

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

"Highland Beginning"

- new global warming and climate change short fiction by Rob Hopcott

The Scots Pine glades of my Highlands valley glowed green and gold beneath me in the gentle Spring sunshine.

Strongly fortified against the social consequences of global warming and climate change, our small log cabin perched like a sentinel on the valley's edge .

5 The resinous wood once used for masts and timbers of Scottish built ships had been hard to cut but the strong balcony that now stood proudly in front of our new home was like the bridge of an ancient galleon and ideal for viewing the fortifications below.

10 It was 9.30 in the morning, 2015. Methane flares arced between clouds above the Isle of Skye. Last week, Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh had exploded into flames. Most English and Welsh cities had been lost to the food riots the previous month. News from further afield only came from word of mouth through short wave amateur radio. There was no world news.

15 But we were safe. Our single story log cabin merged securely into the tree lined hillside of the Western Scottish Highlands. We were armed. The rock strewn hillside below formed a perfect killing zone. Electricity from our well camouflaged windmill with it's large array of batteries was instantly transferable to the lethal electric fences below.

Natural spring water bubbled up within our stockade. Trout and other fish swam contentedly in a protective artificial moat around our home until needed to sustain the family as food.

20 They all laughed at me when I bought this land. Melanie, my wife, showed Jim, the next door neighbour and friend, my detailed map of the fortifications. Jim said I was a dreamer who had nightmares and Melanie's kids put the map on their dart board for target practice.

They totally believed in the suburban idyll. I still remember Jim laughing "See you soon", as he waved us off on our Highland holiday. This was my last ditch effort to get us here ahead of the fuel riots that I'd secretly predicted but dared not mention.

25 But global warming proved for real. The floods that now covered most of the UK lowlands were real. Millions of angry, displaced and rioting middle class Britons were real. Now they realized they'd all been wrong but, for most of them, it was too late.

30 The wooden balcony creaked as Melanie joined me. Slim, blond and pampered, she was a designer babe. A party girl who loved shopping. Completely gorgeous in her totally inappropriate high heels, careful makeup and cocktail dress. Even the crossbow that I taught her to use yesterday looked sexy when she was holding it.

She pecked me on the lips, temporarily distracting me from my survey of our defences which was not a good thing because I just thought I'd seen some movement below.

"I think we may have unwelcome visitors, dear," I said cautiously.

She wrapped her arms around me again.

35 "Rubbish, It's all in your over-fertile imagination."

She rubbed herself against me some more, demanding my undivided attention.

Cooing huskily, she said.

"At least, in this God forsaken place, a girl should get a cuddle now and again."

She slipped her hand inside my pocket persuasively.

40 "Cuddles are all right as long as we are safe."

Removing her hand, I swept the hillside below with my binoculars. Unaccountably, the hairs on the back of my neck were prickling. I was now completely sure that there were people below.

"I'd better load the crossbow," my voice rasped with tension.

This was the moment I'd dreaded. The people were probably ordinary and decent but the stockade was built for one family. One perfectly formed social group to live in harmony with the countryside. Maybe later on we might have been able to expand but, in these dark days, survival came first and survival would be hard.

5 I could now see a line of people struggling up the hill. One man and three children. He had a bushy beard and his kids were skinny with clothes in tatters. They moved wearily as if they'd travelled on foot for many miles.

It occurred to me that the children were the same age as mine and, absurdly, could even be family material for when my children grew into maturity.

10 But, in my carefully conceived master plan, no man must be allowed to join my encampment. To survive, my control had to be absolute.

Melanie suddenly screamed excitedly.

"I think it's Jim."

15 She reached over, clicked off the electric fencing and started jumping up and down, waving her welcome.

The prickling at the back of my neck was joined by an icy chill down my back. It was crystal clear what I had to do.

"I don't care who he is. He's not coming here. If you want, his children can stay, even though they will be a burden. I don't care if it is Jim or not, he must go. I'll shoot him, if I have to."

20 To show my determination, I primed my cross bow with a bolt and placed it within easy reach.

Cupping my hands around my mouth, I yelled:

"Go away, you are not welcome here!"

Letting them leave would still mean that they could tell others who could return and attack. But killing them in cold blood would be too hard.

25 "Harry, it's Jim, your old mate Jim," came the weary voice from below. "Let us come up"

"I'm sorry Jim, times have changed. Send your kids up, if you like, but there's only room for one man up here and the jobs taken. You laughed at me. You had your fun. You made your bed and now you've got to lie in it. There's no room for friendship these days. Sorry!"

30 My throat was dry. I could hardly speak. Even though he'd been my best friend for years, he'd always been a bit too friendly with Melanie. Sometimes, he and his kids seemed to spend more time with Melanie and her kids than I did. Especially as more and more of my time was taken building the Highland retreat.

A couple of times, I'd even secretly wondered whether he and Melanie were having an affair.

35 I reached over to the bright red switch which would reactivate the electric fencing but Melanie suddenly pushed my hand away. Her face had become grim. Her blue eyes were ice cold and the crossbow was suddenly cradled in her shoulder and pointing at me.

"I'm truly sorry, Harry. I didn't want to have to do this." Her voice was even, lacking in emotion, almost as if she didn't really care.

"So my suspicions were right that there was something between you and Jim. How could you, when I was working so hard to look after you and the family."

40 "I could because I had to," Melanie stated flatly. "Like you said everything is now changed. The whole world's got a new beginning."

The crossbow arrow caught me in the throat. Melanie dragged me whimpering and retching across the balcony and with a scream that seemed full of hate pushed me down into the waterfall below.

45 I lay on the rocks besides the waterfall still alive for some time listening to the sounds of their reunions above.

Perhaps Melanie was right.

Everything now was a new beginning.

The End

<http://www.onlineflashfiction.com/2007/10/new-highland-beginnings-by-rob-hopcott.html> (April 2009)