VOYAGER by Diana Gabaldon. 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 se e 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 1 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 Creat or, 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, h e 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 hi m 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 ot her 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 rack ing 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 Purg atory 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 an d 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 f rom 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 l eft 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 Ju dgment 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 w as trou bled. 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 st ruck 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 upwar d 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 Jac k 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 s houlder, 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 sl eeting sky pale gray and whirling dizzily overhead. Jack Randall’s head mov ed obscenely up and down on his stomach with each gasping breath. He pressed his hands flat against the boggy ground—the w ater rose up cold through his fingers and soaked the back of his shirt—and wriggled sideways. Some warmth was trapped between them; as the li mp 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 cru mpled, mudstained 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. Doze ns 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 pl aid 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 s ight didn’t distress him; it seemed only vaguely interesting, the dark red sm ears 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 g roggily. I’m not. Wherever he had been while unconscious, it was a better p lace 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 w ind-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 i ts thick sharp bill into Jack Randall’s eye. Jamie jerked up with a cry of re vulsion and a flurry of movement that sent the crow flapping off, squawking with alarm. “Ay! Over there!” There was a squelchin g 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 han d here; he’ll no be walkin’ on his own.” There were four of th em, and wit h a good deal of effort, they got him up, arms draped helpless about the shoulders of Ewan Cameron and Iain MacKinnon. He wa nted 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 o f their company was too much to resist. The rest had restore d the f eeling 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 a lone, 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 ha nd pressed briefly against his forehead and dropped away wit ho ut 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 a bout 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 k new. 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 hi mself. 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 hi s 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 b ack—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 thou ght. He could feel the shape of his eyeballs beneath his lids, roun d and hot, tasty bits of jelly rolling restless to and fro, looking vainly for oblivion, while the rising sun turned his lids a da rk and bloody red. Four of the men were gathered near the single window of the farmhouse, talking quietly together. “Make a run for it?” o ne said, with a nod outside. “Christ, man, the best of us can barely stagge r—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 hi s own leg, wrapped in the remains of a tattered quilt. “Dinna linger on our account.” Duncan MacDonald turned from the window with a gri m sm ile, shakin g his head. The window’s light shone off the rough planes of his f ace, deepening the lines of fatigue. “Nay, we’ll bide,” he said. “For one thing, the English are thick as lice on the groun d; 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 yes terday will no get far,” MacKinnon put in softly. “Did ye no hear the English t roops 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, w eakened 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 enoug h from Culloden, it was unlikely they would be caught. And yet Claire had told him that Cumberland’s troops would ravage the Highlands, ran gin g far afield in their thirst for revenge. The thought of her this time c aused only a wave of terrible longing. God, to have her here, to lay her hands on him, to tend his wounds and cradl e 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 s mell of burning came suddenly on the air, wafting through the glassless window. It was thicker than the smell of blackpowder smoke, pungent, with an underlying odor that was faintly horrible in its reminisc ent smell of roasting meat. “They are burning the dead,” said MacDonald. He had scarcely moved from his seat b y 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 ba ck from a face in which every bone showed. Here and there, a sma ll, 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 MacD onald still sat by the window, but his eyes were closed. Next to h im, 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 o n 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 Jaco bites 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 sa id, glancing around as though seeking the leader of these men, to whom his remarks might most properly be ad dr esse d. 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 car ried himse lf with a seasoned soldier’s confidence. He looked deliberately from man to man, then reached into his coat a nd produced a folded sheet of paper. “I have here an order from His Grace, the Duke of Cumberland,” he said. “Authorizing the immediate exe cution of my man found to have engaged in the treas onou s rebel lion 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. Innocen ce, with the smoke of battle still black on their faces, here on the edge of the slaughter-field? “No, my lord,” s aid Ma cDon ald, the faintest of smiles on his lips. “Traitors all. Shall we be hanged, then?” Melton’s face twitched in a smal l 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 w hich to pre pare yourselves.” He hesitated, shooting a glance at his lieutenant, as though afraid to sound overgenerous be fore 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 h is he el , 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. MacDo nal d had begged mercy for Giles McMartin and Fred er ick 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 sor row—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 d go grateful for the peace of it. More for form’s sake, 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 cond e tha n because he felt the need of it, he closed his would see her again; he clung to the conviction much more firmly than he embraced the tenets of the Churc h. 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 c emne d to separation for a time? In any case, he heek and temple, a broad fair brow that alway s 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 a nd the feel and the joy of it. The sounds of p ra yi ng, the pen-scratching and the small, choked sobs of Giles McMartin faded from his ears. It was midafter noon when Melton returned, this time with six soldiers in attendance, as well as the Lieu tenant and the clerk. Again, he paused in the door way, b ut MacDonald rose before he could sp ea k. “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? M y clerk will make note of it.” MacDonald glanced a t the c lerk, a small bitter smile tugging at t he 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 L ord Melto n. “At your service—sir.” He passed through the door, a nd shortly there came the soun d of a single pistol-shot from near at hand. The boys were allowed to go together, hands still clutched tigh tly as they passed through the door. The rest were taken one by one, eac h asked for his name, that the clerk might make a recor d of it. The clerk sat on a stoo l by the door, head bent to the papers in his lap, not looking up as the men passed by. When it came Ewa n’s turn, Jamie struggled to prop himself on his elbows, and grasped his f riend’s hand, as hard as he could. “I s hall see ye soon again,” he whisp ered. Ew an’s hand shook in his, but the Cameron only smiled. Then he leaned across simply and kissed J amie’s mouth, and rose to go. They left the six who could not walk to the l olm Mac Kenzie Fraser,” he said, s peak ing s lowly 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 m didn’t an swer him, but stared d ow n at h im, hi s expression of remote distaste altering to one of mingled astonishment and something like d awning horror. “Fraser?” he said. “Of Broch Tuarach?” “I am,” Jamie said t hurry a bit? Being resigned to being shot was one thing, but listening to your friends being killed in your hearing was another, and no t just calculated to settle the nerves. His arms were trembling with the strai n of propping him, and his bowels, not sharing the re sig natio n of his higher faculties, were twitching with a gurgling dread. “Bloody hell,” the Englishman mut tered. He bent and peered at Jamie where he lay in the shadow of the wall, t hen turned and beckone d to his lie utenant. “Help m e g et him into th e light,” he ordered. They weren’t gentle about it, and Jamie grunted as the movement s ent a bolt of pain from his leg right up through the top of his head. It made him dizzy for a momen t, and he m issed what Me lton was s aying to him. “Are you the Jacobite they call ‘Red Jamie’?” he asked again, impatiently. A strea k of fear went through Jamie at that; let them know he was the notorious Re d Jamie, and they wo uldn’t shoo t him. They’ d ta ke him in chains to London to be tried—a prize of war. And after that, it would be the hangman’s rop e, and lying half strangled on the gallows platform while they slit his belly an d ripped out his bo wels. His bo wels gave ano ther lo ng, rumbli ng gurgle; they didn’t think much of the notion either. “No,” he said, with as much f irmness as he could manage. “Just get on wi’ it, eh?” Ignoring this, Melton dropped to his kn ees, and rip ped ope n th e throat of Jamie’s shirt. He gripped Jamie’s hair and jerked back his head. “Damn!” Melton said. Me lton’s finger prodded him in the throat, just above the collarbone. There was a small triangul ar scar there , and t his a ppeared to be what was causing his interrogator’s concern. “James Fraser of Broch Tuarach; red h air and a three-cornered scar on his throat.” Melton let go of the hair and sa t back on his h eels, rubbing his c n a distr acted sort of way. Then he pulled himself together and turned to the lieutenant, gesturing a t the five men remaining in the farm cottage. “Take the rest,” he ordered. Hi s fair brows w ere kn itted together in a de ep frown . He stood ove r Jamie, scowling, while the other Scottish prisoners were removed. “I have to think,” he muttered. “Damme, I must think!” “Do that,” said Jamie, “if yo u’re able. I m ust lie down, m yself.” They ha d ped him sitting against t he far wall, his leg stretched out in front of him, but sitting upright after tw o days of lying flat was more than he could manage; the room was tilting dr unkenly, a nd small fla shing ligh ts kept coming ore his e yes. He leaned t o one side, and eased himself down, hugging the dirt floor, eyes closed as he waited for the dizziness to pass. Melton was muttering u nder his b reath, but Jamie coul dn’t make o ut the words; did n't ly in any case. Si tting up in the sunlight, he had seen his leg clearly for the first time, a nd he was fairly sure that he wouldn’t live long enough to be han ged. Th e deep angry red of inflam mation spread fro m care great pward, much brig hter than the remaining smears of dried blood. The wound itself wa s purulent; with the stench of the other men lessening, he could s mell t he faint s weet-foul od or of the discharg e. Still, a quic midthigh u k bullet through th e head seemed much preferable to the pain and delirium of death by infection. Did you hear the bang? he wondered, and drifted off, th e cool pou nded dirt smooth and co m ing as a m other’s breast und er his hot cheek. He wasn’t really asleep, only drifting in a fever ish doze, but Melton’s voice in his ear jerked him to alertness. “G r ey,” the voi ce was saying, “ Jo fort o you know that n ame?” “No,” he said, mazy with sleep and fever. “Look, man, either shoot me or go away, aye? I’m ill.” “Near Carryarrick.” Mel ton’s voice was g, im hn Will iam Grey! D ir-haired boy, abo ut sixteen. You met him in the wood.” Jamie squinted up at his tormentor. The fever distorted his vision, but there seemed s o mething vaguely famil e-boned patient. “A boy, a fa those large, almo st girlish eyes. “Oh,” he said, catching a single face from the flood of images that swirled erratically through his brain. “T he w ee laddie that tried to kill m i face abo ve him, with again. In the odd way of fever, one sensation seemed to blend into anoth er. He had broken John William Grey’s arm; the memory of the boy’s fin e bone bene m.” He clo sed his eyes of Claire’s forear m as he tore her from the grip of the stones. The coo l misty breeze stroked his face with Claire’s fingers. “Wake u p, damn you ca me the bone on his neck as Melton shook him impatiently. “Listen to me!” Jam ie opened his eyes wearily. “Aye?” “John William Grey is my brother,” Melton said. “ apped his meetin g with you. You spared his life, and he made you a promise—is t hat true?” With great effort, he cast his mind back. He had met the boy two days st battle of the rebellion; the Scottish victory at Prestonpans. The six months between then and now seemed a vast chasm; so much had happened “Aye, I recall. He prom ised to kill me. I dinna mind if you do it for him, though.” His eyelids were drooping again. Did he have to be awa o be sh ot? “He said h e owed you a debt of honor, and he doe s.” Melton stood up, dusting the knees of his breeches, and turned to h t, who had been wat ching the questio ning with considerable bewild erment. “It’s the deuce of a situation, Wallace. This … this Jacobite ous. You’ve heard of Red Jamie? The one on the broadsheets?” The Lie utenant nodded, looking curiously down at the bedr aggled form at h is feet. Melt on smiled bitterly. “No, he doesn’t look so dangerous n ow, does he? But he’s still Red Jamie Fraser, and His Grace mo re than ple ased to hear of s uch an illustrious prisoner. They haven’t yet found Charles Stuart, but a few well-known J acobit the crowds a t Tower Hill n early as much.” “Shall I send a message to His Grace?” The Lieutenant reached for his me ssa n wheele d to glare d own at his prisoner. “That’s the difficulty! Besid es being prime gallows bait, this filthy wretc ed my y oungest brother near Preston, and rather than shooting the brat, which is what he deserved, spared hi ons. T hus,” he said through his teeth, “incurring a bloody great de bt of honor upon my family!” “Dear me,” m to His Grace, after all.” “No, blast it! I can’t even shoot the bastard , without dishonoring my brother’s sw “I w ill na tell anyone if you don’t,” he suggested, and promptly close d it again. “Shut up!” Losing his te he impact, but said nothing more. “Perhaps we could shoot him und er an assumed name,” the Lieut withering scorn, then looked out the window to judge the time. “It wi ll be dark in three hours. I’ , and have it filled with hay. Find a driver—pick someone discreet, Wallace, that means bribable, Wallace—and who grunted at t oner?” The Lieutenant gestured diffidently toward the body on the fl oor. “What about him?” Melton said brusqu ely. “He’s too wea have ave his aide a look of ts here.” “Wagon?” The prisoner was showing signs of life. In fact, und er the stimulus of agitation, he had manage d to raise himself k to craw onto one a ers. Find a small wagon d prison air. “Where are ye sending me?” Turning from the door, Melton cast him a glance of intense dislike. “You’re rm. B the laird of Broch Tuara sir. Er, sir? What about the pris t least not un til the wagon ge ng want to go want to be shot!” The Englishmen exchanged a look. “Raving,” th e Lieutenant said significantly, and Melton n odded. “I doubt he’ll live thro the spikes of matted red h st.” The door sh ut fir mly behind the Englishmen, leaving Jamie Fraser quite alone—and still alive. 2 THE HUNT BEGINS Inverness May 2, 1968 “Of course h e’s dead!” Claire’s voice was sh rill. l, let loodshot b ch, aren’t you ugh the journey arp with agitation; nna the spikes of oing among the rifled bookshelves. She stood against the cork-lined wall like a prisoner awaiting a fir ing squad, staring from her daughter to Roger Wakefield and back again. “I don’t think so.” Roger fel t terribly tired. He rubbed ace, then picke d up the folder from the desk; the one containing all the research he’d done since Claire a nd her daughter had first come to him, three w eeks before, and asked his help. He o pened the folder and thu ugh the contents. The Jacobites of Culloden. The Rising of the ’45. The gallant Scots who had rallied to the banner of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and cu t through Scotland li ke a blazing sword—onl y to come to ruin and defeat against the Duke of Cumberland on the gray moor at Culloden. “He re,” he said, plucking out several sheets clippe d together. mbed s lowly thro The archaic writing looked odd, rendered in the black crisphrust the ness of a photocopy. “This is the mu ster roll of the Master of Lovat’s regiment.” He t n her red thin sheaf of papers at Claire, but it was her daughter, Brianna, who took the sheets from him an d began to turn the pages, a slight frown betwee dish brows. “Read the top sheet,” Roger said. “Where it says ‘Officers.’ ” “All right.‘Officers,’ ” sh e read aloud, “ ‘Simon, Master of Lovat’ …” “The Young Fox,” Roger interrupted. “Lovat’s son. And five more names, right?” Brianna cocked one brow at him, but went on reading. “ ‘William Chisholm Fraser, Lieutenant; George D’Amerd Fraser Shaw, Captain; Duncan Joseph Fraser, Lieutenant; B ayard Murray Fraser, Major,” she paused, swallowing, before reading the last name, “ ‘… James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser. Captain.’ ” She lower ed the papers, looking a little pale. “My father.” Claire moved quickly to her daughter’s side, squeezing the girl’s arm. She was pale, too. “Yes,” she said to Rog er. “I know he went to Culloden. When he left me … there at the stone circle … he meant to go back to Culloden Field, to rescue his men who were with Charles St uart. And we know he did”—she nodded at the folder on the desk, with a manila surface blank and innocent in the lamplight—“you found their names. But … but … J amie …” Speaking the name aloud seemed to rattle her, and she clamped her lips tight. Now it was Brianna’s turn to support her mother. “He meant to go back, yo u said.” Her eyes, dark blue and encouraging, were inten t on her mother’s face. “He meant to take his men away from the field, and then go back to the battle.” Clai re nodded, recovering herself slightly. “He knew he had n't much chance of getting away; if the English caught him … he said he’d rather die in battle. That’s what he meant to do.” She turned to Roger, her gaze an unsettli ng amber. Her eyes always reminded him of hawk’s eyes, as though she could see a good deal farther than mo st people. “I can’t believe he didn’t die there—so many m en di d, and he mea nt to!” Almos t half the Highland army had died at Culloden, cut down in a blast of cannonfire and searing musketry. But not Jamie Fra ser. “No,” Roger said doggedly. “That bit I read you from Linklater’s book—” He reached to pick it up, a white volume, entitled The Prince in the Heather. “Fo llowing the battle,” he read, “eighteen wounded Jacobite officers took refuge in the farmhouse near the moor. There they lay in pain, their wounds untended, for two days. At the end of that t ime, they were taken out and shot. One man, a Fraser of the Master of Lovat’s regiment, escaped the slaughter. The rest are buried at the edge of the domestic park. “See?” he said, laying the book down and looking earnestly at the two women over its pages. “An officer, of the Master of Lovat’s regiment.” He grabbed up the sheets of the muster roll. “And here they are! Jus t six of them. Now, we know the man in the farmhouse can’t have been Young Simon; he’s a well-known historical figure, and we know very well what happened to him. He retreated from the field—unwounded, mind you—with a group of his men, and fought his way north, eventually making it back to Beaufort Castle, near here.” He waved vaguely at the full-length window, t hrough which the nighttime lights of Inverness twinkled faintly. “Nor was the man who escaped Leanach farmhouse any of the other four officers—William, George, Duncan, or Bayard,” Roger said. “Why?” He snatched another paper out of the folder and brandished it, almost triumphantly. “Because they all did die at Culloden! All four of them were killed on the field—I fou nd their names listed on a plaque in the church at Beauly.” Claire let out a long breath, then eased herself down into the old leather swivel chair behind the desk. “Jesus H. Christ,” she said. She closed her eyes and leaned forward, elbows on the desk, and her head against her hands, the thick, curly brown hair spilling forward to hide her face. Brianna laid a hand on Claire’ s back, face troubled as she bent over her mother. She was a tall girl, with large, fine bones, and her long red hair glowed in the warm light of the desk lamp. “If he didn’t die …” she began tentatively. Claire’s head snapped up. “But he is dead!” she said. Her face was strained, and small lines were visible around her eyes. “For God’s sake, it’s two hundred years; whether he died at Culloden or not, he’s dead now!” Brianna stepped back from her mother’s vehemence, and lowered her head, so the red hair—her father’s red hair—swung down beside her cheek. “I guess so,” she whispered. Roger could see she was fighting back tears. And no wonder, he thought. To find out in short order that first, the man you had loved and called “Father” all y our life really wasn’t your father, secondly, that your real father was a Highland Scot who had lived two hundred years ago, and thirdly, to realize that he had likely perished in some horrid fashion, unthinkably far from the wife and child he had sacrificed himself to save … enough to rattle one, Roger thought. He crossed to Brianna and touched her arm. She gave him a brief, distracted glance, and tried to smile. He put his arms around her, even in his pity for her distress thinking how marvelous she felt, all warm and soft and springy at once. Claire still sat at the desk, motionless. The yellow hawk’s eyes had gone a softer color now, remote with memory. They rested sightlessly on the east wall of the study, still covered from floor to ceiling with

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