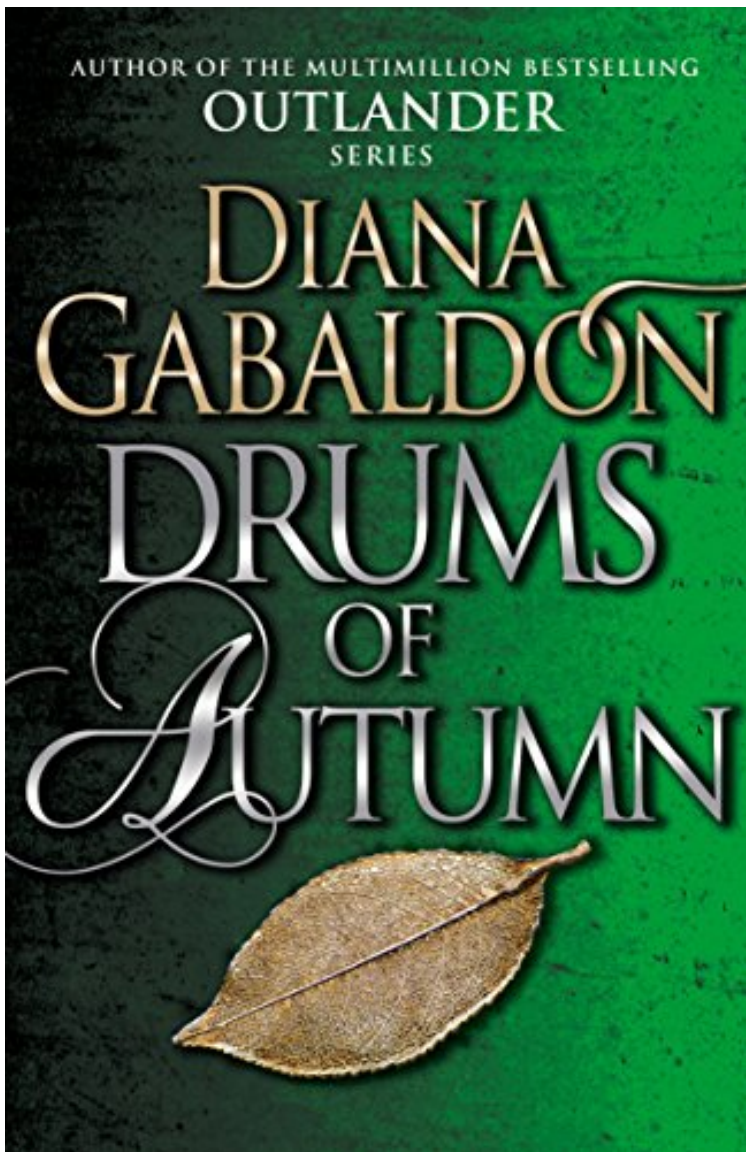


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Drums Of Autumn: (Outlander 4)



*Par Diana Gabaldon
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTHE FOURTH NOVEL IN THE BESTSELLING OUTLANDER SERIES. How far will a woman travel to find a father, a lover a destiny? Across seas, across time across the grave itself. It began in Scotland, at an ancient stone circle. Claire Randall was swept through time into the arms of James Fraser whose love for her became legend - a tale of tragic passion that ended with her return to the present to bear his child. Two decades later, Claire travelled back again to reunite with Jamie, this time in frontier America. But Claire had left someone behind in her own time - their daughter Brianna. Now Brianna has made a disturbing discovery that sends her to the stone circle and a terrifying leap into the unknown. In search of her mother and the father she has never met, she risks her own future to try to change history - and

to save their lives. But as Brianna plunges into an uncharted wilderness, a heartbreaking encounter may strand her forever in the past - or root her in the place she should be, where her heart and soul belong....com

Set in pre-Revolutionary War America, readers finally have the much awaited fourth book in what will probably become a six book series (The Outlander series). The talented Diana Gabaldon continues Claire and Jamie's romantic love affair, and introduces Brianna and Roger's story. Eight hundred pages, and several wonderful new characters later, we wonder why we were waiting for a conclusion. It'll be a long wait for book five, so I recommend you go back and reread Outlander, Dragonfly in Amber, and Voyager to keep yourself sane.

Extrait

A HANGING IN EDEN

Charleston, June 1767

I heard the drums long before they came in sight. The beating echoed in the pit of my stomach, as though I too were hollow. The sound traveled through the crowd, a harsh military rhythm meant to be heard over speech or gunfire. I saw heads turn as the people fell silent, looking up the stretch of East Bay Street, where it ran from the half-built skeleton of the new Customs House toward White Point Gardens. It was a hot day, even for Charleston in June. The best places were on the seawall, where the air moved; here below, it was like being roasted alive. My shift was soaked through, and the cotton bodice clung between my breasts. I wiped my face for the tenth time in as many minutes and lifted the heavy coil of my hair, hoping vainly for a cooling breeze upon my neck. I was morbidly aware of necks at the moment. Unobtrusively, I put my hand up to the base of my throat, letting my fingers circle it. I could feel the pulse beat in my carotid arteries, along with the drums, and when I breathed, the hot wet air clogged my throat as though I were choking. I quickly took my hand down, and drew in a breath as deep as I could manage. That was a mistake. The man in front of me hadn't bathed in a month or more; the edge of the stock about his thick neck was dark with grime and his clothes smelled sour and musty, pungent even amid the sweaty reek of the crowd. The smell of hot bread and frying pig fat from the food vendors stalls lay heavy over a musk of rotting seagrass from the marsh, only slightly relieved by a whiff of salt-breeze from the harbor. There were several children in front of me, craning and gawking, running out from under the oaks and palmettos to look up the street, being called back by anxious parents. The girl nearest me had a neck like the white part of a grass stalk, slender and succulent. There was a ripple of excitement through the crowd; the gallows procession was in sight at the far end of the street. The drums grew louder. Where is he? Fergus muttered beside me, craning his own neck to see. I knew I should have gone with him! Hell be here. I wanted to stand on tiptoe, but didn't, feeling that this would be undignified. I did glance around, though, searching. I could always spot Jamie in a crowd; he stood head and shoulders above most men, and his hair caught the light in a blaze of reddish gold. There was no sign of him yet, only a bobbing sea of bonnets and tricorns, sheltering from the heat those citizens come too late to find a place in the shade. The flags came first, fluttering above the heads of the excited crowd, the banners of Great Britain and of the Royal Colony of South Carolina. And another, bearing the family arms of the Lord Governor of the colony. Then came the drummers, walking two by two in step, their sticks an alternate beat and blur. It was a slow march, grimly inexorable. A dead march, I thought they called that particular cadence; very suitable under the circumstances. All other noises were drowned by the rattle of the drums. Then came the platoon of red-coated soldiers and in their midst, the prisoners. There were three of them, hands bound before them, linked together by a chain that ran through rings on the iron collars about their necks. The first man was small and elderly, ragged and disreputable, a shambling wreck who lurched and staggered so that the dark-suited clergyman who walked beside the prisoners was obliged to grasp his arm to keep him from falling. Is that Gavin Hayes? He looks sick, I murmured to Fergus. He's drunk. The soft voice came from behind me, and I whirled, to find Jamie standing at my shoulder, eyes fixed on the pitiful procession. The small man's disequilibrium was disrupting the progress of the parade, as his stumbling forced the two men chained to him to zig and zag abruptly in order to keep their feet. The general impression was of three inebriates rolling home from the local tavern; grossly at odds with the solemnity of the occasion. I could hear the rustle of laughter over the drums, and shouts and jeers from the crowds on the wrought-iron balconies of the houses on East Bay Street. Your doing? I spoke quietly, so as not to attract notice, but I could have shouted and waved my arms; no one had eyes for anything but the scene before us. I felt rather than saw Jamie's shrug, as he moved forward to stand beside me. It was what he asked of me, he said. And the best I could manage for him. Brandy or whisky? asked Fergus, evaluating Hayes' appearance with a practiced eye. The man's a Scot, wee Fergus. Jamie's voice was as calm as his face, but I heard the small note of strain in it. "Whisky's what he wanted. A wise choice. With luck, he won't even notice when they hang him, Fergus muttered. The small man had slipped from the preacher's grasp and fallen flat on his face in the sandy road, pulling one of his companions to his knees; the last prisoner, a tall young man, stayed on his feet but swayed

wildly from side to side, trying desperately to keep his balance. The crowd on the point roared with glee. The captain of the guard glowed crimson between the white of his wig and the metal of his gorget, flushed with fury as much as with sun. He barked an order as the drums continued their somber roll, and a soldier scrambled hastily to remove the chain that bound the prisoners together. Hayes was jerked unceremoniously to his feet, a soldier grasping each arm, and the procession resumed, in better order. There was no laughter by the time they reached the gallows a muledrawn cart placed beneath the limbs of a huge live oak. I could feel the drums beating through the soles of my feet. I felt slightly sick from the sun and the smells. The drums stopped abruptly, and my ears rang in the silence. Ye dinna need to watch it, Sassenach, Jamie whispered to me. Go back to the wagon. His own eyes were fixed unblinkingly on Hayes, who swayed and mumbled in the soldiers grasp, looking blearily around. The last thing I wanted was to watch. But neither could I leave Jamie to see it through alone. He had come for Gavin Hayes; I had come for him. I touched his hand. Ill stay. Jamie drew himself straighter, squaring his shoulders. He moved a pace forward, making sure that he was visible in the crowd. If Hayes was still sober enough to see anything, the last thing he saw on earth would be the face of a friend. He could see; Hayes glared to and fro as they lifted him into the cart, twisting his neck, desperately looking. Gabhainn! A charaid! Jamie shouted suddenly. Hayes eyes found him at once, and he ceased struggling. The little man stood swaying slightly as the charge was read: theft in the amount of six pounds, ten shillings. He was covered in reddish dust, and pearls of sweat clung trembling to the gray stubble of his beard. The preacher was leaning close, murmuring urgently in his ear. Then the drums began again, in a steady roll. The hangman guided the noose over the balding head and fixed it tight, knot positioned precisely, just under the ear. The captain of the guard stood poised, saber raised. Suddenly, the condemned man drew himself up straight. Eyes on Jamie, he opened his mouth, as though to speak. The saber flashed in the morning sun, and the drums stopped, with a final thunk! I looked at Jamie; he was white to the lips, eyes fixed wide. From the corner of my eye, I could see the twitching rope, and the faint, reflexive jerk of the dangling sack of clothes. A sharp stink of urine and feces struck through the thick air. On my other side, Fergus watched dispassionately. I suppose he noticed, after all, he murmured, with regret. The body swung slightly, a dead weight oscillating like a plumb-bob on its string. There was a sigh from the crowd, of awe and release. Terns squawked from the burning sky, and the harbor sounds came faint and smothered through the heavy air, but the point was wrapped in silence. From where I stood, I could hear the small plit . . . plat . . . plit of the drops that fell from the toe of the corpses dangling shoe. I hadnt known Gavin Hayes, and felt no personal grief for his death, but I was glad it had been quick. I stole a glance at him, with an odd feeling of intrusion. It was a most public way of accomplishing a most private act, and I felt vaguely embarrassed to be looking. The hangman had known his business; there had been no undignified struggle, no staring eyes, no protruding tongue; Gavins small round head tilted sharply to the side, neck grotesquely stretched but cleanly broken. It was a clean break in more ways than one. The captain of the guard, satisfied that Hayes was dead, motioned with his saber for the next man to be brought to the gibbet. I saw his eyes travel down the red-clad file, and then widen in outrage. At the same moment, there was a cry from the crowd, and a ripple of excitement that quickly spread. Heads turned and people pushed each against his neighbor, striving to see where there was nothing to be seen. Hes gone! There he goes! Stop him! It was the third prisoner, the tall young man, who had seized the moment of Gavins death to run for his life, sliding past the guard who should have been watching him, but who had been unable to resist the gallows fascination. I saw a flicker of movement behind a vendors stall, a flash of dirty blond hair. Some of the soldiers saw it, too, and ran in that direction, but many more were rushing in other directions, and among the collisions and confusion, nothing was accomplished. The captain of the guard was shouting, face purple, his voice barely audible over the uproar. The remaining prisoner, looking stunned, was seized and hustled back in the direction of the Court of Guard as the redcoats began hastily to sort themselves back into order under the lash of their captains voice. Jamie snaked an arm around my waist and dragged me out of the way of an oncoming wave of humanity. The crowd fell back before the advance of squads of soldiers, who formed up and marched briskly off to quarter the area, under the grim and furious direction of their sergeant. Wed best find Ian, Jamie said, fending off a group of excited apprentices. He glanced at Fergus, and jerked his head toward the gibbet and its melancholy burden. Claim the body, aye? Well meet at the Willow Tree later. Do you think theyll catch him? I asked, as we pushed through the ebbing crowd, threading our way down a cobbled lane toward the merchants wharves. I expect so. Where can he go? He spoke abstractedly, a narrow line visible between his brows. Plainly the dead man was still on his mind, and he had little attention to spare for the living. Did Hayes have any family? I asked. He shook his head. I asked him that, when I

brought him the whisky. He thought he might have a brother left alive, but no notion where. The brother was transported soon after the Rising to Virginia, Hayes thought, but had heard nothing since. Not surprising if he had not; an indentured laborer would have had no facilities for communicating with kin left behind in Scotland, unless the bondsmans employer was kind enough to send a letter on his behalf. And kind or not, it was unlikely that a letter would have found Gavin Hayes, who had spent ten years in Ardsmuir prison before being transported in his turn. Duncan! Jamie called out, and a tall, thin man turned and raised a hand in acknowledgment. He made his way through the crowd in a corkscrew fashion, his single arm swinging in a wide arc that fended off the passersby. Mac Dubh, he said, bobbing his head in greeting to Jamie. Mrs. Claire. His long, narrow face was furrowed with sadness. He too had once been a prisoner at Ardsmuir, with Hayes and with Jamie. Only the loss of his arm to a blood infection had prevented his being transported with the others. Unfit to be sold for labor, he had instead been pardoned and set free to starve until Jamie had found him. God rest poor Gavin, Duncan said, shaking his head dolorously. Jamie muttered something in response in Gaelic, and crossed himself. Then he straightened, casting off the oppression of the day with a visible effort. Aye, well. I must go to the docks and arrange about Ians passage, and then well think of burying Gavin. But I must have the lad settled first. We struggled through the crowd toward the docks, squeezing our way between knots of excited gossipers, eluding the drays and barrows that came and went through the press with the ponderous indifference of trade. A file of red-coated soldiers came at the quick-march from the other end of the quay, splitting the crowd like vinegar dropped on mayonnaise. The sun glittered hot on the line of bayonet points and the rhythm of their tramping beat through the noise of the crowd like a muffled drum. Even the rumbling sledges and handcarts stopped abruptly to let them pass by. Mind your pocket, Sassenach, Jamie murmured in my ear, ushering me through a narrow space between a turban-clad slave clutching two small children and a street preacher perched on a box. He was shouting sin and repentance, but with only one word in three audible through the noise. I sewed it shut, I assured him, nonetheless reaching to touch the small weight that swung against my thigh. What about yours? He grinned and tilted his hat forward, dark blue eyes narrowing against the bright sunlight. Its where my sporran would be, did I have one. So long as I dinna meet with a quick-fingered harlot, Im safe. I glanced at the slightly bulging front of his breeches, and then up at him. Broad-shouldered and tall, with bold, clean features and a Highlanders proud carriage, he drew the glance of every woman he passed, even with his bright hair covered by a sober blue tricorne. The breeches, which were borrowed, were substantially too tight, and did nothing whatever to detract from the general effect an effect enhanced by the fact that he himself was totally ignorant of it. Youre a walking inducement to harlots, I said. Stick by me; Ill protect you. He laughed and took my arm as we emerged into a small clear space. Ian! he shouted, catching sight of his nephew over the heads of the crowd. A moment later, a tall, stringy gawk of a boy popped out of the crowd, pushing a thatch of brown hair out of his eyes and grinning widely. I thought I should never find ye, Uncle! he exclaimed. Christ, there are more folk here than at the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh! He wiped a coat sleeve across his long, half-homely face, leaving a streak of grime down one cheek. Jamie eyed his nephew askance. Yere lookin indecently cheerful, Ian, for having just seen a man go to his death. Ian hastily altered his expression into an attempt at decent solemnity. Oh, no, Uncle Jamie, he said. I didnt see the hanging. Duncan raised one brow and Ian blushed slightly. It wasna afraid to see; it was only I had . . . something else I wanted to do. Jamie smiled slightly and patted his nephew on the back. Dont trouble yourself, Ian; Id as soon not have seen it myself, only that Gavin was a friend. I know, Uncle. Im sorry for it. A flash of sympathy showed in the boys large brown eyes, the only feature of his face with any claim to beauty. He glanced at me. Was it awful, Auntie? Yes, I said. Its over, though. I pulled the damp handkerchief out of my bosom and stood on tiptoe to rub away the smudge on his cheek. Duncan Innes shook his head sorrowfully. Aye, poor Gavin. Still, its a quicker death than starving, and there was little left for him but that. Lets go, Jamie interrupted, unwilling to spend time in useless lamenting. The Bonnie Mary should be near the far end of the quay. I saw Ian glance at Jamie and draw himself up as though about to speak, but Jamie had already turned toward the harbor and was shoving his way through the crowd. Ian glanced at me, shrugged, and offered me an arm. We followed Jamie behind the warehouses that lined the docks, sidestepping sailors, loaders, slaves, passengers, customers and merchants of all sorts. Charleston was a major shipping port, and business was booming, with as many as a hundred ships a month coming and going from Europe in the season. The Bonnie Mary belonged to a friend of Jamies cousin Jared Fraser, who had gone to France to make his fortune in the wine business and succeeded brilliantly. With luck, the Bonnie Marys captain might be persuaded for Jareds sake to take Ian with him back to Edinburgh, allowing the boy to work his passage as a cabin lad. Ian was not

enthused at the prospect, but Jamie was determined to ship his errant nephew back to Scotland at the earliest opportunity. It was among other concerns news of the Bonnie Marys presence in Charleston that had brought us here from Georgia, where we had first set foot in America by accident two months before. As we passed a tavern, a slatternly barmaid came out with a bowl of slops. She caught sight of Jamie and stood, bowl braced against her hip, giving him a slanted brow and a pouting smile. He passed without a glance, intent on his goal. She tossed her head, flung the slops to the pig who slept by the step, and flounced back inside. He paused, shading his eyes to look down the row of towering ships masts, and I came up beside him. He twitched unconsciously at the front of his breeches, easing the fit, and I took his arm. Family jewels still safe, are they? I murmured. Uncomfortable, but safe, he assured me. He plucked at the lacing of his flies, grimacing. I would ha done better to hide them up my bum, I think. Better you than me, mate, I said, smiling. Id rather risk robbery, myself. The family jewels were just that. We had been driven ashore on the coast of Georgia by a hurricane, arriving soaked, ragged, and destitute save for a handful of large and valuable gemstones. I hoped the captain of the Bonnie Mary thought highly enough of Jared Fraser to accept Ian as a cabin boy, because if not, we were going to have a spot of difficulty about the passage. In theory, Jamies pouch and my pocket contained a sizable fortune. In practice, the stones might have been beach pebbles so far as the good they were to us. While gems were an easy, compact way of transporting wealth, the problem was changing them back into money. Most trade in the southern colonies was conducted by means of barter what wasnt, was handled by the exchange of scrip or bills written on a wealthy merchant or banker. And wealthy bankers were thin on the ground in Georgia; those willing to tie up their available capital in gemstones rarer still. The prosperous rice farmer with whom we had stayed in Savannah had assured us that he himself could scarcely lay his hand on two pounds sterling in cash indeed, there was likely not ten pounds in gold and silver to be had in the whole colony. Nor was there any chance of selling one of the stones in the endless stretches of salt marsh and pine forest through which we had passed on our journey north.

Charleston was the first city we had reached of sufficient size to harbor merchants and bankers who might help to liquidate a portion of our frozen assets. Not that anything was likely to stay frozen long in Charleston in summer, I reflected. Rivulets of sweat were running down my neck and the linen shift under my bodice was soaked and crumpled against my skin. Even so close to the harbor, there was no wind at this time of day, and the smells of hot tar, dead fish, and sweating laborers were nearly overwhelming. Despite their protestations, Jamie had insisted on giving one of our gemstones to Mr. and Mrs. Olivier, the kindly people who had taken us in when we were shipwrecked virtually on their doorstep, as some token of thanks for their hospitality. In return, they had provided us with a wagon, two horses, fresh clothes for traveling, food for the journey north, and a small amount of money. Of this, six shillings and threepence remained in my pocket, constituting the entirety of our disposable fortune. This way, Uncle Jamie, Ian said, turning and beckoning his uncle eagerly. Ive got something to show ye. What is it? Jamie asked, threading his way through a throng of sweating slaves, who were loading dusty bricks of dried indigo into an anchored cargo ship. And how did ye get whatever it is? Ye havena got any money, have you? No, I won it, dicing. Ians voice floated back, his body invisible as he skipped around a cartload of corn. Dicing! Ian, for Gods sake, ye canna be gambling when yeve not a penny to bless yourself with! Holding my arm, Jamie shoved a way through the crowd to catch up to his nephew. You do it all the time, Uncle Jamie, the boy pointed out, pausing to wait for us. Yeve been doing it in every tavern and inn where weve stayed. My God, Ian, thats cards, not dice! And I know what Im doing! So do I, said Ian, looking smug. I won, no? Jamie rolled his eyes toward heaven, imploring patience. Jesus, Ian, but Im glad youre going home before ye get your head beaten in. Promise me ye willna be gambling wi the sailors, aye? Ye canna get away from them on a ship. Ian was paying no attention; he had come to a half-crumbled piling, around which was tied a stout rope. Here he stopped and turned to face us, gesturing at an object by his feet. See? Its a dog, Ian said proudly. I took a quick half-step behind Jamie, grabbing his arm. Ian, I said, that is not a dog. Its a wolf. Its a bloody big wolf, and I think you ought to get away from it before it takes a bite out of your arse. The wolf twitched one ear negligently in my direction, dismissed me, and twitched it back. It continued to sit, panting with the heat, its big yellow eyes fixed on Ian with an intensity that might have been taken for devotion by someone who hadnt met a wolf before. I had. Those things are dangerous, I said. Theyd bite you as soon as look at you. Disregarding this, Jamie stooped to inspect the beast. Its not quite a wolf, is it? Sounding interested, he held out a loose fist to the so-called dog, inviting it to smell his knuckles. I closed my eyes, expecting the imminent amputation of his hand. Hearing no shrieks, I opened them again to find him squatting on the ground, peering up the animals nostrils. Hes a handsome creature, Ian, he said, scratching the thing familiarly under the chin. The yellow

eyes narrowed slightly, either in pleasure at the attention or more likely, I thought in anticipation of biting off Jamies nose. Bigger than a wolf, though; its broader through the head and chest, and a deal longer in the leg. His mother was an Irish wolfhound, Ian was hunkered down by Jamie, eagerly explaining as he stroked the enormous gray-brown back. She got out in heat, into the woods, and when she came back in whelp Oh, aye, I see. Now Jamie was crooning in Gaelic to the monster while he picked up its huge foot and fondled its hairy toes. The curved black claws were a good two inches long. The thing half closed its eyes, the faint breeze ruffling the thick fur at its neck. I glanced at Duncan, who arched his eyebrows at me, shrugged slightly, and sighed. Duncan didnt care for dogs. Jamie I said. Balach Boidheach, Jamie said to the wolf. Are ye no the bonny laddie, then? What would he eat? I asked, somewhat more loudly than necessary. Jamie stopped caressing the beast. Oh, he said. He looked at the yellow-eyed thing with some regret. Well. He rose to his feet, shaking his head reluctantly. Im afraid your aunties right, Ian. How are we to feed him? Oh, thats no trouble, Uncle Jamie, Ian assured him. He hunts for himself. Here? I glanced around at the warehouses, and the stuccoed row of shops beyond. What does he hunt, small children? Ian looked mildly hurt. Of course not, Auntie. Fish. Seeing three skeptical faces surrounding him, Ian dropped to his knees and grabbed the beasts muzzle in both hands, prying his mouth open. He does! I swear, Uncle Jamie! Here, just smell his breath! Jamie cast a dubious glance at the double row of impressively gleaming fangs on display, and rubbed his chin. Iah, I shall take your word for it, Ian. But even so for Christs sake, be careful of your fingers, lad! Ians grip had loosened, and the massive jaws clashed shut, spraying droplets of saliva over the stone quay. Im all right, Uncle, Ian said cheerfully, wiping his hand on his breeks. He wouldnt bite me, Im sure. His name is Rollo. Jamie rubbed his knuckles across his upper lip. Mmphm. Well, whatever his name is, and whatever he eats, I dinna think the captain of the Bonnie Mary will take kindly to his presence in the crews quarters. Ian didnt say anything, but the look of happiness on his face didnt diminish. In fact, it grew. Jamie glanced at him, caught sight of his glowing face, and stiffened. No, he said, in horror. Oh, no. Yes, said Ian. A wide smile of delight split his bony face. She sailed three days ago, Uncle. Were too late. Jamie said something in Gaelic that I didnt understand. Duncan looked scandalized. Damn! Jamie said, reverting to English. Bloody damn! Jamie took off his hat and rubbed a hand over his face, hard. He looked hot, disheveled, and thoroughly disgruntled. He opened his mouth, thought better of whatever he had been going to say, closed it, and ran his fingers roughly through his hair, jerking loose the ribbon that tied it back. Ian looked abashed. Im sorry, Uncle. Ill try not to be a worry to ye, truly I will. And I can work; Ill earn enough for my food. Jamies face softened as he looked at his nephew. He sighed deeply, and patted Ians shoulder. Its not that I dinna want ye, Ian. You know I should like nothing better than to keep ye with me. But what in hell will your mother say? The glow returned to Ians face. I dinna ken, Uncle, he said, but shell be saying it in Scotland, wont she? And were here. He put his arms around Rollo and hugged him. The wolf seemed mildly taken aback by the gesture, but after a moment, put out a long pink tongue and daintily licked Ians ear. Testing him for flavor, I thought cynically. Besides, the boy added, she kens well enough that Im safe; you wrote from Georgia to say I was with you. Jamie summoned a wry smile. I canna say that that particular bit of knowledge will be owercomforting to her, Ian. Shes known me a long time, aye? He sighed and clapped the hat back on his head, and turned to me. I badly need a drink, Sassenach, he said. Lets find that tavern. The Willow Tree was dark, and might have been cool, had there been fewer people in it. As it was, the benches and tables were crowded with sightseers from the hanging and sailors from the docks, and the atmosphere was like a sweatbath. I inhaled as I stepped into the taproom, then let my breath out, fast. It was like breathing through a wad of soiled laundry, soaked in beer. Rollo at once proved his worth, parting the crowd like the Red Sea as he stalked through the taproom, lips drawn back from his teeth in a constant, inaudible growl. He was evidently no stranger to taverns. Having satisfactorily cleared out a corner bench, he curled up under the table and appeared to go to sleep. Out of the sun, with a large pewter mug of dark ale foaming gently in front of him, Jamie quickly regained his normal self-possession. Weve the two choices, he said, brushing back the sweat-soaked hair from his temples. We can stay in Charleston long enough to maybe find a buyer for one of the stones, and perhaps book passage for Ian to Scotland on another ship. Or we can make our way north to Cape Fear, and maybe find a ship for him out of Wilmington or New Bern. I say north, Duncan said, without hesitation. Yeve kin in Cape Fear, no? I mislike the thought of staying ower-long among strangers. And your kinsman would see we were not cheated nor robbed. Here He lifted one shoulder in eloquent indication of the un-Scottish and thus patently dishonest persons surrounding us. Oh, do lets go north, Uncle! Ian said quickly, before Jamie could reply to this. He wiped away a small mustache of ale foam with his sleeve. The journey might be dangerous; youll need an extra man along for protection,

aye? Jamie buried his expression in his own cup, but I was seated close enough to feel a subterranean quiver go through him. Jamie was indeed very fond of his nephew. The fact remained that Ian was the sort of person to whom things happened. Usually through no fault of his own, but still, they happened. The boy had been kidnapped by pirates the year before, and it was the necessity of rescuing him that had brought us by circuitous and often dangerous means to America. Nothing had happened recently, but I knew Jamie was anxious to get his fifteen-year-old nephew back to Scotland and his mother before something did. Ah . . . to be sure, Ian, Jamie said, lowering his cup. He carefully avoided meeting my gaze, but I could see the corner of his mouth twitching. Yed be a great help, Im sure, but . . . We might meet with Red Indians! Ian said, eyes wide. His face, already a rosy brown from the sun, glowed with a flush of pleasurable anticipation. Or wild beasts! Dr. Stern told me that the wilderness of Carolina is alive wi fierce creatures bears and wildcats and wicked panthers and a great foul thing the Indians call a skunk! I choked on my ale. Are ye all right, Auntie? Ian leaned anxiously across the table. Fine, I wheezed, wiping my streaming face with my kerchief. I blotted the drops of spilled ale off my bosom, pulling the fabric of my bodice discreetly away from my flesh in hopes of admitting a little air. Then I caught a glimpse of Jamies face, on which the expression of suppressed amusement had given way to a small frown of concern. Skunks arent dangerous, I murmured, laying a hand on his knee. A skilled and fearless hunter in his native Highlands, Jamie was inclined to regard the unfamiliar fauna of the New World with caution. Mmphm. The frown eased, but a narrow line remained between his brows. Maybe so, but what of the other things? I canna say I wish to be meeting a bear or a pack o savages, wi only this to hand. He touched the large sheathed knife that hung from his belt. Our lack of weapons had worried Jamie considerably on the trip from Georgia, and Ians remarks about Indians and wild animals had brought the concern to the forefront of his mind once more. Besides Jamies knife, Fergus bore a smaller blade, suitable for cutting rope and trimming twigs for kindling. That was the full extent of our armory the Oliviers had had neither guns nor swords to spare. On the journey from Georgia to Charleston, we had had the company of a group of rice and indigo farmers all bristling with knives, pistols, and muskets bringing their produce to the port to be shipped north to Pennsylvania and New York. If we left for Cape Fear now, we would be alone, unarmed, and essentially defenseless against anything that might emerge from the thick forests. At the same time, there were pressing reasons to travel north, our lack of available capital being one. Cape Fear was the largest settlement of Scottish Highlanders in the American Colonies, boasting several towns whose inhabitants had emigrated from Scotland during the last twenty years, following the upheaval after Culloden. And among these emigrants were Jamies kin, who I knew would willingly offer us refuge: a roof, a bed, and time to establish ourselves in this new world. Jamie took another drink and nodded at Duncan. I must say Im of your mind, Duncan. He leaned back against the wall of the tavern, glancing casually around the crowded room. Dye no feel the eyes on your back? A chill ran down my own back, despite the trickle of sweat doing likewise. Duncans eyes widened fractionally, then narrowed, but he didnt turn around. Ah, he said. Whose eyes? I asked, looking rather nervously around. I didnt see anyone taking particular notice of us, though anyone might be watching surreptitiously; the tavern was seething with alcohol-soaked humanity, and the babble of voices was loud enough to drown out all but the closest conversation. Anyones, Sassenach, Jamie answered. He glanced sideways at me, and smiled. Dinna look so scairt about it, aye? Were in no danger. Not here. Not yet, Innes said. He leaned forward to pour another cup of ale. Mac Dubh called out to Gavin on the gallows, dye see? There will be those who took notice Mac Dubh bein the bittie wee fellow he is, he added dryly. And the farmers who came with us from Georgia will have sold their stores by now, and be takin their ease in places like this, Jamie said, evidently absorbed in studying the pattern of his cup. All of them are honest men but theyll talk, Sassenach. It makes a good story, no? The folk cast away by the hurricane? And what are the chances that at least one of them kens a bit about what we carry? I see, I murmured, and did. We had attracted public interest by our association with a criminal, and could no longer pass as inconspicuous travelers. If finding a buyer took some time, as was likely, we risked inviting robbery from unscrupulous persons, or scrutiny from the English authorities. Neither prospect was appealing. Jamie lifted his cup and drank deeply, then set it down with a sigh. No. I think its perhaps not wise to linger in the city. Well see Gavin buried decently, and then well find a safe spot in the woods outside the town to sleep. Tomorrow we can decide whether to stay or go. The thought of spending several more nights in the woods with or without skunk was not appealing. I hadnt taken my dress off in eight days, merely rinsing the outlying portions of my anatomy whenever we paused in the vicinity of a stream. I had been looking forward to a real bed, even if flea-infested, and a chance to scrub off the grime of the last weeks travel. Still, he had a point. I sighed, ruefully eyeing the hem of my sleeve, gray

and grubby with wear. The tavern door flung suddenly open at this point, distracting me from my contemplation, and four red-coated soldiers shoved their way into the crowded room. They wore full uniform, held muskets with bayonets fixed, and were obviously not in pursuit of ale or dice. Two of the soldiers made a rapid circuit of the room, glancing under tables, while another disappeared into the kitchen beyond. The fourth remained on watch by the door, pale eyes flicking over the crowd. His gaze lighted on our table, and rested on us for a moment, full of speculation, but then passed on, restlessly seeking. Jamie was outwardly tranquil, sipping his ale in apparent obliviousness, but I saw the hand in his lap clench slowly into a fist. Duncan, less able to control his feelings, bent his head to hide his expression. Neither man would ever feel at ease in the presence of a red coat, and for good reason. No one else appeared much perturbed by the soldiers presence. The little knot of singers in the chimney corner went on with an interminable version of Fill Every Glass, and a loud argument broke out between the barmaid and a pair of apprentices. The soldier returned from the kitchen, having evidently found nothing. Stepping rudely through a dice game on the hearth, he rejoined his fellows by the door. As the soldiers shoved their way out of the tavern, Fergus slight figure squeezed in, pressing against the doorjamb to avoid swinging elbows and musket butts. I saw one soldiers eyes catch the glint of metal and fasten with interest on the hook Fergus wore in replacement of his missing left hand. He glanced sharply at Fergus, but then shouldered his musket and hurried after his companions. Fergus shoved through the crowd and plopped down on the bench beside Ian. He looked hot and irritated. Blood-sucking salaud, he said, without preamble. Jamies brows went up. The priest, Fergus elaborated. He took the mug Ian pushed in his direction and drained it, lean throat glugging until the cup was empty. He lowered it, exhaled heavily, and sat blinking, looking noticeably happier. He sighed and wiped his mouth. He wants ten shillings to bury the man in the churchyard, he said. An Anglican church, of course; there are no Catholic churches here. Wretched usurer! He knows we have no choice about it. The body will scarcely keep till sunset, as it is. He ran a finger inside his stock, pulling the sweat-wilted cotton away from his neck, then banged his fist several times on the table to attract the attention of the servingmaid, who was being run off her feet by the press of patrons. I told the super-fatted son of a pig that you would decide whether to pay or not. We could just bury him in the wood, after all. Though we should have to purchase a shovel, he added, frowning. These grasping townfolk know we are strangers; theyll take our last coin if they can. Last coin was perilously close to the truth. I had enough to pay for a decent meal here and to buy food for the journey north; perhaps enough to pay for a couple of nights lodging. That was all. I saw Jamies eyes flick round the room, assessing the possibilities of picking up a little money at hazard or loo. Soldiers and sailors were the best prospects for gambling, but there were few of either in the taproom likely most of the garrison was still searching the town for the fugitive. In one corner, a small group of men was being loudly convivial over several pitchers of brandy wine; two of them were singing, or trying to, their attempts causing great hilarity among their comrades. Jamie gave an almost imperceptible nod at sight of them, and turned back to Fergus. What have ye done with Gavin for the time being? Jamie asked. Fergus hunched one shoulder. Put him in the wagon. I traded the clothes he was wearing to a ragwoman for a shroud, and she agreed to wash the body as part of the bargain. He gave Jamie a faint smile. Dont worry, milord; hes seemly. For now, he added, lifting the fresh mug of ale to his lips. Poor Gavin. Duncan Innes lifted his own mug in a half salute to his fallen comrade. Sl` ainte, Jamie replied, and lifted his own mug in reply. He set it down and sighed. He wouldna like being buried in the wood, he said. Why not? I asked, curious. I shouldnt think it would matter to him one way or the other. Oh, no, we couldna do that, Mrs. Claire. Duncan was shaking his head emphatically. Duncan was normally a most reserved man, and I was surprised at so much apparent feeling. He was afraid of the dark, Jamie said softly. I turned to stare at him, and he gave me a lopsided smile. I lived wi Gavin Hayes nearly as long as Ive lived with you, Sassenach and in much closer quarters. I kent him well. Aye, he was afraid of being alone in the dark, Duncan chimed in. He was most mortally scairt of tannagach of spirits, aye? His long, mournful face bore an inward look, and I knew he was seeing in memory the prison cell that he and Jamie had shared with Gavin Hayes and with forty other men for three long years. Dye recall, Mac Dubh, how he told us one night of the tannasq he met? I do, Duncan, and could wish I did not. Jamie shuddered despite the heat. I kept awake myself half the night after he told us that one. What was it, Uncle? Ian was leaning over his cup of ale, round-eyed. His cheeks were flushed and streaming, and his stock crumpled with sweat. Jamie rubbed a hand across his mouth, thinking. Ah. Well, it was a time in the late, cold autumn in the Highlands, just when the season turns, and the feel of the air tells ye the ground will be shivered wi frost come dawn, he said. He settled himself in his seat and sat back, ale cup in hand. He smiled wryly, plucking at his own throat. Not like now, aye? Well, Gavins son brought

back the kine that night, but there was one beast missing the lad had hunted up the hills and down the corries, but couldna find it anywhere. So Gavin set the lad to milk the two others, and set out himself to look for the lost cow. He rolled the pewter cup slowly between his hands, staring down into the dark ale as though seeing in it the bulk of the night-black Scottish peaks and the mist that floats in the autumn glens. He went some distance, and the cot behind him disappeared. When he looked back, he couldna see the light from the window anymore, and there was no sound but the keening of the wind. It was cold, but he went on, tramping through the mud and the heather, hearing the crackle of ice under his boots. He saw a small grove through the mist, and thinking the cow might have taken shelter beneath the trees, he went toward it. He said the trees were birches, standing there all leafless, but with their branches grown together so he must bend his head to squeeze beneath the boughs. He came into the grove and saw it was not a grove at all, but a circle of trees.

There were great tall trees, spaced verra evenly, all around him, and smaller ones, saplings, grown up between to make a wall of branches. And in the center of the circle stood a cairn. Hot as it was in the tavern, I felt as though a sliver of ice had slid melting down my spine. I had seen ancient cairns in the Highlands myself, and found them eerie enough in the broad light of day. Jamie took a sip of ale, and wiped away a trickle of sweat that ran down his temple. He felt quite queer, did Gavin. For he kent the place everyone did, and kept well away from it. It was a strange place. And it seemed even worse in the dark and the cold, from what it did in the light of day. It was an auld cairn, the kind laid wi slabs of rock, all heaped round with stones, and he could see before him the black opening of the tomb. He knew it was a place no man should come, and he without a powerful charm. Gavin had naught but a wooden cross about his neck. So he crossed himself with it and turned to go. Jamie paused to sip his ale. But as Gavin went from the grove, he said softly, he heard footsteps behind him. I saw the Adams apple bob in Ians throat as he swallowed. He reached mechanically for his own cup, eyes fixed on his uncle. He didna turn to see, Jamie went on, but kept walking. And the steps kept pace wi him, step by step, always following. And he came through the peat where the water seeps up, and it was crusted with ice, the weather bein so cold. He could hear the peat crackle under his feet, and behind him the crack! crack! of breaking ice. He walked and he walked, through the cold, dark night, watching ahead for the light of his own window, where his wife had set the candle. But the light never showed, and he began to fear he had lost his way among the heather and the dark hills. And all the time, the steps kept pace with him, loud in his ears. At last he could bear it no more, and seizing hold of the crucifix he wore round his neck, he swung about wi a great cry to face whatever followed. What did he see? Ians pupils were dilated, dark with drink and wonder. Jamie glanced at the boy, and then at Duncan, nodding at him to take up the story. He said it was a figure like a man, but with no body, Duncan said quietly.

All white, like as it might have been made of the mist. But wi great holes where its eyes should be, and empty black, fit to draw the soul from his body with dread. But Gavin held up his cross before his face, and he prayed aloud to the Blessed Virgin. Jamie took up the story, leaning forward intently, the dim firelight outlining his profile in gold. And the thing came no nearer, but stayed there, watching him. And so he began to walk backward, not daring to face round again. He walked backward, stumbling and slipping, fearing every moment as he might tumble into a burn or down a cliff and break his neck, but fearing worse to turn his back on the cold thing. He couldna tell how long hed walked, only that his legs were trembling wi weariness, when at last he caught a glimpse of light through the mist, and there was his own cottage, wi the candle in the window. He cried out in joy, and turned to his door, but the cold thing was quick, and slippit past him, to stand betwixt him and the door. His wife had been watching out for him, and when she heard him cry out, she came at once to the door. Gavin shouted to her not to come out, but for Gods sake to fetch a charm to drive away the tannasq. Quick as thought, she snatched the pot from beneath her bed, and a twig of myrtle bound wi red thread and black, that shed made to bless the cows. She dashed the water against the doorposts, and the cold thing leapt upward, astride the lintel. Gavin rushed in beneath and barred the door, and stayed inside in his wifes arms until the dawn. They let the candle burn all the night, and Gavin Hayes never again left his house past sunset until he went to fight for Prince Tearlach. Even Duncan, who knew the tale, sighed as Jamie finished speaking. Ian crossed himself, then looked about self-consciously, but no one seemed to have noticed. So, now Gavin has gone into the dark, Jamie said softly. But we willna let him lie in unconsecrated ground. Did they find the cow? Fergus asked, with his usual practicality. Jamie quirked one eyebrow at Duncan, who answered. Oh, aye, they did. The next morning they found the poor beast, wi her hooves all clogged wi mud and stones, staring mad and lathered about the muzzle, and her sides heavin fit to burst. He glanced from me to Ian and back to Fergus. Gavin did say, he said precisely, that she looked as though shed been ridden to Hell and back. Jesus. Ian took a deep gulp of his ale, and I did the same. In the

corner, the drinking society was making attempts on a round of Captain Thunder, breaking down each time in helpless laughter. Ian put down his cup on the table. What happened to them? he asked, his face troubled.

To Gavins wife, and his son? Jamies eyes met mine, and his hand touched my thigh. I knew, without being told, what had happened to the Hayes family. Without Jamies own courage and intransigence, the same thing would likely have happened to me and to our daughter Brianna. Gavin never knew, Jamie said quietly. He never heard aught of his wife she will have been starved, maybe, or driven out to die of the cold. His son took the field beside him at Culloden. Whenever a man who had fought there came into our cell, Gavin would ask Have ye maybe seen a bold lad named Archie Hayes, about so tall? He measured automatically, five feet from the floor, capturing Hayes gesture. A lad about fourteen, he'd say, with a green plaidie and a small gilt brooch. But no one ever came who had seen him for sure either seen him fall or seen him run away safe.

Jamie took a sip of the ale, his eyes fixed on a pair of British officers who had come in and settled in the corner. It had grown dark outside, and they were plainly off duty. Their leather stocks were unfastened on account of the heat, and they wore only sidearms, glinting under their coats; nearly black in the dim light save where the firelight touched them with red. Sometimes he hoped the lad might have been captured and transported, he said. Like his brother. Surely that would be somewhere in the records? I said. Did they do they keep lists? They did, Jamie said, still watching the soldiers. A small, bitter smile touched the corner of his mouth. It was such a list that saved me, after Culloden, when they asked my name before shooting me, so as to add it to their roll. But a man like Gavin would have no way to see the English dead lists. And if he could have found out, I think he would not. He glanced at me. Would you choose to know for sure, and it was your child? I shook my head, and he gave me a faint smile and squeezed my hand. Our child was safe, after all. He picked up his cup and drained it, then beckoned to the serving maid. The girl brought the food,

skirting the table widely in order to avoid Rollo. The beast lay motionless under the table, his head protruding into the room and his great hairy tail lying heavily across my feet, but his yellow eyes were wide open, watching everything. They followed the girl intently, and he backed nervously away, keeping an eye on him until she was safely out of biting distance. Seeing this, Jamie cast a dubious look at the so-called dog. Is he hungry? Must I ask for a fish for him? Oh, no, Uncle, Ian reassured him. Rollo catches his own fish.

Jamies eyebrows shot up, but he only nodded, and with a wary glance at Rollo, took a platter of roasted oysters from the tray. Ah, the pity of it. Duncan Innes was quite drunk by now. He sat slumped against the wall, his armless shoulder riding higher than the other, giving him a strange, hunchbacked appearance. That a dear man like Gavin should come to such an end! He shook his head lugubriously, swinging it back and forth over his ale cup like the clapper of a funeral bell. No family left to mourn him, cast alone into a savage land handed as a felon, and to be buried in an unconsecrated grave. Not even a proper lament to be sung for him! He picked up the cup, and with some difficulty, found his mouth with it. He drank deep and set it down with a muffled clang. Well, he shall have a caithris! He glared belligerently from Jamie to Fergus to Ian. Why not? Jamie wasnt drunk, but he wasnt completely sober either. He grinned at Duncan and lifted his own cup in salute. Why not, indeed? he said. Only it will have to be you singin it, Duncan. None of the rest knew

Gavin, and Im no singer. Ill shout along with ye, though. Duncan nodded magisterially, bloodshot eyes surveying us. Without warning, he flung back his head and emitted a terrible howl. I jumped in my seat, spilling half a cup of ale into my lap. Ian and Fergus, who had evidently heard Gaelic laments before, didnt turn a hair. All over the room, benches were shoved back, as men leapt to their feet in alarm, reaching for their pistols. The barmaid leaned out of the serving hatch, eyes big. Rollo came awake with an explosive Woof! and glared round wildly, teeth bared. Tha sinn cruinn a chaoidh ar caraid, Gabhainn Hayes, Duncan thundered, in a ragged baritone. I had just about enough Gaelic to translate this as We are met to weep and cry out to heaven for the loss of our friend, Gavin Hayes! E`isd ris! Jamie chimed in. Rugadh e do Sheumas Immanuel Hayes agus Louisa Nic a Liallainnan am baile Chill-Mhartainn, ann an sgìre Dhun Domhnuill, anns a bhliadhna seachd ceud deug agus a haon! He was born of Seaumais Emmanuel Hayes and of Louisa Maclellan, in the village of Kilmartin in the parish of Dodanil, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and one! E`isd ris! This time Fergus and Ian joined in on the chorus, which I translated roughly as Hear

him! Rollo appeared not to care for either verse or refrain; his ears lay flat against his skull, and his yellow eyes narrowed to slits. Ian scratched his head in reassurance, and he lay down again, muttering wolf curses under his breath. The audience, having caught on to it that no actual violence threatened, and no doubt bored with the inferior vocal efforts of the drinking society in the corner, settled down to enjoy the show. By the time Duncan had worked his way into an accounting of the names of the sheep Gavin Hayes had owned before leaving his croft to follow his laird to Culloden, many of those at the surrounding tables were joining

enthusiastically in the chorus, shouting E`isd ris! and banging their mugs on the tables, in perfect ignorance of what was being said, and a good thing too. Duncan, drunker than ever, fixed the soldiers at the next table with a baleful glare, sweat pouring down his face. A Shasunnaich na galladh, s olc a thig e dhuibh fanaid air b` as gasgaich. Gun toireadh an diabhul fhein leis anns a bh` as sibh, direach do Fhirinn!! Wicked Sassenach dogs, eaters of dead flesh! Ill does it become you to laugh and rejoice at the death of a gallant man! May the devil himself seize upon you in the hour of your death and take you straight to hell! Ian blanched slightly at this, and Jamie cast Duncan a narrow look, but they stoutly shouted E`isd ris! along with the rest of the crowd. Fergus, seized by inspiration, got up and passed his hat among the crowd, who, carried away by ale and excitement, happily flung coppers into it for the privilege of joining in their own denunciation. I had as good a head for drink as most men, but a much smaller bladder. Head spinning from the noise and fumes as much as from alcohol, I got up and edged my way out from behind the table, through the mob, and into the fresh air of the early evening. It was still hot and sultry, though the sun was long since down. Still, there was a lot more air out here, and a lot fewer people sharing it. Having relieved the internal pressure, I sat down on the taverns chopping block with my pewter mug, breathing deeply. The night was clear, with a bright half-moon peeping silver over the harbors edge. Our wagon stood nearby, no more than its outline visible in the light from the tavern windows. Presumably, Gavin Hayes decently shrouded body lay within. I trusted he had enjoyed his caithris. Inside, Duncans chanting had come to an end. A clear tenor voice, wobbly with drink, but sweet nonetheless, was singing a familiar tune, audible over the babble of talk. To Anacreon in heavn, where he sat in full glee, A few sons of harmony sent a petition, That he their inspirer and patron would be! When this answer arrived from the jolly old Grecian: Voice, fiddle, and flute, No longer be mute! Ill lend you my name and inspire you to boot. The singers voice cracked painfully on voice, fiddle, and flute, but he sang stoutly on, despite the laughter from his audience. I smiled wryly to myself as he hit the final couplet, And, besides, Ill instruct you like me to entwine, The Myrtle of Venus with Bacchuss vine! I lifted my cup in salute to the wheeled coffin, softly echoing the melody of the singers last lines. Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave Oer the land of the free and the home of the brave? I drained my cup and sat still, waiting for the men to come out.