

DIANA  
GABALDON

The  
Outlander  
Series

*Diana Gabaldon*

**The Outlander Series**

**Outlander**

**Dragonfly in Amber**

**Voyager**

**Drums of Autumn**

**The Fiery Cross**

**A Breath of Snow and Ashes**

**An Echo in the Bone**



Dellacorte Press

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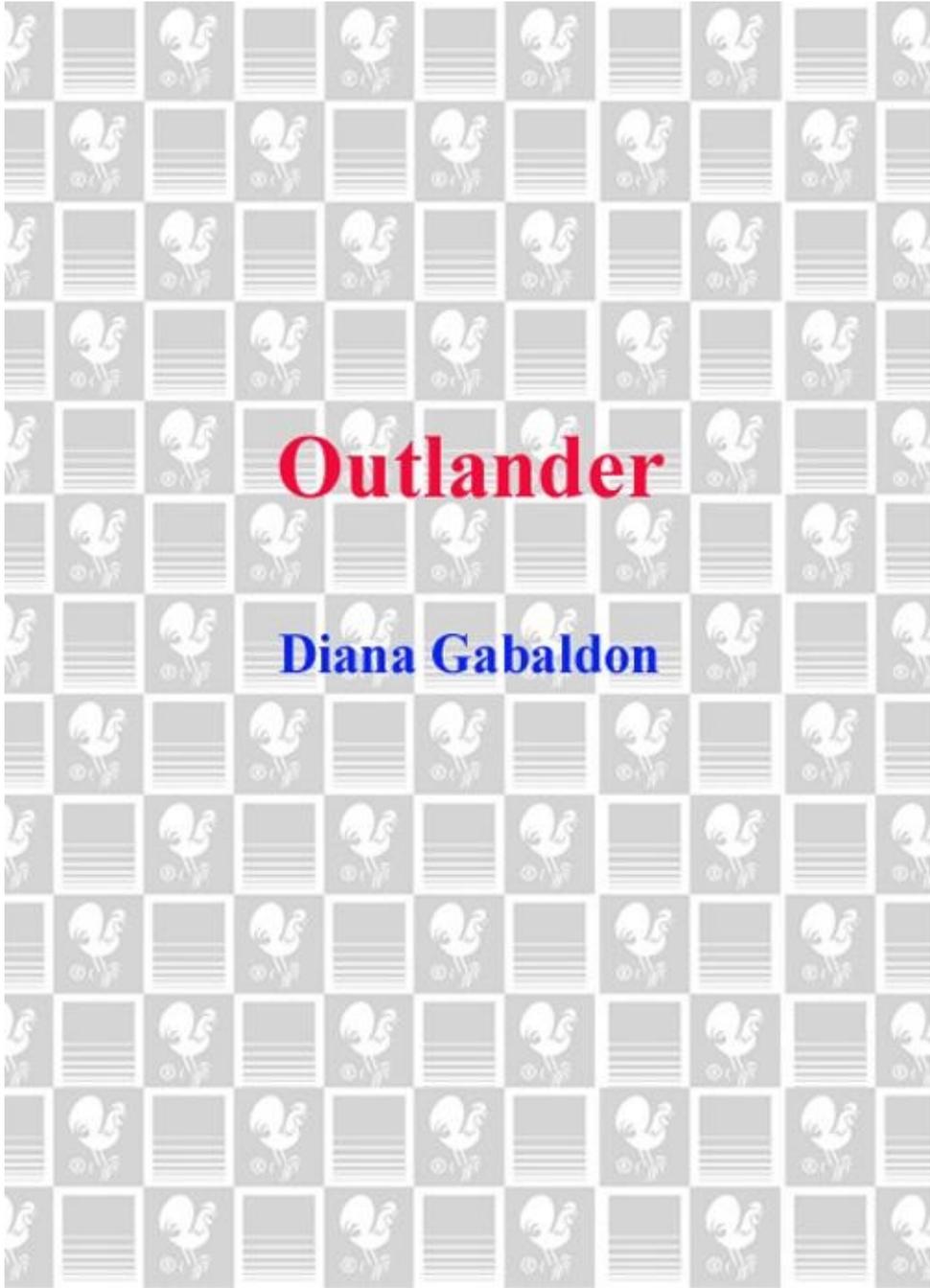
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**Outlander**

**Diana Gabaldon**

DIANA  
GABALDON



OUTLANDER

DELTA TRADE PAPERBACKS

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A Delta Book

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People disappear all the time. Ask any policeman. Better yet, ask a journalist. Disappearances are bread-and-butter to journalists.

Young girls run away from home. Young children stray from their parents and are never seen again. Housewives reach the end of their tether and take the grocery money and a taxi to the station. International financiers change their names and vanish into the smoke of imported cigars.

Many of the lost will be found, eventually, dead or alive. Disappearances, after all, have explanations.

Usually.

## PART ONE



*Inverness, 1945*

## A NEW BEGINNING

It wasn't a very likely place for disappearances, at least at first glance. Mrs. Baird's was like a thousand other Highland bed-and-breakfast establishments in 1945; clean and quiet, with fading floral wallpaper, gleaming floors, and a coin-operated hot-water geyser in the lavatory. Mrs. Baird herself was squat and easygoing, and made no objection to Frank lining her tiny rose-sprigged parlor with the dozens of books and papers with which he always traveled.

I met Mrs. Baird in the front hall on my way out. She stopped me with a pudgy hand on my arm and patted at my hair.

"Dear me, Mrs. Randall, ye canna go out like that! Here, just let me tuck that bit in for ye. There! That's better. Ye know, my cousin was tellin' me about a new perm she tried, comes out beautiful and holds like a dream; perhaps ye should try that kind next time."

I hadn't the heart to tell her that the waywardness of my light brown curls was strictly the fault of nature, and not due to any dereliction on the part of the permanent-wave manufacturers. Her own tightly marceled waves suffered from no such perversity.

"Yes, I'll do that, Mrs. Baird," I lied. "I'm just going down to the village to meet Frank. We'll be back for tea." I ducked out the door and down the path before she could detect any further defects in my undisciplined appearance. After four years as a Royal Army nurse, I was enjoying the escape from uniforms and rationing by indulging in brightly printed light cotton dresses, totally unsuited for rough walking through the heather.

Not that I had originally planned to do a lot of that; my thoughts ran more on the lines of sleeping late in the mornings, and long, lazy afternoons in bed with Frank, not sleeping. However, it was difficult to maintain the proper mood of languorous romance with Mrs. Baird industriously Hoovering away outside our door.

"That must be the dirtiest bit of carpet in the entire Scottish Highlands," Frank had observed that morning as we lay in bed listening to the ferocious roar of the vacuum in the hallway.

"Nearly as dirty as our landlady's mind," I agreed. "Perhaps we should have gone to Brighton after all." We had chosen the Highlands as a place to holiday before Frank took up his appointment as a history professor at Oxford, on the grounds that Scotland had been somewhat less touched by the physical horrors of war than the rest of Britain, and was less susceptible to the frenetic postwar gaiety that infected more popular vacation spots.

And without discussing it, I think we both felt that it was a symbolic place to reestablish our marriage; we had been married and spent a two-day honeymoon in the Highlands, shortly before the outbreak of war seven years before. A peaceful refuge in which to rediscover each other, we thought, not realizing that, while golf and fishing are Scotland's most popular outdoor sports, gossip is the most popular indoor sport. And when it rains as much as it does in Scotland, people spend a lot of time indoors.

"Where are you going?" I asked, as Frank swung his feet out of bed.

"I'd hate the dear old thing to be disappointed in us," he answered. Sitting up on the side of the ancient bed, he bounced gently up and down, creating a piercing rhythmic squeak. The Hoovering in the hall stopped abruptly. After a minute or two of bouncing, he gave a loud, theatrical groan and collapsed backward with a twang of protesting springs. I giggled helplessly into a pillow, so as not to disturb the breathless silence outside.

Frank waggled his eyebrows at me. "You're supposed to moan ecstatically, not giggle," he admonished in a whisper. "She'll think I'm not a good lover."

"You'll have to keep it up for longer than that, if you expect ecstatic moans," I answered. "Two minutes doesn't deserve any more than a giggle."

"Inconsiderate little wench. I came here for a rest, remember?"

"Lazybones. You'll never manage the next branch on your family tree unless you show a bit more industry than that."

Frank's passion for genealogy was yet another reason for choosing the Highlands. According to one of the filthy scraps of paper he lugged to and fro, some tiresome ancestor of his had had something to do with something or other in this region back in the middle of the eighteenth—or was it seventeenth?—century.

"If I end as a childless stub on my family tree, it will undoubtedly be the fault of our untiring hostess out there. After all, we've been married almost eight years. Little Frank Jr. will be quite legitimate without being conceived in the presence of a witness."

"If he's conceived at all," I said pessimistically. We had been disappointed yet again the week before leaving for our Highland retreat.

"With all this bracing fresh air and healthy diet? How could we help but manage here?" Dinner the night before had been herring, fried. Lunch had been herring, pickled. And the pungent scent now wafting up the stairwell strongly intimated that breakfast was to be herring, kippered.

"Unless you're contemplating an encore performance for the edification of Mrs. Baird," I suggested, "you'd better get dressed. Aren't you meeting that parson at ten?" The Rev. Dr. Reginald Wakefield, vicar of the local parish, was to provide some rivetingly fascinating baptismal registers for Frank's inspection, not to mention the glittering prospect that he might have unearthed some moldering army despatches or somesuch that mentioned the notorious ancestor.

"What's the name of that great-great-great-great-grandfather of yours again?" I asked. "The one that mucked about here during one of the Risings? I can't remember if it was Willy or Walter."

"Actually, it was Jonathan." Frank took my complete disinterest in family history placidly, but remained always on guard, ready to seize the slightest expression of inquisitiveness as an excuse for telling me all facts known to date about the early

Randalls and their connections. His eyes assumed the fervid gleam of the fanatic lecturer as he buttoned his shirt.

“Jonathan Wolverton Randall—Wolverton for his mother’s uncle, a minor knight from Sussex. He was, however, known by the rather dashing nickname of ‘Black Jack,’ something he acquired in the army, probably during the time he was stationed here.” I flopped facedown on the bed and affected to snore. Ignoring me, Frank went on with his scholarly exegesis.

“He bought his commission in the mid-thirties—1730s, that is—and served as a captain of dragoons. According to those old letters Cousin May sent me, he did quite well in the army. Good choice for a second son, you know; his younger brother followed tradition as well by becoming a curate, but I haven’t found out much about him yet. Anyway, Jack Randall was highly commended by the Duke of Sandringham for his activities before and during the ’45—the second—Jacobite Rising, you know,” he amplified for the benefit of the ignorant amongst his audience, namely me. “You know, Bonnie Prince Charlie and that lot?”

“I’m not entirely sure the Scots realize they lost that one,” I interrupted, sitting up and trying to subdue my hair. “I distinctly heard the barman at that pub last night refer to us as Sassenachs.”

“Well, why not?” said Frank equably. “It only means ‘Englishman,’ after all, or at worst, ‘outlander,’ and we’re all of that.”

“I know what it means. It was the tone I objected to.”

Frank searched through the bureau drawer for a belt. “He was just annoyed because I told him the ale was weak. I told him the true Highland brew requires an old boot to be added to the vat, and the final product to be strained through a well-worn undergarment.”

“Ah, that accounts for the amount of the bill.”

“Well, I phrased it a little more tactfully than that, but only because the Gaelic language hasn’t got a specific word for drawers.”

I reached for a pair of my own, intrigued. “Why not? Did the ancient Gaels not wear undergarments?”

Frank leered. “You’ve never heard that old song about what a Scotsman wears beneath his kilts?”

“Presumably not gents’ knee-length step-ins,” I said dryly. “Perhaps I’ll go out in search of a local kilt-wearer whilst you’re cavorting with vicars and ask him.”

“Well, do try not to get arrested, Claire. The dean of St. Giles College wouldn’t like it at all.”

---

In the event, there were no kilt-wearers loitering about the town square or patronizing the shops that surrounded it. There were a number of other people there, though, mostly housewives of the Mrs. Baird type, doing their daily shopping. They were garrulous and gossipy, and their solid, print-clad presences filled the shops with a cozy warmth; a buttress against the cold mist of the morning outdoors.

With as yet no house of my own to keep, I had little that needed buying, but enjoyed myself in browsing among the newly replenished shelves, for the pure joy of seeing lots of things for sale again. It had been a long time of rationing, of doing without the simple things like soap and eggs, and even longer without the minor luxuries of life,

like L'Heure Bleu cologne.

My gaze lingered on a shop window filled with household goods—embroidered tea cloths and cozies, pitchers and glasses, a stack of quite homely pie tins, and a set of three vases.

I had never owned a vase in my life. During the war years, I had, of course, lived in the nurses' quarters, first at Pembroke Hospital, later at the field station in France. But even before that, we had lived nowhere long enough to justify the purchase of such an item. Had I had such a thing, I reflected, Uncle Lamb would have filled it with potsherds long before I could have got near it with a bunch of daisies.

Quentin Lambert Beauchamp. "Q" to his archaeological students and his friends. "Dr. Beauchamp" to the scholarly circles in which he moved and lectured and had his being. But always Uncle Lamb to me.

My father's only brother, and my only living relative at the time, he had been landed with me, aged five, when my parents were killed in a car crash. Poised for a trip to the Middle East at the time, he had paused in his preparations long enough to make the funeral arrangements, dispose of my parents' estates, and enroll me in a proper girls' boarding school. Which I had flatly refused to attend.

Faced with the necessity of prying my chubby fingers off the car's door handle and dragging me by the heels up the steps of the school, Uncle Lamb, who hated personal conflict of any kind, had sighed in exasperation, then finally shrugged and tossed his better judgment out the window along with my newly purchased round straw boater.

"Ruddy thing," he muttered, seeing it rolling merrily away in the rearview mirror as we roared down the drive in high gear. "Always loathed hats on women, anyway." He had glanced down at me, fixing me with a fierce glare.

"One thing," he said, in awful tones. "You are *not* to play dolls with my Persian grave figurines. Anything else, but not that. Got it?"

I had nodded, content. And had gone with him to the Middle East, to South America, to dozens of study sites throughout the world. Had learned to read and write from the drafts of journal articles, to dig latrines and boil water, and to do a number of other things not suitable for a young lady of gentle birth—until I had met the handsome, dark-haired historian who came to consult Uncle Lamb on a point of French philosophy as it related to Egyptian religious practice.

Even after our marriage, Frank and I led the nomadic life of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Officers Training and the Intelligence Unit at M16, and me to nurses training. Though we had been married nearly eight years, the new house in Oxford would be our first real home.

Tucking my handbag firmly under my arm, I marched into the shop and bought the vases.

---

I met Frank at the crossing of the High Street and the Gereside Road and we turned up it together. He raised his eyebrows at my purchases.

"Vases?" He smiled. "Wonderful. Perhaps now you'll stop putting flowers in my books."

"They aren't flowers, they're specimens. And it was you who suggested I take up botany. To occupy my mind, now that I've not got nursing to do," I reminded him.

“True.” He nodded good-humoredly. “But I didn’t realize I’d have bits of greenery dropping out into my lap every time I opened a reference. What was that horrible crumbly brown stuff you put in Tuscum and Banks?”

“Groutweed. Good for hemorrhoids.”

“Preparing for my imminent old age, are you? Well, how very thoughtful of you, Claire.”

We pushed through the gate, laughing, and Frank stood back to let me go first up the narrow front steps.

Suddenly he caught my arm. “Look out! You don’t want to step in it.”

I lifted my foot gingerly over a large brownish-red stain on the top step.

“How odd,” I said. “Mrs. Baird scrubs the steps down every morning; I’ve seen her. What do you suppose that can be?”

Frank leaned over the step, sniffing delicately.

“Offhand, I should say that it’s blood.”

“Blood!” I took a step back into the entryway. “Whose?” I glanced nervously into the house. “Do you suppose Mrs. Baird’s had an accident of some kind?” I couldn’t imagine our immaculate landlady leaving bloodstains to dry on her doorstep unless some major catastrophe had occurred, and wondered just for a moment whether the parlor might be harboring a crazed ax-murderer, even now preparing to spring out on us with a spine-chilling shriek.

Frank shook his head. He stood on tiptoe to peer over the hedge into the next garden.

“I shouldn’t think so. There’s a stain like it on the Collinses’ doorstep as well.”

“Really?” I drew closer to Frank, both to see over the hedge and for moral support. The Highlands hardly seemed a likely spot for a mass murderer, but then I doubted such persons used any sort of logical criteria when picking their sites. “That’s rather ... disagreeable,” I observed. There was no sign of life from the next residence. “What do you suppose has happened?”

Frank frowned, thinking, then slapped his hand briefly against his trouser leg in inspiration.

“I think I know! Wait here a moment.” He darted out to the gate and set off down the road at a trot, leaving me stranded on the edge of the doorstep.

He was back shortly, beaming with confirmation.

“Yes, that’s it, it must be. Every house in the row has had it.”

“Had what? A visit from a homicidal maniac?” I spoke a bit sharply, still nervous at having been abruptly abandoned with nothing but a large bloodstain for company.

Frank laughed. “No, a ritual sacrifice. Fascinating!” He was down on his hands and knees in the grass, peering interestedly at the stain.

This hardly sounded better than a homicidal maniac. I squatted beside him, wrinkling my nose at the smell. It was early for flies, but a couple of the big, slow-moving Highland midges circled the stain.

“What do you mean, ‘ritual sacrifice’?” I demanded. “Mrs. Baird’s a good churchgoer, and so are all the neighbors. This isn’t Druid’s Hill or anything, you know.”

He stood, brushing grass-ends from his trousers. “That’s all you know, my girl,” he said. “There’s no place on earth with more of the old superstitions and magic mixed into its daily life than the Scottish Highlands. Church or no church, Mrs. Baird

believes in the Old Folk, and so do all the neighbors.” He pointed at the stain with one neatly polished toe. “The blood of a black cock,” he explained, looking pleased. “The houses are new, you see. Pre-fabs.”

I looked at him coldly. “If you are under the impression that that explains everything, think again. What difference does it make how old the houses are? And where on earth is everybody?”

“Down the pub, I should expect. Let’s go along and see, shall we?” Taking my arm, he steered me out the gate and we set off down the Gereside Road.

“In the old days,” he explained as we went, “and not so long ago, either, when a house was built, it was customary to kill something and bury it under the foundation, as a propitiation to the local earth spirits. You know, ‘He shall lay the foundations thereof in his firstborn and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.’ Old as the hills.”

I shuddered at the quotation. “In that case, I suppose it’s quite modern and enlightened of them to be using chickens instead. You mean, since the houses are fairly new, nothing was buried under them, and the inhabitants are now remedying the omission.”

“Yes, exactly.” Frank seemed pleased with my progress, and patted me on the back. “According to the vicar, many of the local folk thought the War was due in part to people turning away from their roots and omitting to take proper precautions, such as burying a sacrifice under the foundation, that is, or burning fishes’ bones on the hearth—except haddocks, of course,” he added, happily distracted. “You never burn a haddock’s bones—did you know?—or you’ll never catch another. Always bury the bones of a haddock instead.”

“I’ll bear it in mind,” I said. “Tell me what you do in order never to see another herring, and I’ll do it forthwith.”

He shook his head, absorbed in one of his feats of memory, those brief periods of scholastic rapture where he lost touch with the world around him, absorbed completely in conjuring up knowledge from all its sources.

“I don’t know about herring,” he said absently. “For mice, though, you hang bunches of Trembling Jock about—‘Trembling Jock i’ the hoose, and ye’ll ne’er see a moose,’ you know. Bodies under the foundation, though—that’s where a lot of the local ghosts come from. You know Mountgerald, the big house at the end of the High Street? There’s a ghost there, a workman on the house who was killed as a sacrifice for the foundation. In the eighteenth century sometime; that’s really fairly recent,” he added thoughtfully.

“The story goes that by order of the house’s owner, one wall was built up first, then a stone block was dropped from the top of it onto one of the workmen—presumably a dislikable fellow was chosen for the sacrifice—and he was buried then in the cellar and the rest of the house built up over him. He haunts the cellar where he was killed, except on the anniversary of his death and the four Old Days.”

“Old Days?”

“The ancient feasts,” he explained, still lost in his mental notes. “Hogmanay, that’s New Year’s, Midsummer Day, Beltane and All Hallows’. Druids, Beaker Folk, early Picts, everybody kept the sun feasts and the fire feasts, so far as we know. Anyway, ghosts are freed on the holy days, and can wander about at will, to do harm or good as

they please.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “It’s getting on for Beltane—close to the spring equinox. Best keep an eye out, next time you pass the kirkyard.” His eyes twinkled, and I realized the trance had ended.

I laughed. “Are there a number of famous local ghosts, then?”

He shrugged. “Don’t know. We’ll ask the Vicar, shall we, next time we see him?”

We saw the Vicar quite shortly, in fact. He, along with most of the other inhabitants of the village, was down in the pub, having a lager-and-light in celebration of the houses’ new sanctification.

He seemed rather embarrassed at being caught in the act of condoning acts of paganism, as it were, but brushed it off as merely a local observance with historical color, like the Wearing of the Green.

“Really rather fascinating, you know,” he confided, and I recognized, with an internal sigh, the song of the scholar, as identifying a sound as the *terr-whit!* of a thrush. Harking to the call of a kindred spirit, Frank at once settled down to the mating dance of academe, and they were soon neck-deep in archetypes and the parallels between ancient superstitions and modern religions. I shrugged and made my own way through the crowd to the bar and back, a large brandy-and-splash in each hand.

Knowing from experience how difficult it was to distract Frank’s attention from this sort of discussion, I simply picked up his hand, wrapped his fingers about the stem of the glass and left him to his own devices.

I found Mrs. Baird on a deep bench near the window, sharing a companionable pint of bitter with an elderly man whom she introduced to me as Mr. Crook.

“This is the man I tell’t ye about, Mrs. Randall,” she said, eyes bright with the stimulation of alcohol and company. “The one as knows about plants of all sorts.

“Mrs. Randall’s verra much interested in the wee plants,” she confided to her companion, who inclined his head in a combination of politeness and deafness. “Presses them in books and such.”

“Do ye, indeed?” Mr. Crook asked, one tufted white brow raised in interest. “I’ve some presses—the real ones, mind—for plants and such. Had them from my nephew, when he come up from university over his holiday. He brought them for me, and I’d not the heart to tell him I never uses such things. Hangin’s what’s wanted for herbs, ye ken, or maybe to be dried on a frame and put in a bit o’ gauze bag or a jar, but whyever you’d be after squashing the wee things flat, I’ve no idea.”

“Well, to look at, maybe,” Mrs. Baird interjected kindly. “Mrs. Randall’s made some lovely bits out of mallow blossoms, and violets, same as you could put in a frame and hang on the wall, like.”

“Mmmphm.” Mr. Crook’s seamed face seemed to be admitting a dubious possibility to this suggestion. “Weel, if they’re of any use to ye, Missus, you can have the presses, and welcome. I didna wish to be throwing them awa’, but I must say I’ve no use for them.”

I assured Mr. Crook that I would be delighted to make use of the plant presses, and still more delighted if he would show me where some of the rarer plants in the area could be found. He eyed me sharply for a moment, head to one side like an elderly kestrel, but appeared finally to decide that my interest was genuine, and we fixed it up that I should meet him in the morning for a tour of the local shrubbery. Frank, I knew, meant to go into Inverness for the day to consult some records in the town hall there,

and I was pleased to have an excuse not to accompany him. One record was much like another, so far as I was concerned.

Soon after this, Frank pried himself away from the Vicar, and we walked home in company with Mrs. Baird. I was reluctant to mention the cock's blood on the doorstep, myself, but Frank suffered from no such reticence, and questioned her eagerly as to the background of the custom.

"I suppose it's quite old, then?" he asked, swishing a stick along through the roadside weeds. Lamb's-quarters and cinquefoil were already blooming, and I could see the buds of sweet broom swelling; another week and they'd be in flower.

"Och, aye." Mrs. Baird waddled along at a brisk pace, asking no quarter from our younger limbs. "Older than anyone knows, Mr. Randall. Even back before the days of the giants."

"Giants?" I asked.

"Aye. Fionn and the Feinn, ye ken."

"Gaelic folktales," Frank remarked with interest. "Heroes, you know. Probably from Norse roots. There's a lot of the Norse influence round here, and all the way up the coast to the West. Some of the place names are Norse, you know, not Gaelic at all."

I rolled my eyes, sensing another outburst, but Mrs. Baird smiled kindly and encouraged him, saying that was true, then, she'd been up to the north, and seen the Two Brothers stone, and that was Norse, wasn't it?

"The Norsemen came down on that coast hundreds of times between A.D. 500 and 1300 or so," Frank said, looking dreamily at the horizon, seeing dragon-ships in the wind-swept cloud. "Vikings, you know. And they brought a lot of their own myths along. It's a good country for myths. Things seem to take root here."

This I could believe. Twilight was coming on, and so was a storm. In the eerie light beneath the clouds, even the thoroughly modern houses along the road looked as ancient and as sinister as the weathered Pictish stone that stood a hundred feet away, guarding the crossroads it had marked for a thousand years. It seemed a good night to be inside with the shutters fastened.

Rather than staying cozily in Mrs. Baird's parlor to be entertained by stere-opticon views of Perth Harbor, though, Frank chose to keep his appointment for sherry with Mr. Bainbridge, a solicitor with an interest in local historical records. Bearing in mind my earlier encounter with Mr. Bainbridge, I elected to stay at home with Perth Harbor.

"Try to come back before the storm breaks," I said, kissing Frank goodbye. "And give my regards to Mr. Bainbridge."

"Umm, yes. Yes, of course." Carefully not meeting my eye, Frank shrugged into his overcoat and left, collecting an umbrella from the stand by the door.

I closed the door after him, but left it on the latch so he could get back in. I wandered back toward the parlor, reflecting that Frank would doubtless pretend that he didn't have a wife—a pretense in which Mr. Bainbridge would cheerfully join. Not that I could blame him, particularly.

At first, everything had gone quite well on our visit to Mr. Bainbridge's home the afternoon before. I had been demure, genteel, intelligent but self-effacing, well-groomed, and quietly dressed—everything the Perfect Don's Wife should be. Until the tea was served.

I now turned my right hand over, ruefully examining the large blister that ran across

the bases of all four fingers. After all, it was not my fault that Mr. Bainbridge, a widower, made do with a cheap tin teapot instead of a proper crockery one. Nor that the solicitor, seeking to be polite, had asked me to pour out. Nor that the potholder he provided had a worn patch that allowed the red-hot handle of the teapot to come into direct contact with my hand when I picked it up.

No, I decided. Dropping the teapot was a perfectly normal reaction. Dropping it into Mr. Bainbridge's lap was merely an accident of placement; I had to drop it somewhere. It was my exclaiming "Bloody fucking hell!" in a voice that topped Mr. Bainbridge's heartcry that had made Frank glare at me across the scones.

Once he recovered from the shock, Mr. Bainbridge had been quite gallant, fussing about my hand and ignoring Frank's attempts to excuse my language on grounds that I had been stationed in a field hospital for the better part of two years. "I'm afraid my wife picked up a number of, er, colorful expressions from the Yanks and such," Frank offered, with a nervous smile.

"True," I said, gritting my teeth as I wrapped a water-soaked napkin about my hand. "Men tend to be very 'colorful' when you're picking shrapnel out of them."

Mr. Bainbridge had tactfully tried to distract the conversation onto neutral historical ground by saying that he had always been interested in the variations of what was considered profane speech through the ages. There was "Gorblimey," for example, a recent corruption of the oath "God blind me."

"Yes, of course," said Frank, gratefully accepting the diversion. "No sugar, thank you, Claire. What about 'Gadzooks'? The 'Gad' part is quite clear, of course, but the 'zook'...."

"Well, you know," the solicitor interjected, "I've sometimes thought it might be a corruption of an old Scots word, in fact—'yeuk.' Means 'itch.' That would make sense, wouldn't it?"

Frank nodded, letting his unscholarly forelock fall across his forehead. He pushed it back automatically. "Interesting," he said, "the whole evolution of profanity."

"Yes, and it's still going on," I said, carefully picking up a lump of sugar with the tongs.

"Oh?" said Mr. Bainbridge politely. "Did you encounter some interesting variations during your, er, war experience?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "My favorite was one I picked up from a Yank. Man named Williamson, from New York, I believe. He said it every time I changed his dressing."

"What was it?"

" 'Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ,' " I said, and dropped the sugar lump neatly into Frank's coffee.

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After a peaceful and not unpleasant sit with Mrs. Baird, I made my way upstairs, to ready myself before Frank came home. I knew his limit with sherry was two glasses, so I expected him back soon.

The wind was rising, and the very air of the bedroom was prickly with electricity. I drew the brush through my hair, making the curls snap with static and spring into knots and furious tangles. My hair would have to do without its hundred strokes tonight, I decided. I would settle for brushing my teeth, in this sort of weather. Strands of hair adhered stickily to my cheeks, clinging stubbornly as I tried to smooth them