

Lord John and the Brotherhood of the Blade: A Novel (Lord John Grey)

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Diana Gabaldon, the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the Outlander saga, brings back one of her most compelling characters: Lord John Grey. Here Gabaldon weaves together the strands of Lord John's secret and public lives—a shattering family mystery, a love affair with potentially disastrous consequences, and a war that stretches from the Old World to the New.

It's been seventeen years since Lord John's father, the Duke of Pardloe, was found dead, a pistol in his hand and accusations of his role as a Jacobite agent staining forever a family's honor. Now unlaidd ghosts from the past are stirring. Lord John's brother has mysteriously received a page of their late father's missing diary—and John is convinced that someone is taunting the Grey family with secrets from the grave. So he turns to the only man he can trust: the Scottish Jacobite James Fraser. But war, a forbidden affair, and Fraser's own secrets will complicate Lord John's quest—until James Fraser yields the missing piece of an astounding puzzle and Lord John must decide whether his family's honor is worth his life.

Diana Gabaldon is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the wildly popular Outlander novels—Outlander, Dragonfly in Amber, Voyager, Drums of Autumn, The Fiery Cross, A Breath of Snow and Ashes (for which she won a Quill Award and the Corine International Book Prize), An Echo in the Bone, and Written in My Own Heart's Blood—as well as a collection of Outlander fiction, Seven Stones to Stand or Fall; the related Lord John Grey books Lord John and the Private Matter, Lord John and the Brotherhood of the Blade, Lord John and the Hand of Devils, and The Scottish Prisoner; two works of nonfiction, The Outlandish Companion, Volumes 1 and 2; the Outlander graphic novel, The Exile; and The Official Outlander Coloring Book. She lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, with her husband.

Chapter One

All in the Family

London, January 1758 The Society for Appreciation of the English Beefsteak, A Gentlemen's Club

To the best of Lord John Grey's knowledge, stepmothers as depicted in fiction tended to be venal, evil, cunning, homicidal, and occasionally cannibalistic. Stepfathers, by contrast, seemed negligible, if not completely innocuous.

"Squire Allworthy, do you think?" he said to his brother. "Or Claudius?"

Hal stood restlessly twirling the club's terrestrial globe, looking elegant, urbane, and

thoroughly indigestible. He left off performing this activity, and gave Grey a look of incomprehension.

"What?"

"Stepfathers," Grey explained. "There seem remarkably few of them among the pages of novels, by contrast to the maternal variety. I merely wondered where Mother's new acquisition might fall, along the spectrum of character."

Hal's nostrils flared. His own reading tended to be confined to Tacitus and the more detailed Greek and Roman

histories of military endeavor. The practice of reading novels he regarded as a form of moral weakness; forgivable, and in fact, quite understandable in their mother, who was, after all, a woman. That his younger brother should share in this vice was somewhat less acceptable.

However, he merely said, "Claudius? From Hamlet? Surely not, John, unless you happen to know something about Mother that I do not."

Grey was reasonably sure that he knew a number of things about their mother that Hal did not, but this was neither the time nor place to mention them.

"Can you think of any other examples? Notable stepfathers of history, perhaps?"

Hal pursed his lips, frowning a bit in thought. Absently, he touched the watch pocket at his waist.

Grey touched his own watch pocket, where the gold and crystal of his chiming timepiece—the twin of Hal's—made a reassuring weight.

"He's not late yet."

Hal gave him a sideways look, not a smile—Hal was not in a mood that would permit such an expression—but tinged with humor, nonetheless.

"He is at least a soldier."

In Grey's experience, membership in the brotherhood of the blade did not necessarily impute punctuality—their friend Harry Quarry was a colonel and habitually late—but he nodded equably. Hal was sufficiently on edge already. Grey didn't want to start a foolish argument that might color the imminent meeting with their mother's intended third husband.

"It could be worse, I suppose," Hal said, returning to his moody examination of the globe. "At least he's not a bloody merchant. Or a tradesman." His voice dripped loathing at the thought.

In fact, General Sir George Stanley was a knight, granted that distinction by reason of service of arms, rather than birth. His family had dealt in trade, though in the reasonably respectable venues of banking and shipping. Benedicta Grey, however, was a duchess. Or had been.

So far reasonably calm in the face of his mother's impending nuptials, Grey felt a sudden drop of the stomach, a visceral reaction to the realization that his mother would no longer be a Grey, but would become Lady Stanley—someone quite foreign. This was, of course, ridiculous. At the same time, he found himself suddenly in greater sympathy with Hal.

The watch in his pocket began to chime noon. Hal's timepiece sounded no more than half a second later, and the brothers smiled at each other, hands on their pockets, suddenly united.

The watches were identical, gifts from their father upon the occasion of each son's twelfth birthday. The duke had died the day after Grey's twelfth birthday, endowing this small recognition of manhood with a particular poignancy. Grey drew breath to say something, but the sound of voices came from the corridor.

"There he is." Hal lifted his head, evidently undecided whether to go out to meet Sir George or remain in the library to receive him.

"Saint Joseph," Grey said suddenly. "There's another notable stepfather."

"Quite," said his brother, with a sidelong glance. "And which of us are you suggesting . . . ?"

A shadow fell across the Turkey carpet, cast by the form of a bowing servant who stood in the doorway.

"Sir George Stanley, my lord. And party."

General Sir George Stanley was a surprise. While Grey had consciously expected neither Claudius nor Saint Joseph, the reality was a trifle . . . rounder than anticipated.

His mother's first husband had been tall and dashing, by report, while her second, his own father, had been possessed of the same slight stature, fairness, and tidy muscularity which he had bequeathed to both his sons. Sir George rather restored one's faith in the law of averages, Grey thought, amused.

A bit taller than himself or Hal, and quite stout, the general had a face that was round, cheerful, and rosily guileless beneath a rather shabby wig. His features were nondescript in the extreme, bar a pair of wide brown eyes that gave him an air of pleasant expectation, as though he could think of nothing so delightful as a meeting with the person he addressed.

He bowed in greeting, but then shook hands firmly with both Greys, leaving Lord John with

an impression of warmth and sincerity.

"It is kind of you to invite me to luncheon," he said, smiling from one brother to the other. "I cannot say how greatly I appreciate your welcome. I feel most awkward, then, to begin at once with an apology-but I am afraid I have imposed upon you by bringing my stepson. He arrived unexpectedly this morning from the country, just as I was setting out. Seeing that you will in some sense be brothers . . . I, er, thought perhaps you would pardon my liberty in bringing him along to be introduced." He laughed, a little awkwardly, and blushed; an odd mannerism in a man of his age and rank, but rather endearing, Grey thought, smiling back despite himself.

"Of course," Hal said, managing to sound cordial.

"Most certainly," Grey echoed. He was standing closest to Sir George, and now turned to the general's companion, hand extended in greeting, and found himself face to face with a tall, slender, dark-eyed young man.

"My Lord Melton, Lord John," the general was saying, a hand on the young man's shoulder. "May I present Mr. Percival Wainwright?"

Hal was a trifle put out; Grey could feel the vibrations of annoyance from his direction-Hal hated surprises, particularly those of a social nature-but he himself had little attention to spare for his brother's quirks at the moment.

"Your servant, sir," he said, taking Mr. Wainwright's hand, with an odd sense of previous meeting.

The other felt it, too; Grey could see the faint expression of puzzlement on the young man's face, a faint inturning of fine dark brows, as though wondering where . . .

Realization struck them simultaneously. His hand tightened involuntarily on the other's, just as Wainwright's grip clutched his.

"Yours, sir," murmured Wainwright, and stepped back with a slight cough. He reached to shake Hal's hand, but glanced briefly back at Grey. His eyes were also brown, but not at all like his stepfather's, Grey thought, the momentary shock of recognition fading.

They were a soft, vivid brown, like sherry sack, and most expressive. At the moment, they were dancing with mirth at the situation-and filled with the same intensely personal interest Grey had seen in them once before, at their first meeting . . . in the library of Lavender House.

Percy Wainwright had given him his name-and his hand-upon that occasion, too. But Grey had been an anonymous stranger then, and the encounter had been necessarily brief.

Hal was expressing polite welcome to the newcomer, though giving him the sort of coolly

professional appraisal he would use to sum up an officer new to the regiment.

Grey thought Wainwright stood up well to such scrutiny; he was well-built, dressed neatly and with taste, clear-skinned and clean-featured, with an attitude that spoke of both humor and imagination. Both traits could be dangerous in an officer, but on a personal level . . .

Wainwright seemed to be discreetly exercising his own curiosity with regard to Grey, flicking brief glances his way-and little wonder. Grey smiled at him, now rather enjoying the surprise of this new "brother."

"I thank you," Wainwright said, as Hal concluded his welcome. He pulled his lingering attention away from Grey, and bowed to Hal. "Your Grace is most . . . gracious."

There was an instant of stricken silence following that last, half-strangled word, spoken as Wainwright realized, a moment too late, what he had said.

Hal froze, for the briefest instant, before recovering himself and bowing in return.

"Not at all," he said, with impeccable politeness. "Shall we dine, gentlemen?"

Hal turned at once for the door, not looking back. And just as well, Grey thought, seeing the hasty exchange of gestures and glances between the general and his stepson-horrified annoyance from the former, exemplified by rolling of the eyes and a brief clutching of the shabby wig; agonized apology by the latter-an apology extended wordlessly to Grey, as Percy Wainwright turned to him with a grimace.

Grey lifted one shoulder in dismissal. Hal was used to it-and it was his own fault, after all.

"We are fortunate in our timing," he said, and smiled at Percy. He touched Wainwright's back, lightly encouraging him toward the door. "It's Thursday. The Beefsteak's cook does an excellent ragout of beef on Thursdays. With oysters."

Sir George was wise enough to make no apology for his stepson's gaffe, instead engaging both the Greys in conversation regarding the campaigns of the previous autumn. Percy Wainwright appeared a trifle flustered, but quickly regained his composure, listening with every evidence of absorption.

"You were in Prussia?" he asked, hearing Grey's mention of maneuvers near the Oder. "But surely the Forty-sixth has been stationed in France recently-or am I mistaken?"

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