

Vanquished

A novel by
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Chapter 1

August 2009, Isle of Arran, Scotland

The last rays of summer sun cast long shadows on the impeccably kept grounds of the cottage that overlooked Holy Isle and the still waters of the Firth of Clyde. There was a fire crackling in the stone fireplace that took the chill off the cool of the evening inside the small house that Kyla Fraser called home. Standing by an open window in the small but cozy living room, Ian MacLeod raised his glass in a toast.

“To God’s good grace and deliverance from evil,” Ian said as he held out his glass towards Kyla who was sitting by the fire.

Kyla smiled and raised her glass.

“Aye; and to Nigel as well,” Kyla added referring to their friend Nigel Cambridge.

Ian tilted his head and rolled his eyes in reluctant agreement with Kyla’s inclusion of the former spy and lawyer who had shared their recent harrowing experience. Ian could not pretend he wasn’t at times jealous of Nigel, but he could not deny that Kyla’s former suitor had been instrumental in saving his life.

“Aye,” Ian replied as they both sipped the 30-year-old Laphroaig that Kyla kept for special occasions.

Wanting to change the subject, Ian looked out at the rise of Holy Isle lit in a golden hue before turning towards Kyla.

“I hope all is forgiven lass. I was such a hothead the other night,” Ian said, referring to an argument the two had in his Glasgow flat a few days earlier before their narrow escape from death at Dunglass Roundabout.

“I have no idea what you’re on about,” Kyla replied as she took a sip from the crystal scotch glass.

“You know, when you walked out on me,” Ian replied.

There was a moment of silence.

“I’m still serious about the money, Ian,” Kyla replied.

“Well, I’m sorry to say I see it as quid pro quo for what I endured. I hope they spend the rest of their lives behind bars,” Ian stated vehemently.

“I’m sure they will but you need to let it go Ian. I implore you to turn over the funds in your possession to the authorities. Not only is it laundered money, you are also withholding vital evidence in the case against them,” Kyla retorted.

“The Crown will never know that it’s missing and besides I have an altruistic plan for the cash

that I'm sure you will support. But first of all, there are more important things to discuss," Ian said as he set down his glass on the window sill and walked over to the couch where she was sitting.

Kyla looked up at him as he stood with his left hand in his pocket wondering what was on his mind.

"I know we haven't really had the time to get to know each other, but I feel like we've been together forever already," Ian said as he looked into her eyes.

"I feel the same Ian. We've been through so much together. I've seen what you're made of and I have to admit I fell in love the first time we met."

Pulling his closed fist from his pocket Ian knelt in front of Kyla and plucked a shiny object from his open hand.

"I'm askin' you to marry me, Kyla," Ian said as he held a diamond ring between his thumb and forefinger.

Her eyes wide in amazement, Kyla took the ring and marveled at the sparkling diamond. She squinted suspiciously before responding.

"Now do tell, how did y' pay for this, Ian?" she queried.

MacLeod looked around as if to ensure that no one was listening before letting out a sigh.

"With the handsome fee I was paid for the Mills job. All above board I'll have y' know," Ian stated.

"Well first of all, now that I'm out of a job, how are y' gonna support me Mr. MacLeod?" Kyla asked, referring to the fact that she had been discharged from her role at Scotland Yard for not disclosing her relationship with a wanted suspect during an investigation she had been assigned to.

"No worries Kyla; it's all been taken care of," Ian replied.

He pulled two airline tickets out of his back pocket, placing them in Kyla's free hand. She held them up and studied them for a few moments before looking over at Ian.

"There's a beachfront house surrounded by palm trees waitin' for us in the Caymans, Kyla," Ian stated.

Kyla looked at Ian seemingly confused.

"All this in just a few days? It's just too much to take in. I can't—," Kyla started before Ian cut her off.

"Now just hold your tongue lass and let me say my piece. Obviously you know I took the money, but it remained in an RIA account until yesterday when I transferred 2.9 million pounds into a tax free offshore account in the Caymans. It is now in a trust fund, not in *my* name."

“But Ian, how many times do I have to repeat myself? It’s the proceeds of crime,” Kyla said, her tone ratcheting up.

Kyla handed the ring back to Ian and dropped the airline tickets on the couch beside her.

“Proceeds of crime fightin’ y’ mean,” Ian said emphatically.

Kyla could not help but laugh at Ian’s silly reply and demeanor.

“Well no matter how you spin the facts Ian, it’s laundered money and you’re a criminal as long as you are in possession of it.”

“First of all, it is not laundered. I’ve never laid a hand on any marked cash. The money may have been dirty but it was legal for all intents and purposes sitting in an RIA Swiss account. As far as I’m concerned it was just a big number that I transferred into another RIA account I happened to have control over. But you’re right. The money isn’t mine to keep. I’ve decided to use it to help the young victims who have been forced into the sex trade by the likes of the scum I just helped put in jail,” Ian stated passionately.

“Alright, I’m listening,” Kyla said.

“Girls like Natasha need a champion, someone who can rescue them and help them get back on their feet,” Ian said. “That’s where we come in as stewards of the trust fund that Nigel helped me set up. He’s actually a pretty decent lawyer in addition to a damn good spy.”

Kyla smiled as she stood up and placed her arms around Ian.

“OK, enough for now. I believe you Mr. MacLeod,” Kyla said softening her voice. “The money is still an issue, but I see where you are going with this.”

Ian leaned back from Kyla and looked at her.

“Kyla, I’ll explain the details of my plan later but there is one more thing I have to get off my chest,” Ian said with an anxious tone in his voice.

“What is it?” Kyla asked, expecting bad news.

“I know it might be none of my business, but did you and Nigel ever—you know,” Ian said reticently.

Kyla raised her eyebrows and stared disbelievingly at Ian.

“You can’t be serious,” she said.

“All he could talk about the entire time we were being chased across the UK by MI5 was you and the first night you two met,” Ian elaborated. “He’s obsessed with you and he must have his reasons.”

Kyla darted her eyes and looked out the window at the approaching dusk unsure how to

respond.

Ian waited apprehensively.

“Well?”

“No, never in a million years, Ian.”

Ian breathed a sigh of relief.

“That’s what I needed to hear. I hate to admit it but I’ve been so jealous since he said he went home with you that night,” Ian said.

Kyla remained silent and fidgeted for a few moments before Ian knelt down, took her hand and slipped on the engagement ring.

“Mrs. Ian MacLeod. I like the sound of it,” Ian said looking up at the ceiling.

Kyla drew her head back.

“Oh really? I was thinking more like Mr. Ian Fraser,” Kyla said mockingly as she looked up at him.

“I’m not that liberated lassie,” Ian said raising his eyebrows.

They both laughed before Ian placed his hands on the petite redhead’s face and kissed her tenderly.

“I love you MacLeod, but the money—,”

“Shhh,” Ian said.

Not a word was spoken as Ian took Kyla by the hand to the foot of the staircase that led to her bedroom. It seemed like forever since they first made love almost three months earlier before falling asleep in each other’s arms.

Chapter 2

East London, January 2007

A spear of daylight spilled through a small tear in the blackout blind that covered the window opening in a hotel room in London’s East End. There was a musty smell from decades of moisture combined with antiseptic cleansers that gave off the unmistakable odor of a low rent boardinghouse. The room was dark, lit only by a dim lamp that stood next to a bed beside a wastebasket the lone occupant was forced to use in the event she became sick from her nasty drug habit. There was a small shower stall, a sink and a toilet in one corner of the room as well as a hot plate that could be used to

heat up meager meals. What little heat there was came from a single steam radiator that kept the room temperature a few degrees warmer than the damp outside air. Leading to the hallway was a solid wooden door that locked with a heavy deadbolt from the outside preventing exit from inside the flat.

Her eyes were glazed over as Natasha, a pretty blond girl, lay naked on the single bed. She turned away repulsed by the obese man who was about to have sex with her. Like a lumbering primate, he climbed onto the bed and forcefully mounted the terrified 15-year-old, crushing her emaciated 95 pound body under his weight. The cheap box spring began banging against the wall in a violent rhythmic motion as Natasha whimpered at the painful violation of her body.

“Стой! Я дrehнна sjabe adchuvaju,” Natasha cried out in Belarusian, pleading for the man to stop.

She was about to be sick, disgusted by his fetid breath and nauseated from the drugs administered before he arrived. The snorting sounds coming from the disgusting old man reminded Natasha of the pigs she had tended on her family’s farm outside of the Northern European city of Minsk where she had grown up as a child. She grimaced and clutched the sheets beneath her trying to pull away from each thrust in an attempt to resist the man who had paid for what was in reality the sexual assault of a helpless child. Closing her eyes, she suffered the revolting onslaught of the fat old Englishman who grunted away on top of her. Barely able to control her urge to vomit, Natasha counted the passing seconds as she stared at the ceiling, pinned under his weight. Heroin coursed through her veins as she turned her head towards the well-tailored pin striped suit that was laid neatly over a chair beside the bed. On the floor was a leather bag bearing the insignia of one of the UK’s largest and most prestigious banks. Contorting her body she twisted away from him and dry heaved several times. Natasha had been high for almost the entire day without any food so there was nothing to expel from her stomach.

“Lay still for crissake,” the man said angrily in a refined Londoner accent.

Kidnapped on her way home from school in Belarus a year earlier, Natasha had been shipped to the port of London in a container along with half a dozen other girls her age. On her chest was the telltale crude black rose tattoo used by the Glaswegian mob to brand female properties that came by way of sex trafficking. Hooked on cheap Mexican heroin that anesthetized her senses she was forced into prostitution by her mob handlers before being turned over to the custody of a street pimp who shared in the profits.

Down the corridor were five other locked doors that led to girls, several of whom were shipped with Natasha, and others who were wooed into becoming prostitutes by the cunning and charm of the pimp who controlled their lives through drug addiction. Unlike many independents in the sex trafficking business, what went on at Satin House was highly organized and executed with high security vetting of clients wanting the experience of sex with imprisoned young sex slaves.

Outside, heavy rain fell on the streets of East London as their pimp Darnel Winston, a native of the Caribbean island of Martinique waited under the canopy in front of the hotel, talking on his mobile.

“OK, you check out clean and she can be available soon, mon,” he said as he lined up Natasha’s next john.

Ending the call, Winston lit a cigarette and glanced at his watch, pulling up the collar of his expensive full length kid leather coat. He looked around, adjusting the dark glasses that hid bloodshot

eyes and dilated pupils as passersby caught the rank smell of skunk weed that permeated his clothes and wafted all around him.

Twenty minutes later, an elderly man dressed in a tweed overcoat and shedding the heavy rain with a black umbrella approached. Glancing around nervously before recognizing Winston from the description he had been given over the phone a half hour earlier, he stopped, retracted his umbrella and stood a few feet away from the tall slender black man.

“I’m the one you spoke with,” the man said with his head bowed and eyes looking down at the rain soaked pavement.

Winston looked at his watch and glanced around before responding.

“She not ready yet my friend,” he said looking straight ahead and speaking softly as he blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke.

Looking at the elderly man, Winston held his hand out, palm up.

“It’s £100 upfront now and no mobile devices in the room. I hold them until you’re done,” Winston stated.

Handing over a wad of rolled up bank notes and his mobile device, the grey haired man remained silent. Pulling up his collar, both he and Winston stood out of the rain under the canopy at the entrance to the Satin House Hotel.