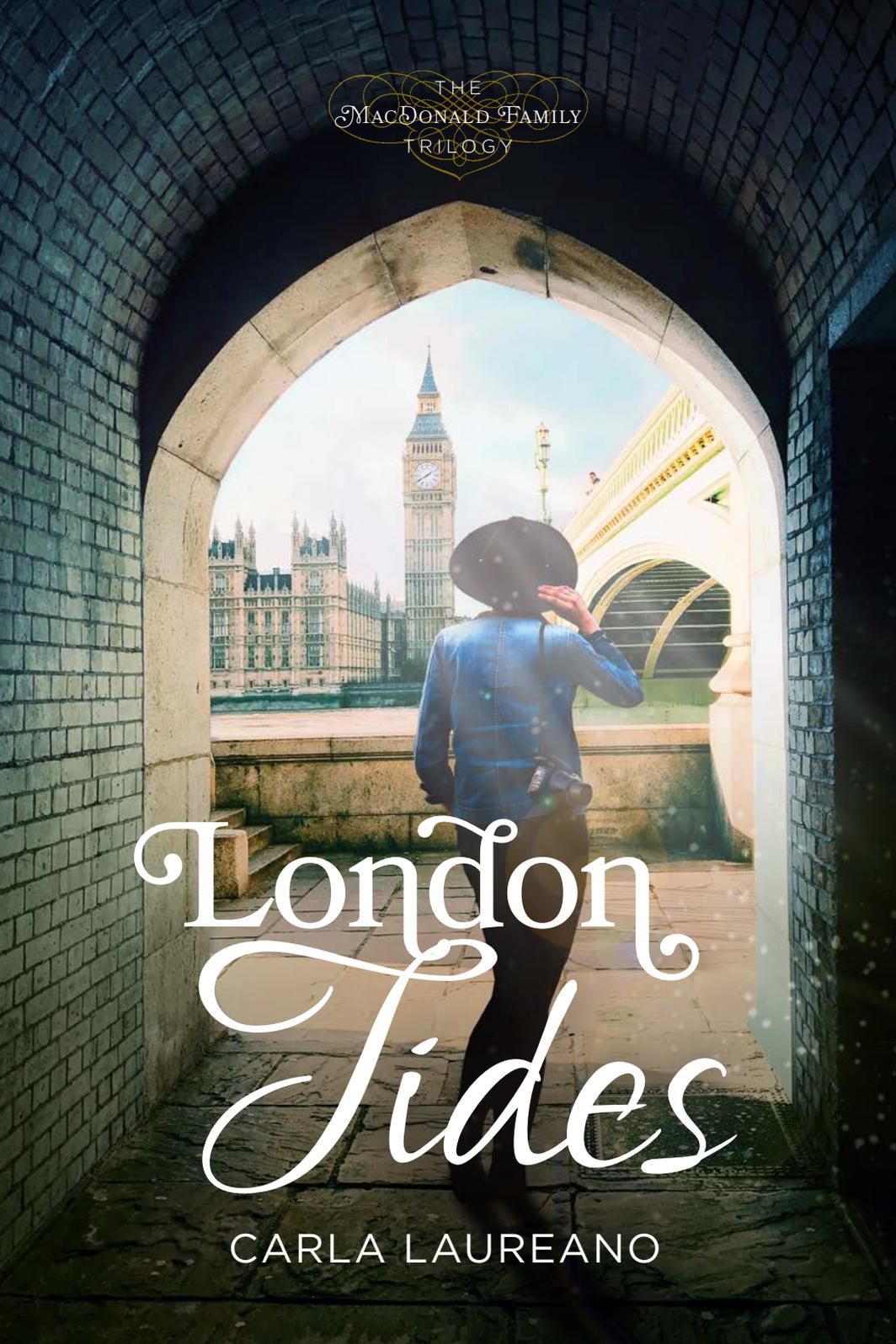


THE
MACDONALD FAMILY
TRILOGY



London
Tides

CARLA LAUREANO

Praise for Carla Laureano

LONDON TIDES

“In *London Tides*, Carla Laureano shows how fear and grief can hold us captive—unable to love ourselves and others. Yes, Laureano has written a beautiful reconciliation romance, but she also delves into deeper themes of identity and acceptance. The character of Grace Brennan, in spite of her unconventional life, speaks to all of us.”

BETH K. VOGT, author of *Things I Never Told You* and *Moments We Forget*

“Achieving an aching depth and a resounding trueness within a heated yet baggage-ridden romance, author Carla Laureano has proven herself a storyteller who is not afraid to take her characters into the darkest regions of their own hearts. An excellent follow-up to *Five Days in Skye*, *London Tides* tugs and churns every emotion . . . right up until the lovely, hope-buoying end.”

SERENA CHASE, author of *Intermission* and the Eyes of E'veria series

“At times lighthearted; at times heart wrenching. Laureano has penned a delightfully romantic tale about the importance of finding home. If readers weren't already smitten with the MacDonald brothers, they will be after *London Tides!*”

KATIE GANSHERT, award-winning author of *No One Ever Asked*

“Another captivating story! *London Tides* is as compelling and engaging as Laureano’s award-winning *Five Days in Skye*. It’s deliciously romantic and filled with tension, wonderful characters, and vivid scenery. A must-read this summer!”

KATHERINE REAY, author of *A Portrait of Emily Price* and *The Austen Escape*

“War photographer Grace Brennan is the kind of character I love to read about—she’s savvy, fearless, and damaged, yet is determined to carry on. Returning to London means making amends with Ian MacDonald, the fiancé she left behind, and author Carla Laureano knows how to make the most of their chemistry. But a chance at love for Grace also means facing the realities of PTSD, a subject Laureano handles with great sensitivity and care. Vividly written and deeply felt, *London Tides* will sweep readers away.”

HILLARY MANTON LODGE, author of *A Table by the Window*

FIVE DAYS IN SKYE

“Sweet and scathing, lush and intimate. . . . This story has guts and heart as well as the depth and heat necessary to satisfy any romance reader’s palate.”

USA TODAY

“From page one, *Five Days in Skye* captured my imagination and every minute of my pleasure-reading time. With enviable finesse, author Carla Laureano weaves romance, hope, healing, and faith into a spunky and sparkling tale that made

me sorry to say good-bye to the characters and the alluring Isle of Skye. I look forward to reading more from this author.”

TAMARA LEIGH, author of *Splitting Harriet* and *The Unveiling*, book one in the Age of Faith series

“After reading *Five Days in Skye*, I wanted to pack my bags and catch the first flight to Scotland to discover Skye for myself. In her debut novel, Carla Laureano brought Skye alive with vivid detail, drew me into the main characters’ budding romance, and kept me turning the pages late into the night. I’m looking forward to more books from Carla!”

BETH K. VOGT, author of *Things I Never Told You* and *Moments We Forget*

“*Five Days in Skye* swept me away to Scotland! Against the craggy beauty of the Isle of Skye, author Carla Laureano weaves a story . . . of love between an American businesswoman and a Scottish celebrity chef. Fans of the movie *The Holiday* are sure to enjoy this contemporary romance. Laureano’s voice is deft, seamless, and wonderfully accomplished. An exciting newcomer to the world of Christian fiction!”

BECKY WADE, author of *My Stubborn Heart* and *Undeniably Yours*

THE SATURDAY NIGHT SUPPER CLUB

“A terrific read from a talented author. Made me hungry more than once. I can’t wait to read what comes next.”

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Masterpiece*

“Bright, jovial, and peppered with romance and delectable cuisine, this is a sweet and lively love story.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review

“Romance aficionados and fans of stories about overcoming obstacles and the role of faith in everyday life will eagerly await the next entry in this sweet food-centered series.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Laureano’s latest novel, the first in her Supper Club series, is a delight for foodies! There’s a delectable amount of behind-the-scenes restaurant and cooking detail . . . that will literally have readers’ mouths watering for a taste.”

ROMANTIC TIMES, 4 ½ star Top Pick

“This romance nurtures the balance between following one’s dreams and embracing the moment.”

FOREWORD MAGAZINE

“Writing charmingly about faith, love, friendship, and food, Laureano will leave readers hungry for the next installment in the Supper Club series.”

BOOKLIST

“You don’t have to be a foodie to enjoy *The Saturday Night Supper Club*, but if you are, you’re in for an extra treat. Carla Laureano has written a delicious romance you’ll

want to devour in one sitting. Filled with sugar and spice, *The Saturday Night Supper Club* will leave you hungry for more from this talented author.”

IRENE HANNON, bestselling author and three-time RITA Award winner

“At turns devastating and delightful, this novel contrasts the heartbreak of instant infamy against the charm of a budding attraction. Highly recommended!”

SERENA CHASE, author of *Intermission* and the Eyes of E'veria series

“An absolute delight with compelling characters, a rich sense of place, and food that lingers on your palate long after the final page.”

KATHERINE REAY, author of *A Portrait of Emily Price* and *The Austen Escape*

“Smart, funny, romantic, hopeful—the perfect starter for Laureano’s scrumptious new series.”

CANDACE CALVERT, bestselling author of *Maybe It's You* and *The Recipe*

“*The Saturday Night Supper Club* is a riveting read, crafted with sophisticated characters, delicious settings, and a satisfying romance that will leave readers breathless and anxious for the next book in the series.”

JEN TURANO, *USA Today* bestselling author of *A Change of Fortune*

BRUNCH AT BITTERSWEET CAFÉ

“With fun food scenes and organic spiritual elements, Laureano’s book will be relished by sweet-toothed inspirational readers.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Realistic romance and spiritual message make *Brunch at Bittersweet Café* an exceptional pick.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

London Tides

THE
MACDONALD FAMILY
TRILOGY

London *Tides*

CARLA LAUREANO



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London Tides

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London Tides is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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*To all my sisters who feel unseen and insignificant—
You are loved. Your stories matter.*

*And for Camille Lepage (1988–2014),
whose life and work helped shape Grace.*

Rest in peace.



Acknowledgments

MY TYNDALE TEAM—thank you for giving me the chance to once more put this story out into the world, this time as close to my original vision as I could make it. Books don't often get a second chance, so I'm eternally grateful.

My agent, Steve Laube—I'm going to start calling you the Author Whisperer, because you somehow always know just what I need to hear. Thank you.

My new editors, Jan Stob and Sarah Rische—thank you for understanding what this story means to me and where I wanted to see it go. You make this process all worthwhile!

The book's original editor, Rachelle Gardner—the road was rocky, but without you, this would have never made it to press the first time. I won't ever forget that.

My “Usual Suspects”—seriously, though, you guys are the only thing keeping me focused and somewhat sane (please stop laughing)—my family, Laurie Tomlinson, Elizabeth Younts, Brandy Vallance, Evangeline Denmark, Serena Chase, Beth Vogt, Jen Turano, and Halee Matthews.

My beta readers, Evangeline Denmark, Elizabeth Olmedo, Laurie Tomlinson, Brandy Vallance, and Sarah Varland. You

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might not recognize this book when you read it again, but I so appreciate you taking time out of your lives and writing to give me your honest feedback.

I couldn't end without naming the photojournalists whose work and lives inspired me while writing *Grace*, particularly Lynsey Addario, Deborah Copaken, and Camille Lepage. Their risks give a look into a world the rest of us might never imagine. I owe their photographs great thanks for opening my eyes and heart to people and places I've never considered. I'm sure I got some details wrong, but in the end I hope my admiration and respect for the discipline shines through.

A Note from the Author

LONDON TIDES WAS FIRST RELEASED in summer of 2015, but it was a slightly different version from the story you're about to read. Novels are often shaped by individuals other than their authors: editors, publishing executives, retailers. At the time, certain elements of my original story were deemed too edgy for the market and I was asked to revise the last quarter of the book. And while I was proud of the finished project, I always felt that Grace's character arc had somewhat suffered from the changes.

The series was then acquired by Tyndale House Publishers, who graciously agreed to take a look at the first version of the book—and liked it as much as I did. What you have here is a combination of the best of both versions—a true collaborative effort—with some brand-new material worked in. And despite the amount of hair-pulling required to get to this version, this story remains the one that is nearest to my heart. I hope you love it as much as I do.

CHAPTER ONE

SHE SHOULDN'T BE HERE.

Grace Brennan snapped several pictures of the fog-shrouded river, forcing down the tide of anxiety that threatened to rise up and engulf her. Chances were he wouldn't be here either. People changed in ten years. She certainly had. What kind of man stuck to such a rigid schedule for over a decade?

She ambled down the cement embankment to where the muddy waters of the Thames lapped the bank and raised her camera once more. Even in the dim morning light, her telephoto lens captured every detail of the boats rowing against the ebb tide, from the markings on the shells to the club crests on the rowers' kit. Grace had photographed enough

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regattas in her career to recognize the different clubs and schools by their colors, to distinguish the casuals from the competitive rowers. To know from a distance she hadn't seen him yet.

It was a mad impulse that brought her here anyhow. Her regrets should have stayed in the past, where they belonged, with the rest of her mistakes. Back then, her fears had clouded her judgment, skewed her perspective. And no matter how far she'd come, there might always be parts of her that were broken. What would coming back here do but remind her of what she'd given up?

She was about ready to move on to some street-level shots when a sleek red eight glided with precision toward the bank on which she stood. Again the camera came up to focus on the crew, and her heart rose into her throat when her gaze landed on the man in the stroke seat nearest the stern.

His dark hair was short now, thick waves cropped into submission, but she would have recognized him anywhere. He radiated capability and confidence with an oar in hand, and even his rowing waterproofs couldn't hide a physique that was as lean and muscular as a decade before. Clearly she'd had good reason to believe things hadn't changed.

Grace's hand tightened convulsively around the column of the thick lens as she let the neck strap take the camera's weight. Her muscles tensed, her heart pounding. Should she call to him? Would he even speak to her?

Then he turned her way and stopped, the oar frozen in midair. He saw her, no mistake. She held her breath, waiting to see what he would do.

Just as quickly, he turned away, his movements brusque

and businesslike as he removed his oar from the lock. Her hopes rushed away as quickly as the tide.

Ten years wondering how she'd feel if she saw him again. Ten years convincing herself that time and distance would change things. Pure rubbish, all of it.

She still loved him. And he still hadn't forgiven her.



Grace wound her way into the Regency Café, ignoring the irritated looks from waiting patrons. Even at eight in the morning, the greasy spoon was packed with diners, the queue stretching out the door, voices raised in a hum just short of deafening. She scanned the crowded room until her gaze landed on a beautiful Indian woman staking out a corner table.

Asha held up her arm and pointed to her wristwatch with raised eyebrows.

"I know, I know, I'm late."

Grace grimaced as she approached the table, but Asha pulled her into a bone-crushing hug before she could get out the rest of her apology.

"Only by about two years! When did you arrive in London? Before you called this morning, I didn't even know you were coming."

"Landed last night." The tightness in Grace's chest eased as she slid into a chair and placed her gear bag between her feet. "It was a last-minute decision. Did you order for us?"

"Of course. I didn't queue for an hour for tea. I got your usual. It *is* your usual, right? You didn't go vegan on me or anything . . ."

Grace laughed. "Absolutely not. I live on bacon. Besides,

Paris hasn't been as much fun since they stopped sautéing everything in a kilo of butter. You know you're in trouble when even the French turn health conscious."

Asha laughed too, her expression radiating happiness. Since they'd met on a medical mission in Jaipur twelve years ago, Dr. Asha Issar had become her close friend and confidante. Grace had no doubt that her joy was genuine.

"So tell me, why *are* you back in London?"

"To see you, of course." At Asha's disbelieving look, Grace smiled and amended, "It was time, Ash. I couldn't avoid an entire country forever. I'm considering moving back."

"I'd love that. But you said you'd never leave the field. What happened?" Asha's attention settled on Grace's right arm, where it rested on the table. "Does it have something to do with the new tattoo?"

Grace touched the tiny green dragon that curled around her wrist like a bracelet, melding seamlessly into the design of colored flowers and wrought iron above it. It was good work—artistic work—but she should have known Asha would understand this was no more a whim than the other tattoos that covered her right arm to the shoulder.

"Brian is dead."

"Oh, Grace, I'm so sorry. What happened?"

Grace swallowed hard while she brought her voice under control. "You hear about the incident in Syria?"

"That was him?" Understanding dawned on Asha's face. "That was you. You were the other photographer who survived the blast. Grace, why didn't you tell me?"

Because she hadn't told anyone. Because the grief was too fresh. And deep down, she felt responsible.

Sure, she'd not been the one to fire the grenade. She'd

warned Brian that their position was too exposed, had been trying to get them out. But he was so young and eager to get the shot, and it had been her responsibility to rein in that reckless enthusiasm, just as her own mentor Jean-Auguste had done for her.

She'd failed miserably.

"So that's why I'm here," Grace said at last. "I'm supposed to be in Aleppo, but I couldn't get on the plane."

Asha reached for her hand across the table and squeezed it hard. "I understand; I really do. But you love the work. Surely you don't want to quit."

"Come on, Ash. You know shooting conflicts was supposed to be a short-term plan, not the past ten years of my life. Everyone with half a brain is out, onto something safer."

"But you've worked for this since you were nineteen!"

"And look where it's gotten me."

"Achieving a level of success most people never imagine. *Newsweek* and *National Geographic* have you on speed dial. You were listed as one of the most influential photographers of the decade, for heaven's sake."

"One of the most influential photographers of the decade." Grace gave a short, humorless laugh. "Had I died along with Brian, would anyone have missed me besides you and Jean-Auguste? I'm thirty-four, Ash. I can pack up my entire life in three cases and a duffel bag. My parents don't talk to me anymore, and the only person to send me a birthday card was the president of my photo agency."

Asha's gaze drilled into her. "You're back for Ian."

"When you say it that way, I sound completely pathetic."

"Not *completely* pathetic. Just a little bit."

“It was daft,” Grace said. “If you could have seen the look on his face—”

“You saw him? What did you do? What did he say?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t stick around to find out.”

“Grace—”

“I know, I know. But what do you say in that situation? ‘Hi, I’m sorry I ran out on you six months before our wedding. How have you been?’ Besides, for all I know, he’s married and has half a dozen kids now.”

“He’s not married.”

The pronouncement stunned Grace into momentary silence. “You’ve seen him?”

“He and Jake go out for a pint on occasion. He dates, but as far as I can tell, nothing serious. It leads one to believe he’s waiting for something. Or someone.”

Grace’s heart jolted at the words, but she shook her head. However much she might want to put things right, what she had done to him was unforgivable. What kind of woman left the man she loved without a proper good-bye? What kind of man forgave that sort of betrayal?

“You should talk to him, Grace. Even if it’s just to put him behind you.”

As Grace opened her mouth to reply, the woman behind the counter shouted a familiar order. “That us?”

“Yeah. I’ll get it.” Asha pushed back the chair.

“Bacon, egg, mushrooms, tomatoes, two toasts! You comin’ to get it, or you want me to fax it to ya?”

Grace chuckled. “Let me. Least I can do after you saved me the hour wait.”

She pushed her way back to the counter, relieved to escape her friend’s scrutiny. Maybe Asha was right, but she’d been

trying to put Ian behind her for ten years. What made either of them think she'd be any more successful now?

By the time Grace returned with their breakfasts, she'd steeled herself for more analysis, but Asha didn't bring up the subject again. Instead, she asked, "Where are you staying?"

"Hotel."

Asha reached into her handbag and slid a key across the table. "You know the address."

"Ash, I couldn't—"

"Nonsense. Of course you could. How long will you be here?"

"At least through the end of August. A friend is putting together a showing of my portraits at his gallery in Putney. After that, I'm not sure."

"You just got here, and you're already looking for an excuse to leave." A smile softened Asha's words, though, and she reached out to squeeze Grace's hand again. "I'm glad you're back."

"Me too." To stave off further discussion, Grace dug into her breakfast and barely stifled a groan of pleasure. Paris might be the culinary center of Europe, but nothing beat an old-fashioned fry-up from this landmark diner. She allowed herself to savor a few more bites before she shot a stern look at Asha. "So. Jake. Don't think you're going to slip that one by me. Did you finally say yes?"

Asha shrugged. "After five years of asking me out, it seemed only fair to give the bloke a chance."

"It's about time. I've always thought you two would make a great couple."

She laughed. "It had crossed my mind over the years. But one or both of us were always seeing someone else. He was

busy with work; I was splitting my time between here and India . . . It wasn't the right time for a relationship."

If anyone understood that, it was Grace. Still, after Asha had broken off a tumultuous romance with a fellow physician, Grace had wondered if she would ever take a chance on another man. "We should have dinner, then, the three of us. I haven't seen him in ages."

"You haven't seen anyone in ages," Asha countered, but it was without heat. She glanced at her watch and grimaced. "I have to go or I'll be late for my shift. Move your things to the flat, yeah? I'll be back later tonight."

"Thanks, Ash. It means a lot to me." Grace gave her a quick hug, then watched her stride from the restaurant. Of all her friends, Asha was the most dependable, the most understanding. But then, she had a better perspective on what Grace did for a living, having spent much of her early career in conflict zones herself. It took firsthand experience to understand how it felt to live day-to-day in varying degrees of danger.

She turned back to her plate, but her mind returned to Ian. She should have stuck around and talked to him, told him the conclusions she'd reached in the three months since Brian's death. After all these years, he deserved to know why she had run away. Deserved to know it hadn't been because she'd stopped loving him.

And maybe he deserved to know that leaving him had been the biggest mistake of her life.