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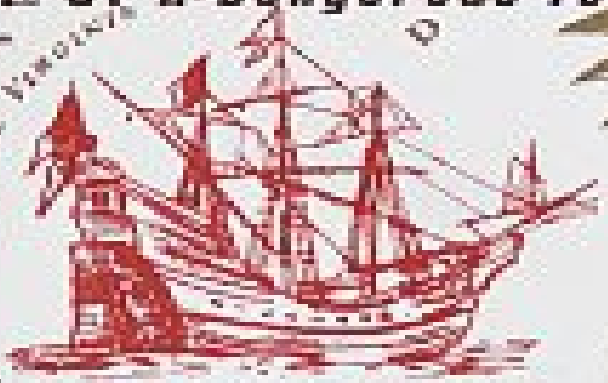

A PLACE CALLED FREEDOM

A NOVEL

A PLACE CALLED FREEDOM

BY

KEN FOLLETT

Dedicated to the memory of

JOHN SMITH I did a lot of gardening when I first moved into High Glen House, and that's how I found the iron collar The house was fialling down and the garden was overgrown. A crazy old lady had lived here for twenty years and never given it a lick of paint. She died and I bought it from her son, who owns the Toyota dealership in Kirkbum, the nearest town, jy~y miles away. You might wonder why a person would buy a dilap idated house fifty miles from nowhere. But I just love this valley. There are shy deer in the woods and an ea gles' nest right at the top of the ridge. Out in the gar den I would spend half the time leaning on in ' y spade and staring at the blue-green mountainsides. But I did some digging too. I decided to plant some shrubs around the outhouse. It's not a handsome building-clapboard walls with no windows-and I wanted to screen it with bushes. While I was digging the trench, I found a box. It wasn't very big, about the size of those cases that contain twelve bottles of good wine. It wasn'tfancy either: just plain unvarnished wood held together with rusty nails. I broke it open with the blade of my spade. There were two things inside. One was a big old book. I got quite excited at that: perhaps it was afamily Bible, with an intriguing history written on the flyleaf-the births, marriages and deaths of people who had lived in my house a hundred years ago. But I was disappointed When I opened it Ifound ix x Prologue

that the pages had turned to pull). Not a word could be read. The other item was an oilcloth bag. That, too, was rotten, and when I touched it with my gardening gloves it disintegrated. Inside was an iron ring about six inches across. It was tarnished, but the oilcloth bag had prevented it from rusting away. It looked crudely made, probably b ' y a village black smith, and at first I thought it might have been part of a cart or a plow. But why had someone wrapped it carefully in oilcloth to preserve iO There was a break in the ring and it hail been bent. I began to think of it as a collar that some prisoner had

been forced to wear When the prisoner escaped the ring had been broken with a heav ' v blacksmith's tool, then bent to get it off. I took it in the house and started to clean it up. It was slow work, so I steeped it in RustAway overnight then tried again in the morning. As I polished it with a rag, an inscription became visible. It was engraved in old-fashioned curly writing, and it took me a while to figure it out, but this is what it said:

-474 -waw ol'

A.D. 1767

It's here on my desk, beside the computer I use it as a paperweight. I often pick it up and turn it in my hands, rereading that inscription. If the iron collar could talk, I think to myself what kind of story would it tell? A PLACE CALLED FREEDOM

SNOW CROWNED THE RIDGES OF HIGH GLEN AND LAY on the wooded slopes in pearly patches, like jewelry on the bosom of a green silk dress. In the valley bottom a hasty stream dodged between icy rocks. The bitter wind that howled inland from the North Sea brought flurries of sleet and hail. Walking to church in the morning the McAsh twins, Malachi and Esther, followed a zigzag trail along the eastern slope of the glen. Malachi, known as Mack, wore a plaid cape and tweed breeches, but his legs were bare below the knee, and his feet, without stockings, froze in his wooden clogs. However, he was young and hot-blooded, and he hardly noticed the cold. This was not the shortest way to church but High Glen always thrilled him. The high mountainsides, the quiet mysterious woods and the laughing water formed a landscape familiar to his soul. He had watched a pair of eagles raise three sets of nestlings here. Like the eagles, he had stolen the laird's salmon from the teeming stream. And, like the deer, he had hidden in the trees, silent and still, when the gamekeepers came, The laird was a woman, Lady Hallim, a widow with a daughter. The land on the far side of the mountain belonged to Sir George Jamisson, and it was a different world. Engineers had torn great holes in the mountainsides; manmade hills of slag disfigured the valley; massive wagons loaded with coal plowed the muddy road; and the stream was black with dust. There the twins lived, in a village called Heugh, a long row of low stone houses marching uphill like a staircase. They were male and female versions of the same image. Both had fair hair blackened by coal dust,

and striking pale green eyes. Both were short and broad backed, with strongly muscled arms and legs. Both were opinionated and argumentative. Arguments were a family tradition. Their father had been an all-round nonconformist, eager to disagree with the government, the church or any other authority. Their mother had worked for Lady Hallim before her marriage, and like many servants she identified with the upper class. One bitter winter, when the pit had closed for a month after an explosion, Father had died of the black spit, the cough that killed so many coal miners; and Mother got pneumonia and followed him within a few weeks. But the arguments went on, usually on Saturday nights in Mrs. Wheighel's parlor, the nearest thing to a tavern in the village of Heugh. The estate workers and the crofters took Mother's view. They said the king was appointed by God, and that was why people had to obey him. The coal miners had heard newer ideas. John Locke and other philosophers said a government's authority could come only from the consent of the people. This theory appealed to Mack. Few miners in Heugh could read, but Mack's mother could, and he had pestered her to teach him. She had taught both her children, ignoring the gibes of her husband, who said she had ideas above her station. At Mrs. Wheighel's Mack was called on to read aloud from the Times, the Edinburgh Advertiser, and political journals such as the radical North Briton. The papers were always weeks out of date, sometimes months, but the inen and women of the village listened avidly to long speeches reported verbatim, satirical diatribes, and accounts of strikes, protests and riots.

It was after a Saturday night argument at Mrs. Wheighel's that Mack had written the letter. None of the miners had ever written a letter before, and there had been long consultations about every word. It was addressed to Caspar Gordonson, a London lawyer who wrote articles in the journals ridiculing the government. The letter had been entrusted to Davey Patch, the one-eyed peddler, for posting; and Mack had wondered if it would ever reach its destination. The reply had come yesterday, and it was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to Mack. It would change his life beyond recognition, he thought. It might set him free. As far back as he could remember he had longed to be free. As a child he had envied Davey Patch, who roamed from village to village selling knives and string and ballads. What was so wonderful about Davey's life, to the child Mack, was that he could get up at sunrise and go to sleep when he felt tired. Mack, from the age

of seven, had been shaken awake by his mother a few minutes before two o'clock in the morning and had worked down the mine for fifteen hours, finishing at five o'clock in the afternoon; then had staggered home, often to fall asleep over his evening porridge. Mack no longer wanted to be a peddler, but he still yearned for a different life. He dreamed of building a house for himself, in a valley like High Glen, on a piece of land he could call his own; of working from dawn to dusk and resting all the hours of darkness; of the freedom to go fishing on a sunny day, in a place where the salmon belonged not to the laird but to whoever caught them. And the letter in his hand meant that his dreams might come true. "I'm still not sure you should read it aloud in church," Esther said as they tramped across the frozen mountainside. Mack was not sure either, but he said: "Why not?" "There'll be trouble. Ratchett will be furious." Harry 6

Ratchett was the viewer, the man who managed the mine on behalf of the owner. "He might even tell Sir George, and then what will they do to you?" He knew she was right, and his heart was full of trepidation. But that did not stop him arguing with her. "If I keep the letter to myself, it's pointless," he said. "Well, you could show it to Ratchett privately. He might let you leave quietly, without any fuss." Mack glanced at his twin out of the comer of his eye. She was not in a dogmatic frame of mind, he could tell. She looked troubled rather than combative. He felt a surge of affection for her. Whatever happened, she would be on his side. All the same he shook his head stubbornly. "I'm not the only one affected by this letter. There's at least five]ads would want to get away from here, if they knew they could. And what about future generations?" She gave him a shrewd look. "You may be rightbut that's not the real reason. You want to stand up in church and prove the mine owner wrong." "No, I don't!" Mack protested. Then he thought for a moment and grinned. "Well, there may be something in what you say. We've heard so many sermons about obeying the law and respecting our betters. Now we find that they've been lying to us, all along, about the one law that affects us most. Of course I want to stand up and shout it aloud." "Don't give them reason to punish you," she said worriedly. He tried to reassure her. "I'll be as polite and humble as can be," he said. "You'll hardly recognize me." "Humble!" she said skeptically. "I'd like to see that." "I'm just going to say what the law is-how can that be wrong?" "It's incautious." "Aye, that it is," he conceded. "But I'm going to do it anyway." They crossed a ridge and dropped

down the far side, 7

back into Coalpit Glen. As they descended, the air became a little less cold. A few moments later the small stone church came into view, beside a bridge over the dirty river. Near the churchyard clustered a few crofters' hovels. These were round huts with an open fire in the middle of the earth floor and a hole in the roof to let the smoke out, the one room shared by cattle and people all winter. The miners' houses, farther up the glen near the pits, were better: though they, too, had earth floors,and turf roofs, every one had a fireplace and a proper chimney, and glass in the little window by the door; and miners were not obliged to share their space with cows. All the same the crofters considered themselves free and independent, and looked down on the miners. However, it was not the peasants' huts that now arrested the attention of Mack and Esther and brought them up short. A closed carriage with a fine pair of grays in harness stood at the church porch. Several ladies in hooped skirts and fur wraps were getting out, helped by the pastor, holding on to their fashionable lacy hats. Esther touched Mack's arm and pointed to the bridge. Riding across on a big chestnut hunter, his head bent into the cold wind, was the owner of the mine, the laird of the glen, Sir George Jamisson. Jamisson had not been seen here for five years. He lived in London, which was a week's journey by ship, two weeks by stagecoach. He had once been a pennypinching Edinburgh chandler, people said, selling candies and gin from a comer shop, and no more honest than he had to be. Then a relative died young and childless, and George had inherited the castle and the mines. On that foundation he had built a business empire that stretched to such unimaginably distant places as Barbados and Virginia. And he was now starchily respectable: a baronet, a magistrate, and alderman of Wapping, 8

responsible for law and order along London's waterfront. He was obviously paying a visit to his Scottish estate, accompanied by family and guests. "Well, that's that," Esther said with relief. "What do you mean?" said Mack, although he could guess. "You won't be able to read out your letter now." ")"y not?" "Malachi McAsh, don't be a damn fool!" she exclaimed. "Not in front of the laird himself!" "On the contrary," he said stubbornly. "This makes it all the better."

UZZIE HALLIM REFUSED TO GO TO CHURCH IN THE carriage. It was a silly idea. The road from Jamisson Castle was a rutted, potholed track, its muddy ridges frozen as hard as rock. The ride would be frightfully bumpy, the carriage would have to go at walking pace, and the passengers would arrive cold and bruised and probably late. She insisted on riding to church. Such unladylike behavior made her mother despaiL "How will you ever get a husband if you always act like a man?" Lady Hallim said. "I can get a husband whenever I like," Lizzie replied. It was true: men fell in love with her all the time. "The problem is finding one I can put up with for more than half an hour." 9

"The problem is finding one that doesn't scare easily," her mother muttered. Lizzie laughed. They were both right. Men fell in love with her at first sight, then found out what she was like and backed off hurriedly. Her comments had scandalized Edinburgh society for years. At her first baB, talking to a trio of old dowagers, she had remarked that the high sheriff had a fat backside, and her reputation had never recovered. Last year Mother had taken her to London in the spring and "launched" her into English society. It had been a disaster. Lizzie had talked too loud, laughed too much and openly mocked the elaborate manners and tight clothes of the dandified young men who tried to court her. "It's because you grew up without a man in the house," her mother added. "It's made you too independent." With that she got into the carriage. Lizzie walked across the flinty front of Jamisson Castle, heading for the stables on the east side. Her father had died when she was three, so she hardly remembered him. When she asked what killed him her mother said vaguely: "Liver." He had left them penniless. For years Mother had scraped by, mortgaging more and more of the Hallim estate, waiting for Lizzie to grow up and many a wealthy man who would solve all their problems. Now Lizzie was twenty years old and it was time to fulfill her destiny. That was undoubtedly why the Jamisson family were visiting their Scottish property again after all these years, and why their principal houseguests were their neighbors, Lizzie and her mother, who lived only ten miles away. The pretext for the party was the twentyfirst birthday of the younger son, Jay; but the real reason was that they wanted Lizzie to marry the older son, Robert. Mother was in favor, as Robert was the heir to a great fortune. Sir George was in favor because he wanted to add the Hallim estate to the Jamisson 10

family's land. Robert seemed to be in favor, to judge by the way he had been paying attention to her ever since they arrived; although it was always hard to know what was in Robert's heart. She saw him standing in the stable yard, waiting for the horses to be saddled. He resembled the portrait of his mother that hung in the castle hall-a grave, plain woman with fine hair and light eyes and a determined look about the mouth. There was nothing wrong with him: he was not especially ugly, neither thin nor fat, nor did he smell bad or drink too much or dress effeminately. He was a great catch, Lizzie told herself, and if he proposed marriage she would probably accept. She was not in love with him, but she knew her duty. She decided to banter with him a little. "It really is most inconsiderate of you to live in London," she said. "Inconsiderate?" He frowned. "Why?" "You leave us without neighbors." Still he looked puzzled. It seemed he did not have much of a sense of humor. She explained: "With you away there isn't another soul between here and Edinburgh." A voice behind her said: "Apart from a hundred families of coal miners and several villages of crofters." "You know what I mean," she said, turning. The man who had spoken was a stranger to her. With her usual directness she said: "Anyway, who are you?" "Jay Jamisson," he said with a bow. "Robert's cleverer brother. How could you forget?" "Oh!" She had heard he had arrived late last night, but she had not recognized him. Five years ago he had been several inches shorter, with pimples on his forehead and a few soft blond hairs on his chin. He was handsomer now. But he had not been clever then and she doubted if he had changed in that respect. "I remember you," she said. "I recognize the conceit." He grinned. "If only I'd had your example of humility and self-effacement to copy, Miss Hallim." 11

Robert said: "Hullo, Jay. Welcome to Castle Jamisson." Jay looked suddenly sulky. "Drop the proprietorial air, Robert. You may be the elder son but you haven't inherited the place yet." Lizzie intervened, saying: "Congratulations on your twenty-first birthday." "Thank you." "Is it today?" "Yes. Robert said impatiently: "Are you going to ride to church with us?" Lizzie saw hatred in Jay's eyes, but his voice was neutral. "Yes. I've told them to saddle a horse for me." "We'd better get going." Robert turned toward the stable and raised his voice. "Hurry up in there!" "All set, sir," a groom called from within, and a moment later three horses were led out: a sturdy black pony, a light bay mare, and a gray gelding. Jay said: "I suppose these beasts have been hired from some Edinburgh horse-dealer." His tone was critical, but he went to the

gelding and patted its neck, letting it nuzzle his blue riding-coat. Lizzie saw that he was comfortable with horses and fond of them. She mounted the black pony, riding sidesaddle, and trotted out of the yard. The brothers followed, Jay on the gelding and Robert on the mare. The wind blew sleet into Lizzie's eyes. Snow underfoot made the road treacherous, for it hid potholes a foot or more deep that caused the horses to stumble. Lizzie said: "Let's ride through the woods. It will be sheltered, and the ground is not so uneven." Without waiting for agreement she turned her horse off the road and into the ancient forest. Underneath the tall pines the forest floor was clear of bushes. Streamlets and marshy patches were frozen hard, and the ground was dusted white. Lizzie urged her pony into a canter. After a moment the gray horse passed her. She glanced up and saw a challenging grin 12

on Jay's face: he wanted to race. She gave a whoop and kicked the pony, who sprang forward eagerly. They dashed through the trees, ducking under low boughs, jumping over fallen trunks, and splashing heedlessly through streams. Jay's horse was bigger and would have been faster in a gallop, but the pony's short legs and light frame were better adapted to this terrain, and gradually Lizzie pulled ahead. When she could no longer hear Jay's horse she slowed down and came to a standstill in a clearing. Jay soon caught up, but there was no sign of Robert. Lizzie guessed he was too sensible to risk his neck in a pointless race. She and Jay walked on, side by side, catching their breath. Heat rose from the horses, keep- ing the riders warm. "I'd like to race you on the straight," Jay panted. "Riding astride I'd beat you," she said. He looked a little shocked. All well-bred women rode sidesaddle. For a woman to fide astride was considered vulgar. Lizzie thought that was a silly idea, and when she was alone she rode like a man. She studied Jay out of the comer of her eye. His mother, Alicia, Sir George's second wife, was a fairhaired coquette, and Jay had her blue eyes and winning smile. "What do you do in London?" Lizzie asked him. "I'm in the Third Regiment of Foot Guards." A note of pride came into his voice and he added: "I've just been made a captain." "Well, Captain Jamisson, what do you brave soldiers have to do?" she said mockingly. "Is there a war in London at the moment? Any enemies for you to kill?" "There's plenty to do keeping the mob under control." Lizzie suddenly remembered Jay as a mean, bullying child, and she wondered if he enjoyed his work. "And how do you control them?" she asked. "For example, by escorting criminals to the gallows, 13

and making sure they don't get rescued by their cronies before the hangman does his work." "So you spend your time killing Englishmen, like a true Scots hero." He did not seem to mind being teased. "One day I'd like to resign my commission and go abroad," he said. "Oh-why?" "No one takes any notice of a younger son in this country. Even servants stop and think about it when you give them an order." "And you believe it will be different elsewhere?" "Everything is different in the colonies. I've read books about it. People are more free and easy. You're taken for what you are." "What would you do?" "My family has a sugar plantation in Barbados. I'm hoping my father will give it to me for my twenty-first birthday, as my portion, so to speak." Lizzie felt deeply envious. "Lucky you," she said. "There's nothing I'd like more than to go to a new country. How thrilling it would be." "It's a rough life out there," he said. "You might miss the comforts of home-shops and operas and French fashions, and so on." "I don't care for any of that," she said contemptuously. "I hate these clothes." She was wearing a hooped skirt and a tight-waisted corset. "I'd like to dress like a man, in breeches and shirt and riding boots." He laughed. "That might be going a bit far, even in Barbados." Lizzie was thinking: Now, if Robert would take me to Barbados, I'd marry him like a shot. "And you have slaves to do all the work," Jay added. They emerged from the forest a few yards upstream from the bridge. On the other side of the water, the miners were filing into the little church. Lizzie was still thinking about Barbados. "It must be very odd, to own slaves, and be able to do anything you 14

like to them, as if they were beasts," she said. "Doesn't it make you feel strange?" "Not in the least," Jay said with a smile.

3

THE LITTLE CHURCH WAS FULL. THE JAMISSON FAMILY and their guests took up a great deal of room, the women with their wide skirts and the men with their swords and three-cornered hats. The miners and crofters who formed the usual Sunday congregation left a space around the newcomers, as if afraid they might touch the fine clothes and besmirch them with coal dust and cow dung. Mack had spoken defiantly to Esther, but he was full of apprehension. Coal owners had the right to flog miners, and on top of that Sir George Jamisson was a magistrate, which meant he could order someone