papers as they were turned in.

As she waited for her wi-fi to connect, she scanned the list. She decided to knock off a little shopping for items that she and Riley would need for the trip. Turning to her laptop,

she checked her email first, finding an email from Gayle waiting for her.

*Hi Cate! The end of the month would work nicely for us and we will plan for that. Again, once you have determined specific dates, please let me know and I can make the exact arrangements. You'll need to spend a few nights with us (2-3) in London before moving on to your new home! Mr. Smythe and I will accompany you to Dunhaven. If you have any other questions, please reach out.*

*Best,*

*Gayle*

Gayle seemed to be very on top of it, although she figured she would have to be working for William Smythe. He didn't seem like the kind of man who suffered incompetence. Cate had another question for Gayle but she didn't want to bombard the poor woman's email so she thought she would wait to see if any additional questions popped into her head and send them all at once.

Cate did another scan of the room; everyone was hard at work. Turning her attention back to her laptop, Cate browsed around a few retail sites, deciding that Riley needed a new carrier for the trip along with a new bed for his new house. She picked out a new coat and ball for him, too. She didn't get any further before she heard a rustling of papers. A few students were packing their things having finished their exam already. She checked her watch, about fifty minutes in with an hour to go. The students made their way to the front of the room, handing her their papers and saying their goodbyes before disappearing out the door. Cate began to grade the exams as they were handled in,

shoving her laptop aside. She wanted to finish up anything she could so she could focus on her move. Taking out her answer key she began to mark each first page before moving on to the next. As she worked a few more students turned in their papers. She added these to the stack and made it through the first page of each before anyone else turned in their exams.

The remaining time in the exam flew by. Cate continued to grade all the papers she had received, going back to the first few pages a few times to mark new submissions. With ten minutes remaining, she announced the time left to the remaining students. This prompted a few more to finish their answers and pack up. She waited to continue any grading since the exam was almost over. At 1:50 p.m. she announced that time was up and students should complete their answers and turn their papers in. A few students hastily selected their final few answers, collected their things and brought their papers to Cate. After stowing her laptop and to-do list in her tote, she collected all the papers and headed back to her office. She planned on finishing the grades for the final and the course overall before heading home for the evening.

After finishing all the final exam grades, she input all the grades into her grade book, made final grade calculations and posted her grades to the online grading system. "One class finished, three to go," she mused. Checking the time, she figured she could pack one more box. When she finished, she stacked the boxes in the corner near the door, gathered her tote and headed for her car.

A few minutes later, she pulled into the parking lot of her building. She gathered her packing supplies and headed in. Piling the flattened boxes in the hall, she bent down to greet Riley. He was his usual excited self. "Hey, buddy! How was your day? After dinner, I want to show you all the new things

I've got in my cart for you!" Riley gave her a lap to the face as though he agreed.

After changing her clothes and making some dinner, Cate spent the rest of the evening showing Riley his new things and completing her purchases for him. He seemed to approve them all. The purchase seemed another way of cementing the reality of Cate's new circumstances.

The next day Cate spent in her office finishing grades for two more classes and packing the remainder of her things. Before she left the apartment, she sent a quick email off to Gayle asking where she should ship the boxes with her personal effects. The ever-efficient Gayle had already responded with the address, indicating that she would arrange for everything to be put in an "obvious but unobtrusive space" in Cate's new home so she could deal with them at the time of her choosing. It seemed so strange for Cate to think of it being her new home, of leaving Aberdeen behind. She couldn't imagine what it would be like, but she was experiencing a mix of emotions about it.

When Cate arrived at the office, she decided that she would do her grading first then finish with whatever packing she could. She hoped to finish with all grading and packing by the end of finals week, allowing her to shift her focus to what she needed to do at home to prepare for the move. She spread out the papers on her desk and started reading the final papers of each student group from her American History class. It took her just under two hours to read each group's papers and input their grades into the grade book. She completed all course grades and entered them into the system. "Halfway done!" she thought.

Glancing at her watch she saw that it was about 10:30 a.m., so she moved on to her next course's final projects. This course, in European History, had a similar final project to her American History course in which groups

submitted final papers. She had about thirteen groups to grade so she dug in. She made it through about two-thirds of the papers when her stomach started to rumble. Checking her watch she saw that it was now close to noon. She grabbed a to-go salad at the cafeteria and return straight to work. She finished the last of the papers while she ate her lunch. By the time she completed all the grades for this course it was just before 1:30 p.m. She had finished all the work she had planned for the day, leaving only one class' grades to finish. Those grades she decided to complete tomorrow and spent the rest of her afternoon packing.

Cate stood up and stretched then started building and filling boxes. She cleared nearly two more shelves of books when there was a knock at her door. "Come on in," she yelled as she taped up another box and marked the address that Gayle had given her in bold letters with a Sharpie.

She turned as Jeff was walking through the door; he looked around, genuine surprise on his face. "Hey, when I said not to count on summer, kiddo, I didn't mean you had to start packing yet!"

Cate gave him a small laugh in response. "About the summer, Jeff," Cate began.

Jeff interrupted her. "Yeah, I've got great news. I managed to get you a few classes," he grinned as though he had just done her the world's biggest favor.

"Thanks, Jeff. I appreciate what you've done but I need to decline."

"Decline? Cate, are you serious?" His face expressed genuine shock.

"Yes, I am serious. I need to decline. I've had some... developments on my end." She chose her words carefully. She didn't want to offer much information, she was sure it would sound crazy if she said it out loud. And, despite her

excitement, she felt a momentary sadness in leaving behind something that had become so familiar.

“Developments?” he said, almost to himself, “Were you offered another position?”

Cate smiled to herself a bit. “Yes, in a way I was. Anyway, what it boils down to is I don’t need the summer classes or a contract for the next academic year. I’m sorry about the late notice, Jeff, if I had known, I would have told you sooner but I only just found out myself.”

“Well, ah...” Jeff was clearly at a loss for words. “Ah,” he struggled, rubbing his chin with his hand, “I guess congratulations are in order!”

“Oh, thanks!” Cate said.

He slowly extended his hand to shake hers as if trying to grasp the reality of the situation at the same time. She took it and gave his hand a big shake. “Well, ah, it looks like you’ve got moving under control and there’s nothing I can do to change your mind.”

“Nope, sorry, it’s too good an opportunity to pass up.” She wasn’t lying.

“Well, ah, okay, I guess I’ll leave you to it. Good luck with... ah, well, everything!”

“Thanks, again, Jeff! I’ll pop in before I leave at the end of the week to say goodbye.”

“Yeah, great, thanks.” Jeff left her office, but not before taking one last glance over his shoulder as if to confirm that what had just happened really did happen. Then he looked her in the eyes again, “You’re sure there’s nothing I can do to change your mind? I think a permanent position is in the cards for you here, eventually.”

“Sorry, Jeff, there’s nothing.”

“Well, okay, can’t blame a guy for trying!” With that he disappeared down the hall.

Despite a twinge of sadness, a smile crept across Cate’s

face. She was content not to live contract-to-contract. Taking a deep breath, she began building another box to clear off her final shelf. After packing the final box, she emptied her file cabinet, marking files that the department needed to keep and discarding those that were no longer needed. A quick scan of the office showed nothing left to pack. She checked all her drawers one final time. Satisfied that she had everything packed, she began carrying boxes one by one to her car, stacking them in the backseat. After making several trips back and forth to get all the boxes, she was spent. She made one final trek to her office to retrieve her laptop and bag. Not wanting to haul the boxes in and out again she stopped at the post office on her way home and shipped this set of boxes to their new destination.

When Cate arrived home, she was exhausted physically and mentally. After a short walk with Riley, she settled on the couch with a bowl of cereal and relaxed for the evening.

As Thursday morning arrived, Cate was all too aware that this was the last she would see of Aberdeen College. She headed to campus with mixed emotions. Despite being glad that she was moving on and not subject to the whim of the department, its chair, or administration, it had been familiar to her. It was the only home she had known since she was on her own so it was bittersweet in many ways for her. Her plan was to finish the grading for her last course, double-check that she had packed everything from her office and turn in her keys. As she readied herself for the day, she promised Riley she wouldn't be late today. She headed to her office, shutting the door behind her. There shouldn't be anyone looking for her today, finals week was almost complete, all papers and projects had been turned in and she had given her notice to Jeff so she should be on her own. She looked at the stack of papers on her desk, twenty-one final reports stood between her and the end of the semester. No sense in delay-

ing, she concluded, and, taking the first paper from the stack, she dove in. It took her the better part of the morning to read and grade all the papers. Digging her laptop out of her bag, she started it up to put all the grades in and finish grading for the course. After completing this, she added the pile of papers to the “keep” pile for the department. As she was just about to close her laptop, she thought it might be a good idea to write a quick letter of resignation for the department so they had it both in writing and verbally.

She pulled up her word editor and typed a brief letter stating that was she resigning effective the end of the spring semester, adding that she had enjoyed her time at Aberdeen College and had experienced a good amount of growth as a faculty member while there. Digitally signing it, she sent it via email to Jeff carbon copying the department secretary.

Closing her laptop, she glanced around the room. It looked barren, like the day she came. She checked all the drawers, finding them empty. Nothing on the bookshelves, nothing hiding under her desk, nothing on the bulletin board. Satisfied, she stowed her laptop, grabbed her keys and worked on removing her office keys from her key ring.

She took one last look around; she had pleasant memories of her first moments in this office at her first real job and some difficult moments that she had rode out in this office. It wasn't easy to leave but, as she reminded herself, she had never truly felt at home here. Sighing away her nostalgia, she tossed her keys into her bag, grabbed the two removed keys, shut off the lights and closed the door on her office for the last time. She lingered a moment with her hand on the door-knob but before she could let any more doubt set in, she forced herself to make her way down the hall. She took the stairs down a flight to the department office. As she expected, she found the door open and Molly, the department's secretary, behind her desk.

"Hey, Cate," she said brightly as Cate entered.

"Hi, Molly," Cate answered. "I have my keys to return to you." She set them down on the desk in front of Molly.

"Keys? Are you moving to a new office?" Molly seemed confused.

"No, sorry. I thought maybe you had heard from Jeff or saw the email I sent a few minutes ago. I've resigned my position, I won't be returning to Aberdeen."

"What?" Molly exclaimed. Lowering her voice, she leaned in to Cate and said, "Is this because of the tenure situation? To be honest, I think Jeff could have done more, but I'd try to hang in there and keep pushing, honey."

"Oh, thanks, Molly, but that's not it entirely. I'm actually moving."

"Moving? To where?!"

"Scotland," Cate said as matter-of-factly as she could.

"SCOTLAND?! Are you kidding me? What prompted this, if you don't mind my asking? Did you get a job offer there?"

"Oh, I just found out I have family there." Cate twisted the truth a bit.

"Oh, that's great, honey, I can understand you wanting to move for your family." Molly said nodding her head as though it all made sense now.

Happy with being able to dodge any further explanations, Cate smiled and said, "So, I guess this is goodbye! I left all the current student paperwork in my office with dates marked showing when they are no longer current and can be disposed of and again, here are my keys, so that's it!"

"Just like you, Cate, always so organized!" she paused a moment, waving a hand in front of her face, tearing up a bit, "And now just a minute, this can't be goodbye just yet. Let me take you to lunch!"

"Oh, you don't have to do that, Molly!"

“Nonsense, come on, then you can tell me all about this move to Scotland!”

Cate considered it for a moment. Molly was always her strongest supporter in the department. She thought it was kind of her to offer, but Cate had one demand for the lunch, “Okay, but only if it’s my treat.”

“Now, Cate...” Molly began.

“I insist or the lunch is off!” Cate grinned.

“Okay, okay, I give in!” Molly said, holding both hands up to admit defeat. “How about tomorrow? I know you will be getting busier the closer your move gets!”

“Works great for me! Should we meet in the café here?”

“Blah, no, let’s go off campus for a change! How about that new Italian place that just opened on Third Street? You can try it before you leave, at least!”

“Sounds good, I’ll see you there, around noon?”

“See you there!” Molly answered.

Smiling, Cate retreated from the office and headed straight for her car, hoping to avoid any more attempts to say goodbye. Luck was on her side, she made it through unscathed and headed home. She got back to her apartment around 12:30 p.m., early, just as she had promised. Given that it was her last day of the semester and of work at Aberdeen she celebrated by taking Riley to the park.

On her way, she grabbed some lunch. Making their way down the gravel path from the parking area, she and Riley found their favorite spot overlooking the pond and sat down to eat their lunch. She had treated Riley to a cup of peanut butter ice cream while she ate a hamburger and fries. She gazed off into the distance. Aberdeen College stood behind the pond. Thinking of the last few glances of her office, she felt sadness to leave behind the familiarity of her current life but she couldn’t deny the excitement building for her new adventure. And despite there being no actual

family there, the connection to her family heritage felt very real to her.

As she finished her lunch, she pulled out Riley's favorite ball. He jumped to attention, ready to play. She tossed the ball and watched Riley race after it. She imagined playing with him on the lawns of Dunhaven Castle. Riley would love the open spaces there. No more cramped apartment, no more tiny patch of grass!

When Riley had grown tired of playing fetch, he collapsed in a heap next to Cate, content to watch life pass them by as he caught his breath. Cate rubbed his head gently as she watched life unfolding. She stared off towards Aberdeen College. Turning to Riley, she said, "So, what do you think, Riley? Should we leave Aberdeen behind and go on an adventure?" Picking his head up, Riley looked inquisitively at Cate. "We can live in a castle with a nice big lawn and you can go on walks every day! You can play ball every day, Riley!" Riley's dark, almond eyes gleamed back at her. "Well buddy, I guess we had better get packed and ready to go. We're leaving in just a few short weeks!" Riley jumped to his feet. Cate laughed, "Relax, buddy, let's enjoy our day today and get at it fresh tomorrow morning." Riley sat down, still looking intently at Cate. "Okay, okay, let's finish the walk around the pond before dinner, sound good?" Riley jumped to his feet again, excited to go.

Cate climbed to her feet and started towards the path after cleaning up from their lunch. As she walked with Riley, she wondered if they would find a pond or lake to walk around and enjoy in Scotland. She hoped they would, but even if they didn't, she decided they would still have a great time and find wonderful places to walk.

After concluding their walk, Cate and Riley climbed into the car and headed home for some dinner. Cate fed Riley his kibble, which he ate with enthusiasm after his big day while

she opted for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She turned in early, planning to get an early start tomorrow on her to-do list before moving. A part of one chapter in her life had closed today; the prologue to another was about to start tomorrow.

Ready to head across the pond with Cate and Riley and discover her new life and the secrets that await her in Scotland? Check out the full book here: [The Secret of Dunhaven Castle](#)



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this free book sample! *The Secret of Dunhaven Castle* will always hold a special place in my heart. I named the main character, Cate, after my late grandmother, Catherine. Cate embodies all the grace, charm and spunk she did in her 90+ years of living!

I hope you enjoyed reading the first few chapters as much as I enjoyed writing them! If you did, I love for you to experience the full book!

It's available here: [The Secret of Dunhaven Castle](#)  
All the best, Nellie

