

AUTHOR OF THE MULTIMILLION BESTSELLING
OUTLANDER
SERIES

DIANA
GABALDON
DRUMS
OF
AUTUMN



Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Diana Gabaldon

Title Page

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Prologue

Part One: O Brave New World

1. A Hanging in Eden
2. In Which We Meet a Ghost

Part Two: Past Imperfect

3. The Minister's Cat
4. A Blast From the Past
5. Two Hundred Years From Yesterday

Part Three: Pirates

6. I Encounter a Hernia
7. Great Prospects Fraught With Peril
8. Man of Worth
9. Two-thirds of a Ghost

Part Four: River Run

10. Jocasta
11. The Law of Bloodshed
12. The Return of John Quincy Myers
13. An Examination of Conscience

Part Five: Strawberry Fields Forever

14. Flee From Wrath to Come

15. Noble Savages
16. The First Law of Thermodynamics

Part Six: Je t'aime

17. Home for the Holidays
18. Unseemly Lust

Part Seven: On the Mountain

19. Hearth Blessing
20. The White Raven
21. Night on a Snowy Mountain
22. Spark of an Ancient Flame
23. The Skull Beneath the Skin
24. Letter-Writing: The Great Art o' Love
25. Enter a Serpent
26. Plague and Pestilence
27. Trout Fishing in America
28. Heated Conversation
29. Charnel Houses

Part Eight: Beaucoup

30. Into Thin Air
31. Return to Inverness
32. Grimoire
33. Midsummer's Eve
34. Lallybroch
35. Bon Voyage
36. You Can't Go Home Again
37. *Gloriana*
38. For Those in Peril on the Sea
39. A Gambling Man

Part Nine: Passionnément

40. Virgin Sacrifice
41. Journey's End

Part Ten: Impaired Relations

- 42. Moonlight
- 43. Whisky in the Jar
- 44. Three-Cornered Conversation
- 45. Fifty-Fifty
- 46. Comes a Stranger
- 47. A Father's Song
- 48. Away in a Manger
- 49. Choices
- 50. In Which All is Revealed

Part Eleven: Pas du Tout

- 51. Betrayal
- 52. Desertion
- 53. Blame
- 54. Captivity I
- 55. Captivity II
- 56. Confessions of the Flesh
- 57. A Shattered Smile
- 58. Lord John Returns
- 59. Blackmail
- 60. Trial by Fire
- 61. The Office of a Priest
- 62. Three-thirds of a Ghost

Part Twelve: Je t'aime

- 63. Forgiveness
- 64. Bottom of the Ninth
- 65. Return to Fraser's Ridge
- 66. Child of My Blood
- 67. The Toss of a Coin
- 68. Domestic Bliss
- 69. Jeremiah
- 70. The Gathering
- 71. Circle's Close

Copyright

About the Book

How far will a woman travel to find a father, a lover, a destiny?

It began in Scotland, at an ancient stone circle, when Claire Randall was swept through time into the arms of Jamie Fraser. Two decades later, Claire travelled back again to reunite with Jamie, this time in frontier America. But Claire had left someone behind in her own time - their daughter Brianna.

Now Brianna has made her own disturbing discovery that sends her to the stone circle and a terrifying leap into the unknown.

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.

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, an 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 ...

Drums of Autumn

Diana Gabaldon



arrow books

*This book turned out to have a lot to do
with fathers, and so its for my own father,
Tony Gabaldon, who also tells stories*

Acknowledgments

The author's grateful thanks to:

My editor, Jackie Cantor, who said, when informed that there was (ahem) actually another book in this series, 'Why am I not surprised to hear this?'

Susan Schwartz and her loyal minions – the copyeditors, typesetters, and book designers – without whom this book would not exist; I hope they fully recover from the experience.

My husband, Doug Watkins, who said, 'I don't know how you go on getting away with this; you don't know *anything* about men!'

My daughter Laura, who generously allowed me to steal two lines of her eighth-grade essay for my Prologue; my son Samuel, who said, 'Aren't you *ever* going to finish writing that book?' and (without pausing for breath), 'Since you're still busy writing, can we have McDonalds again?' and my daughter Jennifer, who said, 'You *are* going to change clothes before you come talk to my class, aren't you? Don't worry, Mommy, I have an outfit all picked out for you.'

The anonymous sixth grader who handed back a sample chapter passed around during a talk at his school and said, 'That was kind of gross, but really interesting. People don't really *do* that, do they?'

Iain MacKinnon Taylor and his brother Hamish, for Gaelic translations, idioms, and colourful invective. Nancy Bushey, for Gaelic tapes. Karl Hagen, for general advice on Latin grammar. Susan Martin and Reid Snider, for Greek epigrams and rotting pythons. Sylvia Petter, Elise Skidmore, Janet Kieffer Kelly, and Karen Pershing for help with the French bits.

Janet MacConnaughey and Keith Sheppard, for Latin love poetry, macaronics, and the original lyrics of 'To Anacreon in Heaven'.

Mary Campbell Toerner and Ruby Vincent, for the loan of an unpublished historical manuscript about the Highlanders of the Cape Fear. Claire Nelson for the loan of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1771 edition. Esther and Bill Schindler, for the loan of the books on Eastern forests.

Ron Wodaski, Karl Hagen, Bruce Woods, Rich Hamper, Eldon Garlock, Dean Quarrel, and several other gentlemen members of the CompuServe Writers Forum, for expert opinions on what it feels like to be kicked in the testicles.

Marte Brengle, for detailed descriptions of sweat lodge ceremonials and suggestions on sports cars. Merrill Cornish, for his stunning description of redbuds in bloom. Arlene and Joe McCrea, for saints' names and descriptions of plowing with a mule. Ken Brown, for details of the Presbyterian Baptismal rite (much abridged in the text). David Stanley, Scotland's next great writer, for advice on anoraks, jackets and the difference between them.

Babara Schnell, for German translations, error-checking, and sympathetic reading.

Dr. Ellen Mandell, for medical opinions, close reading, and useful suggestions for dealing with inguinal hernias, abortion, and other forms of harrowing bodily trauma.

Dr. Rosina Lippi-Green, for details of Mohawk life and customs, and notes on Scots linguistics and German grammar.

Mac Beckett, for his notion of new and ancient spirits.

Jack Whyte, for his memoirs of life as a Scottish folk-singer, including the proper response to kilt jokes.

Susan Davis, for friendship, boundless enthusiasm, dozens of books, descriptions of pulling ticks off her kids - and strawberries.

Walt Hawn and Gordon Fenwick, for telling me how long is a furlong. John Ravenscroft and miscellaneous members of

the UK Forum, for a riveting discussion of the RAF's underpants, circa WWII. Eve Ackerman and helpful members of the CompuServe SFLIT Forum, for the publication dates of *Conan the Barbarian*.

Barbara Raisbeck and Mary M. Robbins, for their helpful references on herbs and early pharmacology.

My anonymous library friend, for the *reams* of useful references.

Arnold Wagner and Steven Lopata, for discussions of high and low explosives and general advice on how to blow things up.

Margaret Campbell and other online residents of North Carolina, for miscellaneous descriptions of their fair state.

John L. Myers, both for telling me about his ghosts, and for generously allowing me to incorporate certain elements of his physique and persona into the formidable John Quincy Myers, Mountain Man. The hernia is fictitious.

As always, thanks also to the many members of the CompuServe Literary Forum and Writers Forum whose names have escaped my memory, for their helpful suggestions and convivial conversation, and to the AOL folderfolk for their stimulating discussions.

A special thanks to Rosana Madrid Gatti, for her labour of love in constructing and maintaining the award-winning Official Diana Gabaldon Web Page (<http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~gatti/gabaldon/gabaldon.html>)

And thanks to Lori Musser, Dawn Van Winkle, Kaera Hallahan, Virginia Clough, Elaine Faxon, Ellen Stanton, Elaine Smith, Cathy Kravitz, Hanneke (whose last name remains unfortunately illegible), Judith MacDonald, Susan Hunt and her sister Holly, the Boise gang, and many others, for their thoughtful gifts of wine, drawings, rosaries, chocolate, Celtic music, soap, statuary, pressed heather from Culloden, handkerchiefs with echidnas, Maori pens, English teas, garden trowels, and other miscellanea meant to boost my

spirits and keep me writing far past the point of exhaustion.
It worked.

And lastly to my mother, who touches me in passing.

Diana Gabaldon

dgabaldon@aol.com

76530,523@compuserve.com

[Section Leader, Research and the Craft of Writing,
CompuServe Writers Forum]

Prologue

I've never been afraid of ghosts. I live with them daily, after all. When I look in a mirror, my mother's eyes look back at me; my mouth curls with the smile that lured my great-grandfather to the fate that was me.

No, how should I fear the touch of those vanished hands, laid on me in love unknowing? How could I be afraid of those that molded my flesh, leaving their remnants to live long past the grave?

Still less could I be afraid of those ghosts who touch my thoughts in passing. Any library is filled with them. I can take a book from dusty shelves, and be haunted by the thoughts of one long dead, still lively as ever in their winding sheet of words.

Of course it isn't these homely and accustomed ghosts that trouble sleep and curdle wakefulness. Look back, hold a torch to light the recesses of the dark. Listen to the footsteps that echo behind, when you walk alone.

All the time the ghosts flit past and through us, hiding in the future. We look in the mirror and see the shades of other faces looking back through the years; we see the shape of memory, standing solid in an empty doorway. By blood and by choice, we make our ghosts; we haunt ourselves.

Each ghost comes unbidden from the misty grounds of dream and silence.

Our rational minds say, 'No, it isn't.'

But another part, an older part, echoes always softly in the dark, 'Yes, but it *could be*.'

We come and go from mystery and, in between, we try to forget. But a breeze passing in a still room stirs my hair now and then in soft affection. I think it is my mother.

PART ONE

O Brave New World

1

A Hanging in Eden

Charleston, June 1767

I heard the drums long before they came in sight. The beating echoed in the pit of my stomach, as though I too were hollow. The sound traveled through the crowd, a harsh military rhythm meant to be heard over speech or gunfire. I saw heads turn as the people fell silent, looking up the stretch of East Bay Street, where it ran from the half-built skeleton of the new Customs House toward White Point Gardens.

It was a hot day, even for Charleston in June. The best places were on the seawall, where the air moved; here below, it was like being roasted alive. My shift was soaked through, and the cotton bodice clung between my breasts. I wiped my face for the tenth time in as many minutes and lifted the heavy coil of my hair, hoping vainly for a cooling breeze upon my neck.

I was morbidly aware of necks at the moment. Unobtrusively, I put my hand up to the base of my throat, letting my fingers circle it. I could feel the pulse beat in my carotid arteries, along with the drums, and when I breathed, the hot wet air clogged my throat as though I were choking.

I quickly took my hand down, and drew in a breath as deep as I could manage. That was a mistake. The man in front of me hadn't bathed in a month or more; the edge of the stock about his thick neck was dark with grime and his clothes smelled sour and musty, pungent even amid the sweaty reek of the crowd. The smell of hot bread and frying

pig fat from the food vendors' stalls lay heavy over a musk of rotting seagrass from the marsh, only slightly relieved by a whiff of salt-breeze from the harbor.

There were several children in front of me, craning and gawking, running out from under the oaks and palmettos to look up the street, being called back by anxious parents. The girl nearest me had a neck like the white part of a grass stalk, slender and succulent.

There was a ripple of excitement through the crowd; the gallows procession was in sight at the far end of the street. The drums grew louder.

'Where is he?' Fergus muttered beside me, craning his own neck to see. 'I knew I should have gone with him!'

'He'll be here.' I wanted to stand on tiptoe, but didn't, feeling that this would be undignified. I did glance around, though, searching. I could always spot Jamie in a crowd; he stood head and shoulders above most men, and his hair caught the light in a blaze of reddish gold. There was no sign of him yet, only a bobbing sea of bonnets and tricorneres, sheltering from the heat those citizens come too late to find a place in the shade.

The flags came first, fluttering above the heads of the excited crowd, the banners of Great Britain and of the Royal Colony of South Carolina. And another, bearing the family arms of the Lord Governor of the colony.

Then came the drummers, walking two by two in step, their sticks an alternate beat and blur. It was a slow march, grimly inexorable. A dead march, I thought they called that particular cadence; very suitable under the circumstances. All other noises were drowned by the rattle of the drums.

Then came the platoon of red-coated soldiers and in their midst, the prisoners.

There were three of them, hands bound before them, linked together by a chain that ran through rings on the iron collars about their necks. The first man was small and elderly, ragged and disreputable, a shambling wreck who

lurched and staggered so that the dark-suited clergyman who walked beside the prisoners was obliged to grasp his arm to keep him from falling.

‘Is that Gavin Hayes? He looks sick,’ I murmured to Fergus.

‘He’s drunk.’ The soft voice came from behind me, and I whirled, to find Jamie standing at my shoulder, eyes fixed on the pitiful procession.

The small man’s disequilibrium was disrupting the progress of the parade, as his stumbling forced the two men chained to him to zig and zag abruptly in order to keep their feet. The general impression was of three inebriates rolling home from the local tavern; grossly at odds with the solemnity of the occasion. I could hear the rustle of laughter over the drums, and shouts and jeers from the crowds on the wrought-iron balconies of the houses on East Bay Street.

‘Your doing?’ I spoke quietly, so as not to attract notice, but I could have shouted and waved my arms; no one had eyes for anything but the scene before us.

I felt rather than saw Jamie’s shrug, as he moved forward to stand beside me.

‘It was what he asked of me,’ he said. ‘And the best I could manage for him.’

‘Brandy or whisky?’ asked Fergus, evaluating Hayes’s appearance with a practiced eye.

‘The man’s a Scot, wee Fergus.’ Jamie’s voice was as calm as his face, but I heard the small note of strain in it. ‘Whisky’s what he wanted.’

‘A wise choice. With luck, he won’t even notice when they hang him,’ Fergus muttered. The small man had slipped from the preacher’s grasp and fallen flat on his face in the sandy road, pulling one of his companions to his knees; the last prisoner, a tall young man, stayed on his feet but swayed wildly from side to side, trying desperately to keep his balance. The crowd on the point roared with glee.

The captain of the guard glowed crimson between the white of his wig and the metal of his gorget, flushed with fury as much as with sun. He barked an order as the drums continued their somber roll, and a soldier scrambled hastily to remove the chain that bound the prisoners together. Hayes was jerked unceremoniously to his feet, a soldier grasping each arm, and the procession resumed, in better order.

There was no laughter by the time they reached the gallows – a muledrawn cart placed beneath the limbs of a huge live oak. I could feel the drums beating through the soles of my feet. I felt slightly sick from the sun and the smells. The drums stopped abruptly, and my ears rang in the silence.

‘Ye dinna need to watch it, Sassenach,’ Jamie whispered to me. ‘Go back to the wagon.’ His own eyes were fixed unblinkingly on Hayes, who swayed and mumbled in the soldiers’ grasp, looking blearily around.

The last thing I wanted was to watch. But neither could I leave Jamie to see it through alone. He had come for Gavin Hayes; I had come for him. I touched his hand.

‘I’ll stay.’

Jamie drew himself straighter, squaring his shoulders. He moved a pace forward, making sure that he was visible in the crowd. If Hayes was still sober enough to see anything, the last thing he saw on earth would be the face of a friend.

He could see; Hayes glared to and fro as they lifted him into the cart, twisting his neck, desperately looking.

‘*Gabhainn! A charaid!*’ Jamie shouted suddenly. Hayes’s eyes found him at once, and he ceased struggling.

The little man stood swaying slightly as the charge was read: theft in the amount of six pounds, ten shillings. He was covered in reddish dust, and pearls of sweat clung trembling to the gray stubble of his beard. The preacher was leaning close, murmuring urgently in his ear.

Then the drums began again, in a steady roll. The hangman guided the noose over the balding head and fixed it tight, knot positioned precisely, just under the ear. The captain of the guard stood poised, saber raised.

Suddenly, the condemned man drew himself up straight. Eyes on Jamie, he opened his mouth, as though to speak.

The saber flashed in the morning sun, and the drums stopped, with a final *thunk!*

I looked at Jamie; he was white to the lips, eyes fixed wide. From the corner of my eye, I could see the twitching rope, and the faint, reflexive jerk of the dangling sack of clothes. A sharp stink of urine and feces struck through the thick air.

On my other side, Fergus watched dispassionately.

‘I suppose he noticed, after all,’ he murmured, with regret.

The body swung slightly, a dead weight oscillating like a plumb-bob on its string. There was a sigh from the crowd, of awe and release. Terns squawked from the burning sky, and the harbor sounds came faint and smothered through the heavy air, but the point was wrapped in silence. From where I stood, I could hear the small *plit ... plat ... plit* of the drops that fell from the toe of the corpse’s dangling shoe.

I hadn’t known Gavin Hayes, and felt no personal grief for his death, but I was glad it had been quick. I stole a glance at him, with an odd feeling of intrusion. It was a most public way of accomplishing a most private act, and I felt vaguely embarrassed to be looking.

The hangman had known his business; there had been no undignified struggle, no staring eyes, no protruding tongue; Gavin’s small round head tilted sharply to the side, neck grotesquely stretched but cleanly broken.

It was a clean break in more ways than one. The captain of the guard, satisfied that Hayes was dead, motioned with his saber for the next man to be brought to the gibbet. I saw

his eyes travel down the red-clad file, and then widen in outrage.

At the same moment, there was a cry from the crowd, and a ripple of excitement that quickly spread. Heads turned and people pushed each against his neighbor, striving to see where there was nothing to be seen.

‘He’s gone!’

‘There he goes!’

‘Stop him!’

It was the third prisoner, the tall young man, who had seized the moment of Gavin’s death to run for his life, sliding past the guard who should have been watching him, but who had been unable to resist the gallows’ fascination.

I saw a flicker of movement behind a vendor’s stall, a flash of dirty blond hair. Some of the soldiers saw it, too, and ran in that direction, but many more were rushing in other directions, and among the collisions and confusion, nothing was accomplished.

The captain of the guard was shouting, face purple, his voice barely audible over the uproar. The remaining prisoner, looking stunned, was seized and hustled back in the direction of the Court of Guard as the redcoats began hastily to sort themselves back into order under the lash of their captain’s voice.

Jamie snaked an arm around my waist and dragged me out of the way of an oncoming wave of humanity. The crowd fell back before the advance of squads of soldiers, who formed up and marched briskly off to quarter the area, under the grim and furious direction of their sergeant.

‘We’d best find Ian,’ Jamie said, fending off a group of excited apprentices. He glanced at Fergus, and jerked his head toward the gibbet and its melancholy burden. ‘Claim the body, aye? We’ll meet at the Willow Tree later.’

‘Do you think they’ll catch him?’ I asked, as we pushed through the ebbing crowd, threading our way down a cobbled lane toward the merchants’ wharves.

'I expect so. Where can he go?' He spoke abstractedly, a narrow line visible between his brows. Plainly the dead man was still on his mind, and he had little attention to spare for the living.

'Did Hayes have any family?' I asked. He shook his head.

'I asked him that, when I brought him the whisky. He thought he might have a brother left alive, but no notion where. The brother was transported soon after the Rising - to Virginia, Hayes thought, but he'd heard nothing since.'

Not surprising if he hadn't; an indentured laborer would have had no facilities for communicating with kin left behind in Scotland, unless the bondsman's employer was kind enough to send a letter on his behalf. And kind or not, it was unlikely that a letter would have found Gavin Hayes, who had spent ten years in Ardsmuir prison before being transported in his turn.

'Duncan!' Jamie called out, and a tall, thin man turned and raised a hand in acknowledgment. He made his way through the crowd in a cork-screw fashion, his single arm swinging in a wide arc that fended off the passersby.

'*Mac Dubh*,' he said, bobbing his head in greeting to Jamie. 'Mrs. Claire.' His long, narrow face was furrowed with sadness. He too had once been a prisoner at Ardsmuir, with Hayes and with Jamie. Only the loss of his arm to a blood infection had prevented his being transported with the others. Unfit to be sold for labor, he had instead been pardoned and set free to starve - until Jamie had found him.

'God rest poor Gavin,' Duncan said, shaking his head dolorously.

Jamie muttered something in response in Gaelic, and crossed himself. Then he straightened, casting off the oppression of the day with a visible effort.

'Aye, well. I must go to the docks and arrange about Ian's passage, and then we'll think of burying Gavin. But I must have the lad settled first.'

We struggled through the crowd toward the docks, squeezing our way between knots of excited gossipers, eluding the drays and barrows that came and went through the press with the ponderous indifference of trade.

A file of red-coated soldiers came at the quick-march from the other end of the quay, splitting the crowd like vinegar dropped on mayonnaise. The sun glittered hot on the line of bayonet points and the rhythm of their tramping beat through the noise of the crowd like a muffled drum. Even the rumbling sledges and handcarts stopped abruptly to let them pass by.

‘Mind your pocket, Sassenach,’ Jamie murmured in my ear, ushering me through a narrow space between a turban-clad slave clutching two small children and a street preacher perched on a box. He was shouting sin and repentance, but with only one word in three audible through the noise.

‘I sewed it shut,’ I assured him, nonetheless reaching to touch the small weight that swung against my thigh. ‘What about yours?’

He grinned and tilted his hat forward, dark blue eyes narrowing against the bright sunlight.

‘It’s where my sporran would be, did I have one. So long as I dinna meet with a quick-fingered harlot, I’m safe.’

I glanced at the slightly bulging front of his breeches, and then up at him. Broad-shouldered and tall, with bold, clean features and a Highlander’s proud carriage, he drew the glance of every woman he passed, even with his bright hair covered by a sober blue tricorne. The breeches, which were borrowed, were substantially too tight, and did nothing whatever to detract from the general effect – an effect enhanced by the fact that he himself was totally ignorant of it.

‘You’re a walking inducement to harlots,’ I said. ‘Stick by me; I’ll protect you.’

He laughed and took my arm as we emerged into a small, clear space.

‘Ian!’ he shouted, catching sight of his nephew over the heads of the crowd. A moment later, a tall, stringy gawk of a boy popped out of the crowd, pushing a thatch of brown hair out of his eyes and grinning widely.

‘I thought I should never find ye, Uncle!’ he exclaimed. ‘Christ, there are more folk here than at the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh!’ He wiped a coat sleeve across his long, half-homely face, leaving a streak of grime down one cheek.

Jamie eyed his nephew askance.

‘Ye’re lookin’ indecently cheerful, Ian, for having just seen a man go to his death.’

Ian hastily altered his expression into an attempt at decent solemnity.

‘Oh, no, Uncle Jamie,’ he said. ‘I didna see the hanging.’ Duncan raised one brow and Ian blushed slightly. ‘I – I wasna afraid to see; it was only I had ... something else I wanted to do.’

Jamie smiled slightly and patted his nephew on the back.

‘Don’t trouble yourself, Ian; I’d as soon not have seen it myself, only that Gavin was a friend.’

‘I know, Uncle. I’m sorry for it.’ A flash of sympathy showed in the boy’s large brown eyes, the only feature of his face with any claim to beauty. He glanced at me. ‘Was it awful, Auntie?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘It’s over, though.’ I pulled the damp handkerchief out of my bosom and stood on tiptoe to rub away the smudge on his cheek.

Duncan Innes shook his head sorrowfully. ‘Aye, poor Gavin. Still, it’s a quicker death than starving, and there was little left for him but that.’

‘Let’s go,’ Jamie interrupted, unwilling to spend time in useless lamenting. ‘The *Bonnie Mary* should be near the far end of the quay.’ I saw Ian glance at Jamie and draw himself up as though about to speak, but Jamie had already turned toward the harbor and was shoving his way through the crowd. Ian glanced at me, shrugged, and offered me an arm.

We followed Jamie behind the warehouses that lined the docks, side-stepping sailors, loaders, slaves, passengers, customers and merchants of all sorts. Charleston was a major shipping port, and business was booming, with as many as a hundred ships a month coming and going from Europe in the season.

The *Bonnie Mary* belonged to a friend of Jamie's cousin Jared Fraser, who had gone to France to make his fortune in the wine business and succeeded brilliantly. With luck, the *Bonnie Mary's* captain might be persuaded for Jared's sake to take Ian with him back to Edinburgh, allowing the boy to work his passage as a cabin lad.

Ian was not enthused at the prospect, but Jamie was determined to ship his errant nephew back to Scotland at the earliest opportunity. It was – among other concerns – news of the *Bonnie Mary's* presence in Charleston that had brought us here from Georgia, where we had first set foot in America – by accident – two months before.

As we passed a tavern, a slatternly barmaid came out with a bowl of slops. She caught sight of Jamie and stood, bowl braced against her hip, giving him a slanted brow and a pouting smile. He passed without a glance, intent on his goal. She tossed her head, flung the slops to the pig who slept by the step, and flounced back inside.

He paused, shading his eyes to look down the row of towering ships' masts, and I came up beside him. He twitched unconsciously at the front of his breeches, easing the fit, and I took his arm.

'Family jewels still safe, are they?' I murmured.

'Uncomfortable, but safe,' he assured me. He plucked at the lacing of his flies, grimacing. 'I would ha' done better to hide them up my bum, I think.'

'Better you than me, mate,' I said, smiling. 'I'd rather risk robbery, myself.'

The family jewels were just that. We had been driven ashore on the coast of Georgia by a hurricane, arriving

soaked, ragged, and destitute – save for a handful of large and valuable gemstones.

I hoped the captain of the *Bonnie Mary* thought highly enough of Jared Fraser to accept Ian as a cabin boy, because if not, we were going to have a spot of difficulty about the passage.

In theory, Jamie's pouch and my pocket contained a sizable fortune. In practice, the stones might have been beach pebbles so far as the good they were to us. While gems were an easy, compact way of transporting wealth, the problem was changing them back into money.

Most trade in the southern colonies was conducted by means of barter – what wasn't, was handled by the exchange of scrip or bills written on a wealthy merchant or banker. And wealthy bankers were thin on the ground in Georgia; those willing to tie up their available capital in gemstones rarer still. The prosperous rice farmer with whom we had stayed in Savannah had assured us that he himself could scarcely lay his hand on two pounds sterling in cash – indeed, there was likely not ten pounds in gold and silver to be had in the whole colony.

Nor was there any chance of selling one of the stones in the endless stretches of salt marsh and pine forest through which we had passed on our journey north. Charleston was the first city we had reached of sufficient size to harbor merchants and bankers who might help to liquidate a portion of our frozen assets.

Not that anything was likely to stay frozen long in Charleston in summer, I reflected. Rivulets of sweat were running down my neck and the linen shift under my bodice was soaked and crumpled against my skin. Even so close to the harbor, there was no wind at this time of day, and the smells of hot tar, dead fish, and sweating laborers were nearly overwhelming.

Despite their protestations, Jamie had insisted on giving one of our gemstones to Mr. and Mrs. Olivier, the kindly

people who had taken us in when we were shipwrecked virtually on their doorstep, as some token of thanks for their hospitality. In return, they had provided us with a wagon, two horses, fresh clothes for traveling, food for the journey north, and a small amount of money.

Of this, six shillings and threepence remained in my pocket, constituting the entirety of our disposable fortune.

‘This way, Uncle Jamie,’ Ian said, turning and beckoning his uncle eagerly. ‘I’ve got something to show ye.’

‘What is it?’ Jamie asked, threading his way through a throng of sweating slaves, who were loading dusty bricks of dried indigo into an anchored cargo ship. ‘And how did ye get whatever it is? Ye havena got any money, have you?’

‘No, I won it, dicing.’ Ian’s voice floated back, his body invisible as he skipped around a cartload of corn.

‘Dicing! Ian, for God’s sake, ye canna be gambling when ye’ve not a penny to bless yourself with!’ Holding my arm, Jamie shoved a way through the crowd to catch up to his nephew.

‘You do it all the time, Uncle Jamie,’ the boy pointed out, pausing to wait for us. ‘Ye’ve been doing it in every tavern and inn where we’ve stayed.’

‘My God, Ian, that’s cards, not dice! And I know what I’m doing!’

‘So do I,’ said Ian, looking smug. ‘I won, no?’

Jamie rolled his eyes toward heaven, imploring patience.

‘Jesus, Ian, but I’m glad you’re going home before ye get your head beaten in. Promise me ye willna be gambling wi’ the sailors, aye? Ye canna get away from them on a ship.’

Ian was paying no attention; he had come to a half-crumbled piling, around which was tied a stout rope. Here he stopped and turned to face us, gesturing at an object by his feet.

‘See? It’s a dog,’ Ian said proudly.

I took a quick half-step behind Jamie, grabbing his arm.

‘Ilan,’ I said, ‘that is not a dog. It’s a wolf. It’s a bloody *big* wolf, and I think you ought to get away from it before it takes a bite out of your arse.’

The wolf twitched one ear negligently in my direction, dismissed me, and twitched it back. It continued to sit, panting with the heat, its big yellow eyes fixed on Ian with an intensity that might have been taken for devotion by someone who hadn’t met a wolf before. I had.

‘Those things are dangerous,’ I said. ‘They’d bite you as soon as look at you.’

Disregarding this, Jamie stooped to inspect the beast.

‘It’s not quite a wolf, is it?’ Sounding interested, he held out a loose fist to the so-called dog, inviting it to smell his knuckles. I closed my eyes, expecting the imminent amputation of his hand. Hearing no shrieks, I opened them again to find him squatting on the ground, peering up the animal’s nostrils.

‘He’s a handsome creature, Ian,’ he said, scratching the thing familiarly under the chin. The yellow eyes narrowed slightly, either in pleasure at the attention or – more likely, I thought – in anticipation of biting off Jamie’s nose. ‘Bigger than a wolf, though; it’s broader through the head and chest, and a deal longer in the leg.’

‘His mother was an Irish wolfhound,’ Ian was hunkered down by Jamie eagerly explaining as he stroked the enormous gray-brown back. ‘She got out in heat, into the woods, and when she came back in whelp –’

‘Oh, aye, I see.’ Now Jamie was crooning in Gaelic to the monster while he picked up its huge foot and fondled its hairy toes. The curved black claws were a good two inches long. The thing half closed its eyes, the faint breeze ruffling the thick fur at its neck.

I glanced at Duncan, who arched his eyebrows at me, shrugged slightly, and sighed. Duncan didn’t care for dogs.

‘Jamie –’ I said.