

Being a scottish crofter



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I wake with the dawn, pulling on a slicker over my thick wool sweater and boots against the cold rain falling steadily from the sky. Walking through the rain to my sister's home across the croft we'd split evenly between the family members when I'd been able to purchase the land as my own, I brace myself for a confrontation with my mad brother-in-law.

From South Uist (51), I've never trusted him and don't quite know why my sister had married him. He brought less with him than we already had and took in more in food than was his share.

With my hands twisted most days and unmovable, I'd hoped that my baby sister would marry a young man full of ambition. Instead, she has married someone with no past or future and with no respect. Without a son, he was my hope but now I will just have to wait for one of my girls to grow big enough to help share in the burden. Perhaps, by that time I will no longer have the sheep. I can smell the sea air, and hear the waves being pushed against the rocks along the shore. Despite the rain, the sound of the sea blankets the whole of this side of the island.

With the steep cliffs, I keep the sheep away and take them to the old community grazing area to eat the seaweed (53), but still my ear strains to catch the sea's strangely beautiful music. My sister meets me at the door to tell me her husband will be along shortly. I turn and walk back towards my own home, seeing the wife moving about as she readies herself and the children for the day ahead. They will help her to harvest some of the potatoes (68) growing in a patch behind the house before leaving to be educated in the town proper.

Potatoes aren't much but enough to keep our bellies full for a couple months as long as none of them are rotten or soggy (65) as they were last year at this time. Crofting is never an easy life but it is made harder still when there are too few hands to work so little land, even if the land is finally your own. We are still our own state, but what that means is slowly eroding as more and more changes are made, some for the better others for the worse