

AUTHOR OF THE MULTIMILLION BESTSELLING
OUTLANDER
SERIES

DIANA
GABALDON

VOYAGER



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About the Book

Jamie Fraser is lying on the battlefield of Culloden, where he had expected and hoped to die. Instead he rises wounded, to face execution or imprisonment. Either prospect pales beside the pain of loss – his wife is gone. Forever.

But sometimes forever is shorter than one thinks.

In 1746, Claire Fraser made a perilous journey through time, leaving her young husband to die at Culloden, in order to protect their unborn child. In 1968, Claire has just been struck through the heart, discovering that Jamie Fraser *didn't* die in battle.

But where is Jamie now? With the help of her grown daughter, Claire sets out to find the man who was her life – and might be once again.

About the Author

DIANA GABALDON is the author of the international bestselling Outlander novels and Lord John Grey series.

She says that the Outlander series started by accident: 'I decided to write a novel for practice in order to learn what it took to write a novel, and to decide whether I really wanted to do it for real. I did – and here we all are trying to decide what to call books that nobody can describe, but that fortunately most people seem to enjoy.'

And enjoy them they do – in their millions, all over the world. Published in 42 countries and 38 languages, in 2014 the Outlander novels were made into an acclaimed TV series starring Sam Heughan as Jamie Fraser and Caitriona Balfe as Claire. Seasons three and four are currently in production.

Diana lives with her husband and dogs in Scottsdale, Arizona, and is currently at work on her ninth Outlander novel.

For further information, please see Diana's website at www.DianaGabaldon.com, or talk to her on Twitter ([@Writer_DG](https://twitter.com/Writer_DG)) or Facebook: [AuthorDianaGabaldon](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorDianaGabaldon)

Also by Diana Gabaldon

Outlander (previously published as *Cross Stitch*)

Claire Randall leaves her husband for an afternoon walk in the Highlands, passes through a circle of standing stones and finds herself in Jacobite Scotland, pursued by danger and forcibly married to another man – a young Scots warrior named Jamie Fraser.

Dragonfly in Amber

For twenty years Claire Randall has kept the secrets of an ancient battle and her daughter's heritage. But the dead don't sleep, and the time for silence is long past.

Voyager

Jamie Fraser died on the battlefield of Culloden – or did he? Claire seeks through the darkness of time for the man who once was her soul – and might be once again.

Drums of Autumn

How far will a daughter go, to save the life of a father she's never known?

The Fiery Cross

The North Carolina backcountry is burning and the long fuse of rebellion is lit. Jamie Fraser is a born leader of men – but a passionate husband and father as well. How much will such a man sacrifice for freedom?

A Breath of Snow and Ashes

1772, and three years hence, the shot heard round the world will be fired. But will Jamie, Claire, and the Frasers of Fraser's Ridge be still alive to hear it?

An Echo in the Bone

Jamie Fraser is an 18th-century Highlander, and ex-Jacobite traitor, and a reluctant rebel. His wife, Claire Randall Fraser, is a surgeon – from the 20th century. What she knows of the future compels him to fight; what she doesn't know may kill them both.

Written in My Own Heart's Blood

Jamie Fraser returns from a watery grave to discover that his best friend has married his wife, his illegitimate son has discovered (to his horror) who his father really is, and his nephew wants to marry a Quaker. The Frasers can only be thankful that their daughter and her family are safe in 20th-century Scotland. Or not ...

DIANA
GABALDON
*V*OYAGER



arrow books

*To my children,
Laura Juliet,
Samuel Gordon,
and Jennifer Rose,*

*Who gave me the heart, the blood, and
the bones of this book.*

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Prologue

When I was small, I never wanted to step in puddles. Not because of any fear of drowned worms or wet stockings; I was by and large a grubby child, with a blissful disregard for filth of any kind.

It was because I couldn't bring myself to believe that that perfect smooth expanse was no more than a thin film of water over solid earth. I believed it was an opening into some fathomless space. Sometimes, seeing the tiny ripples caused by my approach, I thought the puddle impossibly deep, a bottomless sea in which the lazy coil of tentacle and gleam of scale lay hidden, with the threat of huge bodies and sharp teeth adrift and silent in the far-down depths.

And then, looking down into reflection, I would see my own round face and frizzled hair against a featureless blue sweep, and think instead that the puddle was the entrance to another sky. If I stepped in there, I would drop at once, and keep on falling, on and on, into blue space.

The only time I would dare to walk through a puddle was at twilight, when the evening stars came out. If I looked in the water and saw one lighted pinprick there, I could splash through unafraid—for if I should fall into the puddle and on into space, I could grab hold of the star as I passed, and be safe.

Even now, when I see a puddle in my path, my mind half-halts—though my feet do not—then hurries on, with only the echo of the thought left behind.

What if, this time, you fall?

PART ONE



Battle, and the Loves of Men

The Corbies' Feast

*Many a Highland chieftain fought,
Many a gallant man did fall.
Death itself were dearly bought,
All for Scotland's King and law.*

—“*Will Ye No Come Back Again?*”

April 16, 1746

HE WAS DEAD. However, his nose throbbed painfully, which he thought odd in the circumstances. While he placed considerable trust in the understanding and mercy of his Creator, he harbored that residue of elemental guilt that made all men fear the chance of hell. Still, all he had ever heard of hell made him think it unlikely that the torments reserved for its luckless inhabitants could be restricted to a sore nose.

On the other hand, this couldn't be heaven, on several counts. For one, he didn't deserve it. For another, it didn't look it. And for a third, he doubted that the rewards of the blessed included a broken nose, any more than those of the damned.

While he had always thought of Purgatory as a gray sort of place, the faint reddish light that hid everything around him seemed suitable. His mind was clearing a bit, and his power to reason was coming back, if slowly. Someone, he thought rather crossly, ought to see him and tell him just what the sentence was, until he should have suffered enough to be

purified, and at last to enter the Kingdom of God. Whether he was expecting a demon or an angel was uncertain. He had no idea of the staffing requirements of Purgatory; it wasn't a matter the dominie had addressed in his schooldays.

While waiting, he began to take stock of whatever other torments he might be required to endure. There were numerous cuts, gashes, and bruises here and there, and he was fairly sure he'd broken the fourth finger of his right hand again—difficult to protect it, the way it stuck out so stiff, with the joint frozen. None of that was too bad, though. What else?

Claire. The name knifed across his heart with a pain that was more racking than anything his body had ever been called on to withstand.

If he had had an actual body anymore, he was sure it would have doubled up in agony. He had known it would be like this, when he sent her back to the stone circle. Spiritual anguish could be taken as a standard condition in Purgatory, and he had expected all along that the pain of separation would be his chief punishment—sufficient, he thought, to atone for anything he'd ever done: murder and betrayal included.

He did not know whether persons in Purgatory were allowed to pray or not, but tried anyway. *Lord*, he prayed, *that she may be safe. She and the child.* He was sure she would have made it to the circle itself; only two months gone with child, she was still light and fleet of foot—and the most stubbornly determined woman he had ever met. But whether she had managed the dangerous transition back to the place from which she had come—sliding precariously through whatever mysterious layers lay between then and now, powerless in the grip of the rock—that he could never know, and the thought of it was enough to make him forget even the throbbing in his nose.

He resumed his interrupted inventory of bodily ills, and became inordinately distressed at the discovery that his left leg appeared to be missing. Sensation stopped at the hip, with a sort of pins-and-needles tingling at the joint. Presumably he would get it back in due time, either when he finally arrived in Heaven, or at the least, at Judgment Day. And after all, his brother-in-law Ian managed very well on the wooden peg he wore to replace *his* missing leg.

Still, his vanity was troubled. Ah, that must be it; a punishment meant to cure him of the sin of vanity. He mentally set his teeth, determined to accept whatever came to him with fortitude, and such humility as he could manage. Still, he couldn't help reaching an exploratory hand (or whatever he was using for a hand) tentatively downward, to see just where the limb now ended.

The hand struck something hard, and the fingers tangled in wet, snarled hair. He sat up abruptly, and with some effort, cracked the layer of dried blood that had sealed his eyelids shut. Memory flooded back, and he groaned aloud. He had been mistaken. This *was* hell. But James Fraser was unfortunately not dead, after all.



The body of a man lay across his own. Its dead weight crushed his left leg, explaining the absence of feeling. The head, heavy as a spent cannonball, pressed facedown into his abdomen, the damp, matted hair a dark spill on the wet linen of his shirt. He jerked upward in sudden panic; the head rolled sideways into his lap and a half-open eye stared sightlessly up behind the sheltering strands of hair.

It was Jack Randall, his fine red captain's coat so dark with the wet it looked almost black. Jamie made a fumbling effort to push the body away, but found himself amazingly weak; his hand splayed feebly against Randall's shoulder, and the

elbow of his other arm buckled suddenly as he tried to support himself. He found himself lying once more flat on his back, the sleeting sky pale gray and whirling dizzily overhead. Jack Randall's head moved obscenely up and down on his stomach with each gasping breath.

He pressed his hands flat against the boggy ground—the water rose up cold through his fingers and soaked the back of his shirt—and wriggled sideways. Some warmth was trapped between them; as the limp dead weight slid slowly free, the freezing rain struck his newly exposed flesh with a shock like a blow, and he shivered violently with sudden chill.

As he squirmed on the ground, struggling with the crumpled, mud-stained folds of his plaid, he could hear sounds above the keening of the April wind; far-off shouts and a moaning and wailing, like the calling of ghosts in the wind. And overall, the raucous calling of crows. Dozens of crows, from the sound.

That was strange, he thought dimly. Birds shouldn't fly in a storm like this. A final heave freed the plaid from under him, and he fumbled it over his body. As he reached to cover his legs, he saw that his kilt and left leg were soaked with blood. The sight didn't distress him; it seemed only vaguely interesting, the dark red smears a contrast to the grayish green of the moor plants around him. The echoes of battle faded from his ears, and he left Culloden Field to the calling of the crows.



He was wakened much later by the calling of his name.

“Fraser! Jamie Fraser! Are ye here?”

No, he thought groggily. I'm not. Wherever he had been while unconscious, it was a better place than this. He lay in a small declivity, half-filled with water. The sleeting rain had

stopped, but the wind hadn't; it whined over the moor, piercing and chilling. The sky had darkened nearly to black; it must be near evening, then.

"I saw him go down here, I tell ye. Right near a big clump of gorse." The voice was at a distance, fading as it argued with someone.

There was a rustle near his ear, and he turned his head to see the crow. It stood on the grass a foot away, a blotch of wind-ruffled black feathers, regarding him with a bead-bright eye. Deciding that he posed no threat, it swiveled its neck with casual ease and jabbed its thick sharp bill into Jack Randall's eye.

Jamie jerked up with a cry of revulsion and a flurry of movement that sent the crow flapping off, squawking with alarm.

"Ay! Over there!"

There was a squelching through boggy ground, and a face before him, and the welcome feel of a hand on his shoulder.

"He's alive! Come on, MacDonald! D'ye lend a hand here; he'll no be walkin' on his own." There were four of them, and with a good deal of effort, they got him up, arms draped helpless about the shoulders of Ewan Cameron and Iain MacKinnon.

He wanted to tell them to leave him; his purpose had returned to him with the waking, and he remembered that he had meant to die. But the sweetness of their company was too much to resist. The rest had restored the feeling in his dead leg, and he knew the seriousness of the wound. He would die soon in any case; thank God that it need not be alone, in the dark.



"Water?" The edge of the cup pressed against his lip, and he roused himself long enough to drink, careful not to spill

it. A hand pressed briefly against his forehead and dropped away without comment.

He was burning; he could feel the flames behind his eyes when he closed them. His lips were cracked and sore from the heat, but it was better than the chills that came at intervals. At least when he was fevered, he could lie still; the shaking of the chills woke the sleeping demons in his leg.

Murtagh. He had a terrible feeling about his godfather, but no memory to give it shape. Murtagh was dead; he knew that must be it, but didn't know why or how he knew. A good half of the Highland army was dead, slaughtered on the moor—so much he had gathered from the talk of the men in the farmhouse, but he had no memory of the battle himself.

He had fought with armies before, and knew such loss of memory was not uncommon in soldiers; he had seen it, though never before suffered it himself. He knew the memories would come back, and hoped he would be dead before they did. He shifted at the thought, and the movement sent a jolt of white-hot pain through his leg that made him groan.

"All right, Jamie?" Ewan rose on one elbow next to him, worried face wan in the dawning light. A bloodstained bandage circled his head, and there were rusty stains on his collar, from the scalp wound left by a bullet's graze.

"Aye, I'll do." He reached up a hand and touched Ewan's shoulder in gratitude. Ewan patted it, and lay back down.

The crows were back. Black as night themselves, they had gone to roost with the darkness, but with the dawn they were back—birds of war, the corbies had come to feast on the flesh of the fallen. It could as well be his own eyes the cruel beaks picked out, he thought. He could feel the shape of his eyeballs beneath his lids, round and hot, tasty bits of jelly rolling restless to and fro, looking vainly for oblivion, while the rising sun turned his lids a dark and bloody red.

Four of the men were gathered near the single window of the farmhouse, talking quietly together.

"Make a run for it?" one said, with a nod outside. "Christ, man, the best of us can barely stagger—and there's six at least canna walk at all."

"If ye can go, be going," said a man from the floor. He grimaced toward his own leg, wrapped in the remains of a tattered quilt. "Dinna linger on our account."

Duncan MacDonald turned from the window with a grim smile, shaking his head. The window's light shone off the rough planes of his face, deepening the lines of fatigue.

"Nay, we'll bide," he said. "For one thing, the English are thick as lice on the ground; ye can see them swarm from the window. There's no man would get away whole from Drumossie now."

"Even those that fled the field yesterday will no get far," MacKinnon put in softly. "Did ye no hear the English troops passing in the night at the quick-march? D'ye think it will be hard for them to hunt down our ragtag lot?"

There was no response to this; all of them knew the answer too well. Many of the Highlanders had been barely able to stand on the field before the battle, weakened as they were by cold, fatigue, and hunger.

Jamie turned his face to the wall, praying that his men had started early enough. Lallybroch was remote; if they could get far enough from Culloden, it was unlikely they would be caught. And yet Claire had told him that Cumberland's troops would ravage the Highlands, ranging far afield in their thirst for revenge.

The thought of her this time caused only a wave of terrible longing. God, to have her here, to lay her hands on him, to tend his wounds and cradle his head in her lap. But she was gone—gone away two hundred years from him—and thank the Lord that she was! Tears trickled slowly from under his closed lids, and he rolled painfully onto his side, to hide them from the others.

Lord, that she might be safe, he prayed. She and the child.



Toward midafternoon, the smell of burning came suddenly on the air, wafting through the glassless window. It was thicker than the smell of black-powder smoke, pungent, with an underlying odor that was faintly horrible in its reminiscent smell of roasting meat.

"They are burning the dead," said MacDonald. He had scarcely moved from his seat by the window in all the time they had been in the cottage. He looked like a death's-head himself, hair coal-black and matted with dirt, scraped back from a face in which every bone showed.

Here and there, a small, flat crack sounded on the moor. Gunshots. The coups de grace, administered by those English officers with a sense of compassion, before a tartan-clad wretch should be stacked on the pyre with his luckier fellows. When Jamie looked up, Duncan MacDonald still sat by the window, but his eyes were closed.

Next to him, Ewan Cameron crossed himself. "May we find as much mercy," he whispered.



They did. It was just past noon on the second day when booted feet at last approached the farmhouse, and the door swung open on silent leather hinges.

"Christ." It was a muttered exclamation at the sight within the farmhouse. The draft from the door stirred the fetid air over grimed, bedraggled, bloodstained bodies that lay or sat huddled on the packed-dirt floor.

There had been no discussion of the possibility of armed resistance; they had no heart and there was no point. The

Jacobites simply sat, waiting the pleasure of their visitor.

He was a major, all fresh and new in an uncreased uniform, with polished boots. After a moment's hesitation to survey the inhabitants, he stepped inside, his lieutenant close behind.

"I am Lord Melton," he said, glancing around as though seeking the leader of these men, to whom his remarks might most properly be addressed.

Duncan MacDonald, after a glance of his own, stood slowly, and inclined his head. "Duncan MacDonald, of Glen Richie," he said. "And others"—he waved a hand—"late of the forces of His Majesty, King James."

"So I surmised," the Englishman said dryly. He was young, in his early thirties, but he carried himself with a seasoned soldier's confidence. He looked deliberately from man to man, then reached into his coat and produced a folded sheet of paper.

"I have here an order from His Grace, the Duke of Cumberland," he said. "Authorizing the immediate execution of any man found to have engaged in the treasonous rebellion just past." He glanced around the confines of the cottage once more. "Is there any man here who claims innocence of treason?"

There was the faintest breath of laughter from the Scots. Innocence, with the smoke of battle still black on their faces, here on the edge of the slaughter-field?

"No, my lord," said MacDonald, the faintest of smiles on his lips. "Traitors all. Shall we be hanged, then?"

Melton's face twitched in a small grimace of distaste, then settled back into impassivity. He was a slight man, with small, fine bones, but carried his authority well, nonetheless.

"You will be shot," he said. "You have an hour, in which to prepare yourselves." He hesitated, shooting a glance at his lieutenant, as though afraid to sound overgenerous before his subordinate, but continued. "If any of you wish writing

materials—to compose a letter, perhaps—the clerk of my company will attend you.” He nodded briefly to MacDonald, turned on his heel, and left.

It was a grim hour. A few men availed themselves of the offer of pen and ink, and scribbled doggedly, paper held against the slanted wooden chimney for lack of another firm writing surface. Others prayed quietly, or simply sat, waiting.

MacDonald had begged mercy for Giles McMartin and Frederick Murray, arguing that they were barely seventeen, and should not be held to the same account as their elders. This request was denied, and the boys sat together, white-faced against the wall, holding each other’s hands.

For them, Jamie felt a piercing sorrow—and for the others here, loyal friends and gallant soldiers. For himself, he felt only relief. No more to worry, nothing more to do. He had done all he could for his men, his wife, his unborn child. Now let this bodily misery be ended, and he would go grateful for the peace of it.

More for form’s sake than because he felt the need of it, he closed his eyes and began the Act of Contrition, in French, as he always said it. *Mon Dieu, je regrette ...* And yet he didn’t; it was much too late for any sort of regret.

Would he find Claire at once when he died? he wondered. Or perhaps, as he expected, be condemned to separation for a time? In any case, he would see her again; he clung to the conviction much more firmly than he embraced the tenets of the Church. God had given her to him; He would restore her.

Forgetting to pray, he instead began to conjure her face behind his eyelids, the curve of cheek and temple, a broad fair brow that always moved him to kiss it, just there, in that small smooth spot between her eyebrows, just at the top of her nose, between clear amber eyes. He fixed his attention on the shape of her mouth, carefully imagining the full, sweet curve of it, and the taste and the feel and the joy of

it. The sounds of praying, the pen-scratching and the small, choked sobs of Giles McMartin faded from his ears.

It was midafternoon when Melton returned, this time with six soldiers in attendance, as well as the Lieutenant and the clerk. Again, he paused in the doorway, but MacDonald rose before he could speak.

"I'll go first," he said, and walked steadily across the cottage. As he bent his head to go through the door, though, Lord Melton laid a hand on his sleeve.

"Will you give your full name, sir? My clerk will make note of it."

MacDonald glanced at the clerk, a small bitter smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

"A trophy list, is it? Aye, well." He shrugged and drew himself upright. "Duncan William MacLeod MacDonald, of Glen Richie." He bowed politely to Lord Melton. "At your service—sir." He passed through the door, and shortly there came the sound of a single pistol-shot from near at hand.

The boys were allowed to go together, hands still clutched tightly as they passed through the door. The rest were taken one by one, each asked for his name, that the clerk might make a record of it. The clerk sat on a stool by the door, head bent to the papers in his lap, not looking up as the men passed by.

When it came Ewan's turn, Jamie struggled to prop himself on his elbows, and grasped his friend's hand, as hard as he could.

"I shall see ye soon again," he whispered.

Ewan's hand shook in his, but the Cameron only smiled. Then he leaned across simply and kissed Jamie's mouth, and rose to go.

They left the six who could not walk to the last.

"James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser," he said, speaking slowly to allow the clerk time to get it down right. "Laird of Broch Tuarach." Patiently, he spelled it, then glanced up at Melton.

"I must ask your courtesy, my lord, to give me help to stand."

Melton didn't answer him, but stared down at him, his expression of remote distaste altering to one of mingled astonishment and something like dawning horror.

"Fraser?" he said. "Of Broch Tuarach?"

"I am," Jamie said patiently. Would the man not hurry a bit? Being resigned to being shot was one thing, but listening to your friends being killed in your hearing was another, and not just calculated to settle the nerves. His arms were trembling with the strain of propping him, and his bowels, not sharing the resignation of his higher faculties, were twitching with a gurgling dread.

"Bloody hell," the Englishman muttered. He bent and peered at Jamie where he lay in the shadow of the wall, then turned and beckoned to his lieutenant.

"Help me get him into the light," he ordered. They weren't gentle about it, and Jamie grunted as the movement sent a bolt of pain from his leg right up through the top of his head. It made him dizzy for a moment, and he missed what Melton was saying to him.

"Are you the Jacobite they call 'Red Jamie'?" he asked again, impatiently.

A streak of fear went through Jamie at that; let them know he was the notorious Red Jamie, and they wouldn't shoot him. They'd take him in chains to London to be tried—a prize of war. And after that, it would be the hangman's rope, and lying half strangled on the gallows platform while they slit his belly and ripped out his bowels. His bowels gave another long, rumbling gurgle; they didn't think much of the notion either.

"No," he said, with as much firmness as he could manage. "Just get on wi' it, eh?"

Ignoring this, Melton dropped to his knees, and ripped open the throat of Jamie's shirt. He gripped Jamie's hair and jerked back his head.

“Damn!” Melton said. Melton’s finger prodded him in the throat, just above the collarbone. There was a small triangular scar there, and this appeared to be what was causing his interrogator’s concern.

“James Fraser of Broch Tuarach; red hair and a three-cornered scar on his throat.” Melton let go of the hair and sat back on his heels, rubbing his chin in a distracted sort of way. Then he pulled himself together and turned to the Lieutenant, gesturing at the five men remaining in the farm cottage.

“Take the rest,” he ordered. His fair brows were knitted together in a deep frown. He stood over Jamie, scowling, while the other Scottish prisoners were removed.

“I have to think,” he muttered. “Damme, I must think!”

“Do that,” said Jamie, “if you’re able. I must lie down, myself.” They had propped him sitting against the far wall, his leg stretched out in front of him, but sitting upright after two days of lying flat was more than he could manage; the room was tilting drunkenly, and small flashing lights kept coming before his eyes. He leaned to one side, and eased himself down, hugging the dirt floor, eyes closed as he waited for the dizziness to pass.

Melton was muttering under his breath, but Jamie couldn’t make out the words; didn’t care greatly in any case. Sitting up in the sunlight, he had seen his leg clearly for the first time, and he was fairly sure that he wouldn’t live long enough to be hanged.

The deep angry red of inflammation spread from mid thigh upward, much brighter than the remaining smears of dried blood. The wound itself was purulent; with the stench of the other men lessening, he could smell the faint sweet-foul odor of the discharge. Still, a quick bullet through the head seemed much preferable to the pain and delirium of death by infection. Did you hear the bang? he wondered, and drifted off, the cool pounded dirt smooth and comforting as a mother’s breast under his hot cheek.

He wasn't really asleep, only drifting in a feverish doze, but Melton's voice in his ear jerked him to alertness.

"Grey," the voice was saying, "John William Grey! Do you know that name?"

"No," he said, mazy with sleep and fever. "Look, man, either shoot me or go away, aye? I'm ill."

"Near Carryarrick." Melton's voice was prodding, impatient. "A boy, a fair-haired boy, about sixteen. You met him in the wood."

Jamie squinted up at his tormentor. The fever distorted his vision, but there seemed something vaguely familiar about the fine-boned face above him, with those large, almost girlish eyes.

"Oh," he said, catching a single face from the flood of images that swirled erratically through his brain. "The wee laddie that tried to kill me. Aye, I mind him." He closed his eyes again. In the odd way of fever, one sensation seemed to blend into another. He had broken John William Grey's arm; the memory of the boy's fine bone beneath his hand became the bone of Claire's forearm as he tore her from the grip of the stones. The cool misty breeze stroked his face with Claire's fingers.

"Wake up, damn you!" His head snapped on his neck as Melton shook him impatiently. "Listen to me!"

Jamie opened his eyes wearily. "Aye?"

"John William Grey is my brother," Melton said. "He told me of his meeting with you. You spared his life, and he made you a promise—is that true?"

With great effort, he cast his mind back. He had met the boy two days before the first battle of the rebellion; the Scottish victory at Prestonpans. The six months between then and now seemed a vast chasm; so much had happened in between.

"Aye, I recall. He promised to kill me. I dinna mind if you do it for him, though." His eyelids were drooping again. Did he have to be awake in order to be shot?

"He said he owed you a debt of honor, and he does." Melton stood up, dusting the knees of his breeches, and turned to his lieutenant, who had been watching the questioning with considerable bewilderment.

"It's the deuce of a situation, Wallace. This ... this Jacobite scut is famous. You've heard of Red Jamie? The one on the broadsheets?" The Lieutenant nodded, looking curiously down at the bedraggled form in the dirt at his feet. Melton smiled bitterly.

"No, he doesn't look so dangerous now, does he? But he's still Red Jamie Fraser, and His Grace would be more than pleased to hear of such an illustrious prisoner. They haven't yet found Charles Stuart, but a few well-known Jacobites would please the crowds at Tower Hill nearly as much."

"Shall I send a message to His Grace?" The Lieutenant reached for his message box.

"No!" Melton wheeled to glare down at his prisoner. "That's the difficulty! Besides being prime gallows bait, this filthy wretch is also the man who captured my youngest brother near Preston, and rather than shooting the brat, which is what he deserved, spared his life and returned him to his companions. Thus," he said through his teeth, "incurring a bloody great debt of honor upon my family!"

"Dear me," said the Lieutenant. "So you can't give him to His Grace, after all."

"No, blast it! I can't even shoot the bastard, without dishonoring my brother's sworn word!"

The prisoner opened one eye. "I willna tell anyone if you don't," he suggested, and promptly closed it again.

"Shut up!" Losing his temper entirely, Melton kicked the prisoner, who grunted at the impact, but said nothing more.

"Perhaps we could shoot him under an assumed name," the Lieutenant suggested helpfully.

Lord Melton gave his aide a look of withering scorn, then looked out the window to judge the time.

“It will be dark in three hours. I’ll oversee the burial of the other executed prisoners. Find a small wagon, and have it filled with hay. Find a driver—pick someone discreet, Wallace, that means bribable, Wallace—and have them here as soon as it’s dark.”

“Yes, sir. Er, sir? What about the prisoner?” The Lieutenant gestured diffidently toward the body on the floor.

“What about him?” Melton said brusquely. “He’s too weak to crawl, let alone walk. He isn’t going anywhere—at least not until the wagon gets here.”

“Wagon?” The prisoner was showing signs of life. In fact, under the stimulus of agitation, he had managed to raise himself onto one arm. Bloodshot blue eyes gleamed wide with alarm, under the spikes of matted red hair. “Where are ye sending me?” Turning from the door, Melton cast him a glance of intense dislike.

“You’re the laird of Broch Tuarach, aren’t you? Well, that’s where I’m sending you.”

“I dinna want to go home! I want to be shot!”

The Englishmen exchanged a look.

“Raving,” the Lieutenant said significantly, and Melton nodded.

“I doubt he’ll live through the journey—but his death won’t be on my head, at least.”

The door shut firmly behind the Englishmen, leaving Jamie Fraser quite alone—and still alive.