

TORBEG

A NOVEL BY GRACE CAMPBELL



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

There is probably no period in history more romantic than that of the Jacobite risings. In her new novel, Grace Campbell returns to 1744 to tell the story of Finlay, who took a wife and went with her to their new home as the young Laird of Torbeg.

But their period of happiness was brief, for already there was a whisper through the glens that Charles Stuart was returning to take the throne of England. Needless to say, Finlay became involved in the short-lived triumphs and the eventual defeat of the Pretender's cause.

Skilfully and attractively written, this thoroughly enjoyable book presents a marvellously accurate picture of life in the Highlands under the Hanoverians. The author has woven into the story love, sorrow, loyalty and other strong human emotions, which makes her book something more than just another historical romance.

By Grace Campbell

THORN-APPLE TREE
THE HIGHER HILL
FRESH WIND BLOWING
THE TOWER AND THE TOWN

Grace Campbell

★ ★ ★

TORBEG



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To the memory of my mother
CAROLINE GRANT

Glossary

<i>Bantighearna</i>	Mistress, or lady of the house
<i>Biggin</i>	Small cottage
<i>Bodach</i>	Rogue; old fellow
<i>Ceilidh</i>	Neighbourly gathering
<i>Coggie</i>	Wooden pail or cup
<i>Corrie</i>	Circular hollow on a mountainside
<i>Creepie-stool</i>	Three-legged stool
<i>Duine wassel</i>	Gentleman of the clan
<i>Girnal</i>	Granary
<i>Gomeral</i>	Fool
<i>Hoast</i>	Cough
<i>Lave</i>	Remainder
<i>Mallach ort</i>	A curse on you
<i>M'eudail</i>	My darling
<i>Mo cridhe</i>	My dear; my heart
<i>Mo mathair</i>	My mother
<i>Puckle</i>	Small
<i>Sassenach</i>	Southerner, Saxon, Englishman
<i>Sidhe</i>	Fairy
<i>Slainte</i>	A Gaelic toast (Your health!)
<i>Smoored</i>	Smothered; smeared
<i>Stirk</i>	A yearling bullock or heifer
<i>Targe</i>	Shield
<i>Tassie</i>	Cup
<i>Thole</i>	Endure

On the last day of April in the year 1744, Finlay Ban Grant came riding along the high hill road from Glenmoriston to Inverness.

It was a boisterous bright spring day, and the wind came sweeping up from the south over the mountains and over the loch. From a pale, clear sky the sun poured down, warm and golden. Finlay felt the heat of it on his face and hands, on his brown knees, and on his thighs when his kilt blew back and bared them. He laid his palm on the shoulder of his black gelding, and the skin was hot and slippery and rippled under his touch. He sensed a fierce inner vitality in the play of muscle and sinew, and he was aware of a like vitality in his own body. He laughed a little, and when the track ran smooth across a mountain meadow, he scrounged down his bonnet, tightened his knees, and bent low in the saddle.

The horse tossed his dark head and his hooves pounded. Finlay felt the wind pour over him like water. He rode, as it were, along the top of the world, and saw it spread out before him—peaks and glens and tumbling streams. Loch Ness below to the right, and far ahead the silver shimmer of the sea.

It was not only an upsurge of animal spirits from the sun and wind and the springtime that Finlay felt. There was yet another reason for the pleasurable stir in his blood. This day he had attained his majority, and the errand on which he rode had to do, though in a way he did not yet understand, with himself and his future.

Today he was twenty-one. The youngest of the old Laird of Glenmoriston's sons and many years junior to his brother the present chieftain, Finlay had for a long time been the bairn about the house. Now he could not by any stretch of mind be called a bairn. He was an even six feet tall, his shoulders were wide, and his body tough and agile. His hair, however, had not darkened as he grew into manhood. It was the colour of ripe flax. So they called him Finlay Ban. Yet his eyes and brows were black. The sharpness of the contrast gave him an air of unpredictability. Otherwise he ran true to type, and looked what he was—proud, sensitive, high-tempered and sincere, a younger son of a Highland laird, of good blood and little means and with his way to make in the world.

The track began to drop down over the breast of the hill, and black Shanlan placed his hooves carefully and picked his way between the stones and gravel and across slippery grassy slopes till they reached the level ground below. The road followed the river, now wide and swollen with the spate of spring water from the hills. On the far side lay the town of Inverness.

Shanlan trotted briskly past the cluster of stone huts on the nearer shore, then clattered on to the bridge. The river swirled along between the grassy banks and slapped against the thick uprights of the seven stone arches. A couple of boys in worn kilts lay flat, peering over the edge of the planks into the water below. One of them looked up, saw the horse and rider, sprang to his feet, and scampered on ahead.

The bridge behind him, Finlay turned sharply to the right, and there fronting the river was the tall stone house that was the Laird's town dwelling. The boy in the worn kilt was already at Shanlan's head, reaching for the bridle and smiling shyly.

Finlay slipped to the ground. In the face of the house a door swung open, and the Laird himself came down the steps. This was Patric Bui, so named because of his yellow hair that now had more grey in it than yellow. He was shorter than Finlay, heavier and twenty years older. Nevertheless he looked active and ready and in full strength.

"What brings you from home, lad?" His voice was rough with surprise. "Trouble?"

"No trouble. No trouble at all. A guest, rather. Grant of the Speyside came this morning."

"Ludovic!"

"Aye. He was in Glen Urquhart seeing his baillie, and he came on down to Glenmoriston."

"Do you know his errand?"

"It will have something to do with me, I gathered. He wished to speak to you as head of the family, but he questioned me—about my schooling for the most part."

"I see." Patric's grey eyes met his brother's thoughtfully. "We'll talk of it on the way home in the morning. I'll go, of course. My business here is all but done. I must see Ludovic, not only because of this project he has in mind, but . . ." He shrugged, and there was no need to say more.

The Laird and people of Glenmoriston held Ludovic of Castle Grant in high and affectionate esteem. After the Jacobite rising in 1715 the family estate on the shore of Loch Ness had been forfeited, and the old laird, Iain a'Chragain had been forced to take refuge in a rocky retreat in his own glen. Then young Ludovic, son of Grant of the Speyside, a supporter of the Government and a skilled and canny lawyer, bought the property and transferred it to the original owner.

So towards Ludovic, Whig and Hanoverian as he was, the hearts of the Glenmoriston people were warm. Blood had proven to be more potent than politics, and a man's name still meant something. Patric would have been willing indeed to cut short his merchandising in Inverness in order to welcome his friend and benefactor to the family home at Invermoriston.

"Look now," the Laird resumed, "a Belgian boat is in the harbour. She's taking on a dozen pine masts of ours. Your brother Torquil's at the quay. Go into the house and Kirsty will get you a meal, then come along towards the pier. I'll meet you and we'll go together to Abertarff House to see Lord Lovat."

"Lovat?" Finlay's brows lifted.

"Aye. This is my day for messages. He sent for me."

"You would have me go with you?"

Patric stood back and looked at his brother. He smiled. "It's today you're twenty-one, isn't it? Lovat, I'm thinking, is up to something. Eat, and then come along Kirk Street."

Broth, pigeon pie, some crowdie cheese, and a couple of baps well buttered—these Finlay disposed of, while Kirsty, the ancient serving-woman, hovered about, urging him to more. Finally he rose and slapped the flat front of his kilt.

"You'll soon be coming back to the glen, Kirsty?"

She gave him a toothless, loving smile, "Aye, soon. With your brother Alex bringing home a bride, work there'll be aplenty. Och aye! And when will you be finding a lass, now that you're a grown man and tall as a glen pine?"

"God knows," he rejoined piously, "since you won't have me."

She flicked the dishclout at him. "Did I not hear your brother tell you to meet him?"

“Aye, you did.”

He smiled at her, then came out and ran down the stone steps. The wind blew more keen, and he was glad for his woollen jacket, and for the warm clasp and swing of the kilt about his thighs. He made his way up Bridge Street then walked along past the kirk towards the quay.

There before him was the Belgian boat, her masts lifting and dipping as the sea nudged her. She rode easy close to the pier. The Glenmoriston timber was all but loaded. Thick trunks of Scots pine, trimmed and barked and glistening in the sunshine, were being hoisted with rope and pulley, swung over and eased down into the vessel. Patric stood by to watch. Torquil was there too, working with the men. You could tell him by his red thatch. Shouting in three languages—Flemish, English and Gaelic—floated up from the quay, but most of it was Gaelic.

The logs safely in, his brothers came to meet Finlay and the three exchanging small matter-of-fact smiles. They were alike, though Finlay was fair, Torquil red and Patric brindled. There was about Patric as well a certain air of decision and responsibility that marked him the head of the clan.

“I was just saying,” observed Torquil in his quick, eager voice, “that a young callant got off the boat when it landed. He was dressed very plain and dark, and looked neither to the right nor to the left.”

“A foreigner?”

“He spoke not a word, so how can I say?”

“Where did he go?” asked Patric quietly.

“To Abertarff House,” grinned Torquil. “By a long-around road and with me sauntering in the rear.”

There was a small waiting silence, but Patric did not pursue the topic. They came along by the maltyards that spread over the field to the east of the street.

“You might step in,” Patric suggested, “and see to the order I left yesterday.”

“That I will do.” With a companionable grin and a wave of his hand Torquil left them.

A little farther along Kirk Street stood a grey stone building with a steep roof and a triple row of windows—the Grammar School. From the open

door came a steady hum of voices. Here, not long since Finlay had been himself a pupil.

Patric took the thought from his mind. "You've had good schooling. It will be to your advantage, whatever happens. I need not tell you that before many months are past we may all be in a pretty tulzie."

"For the King over the Water?"

"Aye."

"What of Lovat? Was he not once for Hanover?"

Patric nodded. "Aye, he was. MacShimi's a strange man. He lacks constancy, or seems to. Anyway, no one is finally committed as yet. It's many a year since the Stuarts had the throne. The old loyalty's there, like a smooored fire. It may go out if banked too long, but let a wind blow on it . . ."

"Aye," said Finlay deeply, and felt the skin prickle on the back of his neck.

Abertarff House stood in a close and well back from the street. It was a stout three-storied building with a tower entrance, used by Lord Lovat for his convenience when in town. Patric and Finlay came from the street along a flagged walk. Scarcely had they reached the door when it flew open, and a servant lad ushered them in and up the turnpike stair that curved around within the tower. At the top they were met by MacShimi himself, or to give him his full title, Simon, Lord Lovat, Chief of Clan Fraser.

He was now seventy-seven years of age, and his big frame was heavy with sagging flesh. Nevertheless as he greeted them there was humour and friendliness and a vast zest for life in his creased, cajoling old face.

"Glenmoriston! Man of my heart!" He flung an arm around Patric, then turned to Finlay. "And the youngest limb from the same pine tree—a lightsome lad, tall and proud!" He enclosed Finlay briefly in a great soft embrace, and his head moved ruefully from side to side. "Youth, youth! A long road ahead of you and many a hard dunt, but meat and drink and good talk, and here and there a shindy, and love thrown in! I envy you.

"Now here," he went on, "is another lad. Master John MacDonell of France and the Low Countries, come from the one we love and serve. John, these are two good friends—Patric, Laird of Glenmoriston, and his brother Finlay."

He waved them to chairs drawn up about the hearth. The sun slanted in from the western windows, and the fire of bog pine and peat crackled

resinously and filled the room with a faint aromatic perfume. Lovat lifted a gouty foot and laid it tenderly on a hassock. It was enclosed in tartan hose, tight over thick bandaging. It looked huge and, covered as it was, it looked painful. The owner of it regarded it glumly for a moment, his fleshy brow knotted, then he leaned back and ignored it, folding his hands comfortably over his ample paunch.

He glanced quizzically at the other three, whose faces wore the same expression, a watchful and measuring intentness. Then he tapped on the floor with the stick that rested against his chair, and in a moment the dark-haired gillie came, carrying a tray with decanter and goblets. The claret was rosy in the mingled light of sunshine and fireglow. It gurgled musically into the glasses.

Lovat raised his. "*Slainte!*" he cried. "Here's to us! May the hinges of our friendship never rust, nor the wings of our love cast a feather!"

They drank.

Again Lovat lifted his glass. "This one is for you, Finlay Ban, and you at the lift of your life. As you climb the hill of your good fortune, may you never meet a friend coming down!"

"Amen," said the others, and they drank.

Then MacShimi raised himself slowly to his gouty feet. "Fill up, gentlemen!" The decanter went around. They lifted their glasses. "To the King! Not much longer over the water! God bless him."

They drank in some solemnity, their faces quiet with thought. When they sat down, on one impulse they pulled their chairs in closer to each other.

"What news?" asked Patric of the visitor from France. He was a slim, dark fellow with an alert and fine-drawn face.

"King James is well, if a trifle melancholy," he told them. "His sons are also well. Prince Charles longs to put his fortune to the test, but his royal father counsels caution. It was thought wise at this time to have a picture of the state of the Highlands, the disposition of the chiefs of the clans, and their respective strengths in men and money."

Patric looked at him soberly. "We are not rich, you know. None of us are, as Englishmen and Frenchmen count riches. We have men, aye. But we need arms and money."

"We have not enough men," interjected Lovat. "We need a French army well equipped and with resources for provisioning. Give us that, call up the

clans, leap into swift hot action, and the country is ours. Do you agree, Glenmoriston?"

Patric nodded soberly. "Aye, that I do. The clans will gather right enough. MacDonell and Cameron, Robertson, MacPherson and MacIntosh. The Chisholms. The Frasers, of course, and my own clan, the Grants of Glenmoriston. The Skye men too, I hope. Some of them will be remembering, however, that they took the oath of allegiance."

"Pish!" Lovat pushed at his footstool peevishly. "Under duress! A man need have no respect for oaths which have been forced. He can disregard a cartload of them. As I would, to serve my friends, or"—with a pious chuckle—"to serve myself. Tell me now, is there any chance of Ludovic Grant of the Speyside coming in with us?"

Patric shook his head. "I think not. He has always been for Hanover, and his father before him."

"But a man may change his mind—if he has a mind to change."

Patric's brows met. "You mean, my lord? There are two prongs to that."

"Aye, so there are. A man may change his mind if he has a mind. Or if he has a mind to change, a disposition to re-examine circumstances and adjust himself to them. Och aye. I meant it both ways." He chuckled and the sound rumbled through his vast body, while his eyes, bright and warm and wary, moved mirthfully from one to another.

For a moment no one answered. The westering sun slanted in through the greenish windowpanes and cast bars of smoky brightness through the darkening room. The fire burned low. Then Patric placed a hand on either knee and spoke with some asperity.

"My lord, there is another glint to the matter. My father before me, and I in my youth, stood for the house of Stuart, to some risk of life and limb and to the loss of our patrimony for many years. If a new effort is to be made, you know where my loyalty lies. Now this I say to all concerned—think well, take a stand, and then stay by it. For to change, to veer, to trim one's sails, will not avail much in the long run, and may work grave danger on the rest."

Lovat smiled at him in complete good humour. "My staunch Glenmoriston!" he murmured affectionately. "You, Finlay Ban, what do you say?"

"I stand with my chief."

“A true *duine wassel*. John, have you a word for us?”

Young MacDonell gave them his quick dark smile. “Just one thing. The Prince himself. You would not believe how gallant and high-spirited he is, how fit for his place in life.”

Lovat looked kindly at him. “I hope he is all that and more. I hope he is as wise as a serpent and as handsome as Hermes. Now for us, the next step is to arrange a meeting of the heads of the nearby clans, from which we may send back considered messages to His Majesty.”

Said Patric, “My brother, Alex of Livishie, is for marrying the daughter of Robertson of Culcabock in two weeks. There’ll be a *ceilidh* and a welcoming for the pair at my place at Invermoriston. Naturally the friends will gather, and among them will be the neighbouring chieftains. A clack over the decanters while the young folks are at the reels, why not?”

“Why not indeed?” MacShimi’s fleshy old face broke into a smile of pure pleasure. “An excellent thought, Glenmoriston my heart. And did I hear aright? Robertson of Culcabock?”

His eyes danced with mischief, and Patric grinned cheerfully in return. “You heard aright. Robertson it is.”

“Aye so. The end of an ancient feud. And well ended—in the marriage bed.” He turned to MacDonell. “This is an old joke in our precincts. The grandfather of the Laird got into a puckle scrape with Robertson of Inshes over the fine house of Culcabock. There was some jockeying back and forth, burning of haystacks and such frolickings. It was finally settled, in a card game.”

“And my grandfather lost,” admitted Patric. “Some day we’ll get it back. However the present master of Culcabock and I are friends and are like to be closer.”

“I have seen two lassies with him,” ruminated Lovat. “Both bonnie. One dark and one fair.”

“It’s the fair one, Elspeth. The other is his wife’s niece from Skye. A MacLeod of Bracadale, she is.”

MacShimi’s face was bright with interest. “I know Bracadale. My sainted father is buried in Dunvegan. Well, then, gentlemen! At the feast to welcome the new bride to Glenmoriston, we shall meet again. And may God speed the cause!”

A sudden solemnity fell on them. Lovat nodded his grey head. "Aye, it's a chancy thing. For us all. The man we have to fear is Duncan Forbes of Culloden."

"A good man," put in Patric.

"Aye. And what is more to be feared than a man good all the way through—with no warm human weakness in him? Cool, Duncan is, but just. Kind too. Despite the widening rift in our friendship, my heart cleaves to him."

Patric nodded. "He would have us accept things as they are and make the best of them."

"He may be wise," admitted Lovat.

MacDonell looked at the two and his dark eyes glinted. "It is a matter of right and wrong." And in his voice was the cool arrogance of youth.

"It is also a matter of life and death for a few thousand men," amended Patric crisply. "Now as for me, loyalty to the Stuarts I drank in with my mother's milk. Yet at this moment I think of my clan. What will this mean to them in the long run? God only knows."

"Aye, aye," repeated Lovat gloomily, "it's chancy, and for you young callants too, whether you believe me or not."

Finlay and John MacDonell exchanged a quick glance. The same eager and ardent look was in the eyes of both. They struck fire from each other.

"There's risk—yes," came Finlay's clear firm voice. "But it may be that it is laid on us—the danger and the glory."

Lovat smiled his wide, benign smile, and reached for the claret "Well said, lad. Aye, aye, the danger and the glory."

Finlay wakened the next morning in an upper chamber of the house in Inverness, and lay for a while motionless in the recessed bed beside his brother. There was a window in the opposite wall, and he could see a stretch of grey cloud lightening a little with the approach of dawn. The sun is coming up over the sea, he thought, and guessed the exact moment when it topped the waves by the sudden bright effulgence that filled the sky and was reflected into the room.

As at a signal Torquil stirred in his sleep, flung off the blanket and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. Then Finlay raised himself and sat beside the other. Their bare bodies looked pale and defenceless in the dim light. Torquil yawned, buffed his chest and flanks with the palms of his hands, ran his fingers through his rumpled red hair and reached for his clothes.

The door opened and Patric entered, fully dressed and ready for the road. "It came to me in the night," he said to Finlay, "that we should first circle around by Culcabock and tell them what we have planned."

Finlay nodded amiably, flinging his kilt about his hips and thrusting the tail of his linen shirt within.

"Good morning, sirs, and a blessing on you." It was old Kirsty at the door. She had a ranting, cheerful look in her faded blue eyes this morning. From a cupboard in the wall she took a jug and a pewter coggie. The ale spilled limpidly from the one to the other.

The Laird held up the coggie. "God bless the drink," he said, and tossed it off. Torquil was served next.

Then Finlay stepped close. "You'll not forget me, Kirsty."

"A skelp on the ear to you, young sir!" But she gave him a sidewise look of purest affection, and poured full to the brim.

"God bless," said Finlay briefly, and drank. "Thanks to you, Kirsty, and is breakfast laid?"

"Aye, so it is."

As they ate, Kirsty moved about the table serving them. "Is it your will," she inquired of Patric, "that I should buy a measure of tea against your next coming?"

Patric frowned. "The town council's been having a blether about it. Was a law not passed?"

"Only a resolution." Torquil's eyes flickered with inner mirth. "They condemned the use of tea and smuggled brandy, but especially the tea. They claim it rouses and sustains the natural passions of man."

"Ha!" exclaimed Patric on a burst of laughter. "We'll get some then, Kirsty. We might also bring some back to Glenmoriston. Will you look after it, Torquil?"

"I will indeed. And what's left of the pine timber, shall I dispose of it if the price is good?"

"That you may. The hides too. You're as good in a trade as I am. Better," he added honestly, then rose from the table. "Come now, Finlay, I hear the horses stamping by the door."

The two rode up Bridge Street, along the Castle Wynd, and then turned into the Edinburgh Road. The track climbed steadily, and presently they came out on a high knoll where there was laid before them a great sweep of land and sea.

To the north-west stood Ben Wyvis, blue and massive. Nearer rose the round wooded dome of Craig Phadrig and the little hills of Tomnahurich and Torvean. A mist lay over the firth, but even as they watched the sun pierced and dispersed it, and the water spread pale and glittering, reflecting the brightness above. In the moist and luminous air the colours were all smooed together, vague and delicate, like an opal or the inside of a shell.

Then a wind came out of the west and shook the birch trees by the roadway. Finlay felt the wind on his face and on his body. It crept about his shoulders and his back, under his arms and around his chest like a cool hand searching. A shiver of excitement went over him.

"To look out from a high hill is like bathing in cool water," remarked Patric. "It invigorates a man."

They turned off the main causeway then, passed a mill and a stone steading, and there before them stood the white house of Culcabock. The sun fell full on it, on the clean rectangular lines of roof and wall, and on the great two-storied bay window that made one end into a half circle.

At the gate they paused. Patric swung off and handed his bridle rein to Finlay. "I see Ferchar walking among his policies, there beyond the stacks. Do you wait here."

Finlay waited. There was a gabbling of geese from the pond near by, and in a shed near the barn lambs bleated. No sound came from the house, though from the kitchen chimney to the rear rose a ribbon of smoke. This was Culcabock, which—were it not that his grandfather had had bad luck in a card game nearly a hundred years ago—might now be his home.

He slipped from the saddle and tied both bridle reins to a ring in the stone gatepost. Beside him was a holly hedge and a path by it, and at the far end a bleaching green, sunny and sheltered. His shoes made no noise on the clipped grass. Then all at once he stopped short and stood motionless.

A girl was there. She wore a single brief garment, a white night shift it was, belling out very full and stiff about her. She was on her knees, her head bent so that her dark curly hair tumbled forward. She scooped her hands into the dewy grass and laved her face and neck again and again. All the time she laughed, a low chuckling sound full of secret excitement and mirth.

Then she rose, her face dripping, and pushed back her hair. She smoothed down her brief and rumpled garment, threw back her curls, laughed again, tried to turn a hand-spring, slipped, and sat down suddenly, facing Finlay. Her mouth opened and she clapped her hand over it. She leaped to her feet.

Finlay burst into laughter. The mirth he had been holding in check broke in one deep peal, then he was silent, watching. She ran to the hedge, caught up a yellow plaid and wrapped it about her. Finlay backed away carefully, making no noise. So likewise did she, in the opposite direction. Then when she came to the corner of the house, she looked full at him and he saw that her blue eyes were bright with laughter. He raised a hand in salute and she was gone. It was Caroline MacLeod.

He went softly back to the horses. When Patric returned, Ferchar Robertson with him, Finlay sat his black gelding, with the bay mare's bridle rein over his wrist, calmly waiting.

Ferchar held up his hand to grip Finlay's and smiled. He was a grizzled man, grey of hair and eyes, square-built and steady.

"You have a longish ride before you."

"But a fair day for it." Patric swung up into the saddle.

“Then safe home!”

Finlay and Patric rode on in an easy silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The sun was warm as it beat down on them, and the miles slipped by. When they were crossing a moor near Caiplich, Patric began, “Now as to Ludovic of Castle Grant . . .”

Finlay drew his horse in and gave close attention.

“Tell me, Finlay Ban, have you ever thought you’d like to cross the ocean? To America?”

America! The word hung in the air, in the soft luminous Highland air. America! It had a strange sound, bland in the first syllable, then hard and bright like a war cry. It echoed in his mind. He thrust it aside.

“No,” he answered. “Rather would I live my life in my own country.”

Patric reached into his saddlebag and took out a linen napkin folded over a couple of Kirsty’s scones and a skelp of cheese. He handed Finlay his share. “This is the way of it. Ludovic has large interests in a merchandising firm in America. They have need of young men as clerks. Ludovic thought of you. A few months ago he mentioned it, but it seemed a chancy thing. I said nothing of it at the time, but now he has pursued it. You would perhaps do well to hear what he has to say.”

“I will hear what he has to say, but I know my answer. This is where I belong. Why should I leave it?”

“Good. That is how I hoped you would feel.”

They came down into the fertile plain at the mouth of Glen Urquhart and crossed the river at Drumnadrochit. The mountain of Mealfuarvonie loomed close and they were not far from home.

Patric broke silence again. “Nevertheless the time has come to settle your future. What would you think of Torbeg?”

Finlay pulled Shanlan up short. “Torbeg!”

“Aye. It’s vacant, as you know.”

“Torbeg,” Finlay repeated slowly. “Nothing could be better.” He had a swift mental vision of it—a little hill overlooking the river Moriston, a stone house on it and a row of pines behind. He turned to his brother and for a time could find no words. Then, “This is better than America,” he said.

“Aye, so! And I have a man at my back as well. Now about the place. There’s some arable land, enough for your oats and barley, and there’s pasture on the slopes for a thousand beeves. The old road runs close by, but Wade’s new highway goes well to the north. I’ve seen the day when it was good not to be too handy to a military road. Lauchie MacIan has been handling the place, and will stay on with you.”

“I’ll be glad of that.” Finlay’s face was bright with excitement. Horses and cattle on the sides of the mountains, and in the fertile flats barley and oats. His mind reached out to encompass it. “Torbeg,” he said softly. “I can scarce believe it.”

It was high noon when they reached Glenmoriston House. They found their guest sitting with the Dowager Lady and with Isobel who was Patric’s wife and the present mistress. Ludovic rose to greet them. He was a tall man with cool grey eyes.

Patric grasped his hand warmly. “Sad I am that I was not here to greet you. But you’ve been made welcome, I’ll warrant.”

He stepped across to his handsome redheaded wife and bussed her, then turned to his mother. Finlay too bent to his mother’s cheek and she reached up a firm hand and clasped his.

“Finlay Ban—the last of the lot and the tallest,” observed Ludovic.

“Aye,” said the Widow Glenmoriston, “and the one who is both dark and fair. Hair like flax and eyes like a hill tarn.”

“You’d be a hard man to forget, or to disguise,” Ludovic commented.

“I can’t think of myself disguised.”

“One never knows.” He flicked the white frill of his under sleeve with a long forefinger, then turned to Patric. “Have you told your young brother of my offer?”

“I’ve given him the bare bones of the matter.”

“I see. The agent is at present in this country, and is eager to take a few lads back with him. If the plan appeals to you, Finlay, I’ll see that you get every consideration. What do you say?”

Finlay looked at Patric who gave him a small noncommittal smile as if to say, “This is your ploy, lad.” Then he took a deep breath and turned to Ludovic. “My most hearty thanks, sir. But all my heart cleaves to my home in this glen, and here I would like to bide.”

Ludovic regarded him closely. "I see that you have made up your mind, but believe me, you might be better away. However, it is for you to say. I thought of you because I had it from the Grammar School that your record was good."

Finlay's face lighted up. He glanced from one to the other, then, "Torquil!" he cried. "Why not Torquil?"

"Your brother?"

"Aye. At school he used to pore over charts of America. And at computing and figure work he had no equal."

Ludovic smiled agreeably. "Torquil will be a good man, especially since his mind turns in that direction. I'll be glad to recommend him."

The midday meal was now ready. The table was spread in the long dining hall, and Finlay smiled with pleasure at the sight of it. After a thirty-mile ride, it was luck to find a dinner geared to company.

First came a broth thickened with barley and laced with young greens, then a roasted duck and a leg of lamb hot from the spit, and after that a brace of stuffed young pullets served with drappit eggs and their own rich gravy. Oatcakes and barley scones flanked the main dishes, and an honoured place was given a platter of Beltane bannocks.

"You keep up the ancient customs," remarked Ludovic.

"Aye," agreed the Dowager Lady. "We do. On the first day of May we greet the old gods. Some call it heathenish but I say there's a power behind life, call it what you will, and it's well to be humble before it and courteous, and to make oblation. As I did at sunrise, to bring peace to the house for another year."

"For longer than that, I hope." Ludovic inclined his fair head to her.

She smiled. "One year at a time is all that is allowed. But even a year of peace is worth asking for."

Patric laid the breast of the duck into thin dark slices and frowned. "These are kittle times. The union with England does not sit easy. The Sassenach fail to understand us. They fail to try."

"Then we on our part must make every effort."

"Why only on our part? Small thanks your father got for all he did for the Hanovers," observed the Laird's mother tartly.

“True, but with him it was a matter of principle.”

“So it was,” she rejoined warmly, recovering from her lapse of urbanity. “And a man of principle and good feeling he is for all he’s been on the far side of the fence from us. Tell me, will he soon return from London to his fine tall castle among the pines?”

“More than pines now,” Ludovic corrected her, his cool grey eyes brightening. “Our plantations are doing well, especially the larch.”

“I’ve heard tell of your planting,” observed the Laird, “and of your other improvements. In Castle Grant you’ve been fortunate. For a hundred years never a burning or a levelling. While here,” Patric grimaced, and they all remembered with him that after the rising of 1715 the old Glenmoriston house had been burned to the ground, “here we have to keep rebuilding, instead of adding here a wing, there a summerhouse, or a giral if the crops are good.”

“On the other hand, you keep abreast of the times. Wider windows, for instance. In that way you have the advantage.”

“Never say it,” broke in the Widow Glenmoriston. “May you never see your rooftree fall and the flames leap up, and the thought like to overwhelm you that men have done this out of the sheer black deviltry of their hearts.”

Her sombre voice silenced them. Isobel nodded towards the door, and the serving-maid came in with the dessert. The girl wore a prideful look on her freckled young face. For the dessert was a stupendous affair—a great mound of syllabub on the big blue platter, the cream beaten very stiff and high, delicately rosy from the red wine that had been whipped into it, and surrounded by a wreath of broken and quivering quince and currant jellies.

Finlay’s dark eyes met Isobel’s, and she replied with a quick flick of a smile, as if to say, “Aye, we’ve done well by the visiting laird.”

Ludovic picked up the thought. “This is a noble meal.” He bent his head courteously to Isobel, then turned to Patric. “You have here as fine and fertile a glen as there is in the Highlands. I should be sorry to see anything disturb the peace and prosperity of it. You will not forget, Glenmoriston my friend, that the responsibility for that lies largely with you.”

A flush touched Patric’s forehead. “My first care has always been the welfare of the clan. No man need remind me of it.”

“Indeed no,” agreed Ludovic smoothly, having made his point. “Tell me, have you tried potatoes in your garden plot?”

“Some say they are unhealthy.”

“With that I do not agree. I think they’ll be a godsend to this country. Cooked slowly on the hearth, broken and eaten with butter, I vow they’re good nourishment and palatable as well.”

“Another new thing,” observed Isobel, “like tea. I’m in favour of both.”

“So am I,” Ludovic smiled at her. “I’m in favour of using all the good things that offer. That reminds me. I hear that Lord Lovat has bought a new coach, and that recently he took a prodigious journey in it over the spring roads. I’ll vow that his adventures lost nothing in the telling.”

The Dowager Lady smiled. “I knew him in his youth. He can be vastly ingratiating, also vastly maddening, but he’s never a fool, not MacShimi. Though at times perhaps a rogue.”

Ludovic nodded. “Who could doubt that after what he calls his youthful folly, the dastardly kidnapping of the elderly Lady Lovat.”

“Elderly? Tush! She was only fifty. And she grew fond of him. Let us go now and walk in the garden in the warmth of the day.”

Ludovic shook his head. “I grieve that the time has come for me to be away.”

“You’ll not bide the night? It’s not often we see you.”

“No, I regret.”

Ludovic made an impressive figure as he sat his tall grey horse and drank the stirrup cup Isobel handed up to him. In his tartan trews, his trim cloth jacket, and his wide-flowing plaid caught on the shoulder with a silver brooch, he looked what he was, the head of a great clan. He handed down the tassie and lifted his palm to them in friendly farewell. His gillie fell in behind him, the hooves of the horses padded on the soft grass, clattered on the gravel, and they were gone.

“He rides out modestly enough,” observed the Dowager Lady. “Well I mind how my father Lochiel went down the glen with his tail behind him—his henchman, his swordsman, his bard, his carrier lad, his baggage loon, his piper and his piper’s gillie.” A high prideful laugh escaped her as she turned and went into the house.

Patric looked after his mother with humour and affection in his eyes, then turned more soberly to Finlay. “Two warnings we had, one about keeping the peace, the other about . . .”

“Lovat?”

“Aye.”

Finlay laughed softly. “As well his visit did not fall on the day of Alex’s welcome-home.”

Word of that gathering was now dispatched to the heads of all the families up the glen from Invermoriston to Loch Clunie. While to Finlay fell the task of conveying the invitation to the neighbouring chiefs of Glengarry and Lochiel.

It was a two-day journey, and by the time he had come as far as Fort Augustus on his way home, he was tired. The weather was warm for May. He rode through the village slowly and with slack rein. Before the King’s Inn he paused and sat his horse and watched the English soldiers at foot drill on the meadow by the fort, then slipped from Shanlan’s back, flung the reins over the hitching post and entered.

It was dim after the brightness without, and for a moment Finlay stood blinking. The innkeeper leaned over an oak cask, polishing the spigot. He was a melancholy yet friendly-looking fellow, black of hair, pale of face, with solemn slate-blue eyes. He motioned Finlay to a bench by a table. A few Highlanders lounged at the rear of the room. Finlay knew them by sight, and exchanged casual greetings with them. They were MacDonells from the nearby estate of Cullachy.

This was a cool and pleasant place, deep-windowed, with a door to the east and one to the west and a breeze blowing through. Finlay took his ale in a leisurely manner, savouring it and resting himself. Suddenly a shadow darkened the doorway. A man stood there—an English captain by his uniform. He was dark for an Englishman, straight as a ramrod, arrogant and handsome. The others watched him silently. The innkeeper went on polishing the spigot.

The Captain strode over to a table, sat down, rapped sharply with his knuckles and gave an order. The door opened again, and a younger, shorter man entered. He had a sprinkle of pockmarks on his flat-featured face, and even apart from that was singularly homely. He came at once to the Captain’s table, leaned over and whispered.

The officer pushed back his bench, crossed the room, sat down opposite Finlay and stared haughtily into his face. Finlay glanced at the innkeeper who now stood motionless by the row of casks. There was a warning in the slate-blue eyes.

Again the Captain rapped his knuckles. “*Votre nom?*”

Finlay looked coolly at him. “Why do you speak in French?”

“You know French?”

“A little.”

“Your name?”

“Finlay Ban Grant, brother to Glenmoriston.”

“You can prove it?”

“My tartan. The badge in my bonnet. My word.”

“The word of a lying Highlander!”

Finlay breathed deep. His muscles tightened and he sat light and easy. Then he looked at the innkeeper. The eyes were still warning him.

“Where have you been?” demanded the Captain.

“I have been to the home of my cousin, Lochiel.”

“Lochiel! Another of them. Tell me, fellow; from France, aren’t you?” He leaned across the table, his black eyes fierce.

Finlay shook his head. “I am not,” he said slowly, and glanced at the man by the casks. The slate-blue eyes had a look of content in them. Finlay could hear the pad of feet behind him. Figures passed the window and drifted in at either door. Cullachy MacDonells, they were, a dozen or so of them. They lounged against the wall, looking casual and uninterested. But they were there. And there were others in the room behind him. Finlay could see that in the innkeeper’s eyes. Also in the eyes of the Captain, and on the outraged, truculent face of the pockmarked attendant.

Suddenly the Captain flung a coin on the table and stalked out. His lackey followed him. There was a moment of silence. Then the men in the dark chequered tartans converged on Finlay. Benches were pulled up. Elbows rested on the table.

Finlay beckoned to the innkeeper. “Drinks all around, and do you join us. Now what did the bodach want of me?” he asked the others innocently.

They looked as innocently back at him, but with a small spark of mirth in their eyes. It grew, and laughter rocked them.

“Will you believe it?” cried Finlay. “He took me for a MacDonell!”

“No! Can you thole that?”

Suddenly Finlay was sober. "I can. I can well thole it. My thanks to you all, and may we meet again soon."

Finlay rode on home in a thoughtful mood. So the redcoats knew that John MacDonell was in the country, or suspected it. The gathering at Glenmoriston House, if it became known, might pass as neighbourly hospitality. Or it might not. That remained to be seen.

Presently the friendly bulk of Stron-na-muich loomed on his left, and opposite it the twin height of Craig-nan-ean. Between lay pasture lands, crops and trees, and in their midst the Moriston leaping down, white with foam, to the smooth water of the loch below. Finlay crossed the bridge, passed the well of bubbling water which Columba had blessed a thousand years before, came along by the old graveyard, down a stone-fenced lane, and so home.

Glenmoriston House was well swept and garnished and ready for guests on the day that Alex of Livishie was to bring home his bride. The Laird had gone to Culcabock to support his brother during the festivities there, but the other members of the family had remained at home to receive not only the wedding party but the chiefs of the neighbouring clans and the heads of the families up the Glen.

The house stood solidly in the midst of the orchard and gardens, with a green sweep of lawn in front and to one side the blueness of Loch Ness. A gay spring wind crinkled the water into lacy patterns. It scattered the white petal of the cherry tree that edged the roadway like a drift of snow, and sang a thin high song in the dark branches of the pines by the waterfall where the Moriston plunged over the rocks. And it was scooped up into the triangular big sail of the galley as it came sweeping around the bend in the shore.

Finlay ran down to the pier and Torquil came after him, both braw in their red kilts and short wool jackets with white ruffles at the throat and wrist. The boat pulled into the jetty, eager hands steadying her. In the bow the wedding party gathered, the ladies wrapped close in their plaids against the freshness of the wind. Finlay's eyes searched among the tartans for the yellow and black of the MacLeod and not finding it, his eager face sobered.

Then he saw her. She was not wearing a plaid. Instead, a scarlet cloak fell to her ankles. The hood of it was pushed back, her dark curls were close confined, and her face, ivory white, red-lipped, blue-eyed, contoured firmly, bright with beauty, was clear and plain before him. Her uncle stood by her, looking grey and burly beside her lightness.

Alex of Livishie, a dark, tall man, midway in years between Patric and Finlay, helped his bride ashore. Isobel caught her in a warm embrace and kissed her on either cheek.

"New wife of my husband's brother," she cried in her rich husky voice, "glad we are to have you with us."

Then Torquil and Finlay came forward to greet and kiss her. On the terrace before the house, the Dowager Lady waited. Elspeth made a curtsy, then the older woman folded her in her arms. "You're a bonnie lassie, and

Alex tells me you're good as you're bonnie. My dear, you've come among those who will love you if you'll let them. And I know you will."

Finlay moved closer to the wearer of the scarlet cloak. She cast a quick glance towards him, looked away and back again. "Why did you do it?" he asked softly and made a quick movement with his hands as if washing his face.

Her laughter bubbled. "To make me bonnie," she confided in a quick whisper. "If you wash in the dew the morning of May Day—you know!"

"Never did it work so well."

"Then before, I was not bonnie?"

For a moment he considered the dangers of the implication, then he quirked a mirthful brow at her and they came into the house laughing.

The ladies were ushered into one of the upper chambers for rest and refurbishing. There they laid aside their cloaks, and saw to their complexions and curls.

Elspeth wore a gown of ivory silk with a quilted petticoat of the same colour, embroidered in gold thread. With her fair hair, her sweet smile and her serene and comely face, she was a lovely bride. Not less lovely but much less serene was Caroline. Dark-haired, blue-eyed, her cheeks flushed red, she was as vivid as a rose. Her crimson gown was wide in the skirt, snug in the bodice and had a fall of ivory lace at the elbow that made a fine show when she lifted her arms. This she now did experimentally, taking a quick survey of herself in the mirror that hung over the big oak chest. She gave Elspeth the same swift close scrutiny, then leaned and kissed her. "Never was bride so bonnie," she cried.

They could hear from below the sound of doors opening and of hearty voices raised in laughter and greeting. Then came a firm step in the hall without and a knock, and there stood Alex, ready to bring his bride down to meet the company.

From the curve of the stair the hall seemed full of men and women. Along with the familiar red tartan of the clan were other plaids of different set and colour. A great, corpulent, white-wigged figure stood in the midst of the throng, his feet braced wide as if to balance the bulk of his body. It was Lord Lovat.

He bowed low over Elspeth's hand. "Blessings on you, dear lassie! And on you too, Alex, whom every man of us envies this day."

Again he bent, this time before Caroline. "So, the maid from Skye!" His eyes rested on her black curls and on her high-cheekboned, proud and bonnie face. "*Ged is dubh an dearcag, is milis i!*" Aye so. The berry, though dark, is sweet. And more than sweet. I perceive, my dear, that you are a lass of destiny and your feet will travel far." He peered silently into her eyes, and she, startled, looked as silently back at him. Then he murmured, "Forgive me that I keep you from the young callants," and smiled at Finlay who was making his way through the crowd.

The chiefs of the nearby Jacobite clans had gathered. Glengarry stood there, a gaunt old man with tired grey eyes and an honest, craggy countenance. Beside him was his friend and neighbour, Lochiel. Lochiel the Younger he was called, because his exiled father was yet alive. He was, however, fifty-odd and a man of power and influence among the clans. With him was John MacDonell from France. He and Finlay exchanged brief and friendly greetings.

Meanwhile Patric the Laird moved among his guests, making them welcome and in due course ushering them to the long hall where supper was served.

Days of labour had gone into the preparation of this meal. There were roasted joints of young beef—how the spits had twirled before the kitchen fire! There were gigots of mountain mutton, wether mutton, young and tender; cured hams smoked sweet over juniper branches; haunches of venison that had lain for hours covered with claret and had been basted with fresh butter while roasting—and och, the gravy that had gathered in the dripping-pan beneath! There were pasties made from the breast of the red deer. There were collops of beef piled high on pewter ashets, and roasted grouse, and haggis too, oozing oatmeal and onions, and potted sheep's head, and fresh fish from the loch. And bannocks and oatcake and cheese and tall tankards of ale and claret.

The guests, their hunger whetted by the sail down the loch or by hours of riding, fell to with eagerness. In the place of honour at the Laird's right sat the bride, and from time to time the eyes of all were turned kindly but inquiringly on her, the new lady of the Lodge of Livishie. Would she be a good neighbour, easy and hospitable? Aye, she would be kind and good, but she would keep her own counsel. Now that other lass with the black curls and the blue eyes, what a lightsome piece she was, to be sure!

The evening wore on. The fire of bog pine that had been chuckling and whispering on the hearth was built up to a roaring blaze. The candles were

brought in and glittered bright as the light from without grew less. When finally the company retired to the terrace or walked in the garden in the gloaming, the servants rushed to clear away the tables, place back the chairs and prepare for a night of merriment.

Hughie the piper took up his position at one end of the long room, blew up the bag and sent a gay skirl of music floating out into the spring dusk. At the sound, the company gathered again in the great hall. Along one side ranged the women and girls—the bridal guests and the wives and daughters of the gentlemen of the clan. By the door gathered a covey of young men, fair-haired, dark, or red, a few perriwigged and all of them with restless eyes, swinging kilts and light-shod feet.

The pipes slipped into a reel. The young men broke away. Each sought a partner, bowed low, offered an arm, and the pair took their places in the dance. Then began the curtseying, the whirling, the light stepping, the hand-clasping, the advancing and retreating, the low laughing, the snapping of fingers, the quick blood racing, the cheeks flushed, the eyes shining, and over all that high skirling music pressing down on nerve and instinct till they were all caught up in a sort of communal ecstasy, and not an old man watching but felt his youth rise warm within him and his loins tight with the vicarious tension of the dance.

When Finlay led Caroline to her seat beside her aunt, he stood for a moment looking down at her, loath to break the closeness and excitement that had been between them. Suddenly Torquil laid a hand on his arm. “A word with you. Glenmoriston says will you go to the north room by the tower. Alex and I are to bide with the guests.”

In the room by the tower Finlay found his brother the Laird and with him Glengarry, Lochiel, Lovat, Robertson of Culcabock, Grant of Corrimony and John MacDonell the messenger from France. The chamber in which they met was a smallish one lighted with a brace of candles on the mantel and another on the table. Heavy curtains were drawn across both windows, and chairs were arranged about a square oak table. Place was made for Finlay between Lochiel and Corrimony. Except for John MacDonell he was the only young man in the room.

Patric turned to him. “Tell them, Finlay, about the man who accosted you in the King’s Inn.”

Finlay told them.

Glengarry nodded his grey head. “They have their suspicions. For that reason I advise my kinsmen of Abercalder and Cullachy to bide at home

today. Lochiel and I made stir enough coming along the road, all the more after Lovat joined us.”

Glenmoriston looked up curiously. “I had thought to see you come from the east.”

“I was at Stratherrick,” offered Lovat, unscrewing the silver lid of his snuff mull and handing it to Corrimony. “Putting a flea in the lug of my men there. Stratherrick!” His voice caressed the word. “The wild boys of Stratherrick are the best of my clan. I have often thought that when my time comes it would please me to have the old women of the Strath raise the coronach for me. They are a true-hearted people, and very dear to me. As in truth is every man of my name.”

His voice was quiet and grave, with no dissimulation in it at all. He handed the snuffbox to Corrimony and sat looking thoughtfully down at his hands.

Lochiel’s eyes moved about the men ranged around the table, as if assessing the quality of each. “I have had letters,” he said then, in his steady reasonable voice. “His Royal Highness writes in the most affectionate and eager terms. And I have assured him of my personal loyalty and support. Nevertheless, he must be put clear on one point. We in the Highlands cannot handle the affair alone.”

Lovat looked up. “Long ago I saw the proper strategy for this. I see it now. A three-pronged plan. First, a rising of the clans. Second, a French invasion. What of that, John MacDonell? Give us the truth of the matter.”

MacDonell spoke slowly, weighing his words. “It is my firm opinion that at the time chosen France will send over an army.”

Lovat nodded gravely. “Then there is the third prong, an abundance of French money thrown in at the beginning of the rising. That is an absolute necessity. Tell the Prince that. Also, that if one prong fails, the plan fails.”

Lochiel looked up, his grey eyes warm and earnest. “Tell him that. But tell him also that we, like our fathers before us, offer him our loyal support even to the cost of our lives.”

“Aye!” Glenmoriston and Glengarry spoke together. Corrimony lifted his hand in agreement. Lovat looked thoughtfully at them, then his face broke into that smile of his, so oddly compounded of cajolery and malice. “I have written a letter to the Government in London, assuring them that had I a thousand stand of arms delivered to me at Inverness, I could raise twelve hundred men at the King’s command.”

They looked at him in silence.

“But,” he went on, “I neglected to say which king.”

Laughter swept them. But Lochiel leaned and laid a hand on Lovat’s arm. “MacShimi, my friend, have a care that you be not hoist on some such petard.”

Lovat laughed softly. “I’ll keep a weather eye, my Lord Lochiel.”

There was a thoughtful pause. “That then is our message to His Majesty,” concluded Glengarry.

“Which shall be duly delivered,” promised young MacDonell.

“Then,” said Lovat, “shall we go down to the frolic below?”

“Unless you would retire,” suggested Glenmoriston.

“Retire? No. As long as this old body carries me, I’ll not stint it of those pleasures of sight and sense that have so long sustained it.”

“Right and wise you are,” smiled Patric, and offered an arm.

On the last curve of the stair they were brought to a halt. A sudden loud barking came from the watchdogs without.

“Finlay,” cried Patric, “take MacDonell to my mother’s room. The rest of you mingle with the guests.”

The two young men sped up the stair, along a dark passage and into a room that was lighted only by the moon. A pine cupboard or aumry stood against one wall. Finlay opened it, pushed aside a sliding panel and slid through an aperture. MacDonell followed him up a steep little stairway and into a small chamber beneath the roof. Here a single window let in a shaft of moonlight. There was a bed in the corner with a plaid laid on it.

Finlay smiled. “I’m sorry to hustle you and have you skulk in a garret. Make yourself easy, however, you’re safe here.”

Below in the great hall there was no sign of anything untoward. Lovat and Lochiel, Glengarry and the others sat among the guests, and just inside the door stood Patric with two visitors. One was a tall, thin grey man whose skirted coat hung slack about him, and the other—Finlay’s heart dunted at the sight—was the black-browed officer with whom he had had the encounter in the King’s Inn.

There was a stir and Lovat heaved himself to his feet and pushed through the crowd with outstretched hands, his broad face wreathed in

smiles. "The Lord President," he cried. "Duncan Forbes himself! My old and affectionate friend!"

A smile crossed the worn countenance of Forbes of Culloden. "MacShimi, it's long since I saw you. You're well?"

Lovat heaved a prodigious sigh and shook his head. "My legs, my heart, the flux! I am plagued as never man was, I swear. But you, Duncan, what brings you abroad so late? No trouble, I trust."

"None at all," was the tranquil reply. "I was in Fort Augustus. Captain Messiker and I had a mind to go to Inverness. We had intended to sleep at Drumnadrochit, but in passing this place we heard sounds of revelry."

"Sad should I have been, had you gone by," put in Patric. Then, "Lord Lovat, have you met Captain Messiker of the Hessian Guard?"

Lovat gave him a wide sunny smile. "Of His Majesty's Loyal Hessians! It's an honour, sir!" His eyes travelled over the officer's handsome scarlet uniform. "Do you know our native dances? Then you must be taught. Duncan and I will have a bumper of claret together, shall we not, friend of my youth? Give me but a moment to find a partner for our guest."

He was quick on his feet for all his bulk. In a moment he was beside Caroline MacLeod, his hand firm on her arm. "Dear lassie," he whispered, "do you see yon black captain sauntering over? Beguile him. Turn his head with thoughts of gallantry." There was a sudden fierceness in his eyes.

"Why?" She was a little fearful.

"Do as I say. It is of the utmost importance."

Finlay was suddenly at her other side. "Caroline, give me the next reel, will you?"

She turned to him smiling, but Lovat's hand tightened on her arm and he swung her unceremoniously about. The Captain was bowing before her. She laid her hand on the scarlet sleeve.

Finlay flushed angrily and turned to Lovat. The fleshly old face was friendly and placid. "You've got the lad bedded down?"

"Aye."

"Then let him stay there. Dance, lad. Choose a lass. Deil take it, am I the only one among you with the wit to be artful?"

Finlay grinned at that. He chose a bright-haired lass from Aonach and walked to the far end of the hall with her. This he had cause to regret when the reel ended. It left him near a small table in the window alcove where Lovat sat with Duncan Forbes and Patric. Lovat reached out a hand to him. "Here now is a lad of parts, the Laird's youngest brother, who has just attained his majority. Lift your tassies, gentlemen. The young Sir of—what is to be your place, lad?"

"Torbeg. Up the Glen, near Craskie."

"Craskie?"

"Peter Dhu, my wife's brother, lives there," explained the Laird. "There he is beyond the doorway. You can see his black poll."

"Aye. And there's Corrimony and Robertson of Culcabock." Forbes's voice held a thread of surprise.

"The bride's father," put in Lovat. "He'll be around for a crack with you. All your old friends rejoice in your eminence, my dear Duncan, and in your efforts on behalf of your country. How, by the way, goes trade at the moment?"

A smile of genuine pleasure flickered over Duncan Forbes's long, competent, kindly face. "It is most thriving. More, it is expanding, reaching out into new branches. But we need funds. There's a prodigious drain of money out of the country, and the main cause of it is the consumption of tea and foreign liquors. Tea!" His thin face tightened with indignation. He thrust out his tassie and Glenmoriston filled it. "The women," he went on, "are the worst offenders. For their four o'clock refreshment they're drinking tea now instead of honest ale."

Lovat's eyes twinkled, but his face was pulled down sorrowfully. "Tut tut!" he muttered. "Now at Castle Downie, I assure you, nothing of that sort could happen. Rather we are carried off to our beds every night honestly and wholesomely drunk, our bowels unlacerated by any devilish foreign infusion."

Finlay smiled and rose. "You will pardon me, gentlemen. I have a small matter in hand."

At the end of the hall stood Caroline with Captain Messiker. She looked flushed and uncertain, and the tall captain was bending over her with an expression on his handsome sensuous face that sent the blood to Finlay's forehead. He spoke, however, with careful courtesy.

“May I add my welcome, Captain, to the home of my brother, the Laird? You will know now that I spoke truth in the inn at Fort Augustus. And have you yet greeted the bride of the evening? Grieved she would be, should you fail to do so, and her husband also.”

The Captain had no recourse. He made his bow to Caroline and moved on to greet the bride and bridegroom, while Finlay and Caroline stepped out to the reel of Tullochgorum.

Finlay was in high spirits. He had disposed of the Hessian Captain and Caroline had turned gratefully to him. As they danced he looked down at her with increasing tenderness. There was a quality of closeness and dearness about her that melted his heart. He delighted in her beauty and her prideful bearing, but it was this sense of belonging, this closeness between them, that filled him now with a quick warm happiness. So he danced to her, and she to him, lightly, deftly, their hands meeting and their eyes bright. It was as if all the time they spoke to each other in a very old but quite intelligible language.

The reel ended. “Come,” cried Finlay, and they slipped out the open door.

The flagged stones of the terrace were white in the moonlight. They led to a clump of rowan trees that had been cunningly trained into an arbour, roofed and walled with green branches. The moon shone through the feathery foliage and made fluctuating patterns on the floor and on the stone bench. Here Caroline sat and Finlay stood looking down at her.

“You’re tired,” he cried. “Dancing all evening.” Then with a quirk of humour, “But not with me.”

She looked up at him with candid blue eyes. “Lord Lovat,” she explained, “he told me to.”

“To do what?”

“To beguile the Captain.”

“He did! The old deil!” He sat down by her.

“We must go in soon,” went on Caroline. “My aunt will miss me.”

“But this we have time for.” He bent slowly and she lifted her face. Presently he moved and cradled her head in the crook of his arm, then kissed her again, while the moon turned upside down and all the stars danced Tullochgorum.

She laughed unsteadily and freed herself. "We must go in."

"Aye, so we must. Caroline, go up to bed now, and in the morning, with no moon unsteady in the sky but in the full light of day, I'll ask your uncle for your hand in wedlock."

Her eyes went wide, and her lips parted, but she had no words.

"You're not surprised?" He shook her gently. "Not truly."

"Not truly," she admitted, and he laughed in exultation.

"I love you, Caroline. And you . . ."

She nodded. "Or would I have kissed you?"

Laughter fell on them both, and they clung and kissed again. Then they sobered themselves and came back into the house.

In the alcove by the window the Dowager Lady Glenmoriston sat with Duncan Forbes and they were deep in conversation.

"Buttermilk," she told him firmly. "There's nothing better to tone and sweeten the stomach. Or broth laced with tender greens."

"Greens, madam!" objected the Lord President. "My doctor says no greens, and no broth."

"The man's a fool. Fresh greens in the springtime are nature's own physic. While broth, being made from the flesh of beasts which is so like our own, is bound to nourish and sustain. And when a hoast takes hold of you," she warmed to her subject, "take a bottle, fill it with garlic, pour in brandy to the top and let it stand five days. Then each morning when you rise quaff a wee dram. The house will reek of it, but the cold will fly out the window . . . As well it may," she smiled grimly.

"How kind you are, my dear lady, to take an interest in my ailing body. Actually, it matters only in that there remains so much to do. For my own part, I have not valued life too highly since the death of my dear partner many years since."

She heaved a sympathetic sigh and laid her hand on his. "It's a sad world with trouble ever near at hand."

"Sometimes we can prevent it. Here now is your son, the good Laird. I count mightily on him for help in what is now my sole object and aim in life, the peace and welfare of our country." The words came wearily, almost despairingly, as he looked up into the rugged honest face of Patric Bui.

Patric sighed and stood leaning his palms on the table. "That is what we all want," he answered heavily. "The welfare of the country, especially the Highlands. You can't say, my lord, that the welfare of the Highlands bulks large at Westminster, or occupies much of the time of the King and his counsellors."

"They will learn," urged Forbes earnestly. "With patience and foresight and persistence we shall yet win through. Give us ten more years."

"Ten years! I've seen it happen that a timely knock on a thick skull saves much haggling."

"Or sets off a murderous tulzie. That's a dangerous premise, Glenmoriston."

"My lord, you are weary and not overwell, I think. Let me light you to your chamber."

Duncan Forbes rose. "This is kind of you, Patric. Perhaps it was less than thoughtful of us to come in on you with your house full. You'll be able to bed us all down?"

"Och, sure! With ease."

When Patric had the Lord President settled, with a hot posset to soothe his stomach and dispose him to slumber, he came along the passage to his mother's room. She was sitting on a low chair before the fire, the front of her petticoat turned back to let the heat at her knees. Finlay sat on a crepie-stool beside her. Patric pushed a chair close and joined them, then gestured upwards with his thumb. "He's fixed for the night?"

Finlay nodded.

"Good! After two days, you, Finlay, will take him as far as the manse in Glen Urquhart."

"And leave him there?"

"Why not? The minister will look after him, and MacDonell being a Catholic the soldiers will not think of searching the manse."

His mother laughed softly. "They'll be up early who'll get past you, Patric my heart!"

The door opened and Isobel entered. She came over to her husband and stood with her hand on his shoulder. "It disturbs me," she murmured, "this coming and going, the lad hiding and all. It's like trouble starting." She took

the creepie-stool Finlay offered her, and looked up into her mother-in-law's face. "You've known trouble, *mo mathair*. Do you see it coming?"

"Yes," came composedly from the older woman. "I see it coming like a great wave yet far off. But what would you? Trouble's always coming, either near or far." She sat smoothing the folds of quilted satin on her knee, then she lifted her eyes and looked at them. "If trouble comes, so does joy. It has come to Alex today. And to Finlay Ban."

Finlay flushed. Patric and Isobel turned to him smiling, and a little silence full of kindness and delicacy fell upon them. The peat fire glowed bright and lighted up their faces against the shadowy darkness of the room.

"It's Caroline," said Isobel gently. "Nothing could be better."

"A bright beguiling lass," approved the Laird.

His mother took Finlay's hand and held it. He could feel vitality flow from her to him. "God's blessing on you both," she said in a firm voice. As if to ensure it.

When dawn broke a few hours later, Caroline was already awake. Between her and the wall slept two girls from up the glen. She could hear them breathing quietly beside her but her own thoughts were too tumultuous for sleep. So she lay straight and still at the edge of the bed, remembering.

She remembered Finlay as he stood on the pier, his fair hair bright in the sunshine, his face eager and his red kilt blowing. She remembered him later, dancing to her like a moorcock to his mate on a hilltop in spring. Her cheeks burned and her body felt soft and fluid. Then she steadied herself and began to pull her consciousness together and to think.

Here she was, Caroline MacLeod, motherless, fatherless, though with a kind aunt and uncle. So she had to consider and plan and take hold of her life in a way that Elspeth, for instance, never had. She felt a pang of loneliness for Elspeth and for the close companionship there had been between them and the confidences they had shared, as they shared the big soft feather bed in the room under the eaves at Culcabock. That was now over. Here they were, Elspeth with her new husband in a far nuptial chamber, and she bedded down with two redheaded girls she had never seen before yesterday, and with a queer fated feeling that life was running away with her.

So she held hard to the thought of her self and her destiny, and she travelled back in her mind to her beginnings and to events of which she had heard so often that it was not clear what she remembered and what she had got from the telling of others.

Her beginnings were in Skye, and there in part she would always belong, with the blue peaks and the wide heathery moors and the white sea curling round the shore. In the very first picture she could conjure up out of her past, she was a small child in Bracadale, and her mother was there, and her father, and her mother's young sister, a handsome lass called Mairgret.

Then one spring day there was a black sail in Loch Beag, that little arm of the larger lake where sometimes foreign ships came in for water. The girl Mairgret was out on the moor, gathering primroses. Caroline's mother ran to find her. She ran calling, her voice rising and falling and dying away in the distance. Neither of them ever came back. They found the mother at the foot

of a cliff, her body broken by the fall and a great bruise on her forehead. She lay near the sea and the tide washed her long hair to and fro. But where was Mairgret? Had she too fallen and been swept away? The black-sailed sloop was now gone from Loch Beag and never did they know whether Mairgret had been drowned in the loch or been taken by sea raiders.

After that came the long quiet years of Caroline's girlhood in the stone house at Bracadale with her father and her old nurse. Fate struck once again and her father was drowned crossing the loch one wintry day. Then came her uncle from Culcabock and brought her home with him and was like a father to her, and her aunt a mother, and Elspeth a dear sister.

The girls beside her stirred and wakened. One raised herself on an elbow and gave Caroline a shy smile. Then they all scrambled out of bed and chattering cheerfully set about dressing and combing and preparing themselves for the day.

It was a crowded and eventful day. Lord Lovat, Lord President Forbes and Captain Messiker set out for Inverness directly after breakfast. Lovat had to be helped into the saddle by two gillies, his legs having gone back on him, as he said. But his eyes were bright and wary and he seemed in high good humour as he rode off between Duncan Forbes and the Hessian captain.

Then Glengarry and Lochiel began to gather their gear, Patric protesting hospitably.

"But," said Glengarry, "yon black captain may not wait long in Inverness, nor even go that far. He may double back."

"Lovat is with him." Patric's grey eyes crinkled at the corners. "We can count on him being inveigled on, I think."

"Nevertheless, I must warn my kinsmen of Cullachy and Abercalder. Better the lad from France stay clear of Fort Augustus."

"Aye, get him back to Lovat," advised Lochiel.

That same morning Finlay, with Patric his brother to support him, had a conference with Ferchar Robertson and his betrothal to Caroline was formally approved. In the family council that followed, it was planned that the marriage be not long delayed, because of the uncertainty of the times and because the principals frankly desired it. Indeed, when the galley called at the pier for the guests from Culcabock, it wrenched Finlay's heart to bid farewell to Caroline for even so brief a period.

There was, however, much to occupy him. Plans for improving Torbeg crowded his mind, all the more since it was now to be Caroline's home as well as his own. Also there lay heavy on them all the sobering fact that soon Torquil would be leaving them for the far strange land of America. Even more urgent was the safe delivery to the manse at Kilmore of young MacDonell, emissary of the Prince. For the next few days, till the boy set to watch on the slope of Mealfuarvonie should bring back word that Messiker had passed on his way to Fort Augustus, it was necessary that MacDonell stay close confined to the house. Finlay and Torquil were much in his company, and so companionable did they find him that they were loath to see him leave.

When the time came, he and Finlay set out one morning and by noon arrived at the manse. There they found a messenger from Lovat awaiting them. A French boat had put in at Inverness and the chance for a safe return to the continent was not to be missed. There was time only for a quick meal.

The Reverend John Grant was a rugged sandy-haired young man with an abrupt and cheerful manner. "Tell me now of the Prince," he pressed John MacDonell. "What like is he?"

MacDonell's dark eyes lighted. "He is a true Highlander. It is as if the infiltration of Polish blood from his mother merely sharpened the qualities natural to one of his name and blood. He is brave, reckless, sincere. Soon you will judge for yourselves."

"Amen to that," said the minister and turned to Finlay. "What do I hear about your brother Torquil? Going to America, is he?"

"Aye, to a place called Albany."

MacDonell spoke up. "I was glad to hear of it. It will be a second string to your bow should things go wrong. This is what I mean," he went on seriously. "Soon we hope to be engaged in a great undertaking. That it will succeed I have every hope. But should disaster come, there is a place for me in the French army. Now you, Finlay, might find sanctuary with Torquil in America."

"You forget how wide is the Atlantic," observed Finlay with rueful humour. "A fishing boat would not last long on it."

MacDonell smiled his quiet dark smile and went on with his meal.

When he had finished, they bade him farewell on the green lawn before the manse while the groom held his horse and Lovat's messenger waited.

Finlay clasped his hand in both of his. He felt an anxiety for the young expatriate and a warm regard.

“Till we meet again,” cried MacDonell, “and my hearty felicitations on your marriage to be.”

“What now?” cried the minister. “You, Finlay?”

“Aye. To Caroline MacLeod, niece to Culcabock.”

“Good! An excellent match!”

“When next you come,” Finlay turned to MacDonell, “you will perhaps visit us at Torbeg.”

“Nothing would give me more pleasure.”

“God’s blessing on you both, then, till that good day.” The minister lifted his hand in benediction.

They stood watching till the two horsemen disappeared round a bend in the road, then turned towards the house. A tree stood to the right of the flagged path. The minister paused. “This is a Spanish chestnut,” he explained. “It is young, as you see. It should last for four hundred years. Strange to think that when we are gone to dust and all who knew us, and our children’s children too, this tree may still flourish, putting out leaves, sheltering men and beasts, living out its time according to the life that is in it, and was in it when it was a seed.”

Finlay looked up into the branches that would so long survive him, and then at the stone house set among fruit trees and gardens. “You have a comfortable home here,” he remarked.

“True. My lines are laid in pleasant places. As a matter of fact, I’m in luck to be in a Highland parish, being myself what I am.”

“How so, sir?”

“It takes a bit of explaining. In these northern regions, our religion has always had a certain quality of its own. We have carried our faith with buoyancy. It has lain light on our shoulders, lending brightness to our pleasures and solace to our griefs. But look you now, in the Lowlands it is different. There they take their religion hard. Away with dancing and piping and the telling of old tales. A stern faith, theirs is, with the natural joys of life crushed out. I should not like to see it superimposed on the Highlands. That’s another reason I support the Stuarts.”

He pushed open the door of the house and led the way into his study. "I have certain tastes which I have little time to indulge. Let me show you."

He lifted a wooden quaich from the mantelshelf. It was made of oak with silver rim and handles. The silver was carved curiously in an interlacing pattern, with vines and bosses and the twined bodies of beasts and birds. The work was rhythmic and beautiful. The minister pointed to the bosses. "That carries over from the worship of the sun. There was a vivid school of art here in pre-Christian days, connected with the great world civilizations that then prevailed. These intertwined birds are the symbol of friendship, but what some of it means we have no idea. It amuses me to preserve some of these old designs. They are all that is left of a long-ago period of great beauty and splendour."

"Now this," he buffed the silver rim of the quaich on his grey woollen sleeve, "this I am going to give you for a wedding present. Let you and your bride look at it and think now and then of the past of our people as well as your own bright future."

Finlay held the bowl carefully in his hands. "My grateful thanks, sir! We will think both of the past and of the future, and also of the good friend who gave this to us. You too will come to see us when we're settled?"

"I'll be on your doorstep often. Torbeg used to be a ceilidh house and may well be again. I hear you're not a bad hand at the pipes."

"Oh, I blow a bit," confessed Finlay, "but there's scarce a house in the glen without a piper or a fiddler or a good singer of songs."

Soon came the day when Torquil was to leave Glenmoriston. The last afternoon, the family gathered on the sunny terrace before the house and sat for a while together. It was a sort of day one would willingly carry in the mind to remember with longing and pleasure. The world was bright with that fullness of light that comes in June. The water of the loch was a pale luminous shimmer and the mountains stood away to the south, grape-blue and violet and grey. The perfume of Isobel's early roses hung in the warm air and bees murmured in the pink flowering shrubs by the stone wall.

"In America it will not be like this," observed the Dowager Lady, looking down at Torquil who sat on a stool beside her. She laid her hand on his crisp red curls and smiled sadly, and they were all silent.

Old memories held them, as in a net. Finlay thought of hours spent with Torquil, ranging the hills and piny woods together. He thought of days in the schoolroom, and nights when they slept in the same bed, whispering long

under the blankets of the great days and deeds of their manhood. "Och, Torquie!" he exclaimed, for the moment a lad again. "Why are you leaving us?"

Torquil gave him a full candid gaze. "It's hard to find words for it. I know well how I shall miss this place, and all of you."

The Laird leaned forward, his bridled brows meeting. "There's one thing I want to bring to your mind, because it is not too late yet for you to change your plans. Here in this northern half of Scotland you are among men of your own kind. You are among them in any house in the country, be they MacDonell or Campbell or Gordon or Grant or MacKay. We have lived here for some thousands of years, and we're all by blood related. We understand each other. That makes for a queer kind of comfort you don't miss till you lack it. I mind well how I felt in the Low Countries. There was a coldness, a nakedness, no warm leap of the spirit from one man to another."

Torquil's eyes were steady on him. "I had not thought of it, but I see you are right. That closeness I shall miss, and sorely. Nevertheless, I am constrained to go."

"You'll not harry the lad," spoke up the Dowager Lady suddenly, "A man does what it is laid on him to do, but you'll know, my wean," again her hand rested briefly, affectionately on his head, "that here in this place we love you. And should you be minded to return, with joy would we welcome you home. Is that not true, Patric?"

"Aye, it is true. With all my heart, it is true."

"So then, do you keep remembering us and we will remember you. In that way we will not entirely lose each other."

Finlay sat on the low stone wall by the garden at Torbeg, and waited for Caroline. Before him stood the house, clearcut and rectangular, with tall windows evenly spaced and a fine steep slate roof. To one side, and at the foot of the slope, flowed the river, winding through the rich hay meadow that was the floor of the valley and in a great curving sweep enclosing five small islands. One was so small that it was a foothold only for three birch trees. None of them were large, but they were lovely, like green jewels set in the silver of the swift wimpling water.

This, then, was Torbeg. Finlay's heart swelled as he looked at it. This was also the first day of his new estate. Less than an hour ago he had wakened to see on the pillow beside him Caroline's tumbled dark curls. Raising himself cautiously, he had looked long at her. Her face lay in the full light from the window. He noted the delicate line of eyebrow and temple, the long lashes, the flushed cheeks, and the curving, geranium-red mouth. Her embroidered night shift had slipped from her round white shoulders. A sudden strong joy in her beauty rose in him, tightening his sinews and making his heart beat hard. His gaze was so intent, so focused, that she stirred suddenly. Her eyelids fluttered, flew open, and she gazed up at him in amazement.

Then in one swift moment she turned herself over, her flushed face buried in the pillow. Laughter took him, and a great wave of tenderness. "Och, Caroline!" he murmured. "It's me only."

Her head moved cautiously, a blue eye appeared, blinked and shut tight again. "Get on up and out," she whispered. "Can I have a man about me while I dress?"

He laughed again softly, recalling it. Then rose, because now she stood in the doorway. He came to meet her, and went in with her, and they kissed and clung as if they had been longer apart than a scant half-hour.

"You like Torbeg?" he asked proudly.

"Finlay! The bedchamber! With you gone, I could see it."

The room had been lovingly prepared for the new mistress, the windows hung with blue-striped damask, and the furniture and floor well polished.

The bed, not set into the wall as in the other chambers, was a fine tall structure, blue curtained and mountain high, with undertick of heather, top tick of goose down, and bolster and pillows and blankets all soft and snowy white. In Inverness Finlay had bought an elegant new aumry with a mirror in it and shelves and secret doors where Caroline might store her treasures and her gewgaws.

The big main room downstairs had also been refurbished and made fine. It opened to the west and to the gap in the hills that was the road to Skye. The walls were panelled in oak and the floor was of stone, in light and dark blocks that made a chequered pattern. A long table centred the room and high-backed chairs stood about it. The wide windows were curtained in yellow mohair, and between them stood a tall oak desk. But the heart of the room was the fireplace. It was huge, made of squared stone, and over it hung a well-burnished copper plaque.

Caroline came close to look at the words that had been hammered out on the sheet of metal. "*Tha biadh is ceol an so, mar a thuirt a mhadadh ruadh, 's e ruith air falbh leis phiob.* There is meat and music here, as the fox said, running away with the bagpipes."

Finlay explained. "You see, here's the company at meat around the big table and there's the piper marching up and down. Meat and music."

"Is that all it means?"

He shook his head and ran his fingers thoughtfully over the cool metal. "Also, I think it means ourselves, the people who play the pipes. Hardheaded and softhearted we are. Practical and poetic. Tough and bitter fighters, yet with an ear aye cocked for strange music. You know what I mean."

They went out then into the garden. Lauchie was there. Lauchie MacIain was the general manager and chief stay of the place. He was a grey-haired man of sixty, with a fine beak of a nose like the prow of a ship and eyes of the same gentian-blue as Caroline's. Finlay had watched with interest her first meeting with him the night before, and also with Kirsty and the maids. For each she had the same clear searching friendly gaze, the same sensitive bright smile, and the same air of giving herself to them and of sealing to her their loyalty and affection.

Lauchie pulled off his bonnet. "Bantighearna," he said. It was the first time Caroline had been given her title of Lady-of-the-House, and she flushed with pride and pleasure. "Bantighearna, will you please to look at the white roses? For three weeks I've been heartening them against your coming."

“Heartening?”

“Aye, with sheep manure. See this one now.”

It was lovely. It was in fact perfect—the thrusting buds so firm with life, the blossom with delicately turned ivory petals and golden heart, even the thorns red against the strong stem. There was something magical, something secret and inviolate about this white rose. Caroline cupped her hands about the bloom and looked down at it in silence. Then she smiled gently at Lauchie.

They went on to the rest of the garden, the currant bushes, black and red, the gooseberries, the herbs, rosemary, fennel and sage, and the rhubarb with thick rosy stalks and great crumpled green leaves. On the sunny slope was the orchard, with cherry, plum and apple trees. And near by stood the round stone masonry of the dovecot, with the pigeons fluttering and swooping about it and flashing back the light from their iridescent wings. Beyond were the stables, the girnals for the grain and the midden where red and speckled hens clucked and flapped their wings and led abroad flocks of fluffy golden chicks.

Caroline laughed with pleasure. “Torbeg,” she said, “is a lovely place. It suits me. I’ll never want to leave it.”

In the days that followed, Caroline came to know their neighbours and tenants. Peter Dhu, Isobel’s bachelor brother, was the proprietor of Craskie, not far from Torbeg. He was a tall man with arresting dark eyes and an uncompromising mouth. “A man whom no one takes lightly,” said Finlay. “A good friend and a hard enemy. To us, he’s a friend.”

The first steading on the estate that Caroline visited was one close by where lived Big Hector, his wife, his son and his daughter. Everyone knew of Mairi, Hector’s daughter. She was bonnie. There were many comely lasses in the glen, but Mairi was different. Her beauty was beyond the general use and custom. She had pale-gold curling hair, violet eyes and a milky skin. There was something rare and strange about her beauty, like the white rose on Lauchie’s bush. A learned man might wonder about the fortuitous blending of strains, the happy chance of breeding and nourishment, that had thrown up this figure of legendary loveliness in a stone hut in a remote northern glen.

Yet stone hut is far too harsh a term for Hector Mor’s steading. It was one of the old type of dwellings, but comfortable and well kept. In the larger of the rooms the fire was set in the middle of the floor, with an iron kettle swung over it. A few peats smoked lazily on the round hearth and when a

breath of air came in at the door or window, a finger of blue and yellow smoke played delicately about the black sides of the kettle, then rose in a slim quivering column straight to the chimney opening in the roof. The floor was of beaten earth, hard as marble and swept as bare. The windows shone and the tables and benches were scrubbed white. In every way the biggin was clean and sweet.

Hector's wife, a quiet dark woman, hastened to offer hospitality, and Mairi passed the food and drink in her slow gentle way that made everything she said or did seem memorable. Caroline was drawn to her, though later she said to Finlay, "She's too lovely. It's not fair to the rest of us."

Finlay considered. "She's like a pink cloud at sunrise, bonnie but not close or meaningful—like my wife."

In July they visited the shieling grounds. The cattle were driven to these high pastures early in the season, and in the sunshine and in the clean mountain air they fed on the fresh herbage and grew sleek, and the calves were hardy and had good bones. The milkmaids and herdsmen lived in the shieling huts, with a few older women to guide the work of cheese- and butter-making, and the spinning too that went on in their spare time. Life was easygoing and pleasant on the slopes of the mountains in the fine summer weather. Caroline looked forward to sharing it. She had an eager and holiday feeling about the little excursion. In the party, besides Finlay and herself, were Mairi, her brother Murdoch, and Peter Dhu from Craskie, who had cattle on these slopes.

Early in the afternoon they set out, all of them mounted and Murdoch leading a pack pony with a creel slung on either side. Caroline rode a dappled grey mare that was now to be her own, Finlay had black Shanlan, and Mairi a small blond shaggy pony with flowing mane and tail. Caroline smiled to see how Peter Dhu's big fiery bay kept edging close to the pony.

They crossed a humpbacked stone bridge with bluebells growing in the cracks of the stone. Tall clumps of pink and purple foxgloves edged the roadway, and wild thyme in springy cushions starred with bloom. For a time the slope was gradual, then it steepened and they climbed steadily, following the course of a small tumbling stream that dashed over rocky ledges or curled creamily around the boulders in its bed.

The sun felt warm on Caroline's head and shoulders. She wore a gown of natural linen, full-skirted and laced tight across the bodice with cherry-red ribbons. The winy air of the uplands sharpened her senses. She felt full of life and exhilaration, ardent and high-spirited. Beside her rode Mairi, quiet

and lovely, sitting demurely on the cream-coloured sheltie, her slim body moving lightly and surely with the pony's gait.

They arrived at the shielings by mid-afternoon. There, spreading over the sides of the mountain, were the herds of black cattle, milch cows, calves, and yearlings. They had straight, deep-shouldered, thick bodies, wide foreheads and short, sharp prodding horns. Their coats were not a true black but a dark rusty brown. They were magnificent creatures, like stags, and Finlay, seeing them spread over the hillside, looked on them with pride. A single bull, dark and massive, the head of the herd, separated himself from the others and stood watching the little procession of horses and riders. He lowered his head, lazily kicked a tussock of grass over his back and let out a low-pitched ominous roar. Peter Dhu laughed admiringly. "I'd not like to meet him alone or on foot."

There were two shieling huts, built of stone and set a little apart on a grassy knoll. Smoke rose from one of them and some towels were spread out to bleach in the space between the two buildings. At the sound of hoofbeats the girls and women came crowding out. The men were away on the hillsides with the cattle. Peter and Finlay went to join them. But in an hour all returned for a meal of brose and beef collops, cheese and buttermilk scones, and a comb of wild brown honey that Jamie, one of the herds, had found in a hollow tree. Afterwards in the gloaming, the milking done and the beds in the shieling bothies fixed for the night, they spread plaids and sat down on the grassy plot on top of the knoll—a dozen or so of them, men and women.

It was a lonely place. The mountains loomed dark and massive about them, and mist filled the corries. To the west the sky was pale gold, fading into a far thin greyness. In the space and the stillness that lay about them the little company seemed consciously to draw close in friendliness and support.

"Raise a song, shall we?" asked Finlay.

So they sang, softly at first, then more loud and strong. They sang about the pretty brown-haired maiden—*Horo mo nighean donn bhoidheach*—and of Colin's cattle, and of lovely Coiriarairidh. They sang love songs and war songs and songs about their own glen, the mist-covered mountains and the biggin by the burn, and wild old songs that had come down out of their past—of Fingal and Ossian and of the Hosts of the Sidhe. The sound of their voices floated around the shoulders of the hills and was lost in the mist and the darkness. They felt close and friendly, singing together in the gathering

gloom. They were like one family. As indeed they were. What was a clan but a family grown large?

At night the women slept in one of the shieling huts, the men in the other. Along one wall ran a wide bed-platform, piled high with heather tops covered with plaiding, and over that coarse linen sheets and blankets. Caroline was given a place near the low window.

She woke during the night. The moon shone full on her face. Outside, the world was silvery with it. She raised and looked. Gradually she became aware of a faint pervasive scent, familiar yet she could not name it. Then she knew—it was honeysuckle. A sweet beguiling perfume, it stirred and troubled her.

Cautiously she pushed back the covers and moved to the window. She swung her feet down over the sill, then slipped her body through. The grass was cool and damp to her bare soles, the tiny blades pricking her. She crouched just outside the window and looked and listened and smelled the honeysuckle. It was everywhere, coming and going on the air, now faint and fading, now so strong and sweet she could almost taste it.

The night was still. A mushroom of pines on a far ledge showed black against the sky, and nearer, the silhouette of a dead oak tree cast a crooked shadow. The air was so quiet she could hear the water in the burn threshing over the stones.

Then, down from the upper reaches of the mountain came a far faint calling of pipes. It was probably a wakeful herdsman whiling away the slow hours of the night. Still it was strange. As she listened the sound died slowly. Then she felt afraid. All of a sudden she was deep in fear. Her heart contracted, her mouth was dry, her eyes wide and blinded. It was as if a dark wind of foreboding had blown in on her. It passed, and in its stead came a loneliness and a forlornness that washed over her like water over a stone. Her eyes filled with tears and she leaned against the wall of the shieling hut. From within she felt the warm human presence of the sleeping women and her heart swelled with relief. She crept inside, pulled the rough warmth of the blankets over her, sank deep into the heathery bed and slept.

In the morning the milkmaids were early at their task. The cows were driven up, shackled, and if unruly a herd lad held them and chaffed and bantered the girls while the milk foamed into the wooden pails. Others packed the cheeses and the rolls of butter and the jars of buttermilk into the creels for the homeward journey. All were in a cheerful, ranting humour except one girl, Mysie. Mysie's face, Caroline noted, was stiff with grief or

anger, and when she had finished her milking she stood by herself, her lower lip thrust out sulkily.

Caroline came close. "What is it?" she asked in her soft easy Gaelic.

"It's Jamie." The words came hesitating at first, then in a flood. "It was lovely before. He and I were . . . And now Mairi comes and he looks at her instead of me."

"Och now, Mysie!" Caroline's voice was warm. "Listen to me. Today Mairi goes back down the mountain. Then, then . . ." she repeated softly and reasonably.

A look passed between them. Mysie's face cleared slowly. Caroline undid from the front of her bodice a length of cherry-coloured ribbon. "You might bind your hair with this."

Their eyes met again, and this time they laughed. Mysie rolled the ribbon carefully over her finger, then tucked it into her bosom. "I'll not forget," she promised.

On the way down the mountainside, Peter Dhu rode all the time close to Mairi. He made no effort to hide his feeling for her. It was like an emanation surrounding them both, and all but visible. But Mairi gave no sign. She rode on, her lovely face kind but remote, the morning sun shining down on her in a sort of soft splendour.

Caroline was full of pity for Peter. She remembered with gratitude that there had been no time of uncertainty or doubt, no misunderstanding, nor even any long waiting, for Finlay and herself. They had had none of the pain of loving. They had seen each other, loved each other, married forthwith, and had not yet been separated, except for last night, and that only by the distance between two bothies.

Two weeks later Mysie returned to the house at Torbeg, to help with the making of jams and preserves from the small fruits in the garden. Caroline came on her in the stillroom where she sat with a pan of black currants in her lap, busily clipping off the blossom ends. She looked up into her mistress's face. "Jamie and me will need to be getting married," she offered complacently, and popped a black currant into her mouth.

This first summer at Torbeg was for Finlay and Caroline a season of such felicity, such hard work and happiness, that in time to come they were to look back on it and cherish the memory of it as an anodyne against bitterness and despair.

Finlay now entered fully into the management of the estate. Lauchie was at hand to advise and support, but the plans for the betterment of the place and of those who lived on it were Finlay's own. The tillage lands were to be enriched, the herds were to be increased, the stone steadings were to be better built and more spacious, and spinning wheels were to be substituted for the old distaff and spindle.

Excitement began to spread through the little community. Never had the work been more eagerly and industriously carried through. The weather was clear and sunny, and the crop yield good. The hay was first to be gathered in. The men went after it in the boglands and in the stony places as well as in the broad hay meadows that lay along the river. First they used the scythe, then with sickles they hooked out the stray growth around the bushes and between the stones. They even went into the birch woods and cut the thin grass growing there and laid it out to dry.

Then came the harvesting of the runrigs. The oats, barley and peas were sickle-cut, then flailed. The grain was winnowed in riddles on top of the knoll, or in the barn with the doors open to the east and west, and the wind sweeping through. Towards the end of September the cattle came down from the shieling grounds. They came in a great herd. One could see them like a dark moving mass on the farther hillsides, dividing into smaller groups as they neared the steadings. Fat from the summer grazing they came, lowing and tossing their short yellow-tipped horns, their coats sleek and their dark eyes rolling. They poured through the gate in the dyke and into the grassy meadows rich with aftergrowth. Some picked fastidiously at the stubble in the runrigs. They had to be herded away from the late fruits and vegetables in the garden.

Then the drovers came, and with that began the great autumnal migration of cattle to the Lowlands and to England. "We feed the Sassenach," muttered Lauchie, watching them go. "Good meat too. At this

time of year, what is so rich and juicy as the loin or rump of a black Highland stirk? But I'm thinking the long walk will reduce them."

The harvest gathered, the cattle sold, now the rents began to come in. They came partly in money but mostly in produce—cheese, eggs, poultry, grain for the giral. It was the poorer tenants who brought in the fowl. Perhaps a few brace of black or speckled hens, squawking, their feet tied together, slung over the neck of a pony. Kirsty, as hen-wife, received them, hefted them and appraised their value. Rents were also met by services rendered, the rearing and care of cattle and by work in the fields.

The rush of activity began to slacken. It was mid-autumn now and the glen was beautiful. The slopes were purple with heather and the mists played over the tops of the high mountains. The birch-tree boles gleamed white and their slender branches bore leaves of tattered gold.

At Torbeg there was a garden seat where the honeysuckle clambered. There Caroline and Finlay sat one afternoon and looked out over the fields shorn of their harvest. "The summer's gone," observed Finlay, "and no word from France."

"Have you been expecting it?"

"The thought has lain in the back of my mind. I've wondered how young John MacDonell was busying himself."

"Will he be in the French army?"

"He may at that. With winter coming on, there'll be no Highland rising this year, but there's aye another spring."

"But not this year!" Caroline comforted herself. She rubbed her head against his shoulder. "The honeysuckle," she murmured. "Smell it? It smells like love."

He reached out his free hand and pulled a blossom to him. It was an airy and intricate cluster of flower trumpets, pink and pale yellow. He held it to his face. "You're right," he said briefly. The perfume was delicate, yet soft and relaxing. It touched the senses.

Happiness lay over them, warm and light, like the autumn sunshine on the countryside. On the slopes the heather was like a purple carpet patterned with bracken. Between the smooth curving breasts of the hills flowed the river, silvery bright in the distance but peat-brown when near and foaming creamily over the rocky shallows. In the curve of the stream below Torbeg

were the five small islands. The water coursed round and about them and elderberry bushes grew on them, and a few birch trees.

Remarked Caroline dreamily, "They're a toy domain. A place where children could play, a place they'd remember, as I do Bracadale."

"Children!" Finlay bent to look into her face. "That's a diverting thought," he smiled, and she gave him in return a quick loving mirthful glance.

She seemed scarcely more than a child herself, sitting so demurely beside him, her dark hair curling on her brow and around her ears, her hands folded in the lap of her flowery chintz gown. But her words when she broke the little silence were practical and housewifely.

"I've been thinking," she said, "about the new spinning wheels. Some of the women will not know how to use them, being used to the distaff and spindle. But Kirsty knows, and I know. Could we not have a half-dozen girls from the steadings round about spend every afternoon here for a week? What a gossipy good time we'd have, besides the work that would be done."

So, for a week Torbeg was like a beehive, full of the birring and humming of the wheels and the lively voices of the spinners. There was a pleasant and easy feeling in the little company. Mairi was there, deft and industrious, mastering easily the rhythmic play of foot on the treadle and hand to the wheel. Caroline worked with the rest, helping this one and that as needed. Some of the girls were shy with her, but that wore off and they gave her that unobtrusive deference that had nothing servile in it but was friendly and affectionate, rather.

When the week was past Caroline said to Mairi, "Could you stay longer, to help me with some fine sewing?"

Mairi smiled her slow thoughtful smile. "I should like to, Bantighearna."

So Mairi stayed on, and each evening Peter came striding along the river from Craskie, and later walked home with her across the fields. They looked well together—Mairi so delicately lovely, and Peter with his dark head bare, his red kilt swinging, and every movement vigorous and passionate and full of devotion.

During that week certain guests from beyond the glen made their way to Torbeg. One was the Lord President of Session, Duncan Forbes, and with him came Captain Messiker of Fort Augustus and his man Pilchard.

“We are imposing on your kindness,” smiled Duncan Forbes. “The Captain was not anxious to try the rude hospitality of the inn at Aonach.”

“We are most happy to welcome you, sir,” cried Finlay.

At that moment Caroline came up the path from the garden with Mairi beside her. Duncan Forbes greeted her with fatherly and affectionate kindness, then turned with interest to Mairi, while the Captain bent over Caroline’s hand and kissed it with what seemed to Finlay unnecessary fervour. His bold eyes encompassed Mairi briefly, then came back to Caroline and rested there.

“That’s a bonnie lass, even for this glen,” remarked Forbes when Mairi had left them.

“The daughter of a tenant of yours?” inquired the Captain.

“Aye, she is.”

Messiker laughed shortly. “This is an amazing country. The whole social structure is fluid.”

“How would you have us treat our people?” Caroline was curious to know.

He looked at her for a moment, his eyes paying homage to her comeliness and her sex, then he came back to the matter in hand. “Treat them for what they are—underlings.”

“Yet they’re not actually.” Finlay ushered them through to the dining table. “We’re all of one blood. Their name for me means Head of Kin. It sets the tone of our relationship.”

“Brotherly love.” The Captain smiled to take the edge off the remark. “It’s not a term I would have thought of in connection with the history of these glens.”

“Within the clan it holds,” observed Forbes mildly.

“I’ve lived on the Continent a great deal,” pursued the Captain. “Now, in France, for instance, the *paysans* are humble. They shuffle along, their eyes on the ground. But look you how it is here. I meet a ragged clansman and he has his bonnet on the side of his head and he walks with a swing and a swagger and he looks me square in the eye. Till that spirit is broken there’ll be no peace in this part of His Majesty’s domain.”

Finlay looked at him and thought, I hate this man. Aloud he said, “Then I hope there’ll never be peace.”

The Captain met his eyes briefly and shrugged. "The fact is the country needs to be organized. I was looking at these runrigs, as you call them, as we came along. My God, man! Why all the ditches? Get in a good English ploughman and level it off."

"Yes," observed Finlay shortly. "Push all the fertile land into the trenches, then try and raise oats on the bare rock."

"You must remember, Captain," smiled Duncan Forbes, "that this is a watery land and needs much drainage."

The Lord President seemed less frail than he had been. Finlay, recovering his equanimity, remarked on his more robust health.

"Aye. For that I thank God," said the older man. "There are some tasks I have set before me, and for these I crave yet a few years of time. Today, for instance, I ride with my friend to see the lairds in Skye, to inquire into their welfare and find how His Majesty's government may best serve them. And, of course," with a thin wary smile, "to bolster their loyalty." He turned to Caroline, "You are of Skye?"

"Of Bracadale. But my parents are dead."

The Captain, who had been chewing away thoughtfully, now looked up from his collops. "The thing to do is to make them all English. The whole island, language, customs, everything."

"Then," put in Finlay, "you'll have to start with the man presently on the throne in London."

There was a pause. Forbes laughed and after a while Messiker joined in. There was at times a certain bluff heartiness about the man. "You have me there," he admitted. "As for myself, I avow freely that there's not a drop of English blood in me. German! Like His Majesty, and like the great Duke of Cumberland himself. By the way, have we drunk to the King?"

"An oversight," smiled Finlay. "Shall we rise?"

"To the King!" For a second Finlay paused before he drank. There was time for a mental reservation, for a silent utterance of the three words, "over the water," which made the toast proper for a Jacobite. Then he drank, and his eyes met the Captain's.

"Which king was it?" asked the latter bluntly.

Finlay's eyes widened in a bright, sardonic smile. "Why, Herr Captain, are you in any doubt about the rightful one?"

After the meal they came out on the terrace. It was the middle of the day and the sun was warm. "This is a charming vista," said Forbes, easing his body into a chair made of willow withes. "The heather purple, the birches golden, and the blue haze over all. What is that mountain?"

"Sgurr nan Conbhairean. And over there, Beinn Loinne."

"Aye, indeed! There is great beauty here."

"Beauty!" The Captain laughed indolently, "Except in a woman there is no profit in it."

"No profit except to the heart," Forbes answered quietly. "I can see that this place is already dear to you, Finlay Ban, and to your wife."

"No place, I think, could be dearer."

"Then God give you many peaceful years to enjoy it."

Not long afterwards they left. Messiker again bowed low over Caroline's hand, then raised himself, and his eyes rested frankly on her, smiling and insolent and full of desire. She could hear Finlay breathing hard as he stood beside her. "I should have dirked him then and there," he muttered fiercely as they walked into the house.

A few days later they were all cheered by a visit from a traveller of a vastly different sort. A young man, also on his way to Skye, stopped at Torbeg to deliver a letter and a gift. He was Roderick MacKenzie, son of a jewellery merchant in Edinburgh, and Ludovic Grant had sent him.

MacKenzie was a hazel-eyed slim young fellow, with a bright engaging manner. While he refreshed himself with a coggie of ale, Finlay cut the cords that bound the packet and revealed a long leather case. In it were six well-burnished silver tassies.

"Och!" cried Caroline. "How bright and bonnie!" She held one up to catch the sunlight while Finlay rustled open the letter.

To my Esteemed Friend; in honour of his marriage now some months past.

These silver drinking cups I have had made especially for you. Note the carving of a mountain in flames, done in miniature above the words "Stand fast," which is, as you well know, the motto of Clan Grant, both in Strathspey and in Glenmoriston.

This gift will, I hope, symbolize to you the friendship and unity there is between our families. May you have before you

many long years of happiness and peaceful living, much prosperity and a goodly family to carry on the line. My dear wife joins me in these expressions of good will and hopes soon to make the acquaintance of your charming bedfellow.

Your friend and well-wisher,

LUDOVIC GRANT of Castle Grant.

Caroline arranged the silver tassies on the mantelshelf, three on either side of the carved quaich that the minister had given them, and then stood back to admire them.

Said Finlay, "Now where's the lad MacKenzie?"

MacKenzie had stepped outside. Mairi stood on the terrace, her arms full of the heather she had been gathering. For the first time Caroline saw her flushed and shy, her violet eyes clouded and her smile uncertain. She said gently, "You might take the heather to the stillroom and then come back to us."

Young MacKenzie asked straightly, "Who is she?"

"The daughter of a tenant of mine. A good and comely girl for whom we have a great affection."

"I should think so," sighed the young man. "I have never seen anyone like her." He sprang to his feet; Mairi had returned.

It appeared that MacKenzie was fond of music. So Finlay brought out his chanter and handed it to him, and they had a fine spate of reels and strathspeys. Then Mairi sang—she had a small but sweet voice—and young Roderick sang with her, while Finlay picked out a light running melody on the chanter. After that MacKenzie told them of his life in Edinburgh, working as he was with his father and from time to time undertaking commissions for him. As for instance, this present journey. His words were addressed to Finlay and Caroline, but his eyes turned constantly to Mairi. Never had Mairi been more lovely, than now, as she sat on a low stool before the window, blushing and shamefast, her violet eyes dark with feeling and the sun shining in on her pale-gold curls and on the sweet white nape of her neck.

Then along the lane by the stone dyke Peter Dhu came striding, his dark face eager and his kilt aswing. At the door he stopped short when he saw Roderick, then came forward slowly to be greeted and made welcome. At the bemused and quivering look on Mairi's face he stiffened and paled. Then

he sat down and conversation was resumed. But it was not as before. There was restraint and distress in it, and an increasing awkwardness.

Finlay rose unhappily. "I have to see Lauchie," he remarked, but only his wife heard him.

Finally Caroline gave up all effort. She turned to Peter. "Come with me. I've something to show you in the stillroom."

In this cool shuttered chamber a pile of fresh heather lay on the table. And by it, a tall crockery jar. Caroline lifted the web of cloth that covered it, filled two pewter coggies and pushed one towards Peter. They sat down on either side of the narrow table. "This is the first heather ale I've ever made. I wanted you to try it."

He tasted it solemnly, then took a hearty draught, but a flicker in his black eyes told her that he recognized her efforts to divert him.

She smiled earnestly at him nevertheless. "It should have the taste and smell of the heather bells in it. This is an old receipt, but not as old as the one the Picts used, for which a man chose death rather than divulge it. Isobel tells me she makes wine from the sap of the birch tree. In the spring of the year a hole is bored in the tree and a small spout inserted and the sap collected. Sugar and almonds are added, raisins too. It sits five months after fermentation, and then you have to be careful to keep it in a cool cellar."

"A good strong wine, I have no doubt," Peter agreed courteously, but without interest.

At a sound they both looked up. Mairi was singing. Her voice rose and fell in a thin sweet stream like a bird at even. Caroline stared down into her tassie, then she folded her arms on the table and looked up into Peter's face. "He's but a travelling man," she said softly, "and tomorrow will be away to Skye. We'll see no more of him."

"You think so?" His lip curled bitterly. "Listen. You know as well as I do that she's lost to me now. And for good."

They looked at each other in a silence that was full of words not spoken. Then Caroline's blue eyes filled with tears. "Och Peter," she cried brokenly.

He took her hand in his and with a courtly gesture bent his dark head and kissed it. "My thanks to you for the kindness in your heart."

Winter set in early that year and with it came a partial closure of the glen because of snow. Caroline was not aware of any feeling of isolation or loneliness. On the contrary. She was young and vigorous, and her body responded with exhilaration to the keen air and the icy wind. The fact that they were now in a little world of their own, and had to make provision for the needs of mind and body, excited and intrigued her and gave her a sense of heightened living.

Around Michaelmas the bullocks had been slaughtered. The meat was cut up and laid away in wooden tubs, covered with brine strong enough to float an egg, while the hams were smoked over oak sawdust or juniper branches or even over peat, and had a most relishing flavour. The stillroom was now full of the fruits of the garden and countryside. Black currant preserves, rowan jelly—fine with grouse or venison—and jams made from the small red prickly gooseberries that grew below the garden. A row of cheeses ripened slowly on the shelves and there too in earthen jars were the cordials, elderberry wine and heather ale. The ginal held a store of barley and oats, with some wheat too, and peas. The milch cows were snug in the byres while the young cattle ranged the hills but came down to the barn in times of storm.

In the small homesteads and in the big houses like Torbeg and Craskie and Duldreggan there was now a great spinning of wool for plaiding and blankets, and of flax for the making of sheets and table napery. Then when the travelling weaver arrived, there was heard the clank and rumble of the loom. After that came the tailor with his prentice-lad, to make up the jackets and kilts, and was well paid at threepence a day and his keep. Or the shoemaker made his rounds and out of home-grown hides fashioned the soft leather cuarans that laced to the knee, or the low convenient brogans.

To lighten the labour there was many a shinty game and a stone-putting on the flat by the river, or a *ceilidh* by the fire when song and dance and story, and by times courting in the chimney corner, whiled away the long evenings. Or perhaps it was a gathering for “waulking” or fulling the cloth, when the web of plaiding was passed and clutched and flung to the rhythm of an old tune that had come down out of the long ago. Even the occasions of sorrow had a neighbourly and sociable quality as the people gathered at

the wake of a friend, to keep him company on the first stage of his long journey, and with song and drink and prayer, all commingled, bless him and send him on his way.

The days passed, and snow drifted down from the mountains, now gently and now with the wind swirling it, till it covered the valley and formed in great smooth curves with overhanging tips and shadowy blue caverns beneath. The shrubs were soft-mantled with it and the pine trees stood black against it. It glistened white on the tops of the chalk-blue mountain ranges and was bright and blinding in the high corries under the sunshine.

The days passed, and brought trouble to some. Ronald Gorm, in the steading next to Hector's, took to his bed. Rheumatism had him in its grip, and an old infirmity of the chest as well. For the rheumatism Kirsty brought him a little box of dried bees, now disintegrated almost into powder, but as everyone knew efficacious for a misery in the joints. Goat's milk and rich broths and hartshorn jelly appeared at the bedside too, but Lauchie contended there was naught so good as oil from the livers of fresh herring for a long hoast in the lungs, if it were not too far advanced.

That it was too far advanced was soon plain. For Ronald Gorm grew steadily weaker, and finally his spirit passed and his gaunt body was laid to rest in Clachan Merchard, the nearby graveyard. He left behind him a wife and a little son seven years old. Finlay would have taken the lad to Torbeg till the days of the waking were over, but Morag, the mother, her face bleak with sorrow yet thoughtful, said, "No. Let him see and remember all that he can of the life and death of his father."

After the burial, Finlay spent an hour with her in her stone biggin. They sat on either side of the peat fire, with the boy Ronnie on the creepie-stool between them, his black and white cat in his arms and his large dark eyes moving from one to the other as they discussed his future.

At length Finlay rose. "It is settled then. You and the lad will come to live at Torbeg, and when he has his growth I will see him established, either on his father's steading or elsewhere."

"I will serve you well, myself and also my son," Morag promised, her eyes resting on the boy with fierce brooding affection.

So Morag, widow of Ronald Gorm, came to live at Torbeg and slipped quietly into the life of the household and more and more took responsibility from Kirsty who was beginning now to show her years.

In April Caroline was brought to bed. Morag, who had acted as midwife in the glen for many years, tended her, and Kirsty and Mysie assisted.

It was a day of rain, of strong pelting rain that began before sunrise. The world was drenched with it. It tossed and bent and whitened the pine trees, thrummed on the roof, washed over the windowpanes and lay in pools on the terrace, pools that were splashed into a thousand tiny fountains as fresh gusts came. In spite of the pain that engulfed her, the sound of it filled Caroline's consciousness and she felt as though she were enclosed in a world-under-water, like a mermaid or a kelpie.

The long hours passed and the pain endured, the wrenching and the hot swift agony, and by nightfall Caroline was far spent, and those watching were troubled at heart. Then suddenly it was over, and they laid a girl child beside her, a red and wrinkled little creature, small cause of so much trouble.

Kirsty took the newborn babe and passed her quickly above the fire on the hearth, and many an ancient charm and blessing did she put on her with a fine commingling of faiths old and new. "May the goodness of Mary and the kindness of Bride, the beauty of Dearshula, the favour of the lordly ones that walk on the mountains, and the love of the Blessed Branch of Glory Himself be on you, *m'eudail mo cridhe*."

The baby was given the name Alsoon. Her eyes were blue like her mother's, her hair was fair like her father's, and it curled where it turned up at the back of her small sweet neck. From the first she was a lovable bairn, cuddling into the arms that held her, gazing thoughtfully up into the eyes that looked down at her, and crying but seldom.

Four weeks after the birth, the family and friends gathered to do honour to the mother and child. The roads in the glen had dried and the weather was fine. From the Laird's house at Invermoriston came a small procession—Patric himself, Isobel his wife, and the Dowager Lady, sitting firm and composedly on her own ambling grey mare. At Livishie Elspeth and Alex joined the party, and they came on up the glen together under the dappled shade of the birch trees and along the tumbling Moriston. Peter Dhu came across the fields from Craskie, and Mairi was already there.

The Dowager Lady said of Mairi as she laid off her cloak and bonnet, "She's like a fairy vision. God help her!"

"Why?" asked Isobel. "Already He's been generous enough."

"She has too much beauty. It's something I'd never ask for a bairn of mine. Trouble comes in the wake of it."

Isobel sighed. "I know. Look at my brother Peter. And she with no more than kindness for him now."

"His will not be the greater sorrow." The older woman smoothed her grey hair and settled the lace at her bosom. "Now bring me to the bairn."

The child Alsoon lay asleep in a cradle of woven withes. When they gathered round her, she blinked, opened her blue eyes and made vague waving motions with a tiny pink hand.

The grandmother sat herself down in a low chair before the fire, and made a lap. Caroline lifted and laid the bairn on her knees.

"Too many clothes," grumbled the Dowager Lady. "I like them bare."

The white shawl was laid back and the small full-gathered gown removed. Then the outer and inner petticoat, the tiny flannel shirt, and finally the band and folded napkin. The child lay pink and plump, with the light of the fire flickering over her. The tiny muscles of back and buttocks, of shoulder and loin played smoothly as she spread her little limbs and moved her small fair head, and tensed and tightened herself.

"Good!" approved her grandmother. "I like a bairn with spring in it." Then she spread finger and thumb and measured from elbow to wrist and from hip to knee joint. "She'll not be tall, but she's bonnily made. There was a lamb born the day she was. It will be hers, so it will, and the first fleece from it will be set aside for a wee plaidie. Now clothe her, but leave her feet more free."

Elspeth had brought a baptismal robe, a gift from the aunt in Culcabock. It was of India muslin, fine like silk, and embroidered in a fairylike design of buds and blossoms. The christening would be in the church at Invermoriston and in a few weeks time.

"You're to be godmother," Caroline told Elspeth privately on the way down the stair. "I'd have named her for you, but I thought, the first for my mother. My second daughter will be Elspeth." She laughed happily. "So short a time ago we were together at Culcabock. Look at me now, and look at you! When is it?"

"In three months." Elspeth smiled ruefully. "Alex cannot span my waist now with his long hands."

"I think Alex does not mind. Dear Elspeth, I hope we live in this glen all our lives and see our bairns grow up together and be friends. I hope that happens," she finished fervently.

“And why should it not happen?” asked Elspeth reasonably. “Here we are, and here we’ll stay most likely. Who ever heard of anything else?”

“Well, Torquil left,” murmured Caroline.

The midday meal over, the men walked about the property with Finlay, visiting the steadings and discussing plans and improvements, and then came in hungry for their “four hours” refreshment. For this they were served not only the usual elderberry wine and seed cake, but Caroline had set up a small table and offered her guests tea as well, using the thin green cups and saucers Torquil had given her as a wedding present.

The Widow Glenmoriston savoured the beverage critically. “A fine clean taste,” she gave judgment, “and I think it not unwholesome, though I’m told a dash of whisky in the last cup is a wise precaution.”

The Laird had a piece of news for them, and he gave it to them now while they were all assembled. He said, “I saw Ludovic Grant at Inverness. He has had dispatches from the trading company at Albany. There’s been trouble with the French and the Indians—raiding back and forth, and some bloodshed. However, in the immediate vicinity of Albany all is quiet, the greatest danger being farther north. Ludovic said also that Torquil was in good health and was well thought of in the company.”

There was a thoughtful silence. It was sad to think of Torquil so far away, and in danger, and none of them able to help.

The Dowager Lady put the thought into words. “We can do naught but put a good wish on him and send up a prayer that he may be protected in all his ways. The fact is,” there was hardy humour in her smile, “I have so many to put a prayer on that my knees will no longer take the bare floor, so I lie soft in my bed for my petitions. With the result that sleep often overtakes me before I am through with my grandchildren. But every night, without fail, I pray for the clan. Also that trouble may stay way from this glen.”

Later, when the younger women had left the room, the Laird took up his mother’s words. “For many a year now we’ve been free of trouble. There has been peace and a fair measure of prosperity. But now I think a wind is about to blow in on us.”

“You have news?” asked Alex.

“Aye.” Patric’s grey eyes ranged the group. “I have heard that the Prince is buying arms in Paris. Also that a ship is being fitted out for him.”

“What of the French?”

“Blowing hot and cold, I think. Though being at war with England, it is logical that they should support a Highland rising. The Prince, it is said, has an implicit trust in his Highlanders, as he calls us, and would put his future to the test without delay.”

Peter’s dark eyes smouldered. “What like is the young man?”

Alex of Livishie smiled wryly. “The Hanoverians say he is a cripple and dumb of sense. That, I think, we need not believe.”

“Indeed,” spoke up the Laird’s mother. “I hear he is a bonnie lad, tall and strong. Fit to be Scotland’s king—if he is let. How stand the clans?”

“That depends. If he comes with soldiery and supplies, half Scotland will flock to him.”

“And if he does not, will some throw in their lot to live and die with him? I wonder. What of our glen, Patric my son?”

“We can raise at once a hundred men,” answered the Laird simply. “That will leave some to tend the crops.”

Meanwhile, in the room where the baby lay, fed and quiet in her cradle, the four younger women sat together in close and friendly conversation. They were a well-favoured quartet—Isobel mature and comely; Caroline dark-haired, blue-eyed and high-spirited; Elspeth looking now in her quince-coloured gown like a full-blown yellow rose; and Mairi with her strange snow-white loveliness. Mairi sat still, saying little. Then in a pause, slowly she drew a gold chain from her bosom. On it was a ring. She laid it on the palm of her hand and showed it to the others.

They crowded close. She slipped it on her finger and held it out to catch the light. There were three opals enclosed in circles of small diamonds. The opals glowed warm and rainbow-hued amid the frosty sparkle of the diamonds. The effect was rare and lovely. Caroline found her voice first. “From Roderick?”

Mairi nodded and looked down at the ring, a bemused and gentle smile on her face.

“He was here then?” pursued Caroline.

“Three days ago.” Then like a trustful happy child she confided in them. “We’re not to be wed for a while. His parents are not willing. So I keep the

ring in my bosom. But before the summer is over he will have a home of his own and then . . .”

Caroline bent and kissed her. So, wonderingly, did the others. It was like a fairy tale. From the stone biggin to the fine house in Edinburgh. Lucky, lucky Mairi!

A few weeks later Finlay set out to appraise a new shieling ground on the side of the mountain that lay towards Craskie, and Caroline went with him. She wore a country woman’s garb, a kilted black and white skirt and a short white jacket, and her curls swung free. It was a day of sun and shade, with high white clouds sailing in a sky of robin’s egg blue. Small Alsoon was safe in Kirsty’s care and Caroline felt lighthearted and happy.

As their ponies breasted the lift of the hill Finlay asked, “What were you and Mairi about in the stillroom this morning?”

Caroline laughed. “We were making a paste for the hands. Fresh lard, egg yolks, oatmeal and honey. I’ll give her half.”

Finlay smiled gravely. “You’re not raising her hopes too high?”

“I think not. After all, there’s the ring. I wish you’d seen it, Finlay. You’d not believe how lovely it is.” She sighed. “It’s most romantic, is it not?”

“Aye, it is. Roderick’s a good lad, and once his parents see Mairi they will likely relent. But I feel for Peter Dhu.”

“And so do I.” Caroline’s voice was warm with sympathy, remembering Peter as he had been the day they sampled the heather ale.

They topped the next rise of the mountain, and there before them was a level place soft with young heather and crossed meanderingly by a small stream. Beneath a clump of birches bluebells grew, and delicate green sorrel, and here and there a tall scented fern. Finlay and Caroline slipped from their ponies and let them crop the short sweet herbage. Finlay pushed at it experimentally with his foot. It was good grazing, tender and rich—the sort of grazing that sheep were later to destroy.

They sat down on a bank that was springy with wild thyme. Below them lay Torbeg, in a cradle of swelling green slopes. Smoke rose from the chimney of the lime-washed stone house. The girnal, the dovecote, the barns and stables made a group behind it. They could see the tiny triangle that was the garden, and the nearby orchard, and the fringe of dark Scots pine.

Finlay turned to Caroline and his mouth widened in a smile of hardy happiness. "There it is," he said. "Torbeg, a house founded, a family. As the old teacher in Inverness would say, *Floreat familia*. Or, *Floreat Torbeg!*"

From the sun-warmed clover and the thyme rose a faint bland perfume. From the black earth itself came another, sharper odour, a clean astringent smell that stung the nostrils. The water in the brook chuckled over the pebbles or sucked softly at the grassy brink, and from the birch trees above came a lift of song. A yellow warbler like a bright butterfly flitted among the branches.

A wave of pleasure, so keen it was near to pain, swept over Caroline. She turned to Finlay. His eyes were on her, and her cheeks flushed at the look in them. He bent his head and laid his lips on the white hollow at the base of her throat, and his arms came hard around her. When she put her hands about his head, his hair was sun-warmed and soft under her fingers.

Later, she laughed in soft derision. "Like a herdsman and his lass in the heather on the hillside."

"Where better?" he murmured drowsily.

The birds wheeled over and the burn gurgled and a bee nuzzled into the wild thyme. Finlay moved and laid his head against her. Her arm went round him and he slept. Watching him, Caroline thought, I'll remember this time and this place. Forever.

The moment was perfect. It lengthened out. The burden of its felicity seemed almost too much to be borne. It broke. It broke on the sound of the furious thudding of a horse's hooves. The small stones in the bed of the burn scattered. A great wild-eyed bay horse rounded the edge of the birch grove, pulled to a halt, rearing foaming and came down with a thud that scattered the turf. Peter Dhu flung himself from the saddle. He looked like a madman, his eyes bloodshot, his mouth drawn back, his face dead-white and set like stone.

He stared at them, and as recognition came he stiffened and stood motionless, his chest heaving and the anger of attack going out of him. Finlay took his arm and led him a few steps away. Caroline said nothing. From the moment Finlay had leaped to his feet in alarm, she had been entirely still. Neither man looked at her. It was almost as if she did not exist. She gazed down over the valley, but she listened.

"Well," demanded Finlay, and the reply came hoarsely.

"From the dress I thought it was Mairi."

“Mairi? And I?” Finlay’s voice was stiff and wary.

“*Dhia!* No. I was mistaken in you also. I was altogether mistaken. I saw only a tall man and the fairness of his hair.”

“I see.” The two looked for an instant into each other’s eyes. Peter’s face was unsteady with humiliation, but on a level beneath that, there went on an interchange of purely masculine understanding and support.

“Sometimes I think,” said Peter finally, “that we’re over nice in our day. Often it has happened in this glen that a lass has been flung over a man’s saddle and borne away to his steading.”

“Aye, and not a bad practice,” agreed Finlay gravely. “In the olden times. But in these days, and with one like the daughter of Hector, trouble would follow, would it not, dark Peter?”

A reluctant grin twisted Peter’s mouth, “Aye, so it would.” Then he thrust out his hand and Finlay’s palm slapped into it. Their eyes met again in a look that was like a pact, then Peter threw a leg over his big bay and went galloping down the hill.

Finlay sat down beside Caroline and after a thoughtful silence she asked, “Would you have flung me over your saddle with never a by-your-leave?”

“If needful,” he told her calmly and went on looking down the hillside after Peter.

She should have felt affronted, but in honesty she had to admit that the thought gave her a small shiver of delight.

Again they were silent. A cloud passed and bars of light and shadow moved over the slopes. For a time the house at Torbeg gleamed white in the sunshine, then the shadows touched it and the brightness went out of it, till sunshine flooded the valley again. Caroline and Finlay sat side by side, their hands clasped, their shoulders touching. They felt life flow through them, warm and strong and steady. The sunlit ecstasy of the hour just gone still ran in their veins, but with it was now a hardihood, a wariness, and a readiness for what might lie ahead. Trouble was now with Peter Dhu, and happiness was with them. But who knew for how long?

At that moment, in a little village near the mouth of the Loire, a tall young man boarded a French vessel called *La Doutelle*. With him were seven companions. Their sails were set for Scotland.

If the past year had been a season of felicity at Torbeg, the one that followed was full of tumult and anxiety. Vague but exciting rumours began to move through the glen. Some said that the Prince was in the Western Isles already; others that he had landed at Borradale on the mainland. Nothing was known of a certainty, but in the faces of the people when they met, at the kirk or the smithy or in the hills, was a strange look of both eagerness and apprehension.

Then one day Peter Dhu came to Torbeg with the positive statement that Prince Charles Edward, heir to the Stuart throne, was indeed in the country. Peter had it from Alex Grant of Shewglie, who had sent the Prince an address of welcome and had then composed a song in his honour which was already being sung by the firesides in Glen Urquhart. Others had been to see him also. The Clanranald MacDonalds had formed a bodyguard for him. Lochiel had visited him at Borradale and was now raising the Cameron clansmen. Keppoch had pledged his loyalty. But the chiefs of Skye were holding back. Duncan Forbes was throwing his powerful weight against the rising, and Ludovic of Castle Grant had written a letter to his baillie in Glen Urquhart urging his tenants to get on with the harvesting and keep the peace.

This was definite and dependable news, and it moved them all profoundly. In spite of plans and expectations the thought of a rising had remained vague in their minds. The thirty years of peace had left their mark. War and rebellion, and the marching of men, seemed far removed and unreal. But no longer! The word had gone out. The clans were rising. The Prince was come—Tearlach himself. They gave him his name in Gaelic and at once it seemed as if he belonged to them. He was now a part of their lives, and like indeed to change those lives.

None felt this more than Finlay. He listened while Peter told his tale, his eyes bright and his excitement growing. Then he cried, "But what of help from France? Ships, men, arms?"

Peter leaned his arms on the table before him and looked at Finlay with a twisted, enigmatic smile. "Ships? One small ship. As for arms and money, but little, if any. And for an army, seven men."

“Seven!” Finlay stiffened in his chair and his countenance changed. There was in his face at first an immense incredulity, then a gravity, a weighing and considering seriousness, and finally comprehension. And with that a grim and fated gaiety. His eyes smiled and he began to hum softly through his teeth.

Then he hitched one knee over the other. “So that’s how it’s to be. Seven men! You see then, he trusts us. We’re his army.” He got up and walked about the room, his kilt swinging. He paused by Peter and laid a hand on his shoulder. “This is how the game will be played. With audacity. The bold stroke, the headlong rush, the tactics of a Highland charge. It’s now or never for us all.”

He sat down and went on humming and smiling, with that queer happy look in his eyes.

Caroline watched him wonderingly then asked, over a tightening in her throat, “What of the garrison in Fort Augustus? They’re over near as the men gather.”

Peter nodded. “Aye, we have to watch out for them. I saw Captain Messiker with that homely gillie of his in the inn at Aonach last night. Och well, it looks as if we may soon be rid of the bodachs.”

“If we win,” declared Finlay, “it’s good-bye to the Union. It’s the slap of the sword on a man’s thigh once again. It’s our old ways and customs let flourish. It’s no more redcoats in the glen. It’s the wee fat German lairdie pushed off the throne of the Stuarts and sent back where he belongs.”

He laughed again and rose, limbering his shoulders. “It’s also seven men against the might of Hanover. Seven men, plus the clans. It’s a gamble and our lives are the stake. Our lives!” His eyes met Caroline’s and a look passed between them. On her part, a look of love and pain and fear, but he wore still the grim fated, not unhappy smile of a man for whom the die was already cast.

In the days that followed, Torbeg took on an air of great and feverish activity. The farm work was briskly and hurriedly carried through. One never knew how much time was left. Every few days butter and cheese came down from the shielings. The fruits of the garden were preserved as soon as they came ripe. The maids were at the spinning from morning light till late into the gloaming. The shoemaker toiled at the making of brogans, strong brogans and many of them, fit for marching men.

Weapons were taken from their places of hiding, honed and burnished. Where swords and pistols were lacking, there were scythes, were there not, to be fastened firm to hazel boughs. And every man had his dirk.

Finlay was oiling and polishing a brace of pistols one day on the stone steps before the house when he looked up and there was his brother, Patric the Laird.

“You came softly,” he observed, smiling a welcome.

“I came softly and in haste. I bear news. Also I ask a favour.”

Finlay rose and stood looking at him.

“This is the way of it,” said the Laird. “The Prince, I hear, will raise his standard at Glenfinnan, then he will march to Inverness, or he will plunge down the road to Edinburgh. Clanranald is with him now. Lochiel is bringing in Clan Cameron.”

“And our men?”

“We’ll not get to Glenfinnan. There’s not time, nor is there need. We’ll join the others on the march. But it comes to me that I would do well to send someone to the raising of the standard. A kinsman, perhaps. As an earnest and token of our loyalty. So, Finlay Ban, will you go?”

Finlay’s face paled, then set firm. “Aye, that I will,” he said deeply. “That I will, indeed. I am honoured.”

“Get you braw then. There’s not time to lose. You’ll ride to Achnacarry and go in with the Camerons. But you’ll not ride alone. Not these days. What of Peter of Craskie?”

“A good choice. Peter’s a soldierly man.”

“Besides, he knows the country, every glen and corrie between here and there. You’ll need to avoid Fort Augustus. Once you reach Achnacarry you’ll be with friends.”

Not many hours later the two *duine wassels* set out, Finlay on black Shanlan and Peter on his big fiery bay. They rode as gentlemen of the clan, which is what they were, and they were dressed accordingly. Their round bonnets bore the eagle feather that denoted their rank. Peter’s bore one feather and Finlay’s two, he being the son of a chief. Their plaids were caught at the shoulder by ornamented silver brooches, centred with cairngorm; their jackets were fastened trimly with well-burnished buttons also of silver—a wise precaution always, because were a man killed far from

home the silver would give him decent burial. Their red kilts were of new tartan, clean and bright, and they carried swords and pistols as well as their dirks. So, they were careful to avoid the redcoats at Fort Augustus. The time was not yet come to engage them.

The two spoke but little as they rode, each busy with his own thoughts. As Patric had urged, they avoided main roads and hamlets, and took to the heathery moors and hillsides. The hooves of their horses plunged into the springy turf of many a mountain meadow and they looked out far and wide over great lone slopes and deep valleys. Now and then from the lip of a high crag a veil of water fell thin and snow-white in the sunshine, dropping sheerly down and down to a little loch below. Against the horizon the far peaks stood purple and plum-coloured, while the nearer hills were bright green, medallioned with bracken and heather and clumps of birch. It was a heart-stirring country to look out upon.

“They tell me,” observed Peter, “that in some places the land lies flat as a bannock, with no rim to it at all, the sky coming down like a big bowl.”

“They do say so,” agreed Finlay. “I understand that in parts of America there are plains that extend for thousands of miles.”

“How they can bear it!” exclaimed Peter. “For me the old saying holds, the breathing place of the Gael is on the summit.”

“Aye so! Not willingly would I live out of sight of our hills.”

“Nor even away from our own glen,” pursued Peter. “Yet look at us now, edging into change. We’ll not put Tearlach on his throne by biding close to home.”

“Aye,” agreed Finlay, smiling hardily. “A day’s darg for Chairlie, and then back to our hills.”

“More or less. Say six months, or three. It has to be fast or it fails.”

“If it fails, it’s the hills for us truly.”

They laughed together. To fail was not within the range of their thought. Yet who was it had said that one must face the fact of failure? John MacDonell, the lad from France whom they might soon see.

When they reached Achnacarry, they found the Camerons ready to march. There were eight hundred of them milling about on the level land by

the water of Lochy. Lochiel himself came to meet the two from Glenmoriston.

“Glad I am to see you. You strengthen our hands. Because you are an earnest, are you not, of more to follow?”

“Aye, we are that, my lord and cousin. The Glen is mustering.”

“And how are you off for arms?”

“We could do with more, but we’ll make out.”

“Good! Half my brave boys have naught but scythes. But they’ll march, were it with sickles. It will hearten the Prince.”

“Is he like to have a supply of arms?”

“I fear not. You will know, Finlay, that at first I was for telling him to go back, so ill was he prepared.” He scrouged his bonnet down over his brow and grinned ruefully. “I was planting saplings when I heard the news. There they still lie, heeled into the ditch. Since then I’ve had more on my mind than beech trees, and am like to.”

“He overpersuaded you then?” Finlay was curious to know.

Lochiel laughed softly. “Aye, he did that. Wait till you see him. For good or ill I’m with him now, and all my clan.”

He looked over the ranks. The men were ranging into two columns of three. “Since the beginning of time,” he observed, “the Gael has marched in threes. We keep it up, like many another good old custom. These are fine lads, full of vigour and high spirits. Hear the pipes—‘The March of the Cameron Men.’ You’ll not mind going in with us?” he smiled in pride and good humour.

“It will be an honour, sir! After all, I am myself half Cameron.”

“That you are.” Lochiel linked an arm in his. “Close kin, I hold you, and dear to me for your own sake as well as for your mother.”

The little army set out. They swung along by Loch Arkaig and over the mountains. It was warm under the August sun and the going was rough. But they were hillmen and hardy, and before the day was too far spent they had arrived at their destination. There before them lay the shining blue of Loch Shiel, and below, between them and the water, was a meadow, a wide level plot, ranged about with hills, and in the midst of it a cluster of men looking strangely small and lonely.

On the edge of the last declivity the front ranks of the clansmen paused and crowded together for a moment. Then they flung themselves down the slope in a dark leaping mass of men that spread out when it found the plain, then poured on inexorably till all Clan Camerons, eight hundred strong, crowded about and enclosed the little group that awaited them.

In that group Finlay saw the Prince. There was no doubt at all about him. He looked young and fair and most kingly. His face was bright and quick with feeling as the Highlanders moved in about him. Their coming had meant something to him, it was plain. Lochiel stepped forward and knelt before him. But the Prince raised him, kissed him on the cheek and flung an arm affectionately across his shoulder.

Round about were the Clanranald men. Finlay knew them by their tartans. The aged Marquis of Tullibardine stood a little apart, smiling benignly to see his Prince surrounded at last by friends and supporters. Then Lochiel turned and motioned, and Finlay with his heart thumping in his chest came forward and knelt. And laid his hands in fealty between those warm princely palms, and looked up into the spirited friendly face of Tearlach himself.

“Finlay Ban! Brother to the Chief of the Grants of Glenmoriston, so Lochiel tells me. You’re for helping us, Finlay?”

“Your Highness, I am indeed. And with me all the men our glen can muster. So the Laird, my brother, bade me tell you.”

“My thanks. God is good to me this day, though an hour since I near despaired. Finlay, we shall see each other again, and often, on the road we take together.”

He smiled, stepped back and surveyed the group before him, then lifted his hand and his voice came ringingly. “My lords and gentlemen, the time has come to raise the standard.”

So there, in the meadow at the head of Loch Shiel, they set up the standard of the Stuart kings, and it fluttered out all blue and white and crimson. Old Tullibardine, heavy with years and infirmities, and almost overcome with emotion, with a sturdy Highlander supporting him on either side, proclaimed the kingship of James the Third and Eighth and the appointment of his son, Charles Edward, Prince and Regent of Great Britain and Ireland.

Then Charles made a short speech in a clear and carrying voice. He stood where they could all see him, this tall fair slender young man who was

not only the son of a king but by name and blood a Highlander like themselves. Listening to him, Finlay felt his heart turn over. It was as if he himself stood there, so close did his spirit cleave to the speaker. That was it. Charles Edward, known affectionately as Tearlach, was in himself all their selves, heightened and made splendid. He was the very essence and spirit of the country to which he had come. "I am come home," he told them, and it was true. For weal or woe this place was his home, and in truth would be the abiding place of his spirit for longer than he knew.

When he had finished, a hundred pipers struck lips to chanter and elbow to bag and the pibroch shrilled out wildly. The clansmen skimmed their bonnets to the sky, a whole flock of them in the air at one time lifting and turning and falling over and over like dark birds. Men laughed and heuched and shouted for Charlie, or rent the air with savage Gaelic war cries.

New troops came along the road from the east. It was Keppoch with his MacDonalds, marching proudly three hundred strong. A roar of welcome met them. They were followed by a company of MacLeods of Skye, bright as wasps in their black and yellow tartans, their pipes humming fiercely as they came through the summer dusk. These were without their chief who was for staying neutral. A gentleman of the clan led them and on their behalf presented them to the Prince and offered their services.

Suddenly Finlay caught a glimpse of John MacDonell whom he had last seen at Kilmore Manse in Glen Urquhart. They made their way through the crowd to each other, and their hands gripped hard.

"Glad I am to see you." MacDonell's voice was high with excitement. "Glad were we all to see Clan Cameron on the top of that hill. Our hearts had nigh failed, so solitary seemed this place with the mountains lowering all around, and us so few and lonely. Then there came the sound of pipes, very faint, then louder. Our eyes turned to the mouth of Glen Finnan. One moment the rim of the valley was bare; the next, a lone clansman stood looking over. In a flash there were three. Then like an avalanche came the whole eight hundred, springing and leaping down the declivity. Never shall I forget it. At once the Prince's face was like sunshine."

Finlay turned. "Look you, here is Peter Grant of Craskie who rode with me from Glenmoriston."

The two shook hands. They were of a type, dark alert and steady, except that Peter was ten years older. They sat down on a grassy bank. Around them men were disposing themselves in groups, laughing, talking and shouting in

excitement. Pipes were playing, and the Royal Standard with an escort of fifty Camerons was being marched away to the nearby lodging of the Prince.

“Do you remain with us?” asked MacDonell.

“No,” said Finlay. “At the break of day we ride for home.”

Lochiel saw them and strolled over. He sat down and looked from face to face with a quiet smile playing over his handsome square-cut middle-aged countenance. “So the stage is set. And is he not a bonnie hero?”

“He is that.” They said it on one breath.

Lochiel nodded his head. “Aye. The curtain rises. The play begins. But what will be the ending that’s in it?”

There was a pause. Then softly from Finlay, “There will be glory in it whatever.”

“Aye. And tears! Tears of joy, mayhap. As today. Here we are, all of us in this place, of one heart and it hot with love and loyalty. Out of that heat we may forge a great victory. A great cause, at any rate.” Then in a changed and practical tone he added to Finlay, “Are you off then by morn?”

“We are. Think you, will the Prince go to Inverness or cut across the mountains to the south?”

Lochiel frowned. “That is our present problem. Lovat writes advising Inverness, but—says the Prince—that would be to move away from the enemy. He is for marching south to meet General Cope and then pushing on to the heart of the country, Edinburgh itself.”

Peter of Craskie looked up kindly. “The lad is right. He has the feel for battle. I could see it in his eye.”

“Then,” pursued Finlay, “if you’re for going over Corrieyairack, we of Glenmoriston might join you at Cullachy.”

“Not so,” objected Peter. “At Abercalder rather. There’s a short cut over the hills from behind Abercalder. It avoids the garrison at Fort Augustus. Better we should rendezvous there.”

“Good!” approved Lochiel. “I’ll pass on the word, and thank you for it. We’ll not linger here any longer than we must. It’s the baggage that daunts us, and the provisioning. Howsoever, we’ll make out. So, till Abercalder . . . !”

The next day Finlay and Peter reported to the Laird at Glenmoriston House. They turned in between the stone dykes, followed a grassy lane past the orchard and garden, and came out on the green before the entrance. Patric met them there and called a gillie to take their horses.

“Good lads! You did well, and got back in time too. Yesterday I sent word up the glen. Duldreggan, Livishie and the lave are now here.”

About the table in the big dining hall were gathered the gentlemen of the clan. Alex of Livishie, Iain from the home farm, Peter from Craskie, and Aeneas Grant of Duldreggan as well as others from places like Aonach and Dalchreichart, Balnacarn, Ceannacroc and Achlain. The Laird stood by the hearth, one arm laid along the mantelshelf. He smiled grimly. “Two of you were with me twenty-four years ago in Glen Affric when with Donald Murchison we scattered the Hanoverian factors sent to harry us. This time we are on a yet bolder venture. The King over the water has sent us the Prince to make another try for the throne of his fathers. My brother Finlay and Peter of Craskie were at Glenfinnan when the standard was raised.”

He moved over and sat down at the table with the rest. “Tell them of it, Finlay.”

Finlay told them of the lifting of the standard.

There was a silence. Then, “Seven men!” murmured Duldreggan in amazement.

Patric’s answer came swift and firm. “He has more now. In fact he has an army. Clanranald has risen, also the Camerons. The Frasers too. We can count on the Chisholms and MacGregors. And yesterday Gordon of Glenbucket came pounding by on his way to join the Prince. Now, the time has come to give the word to the men of Glenmoriston.”

He paused and a murmur went round the board, a low-pitched sound, strangely ominous.

Then Peter’s fist came down on the table. “Well then, let us march. We’re blithe for battle.” His face was hard and bright.

Alex of Livishie looked up. “I am not blithe for battle. In fact, I regret that this is laid on us at this time. But laid on us it is, because of our loyalty and our allegiance.” He smiled gravely. “So, I am with you, Patric, myself and the men from Livishie.”

Finlay slipped his hand into his jacket, placed his dirk on his bare knee and slapped his palm on it. “On the dirk!” he said briefly. “And with all my

heart.”

Big Iain sat, feet wide, his brown head nodding agreeably. “Och, aye! But it would be good to get the harvest in first.”

Meanwhile, Aeneas Grant, called Duldreggan, was silent, his blue eyes turning from one to another. Then he spoke up. “Glenmoriston, say but the word and I’m with you. But to tell the truth, I’d like better to bide by my farm. I care not much who sits on the throne far away in London. Sooner than rush into battle I would tend my beeves and plough my fields and gather gear. But, as is my duty, my sword is yours, give but the word.”

“I give the word. Stay by your beeves and your barley rigs, good Duldreggan. But for the rest of you!” Again came that deep murmur, a sound like bees before swarming. Patric’s face flushed with pride. “This is the plan. A hundred men will march at once, armed and ready, and more at the close of the harvest. Those who can leave in two days, give me your names before you go. The rest of us will see to our properties, get in the harvest, and then meet the Prince at Blair Athol or Dunkeld or Perth or at the Palace of Holyrood itself.”

A sudden stillness fell on them. Holyrood! The very name stirred them. Holyrood, where had lived the kings and queens of Scotland. A strange fervour filled the eyes of the men about the table, a wistfulness and a wonder.

Patric’s matter-of-fact voice brought them back. “Now as for weapons. There is a store of good nail-studded targes in the great chest by the door. Help yourselves. Also, look well to your pistols and get the swords to the grindstone. Alex of Livishie, the next in age to me of my brothers, is in charge of the first hundred men. For you the time is scant enough. Wait but for the stirrup cup and then go, and God’s blessing be on you.”

Patric had a private word with Alex and Finlay before they left. “I could wish for you both a longer season of peace, you with young wives and a bairn apiece in the cradle. But what would you? The standard’s raised. And I promise you that any disposition that I can make for the comfort and safety of your families, I will undertake before I leave. Alex, would Elspeth be safer with her mother in Culcabock?”

“Not should there be fighting around Inverness.”

“True enough.” Patric frowned and shifted his gaze to Finlay. “Yet here in Glenmoriston we are all over close to the garrison at Fort Augustus. I’ll leave strict word with Duldreggan that if need arise he fold your wives and

bairns safe in his big house. That thought came to me when he said he was for biding at home.”

At Torbeg, Finlay looked again to his own weapons, and those over and above his need he set aside to be shared with his neighbours. There remained then a half-dozen dirks in the bottom of the chest. One he held in the palm of his hand consideringly.

“This one I will leave behind, and not hid away in the chest.” He smiled at Caroline, and his eyes moved about the room seeking a place. On the high oak desk between the windows lay a leather-covered Bible. Finlay opened the book, laid the dirk flat between the pages and closed it again. The handle was out of sight at the rear. “A right good bookmark,” he observed.

He looked at Caroline with affection and concern in his eyes. “It’s a strong dirk and very sharp. You’d not fail to use it?”

Caroline’s eyes, very large and blue and somehow child-like, met his soberly. “I’d use it,” she promised in a steady voice.

All up and down the glen the men began to gather. They scrounged on their blue bonnets, twitched them jauntily sideways, flung their round leather targes over their shoulders, and they were ready. Their uniforms were what they wore. The kilt or belted plaid, the tartan hose, the leather brogans pierced to let the water out, for in it would surely come, the short wool jacket—that was uniform enough. Each man bore in the set and colour of his plaid and in the crest on his bonnet his name and his allegiance for all the world to see.

To Torbeg there came Hector, Mairi’s father, and her brother Murdoch, Jamie the herd, and a dozen others from the stone steadings round about. At once this group of men were like brothers. They strengthened and comforted each other, and in a sense took the place of those they were to leave behind. For it was not easy to part with wife and child, they found. Finlay felt a great wrenching ache at the thought of leaving Caroline and also that small sweet girl-child called Alsoon.

The last night, he knelt by her cradle and looked long and earnestly at her, as if to store the picture in his mind. She slept. One cheek was pressed into the pillow, one little arm was flung wide. Finlay laid his brown hard finger against her closed fist. Her fingers opened, then curled around his, tightened and held. “She too,” murmured Caroline, “would hold you.”

He freed himself and rose. He drew Caroline down beside him in a seat before the window, and they sat for a long time hand-clasped, feeling the

current of their love flowing strong and warm between them.

Then said Finlay softly, "If this rising is well handled it will be short and sharp and soon over, and I'll be back again at Torbeg. But come what will, we are together, Caroline *mo cridhe*. You are my heart in very truth, and I yours. Nothing can separate us. Do you feel that?" he asked earnestly turning her face up and looking down into her black-lashed gentian-blue eyes.

"I feel it when I'm strong in my mind, but in the night-time I wake and am afraid."

"I know," he agreed. "But we must be strong in our minds."

Caroline thought of that the next morning. She thought of it as she saw him march away with his men, armed and ready, his shoulders straight, his kilt aswing. She feared he was not going to look back, but at the bend of the track, before it led up over the rise and out of sight, he paused and the others with him. He pulled off his bonnet, raised it in a sweeping gesture that took in Torbeg and all in it, turned and was gone.

The men from Glenmoriston arrived at Abercalder late in the evening of the twenty-sixth of August, and found the Prince's army preparing to bivouac for night. At once they sought out their friends and neighbours, the MacDonells of Glengarry, who had come in the day before. Then they proceeded to dispose of themselves and their gear, and to gather news. The army, they were told, had been greatly augmented the last few days. The MacDonalds of Glencoe had come in, more of the Stuarts, and the Glengarry men with whom they of Glenmoriston would march, as of old custom. In the morning they were to strike across Corrieyairack and on the far side of it they hoped to meet Sir John Cope and his men who were known to be pushing north to engage them.

Campfires glowed bright in the gathering dusk and already the men were rowing themselves in their plaids and settling down into the heather. Tomorrow they would be astir with the birds, so it was well to get sleep. Hector, however, slipped off his shoe and sat with his heel cupped tenderly in his palm.

"I rasped the skin off," he confessed at Finlay's look of inquiry, "but I've gathered me a cure," and he pulled from his sporran a handful of red moss.

His son Murdoch rose then and went down the brae to the carts. Soon he was back with a wooden coggie which he filled from the burn nearby. Then from the edge of the fire he flipped some hot stones into it, tossed in the moss and twirled the coggie about till the water was stained deep brown.

Hector lowered his foot cautiously into it and sighed with relief. After a moment he looked up. "You'll understand, that I scraped it. It's not that my feet would be tender."

"Och aye!" Peter Dhu assured him seriously. "A sore scrape it is to be sure, and wise you are to care for it."

The encampment sank slowly into silence, then from the far darkness where lay the Stuarts of Appin came a single strong voice raised in song. A bardic song marked with a strange rhythm so that it rose and fell and beat like the crash of stormy waters. It was a wild old lay that might have come down from the days of Fingal, full of clashing swords and bloody dirks and brave men dying fiercely by their chieftains. Listening, each man felt his

spirit strong within him, yet sad too, laden with a legendary memory of those of his blood who had died in battle long ago, even as he might on the morrow morn.

Finlay drew his plaid about him and settled himself for his first night in the heather. He thought with tenderness of his wife Caroline and small Alsoon. He saw them bedded soft and safe at Torbeg, in the blue-curtained chamber where there had been so much happiness. He gave himself entirely to the thought of them, then it was as if he happed them close in the warm core of his heart and turned his mind to the place and state in which he now was. And to the men who lay close-ranged about him.

He could feel their complete relaxation. They were wrapped in their plaids, yet these plaids were so disposed that instantly they could leap to their feet, sword and dirk bare. It was part of them that they could retire into themselves in revery or indolence or sleep, yet at a word spring into action. Natural fighting men they were. Lean, hot-blooded, loyal men, with an easy give and take to life.

Finlay turned on his back and looked up at the stars. They seemed not far away, almost as if he could reach up a hand to them. A little wind came whispering up from the loch and moved over the fields, and the smouldering campfires flared up suddenly into yellow flame. A night bird creaked in a brake, and there was the sound of the constant soft chuckling of the burn purling its way through the heather. The sky seemed very wide and the stars multitudinous. A thousand men were as naught beneath them. Finlay took to his prayers.

“King of the Elements,” he began, and opened his heart to silent worship. Then, “Keep safe my Caroline and her babe, and all at Torbeg. Give victory to our arms and a quick one at that. Guard well my men, and if it be expedient, guard also me.” He was quiet then, relaxed and receptive of mind, and he felt strength and peace flow into him.

His religion was not very clearcut; it was vague and amorphous at the edges. The Puritanism that moulded Highland Protestantism into the fierce fervent faith it later became, had not yet taken hold in the glens. Finlay was of the Church of Scotland, but when he prayed it was much as his forbears had before ever Columba or Ninian or Drostan or Merchard lived and laboured and died in the service of their Lord in these northern glens.

So, when a long sighing sound came down from the hills, grew to a thin wail and rose again, and a mist crept with slow fingers over the sleeping forms, and a man stirred in his sleep and made a sudden sobbing sound,

Finlay felt his flesh tighten and his throat close. Surely it was the Host of the Sidhe, the Lordly Ones who ride the wind and linger in the lonely places on the mountains. In his heart he made respectful obeisance to them, and the sound of their going passed over, and with that he slept.

At the moment the first pink flush of dawn touched the east there came a loud skirl on the pipes and the men flung back their plaids and stood on their feet and were ready. They took their breakfast standing, and immediately after, formed into ranks. The pipes screamed out again, then settled into a firm marching beat. The front rank swung off along the path that led across the meadow and up over the breast of the green hill behind Abercalder.

On a little knoll beside the line of march stood the Prince. His head was bare and his fair hair blew in the breeze. A bright flickering smile played over his face and his eyes scanned the marching men with eagerness and affection. Finlay's heart thudded when he came abreast and saw him plain. It was as if all the lightheartedness of life, all the true brave generous things of life, shone forth in that ardent and princely figure. More, in him each clansman saw and saluted himself writ large and glorious. It was all there—the courage, the recklessness, the feyness and the passion that was in themselves, and that need for splendour which was a necessity nearer than food, nearer even than drink.

Peter Dhu laughed softly, admiringly. "A pretty man, if ever I saw one. A Prince to follow. In life or death."

The sun now rode high and sent long bright rays across the hilltops. The air was chill and sweet. Suddenly an eagle swooped and hovered over the marching men, then lifted and soared away on wide spread wings. The clans began to sing. "The King shall enjoy his own again," it was, and they sang it firmly, as if they meant to make it come true.

"Look now, Peter!" cried Finlay. "Look who comes running."

Incredibly it was the Prince. He fell in beside them.

"Your Highness!" Finlay and Peter snatched at their bonnets.

Charles laughed breathlessly. "At present a soldier of Clan Stuart marching with his friends, the Grant of Glenmoriston. Or do I remember your flaxen poll aright?"

"You do indeed," smiled Finlay.

"Good! Now a few weeks gone I dispatched a letter to another chief of Grant, Ludovic of the Speyside. You know him?"

“Aye, sir! I do. He has been a good friend to our family.”

“But he is a Hanoverian, and you march with us.”

“True, Your Highness. Yet when my father’s estates were forfeited, it was through him we got them back. He is a Hanoverian but also a Highlander, and blood is more thick than water.”

Peter Dhu spoke up. “I’ve heard it said, and it please Your Grace, that Ludovic has a secret will to your cause.”

“What do you think of that Finlay?”

Finlay shook his head. “His great desire is for peace and order among the clans, so he is fearful of this venture.”

“Could he be beguiled into our company, think you?”

Finlay smiled. “He is a lawyer by profession, very cool of head however kind of heart.”

“I see that I shall have to fare without him. Yet,” and a smile like sunshine flickered over the Prince’s face, “here are two thousand fighting men swinging over the hills to meet and scatter the enemies of my father, the King. One thing I notice, they do not march; they flow along like a torrent.”

Peter spoke up. “But few of us have been drilled like the redcoats, Your Highness. Yet we’re brisk enough with a broadsword or dirk.”

“And what of that tremendous affair called a Lochaber axe?”

“Sir! Not so tremendous as what some have made of a scythe set straight on a hazel pole. A good account of themselves they will give with it too, though we have had peace in the Highlands for many a year and not much practice.”

The Prince was silent for a moment, then, “It humbles me,” he said simply. “When I knew the French troops would fail me, I asked Providence for one thing, for a handful of men, young, loyal, willing to die for a cause. A weapon fashioned to my hand, keen and joyful. You see how God has granted me my prayer.” Then with a swift change of mood he quirked an eyebrow at Finlay. “Lochiel calls you Finlay Ban.”

“Aye, sir! Because of my hair.”

“It occurs to me, Finlay Ban, that you and I might be doubles, except for your eyes, which are darker, and your hair, which is lighter. But our height, our habit of body, even our way of walking are, I think, much alike.”

"Sir, you flatter me immeasurably." Then he smiled. "There is another man for whom I have been taken who is yet more like your Highness."

"Where does he live?"

"In Edinburgh."

"Good. I must see him. His name?"

"Roderick MacKenzie."

They tramped on for a while in silence.

"I marvel at Your Highness's strength and endurance," observed Finlay presently. "You walk like a hill man."

"It's true. I am strong," acquiesced the Prince. "My recreation for many years has been hunting on the high plains of Tuscany. I have simple tastes. In fact, I have been chided for my lack of interest in the pleasurable vices of my class. In the courts of Europe I've seen overmuch corruption. Here, among you, I am at home."

"God bless Your Highness." Peter spoke with feeling. "And keep you ever safe among us."

"That," grinned the other cheerfully, "lies with you. Did you know that my cousin of Hanover has put a price of thirty thousand pounds on my head?"

They were silent for a moment. Peter fished in his sporran for his snuff mull, slipped the lid and handed it to the Prince. "Will you honour me?" Then, "Your Highness is in no danger whatever. You know that?"

Charles nodded. "I trust you all implicitly. It was my intention, when my council insisted on reprisal, to place a price of just thirty pounds on my cousin George's head."

Finlay's laughter broke out. "Did you do it?"

"No," admitted the Prince sadly. "I was overruled. They made it an even thirty thousand." He paused, then smiled warmly at them both. "Now I think I'll march awhile with the men of Glengarry. Just ahead, are they not?"

"Aye. Lochgarry leads them."

"Good." He stepped out of rank and looked at the men swinging towards him and flowing by. "My lads!" he cried in his clear ringing voice, then paused, searching in his mind. He smiled triumphantly. "One thing I ask of you—*gres-ort*."

They raised a cheer and he broke away and ran on ahead.

“*Gres-ort.*” They repeated the Gaelic words, laughing. “Hurry! He is the one to be telling us that. It’s *gres-ort* we must to keep up with his long legs.”

Peter Dhu took out his snuffbox and looked at it. It was a neat spiral horn, silver lidded, with a tiny spoon attached by a chain. He thrust it back into his sporran. “Now forever more it is Tearlach’s sneesh box, and for no lesser loon will I open it. Not even for myself. Finlay Ban, will you lend me a sneeshin out of yours?”

They were now at the top of the pass. Around them lay mountains, peak on peak to the edge of the horizon. Cataracts fell from dark crags, and in the folds of the hills little lochs were set like silver medallions. The wind blew thin through the stunted shrubbery. It was a high lonely world into which they had come. At the sound of their trampling feet and the skirl of the pipes, the red deer scattered up the corries and birds were flushed from the thickets and went rocketing away across the heather.

Suddenly the ranks were called to a halt. A party had been sent on ahead to reconnoitre and were now returned. They had news. Cope was not charging up the far slopes of Corrieyairack to meet them. He had turned tail and made off for Inverness, his army lumbering along behind.

“*Mallach ort!*” exclaimed the Highlanders. “The bodachs have escaped us.”

The enemy had not only escaped them, they had left the road to Edinburgh clear. On the realization of that, the spirits of the Prince’s army rose to wild gaiety. In front of all ranks Tearlach stood and toasted Cope in a beaker of raw Highland whisky, and gave orders that all should be given the means to do the same.

So they drank and raised a cheer and tossed up their bonnets and then came louping down over Corrieyairack by way of the seventeen traverses, cut so laboriously across the face of the mountain by General Wade fourteen years before.

“Cope was maybe wise,” muttered Peter, peering over a wall of rock. “What could we not have done to the redcoats here?”

In three days the Prince’s forces were at Dalnacardoch. The pace had not lessened. Once the word passed along the line that a heel had come off

Tearlach's boot and the news raised a laugh and a cheer. "Maybe now he'll slack a wee."

Not so. A day later they were at Blair. Then it was Dunkeld, and then Perth. Perth, the ancient capital of the country, Charles entered in triumph, dressed in tartan trimmed with gold, and magnificently mounted. It was not like to be suspected that he had but a single guinea in his pocket, his resources being by now all but spent for the sustenance of the army.

Here at Perth his finances were restored. From the city and from the country round about, money poured in. Not only money, but men. The Struan Robertsons joined him here, the Stuarts from the uplands of Perthshire, and the men of Athol. The Duke of Perth came in with two hundred men, and Lord George Murray, brother to the aged Marquis of Tullibardine. Both of these were made lieutenant generals in the Prince's army. Here, in fact, the army was organized. The chiefs were confirmed in their position by being made officers, but the gentlemen of the clans, for the most part, marched with their men.

On Sunday the Prince attended divine service in St. John's Church, and the next day early in the morning with a small retinue he set out to view the ancient House of Scone where a long line of his kingly ancestors had been crowned on that sacred slab of stone, since lifted by the Sassenach. Later the same day his army, once more in funds, well organized and increased in numbers, left Perth behind. Cope, it was now known, had embarked at Inverness and was on his way south by sea. So time was short for what they had to do, which was simply to take possession of the capital city, Edinburgh itself.

In the early morning of the seventeenth of September, Lochiel, Keppoch and Ardshiel—that is, a Cameron, a MacDonell and a Stuart—with picked men from each of the other clans and with a barrel of gunpowder, stood before the Netherbow Port of the city. They were spared the use of the gunpowder. The gate opened to let out a hackney coach, and the Highlanders rushed it. The whole party, nine hundred strong, poured in and at once the decorous morning calm of the old city was shattered. A spate of wild clan cries filled the air, and rose to the Castle towering on the hill above. The City of Edinburgh—with no blood spilled—was taken.

Soon Prince Charles Edward was established in residence at the Palace of Holyrood. Half of Scotland, including the capital, was at his feet. Less than a month ago his standard had been raised in lonely Glenfinnan. "The

King shall enjoy his own again,” his men had sung, marching over Corrieairack. It looked as if their cheerful boast would yet be made good.

Meanwhile Cope was moving towards Dunbar. Then came the word that he had landed. Immediately the Prince put his troops in readiness. Their numbers had increased. The clans MacLachlan and MacGregor had come in, and at daybreak on the twentieth, Patric Bui, Laird of Glenmoriston, arrived with three hundred and fifty more men. They had hurried across Corrieairack, marched all night and were now travel-stained and weary, but by no means downhearted. They came into the Prince’s encampment at King’s Park with their pipes playing. Finlay and Alex and a score of others pricked up their ears at the sound, and came running to greet their friends and kinsmen.

Patric flung an arm around each of his brothers and Finlay felt the roughness of his stubbled cheek against his own. “My fine lads! Glad I am to see you, and not a nick or a scratch on you, for all you’ve taken Edinburgh Town. Caroline? Och, she’s fine, but missing her man. As is Elspeth.”

“You travelled hard,” observed Alex.

“Aye. We’re weary and glad of this bite and sup.”

The new arrivals stood about, spooning porridge from wooden bowls or devouring beef collops hastily roasted for them over the open fires. A dark burly fellow, feet wide, head back, tilted a flask to his mouth, then wiped his lips with the back of a hairy hand. His eyes met Finlay’s and they both grinned.

“How went the gathering?” asked Alex.

“Fine, fine! One day the minister read a letter from the Prince after the Sunday service at Kilmore. That spirited up the men in Glen Urquhart.” He paused and rubbed his chin. “Tell me, lads, have I time to shave myself? No, I’ll look more fearsome to the Sassenach with my whiskers burly. Well, when they stopped by at Glenmoriston we were ready and waiting. Down we all came over the mountains, at top speed, knowing the redcoats were racing us by sea. Loath we were to have you engage them and the rest of us not there.”

“You’re barely in time,” Finlay told him. “I see Hughie the piper with the bag under his arm, puffing his cheeks and limbering himself.”

“An inch is as good as an ell,” observed Patric coolly. “Aye, now—there goes The Gathering.”

For the younger men in the Highland army the encounter with Cope to which they were now marching was their first battle. MacDonald of Keppoch explained this to the Prince at the council meeting in Duddington.

“Many a long year of peace we’ve had.” His soft brown eyes looked earnestly into Charles’s face. “There was the rising in favour of your father. That was thirty years ago. And then the wee tulzie in Glen Shiel a few years after. Since that there’s not been even a clan bickering of any size at all. A puckle of cattle have been run from time to time, but that’s only a diversion for the young lads. No, we’ve been o’er peaceable of late.”

“Do you mean,” asked the Prince gravely, “that you doubt the behaviour of your men when they meet Cope?”

The brown eyes were not so soft now. “The behaviour of the children of my clan! Doubt it? Never, Your Highness. Nor of the other clans. You’ve not seen a Highland charge. By God, you will before you’re much older. Cold steel, that’s our weapon. These pop-guns, even the mother of rifles they call a cannon, what are they when a fight is fierce? It’s the broadsword and the dirk and the strong arm behind them, and no fear in the heart at all.”

Charles laughed on a sudden high note of excitement, and pushed back his chair. “I will lead them myself. Sword in hand! I swear it. I demand the right.”

“Whisht now!” said Lochiel gently. “The men would be so troubled for you and so anxious that they could scarce put their hearts into the fight or properly enjoy it.”

“A ruinous thought, Your Highness,” observed Lord George. “Leave such dangerous ploys to those who are most willing to undertake them for you, as we all are.”

Charles sat down reluctantly, and bit his lip. “Then let us make haste. Already Cope has the advantage of us.”

They made haste. They proceeded to Tranent, marching across the fields and avoiding the coastal road. There they bivouacked for the night. Cope had drawn up his forces near the sea, facing to the west. But seeing the Highlanders to the south of them he wheeled about and took up a new position confronting them. Between the two forces lay a bog. Near the edge of it, and along the front of their line, Cope’s men had built fires. It was September and though the days were mild the nights were chill to a southerner.

The Highland army lay down to rest in a field of peas, new harvested. They were well fed and in high cheer, the Prince having bought a number of bullocks from the butcher in Tranent for their supper. A stook of peas made a good enough pillow, or broken apart and strewn thick, it did for a couch. Charles declined the offer of a bed in town and lay on the ground with his men.

It was a still cold night, but a pregnant one. In the fertile brain of an East Lothian lad was born an idea. He took it to an officer who sent him on to Lord George Murray. Lord George, alert to its possibilities, reached out an arm and wakened the Prince. They sat up in their beds of pease straw and conferred. The plan looked good. Lochiel and some others were aroused and joined the parley. There was a road, said young Anderson the country boy, a poor road, a mere track through the morass, but it led across the mill ditch towards the high ground at the east of Cope's army. Good or bad, it was a road. They would take it. Charles was for it and the chiefs agreed.

The whispered word passed along the ranks. The men roused and readied themselves, and by four o'clock in the morning they were on the move, three abreast and silent. It was dark and cold and the mist swirled about their bare knees. They came to the bog. Cautiously they picked their footing along the scarce discernible path. They slid and recovered and slid again, but they ploughed on doggedly. There was no sound but the squelch and suck of the mud about their feet or the startled cry of a marsh hen that went chittering and fluttering off through the reeds.

Once Jamie clutched at Finlay's shoulder and was up to his waist in mud and water. But Finlay's arm went round him and his feet found the path and he was up and on again. They reached the foss that led from the mill, and leaped or floundered across, and then came out on solid ground. Immediately they formed—MacDonells on the right, Camerons on the left, and the rest between, all in solid clan phalanxes. Cope meanwhile, like a tired fighter pivoting to face a swift-moving foe, wheeled his army round once more and was back in his first position, facing now to the east.

Day broke. The dark waters of the firth gleamed bright and cold and the mist began to roll up in great billows across the field. The men readied themselves in silence. They raised no cheer, no pipes skirled. Each of them looked to his arms, then pulled off his bonnet, raised his face to the grey skies and said a prayer. It took perhaps three minutes.

Then they charged. There was yet no sound except the steady swish of their feet through the stubble. Then there began a muttering among

themselves, a guttural Gaelic rumbling. It was as if they fed their fury and their fierceness. The enemy were in full sight now, a heavy hedge of steel protected on either flank by dragoons. They came into range. The clansmen wasted but one volley on them, then flung away their muskets. Out flashed their swords and dirks and they leaped for their prey. Colonel Gardiner's Dragoons pushed into their way, but the Camerons slashed at the noses of the horses with their broadswords, scattered and confounded them. The Fourteenth stood before the MacDonells and lasted less than a minute.

Finlay's sword rose and fell. He laughed and sprang at a dragoon and pulled him from his horse. A shot tore through the cloth of his jacket and grazed his shoulder, but there was no pain. "*Craigellachie*," he shouted and was answered from a dozen quarters. "*An fhithich!*" shrilled the MacDonells. The air was full of Gaelic yells, short, sharp and savage, also of the neighing of horses, the bubbling screams of the wounded, and the steady swing and whistle and slicing thud of the broadswords. Dead men and men who were dying lay among the stooks and stubble of the harvest field. They were not all Hanoverians.

Young Captain MacGregor fell with five bullets in him. He raised himself on his hands, and laughed, and shouted to his men, "Look you, my lads, I'm not dead. By God I'll see if any of you does not do his duty." Then he died. And his wild clansmen clashed their broadswords and their scythes and avenged him.

The battle lasted approximately five minutes.

The Hanoverian infantry had been entirely cut down. The Dragoons were more fortunate, being mobile. Indeed, they fled in such panic and with such furious haste that some of them got as far as Peebles. Cope himself took refuge in Berwick. Nearly two thousand prisoners, foot soldiers and cavalry, fell into the hands of Lord George Murray and the Duke of Perth that day.

Charles remained on the field of battle. It was not a pleasant sight. Many were the hacked bodies and the bloody limbs that lay about. In places the very ground was red and soggy. There was a need for surgeons, more even than those the Prince had with him. So he sent to Edinburgh for all that could be found.

Nor did the clansmen lag behind in mercy for their erstwhile foes. Four MacDonalds of Keppoch ran all the way to Port Seton for liquor to ease them. Shaggy big Highlanders bent over the red-coated lads they had all but slashed to pieces and patted them comfortingly, or held their own flasks to

their lips. Finlay came on his brother Alex supporting a young officer and pressing hard with his palm against a breast wound.

“Whisht now,” Alex was saying. “Never fear. You’ll be looked to.”

“Here’s Doctor Cameron,” Finlay told him. The doctor knelt, examined the wound, looked into the lad’s face and smiled.

“Easy now, my young cockerel. A firm pad and a tight bandage, and with luck you’ll be as good as new. But you should thank the man who stanchd the wound. Let someone stretch a plaid between two poles.”

Then stepping carefully over the slain bodies came a tall fair lad. It was Roderick MacKenzie. Finlay looked at him with a smile in his friendly dark eyes. “His Highness once told me that I bore him a likeness. How much more do you!”

“So they say.” Roderick flushed with pleasure. Then, “Have you had news from Glenmoriston?”

“Yesterday only. My brother tells me they are all well.”

Roderick sighed. “I had thought that by now Mairi and I would have been wed. I have a group of rooms in a pleasant close, and I’ve been plenishing them. However, today’s victory makes me hope it will not be long. Do you know where her father is?”

“Beyond the Athol men. Aye, there by the MacDonells.” He found him sitting on a pile of baggage, chin on palm and elbow on knee, whistling softly through his teeth.

Seeing Finlay, he made place for him. “The men have been looking after the wounded. Burying the bodies too, and finding a bit spulzie, I have no doubt. What matter to a dead man if he lose a jacket or a fine pair of shoes? Tell me now, Finlay Ban, how was your first battle? I saw you slashing away like Iain a’ Chragain in the Pass of Killiecrankie.”

“I can scarce say. I felt out of myself.” He frowned, remembering that savage ecstasy.

“Aye!” nodded the Laird. “It is as if one were in liquor or in love. Three ways a man can be drunk—liquor, love or war. In each case, there comes after a great emptiness of body, a slackness and a need for sleep.”

“What think you of the Prince?”

Patric’s grey eyes gleamed with satisfaction. “A braw lad. Never was one like him. He can gnaw a dry crust, sleep on a puckle of pease straw, take

his dinner in four minutes and win a battle in five. King of the Highlands he now is. King of Scotland he well may be.”

“And King of England?” pursued Finlay.

“That is as may happen. What, after all, do those bodachs matter?”

The Prince and his officers lodged that night in Pinkie House, not far from the battlefield. In the late afternoon Charles retired alone to his chamber and began a letter to his father.

SIR:

Since my last from Perth, it has pleased Almighty God to prosper Your Majesty's arms, under my command, with a success that has surprised my wishes. . . .

It had indeed pleased Almighty God to prosper the cause. Never was the favour of God and man more apparent than on the following day, which was Sunday, when the Prince led his victorious Highlanders back into Edinburgh. They marched in a long unending line with bright banners fluttering and a hundred pipers playing in tune. In the van rode the Prince with the officers of his staff. Then came the clans, stepping jubilantly behind their chieftains, and then the long line of prisoners. To the rear lumbered the carts carrying the wounded, friend and foe treated alike and all treated kindly. While at the tail of the column rattled the baggage train and the cannon.

The city received them with wild acclaim, and would have made a public fête of the occasion but Charles forbade it, reminding the citizens that the defeated, though misguided, were still the subjects of his father, the King.

Nevertheless, court was held in the romantic old Palace of Holyrood, in conditions of great beauty and splendour. And Charles became now the centre of an ecstatic sort of homage that had about it a tinge of the incorporeal and dreamlike. When he stood among the dark plaided chieftains in his court dress of pale blue velvet, the star of the Order of the Garter bright on his breast, his hair powdered white above his proud smiling young face, there was about him a fey and unearthly charm that shook the heart.

Nevertheless, the affairs of state pressed in on him. There was dissension in his council. Charles was eager to advance at once into England. The clansmen, flushed with victory, would sweep all before them. Indeed, it was essential that they be given a chance to do so. The greatest asset the cause

had was the invincibility of the Highland charge; that, and their capacity for unbelievable marches.

But Lord George Murray counselled caution. “This time is given us for preparation, to raise more men, to drill those we have and to make plans for our later advance.”

“Aye,” rejoined Charles, “while the Duke of Cumberland hastens back to England with yet more German mercenaries.”

But Lord George outweighed him with his slow, cold wisdom, the fruit of years of foreign soldiering. Efforts were made to gather in the hesitant clans. The Earl of Airlie brought his men, and four hundred Gordons came in with Lord Pitsligo. While up in Castle Beauly near Inverness Lord Lovat decided that at last he could risk an open break with the government. So he took his pen joyfully in hand and wrote to Prince Charlie:

I send my son, the hope of my family, and the darling of my life, a youth of nineteen, a graduate Master of Arts, who was about to go abroad to finish his studies, I send him to adventure the last drop of his blood in my glorious Prince’s service, and with him two handsome battalions.

MacShimi sat for a while, gnawing his knuckles thoughtfully, then he pulled another sheet of paper towards him and wrote to his friend, the Lord President Forbes of Culloden.

I cannot help it. [His mobile old face quivered with emotion.] I must submit to the will of God. My son only laughs at me when I make remonstrance, or flies in my face like a wildcat. I could not have done more than I have done, by rough ways or smooth, to detain him at home.

He sat for a while deep in thought while over his crafty and turbulent old countenance moved fleeting expressions of satisfaction, cunning and caution, and then one of pure and honest pleasure. The lines smoothed out, the duplicity disappeared, the conflict was resolved.

“My heart and it joyful!” he muttered in Gaelic. “He’s a braw lad, and victory sits well on his shoulder.” He thumped on the floor with his stick. “Bring me a bumper,” he cried when the gillie came running. “It’s up with the white rose and my hand on the dirk for Prince Charlie.”

For five weeks the Prince and his Highlanders cooled their impatient heels in Edinburgh. If their forces increased at one point, they diminished at another. For instance, Patric, Laird of Glenmoriston, sought out the Prince one day and said simply, “Your Highness, some of my men are off for home in the morning.”

Charles looked at him in dismay. Glenmoriston spoke as one who had unquestioned authority over his men. As in truth he had.

He went on. “Were we to march at once for London, my men would have stayed. But to saunter through the days in idleness and drinking is not fitting while their young wives and their old fathers strain their strength to prepare the homesteads for the winter. You see, my lord, I am the father of my clan and the care of them all lies close to my heart.” He sighed deeply and his honest grey eyes rested on the Prince in affection. “Anygates,” he went on, “they’re yours again at a nod to me. Give the word and a swift runner will take to the road and the clan will come louping over the mountains.”

“You’ll not send them all back?” asked Charles wistfully.

“All? By no means. The best armed, the best trained, the young and the hardy will remain. There’s Big Hector now. Fifty, and his feet hurt. He’ll go back. But Murdoch, his son, no. The gentlemen of the clan, naturally, will bide with you, as will I. But these lads armed only with scythes; the English would laugh at them maybe.”

“The lads with scythes,” repeated Charles. “Laugh at them? Not after Prestonpans, Glenmoriston. Not after Prestonpans.”

There it rested. The weeks passed. Others beside the Prince chafed at the delay. Finlay thought of Torbeg. As well might he be there now, setting the place in order for the winter. As well might he be with Caroline. He burned with longing and impatience. Then, suddenly, the waiting was over. The decision was taken. They marched for England. The blue bonnets were over the border.

The Prince’s hopes rose and the spirits of the men also. As before, Charles left the horse and coach provided for him, to some elderly officers and marched with the clans. As they marched, they sang. They sang the familiar “The King shall enjoy his own again,” and that new song composed since Prestonpans.

Hey, Johnnie Cope, are you waukin’ yet,
And are your drums a-beatin’ yet?

The soft leather brogans padded along on the smooth English roads with stone dykes on either side and snug, startled English homesteads.

Hey, Johnnie Cope, get up and rin,
The Highland bagpipes make a din;
'Twere better to sleep in a hale skin,
For 'twill be a bluidy mornin'.

Meanwhile, towns streamed by like beads on a string. Carlisle, Penrith, Kendall and Lancaster—they loomed up before and fell behind. Then Manchester, Macclesfield, Leek and finally, on the fifth of December, Derby. Derby!

They were now within a hundred and twenty-seven miles of their objective. Four days' marching, and they would reach London. Never since the time of William of Normandy, called the Conqueror, had a hostile army pierced so far into England. The Prince's troops were jubilant. True, the Duke of Cumberland and his mercenaries lay now to the west of them at Stone, but could they not out-march those lazy loons? In Derby they honed their broadswords and new-edged their dirks, while they made jokes among themselves and laughed at the curious fears of the townspeople.

Said Alex of Livishie, testing the edge of his sword with a cautious finger, "You remember the farmhouse on the lift of the hill before we came into the city? I sent Murdoch over to buy provisions. Tell them about it."

"Aye," said Murdoch in his slow, soft Gaelic. "The man of the house was away. There was a woman there, plump and bonnie but daft. When she saw me she fell on her knees, weeping and kissing my hand till I was fair affronted. I made motions of champing my jaws, like this . . . to tell her it was provender I wanted, and she screamed outright then, and huddled in a heap on the floor. So I danced a spring to show her how I was harmless and merry, now and then letting out a heuch to inspirit the poor wench. But there she lay, keening and cowering, and looking that tarn miserable I had half a mind to dirk her."

Livishie laughed grimly. "I went in, hearing the noise. Even speaking better English than Murdoch's, it was all I could do to convince her we were not for killing and eating her. Indeed, she offered herself if I spared the two bairns who were hiding in the closet. I left, feeling like Murdoch."

A gust of laughter went around the circle. The thought of Alex, so quiet and civilized a man, dining on a plump young English woman convulsed them.

“Now, if it had been a wild-looking carl like me,” considered Peter Dhu, “she’d have been fair frantic.”

Finlay laughed. “I saw a lad duck into a house—all he wanted was a bite of sup or drink—and his officer called after him to the edification of the townsfolks, ‘Come out of there, you vile wretch, or I’ll fill you with shot,’ then went on in Gaelic, ‘If you see anything worth while bring it along.’”

Again a roar of laughter struck the group. Then someone raised a song. “Johnnie Cope,” it was, and never had they sung it with more glee and abandon.

Far different was it in the meeting of the lords and chieftains, called that day. Charles waited eagerly for them in the rooms set apart as council-chamber. Like his men, he was in high and buoyant spirits. London was before him. Cumberland no longer blocked his way. As a matter of fact, there was in his path only a miserable mob of militia-men, milling about at Finchley and Highgate. The goal of his life seemed now in sight. This was a great and auspicious morning.

The members of his council filed in, and with their entrance the very air chilled. Charles’s smile faded and he looked about uneasily. Lord George Murray was the first to speak. He spoke at some length and to the point. Where were the English Jacobites? What could forty-five hundred men do in London, with enemy troops converging on them from all sides? The Scottish Jacobites had now done all that could be expected of them. Their strength and their spirits were exhausted.

At that, a burst of high Gaelic laughter drifted in from the street, and on the Prince’s face a smile gleamed and died.

“In short,” concluded Lord George, “I advise an immediate retreat, and the members of this Council are of like mind to me.”

Prince Charles’s stricken eyes moved from one to the other—Perth, Elcho, Keppoch, Lochiel whom he loved. They were silent. Sad, but silent.

Then he pulled himself together. “Gentlemen,” he told them crisply, “you dwell on the weakness of our position, and ignore our strength. Our strength lies in the spirit of our men. It does not lie in caution.” He leaned forward, his voice deep with the most earnest feeling. “I repeat. This, my lords and chieftains, is not the kind of enterprise that can be carried through with caution. It takes daring. It takes the sharp thrust at the heart of the nation. It takes above all the will to win. You say the English have not joined in any numbers. Raise our standard in London and then see if they will not

come. You say our men are tired and dispirited. That, gentlemen, is not true. Hark to them. I know the clansmen. You see, I have marched with them. I have not ridden with the officers. If I had, I might have been prepared for the present moment."

"Your Highness, bear with us," put in Lochiel gently. "As chieftains, it is laid on us to think first of the children of our clan. Few of them, I fear, would ever return from London town."

Charles met his gaze levelly. "You will remember that I have thirty thousand pounds on my head. There is a scaffold in Whitehall, and I am a Stuart. Gentlemen, I entreat you to listen. I believe that I have a sure instinct in this matter. March now on London and as God is above me, I know that we shall take it."

He sought their eyes, one by one. They were full of pain, of pity, of affection, but they were not won over. The members of the Council rose and filed out of the room, and he was left alone.

The retreat began. The men no longer sang. The Prince no longer walked with them. No longer did he rise early while the white moon yet hung in the December sky, and take his place in the ranks. Finlay got a glimpse of him once as he rode past the marching columns, and his face was white and set, like a drowned man's, like a man in complete despair.

So they marched out of England, and the names of the places they passed through were like beads on a string again, but in reverse order. Presently they were back at Carlisle, and near to Scottish ground. Here the spirits of both the Prince and his followers suddenly rose. At the border they found the Esk swollen with rain. They bundled their clothes on their backs and crossed it so thick-ranked that one could have walked over on the sea of heads. Then they danced themselves dry on the shore, naked and with all the pipes playing.

The Prince moved among the men, laughing and friendly as of old. He stopped by Finlay who sat on the ground buckling his shoes. Finlay leaped to his feet, but Charles waved him down and they sat on a convenient boulder together.

"It's been a long way since Corrieyairack."

"It has indeed, Your Highness."

The Prince's eyes roved over the clansmen busy pulling their shirts over their heads, folding their ragged kilts about their hips, and hunching themselves into their jackets. Many of them no longer had brogans to their

feet, nor even hose. Their hair hung wet and shaggy and their faces were rough with beard.

Charles sighed. "We'll have to freshen ourselves when we reach Glasgow." Then without looking at Finlay he added softly, "You have a wife, I hear."

"Aye, and a small daughter."

"You're fortunate. Any man is, with a loving and faithful wife, especially in times of discouragement." He added then, even more quietly, "When this is over, get you home to them and make your peace and build yourself a life and be happy."

Finlay turned slowly and faced him. "Your Highness," he breathed. "Please God we will first bring you a victory and set you on the road to the throne."

"Finlay," came the quiet fated voice, "you will know that something happened in Derby. What is done is done, and we will fight on and save what we can. It's the men I think of now—my Highlanders! To the last day God gives me they'll be in my heart. From every misfortune would I shield them. Yet I cannot."

"My Lord," Finlay said pitifully, "the retreat is marvellously well managed."

"Aye, so it is. Lord George is a specialist in retreats. But when did a retreat lead to victory?" He stirred restlessly. "And yet never have there been troops such as these. Look now at that shaggy fellow. He belongs with you, does he not?"

It was Hughie, the piper. His face was all but covered with a rich dark-red growth of beard, his hair more grey than red fell in elf locks over his shoulders, his kilt was muddy and his jacket had in it a great rent caught up with a thorn. But he was far above all that. He held his chanter delicately to his pursed lips and a sweet, gentle, fairylike tune came warbling and twittering from the pipe and floated away on the chill air. His face, what one could see of it, was full of quiet absorption and delight.

Finlay laughed softly. "He's our clan piper."

"Is he indeed?" smiled the Prince, then his voice quickened and warmed with welcome. "Here come two friends of ours."

It was Roderick MacKenzie, and with him John MacDonell.

“Come share our boulder, lads,” called the Prince. “Now here we are, the three men who look alike, and one other. Tell me how you three came to know each other; you, Finlay, from that far northern glen, Roderick from Edinburgh and John late of France.”

MacDonell spoke first. “As you know, last year I carried messages to the chiefs in the Highlands. Finlay gave me sanctuary on one occasion in an attic room.” The two exchanged a smile.

“And Roderick brought me a packet one day, and a letter,” explained Finlay.

Roderick sighed and offered simply, “Then I came again to Torbeg to see Mairi Ban Grant who lives there.”

“So!” cried the Prince with interest. “What is she like?”

“She is the fairest maid in Scotland barring none.”

“You take that, Finlay?”

“She’s very bonnie,” admitted Finlay kindly.

Roderick went on as if, his tongue once loosed, he could not refrain. “When this is over we plan to be wed. She has my ring and I have her promise. Tell me, Finlay, why does that dark fellow in your company hold away from me?”

“Peter Dhu. Had you not been so bemused, you’d have seen why. He too had his eye on Mairi.”

“I thought that was it,” sighed Roderick.

“Come, come,” cried the Prince. “Not so doleful a lover if you please. Have you a flask, Roderick?”

“Aye. And we have our coggies.”

He poured, and they waited on the Prince.

“No,” demurred Charles. “Finlay here has a fair and faithful wife. Name her, Finlay.”

So there in the wintry sunshine among the milling soldiery Finlay raised the pewter coggie. “Caroline!” he said proudly, his voice lingering over the smooth flowing syllables.

“Now you, Roderick.”

“To Mairi Ban, the white rose of the Highlands!”

When they looked at John MacDonell, “My love is the Cause,” he said.

Again they lifted their coggies and waited. The Prince smiled wistfully. “To Black Eyes,” he said and when their faces turned to him in quick curiosity he laughed at them and confided, “She is the daughter of the King of France. That is as near as I have come to the tender passion.”

They were now back in Scotland. After all it was good to be there. The very climate seemed right for them. The sting of the cold rain, the brisk wind that swept down the snowy hillsides had a feel of home.

The wind and the rain were their allies a few weeks later at the battle of Falkirk where once again the Highland army swept the Hanoverians into headlong flight. In February there was a further movement of the Prince’s army to the north urged on by the cautious, competent, but ever-retreating Lord George Murray. Again a string of towns met them and were left behind —Crieff, Blair, Dalnacardoch, Dalwhinnie, Ruthven and Moy. While behind them Cumberland was making his slow lumbering inexorable advance along the coastal road.

The Prince took possession of the royal burgh of Inverness and a few days later of the fort, which he promptly demolished. A large portion of his forces he dispersed throughout the country. Lochiel and Keppoch were sent down the Great Glen to attack Fort Augustus and Fort William. Another group, among them some Glengarry and Glenmoriston men, waged war in the north against the Whiggish troops there and returned to Inverness only at the end of March. At that time Cluny MacPherson and his men were at home in Badenoch with a view to provisioning themselves in their own country. As were some hundreds of others of the clans.

The fact of the matter was that now the Prince’s army was ill supplied with food and money. The supply boats from France had not been able to evade the English warships that cruised so relentlessly along the shore, and the farmlands roundabout were now stripped of all produce.

Then said Patric Bui, but newly returned to a hungry camp, “Why should there be flat bellies amongst us when the hills at home are black with cattle? Give us a week and we’ll bring back a drove of fat stirks that will sustain and hearten the lot of you.”

The plan found favour and a company of the men of Glenmoriston made their way back to their native glen. They came along the high hill road, across Glen Urquhart and around the skirts of Mealfuarvonie, and their

hearts were warm for the welcome that awaited them. They were weary after the long campaign, and were it possible, they would most willingly have stayed with their wives and weans. But it was not to be so. They were to hold themselves in readiness, and should word come, they were not to wait for the cattle but hasten with all speed back to the army.

When Finlay reached Torbeg it was in the middle of the night. As he came over the lift of the brae he paused. The place was bathed in moonlight. The lime-washed walls of the house were like ivory, and the window spaces and the shadows were black as jet. The wind stirred the pine branches in a lullaby that was familiar and most dear. There came a scurrying through the heather and a small black dog flung itself on him, whining and licking his hands. Finlay rumbled the silky dark ears and whispered "Quiet now," and the dog fell in at his heels.

The door was not barred. Was ever a door barred in the honest Highlands? The hall was dark with a dim pattern of moonlight on the stone floor. Finlay padded up the stair in his soft brogans and into the chamber that faced the west. A shaft of moonlight slanted in from the window and lay across the bed. Caroline's face lay full in the path of it. Her black curls were loose on the pillow. An arm was upflung. She moved and her hand went out to the trundle bed on the far side and closed over the edge of it.

Finlay tiptoed round to see. Here was his daughter. The trundle bed lay in shadow and the small face showed only as a lightish blur. But he could see one tiny arm flung up in a gesture like her mother's. Finlay's heart turned over in tenderness. He moved softly lest the clink of sword belt or sporran clasp or the buckles of his brogans should wake them.

Och, the good clean feel of sheets to a man who had slept in the heather! Caroline turned sleepily towards him. Then her eyes flew open and with a wild cry she lifted herself. His arms went hard about her and her scream was smothered against his chest.

For the next few days happiness lay over the glen, warm as the spring sunshine. It was a delicate and finely poised happiness because at any time the message might come that would call the men away. Meanwhile there was feasting and merriment. Many a tale was told of the journey into England and the strange customs of that southern land. But most of all they talked of the Prince. They recalled his hardiness, his friendliness, his merry laughter and his kind heart and that quality in him that in spite of his easy familiarity set him apart. They told how he came into Holyrood in splendour, with the Star of St. Andrew on his breast, how he marched with

the men by day and slept in the heather with them at night. The hearts of those who listened were stirred and quickened as at an old heroic tale.

Never had Torbeg looked so fair to Finlay. His heart clave to the very stones and turf of it. By the wall the buds on the honeysuckle were thickening. Green shoots were showing in the garden. Finlay picked up a handful of the soil and crumbled it, and it felt good in his hands. The sun was warm on the short grass by the terrace. The wee girl Alsoon, wearing her new frock of plaiding made from the first fleece of her own lamb, played there with a yellow kitten. Alsoon's hair was a cluster of pale-gold curls and her eyes were gentian-blue like her mother's. She was round and firm and friendly in one's arms. Finlay could not get over the wonder of her.

He sat down beside her and Caroline knelt by the two. She took Alsoon's hands in hers and raised her, and the baby took three proud steps and flung herself laughing into Finlay's arms. She was quiet then, examining the cairngorm in the silver brooch on his shoulder. Where the sunlight struck it, a deep amber light glowed in it, like fire.

Finlay looked over the child's head and smiled soberly at Caroline. "I've been desperately lonely for you," he said, "nevertheless, I've never lost you. I've never lost you out of my mind. Has it been that way with you?"

She nodded, began to speak then stopped.

For Finlay was not listening. His eyes were on the road that led down the glen. Over the lip of the brae came a horseman, riding furiously. Finlay rose, held his daughter close for a moment, kissed his wife, and went indoors to gather his gear.

Once more the glen was quiet, empty of laughter and young men's voices. It waited. But there was a difference now in the quality of the waiting. In the months past, those who were left held in their minds the thought of a long campaign with now and then a battle. Now they knew their men were going directly into conflict.

Caroline took small Alsoon and walked out towards the byres. Dandelions bloomed along the way and she bent to let Alsoon pick them. Surely no flower was so gold-dusted, so sunshine-yellow, so bright with happiness. Sighed Caroline, "And I so full of care."

Cattle milled about in the stable yard. Their coats were rough and shaggy. It would do them good to get up to the fresh green pastures on the mountain sides. The byre door opened and Kirsty appeared, her big blue apron caught up and full of eggs.

She made her way to them. "The hens are laying fine, so they are, with the new warmth in the sun. And look who's taking all the glory for it. Shoo, ye great gomerl!"

On the top of the midden pile stood the cock, brown-speckled, glossy, red of comb and wattles. He clapped his wings, curved his shining gorget and trumpeted loud and long. Alsoon leaped in Caroline's arms and crowed too, a funny bubbling sound to which she herself began to listen, a bright startled look on her little face.

"Bless the bairn," cried Kirsty, "and her so joyful."

They came around to the south side of the house, and there sat Lauchie on a wooden bench, the dog Bran pressed against his knees. Lauchie turned bleakly to them. "*Is trom an uallach an aois,*" he quoted.

"Hear the man," scoffed Kirsty. "So old age is a sore burden. Wait till the burden is on your back before you complain. Here, let me put the eggs in that bucket. Now give me the bairn and we'll away, the two of us, to see the new yellow chookies that chipped their shells the morn."

Caroline sat down beside Lauchie, and leaned her head against the cool hard stone of the wall of the house, and was silent.

Said Lauchie, looking away over the river, "I spoke to himself about going today. I reckon he thought me too old. Hector though, sore feet and all, stepped off with the rest."

"It's not that you're old, Lauchie. It's that he wants an able-bodied man about Torbeg. And we have need of you, have we not! Look at me, ready to weep. Look at Mysie at the churning with her eyes red and her tears dropping into the buttermilk."

Lauchie smiled a little.

"It's not only us," went on Caroline. "It's Mairi and her mother alone in their biggin, and many another like them, and who's to help and advise them but you?"

Suddenly Bran lifted his head and stiffened, then leaped away, barking furiously. Hard on that, came the sound of the thudding of hooves. Caroline and Lauchie rose hastily and hurried to the front of the house.

It was Roderick MacKenzie. He pulled his horse to a halt, slipped from the saddle and stood leaning against it, as though exhausted. In a moment Lauchie had a firm arm around him, while Caroline held the hall door wide. Roderick sat down on the nearest chair, breathed loud for a moment, then looked soberly up at them.

"I bear bad news," he said. "Our forces have been routed at Culloden, and the Prince is in flight."

"He is safe?"

"Aye, but in sore straits. There is some talk of rallying the clans. In regard to that I bear a message for Glenmoriston."

"You've not been at the Laird's then?"

"Not yet. I came by the other way."

"Can you tell me," Caroline looked anxiously down at him, "if the men who left here yesterday were in time for the battle?"

"No, they were not. At the last Cumberland came on us sooner than we expected. Part of Clan Fraser was also away. Keppoch and his MacDonalds got there only in the nick of time."

Roderick leaned forward wearily, his hand limp between his knees. In a drained and colourless voice he went on. "Keppoch is dead. I saw him die. Also MacGillivray of Dunmaglas. The MacIntoshes were wiped out to a man, I think. Lochiel was wounded but he escaped." His voice trailed off.

Caroline went to the door of the kitchen. Morag had scones and cheese and a bowl of broth set out on a tray. This Caroline laid before young MacKenzie. He sat for a moment, the spoon halfway to his lips, looking down into the bowl. "You see," he said, "our men were hungry. Yesterday we had, each of us, only a small hunk of bannock made from oat husks and sweepings from the miller's floor. But"—a peculiarly sweet and tired smile played over his face—"before battle we took communion. For the bread and wine the minister used whisky and bits of bannock. For many it was a last meal." Again that unearthly sweet smile. "A last supper."

He dipped his spoon into the broth and spoke no more till he had finished. "The weather was bad too, snow and sleet and the wind in our faces."

He broke a bannock, laid on the fresh yellow butter and smiled. Then in that drained and level voice, "Cumberland's army moved in on us at once. We had scarce five thousand men, so many were absent. The ground was not proper for a Highland charge, being flat and boggy and also crossed by stone dykes. But when the Prince rode out before the men, they gave him a cheer. Starving as they were and without hope, they looked on him with love, tossed up their bonnets and cheered."

Again he paused and again after a time, roused himself. "The men waited a long time for the order to charge. The guns began to shatter them. Round shot and grape. They stood and took it, dropping down and dying, their flesh torn, the blood welling out on the heather, the snow and the sleet blinding them."

"Why did they not charge?" cried Lauchie hoarsely.

"The bearer of the message was killed, I think. Finally they broke away, orders or no, leaping into the gunfire. By this time the enemy had us on the sides too. Well, they massacred us—that was the way of it."

He paused and his head suddenly fell forward on his breast.

"We'll put him in the west chamber," said Caroline. "That wound on his head, should it be tended?"

"A scratch only. It can wait."

Roderick was asleep as soon as his body found the bed. For a moment Caroline stood looking down at him. He resembled the Prince, so Finlay said. A weary prince then, she thought, and young. In sleep he seemed but a tired lad.

But he woke in an hour, ready for the road. He was not willing to wait even to have his wound bound nor for the meal prepared for him. A swallow of Athol brose was all he took time for.

Caroline looked up at him as he sat astride his sorrel mare. "You'll be stopping to see Mairi?" she questioned softly.

He smiled. "I shall indeed, though but for a moment."

At Torbeg they began immediately to prepare for the return of the men. They would be coming back low in spirits. So Lauchie and the women prepared a meal that would stay and fortify them. A yearling stirk was sacrificed. A roaring fire was built up and soon the joints of meat were sputtering and crackling before it.

All the while Caroline had a strange breathless feeling of change and dread. Morag and Kirsty went about with sober and thoughtful faces, but Mysie was openly jubilant. That Jamie had missed the battle was all that mattered. Perhaps now it would be over, all this foolishness and fighting.

"It's a sore defeat, remember," observed Kirsty sombrely.

"It's Jamie home again," cried Mysie in triumph, giving the broth pot such a mighty stir that drops flew wide and spattered into the fire.

In due time the men arrived—Hector and Murdoch and Jamie. But not Finlay Ban.

"Where is he?" cried Caroline, her eyes big with fear.

"Whisht now!" said Hector comfortingly. "He was delayed."

"Aye, he went on to the battlefield, himself and Peter Dhu. To reconnoitre and look for his brother Alex."

"Alex?"

"Aye. He was, as you know, with the MacDonells."

Murdoch took up the tale. "At Caiplich we met the men who were returning from Culloden. Alex was not with them. Corrimony said he had been wounded, so Finlay Ban and Peter went to search for him."

"We were to wait there," resumed Hector, "till the time appointed, and if they did not return we were to come on home. That we did. There was nothing else to do."

They took their places at the table and ate hungrily but absentmindedly. They were quiet and grave, like men who had gathered for a wake.

Caroline herself was heavy of heart. She strained to remember what she could of the lonely moor at Culloden where the battle had been and where Finlay had now gone, walking deliberately into danger. Yet, were Finlay lying wounded, Alex would surely seek him out. She sighed and went towards the door as if by looking she could draw him back to her and to safety.

At that the door was pushed in, and there he stood, and Peter Dhu beside him. She ran to him on a sobbing cry of welcome.

He kissed her gravely, and he and Peter laid by their bonnets and plaids and took the chairs pushed eagerly towards them.

“We found Alex,” Finlay told them at once. “He is now at home at Livishie with his wife.”

“Was he hurted bad?”

“A flesh wound in one leg and a knock on the head that stunned him. It also saved his life because they thought him dead.”

There was a quick chorus of glad cries suddenly stilled.

“I’m glad I have that much of good to tell you,” Finlay went on soberly. “The rest is bad. There was a defeat, as you know, but what I saw was not just a defeat. Near to Culloden there is along the road a swath of dead men where Cumberland’s Dragoons harried the fleeing clansmen—the Glen Urquhart men, the Glengarry men, the Frasers and the Chisholms. It was a hard sight.”

He paused and took the drink someone handed him. “We came by a roundabout way, so it was night by the time we reached the battlefield. There were fires built and soldiers on guard. We were not able to do much till daylight, but we crept close and hid in a thicket where, come morn, we could see the place plain. The field was covered with the bodies of the dead and the wounded. In the moonlight they looked like a flock of sheep, Cumberland’s soldiers having stripped them. At break of day the guards marched off and we were for a short time unmolested. We found Keppoch’s butchered body, and Dunmaglas by the well and the water of it bloody. MacLachlan, and Fraser of Inverallachie too, all stiff and dead. But not Alex. Then a body of redcoats came marching onto the field and we went back into our covert.”

“We lay in the thicket for a while and then we began to consider. If Alex had by God’s mercy escaped, which way would he have gone? Peter thought that a man would follow where a burn had cut a deep path in the heather. So

by stealth we made our way along that burn and came out on a roadway with a stone dyke beside it. An old woman was sitting there near a little fire of faggots. She had a girdle stone, and also a coggie of meal and some water from the burn, and she was baking bannocks. She looked up at us and offered us some, which we ate and were glad of.

“‘Mother,’ we said, ‘could you not find a safer spot for your baking?’

“‘Safer? Aye, but not so useful. Many a poor lad I fed yestere’en, who had time but to snatch a bannock and run. Today there may be more, though I think not. They’re fled or dead or about to be butchered.’

“We told her whom we were seeking, and she said, ‘Is he a tall man with black eyes and gentle of manner?’ We said he was. Well, the fact of the matter was that she had Alex hid on the far side of the stone dyke, well covered with bracken and under some thorn bushes.”

“God bless her,” came huskily from Lauchie.

“We would have taken her with us, her life being every moment in danger. But no, there she stayed, baking her bannocks. Alex’s leg hurt him but otherwise he was not in ill shape. We got him across the moor to Culcabock House. There they would have had us stay, but that would not have been safe for either them or us. We were glad however of the loan of three horses. So, taking to the fields till we were well on the way, we came on home.”

“You were in luck,” Hector broke silence. “All of you.”

“Aye,” assented Peter grimly. “Had you seen that field of battle you would say so.”

The little group exchanged uneasy glances, then looked towards Finlay. “Is it that we gather again and make a stand?” asked Hector.

“On Sunday there will be a meeting at Invermoriston.”

“The Prince?” asked Murdoch softly.

“God keep him,” said Finlay.

The meeting was duly held at Invermoriston in the inn which stood on a little rise near the mouth of the glen. When Finlay approached it, he saw a row of sturdy fellows in kilts of Fraser tartan, sitting on the low stone wall that edged the innkeeper’s garden. So he was not surprised to find Lord Lovat within, in a great chair before the peat fire, wrapped in a plaid and

with one swollen and thick-bandaged foot resting on a stool before him. By the door stood Patric the Laird, to greet each man as he entered.

Alex of Livishie came in just after Finlay. He limped and his face was still pale from loss of blood. Patric gave him an affectionate clap on the shoulder and Lovat reached out a hand to him.

“My dear lad,” came his warm friendly old voice. “Snatched from the jaws of death you were. My heart rejoices.”

A smile flickered over Alex’s face. “Not more than my own. I am also full of gratitude. I owe my life to Finlay and Peter and to a certain old woman.”

“To your clan and your kind. It is the basic bond,” said Lovat softly. “That I’ve always held.”

“Aye,” agreed Peter of Craskie. He sat firm in his chair, his black hair pushed back and his dark eyes alert and wary. There was about him a fierce and watchful look, like a mountain cat bested in one encounter but ready now for the next.

Beside him was Aeneas Grant of Duldreggan, he who had elected to bide by his beeves and his barley rigs rather than join the rising. He was a kind-looking man with a shock of hair gone white early and black bushy brows over eyes that were blue and innocent like a bairn’s.

The innkeeper filled the pewter flagons and withdrew, shutting the heavy door behind him. Spring sunshine slanted in from the deep-silled windows but the air within was cool and damp. Lovat hitched himself a little closer to the fire.

Said Patric the Laird, “You will know why you were called together. You will all have heard the bitter news of the defeat at Culloden and that the clans are scattered and the Prince fled to the Western Isles. Aye, so he is. Tearlach has now gone from us, and may God keep him safe for evermore.”

A murmur and a sighing went round the company. The Laird resumed. “You will know too that in Cumberland we have an implacable and cruel enemy. Word has just come to me that after the battle nineteen Highland officers, sore wounded, were taken to the courtyard of Culloden House, left there all night in the open, then ranged along the park wall and shot to death at close range.”

Again a long sighing sound filled the room. Patric continued. “We must now consider what we are to do. It has been suggested that the clans gather

again, make a stand and display such strength that they can bargain with Cumberland for terms—the men of Glenmoriston and Glen Urquhart to join with the Frasers and the Chisholms and proceed together to the appointed place. Lord Lovat will bear me out in this.”

The chief of the Frasers inclined his head. “You have made it clear, Glenmoriston, my friend. We bind ourselves firmly together, lest the enemy eat us piecemeal.”

Patric looked thoughtful. “It will be hard enough to hold the clans together now. Culloden took the heart out of them. Nor have we Tearlach here to hearten us.”

Then Aeneas Grant of Duldreggan spoke up. “Listen to me now. I have a message from Ludovic of Castle Grant to the effect that the men of Urquhart and Glenmoriston should lay down their arms at Balmacaan and come in under the protection of the government.”

There was again a silence. Then Patric the Laird scraped back his chair, laid his hands on his thighs and turned his full frowning gaze on Duldreggan.

The latter resumed hastily. “You will understand, Glenmoriston, that Grant of Grant wrote to me because I alone of you all was not out for the Prince. Now I beg that you will listen well to this proposal. If we take a stand, we face forces that have already proven too strong. But this way we come in at once to the protection of a great chief.”

“A great chief, yes!” Peter Dhu’s black brows met. “But how heavy does he weigh with Cumberland? What does Cumberland care for chief or clan? Donald Chisholm came over the braes last night and we talked. There’s a devil’s brew in Inverness, the torturing and shaming of prisoners and the most hellish cruelties to them.”

Patric frowned. “Cumberland is a German. We have not had to deal with Germans before. Now the English do not understand us, but they are not over cruel. Were we to make honest surrender to a man like Cope, we could count on as much generosity as with a Scot, maybe more. But with Cumberland it may well be different.”

“All the more reason for protection then,” cried Duldreggan.

Peter Dhu rose and laid his hands flat on the table. “We have two plans before us. I reject the both of them. The first will not work. The other I will have no part in. Never will I lay down my arms to that bloated bag of corruption called Cumberland. I’ll take to the hills. I’ll live on the deer and

the roe and the fowls of the air. I'll bed in the heather. But I'll not bow the knee. This plan of Ludovic's has a smell of treachery."

Duldreggan's brows met. "As I said, I have a written word."

"That may be. They mean well, both Forbes and Ludovic. They would take the middle of the road, keep Hanover in power and yet protect the clans. But in time of violence does anyone listen to men of moderation? What think you, Alex, you who were at Culloden?"

Alex shrugged. "Would I put my head in the lion's mouth?"

Then Patric turned to Finlay who had not yet spoken.

Finlay drew his breath in sharply. "For me, it hangs on this. Has the Prince further need of us?"

Patric shook his head. "Word has come from him that we should now seek our own safety."

For a moment Finlay was still, listening in his mind to a young tired voice heard some months ago since on the banks of the Esk, "When this is past, get you home and make a life for yourself and be happy." Aloud he said, "The rising then is over. Ludovic offers us protection, and I would take it. I'd not trust Cumberland but Ludovic is one of us. A friend before, why should he not yet be a friend?"

"Well put, Finlay Ban," approved the Laird and Duldreggan nodded his white head.

But Lovat smote the arm of his chair with his fist. "The deil take the lot of you! I say let us join forces, make a show of strength, and then bargain for terms."

Finlay looked measuringly at him. "My lord, that is good strategy if it can be carried through. Will you, along with the rest of us, put your name to a written promise that we stand together and make no separate agreement of any sort?"

The eyes of all turned on Lovat. His heavy brow was creased deep, and he gnawed a knuckle thoughtfully for a while. Then he looked at them coldly.

"I'll not do it," he said. "I've put my name to too many documents and letters and such like. How do I know that the others would honour their written word?"

A groan escaped Patric. "Then the plan fails before our eyes. All that remains is to surrender or to take to the hills. Do you trust no man, my lord?"

"I trust the loyalty of my clan. And to that I now commit myself. I will throw this old body on the protection of my men, which is, in my opinion, the only protection now valid in the Highlands."

He struck the floor with his stick. "Call my bearers," he told the innkeeper, then to the others, "I leave you now to your further deliberations. I will away with the children of my clan."

Outside the door he was lifted to the litter. He disposed himself, then laid a hand on the curly dark head of one of his men.

"This lad here, I was at his christening. Through cold and snow I rode to be there. They called him Simon, so they did, after me, and I gave him a guinea. Is that not right, my son?"

Young Simon turned on him a look of pure devotion. "All my life I have treasured the name and the guinea, my Lord Chief."

A tear filled the crease in Lovat's sagging cheek. "There you have it, Patric. That is what I hold to, the love of my clan. And that, it comes to me, is where the rest of you should place your trust. The high hills and the love of your men. Och well, a benison on you all. It sticks in my mind that we may not meet again."

The bearers lifted the litter to their shoulders and swung off up the glen.

When Finlay got back to Torbeg and told Caroline that he intended to go to Balmacaan to lay down his arms under promise of protection, she was at first pleased, then puzzled, then perturbed. "What do the others think of the plan?" she asked. "What does Peter?"

"Peter will have none of it. Nor will Alex. The Laird was in doubt, but his final thought was for going. There are dangers, I know, but in it there's a future for us and for Torbeg."

"Rather I'd have you safe."

"I am not safe now, nor any of us. But with the signed and sealed protection of the government we should be."

During the days that followed he was sometimes not so sure. Indeed his mind veered this way and that and he was distressed by his own uncertainty. The night before he was to leave he was long in getting to sleep, and then he was plunged into vague troubled dreams that escaped him when he tried to recall them. He lay still in the dark listening to Caroline's quiet breathing, and the thought came to him that should anything sever him from her and from the little lass and from Torbeg, how could he bear it? At that a great wave of foreboding went over him, so that he felt the very bones of his body weak with dread and his heart like a stone in his breast. A sob broke from him, and in an instant Caroline was awake and was pressed close, hands and lips comforting him.

"My dear, my dear," she soothed, and he turned and took comfort from her love. Presently he whispered "I'm not knowing, Caroline. I'm not knowing what to do."

She kissed him softly and thought how hard it was to be a man and have sore decisions to make. She said, "Let us ask God for His guidance, and perhaps He will show us the way."

Next morning the men gathered at Torbeg before they left. Their women came with them, Mairi and her mother among the rest, and they all put up a show of laughter and good cheer. Yet there was at the same time a nervous quickness in their voices and a thread of fear in the laughter. Finlay, however, was himself again. He was cheerful and steady, and though his

voice deepened and faltered when he spoke to his wife, yet the look in his dark eyes was hardy and sustaining. But before he left, Kirsty sought him out, shutting the door behind her and coming close to him.

“Last night I had a sore dream.” Her voice was low and flowing. “In it a black cloud covered Torbeg. The warning I pass on to you. What is at the heart of it I’m not knowing, but it might be that you should not go.”

“Nor am I knowing, Kirsty,” he told her gravely. “Not for sure. Though my best thought and prayers I’ve given it. I’ve had no clear leading that I should go, neither have I felt a strong restraining hand. So I must follow my own deciding.”

“No man can do else,” she assented soberly. “So may God go with you, Finlay Ban.”

The smile on her old face was grave and sweet. Finlay laid an arm gently over her shoulders. “Kirsty, *mo cridhe*,” he said, “guard well my two lassies.”

“I will that,” she told him stoutly. “With my life I will.”

So, in the fine spring weather the men marched away. As they went down the glen they were met by others from neighbouring homesteads, like tributaries joining a stream, till sixty-four from the Glen of Moriston made their way to Balmacaan. With them they carried their arms, their fire-locks, their swords, their pistols, their Lochaber axes and their dirks.

Torbeg was quiet again. Indeed, the strange brooding quiet that lay over it was almost tangible. Mairi sat with Caroline on the garden seat, and neither spoke. Caroline was aware in every nerve of the men marching away to Balmacaan to surrender. She followed them in her mind. Not till they were home again with their papers of protection would she be at rest. Her hands were tight-clasped in her lap and her face was pale. Beside her sat Mairi, tranquil and lovely. Happiness lay on her like a patina. Her face was flushed, her blue eyes were soft with it. Never had she been more beautiful.

Caroline felt a stir of impatience. Hector and Murdoch were among those on this chancy mission, even if Roderick was not. Then she relented. “You see Roderick sometimes?” she asked.

“Och yes,” breathed Mairi. “From time to time he comes. I never know when. Then he’s away again. But soon this time of danger will be over, and no longer will he have to skulk in the hills. Then we’ll be wed. His parents are now willing.” She smiled softly, looking down at her hands folded so serenely in her lap.

“We have a visitor,” cried Caroline suddenly.

But it was only Peter Dhu from Craskie. His face changed when he saw Mairi, but he recovered his composure at once. Matter-of-factly he slipped to the ground and flung the bridle rein over the post. He had the same big bay horse that had come charging up the slope at the shieling grounds one summer day, was it only a year and a half ago?

“They’ve gone then,” he remarked, and sat down on the stone wall before them.

“An hour ago.”

“I had thought,” observed Peter, “of going to Balmacaan myself. No, not to surrender, but to skulk in the rear, to see and not be seen.” He smiled grimly. “Also I go armed. Broadsword, pistol and dirk.”

“Is that wise?”

He shrugged. “If I’m caught, I can say I was about to deliver them up. On the other hand, in case of treachery they may help rescue a friend.”

Her hand went to her mouth and he smiled reassuringly at her, his dark face full of kindness. “Never fear, Bantighearna! If Finlay has the right of it, you have no cause for fear; you will have protection. And I pray God he is right. I’ll keep my eye on him from afar, and also,” he turned briefly to Mairi, “on Big Hector and Murdoch.”

Later that day from a thicket of scrub oak and fir Peter watched the proceedings at Balmacaan. Balmacaan was an estate in the mouth of Glen Urquhart that was under the control of Ludovic Grant of the Speyside. The house stood on an eminence and behind it the hills rose, tier on tier, thick-forested. To one side there was a spacious lawn with a curious round hillock in the centre of it, while to the rear was a dense growth of small timber. There Peter lay in a nest of last year’s bracken.

The lawn before him was encircled by a solid line of soldiery, their rifles and bayonets flashing bright in the sunshine. On the far side there was a gap where the road led up the slope towards the house. Along this road came now the clansmen. He could see them between the rows of trees that edged the way on either side. At the mouth of the enclosure they paused and milled about uncertainly.

Then from among the soldiery on the lawn Ludovic Grant stepped out. He looked like a leader of men, cool, efficient and forceful; and at the same

time as if his patience had worn thin.

“Men of Urquhart and Glenmoriston, I am glad to see that you have come to your senses. You will remember that I warned you repeatedly against the late rebellion, urging you to stay by your homes and resist the efforts of others to embroil you. You would not be so advised. So now you will give up your arms in token of surrender to the Duke of Cumberland. If you do not, your lands will be taken, your buildings burned and yourselves shot on sight. If you do throw yourselves on the mercy of the government, you will have letters of protection and may safely return to your homes.”

There was a pause—a long tense moment of waiting. Then came the sound of feet on the turf and the Highlanders walked through the gap. First was Finlay, his fair head held high.

“I take you at your word, sir,” he said to Ludovic in a firm easy voice. He paused by the mound in the centre of the lawn, slipped his sword from his belt and laid it on the smooth grassy slope, and beside it a brace of pistols. The others followed, Hector, Murdoch and the rest, in all sixty-eight men from Glenmoriston and sixteen from Glen Urquhart, and with them the Reverend John Grant.

The minister spoke to Ludovic as to an equal. “Sir, I have come to be with my people as they do this thing. I have no arms to give up.”

Ludovic looked coolly at him. “Yet it is true, is it not, that you screened and sheltered the fugitives after Culloden and kept their bits of money for them? You too will go to Inverness to ask pardon from the Duke.”

Inverness! At the word there was a stir among the disarmed men as though a wind of fear had been let loose among them. “Inverness!” they echoed sharply and a few of them made a quick move towards the mound of arms. At that an order was barked out and a ring of steel enclosed them.

Prisoners! That’s what they were. Herded to the far side of the grounds with the guard tightening and thickening around them. A hoarse wail, a yell of protest rose from them. “What means this? We have your word.”

“You have my word that at Inverness you will get your papers of protection.” Ludovic turned his back on them. Immediately a cart rumbled up and the arms were loaded noisily and hastily into it. While the Highlanders looked on, their faces dark with anger and fear, and that ring of steel enclosing them.

Ludovic gave another quick order. The prisoners were marshalled into ranks, a column was formed and they were hurried off down the hill on their

way to Inverness.

Peter lay for a long time pondering. Should he go back, or should he go on to Inverness? What would now happen to the men who were taken? And where was Glenmoriston himself on this fateful day? He must be told of the new turn of events, and that at once.

He recovered his horse where he had left him, half a mile away tethered to a tree, and made his way with speed to Glenmoriston House.

He found Patric the Laird in his bed, ill of a griping and feverous ailment that had lasted for three days and in that time had whittled the flesh off him. When he heard Peter's news, he rose, glowering, and flung his kilt about him, then staggered back and had to be helped to his bed.

"Dhia! Dhia!" he kept saying. "The poor lads! I should have known." Then, "You'll do this for me, Peter Dhu. Go to Duldreggan and tell him what has happened, then hasten to Caroline, poor lass. Bid her come here with her bairn. By then I'll be fit to travel. The sooner we get to Inverness the better."

Caroline received the news with horror and despair, then immediately set out with Lauchie and Alsoon for Invermoriston.

When they arrived they found the Laird's house in a state of dismay and confusion. Isobel took them to Patric. He was still fevered and hollow-eyed and not able to stand on his feet for more than a few minutes.

"I've had word," he told Caroline directly. "It's true, what Peter feared. The men are held in the stone kirk. They have not been released. I had thought to go to Inverness myself, but Alex is taking my place. What of you, Caroline?"

Caroline turned to Isobel. "Will you keep my bairn?"

"I will, and care well for her."

"Duldreggan will go too. As well he may," muttered the Laird grimly, then wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Lie down now." Isobel put her arm around his shoulder and eased him back on the couch. "Rest yourself, till Alex comes."

"How strange to see the Laird ill," said Caroline as she climbed the stair with Isobel.

Isobel stopped and looked at her for a moment, then tears poured down over her face. She leaned against the wall as if life were too much for her.

"It was I," she confessed brokenly. "I was afraid to see him give himself up. I couldn't bear it, I felt so great a dread. Och well, I just put a piece of toadstool in his broth, that was all. A goodish piece. He's so strong a small sickness would not have held him. But I doubt I nearly killed him. I've told no one, but I think his mother knows."

Upstairs the Dowager Lady sat by the trundle bed where Alsoon lay. The child was not sleeping but just lying there quiet and thoughtful, as if she felt the strain and sorrow about her and was bent on being no trouble. The grandmother rose and kissed Caroline gravely.

"It's the same wee bed where her father used to sleep," she remarked. "God help us all."

Alex came then, and Elspeth with him, her baby in her arms. She and the child were to go to Inverness also and to stay at Culcabock with her parents. She was set on that. If Alex was going into danger, and he with his wound barely healed, she would be near him.

From his couch Patric made plans for them. "Duldreggan will be a safeguard to you. You'll go by boat down the loch and under cover of night, then across country to Culcabock. Avoid main roads, and above all, you Alex, have a care to yourself."

At dusk Duldreggan arrived, ready for the journey. He was greatly shaken by the news that had come, and anxious and apologetic because his plan had turned out so strangely and so ill. Yet he was confident that once he saw Ludovic, the error would be quickly set right. It had to be.

"Some of these men," he cried sharply, "were not even out for Charlie. They just wanted to clear their position and get protection in case of trouble. *Dhia!* My heart's fair broke over the anxiety they are now in. So let us haste."

The night air was sweet about them as they made their way down the path to the boat and took their places. Alex and Elspeth sat side by side with small Duncan in his father's arms. Caroline was alone in the prow and Duldreggan in the stern. The two oarsmen took their places and the boat pushed out over the loch.

There was no moon, but a fine speckle of stars. The shore was dark behind them and then was lost to sight. Around them there was nothing but the high spangled heavens, the lake black like jet, and the liquid sound of the water slipping off the edge of the oars. Caroline was glad to be sitting alone. This was all unreal and impossible, and for a while she let the unreality of it

lull her. It was not possible that she should be here in this small boat on this vasty sea, or so it seemed by night, with her husband imprisoned and in danger. At the thought, her anxiety came back in full force, and she had all she could do to hold herself still and not beat with her hands on the gunwales and cry out.

The nights are short in May, so there was a faint blush in the eastern sky by the time they left the boat. They made haste and reached Culcabock while it was yet early in the morning and few were abroad in the countryside.

There, Ferchar Robertson and his wife received them with warmth and affection. The kindness of their welcome cheered Caroline a little and took away some of the chill and foreboding that lay heavy on her heart. Ferchar himself was sore crippled with rheumatism. Yet that had been fortunate in a way too. He had not been able to be out for Charlie, and so had escaped trouble and his house had been unmolested.

Bad news awaited them however. The men of Glenmoriston were close confined in the kirk and no one might get into them, that is, if he wished to get out again. It was a strange and direful situation. Indeed the times were most strange and dangerous. "Guard well your words, when you are without these walls," Mistress Robertson told them. "Guard even your countenance."

"Aye," agreed her husband, feeling for his cane and rising painfully. "These are chancy days. If ever there was a devil, Cumberland is one. Let us go in now to our meal and as we eat we can consider the situation."

From his place at the head of the table he turned to Alex. "Each day I thank God for your escape from Culloden. The men who were taken have fared ill, especially the wounded. They have had no care at all."

"How are they provisioned?" asked Alex.

"Half a pound of meal a day, if they get it. The poor fellows had nothing to hold the meal when it was given them. Nothing but the fore tails of their shirts, such as had shirts. That amused the guards mightily, I am told. Some of the men were handcuffed so tight that the steel was lost to view in their swollen and festering flesh."

Mistress Robertson glanced at Caroline. "Whisht now, Ferchar!" She shook her head at her husband.

Alex's quiet face settled into bitter and angry lines. "What is the good of appealing to men of that sort? Would I had Peter here! He had the right of it. Trust those in high places? No. Trust our swords and dirks."

“Not so!” Duldreggan pushed back his chair in indignation. “I will now this very minute set out for Inverness. There has been a mistake. Nothing more. How could there be? I have the written word. Please God, before night I’ll bring you news to cheer your hearts.”

But he brought them back no cheer. The minister had been clapped into prison with the rest, and it was not possible to communicate with him. Pickets were set around Glenmoriston’s town house, which place they must now be careful to avoid. And it was only with difficulty that he had arranged for a meeting with Ludovic in the morning.

“I will go with you,” cried Caroline. “We must miss no chance.”

The next morning they knocked at the door of Ludovic’s lodging in Kirk Street. As they were ushered in, he rose hastily from a desk at the far end of the room, came forward and bent low over Caroline’s hand.

“I am honoured indeed, ma’am. Will you allow me?” And he pulled forward a high-backed leather chair. “You, too, my good Duldreggan, pray be seated.”

He spoke quickly, nervously, resuming his seat behind the desk. “I can well guess your errand, and I grieve deeply for you in your anxiety over your husband and friends. However, I am confident that the Duke of Cumberland will set them free, once they have craved his mercy.”

“Have they had a chance to do so?” asked Caroline directly.

Ludovic flushed. “All that I can do for them, I promise you I am doing. You must remember that I laboured long with these people. In their willfulness they refused to heed me. Now must I set all at rights for them at one stroke?”

Caroline rose and stood before him. “Sir,” she said clearly. “I think you need not feel injured or hard used. The truth is that you and your family stood for the Hanovers while my husband stood for the Stuarts and fought faithfully for them. Defeat came on Culloden Moor. Then under promise of protection and trusting to the honour of the one who promised, he and his friends laid down their arms at Balmacaan. And they were sent to prison. Does that not look like treachery?”

Ludovic’s breath came heavily. “Madam, you speak boldly.”

Then Duldreggan moved in closer. “Sir!” he cried imploringly. “The matter of your promise!”

The man behind the oak table looked from one to the other. His lips were pressed tight and his face was flushed. He spoke in a changed voice, slow and heavy. "I had Cumberland's statement that if the rebels brought in their arms and submitted themselves, they would be set free. If not, the full rigour of the law was to be exerted against them. Was that not authority enough?"

Duldreggan nodded his white head, then pressed further. "Why then, was the word not honoured?"

Ludovic slapped his hand down on the table. For a moment speech failed him, then with quiet bitterness, "Why not, indeed?"

Caroline leaned towards him. "Sir," she said softly. "You knew Finlay. You were his friend. Will you not save him?"

"Save him? Save the minister? Save eighty of them? Would I not if I could?" His voice rose and broke. Then in a flash his face was steady and watchful, and his eyes were turned to the door.

It was pushed noisily in. The Duke of Cumberland, red-faced, thick-jowled, bluff and hearty, stamped into the room. Behind him was Captain Messiker.

"Ha, here you are!" The Duke waved a fat white hand. "And vot is this you have got? A pretty baggage, upon my word. Your light of love, *nein*?"

Caroline clenched her hands beneath her red cloak and tried to still her trembling, and found she could not.

"My Lord Duke," explained Ludovic frigidly, "this is Mistress Grant of Torbeg in Glenmoriston. Madam, Captain Messiker accompanies the Duke."

The Captain laughed delightedly. "But we have met before, have we not? Not once but several times. It was her husband of whom I told you, my Lord."

"So! Now you will doubtless pursue the advantage. Unless perhaps you'd defer to higher rank." He laughed deep from his paunch, and stood looking over Caroline as if she were a filly on the block.

Both Ludovic and Duldreggan moved closer to her. She was no longer trembling. Anger stiffened her, but her face was like snow.

"Sirs!" objected Duldreggan in a loud outraged voice.

Messiker swung round on him, but Ludovic interposed. "My Lord Duke, this is the one to whom you owe thanks for bringing in the Glenmoriston men."

“A traitor? Good. We can use traitors.”

Duldreggan’s face was suddenly grey. “Not a traitor,” he muttered brokenly. “A fool.”

Messiker turned to Caroline. He said softly, “You will be lonely with your hot-blooded young husband in prison.”

“Had you to do with sending him there?” she flung back.

“Had I! I told the Duke that he was a Jacobite, a rebel, a plotter and a dangerous man. What more could I do?”

Cumberland broke in. “Herr Captain, you may pursue your amours later. As for you,” he turned brusquely to Ludovic, “there is the matter of the lists. The prisoners are to be named and noted and a record made, both of those who surrendered and of those taken with arms.”

Ludovic spoke up quickly. “Then those who surrendered will be released. Is that not so?”

Laughter shook the great paunch. “It remains to be seen.” He stamped out noisily, Messiker following him, but pausing at the door to lift a hand in farewell, and to cast an amused and smiling glance in Caroline’s direction.

There was silence when they had gone. It was as if their images hung in the air, polluting it. Caroline drew a long sobbing breath and turned to Ludovic. “These are two most wicked men,” she said clearly and accusingly. “Devils, they are. Why are you embroiled with them?”

“We are on the same side,” he explained uneasily.

“So you are. You’d be in cleaner company, had you been out for Charlie.”

“God alone knows about that. What has Messiker against Finlay?”

Caroline shook her head helplessly. “He likes a victim. Come,” she said to Duldreggan, “let us go.”

Back at Culcabock, she went up to her room and lay face down on the bed and wept. Elspeth came and comforted her and smoothed back her black curls, and promised, “Alex will manage it, see if he doesn’t. He’s away now on a plan of his own. There’s not much he can’t do when he sets his mind to it.”

Caroline hardly heard her. Finlay. Finlay Ban. What was to become of him, of her dear love? On that anguished query her heart and mind hung

trembling.

“The fact of the matter is,” said Ferchar Robertson that night as they waited for Alex to return, “the fact is, we are a conquered people, and we must now use the methods of the conquered.”

“What methods?” muttered Duldreggan. He looked older by ten years than he had a day ago. His face sagged and his blue eyes fleered away uneasily when one spoke to him.

“Methods? Going the long way round to find out something instead of speering straight, and being at all times careful.”

Elsbeth came and stood by her father’s chair. “But where’s Alex? Why does he not come?”

“He’ll be along, lassie. He’s a cautious lad, but clever. Aye, even if he’s out the night, by morn he’ll be on the doorstep.”

The others turned to him in surprise, but he sat gazing into the fire, tapping his snuffbox and trying to hide his own uneasiness.

For Alex did not return that night, nor in the morning. But the following evening a man came to the rear door, knocked softly, and when they let him in, they saw he wore the Fraser tartan.

“Livishie said you had a hiding place,” he told them, his voice low and quick.

“Livishie? You know Alex?”

“Aye.”

“You’re wounded.”

“Aye. They dirked me.”

They bandaged his arm and fed him and he told them his story.

“We met last night in the stone biggin on the far side of the maltyard. A MacKay, a MacIntosh, myself a Fraser, and Alex of Livishie, a Grant. We had all known each other in the Prince’s army. Sore affronted we were to hear of the men being in prison.” He paused and took a long drink of broth. “My thanks to you, ma’am, for the food and drink.”

“So you made a plan,” suggested Robertson.

“Aye, we did. There’s a window in the church that can be reached from the ledge of the roof. We got a ladder. Well, I was on the ladder and Alex holding it, when they came on us. Someone struck at me, but I went on up

and over the ridge of the roof and fell into a thicket on the far side, and they lost me. The others they caught, I think.”

Elspeth turned and hid her face on her mother’s shoulder.

“There is a rumour.” Young Fraser paused thoughtfully. “The prisoners are soon to be taken to the boats, I hear.”

“The boats?” Caroline’s voice rose to a queer high pitch and broke. “Why so?”

Fraser shrugged. “It may be they want to try them in England. No Scots jury will condemn a Jacobite any more. Not after the cruelties. Blood’s thicker than water. Could you bed me safe, in case they trace me?”

“Come with me.” Robertson got heavily to his feet, took up his cane, and then a candle. He led the way to an upper chamber and to an inner closet in it, put his shoulder to a chest of drawers and when that was moved aside, there was an aperture in the wall and a ladder leading up.

The time came when the men were moved to the boats. Duldreggan got word of it, and Caroline and Elspeth and her father went with him to the quay on the chance that they might see Finlay and Alex.

A government sloop rode easy, close in to the pier. A crowd had gathered, a silent and angry crowd, but a helpless one. Everywhere were the red-coated soldiers, armed and alert. They looked hard, cheerful and unconcerned.

Suddenly there was a stir at the far edge of the throng. “They’re coming,” someone shouted, and the crowd surged forward.

They came. A column, two abreast, of half-starved desperate men. Men whose eyes were wild with question and surmise, with fear and fury. Old men and young. Trapped men, with a line of steel on either side of them, bayonets at the ready and pistols cocked.

They came closer. Caroline, plain to be seen in her scarlet cloak, pushed her way to the front. With her heart in her eyes she watched. She saw Murdoch, and by him the minister. And walking steadily beside Big Hector, who limped, there was Finlay!

His sleeve was torn and his bare arm bloody. But his head was high and all the time his eyes searched. Then he saw. He broke rank. But a bayonet flashed and held him. He lifted his arm, cupped his palm to his mouth, and called out to her, clear and strong, one word only—“Torquil!” Then from his

dark eyes a long desperate look of love and longing, and he stumbled by and was gone.

She ran. She tripped over the boot of a Hessian mercenary who looked down at her and laughed coarsely. She picked herself up and ran again, Duldreggan pushing along after her. But Finlay was out of sight. He had gone up over the plank and into the boat.

She stood and watched till all the prisoners had embarked. Sailors were busy with the rigging. Orders were shouted. Ropes were flung free. Then very slowly the boat began to move. Caroline felt the life blood drain from her heart at the sight. It was as if a web of love and longing between herself and Finlay was being stretched intolerably, was torn asunder. They were parted.

For a long time she stood, Duldreggan beside her. The sloop now stood well away from the dock, veered about and set a course. Caroline was oblivious to all else. A red-coated soldier came close and looked curiously at her. He was young and had a pink good-natured English face.

“Ma’am,” he said politely, “you had best move on.”

Incredibly he was kind. In the face of the monstrous cruelty all about her, he was kind. She looked dumbly at him.

Distress suddenly twisted his blunt features. He gestured briefly towards the boat. “You have someone?”

“My husband.” And because of the pity in his face, her eyes brimmed over.

“Gawd!” he muttered. “That’s hard luck, ma’am, and no mistake.” Then at the sound of a firm military step behind him, he slapped his hand to his rifle butt.

“Now then, move on there, can’t you?” he shouted harshly. But she was not deceived. He wished her well.

They went back to Elspeth and her father. “He never saw me,” Elspeth said, dry-eyed and despairing. “Alex never saw me. I saw him, but he was looking the wrong way.”

Not long after that Caroline left Culcabock. She travelled by night, she and Aeneas Grant of Duldreggan, on two stout roan geldings from the stable at Culcabock. They came by Wade's good road that hugged the shore of Loch Ness till it neared the falls at Foyers and then slanted inland. There was a moon, and for the first part of their journey the loch lay below them, shimmering and winking in the pale brightness as if there were no such thing as war or trouble. Then the road crossed the high moors and the wind swept over them, chill and sweet with spring, and it was as if they were on the roof of the world, going on forever with the moonlight casting black shadows before them, the gravel firm under the hooves, and the damp smell of night flowers coming up to meet them.

Duldreggan watched for and found a side road that led in towards the loch. He would have stopped for rest at the friendly house of Knockie, but Caroline was overtaken by so acute an eagerness to see and hold her child again, and to confide in her kinfolk, that she could brook no delay. So they left their horses in an empty paddock and made their way by a steep and winding path down to the pier.

As she took her place in the boat, she peered across the loch. "The house is dark," she said. "They're all asleep."

Duldreggan bent to his oars and said nothing. He was bowed down by the weight of the calamity that had befallen them because of him. For a while there was no sound but the creaking of the rowlocks and the dip of the blades. Then all of a sudden he lifted his head and sniffed. He twisted around and waited, his head held high to the land breeze that drifted towards them.

"What is it?" cried Caroline in sudden fear.

He shook his head and again took up the oars. She answered her own question. "It's smoke," she whispered.

The moon was bright on the water, but the shore-line was dark as they approached it. They were soon at the jetty. In silence they climbed the path that wound up between the cherry trees and came out on the level space before the house.

But, there was no house. Four blackened walls rose open to the sky, pierced by empty window sockets. The giral was burned too, and the byres. Only the dovecot stood firm.

“But the family—where are they?” cried Caroline agonizedly.

Duldreggan made no answer. Stumblingly, threateningly, he moved towards the ruined house, his shaggy head white in the moonlight and his long arms raised into the air. He shook his fists. “*Mallach ort, mallach ort!*” he shouted in a deep, savage, roaring voice, and the curse rang loud in the stillness.

He disappeared into the empty doorway and in a few minutes came out again. Caroline moved closer to see what was in his hand. It was the haft of a scythe. “Do you see what the *diabhols* did? They threw the implements into the fire, the spades and the plows and these. Curse their black hearts.” Then he caught Caroline’s arm. “There’s still heat in the ashes. Those who did this may not be far.”

“What shall we do?” she whispered.

“We’ll hasten on to Duldreggan.”

“But my child? The others?”

“My hope is you’ll find them there.”

They made their way along the darkling road that led up the glen. In places the trees pressed in so close that they could only feel out the path with their feet, while beside them the river roared noisily over the rocks. They came to the gateway to Livishie and a dog ran out barking, but Duldreggan spoke to him and he came whining to their heels. Once Caroline stumbled from weariness, but her companion took a firmer grip on her arm and they hurried on.

Dawn was breaking when they reached Duldreggan. The big stone house looked lonely and remote in the pale light, with the dark hills behind it and the flat river meadows in front. Birds woke in the bushes by the stream and spoke to one another on a liquid calling note. The light of the sun strengthened and warmed. Suddenly smoke puffed from the big chimney, and as they made their way up the rise of land and crossed the green, the door flew open and Isobel ran out to meet them.

“You’re safe then,” she cried. And to the question in Caroline’s eyes, “Your bairn is safe too and sleeping sound this minute.” She kissed Caroline

and held out a hand to Aeneas Grant of Duldreggan. “You’ll find us all here, quartered on you,” she told him frankly. “It was the only thing we could do.”

Duldreggan heaved a sigh. “Glad I am my house can shelter you, after the harm I’ve done, though all unwitting. We came past your place. Was it Cumberland?”

“His underlings.”

“From Inverness?”

“No.” Isobel paused delicately and looked away from Caroline. “The Sky men it was, under Hanoverian orders.”

Caroline gave a sharp cry. “Not MacLeods?”

“MacLeods and MacDonalds were among them. In this thing we’re like peas stirred with a stick—some on one side and some on the other. Come away in.”

“You haven’t asked . . .”

“You will tell us in good time.”

Within, the Dowager Lady stood waiting for them, a plaid thrown over her nightgown. When Caroline came towards her, “What of my sons?” she asked. “Alex and Finlay, what of them?”

“*Mo mathair.*” Caroline’s voice was quiet and sad. “I have come to tell you. Your sons are taken, both of them. They were in the stone church, then they were put on a boat, and they are now far out at sea.”

For a long time no word was spoken. A peat fell on the hearth and exploded in a soft flurry of smoke and ash, and the black spaniel whined and crept on his stomach towards the warmth of the fire. Then the Widow Glenmoriston opened her arms and Caroline walked into them and they stood for a while, not speaking nor crying, just holding each other.

At breakfast Caroline said of the burning of the Laird’s house, “My heart is sore and shamed that MacLeods had a hand in it.”

“Aye,” agreed her mother-in-law. “MacLeods and MacDonalds. Two nephews of my own were with the MacDonalds.”

“No! How were they there?”

“You’ll not be blaming the lads. Heartbroke they were at what they had to do. Did they not join the militia like many another in these glens when Charlie seemed like never to come? They were caught so.”

“Aye,” agreed Duldreggan. “There’s been many a sad scene like that. Young Scothouse, they say, was taken by his own father, who had joined Lord Loudon’s regiment long ago, and was constrained to obey orders, hard indeed as it must have been.”

Caroline’s eyes filled. “The poor lad! And also his father. Your nephews too,” she added turning to the Dowager Lady.

“Aye. The lads came to me in the early dawn. They told me the orders were for firing the house. They said, ‘Aunt, dear, tell us what you’d like us to be carrying out and where we should put it.’ So I showed them the small stone hut over the lip of the bank. They took out the oak aumry, a chair or two, some feather ticks, and a few boxes of clothes and plaiding—that was all. But for that I was grateful. Then it was full morn. The curtains were pulled from the windows and piled in a heap. Oil was poured on and the house was on fire. It was a heavy sight.”

“We watched from the edge of the garden.” After a pause she went on sombrely. “They went into the sheds and the byres and they took out scythes and carts and ploughs and fired them too. The flames and the black smoke rose high. The soldiers grew more and more excited. The violence of the burning worked on them. They tore my plaid from my shoulders, but my nephews brought it back. They took even the rings from Isobel’s fingers.”

Isobel shrugged. “The one was tight, you see. I’ve grown in flesh since my wedding day. A big ruffian tugged at it, then clipped out his dirk, and was for taking finger and all. The MacDonald lads saved me. But—” she held up her hand and smiled ruefully. “Patric was in the hills at the time, making ready some shieling huts for those who will need them. ’Tis ourselves who will.”

Caroline went back to Torbeg by night. She thought, “Am I now to travel always by night and furtively?”

The fact was, life itself had become strangely furtive. The men who had been in the rising lurked in the hills. Skulked was the word they used for it, overlaying the indignity with grim humour. All the time cattle were being rounded up by the Hanoverian soldiers and driven off to Fort Augustus. At Torbeg they had already lost a good share of the herd in spite of Lauchie’s best efforts to keep them hidden in the remote corries. During the day, Morag’s young son Ronald kept watch from the hillock behind the house for the first flash of red that meant the coming of Cumberland’s men, while the others in the household went about their tasks in an intent and hurried manner as if they might at any time be interrupted.

A few hours after Caroline's return, Peter of Craskie came riding in between the stone gateposts. She was inordinately glad to see him. They stood hand-clasped for a long moment, then "Bantighearna Dhu!" said Peter deeply, and in his voice was all his concern for her, and his friendship.

"You had no luck then," he remarked.

She shook her head. "Och, Peter, it's bad luck we had." She motioned him to a chair. He sat there dangling his bonnet between his knees, his dark eyes on her. He looked different somehow, released and reckless. In sudden anxiety she asked, "How is it with you, Peter?"

"Och, not so bad." He laughed easily. "It might be waur. However they've burned Craskie, byre and barn, and they've run off my cattle. There's nothing left, so like many another I've taken to the hills."

"How do you live?"

"As best I can. They got my cattle while I was away. Otherwise I'd have made a fight for them. How about yours?"

"We have some hid in a corrie."

"Good. A drove of two thousand came into Fort Augustus the other day." His face twisted ironically. "The Sassenach used to call us cattle lifters. Never has there been such a lifting of cattle as now." He sighed gustily. "Caroline, my kinswoman, there are some things you must know. I am now an outlaw. A party of us, all in like circumstances and all of us formerly of the Prince's army, live in the hills. We are not far from Torbeg and will take you especially under our protection. Yet in spite of all, trouble may come. Remember always the shieling huts on the side of the mountain. There you would be safe, I think, and yet nearer to us. How, by the way, is the little lass?"

Caroline called her, and Alsoon came and climbed up on Peter's knee and snuggled into the circle of his arm. He laid his chin on the top of her curly head and looked across at Caroline.

"I've been to see Mairi," he said softly. "She's with her mother in the steading. I urged them to go to the shielings. Two women alone! Do you know why she wouldn't?" Bitterness slid into the softness of his voice and sadness with it. "She wants to be where MacKenzie can find her. He too is lurking in the mountains."

Alsoon turned in his arms, reached up and kissed him, then continued to gaze gravely and questioningly into his face.

“She misses her father,” explained Caroline unsteadily. “She wonders. Peter,” she went on urgently, “Finlay spoke to me at the quay in Inverness. One word only he had time for. It was ‘Torquil’. Can you think why?”

Peter bent his dark brows and cogitated. After a moment he shook his head. “It defeats me.”

She nodded. “And me. Yet I think about it a great deal, and wonder. Och Peter” —her voice broke— “I’m very fearful.”

“Bantighearna,” he said gently, “do not despair. My friend Finlay, what can the like of the Sassenach do to daunt him?”

She smiled tearfully. “Well you know they can do much. Where is he now? That is what I think of day and night. Where is he at this moment?”

“On board ship, I’m thinking.”

“Still?”

“They keep the prisoners in the transports for quite a while, I hear. But they will come to trial in due time. Could we but get to him,” he added fiercely, “the seven of us who are in Corri-Dho, with our dirks and pistols, I swear we’d get him free! Meanwhile our chief care must be for you and for this small lass.”

Caroline smiled gratefully at him, and suddenly she saw that his kilt was ragged and dark with long wear. “You’ll take some things of Finlay’s,” she exclaimed, “you with your gear burned. I should have thought of it before. You will, Peter?”

“I will with pleasure, and thanks for the kind thought.”

She went out and came back with kilt and plaid and brogans and a woollen shirt as well. Peter took them and wrapped them all expertly in a fold of the plaid.

“Thanks once again,” he said and then looked at her consideringly. “I’d be easier in my mind were you all in the shielings. Gather your gear and store it in the stone shed at the foot of the garden. In two, three days I’ll be back to help you shift it.”

They set to work. Caroline could scarce bear the thought of deserting the place and leaving it unprotected, but the others overruled her. So she sorted her possessions, putting money and jewellery in a soft deerskin bag which she fastened within her clothing. In a stout oaken chest she laid Finlay’s kilts and plaids, his woollen jackets, his father’s sword, his pipes, the quaich the

minister had given him, and the silver goblets. She looked at the dirk laid between the leaves of the big Bible, took it out and put it back again. That would remain till the last moment.

Meanwhile the grain from the giral was poured into sacks; in the still room the cheeses and the jams and conserves and cordials were made ready to be moved; and the linen and blankets and clothing were folded small and packed in boxes. Two days passed and there was no further alarm or sign of trouble.

Then Peter returned. He came in without ceremony, his face bone-white and hard as stone.

“Are you ready?” he demanded. “In the morning you go to the shielings. Mairi and her mother too. Wait but till I come to aid and protect you.”

“What has happened?” Caroline broke in fearfully.

“What? To start with, the Duldreggan house has been burned. The soldiers came, ordered the cattle to be delivered up to them, then fired the place. They stripped Duldreggan himself and would have hanged him, but for a Highland officer in Loudon’s regiment who stayed them.”

“But he was not in the rising!”

“Small lot the soldiers care for that. They’re scouring the glen.”

So the house that had so lately been a refuge to them all was now reduced to ashes. “Where are they living?” asked Caroline.

“In the hills. There is yet more to tell. There were women ravished in the glen yesterday, four of them. You must leave at once.”

“We should have gone before,” faltered Caroline.

“You will go in the morning.” Peter’s voice was like iron.

She nodded. “We will work all night to be ready.”

He turned abruptly as if to go, then came back and looked down at her, his dark face quivering. But he said nothing, and turned again and left.

Morning broke clear and lovely in Glenmoriston. The sky was a wash of pale hyacinth, the far hills were grape-blue, and on all sides lifted the great swelling splendid contours of the nearer slopes. Bog cotton fluttered in the meadows and yellow iris starred the low places by the river. By the roadway wild roses grew, and tall purple foxgloves and moon daisies. A rocky outcrop that edged the path was half hidden by a clump of cherry trees, their branches so entwined with honeysuckle that the air was sweet with the soft summery smell of the blossoms.

Along this flowery way a young man came riding—a smiling fair-haired tall young man. It was Roderick MacKenzie, once of Edinburgh, later of the Prince's army, now a sojourner in the heights of Glen Affric. And he rode to meet Mairi Ban Og, the fair young Mary, whom he loved.

Roderick was finely dressed, for all he was a wanderer, with his kilt of MacKenzie tartan well brushed, the buttons of his jacket burnished, and his great shoulder brooch of silver and cairngorm catching and throwing back the bright beams of the sun. His sorrel mare pranced and curvetted as if she too was aware of the brightness of the day and the sweet turmoil in the breast of the rider.

The glen was utterly still and sun-washed and peaceful. MacKenzie's mind reached out joyfully before him to the meeting with Mairi. He began to sing softly at first and then more loud.

O Mairi Ban Og, O rapture to be
With thee, my beautiful bride . . .

And as he sang, he rode on happily, musingly, into the jaws of a trap.

From the cherry trees by the road they sprang on him. Red-coated horsemen dashed out from behind the rock and closed in on him with the clatter of hooves and the hoarse yelling of men. Of men who were wild with excitement and cupidity. Furiously they dragged him from the saddle and stood him among them. With the strength and resiliency that was in him he took the shock, braced himself on his two feet and faced them.

"Demmit," came a voice out of the tumult. "I tell you it is. It's the Young Pretender."

At that a great roar went up, and men thrust and pushed to be in at the kill. Roderick's face went stiff with surprise, then a strange flickering smile broke over it. He lifted his sword.

"Villains," he cried ringingly. "You'll not take me alive." And in that instant he fell, riddled with bullets. But dying, he turned his face to them with that bright ironic smile still flickering over it. Weakly but clearly, so that all heard him, he said, "You have killed your Prince."

At that with wild laughter and shouting they thrust their swords again and again into his body. The hunt was over. The reward was theirs. Thirty thousand pounds! They yelled in glee.

The body was now all but hacked to pieces. They slashed off the head and in high spirits they carried it to their master, the Duke of Cumberland, at Fort Augustus. He, it is said, received it with elation, then rattled off to London in a coach with the head wrapped in a napkin beside him on the seat, and left his officers and men to continue wreaking their will on the homesteads and herds and the men and women of the glens.

The morning of MacKenzie's death they at Torbeg went about their business all unwitting. Their gear except for a few pieces was ready to be moved. But Peter had not come. All morning young Ronald kept watch on the knoll behind the house. Nor did he see anything to report till the middle of the afternoon when he looked towards the stone cottage where Mairi lived with her mother. A man appeared in the doorway and made urgent motions of his arms in the direction of Torbeg. Ronald watched him for a moment, wondering, then raced down to the house to tell of it.

"They'll maybe need help with the packing," suggested Lauchie quietly, "or it just might be something more."

"I'll go with you." At the door Caroline paused and looked back. Kirsty was folding some small frocks and plaidies and laying them neatly in a leathern case. As each garment went in, Alsoon bent and patted it, as Kirsty had done, then looked up smiling into the old woman's face.

"Bless the bairn," cried Kirsty and kissed the fair curls.

"Guard her well, Kirsty *mo cridhe*," murmured Caroline, and Kirsty nodded gravely.

The two hurried down the lane and across the meadow towards the grey stone steading, where in the absence of Hector the elder and Murdoch the younger, Mairi and her mother managed bield and byre as well as they could alone.

Peter of Craskie met them at the door. He shut it behind him and held them without. His face was grey and expressionless and his voice hard, though it broke queerly at times. He told them of what had befallen Roderick MacKenzie, and at the tale, they cried out in grief and horror.

“The soldiers thought he was the Prince,” he explained. “I had it from the innkeeper at Aonach. The redcoats stopped there after.” His breath now came laboured and heavy as if he were ill.

“Poor, poor Mairi,” muttered Caroline and again made as if to enter the house.

But Peter thrust an arm out before her. “Mairi was expecting him. She went to meet him. Well, she found him.”

Caroline’s hand went to her mouth and her eyes dilated.

Peter resumed. “It was enough to unhinge her reason. Perhaps it did. She will not speak of it nor of what happened after. The soldiers got her, and left her for dead. After a time, her mother, searching, found her and carried her home.”

Caroline had no words. She felt the blood drain away from her heart and she leaned against the stone of the steading wall.

“We must get her to the shielings,” went on Peter’s bitter inexorable voice. “Lauchie, we’ll need your help. And you, Caroline, may be of some comfort to her now.”

In the house, Mairi lay on the bed, covered with a blue blanket, her pale-gold hair smoothed back from her forehead, her white lids closed and her long lashes lying on her cheeks. One side of her face from brow to chin was a vast purpling bruise.

“Aye, she’s sore hurted,” said her mother in a soft despairing hopeless voice. “And her mind wanders.”

Caroline came close. “Dear Mairi,” she whispered. “Mairi *mo cridhe*, we’re here to help you.” There was no sign that she heard.

Then Peter brought his horse to the door, tethered it and came in. He stood and looked down at Mairi with so firm and compelling a gaze that it did finally reach her in that far place where she had garrisoned herself. Her lids fluttered open, and her blue eyes, wild with fear and shame, darted from one to another, then closed again.

Peter moved closer. “Mairi,” he told her quietly but with strength in his voice, “I am now taking you to the hills where you will be safe.”

Her lids fluttered again and she peered briefly and furtively about. Caroline’s heart lurched, because she did indeed look like one demented. But Peter gathered her hands in his and bent low and talked to her, and the others moved back to leave them alone.

Presently he took the blanket and wrapped and lifted her in his arms and strode out the door. Lauchie held her till Peter was in the saddle. Then when she was eased up to him and as he took her into the curve of his arm, she turned and like a tired child laid her head against his shoulder. They moved away, the big horse placing his feet carefully among the grassy hummocks. They went slowly up the first rise, and over it, and on towards the hills.

The three of them stood watching, the mother twisting her hands in her apron and saying nothing. Finally Lauchie turned to her. “We’ll get the rest of the gear into the cart. Get your things ready. And you, Bantighearna, hasten home. I’ll be away no longer than I can help. My pistols lie on top of the oak chest by the hall door. Loaded.”

Then Caroline went to Mairi’s mother, put her arms around her and kissed her pale cheek. “Soon we’ll be with you,” she promised. “And among us all, we’ll win Mairi back to health.”

The older woman gave her a courteous sad smile and nodded. She was so far gone in grief that it was not possible to reach her.

“Haste now,” called Lauchie anxiously.

Caroline, heavy of heart and fearful, made her way along the stone dyke, up the knoll and over it on her way to Torbeg. The house looked as usual, yet why were two horses tethered by the gate? Two horses, one black and one white, champing and switching and seeming somehow not like Highland horses, but alien and unfamiliar.

She stopped, her heart choking her. Then she gathered herself together and walked firmly and unhesitatingly across the stone terrace and into the house. For a moment the change from the sunlight to the dimness of the interior blinded her. Then she saw. Her speech failed her. There was in fact a perfect stillness. No one moved or spoke. Caroline’s eyes travelled from one to the other of those in the room—the living and the dead.

For there on the floor by the settle was Kirsty, and she was dead or sleeping. It was not likely that she slept. Nearby, Morag knelt beside the body of the young lad, Ronald. He lay in a pool of blood that crept slowly

across the smooth stone floor. Morag's hand was pressed against his breast. The boy's face wore a startled look and was ashen pale.

Two men stood, one on either side of the room. Two red-coated soldiers, Captain Messiker and Pilchard, his lackey. Messiker's dark smiling eyes rested enigmatically on Caroline. She ignored him and walked across the room to Morag and looked down at the lad. "Is he gone then?" she asked softly.

"Aye. Just now."

Then with a sudden wildness in her voice Caroline cried, "Where is Alsoon?"

"Here, mistress." Morag pushed her skirts aside and there, burrowed into them and peering out with wide frightened blue eyes, was Alsoon. Caroline lifted her, and the child clung with arms and legs, her head pressed hard into her mother's shoulder.

Caroline's eyes went to the still figure by the settle. "Kirsty?"

"Aye. First of all. They dirked her."

At this point Caroline felt no fear. Her body felt light and vibrant, not quite belonging to her, but able. A great bitter rage strengthened her. She walked across the room to the high desk and sat Alsoon down on it, still within the curve of her arm. "Be quiet now," she said, and the child obeyed, relaxing her clutch and resting easily against her mother.

The Captain was still smiling and there was as well a queer look of homage in his insolent dark eyes. The man, Pilchard, stared straight ahead, his ugly pockmarked face expressionless.

"Captain Messiker," asked Caroline, "why have you come into this house in my absence and murdered my people?"

He advanced a step and spoke smoothly. "Dear lady, I regret it exceedingly. This unfortunate lad would have dirked me."

"Why?"

"Because of the old woman."

"You molested her?"

"My man tried to pluck the child from her. So savagely did she attack him that he had to silence her."

“Why did he try to take the child?” Her voice faltered a little and she held Alsoon close.

Messiker stepped yet a little nearer and Pilchard like an automaton advanced two paces also. Morag lifted Ronald from the floor and laid him on the settle, folding his hands on his breast and disposing the folds of his kilt about his slim brown knees. Watching her, Caroline felt her throat tighten and fill. She took a deep breath and turned again to the Captain.

“Why?” she repeated steadily. But she was not prepared for his reply.

“Because”—his eyes moved down over her person—“because, with your child in our possession, you might be more reasonable and obliging.”

There was a long pause. She made no effort to hide the fact that she took his meaning. Her eyes moved about the room, then she said softly in Gaelic, “Morag, Lauchie’s pistols are on top of the high chest beside you. You will need them.” She saw Morag raise her head cautiously, then she turned again to the Captain.

Both he and Pilchard had moved in a little nearer. “Sir,” she said coldly, “you underestimate my loyalty to my husband.”

“Your husband! Now that’s an old tale you can well forget. Your husband faces death or transportation. He has gone out of your life and will never come back into it.”

She gave him a bitter brooding look, and he laughed soft and mockingly. “Why do you think this house has been left standing? By whose favour? Can you not face the facts of the case? From the beginning of time women have been spoil for the conqueror. But you I have set apart to be treated with consideration.”

Her eyes flickered over the still forms before her.

“That was an accident. Regrettable, if it grieves you. Because just now, I would not grieve you. Too many of these wild Highland witches have to be taken by force. I crave a softer triumph, a voluntary and reciprocal transport.” His dark eyes continued to rest smilingly on her. His face had flushed. For a moment she felt as if she might fall, then her heart began to beat again and strength flowed through her.

“Captain,” she said clearly and with the utmost sincerity. “Your touch would sicken me.”

At that, a sudden wild anger took him. His eyes flamed, his face whitened. He stood for a moment furiously silent, then, “Remove the child,

Pilchard,” he shouted.

In the space of a heartbeat it happened. The man leaped and caught Alsoon and wrenched her from her mother’s arms. In that instant Caroline found the dirk that was thrust between the pages of the Bible, jerked it free and plunged it with all her force into Pilchard’s body. Smoothly and fiercely it slipped home. He slumped clumsily to the floor and lay sprawled.

A volley of oaths broke from the Captain. He whipped out his sword, and at the same instant there came a blasting roar, and his arm dropped and his hand was bloody. Morag had found the pistol.

Alsoon ran behind her mother, crying shrilly and clutching at her skirts, while the Captain cursed in pain and rage. But he made no threatening move. Lauchie’s other pistol was trained on him. Morag muttered savagely in Gaelic as she held it steady.

Messiker turned to Caroline but there was no smile in his eyes now nor any soft intent. He glared bitterly at her. “I will go now, but this is not the end of the matter. You have killed a soldier engaged in his duty, and what is more”—his voice rose violently—“you have maimed me.” He held up his bleeding hand and the small finger hung by a torn bit of flesh. “That I will never forgive. So you will hang—which will be worse than what I have offered you. You will hang and your house will burn.”

“Shall I not shoot him?” begged Morag.

“There’s been killing enough.” Indeed weakness and reaction were taking such hold of Caroline that she could hardly stand.

The Captain spurned Pilchard’s body with his foot and stepped over it. Blood dripped from the kerchief he had twisted about his hand. Furiously he flung himself on his horse, looked down on the two women with hate in his eyes, and rode away.

They stood and watched him go, Morag holding the pistol poised till he was well over the knoll and out of sight. Then they came into the house and there was blood there too. On the floor and on the settle. Kirsty’s blue apron, when they went to lift her, was sodden with it. At that, Caroline covered her face with her hands and broke into sobs.

“You will control yourself now, Bantighearna,” said Morag sternly. “What shall we do with our dead?”

Caroline sobered. “Let us wrap them and take them with us to the hills. Later, if God lets us, we can move them to their proper place.”

So they tidied the bodies and bound them in long woollen plaids. Only once did Morag give way. She took her son in her arms and crooned over him and kissed him and her tears fell fast. But already he was beginning to be cold. He was beginning to be no longer Ronald, but only Ronald's body with a cruel wound in the heart.

Said Morag, "I was in the byre when they came. Had I been here I might have saved him, my own lad, my bairn, my . . ." She heaved a long sigh.

"He died for Kirsty." Caroline's voice was soft and sweet with sorrow. And Kirsty had died for little Alsoon. Caroline pushed back the unruly grey hair and smoothed the wrinkled brow with her finger tips. Kirsty too was away. Her body was now untenanted. Pain and trouble would no longer touch her, nor the ache in her back nor the weariness in her knees.

When they had finished, they looked down at the sprawled body of the man Pilchard, and then at each other. "We'll need help for that," decided Caroline. "It can wait."

Morag brought a bucket of water then, and washed the floor and made the room decent. There was now nothing to do till Lauchie returned. Without, the dusk was falling. Long shadows crept down the slopes and night birds called eerily. From far in the dark hills came the forlorn crying of lost and bewildered cattle.

"Where is Mysie?" asked Caroline.

"She ran off when she saw the soldiers."

Time passed. Alsoon fell asleep in her mother's arms and was laid on a bench and covered. They waited. Horror and fear were there in the dark room with them, as real a presence as the dead bodies lying near. Caroline sat still, her heart fluttering, her limbs trembling, and an ache in her throat. She felt utterly lonely and frightened and full of woe. Morag stood by the settle on which Ronald's body lay, her hand on the plaid that wrapped him, silent in her sorrow.

Suddenly she said, "Kirsty dreamed of a black cloud over Torbeg. This is it, surely."

She got the candles then and lighted them and they made pools of brightness in the room. Alsoon stirred in her sleep and Caroline shaded her eyes with a corner of the blanket that covered her.

All at once the door swung wide and Peter and Lauchie were there. Caroline wept with relief to see them.

“What devil’s work is this?” demanded Peter, looking down at the bodies.

Morag pointed to Pilchard.

“Did you dispatch him?”

“The Bantighearna did.”

Peter looked at Caroline with pride and sternness in his face.

“Captain Messiker was here also,” she told him, steadying her voice. “Morag shot and wounded him, and he left.”

Lauchie went down on his knees beside Ronald’s body. “*Ochone, ochone,*” he lamented. “Sore is my heart for the brave dear lad. Better it had been myself and me old.”

Peter stepped over and pushed at Pilchard’s body with his foot. “This must be hidden. The spades, Lauchie?”

“In the shed by the byre. The ground in the garden is soft.”

“The garden? The dungheap’s quicker.”

By morning they were at the shielings. It was a grey and rainy dawn, and the stone huts looked forlorn and comfortless as they approached them with their small cavalcade. In one of them Mairi lay still and quiet as before, her mother watching over her. In the other they bedded Alsoon down in a nest of blankets, and she went promptly to sleep. They disposed of their belongings roughly and laid a fire on the big stone hearth.

Then Peter and Lauchie took their spades and dug a grave in a little hollow by the ridge of rock where the honeysuckle grew. There they buried Kirsty and Ronald. Peter said a brief prayer over them. So did Caroline, standing plaided in the rain. Lauchie, his grey head bare, repeated the Shepherd Psalm in his quiet soft Gaelic. When they had finished, Morag stepped forward and laid her shawl over the grave.

The rain beat down as if it would go on forever. The sound of falling water filled the world and blotted out the shape of it and made it all unreal. Within the hut they piled more fuel on the fire and huddled about it and tried to comfort Morag. They reminded her of how kind Kirsty had been to the little lad, how she had sung songs to him at bedtime, and told him old tales. Fast friends they had been, and they were together now, and doubtless would be of help to each other. Ronald Gorm, the lad’s father, would be with them

too. Morag sat and listened with the slow tears running down her face, and took comfort from their very desire to comfort.

But in the other shieling Mairi lay quiet on her bed, never speaking, never moving, the flush on her cheeks deeper, and her breathing hard and heavy. Two days passed and still she lay, while they watched her helplessly. By times Caroline dipped a kerchief in cold water and bathed her hot face and her hands. But the fever mounted. Would it break in blessed relief and leave her spent but on the road to recovery? Caroline asked that of Morag. Morag shook her head. "How can she recover? I think she'll be away soon."

Morag was right. In the middle of that same afternoon, Mairi roused, opened her blue eyes and looked at them all. She looked at them, seeing and knowing them, with love and peace in her glance. She was herself again—Mairi Ban Og, fair young Mary, the white rose of the glen, lovely and beloved, tranquil and kind. Their hearts beat hard to see it. Slowly her eyes moved from one to the other of them and rested last on Peter. He dropped to his knees beside her.

She sighed gently and closed her eyes. Her breathing grew slow, unsteady, stopped for a moment, and they held their breaths waiting. It began again, very lightly and shallowly, and then imperceptibly it ceased.

So there was another grave to be dug by the ridge where the honeysuckle grew. Peter and Lauchie dug it, saying only a low word to each other now and again, while the women prepared the body for burial. Once Peter dropped his spade and went into the hut. Caroline looked up questioningly, and he flushed and asked, "Might she be wrapped in my plaid?"

"It would be fitting," she answered gravely, her face unsteady with compassion.

So they wrapped her in Peter's big worn plaid. But on her finger gleamed the ring Roderick had given her, three opals burning bright, enclosed in the frosty glitter of diamonds. Towards the last, her mother had slipped it on her finger. When all was ready, they bore her out into the open air, circled the grave three times from left to right, as was proper, said their prayers over her, and laid her away in the damp cold ground.

Such a weight of sadness rested on them now that life seemed insupportable. Sorrow had been heaped on sorrow. Caroline felt it like a dark mist in the air, covering and numbing them and taking their strength.

Peter was a great help to her. She leaned on his firmness of mind and his indomitability. One day he came in from the brightness without and

motioned to her. He led the way to a high ledge of rock, and when they were seated, he pointed.

Far below lay the white house of Torbeg, the pine trees behind, the garden in front, and beyond, the river winding like a silver ribbon. Caroline looked intently at it. Figures were moving about on the green—scarlet-coated figures. Suddenly smoke puffed from the windows. A tall column of it rose from a skylight in the roof, as she watched. “This is my home being burned,” she thought incredulously. At that pain struck through to her heart and grew and spread and sharpened till it filled her whole body and she could no longer bear to look.

“Come,” said Peter and led her to the other side of the rock. “Think you the Captain will be for seeking you out?”

She nodded slowly. “He threatened to have me hanged.”

“I see. Then you’re not safe, even here.”

“Where shall I go then? Culcabock?”

“You’d be no better. Now still higher up on this slope there is a cave. Well hidden and dry it is, but rough. For a while I think you should bide there. Does it daunt you to think of sleeping in a cave?”

She shook her head. “Not if you think it needful.”

“I do. Look how they got Lord Lovat though he took refuge in the wilds of Morar. I know he is a great chief and they were hot on his trail, yet Cumberland’s men are queerly vindictive even against women.”

“So Lord Lovat is taken. I am sad to hear it.”

“Aye, so am I. They brought him out on a litter by way of Fort Augustus. He is now on the way to London, and I fear it will go hard with him.”

Caroline was still for a moment, thinking of that friendly, devious-minded, disarming old man. “Do you think he may even yet escape them?” she cried hopefully.

Peter shook his head. “Were he ten years younger! But his legs will no longer support him. The party passed the western reaches of Stratherrick on the way south. There the old women of the clan followed the litter, wailing for him, and the sennachie played a lamentable loud lament.”

He rose. “Come now, Bantighearna Dhu, strengthen your heart and take one more look at Torbeg and it burning. Then I will show you the way to your mountainy retreat.”

The mountainy retreat to which Peter took Caroline was a crevice in a wall of rock, a hundred yards up the slope from the shieling huts. A wide-spreading thorn bush hid the entrance to it, and around the base of the rock flowed a shallow stream through which one had to step to enter. Within, the grotto was as big as a monk's cell, with on one side a projecting shelf of rock which could be used for a couch.

Here, for a week, Caroline lived. Down in the bothy, Morag and Lauchie cared for Alsoon, and went about the business of bringing as much comfort and ease of living into the place as they could. Meanwhile Peter escorted Mairi's mother to her old home in Strathglass, and then betook himself to the company of those seven companions of his who dwelt "not far away," he said, and who even now had the shielings under their watchful care.

Caroline herself was to be on guard constantly, and should she catch a glimpse of red on the grassy slopes, she was to whistle a throstle's call, and then bide close and make no sound or movement to betray her. From the cave, peering through the thorn branches or pushing them aside, she could see the whole sweep of the countryside, glen and river and encircling mountain slopes.

It was for her a strange and lonely time. Each day she watched the sun climb the high blue arches of the sky, till by noon the air over the bare rocks shimmered with the heat. Then the shadows began to slant a little eastward, while the breeze rustled through the thorn bushes and clouds passed and made dark shadows on the smooth green hills. Till finally the sky was stained with sunset, and dusk crept up the corries and it was night.

The thought came to her that surely she was not the first to seek refuge in this cave. Hill beasts must have sheltered here, wildcat, badger and fox, and doubtless in the old clan wars many a fleeing warrior. Or perhaps a Culdee brother had made this his home, one of Columba's men, or Merchard of the Miracles himself, he who had laboured so long and lovingly in this very glen many centuries ago. Certainly there was in the place a tranquility, a sense of healing and peace. It was in the calm light air, in the stirring of the sheltering leaves and in the warm benison of the sunshine. Caroline felt it. She opened her heart to it and it fed and sustained her.

It gave her strength to assess her own position, and to take into her consciousness the full realization of what had happened. First and foremost in her thoughts was the plight of Finlay. Imprisoned, anxious, uncared for, that at the least. “Finlay,” she cried in her heart, “think of me now, Finlay, for I think of you. I reach out to you. Do you reach out to me.”

She filled her mind with him. She saw him as she so often had, his red kilt, his woollen jacket, his plaid flowing free, his hair bright, his dark eyes smiling, Finlay, the Master of Torbeg. What had captivity done to him? Confinement and cruelty?

Her heart went sick at the thought. There was Alex too, in like plight, and Glenmoriston an outlaw, Peter dispossessed, Kirsty dead, and dear young Ronald. Mairi, and Roderick whom she loved. The Prince, where was he? Was he safe, or had his star failed him utterly? And how fared Lord Lovat, that bold and contriving old man? From her heart she wished him well.

And while she was about it, how fared Caroline, wife of Finlay? Alone in the mountains like a coney or a wild hind, she was. She savoured the fact of her aloneness. She, as it were, assayed her own weight and density. She separated herself from all the other lives that had impinged on hers, and looked at the self that remained. At this Caroline Grant, born MacLeod, who had till of late known naught but care and kindness, and who had now to live a new hard sort of life to which she was ill accustomed. “I must face it,” she thought. “My husband has been taken from me, my home has been destroyed and”—she brought the thought out into the open—“I have killed a man, and it’s like I’m being sought for it.”

When she had come thus far in her thinking, it was evening. She pushed aside the thorn branches, splashed through the burn, sat down on the grass and looked out over the hills and slopes and away to the far spirey peaks of the mountains. Against the brightness of the sky came an eagle flying. His great wings stroked slowly, then all at once he lifted and soared in wide sweep that took him up and away over the hills beyond the Loyne. The air was very clear and light. It washed over this high grassy world and left it luminous. Even the pebbles in the little stream shone clean and many-coloured and the very grass blades were distinct and shapely. At the edge of the water grew a small plant with a delicate pale flower like a lily of the valley—tiny white bells on a stalk that rose from a nest of green leaves. Caroline touched it gently. So pure, so cool, so waxen white it seemed, she felt as if she had found something rare and exquisite in this remote and lonely place.

She sat still, taking the silence and the evening light into her consciousness. Suddenly there came from above her a strange wild cry, and the song of the greenshank flung itself from hill to hill and died away. The sound was wild, sad and joyful all at the same time, piercing and beautiful. It was the time and place made vocal. Caroline felt merged and one with it, with the time and the place, the call of the greenshank and the white-petalled pure and lovely blossom. She rested in the grass by the thorn tree, her mind more peaceful than it had been.

The days passed. Once she heard scattered shooting far down the glen. She heard it again and closer. Then, though she listened and waited, there was no more. From time to time under cover of darkness she came down to the shieling huts and was glad to be with Alsoon and the others. Lauchie made his way regularly up to the shelter by night, bringing food and drink.

One day Peter came. He entered without ceremony. "Caroline," he cried, his voice tight with excitement. "I have a visitor for you. Shall I bring him?"

Standing by a boulder and under a birch tree was a tall ragged young man. He wore a kilt and a shabby black jacket and his head was bare. The sun filtering through the leaves flickered over his fair hair and his sunburned smiling face.

For a long moment Caroline stared at him, then she picked up her skirts, stepped through the stream and came to meet him. He advanced halfway, and when she would have curtsied, he took her hand, bowed over it and kissed it.

"One day," he remarked in his pleasant cultivated voice, "my friend Finlay and I drank to our ladies. He told me how fair was his, and I am happy now to see for myself."

"Look you," cried Peter. "Better you should both step inside. I'll lie in the shadow of the rock and keep watch."

Charles Edward, heir to the throne of the Stuarts, sat down beside Caroline on her rocky couch and smiled cheerfully at her.

"Your Highness!" Caroline felt the impact of his personality like a draught of wine. "I am happy to know you safe and well."

"I am both. I have a most loyal guard. We live in a cave, which is, oh, much more spacious than this." He smiled at her in gentle raillery. "In Corri-Dho we have all the comforts—beds of springy heather, meat and meal aplenty, even sweet meats. One of my faithful followers went as far as Fort Augustus at great peril to himself and brought back a gift of gingerbread."

Caroline smiled uncertainly at the doubtful value of the offering and his face sobered.

"I do assure you that no jewel or bauble given me in the days of my prosperity was more valued or more gratefully received. These men, three Chisholms, two MacDonells, a MacGregor, a Grant and a MacMillan—I call them my privy council, and they call me Dougall MacCullony."

"Why?"

"For my greater safety. They took a mighty oath that their backs be to God and their faces to the devil, if they ever betray me. I offered to take a similar vow to be faithful to them, but with a delicate courtesy they refused. These Highlanders, rough or smooth, have all the gentle instincts."

"You must remember, my lord, that these were men of substance till recently."

"I know it well. My heart will never cease to grieve for the loss and sorrow I have caused them. There are others whose fate lies very heavy on me—Roderick MacKenzie, for instance, who in dying drew off my pursuers, your warmhearted Finlay, and you yourself, now in a position of some danger."

His eyes rested gravely on her. "You remind me of another Highland lady I have known of late. You have the same steadfast beauty. She is Mistress Flora MacDonald of Skye and at great risk to herself she did save my unworthy life." He paused and smote his fist against the rocky wall. "If the Almighty will but let me make it up to those who have suffered for me!"

Caroline averted her eyes from the misery in his face, and saw again how worn was his jacket, and how far from fresh the linen shirt he wore. The end of his plaid too was all begrimed and wrinkled. His glance followed hers, and suddenly his cheerful laughter filled the rocky little cave.

"Never grieve for my garments," he cried. "As for the tail of my plaid . . . Peter will tell you that by day I can outwalk the best of them, but by night it is far different. I have fallen into every bog, puddle and morass between Morar and Loch Clunie. I use my plaid to scour off the mud." He laughed again at her look of distress. "Peter," he called. "Come in now and expound your fine plan."

Peter came in. There was scarce room for him. He said, "This is the way of it, Caroline. A French boat is expected at Poolewe, and it is our hope to get His Highness to it, and away to France. Why could you not get a passage too and bide safe in that country till it was wise for you to return?"

Astounded, Caroline looked from one to the other.

“You would be treated with the utmost care,” observed the Prince gently, “though the trip over the mountains would be hard.”

She said nothing for a while, then falteringly, “But how could I leave? Finlay might return. Besides I have a small daughter in the shieling below us.”

Charles looked at her with both pity and encouragement in his eyes. “For a while you would be separated from her. Yet in France there are now many of your countrymen. You would be among friends.”

Her tears gathered and overflowed. “You are most kind, both of you, and Finlay would thank you too if he could. But here I must stay, with my child and with those of Torbeg who are left.”

The Prince bowed his head courteously, then slipped loose the silver brooch from the shoulder of his plaid. “Will you give this to Finlay when he wins back to you as a token of my love?”

She held it in her palm and smiled at him through her tears. “Sir, my heart’s thanks to you, and my loyalty with it,” she said.

He bent and kissed her hand. The two smiled at her, pushed aside the branches and were away. She stood and watched them as they went, slipping from shelter to shelter till they were lost to sight over the breast of the hill. She went back to the couch and wept a little for the Prince and for Finlay and for herself too. Then she rose and wiped her face and thought, “I have met my Prince in my old blue gown and my ankles bare. And at that I was more braw than he. Yet he gave me a gift.” She cradled the brooch again in her palm and thought with wild desperate longing, “Could I but lay it now in Finlay’s own warm hand!”

A day later Caroline returned to the shieling huts. For some time there had been no sign of soldiers in the glen, so it seemed safe enough to join the others in the bothies. Then Lauchie went cautiously down to Torbeg and found the herd of cattle hidden on the far side of the river and brought them back up with him, among them a dozen milch cows with their calves running by them.

Along with them came Mysie. “I’ve been slipping over to milk them,” she told Caroline matter-of-factly. “I’ll bide with you now for a while. Cheese and butter will have to be made, and sore we’ll miss Kirsty.” She wiped her eyes on her sleeve. “You’ll be thinking hard of me, no doubt, for

running away that day. But I was feared and that's the truth of it. I hid under a willow bush by the river all night. You're not affronted?"

Caroline laid a hand on her arm. "I'm not affronted. I'm glad you're alive."

The days passed quietly and busily. After the grotto the shieling bothies seemed comfortable indeed. They were built of rough stone thatched with turf, with a central hearthstone and directly over it an opening in the ceiling for the escape of smoke. Along one wall were rough-built beds, made soft with ticks of heather covered with blankets and plaiding. There were chests and cupboards, a big oak table and some benches and stools.

As a summer shelter for milkmaids and herds it did very well, but what of the winter? What of crops unsown and cattle driven off? It was not possible to buy meal though the military stores at Fort Augustus were full of it. Cumberland had left a special order that none was to be sold to "any person of the country," on pain of severe punishment, and what Cumberland meant by *severe* they now knew. The outlook was not bright.

Then one day the Laird of Glenmoriston himself came to see them. They felt the greatest relief and pleasure at the sight of him. His burly figure, his rugged, reliable face, even his deep firm voice seemed to carry an assurance that order and safety were being at last restored to their shaken world.

He dandled Alsoon on his knee and patted her firm little thighs. "The wee lass has not suffered," he remarked. "Caroline *mo cridhe*, I was sad to hear of the business at Torbeg, though proud you had the courage to do what you did. Sore do I grieve for Kirsty who served us well for many years, and for Ronald too, that fine young lad. I would he could have grown to manhood and taken his place in the clan. Peter Dhu sent me word that he had you under his protection, and for that I was relieved and thankful."

His eyes rested uneasily on her. "You will understand that I am not able to move about freely, but some information I have gathered. It seems the Glenmoriston men are in Tilbury gaol, except for a few in Southwark. Alex is in Southwark, but Finlay is not there, nor have they yet found any trace of him at Tilbury."

Caroline's eyes were enormous in her white face.

"That does not mean he is dead," Patric added hastily, "though it may. Finlay is quick and hardy and is now at the peak of his strength. I put my faith in him."

"But cruelty—that would be hard on him."

“Aye, till he toughened,” agreed Patric. “I have, after all, one piece of good news for you. Captain Messiker was moved away from Fort Augustus some little time ago. Otherwise you might not have been so quiet here.”

“Then,” she cried, “can we not go back to Torbeg?”

“Aye, that you can. Part of the house can be made habitable. I’ll send help for the moving, since Peter is not at hand.”

He rose and made his farewells, kissing Caroline gravely on the cheek. “God bless you, *mo cridhe*,” came his warm sustaining voice. Then he was away, not to the fine big house at Invermoriston, now alas destroyed, but to a stone bothy in the hills not much better than their own.

Peter returned from his journey before they had made the move to Torbeg. They were all inordinately glad to see him. Morag set food before him, and Caroline brought a jug from the cupboard and poured him a coggie of heather ale.

He laughed softly as he took it and raised it to her and said, “Slainte and God bless you! Is it the same?”

“The very same that Kirsty and I made last year. There’s not much of it left, and why save it?”

“Why indeed?” He drew the back of his hand across his mouth and smiled at her. There was pride and satisfaction in his dark, firm-featured face. “Well, so far, Tearlach’s safe. Quite a tramp we had.”

“Did you find a boat at Poolewe?”

“Och no, we did not. There was none there. So we came back by Strathglass, cut across this glen and Glengarry and on into the country of the Camerons. I said farewell to Tearlach there. He sent to you his affectionate regards and also to Finlay whom he feels sure you will yet see. Finlay, he said, was a durable lad.”

Caroline smiled sadly, then her face brightened. “I have news too. Captain Messiker has left Fort Augustus, and soon we’ll be moving back to Torbeg, ruined as it is.”

“Aye, aye. It will not be grand, but it will be better than this. And with the Captain gone, it should be safe enough.”

In a week they were back at Torbeg. The place was more habitable than they had hoped. The big hall, stone-floored, stone-walled, was intact up to

the first storey. In fact it was possible to roof in all the rooms on the ground floor by fitting in poles at the level of the ceiling. The stables likewise. The giral stood firm. The burning of Torbeg had not been so thoroughgoing a job as the destruction of the Laird's house at Invermoriston. Nevertheless the whole was a reduced and pathetic substitute for Torbeg as it had been.

In a sense all their life was reduced and pathetic. Yet it went on. Such harvest as there was, they gathered in. The few herds of cattle that had been successfully hidden in the hills now roamed the fields and pastures. Summer flowed into autumn with the birch trees golden and the heather purple on the moors. The air grew wine-sharp and the winds cool. In time winter would be on them. Come winter, many in the glen were like to go hungry. There was neither meat nor meal enough.

The realization lay heavy on Caroline. But it was not so great a burden as her anxiety for Finlay. All the time her heart reached out to him in love and fear and desperate longing. Wild schemes for his relief and rescue crowded her mind, yet what could she do, a woman alone and herself vulnerable to arrest? Her hope lay in Patric and in what influence he could bring to bear, though she reminded herself sadly that the Laird's name was on the list of those exempted from pardon and any action on his part would have to be devious and made through others.

Then one day came a letter. It was from the Reverend John Grant, who had been with Finlay when he had been taken. It was written from Kilmore Manse in Glen Urquhart. He was home then.

I am home, but not yet sufficiently robust of health to ride to Torbeg to see you. You will want to know all I can tell you of your husband. Would it were more! We were together in the Kirk at Inverness. He was well but disturbed and angry as we all were. The place was crowded with the wounded from Culloden who were in worse case than we. There was a priest there, a Clanranald man, and he and I did our best to comfort the dying. Then we were moved to the boats, and, alas, I was put on the *Dolphin*, and Finlay on the *Wallsgrove* and we were separated. When we came to London I was sent to the Tilbury gaol but I could find no trace of Finlay. I found the same Clanranald priest however, and he said that when they left the *Wallsgrove*, Finlay lay ill of a fever in the hold. Later I had enquiries made in the list of prisoners at London, which I found out was an ill-managed affair. As you well know we distinguish between those of the same surname by terms like *Bui*

or *Ban* or *Dhu*. The Sassenach, not knowing that these words mean only *Yellow* or *Fair* or *Black*, have a fine rash of queer surnames on the list, which reduces the accuracy of it. At any rate I was not able to get any trace of Finlay.

As for me. I was let out on bail to appear before the Court of Judiciary in Edinburgh, where my chances of acquittal are good. A Scottish jury is not like to convict a Scot after all the cruelties.

You will be deeply glad, I know, to hear that the Prince is safe away to France and among friends, and may God bless and comfort him. Your brother-in-law, Alex of Livishie, will come up for trial soon. I pray God earnestly for his release. Also every day I do entreat the Heavenly Father on Finlay's behalf, that he may be kept safe and that you and he may be again united and resume your interrupted happiness.

One part of John Grant's prayer was answered. Not long after, Alex's trial came up. He was acquitted and returned to his home in the Highlands. Finlay's uncertain fate weighed heavily on him, and directly he had seen his wife, Elspeth, and Duncan, his son, he came to Torbeg.

He was not the same man he had been six months ago. He was now very thin. The ridge of his cheekbone stood out sharp, his eyes were sunken and his skin had a strange dry pallor. Alex had been of all the family the most reserved and quiet of speech, but now there was a compressed and angry quality to his silence, and when he spoke his words were brief and bitter.

He walked with Caroline about the partially reclaimed ruin of Torbeg and examined carefully the makeshift furnishings and repairs.

"Fine plans the lad made," he remarked. "And now this! Blackened walls and empty window holes, and men like to starve before the winter is over."

"But were Finlay to win back to us, then together we'd build Torbeg up again, and in time it would be as before."

He eyed her with pity. "Nothing will be as before. Neither Finlay nor you nor myself nor any of us."

They came into the house and sat down in the hall. A fire burned on the hearth and brought a little cheer and brightness to the big bare room.

"Tell me now," she said and smiled at him encouragingly.

He sat for a moment in heavy silence. Then, "Once we left Inverness we were separated. At the boats and later. I went to Southwark. I thought Finlay was for Tilbury, but not so, as I found out later. The naked truth of the matter is that I could find no trace of him."

She broke in "The minister says he was known to be ill of a fever."

Alex lifted his hand and let it fall. "You may as well face it. The chances are that he died and was thrown overboard and no record kept. But on the other hand, he may be alive. Who can tell?" His voice fell away.

"Go on," she prompted. "You went to Southwark from the boat."

"Aye. We were marched through the streets while the mob threw stones at us and spat on us. Once there, the gaoler—may he roast in hell—loaded us with leg irons. If a man had enough money, one leg was left free. I had not enough."

"Why were you so long without trial?"

He shrugged. "Justice is slow, my dear. Besides, every day death was making the matter more simple and more cheap. Death by disease, I mean. There was also from time to time death by execution. The butchered bodies were brought back and kept on view for a few days to show the rest of us how we were to be used. Extraordinarily debilitating to see that. It wore some of us down."

A small bitter silence followed, broken suddenly by a sob from Caroline. Alex turned and put his arm around her. "Caroline, my dear," he said in a soft and altered voice, "forgive my wild words. Hardly have I settled into sanity yet. Do you forgive me, *mo cridhe*?"

She smiled affectionately at him and nodded. They were again silent for a little while, sitting there on a wooden bench before the fire in the patched-up hall at Torbeg. Caroline gathered her shawl about her against the chill that crept in about the improvised window casings. "Tell me of your trial," she said.

"It was a chancy thing," observed Alex, holding his hands out to the blaze, "with English officers swearing they saw me at the Battle of Prestonpans, and walking about with the Glengarry men in Edinburgh armed with broadsword and dirk and pistols. A devil of a fellow they made me out to be."

"Yet in the end you were set free."

“I was. And for an unexpected reason. One of those same English officers who swore they saw me at Prestonpans, came forward with new evidence. He said that after the battle I had saved his life by staunching his wound and getting a doctor to him. And blast me, if I could remember him! Dozens of enemy wounded we looked to, that day.”

“It cheers me to hear it,” cried Caroline. “It makes me feel that in some way Providence has reached out to Finlay too, and that he is alive.”

Alex smiled at her kindly, but without conviction.

Finlay was alive. He was, at that moment in the gloomy hold of a prison ship in the Thames, off Tilbury Fort, near London. A man lay on the floor on a straw pallet, and Finlay knelt beside him. The man was Big Hector, Mairi's father, and he was ill of a fever. The bosses of his cheekbones were red from the heat of it, and his eyes were deep-sunk and unseeing. His chest rose and fell with the effort of his breathing, his head moved restlessly, and all the time he muttered.

Finlay bent to listen. It was a spate of soft quick words that just escaped hearing, a spate that played itself out presently, and faltered into silence. The breathing went on, and the heaving of the chest. Then it was different. It was slower. Finlay straightened, and his eyes sought this man and that among the prisoners in the hold. Four or five moved in, and the others grew quiet and some crossed themselves.

"He's going now," said Finlay softly.

They closed in about the dying man. Ragged fellows they were, gaunt and bone-thin, like scarecrows or like starving animals shut in a dark and noisome cave. Though no cave could ever hold a stench like this or be so foul.

On that thought Finlay's words came hard and clear. "We are like beasts in a byre here. Nevertheless we are men. Hector who is one of us is about to leave us. Let us put a prayer on him for the journey he now takes."

"*Ar n'Athair a ta air neamh,*" came the whispering Gaelic words, on through to the end of the Lord's Prayer.

The breathing continued, a little more unsteadily. There was now a soft fluttering in the bare throat that reminded Finlay queerly of the feel of a bird held lightly in cupped hands. He looked at the others kneeling near him, and they looked expectantly back at him. What more could he say? The prayers of their childhood, what had they to do with this grim place, full of dirt and disease and dying? What was the word for them now? It came to him—the Creed. They repeated it together.

"*Creideam ann an Dia . . .* I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

They were strong words, hard and uncompromising, no pity or sadness in them at all, but they carried conviction. Then at the last, in the part about the communion of saints and the life everlasting, it was as if a light slanted in on the darkness and stench and misery of their condition. A light only, no warmth or real comfort, but a reminder that life of another sort yet existed. That was all.

The breathing had stopped. Finlay folded Hector's hands and disposed his limbs straightly, then stood looking down at him, his own face increasingly bitter and broken up and hard.

The others were silent. They had all come to recognize certain times of revolt and fury that laid hold now on one and now on another. At such times a man was left alone till he had himself in hand. There was madness implicit in these moods, the madness that comes on man or beast inured to freedom and then held captive. So they left Finlay alone and he stood and looked down at Big Hector, and his eyes were full of wildness and despair.

Like Alex, he was not the same man who left Torbeg that day in May now many months ago. He was now, as they all were, thin. They were of a kind of thinness seldom seen. The working of their joints was visible, as in a mechanism made of wood or ivory. There was no flesh on their frames. Their cheekbones showed white where the skin was drawn across them. Their hands were hard like hooks or claws. They had all been ill, but some had recovered and were now like a new breed of men who could live with hunger and nakedness, and refuse to die.

Finlay had refused to die. He stood now, his back pressed against the rough wall of the hold, and he looked taller than before. His flaxen hair, which had been bright and glistening with the health of his body, was dry and matted. His torso was bare, and his red kilt, now more dun than red, hung slack about his hips. Suddenly he stretched his arms out along a narrow ledge on the wall behind him, and stood there like a man suspended, completely motionless except for his eyes. His eyes had escaped the emaciation of his body. They burned with life and with the will to live, while his body looked like that of a man already in death.

It was something said in the kirk at Inverness, where the prisoners were first held, that had planted in him the spark of this fierce inner resistance. The minister had said it, John Grant of Kilmore in Glen Urquhart. The kirk had been crowded. The wounded from the battle of Culloden were there, half naked, covered with gore, their sores festering; and with them were the men who had surrendered their arms under promise of pardon and were

instead thrown into gaol. These were wild with rage at the treachery done them. All were hungry, many were in pain and some were dying. In the midst of all this, the minister stepped up to the pulpit platform, raised his voice and spoke. At the sound of that strong, deep voice, rough with authority and courage, the wounded lessened their moaning, and all of them listened.

“Friends in adversity—God help you. God help us all. And He will in His own way. Remember this and hold it to you—there is in each of you something they can’t get at. Neither Cumberland nor the devil himself. That part of you is safe. And now, *Gras ar Tighearna Iosa Crìosd gu robh maille ribh uile*. Amen.”

The words had strengthened them in the despair and bewilderment of those first days of their captivity. Not long after, they were taken to the boats. And that was the time when Finlay saw Caroline. At the thought of it, his chest swelled and his shoulders pressed hard against the wall. Caroline in her crimson cloak, her dark curls falling about her face, and her blue eyes wild with wanting to break through the crowd and get to him—he felt tears behind his lids at the memory.

Standing now in the hold of the prison ship with Hector lying dead before him, he went over in his mind the events that had followed on that day. In Inverness he had been put on a sloop called the *Wallsgrove*. To his great regret, Alex was sent to another boat, and never since had he been able to make contact with him. The men from Torbeg were in the sloop however, and many another from up and down the glen.

Then the *Wallsgrove* had begun its slow way down the coast towards London. In the hold they had no bedding, nor bunks, nor covering except for the plaids that some had yet with them. The ballast was loose earth and stones. The stones they used for seats or pillows or to prop up the sick out of the filth that covered the floor. Their food was for each man a half pound of coarse meal a day and a small bottle of water.

A ladder led up to the hatch, and from time to time someone would creep up the rungs to get a breath of pure air. But a guard was placed at the top with a whip of rope, and he used it. He used it so savagely that sometimes a man dropped clear from the top and lay moaning on the stones. Many were seasick, many were fevered from their wounds, many others came down with a new sickness, caused by crowding and vermin and poor food. All were miserable. The guards despised them for the stench that came up from the hatch, and grew worse daily. They hated themselves for it, and were

powerless to help it. Remembering it now, Finlay felt the old familiar fury and disgust.

Murdoch had sickened first. He kept crying for his home, for air, for water. The guard stood on a rung of the ladder and looked at him, his thick underlip stuck out. There was a light in his eye. Was it humour? Or cruelty? Was it a flicker of kindness? They watched him with a terrible intentness.

He jerked his thumb. "What's he say?"

Finlay answered. "He says he's sick and lousy and miserable. He wants water."

"He does, eh? The dog wants water. Ho, ho, ho!" His loud chortling laugh bounced from the walls of the hold. He cupped his hands and called, "Dixon! Get the rope."

The rope had come hurtling down. The guard slipped an end of it around Murdoch, knotted it, then looked up. "Haul away," he cried. To the creaking of a windlass the body swung up and out and was lost to view. Grinning, the guard ran up the ladder.

In the hold they stood aghast.

A roar of laughter came down from above. "Wanted a washing, did he? Gorbliney, he's got it."

"Drowned the vermin at any rate," came an officer's quick, cool voice. "Haul him up now."

Again there had been a creaking of tackle and then a thump on the boards of the deck. Finlay leaped for the ladder and climbed swiftly. The guard's head was turned away to watch. They were all gathered around Murdoch, who lay sprawled on the boards, water spreading out all about him. His eyes were closed. His black hair lay in wet wisps across his face. He was as white as a corpse.

"Drowned more than the lice, sir," the guard observed cheerfully. "The blugger's dead."

The officer moved in closer. "So he is. Or as good as. Tie a stone to his ankles and heave him overboard."

Finlay sprang clear of the hatch. "Stop, damn you. He's not dead. See his ribs move." He thrust someone back with an impatient elbow. He was no longer the half-starved captive. He was as he used to be, a free man. His eyes blazed in protest and fury.

For a moment no one spoke, then the Captain shrugged and a small, fleeting smile touched his bearded lips. He gestured to the mast. "Tie him up."

They flogged Finlay. He recalled it now with bitter exactness. They did it carefully, scientifically, with each time a long swinging fling of the lash and a dull thud on the yielding flesh. His white back was soon crisscrossed with red, strips of skin fell on the deck, and the blood ran. His arms were stretched above his head, so there was no way of helping himself or resisting. He took the pain and that sick dunt to his heart that came with every blow. But he remembered dimly something about that within him which could not be destroyed. He was aware of it now. Consciously he protected it. They were not getting at it.

When they released him, he looked at them as if from a long way off. He was as white as Murdoch and it was hard to stand. When they threw a bucket of salt water over him, he gasped and shuddered.

Down in the hold his friends had turned to him with shame and sorrow in their faces. Jamie brought his own bottle of water. "Would it freshen you?" he asked, his grey eyes full of tears.

Finlay took it and drank. Then he sat down on the floor near the wall, bent over so that nothing touched his torn back. A blunt-featured man in a tattered kilt made his way across and sat hunkered down beside him. It was Tomas MacIntosh, once of the Grammar School in Inverness.

"I have some small skill," he said. "Turn a bit and let me look at your back." When he had seen it, he sighed. "Some ointment, or a clean rag even! The welts will heal, but when they dry and pull at the edges with no softening unguent to ease them, that will be a sore time. Think you, would they let me have some clean fat?"

Finlay's mouth twisted. "Yesterday I asked for the water in which they boiled the beef for the Captain's table, to give it to Murdoch in his fever. Instead, they threw it into the sea."

Tomas drew his breath through clenched teeth. "May the devil take them to himself where they belong. But look you, Finlay Ban, I have a word for you. Do not be resisting overmuch."

"Not even when they dip a fevered man into the sea?"

"Not even then."

All the while the *Wallsgrove* had been ploughing on through the coastal waters, and in due time entered the Thames Estuary and came up as far as Tilbury Fort. Here the boats that Cumberland had commandeered at Inverness gathered, each with its quota of prisoners. There was not room for them all in Tilbury, so those left over were put on transports and anchored hard by in the River Thames.

The Glenmoriston men had been taken to Tilbury with the exception of Finlay and a few of his friends. How it happened was explained to him later. Shortly after the flogging he had fallen ill. When the men in the *Wallsgrove* were ordered on deck to be taken off, he lay prone and unconscious in the hold. Tomas MacIntosh knelt beside him, feeling for his pulse. The others from Torbeg were gathered round.

“Is he for going?” whispered Jamie.

“Not yet. He will live for a while.”

Then Tomas had knelt and put his arm under Finlay’s shoulders, Jamie locked his hands beneath the knees, and they struggled up the ladder to the deck. But the tender for Tilbury had gone. They saw it pulling rapidly away, and all their friends with it. The voice of the guard broke in on their dismay. “Throw the dead man over.”

“We will not,” objected Tomas. “He is alive.”

“Then off to the *Liberty and Property* with you and carry him down to the boat yourselves.”

So here on the *Liberty and Property* they now were, and had been for long weary weeks. That Finlay did not die was due to the care given him by Tomas MacIntosh and the others. Slowly he won back to a comparative degree of strength, and then to that strange toughness that comes when the body adjusts itself to a minimum of food and comfort and learns to function on it.

The prison ships stood off Tilbury Fort in the Thames. The country on either side of the river was low and marshy and blanketed often with fog. There was a great deal of sickness among the prisoners, a sort of wasting fever from which some recovered but many died. Like Hector here, who lay on his straw pallet, quiet now, his time of privation and suffering so strangely ended with the simple ceasing of his breath. He was perhaps to be envied.

But no! The young life in Finlay’s wasted body resisted the thought. His heart beat strongly and defiantly. His mind came back to the present. His

arms dropped from the beam on which they had been resting. He rubbed his elbows with his palms to restore circulation, and then stepped over to where Tomas sat, arms clasped about his ankles and his chin on his knees, in a deep study.

He looked up as Finlay sat down by him, and smiled. "You know, this sickness could be greatly reduced. Think you, would it be of any use to memorialize the authorities?"

Finlay shook his head. "You're fanciful, Tomas. You're dreaming dreams."

"Dreams have a value in a state like ours. Certain things could be done. This place could be cleaned and fumigated, our clothes burned and fresh ones issued, warm enough to keep us in health. We should be given a chance to wash, to cut our hair, to be at times in the open air. Then plain food but wholesome, and once in a while a coggie of ale to elevate our spirits."

Finlay laughed harshly. "When one dreams, one might as well dream well. I'd give all that for a chance to leap unshackled into the river and make a try at winning home to the Highlands."

"Aye, so. But we can try for smaller mercies first. Yesterday, by the way, I was talking to one of the guards. He had a sore felon on his thumb. I have no instruments of course, but I told him how to poultice it, and belike it will break of its own power. He told me quickly and out of hearing of his mates that the guards were petitioning for better treatment. They complain of poor bedding and nothing to eat but bread and cheese."

Finlay laughed. "I'll not weep for them. They're cruel, villainous men with no mercy in them."

"Of course. They were picked for that. Nevertheless I would not choose their lot."

Finlay looked curiously at him. "You've a cool head, Tomas. You think. The rest of us, we grieve, we hate, we long for home or death or deliverance. But you exercise your mind."

"So should you."

"Where shall I begin?"

Tomas's eyes crinkled at the corners. In spite of the privations he had retained somehow a thickset look. It was the structure of the bones of his body and his square-built skull. His grey eyes were keen but kindly. He had

the look of one who had found himself and made his peace with fate. He said now, "This is the time for us to cultivate our interiors."

Finlay gave a yelp of sardonic laughter and slapped the front of his kilt. "Interiors! We haven't any. Were they to hang, draw and quarter us, there'd be precious little viscera to burn."

Tomas smiled. "It is not our physical interiors that I mean. We do have hearts and minds to explore. And memories."

Finlay thought of that as he lay in the darkness that night. For the most part he had been afraid to think with more than the surface of his mind, or to remember. Lest he be entirely unmanned. Where now should he turn? To Caroline? Not yet, not yet, he cried within himself, holding back the wall of grief that threatened to engulf him. Instead he would return to his boyhood. He would think of that well-ordered, clean and kindly house at the mouth of the glen, where dwelt his brother, the Laird of Glenmoriston, and where he himself had lived as a boy. He saw the house with the summer sun on it, and the rowan tree bright beside it, and the stone bench on the terrace.

Then he turned in his mind to Torbeg, where indeed his heart lay. Torbeg, set in the sweep of green hills, with the dark row of trees behind it and the gardens below. He lingered over the garden. He saw the white rosebush which Lauchie had been so eager to have in good heart against Caroline's coming. He saw, he vowed he smelled the honeysuckle. Even in the stench of the hold, he got a faint sweet breath of the honeysuckle as it was of a summer evening in the garden at Torbeg.

The smell of love, Caroline had said. Then at last he gave himself over to the thought of Caroline and of his longing for her. Under cover of night, he gave himself to it. He sank in it, he drowned, he all but died in it—in a sea of love and longing and loss.

"Caroline," he cried silently, and his tears flowed and pain and grief twisted him. Then he put the thought of her away from him, because he could no longer sustain it.

The clothing of all the prisoners was now in a sad condition. Their shirts had, in point of fact, simply worn off their bodies. Their kilts, hand-spun, hand-woven of hard woollen twist, fared better. They were unbelievably dirty and ragged, but they hung together. They covered their nakedness. But the upper part of their bodies was bare enough. As the weather worsened, they all suffered miserably from the cold and damp.

Then one day the guard threw a great bundle down among them. It was clothing—jackets, breeches, shirts and woollen hose. They fell on it like beasts on a bone. Finlay's voice rose, and they stood back, shamed.

"Tomas will divide it," he said. "Gather about and let him see your need."

The comfort of a warm jacket to the chill of their backs, of woollen hose to the ache of their ankle joints and knees, was indescribable. But what they felt was more than gratitude for physical comfort. It was that from somewhere a drift of kindness had blown in on their misery. They were touched and disturbed by it. When the guard came down next, they inquired of him about the issue of clothing.

"Issue? No issue. The women of London did it. They heard you were near naked, so they collected this and had it sent in. Move away now," he added gruffly and climbed the ladder. He too was stirred and made uncomfortable by this intrusion of goodness. It was unnatural here, and out of character.

"The women of London," the men whispered to themselves, fingering the texture of hose or sleeve. There were women in London then, like those at home in the Highlands, gentle and compassionate, who would comfort a man in his need. They avoided each other's eyes, and sat thoughtful and silent. And each man felt about his heart a little area of warmth and ease.

When the winter dusk set in that night, they unrolled their pallets as usual, but sleep was slow to come. Not for a long time had there been occasion for them to feel any of the softer emotions. Now gratitude disturbed their hard equanimity. So there was a restlessness, a sighing, a turning of bodies on the straw pallets, and finally, a waiting silence.

Then out of the darkness to the left of Finlay there came a low humming. It was Jamie. He lifted his voice just a little, and sang. "Colin's Cattle," it was, a shieling song, homely and warm and one they all knew. Jamie's voice, young and true and full of lilt, came persuadingly in the chorus—

*Cro dh Chailein mo cridhe,
Cro dh Chailein mo ghaoil—*

and one by one the others joined in, till the dark hold was full of singing. With it came a gradual easing of tension in mind and body. They sang of "The Tocherless Lass," and "The Nutbrown Maiden." Then came "*C'aite 'n Caidil an Ribhinn,*" and this reached down into the depths of them.

O, where art thou, my love, tonight?
Where sleepest thou, my dearie?
Where'er thou art, my lady bright,
O, would that I were near thee.

They sang it with full hearts and sorrow and longing and love.

From above, two guards peered down into the blackness of the hold.
“What are the blighters up to?”

His mate shrugged. “Sound mutinous to you?”

“Naow. Sounds lovesick, like cats on a fence when the moon is full.”

“Can’t say as how I blame them,” conceded the other generously.
“They’re human, ain’t they?”

Below, Finlay lay in the mirk and the stench, and the music sang on in his heart, when the rest were still. “Where art thou, my love, tonight? Where sleepest thou, my dearie?” He saw the room at Torbeg with the oak aumry and the blue curtains and the canopied bed, and Caroline’s dark hair on the pillow. On the surcease of that thought, he slept.

Caroline was at that moment asleep in Torbeg, but not in the pleasant high-windowed room where Finlay pictured her. It was in a lesser chamber that she lay, and in due time wakened to the burdens and cares of the day.

The problem of food continued to plague her, food for those at Torbeg and in the steadings roundabout. The truth was the glen was near to starvation. The cattle had been almost all driven off, and there had been no harvest. The men who would have planted and tended and garnered it were — where were they? Many were dead. Others were in far places and in great distress, fetters on their limbs and loneliness in their hearts. So hunger stalked the glen that had been their home.

The grain in the giral at Torbeg was now running low. Many an old man or woman or child had come borrowing as they termed it, and who would refuse with them hungry? The herd so carefully tended by Lauchie was being depleted as the cattle were slaughtered for food. As many milch cows as they could, they saved, but at this time of year, at best, the milk was scanty. Not only had the herds been decimated, the glen had been stripped of its young and able-bodied men, and those who were left felt the strain. Lauchie himself suffered from pain and swelling in the joints, and the work would have gone ill at Torbeg but for Peter who came down every day from the hills.

“When this is over, will you rebuild Craskie?” Caroline asked him one day.

They were standing before the window in the hall, looking up the glen. There was snow everywhere. The sun struck blindingly on it in the high corries of the mountains. The slopes were covered with it. On the floor of the valley it lay in great sweeping curves and conformations like waves curled over, or jutted fantastically from ledge and boulder. The river ran black in a winding channel cut deep into it. Tiny particles of frost hung in the air, and the honeysuckle and the red-hawed rosebushes were all bedecked with rime.

“Bonnie,” observed Peter, “but cold.” Then in reply to her question, “Rebuild Craskie? In time, maybe. Who can say what is ahead for any of

us?" His eyes rested soberly on her. She was thinner of face and figure than she had been. The rigour of the time was telling on her.

She sighed. "I look at these hills, and I think perhaps there is a woman sick in some small upland stead, or a child hungry, or an old man with no broth to warm and cheer him."

"And you will be right. There will be all that and more. There will be death by starvation. Yet as a matter of fact, so many have died that there are now not so many hungry. You have no idea how the glen has been reduced in numbers. The fox looks out of the window in many a biggin where last year there were men and women and work and laughter. The graveyards are overfull."

"And the prisons."

"Aye," he went on quietly, "the graveyards and the prisons and the cauld sea. We may as well face the knowledge and take it into our minds."

She turned to him. "You think Finlay is dead?"

He stood looking down into her stormy blue eyes. "Aye, that I do. You will not be angry with me for answering truly."

"Angry? How could I be? And you my friend."

"I am more than that," he said simply.

"I am not angry," she said. "But I do not believe you."

"I know you do not. So you wonder and suffer and hope and fear and despair and hope again. You will wear yourself into a sickness or even to death that way."

"What then should I do?"

"You should face the facts that confront you, let your heart sink into sorrow, then rouse yourself and take up your life again."

She looked bitterly at him. She had no words.

Not long after this, Caroline got a letter from Culcabock, written by Elspeth:—

Come and stay with us here, you and Alsoon. Come for at least a month. Alex has an undertaking in hand. He is about to leave for London with money, and letters to those in authority, to see what

he can find out about Finlay. You will want to hear his news the moment he returns. So come now before the approaching spring breaks up the roads.

Caroline considered the letter thoughtfully. The factor that finally decided her was one that would never have come into her mind a year ago. With herself and Alsoon absent, there would be more food in the household for the ones who remained, and for sharing with those in need. Added to that, she would the sooner see Alex when he returned, and it would be pleasant indeed and comforting to be for a while with her kinsfolk at Culcabock.

Peter urged her to go. "Nothing could be better for you and for the little maid. It's needful to take the burden from the back by times, if the bearer is to endure."

"But I leave it to Morag and Lauchie," she protested.

"I myself will be close by. Indeed if it will set your mind at rest, I will bide here, bringing what provender I have."

"Peter," she cried in instant relief, "what should I do without you?"

He gave her a quick guarded look, then grinned. "What indeed!"

At Culcabock everyone from Ferchar Robertson himself down to the scullery maids conspired to indulge Caroline and small Alsoon. Gratefully Caroline accepted this comfort and kindness. She had an odd feeling that this was for her a respite when she was to be nourished and sustained for what might lie ahead.

Her aunt delighted in the presence of the two children, Alsoon and Elspeth's little Duncan, who played so happily together in the big, sunny nursery upstairs. For Alsoon she set herself at once to fashion many small garments, little frocks of homespun and plaiding for everyday, and for best a fine primrose-yellow silk one with a full skirt, a tiny bodice and ribbon ruching at the neck and elbows.

Caroline herself was treated like a dear daughter. She had no responsibility. It was not that she had no anxiety. She remembered Finlay constantly, and always in the back of her mind was the tension of waiting and fearing and hoping all at the same time. Especially did she wait with eagerness and anxiety for Alex's return. Nevertheless the weeks of rest and refreshment at Culcabock restored her to health and, in a measure, to the buoyancy of spirit that was natural to her.

Winter had now turned definitely to spring. There was still frost at night, but by day the sun poured down from a high, bright sky and warmed the earth beneath. The smell of growth and damp ground and young shoots pushing through was everywhere. So was the sound of water, trickling or gurgling, runnelling or splashing over rock and gravel. There was a chill sweetness in the air, a freshness that lay cool and soft against the skin, and was felt all through the body. Flower buds swelled pink, leaves burst, birds sang riotously in the branches.

In the bleaching green the grass was fresh and thick. This was a pleasant place, sun-warmed and sheltered from the wind by a high hedge of holly. Caroline stood there one day and thought of a morning nearly three years gone, when the lass she had been had washed her face in dew and found herself a lover.

Suddenly the happiness and buoyancy of that morning came flooding back over her. She felt it in her veins like wine. It filled her with a secret strong delight. There in the middle of the bleaching green she stood and held it to her. The bright cold spring air played over her. The sun was hot on her hair. Ecstasy filled her. Her heart beat hard and tears broke and slipped down over her face.

For a space this season of felicity endured, then slowly it began to fade. The world lost that strange look of freshness and beauty. But her heart still held the enchantment. Here, where her love had been born, it had returned to ravish and delight her. "This no one can take from me," she thought. "This I have had. And it has a meaning. It means that what began here is not finished."

She was trembling as she walked towards the house. Alsoon came running to meet her, and Caroline picked her up and held her high in her arms. Alsoon laughed down at her and her little face was so endearing that Caroline's heart brimmed over again with happiness.

Elsbeth met them. "Visitors, my dear." She glanced curiously at Caroline, and smiled. "You're looking bonnie."

"Who are the visitors?"

"Ludovic of Castle Grant, and Glenmoriston himself. Will you go in?"

Caroline went in. The men rose. Ludovic bent over her hand, and Patric gave her a brotherly buss on the cheek.

She said, "You're not taking risks, Patric?"

“Och I’m safe enough, if I’m careful. And I am careful. Besides, I met Ludovic on the way. To be in his company is a warrant of safety.”

“I’m not so sure,” remarked Ludovic bitterly. “After all, I am a Highlander.”

Caroline looked at him, and remembered where and when she had last seen him. “What of the men of Glenmoriston?” she asked silently of him. And he took the words out of her mind.

“There is a matter that lies heavy on my heart,” he said. “I should now like to ventilate it, and I ask you to believe me. When I prevailed on the men of Urquhart and Glenmoriston to lay down their arms, I expected that they would make their submission to the Duke of Cumberland, and then return to their homes in safety. That is the simple truth. I can only lay it before you.”

Glenmoriston looked at him with a grave and heavy look on his rugged face. “I believe you made a grievous error in judgment, Ludovic, but that is all. I never credited you with treachery.”

“My grateful thanks for that.” Ludovic’s handsome face, that had been so cool and proud, was now lined deeply, and his eyes were tired. “I can never live it down,” he admitted sombrely. “It will be a mark against my name forever. Not only that, I sleep ill o’ nights, thinking of this one and that in durance and distress.”

“Like Forbes of Culloden,” observed Ferchar Robertson, “you erred in your estimate of the Duke of Cumberland.”

“True, true. I had no comprehension of him at all.” He raised his head suddenly and listened. In the ensuing silence came the sound of hooves scraping to a stop on the gravel.

“It’s Alex,” cried Glenmoriston. “Home at last.”

Elsbeth was already out of the door, and Alex flung himself from his horse and had her in his arms. They came in together. Alex was tired from his long journey. His face was ruddy from the spring wind, but his eyes were dark-circled and sober. One by one, he greeted them, his eyes resting briefly and compassionately on Caroline.

“You’ll be hungered,” cried Mrs. Robertson, as if to stay his news for a while, be it good or bad.

“That can wait.” He moved to the warmth of the fire, Caroline watching him with the most painful eagerness. He turned slowly and met her eyes. “I did not see Finlay,” he said simply and looked away. Then he went on

firmly, "The Jacobite prisoners in Tilbury and in the transports have been sent to America. Indentured for life."

The cruel words were tossed into the air, and hung there. Caroline felt the blood drain from her heart. Desperately her eyes sought out the faces of the others. On each was the same look of outrage. No one spoke.

Alsoon came tiptoeing into the room, looking inquiringly into the sober faces, and leaned against her mother's knee. Without speaking, Caroline put an arm around her. Indentured for life!

"What does it mean?" broke harshly from her lips.

Alex explained carefully. "The prisoners will be taken into service by plantation owners to labour for their keep."

"For all their lives?" Her voice rose incredulously.

There was nothing to be said. Ludovic averted his eyes, while the sound of Patric's angry breathing was loud in the room. Caroline sat stonily silent. Elspeth, her face wet with tears, made as if to go to her, then sat down again.

"I am sorry to be the bearer of such news," said Alex heavily. "Also, I saw Lord Lovat beheaded."

There was a sudden gasp at that, and a flurry of exclamations.

"God rest his burly soul," prayed Patric of Glenmoriston fiercely. "I'll warrant they failed to daunt him. He behaved well?"

"Admirably. All through his trial too, they tell me."

Alex paused for a moment and looked uneasily at Caroline. It was as if in talking of Lovat the intolerable fact of Finlay's predicament was pushed out of their minds for a moment. But Caroline sat motionless and unhearing.

Alex went on. "During his imprisonment Lovat had endeared himself to his warders and attendants. The last evening he had a sociable glass of wine with them. He told them he had left a sum of money so that all the pipers from John O'Groats to Edinburgh might play him a lament. The old women of Clan Fraser would cry the coronach, he knew, and there would be weeping and clapping of hands. His heart turned to the Highlands, where in fact it had always been anchored."

Alex leaned forward and looked into the flames, as if seeing the events of which he spoke. "I had to be out early to get a place on Tower Hill. They made a fête of it, a spectacle for the masses. For me, there was no pleasure in it. Many a friend of mine I had seen brought back into Southwark gaol,

quartered like a bullock at Michaelmas. But for Lovat's sake I went. I thought that, were it myself, I should like to have an old neighbour and friend put a good wish on me at the time of my passing. So I was there. Lovat was eighty, you know. His legs would no longer support him in walking, but he was able to stand. He looked out over the crowd like an actor on a stage who had the situation well in hand.

"All at once a platform, jammed with spectators, gave way at one corner, men and women spilled off, and many were hurt. At that Lovat's face broke into a smile, that fierce, twinkling smile of his, and he cried out rantingly so that many heard him, 'Aha, the more mischief, the better sport!' Then he composed himself, felt the edge of the axe, smiled gravely, muttered a word or two—some said it was a line from Horace, some a prayer—and was helped to his knees. It was soon over. It seemed to me a demeaning performance on the part of the government, this doing to death of an old man who would so soon have died anyway."

Ludovic shook his head. "They feared him, and well they might. His fertile brain, his great schemes—he was a man of parts. In fact there has not been the like of him in this generation for mental vigour and sweep of fancy, and for ascendancy over the minds of men. But he lacked constancy."

"He was true to his clan," put in Glenmoriston. "He was father to each and every one of them."

"Aye, he was," agreed Robertson, and sighed. "So that is the end of MacShimi. It is more than that. It is the end of the clans. Look at us. Lovat, Kilmarnock, Balmerino, beheaded. Lochiel, fled to France. Glengarry in prison. Keppoch dead in battle, and Dunmaglas and Inverallachie. Look at Lord President Forbes, a broken man. Even you, sir"—he turned to Ludovic—"have no easy heart about it all."

Ludovic stirred uncomfortably. "You're right. The Highlands will not be the same again."

"I hear," observed Robertson, "that they're for taking the kilts off us."

"Hughie, the piper, vows the most he'll do is to put a few stitches down the front."

Ludovic shook his head. "The law is to be taken seriously, the penalty being transportation."

"No!" They looked at each other in anger and dismay.

“There’s a meanness in this matter,” Ludovic went on, “that sits ill on my stomach. I can see reason in the disarming of the clans. But to take away the pipes and to take away the kilt, that is different. The kilt is the mark of a man’s clan, his name, his honour. Nor do they confine the law to the Jacobites. I confess, when I heard it first, I thought of America.”

America! Caroline, sitting pale and silent by the window, looked up startled.

Cried Alex, “Sir! You’re not serious.”

Ludovic smiled. “That’s right. I’m not serious. Yet the thought came to me. I’ve had word from Albany. A few days ago a ship from America came into Fort William. It will leave in two weeks’ time. The trading company suggests that I send them a few more young men of brains and ability, like Torquil. They think well of him, it seems. The company prospers. There is good chance of advancement, and there are also large tracts of land to be had for little. Alex, would you think of joining Torquil?”

Alex looked across at Elspeth, and a smile passed between them. He shook his head. “Livishie suits me.”

“Aye, so. And you, Glenmoriston? Your case,” he spoke delicately, “is a little different.”

Patric looked up grimly. “That I know. But they’ll not harry me out of my hills, be my name on the Bill of Attainder or no. I’ll bide quiet, and after a time, if naught threatens, I’ll move in again on my policies and start to build.”

Ludovic placed his fingers together judicially. “You’re probably right. The Government is not like to harry this glen further. Och well, I’ll look out for a young man in Strathspey.”

Abruptly Caroline came out of her long silence. She rose and faced them. “I should like to go to Albany,” she said, and the words dropped like a stone into the stillness.

For a moment it held. Then, “Caroline *mo cridhe*,” cried the Laird, his grey eyes puzzled and uneasy, “It’s a man that’s needed, to clerk or to take up land.”

“I know.” She brushed his words aside. “But this is why I want to go. When I saw Finlay at the pier in Inverness, he had time for just one word to me. That word was ‘Torquil’.”

Patric scraped back his chair. "But you mistook him. You must have. There's no sense to it."

Alex turned his tired dark eyes on her. "What is in your mind, Caroline?"

"It is in my mind to look for Finlay. Torquil will help me."

"Child, child." Her aunt reached out a hand to her. "You're overwrought. Let you lie down for a while."

"Lie down! No." Excitement grew visibly in her. "The transports are away to America. Finlay will soon be there. One day Torquil showed me a map of America. The coast line is long, but the settlement does not extend far in. It is just a matter of seeking till we find him. Then we can buy him off the plantation owner. I'll need money, all that's left of my dowry from Skye, all I can get from Torbeg." She laughed on a high note that broke in tears. Her face was wild with hope.

The Laird and Alex and the others looked at her in pity and embarrassment. All but Ludovic. His eyes never left her face, probing, assessing, appraising. Then he put his long, white fingers together and smiled.

"I can get you a passage," he announced calmly.

She whirled on him. "Will you? Truly?"

Glenmoriston broke in. "This is madness. Let Caroline stay here among her friends, where she belongs."

"Aye," agreed Ludovic smoothly, "and wear her life away, never knowing whether or no she has a husband. Let her find out, I say." Then he amended swiftly, "But I have no right. You will do well, my dear, to be advised by your kinfolk."

Mistress Robertson now took charge of the situation. "Come now. We can speak of it later. Meanwhile we will go through to the dining hall and refresh ourselves."

The subject was dropped, but Caroline remained preoccupied, tense and silent with excitement. Before Ludovic took his leave, she sought him out.

"Yes, I meant it," he assured her, drawing on his leather gloves and smoothing the fingers. "I would count it a favour to be allowed to make your way easy, should you go. Mind, though, I am not urging nor even advising you."

“There is no need to urge.”

“Take it up again with Glenmoriston. Make your decision. I’ll send word to the captain of the *Emily Barr*, that quarters are to be reserved for you and your party, should you require them. The passage money is my gift to you and Finlay. No, never thank me. It eases me to do it. It lifts a load off my heart.”

“I will do more than thank you,” said Caroline softly, her blue eyes lifted candidly to his. “I will fully and freely forgive you for your error in judgment.”

“Bless you for that,” he cried, his voice husky.

Caroline took up the matter with her brother-in-law, the Laird, and with her uncle Ferchar Robertson, and with Alex and Elspeth and her aunt. They all, separately and together, besought her to repent of her rash intent.

But she did not repent. For the first time since she had seen Finlay on the quay at Inverness with the enemy bayonets a hedge between them, a way was opening up by which she could seek him out rather than wait passively at home till Providence or friends or simple justice brought about his release. The whole of her mind was poured into this one firm purpose, and to the pleading of her friends she was impervious.

She listened to them of course, seriously and with affection, because they loved her and were anxious. Her aunt wept over her. Elspeth tried to understand but was fearful. Her uncle became impatient with her. He told her of the miseries of a long sea voyage, of the wild, rough life in America, of the Indians who from time to time attacked the white men.

“But I’ve lived in a country harried by Cumberland,” she protested. “What would I fear from red Indians? Besides, there’s the matter of the man Pilchard. Think you, if they start scouring the glens to prevent the wearing of the kilt, someone might remember and make trouble?”

Her uncle brushed this aside. “A fine thing for Ludovic to aid and abet you! Let him salve his conscience some other way. And bide you here where you belong. If Finlay is alive and wins free, where else would he seek you?”

With Lauchie and Morag it was simple. She was for going, was she? Then they would go with her. Their loyalty and their faith in her both strengthened and humbled her.

But the words spoken to her by Peter of Craskie, she did not forget. He came into the hall at Torbeg, and sat down on the opposite side of the table

from her, and they looked at each other.

“The Laird has told you?” she asked.

He nodded, his dark eyes resting on her. For some reason she flushed under the scrutiny. She wore a grape-blue linen frock, tight-bodiced, full-skirted, and the colour of it brought out the blueness of her eyes and the wild-rose bloom on her cheeks.

“The change has done you good,” he remarked, then he sighed, and laid hands flat on the table before him. They were long, firm hands, with bony joints and hardened skin and strength in the very look of them.

“Tell me,” cried Caroline, “what you are thinking?”

“I am thinking you are carried away by an unreasonable hope. Suppose Finlay is alive. How can you find him in a strange wild land with none of us by to protect you?” He paused and a singularly sweet and affectionate smile played over his firm lips. “Stay here where we will all be good to you.” Again he paused, while that queer gentle look grew in his eyes. Then, “Listen now, Caroline *mo cridhe*, to what I am about to propose. If you stay, I will serve you faithfully and help build up Torbeg to what it was before. For seven years I will do that. Glenmoriston tells me that men have been known to be set free in seven years. If at that time Finlay wins home, I will give him the welcome of a friend and a kinsman. If he fails to return, I will ask your hand in marriage.”

She pushed back from the table, flushing hotly.

“In the meantime,” he went on levelly, “I will not tempt your loyalty.”

His eyes held her and forced her to put aside her flare of feeling, and think of what he said. “It would be most unfair to you,” she whispered finally.

“It is what I want nevertheless.”

There was a painful silence. She traced patterns on the tabletop with her finger, then said suddenly, shyly, “But I think Finlay’s alive. And even were he not, or we never found each other, it would make no difference. That’s how it is. But you, och Peter, you have a special place. More than a friend you’ve been.” Tears were on her cheeks.

“Whisht now,” he said softly and reassuringly, “and thank you for the kindness of your heart. Once before I thanked you for that. It becomes a habit.” He was silent for a long moment. “So you will be going. If you do not find him, will you return?”

She nodded.

He shook his head. "No, you will not, I feel it." Then he said his last word on the subject. "When you are in that far land, I will be thinking of you and remembering you. Think sometimes of me, Bantighearna."

Nor did Caroline forget the words spoken by the Dowager Lady, the Widow Glenmoriston, that formidable and affectionate old woman. She did not urge her daughter-in-law to bide at home and wait. She approved of her going, and nothing so heartened Caroline as that approval.

"Sure," she said comfortably, as if the trip to America were nothing, "go you and seek the lad. Till you do, you'll be nothing but a ghost woman with half your soul wandering."

She sighed then, and folded her firm old hands in her lap and looked past them all and into the future. "This is only the beginning. Many more will leave these glens and cross the sea. New clans will spring up over there, of our name and blood, but their lives will be moulded by their circumstances, and so will be different from ours. Yet they will not forget the glens from which they came. In the gloaming they will see the heather on the hills, and the mist in the corries, and the sun glinting on the lochs and streamlets. They will remember. And the memory will bide in the blood. For they will die, and their sons and daughters will die, but the memory will prevail. Their children's children will come back, and they will look at the steadings in the glen and the dykes on the hillside and they will know that this is yet their home."

Preparations for the journey went on at Torbeg. Gear was gathered. Finlay's things were packed first, his bright kilts, his plaids, his jackets, his pipes all silver-mounted and braw with ribbons, the old claymore that had been his father's, and a few dirks. The big Bible went in, and the quaich and the silver tassies, even the set of pale-green china dishes that Torquil had given them, well wrapped in carded wool.

The days passed in a haze of excitement and emotion and great activity. As a matter of fact, not till the *Emily Barr* stood well out from Fort William, and was making her way down the waters of Loch Linnhe, did the full realization of the step she had taken come upon Caroline. Here she was in a tiny cabin furnished with two rough bunks, a table and a few stools. Here was Alsoon sitting up and gazing across at her with wide, wondering eyes.

“Poor bairn,” Caroline smiled at her, “has your mother treated you badly taking you from your home?”

Actually she had no doubt at all about the rightness of what she had done, so strong was the impulse that drove her. Not even when they came out into the open sea and a storm struck them did she falter. Though through a long night she sat clutching her child to her while the ship rolled and took water and the wind screamed in the rigging.

The storm awed her. They were, it seemed, in the very centre of it, tossed and thrown about like a drift of seaweed. It was as if the waves were alive. They warred with one another, bellowing hoarsely, the far ones roaring as they came and falling on the ones close in. The ship groaned and creaked and sometimes a long shudder took her from stern to stem. All too thin seemed the wooden walls to withstand the fury of the wild Atlantic.

Caroline was awed, but not terrified. Nor were Morag and Lauchie. At least they took it quietly, whatever were their thoughts. Alsoon, it is true, sobbed softly in a forlorn and heart-breaking way as if she knew the unease in her world was beyond her mother’s power to control. All night and all day the storm lasted. Finally at evenfall they were able to sleep, and by morning it had blown itself out, and soon the sea was almost smooth, a grey-white, only slightly tilting table. The waves no longer roared and barked. The wind was still. The storm was over.

Caroline settled down into the routine and monotony of a journey that would, she knew, stretch on from weeks into months. What lay at the end of it, she could not tell. The days were to be taken as they came. She had a purpose, and she was moving towards the accomplishment of it. With that thought firm in her mind, she was upheld amid the present dangers and discomforts.

At this time Finlay too was on the open sea, but he was nearer to his destination than was Caroline to hers, and some hundreds of miles to the south. He looked stronger, hardier and less emaciated than he had been when on board the transport in the Thames. The fresh air was responsible, and the improved food. No longer was death among the prisoners an economy to those in charge, nor their weakness an advantage. Now a new motive came into play. Messieurs Gildart and Smith, contractors for the disposal of the transportees, looked to make a handsome profit out of the business. So the food was increased, and the men were allowed on deck for air, in groups of ten at a time.

In spite of their known fate, their spirits lightened. The sun and the clean wind healed their sick bodies. They still wore shackles, but they felt now like men and not like caged animals. A certain reshuffling had occurred among the prisoners. Some that Finlay had not seen since they had been together in the *Wallsgrove* on the way to London, or even before that in the stone kirk at Inverness, he met when they boarded the *Hypatia*, and it was good to greet old friends and neighbours. The men from Torbeg were still with him, also Tomas MacIntosh, with whom he felt an increasing closeness.

It was not the same sort of intimacy he had with those of his own name from Glenmoriston. With these it was a closeness of the blood. With Tomas it was a nearness in mind, a shared awareness of the significance of what was happening to them. But it was the lads from Torbeg whose fate twisted his heart as he looked at them. They depended on him. He could do little enough for them. Yet they upheld each other.

Jamie still had his chanter, and sometimes the group allowed on deck at one time, gathered around him, and he played ranting old tunes for them or love liltis or war songs. Whiles he swung into a lament, and the music came slow and sorrowful, and the men put their heads down on their arms or looked far out to sea, and tears brimmed over in blue eyes or black or brown. Then the guard would push in roughly.

“Come naow, no more of that—caterwauling all over the plyce!”

Meanwhile the brig, *Hypatia*, small, sturdy, two-masted, swept on across the Atlantic. To one on deck, and in good weather, the motion was

exhilarating—the quick, living response of sail to wind, the sudden bellying, the fluttering, the steadying, the wild plunging, and then the smooth swaying onward motion over the great, green sea, laced with white and gently rocking. It was springtime, and the wind over the ocean was soft and full of promise. The days were golden, the sky a clear blue, and the sea a floor of dancing wavelets. In spite of fate, the heart was light to see it.

But as the days and weeks passed over, the exhilaration began to fade. Full realization of their plight settled gradually into their minds during the long, slow days under the warming sun. At times it was pushed away as something too much for the mind to grapple. But it lay in wait.

One day as they lounged on deck, listening to the humming of the breeze in the rigging, and the slap and hiss of the waves below the bow, said Jamie in a voice that was carefully quiet and inflectionless, “What like is this island where they are taking us?”

Tomas answered him. “Barbados? It’s one of the Indies. Standing well out into the Atlantic, as I remember the maps. They grow tobacco and sugar cane, and they manufacture rum.”

“It will be warm there?”

“Aye. Warm.”

Jamie looked at his legs, already sore burned by the sun, then shrugged. “Better than cold. But,” he averted his eyes, “what about us? What will they do to us?”

“We’ll be indentured servants,” explained Tomas evenly, “working on the plantations.”

“They will hire us?”

There was a pause. Then harshly from Tomas, “What use is it to mince matters? They will buy us.”

Jamie’s breath came sharply. “Slaves we’ll be then?”

“Slaves of a sort, yes.”

Listening, Finlay felt his heart like to burst with bitterness and despair. As long as they were in England, miserable though they had been, they were not irretrievably cut off from Scotland and home. Now, on the way to the West Indies, they were. There was no denying it—they were cut off.

He said to Tomas when Jamie had without a word moved away, “I had thought we might be sent to the mainland.”

Tomas nodded “There’d be a chance for escape. But on a small island, bound about by rocks and reefs and set far out in the ocean, what hope?”

Finlay was searching in his memory. “Were not indentured Highlanders sent to Barbados before?”

“Aye, they were. After the Rising of Seventeen-fifteen. We’ll find some of our own there before us. Poor devils.”

Tomas’s square-cut reasonable face looked less reasonable of late. There was at times a frantic, fleeing light in his grey eyes. “They call this ‘the king’s grace’ —pardon, with transportation for life. What would I not give at this minute for a glimpse of a certain high hill in Moy, or for the sound of a burn I know leaping down the side of a mountain?” He drew a long, sighing breath. “But to tell the truth, Finlay, it is when I look far into the future that I am daunted.”

“What do you see?”

“I see us on an island from which we cannot escape, living a life of poverty and servitude, and black men all around us. Can we keep ourselves to ourselves? Look ahead—two hundred years. Will there be just a few Negroes with skin a little lighter than the lave, to mark our living and our dying?”

Appalled and angry, Finlay turned on him. “That will never be.”

“That there should be danger of it fills me with despair.”

Finlay looked out over the sea. “For me, I must get back.”

“Get back?”

“Aye. To Scotland. To the Highlands. To my wife.”

Tomas made no answer.

“You think it will not be,” cried Finlay hotly. “I tell you it must be. In some way it must come to pass.” His voice broke.

Then Tomas said soothingly, “Who can tell? We are in the hands of God —literally.”

The old steady reasonableness was restored in Tomas. It was still like that among the prisoners. When one failed in composure, the others grew more calm, and stood about him as it were, till his nerve returned, knowing that each of them would at some time need to be so shielded.

Jamie it was, who next fell disconsolate. The fair weather broke. The waves reared up and the brig leaped and plunged, her deck awash and her masts creaking. The prisoners were kept below. It was curiously unmanning, being shut in and helpless, while all about the noise of the storm drummed on nerve and diaphragm in a mad, loud monotony of sound.

Down in the hold Jamie lay, white and limp. His friends crouched close to him, their eyes dark with concern. Finlay smoothed the damp red curls back from his forehead. "Jamie, my hero, you must keep a good heart. We're all here with you."

Jamie looked soberly up at him. His voice came slow and soft. "In my pocket now, there's my chanter. I want you to have it."

Finlay shook his head in quick remonstrance.

"Never mind that," came Jamie's insistent low voice. "Take it now when I tell you."

Finlay reached and got it and put it away carefully in his own pocket. "Proud I am to have it, Jamie," he said.

A smile fleered over the tired, young face. "Mind, I'll be hearing it if you play a wrong note." Then he sighed deeply, and his eyes fell shut, while his breathing went on, quiet and steady like a bairn's. After a while his eyes flew open again, and they drew in closer. "I'll no see Mysie any more," he said in a voice full of mournful wonder.

Nor did he. In two days he was dead, and the storm being then blown out, they wrapped him in canvas, and slipped him into the gently heaving cool green sea.

Nearer and nearer to their destination they came. The weather warmed yet more, but the winds blew and tempered the air. Excitement grew among the prisoners. They gathered in groups in the dimness of the hold and pooled their knowledge and their wild surmise.

"I was talking to a sailor lad," said one, wiping the sweat from his brow with his palm. "He says we'll be in the sugar plantations, working dawn to dark under the hot sun."

"Is there no shade?" cried one.

"A little. In places. There are cedars and some queer bright trees covered with flowers."

"There's tobacco," said another, "and rum."

“Scotch whisky?”

“Not for the likes of us.”

Tomas lifted his steady voice. “We must realize our fate and set ourselves to endure it. We will be in a position where not the least or meanest of us ever stood. So we must support each other and hold together.”

“Is it a big island? Will we be far separate?” a young lad asked uneasily.

“It is not big, and we will not be far apart. More than that, some of our own are there before us. Thirty-odd years ago, after Mar’s rising, Scottish prisoners were sent here, indentured like ourselves. Also, other ships will come with more of our own comrades. Women and children too, a few of them.”

There was a long pause. Men did not meet each other’s eyes, but looked away, swallowing hard, their faces carefully blank of expression.

Tomas’s implacable, smooth voice went on. “All around us will be black men and women, slaves like ourselves.”

There came another long pause. Then from the back of the hold was flung a tortured question, “What’s to become of us?”

“That,” answered Tomas inexorably, “is for us to say. When men visit this island in time to come, will they find just a drift of blue-eyed Negroes among the rest and no other sign that here came men from the glens and hills of Scotland? Or, shall we survive?”

Then a man came shouldering through and stood by MacIntosh and Finlay. He was a MacDonell from the braes of Glengarry and of the estate of Greenfield—a tall man with a dark passionate face. He spoke briefly in a firm authoritative voice. “We shall keep to ourselves, I swear it. On the dirk!” He held out his left hand, level with his wrist as if a *sgian dhu* were laid on it, and clapped his right hand on it.

“On the dirk!” came the quick, harsh response from the others, each man slapping his right hand on his left in a gesture of pride and fury.

Their first glimpse of the island of Barbados was a reassuring one. It was a soft smooth land, rising in terraces from the shore to a central ridge, a land grey-green and waving with sugar cane. The town of Bridgetown came into view, clustered about the harbour, with trim streets and clean white buildings. A sloop or two lay at anchor in the bay, and a boat dashed out from shore with black men rowing and a white man in the bow.

On the *Hypatia* the prisoners were paraded on deck, and the Captain looked them over critically. "Stand straight," he admonished them. "Comb out your wild hair. Smile. Look willing. Do you not want a good master?"

They stood straight because of the natural pride that was in them. For the same reason they cleaned and tidied themselves as well as they could. But they did not look docile or complaisant or willing. They looked like free men caught up into slavery, and filled with pride and fury. Which they were.

As they stood on deck, the men from Torbeg closed in about Finlay. It was as if they felt most keenly the indignity done to him. He stood taller than the others, his fair head high and his old red kilt whipping about his knees. He looked like a chieftain with his men by him. But his hands were manacled.

These stood together also, when they were put up for sale. For as long as they could. Finlay went first. A planter's agent looked him over coolly and asked, "Can you read and write?"

Finlay nodded as coldly, and the agent grinned a little. "Proud stomach, eh?" he remarked. "Very well, I'll take him."

Quickly Finlay turned to the others. "These also?" The words burst from him in spite of himself.

The agent ignored him. "That will be all. Follow me."

Again Finlay turned to his friends. A quick look passed between them, that same look of helplessness and pride and fury that was to mark these sea-locked clansmen for at least two hundred years.

When the formalities of his indentureship had been concluded, Finlay walked through Bridgetown with the planter's agent. The sun was hot on his bare head and the dust rose in clouds about them. On the outskirts of the town two horses were tethered.

"Can you ride?" asked the agent.

Finlay thought of black Shanlan, pasturing now, he trusted, on the river meadow below Torbeg, splashing over the gravelly shallows, dipping his velvet muzzle into the cold clear water. "Aye," he answered. "I can ride."

The agent gestured towards a lank, grey gelding, and swung himself up on another and better beast. It was good to feel a horse between one's knees, the vitality, the muscle play. But this rusty and ill-kept nag was a far cry from Shanlan.

“You’ll not judge the establishment by the horse you ride,” commented his companion dryly. There was the faintest emphasis on the you. Finlay felt he had been put in his place. He said nothing.

The white road led out of town and up a gentle slope. Fields of sugar cane stretched out on all sides, rustling softly in the wind. The wind blew steadily and strongly from the east.

Said the agent, “My name is Bilkley. The owner of the plantation is Master Mondego Brand.”

Carefully Finlay repeated the unfamiliar words.

“That’s it. It’s not a common name. The place lies to the east as you may see. The western shore of the island is studded with plantations. We to the east stand remote and have little commerce with the rest.”

He fell silent and Finlay, not knowing what degree of familiarity was allowed him, forbore to ask questions. They met an ox team with a cart behind, loaded high with sugar cane. Two slim black boys walked alongside, their bare feet plopping in the light grey dust. Then Finlay did ask, “Are there any other indentured white men on the plantation?”

Bilkley shook his head. “You are the first white we’ve had.” He looked speculatively at Finlay’s red kilt. “You’re from the north of Britain, I take it. A Scot?”

“Aye. A Jacobite.”

“So I gather. No record of thievery or murder or aught like that?”

Finlay flushed but answered simply, “None whatever.”

“You have book learning?”

“Some.” He thought of the stone grammar school in Inverness with its stepped gables, its triple row of windows, its air of rigour and righteousness. Was it for this they had trained his mind within those grey walls?

“For the most part,” Bilkley went on equably, “the master is a reasonable, even a kind man. You must however be careful to treat his lady with the most distant and careful respect.”

“You need have no fears on that score.”

Bilkley smiled quietly. “You have not seen her. A month ago a black boy was whipped and the next day died.”

So Finlay came to the Mondego Brand plantation. There was a house set high facing the sea, and all about it were fields of sugar cane, rustling and whispering in the constant breeze. Windmills whirled their great arms against the sky. Palm trees lined the long avenue that led to the house, smooth grey pillars ninety feet high, and at the top a burst of long green flanges of foliage. These were strange to Finlay. So were the towering and umbrageous silk-cotton trees. And so the bougainvillea, red or rose or snow-white, and the crimson banners of the flamboyant. They were beautiful. They were beautiful in a breath-taking and overpowering way, but strange also, like everything else on this island.

Finlay worked with some Negroes, building a bridge across a small ravine that was quite dry of water.

“But you wait,” one of his companions told him. “Sometimes storms come, fill the gullies right up, then pretty soon water go away.”

“Where?”

“Into the ground. Make wells. Pump him up.”

While they were busy with rock and mortar and Finlay was thinking how like, after all, this would be to many a small, humpbacked stone bridge in the Highlands, then it was he met the master, Mondego Brand himself. He heard his voice first, a deep strong voice with now and then a hard metallic note in it, like the sudden rasp of steel. Hastily Finlay raised himself and stood at attention.

Mondego Brand was not a tall man, but he had an enormous breadth of shoulder. He had also a great red-brown, curling beard and black hair that curled too and had red lights in it. His eyes were russet-brown, the colour of old ale in a deep wooden coggie.

“So you’re the Scot,” he said.

“Aye, sir.”

“You look able.” He stood, feet wide, thumbs thrust in his belt, his brow creased. Finlay was reminded of Lord Lovat. There was the same excessive vitality, the same look of unpredictability.

“Well, my young cockerel,” came that rich rough uneven voice, “what do you want?”

What do I want? A spark of anger kindled in Finlay’s dark eyes. This was baiting. “I want to escape,” he answered coldly.

A gust of laughter burst from the other. The big bearded face broke up in jocularly, nevertheless it did not lose that look of fierceness. Finlay remembered the Negro boy who had been whipped and had died.

Mondego drew his hand down over mouth and chin. "So, my captive Scot, that is what you want—to escape!" Still chuckling he moved away. Finlay looked at the Negroes. They stared, their eyes white-circled. What were they afraid of, he thought irritably, and picked up a stone and fitted it into the arch.

His muscles hardened up. Soon he could, without that sick weakness which had first plagued him, work comfortably all day, as was required of him. But he suffered under the heat which grew greater as the days passed, and was like nothing he had known in the cool and misty climate of his homeland. The skin of his legs blistered and peeled, then burned to a smooth reddish brown. The sun's rays pouring down on his head and shoulders seemed sometimes more than he could bear.

One evening he climbed to a nearby hillock that overlooked the ocean. This was not what he wanted to do. He wanted to set out for the other side of the island and find his friends. He was, however, not allowed to leave the estate except on an errand for his master. The fact filled him with rebellion, but there was nothing he could do about it.

On this eastern coast the wind blew free and hard, and waves crashed in against the shore. Peacock-blue, they were, foam-crested as they broke and creamed up into the white sand. Along the beach rocks outjugged, black and massive, and here the waves flung themselves high and fell back in a smother of spume. There was vigour and wildness as well as beauty in the scene.

"It's like Scotland," said Finlay to himself, and his heart swelled at the thought. Three thousand miles and more over the ocean lay Torbeg. His eyes strained into the distance—wave upon wave to the rim of the world. He plucked Jamie's chanter from his pocket, put it to his lips and played:

O, where art thou, my love, tonight?
Where sleepest thou, my dearie?

and felt his heart like to break. So he changed over. He swung into another sort of tune, a song of Skye about the glens and bens and misty mountain moors. He was well into it and happier than he had been, when there came a scurry behind him, a cry, and he sprang to his feet. There stood a woman.

There was no doubt about it—she was the master’s lady. That was plain even before Mondego Brand came charging up the slope after her, his nostrils flaring and his eyes bright.

The first thing that struck Finlay, and it struck him like a blow, was that she was like Caroline. Older, of course, also taller and fuller of figure, but with dark, curly hair, slate-blue eyes and a definitely contoured white-skinned face.

“The tune you played,” she cried breathlessly, “it was of Skye.”

He bowed. “Aye, my lady. I learned it from my wife who was born there.”

“Skye!” Her voice rang like a bell. Impulsively she turned to Mondego and clasped his arm. “We will have the young man to the house, that I may speak to him of Scotland.”

“As you wish.” Mondego’s wary eyes rested on Finlay. “You may follow us.”

So Finlay followed them. The lady swept on before, her thin blue gown trailing over the stone-flagged path. Mondego had a rolling gait like a burly sailor. They came up the long, palm-bordered avenue, with the western sky bright before them and the palm fronds silhouetted against it. There was still light enough to see the masses of flowering shrubs, the hibiscus and the flamboyant, that spread around the house like a garland of colour.

Steps led up into a large, well-windowed room. A black boy came running, and soon thick candles guttered and gave light. They were set about the wall in brackets, and on the table in a branched silver candelabrum. Mondego’s lady sank into a high-backed chair, laid her hands along the arms of it and smiled. Finlay was motioned to a seat and Mondego placed himself between the two on a cushioned sofa.

“The Lady Margreeta,” he said evenly, “wishes to hear of the country where she lived as a child.”

“Tell me of Skye,” she broke in warmly. “Tell me of your wife from Skye.”

“My wife from Skye—her name was Caroline MacLeod before we were married.” He paused and the place seemed very still.

“Where was she born?” came quietly.

“In Bracadale. Her parents are both dead, her father by drowning, and her mother died in sad circumstances when Caroline was but a little maid.”

“Sad circumstances?”

“It’s a long story, my lady.”

“Tell me.”

He hesitated and looked warily at Mondego, who nodded. “Her sister—that is my wife’s young aunt—was captured by pirates one day when she wandered on the moor. Caroline’s mother went to search for her and failed to return. Her they found at the foot of the cliff, drowned.”

A silence fell. Mondego clapped his hands and a boy came in with a decanter and glasses. The wine was red and cool. Finlay lifted his. “To your good health!”

“To Skye!” the Lady Margreeta said softly and sorrowfully. Then, as if on a sudden idea, she clasped her hands firmly in her lap and looked from one to the other of the two men before her. It was a measuring look, intent and purposeful. She rose and came and sat by Mondego on the couch. She sat close so that their bodies touched. Then she slipped a firm white hand into his rough brown one and her fingers twined in his.

“I too,” she smiled proudly, “was taken in Skye.”

Finlay’s voice went husky as he asked, “In Bracadale?”

“In another part of the island,” she told him clearly. “I still carry a load of guilt for the sorrow caused to my family.”

“Guilt? You, ma’am?”

Her eyes brightened and a sudden red whipped her cheeks. “Because, though I was taken, I stayed willingly.”

On that, Mondego’s lusty laughter burst out. He sat up, slipped an arm shamelessly about Margreeta and held her against him. “Aye. That I can swear to. You stayed as a conqueror.”

Finlay was abashed. Passion filled the cool, dim room like a burst of music.

In a moment the Lady Margreeta resumed. “As I said, I bear a load of guilt of which I would disencumber myself. My Mondego, shall we set this long lad free, this husband of Caroline MacLeod of Bracadale? Remembering this other girl from Skye whose lot was so lucky, and still is.”

Mondego's face was suddenly guarded and careful. Her white fingers found his wrist and stayed there. He turned and looked at her. "But to what purpose? I lose his labour, and here he is—with his freedom, yes. But what to do with it?"

She smiled at Finlay. "Where would you go, could you choose?"

"Where? To Torbeg in the Highlands. To my home."

Margreeta's fingers pressed and tapped on Mondego's wrist, and it was as if the message she pressed and tapped came through to the brain. "You mean?" he whispered.

She nodded serenely.

"Well now, my captive Scot," he burst into sudden laughter, "you're like to get your wish. And better so, by Jupiter. I'd not rest easy with a handsome countryman so close to my lady."

That night Finlay slept not at all in his hut in the servant's quarters. Hope swelled so big in his breast that it seemed more than his body could bear. The next day when the heat had abated a little, Bilkley, the overseer, sent a boy for him. When he came in from the cane fields he was shown into a sort of office at the rear of the house, and there he found Mondego Brand waiting.

The big man sat in a slatted chair near the window. He was dressed in a loose white linen shirt and trousers, girded at the waist with a greenish-gold sash, and he looked relaxed and easy.

"Now as to the matter in hand," he began. "The business of cancelling the indentureship will be handled through the authorities at Bridgetown. It will be simple enough. I bought your services. I take the loss and set you free. Bilkley will handle it. But after that—what?"

"I would get home."

"So you said. How, is the problem." He drummed his heavy fingers on the mahogany table beside him and the decanter jingled. "You may have gathered from what was said last night that at one time I sailed the seas in a piratical manner. The fact is not generally known. However, some friends of mine, still engaged in the trade, do me the honour of a visit from time to time. They are soon due. With them you could make a swift journey, though not an entirely safe one."

"But will they go to Scotland?"

Mondego Brand was still for a moment. He had a capacity for brief periods of complete stillness when he retreated into himself and seemed scarcely to breathe. Finally he lifted a heavy hand and let it fall. "If I say so, they will go to Scotland. I am still the owner, and business is business in any quarter of the sea."

Finlay too was silent while the implications sank into his mind.

Mondego smiled grimly, watching him. "There is another course open to you. Leave Bridgetown on any one of a dozen boats, and make for the coast of America, where, I am told, a young blade with a strong back and a bit of book learning can make a fortune these days. That, naturally, is the wiser course. After all, will Scotland be safe for you? Your pardon, I take it, hinged on transportation."

A large leather-covered book lay on the table beside the decanter. Mondego opened it, flattened it with his hand and peered at an entry. He rubbed his thumb along a line. "Bilkley will cross it out. He's a bookish man. Now, my Scot no longer captive quite, you can turn all this over in your mind."

"Sir, one moment. First, my extreme gratitude. There are no words to say it. But I think now of my friends who came with me to this island. May I seek them out and wish them well?"

Mondego's brows met. "Not so! Not by any means. Till you go, you are to be close confined to this estate. I can afford no idle talk, no blabbing. You will not forget that."

"What will become of my countrymen, may I ask?"

"What would have become of you," came the harsh answer. "You've seen that hilltop up the coast? That's Chalky Mountain. Those who have finished their term, and those born here, drift to that rough terrain, build themselves huts and live by fishing and small farming and by hiring out their labour. If they are indentured for life, they have not even that to look forward to."

"Unless they escape."

Mondego laughed grimly. "There's a ring of reefs around this island. We worry little about escape."

Finlay eyed him warily. In a minute he'll repent of his generosity, he thought.

Then a voice came floating in from the garden, a woman's rich voice singing. Miraculously the cloud cleared from Mondego's brow. "This much I will do," he offered in an altered and equable voice. "Give me the names of the men, and if they are at present ill used, I will buy them." His eyes were on the window, and his words trailed away into silence. He rose, took Finlay's thanks with an absent-minded nod, and went through to the garden.

Finlay returned to the cane fields, to the sugar mill with the tall chimneys puffing out smoke, and the windmill whirling and creaking and the wide-horned white oxen hunching their shoulders to the load that lumbered along behind.

"Turn it over in your mind," Mondego Brand had said. That Finlay did, the rest of the day and all the night. Towards morning he rose from his bed and came out into the darkness. For a while he stood listening, as often at home in Torbeg he had listened to the sounds of the night, to the water gently lapping and the wind in the birch trees. Here the sounds were different. Here was the rustling of the high, slatted palm branches and the distant, steady roar of the surf.

The sound of the surf called him. He moved quietly through the night and came along a dark path that led up to a cliff that overlooked the sea. The wind was like a heavy hand on his chest. It came roaring in over three thousand miles of wild Atlantic breakers. With it came the first flare of dawn. As he watched, the dark sky to the eastward lightened, changed from purple to violet to pink. Long rays thrust upward. Then came a sudden great effulgence of light that poured over sea and sky till the whole burned like a fire, gold and rose and saffron. The waves leaped up, flame-tipped, and the new day was born.

It was indeed. Away to his left, fishing boats were pushing out, setting their sails for the gaps in the encircling reefs. A ribbon of ivory sand ran along the shore, and behind it a belt of trees. And there far up the coast was the hill called Chalky Mountain where the captive Scots resorted. The familiar turbulence rose in Finlay's breast as he looked, the fury and the hurt pride. That this should be the end of the road for the young men who had marched singing over the steeps of Corrieyairack with their Prince!

"God help them," he prayed, and for a while his heart was given over to bitterness and grieving. How could he leave them to their fate? Yet in truth, he was not able to ask them to share his, and was it one they would wish to share?

So now he came to the problem set before him by Mondego Brand. Was he to go by pirate ship wildly and unlawfully to Scotland? Or was he to make his way to America and gather gear there and plan for a safe passage in due time, when old scores would be wiped out and forgotten?

There was no choice. Torbeg called him across the waves. Torbeg and those in it. What matter if the way was hedged with danger? It was swift. As to sailing in a pirate craft, why should he stick at it? Had the laws of his land been fair to him? In good faith he had laid down his arms, trusting to the word of his superiors, and what had come of it? Had he been hard and wise like Peter of Craskie, he had then in the spring of '46, taken to the high hills with his family and lived in shieling huts or in caves in the rocks, and defied Cumberland and his soldiery. That he should have done. Now he knew it. This too was a time for hard thinking and hard doing. It was no time for qualms or compliance. He would set a firm course, look to his own interest, and the devil take those who would stay him.

The sun now stood high in the heavens. The sea was emerald-green, rocking high and ridged with foam. The sky was a wide incredible wash of colour, fading in the east to palest yellow. Primrose yellow. Did the primroses bloom in the low ground by the Moriston where it widened to enclose those five small islands? Was the hawthorn white by the garden wall? Was the honeysuckle in bud? Did the yellow iris lift its flags in the marshy places? Did the mist pour down from the high corries and break and let the sun through? And did it shine on the white stone walls of Torbeg?

All that I will yet see, thought Finlay firmly, and set his mind and will to encompass it.

Meanwhile the *Emily Barr* was swinging across the North Atlantic. Of the voyage Caroline was to remember most vividly not the poor and scanty meals, or the brackish drinking water, or the storms, or the calms that held them fast by times, or even the troubled and protective concern she felt for her small child. What she was to remember was herself at the deck rail, straining her eyes westward over the water, her heart filled with longing. The fierceness and eagerness of that longing burned in her like a fire, and left her thinner, paler, but with a strange vigour and brightness. The privations and hardships of the journey she took uncomplaining. Had she not lived in a shieling hut but not long since, and, whiles, in a cave? It was only the length of the time that daunted her.

As a matter of fact, it took two months, less nine days. On the whole it was a good voyage, and their difficulties only those inevitable to ocean travel of the day. Caroline, Alsoon and Morag shared a tiny cabin, but Lauchie slept with the other passengers between decks. There, bunks were ranged, two-deep on either side of the ship, and in the space left in the middle, the luggage was piled up, the boxes and chests doing double duty by day as tables and chairs. During a storm these often shifted alarmingly and added to the general disquiet.

Two meals a day were provided for the passengers. The fare was plain and monotonous, and it worsened steadily as the water in the casks grew foul and tainted the foodstuffs that were cooked in it. In time the meal went bad too. It was alive with weevils. To this fact one had resolutely to close the mind. Morag, however, had made a provision that now stood them in good stead. She had stored away in the chests several small brown jars of black-currant jam and rose-haw jelly, which when spread on the cakes of barley meal deadened the offensive taste and lent their own tart flavour. This jelly, made from the wild roses that grew beside the road that led to the shielings, and the currant jam from their own garden at Torbeg, seemed to them especially relishing and beneficial. Caroline felt that it kept small Alsoon in health, so they saved most of it for her.

Alsoon too was paler of face and thinner than she had been, and listless from the confined life and the lack of exercise. Yet she did not actually sicken, as most of the others did. In time of storm many suffered miserably

from seasickness, and as the voyage lengthened others contracted a wasting fever. However the main causes of distress among them were the poor food and drink and the weariness and the monotony. They met no French privateers though a desultory war was going on at the time between France and England. Nor did they sight a single pirate ship though these from time to time infested the lanes of shipping.

The squalls that swept the sea occasionally were welcome. Then the casks were got out and the water supply was replenished. The rain water, though flat to the taste, was refreshing. At least, as Morag said, it didn't scunner one with the smell. At times they made good progress—as much as ninety miles in twelve hours. Then the breeze blew hard, and the white sails snapped and bellied, and the ship sped like a great bird over the green water. Then the wind in the rigging sang *Finlay*, and the waves leaped at the thought, and Caroline leaned and looked and her spirit sprang ahead in wildness and longing and hope.

According to the Captain they were now nearing the coast of America. Throughout the voyage he had been kind and obliging to Caroline. Now he assured her that once they landed, he would see that she and her party were put safely aboard a Hudson River boat that would convey them on the last leg of their journey and up to Albany. For all this she knew that she had to thank the long reach of Ludovic Grant's influence, and she was grateful.

One night there was a smudge on the horizon. They saw it for just a moment before darkness came down, but there was no mistaking it. The next day they came along by a low, sandy beach. A great cloud of sea birds fluttered over it and filled the air with their high, weird fluting. The *Emily Barr* was no longer alone on the water. On every hand other boats flitted about, plying their several ways. Houses appeared on the shore, then a wooded hill, and again more houses. Men put out in small skiffs and followed in their wake, the sunlight flashing on the blades of the oars. The ship pushed in between two points of land and entered wider water within. New York lay before them—roofs among the trees, wharves and streets and houses, church spires too. Behind it lay all America. Caroline's heart swelled at the thought.

The Captain was as good as his word. In the confusion and excitement of disembarkation he took time to assign a man to see to the transfer of Caroline's effects to the Hudson River sloop. There was need for haste. As the sailor explained, the tide was coming in, and those on the sloop would be anxious to have the advantage of it on the trip up the river.

“It means a quick run for you, ma’am,” he told her, trundling the baggage along the pier.

He was right. No sooner had they got themselves and their goods installed than the ropes were slipped, the sails were set, and they were away. The change from the monotonous life on shipboard to the hustle and excitement of the port, and their hurried shift to the smaller boat, combined to leave them tired and a little breathless. Alsoon went wearily to sleep in her mother’s arms. When she was made comfortable on a bench in the cabin, Lauchie came and sat down by her. He sighed and looked up at Caroline.

“Go you out to the deck now, and see what like is the land to which we have come. As for me, I’ll bide with the little lass, and be quiet for a while and sort my feelings.”

The Hudson River was like an arm of the sea. Indeed, it was that. With wind and tide to aid them, they sped up the wide stream. They were not alone; a fleet of small boats scudded along with them, bound also for Albany. The water ran bright and fast. Porpoises tumbled in it. Once Caroline saw a great sturgeon break clear, curve its body into a silver arch and leave a trail of bubbles behind. Gulls swooped and planed, the sunshine glinting from their wings. The banks of the river were green with trees.

Said Caroline to Morag. “It’s a fine fair land.”

“Aye, it’s bonnie. But too bright. I miss the soft look of the hills at home, and the mist.”

“I like the brightness. For me, it lifts the spirits.”

“Aye, aye,” agreed Morag obligingly.

To the west, cliffs now rose sharply, and became a great rocky rampart that ran for miles along the river like a fortification. To the east were farms with pasture and ploughed land and orchards in a checkerboard of green and brown and blossoming pink. The water was a deep electric blue whipped by the wind. There was a certain clear hard brightness about the scene that met Caroline’s mood—the air so fresh and buoyant, and the sunshine blinding strong and warm like the heat from a fire. The sun got through to one’s bones here. It had strength in it.

When Alsoon wakened from her nap, Lauchie brought her out on deck. They found a bench outside the cabin door, the four of them, and Alsoon stood between Lauchie’s knees and watched the world with wide blue eyes. Captain Barslow came and sat down by them and engaged them in talk. He was a long, lean man with clear, almost colourless grey eyes. He smiled at

Alsoon in a fatherly way, and she held up to him a doll Morag had contrived for her out of some carded wool in the chest. He admired it gravely, kissed it on instructions from the owner, and returned it.

“It was so long a journey,” explained Caroline. “I’m afraid we all indulged her.”

The Captain looked down into the small face, so trustfully turned up to him, and laid a hard, brown hand on her curls. “Little yallerhead,” he said fondly, then turned to Caroline. “You have kin waiting for you in Albany, I reckon, ma’am?”

“My husband’s brother, Torquil Grant, is with the Trading Company.”

“Then you’ll be from Scotland, same as him.” His eyes flicked to Lauchie’s worn kilt. “I might have knowed from the petticoat.”

When the Captain had left them, Caroline sat listening to the voices of the men on the deck about her. Their voices had a quality that was new to her. They were clear and resounding like a clapper struck on bronze. They had not the soft confiding grace and candour of the Highland speech, that softness and candour that slipped in under one’s guard and touched the heart as with a finger tip. That softness and candour belonged to the old days, and must now be laid aside till she could find Finlay and take up her life again as the loved and protected wife of a Highland gentleman. Meanwhile she was with a people whose habit of mind suited her present temper and mission.

They were now nearing Albany, and her mind turned strongly on Torquil. She thought of him as he had been in the days before he had left Glenmoriston—redheaded, friendly, downright. He’d not have changed much over the years.

Nor had he. They waited by the waterside at Albany while a messenger hurried to the offices of the Highland Trading Company on Patroon Street. At the first sight of him coming towards them, she knew he had not changed. His hair was bright in the sunshine. His long legs covered the ground rapidly.

“Caroline!” he called when he came close. “When the boy said it was my kinswoman, I scarce believed him. Caroline *mo cridhe!*” He put his arms around her and kissed her heartily. He was young and strong and masculine. He was like Finlay. More than ever her heart warmed to him.

Torquil stooped to look into Alsoon’s face. “Blue eyes like her mother, hair yellow as the Laird’s, but curly like her uncle Torquil’s, and her smile—Finlay Ban himself. All of us in this one small parcel. Blessings on her.” He

shook hands with Lauchie and Morag. "Now come away. You'll be ready for food and rest."

"Torquil!" Caroline laid her hand on his arm and smiled ruefully. "Well I know this is a blow that fair staggers you. Four of us coming on you without warning! Is there not an inn?"

He grinned at her companionably. "Such hawering! I thought it all out on the way. I have quarters in a Dutchman's house. The good lady who lives next door will, I know, oblige me by making place for my guests. Till recently some officers were billeted on her. Come along. The boys will bring the baggage. Och, is it not nice to speak the good Gaelic again with one's own kin!"

As they went Caroline cast quick inquiring glances about her. Albany was a tidy and well-arranged town. A long street ran parallel to the river, and at right angles to it, other streets struck off. The house to which Torquil brought them was on the long street parallel to the river. It was of stone, steep-roofed, with dormer windows and widespread eaves. The gable end faced the street, and in front of the entrance was a sort of portico, furnished with benches and railed in on either side.

"This is what the Dutch call a stoop," Torquil told them.

It was on the stoop that Caroline and Torquil sat in the cool of the evening. Nothing, she thought, could be more peaceful than this quiet and tree-lined street. A herd of tawny cattle filed by, their bells tinkling as they passed. One by one they turned into this lane or that.

"They pasture in the meadows at the far end of the town," explained Torquil, "and come home at night to be milked."

"How docile they seem." Caroline watched the slow procession and remembered the black Highland cattle on the slopes of Corri-Dho.

"They are Dutch cows," Torquil smiled. "Sedate and careful."

"Do you like the Dutch?"

"Aye, but they're different. I'm glad to have a crack with a Highlander once in a while to restore the natural man in me." He threw one leg over the other and settled into his chair. "Now Caroline, my kinswoman, tell me."

"Indeed I will tell you, Torquil. You know what befell Finlay?"

"Aye. That he was taken by treachery and sent to London; that when Alex was freed, he was not in Tilbury or Southwark, but might have been in

the transports. So much I have had in letters.”

“There is more to know. First, when I saw Finlay for but a moment on the quay at Inverness, he called out to me the word, ‘Torquil.’ Why, I am not sure, but he did. Again, the remaining Jacobite prisoners left the Thames early this spring for America.”

“To be indentured.”

“Yes. I am hoping that Finlay is among them.”

“What do you intend to do?”

“I intend to find him and buy his release. Before leaving Scotland I raised all the money I could. I have, besides, a letter from Ludovic of Castle Grant, allowing me to use his interests in the company as security in case I need to borrow.”

“The transports were bound for—where?”

“America.”

“Caroline, do you realize the extent of America?”

“You showed me a map once. A strip along the coast, you said, made up the English dominions.”

“Aye,” he repeated. “A strip two thousand miles long and five hundred wide, more or less. The islands of the Indies besides.”

“So it’s big then. It seemed not so big on the map.” Her voice trembled a little, then she rallied. “Nevertheless, if Finlay were able to get word to anyone, it would be to you here at Albany, would it not?”

He looked thoughtful. “You are right there.”

Reassured, she turned urgently to him. “What now is the first thing to be done?”

For a moment he stared at her, his face expressionless and his grey eyes wide. “*Dhia!*” he breathed, and then set himself to think. “I can speak to the heads of the company. I can get word to the great landowners in the south, to the tobacco plantations. Then we must consider the West Indian Islands.”

“Is that much farther?”

“And also harder to get at. You are prepared, Caroline, for the possibility that Finlay never left London?”

“You mean that he died on the transport? That’s what the others believe. To that my mind is still shut. If I have to face it, I will. At this moment, for me, Finlay is alive somewhere and grieving for his own. So I shall set myself to find him.”

“And I to help you,” came the quick warm reply.

She smiled at him affectionately. “It twists my heart to see you so like him.”

“Am I?”

She nodded. “The set of the shoulder, the way the head lifts . . .” Suddenly she could not continue.

“Whisht now, *mo cridhe*,” he said softly. “Listen to me. A plan leaps full-fledged into my mind. It happens that I am on the point of buying a piece of property. A farm it is, with buildings and stock, and also a fine stand of timber. It comes to me that Lauchie might well take over the management of it, with Morag to help him and the Dutch boys who are already there. Let it lie for now. It’s a thought only.” He broke off. “Look now. Here is something you have not yet seen.”

Three Indians came down the street, walking in a slow and stately manner. They were tall men with firm, aquiline features and red-brown skin. They wore long, cream-coloured leggings of doeskin, and from the shoulders of each swung a scarlet blanket. But what held Caroline was their headdress. Their hair was shaven close except for a broad strip from brow to nape that stood up short and stiff like the comb on a fighting cock. It gave them an extraordinary look of dignified ferocity. As they passed, Torquil bowed gravely to them, and they inclined their fierce heads courteously in return.

Caroline looked after them soberly. “Could it be that in the place you speak of, Lauchie and Morag might be in danger of the Indians?”

“Not of these. These are chiefs of friendly tribes. It is the ones who come down from Canada with the French that we fear. As to there being danger at the farm—not much, I think. Always of course there is just a little. The people who had the place before were nervous at being far from neighbours, but I never heard of them being molested.” His face brightened with enthusiasm. “A fine place it is, truly. Hilly enough to make a Highlandman feel at home, yet fertile too.”

“Might you live there yourself sometime?”

He shook his head. “My future is with the trading company. It’s an odd thing, Caroline, how we Scots do sometimes take to trade. I confess I find it exhilarating. Furs, timber, flour, fish—this country reeks with produce. It’s a pleasure to lift and sort and exchange it to meet the varying needs of men. For a consideration, naturally.”

Immediately Torquil set about the task that had been laid on him. He sent letters to town officials, to plantation owners, even to governors of colonies. He interviewed captains of ships that plied along the coast. Every plan he could devise by which Finlay's whereabouts might be learned, was set in motion. Every avenue was explored. Caroline was cheered and encouraged by all this activity. She set herself to wait with as much patience as she could find. Two months, she told herself hopefully, should bring news of some sort.

Meanwhile she would live on in Vrouw Bleeker's comfortable Dutch home in this little frontier town of Albany with her child, and with Morag and Lauchie for the time being anyway. It distressed her to think of the two of them going to Torquil's far-off woodland farm, though it might well be wise and right for them to do so. She would miss them sorely.

Morag was now intent on learning all she could of the kind of housekeeping practised in this new land, especially the cookery. Indeed, when Vrouw Bleeker made hop-rising bread, Caroline and Lauchie gathered round as well. Even Alsoon stood on a chair to watch.

The hops grew along the picket fence by the back yard. Very soft and rustling they were, greenish gold, with an acrid yet pleasant scent, and so light that they had no weight at all when held on the palm. Two double handfuls of them were boiled in a gallon of rain water till they sank to the bottom. The liquor was then poured into a batter of flour and water.

"Now some potatoes I add," said Vrouw Bleeker. "Do they use potatoes in Scotland?"

"They are beginning to."

"The staff of life they are." She attacked the batter with a wooden spoon and with so strong and hard a rhythm that it made a galloping sound. Alsoon laughed to hear it. More flour was added and the dough was moulded into round, white loaves, spanked firmly, and set in a warm place to rise. When eventually the bread came from the oven, brown and crusty, light as a feather and sweet-smelling, they all took pride in it, and admired excessively the row of loaves set out on the well-scrubbed kitchen table.

Vrouw Bleeker spoke English well enough to be understood. She was a large woman with a smooth face and placid grey eyes. Between Morag and her there grew up a comfortable relationship. Often Caroline smiled, listening to their slow amiable conversation, Vrouw Bleeker's English threaded thick with Dutch, and Morag's half Gaelic in words and all Gaelic in sentence structure. Sitting on the back stoop together, they peeled apples and sliced and strung them for drying, or shelled peas; or made ready for preserving the blueberries the children of the neighbourhood gathered on the sandy flats above the town.

Morag grew more and more engrossed in these tasks, and more cheerful as she went about them. Her face however never quite lost the tragic impress of that day now a year gone, when young Ronald had been killed; and though her grief now lay easier on her, yet at times when she was alone her dark eyes brooded fiercely.

"She does not laugh," observed the Dutch woman one day.

"She has had trouble," Caroline told her.

"Yah, so have we all had. My husband now, I have lost."

Caroline nodded, thinking, "He died in his big feather bed, like as not, with all his friends around him, not on a cold stone floor with a dagger in his side, and him in the bloom of boyhood. Och Ronald," her thoughts ran on sorrowfully. "Dear little lad! Is heaven green and fair, like the lift of the brae above Torbeg where you kept watch for us, and you so faithful?" Faithful! Like Kirsty, or Morag, or Lauchie. That is what we grow in the Highlands, it came to her, faithfulness and loyalty. Sometimes to our own undoing.

When Torquil had completed the purchase of the farm he had been considering, he took Lauchie with him on a trip to inspect it. Lauchie came back filled with enthusiasm.

"Pine trees taller than on Craig-nan-ean," he told Caroline. "A burn bounding down the hillside. A stout-built house and a barn with cattle. Hayfields. Bantighearna, you should see it. Glad I'll be to have the running of a farm again."

Caroline rejoiced for him. This new responsibility would make both Morag and Lauchie happy. "But I'll miss them," she admitted ruefully.

She did miss them very much, after they had gone. As a result she was thrown more into Vrouw Bleeker's company, and from her learned the gossip of the town. She learned too the story of the Indian raids, and of the prevailing uneasiness and sense of danger among the citizens. There was

little open talk about it, said her informant, but the bloody affair at Schenectady, though many years past, had not been forgotten; and only last year Fort Massachusetts had been attacked.

That evening she said to Torquil as they sat on the stoop in the warm summer dusk, "I've been hearing about the Indian raids."

He reassured her. "In Albany we're safe enough, being at a fair distance from even the most southerly of the French posts. It's different around Saratoga and Fish Creek. The French and Indians sally out from Crown Point and harry the settlers unmercifully."

"Do the English soldiery not return the courtesy?"

"Do they not! The scalping is a bad business on both sides, and the whole blame does not lie with the Indians. With one hand the white man tries to check his savage allies, and with the other offers bounties for scalps."

"What will be the end of it?"

"The end will come when enough troops are sent out to conclude the matter. Perhaps that is soon to happen. A new regiment has arrived from England to reinforce the garrison at the fort."

"They are a protection?"

He laughed. "The forces from England? Were it not for them, the French and Indians would pour over us like a spring torrent."

Caroline was thoughtful. It was strange that the English soldiery should now be a protection to her. The same English soldiery, who had harried the Highlands only a year since.

"The Indians," she remarked, "could hardly be more cruel than the Duke of Cumberland."

Again Torquil laughed. "They could teach him a few tricks. They torture their prisoners in quite ingenious ways. Sometimes they make slivers of cedar, tip the outer end in brimstone, and fair feather a victim with them. Then they set them on fire. The result is extremely horrible. On the other hand, they often adopt prisoners and treat them with great kindness. Boys have been known to refuse to leave them. Women too have elected to remain in the wigwams of their new masters. Aye, they're unpredictable, these redmen. Grave, kind, honourable, wise even, and at times—fiends."

In the country roundabout Albany the great landowners lived in a state not unlike that of the Highland lairds. Some of these and their ladies, Caroline met when she went with Torquil to the kirk on the Sabbath. She met also the wives of the officials in the company. These new acquaintances were courteous and kindly, yet curious and a little uncertain about her. She was the Jacobite's wife from over the water, a transient and a stranger.

It was as Patric the Laird had said once. In a man's own glen he hardly needed to speak to give his thought to another, so strong was the kinship of heart and mind. In a foreign land it was not so. This Caroline now found to be true. She missed the warm clan feeling, the sense of being in a place where she belonged.

Yet this little colonial town, set between the forest and the bright river, was a pleasant place that summer of 1747. Nowhere more so than in Vrouw Bleeker's garden. It stretched from the rear of the house to the water's edge. On one side was the vegetable plot—beans, beets, onions and carrots in regimented rows, and the sprawling big-leaved vines of pumpkin and squash. On the other and along the picket fence, flowers bloomed, phlox and purple pansies and nicotine, sweet-smelling stocks and scarlet poppies with petals like crumpled silk.

The central grassy plot was shaded by an old apple tree, the fruit of which now ripened under the August sun. The apples were large and round, streaked with red as with bright strokes of a brush, and very cool and refreshing to the taste.

Here Alsoon played, trotting busily up and down the paths and around the beds of phlox and pansies. Everywhere she carried Vrouw Bleeker's grey kitten in her arms, patting it, talking softly to it or crooning it a lullaby. Alsoon was now rosy with health, yet sometimes pensive, sitting quiet and alone as though remembering with wonder and sadness and surmise.

Caroline looked at her at such times, her own heart heavy. The child should have a settled abode, so that she might grow up feeling the world firm beneath her feet. But the world was not firm beneath Caroline's own feet. She herself was in a state of wonder and sadness and surmise, and would be until she had some word of reassurance, some hint of Finlay's whereabouts and well-being.

Word of a sort did come. It was that a transport called the *Veteran* with a hundred and fifty Jacobite prisoners on board, bound for Antigua in the West Indies, had been attacked by a privateer near Martinique, taken into port, and the prisoners had been set free by the French governor. That was the news

that came. What did it signify? Might Finlay not have been among those set loose on Martinique?

Torquil shook his head. "The list of prisoners on the *Veteran* was given. His name was not there. Nor any that might conceivably have been meant for his." He frowned thoughtfully. "But there is this to be taken from it. The transports were bound for the West Indies. There the indentured Highlanders are now."

"Get me a map," suggested Caroline.

The next day Torquil brought her a chart of the New World. They spread it out on the table in Vrouw Bleeker's front room.

Torquil traced with his finger the route from New York up the Hudson to Albany. He pointed out French Canada to the north, and to the east the New England colonies. Down the coast line moved his firm finger, then with a sweeping curve out from the tip of the Florida peninsula. "Here now are the islands of the Indies. Here is Antigua."

"And where is Martinique?" Caroline pushed back her dark curls and bent eagerly over the map.

"Farther south. And here is St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and farther out into the Atlantic, Barbados."

Caroline gazed down at that curving shield of a hundred scattered islands stretching so far out into the sea.

"Some say," observed Torquil, "that they are the peaks of a submerged mountain range."

There was no answer. She continued to stare down at the map, but she saw no longer the varying shapes and sizes of the innumerable small islands. They swam together now in misty and wavering lines, as her eyes ceased to focus.

"Caroline!" cried Torquil, looking with pity and concern into her slowly whitening face.

Silently she moved from the table and sat down. Where in that sweep of land and sea was Finlay? Her dear love! Where he was, she might never know.

Sitting there in that quiet room with Torquil watching her, she at last came through to that, and took it wholly and heavily into her consciousness. It lay like a weight on her, leaving her weak and shaken, yet at the same

time, more clear-eyed and humble and wise than she had been. The task on which she had ventured with such high hopes and so strong a will, she now assessed with more accuracy. For a long time she sat still, not speaking, laden down with thought.

She assessed her task more accurately, but she had no thought of giving it up.

She would need more time, more courage and further support. She looked up at Torquil, her face pale, her blue eyes sombre.

“One thing remains as it was. You are the person on this side of the world to whom Finlay would turn, were he able. So for a while I shall bide here as we planned, then I shall seek him further. In the islands of the Indies.”

“God help us!” exclaimed Torquil. “Well, you’re a brave lass, whatever.”

Some days after that, there came a letter from Elspeth in far-away Glenmoriston. Caroline opened it with fingers that trembled with eagerness. The last time Elspeth had written her, it had been to invite her to Culcabock, and out of that visit this whole journey had sprung. Elspeth’s letters were big with fate, and this time, please God, with good fortune.

Caroline, dear heart! How strange it is that a wide sea roars between us, who were once so close. Close we are still in heart and mind, but separated much by distance. I need not say that here we wonder mightily about you, that we think with dread of the dangers and discomforts you may be enduring, and pray most fervently for your safety and for your success in your efforts to find Finlay. Give Alsoon a special kiss and embrace from her Aunt Elspeth, and talk to her of us all, so that she may not forget us who do so love her. To Torquil we send our affectionate greetings. He will be a guide and a guard to you. Indeed were it not for him, we could not support the thought of you being so far away from us all.

You will be glad to know that at Culcabock they are well, though my father still is troubled with a stiffness in his joints. The Laird continues to live in his eyrie among the rocks, but he had been undertaking certain work on the ruins of the big house at Invermoriston, and it is his hope to ease into residence there in course of time.

Alex and I, with our small Duncan, are now back at Livishie. Alex is busy restoring the place after the damage and neglect of

the past months. The Dowager Lady keeps her composure and her good health, and Isobel and her daughters are well. By the way, your going set an example. Peter of Craskie is all for taking himself to the continent to seek out the Prince and to enter into his service. Isobel tells me that he has now no interest in rebuilding Craskie. All he wants is to lay his arms and his life at the feet of his Prince for whom he feels the utmost tender love and loyalty. We are all trying to dissuade him. He knows nothing of foreign parts or their languages. Indeed his English is but halting, and few there be, I fancy, in France or Italy who have the Gaelic, except our lonely exiles. A number of those exiles, I am told, have joined the French army and are in service in the New World.

Now, my dear Caroline, I come to the point of my letter. It is this. Come home. Let us help you bear the burden of your loneliness. Let us help you bring up young Alsoon among her kinfolk and in the place where she belongs. Torquil can go on making inquiries about Finlay. In that he will be most faithful, I know. But your place is here. Because, darling Caroline, there is now no reasonable doubt of Finlay's death. He was seen practically breathing his last. Accept the facts, cruel as they are, and come where we who love you may comfort you.

It is now full summer. Will you not have Torquil arrange a passage at once that you may avoid the equinoctial storms? Alex adds his entreaties to mine. So do all the clan from the Laird down to your former serving-woman Mysie, who is now with us. Again our love to Alsoon and Torquil, and our kind regards to Morag and Lauchie. I am believing that you will come.

Your more than cousin,
ELSPETH.

Caroline read and reread the letter. She went out to the seat under the apple tree and read it again. Her old life came back so strongly and nostalgically upon her that she saw not the sunny, well-kept regimented rows and paths and blossoms before her. She saw instead the white birches and the green crested pines and the dark, heraldic glory of the hills above Torbeg. She was wrenched with longing. She hungered for her country and her kin. But how could she go? The thought of giving up her search for Finlay filled her with a distress more keen by far than her feeling for her home.

The slow days passed. No word of Finlay came. Caroline found a measure of comfort in Vrouw Bleeker. The placidity of the big Dutch woman was a foil to the tension in her own mind. Often of an afternoon they sat together on a seat under the apple tree, sewing or talking in a comfortable and desultory way.

“Now that summer is near the end,” remarked Vrouw Bleeker one day, “soon we will the grapes gather. You know to make the wine?”

“You must teach me.”

“So. That I will. Look, Alsoon my little pet, if you tie the ribbon on the kitty’s neck, she may climb the tree and fall and hang herself.”

Alsoon, her blue eyes wide with dismay, snatched off the red ribbon and kissed the kitten remorsefully on the nose.

Vrouw Bleeker laughed, then was sober. “They’re hanging a man tomorrow by the Stadhuis.”

“What did he do?” asked Caroline.

The other shrugged. “It takes not much to hang a man. Perhaps he stole. Perhaps he was hungry. It is a bad death. Shameful.”

“It is indeed.” Caroline bent over her sewing.

Along the street red branches were now bright among the green. Apples hung ripe on the trees and lay on the grass beneath. Pumpkins were yellow in the fields of corn. The nights grew cool.

“Come home,” Elspeth had written, “before the equinoctial storms.” Home! It was not home Caroline was like to be going, but to those strange, warm, slave-ridden islands to the south. Where, if God was good, Finlay worked and waited, whether he knew it or not, for her coming. That he should wait one day longer than need be was intolerable. Was the time not come?

When she brought the matter up with Torquil, he smiled kindly and compassionately. “Better wait till the war is over. Otherwise we might meet a French privateer, or worse a black-flagged pirate ship. They infest the waters of the Indies, I am told.”

Caroline realized that he was putting her off, humouring her and waiting for her to come to her sober senses. The thought saddened her immeasurably. She sat one day by herself on the front stoop and thought about it. What if Torquil were to fail her now? What if he, like the family at

home in Scotland, believed she had now exhausted every reasonable hope, and it was time to face what to them were the facts?

Never had she felt so alone. Behind her in the house, she could hear Alsoon's clear little voice and Vrouw Bleeker's deep one. From neither of these could she draw help. Lauchie and Morag were away on the farm. Only Torquil was left, and Torquil was tiring. Not that he loved Finlay less or cared less for her, but he felt that now she should be reasonable.

A wind whirled up the street and a few red leaves fluttered down. They lay bright on the green grass like splotches of blood. On the walk outside the gate was Alsoon's doll where she must have flung it in a burst of high spirits. Caroline walked down the steps to pick it up. As she rose from doing so, she found herself suddenly confronted.

A tall red-coated soldier stood looking at her. He bowed deeply and smiled into her eyes with the half-charming, half-insolent gaze of a well-favoured man of the world, about to condescend to a provincial female.

"Your servant, ma'am." He stopped in the middle of a word.

Their eyes held. Incredulity and delight kindled and grew in his. Caroline stood rooted. The foolish doll dangled from her hand, then dropped to the ground. He picked it up and held it out to her. With a lurch at her heart, she saw that his little finger was missing.

"Ma'am," he repeated softly.

Then life poured back into Caroline. She gave him a blank, proud look, turned and walked into the house. She shot the bolt behind her, then stood pressed against the wooden panel listening. For a while she heard nothing but the heavy thumping of her own heart, then came the sound of quick even military footsteps moving up the street.

She ran up the stair, came into her own room, fell on her bed and lay still. The red-coated soldier was Captain Messiker, and the last time she had seen him was the day Kirsty had been slain, the day she herself had killed the man Pilchard.

"You will hang for this," had been Messiker's farewell to her that day. Now it was "Your servant, ma'am." But a sudden meaning and intent had poured into his face as he had looked at her. In his eyes there had been an exquisite and sensuous cruelty and a purpose to indulge it. She had been like a bird held by the eyes of a serpent.

She lay on her bed while her heart beat in slow throbs that shook her whole body. She was bathed in sweat. Here was danger and she knew it. Yet, she rallied, what could he do? Were the whole story told, she would be justified. But, except for Torquil, who would believe her? Here she was only “the Jacobite’s wife,” and a stranger in the town. What would her word avail against the word of an officer in an army that was at the moment the chief bulwark against the enemy to the north?

Suddenly she remembered Vrouw Bleeker’s story of the man who was to be hanged. At that she flung herself over on her back and clasped her two hands about her throat, her eyes wild with fear. “Och Finlay,” she cried in her heart, “It’s I that need you now. Could I find you, how glad I’d be to bide with you in slavery in some far strange land where we would be safe.”

By night she was ill, a fever burning her and her hands like ice. Vrouw Bleeker undressed her and put her to bed and plied her with broths and simples. The illness lasted three days. It was not an illness of the body except as the body was overcome by the perturbation of the spirit. It was as if all the anxiety and grief, held so long at bay, had at last broken through. It overwhelmed her like a flood. She was like a spent swimmer, her strength gone and the will to resist. Disaster claimed her, and in the accepting of it came a certain poignant relaxation and relief.

She recalled the spirit in which she had begun her journey, her conviction that she need no longer passively accept a cruel fate, but could set out on a course of action, and at last attain her goal. She had set out in courage and hardihood and she had failed. It was perhaps possible for a man to shape his destiny, to push through ruthlessly towards the end in view, but for a woman, built for love and lost without it, and vulnerable at every point, it was too much to expect. This she thought, lying in the dimness of her quiet, slant-ceilinged chamber.

The room was well shaded from the sun. Heavy blue homespun curtains were drawn across the window and only slim fingers of light struck in at the edges. Caroline lay watching these bars of yellow sunshine, awash with swirling motes and particles of dust, till her lids grew heavy and fell shut.

An hour later she began to waken. Not yet ready to open her eyes, she lay in the dark, consciousness coming quietly back to her. Then she was aware that her hands were being held. So it must be that still she dreamed. They were being held in a firm warm grip that slowly tightened.

In one wild movement she flung off the covers and raised herself. A man sat close by the bed, dark against the window. “Caroline!” he cried strongly,

and at the sound of his voice, consciousness failed her again, and she sank back, and all was darkness and unknowing. But only for a moment. Her eyes flew wide. Now he was kneeling by the bed and his arms were raising her, and it was—Finlay! Her hands travelled avidly over him, his hair so fine and flaxen, the curves of his cheek, his mouth.

He kissed her.

She lay and looked at him. “I’ve not died then,” she said.

“You have not died. Nor have I. My thanks to God for these two mercies. Are you ill then, *mo cridhe*?”

“Ill? Not now. I was overcome. But I’m not ill.” She rose hastily. “Let me dress.” Then looked at him and blushed.

He laughed in delight. “Shy, are you?”

“It’s been a long time. I’ve lived a spinsterish life. But not,” she conceded, “with a spinsterish heart or mind.”

“Aye so,” he agreed deeply.

He pulled aside the curtains and light flooded into the room. She could see him plain. He was thinner, he was older, but he was yet Finlay. It was true then. Relief and gratitude engulfed her, and tears poured silently down over her face.

He stood by the oak chest, surveying the room. His dark eyes touched the wide, white expanse of the feather bed, then lifted to her, warm with desire.

“Where sleepest thou, my love, tonight?” he questioned softly.

“With my ain kind dearie,” she answered over the breath that caught in her throat.

Suddenly they were clinging together in mingled mirth and weeping. Then they stood apart and looked at each other, and at the same time from both came the word, “How?”

Again laughter took them.

“Days it will take to tell how,” said Finlay.

Caroline could not bring herself to speak to Finlay of Captain Messiker and of the danger that hung over her. Not yet. Not while her happiness was still so new and precious. Instead she opened the big oak chest and showed Finlay the things she had brought from Torbeg. Piece by piece he lifted them out and laid them on the bed.

“Time I was out of these ungodly breeches.” He flung the red tartan about his hips and buckled on his sporran. “My old kilt rotted off me, but not till then did I discard it. And will you look! My father’s claymore! And—God save us—the pipes!” He fingered them lovingly. “The silver will need to be burnished. Never did I think to see them again. Hark to this, Alsoon!”

He put the chanter to his lips and played a little run.

Alsoon laughed and her feet patted uncertainly to the music. He smiled encouragingly and accented the beat.

“She’ll dance like a sunbeam, so she will,” he boasted.

They turned again to the oak chest. “Now here,” cried Caroline, “is something you will cherish,” and she laid in his hand Prince Charlie’s silver shoulder brooch. And for an instant she was back in the cave above the shieling ground with Peter of Craskie and Tearlach himself, and it was a summer day more than a year ago, and she fearful for Finlay and lonely of heart.

For a long time he held the brooch on his palm without speaking. “Tell me how you came by it,” he said finally.

She told him. He questioned her closely. “How did he look? Was he in health? Was he able to endure the hardship and skulking in the hills?”

“He was able. He endured it with grace and humour. Never in the days of his prosperity had his followers loved him more. So said Peter of Craskie.”

Finlay sighed. “God keep him. Would I had been there with you! What of those who followed him to France?”

“Elsbeth writes that many have joined the French soldiery and some are now here in the New World.”

“Aye, that well may be. John MacDonell had a commission in the French army before he came to Scotland.”

There was a step at the door. It was Torquil, home from the Company offices. Torquil could hardly credit the fact of his brother’s presence. He kept looking at him in mingled amazement and delight.

“I have a million questions,” he exclaimed. “Come and sit on the stoop and we can talk.”

Caroline shook her head. “The garden is better. There we are more private from the street.”

She sat in a low chair and Torquil and Finlay on the seat beneath the apple tree. The sun came down through the branches and the fruit lay ripe on the grass about them. They talked. Finlay talked. Not of life as it was in the transports, not of the floggings and the filth and the starvation and the cruelty; but of Jamie and Hector and Murdoch and of the way they upheld and comforted each other. He told too of the warm garments sent them by the women of London, and in his voice was yet a quiver of gratitude.

“That I will never forget. Nor Hector’s passing, nor Murdoch’s, nor Jamie’s. Nor, God help me, will I forget the living, those enslaved for life on the island of Barbados.”

He spoke then of Mondego Brand and his wife Margreeta. Caroline cried out in amazement, “From Skye? But you know the tale of my mother’s sister? Might it be . . .?”

“She said, ‘From another part of the island,’” Finlay recalled. “I asked few questions. My chance for freedom hung too precariously. Yet I must confess, she looked like enough to be kin.”

Caroline sighed. “I am of a kind common enough in Skye—blue eyes, dark hair.”

“Aye so. Who she was we shall never know. Yet we do owe her my freedom.”

“Was she unhappy?”

“No. Yet at times uneasy, I think.”

“God help her then. What next did you do?”

“Next? I set sail with a pirate crew.”

“No!”

“Aye, so I did. The same sort of crew that raided Skye and got Mondego his lady long ago.”

Torquil nodded. “The traffic is still common, I hear. Mostly they spirit away street urchins and such like, and then sell them to plantation owners in the West Indies.”

“Well, these were the lads I sailed with. Kind they were to me too, and vastly different was my life from what it was in the government transports. Here I was a friend of the owner.”

Finlay laughed and crossed his bare knees. “So I was comfortable enough. But when I realized exactly what their business was, selling helpless lads and lassies into slavery, that set me to think. Having been myself in servitude. Another thing troubled me.” He turned to his wife. “You will remember that I saw you on the Citadel Pier at Inverness.”

“Remember?” Her blue eyes were sober.

“Aye, neither of us is like to forget. In that moment I called out Torquil’s name to you. On a sudden mad thought I did it, and afterwards regretted. While we were in the stone kirk, cruel tales passed among the prisoners about what Cumberland was doing in the glens. We were all wild with anxiety. It came to me what John MacDonell had said once, that it was well Torquil lived in America; if things went ill he would be a refuge. So on that thought I called to you his name. Afterwards during the long months, I was sorry. It might unduly trouble and puzzle you. I could no longer be wise for you or help you. I must leave you to God and my kinsmen, and the courage and wit that was in you.”

“God and your kinsmen did not fail. My courage and wit were not so reliable.”

“Not so,” spoke up Torquil. And Finlay gave her a long slow look so full of love and homage that the red flicked in her cheeks.

He went on. “On the pirate ship I kept remembering that word that had been between us. I wondered, could it be that you might understand my thought, and in some way be able to act on it. Added to that, the idea of harrying the coast of Scotland for white children—and it was because of me they were going to Scotland—disturbed me mightily.”

He paused for a moment, as if reliving that time of indecision, then resumed. “We encountered a storm off the Virginia coast, and were driven in towards land. It seems that they deal very summarily with sea raiders in those parts, so the Captain was nervous. But when I asked it, they put in on a

deserted beach and let me ashore. I think they were glad to be rid of me. But we parted with good will and I set out with a few coins in my pocket, my papers from Mondego Brand, and Jamie's chanter."

"Jamie's?"

"He gave it to me before he died. I prize it. It cheered us often when we were nigh past cheer. I thought at first, should I send it to Mysie? But no, he gave it to me. However I'd like her to know that at the end he spoke of her."

"And then?" asked Torquil after a pause.

"It was simple enough. I made my way to a nearby settlement and then worked north. A Hudson River boat took me on the last leg of the journey. And here I found not only my brother, but an end to all my dangers and distresses." "Yes," he amended, "I saw some red-coated soldiery about. It reminded me that here too you have a war, though not, I think, a very brisk one."

"It's the same war you left in Scotland. The Stuart rising was part of it. That being ended, English troops are free to come to this country. So we may look to a speedier conclusion."

"Do you depend entirely on troops from England?"

"By no means. We have our colonial soldiery. But this fresh influx of troops—English and Hessian—are a tremendous boon to us."

"Of that I'm not so sure," cried Caroline, her face suddenly pale. "Now I must tell you. I can no longer postpone it."

The two turned startled and anxious eyes on her, while she poured out the story of Messiker, the Hessian captain. She began with the events at Torbeg, of which Torquil knew, but Finlay did not, and ended with the encounter a few days past in front of Vrouw Bleeker's house.

Finlay leaped to his feet, savage with anger. "Curse him! Blast him to hell, and this day I'll tend to it."

"That you will not." Torquil's words came quick and hard. "This is a time for a cool head and a contriving mind. Think of his position and then of yours."

Finlay breathed heavily and sat down. "You're right," he admitted. "Nevertheless by rough ways or smooth, I shall accomplish his downfall. That is laid on me."

“God speed you then, but be careful.” Torquil went into a deep study. “Wait now. I have a thought.” He picked a red apple from the ground, threw it up and caught it. “I have a good thought. What of the farm I have, and it with only Lauchie and Morag to run it? That’s the place for you. Buy it from me if you like. If not, tenant it. There you can lie low. Messiker will not be here forever.”

Finlay turned to him and the two smiled happily at each other. They sat close on the bench, flaxen poll and red head, with the same high-cheekboned, fierce and friendly faces, alike in the architecture of their bodies and of their minds—brothers.

“Torquil,” cried Caroline, “what would we do without you? It was by God’s grace that Finlay called your name to me that day in Inverness.”

Torquil ran his fingers through his stiff red curls and laughed. “And was it by God’s grace that I came to America, with all my kinfolk wailing at me and trying to hold me back?”

“As they were with me. Because they loved us and were sore at heart to see us go.”

He sobered. “Well I know it. And is it not a heavy grief, the wide sea that roars between us and them? I feel it. But my life lies here. Could it be that yours does also?”

Finlay reached to the bough above for an apple. “These are not the same as in the orchard at Torbeg, but fine they are too. Your plan, Torquil, seems wonderful to me. And your farm. What is the name that is on it?”

“Och, none at all yet. You can do the naming. I’ll send a lad on horseback in the morning to tell Lauchie to expect us and to have ready a housewarming for the new master. A *ceilidh*, God bless the word, that’s what we’ll have, to leaven the lump of this new land.”

It turned out that the *ceilidh* or housewarming was one that they themselves long remembered, whether or not it was leaven to the lump of the new land.

Finlay, Torquil, Caroline and Alsoon, the four of them, came from Albany in a light wagon. The long winding road took them north and west till at last they struck off on a shady track that led deep into the forest. It was nightfall when they arrived, and they went soon to their beds. The next day, however, was given over to celebration.

Morag and Lauchie had prepared bountifully for their coming. All morning joints of beef twirled, brown and crackling, on the spits, and dripped their savoury juices into the pan below. Stuffed young pullets simmered in iron kettles set close to the fire, and broth bubbled in the big black pot on the crane. Morag made great quantities of wheat and corn and oatmeal bannocks, stacked them in earthen crocks and set them on the hearth to keep warm. As she worked, Alsoon trotted happily at her heels, and from time to time Morag bent and dropped a kiss on the yellow curls and murmured, "Bless the bairn."

It was a windswept and beautiful morning and the country was awash with colour. Never had Caroline seen anything like it. The rich red of oak trees in autumn she knew, also the gold of elms and the clear yellow of the birch. But here the maples were added. They were like a fire in the woodlands, crimson and claret, pale gold and red gold, copper and rose-rust and ruby. The colours were unbelievable. They were fierce and beautiful. Caroline stood and gazed as if she could not get enough of them.

The house stood on the rim of a valley, with a level lawn in front that broke away at the edge of the slope. To the west a little stream fell over a ledge of rock and tumbled noisily down to the valley below. Pine trees grew tall and stately on a ridge beyond, their heavy branches tossing darkly in the wind. To the east of the green was a fence, the rails of it entirely hidden by a thick growth of cherry trees and wild grape. The vines were bright with multitudinous small clusters of fruit, purple and plum-coloured, very graceful and light and breeze-blown.

"Like a frieze to Bacchus," remarked Torquil. "They make good wine too."

The noonday meal was set out on the table before the wide windows. The shutters, very strong and well braced, were thrown back against the inner walls and the autumn sunshine streamed in on the company.

"The shutters are for defence," explained Torquil. "Close them, come evening. While the war lasts, that is. You're remote enough here, but one never knows." He turned his attention to the beef collops before him, then looked up again. "Another thing, Finlay Ban. Take the paper you had from the plantation owner in Barbados and register it with the Stadhuis at Albany. Better do it at once."

Finlay nodded thoughtfully. "Aye, that is the thing to do. A man of affairs my brother is. While I was meant for the hills and braes of Torbeg." For a moment his voice was heavy with homesickness, then he smiled.

“When this noble meal is over, we’ll have a pull at the pipes on the green without. We’ll raise a tune, so we will, for the sake of the days that are gone, and to put a blessing on this new place.”

The grassy plot in front of the house, sheltered from the wind by the thick wall of cherry trees and grapevine, was bright with sunshine, and warm. A long bench stood just outside the door, and here they all gathered, Morag and Lauchie and the Dutch boys as well. Finlay brought the pipes from the chest in the hall. Today he wore a crotal-dyed wool jacket above his best red kilt, his shoes had silver buckles, his sporran silver clasps, and his linen shirt white ruffles at the throat. Torquil too was braw in jacket and kilt.

“It’s like the time of Elspeth’s wedding party,” commented Caroline, “when the house seemed full of Alex’s brothers—all handsome and all different.”

“But you were bemused,” Torquil rallied her. “You saw only one, really.”

“True,” admitted Caroline and laughed and wrapped her plaid about her. Her gown was of thin wool, pale yellow and flower-sprigged, and she wore it to be bonnie for this day. But now the autumn wind slid in through the screen of cherry trees and had an edge to it. Lauchie pulled his plaid about him too, and sat leaning back against the house, his rugged face relaxed and gentle. There was about him today an air of the most complete content. Finlay had returned. Life was again ordered and good.

Finlay took the bag under his arm, put the chanter to his lips and with nimble fingers picked out a ranting, cheerful tune. The sound streamed away on the wind like a bright banner. Then it tightened, strengthened, and came stinging and warbling and twittering through the air, till one breathed it in, and the blood went racing. As he played, Finlay walked up and down over the green sward. He had the proud prancing step of a piper, his feet fell soundlessly, his kilt swung free, and every turn of his body was firm and stately.

Caroline smiled, watching. With all her heart she delighted in him, in this loyal, wary, passionate man who was her husband. There was about him that quick sense of life, that capacity for exhilaration and gallantry and mirth that had been his ever since she knew him. Now there was more. He had increased in stature. There was an added rigour and recklessness, an intensity, a heightening of all his natural inclinations. It came to Caroline on a bubble of inner laughter that all her life her chief diversion would be her

own admiring study of the moods and mind of this long lad of hers, Finlay Ban.

The music changed, became hard and martial, it was "The Salute to Clanranald," then it was "*Gille Chriosd*." Finlay said soberly, "This is for my friends, the MacDonells of Glengarry and Clanranald, and may God keep them if I never see them more." And the wild music filled the air with fierceness and sadness and a kind of glory.

The listeners sat quiet with the autumnal sun pouring down over them. They were entirely given over to the music, taking it into themselves like sustenance for which they had hungered. They took it gratefully but with sorrow, for now they were exiles and far indeed from their own dear glen.

Suddenly the pipes crashed into discord. On the same instant came a high, yelping sound, horrifying and inhuman. A half-dozen Indians broke through the screen of cherry trees. With them were as many Frenchmen, and one was an officer. He threw out his arms in a sweep that took in the whole assembly, and in a loud ringing voice called out:—

"Peace and God bless you and let no man move!"

He called it in Gaelic. It was past believing. "Who is it," he demanded, "plays 'Salute to Clanranald'?"

There was an utter silence. Time stopped. The Indians stood, hatchets and long knives in hand, war-painted, terrifying. Alsoon turned and buried her face in her mother's breast.

Then came a shout of greeting. It was Finlay. "John MacDonell, do you not know me?"

"Finlay Ban Grant, God save us! Keep quiet now and do as I tell you. These bodachs are hard to hold."

He turned to his soldiers and called out in French, "This man is my friend. He saved me once from the English soldiers. I speak truth. In time of war one meets old friends in strange places. No, he is not English. *Écossais*. As I am. His brother too, the *tête-rouge*, and the rest. Pierre, tell this to the redskins."

Pierre, the big bearded Frenchman, translated. The Indians grunted and nodded their fierce heads, but their eyes were restless.

Then Finlay walked out towards them. He was not afraid. That was plain. On the contrary, there was hardihood and welcome in his face. There

was more. There was something turbulent and ecstatic that spoke directly to them.

“Sure now,” he cried in a loud friendly voice, “we’ll have some food and drink, so we will. Sit down, my friends—*mes amis—mo cairdean!*” He tossed the three languages about. “Dirk and Jan, bring meat and scones, buttermilk too. Lauchie, help them with it.”

The Indians stirred uneasily. Suspicion gleamed in the fierce dark eyes, but a word from MacDonell held them. They stood then like dogs straining the leash.

Finlay disregarded them, and turned to his friend. “So you went back to the French army.”

“Aye so. And I’ve been six months in Canada. Do you remember that once I said you were lucky to have Torquil on this side of the water?”

Finlay grinned. “I remember. But never did I think to be here myself, or to meet you. How came you to find us?”

“We followed a party of English soldiers, whom we dispatched silently, except for one. Then we heard the pipes, and I could not refrain from seeking out the sound. It warms my heart to see the tartan. Did you know it is now proscribed in Scotland?”

“Aye, I heard.”

Lauchie came out carrying a wooden bowl filled with beef collops, hastily sliced from the joints, and Dirk and Jan followed, one with a platter of bannocks and the other a tall jug of buttermilk. Jan shook so that the buttermilk slopped over the edge and spilled on the grass. Finlay laughed to see it, and a sudden deep ho-ho came from the red men. Whereupon Morag got smoothly to her feet, took the jug and carried it from one to another.

The Indians tore at the collops and wolfed down the scones. It was odd to see the line of white on their upper lips left by the buttermilk. It belied their fierce painted faces and made them look like greedy boys. The French soldiers helped themselves politely with many a *merci* and *à votre santé*.

“Wise you were with the buttermilk,” approved John MacDonell, speaking in Gaelic. “Whisky turns them into devils. You’re not afraid, I notice. Good. They smell fear. It has the same effect on them as the whisky.”

French soldiers had placed themselves unobtrusively at either end of the bench where Caroline sat with Alsoon on her knees, and Torquil watchful and wary beside her. The child faced the company now, but she sat still and

small and drawn into herself like a baby grouse hiding in the heather. She made not the slightest sound. Nor did Caroline. Only Torquil muttered once, "Pull your plaid over your curls. No need to tempt them." Her heart dunted painfully as she obeyed him.

Then Finlay lifted his pipes from the grass and smiled cheerfully at them all. "I'll now give you a tune to cheer you as you eat. *Musique écossaise!* Lauchie, see that the food goes around."

He blew up the pipes. The scream of the swelling bag struck the wall of the house and bounded back. He pressed his elbow. The music came hot like a flame—fierce wild music, with the skirl of battle in it, the eagle's cry and the roll of the sea.

"*Mon dieu!*" murmured Pierre, the Frenchman. "*C'est formidable.*"

The braves forgot to eat. Their eyes were wide, their nostrils distended.

Finlay marched up and down as before, and the sun was bright on his silver trappings, on his red kilt and on the fluttering ribbons. Never had he played quite like this, with such abandon and such power drawn up from within him and consciously exerted. On and on poured the music like an avalanche of sound, then on a high, piercing note, abruptly he ended.

There was a roar of approbation. MacDonell laughed. "They want to take you with us, not as a prisoner but as a brother."

It was then that Caroline whispered to Torquil. "What have they in their belts?"

"Did you not notice? Scalps. Fresh ones. Fair-haired too. English or Dutch. Be thankful we have ours."

Finlay stood buffing the silver mountings on the pipes. The braves had gone back to the meat and the bannocks. There was a companionable silence.

A high bubbling scream tore through it. The sound was like that of a beast in agony.

"It's our prisoner," MacDonell exclaimed angrily. "They've been at him."

Pierre went to the edge of the green and called down the hill. The others waited. But not for long. The prisoner came up the slope, helped along by the two braves who had been set to guard him. Pierre spoke sternly to them, then looked at MacDonell. "They say they have but caressed him a little."

He was an English soldier, though it was hard to be sure even of that. Most of his clothes had been stripped from him. Blood covered his face, his torso, and ran in rivulets down his legs. He had a gash on his shoulder and innumerable small wounds all over his body. In fact, strips of flesh had been cut from him and left hanging. His fingers—Caroline shut her eyes—had been gnawed, or was it burned? Yet but one scream they had heard. He had courage, this Englishman.

His dark, desperate eyes swept over the company and came to rest on Caroline. Then it was she felt the fierce visceral twist of complete shock. This was the Hessian Captain of Fort Augustus, Messiker himself.

MacDonell looked soberly at him. “The lads were impatient,” he explained. “He’s a sorry object, and worse is yet before him.”

“*Dhia!*” cried Finlay, “It sickens me.”

“Myself also,” agreed MacDonell. “But it is not always possible to hold the red men in check. Well, Finlay Ban, we’ll now be on our way. Glad I’ve been to see you, and when this war is over we’ll meet again, God willing.”

Finlay spoke feelingly. “God bless you, John MacDonell. With my wife and bairn in jeopardy, you can judge my gratitude better than I can tell it.”

“An old debt paid, with thanks and affection.”

Finlay’s eyes flicked carelessly over the prisoner. Suddenly they widened, his face paled and stiffened and he stood like stone. He knew him. He had first seen that arrogant countenance, now so bludgeoned and bloody, three years ago in the inn at Fort Augustus, then at the Laird’s house, and again at Torbeg. This was the man who had threatened his wife and killed two of his household and burned Torbeg.

Finlay laughed on a high wild note of pure pleasure, felt for his dirk and moved closer. His purpose was plain. It was in the bone-cold savagery of his face, and in the gleam in his eyes. But—and this held his hand—the eyes that met his invited the dirk, implored it even. That too was plain. The dark bloody face quivered with eagerness and pleading.

At once came an angry growl of remonstrance from the Indians. He was theirs for sport by the evening campfire. They claimed him. They closed in about him.

Finlay’s face changed. It broke up suddenly and painfully. A queer look of shame crossed it. Morag cried out to him, her voice hard and strident, “Sir, let the red men have him. Let him pay now for Ronald and Kirsty.”

He seemed not to hear her. His eyes played over Messiker, standing braced and defiant, and the Indians who surrounded him. Suddenly he picked up his pipes and lifted them shoulder-high.

"A barter!" he cried in a loud clear voice. "Give me yon bloody mess of a man, and it's my pipes you can have in return."

There was a stunned silence, then a storm of talk in French and Indian. One of the braves pointed to Messiker, who seemed now scarce able to keep his feet.

Said Pierre, "They think he will not last long. So it's a bargain, m'sieu!"

A tall Indian caught up the pipes and hugged them to him.

John MacDonell laughed. "Now indeed we must away. Again a blessing on you, Finlay, and on your fair wife." He turned briefly to Caroline. "When next I see you, ma'am, it will be in different circumstances, I hope."

He saluted. So did the Frenchman. The Indians lifted their hands, one after another, to Finlay. Then they slipped down over the brow of the hill and melted into the landscape. Only Messiker was left, still standing braced like an animal at bay.

Finlay turned to Torquil and Lauchie. "Tend to him, will you? At the moment, I can't stomach it. Nor can we ask Morag."

He sat down by Caroline on the bench. After a moment he said, "Did you recognize him?"

She nodded.

His eyes met hers in a long look. "On the *Wallsgrove* I was flogged," he said simply.

They sat silent with Alsoon between them, equally still. Caroline was sick at heart, thinking of the flogging. Then she pushed away the thought of it. "It was strange and wonderful that you were able to take those wild men under your control."

"Aye. It seems strange now to myself. It's curious. Sometimes a man has power. Sometimes he can take hold of his fate. I set out to do that at Torbeg, and I am setting out to do it here. But from time to time larger forces catch a man up and fling him out of his course. Yet if he is durable and lucky, he can survive and set out again to direct his life. Today for a while I thought I was due once more to be flung."

He stretched out his long legs. "I'm hungry," he confessed. "Did they eat the house bare, I wonder?" He began to laugh, softly at first then loud and heartily. "I can see MacDonell teaching the Indians to play the pipes. The woods will ring."

He picked up Alsoon and set her on his knee. "Laugh, my wean. Laugh and be happy. You're not afraid?" Obediently she crinkled up the corners of her eyes and laughed a little, but there was a thread of tears in the sound, and her baby chin quivered. He cradled her against him then, and rocked her. Over her head he looked at Caroline. "What a thing it is to have a small sweet lass like this, brave and bonnie like her mother."

"The Captain would like to speak to you, Caroline." It was Torquil in the doorway behind them.

Her eyes met Finlay's. He shrugged. "Go in and see the poor hulk," he muttered tolerantly.

Messiker's wounds had been tended well enough to serve till he could be got to Albany. The blood had been washed from his face. His hands were bandaged, his head too, but his mouth was uncovered, and his eyes. They were the same dark, hot eyes that she remembered. She began to tremble, then steadied herself. "Are you in distress?" she asked politely.

"Not more than I can bear."

She felt the impact of his personalty, dark and evil and in spite of his weakness, strong. "What do you want of me?" she asked.

For a while he forbore to answer. His eyes moved over her like the lick of a flame. Then his bruised lips smiled. "What do I want of you? Think back to that first night at Invermoriston."

"What has that to do with it?"

His voice gathered strength. "Something passed between us then. In such things a man is not deceived. Something began then that might have been different from all else."

She flushed. "Nothing began."

"What then did you mean by the brightness and promise in your eyes? Break through to the truth, ma'am, this once and to a man in my condition."

Her colour faded slowly as she looked down into his ravaged and imperious face. "MacShimi said 'Beguile him'," she faltered.

"MacShimi?"

“Lord Lovat. The chief had been conferring before you came. It was necessary to distract you.”

“A devil’s brew!” he muttered savagely. “Lovat, whose chopped-off head sits rotting on a gatepost in London.”

“Be that as it may, he died undaunted.” Her voice was cold.

“You Highlanders live in an old wild world that is ended, did you but know it. Nevertheless, I owe thanks to your husband for saving me from the savages.”

“That you do,” she agreed. Then pity softened her voice. “What will become of you?”

He looked at her in bitterness. “If I live, I’ll sit in the sun in a pensioner’s row, and think of you. You stick in my mind like a burr.”

“I do?” Then on a sudden suspicion, “Why were you on the road today with a body of men? Were you coming to torment me?”

He smiled queerly. “Because of the man Pilchard, so strangely missing from the barracks at Fort Augustus? It was officially decided—and on my suggestion—that he had been done to death by persons unknown.”

She breathed deep. When she tried, she found herself unable to speak.

He went on. “Yet it was in my mind, as you say, to torment you. Also to question the presence in the country of a runaway indentured slave.”

“In that you were mistaken.”

“Aye. So the redheaded brother told me.” His voice weakened and he turned his face aside. His strength was at an end.

She came out again into the sunshine.

Finlay stood alone on the green with his wife’s plaid over his arm. “Listen,” he said and held up his hand.

Caroline listened. From the ridge to the west came the soft sonorous singing of the pines. Nearer, the brook splashed noisily over the rocks and fell in a spate of foam. A bird called on a clear and plaintive note from a birch tree near the woods, and cow bells tinkled musically as the cattle came down from the pasture. She knew what he meant. It was like Torbeg. In a way.

“The fact is,” he went on in a hard and searching voice, “we have been transplanted. What we had in mind for Torbeg can come to fruit here. With

some loss, I grant. The sore loss of the friends of our youth and the dear glen that was our home. But with some gain. Freedom, for instance. Here the very air has freedom in it. It is sharp and clean, exhilarating, and with a nip of danger. The air of a new and lusty land.”

He smiled down at her and she leaned against him and thought, “I have him by me, and what else matters?” Her heart was full of thanksgiving, yet it came to her with a pang, “Shall I not hear the Moriston skirling over the rocks again, nor see the heather blooming on the hills?”

He took the thought from her. “Till the day I die I’ll carry the Highlands in my heart, but it is borne in on me that from now on this is our home.”

They stood silent as that settled into their minds. The world was bright-coloured and beautiful about them, but the wind was freshening and blew chill. The leaves stirred and cloud shadows raced over the shorn fields below. Finlay took the plaid and laid it about Caroline’s shoulders, then flung an end of it over his own. Thus, close-happed and together, they looked out over the rim of the valley, over tilled land and forest and away to the wilderness beyond.

They looked out towards their future.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Torbeg* by Grace Campbell]