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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 1 A NEW BEGINNING It was
                        nd 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
   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 muse 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 our landlady's mind," I agreed. "Perhaps we should have gone to Brighton after all." We had chosen the Highlands
                      ioliday 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 spo
                   out 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 though
                    e 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
                             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
     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 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, pickled. And the pungent scent now wafting up the stairwell strongly intimated that breakfast wa
 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 rec
  ters 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-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-
 quired 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 let
res 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, by Laven't found out him yet. Anyway, Jack Randall was highly commended by the Duke of Sandringham for his activities before a second—Jacobite Rising, you know," he am plified 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 interpreted, sitting up and trying to subdue m

y 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
                    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 proc
uct 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 no
                                        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
 ested, Claire. The dean of St. Giles College wouldn't like it at all." * * * In the event, there were a number of other people there, though, mostly housewives of the Mrs. Baird type, doing their daily shoppi
   , 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 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 now
ere 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 filled it with potsherds long before I could have filled it with potsherds long before I could have filled it with a bunch of daisies. Quentin Lambert Beauchamp. "Q" to his archaeological students and his friends. "Dr. Beauchamp" to the
 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 r
pared 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
                        liddle 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-hai
   I 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 Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of war had sent him to Office of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of junior faculty, divided between continental conferences and temporary flats, until the outbreak of junior faculty flats, and the outbreak of junior flats are flats.
 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, they're specimens. And it was you who suggested I take up botany. To occupy my mind, now it 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." "Prepared 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 that to 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 in the step in the 
                      ighlands hardly seemed a likely spot for a mass murgerer, 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 fro
  ned, 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,
 pering 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 of
                                                                                                                                                                                                            e stood, brushing grass-ends from his trousers. "That's all you know, my girl," h
Baird believes in the Old Folk, and so do all the neighbor
hurch-goer, and so are all the neighbors. This isn't Druid's Hill or anything, you kn
nto its daily life than the Scottish Highlands. Church or no church, Mrs.
                  "The blood of a black cock," he explained, looking ple
    his firstborn and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.' Old as the hills." I shu
    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 precaution
  such as burying a sacrifice under the foundation, that is, or burning fishes' bones on the hearth—except haddock's bones on the hearth—except haddock's bones of a haddock's bones of a haddock'instead." "I'll bear it in mi
                       I 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 sou
       "I don't know about herring," he said absently. "For mice, though, you hang bunches of Trembling Jock about—'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
one 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 where he was killed, except on the anniversary of his death and the four Ole
                                   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,
  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 cal 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 in the pub, having a lager-and-light in celebration of the houses' new sanctification. He seemed in the pub, having a lager-and-light in celebration of the houses' new sanctification.
  er 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 it
   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.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             uestioned her eagerly as to the background of the custom. "I suppose it's quite old, then?" he asked, swishing a stick along through the road
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 d be in flower. "Och, aye." Mrs. Baird waddled along at a brisk pace
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ken." "Gaelic folktales,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ay up the coast to the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          seeing dragon-ships in the wind-swept cloud. "Viki
  gs, 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 co
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         uld believe. Twilight was coming on, and so was a storm
     the eerie light beneath the clouds, even the thoroughly modern houses along the road looked as ancient and as sinister as the weath
  et away, quarding the crossroads it had marked for a thousand years. It seemed a good night to be inside with the shutters fastened. R
ligent but self-effacing, well groomed, and quietly dressed—everything the Perfect Ďon's Wife should be. Until the tea was served. I now turned
 idge, 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 po
              en 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
                                                                                                              are 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
nd 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," fo
r 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,
                                                                                        th?" 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 sa
carefully picking up a tump of sugar with the tongs. On? Said Mr. Bainbridge politers. Did you encounter some interesting variations until your, er, was expected the first it floated in heavy, so it still guidence and sit of the bedroom was prickly with electricity. I drew the brush through my hair, making the curls on specific and spring my hair, making the curls on specific and spring into knots and spring into k
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so that it notated in heavy, shining waves about my face. And the evaporating alcohol had left bening a very pleasant scent. Frank would like mat, it notes in the light was a sudden flash close at hand, with the crash of the drawers. Somewhere I had seen candles and matches; power failure was so frequent an occurrence in the Highlands that candles were a necessary furnishing for all inn and hotel rooms. I had seen in frosted glass holders with shimmering pendants. Mrs. Baird's candles—but there were a lot of them, and three were a lot of them, and three dolders of matches as well. I was not inclined to be picky over style at time like this. I fitted a candles—but there were a lot of them, and three of matches as well. I was not inclined to be picky over style at time like this. I fitted a candles—but there were a lot of them, and three of matches as well. I was not inclined to be picky over style at time like this. I fitted a candles—but there of the candles of matches as well. I was not inclined to be picky over style at time like the candles of matches, it is the whole room was filled with a soft, wavering radiance. Very romantic, I thought, and with some presence of mind, I pressed down the light switch, so that a sudden return of power sho uldn't ruin the mood at some inopportune moment. The candles had burned no more than a half-inch when the door opened and Frank blew in. Literally, for the draft that followed him up the stairs extinguished three of the candles. The door closed behind him with a bang that blew out two more, and he pee red into the sudden gloom, pushing a hand through his disheveled hair. I got up and relit the candles, making mild remarks about his abrupt methods of entering rooms. It was only when I had finished and turned to ask him whether he'd like a drink, that I saw he was looking rather white and unsettled. "What a sudden whiff of L'Heure Bleu reached his nose and set it down again, settling for the attention ones of his pocket comb instead of the probability and the proposition of ch. "Bit blustery for a ghost, I'd think," I said. "Don't they like quiet, misty evenings in graveyards?" Frank laughed a bit sheepishly. "Well, I daresay it's only Bainbridge's stories, plus a bit more of his sherry than I really meant to have. Nothing at all, likely." Now I was curious. "What exactly did you see?" I asked, settling myself on the dressing-table seat. I motioned to the whisky bottle with a half-lifted brow, and Frank went at once to pour a couple of drinks. "Well, only a man, really," he began, measuring out a jigger for himself and two for me. "Standing down in the road outside." "What, outside this house?" I laughed. "Must have been a ghost, then; I can't feature any living person standing about on a night I ike this." Frank tilted the ewer over his glass, then looked accusingly at me when no water came out. "Don't look at me," I said. "You used up all the water. I don't mind it neat, thoug ?" I laughed. "Must have been a ghost, then; I can't feature any living person standing about on a night I h." I took a sip in illustration. Frank looked as though he were tempted to nip down to the lavatory for water, but abandoned nd went on with his story, sipping cautiously as though his glass contained vitriol, rather tha ught"—he hesitated, looking down into his glass—"I rather thought he was looking up at your window." "My window? How extraordin the idea a n the best Glenfiddich single malt whisky. "Yes, he was down at the edge of the garden on this side, standing by the fence. I tho ary!" I couldn't repress a mild shiver, and went across to fasten the shutters, though it seemed a b it late for that. Frank followed me across the room, still talking. "Yes, I could see you myself from below. You were brushing your hair and cursing a bit because it was standing."

ugh," I said tartly. Frank shook his head, though he smiled and smoothed his hands over my hair. "No, he wasn't laughing. In fact, he seemed terribly unhappy about somethin he way he stood. I came up behind him, and when he didn't move, I asked politely if I could help him with something. He acted at first as though he didn't hear m ng. Not that I could see his face well; just something about t e, and I thought perhaps he didn't, over the noise of the wind, so I repeated myself, a nd I reached out to tap his shoulder, to get his attention, you know. But before I could touch him, he whirled suddenly round a nd pushed past me and walked off down the road." "Sounds a bit rude, but not very ghostly," I observed, draining my glass. "What did he look like?" "Big chap," said Frank, frowning in recollection. "And a Scot, in complete Highland rig-out, complete to sporran and the most beautiful running-stag br ooch on his plaid. I wanted to ask where he'd got it from, but he was off before I could." I went to the bureau and poured another drink. "Well, not so unusual an appearance for these parts, surely? I've seen men dressed like that in the village now and then." "Nooo ..." Frank sounded doubtful. "No, it wasn' his dress that was odd. But when he pushed past me, I could swear he was close enough that I should have felt him brush my sleeve—but I didn't. And I was intrigued enough to turn round and watch him as he walked away. He walked down the Gereside Road, but when he'd almost reached the corner, he In the contract of the contrac tions." I smiled, remembering one in particular. "We had one—rather a crusty old thing really, a piper from the most awful discomfort before he'd let anyone near him with a needle, and even then he'd try to get us to give him the injection in the arm, though it's meant to be intramuscular." I laughed at the memory of Corporal Chisholm. "He told me, 'If I'm goin' to lie on my face wi'my buttocks bared, I want the lass under me, not behind me wi' a hatpin!" "Frank smiled, but looked a trifle uneasy, as he often did a et us to give nim the linjection in the arm, though it's meant to be intramuscular. I laughed at the ememory of Corporal Chisholim. He told me, if I'm goin' to lie on my face withy but the lipst the look, "I won't tell that one at the intramuscular." I laughed at the deeping the look, "I won't tell that one at the intramuscular in the senior Common Room." The smile lightened and he came forward to ver my shoulders in the hin night the six of the thin night the six of the thin night the lass under the lamps permanently." "Is along the look, "I won't tell that one at the won't he said. "The sometime later, cuping my breasts in the thin night the six of this of this of the thin night the six of this of the thin night the six of the thin me." I pushed up onto one elbow, staring at him. We had left one candle burning, and I could see him well enough. He had turned his head, and was looking for for proper word, "Liaison?" I he side wide many ou saw outside was some sort of, of ..." I hesitated, looking for he suge sted helpfully. "Romanded his eyes in simulated surprise. "Are you implying," I demanded, "that the man you saw outside was some sort of, of ..." I hesitated, looking for hesitate

e dew from heaven ...' "Frank laughed and looked upward; the overlapping stains on the ceiling boded ill for the prospects of our sleeping dry all night. "If that's a sample of your mercy," he said, "I'd hate to see your vengeance." The thunder went off like a mortar attack, as though in answer to his words, and we both laughed, at ease again. It was only later, listening to his regular deep breathing beside me, that I began to wonder. As I had said, there was no evidence whatsoever to imply unfaithfulness on my part. Bu ES Mr. Crook called for me, as arranged, promptly at seven the next morning. "So as we'll catch the dew on the buttercups, eh, lass?" he said, twinkling with elderly gallantry. He had brought a motorcycle of his own appro de. The plant presses were tidily strapped to the sides of this enormous machine, like bumpers on a tugboat. It was a leisurely ramble through the quiet countryside, made all the more quiet by contrast with the thu o silence. The old man did indeed know a lot about the local plants, I discovered. Not only where they were to be found but their medicinal uses, and how to prepare them. I wished I had brought a n racked old voice, and did my best to commit the information to memory as I stowed our specimens in the heavy plant presses. We stopped for a packed luncheon near the base of a curious fla ell-worn path leading up one side and disappearing abruptly behind a granite outcrop. "What's up there?" I asked, gesturing with a ha h na Dun, lass. I'd meant to show ye after our meal." "Really? Is there something special about it?" "Oh, aye," he answered, but re the same rocky juts and crags, it had something different: a w cnicking." "Ah." Mr. Crook glanced at the hill. "That's Craig hat I'd see when I saw. I had some fears about his abi such a steep path, but these evaporated as I found myself panting in his wake. At las 1, M lity to climb pulled me up over the rim of the hill. "There 'tis." H hand with a sort of proprietorial gesture. "Why, it's a henge!" I said, delighte e waved a isited Salisbury Plain, but Frank and I had seen Stonehenge soon af of the war, it had been several years since I h ad last v e other tourists wandering awed among the tanding stones, we had gaped at the Altar Stone ('w'ere ancient Dru huge s dful 'uman sacrifices,' announced the son Cockney tour guide accompanying a busload of Italian tourists, who all dutifu orous nary-looking stone block). Out of the sa passion for exactness that made Frank adjust his ties on the hanger so that me the ends cle, pacing off the distance between the Z holes and the Y holes, and d around the circumference of the cir counting t e hours later, we knew how many Y and Z holes there were (fifty-nine, i ring of monstrous uprights. Thre f you care; I didn' ars. N e than had the dozens of amat eur a nd profe ssional archaeologists who had crawled over the site for the last five hundr

g on end." "In that case, the fellow was probably enjoying a good la

e that a well-expressed opinio

he inaptly named "Slaughter Sto

ging the glaze on the latest shipm

e of bodies under the Altar Stone and crem

signs of burial in the miniature henge atop

ands. No. what's odd is that nothing ever

en the serious ones."

nehenge that these stone circles occur all over Britain

n to touch one gently, as though my touch could make a

All of them were remarkably different from the clumps of

ks for the erection of their testimonial. Shaped—how? Tran

'The gnarled old man gallantly offered me an arm at the top

lage, to fetch Frank from the vicarage. I happily breathed in th

ty at the foot of one of those soaring crags that rise so steeply

ears old, sported bright yellow trim around its sagging windowf

narrow, dark hallway, lined with sepia engravings of people who

By contrast, the vicar's study was blinding with light from the e

e windows, which must have been added long after the house w

vicar politely left off his explanations and hurried over to clasp

ews!" "News?" Casting an eye on the grubbiness and typeface

sband's ancestor, Jack Randall, through the army dispatches of

orical Society files. You'll be careful not to tell anyone?" Amuse

g chair nearest the windows looked suitable, but as I reached to

ound asleep. "Roger!" The vicar, coming to assist me, was as s

ate d re

the hill.

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o lack a badly expressed fact, so far as professional advancement goes. A temple. A but n is u sually b etter than groun half sunk in its own pit). An open-air market. I liked this last suggestion, visualizing Megalithic housewives ne" that one side, strolli nd listening skeptically to the claims of stone-age bakers and vendors of deer-bone shovels and amber beads. Th ent of rede onl s. Unless these were the hapless remains of merchants accused of short-weighting the customers, it seemed a bit uns m ains in the Z ani "miniatu re," mean only that the circle of standing stones was smaller than Stonehenge; each stone was still twice my own height, and massive n better repair than others, some differing slightly in orientation or form, all of purpose and origin unknown. Mr. Crook stood smiling ber Eu rope—s ome i on the monumental boulders. Some of the standing stones were brindled, striped with dim colors mpress . Others were speckled with flakes of ne that thrust out of the bracken all around. Whoever built the stone circles, and for whatever purpo ative s se, thought it important enough to how, and from what unimaginable distance? "My husband would be fascinated," I told Mr. Crook, sto pping to thank him for showin he trail. I took it, deciding after one look down the precipitous decline that in spite of his age, he was like ly steadier on his pins than I w heady Highland mix of heather, sage, and broom, spiced here and there with chimney smoke and the tang of fried herring, as I passed the from the Highland moors. Those cottages near the road were nice. The bloom of postwar prosperity had s pread as far as a new coat of p r answered the door, a tall, stringy woman with three strands of artificia l pearls round her neck. Hearin rames. The vicar's housekeepe may have been famous persona ges of their time, or cherished rela the present vicar but might as well have been the tives of normous windows that ran nearl y from ceiling to floor in one wall . An ea sel near the firep ace, bearing a half-finished oil of a short, tubb ozily poring over a mass of tattered paper on the as built. Frank and y man with a clerical dog-collar were c dall!" he said, pu d face beami ng with soci mping my hand heartily. "How ni my hand, his roun able delight. "Mr s. Ran ulated the da te of the news estion as being I kely around 1750. Not precisely s of the papers on th e desk. I calc in qu the period." The v ng out of the s f his mouth like a gang ster in an American film icar leaned c lose, speaki ide o d, I agreed that I w ould not reve al his deadly secret, and lo oked about for a co mforta ble chair in which to re turn it toward the desk. I disco vered that it was already o ccup ied. The inhab itant, a small boy with a shoc ht, the urprised as I. The b of moss. "Now what oy, startled o ut of sleep, s hot bolt uprig wide eves the color and handed m to the lad. He scooped up th e brightly co lored pages Run along now, Roger, I a con firmed rend Wakefield was bachelor. would hav e th ought Reve

affectionately. "Oh, fell asleep reading the comic papers again? uce you—Mrs. Randall, this is my son, Roger." I was a bit surpri sed. If ever I'd seen sting the urge to wipe a certain residual stickiness on my skirt. off toward the kitch The Reverend Wake field looke d fondly a fter the bo y a f U s he t ro oped him." "How kind of he Channel, and mother killed in the Blitz, though, so I've taken ." I mu rmured. thinking o ncle mb. H e, too, had died in you antiquities next d here he had been lecturing. Knowing him, I thought his main fe f Pe eling would have be en aratifi cation th at the win g o n embarrassment. "Nice to have a bit of young life about the h ouse. Now, do have eat." F rank be gan talkin gе ven efor e I had set my ha a s bing through the dog-eared pile. "The vicar's located a whole series of military di atche s that mention J on atha ndall." "Well. a d sp s own doing," the vicar observed, taking some of the papers from Frank. "He wa s i mand o f the garr t F ort William for fo n com on a harassing the Scottish countryside above the Border on beh alf of the Crown. T —he gi ted a stack of pape s lot ngerly s gainst the Captain by various families and estate holders, cl aiming everything rom interfe thei r maidservant o mention assorted instances of 'insult,' unspecified," I wa s amused. "So y over bial horse t 0 bed. "He was what he was, and nothing I can do about it. I only want nd out. T riod; the English in general, and the army in particular

d. "A miniature henge!" Because ter we were married. Like th ests performed their drea graphs of the rather ordi even, we had even trekke g precisely Sarsen Circle, the outermost ntels in the ut had no m ore clue to the purpose of the structur pinions, o f course. Life among academics had taught m omical observatory. A place of execution (hence t n astron een the lintels, baskets on their arms, critically jud ng betw could see against that hypothesis was the present thing I be burying people in the marketplace. There were no y to proportion. I had heard from another tour-guide at Sto ly as I prowled among the stones, pausing now and the a that caught the morning sun with a cheerful shimmer. ave quarried, shaped, and transported special stone bloc me the place and the plants. "I'll bring him up to see it later as. * * * I swung down the road that afternoon toward the vil scattered cottages. The village lay nestled in a small declivi aint, and even the manse, which must be at least a hundred y g who I was, she welcomed me in and towed me down a long, Royal Family, for all I could see of their features in the gloom black cliffs against the evening sky, showed the reason for th desk by the far wall. Frank barely looked up in greeting, but the ce to see you again. And you've come just in time to hear the n top-the-presses, then. "Yes, indeed. We've been tracing your hi "I've, er, 'borrowed' the original dispatches from the local Hist ceive the latest revelations from the eighteenth century. The win k of glossy black hair, was curled up in the depths of the chair, s are you up to in here, you young scamp?" The vicar was scoldin have business with the Randalls. Oh, wait, I've forgotten to introd it. Still, I took the politely proffered paw and shook it warmly, resi en. "My niece's son, really," he confided. "Father shot down over the Blitz, killed by a hit to the auditorium of the British Museum, w oor had escaped. "Not at all, not at all." The vicar flapped a hand ndbag down. "The most amazing luck, Claire," he enthused, thun ood deal of the prominence seems to have been Captain Randall ur years or so, but he seems to have spent quite a bit of his time rs and laid them on the desk—"is reports of complaints lodged s by the soldiers of the garrison to outright theft of horses, not t hief in your family tree?" I said to Frank. He shrugged, unpertur

t six years, as he'd said, was a long time. 2 STANDING STON

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ximate vintage, on which to transport us into the countrys

nderous roar of Mr. Crook's cycle, suddenly throttled int

otebook to get it all down, but listened intently to the o

pped hill. Green as most of its neighbors, with

m sandwich. "It seems a difficult place for pi

fused to elaborate further, merely saying

rook extended a gnarled hand and

ms to have come of the complaints, ev The vicar, unable to keep for long, br

he complaints aren't all that odd, for that particular time pe

, were rather notably unpopular throughout the Highl