

Extract from *Go Tell The Bees That I Am Gone*, by Diana Gabaldon

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Fraser's Ridge, Colony of North Carolina

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THERE WAS A STONE under my right buttock, but I didn't want to move. The tiny heartbeat under my fingers was soft and stubborn, the fleeting jolts life. The space between them was infinity, my connection to the dark sky and the rising flame.

"Move your arse a bit, Sassenach," said a voice in my ear. "I need to scratch my nose and ye're sitting on my hand." Jamie twitched his fingers under me, and I moved, turning toward him as I shifted and resettled, keeping my hold on three-year-old Mandy, bonelessly asleep in my arms.

He smiled at me over Jem's tousled head and scratched his nose. It must have been past midnight, but the fire was still high, and the light sparked off the stubble of his beard and glowed as softly in his eyes as in his grandson's red hair and the shadowed folds of the worn plaid he'd wrapped about them both.

On the other side of the fire, Brianna laughed, in the quiet way people laugh in the middle of the night with sleeping children near.

She laid her head on Roger's shoulder, her eyes half closed. She looked completely exhausted, her hair unwashed and tangled, the firelight scooping deep hollows in her face . . .but happy.

"What is it ye find funny, a nighean?" Jamie asked, shifting Jem into a more comfortable position. Jem was fighting as hard as he could to stay awake, but was losing the fight. He gaped enormously and shook his head, blinking like a dazed owl.

"Wha's funny?" he repeated, but the last word trailed off, leaving him with his mouth half open and a glassy stare.

His mother giggled, a lovely girlish sound, and I felt Jamie's smile.

"I just asked Daddy if he remembered a Gathering we went to, years ago. The clans were all called at a big bonfire and I handed Daddy a burning branch and told him to go down to the fire and say the MacKenzies were there."

"Oh." Jem blinked once, then twice, looked at the fire blazing in front of us, and a slight frown formed between his soft red brows. "Where are we now?"

"Home," Roger said firmly, and his eyes met mine, then passed to Jamie. "For good."

Jamie let out the same breath I'd been holding since the afternoon, when those four figures had appeared suddenly in the clearing below, and we had flown down the hill to meet them. There had been one moment of joyous, wordless explosion as we all flung ourselves at one another, and then the explosion had widened as Amy Higgins came out of her cabin, summoned by the noise, to be followed by Bobby, then Aidan— who had whooped at sight of Jem and tackled him, knocking him flat— with Orrie and little Rob.

Jo Beardsley had been in the woods nearby, heard the racket, and come to see . . . and within what seemed like moments, the clearing was alive with people. Six households were within reach of the news before sundown; the rest would undoubtedly hear of it tomorrow.