



Left, Sir Ian Anstruther as a boy. Below, his aunt, Joan Campbell, who bought him from his mother for £500. Right, Inveraray Castle



heir today, gone tomorrow

Eleanor Anstruther, descendant of the Dukes of Argyll, was astonished to learn that her father had been sold for £500

My paternal ancestors were people of great privilege. Descended from the Dukes of Argyll, my grandmother Enid, her sister Joan and brother Ivar grew up at the turn of the 19th century in Inveraray Castle, the ducal seat which had been given to their family temporarily by their uncle, the 9th Duke.

Inveraray is a magical place. On the shores of Loch Fyne, it's the stuff of fairy tales with its turrets and fluttering flags. The 9th Duke passed the care of the castle to his younger brother, my great-grandfather, Lord George Campbell. In 1879, George had married Sybil Lascelles Alexander, an heiress who was an indomitable force. Together they planned for their daughters to marry well and their son, Ivar, to inherit his

mother's estate. Those best-laid plans, they're bound to shatter.

As a child, I was aware of the grandeur of my family history; a bust of the 8th Duke, known to us as the Marble Duke, sat in our summer house in France, and the walls of our family home in London were hung with landscapes of Argyll. I remember being allowed to hold a pair of gloves worn by Queen Victoria, kept in a hidden gallery, and staring at the oil paintings of my ancestors, trying to see myself in their eyes. Equally, details of the early life of my father, Sir Ian Anstruther, were not hidden from us; the story of his childhood was a myth so familiar I don't even remember when I first learnt it. We knew he had been sold by his mother, Enid, to his Aunt Joan for the sum of £500 – about £27,000 in today's money.

Enid and Joan didn't like each other. They were cut from different cloth: Enid was wayward and difficult; Joan was gay, never married, easygoing and fun. In a sense they were both rebels. But where Joan was careful that her rebellion

didn't offend Society, Enid made no such provision.

We knew my father was brought up by his beloved Aunt Joan – her bohemian influence shone through, from the Turkish slippers he wore in the evenings to his humour, intellect and passion for the arts. But he never spoke of his mother and I never knew precisely what had happened to him.

Born in 1922, my father moved in a world of his own. Always impeccably dressed, he valued his privacy above all else, hated unexpected guests or fuss of any kind, and would quietly slip away from lunch when it got too loud. But when I decided to pursue his story and follow the scent of something still in our blood, I had the chance to get closer to him and learn about his life. Every day I read and made notes at the table in the studio where he worked. Slowly I was uncovering a secret that had haunted him.

What I discovered was a catastrophic chain of events that had split the family apart. Months before the outbreak of the First World War, the 9th Duke had died and his nephew, the 10th Duke, had taken up his seat at Inveraray. The Campbells were forced to move across the Loch to Strachur House. Lord George became gravely ill with stomach cancer, Ivar had gone to the frontline and Joan showed no sign of wishing to marry anyone. Meanwhile, Enid had become secretly engaged to a man far below her in status and fortune, then changed her mind about the marriage.

It had been a folly she'd hoped to forget, but when his mother announced it in *The Times*, she was forced by her mother to save face

and marry him. Two years later Ivar was killed in Mesopotamia and so, on top of an unhappy marriage, the weight of family duty fell to her. Enid was banished to a villa in the Home Counties to produce an heir. These were times ruled by Edwardian duty, and families like mine put inheritance above all else – they had to do as they were told.

Enid began to unravel. After a breakdown and divorce, she was forced to give up her son, who went to live with Joan, but Enid later decided she wanted him back. A custody battle raged on painfully for years, culminating in his sale. Its lasting impact was a man who needed absolute order in his life, a control that he had lacked in his childhood. He shored himself up against chaos, the messy business of emotions put away. Until I asked him about his mother, I'd never even known her name.

Some years after his sale, my father was swept up in the Second World War. He survived and spent the following years in Washington as Private Secretary to the British Ambassador. On Joan's death, he returned to England and became a writer. He published seven works of non-fiction and became Vice President of the London Library. He lived quietly and privately, and taught us to do the same. Yet when I asked if I might write his story, and that of his mother and aunt, he gave his blessing. He had lived in its shadow too long. He was a writer and he understood. The first question I asked was, 'What would you say to your mother if she was here now?' His reply was instant. 'Read my books.' He would say the same of this.

A Perfect Explanation (£12.99, Salt) by Eleanor Anstruther is out 15 March