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# MALCOLM

Cross and Crown - Book 2

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
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## Chapter 1

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### *Malcolm*

**Y**esterday turned out much differently than anticipated, causing me to reflect on recent events as I perused the gallery in my father's estate. My father, Henry Fitzwilliam, was from a long line of Crown supporters whose origins started in Sussex, England, several hundred years ago.

I slowed my ambling to gaze into the eyes of the first Fitzwilliam, Sir William of Southampton, and peered at the long line of portraits to the current Fitzwilliam, Henry, my father. But I was not his son by birth. I had come to learn that he was my adopted father and the woman I'd called Mother, his wife.

My birth mother was now comfortably stationed in the Edinburgh Clinic, a short drive from my home. Staring into the warm eyes of my stepfather, I wondered how my life had recently become such a clusterfuck.

I plunked down on one of the many chaises and stared at

the wall of legitimate Fitzwilliam men, my mind drifting back to that fateful day not long ago when I met my mother.

*The day was chilly, with a steady drizzle of rain that had been coming down all day. I rushed from the gym to my car and found a woman blocking the driver's door.*

*"Hello, John."*

*"Sorry, lady, you have the wrong man. My name is Malcolm."*

She wouldn't move, but stood firmly and regarded me with an uncomfortable intensity. *"You are tall, so very tall, almost as tall as yer brother. Your father is short, and you don't look a thing like him."* She was correct in that I didn't look a thing like my father and, until recently, had never questioned it. But I didn't have a brother and was beginning to wonder if the woman was on drugs.

*"You look like your real father, not that short pretender, Fitzwilliam."* Her words stirred a recent memory, one of my father's best mates, Sir Robert Campbell.

*I had only seen the man a few times, and something about him had struck a chord every time, although I couldn't put my finger on what exactly. Until I looked at myself in a mirror hanging on the wall outside of the den. Both men were sitting across from each other in leather armchairs.*

*Sir Robert's coloring was different, but his build, his posture, reminded me of myself. I looked back at him and then the mirror, the unthinkable dawning in my consciousness like a nightmare come to life.*

*I looked at Henry, my father, and knew that I wasn't his. It was like a bolt of understanding had hit me, and when I glanced back at his friend, Robert, I knew I was his.*

*"I'm yer mother, Annie. You were born John, and Sir Robert Campbell Lord of Roswell is yer father."*

*I stood in the drizzle, no longer feeling the cold, no longer feeling anything. "Perhaps we should talk." Maybe she was crazy. Maybe what I saw in the mirror several weeks earlier was a figment. But I needed to hear what this woman had to say regardless.*

## Malcolm

*"Come, I know a place we can talk." I opened the passenger door for her and drove to a secluded spot to hear her story.*

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"Malcolm!" Henry came around the corner at the end of the gallery. "There you are," he said, coming to a stop in front of me. Are you ready, Malcolm, as it's time to go."

"As ready as I'll ever be," I sighed in resignation. Just yesterday, I had kidnapped my half-brother's girlfriend. Today was the first day of whatever was to come next, and I didn't know how to feel about any of it.

Henry approached me as one would an injured animal and gently placed a hand on my shoulder. "You are a good man, Malcolm, don't fret. What's done is done, and we can't fix past events, but we can move forward.

"If I could do things over again, I would. I should have talked to you when I first discovered the truth about Sir Robert. I should have seen that Annie was off her rocker, and although correct about some things, her jaded perspective was terrifying to see when she finally became unhinged. She really holds a grudge against Laughlin, and none of this is his fault."

"Aye," Henry answered, "Annie has problems, and with the other two dead, she needed someone new to take her rage out on. Regarding her jaded perspective, Laughlin has seen her every day of his life and didn't notice, either. It stands to reason that Annie must be a good actress or very ill. Regardless of how her treatment and hopefully subsequent cure goes, you still have a life to live."

"You are right again... Do I still call you Father?"

Henry's face became serious as he glared at me. "You have been and will always be my son and heir. I raised you and made you mine. Of course, you are calling me Father." I smiled at the vehemence in his tone.

"All right, no need to get American on me, da." I used my old name for him, which brought an immediate smile to his face. We left his estate for the short drive to Laughlin's castle, and as each mile brought us closer, I felt the horror of my actions more acutely. Could I face them? I didn't see how we could move forward, as kidnapping is a pretty serious crime.

We passed through the gate and drove the few hundred feet to the circular driveway. I wanted to hide when I saw Laughlin and Suri waiting for us on the steps with smiles that seemed to hold no nefarious intentions toward me. Maybe it was a trick, and they were acting as Annie had been. We'd soon find out.

Henry embraced Laughlin and took a moment to properly greet Suri, as the last time he saw her, she had been bound, a kidnapped victim of my mother's crazy plan. I stood back, waiting my turn and seizing the moment to observe both my brother and his woman.

She was gorgeous and not in that American way that had become so popular. This woman was curvy and earthy and a good match for my brother. He was built like me but broader, and I could tell from his stance that he did more than *workout*. He looked like a man who was prepared for anything, a fighter, a true warrior.

His body, while not rigid, seemed in constant motion even while standing still. He was on guard, and I wondered if he had seen action at some point. Beside him, Suri was firm but soft and inviting, both in body and mannerisms. They were the epitome of the yin and yang symbol on the gym wall where I worked out.

When Suri's eyes turned to mine, I saw a world of emotions there. I'd scared her, and although I would never have hurt her, she hadn't known that last night.

"Suri," I said, reaching for her hand. "I am so very sorry, lass. I have no way to prove that my intentions were never to

hurt you, but maybe with time, you will come to learn my character and see for yourself that I am truly sorry and not a threat to you."

She didn't let go of my hand and continued to gaze into my eyes. I began to feel the heat emanating from her hold on me and wondered what was going on. She continued to hold my hands and closed her eyes. When she opened them, she smiled up at me. "I accept your apology, Malcolm, and I believe that had push come to shove, you would not have hurt me."

Laughlin let out a breath, I assumed, one of relief, making me wonder what had just occurred. "Please, come inside, we have much to discuss, and lunch is ready."

I was surprised when we were led to a dining room, instead of his office, and found the others from last night present as well. I had been questioned by two of the men from the previous night, Eddy and Geoff, who were both at the dining table and wore friendly expressions.

"Sir Henry, Malcolm, these are our Canadian friends, Geoff, his son Adam, and his wife, Montana. Their friend and head of security, Eddy, his team, J2, Mike, Luke Rob, and Steve. And you may know that big ox sitting at the end, Declan Campbell."

There was a pause, then Laughlin continued. "Gentlemen, and lady," he said, nodding his head at Montana, "this is my brother, Malcolm, and his father, Henry. Now let's eat."

We took our places. I was sitting beside Laughlin and across from Suri. Henry was at the other end, next to Declan and across from Geoff.

Divide and conquer. I had to admire my brother's tactics. He would learn more through casual dining than placing either Henry or myself in the hot seat. From the other end of the table, we heard Eddy teasing Montana about passing out in the hot tub. Her eyes found Suri's, and

an unspoken communication passed between the two women.

I had been watching them at the hot tub last night. That was how I was able to kidnap Suri. She'd had her hands on Montana's back, and the woman had laid down her head and fallen asleep. At least that was how it looked from my hiding spot. I glanced across the table at Suri, who was now regarding me.

She had remarkable eyes, open, with an odd assortment of colors that seemed to shift from grey to green constantly. I could tell from the way she looked at me that I was not the only one thinking about the hot tub incident. Whatever I had witnessed, I hoped I would soon learn what it was. The conversation was pretty general throughout the meal, and once the dishes were cleared away, Laughlin stood and drew Suri to her feet.

"I'm glad you are all here, as I have an announcement to make. This extraordinary woman has agreed to be my wife." A hint of color rose in Suri's cheeks at Laughlin's pronouncement. "She has made it clear that we will not have a wedding without our Canadian friends."

Grins and backslapping from the assembled guests went on for a moment.

"We are aware that you are all busy, and we are hoping you can all come back, and as such, the future Mrs. Campbell, Lady Roswell, is happy to accommodate."

"Why wait? We are here now, and there is no time like the present," Montana suggested with a glint of mischief in her eyes. "Besides, we planned on being here for a bit. What's a few more days?"

Laughlin and Suri exchanged looks. I was sure he was hoping for sooner rather than later.

"Adam and I have a beautiful chapel you may want to use for the occasion." Montana sweetened the pot. "And Declan's



mother, Mrs. C, can have it readied with heather and wildflowers in a day. Then you don't have to do anything but focus on yourself."

I gazed at my brother and soon-to-be sister-in-law. Would they bow to the pressure? I was curious to watch how Laughlin handled things. Henry had mentioned that Laughlin was formidable in both business and his personal life.

"We will take that under advisement, Montana. Thank you for your generous offer." He finished with a slight bow, ever the gentleman. "Now, if you will excuse me, I need to acquaint myself better with Malcolm."

His eyes traveled to Geoff, who was watching Laughlin almost as intensely as I was. That man was dangerous, I decided, and was glad he was one of the good guys. At least I hoped he was one of the good guys. In truth, I didn't know any of these people well enough to know.

"Geoff, perhaps you and Declan can talk a little more in-depth with Henry regarding our unsolved questions and see if we can learn any more as to the bigger plan."

"Of course, gentlemen, let's head to the meeting room." The three excused themselves and left with a carafe of coffee.

Montana and Suri regarded each other again, seeming to speak without using words. Suri kissed Laughlin on the cheek. "Montana and I will be at the lagoon if you need me."

He pulled her to him and kissed her deeply before letting her go. When he did, he told her to behave, and there was a gleam in his eyes that made me wonder what went on between the two of them in private.

Laughlin watched her walk out of the room. I think we all did, for Suri had one of the finest asses I'd ever seen. Laughlin was a lucky man. When he turned to me, his eyes shuttered. I imagine that was a force of habit he'd learned from our father, Sir Robert.

"Come, let's go somewhere we can talk." Laughlin rose,

and I followed him out of the dining room and down several connecting hallways until we sat in a garden room that overlooked the lagoon. He was keeping an eye on Suri, and I didn't blame him. If I had such a remarkable woman I was in love with, I would do the same.

"How are you feeling after all that transpired last night?" He was asking me how I felt? How very curious, as I was the bad guy.

"Honestly, I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop. I can't imagine anything positive coming of this, but I do appreciate the show of camaraderie at lunch, thank you."

Laughlin reclined in a vast antique leather chair that did nothing to dwarf his six-foot-five-inch frame. His eyes gave away nothing; he could have been thinking anything, even murdering me where I sat, and I would have no idea. "Malcolm, let's begin again. He sat forward and reached out his hand. I sat forward and took it in my grasp. "Hello, I am Laughlin Campbell. It is very nice to meet you at long last, brother."