

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE SERIES

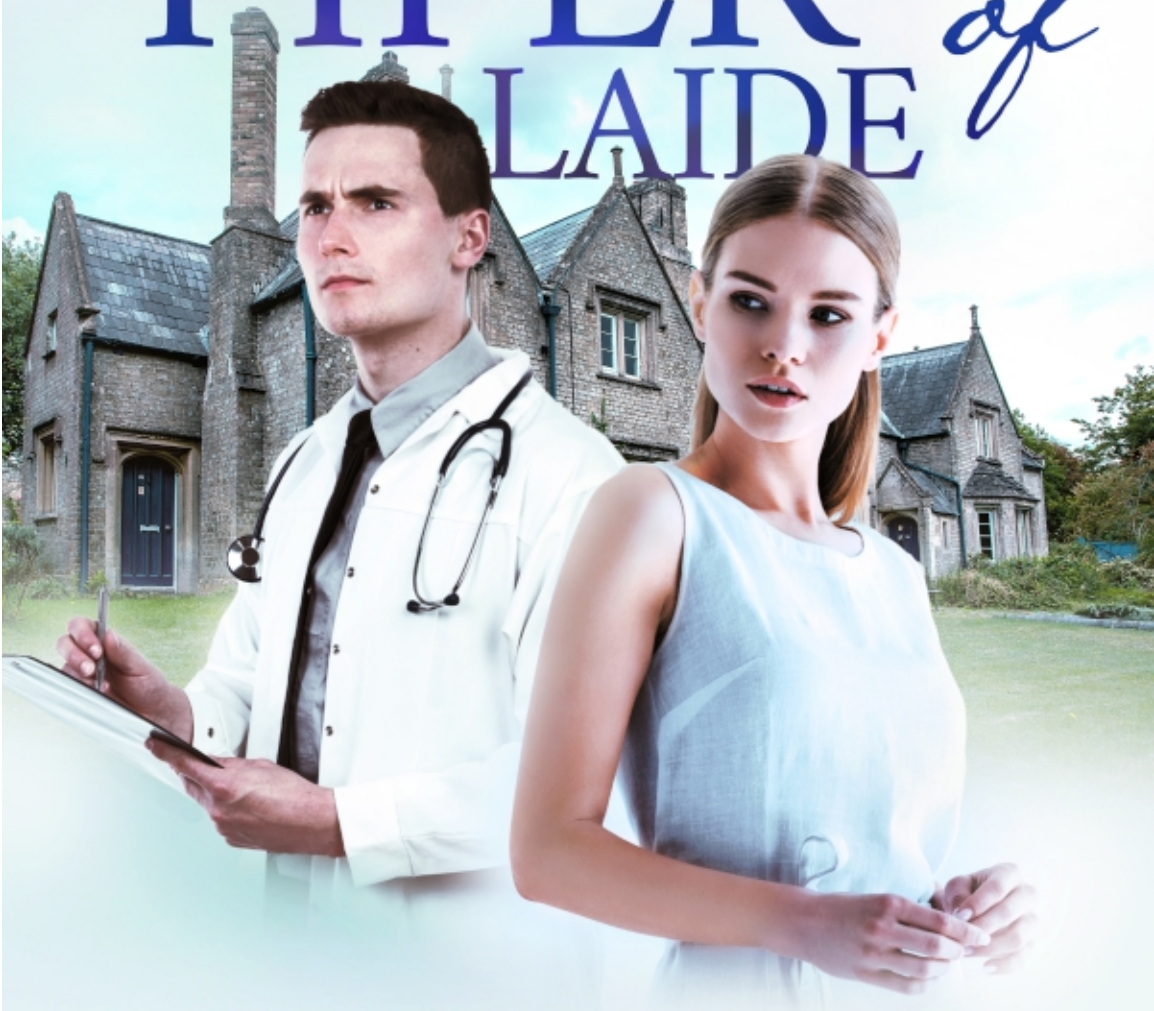
*The*  
**PIPER**  
**LAIDE** *of*



VIVIAN STUART

~ A HISTORICAL ROMANCE SERIES ~

# The PIPER of LAIDE



VIVIAN STUART



# The Piper of Laide

The Piper of Laide

© Vivian Stuart, 1963

© eBook in English: Jentas ehf. 2022

ISBN: 978-9979-64-419-4

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchase.

All contracts and agreements regarding the work, editing, and layout are owned by Jentas ehf.

---

*For  
May (Percy) Scullion  
of Sydney, New South Wales*

# Chapter 1

Rain, in a grey, obscuring curtain fell from a leaden sky, shutting the small Outer Isles mail steamer, *Loch Duich*, into a strange, lost world of her own. It was over an hour since she had left Tobermory, and now even the dark coastline of Mull had vanished into the mist.

Standing alone and disconsolate on the upper deck, Alison Graham stared into the swirling curtain of moisture ahead and shivered. She wished fervently that she had never listened to her aunt's inducements, never let herself be talked into coming back to Rhua. She hadn't been back since childhood and her memories of this part of the world must, she realized now, have been tinged with that magic which time and distance lend, for certainly they bore little resemblance to the reality. But she was committed, she had given her word—because her aunt had insisted on it—that she would spend the next six months on the island.

Her colleagues at the hospital had been puzzled by her decision, Alison recalled.

'But why in heaven's name do you *want* to practise medicine in the Outer Hebrides?' Sir James Lockhart, her chief, had questioned in astonishment, when she had told him of her intention. 'What possesses a girl like you to think of acting as assistant to a G.P. when you have so much to gain by staying where you are?'

She had had an answer then, Alison reflected wryly. She had been able to tell him that the opportunity being offered to her was very much more than that normally offered to an assistant in a general practice. Her aunt, Janet Campbell, was the only

doctor on the Island of Rhua and, after forty years there, she had decided to retire. The practice—which was a good one, even by Edinburgh standards—could be hers as soon as her aunt did retire, and Janet had promised that there would be no difficulty with the Regional Executive Council over her appointment. So long as she served a six months' trial period, as her aunt's assistant, in order to make herself familiar with the district and get to know the patients, she would be accepted as the 'logical successor' and duly appointed under the Health Service. The doctor's house and surgery, a car and such furniture, instruments and other equipment as she wished to keep, would also, Janet Campbell had assured her, be handed over, so that the usual expense of setting up in practice could, in her case, be entirely avoided.

Any recently qualified doctor would have been a fool to have refused so rare and excellent an opportunity, and yet, Alison reminded herself, looking back, she very nearly had refused it. Not because she had so much money that it wasn't tempting. Very much the reverse—the small capital sum she had inherited from her father had almost all gone to pay for the last two years of her medical training. Even when that was over, she hadn't found it easy to live on a house surgeon's salary; the last eighteen months, as a junior surgical registrar, had been easier, but she had never had very much to spare. And it was unlikely that she would have for a number of years, if she continued in the hospital service, working for advancement to consultant status in her chosen field, which was thoracic surgery.

All the same, it had been a wrench to abandon it—even for the six months' period of trial which, reluctantly, she had promised her aunt. This was all she had promised, of course, and she had made the promise less on account of the excellence of the opportunity which Janet Campbell was offering her than . . . she

sighed. Well, perhaps what it really amounted to was that blood was thicker than water. She had agreed to go to Rhua finally because Janet was her father's only surviving sister and, as such, her own closest relative. She knew that her father, had he been alive, would have urged her to go, for he had been deeply attached to his sister. In any case it had seemed only fair—since Janet apparently wanted it so much—to consent to a trial. A trial committed neither of them to anything definite or binding; it gave both of them time to re-consider, if it wasn't a success.

She hadn't completely burnt her boats either, Alison told herself, starting restlessly to pace the small, confined space of the deck. Before leaving St Ninian's, her Edinburgh training hospital, she had extracted a promise from Sir James Lockhart that a place would be found for her on his firm should she decide that she wanted to return. He had been flatteringly reluctant to let her go and had prophesied, quite confidently, that she would be back.

'In less than six months, Alison my dear—I'm certain of it. You'll never stand general practice in the Islands, after the work you've been doing here at the Chest Unit, you know. I'm not saying anything against this aunt of yours, you understand, but I fear you'll not take kindly to being told how to do your job by a doctor who will seem to you to be years behind the times. Even when you're on your own, you'll feel isolated, cut off from medical progress, from your colleagues, and lacking all the scientific resources of a modern hospital, which you're accustomed to have at your back. Besides'—he had eyed her gravely, Alison remembered, and shaken his head—'you have the makings of a very competent surgeon, and a rare temperament for a woman. It would be a pity to turn your back on all you have so far achieved, would it not? More especially on what you *could* achieve, if you went on . . .'



And it would, the young doctor thought bitterly. Because, even in these enlightened days, it was unusual for a woman to make an outstanding career as a surgeon. The McAlister Gold Medal, which she had won in her final year at St Ninian's, had opened the way for her—she had been only the second woman to have merited the award, since the hospital had started to accept women as medical students after the First World War. Her predecessor's name was still spoken of with reverence, whereas she . . . Alison bit her lip fiercely and went to lean on the rail.

A distant smudge of land had appeared to starboard, and although it was still shrouded in mist, she supposed it must be Rhua, since the *Loch Dutch* was scheduled to dock there in about three-quarters of an hour. Most of the passengers from the mainland had disembarked at Tobermory and, apart from herself, only one elderly man remained in the First Class. He was warmly and comfortably ensconced in the saloon, deep in a book and puffing at a pipe whose pungent and unpleasant fumes had driven her to the cold but fresher air of the open deck. She glanced over her shoulder and sighed. He was still there, his pipe smoking as furiously as ever, apparently quite unaware of the discomfort it had caused her.

She wondered who he was and why he should be going to Rhua. She had seen him in the dining saloon, when she had gone there earlier for a meal, but then it had been crowded and she hadn't known that his destination was the same as her own. In any case, he hadn't seemed particularly friendly, and although she longed to talk to someone about Rhua, his manner—and his pipe—had put her off making any sort of approach to him. It was possible that he was a tourist, although the tourist season didn't start until later in the year, and he didn't look like a tourist.

The mist started to clear a little and Alison leaned forward,

screwing up her eyes in an attempt to make out some details of the land ahead. But, despite much anxious staring, it was still too far away for her to make out more than a hazy outline, and she gazed at it unenthusiastically across the expanse of cold grey sea which separated her from it.

Why, she asked herself for perhaps the hundredth time, did her aunt love Rhua with so deep and passionate a love that, having given forty years of her own life to caring for its sick and injured, she should make such strenuous efforts to persuade her niece to do likewise?

Janet Campbell had not been born in the Islands, but in Glasgow. She had married a doctor and he had bought the practice soon after they both qualified, taking her with him, as a bride, to the white, stone-built house she still occupied at Ardloisk, which was seven or eight miles from Port of Laide. At first, on her own admission, she had been too busy with domestic duties to assist her husband in the practice, but later, when it became evident that they were not to be blessed with children, she had done so . . . rather fortunately, as it happened. Her husband, overworking in an influenza epidemic, had fallen victim to the disease and had died, with scarcely a fight, not long afterwards. Since then, with remarkable courage and determination, Janet had carried on single-handed, and, except for very infrequent holidays, had never left the island.

Alison had spent several summers with her uncle and aunt, as a small child, but she remembered very little about her uncle, save that he had been tall and red-headed, possessed of a loud laugh and a gay and boyish sense of humour. She could recall that she had liked him and been happy in his company—especially when he had driven her in his high, old-fashioned dogcart to pay calls on his patients—but that was about all. After his death, her visits to Rhua had stopped, although her

father had continued to make the long journey regularly during the summer vacation, when he was free of his University lecturing, and Janet had occasionally visited them in Edinburgh. She suspected, though she had never been quite sure, that her father's suggestion that she should study medicine had been made at her aunt's behest, since it had coincided with one of Janet's rare visits. She had never regretted the choice of career which had been made for her, in spite of the fact that originally her father had wanted her to follow in his own footsteps. He had been a historian of some renown; but she could never, Alison was aware, have equalled him in dedicated scholarship, nor indeed had his subject ever held for her the interest which medicine held.

Although now . . . her fingers tightened their grip about the rail in front of her. Now it was beginning to look as if Janet had been planning her return to Rhua right from the start, right from those far-off days when she had come to the island as a small child. Certainly she had been most insistent about the six months' trial, refusing to listen to any of Alison's objections.

'Give me six months, that's all I'm asking,' she had said, and then she had added, smiling, 'If you haven't lost your heart to Rhua by then, you can go, and I promise that I shan't try to stop you. But I don't believe you will want to leave, ever. The Piper of Laide will play his fairy music to you and you will belong to Rhua, as I do. You will belong, you will take my place, and you will be happy. I give you my word that you'll be happy, Alison.'

Alison stifled an impatient sigh. She hadn't asked about the Piper of Laide, guessing that this would be some island myth with which her aunt was seeking to appeal to her imagination. As a severely practical woman doctor, she had no time for superstitious legends; up till now, she had had very little time to give to anything except her work, hadn't even stopped to think

whether or not she was happy. She had believed she was. She loved her work; it satisfied her and it occupied her thoughts to the exclusion of almost everything else. There had been times, of course, when she had thought—once very seriously—of marriage, others when, for a brief moment of madness, she had imagined herself in love. But, when it came to the point, she had put her work first and hadn't questioned the wisdom of that decision, because her career meant more to her than love, for either people or places.

So it wasn't likely, surely, that she would lose her heart to Rhua, whatever truth there might be about the Piper of Laide and the old legend of his fairy music? It wasn't likely, since she was coming back to Rhua not because she wanted to come—or had any intention of staying—but because she had felt sorry for her aunt Janet. Against her will, she had pitied Janet, and against her better judgement given in to that pity and agreed to sacrifice six months of her precious career, because Janet was old and not very strong and alone and . . . needed her. Perhaps, Alison reflected, her strongest reason for coming was because Janet resembled her father, and during his lifetime she had never been able to refuse her father anything. She was his only daughter and he had been widowed when she was only ten, so .

. .

With startling suddenness the mist cleared, and she caught her breath at the awesome spectacle spread out before her. Great rocky cliffs came down to the water's edge, a white cloud of gulls and other sea birds circling about them with shrill, raucous cries. Behind, bathed now in watery golden sunlight, lay a patchwork quilt of cultivated fields, but these swiftly gave place to wild moorland and tree-clad hills, rising steeply to meet a range of mountains whose peaks, denuded of vegetation, knifed majestically skywards to where the mist still swirled and

edded, as if to form a crown about them. Others, even higher, loomed as dim, ghostly shapes in the remote distance, suggested rather than seen, their presence curiously awe-inspiring. Here and there, a small house or the white-painted stone outbuildings of a farm or croft clung to the bleak slopes or nestled, half hidden, among the trees, and a road—the only one which Alison could see—ran like a narrow ribbon, picking its way between the fields and the lighter green grass of unreclaimed bogland.

As she watched, the little steamer rounded a tall, rock encrusted headland in a flurry of wind-tossed water, and then Port of Laide came into view, a cluster of grey houses behind a massive sea-wall. Fishing boats lay there at anchor, rising and falling gently on the slight swell, and, easily distinguishable even from so far away by reason of its bright red paint, a Post Office van waited by the quayside for the arrival of the mail.

Alison looked about her, all pretence of indifference vanishing now. Apart from the mail van, there appeared to be no other cars on the jetty, and she wondered whether Janet had remembered that she was due to arrive today or whether, characteristically, she had put off going to meet her until she sighted the *Loch Duich* from her surgery window. In the mist, she might not have seen her, might have imagined that—as she often was in bad weather—the steamer was late.

‘Well, We’re nearly in, I see.’ The voice came from behind, and Alison turned, a trifle startled since she hadn’t heard his approach, to find that her fellow passenger had left the warmth of the saloon which he had hitherto monopolized, to join her on the chilly deck. She eyed him reproachfully, but he was smiling now in a friendly way and his pipe, to her relief, was no longer in evidence. He was a thin, gaunt-faced man, with a scholar’s stoop, heavily muffled in a tweed overcoat and wearing a

shabby deerstalker which somehow did not become him. He gestured to the jetty. 'Is this your first visit to Rhua?' he asked.

She shook her head. 'No, I was here years ago, as a child. But I don't remember much about it. Do you live on the island?'

'I work on it. One might almost say'—his tone was unexpectedly bitter—'that I'm buried alive here. And you? You're not a tourist, are you?'

'Oh, no. I've come here to work too,' Alison said, 'as assistant to Dr Janet Campbell. I imagine you will know her?'

'We've met,' the gaunt-faced stranger conceded. 'To date, I have never had to call on Dr Campbell's professional services, I'm happy to say . . . implying no disrespect, of course, merely that I am fortunate in my state of health. And now Rhua is to have a second lady physician . . . well, well! But one from outside, this time. . . .' His eyes, dark and deep-set, studied her carefully, the smile fading. 'Perhaps I may be permitted to introduce myself, Doctor. My name is Westlake, Howard Westlake, and I'm also a doctor, though not of medicine. I am a scientist, government-employed, at present directing the research establishment set up eighteen months ago, at the Castle of Laide. Possibly Dr Campbell has mentioned its existence to you?'

'No,' Alison denied. She told him her name and waited expectantly for some further explanation, but her new acquaintance did not offer one. Instead, after a few brief and merely courteous remarks about the weather and their trip from Oban, he excused himself, and she didn't see him again until after they had landed. By that time it was evident that Janet Campbell had not come to meet the boat, and, having enquired for taxis and been told that there were none, Alison was glad to see him and grateful for his offer—made somewhat grudgingly—to drive her to Ardloisk. His car, a large Rover,

which had been on the cargo deck of the steamer, was unloaded, and in response to Dr Westlake's invitation, she got into the front seat, while he dealt with her luggage for her.

She said, as they drove through the narrow main street, 'I do hope I'm not taking you out of your way, Dr Westlake. I can't imagine why my aunt didn't meet the boat, because she knew I was coming today. I sent her a wire before we left Oban.'

'Then she probably hasn't yet received it, Dr Graham. The telegraph service isn't what it might be here.' He glanced at her curiously. 'So Janet Campbell is your aunt! You didn't say so.'

'You didn't tell me very much about yourself either,' Alison returned. 'Or about your work. But perhaps I shouldn't ask. Is it secret?'

'Yes,' he answered noncommittally. 'As a matter of fact it is. Although that doesn't prevent the locals indulging in speculation as to its nature. We're very unpopular here, you know, because we're supposed to be experimenting in germ-warfare, of all things! A recent outbreak of some mysterious fever among the island cattle has, of course, been attributed to our experiments, and the ill-feeling against us is reaching absurd proportions, fostered by a crazy individual who calls himself Preacher McLeod. I believe he's what is known as a lay evangelist. But whatever he is, the inhabitants of this island take his pronouncements as gospel and they vent their spite on us in all kinds of ways, from supplying us with stale bread and forgetting to deliver milk to——' He shrugged. 'I lose my temper when I talk about it, I'm afraid. It's all so petty and childish . . . and unpleasant, if you're at the receiving end of it. Like some primitive witch-hunt.'

Watching his face, Alison saw that he was really angry and resentful. 'I can imagine it must be unpleasant, Dr Westlake,' she assured him sympathetically. 'But surely not all the

inhabitants of Rhua are so . . . so narrow-minded and unreasonable?’

‘Oh, but they are, Dr Graham, they are. Even the gentry and those who might be expected to know better have shown us pretty clearly that they’d rather we weren’t here. For one thing’—his mouth tightened—‘We’re foreigners. Our staff, scientists and technicians, are English and American. My chief assistant is a German by birth, although he’s been naturalized for years.’

They left the town behind them and Dr Westlake increased his speed, as the road started to climb. He was frowning as he went on, ‘Another thing they’ve got against us is that We’re occupying the castle, which was once the feudal stronghold of the Macraes of Rhua, and they feel we haven’t any right to be there. It’s a draughty, incredibly uncomfortable castle, I may say, with acres of stone flooring and Victorian sanitation, and it can’t be adequately heated—the Macraes were damned lucky to rid themselves of it. They got an extremely good price from the Ministry, of course. But we had to have somewhere where all our staff—and their families, in some cases—could be housed under one roof. The Castle of Laide was the only answer, it’s so vast, it can be divided into flats and still leave us plenty of space for our laboratories and equipment. Personally, however, I wish it hadn’t been. *I’m* not enamoured of the place.’ He expelled his breath in a frustrated sigh. ‘I never suffered from rheumatism until I came here, Dr Graham. Now’—he flexed his long, thin fingers and made a painful grimace—‘I shall probably have to come and consult you about it, if it gets any worse!’

They rounded a sharp bend in the road and, without warning, Dr Westlake applied his brakes. He said apologetically, gesturing ahead of them to where a tall figure in a raincoat was striding up the hill, ‘Forgive me, but that’s a member of my staff,



and I imagine he'd appreciate a lift. No one can possibly walk for pleasure in this weather, can they?' He slowed the car to a crawl and touched the horn button in a warning pip-pip. The walker heard it and turned to look back, then raised his hand in a gesture of recognition and stood waiting for them to draw level. Dr Westlake said, a warm note of approval in his voice, 'That's Stephen Lang. He's a brilliant young man in his own field. Like you, he has a medical degree, but he became interested in research and is now a very fine bacteriologist.' He pulled up, leaning past Alison to open the rear door of the car. 'Well, Steve, as you see, I'm back. Get in, won't you? This is Dr Alison Graham . . .'

'It's great to have you back, sir,' Stephen Lang said, with enthusiasm. He acknowledged the introduction to Alison as he got into the car, smiling at her with frank and unconcealed admiration in his blue eyes. He was a striking-looking man, very tall and well built, with fair hair and a deeply tanned face. From his accent, Alison judged him to be American, from his appearance, she guessed that he was in his middle or early thirties. He wasn't at all her idea of a research scientist, the tanned skin and general air of physical wellbeing suggesting that he spent more of his time in the open air than bending over a microscope at a laboratory bench. Although appearances, she was aware, could be deceptive. He said, as they resumed their interrupted journey and the car gathered speed, 'You're coming to join us in exile, Dr Graham?'

She shook her head, 'Well, no, not exactly. I'm Dr Janet Campbell's new assistant and——'

'*And* her niece, Steve,' Dr Westlake put in quickly. Their eyes met in the driving mirror, and Alison observed, secretly amused, that Dr Westlake's conveyed a warning. The tall young American said smoothly, as if in answer to it, 'Well, I reckon

she'll be very glad to have you.'

'I've been telling Dr Graham,' his chief continued, 'about our unpopularity with the local inhabitants. But I don't think she really believes me.'

'It's true all right,' Steve Lang confirmed, a faint note of irritation in his deep, pleasant voice. 'We're blamed for anything and everything that goes wrong around here. Crops fail—it's our fault. Cattle sicken, We're responsible. We're believed to practise vivisection and regarded as inhuman sadists by the animal-lovers. The only thing we aren't blamed for is the rain . . . that's practically continuous and always has been, so most people are accustomed to it. We're not, needless to say. We find it restricts our social life—such as there is of it.'

'Have you tried to get to know any of the local people?' Alison asked diffidently. 'To entertain any of them, I mean? Hospitality is . . .'

but they both interrupted her.

'Tried!' Dr Westlake exploded. 'Yes, by heaven, we have tried, Dr Graham. And what have we achieved by our efforts?'

'We've been put in our place,' Steve Lang supplied flatly. 'Well and truly shown where we get off, I can promise you. When we first came, we held a reception . . . you know, a kind of free-for-all in the castle grounds, to which we invited the local landowners, the tenant farmers and estate workers, as well as people from the town. And the ministers, of course, and the church folk. That was a great success, except that it rained. Most of them turned up, including the famous Preacher McLeod—a fiery old character with white hair and a booming voice. They were all very neighbourly, promised us invitations to fish and shoot, to play golf, to sail. We were asked to join in some of the church functions . . . things looked pretty good. And then——'

He broke *off*, *spreading* his brown hands in a defeated gesture. 'I don't know what went wrong or where they got the strange

ideas they now have about us. Maybe I was responsible for part of it—I made the mistake of showing Preacher McLeod over one of the animal labs.’ He talked on, his voice sounding puzzled and bitter.

Alison listened, feeling sorry for him, yet bewildered by what he was telling her. He gave no details of the work the research centre was engaged in, apologizing for his inability to do so because its nature was secret and governed by strict security regulations. But he told her enough to make it clear that a most unhappy misunderstanding had arisen. Obviously there had been mistakes on both sides, yet there seemed to be no excuse for the attitude of the local people—particularly the better educated among them. Even the gentry who, as Dr Westlake had said, ought to have known better, apparently refused to mix socially with the research men and their wives, and efforts to entertain them had been met with persistent rebuffs.

Dr Westlake said, breaking in on his colleague’s embittered recital, ‘There’s the principal bone of contention, Dr Graham . . . do you see it, over there by the lochside? That’s our research centre, that’s the Castle of Laide. It looks rather magnificent from here, doesn’t it?’

It did, Alison realized, following the direction of his pointing finger. The castle stood high above the narrow sea loch they were approaching, its weathered battlements and tall keep silhouetted against the darkening sky. It was a vast building, commanding both the road and the entrance to the loch, parts of it many centuries old, defying time and the ravages of wind and water, a mediaeval fortress, built to withstand the assaults of any foe who might be bold enough to pit his strength against it.

Steve Lang leaned closer, his hand on her shoulder.

‘I live in the West Tower, Dr Graham,’ he told her. ‘There, the

one which overlooks the road. It's round those battlements that the ghost of the Piper of Laide is said to wander, playing the music which either keeps you here for ever or drives you away. You can guess what tunes he's been heard playing to *us* since our arrival, can't you?'

Alison turned to look at him in astonishment, unable to believe that he was serious. 'Don't tell me you've heard him, Dr Lang——'

He inclined his crew-cut fair head. 'I've heard him,' he replied grimly. 'Never when I was in my room, though. Which suggests that he isn't a ghost, don't you think? On the only occasion when I saw him, he looked pretty solid. But you can't tell these people that, they just won't have it . . . and our so-called ghostly visitant is making plenty of trouble for us, along with the rest.'

'Then he's still about, is he?' Dr Westlake questioned.

'Sure, he's still about, sir. But the Lord only knows how he gets out on to those battlements—I've had my apartment locked up for a month, and that's the only way I know that he can reach the top of the tower. I keep the key with me, when I go out, too.' He grinned wryly at Alison. 'I guess Dr Graham may wonder what she's coming to, if we go on talking this way. Maybe we should change the subject.'

'Not on my account,' Alison pleaded. 'I find it all very interesting, I must admit. I mean—it almost looks as if—well, as if some sort of attempt is being made to sabotage your work, doesn't it?'

The two scientists were silent, again exchanging a significant glance in the driving mirror. Finally Dr Westlake said, with a thin smile, 'That idea has occurred to us, Doctor. It's being investigated. Though it's hardly the sort of attempt at sabotage we can report to our security people—or to the police—is it? They would think, not without justification, that we were mad.'

They drove in silence for a while. Then, when the grey slate rooftops of a village came into sight, Steve Lang said, 'That is the village of Ardloisk, Dr Graham, and no doubt you'll be given a warm welcome there by the redoubtable Dr Campbell.'

'I hope so, Dr Lang. Even if she did forget to come and meet me!'

'She did?' He shrugged. 'Well, what do you know? I must say, if you'd been coming here as *my* assistant, I shouldn't have forgotten to meet you. Far from it, I'd have been pacing the jetty impatiently hours before the *Loch Dutch* was even on the horizon! But of course, Dr Campbell is your aunt, isn't she?'

'Yes,' Alison agreed, sensing more in the bantering question than the words implied. 'Dr Campbell is my aunt.'

'Which puts you on the other side, maybe?'

She met his gaze squarely. 'Why should it? I'm an outsider too, you know.'

'Fine! Then may we hope you'll come and visit us, after you're settled in?' Steve Lang's voice was eager, his eyes once again admiring.

'Thank you. I should like to do that very much,' Alison told him, meaning it and very conscious suddenly of his attraction.

He touched her arm briefly. 'I'll call you, then. And I shall hold you to your promise, Dr Graham.'

Dr Westlake drew up outside a drive gate, whose stone pillar bore a worn brass plate. 'This is the house, I believe . . . yes, I can see the name.' He engaged his gear once more and skilfully negotiated the steep, moss-grown drive. The house standing at the end of it was larger and shabbier than Alison remembered, but it was familiar, a rambling, three-storey house, with greenpainted shutters, and a pair of dormer windows beneath the eaves which, she recalled, opened out of the bedroom she had occupied years ago.