

## CHAPTER ONE

**A** WOMAN ALONE IN A LIGHT, WHITE ROOM. A glowing stove, a scrubbed pine table. No mirror, no clock, no photographs. A sewing-box lies open on the bare wooden floor. On a window-sill a still-life: driftwood, shells and a sheep's skull. The woman – not old, not young – lays down her pen and shifts her weight in the chair. The screech of wood on wood shatters the silence. She folds sheets of paper with great care, pushing them into the envelope with hands that tremble slightly.

*Grenitote  
North Uist  
Western Isles*

*January 11<sup>th</sup> 2000*

*My dear Megan,*

*The days are very short, very dark and the wind is almost constant. My new home – my doll's house! – is small, but I like it that way. (For a start there is very little to keep clean.) I have a sitting room and a workroom downstairs, a minute kitchen extension out the back and a bedroom and bathroom upstairs, all of a monastic simplicity. I can see the sea from the sitting room and from my bedroom. The holiday-home buyers didn't want this one because it's too close to the sea, or so my neighbour Shona McAskill says. (Dear Shona, fount of all wisdom and a great many outrageous Gaelic proverbs. There seems to be one for every occasion – all of them gloomy.) If there's a freak*

*high tide I shall have seawater round my ankles apparently, so I haven't bothered with a carpet. The floorboards are bare and I have put my oldest, most faded quilts over the furniture to hide the suddenly-garish colours I've imported from my former life. (I like the idea of having a Former Life. It makes me sound intriguing and romantic, doesn't it? Or does it make me sound reformed, like a criminal? Perhaps I shall tell the locals that I have moved here in an attempt to go straight. In a way, I have.)*

*I try to go for a walk every day, whatever the weather – that is if the wind allows me to stay perpendicular. I see very few people on my walks. There are no tourists at this time of year and the locals are sensibly installed by their firesides, watching daytime TV. (Not an option for me as I don't have one.) The radio has been my constant companion and the shipping forecast has taken on a new meaning. I don't pretend to understand it but I am beginning to get the gist. The prognostications for 'Mallin, Hebrides, Minches' always sound vague but dire. (Rather like Shona's proverbs.)*

*Today I walked very fast to get warm, then I sat on some rocks to watch gannets dive, which made me cry. I can never watch gannets without thinking of how they go blind in old age and die of starvation. They hit the water at God knows what speed with their eyes open, looking for food. How can their eyeballs withstand the impact? And how do ornithologists know gannets don't sneakily shut their eyes at the last minute? (Maybe gannets don't have eyelids? I will ask Shona. I am sure she will know.)*

*The silence and the long expanses of uninterrupted time are Heaven. ('When God made time, He made plenty of it.' The Gospel According to Shona.) I think it's affecting my work already. I seem to be using less colour and more texture and when I do use colour it*

*tends to be colours from the natural world. I think this place will be good for my work, good for me. I hope so.*

*Apart from the fact that they have made it clear that they think I am a) mad and b) unlikely to last six months, the locals have been kindness itself. I am sure they regard it as their Christian duty, although I doubt that duty prevents them from repeating (and probably embellishing) every snippet of personal information that I am foolish enough to let fall. But I don't mind – I didn't come here expecting privacy. I realise I am an event. I am what passes for entertainment on an under-populated Hebridean island. I am an anomaly – a woman alone, too young to be widowed and too old to be looking for a mate. I occupy that no man's land – no woman's land – between youth and old age.*

*Write soon, darling, or phone if you can. I'm not at all lonely but would love to hear your news.*

*With love,*

*Mum*

*P.S. I am keeping very well – no nightmares and I have not had to increase my dosage so far. You do not need to worry about me at all!*

She seals the envelope with a sigh and picks up her pen again. Gazing down at the blank white space, her memory shuffles, deals another blank white space. The pen hovers, dashes off a name, then skids across the envelope. She concedes defeat, replaces the cap on her pen and walks to the window where she rests her head against the cold glass.

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The comfort of glass. The attraction, the seduction of breaking glass and the quietus it will bring. No effort, just push, push until it cracks, breaks, then peels back your skin, letting the blood, letting the pulsing blood flow, cleansing your body, emptying your mind, letting life ebb away like the tide, leaving the beach clean, flat, blank.

No one will ever know you were here.

I lie in my bed, the bed I used to share with Gavin. Tiny pieces of fabric are flying round the room, a flurry of multi-coloured snowflakes, a rainbow blizzard. They cascade down until the floor is covered, inches deep in brilliant fragments, and still they fall. I watch the pieces flutter round the room, see them settle on the duvet, settle on me, piling up until I am buried like the Babes in the Wood by a mountain of multi-coloured leaves. And still they fall. My face is covered and I cannot breathe. I call out to Gavin but my mouth fills with pieces of cloth...

I wake, sobbing, sweating, the duvet over my head, my mouth full of hair. In the dark I turn to Gavin's side of the bed and reach across, terrified.

He isn't there of course. He hasn't been there for five years.

But still I reach.

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When I wake I think at first that it is silent. I lie in bed quite motionless, thinking 'Is *this* what it's like to be dead?' Gradually sounds impinge – the rumble and hiss of the waves on the shore, the whingeing of gulls, the tick of the clock.

I wonder – do I really need a clock now? Here I have all the time I need. Once when I was researching a project, I saw a strange clock in a museum, a clock used by early American pioneers, a clock with only one hand. They only ever needed to know the hour. When they boiled an egg they used an egg timer.

When God made time, He made plenty of it.

Sometimes it requires a great act of will to get up, not because I am reluctant to resume my new routine, simply that I feel suspended, outside time, in a white space, here at the edge of the world. I do not move, I cannot move.

Then I remember being in the hospital.

It is in the end the memory of feeling drugged that induces me to move. I move to prove to myself that I am not drugged, that I have willpower and can use it. See me – I can move. I exist. I am me.

The first battle of the day is fought and won.

Brushing my teeth, I stare out the window but a cobweb catches my eye, a cobweb slung across the corner of the rattling window frame. I raise my hand with a housewifely impulse to brush it away, then feel a sudden reluctance to destroy the web, so perfect, so mathematical in its construction. A small

spider waits in the centre for its prey, looking not sinister, but pathetically vulnerable and exposed. The cobweb billows in the draught, like a sail.

Who is there to pass judgement on my slovenly house-keeping? I am prepared to share my bathroom with this tiny spider. We shall endure the draughts together.

So now I have company. A lodger. I shall call him Bruce. After Robert the Bruce, of course.

We both dangle by a thread, Bruce...

A spider splayed on a limestone rockface.

Not a spider. A man. A vertical impossibility.

He is still, spread-eagled, waiting to make his move. Then, sudden as an insect but with more grace, he moves diagonally upwards, jamming claw-like fingers into invisible cracks, folding grasshopper legs beneath him ready for the push, the swing, the gymnastic counterbalance as his body grazes the rock and takes up another perilous, temporary foothold on a crumbling ledge. He gathers himself, rests, an insect basking in the sun.

Below at the foot of the cliff, a woman watches.

When I think back to life with Gavin it was always as if he had just moved in. Or was about to move out. Boxes, cases, rucksacks, boots, jackets, sleeping bags, bivvy bags, crampons, ice-axes, harnesses, maps and hundreds of bars of chocolate.

In my bitterest moments I used to ask myself if it was me Gavin needed or just my house as a place to store his gear.

Was it love, Gavin? Or was it just need?

The climber descends, sliding easily down a gaudy rope. He walks towards her, the glossy lycra shocking, revealing as nudity. He is not tall, but good-looking, with a dazzling thatch of white-blond hair and the old-young face climbers have: bright-eyed, tanned, prematurely wrinkled by the sun. He coils rope slowly, his large hands white with chalk.

‘Do you climb?’

‘No. But it fascinates me. It’s so beautiful to watch. Like dancing... Dancing on a rock-face, defying gravity.’ She gazes up at the amphitheatre of bleached limestone. ‘“Death-defying”. That’s what they say about circus acts, isn’t it? Is that what you’re doing? Defying death?’

I never asked if you were faithful. I didn’t want to know. I had no illusions about your appetite for adventure, for risk, for novelty. With your charm and looks, your reputation in the climbing world, you must have had women throwing themselves in your path. Moral scruples – as I later discovered – were unknown to you, so I don’t doubt you availed yourself of whatever there was going.

Ours was a very modern relationship, very grown-up, based on trust. Or so I thought. You had no idea what I was up

to back in Fort William while you were freezing your balls off halfway up a Dolomite. For all you knew I was screwing your best mates. Except that you knew I wasn't. I wouldn't. Because I loved you. Because I loved *you*, Gavin. And attractive though Dave and Andy and Simon were – especially darling Simon who had a thing about older women and whose chat-up line (and I've heard worse) was that I reminded him of his mum who died when he was six – I would never have succumbed, in case you found out and were hurt and finished the relationship.

And that is surely what you would have done, because you of all men wouldn't be able to hack it if your girlfriend bedded any of your mates. Dear me, no. If a bloke has to climb a sodding Himalaya to prove he's a man, he's hardly likely to take a philosophical view of a mate shagging his woman. And the thing for you, Gavin, the thing that you would have killed to know, would have been whether Dave or Andy or even little Simon were any better at it than you. Had they scaled my North Face any quicker? With any more expertise, or with less gear? Or even without oxygen?

So I didn't screw around. And you knew I didn't.

But *you* screwed around. And – eventually – I knew that you did.

Then I got angry.

'Why do you climb?'

He laughs, flings the coil of rope to the ground and takes a large bottle of water from his rucksack. He drinks deeply, ignoring her, then wipes his mouth with a chalky hand.

'It's like a drug. The adrenalin. The high. There's nothing else like it. Booze, speed, sex... They're all an impure form of the experience you get up there.' He tips the bottle up over his head and lets the dregs trickle down through his hair and over his sunburned face and shoulders.

'It sounds like a dangerous form of escapism. Do you escape up there?'

'What makes you think I'm trying to escape from something?'

'Isn't everybody?'

Looking away, disconcerted by her frank stare, he gestures upwards. 'There's no escape *here*... Too many fucking tourists. It's different in the mountains.'

'How different?'

'Persistent, aren't you?'

'I'd like to know.'

His broad shoulders sag and he exhales. 'I need a piss.'

'Tell me. Please...'

He runs a hand through his damp hair, suddenly tired, exasperated. He shuts his eyes and turns his face up to the sun. 'You stand on a ledge and you're safe, you know you're okay. Your foothold is secure, you've got a good grip, you can even rest for a while... You want to stay there forever. The last thing you want to do is move, lift that foot and place it down somewhere else, somewhere that might give under your weight. But you have to move because if you don't you'll die of exposure... So you move.' He opens his eyes suddenly and

fixes her with a stare, unsmiling. 'That's your ultimate reality, that moment when you decide to risk it. You lift one foot and put it in front of the other and you just don't know... In that moment you are fully alive, because you know you might be about to die. But you just put one foot in front of the other.' He shrugs, embarrassed by his avalanche of words. 'That's how it is. You can't explain.'

'I think you just did.'

He pulls a bright fleece jacket from his rucksack and puts it on, tugging violently at the zip. 'That's our world and it's more real than all this – the tourists, the picnickers, the weekend hikers... This isn't real at all, it's a fucking nightmare! The nine-to-five and the suit and tie, traffic jams and shopping in Tesco's... You wheel your trolley but your mind is planning the next climb, your body is rehearsing the moves. You're just killing time till the next climb.'

'And your next fix of reality...'

He glares at her but she is gazing up at the rockface, her head thrown back. 'What do you do when you come down... to earth?' She smiles. 'I mean, how do you cope with all the... *unreality*?'

'Drinking. Fucking. The groupies are usually very accommodating. Climbing turns some women on, you know.' He runs his eyes over her breasts in an appraising, professional way.

'Really? I'm surprised you find the energy... I suppose it must be in the blood.' He looks puzzled, momentarily at a disadvantage. She extends a hand and touches the damp, blond thatch. 'The Viking ancestry. Rape and pillage as a not very subtle way of celebrating the fact that you're still alive.'

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I dress like a bag lady. The only sensible outfit to wear in this climate is wellies, thermal underwear and several woolly jumpers. No make-up – what use is mascara in perpetual mist and rain? I slap on moisturiser and lip-salve as often as I remember but my complexion still resembles stewed rhubarb. My long hair is proving inconvenient and resembles the heaps of seaweed that are washed up here after a storm. When I go outside I can't see unless it is tied back in a heavy-duty elastic band and the constant tangles are beginning to annoy me. I suppose I could have it cut. I notice none of the younger women on the island have long hair and the elderly have theirs scraped back with vicious hairgrips.

Am I becoming de-sexed? Most of the trappings of townie femininity have gone by the board – shoes with heels, tights, perfume. I live now in my unadorned state, shapeless and colourless; I no longer engage in anything David Attenborough would construe as a mating display. But then as I recall, in Nature it is the male of the species who is supposed to make all the effort – the female just sits back and waits to be entertained. It is rather like that here as there are so few young women. The ones that have resisted the lure of jobs and education on the mainland seem unimpressed by their male peers but the men and boys are polite, eager to please and take trouble over their appearance on social occasions.

I notice such things but they are other, they do not concern me.

But I shall buy a bottle of industrial-strength conditioner next time I'm shopping in Balivanich.

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I popped into Shona's today to ask about the mobile bank. We sat at her kitchen table drinking coffee. She has the most wonderful job. I wish I had it for the sheer pleasure of telling people how I earned a crust. Shona counts corncrakes. She counts them for the RSPB and in summer she goes out at night and counts the number of corncrake calls she hears. She logs the calls and ventures into fields with her torch to locate the birds so that the RSPB can work out what corncrake numbers are doing. The money's pitiful but I think Shona quite likes having time to herself, albeit in the middle of the night. She doesn't appear to sleep very much. She says ten years of getting up to children in the night have cured her of needing anything more than catnaps.

She appears to have four children but it may be fewer, or indeed more – I haven't been able to do a head count as they don't often assemble all together and when they do they tend to rush about, shouting and squealing, making their number seem larger. If Shona and I ever manage to have an uninterrupted conversation I think we'll find we get along just fine.

Every available surface in her kitchen was strewn with toys, felt-tips, newspapers, books, bills, letters, half-eaten biscuits, brown apple cores, hair-slides, exercise books, screwdrivers, spanners, knitting, mending and seed packets. Shona surely never needs to dust as no surface can ever be exposed long enough for dust to accumulate. When the children came in and needed room to eat their snacks and do their homework they swept the table slowly with their arms in

what looked like a practised gesture, until they had cleared some space.

Not surprisingly, Shona is always lamenting that she cannot find things, but Aly, the eldest, a cheerfully precocious ten-year-old with a face like a currant bun, can usually find anything within a couple of minutes. 'Lost Property Office' is apparently the name of a game the children play, a variant of Kim's Game, invented by Shona's younger brother, whom she refers to with obvious affection as 'wee Calum'. Aly always wins. When I got home ('home' – it still sounds strange) it struck me for the first time how odd it is that my house is so tidy apart from my workroom, which always looks as if a particularly chaotic jumble sale has just taken place. I couldn't bear for the workroom to be tidy and I couldn't stand disorder in the sitting room. (The disorder of my mind is quite enough.) The chaos of the workroom is only an illusion in any case. The clutter is controlled. When it reaches a certain height and depth I sweep it aside, as Shona's children did. But I know what is there, hidden under the heaps of scraps, stashed away in shoeboxes and carrier bags. I can put my hands on a gold sequin, a piece of felt or a fragment of antique silk kimono within minutes. Just like Aly.

There's method in my madness.

Two dark curly heads, one large, one small, are bent over an exercise book at the kitchen table. Without lifting her eyes from the ironing Shona announces briskly: 'You've a new neighbour, Calum.'

‘Oh, aye?’ The man points. ‘That’s not how you spell “because”, Aly.’

The boy gapes, first at his book, then at the man with the red pen. ‘It is too!’

‘Trust me. I’ve been spelling that word for over thirty years and it’s never had an “o”.’

‘She’s bought poor Lachlan’s house.’

‘Who has?’

‘Your new neighbour. Rose Leonard.’

Aly sits back in his chair, arms folded, truculent. ‘Well, how *do* you spell it then, Mr. Clever Clogs?’

Shona and the iron hiss. ‘Alasdair, you’ll no’ speak to your uncle like that! I’m sure he has better things to do with his time than help you with your homework.’ She smooths a shirtsleeve carefully, then smooths her voice. ‘You should drop by some time, Calum.’

‘B-e-c-a-u-s-e.’

Aly makes an indeterminate choking noise. ‘You’re kiddin’ me!’

Calum spread his hands and shrugs. ‘Would I joke about *spelling*?’

Shona persists, unregarded. ‘She’s English, mind, but she seems very nice.’

Calum leans back in his chair and announces, ‘Big elephants can always upset small elephants.’

His sister bangs down the iron. ‘And what’s *that* supposed to mean?’

‘Och, I was talking to Aly... That’s how you remember to spell “because”. You take the first letter of all the words in that

sentence – big elephants can always upset small elephants.  
Because. Easy.'

'Cool!'

'Sausage.'

'What?'

'That's your next spelling.'

Aly groans and bows his head over his book. Dragging another shirt from the overflowing wash-basket Shona continues, 'She's an *artist* of some sort. But then they usually are... No doubt you'll have a lot to say to each other. She's a real intellectual, mind.'

'You managed to establish that over a quick cup of Nescafé, did you, Shona? What did she do – offer to lend you her back-numbers of *The New Internationalist*?'

Shona sniffs. 'It was obvious.'

'How, obvious?'

'She has a room full of books and no TV.'

'I've got a room full of books and no TV.'

'Aye... But *you* come over here and watch ours.'

'So what does that make me, Shona?'

'A *pseudo-intellectual*.'

Aly sighs and prods his uncle with his pencil. 'If you don't hurry up and finish testing me on ma spellings we're gonna miss *The Simpsons*.'

Calum places a hand on his heart. 'Et tu, Brute?'

Aly frowns. 'That's no' one of ma spellings, Uncle Calum...'

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I discovered today with something like relief that, no, I am not quite neutered. I finally got to meet 'wee Calum', Shona's brother. Wee Calum is six foot if he's an inch and seemed to take up a lot of room in Shona's kitchen. His designation as 'wee' would appear to be merely a concession to her seniority. He appears to be mid-thirties – could be older I suppose, which means Shona is older than I first thought, but probably still younger than me.

Calum, like many island men, seems to be a jack-of-all-trades, one of them climbing. He teaches at the high school on Benbecula and, in the summer holidays, at an outdoor activity centre on Skye. With the characteristic black curls and startling blue eyes of the Celt, he looks like one of the models in the Hawkshead catalogue, only not so self-absorbed. From the way he moves you can tell – and I think perhaps I would rather not have known – that underneath the layers of wool, fleece and ancient denim is a rangy, athletic body.

My decision to abandon mascara and all other artificial improvements was perhaps precipitate. Could eyelash dye be procured by post, I wonder?

Collecting pebbles on the beach I fill my pockets like a would-be suicide. So many shades of grey, beige, brown, oatmeal, ivory. The odd faint tinge of orange and pink. My eye is caught by some dazzling lime-green seaweed, dramatic against Rastafarian black bladderwrack. I wish I knew the names of the different types of seaweed... I could check in the library. Somewhere new for me to venture. An expedition.

I bring the pebbles indoors to study their colours, sorting them, arranging them in piles. Playgroup play. I reject the more colourful stones and settle for a monochrome selection of greys, browns, taupes, creams and a dazzling white.

Feels right...

Looks wrong...

I pull out fabrics in a similar colour range, drape them, twitch and fiddle, irritated. They look dull, colourless. Like the men's wear department in Marks and Spencer. But the pebbles *don't*. Something is missing. A colour? A texture? Maybe silks would work better, have more life?

I abandon the pebbles, leave them heaped on my work-table, like a memorial cairn.

White sand, crystalline, colourless, slithering between my fingers, dusting my boots; castaway seaweed; scattered shells like broken beads, precious and useless. Elephantine lumps of rock, humbug boulders, striped and stratified, like a pile of collapsed deckchairs.

So much sky...

So much space...

I shrink, entirely irrelevant. My soul expands. Tears mix with salt spray on my cheeks.

A running figure, male, tall, wet hair slicked back by the wind, running easily, naturally, leaving deep, ridged footprints as

his trainers bite into the wet sand. He slows down as he sees another figure: female, dressed in a waxed jacket and wellingtons. Her long thick hair flails around her head, Medusa-like. She scrapes it back behind her ears, bows her head, unaware of the man's approach. She bends down, turns over a few pebbles, picks one up, discards it.

The man jogs to a halt beside her and says something. She looks up alarmed, takes a step backwards. He smiles. 'Hi... I didn't realise it was you, Rose.' She still looks confused, almost distressed. 'We met yesterday. Calum Morrison. Shona's brother.'

The woman peers at him. She registers wet, tanned skin stretched taut over prominent cheekbones; a long, straight nose pinched with cold; eyes of a glacial, glittering blue. She remembers the eyes.

'I'm sorry! I didn't recognise you. You look different today. Your hair's so wet. I remember it as shorter... and very curly.'

'Aye. It was raining a wee while back. But it's no' so bad now.'

'No... Well, not bad for January, anyway!'

'Have you lost something?'

'Oh, no, I'm just beachcombing. Collecting material for my work. Seeking inspiration...'

'I'll leave you in peace then.'

'Don't worry, you're not disturbing me. I was about to call it a day anyway. I'm rather cold so I think I'll head for home...'  
She smiles. 'It still seems odd to call it that... I have to keep reminding myself I'm not on holiday.' A vicious gust of wind

whips long strands of hair into her eyes. She tosses her head back, laughing. 'Some holiday!'

She gathers up all her hair with both hands and whoops with excitement as the wind buffets them. He sees that her head under all the hair is quite small, her face heart-shaped, not young, but firm and unlined. The smile she turns on him is sudden, dazzling, a bright slash across her face. 'It's so beautiful here, it makes me *ache*! Even on a day like this... the space, the scale... Oh, I can't describe it!' She lets down a cascade of hair. 'And you certainly can't photograph it.'

'Aye... You really need a wide-angle lens.'

She rakes the dunes with narrowed eyes, then stares out to sea. 'Actually, I think you need a wide-angle *mind*...'

'We can ease the pain, Rose, you know we can... and you can make something out of it, something positive. You of all people will know how to make a silk purse out of this particularly nasty sow's ear.'

'Ha, ha, very funny.'

'You will survive. You will grow as a result of all this. I've seen it happen many times. Your illness is a terrible gift. It makes you see things differently, it makes you create. Without it you would probably not be an artist, a maker. And if you didn't make things, who would you be? After all, isn't that the reason you stopped taking your medication?'

'But the pain in my head...'

'It will pass, believe me. But you must let us help you.'

'If a dog or a horse suffered like this you would put it down!'

'The fact that you can articulate that thought shows how far you are from being a dog or a horse.'

'But why should I have to suffer more than them?'

'You don't. You have choices, Rose. Very hard ones.'

'What do you mean?'

'You could have killed yourself. If you had slashed your throat instead of your wrists I doubt you would have survived.'

'I wanted to die!'

'You no longer wanted to live.'

'Is there a difference?'

'Oh, yes, a great deal of difference... We can do very little for those who want to die.'

I lay awake for some time last night thinking about Shona's brother, Calum.

It appears I am not going gentle into the good night of a contemplative, blessedly celibate middle-age since I spent some considerable time trying to imagine what it would be like making love with Calum. Having imagined this in various locations and positions (in a tent on a mountainside on Skye, in the dunes with the Atlantic breakers crashing around us, on Shona's kitchen table) I came to the conclusion that it might be very nice indeed.

This will not *do*.

Tomorrow I am going for a long, exhausting walk on the beach. Sexual frustration is not a complication I wish to

incorporate into my new simple life. I am surprised and dismayed. I had thought all that – ‘all that’? Oh, Gavin, *listen* to me! – was long dead. My passions are for my work, for causes (preferably lost), for poetry, for landscape.

My body has slept.

But now Sleeping Beauty wakes...

Is it possible to feel such an animal attraction to a man you have met only twice, who says very little, some of which is in a language you don't understand?

It's not just my body that stirs. Memories too.

When I look at Calum I remember Skye and why I chose to live here instead. The landscape here on North Uist is female: pale, undulating, yielding. There are no cliffs or mountains, no wide rivers, no great heights or depths, not even many trees. There are sparkling lochans like jewels, wild flowers scattered on the dunes like bright beads, burns that chatter and gurgle like Shona's children. I feel safe here, even in the teeth of a gale. To be sure, the wind and sea seem male, gnawing away at the land, occasionally beating her into submission, but they come and they go, like the fishermen.

When I stayed on Skye the world seemed very different. I walked in a masculine country of hard edges and angles, of ridges and gulfs. The upward thrust of the Cuillin mountains, the perilous cliffs and precipices seemed male and exciting. Disturbing. Sexual. I felt small and helpless, excluded and overwhelmed, but that too was exciting. I was alone on Skye but I wanted desperately to make love. I tried to think who it was that I wanted to love. Certainly not Gavin.

Then I realised there was nobody. No body. I wanted to  
fuck the land. The whole fucking island.

But instead I came here.

Damn you, Calum. I had almost forgotten.