

THE  
**VANISHED  
DAYS**

SUSANNA  
KEARSLEY

# I

I WAS A YOUNGER MAN when I first met her. I should tell you this in fairness, not because the years have dulled my recollection of that moment, for in truth I could still lead you to the spot where I was standing when she looked in my direction. I've forgotten many things. That is not one of them. I'm telling you because even the wisest man, when young, is ruled by other things than wisdom when he meets with such a woman. And when I met Lily Aitcheson, I knew I was in trouble.

There are many who believe they know what happened, but they do not know the whole of it. The rumors spread, and grow, and take their hold, and so to end them I have been persuaded now to take my pen in hand and tell the story as it should be told—both in the parts that are my own and in those pieces that were hers, as they were told to me by others and as I came to discover them.

You may ask how closely you can trust my narrative, when I have waited until now to set it down, and when those days must surely seem so distant to me, like a magic lantern show of memories played against the coming darkness. I can only reassure you we kept notes from our inquiries—Gilroy's and my own—and I have those beside me here now in my study, for my reference.

As to memory, you may understand this better for yourself, when you are old, but there are some corners of the mind imprinted so indelibly with what we have experienced that, long after the less important things have slipped away and we have lost the simple function of recalling where we last set down our spectacles, those deeper memories yet remain. The slightest thing

may make them stir—a wafting scent, a few notes of a song half-sung, the darkness of a passing cloud.

Most evenings in my armchair by the fireside, I drift now to those memories and assure you they are every bit as clear as when I lived them.

Me at fourteen in the scorching bright sunlight, the day I was taught how to fire a musket.

A turn, and I'm deep in the jungles of Darien, fighting the Spaniards, and Lieutenant Turnbull, my friend and commander, is urging me onward in spite of the shot to his shoulder that's just made him fall. "Go," he says. "Do not stop. Go!"

Turn again, and it's several years on and I'm once again following Turnbull's directions, his letter inviting me to come and visit him tucked in my pocket as I climb the worn stones of Edinburgh's High Street in search of his door.

He lived, that year, in Caldow's Land—the term *land* being commonly applied in that town to those great, high tenements in which each floor was, of itself, a separate dwelling, serviced by a common stair. It was a narrow building, and an old one, and the evening I arrived in mid-September under skies that threatened rain, it looked unwelcoming. The hollow shadows lying deeply in the arched shop booths at street level, the several looming stories of dark windows, and the jagged roofline cutting at the sky all seemed to warn me not to stay.

But I was stubborn, I was weary, and I did not heed the warning.

So, for what came next, I've no one but myself to blame.

# CHAPTER 1

*Monday, 22 September, 1707*

**M**ACDOUGALL WAS WATCHING ME. It was unsettling to waken and find him half-shielded by shadow, an arm's length away from my bed. For a sick moment I thought I was still in the grip of the trembling fever that had been my curse these past years and that had, as it always did, struck without warning, the same night I'd set foot in Caldow's Land.

Making things worse, my friend Turnbull was not even here in town.

Instead, on his threshold, I'd found myself facing his wife, great with child, who had offered apologies. "But do come in. You can sup with us, surely?"

He'd written to me that he'd married and that they were well matched, but this was my proof—for few women, upon opening their door to find me standing there, a stranger, would have welcomed me inside. And fewer still, when I had shown that night the first signs of my fever, would have brushed aside my protests and insisted that I stay.

I should have protested more strongly. But before I could collect my wits I'd found myself installed within a bedchamber, attended by the Turnbulls' rough-edged and rough-handed manservant, MacDougall.

He was not pleased by my presence.

"It's not right," he told me one evening. "Ye should not be here when the master's away."

I'd have gladly obliged him by leaving, but I had no choice.

There was naught to be done for an ague like mine but to faithfully drink my infusion of Jesuits' powder and wait while the hot fevers cycled their course.

In the peak of my delirium, I'd watched MacDougall search the pockets of my coat, remove the letter I had brought from Turnbull, and unfold it. In my outrage, with my lips too dry to form the words, I told him, "Leave that!"

He'd ignored me. Reading it, he'd held the letter closer to the light to see the signature, refolded it along its seams, and with a frown, replaced it.

What else he'd searched while I was sleeping, I knew not, but from the first, he had determined I was not a man to trust.

This morning, as I woke, he watched me. Setting down my washbasin, he said, "Terrible things, tertian fevers."

His tone had a purpose I couldn't unravel, so when there was no need to make a reply, I kept silent. What was there to say? The fevers were a nuisance I'd been plagued with now for several years. The first infection, starting in the full heat of the jungle and continuing on shipboard, had been worst of all. Since then the agues cycled round at random, striking when they pleased, and disappearing till the next attack. I'd learned the way to live with them.

MacDougall told me, "'Tis what happens when men muck about in foreign lands. The master, thanks to God, does have a stronger constitution and brought none of that foul sickness home with him." He looked at me directly. "Ye must find it inconvenient, falling ill in other people's houses."

"I don't make a habit of it."

"Do ye not?"

I found his open insolence uncommon for a servant, and a contrast to the timid housemaid who kept closely to the kitchen like a shadow and was scarcely ever seen, but my hostess had already warned me that MacDougall was a law unto himself.

"You will forgive him," she'd apologized. "He's served my

husband's family since he was a lad, as did his father before him, and he considers it a calling. He is overly protective, more so now I am with child, but he does mean well, and is harmless."

I was not so sure. MacDougall, for his life of service, had the hardened look of one who knew how to do violence.

I preferred to meet him on my feet. I stood, but taking up the gauntlet he'd cast down I said, "I'm here by invitation. As you know. You've read my letter."

"Aye. Ye must have telt a sad tale for the master tae have written ye those lines, for him tae offer ye his outstretched hand. He is a giving man, the master. He'd turn out his pockets for ye, let ye use his name and his connections to advance yerself, and ask for nothing. But I'm sure that's not why ye came back."

He said that last sarcastically, and while I felt my blood heat from the insult, I held back my temper.

I owed this man no explanation. Someone like MacDougall, who had never strayed from Scotland's shores, could never know what drove a man like me. He'd never feel the pull that made a soldier like myself, after the lonely years of hiring my sword to foreign princes under foreign skies, turn homeward once again to seek a face I recognized, a hearth that I could call my own, a wife to build a future with. He'd never understand.

I turned my back, dismissively, and reached for a clean shirt.

MacDougall said, "The master has troubles enough of his own, without looking tae yours. In the Earl of Mar's regiment, he should by now be a captain commanding a company of his own men, and he's written tae the earl himself saying so, as have the mistress's high-flung relations, but he's held back as a lieutenant while other, more cunning men rise—younger men, with less time in the army." *Men like you*, he might have said, from the fierce burn of the gaze I knew well that MacDougall had aimed at my back. "With a wife and a bairn on the way, he's no time to be burdened with such as yerself. Ye're not even a gentleman."

I turned then. Met his eyes. "Then we are equal, you and I."

There was a moment when I thought he might forget his station altogether and return the challenge in my tone with a strike of his fist. But he did not. Instead, he carefully laid out the towel he had brought, beside the basin.

Looking down, he commented, "That's three days with no fever."

"Aye."

"It's finished, then. Ye're better."

"Aye."

"Good," he said, and turned away. "Time ye were gone."



"We must find you a wife while you're here," Turnbull's wife said at breakfast. "No, you may smile, but a bachelor of your age—"

"Of my age? I'm not yet five and thirty. Still a few years younger than your husband, and I hope you will agree he's hardly ancient."

With a blush she laid a hand upon her rounded belly, in awareness that it proved the man she'd married was yet virile. But her wit would not be bested. "And my husband was a few years younger than he is now when he met me, so my point stands. What sort of woman do you favor? I have several friends in mind who might do well for you."

"My dear Mrs. Turnbull—"

"Please do call me Helen."

MacDougall cut in to serve our morning porridge. He gently set Helen's bowl down, but set mine down hard, with a glower.

I'd had time while finishing dressing to think on his words without passion, and now that I knew my friend Turnbull was having his own struggles climbing the ranks, I agreed that my being here would only add to the weight Turnbull carried. I could not do that to my friend.

I replied, "My dear Helen, then. You're very kind, but I've been in your care these ten days and I cannot impose on you

longer, not now that I'm well." I glanced at MacDougall, who narrowed his eyes as I told Helen lightly, "'Tis time I was gone."

She looked at me, surprised. "You will not leave, I hope, until my husband has returned? He'd not forgive me if he learned that you'd been here and gone and he had missed your company."

No more than I'd miss his, I knew, as I would miss the comforts of this house that I'd been able to explore these past few days since my last fevers had subsided and I had regained my strength.

As stern and forbidding as Caldow's Land might have appeared from the street on the evening that I had arrived, on the inside it was full of life, the floors above taken by an interesting mix of people I had heard about but not yet met, from the former Latin master to the spinster merchant sisters who together kept the shop below.

The Turnbulls' dwelling occupied the whole of the first floor, made warm and charming by its painted walls and ceiling beams. We passed most of the day in this front chamber—the long drawing room, with its row of bright windows along the end wall looking out onto the bustle of the Landmarket.

The merchant sisters were already up and at their business. I'd discovered it was common, when we breakfasted, to hear the daily noises of their trade—the muffled movements as they set their wares in place within the alcoves, and the greetings they exchanged with passing customers—but it was rare to hear a footstep at this hour of morning climb the curved stone forestair leading to the front door of the house, and rarer still to hear those footsteps pause within the common stairwell, at the door of Turnbull's lodgings.

My own attention was then fixed on trying to decide how best to answer Helen, but the footsteps broke my concentration, and the brisk rap at the door that followed made me look, with Helen, at MacDougall, who had crossed now to admit the early caller.

I might not have recognized the gentleman who entered, ducking through the doorway in a practiced movement that both saved his high wig from a knock against the lintel while appearing



at the same time to be more or less a bow of greeting, but he was no stranger to the others.

Helen stood and dropped so quickly to a curtsy that my first thought was she might have done her unborn child an injury.

Apparently I wasn't alone in that thought. Our visitor hastily moved forward, taking her elbow and guiding her back to her seat. "Madam, please. I do fear for your health."

Helen smiled. "My lord, I am perfectly healthy, I promise you. My doctors assure me it will be at least two months more till I'm brought to bed, and I intend to make use of what liberty I am allowed in that time." But she stayed in her chair, to appease him, and in a graceful motion of her hand included me. "May I present my husband's good friend, Sergeant Adam Williamson, who served with him at Toubacanti. Sergeant, may I introduce you to Lord Grange?"

I paid my honors then, bowing so smartly that I drew a glance of sidelong cynicism from MacDougall in his place beside the hearth, to make it plain he thought my actions were for show. Perhaps they were. I'll not deny that when a man like me, with few connections and few prospects, met a Lord of the Justiciary whose brother was the Earl of Mar and rich with friends at Queen Anne's court, then it was worth the effort of a little extra show. But I confess my first thought was that Lord Grange was the brother of the earl within whose regiment Lieutenant Turnbull was now seeking a promotion, and my manners might reflect upon my friend. "My lord," I said. "Your servant."

Lord Grange was agreeable and pleasant in his manners and his speech. A younger man than me, but I was growing used to the reality that many men I met these days were younger. He could not yet have been thirty.

"I was hoping," he remarked to Helen, as he took his own seat with us at the table, "that your husband might be here."

"No, I regret he's still away, and likely will be for another fortnight."

“A shame.” Lord Grange seemed genuinely sorry. “I came to ask a favor of him. Just a minor job, but one that wants discretion, and is urgent. I could think of no one better than Lieutenant Turnbull to perform it, but it cannot wait. I must arrange things now. Today.”

On Helen’s face I saw the changing flow of her reactions from dismay to rapid thought to inspiration, so I had a sense of what was coming. “Adam—Sergeant Williamson—has been my husband’s friend for years. He has my husband’s trust. He would be eminently qualified to start this work, I’m sure, and then my husband could complete it for you upon his return.”

They looked at me.

I was less sure than Helen I was suited to the task, whatever it might be, but Turnbull had my loyalty. By taking on this job now as his surrogate, I’d hold his place and make sure that it did not go to someone else, for if he won the gratitude of Lord Grange and the Earl of Mar, my friend might also finally win his captaincy.

I felt the weight of all their eyes. MacDougall’s coldly disapproving. Those of Lord Grange waiting patiently. And Helen’s, holding hope.

“Of course,” I said, “if I can be of any help at all.”

Lord Grange pronounced this excellent. “I’ll send one of my clerks to you this afternoon, then. Shall we say, at two o’clock? He’ll bring the papers you’ll need, and explain things.”

He didn’t stay long after that.

“I regret,” he told us, “I must travel up to Alloa tomorrow, and stay awhile on business. I should have been there already, but with circumstances being what they were...” He coughed, apologized, and took his leave.

“Poor man,” Helen said, as her hand went once more to the round of her belly. “His wife fell extremely ill Friday last past, and she miscarried. They are but recently wed. It is said that he would not have married her had she not carried his child, for her family does not have the best reputation. Her father was hanged

as a murderer, here at the cross, years ago, and the stain of an act like that cannot be easily washed from a bloodline. Lord Grange's wife, so they say, has a fierce temper. But I am still sorry she lost her child." She sat a moment in silence, then allowed, "And that, at least, is one sorrow a bachelor is spared, I suppose."

"The loss of a child?"

"Yes. Although I do realize a man doesn't need to be married," she said, "to have children."

I said, "I would need to be."

"Truly?"

"Yes. I would wish that any child of mine be legitimate, and bear my name."

"Very honorable." Fondly, she added, "I truly must find you a wife while you're here. It's the least I can do in return for this work you've agreed to do, saving my husband's chance to earn the favor of Lord Grange."

"It seems he does already have it."

"The favor of such men is often haphazardly given and easily lost if one doesn't stand in the right place," she explained, with a keenness of insight that put me in mind of the fact she had told me her own father had been a man of the law. "I'm glad you were standing in my husband's place today."

I owed him much, so anything that I could do for Turnbull was but feeble payment for the debt I carried. When I told her this, her eyes held pride.

"I do hope," she said, "the work itself will not be too unpleasant."

I was hoping that as well, but I'd resigned myself to anything, so when Lord Grange's clerk appeared at two o'clock precisely with a file of papers underneath one arm, I breathed more easily. The drudgery of paperwork was something I could bear.

The clerk was younger than me, too—a tall man in his later twenties with broad shoulders and a build that seemed more suited to the fields than to an office, but his voice was educated.

Gilroy was his name. "I will be with you every day," he promised, "until we finish the inquiry."

I tried to sound informed, and failed. "The inquiry?"

"You've not been told?" His mouth, for just a moment, made a line that I knew well. Mine did the same when I was forced to explain basic things to new recruits. He set the papers on the table by the window, which by now had been cleared of its breakfast things and sat in readiness, with four chairs stationed round it. "How much do you know of the business of the Commissioners of the Equivalent?"

I knew that since that Acts of Union had been passed between my own country of Scotland and the English this past spring, dissolving our parliament and creating one united nation, the government of Queen Anne down at Westminster had sent north an enormous sum of money to be managed as a fund designed to offset our assumption of a share of England's debt, and for some other sundry purposes, and that this money was called the Equivalent, and those who had its charge were its Commissioners.

I said all this to Gilroy, who seemed satisfied. "That's fairly it. Except a large part of what those commissioners are doing now is sorting through the claims of those owed money by our African Company, since one promise of the union was that everyone who lost by that adventure would be compensated out of the Equivalent."

Helen, who had been all this time in the room with us, spoke up. "Sergeant Williamson is very well acquainted with the African Company. He is one of our brave men who went to Darien. He fought at Toubacanti, with my husband."

Gilroy's level grey eyes held a new appreciation. "Did you? Then you'll not need me to waste my breath on that."

"No." I knew all about the Company.

"The people who lost money, and the men still owed their wages, have been publicly invited to apply for payment," Gilroy said. "As have the heirs of those who died."

I worked to smooth the brittle edge from my own tone. "I should imagine the commissioners are overrun with claims."

"They are. But this one," he said, untying the string that bound the file of papers, "they have passed to us. A woman who has recently come forward with a claim to be the widow of a sailor."

Helen looked at him. "You do not think she is?"

"I did not say that."

"No," she mused. "You did not." Leaning closer, she glanced at the few pages that were topmost in the file. "So we are meant to ask her questions?"

"Sergeant Williamson is, yes."

I felt at sea. "What sort of questions?"

"Ones that will determine whether she was truly married to this sailor, and establish whether she is owed his wages," Gilroy said, with patience. "When Lieutenant Turnbull has returned, he will assume the inquiry, but until then you have the lead, sir."

Not a thought that gave me comfort.

Somebody was coming up the curved steps of the forestairs. Gilroy turned toward the sound and said, "That's probably the lady now. Lord Grange said he would tell her to be here at half past two."

MacDougall let her in.

She was not tall. She did not have to duck to miss the lintel, but as she entered, she turned her head slightly toward me and I felt the breath leave my lungs.

I'd seen beautiful women. Society women. Their faces would fade from my mind. But the face of this one unremarkable widow, I knew beyond all doubt, I'd always remember.

Our eyes met.

She'd paused just inside the door, hesitant, as though she hadn't expected to see us all waiting there, but when I smiled reassurance, she took a step forward.

Gilroy made the introductions. "Mistress Aitcheson," he called her first, then correcting himself, "Mrs. Graeme."

She offered me her gloved hand and said, "That is what we're all here to decide, is it not, Mr.—?"

Gilroy gave her my name. I was grateful, for I doubt that I could have managed it.

I paid her my honors and felt her hand slip from mine. I missed the touch.

"Well, Sergeant Williamson," she told me, steadily, "shall we begin?"



From self-preservation, I gave her the chair to my left at the table, for had she been seated across from me I should have found it impossible not to stare openly, much less to concentrate. Opposite me I sat Helen, whom I'd asked to stay for propriety's sake and to make Mrs. Graeme more comfortable, since I could hardly imagine a woman would feel at ease when being questioned alone by two men. Helen, facing me, was at least not a distraction, although she had arguably the more classically beautiful face.

Mrs. Graeme had freckles across cheeks and nose, not a porcelain skin, and her face was the shape of a heart, not an oval, the whole framed by hair of plain brown that refused to stay in a smooth style and escaped in small curls from beneath the lace pinner she wore to contain it. A cap, I might have called it in my youth, until the girl I'd lost my heart to in those days had set me straight. "How did you get to be the age you are and not know what a pinner is?" she'd asked me while removing it and drawing out the hairpins one by one to set her hair loose, and I never had forgotten. It was not the most convenient memory, for my glance at Mrs. Graeme's hair, however brief, had left me with a vision of it tumbling loose like that, and to regain my focus I reached for the papers Gilroy spread before me.

He sat at my right hand, which I thought fitting, since he played the role now of my right-hand man with quiet competence.

Much like a schoolmaster setting a lesson, he'd put all the

papers in order, so I'd understand. First his summary of all the facts as he felt I should know them, then a declaration from the Commissioners of the Equivalent, and finally two certificates of marriage—one the original she must have given them when she'd applied to them, whenever that had been, and one the copy they'd made from that, both stating clearly the name of her husband—James Graeme—and her full name: Liliás Aitcheson.

The certificate plainly declared they'd been lawfully married at Edinburgh on the second day of January 1698 before the required two witnesses, by a minister whose name was not unfamiliar.

I took time to read through the rest. It allowed me the space to compose myself, and become settled and sure of my footing. Then, taking the marriage certificates, I set the copy aside.

"I can return this to you, now," I said, and passed her the original. "I'm sure it's very precious to you."

"Yes."

I cleared my throat. "Mrs. Graeme, I'm sure you can appreciate that since the Equivalent money has been brought up to Edinburgh, there have been a great many people come forward to lay claim to their share of it, and the Commissioners must examine every case with care. Your husband having lost his life while sailing for the African Company would of course be owed his wages, to be paid from the Equivalent directly to his heir. The Commissioners must then determine clearly if you are in fact his heir."

I caught the turn of Gilroy's head toward me, as though he had not expected I'd be able to explain the case so neatly, but while I might not have his education, I was not a fool, and since I had agreed to sit in Turnbull's place, I would not spoil the prospects of my friend through my incompetence.

Of course, I had not counted on the complicating factor of the woman to my left.

She took in what I'd said, and nodded, and she waited, and we all four sat at the table for a moment in our places as though

playing at a game of cards, with no one keen to let the others see their hand. And finally it was left to me to say, "We have a problem."

In the silence that came after, Gilroy said, to clarify, "The marriage was irregular."

By which he meant they'd not been married in the Kirk, and by the parish minister, but in a more clandestine way. The minister they'd chosen was not even Presbyterian. I recognized him by his name as one of those devout Episcopalians who, at the Revolution, had been stripped of their own parishes and had since, with the others of their outcast faith, been barred from leading any form of worship, or from baptizing a newborn bairn—or celebrating marriages.

She touched the edge of the certificate with something like defiance. "An irregular marriage is still a legal marriage."

Gilroy allowed this. "Only this one was never judicially acknowledged." As though realizing his language might be overly technical, he patiently explained, "You never went before the Kirk to confess it, so that you could be rebuked and pay the fine and have the marriage properly entered in their records."

Her nod was cool, as was her tone. "It was a failing of my husband's that he died before we could confess our marriage to the Kirk."

"But then it must be proved," said Gilroy. "I'm afraid the minister who married you is long since dead. Which normally would leave us with the witnesses, but my initial inquiries would indicate that they, too, are deceased."

"Again our failing, I suppose, to not choose people who'd outlive us, and to lack the foresight to have filled the room with guests."

I leaned forward slightly, taking up the space between them in the way one does when sensing friends are in a mood to fight. "With your permission, Mrs. Graeme, that is why we're here. To seek another means of proof."



She collected her emotions with an effort betrayed only by the slightest setting of her shoulders—something that she likely didn't even know she did, when pressed. But it had the desired effect, for when she spoke, her voice had lost its edge.

"Pray, Sergeant Williamson, if this certificate and my own word are insufficient, then what proof will satisfy the men of your commission?"

"Have you any other documents that bear your husband's signature and name you as his wife? A deed, or back bond, or—"

"We owned no land."

"His final will and testament?"

"He did not leave one. If he had, I surely would have brought it with me, would I not?"

"A letter, then." I grasped at any document I could. "You must have letters that he wrote to you, which might help to establish your relationship."

She told me, "I have nothing of my husband's, Sergeant Williamson."

Others might have missed her faint frown as she turned her face toward the windows. I did not.

It had been years since I'd felt so compelled to help, protect, and care for someone else. The feeling hit me like a hammer blow, and held me silent.

Gilroy said, "In such a case, the best approach is to attempt to find people who knew you and your husband, when he lived, and who could testify your marriage was a proper one. These witnesses you list on your certificate—"

"—are dead," she said, "as you've observed."

"But were they strangers called in off the street?" he asked. "I know that's often how it's done, with such clandestine marriages. Or were they people known to you?"

Still looking at the street beyond the windows, she replied, "They were my friends."

"I see," said Gilroy. "Barbara Malcolm, your first witness named, did she have any family?"

"Barbara Malcolm had a sister, but she died." She looked at Gilroy. "Why?"

He made a note upon his papers. "And this other, Walter Browne?"

"He had brothers, though I don't know what became of them."

Another note. "And were these brothers well acquainted with you and your husband?"

"We were very private people."

"Nonetheless. If you would have us help you, this is how it must be done. We must prepare a list of those who knew you as a married couple, and seek out their testimony."

"How long will that take?"

"It depends upon the list. Perhaps a fortnight."

Longer than she'd hoped, apparently, to judge by her expression when she brought her face around again to look at me. Her eyes were blue and shadowed with impatience and, behind that, something deeper and unspoken that looked very much like fear.

It hit me squarely in my gut.

I could not think why such a mundane thing as proving she'd been married to this man would make her frightened, but there were already many things about this "simple" inquiry I did not understand.

And in that moment I reacted without thinking; without caring what the others in the room might think. I hitched my chair around so that it faced hers more directly, and I told her, "Mrs. Graeme, I realize this is an uncomfortable position for you, sitting here with strangers, being judged. But I can promise, if you'll trust me, I will help you find your way through all of this." I met her eyes and asked her, "Will you trust me?"

It might well have been the longest moment I had ever spent.

And then, at last, it ended.

"Yes," she said.

If I hadn't already known I was in trouble, I would have been sure of it then, when she spoke that one word and attempted a smile and it seemed, for that heartbeat of time, there were only the two of us there in the drawing room, and all the rest of the world fell away.

But we were not alone. There, at my right hand, was Gilroy, his pen in hand, waiting. Across from me, Helen, observing the scene with her clever and curious gaze. And MacDougall, a dark presence who might be standing behind any door, wishing me gone.

If I were to help both my friend Turnbull and Mrs. Graeme, I'd have to be careful, conceal what I felt, and be always on guard.

I wanted to smile back at Mrs. Graeme, but I held it to myself and merely gave a nod and shifted my chair back into position. "Good. Let's begin, then, with this list of those who knew you and your husband. What names can you add to it?"

"None," was her answer. "At least, none who knew us as adults."

I looked at her, curious, and she said quietly, "We met as children."

And although she owed us no piece of that past, she began, in a soft voice, to speak of it, drawing us back with her words to the girl she had been when she'd first known James Graeme.