A Wild Night in Vegas
by takemeawaytocamelot

Summary

Jamie Fraser and Claire Beauchamp live in Las Vegas, Nevada. She tends bar and he is a performer in the Tournament of Kings hosted by the Excalibur hotel. They become acquaintances until one night, they have a bit too much to drink. What happens next surprises them both.
Chapter 1

Claire slid the glass of whiskey to the young man who’d ordered it. She’d checked his ID twice to be sure he was old enough, though he still looked like a child to her. How had a woman like herself become a bartender in some Las Vegas bar? All stories started the same way, didn’t they? It began with a boy…

Her history professor from university. It had been a required course to take and she’d developed something of a crush on Dr. Randall. Those long elegant fingers that wove magic in the air while he spoke. That resonant voice dripping with passion. The age difference between them hadn’t meant a thing to her. And the day he’d started to show interest back, well…

They’d begun dating in secret until she was no longer in his class. They’d gotten serious, or at least that’s what she thought. He’d been offered a position at University of Nevada Las Vegas, which he’d accepted. Why the hell he wanted to go from Oxford to Las Vegas, she didn’t understand. But he’d asked her to move with him, to take their relationship to the next level. So she had, she’d given up her own university path and gone with him to this place.

Frank was happy with his position and for a while, Claire had been happy too. But she missed her studies, so she’d gone out for a job and worked nights to put herself through the remainder of a nursing program.

Tonight was the same as any other. She kept track of the time by watching the shift changes. Dancers and strippers came in for their usual after-work drinks. No-name singers came in to wet their parched throats. Impersonators wandered in to blur the line between fantasy and reality.

A new face she hadn’t seen before came in and sat heavily on one of the wooden stools. Wiping her hands on her apron, she approached him.

“What can I get you?”

His copper head jerked up, eyes of crystalline blue boring into her own.

“You’re British,” he stated.

“I am,” she answered. “What can I get you?”

For a moment, his mouth opened and closed.

“Ah… Whatever’s on tap, please.”

Filling a glass, she handed it over to him, though he made no move to drink it.

“So, what’s-”

“If you seriously ask me ‘so what’s a pretty girl like you doing here’ I’m going to dump that drink in your lap and have Roscoe escort you out,” she said sharply.

Immediately his mouth snapped shut.

“I was only going to ask what a fine British lady like yourself would be doin’ in a place like this,” he said rather sheepishly.

It was only then that she caught his own accent.
“I could ask you the same thing, Scotsman.”

His smile was bright and wide, dipping his head in a nod.

“Weel… I’m no’ exactly sure how I ended up in Las Vegas. I work at Excalibur.”

Claire snorted, wiping down the bar and refilling the napkin dispenser.

“Oh the irony.”

“I ride in the Tournament of Kings show.”

Now it was her mouth hanging open, impressed.

“Is that right? That’s not an easy job to get.”

The man with the red hair smirked and took a long drink of his beer.

“No, it isna. But I’m happy to have it.”

“Excuse me!” came a voice at the end of the bar.

Claire smiled at the man.

“Let me know if you’d like a refill,” she said before darting down to the man waving his cash.

###

Jamie watched the Englishwoman go, intrigued. She was far too beautiful for a place like this, though she seemed to handle it with grace. He decided this would become his after-work tradition, if only to see her.

And so it was. After every show he rode in, he’d stop at that bar on his way home. She got to know what drinks he liked, memorizing his preferences once he’d become a regular. Always started with a glass of beer on tap, followed by a glass of whiskey or brandy, depending on his mood. They talked a bit, as much as her busy job allowed. He was quite fond of her, finding someone who at least understood that longing for proper tea.

Nearly a month after he’d first ventured into the bar, he went in for his usual drinks only to find someone else behind the bar. A tall, lean woman was bustling about, her fair hair braided tight against her head.

“What can I get you?” she asked.

“Where’s Claire?” he said, glancing up and down the bar.

The woman’s face fell.

“Oh, you didn’t hear. She caught her boyfriend with one of his students. Been drinkin’ in the corner all night,” she said, nodding to a dark spot in the room.

He made his way over to her without another word. He knew full well that he stank of sweat and horse, but Claire was in pain.

“Sassenach?”
Bleary eyes rolled up to meet him. “Can you believe it? That bitch is barely eighteen.”

“Aye, so your friend said. Would ye rather be alone, then?”

“Drink with me.”

Sitting opposite her, he accepted the glass she slid over to him. They drank, Claire sometimes blurting out profanities about either Frank or the ‘harlot’ he’d been caught with.

“Was it my fault?” she asked suddenly, wiping angry tears from her cheeks.

“That he was a fool?”

“Yes! Did I push him to it? I’ve been busy with university and work, but I thought… I’ve not gotten fat, have I?”

Jamie scoffed and set his glass down harder than he’d meant. He was getting rather drunk, he noted.

“Fat? God no, Sassenach. Ye’ve got a fine round arse, but no’ fat.”

Claire began to giggle, staring at him.

“Your accent gets worse when you’re drunk,” she said.

“Aye, and so it does.”

“I should get home. I’ve got class tomorrow and I’m already going to be hung over.”

Jamie stood, on wobbly feet, and offered his hand.

“Then I shall be a proper gentleman and escort the lady home,” he said with a flourish.

Clare began to giggle again and accepted his hand. Neither of them being able to drive, they started walking. There were no taxi’s outside the bar at the moment, all having gotten fares and left.

After that, things began to get fuzzy. There was a foggy memory of a room, of a man asking them questions, but he couldn’t understand the words. Jamie remembered eventually stumbling into a taxi, he and Claire giggling like children. He remembered following her up the stairs to her apartment, insisting that he would see her safely to her door. And he remembered her asking him to come inside.

###

Distraction was what she wanted and he seemed willing to give it. She wasn’t sure how drunk either of them were, but she gave him plenty of opportunity to leave. Desirable. She wanted to feel desirable again, being currently racked with insecurity after finding Frank with…

“Stay?” she asked Jamie, who sat on her couch.

“For as long as ye need, Sassenach.”

“Thank you.”
Sinking down beside him, she sighed. One of his large hands lifted and brushed the hair from her face. His touch was warm and gentle, nothing like Frank’s. Before she knew it, she was kissing him, moving from her own seat into his lap. His hands groped around her body before settling on her rump.

“Sassenach,” he breathed in the brief moment she released his mouth. “I dinna want to take advantage of a lass in a vulnrealble state,” he stumbled over the odd word.

“You’re not. I want this. I want to feel wanted and sexy.”

“Ye are, mo nighean donn. Ye feel like a vixen in my arms.”

His hands squeezed her buttocks, her hips beginning to churn.

“A vixen, am I?”

“Aye,” he smiled into her neck. “Bespelled me the moment I met ye.”

Teeth tugged gently on her skin, making her moan. Drunk as she was, she got a hold of herself long enough to crawl off him. Grabbing his hand, she pulled him to her bedroom and closed the door behind her. When he looked at her as he sat on her bed, she felt herself get lost in his eyes.

“Are you sure you’re alright with this?” she asked, unbuttoning her shirt.

“Aye, mo chridhe,” he breathed, eyes on her chest.

If she’d still been at work, it would have made her angry to have a man stare at her that way. But alone in her bedroom, it pleased her.

“What did you say?” she asked, stepping out of her tight blue jeans.

“Ach,” he waved his hand. “Perhaps I’ll tell ye someday.”

Barely taking the time to step out of her panties, she threw herself at him. This would be violent, leaving her sated and bruised in the morning. Or, that’s what she was hoping for. She had no idea what kind of lover Jamie was, or what he was comfortable doing.

His mouth sealed to hers once more, hands fondling her buttocks. While he was busy, she pushed his trousers down and fumbled with his boxers.

She wasn’t sure what she’d been expecting. His cock was hard as steel in her hands, hot and ready for her. It had been so long since she’d been with anyone besides Frank she forgot there were differences. Jamie was bulky and defined where Frank had been graceful and elegant.

Her bra suddenly sprang free and she shook her head, looking down at him.

“Ah, there ye are.”

“What?”

With a carefully maneuvered roll, she was on her back, his face flushed and smiling above her.

“Ye went somewhere, just now. Ha’ to bring ye back. If I’m to make love to ye, I’d rather ye be here for it.”

“Then what are you waiting for, Sir Knight,” she said, wrapping her legs around his hips.
“For that,” he growled, thrusting his hips forward roughly.

Her back arched and she cried out, filled and stretched more than she’d expected. But he didn’t stop there. Both hands grabbed her wrists and pulled her arms above her head, while his body kept moving. She had not an ounce of control in this and she found she rather liked it. The sounds of their bodies coming together drove coherent thought from her mind. All that existed was them, both of them moving as one.

Jamie was grunting in her ear, his breath hot against it. She thought it was Gaelic, though she couldn’t be sure. If he was very drunk or too excited about something, he reverted to that language and she never understood a word.

Letting go of her hands, he grabbed roughly at her thighs and pushed them further apart. Her breath caught and she clawed at his shoulders.

“Aye,” he snarled in a deep voice. “Cry for me, beg me to take ye. I am the master of yer satisfaction.”

Then she howled, her body bursting with fire and electricity. Stars danced before her eyes while she trembled and convulsed. Jamie’s hips pounded on, taking her from the peak of one orgasm straight into another.

“Oh God!” she cried, her fingers digging into the firm flesh of his buttocks.

“No’ quite,” he smiled down at her, face deep red and sweating. “But I thank ye for the compliment.”

“YES!” she yelped as his lips latched onto her nipple.

And then he, too, was shaking and shuddering, his seed shooting hot and deep into her womb. Panting heavily, she looked up at him and smiled. His eyes were strangely sober, no longer veiled in the mask he usually wore. All she saw in them was pure adoration and trust, not the lust she’d expected to see. He cared for her, truly, and she could see the depth of it in his gaze.

“Will ye rest now, mo nighean donn?” he asked quietly, lips trailing over her neck.

“I-I think so,” she said, feeling her eyes droop already.

“Good. I promise I’ll be here when ye wake.”

###

Glaring around him, he wondered how he’d gotten home last night. But this wasn’t his bed, wasn’t his room. The spot beside him was empty and cool and he saw his clothes folded on the corner. A note sat atop the pile.

*Morning! Sorry I had to dash out. I had a class this morning and couldn’t be late. There’s coffee in the kitchen still and a bagel left if you’d like. Thanks for last night, I really needed it. I’ll see you at the bar after your next show. If you wouldn’t mind locking the door on your way out, I’d appreciate it. Thanks! xx Claire*

With a sigh, Jamie set the note back down and dressed groggily. Something crinkled in his pocket and he wondered if it was another note from Claire. Pulling it out, he felt his mouth fall open. It couldn’t possibly be true.
Chapter 2

Claire wiped down the bar, scrubbing some stickiness off the polished wood. She hadn’t seen or spoken to Frank in three days, ignoring his calls and refusing to open the door when he came by. She hadn’t seen or spoken to Jamie in that time either. It wasn’t until she’d gone home after her classes that she realized she didn’t have his phone number or even know his last name.

If his schedule stayed as it usually did, he’d likely be by the bar tonight. Claire began mixing drinks for a cluster of women at one end of the bar when someone leaned close to her.

“Why won’t you answer my calls?”

No greeting, just a demand. How very like him.

“Piss off, Frank.”

“Claire, can’t we at least talk about this?”

“Talk about what? You fucking a girl who’s barely legal?”

His lips formed a hard line as he glared at her. But she wasn’t going to roll over and take it. Not after everything she’d given up for him.

“It wasn’t like that, Claire.”

“I don’t care how it was, Frank. The one thing I asked of you was for you to remain faithful to me. I heard the rumors at Oxford, before we moved, but I didn’t want to believe them. I suppose those were true too, weren’t they?”

“Now hang on, that’s not fair.”

She laughed and shook her head.

“Not fair? Please, Frank. Tell me how you’re the victim in all this.”

“I wasn’t looking for something with her,” he said, almost too quietly for her to hear. “But there she was. And, well…”

Frank looked her up and down, an almost sad expression in his eyes.

“Well what?”

“Well, if only you’d put a little more effort into taking care of yourself, I might not have been so tempted.”

Feeling like she’d taken a punch in the gut, her mouth fell open. How could he say such a thing?

“Sassenach!”

The pain of Frank’s betrayal disappeared in that single Gaelic word she didn’t really understand. Heat pooled in her belly at the sound of his call. That night with him had been amazing, unlike any experience she’d ever had. She’d had dreams about him every night since they’d slept together, though none of them had been as intense as reality.
“Jamie!”

“Thank God you’re working tonight,” he said, his face serious.

Claire frowned at him, concerned.

“We’ve got your favorite beer two for one tonight,” she said, already pulling out a glass.

“You know his favorite beer?” Frank said, looking at Jamie with complete disgust.

After rolling her eyes, she filled a glass for Jamie and gave it to him.

“I’m a bartender, Frank. That’s my job.”

Suddenly Jamie’s expression changed and he looked between Claire and Frank.

“Frank… Randall?” he asked.

Belatedly, she realized that Jamie hadn’t ever met Frank and was only just putting together who he was. Something darkened those sapphire blue eyes, something deep and filled with rage.

“Yes, my ex-boyfriend.”

“Ex? Claire, I thought we could talk about this, work things out.”

Glaring at him, she shook her head.

“No. We’re done talking. I didn’t answer your calls for a reason. You slept with another woman while I was in class, and that’s not something I’ll get over.”

“I won’t see her again. I promise. And all you need to do is comb your hair a little and maybe wear some nicer clothes and—”

A loud thud had Claire spinning around, bottle of vodka in hand. Frank had disappeared and Jamie was shaking his hand.

“Jamie!”

“I heard what he said to ye a moment ago. I didna get here in time to hit him for it, but I could hit him for that. He shouldna speak to ye so.”

Frank staggered back to his feet, glaring.

“And who the hell are you to tell me what to do?!”

Jamie ignored him and looked at Claire.

“Sassenach, we need to talk.”

Frowning, she nodded to the other end of the bar. Jamie followed her, holding a piece of paper in his hand.

“Look, I’m sorry for skipping out on you the other morning, I just—”

“No, it’s fine. I ken you’ve classes that are important to ye. I only wondered how much of that night ye remember.”
Her face flushed deep scarlet and she busied herself with straightening the basket of pretzels in front of her.

“Well, ah… I remember… You… I mean we… That is to say you came over and-”

“I ken what happened when I came over. But before that. What can ye remember?”

Thinking hard, she realized it was fuzzy.

“I can’t recall.”

“Are ye sure?”

“It’s all fuzzy. I found out about Frank, came here, got drunk. You came and sat down and drank with me. We… We left, trying to find a cab, but we couldn’t. And then… We were in my apartment.”

After a deep breath, he slid the paper over to her. She opened it and her eyes went wide.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” she said.

“I dinna think it’s a joke, Sassenach. That’s a real certificate.”

“Of marriage?!”

“I’m afraid so.”

She stared at the bottom at her own signature, right beside Jamie’s.

“How many names do you have ?!”

“Three,” he said abruptly. “Claire I’m so sorry. I didna mean to do… Whatever this is. I’m sure we can find a way to annul it or somesuch.”

“We’re actually married?!!”

His hands spread on the bar, the fingers of his left twitching.

“Aye, it seems we are. I’m so verra sorry, Claire. I ken we were both drunk, but I shouldna ha’ taken advantage like that.”

“This… This can’t be legally binding.”

“Weel, it says here the man is licensed by the state o’ Nevada. According to some old Scottish customs, consummation is what makes it legally binding. And, ach… Weel, we did that.”

Claire jumped as one of the other bartenders brushed by her.

“Look, can you wait until my shift is over? We need to talk about this.”

“Aye, I’ll wait.”

“Take the beer while you wait. I’ll… I’ll be with you as soon as I can.”

###

Jamie sat in a corner and waited for her. The whole night she looked distracted, serving her
customers with an absent smile. And why wouldn’t she be? She’d just found out that she’d married a strange Scotsman she hardly knew!

Finally, her shift was over and she came out from behind the bar. Frank, damn him, was still hanging about. He’d been drinking a bit, though Jamie had only had his one glass. As Claire made her way towards him, Frank got up from his seat.

“Claire,” he drawled, very drunk. “We need to talk about this.”

“There’s nothing left to talk about. Go off with whoever it was you were sleeping with.”

Jamie stood as well, preparing to leave.

“No! This isn’t over!”

Frank made to grab for Claire, long fingers reaching for her like talons. Jamie stepped in front of her, blocking Frank.

“Aye, it is,” Jamie said, bringing himself up to his full height. “I’ll thank you to keep your hands off my wife.”

“Oh piss off. This’s nothing to do with you.”

One of the security personnel approached them.

“Is there a problem here, Claire?”

“Hello Harvey, I’m afraid Doctor Randall here has had enough. Could you be sure he gets a cab home?”

Harvey nodded and glared down at Frank.

“You heard her, let’s go.”

With her bag over her shoulder, Claire nodded at the door and Jamie made to follow her out.

“Please Claire!”

Frank made a grab for her again, but Jamie grabbed his outstretched hand and twisted it behind his back.

“She’s asked ye kindly to leave her be. If ye wish to keep this arm attached to the rest of yer body, I recommend ye do as she says.”

Harvey took over after that and pushed Frank out of the bar, giving him a well-rehearsed lecture on treating women right.

“Thank you,” Claire said, wrapping her arms right around herself.

“I ken the situation we’re in is a bit… sticky. But I’ll no’ leave ye to deal wi’ him alone if I can help it.”

“Damn it,” she muttered, holding her keys in her hand.

Jamie walked beside her, waiting.
“He has a key to my apartment.”

“Ye can come and stay wi’ me, if ye prefer.”

“You move fast, don’t you?” she asked with a smirk.

His ears burned red and he looked down.

“Ye dinna have to stay, I just thought ye’d like a place where he’ll no’ find ye.”

“I would appreciate that, thank you,” she said quietly.

He drove them to his apartment and let her inside. Being late as it was, or early, he was exhausted and he knew she was as well.

“I dinna work tomorrow,” he said, locking the deadbolt on his door. “So you’re welcome to stay the night here if ye wish. I’ll take the couch.”

“But this is your home. I can’t take your bed from you.”

“It’s my home and I can do wi’ it what I wish. Please, ye need the rest. I’ll be fine.”

“Do you… Could I borrow a shirt or something to sleep in? I smell like work.”

“Sure.”

Jamie rummaged in his dresser and handed her a shirt that would be far too large for her.

“Thank you, for doing this. Once we’re better rested, we can talk about what this all… means.”

“Aye. Rest well, Sassenach.”

Taking an extra pillow from the bed and the tartan blanket he’d brought from Scotland, he went out to the couch.

###

The bed was comfortable, but it smelled of him. So did the shirt she wore. The scent brought back memories of that wild night when they’d… Well, when they’d gotten married apparently. She tossed and turned for a while before slipping out of the bed. Walking quietly, she saw him on the couch, eyes closed. But his breathing wasn’t steady enough for him to be asleep.

“I can’t sleep,” she said quietly.

“Me either.”

“Would you mind if we talked for a bit?”

Sitting up, he patted the seat beside him. Easing herself onto the couch, she pulled at the hem of the shirt. Why she was so self conscious she didn’t understand, he’d already seen every bit of her.

“What would ye like to talk about, Sassenach?”

“I can’t be married to you.”

His brows rose.
“And why is that? I believe there’s a paper in my pocket that says otherwise.”

“I don’t even know your real name.”

With a dignified bow, or what he could accomplish while sitting on a couch, he met her eyes.

“It’s Fraser. James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser.”

“Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp.”

She extended her hand and he shook it.

“Pleasure to meet ye, Claire.”

They fell silent for a time, his thumb making small circles on the back of her hand.

“Tell me about your family.”

Smiling, he took a deep breath and offered her one end of the wool blanket.

“How many generations back?”

Thankful for the extra covering, she settled into her seat.

“Your parents will do.”

They passed hours, just talking, getting to know one another for the first time. The more they talked, the closer they became. He told her of his parents, his older sister, his older brother who had gotten sick as a child and died. She told him how her parents had died, about being raised by her odd uncle. Neither of them explored how they’d both ended up in Las Vegas, but that didn’t seem to matter.

When her eyes began to droop, she heard Jamie laugh.

“Lay your head, Sassenach. Get some rest.”

Letting out a deep sigh she closed her eyes.

She woke the next morning with her head on his chest. His arms were comfortably around her and she realized abruptly she was laying completely on top of him. The woolen blanket was draped over them both, but the body beneath her was pleasantly warm.

For a moment, she watched his sleeping face. He was perfectly at peace, his mouth hanging open a little. Frank would never have done this, never stayed up late just to talk with her. Whenever he held her at night, it was always a little stiff, even in sleep. He was never perfectly comfortable with her. This odd intimacy she had with Jamie was beyond anything she could have imagined having with anyone.

His breathing changed as he woke and she smiled up into his blue eyes.

“Good morning to ye, Sassenach.”

“Morning, Jamie.”

“I didna get to say that, last time.”
She winced.

“Sorry about that.”

One corner of his mouth ticked up in a smirk.

“Dinna fash. I could fix ye some breakfast though, if ye like.”

“I’d like that.”

They moved at the same time, her trying to let him up, him trying to slide out from beneath her without dropping her on the ground. The result of their simultaneous action had something stiff pressing into Claire’s belly. Immediately red crept up Jamie’s neck, settling in his ears.

“Ah… Apologies, Sassenach.”

Her own cheeks burned and she moved off him, giving him the blanket as covering. Why did she feel so silly with him all of a sudden?

“It’s fine,” she said, unable to look at him for the moment.

“I’ll just be a moment. Then I’ll come fix ye some breakfast and we’ll talk about what’s to do next, aye?”

Daring a glance up at him, she gave him a small smile and nodded.
As soon as the door closed, he nearly collapsed against it.

“Blessed Michael defend us,” he breathed. “What have ye done, James?! Holy Mary mother of God! Ye went and got yerself marriet!”

Stifling a groan, he went about his business and prepared himself to make a fine Scottish breakfast. He couldn’t let his new wife starve.

Making his way to the small kitchen, he noticed she wasn’t on the couch.

“Claire?”

“In here, sorry! I just needed to put my trousers back on.”

“I suppose we should get ye home for some fresh clothes at some point, aye?”

She came out of his bedroom wearing her own trousers but his shirt still. Christ Almighty, she hadn’t put a bra back on. He could just see the points of her nipples teasing him from beneath the fabric.

“Yes, I suppose I should. I honestly wouldn’t put it past Frank to be waiting for me.”

“Then I’ll come wi’ ye.”

“Oh, you don’t have to do that.”

Moving swiftly around the kitchen, he snorted.

“I’m your husband now, Sassenach. Wouldna be right of me to leave ye unprotected.”

Claire rolled her eyes hard and sat down at his small kitchen table.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“If ye changed the locks, he couldn’a get in.”

“No, but he’d still know where I live. And he knows my neighbors, they know him.”

Sliding the eggs onto a plate, he set about with the rest of breakfast.

“If you’re no’ safe there, perhaps it’s time to find a new place?”

“That could take me months,” she said, standing as the kettle went off. “What will I do in the mean time?”

“Stay here. He doesna ken where I live, you’d be safe here. We could get ye a storage unit to put your things in until we find ye a good place.”

Claire sat back down with her cup of tea, waiting for it to cool.

“You don’t have to do that, Jamie. You hardly know me.”

Hardly know, yet love, perhaps.
“Aye, but what’s mine is yours, Sassenach. The state of Nevada says so.”

“Well! If the state of Nevada says so, it must be!”

“We’ll go after we finish wi’ breakfast and get your things, aye?”

It didn’t take them as long as he’d thought, to pack up her things. She had two decently sized cardboard boxes that she’d put into his car, the rest would go into storage. He hadn’t been much help, besides carrying one of them down. She’d gone about the apartment picking the things that would go with her with care. Those, and a duffel bag of clothes, were all she’d bring into his apartment.

“We can pack up the rest and take some to storage now, if ye like,” Jamie said.

Claire sighed and gently took a sheathed sword from it’s place on the wall. She held it with reverence and noticed him staring.

“Sorry. Would you mind terribly if this came with me? I’d rather it not go into storage.”

“I wouldn’t mind. I’ve got all sorts of odd things about my apartment. Though I have to say, I didna expect to see you wi’ such a weapon.”

“It’s…” she looked shyly up at him. “Well, it’s special. My Uncle Lamb gave it to me, one of the last things I got from him.”

Jamie held out his hand in question and she gave it to him carefully.

“He was an archeologist. Told me he bought that at a market in Egypt, but it’s clearly Viking. He wasn’t always very clear about how he acquired things.”

Handing it back to her, she smiled and traced the hilt.

“You can tell it’s Viking by the five-lobed pommel. Tenth century, I think. Uncle Lamb said that-”

The door behind Jamie opened and Claire stopped. Turning, Jamie saw Frank in the doorway, eyes squinting at them both.

“I’ll just go take these down to the car then, aye? Gi’ ye a little privacy to tie up loose ends?” he said quietly, looking at Claire.

“Thank you.”

Picking up a few boxes, Jamie pushed passed Frank and went down to the car.

###

With a heavy sigh, she continued putting things into boxes. Frank came here on his own. If he wanted to talk, he would have to get things started.

“Would you stop for a moment and talk to me, please?”

“What exactly do you want to talk about, Frank? You can’t exactly deny that you were sleeping with that girl.”

“I’m not.”
She dropped a pile of books into another box.

“Good. Because I know I’ve asked professors for extra credit before and I know what they did to help me. It certainly wasn’t putting me on my back on their desk.”

Frank at least had the decency to look ashamed at that.

“I wish you hadn’t seen that.”

“Seen you fucking your student? Trust me, I wish I hadn’t seen it either.”

“Isn’t there something I can do to make you see how sorry I am?”

Turning to look at him, she thought through all the things she’d wanted to say to him.

“Promise me honesty?”

“Of course.”

Right, because his word was worth so much to her now.

“How many?”

“What?”

Arms folded over her chest, she looked him in the eye.

“How many, Frank? How many impressionable students like me did you take to your office for ‘extra credit’? How many got on their knees for you, begging you to pass their papers?”

“Claire, I-”

"How many?!" A sickening thought occurred to her in that moment. “Oh God. I have to go to the clinic and get tested."

"I promise I'm clean."

She actually laughed at that.

"The same way you promised you were faithful?"

"We always used protection."

"You and your whores might have, but WE didn't! Not every time!"

Putting a hand over her mouth, she fought back the bile that threatened to come up. If Frank had given her something and she didn’t know, she could have passed it on to Jamie.

“I swear to God Frank, if you gave me something, you're paying for treatment.”

Then Frank gave her that look. The one that said he was smarter than her and she should have learned that by now.

“Really? You expect me to pay for some treatment when you’ve been whoring yourself out to whoever remembers your name?”

“You bastard. You’ve no right to say that to me.”
“Don’t I? We’ve not been broken up for a week and already you’re already moving into some other man’s flat? Married him after knowing him for how long?”

Gritting her teeth, she noticed a figure darkening her doorway again. Jamie’s hulking form stepped out of the shadows, eyes locked on hers. It was a silent question. He wouldn’t force himself into the situation unless she asked him to. This was hers to deal with as she saw fit.

“I just remembered something Frank,” she said, nodding subtly to Jamie. “This isn’t any of your business anymore.”

“Time to go, Mr. Randall.”

Frank’s lips twitched, the tell that he was properly angry.

“It’s Doctor Randall.”

Jamie gripped his shoulder with one hand and steered him to the door.

“Please dinna bother my wife again, Frankie. It would be a shame if your university learned of your ‘extra credit’ opportunities, wouldn’t it?”

Frank twisted awkwardly under Jamie’s hand, slipping out of his grip. She backed away as he came at her, hands outstretched.

“Listen to reason, Claire,” he said, holding her by the shoulders hard enough to bruise. “Do you really think anyone else will have you? You think that Scottish bastard will stick around when he learns just how selfish you are? That he’ll stay with you when you don’t come home until six in the morning? Or that he won’t find someone far more interesting? Why do you think I slept with those other women? I. Got. Bored.”

Hot tears burned her eyes as he voiced every insecurity she had.

“I suggest,” she said in a voice much more calm than she felt. “That you take my husband’s advice and leave. Or he might throw you down the stairs.”

With a hiss of frustration, Frank turned and left, shoving Jamie out of his way. Once the echo of his footsteps faded, she sank onto her couch.

“Sassenach, are ye alright?”

“I’m fine, really. Just… Frank, being Frank.”

He knelt in front of her and took her trembling hands between his own. For a long moment they sat that way as her shaking came under control. Jamie waited until she met his eyes before speaking.

“He was wrong, ye ken. You’re no’ a selfish woman. And you’re by far the most intriguing woman I’ve ever met in this city.”

Unsure how to respond to that, she gave him a weak smile.

“I think I’ve had enough of this apartment for one day. Can we go?”

Jamie nodded and helped her to her feet.

“Of course. We’ll go to your storage unit and drop some of the boxes off, then I’ll take ye back to my place for a proper cuppa.”
“Thank you.”

On their way out, Jamie paused to grab the Viking sword.

###

Before he took them back to his apartment, he made an extra stop. She glanced up from her cell phone and blinked at the health clinic.

“What are… Jesus H. You heard all that, didn’t you?”

“Aye, I did. And I can see by frown on your face it’s botherin’ ye. So I thought we could both come and get tested.”

She stared up at him.

“Both?”

“So you’ll ken I’m clean too. I havena got anything I could give you. I ken we’ve already slept together, but I dinna want you to worry.”

“You’re not worried I gave you something?”

Giving her a reassuring smile, he took the keys out of the ignition and shook his head.

“That’s why we’re doing this together.”

They filled out the medical history forms and a nurse took their blood. She assured them that they’d made it in time for their samples to make it to the lab for testing. They’d have their results in an hour.

Jamie sat quietly beside her, flipping through a hunting magazine while Claire’s fingers tapped on her thigh. He settled a hand over hers reassuringly and squeezed.

“Ye ken I’m no’ going to make ye walk back, aye?”

“What?”

“I’m no’ going to leave ye here, no matter what the doctor says.”

She nodded, but clearly was still nervous.

A little over an hour later, they were each handed their results. Jamie was, as he’d expected, in perfect physical and sexual health. Judging by the sigh of relief on Claire’s face, she was also given a clean bill of health.

The drive to his apartment had far less tension than it had before. Good, he thought. He hated the thought of her being so worried.

The deadbolt slammed home and Jamie turned to look at the boxes sitting on his couch. Claire had one open and was digging through it, hunting for something.

“I thought we might put this somewhere safe,” he said, holding up the sword.

“Oh! You grabbed it! I didn’t even notice, after… Thank you.”
For now, he had it leaning against one wall while he went to fix them both some tea. Together they unpacked some of her things, setting up her pile of university textbooks on the desk Jamie never used.

“Are you sure you don’t mind my taking over the desk?”

“Not at all, Sassenach. First time it’s been used for its proper purpose since I bought it, I expect.”

“I’ve given ye some space in my wardrobe too. I ken apartment hunting is quite a task that takes time.”

She beamed at him, sitting down at the desk to get herself organized.

“Then I think we need to come to a compromise,” she said, turning to look at him.

“And what would that be?”

He set out a few photographs of her parents and her uncle on the side table, next to the photos of his own family.

“If I’m going to be staying here for an indeterminate amount of time, I’ll not force you to live on your own couch.”

He shot her a shocked glance.

“Weel it’s rude to put a man on his own floor!”

“Listen here you cheeky bastard,” she said, fighting down a smile. “We’re both adults and I think we can handle sharing a bed.”

He lifted both brows.

“Oh! A man sharing his bed wi’ his wife. Do you think Las Vegas can handle that scandal?”

“Probably not,” she said with a light laugh.

Turning back to her books, she let her face fall. He noticed how her hand still trembled when she reached for her pencils. She put on a good show, keeping up with his witty banter. But he saw how much Frank’s words had hurt her.

From all that he’d learned of her in the last twenty-four hours, he knew one thing. She was a woman of action, not of words. Frank’s accusations hurt because she’d trusted him and he’d betrayed with his actions. Jamie glanced at the sword leaning against the wall and went to find his toolbag. In less than fifteen minutes, he had the Viking sword hanging proudly on the wall in the best possible spot he could find. The sun would shine on it in the evening as it set, giving it a spotlight of its very own.

He unpacked the rest of her two boxes, putting the items into neat piles. The things she’d need on a regular basis - toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, shampoo and the like - he set up beside his own. Her towel hung beside his, within easy reach of the shower. The remainder of his day was spent settling Claire’s things into his apartment. She’d said this wouldn’t be permanent, but he knew how much she needed a safe haven. Frank had taken away that safety when he’d betrayed her and Jamie knew he couldn’t exactly give it back. But he would give her the little comfort that he could.

When she yawned for the fifth time in twenty minutes, he fixed a cup of coffee and set it on the
coaster beside her right hand.

“Oh, you’re so sweet. Thank you.”

“Wouldna be helpful to fall asleep while reading, I figure.”

Nose buried in her book again, he smiled at the flush of pleasure on her face when she drank the coffee. He did his best to leave her be, to not disturb her studies.

Dinner was nearly cooked when she finally pulled free of the desk, bringing the empty mug with her.

“He cooks, he cleans,” she said quietly.

“Ye seemed busy, I didna want to bother you. I havena put your clothes away, but they’re in my room.”

“Thank you for doing this, Jamie.”

Spooning the pasta into a bowl, he set it down on the table in front of her. As he turned away, he smirked, realizing she was still wearing his shirt. He had a sneaking suspicion that he’d likely never wear it again and found he didn’t mind.

She insisted on helping clean the dishes, since he’d done all the cooking, and promised to fix dinner the next night. While he went and drew the blinds and curtains around the apartment, she prepared for bed. He found himself wondering what she would wear. She didn’t seem the skimpy silk type, but more something that was comfortable.

Belatedly, he realized he’d be sharing a bed with this woman. Not just the drunken hook up they’d had before, but actually sharing his bed. He felt self conscious and wondered if he should dig through his drawers to find something to wear. Usually he slept in his boxers, or less during the summer months. He hesitated outside the door, thinking furiously.

“Sassenach?”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to knock on your own bedroom door.”

He put his hand down, taking care not to bump the door on accident.

“Oh… Are ye decent, then?”

“You’ve already seen me naked, I don’t think there’s anything left you haven’t seen.”

His ears began to burn red.

“I only meant, were ye… I mean that…”

“It’s alright, I’m dressed,” she laughed.

Opening the door, he looked at his bed and bit back a groan of longing.

“Blessed Michael defend us,” he breathed.

There was a woman in his bed. A beautiful woman.

“What did you say?”
“Nothin’. Ah…”

Was it odd to ask a woman what she preferred her man wear in bed? *Her man?! Get a hold of yourself, Fraser.*

He met her eyes again, catching the playful glint in their blue depths. Her gaze dropped a little, make her look up at him from beneath her dark lashes.

“Are you going to come to bed, Jamie?”

*Oh holy God yes.*

Meeting her gaze once more, he felt a smile pulling at his lips.

“To bed? Or… To sleep?”

Her eyes went wide with his question, bringing on his full smile. Then she gave him a coy smile.

“Well I’m sure we’ll sleep at some point…”

Shrugging out of his shirt, he tossed it into his laundry bin and his jeans joined it shortly after. Then he stopped, staring down at his socks.

“Jamie?”

“Is this what ye want, Claire?”

“I said as much, didn’t I?”

He shook his head, looking up at her.

“That’s no’ what I mean. Why do you want to do this? Are you sure it’s because ye want it and no’ because ye feel poorly about yourself?”

She stared at him for a few minutes, clearly unprepared for his questions.

“It’s… I don’t know what it is, this *thing* between us. It’s more than a drunken one night stand, I know that much. It’s different. I’ve never felt anything like this before and I don’t understand it. But…” she bit down on her bottom lip. “Right now I know that I want you, for your own sake. Not because Frank made me feel like shit earlier today. But because…”

Waiting patiently, he remained standing where he was. This wasn’t easy for her, to be so vulnerable with him after what Frank had done, so he would give her whatever time she needed to put her thoughts in order.

“Because you make me feel safe. Like… Like I’m home. I don’t understand what this connection is, not yet, but for tonight I’d just like to feel it. If that’s alright.”

No one had ever said anything like that to him before.

“Aye, my Sassenach. That’s quite alright.”

As he approached the bed, she pushed the sheets down and away from her body. It would be much different this time, neither of them drunk or emotional. It would just be them, coming together as lovers and friends.
Her cheek was soft and warm in his hand as he cupped it, leaning down to kiss her. She tasted different than he remembered, sweeter. There was no hard edge of alcohol on her tongue as it moved against his own. One of her hands reached up and tangled in his hair, pulling him fully down onto the bed. Everything about her body was warm curves and soft flesh. God, he could lose himself in it and not have a care in the world.

The last time they’d been in the same bed together, they’d been reckless and almost heedless of the other. She’d wanted the roughness he could give her, and he was more than willing to take the same treatment in return. But this… This was much different. There was something more between them now, more than just their two bodies meeting.

As he settled himself between her legs, hands exploring her body, she pushed him back. They were both breathing hard, her lips red and smiling.

“Not this time, Fraser,” she said.

“What?”

“I may not remember much about our wedding night, but I do remember you taking charge.”

He began nibbling down her neck, enjoying the gooseflesh that rose in his wake.

“Is that a complaint, then?”

“Oh, God no,” she teased. “But now it’s my turn.”

His head popped up, brows raised in interest.

“Is it?”

“Yes,” she nudged him in the side. “It is.”

Obligingly, he rolled onto his back and pulled her with him. Straddling him, she pulled off the shirt she’d been wearing all day and tossed it aside. Then she guided him to her breasts, keeping their gazes locked the whole while.

Jamie had never been more grateful for his large hands than he was in that moment. With his left thumb, he gently circled one nipple, pleased when it responded to him. He did the same with the other, making Claire’s eyes roll back a little. But she could only take so much before needing more, he quickly realized.

She moved suddenly, removing the pink panties she’d been wearing and pulling his boxers off.

“Wait a moment,” he said, reaching over to his bedside table. “I ken we’re both clean, but I thought we’d be better safe than sorry.”

Taking the little foil package from him, she nodded.

“Thank you.”

Back above him, she rolled the condom onto him before taking her position once more. Then her eyes met his, open and honest.

“I feel it too,” he whispered, hands on her hips. “That thing ye mentioned. I kent it the moment we met. I dinna ken what it is either, but I’ve only ever felt it wi’ you. Let me feel it again?”
Eyes closing slowly, she brought their two bodies together and sighed. The universe around him ceased - the neon lights, sirens, the cars, tourists yelling - leaving him alone with Claire. The smell of her surrounded him, a hint of whiskey and her own natural scent. The heat of her desire matched his own, so strong and intense he was sure they’d burn the world down with them. Her lips on his were strangely cool, intoxicating. He wanted to hold on to this moment, to never move from it. For once they began, the end would come.

“Jesus H. Bloody Christ!”

“I havena even done anything!”

Slowly, deliberately, her body began to move. It composed a song in perfect harmony with his, matching his rhythm beat for beat. Claire Beauchamp was not the first woman he’d taken to bed, but damn it, she would be the last.

Her hips started moving faster, harder, their skins coming together with soft smacking sounds, their perspiration aiding Claire as she moved over his body. It was building, the both of them coming closer and closer to that glorious end. That moment when the pleasure was so strong it nearly became pain, when he would fall into oblivion and her arms.

“Come with me,” she said in a harsh whisper. “Come feel it with me.”

Both his hands gripped her hips, pushing and pulling her harder. He was beginning to cry out now, all he needed was a moment more before it was done. In one final push, her back arched and she threw her head back.

“Tha mi ’n dùil sgàin mo chridhe.”

Her head rolled forward and she looked down at him, her chest still heaving.

“What did you say?”

“I said,” he pulled her down to lay beside him. “I thought my heart was gonna burst.”

“Well that’ll boost a girl’s confidence any day,” she laughed.

Her hand moved to his cheek, her thumb tracing the line of his lips.

“I’ve never felt anything like this,” she said, softly.

“Nor have I.”

“Thank you, for all of this. Letting me stay here and helping me with Frank.”

Tucking her curls behind her ear, he smiled at her.

“Anything I can do to help ye, Sassenach.”

Rolling onto her side, she pulled the sheets back up and settled down to sleep.

“We’ll talk about this whole marriage situation later,” she mumbled.

“Aye, I give ye my word.”

Wrapping his arms around her, he cuddled up behind her. He felt her relax completely into his embrace, feeling a bone deep contentment himself, and drifted off to sleep with her, the perfume of
her completely penetrating his senses.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Jamie invites Claire to watch his show.

They'd become quite close, as both lovers and friends, and had developed a sort of unspoken relationship between them. Claire was still a little hesitant to label it anything more, though she knew she couldn't deny what she felt for him. Moreover, she felt acutely his feelings towards her. She'd never felt closer to someone as she did to him, and the precariousness of the circumstance of their relationship made her all the more wary of labeling it.

As the days had moved forward, Claire and Jamie fell into a sort of routine. He still came to the bar for his usual drinks when his show was over, but now he waited for her shift to finish. They would go home together, often talking about this or that.

He'd had a show tonight, and Claire was looking forward to seeing him. They'd been accidentally married for just three weeks now and she had his schedule memorized. When the clock hit midnight, she grabbed a glass and filled it with his favorite beer.

“Would you stop grinning like that?” Gellis said. “He’s not even here yet!”

“I am not!” Claire retorted. “And yes, he is.”

She turned to greet him, breathing deeply when he came near. He always smelled of sweat and horses after a show, which she enjoyed.

“Your drink, good sir,” she said, sliding the glass over to him.

“I thank ye, kind lady,” he bowed with a flourish. “I’ve a surprise for ye, Sassenach.”

“Oh?”

That smirk that killed her every time peeked out and she felt herself shudder. Then he gave her a wink and went to sit down in his usual corner.

“Aye,” he said as she walked over, cleaning the bar. “I do. But it’ll have to wait until after your shift is over.”

Giving him a sour look, she turned to a customer and began mixing another drink.

“It’s rude to keep secrets, Fraser.”

“I am not keeping a secret. Only saving a surprise.”

Finally, her shift ended and he stood to walk with her out to her car.

“Tell me, damn you.”

“It’s been killing you, hasn’t it?”
“Of course it bloody has! You know how I am with surprises!”

With a wink, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a slip of paper. For a moment, she thought it was the thing they’d both avoided talking about. Their unexpected marriage. Her heart began to race until he handed it to her.

“What’s this?”

“A ticket to my show tomorrow. I thought ye might like to see what it is I do.”

“Really?! Oh Jamie, that’s wonderful!”

“Aye? You’ll come then? I ken tomorrow’s your night off, I just thought it might be nice. I’ll take ye out for drinks after. I have one of my castmates willing to look after my things when the show’s over so I shouldn’t be long.”

Beaming up at him, she nodded.

“Yes! Oh, this is perfect!”

“Good! Let’s get ye home, then.”

The following night, Claire dressed in a simple black dress and headed to the Excalibur. Jamie had texted her earlier, telling her to keep an eye on the knight in blue. This whole thing he’d set up was a strangely thrilling experience.

She took her seat, watching eagerly as the rest of the audience filed in. After a brief announcement about emergency exits, the arena went dark. A few of the cast members came out, speaking their lines and explaining how the wizard Merlin had been corrupted. The Knights of the Realm were the only ones that could fight his army.

Claire was on the edge of her seat, watching the dark knights file out and take their positions. After some stunning pyrotechnics, the spotlights swiveled to reveal six knights on their large steeds. Jamie needn’t have told her what colors he wore. He sat head and shoulders above the other men in line.

His copper hair was worn in a tight braid down the back of his head and his face was serious. This was a side of him she’d never seen before, Jamie the showman. She supposed if he was a knight, he might go by James instead.

To her shock, it was Jamie and the green knight that were chosen for the jousting tournament. He’d never told her he knew how to joust. Claire watched with anxiety as the two men charged at each other. A loud crash made her jump in her seat, eyes frantically searching for her blue knight.

There he was, trotting around the end of the arena, eyes focused on the green knight.

*Lord Midnight the Blue has struck the Lord Maximilian the Green, but has not yet unhorsed him. Once more, gentlemen! Take your places! May the honorable man win!*

Jamie lined up again and they launched at each other. Claire nearly yelped when they collided, but held herself back. When the dust settled, the green knight was on the ground while Jamie held up his broken lance and howled his victory.

After tossing his broken weapon down, he rode over to the king and princess to accept a beautiful rose.
“A gift,” said the blonde princess. “For the maiden of your choice.”

Jamie rode slowly around the arena and Claire wondered how he chose his maidens. He’d mentioned once that he liked to hand the rose to little girls with glittering eyes for the smiles they gave him in return.

That wasn’t his goal tonight, she realized. His horse, still breathing heavily, stopped in front of her. He dismounted in a flourish of skill and locked eyes with her. With a deep bow, he tossed her the rose. She caught it, her cheeks burning as his gaze met hers again. She couldn’t help the smile that bloomed across her face. After a nod in reply, he turned and remounted his horse.

Claire had butterflies in her stomach and lightening in her veins. He’d given her a rose, invited her to his show just to give her a rose. It was one of the most beautiful gestures she’d ever received from someone.

The show was an absolute masterpiece from start to finish. The swordplay, jousting, horseback riding. Every moment of it had amazed her. Now that it was over, she was to wait for him in the lobby.

Eventually, he came out. She’d thought he would be in the sweaty clothes he wore beneath the costume, but he was in a nice plaid button down and very nice jeans.

“There ye are! What did ye think of the show?”

“Jamie, that was incredible! I had no idea you did so much!”

“Och,” he said playfully. “The lads and I take turns who’s jousting and who gives roses to fine young maidens.”

Accepting his arm, she walked with him out of the hotel and made their way to the strip. It was crowded as always, but it didn’t seem to bother him.

“Still. That was absolutely beautiful. And I think we both know I’m no fine young maiden.”

“Aye, maybe no’. But I thought I could bend the rules, just this once.”

They walked for a few moments, Claire smiling to herself and smelling her rose.

“Jamie, where are we going for drinks?”

“There’s a great little bar I think ye might like. We’ll have to drive, it’s a bit of a walk otherwise.”

He was warm beneath her hands, still smelling faintly of sweat.

“You showered.”

“Aye. I couldn’a take ye out for drinks stinking worse than my horse!”

“Do we have to go out for drinks?”

Stopping near his car, he looked down at her skeptically.

“Did ye have something in mind ye’d rather do?”

“I was thinking… It might just be nice to go home and have drinks there.”
“I suppose we could. But I promised you a night out.”

Brushing the rose across her upper lip, she grinned at him coyly.

“I think I’d rather a night in. With you.”

“Drinks are better priced at our place,” he said, his voice turning to velvet.

“You don’t have to tip the bartender either.”

Opening the door for her, he helped her into her seat and grinned salaciously.

“I always tip my bartender.”

He drove home rather quickly, hardly remembering to lock the door once they were inside.

“You know,” she said, backing away from him. “You’re not the only one good at surprises.”

“Is that so?”

Grinning, she nodded and moved into the bedroom. He followed her, eyes roaming over her.

“Yes. I’ve got a surprise for you too.”

“If it involves ye being naked, I’m all for it,” he said, reaching out a hand to her.

She clicked her tongue, swatted playfully at his outstretched hand and reached behind herself to unzip her dress.

“Did I say you could touch?”

Something dark flashed in his eyes before he put both hands behind his back. His intense gaze only spurred Claire onward. She shimmied out of the dress, letting him see the front of her surprise.

“Holy Mary mother of God,” he breathed, looking her over.

“Like it?”

“Jesus, Claire. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again. You are a wee vixen.”

With a pleased smile, she walked slowly around the room, swaying her hips as much as she could. Jamie couldn’t help following the swaying of her perfectly plump arse as she strode around, teasing him.

“You’re being verra cruel, Sassenach.”

She stopped in front of him, her feet planted a little more than shoulder width apart. With her hands on her hips, she eyed him.

“Cruel? Oh, I can be cruel.”

Picking up the rose she’d set on the bedside table, she lifted it to her nose and breathed deeply.

“Out of all the girls in that arena, you gave this to me.”

“Aye. I did.”
“Did you win that match just for me?”

His hand clenched into a fist as he resisted the impulse to touch her.


Claire snorted. She slid one hand down her body to ‘adjust’ one of the straps, ensuring it was perfectly smooth.

“What was it my brave knight did tonight? I can’t seem to remember what it’s called.”

He stood close to her but he did not reach out. She felt the heat of his breath on her neck as she turned away from him.

“J-jousting.”

“Oh that’s right. Tell me… What is it that you joust with?”

Jamie groaned, his eyes staring longingly at her backside.

“My Lord Midnight?”

“What?” he asked, shaking his head.

“What is that weapon you joust with?”

He swallowed.

“A lance.”

“Mm. That one you fought with today… Is that the only lance you know how to wield?”

“No, it’s not,” he answered, voice cracking.

Casting a glance at him over her shoulder, she backed into him.

“Oh God,” he moaned, barely maintaining his self control.

“Ooohhh,” she said, pressing her backside against him harder. “That is quite the weapon you’ve got there, sir.”

“Jesus Claire, please.”

Meeting his eyes, she shot him a cheshire cat smile and gave in.

“I suppose I’ll have to let you touch me at some point…”

He was beginning to crack, his hands nearly shaking at his sides.

“Aye, ye will if ye want any satisfaction tonight.”

“Alright then, Sir Midnight. I do believe you’ve won your maiden.”

“One thing,” he said, trailing fingers gently across her mostly-exposed arse.

Ticking one brow up, she waited.
“And what would that one thing be? *This* perhaps?” she asked as she nudged back a little.

“Just remember ye brought this on yerself.”

Then both hands grabbed her buttocks and let out a satisfied sigh.

“Fondle my arse all night, will you?”

“Certainly not, Sassenach. I just need a moment before I repay your sweet torture.”

When he finished with his moment, she was leaning against him.

“On the bed, then, if ye please.”

“And if I don’t please?”

“I bested the green knight and helped defeat the forces of Merlin tonight. I’m sure I could get ye and yer perfect arse on that bed if I tried hard enough.”

Giving in, she walked slowly to the bed and sat down, watching as he surveyed her. He first removed her shoes, gently tracing the muscles in her calves.

“Ye’ve fine legs, Sassenach.”

“And your hands are magic. Jesus H…”

Claire then began to learn just how stubborn a Scot this man was. He hadn’t been kidding about repaying her torture. After setting her shoes aside, he carefully unhooked the straps holding up her thigh high stockings, topped with intricate lace, his lips trailing down her legs as he rolled them off. Then he crawled above her, carefully observing the intricate outfit she wore.

“Now how the hell am I supposed to get this thing off ye?”

“Do you really need me to tell you how to do that?”

“I didna really look at the back when ye showed it to me. Are there ties or those bloody wee hooks?”

Rather than answer, she rolled onto her stomach.

“Wee hooks then. This might take some time.”

“Better not take too long.”

With one extra squeeze of her backside, he ran a finger up her spine.

“Get more onto the bed, Sassenach.”

Wiggling further on, she looked back to see him appreciating her body.

“Better?”


Moving to the edge of her vision, he began slowly undressing. That just wasn’t fair, watching the graceful way he carried himself. She couldn’t help but snort a little when he was finally naked.
“That’s quite the lance you have there, sir knight.”

“Hush now, Sassenach, and let me go about my business,” he responded, eyeing her prone form with appreciation.

The bed shifted when he moved onto it, his knees squeezing slightly on either side of her hips. She let her eyes close, deciding to simply enjoy the moment. His fingers fumbled for a moment with the edge of the fabric before getting a good hold. It unhooked with relative ease, freeing her just a little. She flinched, then shivered, at the unexpected touch of his lips on her skin.

With every hook he released, he kissed the next bit of her that was exposed. The tenderness and slowness of his actions seemed to heighten each one of her senses. It was like every cell in her body was on the brink of combustion. All she needed was a spark.

But he kept that spark back, not ready to let either of them catch fire yet. When the last hook released, he ran his hands up and down her back. He pushed the straps from her shoulders, following them with his lips. Claire had never been with a man who took such care with her, one who worshiped her body so openly. It was equal parts frightening and arousing.

His body was close to hers, though she couldn’t see him. The heat that radiated from him gave her visions of him as a live flame, hungry and consuming. She wanted to burn in it with him, to let him take possession of her and worship her in the way only he could. But she wasn’t given time to dwell on it as his hands found her breasts.

After some careful maneuvering, he pulled the garment free of her body. He held her breasts again while kissed her neck. She trembled beneath him, growing desperate for contact.

“Nearly there,” he growled into her ear. “Just one last thing.”

Gasping as he moved off her, she turned to see what he was doing. She’d completely forgotten about the little black thong she’d put on earlier. Tugging it down over her hips, he smiled up at her.

“Finally,” she moaned.

“Care for a wee joust, Sassenach?”

She snorted.

“I don’t think-”

“That was a rhetorical question.”

Before he returned, he pulled open the drawer on his bedside table. With a proud smirk, he held up the little package and wiggled his eyebrows at her.

“Safety first, my lady.”

She broke out into unexpected laughter while he rolled the condom on. Moving back into his previous position, he settled and guided himself in. That first moment of connection ignited her, setting them both on fire.

He was as determined and relentless as he had been in the arena only a few hours before. Lifting her hips up higher, he enjoyed the keening sounds she made as he continued to love her body. Claire couldn’t help but glance back at him, and that coy look alone, spurred him on faster.
“Oh, Jamie!” Claire cried out, her head nodding forward again, overcome by how good he felt. How he knew exactly where to hold her, exactly when she needed him to move harder or faster with her.

Wanting to see her face as she came undone, he moved to turn her over. She growled at the loss of contact, but didn’t have a chance to speak as he moved into her again, his face hovering close in to hers. He lifted her legs higher up his body, pressing in deeper.

Hungrily, she pulled his mouth down to hers, each devouring the others sounds of sheer pleasure.

“Jamie… Jamie… I- I…” Claire tried to speak, but she moaned again as he reached a new spot inside her.

Her eyes squeezed shut as the tension built up within her. Jamie’s movements suddenly stopped with him sheathed to the hilt.

“Don’t ye dare close yer eyes,” he growled.

She began to writhe beneath him, trying to force him into moving again.

“Please !”

“Look at me! ”

Forcing her eyes open, she met his gaze and dissolved. He bucked against her with wild abandon as he lost his ability to speak English. Whatever he was saying, she didn’t understand. But she felt it, like each word he yelled touched her soul.

As she fought to catch her breath and her racing heart, she noticed his arms were shaking. Sweat dripped off his nose and landed on her chest, mixing with her own.

“Jesus. H. Roosevelt. Christ,” she panted. “How the hell… Can you do a show like that… And still have the energy… For that ?!”

With a smirk, he dropped onto his side heavily, making them both bounce on the mattress.

“I’ll always have energy for that.”

Working together, they moved the sheets around enough to crawl beneath them and come together again. Most nights, she slept with her back to him and his arms around her. But tonight, she turned and faced him. A smile tender enough to break her heart came to his lips as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. He kissed her forehead and sighed, his heart beginning to slow. Claire snuggled in closer, breathing in the warm scent of him that lingered on the skin of his neck. As she started to drift off to sleep, she could have sworn she heard him softly say, “We still need to talk of our marriage, Sassenach.”

Whether it was a trick of her mind or not, she responded sleepily, “I know. Tomorrow,” and drifted off, in the comfort of his arms.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Claire takes Jamie on a small holiday to relax.

In the two weeks since she’d attended one of his shows, one of his castmates had begged a favor. The man’s aunt had unexpectedly died and he was called away to attend the funeral. Jamie, being the perfect gentleman that he was, had agreed to cover the shows his friend was unable to work. Taking on the extra shows made his schedule intense. Knowing how much it was draining him already, she strove to do a little more for him. They usually took turns cooking dinner, but on one of his first late nights she took his turn. She made his favorite meal and was bursting with pride when she had it all sitting on the table when he came home. He’d been touched at her gesture, enjoying dinner with her before showering and going to bed.

Since that time, Jamie had come home or to the bar every night looking more exhausted than the night before. When they'd finally retire to bed for the night, he would promptly curl up around her, snuggling deeply, before falling straight into sleep. It was only for a short time, she knew, but she began to worry that he was overworking himself.

One night, as she had experimentally stroked his hair while he slept, she noticed his mouth raise up slightly in a smile. It was one of his smiles that simply broke her heart with happiness. All at once, she resolved that once these extra days were over, they had to do something fun, something Jamie would love. Claire remembered a conversation from not long ago… when they’d talked about Scotland. She’d seen the yearning for the quiet countryside, for the vast open spaces, in his eyes that night. Suddenly an idea came to her, and as she drifted off to sleep, plans started forming. Enhanced by the warmth of Jamie surrounding her, she smiled and decided to start looking as soon as he left.

It took most of the week, but Claire got a small holiday set up. She had a long weekend off from her schooling and she’d taken time off from work as well. Jamie would be getting his own time away as soon as his castmate returned.

“Jamie,” she asked while he finished his dinner.

“Aye, lass?”

“Do you have any plans this weekend?”

He groaned and let his head roll back on his neck.

“Other than dropping dead? No, I dinna think I do. Why?”

Biting her bottom lip, she went to the desk and pulled out the folder she’d made.

“You’ve been working so hard, helping out your mate. I got to thinking that you needed some time off, time to relax and recover. That’s not easy to do in this city, so I put together a little holiday for us.”

Pulling himself up, he looked at the folder.
“Oh, have ye now?”

“Well, I’ve got a long weekend this weekend and I made sure I’m not scheduled to work. I know your mate is back, so you’ve got the time off coming too.”

“Then where are we going?”

He was actually curious about the trip! He didn’t think it was silly or stupid, but looked interested! Well, as interested as he could while being exhausted.

“Do you remember about two weeks ago, you were talking about Scotland and I know how much you miss it. I see it in your face when you speak of it, so I thought that we could get a little taste, even though I know it’s not the same. I can’t afford to take us to Scotland for a weekend, but I did get us a cheap flight to Colorado. I rented us a small cabin for three days that has easy access to a lake stocked with fish year round and a few hiking trails. I know it won’t be exactly like Scotland, but I thought you’d enjoy being out in nature again and not in this place.”

“Claire, that’s… I think that’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me.”

“So you’ll go?”

A broad, tired smile broke out on his face.

“Aye, a’course we’ll go! Ye already bought tickets and rented us a cabin. How could I say no to that?”

“It won’t be able to compare to Scotland I’m sure, but-”

He interrupted her frenzied words with a very warm and thorough kiss. Other than cuddling and snuggling in bed, they’d hardly touched since he’d picked up the extra work. Her body was beginning to yearn for his again, though she was convinced it was just because he was a very good lover.

“Thank you, Claire,” he said softly. “This means a great deal to me.”

There was something swimming deep in his eyes that she didn’t quite understand. It was intense, whatever it was, and she shied away from it.

“I just want you to be able to relax and recover a little. You’ve had a rough few days.”

“When do we leave?”

“Friday morning. I’ll pack our bags on Thursday night before you get home. So all you need to do is eat, shower, and sleep. Then we’ll leave in the morning.”

He sighed, his eyes drooping once more.

“Speaking of sleeping… Are ye ready for bed? Or are you going to stay up for a bit?”

“I’m just going to put the leftovers away and then I’ll be in. Are you going to shower first?”

With a shake of his head, he groaned and got to his feet.

“I dinna think I could stay awake through it. And I dinna think ye want to drag my body from the tub were I to drown.”
“Go on to bed, I’ll be in soon.”

After packing away the leftovers of their dinner, she went into their bedroom. The first few nights after she moved in, they’d been shy around each other. They’d dress for bed in separate rooms, barely looking at each other when they went to bed. That shyness was long gone now as she pulled open her drawer and changed.

Jamie wasn’t asleep yet, but was close to it. She slipped in beside him, tangling her arms and legs with his. Once he was asleep, she reached up and brushed back his hair, wondering if she’d get that smile again. She did, bringing a matching one to her own face.

####

Friday morning came and they were off to the airport. It would be a short flight to Denver and then an hour’s drive to the cabin she’d rented. Jamie let her drive, as he was on his second cup of coffee and still yawning.

“Jamie, we’re here.”

Prying his eyes open, he looked around. For a moment, he thought he was home, hiking through the foothills near Lallybroch.

“Jamie?”

That wasn’t Jenny’s voice, calling him in for dinner. It was Claire, who was watching him with a worried expression.

“Sorry, Sassenach. I’m just tired. Is this the place, then?”

“It is. It’s all ours until Monday. Not a soul in sight for miles.”

“Would it be terrible to go in and take a wee nap?”

Smiling at him, she shook her head.

“No, it wouldn’t be. We just need to make the bed. But then you get some rest and I’ll fix us something for lunch, hmm?”

“Aye, that sounds verra good, Sassenach. Thank ye.”

He carried their bags inside and made the bed quickly before collapsing onto it. Maybe by the time they went home, he wouldn’t feel so exhausted.

When he woke, she was in the kitchen humming to herself. Christ Almighty, she was beautiful. She’d put together this whole trip just for him, because she knew he missed Scotland and that he was tired.

Over a month had passed since their marriage and they still hadn’t talked about it. He was beginning to worry that they never would, that they’d never come to a conclusion about what they wanted. All he wanted was her, whatever that looked like. Sometimes, when she thought he couldn’t see, she watched him. He thought he saw a fondness in her eyes, but couldn’t be sure. She seemed happy, with him.

“Hey there, sleepy head. Feeling any better?”

“Aye, verra much.”
“Good. Hungry?”

His stomach rumbled in answer to her question, making her laugh. God, what he wouldn’t give to hear that sound all day long. With a satisfied stretch, he went to the small table and observed the sandwiches she’d made.

“Is that sauerkraut?”

“It is,” she smiled. “You haven’t had it in a while. Thought I might spoil you a little.”

“Keep this up and you’ll make me fat,” he muttered, stuffing a large bite into his mouth.

They ate their sandwiches and decided to go for a nice stroll after.

“God, even the air feels better out here,” she said, taking a deep breath.

“We’ll be able to see the stars tonight, Sassenach.”

For a while, they walked the area near the cabin, stopping beside the lake to just sit. He felt something deep inside himself click back into place. The city wasn’t where he belonged, wasn’t what he was built for.

“It’s getting chilly,” Claire said, snuggling closer to him.

“Aye, it is. We should head back.”

“You know, I’m not sure our cabin has a heater.”

With his arm around her waist, he winked.

“I think I can keep ye warm through the night.”

“Oh? All night, you say?”

“Weel… Maybe not all night.”

Claire chuckled, pulling the cabin’s key from her coat pocket.

“You slept the entire car ride and throughout the flight. Maybe we should just go to sleep for the night.”

When he yawned, he started laughing.

“Aye, perhaps you’re right. Ye said the lake was stocked wi’ fish?”

“It is. I got you a fishing license for the weekend. Will you catch our dinner for tomorrow?”

“No, Sassenach. We will. I intend to teach ye how to fish.”

They settled in for the night, her head on his chest. He felt that intimacy between them grow and he hoped that maybe she’d made her choice, not just about their quick and unorthodox marriage, but about their relationship as well.

###

Soft butterfly wings danced over her cheeks, down her neck, over her stomach. Opening her eyes, she observed Jamie’s red hair in close proximity to her face.
“Awake, then?” he asked, his lips against her neck.

“Quite.”

His head popped up, eyes glittering.

“Good. Get dressed. If ye want something to eat for supper, we’d best get fishing now!”

“Is the sun even up yet?”

“No, but it will be soon. Come on.”

Claire dressed groggily and he handed her a steaming cup of coffee. Once she’d finished it, she felt more like herself. He was practically vibrating with excitement.

As he got their gear together, he explained to her how everything worked. But he didn’t treat her like an idiot, only speaking to her as an equal. When he decided everything was ready, they went out to find the “perfect spot” as Jamie had called it.

It was a pleasant day outside, chilly without being frigid. Even still, she sat as close to him as he would allow, marveling at his internal furnace. They fished for hours, coming away with a few good sized ones that he promised to prepare. Jamie stayed outside to gut and clean them while Claire began to gather the rest of what they’d have for dinner.

Leaving the fish to marinate a little while, they sat on the small porch for lunch. Jamie was in a wonderful mood, the sun sparking off his hair.

“Was my father who taught me to fish, ye ken.”

She glanced up at him, curious. He rarely spoke of his family.

“Really?”

“Aye. We’d go out and spend all day catching fish. Bring home wi’ our baskets full and Mam would be so proud. Jenny always hated it because she had to help clean them.”

“She sounds like quite a character.”

His eyes took on the distant look of memory and he smiled.

“Aye, she’s a rare woman. No’ verra unlike you, Sassenach. She’s every bit o’ stubborn as me and twice as fierce.”

That night, Jamie cooked the fish over an open fire in the pit outside the cabin. He was beautiful, between the silver moonlight and the ruddy firelight. The contrast made him look other-worldly in a way.

Jamie brought the tartan wool blanket out of the cabin and wrapped it around her. She made space for him on the large bench and cuddled into his side. His arm came around her and a deep pleased sound rumbled in his chest.

Glancing up at him, she watched the stress and worry melt away. The exhaustion was gone now and she felt an incredible longing for him. Turning her body toward his, she reached up and ran her finger along the line of his jaw. He hadn’t shaved before they’d gone out fishing and the day’s growth was rough.
Gently, she pulled his face to hers and kissed him, long and slow. He was surprised at first, but quickly embraced her back. One hand cupped the her cheek while he brought her closer. Bracing on the back of the bench, she swung one leg over him and settled in his lap. The blanket was puddled around their hips.

“Have you ever made love out of doors before?” she asked, releasing the buckle of his belt.

“Canna say I have, Sassenach.”

She stood for a moment, kicking out of her shoes and wriggling out of her own jeans. Better prepared for the evening’s activities, she crawled onto him again.

“How about we change that?”

“I’ve never kent a woman like you, Claire.”

She winked as one of her hands moved beneath his boxers.

“They broke the mold after they made me.”

“I dinna think the universe could handle two of ye.”

Finding what she’d been searching for, she began stroking him to life. He tried to hold her gaze, but she watched the red creep up his neck and face. Finally, he let out a groan and leaned his head back on the bench, mouth open. He muttered something in Gaelic that she thought might have been a prayer of thanksgiving. Both of his hands were on her hips, clutching her with white knuckles.

Before it went too far, she reached down and picked up her trousers, rummaging through the pocket.

“Christ, why did ye stop?” he pleaded.

She grinned as she opened the foil package.

“Safety first, my Lord Midnight.”

“How does that always sound so bloody sexy when ye say it?”

“Because I’m about to make love to you in the wild forest of Colorado.”

His head rolled back again as she unrolled the condom onto him, being purposefully slow with the movement.

Moving herself forward, she leaned in and kissed his open mouth. Suddenly detached, his hands tangled in her hair, holding hard to her. Then she brought her hips down, taking both his cock and his sigh.

She purred as she rocked back and forth, arms around his neck. It was a little funny to her that she wore no trousers or knickers, his were around his ankles, but they still both wore their shirts. Her fingers tangled in his hair, pulling on it while she moved. The blanket fell away from them and the cold night air bit into her exposed skin.

“Roosevelt Christ!” she yelped, legs locking around Jamie.

“Oh God… What happened?”
He looked around, trying to regain control of his brain.

“The blanket fell off. And as warm as you are, you’re not covering my bare arse.”

“I suggest a change of location?”

Nodding, she made to get off, but he stood, holding her securely against him.

###

Her weight was solid in his arms as he carried her inside the cabin. He’d paused barely long enough to grab the blanket from the ground before bringing her in. If it had been warmer outside, he would have made love to her long and slow beneath the stars. *What would it be like, he wondered, to have her in the wild heather near Lallybroch?*

Laying her on the bed, he paused only long enough to pull his shirt off. It was joined on the floor of the cabin by her own. He sat back on his haunches and scooted closer, running his hands up her legs. They were strong and smooth, though a bit chilled. *Best way to warm someone was to get their blood pumping, right?*

Her legs opened for him, sliding around his middle and pulling him closer. The way she smiled at him, the tenderness in her eyes, urged him to say words he’d never uttered before.

“Tha gaol agam ort,” he whispered, leaning down to kiss her.

“Is that another one of those things you’ll tell me someday?”

“Aye, it is. Come here to me, wee vixen. Let me make love to ye.”

Guiding himself back into her, he bent his neck to taste her pleasure. If ever there was a woman he could give his life to, it would be her. For so long, he’d been unsure of her feelings, constantly wondering if she cared for him the way he did her. But after she’d attended his show and the night she’d given him, he thought he knew. He didn’t expect her to fall in love with him straight away, that would take time. All he wanted was to know if she wanted to try a relationship with him. Some form of commitment.

“Oh Jamie,” she said, dragging out his name.

With a smile, he kissed her parted lips, savoring the taste of fish that lingered on them. Her hands slid down his back and gripped his buttocks, fingernails digging into his flesh. It made him yelp and jerk a little, but he wouldn’t let her push him harder. He wanted to make proper love to her, worship her body as it deserved.

“Would it kill you to go a little faster?”

Pulling himself up, he stared at her with a wicked grin.

“It just might.”

Grinding against her, he watched every change her face made. The utter joy to the frustration at her lack of control. Every single thing would be burned into his memory for all of eternity.

“Jamie, *please* …” she whined, her face finally contorting into the longing he’d been waiting for.

“Weel, since ye asked so nicely.”
Readjusting his position, he held her hips and increased his pace. She made the most beautiful squeaks when he took her this way, even as her legs churned and kicked. The look of sheer ecstasy that spread across her face spurred him harder, his body now slamming against hers. Then her back arched and she cried out, hitting that glorious peak.

His heart was thundering in his chest, ready to break free at any moment. The closer he got, the harder it beat. The cry that built in his throat cut short when it finally escaped. Burying his face in her neck, he shuddered for what felt like an eternity.

Claire reached up and grabbed his face, pulling him down for a kiss.

“Check that off your bucket list, Fraser,” she said with a grin.

“Aye, I will. Perhaps tomorrow, though.”

Gathering her to him, he breathed deep the scent of her hair and relaxed with her body warm beside his.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

A decision is made about what the future looks like for Jamie and Claire

Jamie lay on his back, Claire wrapped around him. Neither of them were asleep yet, though he suspected she was close. They’d gone out for a hike that morning, deciding to take advantage of their last day at the cabin. Claire was admittedly not someone who hiked often, but she kept up with him. He’d rubbed her sore feet when they returned to the cabin that night, which had led to her mentioning her sore calves. And sore thighs. And something else that needed his attention.

He came to a decision while he twirled her hair through his fingers. There was something he needed to tell her, something he’d never shared with another living person.

“Ye ken…” he stopped. That wasn’t the way to start this. “I havena told ye why I left Scotland, have I?”

Her head shook on his chest.

“You haven’t. I’ve always wondered.”

“It… I canna face my family. My da had this whole plan for me. Got me set up in university so I could run the family farm when I graduated. Business and accounting classes, that sort of thing. But I’m no’ that sort of man. I couldna see myself sitting down wi’ a laptop updating accounts. So I dropped out of university.”

Claire sat up on her elbow and looked at him, her face shadowed in the dim light.

“That doesn’t explain why you ran all the way to Las Vegas.”

“I took a job wi’ a stage company, helping build sets for theaters and the like. They had an opening for a crew in Las Vegas and I accepted it. I went home to pack my things, knowing I’d be gone for a few months. My da found me packing and…” He took a deep breath, steeling himself against the pain of what came next. “He asked me what the hell I was doing, abandoning my family like this. How I could gi’ up my studies since I would inherit Lallybroch and run the farm. I blew up.”

A rapid fire of memories came with fresh waves of shame and agony. It had happened years ago, surely it shouldn’t hurt this much still.

“I started screamin’ at him about how awful uni was for me, how much I hated it. Felt like I was in a bloody God-forsaken prison. I never told anyone that I loathed being in uni. Da never knew. My yelling got Da’s danders up and weel… They say the Fraser’s are stubborn as rocks. So he asked me just what I expected him to do about this, to do wi’ the farm if he had no son to take it over. I told him to gi’ it to Jenny, she had a better head for it anyway. He said he never dreamt his son would be so selfish to put his own wants ahead of his family. I planned on being on the work team for the time I was assigned, but coming back and maybe working something out. But when he said that… I couldn’a.”

The echo of Brian’s last words to him rang in his ears.
If ye walk out that door,’ he screamed at me. ‘If ye walk out that door, you’re no son of mine! Dinna even think of setting foot on Lallybroch land again!’ And I havena. When… When I landed in Vegas, I had a few missed calls from mam and my sister. I didna call them back, I kent they’d hate me for what happened wi’ Da. Jenny texted me that Da was in hospital. He had a stroke just after I left.”

“Oh Jamie,” she said, her voice filled with compassion.

“I stayed in Vegas because I have no home to go back to. It’s my fault Da had a stroke, why he canna walk or speak or take care of that bloody farm. I let them all down and they hate me for it.”

Claire shook her head.

“You don’t know that for sure, Jamie. I’m sure they don’t hate you.”

Her soft hand reached out and brushed the tears from his cheeks.

“Da was right. I let the family down by leavin’.”

“No, you didn’t. You would have let them down if you weren’t true to yourself, Jamie. I think what you did was incredibly brave.”

Patting her shoulder, he nodded.

“Aye, perhaps it was. I dinna ken.”

“Is he still alive? Your father?”

He nodded slowly.

“As far as I ken, he is.”

Claire leaned forward and kissed him for a very long moment.

“I think you’ve built a good life in Vegas. You’ve got a good job and a nice apartment.”

And you, he thought.

###

He was finally asleep. She lay there, staring at him. What he’d just told her put him in a vulnerable place. Essentially he’d opened up his chest and shown her his heart. The question she had to answer now was, what would she do with it?

###

In the morning, they cleaned the cabin and gathered their belongings. He’d given her something last night and needed to know she understood that. Their unusual situation was in an odd state of limbo and a decision needed to be made. He didn’t need her to stay married to him, just for her to make the choice.

“Sassenach,” he said, folding up the tartan blanket.

“Hmm?”

“When we get home, do ye want me to make an appointment wi’ the courthouse? Get our situation
She looked up at him, surprised by his question. She hesitated before answering him.

“Well...I think everything’s fine the way it is, don’t you? No need to fix what isn’t broken.”

She wouldn’t meet his eyes, or even look in his direction as she said it, busying herself with tidying up. At that moment, he understood. She wouldn’t make a choice, couldn’t make that choice. It was clear as day to him that she cared deeply for him, but now he realized she’d not admitted it to herself yet. The last man she’d loved had betrayed her and thrown her insecurities in her face. He didn’t blame her or hate her for being afraid of committing. But continuing on this way wasn’t working for him. This ambiguous limbo wasn’t a relationship. He was in love with her, body and soul, and he knew he had to let her go.

“Perhaps when we get back, we can start to look at available apartments?”

“Sure,” she said, confused.

“Would ye make me a list of the things ye need? Between work and uni for you, I’ll have more time to look at listings.”

Nodding, she picked up her bag and headed out to the car. Holding his own bag with white knuckles, he took a deep breath and followed her out.

On their return to Las Vegas, Claire went about her days like nothing changed. In reality, nothing really had. But Jamie was determined to find an apartment that fit her list of requirements. It wouldn’t be easy, but he would do anything for her.

He unpacked their bags while she threw something together for a quick dinner. When he opened the closet door, he noticed a dried rose hanging on the back of the door.

“Sassenach, what’s this?”

She came in and popped her head around the corner. Pink flushed her cheeks and she looked away.

“Oh, that’s just… That’s the rose you gave me at your show.”

“Why on earth did ye keep it? I’d ha’ gotten ye a fresher one if I kent you’d do this to it.”

A frown colored her face and she huffed at him.

“It has sentimental value. Don’t you dare throw it away.”

“I willna, ye hae my word.”

“Come on, then. I’ve got dinner ready.”

Following her out to the kitchen table, an idea began forming in his mind. The rose couldn’t be left to hang in his closet forever, especially when he found her an apartment. Something would have to be done about it.

Almost two weeks after their trip to Colorado, he found the perfect place for her. It was in her price range with every one of the things she’d wanted. She came home after a long day of classes and exams, tossing her bag on the floor just inside the door.

“Please tell me you’ve got the whiskey out already.”
“I’ve done better than that, Claire.”

She frowned at him, curious.

“Well I haven’t showered yet today, but if you’re willing to put up with my stink, I suppose I can be persuaded to make wild love to you on the couch.”

Smiling, he shook his head.

“No. I found your apartment. It’s in a good neighborhood, no’ too expensive, and it’s got all the things ye wanted.”

She looked genuinely shocked, as if she hadn’t expected him to actually find the apartment. She thought the list that she had given him was so thorough that he would never be able to find one that fit her every wish. This was the only way he could think of, to get a final conclusion and a decision.

“Ooh… Y-you did?” He heard her voice falter slightly, and it almost stopped him from replying.

“Aye. We’ve an appointment to see it tomorrow.”

“That’s… That’s wonderful, Jamie. Thank you.”

“Here.”

He handed her the printout of the listing and got their dinner out of the oven, not being able to look at her glass face. She clearly had not been expecting this.

“It’s… It’s beautiful, Jamie.”

She read it over while they ate dinner, quiet. *Was this what the beginning of goodbye sounded like, he asked himself. Could he do it? Take her to that place and leave her there?*

When they visited the apartment, Claire’s face was a mix of emotion. She flitted between too many for him to keep track of. But she couldn’t deny that it was a perfect place for her, one that had no attachment to Frank, one she could make a home in. *Without me*, he thought bitterly. She tried to come up with any reason that this apartment wouldn’t work for her, wasn’t the right place for her. She even voiced one or two of them, but Jamie was quick to explain otherwise. He knew this was everything she’d asked for.

So she’d signed the papers and made the security deposit, accepting the key from the landlord. They began moving her things into the new apartment, mostly the things that she’d had in his apartment. She made arrangements with a company to move her larger items from her storage unit into the new place.

They lay in bed the night before she was to move into her new home, curled around each other as they usually were. He’d left one of the windows open, letting in the harsh neon light that burned eternally in this city. They were always closed, but tonight he wanted to see her, to memorize every curve of her face. The way her lips parted when she stretched, the way her hair went wild as she moved.

As he took in everything about her, he pushed the sheets off their bodies. He couldn’t help but smile at the sight of her wearing the shirt he’d first given her. With one finger, he traced the lines of her lips, down her cheek and drifting down her neck. He paused for a moment on her breast, circling her nipple until it roused, before reaching the bottom of the shirt.
Carefully, he pulled it up above her bellybutton, smiling at the gooseflesh that rose in his wake. Moving a little closer, he positioned himself above her and kissed her while his hand dipped between her legs. Her mouth opened and her legs spread a little wider as she began to wake up.

He ran one finger up and down before sliding it into her. She gasped and opened her eyes, meeting his own. Reaching for him, she clutched his shoulder hard.

“I thought I was dreaming,” she breathed.

“No’ this time.”

Both of her deep blue eyes rolled back as he added a second finger. She was as slippery as an eel and writhing almost as much. The hand that was on his shoulder moved to his hair and pulled hard. He kept up the rhythmic movements he’d begun, stealing her breath as she gasped and moaned.

“I want you inside me,” she begged.

“No, mo nighean donn,” he smiled against her lips. “I want to watch you.”

Her head dropped back into her pillow and her legs began churning, tangling in the sheets. The most exquisite squeaking noises emanated from her and it was beginning to get to him. His cock was starting to throb with need.

Then she cried out, yanking his head to one side by her grip in his hair as her body contracted around his fingers.

“Now,” she said, eyes snapping open. “I need you inside me now.”

“Technically I am.”

Her free hand shot between his legs and took a strong hold of him.

“Now, damn you!”

Crawling on top of her, he reached for the ever-present foil package and rolled it on quickly. She wrapped her legs around him and drew him in. Already her hips were jerking against his, reckless and needy. Watching her face change and smile made him wish tomorrow would never come.

Before he broke down and begged her to stay, he kissed her and held her face.

“Tha gaol agam ort, agus tha mi duilich,” he whispered.

With one last push, they shattered together. He kept his eyes open, watching as she relaxed into her satiated state. One final kiss, he rolled off her.

“Are you ever going to tell me what tha gaol agam ort means? You’ve said it before.”

“It’s nothin’, Claire. Dinna fash about it. They’re just words.”

Gathering her into his arms, he let the smell of her soothe him to sleep.

###

She couldn’t believe this was really happening. For two months, she’d lived with Jamie and been happy. Now here she was, moving the final box into her new apartment.
“I suppose that’s it, then,” Jamie said, pulling her from her thoughts.

“Won’t you stay?”

He shook his head.

“I canna, lass. Ye need… I’ve got things that need doing. And ye need time to settle in, make it your own. I canna help wi’ that.”

The silver key in her hand felt suddenly heavy and cold.

"You don’t... you don't want me to stay? With you?"

For a moment, she thought she caught a flicker of indecision. But he quickly masked it and gave her a smile.

"Ye ken where I live by now, Sassenach. If ye need me, I'm a few minutes or a phone call away. And besides. I'll still come by the bar after my show."

He was leaving. He was really going to leave her here in this apartment. Alone.

“Right,” she said, almost in a daze. “The bar.”

With the silver key heavy in her cold hand, she realized his brass key was still in her pocket. It was warm from her body when she dug it out.

“I’ll see ye in a few days, then.”

“I suppose you’ll want this back.”

His jaw clenched when he saw the key in her hand, but he accepted it. Why did it feel like she was losing a part of herself when he slipped it into his own pocket.

“Oh, aye. Thank ye. I suppose… Weel we’ve an appointment at the courthouse on Wednesday. For the annulment.”

“Right. I guess I’ll see you Wednesday.”

Then he stood up very straight and gave her a bow worthy of a king. Oh God, she thought. Why does this hurt?

When the door closed behind him, she thought she might cry.

###

The click of the door sounded too loud. It felt as if his heart had been wrenched in two. No, not in two. It was being torn completely from his chest. He would live his life without it now. He did want her to stay, badly. But this needed to be her decision, one she made with a clear mind. She'd gone from a poor relationship with Frank straight into an unexpected relationship with him and she needed to understand who she was now and who she wanted to be.

###

Claire stared at the door for a long time, the silver key still in her palm. It was so quiet here, far enough from the madness of the Vegas strip that she couldn’t hear the cars. Jamie really had found her the perfect place. It smelled clean, that unmistakable burn of bleach rolling out of the bathroom.
and from the kitchen floor. But it wasn’t right. There should be a tang of sweat and cooked food, like there had been in Jamie’s apartment.

###

The apartment felt small and lifeless when he returned to it. It had never been a large place, only somewhere for a perpetual bachelor to lay his head. Claire’s presence had made it all feel bigger, more important. She’d made it a home.

The spot where Uncle Lamb's Viking sword had hung for these last two months was barren now. Tears burned in his eyes at the sight of the naked wall. Jamie refused to weep over an antique weapon!

###

She was crying. Standing in the middle of her brand new apartment and she was weeping. None of this felt right.

“Pull yourself together, Beauchamp!” she yelled at herself. “You’ve got things to do!”

Still clutching the key, she moved around the apartment, opening random boxes, but never removing anything.

"Jesus H..." she whispered quietly to herself, the pieces coming together in her mind.

Suddenly, it all made sense to her. She knew that Jamie wanted her, cared for her deeply, as he’d told her that much himself. The initial shock of being brought to this new apartment was wearing off and she realized that he’d done this for her, just like everything else. He’d seen what she had refused to, and had given her the space to make the choice for their future.

She started to weep again. Her insecurities had gotten the best of her as he’d turned and left, and she’d wanted to start walling off her heart again, in hopes that it could spare her the pain.

_Did he want an annulment?_ They had skirted the issue so long, and she realized that he had let her have as much time as he could, but it must have been hurting him too. A renewed wave of grief came over her at the thought of causing him pain like that.

_Damn it all to hell_ she thought, becoming aware all at once that she was curled up on the floor. _How did she end up here?_ The last bit of light from the sunset was shining into her large windows. _How long had she been staring into the abyss without seeing?_

###

Jamie had paced around and around, not able to sit still for more than a few seconds. He hadn’t had the heart to watch the sunset, remembering too painfully how the golden light had caught in her hair. It brought out the wee bits of auburn and the other beautiful shades of brown in her curls. Finally he forced himself to go to sleep, or at least try. “Ye’ll never sleep if ye dinna go through yer regular routine, mo chridhe,” his mother’s voice echoed in his thoughts.

Her side of the bed felt too cold, too empty. So he rolled back to his regular side. After a few restless minutes, he switched his pillow for the one she’d used. Christ it still smelled of her. Somewhere in the back of his mind as he floated somewhere between waking and sleeping, he hoped Claire was settling in well. He hoped she would have a good night’s rest and that she’d be ready for whatever came next in her life.
She continued to sit, not having the capacity to do anything more than drowning in the sorrow of her situation. Why did you let him leave Beauchamp? she scolded herself. Why would you let him go when you love him?

She startled at the thought, though she had known it all along. She loved him. Well and truly did. She had been with Frank for years and thought she had loved him, but she hadn’t. Not like this. Not this all consuming fire that she had developed with Jamie.

Jamie… he wasn’t Frank. He never would be. She had been so hell bent on not moving forward with Jamie because she was afraid, the lack of trust with Frank tainting her ability to see what was in front of her. She had ignored all the small, important things; how perfectly easy their relationship was together. That was probably for a reason, she realized. He had attempted to prove to her over and over that he was committed to whatever they had and she had brushed it off, trying to keep herself safe. He’d given her so much time to figure out what she wanted, gave her opportunities to unwall her heart completely to him, and she had been to scared to do anything about it, hoping by ignoring it, the situation might just resolve itself.

She came to a decision soon after her realization. She needed him to know, she wanted to explain herself to him. She wanted him to still want her.

Sprinting into her “new” bedroom, she was stopped dead by a glass case sitting up against her pillow. Inside it, was her perfectly dried and preserved rose. Nearly dropping to her knees again, she wobbled towards the bed, afraid to actually touch it in case it was just an illusion. Her hand met the glass and she sighed softly, trying to clear her eyes of the tears.

“Oh, Jamie…” she choked out.

About to just leave the apartment and to hell with how she looked, she moved towards the door. Before she could leave however, she caught sight of herself in the mirror. You at least need to brush your hair, Beauchamp. She hurried into the bathroom, crashing through the drawers trying to find where her hairbrush had gone to and was halted in her tracks again.

That small blue box started up at her, had her counting backwards in her mind. Her breath rushed out of her in a loud gasp as she met her own face in the mirror.

“Oh my God… oh my God…”

####

Somewhere near three in the morning, Jamie was roused from his stuporous state by a pounding on his door. Las Vegas may never sleep, but that didn’t mean people should come around his apartment before sunup. Grumbling, he got out of bed and went to see who it was. When he opened the door, he thought for a moment he was dreaming.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, her eyes red from crying and still leaking tears. "That bed doesn't smell like you. Like us."

"Sweet bleeding Jesus," he breathed, afraid to believe she was really there.

"And it was too big without you. Jamie, can I come home?"

His mouth started speaking before he’d made a conscious decision.
"Yes! Oh thank God! I couldna sleep either!"

She nearly knocked him over as she leapt into his open arms, peppering kisses everywhere she could reach. He kicked the door shut and nearly sprinted back to their bedroom.

"Jamie," she sighed, her voice cracking under the strain of her emotions. "I love you."

Then he buried his face in her chest and wept.

_Gaelic translation: I love you, and I’m sorry._
Reconnecting after decisions are made.

It wouldn’t be gentle and they both knew it. Neither did they really care. Jamie was only vaguely aware of the clothes they were shedding, not bothering to take them off correctly. He heard the tearing of cloth as his shirt fell away, Claire clawing at his chest trying desperately to free him of all the articles in her way.

Jamie was just as frantic, having no patience for the hooks on her bra. Ripping the back clear open, the wee metal pieces pinging off of the floor, he freed her of it and tossed it haphazardly behind her. Immediately, he latched his mouth to her breast. She groaned loudly, spurring him forward with her hands clamped in his hair, needing him to be closer.

His teeth grazed against her breast before tugging gently on her nipple. She shuddered, holding him harder against her. Neither of his hands could remain idle, not while she was here with him. It was difficult, he discovered, to remove her jeans while still teasing her breasts. Perhaps it would be easier if he actually put her down on the bed rather than standing halfway in their room.

Her hair shot out around her head as she fell back on the mattress, lips red and swollen. This feeling was definitely a first for him. He couldn't think of a time when he’d wanted to ravage a woman as much as he did right now. The very thought of pausing to remove her shoes was a near physical pain. But he had to, if he wanted unrestricted access to her beautiful body. Which, of course, he did.

Finally tearing the denim away from her, he yanked at her panties as ruthlessly as he had her bra. They had no need for such things just now. She lay sprawled on the bed, chest heaving as though she’d just sprinted a mile. Struggling with the old sweats he’d worn to bed, he nearly fell on his arse trying to get them off. Claire lapsed into a fit of giggles, watching him fling the garment away.

The giggles died off abruptly when he rammed himself home. That was the truth of it, right there. She was home. Not that apartment, or that city, or even that country. Home was her. Her cry of pleasure brought him out of his moment of clarity and back to their connected bodies.

“You’re mine, mo nighean donn. Now and forever!” he said, punctuating his words with hard thrusts.

“Yes! Forever!”

He grabbed roughly at her breasts, pinching and rolling her nipples until she began to squeal. Sweat was beading and running down his back, burning as it fell into his eyes. But he wouldn’t take his hands from her body to wipe it away. Her hands didn’t remain idle, clawing up and down his back. The marks she left stung and he could feel every one of them. More, he pleaded silently. Mark me as yours as you are mine!

The bed frame beneath them was squeaking terribly loud, likely disrupting the neighbors. Somehow the thought that someone was listening to them drove him harder. Let them hear him
loving her. Let them know that she was his. Releasing his hold on her breasts, he put both hands down on the mattress.

“Look!” he growled at her. “Look at me! Watch me as I take ye! While I claim yer body as mine!”

With another cry, she opened her eyes and locked gazes with him. He felt the fire and intensity in her, allowed himself to be consumed by the passion in her eyes. Christ, he couldn’t keep this up much longer.

Laying his body on top of hers, he felt her soft breasts pressed against his chest. Her arms wove around his shoulders and he howled when her teeth sank into his shoulder. The sharpness of the pain shot him over the precipice. Distantly, he heard his voice shouting in Gaelic, though even he wasn’t sure exactly what he was saying.

Her mouth was moving, but the only sound that came out was a contented moan. As he slipped out of her and rolled to the side, he had a sudden realization.

“Sassenach,” he whispered as she moved closer to him, still kissing his neck and shoulders, everywhere she could reach without moving too much.

“Hmm?” came a quiet reply.

“We...I’m sorry, Sassenach. I didna even think...”

“What?” Claire asked, confused. “Jamie, what’s the matter?”

“I didna even think to use protection Claire. I was so taken with ye actually being here, all thought just left me.”

“It’s alright, Jamie, really,” she started, but he continued talking over her.

“JAMIE,” she said, louder this time so he would stop and listen. “It’s alright.”

“It’s no’ alright, Claire. What if...” She stopped him with her mouth over his.

She stared at him for a long moment. “I need to tell you something.”

“What is it?” he asked, alarm showing on his face as he took her in.

“Well...I’m pregnant.”

Jamie stared at her, dumbfounded. She reached up to close his gaping mouth with a finger and it broke him of his reverie.

“Are ye sure?”

“Well, I’ve not been to a doctor yet, but before I came here, I had caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and decided I at least needed to brush my hair so I didn’t look completely homeless, and as I was tearing my bathroom apart, I came across a box of...tampons...in the drawer. And I realized, I hadn’t even opened it. I hadn’t used it once since I came to live with you. I counted back and realized that our first night together, that was probably when it happened.”

Her face was flushed a deep scarlet, and he knew it wasn’t just from their fevered lovemaking. She had tried to keep eye contact with him, but she was overwhelmed, first by his acceptance of her back and now of her confession to him.
“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you straight away when I got here. I meant to, really I did but I was so happy to see you and when you said you wanted me, everything went from my mind and I just forgot completely and I’m sorry and…”

“Claire, hush,” he said softly. ‘I’m no’ sure I would have heard ye anyway. I didna expect to see ye, I thought I was dreaming. Ye’ve nothing to apologize for, lass.”

Her body glistened in the soft light filtering in through his blinds. Both of her eyes were dark enough to seem black, but he saw the tears welling in them.

“Are you happy?”

Those dark pools kept darting up to his and away before she turned her face away from him. With a finger beneath her chin, he brought her back to him.

“Aye, Sassenach. Aye, I’m verra happy. We made a bairn, accidental or no. It doesna matter when ye told me, only that ye did. It doesna make me love ye any less.”

A ragged gasp left her trembling in his arms. He held her until the shaking stopped, letting his fingers follow her spine up and down.

“You mean that?” she asked, very quietly.

“Mean what?”

“That you… love me?”

Taking her face between his hands, he forced her to look up at him.

“Have I no’ said as much?”

“Well… no, actually.”

Unable to resist her soft lips, he kissed her slowly.

“Tha gaol agam ort. I love you, Claire.”

She sat up abruptly, knocking his balance off and causing him to fall onto his back.

“That’s what that means?!”

He sat up as well, watching her glass face transform into disbelief.

“Aye, that’s what it means.”

“All this time and you… And I wouldn’t… Jesus H. Christ! Jamie, I’m so sorry!” Tears began sliding down her cheeks again. “I’m so sorry I hurt you. I didn’t mean-”

Placing a hand softly over her mouth, he shook his head.

“If I recall, I told ye that ye didna need to apologize. Ye returned to me in the end and ye’ve given me a great gift wi’ this bairn. Dinna fash any more about it.” Replacing his hand with his lips, he smiled at her. “Oh. And I love you.”

A visible shudder of pleasure moved through her body, drawing his eyes down its creamy curves.
“I love you too, Jamie.”

“Come here to me,” he said, drawing her into his lap. “And show me all the ways ye love me.”

Using his shoulders for balance, she wrapped her legs around him and settled down. At the feeling of skin against skin, he had a brief surge of panic. But her words came back to him, that she was carrying his child, and the fear vanished. With her arms around his neck, she kissed him as her hips moved in slow circles.

After the intensity of their earlier love making, this was docile, though no less beautiful. Each twist of her exquisite body created sparks behind his eyes. Love was lost and returned, all the sweeter for it.

“You said you claimed my body as yours,” she said, hips still making slow movements.

“Aye.”

“Then I claim your body as mine. Now and forever.” She paused to giggle. “For better or for worse.”

Talking ceased after that as she made love to him tenderly. He knew it was far too soon, but he imagined he could feel his child within her, growing day by day. An absurd wave of pleasure came over him as he thought about watching her swell, watching their bairn feed at her breast. Never before would the suggestion of fatherhood have made him so happy.

They came to a much calmer conclusion together, shuddering in each other’s arms. She gave one great sigh and her body melted against his. With a smile, he settled them down in their bed, tucking the sheets around her. As he began to fall into sleep beside her, he slid his left hand around to her stomach and let it remain there, shielding his bairn.

###

Jamie felt the warmth of the sun on his skin as he rose slowly up to consciousness. His body ached a bit and his heart felt heavy. Before he opened his eyes to the new day, he felt warm air blowing against his neck and a weight lying partly on his chest. Startled, he jerked and looked down to see the Claire’s wild mane of hair nuzzled under his chin. Following him, she started awake as well, jostled by his sudden movement.

“Christ,” he said quietly, almost to himself. “You are here.”

She looked up and smiled sleepily at him, that small gesture spreading warmth from his heart straight out to the rest of his body.

“Yes, I am,” she replied, her voice rough with sleep, but tender all the same.

He leaned down and kissed her gently before smiling.

“I’m verra glad to have ye back, Sassenach.”

“I should never have left.”

The heaviness in his heart grew and he knew what needed to come next.

“I’ve something to ask ye, Claire, and all I ask of you is to answer me honestly.”

He felt her body stiffen and the smile melted from her face. She couldn’t seem to respond verbally,
so she nodded for him to continue.

“Is this truly what ye want? Did ye come back to be wi’ me or just for the sake of the bairn? Because ye should know that I will take care of ye both, even if ye dinna want to be partners now. I wouldna turn my back on you for that.”

Claire felt a bone deep shiver run through her, ice replacing the blood in her veins. She turned to fully face him, squared her shoulders and made sure she had his full attention before she spoke.

“Jamie, I do want this. I want it so much. I couldn’t even breathe when I was alone in that apartment. I told you last night that I didn’t even realize that I might be pregnant until I was already getting ready to come straight to you. If I hadn’t thought to brush my hair to look somewhat presentable, I wouldn’t have even stumbled upon the box. I want you and I want us. I would want this no matter what, even when I wasn’t thinking I might be pregnant. If I have to spend every single day of my life proving that to you, I will. I’d do it and gladly.”

Her eyes were shining with tears, but she held them at bay. She wanted him to see in her face how much she meant every single word. She knew her face was clear as glass to him and she welcomed it. She wanted him to see that she wasn’t going to shy away from this.

He released a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding and his shoulders relaxed slightly. He smiled gently at her, but noticed the crease between her brows still furrowed in thought.

“What is it, Sassenach?” he questioned softly.

“Well… are you sure this is what you want, Jamie? I don’t want you to feel like you must be with me just because I may be carrying your child. I don’t want you to feel beholden to me in any way. I want this to be a decision we both make, together.”

He looked at her for a long moment, the truth of her words shining through her face all the way into her eyes. He was willing to do anything to keep her with him, and her impassioned declaration had only heightened that feeling for him. A strong shot of love surged through him, unable to take his eyes away from her face, her beautiful, untamed locks and the skin of her body, kissed by the sunlight. He reached up to touch her cheek softly before he replied.

“Aye, mo nighean donn. It is. It’s always been forever for me.”

Patting her round rump, he beamed down at her.

“Weel, if ye love me, I suppose ye’ll want to stay here?”

“Oh I didn’t even think…”

“Dinna fash. Let’s get ye fed and then we’ll go collect yer things.”

She had to borrow another of his shirts to dress in, though thankfully, her jeans were still intact. They smiled and bumped each other on their way to the kitchen, giggling like newlyweds.

###

Claire sat at the table, watching him cook breakfast. She insisted she wasn’t that hungry, but promised to make an effort. Jamie set a large plate of eggs, toast, bacon, and sausage in front of her with a smile.

“My lady,” he said, kissing the top of her head. “Once we’ve finished wi’ breakfast, we’ll go over
and get yer things. I’ll just call the landlord first.”

“Alright.”

She began picking at the food on her plate while Jamie went to the small living room for his phone call.

“Henry? It’s Jamie Fraser. Aye, aye, I’m good man. How are ye?”

He seemed to make friends wherever he went.

“Weel, that’s why I’m callin’... No, there’s nothing wrong wi’ the unit, only her situation has changed...” His ears burned red and he turned away from her, whispering something harsh into the phone. “I’ll thank ye to keep those sorts of comments to yourself, Henry. Aye, that’ll do. We’ll be over in an hour, can ye meet us there?”

Jamie said something in Gaelic and put his phone back in his pocket before joining her at the table.

“Ye must eat, Sassenach. It’s no’ just you anymore. There’s the three of us now.”

Leaning forward, he put a hand on her stomach, fingers caressing gently. His eyes brightened with tears for a moment before he coughed and sat back up.

“It’s my job to care for ye. I canna do much for the bairn right now, but I can keep ye safe and well fed.”

“I know, I’m just not hungry right now.”

“Did ye eat anything?”

She nodded and pointed to the empty spot where the toast had been.

“Eat a wee bit o’ bacon too? For the protein, aye?”

Rolling her eyes, she took the piece he offered her and ate it. While she finished the one slice of bacon, he’d cleaned the entire plate.

“If you eat like that,” she said collecting the plate and his empty mug of coffee. “You’ll gain as much baby weight as me.”

“I canna have ye feeling poorly about a situation I put ye in. Come on, we’ve got to meet wi’ Henry.”

Jamie took her hand as they walked up the stairs to the unit she’d almost lived in. His hand was warm and rough from his various jobs, but it was strong. Henry the landlord was waiting for them outside the door.

“Mornin’ Jamie!”

“Henry, thanks for meeting wi’ us on such short notice. We appreciate it.”

“Not a problem, shall we talk inside?”

Claire unlocked the door and all three of them went inside. She and Jamie sat on the small couch while Henry pulled a chair from the kitchen table.
“Here’s the way I see it. I don’t have any problem with you breaking the lease. You signed it what, twenty-four hours ago? But I’m also not worried because I’ve had at least four other people inquire about the ad before I pulled it. Two of them asked to be called if anything came available in my building.”

Jamie put his hand on her knee and squeezed it gently, smiling.

“That’s good news, Henry. I think I may owe ye a favor after this.”

Henry’s face fell a little as he nodded.

“I’m sorry Claire, but I can only give you back half of your deposit. I know that you took the deal with the first months rent free, and I’d usually keep the whole deposit, but since you’re a…’Friend’ of Jamie’s, we can work it out so I’ll send you half of it back once your check clears.”

“That’s very generous of you, Henry, thank you,” Claire said. “I appreciate it. We’ll have everything out as soon as possible.”

Henry grinned and looked at Jamie.

“Oh, it’s not generosity I’m interested in. It’ll be good to have a favor to call in to this guy here.”

Jamie rolled his eyes and stood, offering his hand to shake.

“Thank ye, Henry. I appreciate ye making this deal with us.”

After Henry left, they packed her boxes back into Jamie’s car and arranged for a moving company to take what furniture they took out back to the storage unit. They’d work out what to do with all of it later.

“So what do we need to do for the bairn?” he asked as they got back in the car.

Spreading her hand over her stomach, she smiled.

“We should make sure there’s actually a bairn first. Then I’ll make an appointment with my doctor if a home test is positive.”

“So a home test first. Alright, we’ll go get one.”

“Thank you,” she said, throat suddenly tight with emotion. “For being so good about all this.”

Taking her hand, he kissed the back of it and smiled at her.

“We’re in this together.”

Back home in their apartment, she drank a few glasses of water while Jamie waited patiently. Sitting on the toilet, she did her business and sudden fear clutched at her. Jamie knocked on the door.

“Have ye finished? Do ye need more water? Tea?”

“No, no I did it. Now we just wait.”

“Can I come in?”
“Sure.”

He came in and leaned against the counter, arms folded over his chest. The little unassuming stick sat on the counter between them and he noticed that she’d placed it facing down, so as to not be able to read the result without having to turn it over. It felt rather more like a giant beacon that would define their future rather than just a $15 plastic stick.

The timer on Claire’s phone sounded, but neither of them moved. Claire looked up and met Jamie’s gaze, fear potent in her eyes.

“What if...what if I was wrong, Jamie? What if this is just something else?”

“Weel, we won’t know unless ye turn it over and look, Sassenach,” he replied gently.

“I don’t think I can do it,” she responded, moving her gaze to the unobtrusive stick, but staring at it as though it might grow teeth and snap at her hand the moment she reached for it. Her gaze flickered back to him, pleading.

“I’ll look if you like, mo nighean donn. Just know that it doesna matter whether ye are or ye aren’t because we’re together now. It willna change a single thing about the love I have for ye, ken? Or the love ye have for me, right?”

He held her gaze as she shook her head.

“No, no it won’t change that,” she responded, voice smaller than he had ever heard it. “But Jamie, can you look? I just don’t think I can.”

“Aye, I’ll look.”

Claire scooted over on the bathtub ledge so he could sit between her and the stick. With one hand, he grabbed onto hers and held it tight. As he reached for the stick, he saw her scrunch her eyes closed; her whole body was shaking.

Taking a deep breath, he picked it up and turned it over.

When Claire didn’t hear anything for several seconds, she peeked open her eyes to try and read Jamie’s face, but it was entirely smooth, devoid of any emotion.

“Jamie...?” she asked, tentatively. “Wha-what does it say?”

He came back to himself suddenly at the sound of her voice and just looked at her. Then he squeezed her hand, and turned the test around to face her.

In large, easy-to-read print, clear as day, it read:

PREGNANT
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire start to plan for their future.

Chapter Notes

Since this was first published, I realized there was a significant scene that I forgot about. On my tumblr blog, it's posted as part 8-ish because it's too short to be a full chapter. I can't really do that here, so I've added it to the end of chapter 8, even though it throws off the flow a little. I've put it below *** so you'll know that's the new part.

Claire was still in complete and utter shock. Jamie had embraced her, dropping the small stick to the floor and lifting her off her feet. She couldn’t tell if the noises they were making were laughter or tears, but they were joyful nonetheless.

She had followed him out into the kitchen, perching on a stool to watch him put together supper for them. It could have been minutes or hours later when Claire came to, a delicious looking meal of chicken and rice with a salad placed in front of her by Jamie.

“Are ye alright, Sassenach?” he questioned her softly, taking care not to spook her. “Ye’ve been verra quiet.”

“I’m fine,” she replied, looking off into the distance. “I know that I had thought that I was, but it… it feels different now. Knowing.”

“Is it what ye want?”

She startled and looked directly at him for the first time since they’d left the bathroom, a masked look of anxiety coloring his features.

“Yes! I promise it is! It just feels so surreal that it’s thrown me off kilter a bit. I’m not having any kind of second thoughts.”

“That’s good. Ye didna have much for breakfast, so eat up.”

With her hand over her stomach, she wondered for a moment if the test had been a false positive.

“I will in a moment. I’ll be right back. Go ahead and start eating. I’ll just be a moment.”

After a quick kiss on his cheek, she slipped into the bathroom again and looked at the box of pregnancy tests. There were four more in the box. If she took them at intervals, it would give her the best result, right? Hoping Jamie wouldn’t notice how long she was gone, she took the second test and waited. A mix of relief and fear twisted in her gut: PREGNANT.

While she washed her hands, her heart began to race. Two tests could be false positives, couldn’t
they? Unlikely, but still possible.

Jamie was scrolling through something on his phone when she returned to the table. Glancing up at her, he smiled.

“Everything alright?”

“Yes, I’m just fine. We,” she put her hand over her stomach. “We’re both fine. Just had to pee. Again. Too much water.”

His eyes narrowed at her for a moment before he nodded, trying hard not to let a smile escape his lips.

“Good. Can ye eat now?”

They sat and had their dinner quietly, her mind whirling with possibilities. What would she do? Between work and school, her life was already busy. And now to add a newborn to that?

“Are you sure we can do this?” she asked, watching him clean the dishes. “Have a baby, I mean.”

“I think that ship’s already sailed, Sassenach. And I seem to recall telling ye that I’d be by your side every step of the way. What’s to do next then?”

“I’ll need to call my doctor and get an exam done. They’ll give me a test to confirm the pregnancy and then we’ll start the process of check ups and all that.”

Jamie nodded, eyes distracted.

“Ye’ll tell me when yer appointments are? I’ll no’... I don’t want ye to go alone. I want to come wi’ ye too. I want… to see the bairn. If ye dinna mind,” he said, looking down quickly as his face and ears turned pink.

“Of course.” He looked up to see a large smile gracing her beautiful face. “I’ll call first thing in the morning.”

Going to bed that night was comfortable. They moved around each other easily, neither feeling shy anymore. Jamie gathered her into his arms, one hand resting on her stomach again, attracted to it like a magnet.

“Sassenach, I’ve something I’d like ye to think about.”

“What is it?”

“Ye dinna need to give an answer right now, just give yourself time to think it over. But... If ye think ye wouldna be opposed to it, perhaps we might no’ annul our marriage. But I’ll leave it to you to decide. Just think about it for a time, aye?”

She nodded and laid her head back down on his chest, content. Around midnight, Claire extricated herself from Jamie and went to try another of the home tests. As she waited for this one to reveal it’s answer, her mind began to wander. Did she expect a different result? Did she want a different result? If it did come back negative, would she believe it? She had two previous tests that were positive. When her phone’s timer vibrated quietly, she turned the stick over.

PREGNANT

Tossing it into the small bin Jamie had for a trash can, Claire sighed and slid back into bed. Jamie
flinched as her cold feet moved between his, but he drew her close in his sleep. Without thinking, she reached up and brushed his hair behind his ear. That heartbreakingly soft smile pulled at his lips before sliding away again.

“You do break my heart with loving you,” she whispered before laying back down and going to sleep.

In the morning, while Jamie made another impressive breakfast, Claire stood in the bathroom and stared at her reflection.

“You're being ridiculous. You don't need to take those last two tests,” she told her reflection, sternly. She sighed and eyed the box. “But, I suppose if I'm in for a penny…”

When the time was up, she turned both the sticks over simultaneously. They both read the same result: PREGNANT.

Feeling relieved and fairly certain that all 5 tests couldn't possibly be wrong, she called her OB/GYN. She answered their questions and made an appointment for later that afternoon as they’d had a cancellation.

###

The drive to her doctor’s office was quiet, both of them still fraught with nerves.

“We’re here, Sassenach,” Jamie said, startling Claire from her thoughts. She looked over to him and he grabbed her hand. “It’s going to be alright.”

“I know. I’m just nervous.” She tried to smile at him reassuringly, but wasn’t sure it came across more as a grimace.

“Aye, well then. Let’s go.”

Sitting in the waiting room brought on more anxiety. There were a few women in there, all very clearly pregnant. Claire’s hand drifted unconsciously to her abdomen, rubbing small circles. Jamie held her other hand in his, his grasp reassuringly strong.

“Claire Beauchamp!”

She jumped and abruptly stood, pulling Jamie with her, and they followed the nurse back into the office. Claire provided them samples to test for pregnancy again and then was put into a room.

“Go ahead and put the gown on and the doctor will be in once she’s seen the results,” the nurse said, smiling at the couple.

She knew it had only been about 20 minutes, but it felt like a lifetime.

“Relax, mo chridhe,” Jamie soothed, rubbing her leg softly.

A sharp knock echoed from the door and the doctor walked in.

“Well, hello there Miss Beauchamp,” the doctor said to her, smiling. “Tell me why you’re here today.”

“Well, I-I think I’m pregnant,” Claire replied, blushing.

The doctor looked up and had a flicker of surprise cross her face at seeing Jamie sitting next to
Claire, but she refocused on Claire almost at once.

“And it says here that you took… 5 at home tests?”

“Um, yes.” The flush crept farther up her cheeks, a even darker shade of red forming there. “I wanted to be sure.”

“Don’t worry, it’s quite normal for expectant mother’s to do that,” the doctor stated with a smile. “So, let’s get down to it then, shall we? Your test results came back in and both your blood and urine samples show that you are, probably, pregnant. We need to do the ultrasound to confirm it, but everything is pointing to yes.”

Jamie’s sharp intake of breath caused Claire to turn her attention from the doctor to him. His wide grin was answered by her own and she could have sworn she heard him whisper ‘Thank God’ before he stood to hug her.

“By the date that you told us, it would appear you’re probably about 10 weeks or so along, but we’ll do the ultrasound to check and see if our due date matches with how big baby is. I’ll give you two a few minutes and then we’ll come in and get started.”

Claire’s face was still buried in Jamie’s neck.

“Thank you,” she answered, attempting to hold back tears.

As the door closed, Jamie pulled Claire’s face to look up at his.

“Ye took all the tests in the box?” he joked, light shining in his eyes.

“Don’t you make fun of me, James Fraser,” she pouted. He laughed again and kissed her pursed lips, feeling a smile return to them.

They didn’t have to wait long for the ultrasound. The warning of This will be cold! didn’t really give Claire any time to get ready before the jelly was applied to her abdomen. They both sat, mesmerized by the screen, but unsure of what they were seeing. It all just looked like a fuzzy TV channel.

Suddenly, a small, throbbing sound emanated from the machine.

“Oh, there you are!” the tech said, triumphantly, as a small form appeared on the screen. “There’s your baby!”

Claire’s vision blurred and she realized that the throbbing sound was that of her baby’s heart. She turned to face Jamie and saw that his mouth was slightly open and tears were in his eyes as well.

“Is that -” he choked out, then cleared his throat to try again. “That sound. Is it...?”

“That’s your baby’s heartbeat!” the tech responded, smiling widely at them. “Sounds good and strong too. Would you like a print out to take with you?”

They sat together in their living room, staring at the small, black and white printout of their ultrasound.

“I canna believe it,” Jamie said in wonder, fingertips just brushing over the top of the picture.
“I can’t either. It’s amazing. It’s so small.”

He turned to face her, full to bursting with pride and happiness.

“I found it amusin’ that your doctor, she looked a wee bit surprised to see me. But then, I suppose that many women, especially here, end up at those kind of appointments by themselves.”

“I don’t think it was just that, actually.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, she’s actually seen Frank before. Met him once as well. She’s been my doctor since I moved here.”

A sickening thought formed in Jamie’s mind.

“Claire, I have something I need to ask ye.”

She started at his abrupt change in demeanor and felt her whole body stiffen with anxiety.

“Yes?”

“Is there...any possibility that this bairn...that he isna mine?”

“What?! Jamie, I wouldn’t lie to you about something like this.”

“And I dinna think ye are. I’m only askin’ ye to think back and see. Could this bairn no’ be Frank’s?”

“Oh, um, no actually.” She gave a rueful chuckle that made him simultaneously relieved and worried. “Not only had Frank and I not been having sex in the couple weeks prior to my ‘discovery’ in his office, remember what he said, about me not making the time or effort? Well, I had a pregnancy scare a little over a year ago now, but it turned out on that occasion that I was wrong. We also found out that Frank can’t have children. I believe the phrasing the doctor used was that he was ‘shooting blanks.’ Rather unorthodox way of telling someone that sort of news but anyway. So, yes, Jamie. I know this baby is yours. I haven’t made it a habit of running about sleeping with other people.”

She said the last part with a tone full of distaste, her eyes hardening as she remembered that day she had walked into Frank’s office, so naive and unknowing. Though she really couldn’t be bitter about it now, not when that discovery had brought her to where she was now.

“I dinna want ye to think I asked solely for my own sake. I wanted you to be sure as well. It didna occur to me until just now, when you mentioned him. I’ve never been happier, Claire, and it still wouldna change anything.”

“I don’t think much now could change things,” Claire replied softly, leaning into his side. “It’s alright, Jamie. I’m not angry. You couldn’t have known about it. But I’m pretty sure that’s why she looked at you like that. She would have known I couldn’t have children with Frank.”

A short while later, he felt Claire breathe deeply and then falter, as if she wanted to say something, but needed to work up the nerve.

“It’s a little scary, don’t you think?” she asked, voice small.

“Aye. Terrifying. But dinna be afraid, mo nighean donn. What we dinna ken about this, we’ll
learn. Together.”

She tilted her head up towards his and reached for a kiss.

His eyes shone with joy, his face in a permanent grin.

“Now that we know for sure that I’m really pregnant, I think I might need to find new work.”

“Aye, I think so too. I dinna want those rowdy men starin’ at ye.”

She smiled a little but shook her head.

“No, it’s not that. Or not only that, at least. But it won’t be healthy for us, me and the baby. Not with all the cigarette smoke inside the bar. I won’t put our child at risk.”

His mouth was suddenly on hers, fingers sliding into her hair.

“What was that?” she asked when he released her.

“Sorry, Sassenach,” he said with a sheepish smile. “I only like the way it sounds when ye say ‘our child’.”

“Well it is ours. Yours and mine.” Her hands spread over her womb and she smiled. “Our little peanut.”

“I dinna want ye to worry overmuch about a new job, aye? Ye’ve got enough going on.”

Snuggling up into his side again, she sighed and relaxed.

###

Claire’s job at the bar had ended shortly after their first ultrasound and she’d been hunting for a new one relentlessly. The difficulty was finding something that would allow her to finish her schooling and that wouldn’t be too much for the baby.

Every time he thought about her pregnancy, he smiled. The lads at work were giving him a hard time about it since he’d put a copy of the ultrasound in his locker. He came home one night to see her at her desk, glaring at her computer.

“My mam always said if ye frowned at somethin’ too long, yer face would be stuck like that,” he said, hanging his keys on their hook.

“Oh! God, is it that time? I completely forgot about dinner, I’m so sorry Jamie.”

“Dinna fash. We’ll order something in. Tomorrow’s my day off, so I thought I’d take ye out for a nice date.”

She closed her computer and stretched. He wrapped her in his arms and hugged her close. Even if he lived forever, he would never tire of holding her.

“That sounds lovely. I think I’m beginning to go cross-eyed from filling out job applications all day.”

“Aye, and I dinna want ye to put the bairn at risk by working too much. So tomorrow we’ll just have a nice day. Now. What are ye in the mood for?”
“I picked dinner last week.”

After a soft kiss on her forehead, he went to the menus he kept in a drawer.

“Aye, but I’m no’ the one that’s pregnant.”

“You spoil me.”

“That’s my job, Sassenach.”

The next morning, Jamie drove them out to *Springs Preserve*. Claire’s mouth fell open as they parked, her eyes alight with excitement.

“Oh Jamie! I had no idea this was out here!”

“Aye, it’s no’ what ye’d expect in Las Vegas. It’s a nice place to get away from the city. Fresh air, aye?” One arm went around her waist while his other hand rubbed her stomach gently. “Good for you and the bairn.”

“Is that all you think about these days?” she said with a laugh as they headed into the botanical garden. “The baby.”

He smirked.

“No’ *all* I think about, no. But I think of it quite a bit.”

As they began exploring, Claire surprised him. She knew what the plants were before he’d finished reading their name card. More than that, she began explaining what they were good for and what they had been used for. She was a fount of knowledge about almost everything they walked by. An idea began niggling in the back of his mind as he watched her joy at being around these plants.

“I could kill for some chips,” she said, eyeing the cafe.

“Weel then let’s get ye some chips.”

She began digging into her plate and he smiled at her.

“Sassenach, I ken you’re still lookin’ for work, but I had an idea.”

“Oh?”

“What if ye applied to work here? Like I said the clean air would be good for the bairn. But ye seem happy here, ye enjoy being around living and growing things.”

For a few moments, he watched the thoughts form on her face.

“You know, that’s a great idea, Jamie.”

“I’ve been known to have them from time to time.”

She gave him a flat, though amused, look.

“I’ll have to see if I can speak to someone about an application. It would be nice to have regular hours like a normal person.”

“Aye, it would. And it would make me feel better too. I ken ye’d be safer out here.”
Jamie paid for their lunch and they went off to find someone who worked at the gardens. Once they learned the application was on the website, like everything was these days, they decided to go home.

It was the first time in days that Claire had felt hopeful about finding work, especially when it was something that she loved. As they snuggled into bed that night, whispering words of love to each other, she sighed contentedly. This was the happiest she'd ever been, and she couldn't wait to see what their future held now.

***

That was the last of it. They’d made arrangements for the furniture she wouldn’t need and had found places for all of her things. The closet and dresser were a little cramped now, but it somehow felt right. Uncle Lamb’s Viking sword hung back in it’s place, looking like it was finally home. Claire seemed happy too, to be back.

The only photographs she had of her parents sat beside the photos of his own family, though he’d moved hers to the forefront. Looking around, he was pleased to see how well her things fit in with his own. Hearing her soft voice drifting in from his - their - bedroom, he went to see what she was up to.

“That’s just about right, I think. I’m glad to see you survived being packed and unpacked and repacked.”

Delicately, her fingers drifted over a glass case as she stared lovingly at the rose inside. It was the same rose he’d given her when she’d come to see his show, the one she’d hung in his closet to dry.

“I was hoping ye’d like it,” he said quietly. She didn’t seem surprised that he was there. “When I left it there, I wasna sure if ye’d keep it as a memory of us together, or throw it against the wall. But I kent that ye had wanted to save it.”

“I thought I might faint the first time I saw it, lying on my bed. It clicked with everything else.”

“What did?”

She turned to face him, standing and putting her arms around his neck.

“That you loved me. And that you loved me enough to let me go, even though it broke your heart. I didn’t see it before, that I loved you too. Or, I did, but I was afraid to admit it to myself. But then it all made sense and seeing what you did for that silly little flower, well… I knew I had to come home then.”

He kissed her, long and slow, feeling the emotion swirl through him at her words.

“I’m glad ye did, and that ye feel that here. If ye wished, we could find a different apartment. One we pick together.”

Shaking her head, she smiled softly.

“Home isn’t this apartment, you silly Scot. Home is you.”
In case you missed it, I added a small scene to the end of chapter 8 and re-published it on March 21st.

Jamie put the finishing touches on the quinoa salad as the door unlocked. Claire hung her keys up and dropped her bag on the floor.

“Why is it so bloody hot here?” she asked, heading to the refrigerator for a bottle of cold water.

While she took a long drink, he went to her bag and pulled out the plastic bag of wet washcloths to rinse and return to the freezer. Claire already had the extra out and pressed against her neck.

“Because it’s July in the desert, Sassenach,” he said with a laugh. “Did ye drink enough water?”

“I did, I promise. What did you make?”

Setting the bowl on the table, he stuck the serving spoon into it and took a deep breath.

“Weel, it’s a quinoa salad wi’ cucumbers and chickpeas, and a light yogurt dill dressing on the side, to use as ye like.”

“That sounds interesting. And it’s cool, oh I do love you Jamie.”

He gave her a soft kiss on her cheek and smiled as she picked up a slice of cucumber from the cutting board. It was true, what they said. Women had a particular glow about them when they were pregnant and his wife was no different.

Claire had gotten through the first couple month of her pregnancy pretty much unscathed as far as morning sickness was concerned. She had heard the horror stories of mornings filled with vomiting and not being able to eat and thought she had made it past the point that it would affect her. She thought that. But sadly, she was wrong.

It came on all of a sudden. Just one bite of the cucumber. One minute she was fine, the next, she was sprinting down the short hallway and into the bathroom to release the food she had just put into her mouth. Jamie, who had been startled from his dinner preparation by her sudden departure, heard the retching coming from behind the closed door and knocked tentatively.

“Sassenach? Are ye alright?”

He heard her gasp before she answered. “Yes, I’m fine. Don’t come in! I don’t want you to see this.”

The water came on and he listened while she brushed her teeth. A moment later, she came out, her face still a little flushed.

“Are ye sure you’re alright, Sassenach?”
“Yes, I’m just fine. I’m perfectly alright now. Though, I think I might not be able to make myself eat the cucumbers in the salad…”

“Dinna fash. I’ll pick them out for ye and eat them myself. I made them big chunks, aye?”

She filled a glass with water and began to drink it while he fixed her a bowl without cucumbers. The rest of the evening was uneventful. They snuggled in bed, though he was hesitant to let it go further than that.

In the morning, he set aside a portion of the leftovers from the previous night for Claire’s lunch, taking care to pick out the cucumbers. Then he started getting together a small breakfast for her, knowing she had a very full day between her classes and work. He’d just buttered some toast and set it on a plate when she came out of the bedroom.

“Morning,” she said, grinning at him.

“Morning, mo nighean donn. Are ye hungry?”

“Definitely.”

Steering her away from the plate of eggs he’d fixed, he sat her down at the table.

“We’ll no’ see each other all day and I’ll probably be late wi’ work tonight. Let me feed ye properly, at least.”

Rolling her eyes, she folded her arms and waited. Finished, he filled her plate with the eggs and toast. She took one big bite of the perfectly cooked eggs and her hand went to her mouth. Immediately, he knew she would bolt to the bathroom again by the look on her face. This time he followed her in.

While she gripped the sides of the toilet, he held her hair back and out of her face until she finished retching. The sound of it had him worrying that something was wrong with the bairn. Finally, it was over. She sat back and slumped against the wall, her face covered in sweat.

“Are ye alright?”

“I am now.”

“Do we need to call your doctor? I’m gettin’ worried.”

Shaking her head, she closed her eyes and leaned against the wall.

“Unfortunately, this is completely normal,” she sighed, wiping her mouth and taking his outstretched hand to stand up. “Completely normal. It’s just morning sickness.”

“That doesna really explain you being sick last night though.”

“Well, they call it morning sickness, but really it happens all the time. It can happen any time of day and all through the pregnancy, although I’m really hoping our little one here doesn’t keep making me sick or it’ll be a long 6 months to go.” She smiled as she said this, caressing her very, very small bump. She would throw up every day, and gladly, as long as the baby was safe.

Jamie rubbed her back gently, still worried.

“And you’ll be alright at school? And work?”
“Honestly, I feel perfectly alright now. I’ll take it as easy as I can, I promise. But I’ll be fine.”

She brushed her teeth again and followed him back out. Opting for a bowl of cereal instead of the eggs, she finished and grabbed her lunch bag.

“What’d you pack me today?”

“Leftovers from last night. Wi’out the cucumbers. Picked them all out myself.”

“Such a gentleman you are.”

With a deep bow, he gave her hand a kiss.

“Lord Midnight the Blue, at your service, my lady.”

“I’ll see you tonight, my lord. Try not to break yourself at work?”

“Ye ken I fight the dark forces of Merlin. Sometimes that involves taking a blow. But I’ve got a fine lady of medicine waiting for me at home who’ll tend to my wounds.”

Car keys in hand, she smirked from the doorway.

“Just make sure to sneak her out the back door before I see her.”

He let out a hearty laugh as she left.

Thankfully his show had gone well and he hadn’t left with new injuries. Claire would be pleased. As he pulled out of the employee parking lot, he thought about her struggles with the pregnancy sickness. With a stroke of inspiration, he drove to a grocery store and bought her three red roses.

At home, Claire was bustling around the kitchen.

“You’re home!”

“Aye, I am. Sorry I’m late.”

“It’s alright. You’re here now. Hungry?”

With the roses in one hand, he wrapped his arms around her, presenting the flowers with a flourish.

“Starved. But I’ve a wee gift for ye first.”

“Oh Jamie! What’s the occasion?”

“Well, I figure you’re about three months gone now, aye? Three roses for three months. I canna do the work for ye or take this sickness for ye, but I can bring ye something to say thank you.”

Turning around in his arms, she put her own around his neck and blinked back the tears.

“I think that’s the sweetest thing anyone’s ever done for me. I didn’t think you’d kept such close track.”

“Of course I have, mo nighean donn,” he said, hand over the nearly invisible swell. “This is my child too. I want to keep track of how our bairn’s progress is doing. And to say I love ye more and more every day.”

“I love you too, Jamie.”
Claire set the table and served them both dinner. They ate happily while she regaled him with
details from her day, both school and work. Admittedly, he didn’t understand most of the things
she said about her classes, but she was happy. That was all he ever wanted.

Dishes in the sink, they cuddled on the couch for a little while. The three red roses sat in a vase on
the end table where Claire had put them.

“Ye ken what day it is, Sassenach?”

“Monday?”

He tried to keep his smile down, but he couldn’t. Monday was easily his favorite day of the week
for one very good reason.

“Ye ken how ye let me take a photograph of yer wee belly on Mondays?”

Heaving a sigh, she slowly stood and started to walk towards the wall he liked to take the picture
against.

“Honestly Jamie, I’m not even showing yet. At most, it looks like I’ve a food baby that’s settled
there. I don’t know why you want a picture of it. I just look bloated.”

“I want a picture,” he said, turning her slightly after she pulled her shirt up to reveal her belly to
him. “Because I want to watch you and the bairn grow.” He kissed her softly then pulled away.

“I want a picture because my beautiful wife is pregnant and glowing with our wee babe inside her.”

“I’m glowing because my skin is so oily and it’s shining in this light,” she retorted, though she
smiled at him when he pointed his phone in her direction, unable to keep her hand from touching
her near-flat belly.

“Take yer hand off there, Sassenach. I want to see the belly.” He smirked at her over the top of his
phone and took another few pictures. She rolled her eyes at him and stuck her tongue out, but let
him do as he pleased. Whether she would admit it or not, she also wanted to see her body grow and
change, the subtle swell of her belly get larger with their child.

“And ye are glowing. It’s not just yer face, yer whole body seems more alight. Ye look completely
beautiful. It’s not just the look of ye either, ken? There’s something all around ye now. I canna
explain it, but it’s there.”

He leaned down and took her lips against his, her face shocked but pleased at his assessment of her.

“I do love you something fierce, Jamie Fraser,” she whispered to him between kisses.

“I love you, too, mo nighean donn. Come on. Let’s go to bed.”

About a week later, Jamie was just getting things out to start on dinner when Claire suddenly
pushed back from her desk. She’d been studying for an exam all afternoon on her day off and he’d
been trying to give her space. He’d been taking careful note about what different foods set off her
nausea and had avoided using them at all costs.

Pulling the refrigerator door open roughly, she began digging through the drawers, muttering to
herself.

“How do we have no cucumbers in this whole bloody apartment?!”
Frowning, he opened a jar and set it on the counter.

“Cucumber? The last time ye had any, it left ye puking yer guts out! I havena bought any in a week.”

She stood up and closed the door. He glanced at her just in time to see the tears welling in her eyes. Her bottom lip began to tremble as a red flush started up her neck. When her mouth opened, he thought she might yell. What happened was much, much worse.

“I just… Wanted… B-bloody cucumber…”

Then the dam broke and she shook with intense sobs. For a moment, he stood there in complete shock. His mouth hung open while she wept in the middle of the kitchen. He rushed to her and pulled her close, trying to find a way to soothe her.

“Hush lass, dinna cry. If ye want a cucumber, I’ll go and fetch ye one. Dinna cry, mo nighean donn. I’ll fetch ye a whole bushel if ye wish.”

Slowly, her head came up from his chest, her blue eyes amazingly bright from her tears.

“W-would y-you?” she stammered between hiccups.

“Aye, lass. I’ll go right now.”

“Th-thank you, Jamie.”

Considering her emotional state, he bought as many cucumbers as he could fit in the produce bag at the grocery store.

She was on the couch when he got home, no longer crying, thank God. She looked a little sheepish but, as soon as she saw him, she hopped to her feet and began reaching for the bag.

“No, no, a nighean. Let me wash one for ye first.”

He rinsed and brushed a large cucumber off before turning to the cutting board. Claire stood directly behind him, eyes on the vegetable.

“Christ!” he yelped, moving back. “I didna even hear ye get off the couch!”

Her eyes darted from him to the cucumber and back. When she licked her lips, he nearly threw it at her for fear of losing his own fingers.

“Here! Take the damn thing!”

She held it, staring down at it for a moment. Quickly, she picked up the knife Jamie had been about to use and chopped one end off before taking a huge bite. It wasn’t until she’d swallowed the bite that she looked up and met his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Jamie. These hormones are… I don’t even know what to do with myself. I didn’t mean to start crying like that. I’m sorry I frightened you.”

“Dinna fash, lass. Ye didna frighten me. I worried I’d been an arse somehow and hurt ye. If I’d kent ye wanted them, I’d have bought them at the store today.”

“I know, and I didn’t know I wanted them until I got up from the desk. I promise, it wasn’t you at all. Thank you for getting some. It’s quite good.”
Cupping her face in one hand, he smiled fondly at her.

“All I want is for ye to be happy. If ye need me to get ye cucumbers in the middle of the night, I’ll find some way to make it happen.”

She looked up at him seriously for a moment.

“I want you to be happy too. I feel like sometimes… I feel quite selfish. You do all these things for me and…”

Jamie cut her off with a long, slow kiss. He rested his forehead against hers and waited until she met his gaze.

“Ye do plenty for me, Claire. You come home after long days and make us dinner, you always ken when I need ye, when I’m hurting after work and yer willing to rub my shoulders for me, when ye get up before me to make a coffee for me, ye’re doing sae well in classes and working and growing our bairn. Trust me, Sassenach, going to fetch ye a wee cucumber is but a blip on the radar.”

He saw her eyes get teary again and hugged her close.

“Ye are perfect, mo nighean donn. Yer everything I didna know I wanted until I met ye. Dinna think that yer not worth that.”

He heard her soft sniffle against his shirt and ran a soothing hand down the length of her back.

“I love you,” came a watery voice from below his chin.

“I love ye, too, mo nighean donn. Come on. Let’s having something to eat, aye? Aside from yon wee cucumber there.”

That earned him a small laugh and a thump to the chest, but her eyes shone up at him, filled with wonder at this man who could love her so much.

She helped him prepare the rest of their dinner and they ate cuddled up on the couch instead of at the table, needing to just be close to one another.

When they went to bed that night, right before he drifted off to sleep, arms snugly around her, he heard her whisper, “How did I ever get so lucky as to find you?”

He smiled and searched for her mouth with his, giving her a sleepy kiss before bringing her even closer and pulling her into sleep with him, safe and secure in each other’s arms.
Things were definitely beginning to change inside her body. She could feel it, even as she watched the changes. Her belly was beginning to really grow now, no longer appearing as if she’d eaten too much. Some mornings she would steal Jamie’s phone before he woke and flip through the photos he had of her belly. There were only a few of them, since they’d found out late, but he kept them in their own folder in his phone.

That was one of the best things about this situation. No matter how she was feeling, how many times she’d thrown up, or how many evenings she fell asleep halfway through her meal, he was happy. He was overjoyed to watch her grow.

She wasn’t getting as sick this month, though it still happened. Jamie was so good about making sure whatever had triggered her sickness didn’t make it onto the grocery list for that week.

He came home, several bags of groceries in his hands and a small bundle of flowers.

“You’re going to spoil me, Jamie Fraser. If you’re not careful, I’ll start expecting flowers every month.”

With a wink and a kiss on her cheek, he went to set the bags down. As he put their groceries away, she set the roses up in the vase where the previous three had been.

“Four roses for four months,” he said, coming up behind her. “Because I love ye more than my own life and I thank ye for carrying my bairn.”

The following day, she went to work as she usually did, armed with a cool water bottle and several frozen washcloths to help keep her cool. She’d had an idea brewing in her mind, but she hadn’t figured out how to execute it yet.

Jamie had done so much for her, given up so many things for her, and steadfastly held true since before she had moved out and back (if she was honest with herself), and she wanted to figure out what she could do for him. He wasn’t a materialistic man, he didn’t need things. She wanted to do something else, take him somewhere closer to home, but still have it feel like a getaway.

There were quite a few options that they could afford that were nearby, but she hadn’t been able to make a concrete decision yet. As she finished her shift, she watched a young family wander through the gardens. The man and woman held hands as they walked, their eyes content as they looked at each other. Their little girl toddled around them, eager to explore everything around her. Both parents looked at their child with such tenderness and fondness that Claire felt tears pricking her eyes.

The whole drive home, the image of the young family played in her mind’s eye. When she walked in the door, she stared around the front room with her mouth open. She wasn’t a messy person by nature, but with her odd cravings at times, she ate food just about everywhere. Jamie never complained about it either, which was comforting. Frank had hated if she’d had a snack somewhere other than the kitchen table.

But the entire apartment, from what she could see, was spotless. The carpet was freshly vacuumed, she could still see the lines in it, and everything had been dusted. When she put her bag down and headed into the kitchen for the extra washcloth Jamie kept frozen for her, she noticed that he’d even mopped and wiped down the counter. The bathroom was also probably wiped down and
scrubbed as well, if he’d gone to this much trouble.

He was moving about the kitchen as if some exciting tune was playing that only he could hear. As he did, he hummed something she didn’t recognize. Sometimes when he was in a really good mood, he’d hum or chant something he’d heard growing up in Scotland. Given the cadence she thought this thing he was humming might be along those lines.

A pot sat on the stove, Jamie stirring its contents. She thought she smelled chili powder, but wasn’t sure. He had a few other bowls sitting out on the counter filled with a few different things and she realized what he was making. Meatless taco salad. It was something he’d tried a few weeks back and she’d loved it. None of the things in it had made her sick or given her heartburn.

Watching him swaying to his own music, an overwhelming sense of fondness flooded her and she began weeping.

“Claire?” He turned suddenly, surprised to see her standing behind him and noticed the tears flowing down her cheeks. “Christ! Are ye alright lass?! The bairn?”

Unable to form words, she just stared at his blurry image and wept.

“Is it something in the kitchen bothering ye? I thought it was alright last time and ye liked it so much… If it’s too much I can make something else.”

“No! No don’t do that!” she said, suddenly finding the words. “It’s just… You’re such a good man, Jamie. I know you had training at work today and you still had the time to come home and clean our whole apartment and make dinner. I just… I’m just…”

When the words fled from her mind again, she reached for him and brought his lips down to hers. He was surprised at first, but quickly melted into her embrace and returned it.

“I love you too, mo chridhe,” he whispered when she let him go. “Are ye sure the bairn’s alright?”

“Yes,” she said, spreading her hand over the small swell. “We’re both alright. I was just a little emotional. These goddamned bloody hormones. I’m sorry.”

He shook his head, laughing, and went back to the stove.

“Dinna apologize for that, Sassenach. It comes wi’ the territory of you being wi’ child.”

She smiled. “How long until dinner is ready?”

“Only a few more minutes. Just need to heat the beans and corn back up and throw it all together.”

The idea that had been forming in her mind came suddenly to life and she knew what she needed to do.

“Alright. I just have a few things I need to do on the computer.”

Before she turned away, he took two steps toward her and stole another kiss.

Sitting down at her desk, she opened up her laptop and began researching Lake Mead. It was about an hour from their apartment and would be a perfect thing for them to do. They could get away without really going anywhere and have some time just to themselves. She knew Jamie would love it.

Friday night, she snuggled up to him and began playing with the hairs on his chest.
“Have you any plans this weekend?”

“Ah… No, I dinna think so. Why?”

“What if we went to Lake Mead for the day tomorrow?”

Craning his neck, he looked down at her, brows raised.

“Oh? For the day? We dinna have a boat.”

“No, but we can rent one.”

He leaned down and kissed her forehead.

“Aye, I’d like that verra much, Sassenach. Thank ye.”

“Well, this is sort of my way to say thank you actually. You’ve done so much for me since I told you I was pregnant. You’ve taken such good care of me, so I’ve got a whole day planned for us.”

“Have ye now? Been planning this for some time, then?”

She shrugged.

“Not really. It’s been brewing in my head for a while, but it only just fell into place.”

“I look forward to seeing what ye’ve planned for us, then.”

With a smile, she hugged him tightly and relaxed into sleep.

The following morning, she packed a few things into a large bag and they drove out to Lake Mead. They picked up their rental boat and Jamie set out to find a spot of beach just for them. It was hot, but being out on the lake was more fun than she’d expected. She stayed under the awning with him while he drove the boat around.

He looked good out here, dressed only in his swim trunks as he’d shed his shirt as soon as they’d gotten on the boat. She wore the only swimsuit she owned, but had put his shirt on over it.

“It’s a beautiful day,” he said, staring out at the blue water.

“It really is. I was worried it might rain, but it looks like the sky has cleared up.”

“Aye. Thank ye, Sassenach. This is a verra nice thing to do.”

They ate lunch on the beach, laying out on the towels she’d brought with them. It was too hot to be too near each other, but they were comfortable this way.

“We canna make love on a public beach, can we?” he asked some time later.

Claire snorted.

“This corner might be secluded, but it’s not that secluded. See?” she nodded to someone flying by on a jet ski.

He sighed.

“Someday I want to take ye somewhere and make love to ye on a beach.”
“Why?”

“Dinna ken. Something I’ve never done and I suspect ye havena either. Always thought it would be verra romantic to do that.”

She smiled at him.

“You really are a romantic at heart, aren’t you?”

“Aye, maybe I am. Ye said ye had other plans for us today?”

“I do. We’ll need to head back soon so I can get started on our dinner.”

Nodding, he helped her up and gathered her into his arms for a very thorough kiss.

“Then let’s return the boat and head home.”

On the drive back, she dozed off a little. Jamie woke her when they got back to their apartment.

“Can I help ye wi’ the meal?”

“No, you can’t. Go and read or watch TV or something. It’s my turn to appreciate all that you’ve done for me.”

Pursing his lips, he grunted and went to the couch to read. She got to work on a full dinner for him. Pan-seared steaks, his favorite garlic mashed potatoes, and cheesy broccoli. The last time he’d had cheesy broccoli had been over a month before and it had ended with her vomiting in the bathroom. But she knew how much he’d loved it, so she made it for him.

When the meal was all done, she set the table and looked proudly at all she’d done.

“Christ Sassenach, this looks amazing!”

“I hope so. It’s all your favorites.”

“And the cheesy… Claire, ye dinna need to cook things ye canna eat.”

Shaking her head, she motioned to his seat and he took it.

“This is something you like, Jamie. I wanted to do this for you.”

“It isna fair for me to eat it and you to-”

“I made you these bloody cheesy broccoli to say thank you, damn it! Will you not just eat them?!”

He blinked and looked down sheepishly.

“You’re right. I’m sorry, Sassenach. I appreciate that ye made them for me.”

“Good. Now eat up. I have one last thing planned for tonight.”

After they finished, Jamie insisted that she leave the dishes for him to take care of the next day. Reluctantly, she agreed.

“So what are we to do next? Dessert, perhaps?”

The glint in his eye made her giggle a little.
“Maybe later. How are your shoulders?”

He moved them stiffly, as if his shirt didn’t fit him quite right.

“Still sore. But no’ so bad as they were a few days ago. Ye’ve a good touch.”

“Lie down on the bed. Take off your shirt and trousers.”

As he did, she caught the wince he tried to hide. No matter what he did, all of the tension and soreness from his work ended up in his broad shoulders. He lay down on their bed arms folded beneath the pillow she’d moved for him.

“I’m glad we did this today,” she said, running her hands up his back.

He shivered a little, gooseflesh rippling over him.

“Aye, me too. It’s always good to get away wi’ you. Helps to get away from the city and the strip. Sometimes I think…”

Squeezing the bottle of oil, which she’d gotten specifically with this in mind, onto his back, she began to work it into his muscles.

“Think what?”

“You’ll think I’m daft.”

“I live with you. I already know you’re daft.”

One blue eye opened a crack to glare at her. She smiled at it and started digging her fingers into his tense back.

“Weel now I’m no’ gonna tell you.”

“Please? I like to hear what you’re thinking.”

A knot in his lower back gave way and he let out a deep sigh.

“Weel… Sometimes I find myself thinking that if the whole world fell away, I would be alright. Because I have you.”

Again, she felt tears in her eyes.

“Oh Jamie, that’s very sweet. I couldn’t think you daft for that.”

“Thank ye, Sassenach.”

Working slowly, she released the knots in his lower back and middle back before reaching his shoulders. His breathing was slow and even, but he wasn’t asleep. She climbed onto the bed and held herself above him to get a better angle.

Putting as much pressure into her hands as she could, she compelled the knots to release. Closing her eyes, she imagined the muscle held beneath his skin. She thought of how they should look, how they should feel, how they should move. Kneading and pressing in the places her hands told her, she continued until she felt the tightness give. Jamie let out a mighty gasp, his body flinching beneath her.
“Oh… Claire that…”

“Did it work?”

“Aye, lass. It worked verra well. I dinna think my shoulders have felt this good in weeks.”

With a pleased smile, she got off the bed.

“Good! That was the whole point of doing this, after all.”

Jamie rolled onto his back, staring up at her. His eyes drooped, but they glittered with desire and mischief.

“Though, now that ye have me thinkin’…”

Claire snorted, already opening the bottle of oil again.

“What? Are you going to tell me your cock has a certain stiffness as well?”

He smirked at her and shook his head.

“It doesna yet. But I think other bits of me could use yer touch.”

As she looked his body over, she thought it would be most enjoyable to start from the bottom and work her way up, skipping sensitive areas. With the majority of his body now covered in oil, she felt her own desire stirring. How could someone be so perfectly formed? In the waning light of the room he looked like a sculpture of a Greek god, in the living flesh.

Her eyes darted down to his crotch and she smiled. Living flesh indeed. Flesh that she needed to feel. Hands back on his chest, she made the mistake of looking up to meet his eyes.

She was drawn to him by some invisible force. He made no move for her and said nothing. Yet he compelled her to bring herself closer. Was it the eyes? Perhaps. But it was also more than that, as if his soul was calling to hers and it was calling back.

Before she even realized how close to him she was, her mouth found his. Both of his arms came around her waist then and pulled her up onto the bed. Feeling his body beneath hers shortened her breath.

At some point, he’d begun to pull her jeans off. Forcing herself to get off him for a moment, she stood and finished what he’d started. Jamie was not one for remaining idle, though. Hopping to his own feet, he pulled her to him and kissed her hard.

His skin was smooth to her hands, oiled as it was. She couldn’t help but smile when his hands found her buttocks, squeezing them excitedly. Then he pushed her panties off before removing his boxers.

“I must have ye now, Claire,” he said, voice strained with his desire.

“Then have me,” she answered.

He brought her back into his arms and began to tug at her shirt. She shied away from him, pulling it back down. His brow furrowed at her, eyes narrowing in question.

“Just leave it.”
“And no’ see your beautiful body in all it’s naked glory? I think not, Sassenach. Off wi’ it.”

Reaching for it again, he had her stomach exposed before she started to pull it back down. For a moment, she thought about insisting, but that would lead to questions. Instead, she lifted her arms so he could take the last bit of covering from her.

He laid her down on their bed, pausing briefly to kiss her stomach. Then he moved back up to kiss her lips.

“Thank ye, Claire, for all you’ve done today. Taking me out for a day on the lake, cooking me a verra fine dinner, even wi’ things ye couldna eat. And then ye tend my body? I’ve never kent a woman like you.”

“I don’t think there’s ever been a woman quite like me before,” she sighed before stroking his face. “Or a man quite like you.”

“I’m glad I found ye.”

She opened her mouth to say something back, but was cut off by his sudden thrust. Whatever she’d done to help relieve the tension in his back and shoulders had clearly made him feel better. He moved with a frenzy she hadn’t felt in some time, like he was making love to her for the first time.

Her legs couldn’t lock around him, constantly slipping off his body from the oil as much as his vigor. She let her head fall back onto the pillow. His lips visited her neck, biting gently. Her back arched off the bed in response, hands clawing at his back uselessly as they slipped and slid against his skin. Lifting her head up, she bit his neck in kind, spurring him to rear up and continue his merciless attack on her body, hands exploring every piece of her as she did the same.

Overwhelmed by the animalistic feelings aroused in him, he pushed on, growling into Claire’s ear, “Ye’re mine, mo nighean donn. Now and forever, yer mine.”

He gripped her hips to hold her body in position while he continued on. The end was coming nearer, her body preparing for that release it needed desperately. Taking a grip on his hair, she pulled him back down to her and bit his shoulder hard to mute her scream. Then he too cried out, his own body bucking against hers.

They lay together for several minutes, neither able to move after the climax faded. Jamie gave her a very sweet kiss before rolling onto his side. She curled up in his arms, observing the bright red mark she’d left him.

“Sorry about that one,” she said quietly, poking it.

He hissed a little.

“Dinna fash. Was worth a little pain to hear ye squeak like that.”

With a contented sigh, she pressed her ear to his chest and let his steady heartbeat sing her to sleep.

###

The following night, Jamie was nudged awake by his wife. Grunting, he forced his eyes open.

“Are ye alright?” he mumbled. “The bairn?”

“We’re alright. Would you mind… Maybe going and getting us some hot wings?”
“Are ye daft? I dinna even ken what the time is.”

With a heavy sigh, he looked at the clock on her bedside table.

2:31 AM

“Wings? Ye want hot wings? Now?”

She smiled sheepishly.

“Pregnancy cravings?”

“If ye start craving pickles wi’ yer ice cream, I’m moving out,” he said, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. “But if it’s hot wings ye need, it’s hot wings ye’ll get.”

“Thank you, darling.”

“Anything for you.”

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he tried to ignore the clock inside his car. He drove around for nearly half an hour until he found a place that was open and sold hot wings. As he pulled up to the window, his phone buzzed.

Hello darling. Could you maybe pick up some cheesy chips too? Thank you!

The speaker squacked and a woman yawned.

“What can I get you?”

“I’d like an order of hot wings and cheesy chips, please. Thank ye.”

“One order of hot wings and one order of nachos. That’ll be-”

“No, miss. I’m sorry. I mean cheese fries.”

“Hot wings, nachos, and cheese fries. That’ll be…”

Jamie rolled his eyes. He was too tired to argue with the woman at three in the morning.

He tripped several times as he went up the stairs to their apartment, but he kept the food from dropping. She was in bed, wiggling like an excited puppy. Her nose flared when he walked in.

“Did you get nachos too?”

“I forgot to say cheesy fries rather than cheesy chips, so she thought I meant nachos. But I got you proper chips too.”

Laying out a napkin on the bed, she pulled the things out of the bag and began shoveling them into her open mouth, still wiggling happily.

“Why did it take you so long?” she asked, licking hot sauce from her fingers.

“It isna easy to find a place that sells hot wings at three in the morning.”

When she smiled at him, he sighed and wiped the sauce from her chin.

“You’re a good husband.”
His heart leapt, hearing her say that, though he chose to keep that feeling to himself. Instead, he stole a cheesy and slightly spicy kiss from her.

“Here,” she said, setting the nachos out. “Share with me.”

“I wouldna dream of taking a pregnant woman’s late night cravings,” he said with a chuckle.

“Well this pregnant woman is sharing them with you. You went out at three in the morning to get them for me.”

With a nod, he gave in and split the nachos with her. They weren’t bad, he thought. When she finished, he gathered up the wrappings and took them to the kitchen trash.

Despite how tired he was now, the look of satisfaction on her face was worth it. He slid back into bed beside her and held her close. Her breath smelled like all the things she’d just eaten, but he didn’t mind.

###

After she showered in the morning, she went out to breakfast. Jamie beamed at her and kissed her cheek.

“Morning, Sassenach. Sleep well?”

“Very. Thank you for going out last night.”


She was a little surprised he wanted to take it right now. It was usually something he did after he got home in the evenings.

“Oh, um… Sure, I guess.”

Going to the same spot she always stood in, she tentatively lifted her shirt to expose her growing belly. It felt heavier somehow, like a lead weight had settled in her stomach.

“Look at ye! Finally looking verra pregnant. Christ, you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen!”

_Verra pregnant._

Those words echoed through her mind all through her classes that day and through her short shift at the gardens. She’d known that she would get bigger, of course, she wasn’t stupid. But she wasn’t sure she liked how she was starting to look now.

She was nursing a mug of tea when Jamie came home.

“Sorry I’m home late,” he said, locking the door behind him.

“It’s alright. I just had some leftovers for dinner.”

“Are ye alright?”

She finished the tea and nodded.

“Yes, we’re both doing just fine.”
As she reached to put her mug in the sink, Jamie made a move to feel her stomach. It was something he’d done regularly since finding out about the baby. But with her newfound discomfort, she shied away from him, backing into the wall.

A hurt expression moved over his face before he stepped back. Unable to meet his eyes, she maneuvered around him to her desk to attempt studying while he ate his own leftovers for dinner. When they went to bed that night, she chose to wear a long night dress. It felt a little old fashioned, but the cut of it hid the new shapes of her body.

Jamie observed her new sleeping outfit with lifted brows, but he didn’t say anything. He only gathered her into his arms and held her as they went to sleep. She let him rest his hands on the bump, the deep-seated awful feeling she had at pulling away from him before tugging at her heart. She knew the coming days and months would bring more changes. All she could hope, for now, was that she’d grow to accept and embrace them.
Chapter Summary

Claire and Jamie's relationship moves forward along with their unexpected pregnancy.

Exhausted, Claire opened the apartment door and took a deep breath. Amongst the aromas of food cooking, she thought she smelled something fainter, sweeter. Eyes springing open, she locked her eyes on the vase and saw five fresh roses in it.

“Welcome home, Sassenach,” Jamie called from the kitchen.

Grinning, she walked in and kissed him.

“Thank you for the roses, Jamie. They’re lovely.”

“Five roses for five months gone. Only a few left for me to thank ye for carrying our bairn.”

Leaning on him this way, she was acutely aware of her rounding stomach as it pressed against Jamie’s.

“You're welcome,” she said before pulling away from him.

They ate their dinner at the table and, for once, nothing made her sick. Before they went to bed, she did a little homework at her desk, though she couldn’t sit as close to it as she used to.

Tomorrow was to be their 20 week ultrasound and Claire had been waiting for this day for weeks. They’d finally be able to see the baby look, well, more like a baby.

“You know, we can find out tomorrow if this little one is a boy or a girl.”

“I dinna want to find out,” he said, turning a page in his book.

Her mouth fell open as she stared at him. It took a minute before he realized what she was doing.

“But I want to know the sex of the baby!”

“Weel, I dinna want to know. Don't ye want to be surprised?”

“I think this baby was a surprise enough, Jamie. Don't you want to get prepared?”

“Sassenach, people have been having bairns for centuries without knowing what they are and they seemed to do just fine getting ready.”

“Why can’t I just find out and you not? You can still be surprised then.”

Jamie fixed her with a flat look and closed his book with a sigh.

“Sassenach, have ye ever seen yerself try to keep a secret? I love ye, but yer face canna keep a secret from me. If you find out, ye won’t be able to keep it from showing all over your face.” He reached out and stroked her cheek and she leaned into him instinctively.
The pleading look on his face made Claire’s resolve waiver. She really did want to know, but finding out together would mean much more than having to carry it around with her for the next few months by herself.

“Oh, alright you bloody Scot. We won’t find out until this little peanut decides to make its debut,” she huffed, placing her hand on her belly.

Jamie twined their fingers together, resting over her wee bump. She suppressed flinching away from it and when she finally looked up at him, she saw that heartbreaking smile spread across his face as his hand moved theirs back and forth over her stomach.

“I love ye, mo nighean donn. I ken it makes ye a little disappointed,” he started, but was halted by her rising up on tiptoe to give him a peck on the lips that, as always, turned into something a little deeper.

“Compromise, right?” she whispered. “You and I have done a lot of it so far. It won’t kill me and at least I’ll know that you’re suffering right along with me.” She laughed, a soft, tinkling sound that Jamie loved. He lived for that laugh, the smile making her whole face crinkle in happiness.

He rested his head against hers for a moment, basking in the warmth of her smile. Leaning in, he kissed her softly, letting his hands wander over her. After he squeezed her arse, he began to pull her closer. But she pulled back and took a breath.

“Are ye alright, mo chridhe?”

“Yes, I’m… I’m alright. I’m a little tired though, could we maybe just snuggle a bit tonight?”

Watching her face for a moment, he thought he understood why she was hesitating. Her stomach was getting larger by the day and it made her uncomfortable.

“Ye dinna have to get naked, Sassenach. Leave yer shirt on, it doesna matter to me.”

She gave him a weak smile before pulling out of his arms.

“That’s alright. Perhaps another time.”

Leaning over the side of the couch, she gave his cheek a light peck and left to change for bed. When he joined her, he saw she wore the nightgown she’d been favoring lately. It covered her and gave her body little shape, which was likely what she wanted it to do.

As she lay on her side, the sheets tucked up around her, he gently eased in behind her, careful not to fully cup the wee swell of her belly. Instead, he opted for reaching for her hand, entwining their fingers together.

“Sassenach?”

“Hmm?”

“Ye ken I love ye, right?”

“Of course I do.”

He nodded, taking a moment before continuing.

“And ye ken I think yer beautiful, right?”
“I… yes, I do.”

“And that I dinna think yer fat or ugly? That seeing ye carry my child is the most amazing blessing ye could ever give me?”

She paused before answering, and gently brought their hands down to rest near her stomach.

“Yes, Jamie. I do. I’m sorry, I really am just tired tonight.”

“Aye, it’s fine, mo nighean donn. I just want ye to ken that I love ye verra much.”

She turned around, searching for a kiss.

“I love you, too, Jamie. So much.”

###

Sitting in the waiting room with so many pregnant women felt strange, but Claire was comfortable. He held her hand, his thumb rubbing the back of hers constantly. A door opened and the nurse called them back. He was excited for this, to see their child again. The last time it hadn’t looked like much more than a fuzzy blur on the screen. Claire had assured him it would look more like an actual human being now. His little human being.

Claire sat on the exam table fidgeting nervously. Jamie put a hand on her knee to keep her leg from bouncing.

“Alright Miss Beauchamp, how are we feeling today?” the nurse asked.

“Very well, thank you.”

They launched into the barrage of questions he couldn’t answer, so he just waited. As the ultrasound machine booted up, the nurse smiled at them.

“So are we going to learn the sex of your baby today?”

Claire shot him a dark glare before turning back to the kind woman.

“No. We’d like it to be a surprise, apparently.”

The nurse laughed at the scorned look on Claire’s face and patted her hand.

“Alright then, I won’t tell you,” she continued to chuckle and looked at Jamie as if to wish him luck with the decision they made.

Then she stage whispered to Claire, “The doctor will know, you know, just in case you decide to change your mind.”

Claire finally broke a real smile and sighed, looking back at Jamie again.

“No, no. I’ll wait,” she said, grinning at Jamie.

Hearing the heartbeat of their child never ceased to enchant them. Each little lub-dub brought tears to both their eyes. Blinking them back, Jamie tried to clear his vision. He wanted to see their wee bairn completely, wanted to commit this moment to his memory forever, and he didn’t want the memory to be blurry.
“Here’s your baby!” the nurse exclaimed, pointing out the head, feet and bottom of their baby.

“He looks like a wee person now,” Jamie said softly, staring in awe at the black and white screen. “I can actually see which end is his head now.”

Claire swatted at him playfully and giggled at his awestruck face.

“Well it’s a good thing that you didn’t want to know the sex of your baby, Miss Beauchamp, because this little one isn’t showing me anything! Turned away and legs crossed. This one is going to be a stubborn one for sure,” he joked as Claire chuckled.

“Well between her father and I, I’m not really surprised by that assessment.”

“He’s protectin’ his virtue is all. I wouldn’a want my baws splayed all over a screen for anyone to look at either,” Jamie said, seriousness coloring his tone but smiling nonetheless.

“Would you both like a printout to take with you?” the nurse asked, cleaning the gel off of Claire’s belly. As soon as it was clean, Jamie noticed she pulled the shirt she had on down as fast as she could.

“Can we have a couple please? Maybe 3?” Claire turned to look at him. “I thought maybe we could frame one and I know you like to keep one at work.”

“Aye, mo chridhe, whatever you wish.”

She grinned and reached for him, pulling him down to kiss her soundly.

###

"Jamie?" Claire asked, softly.

He turned his head away from the ultrasound picture to her, the sound of her voice alarming him.

"What is it, Sassenach? Are ye feelin’ alright? Ye look… concerned."

She took a deep breath and met his gaze.

"I think we need to talk about something."

He raised his eyebrow at her and she continued, trying to keep eye contact with him.

"I was wondering… well… at the ultrasound today, the nurse called me ‘Miss Beauchamp’ and it got me thinking. I was wondering if… if you wanted to stay married. To me." She kept her eyes on his, and saw his face mask over. The last time they had talked about this, she had brushed him off. She didn't want to do that now..

“We haven’t really talked about it and…” she trailed off, unable to finish her thought, too scared of what might come from this to be the one to go first.

He held her gaze, but didn't answer. Several tense moments passed between them, but his lips stayed sealed shut. He simply looked at her and she knew that she would have to be the one to break the silence. She reached into her bag and pulled something small out of it.

"Because," she started hoarsely. She cleared her throat and tried again. "Because I… I want to stay married to you."
She opened her palm and in it was a titanium band. She was staring hard at the band in her hands, not risking looking up at Jamie. A finger under her chin lifted her face to his; he was much closer than before. His face had a broad smile across it right before he leaned in and took her lips against his.

"Wait right here, mo graitdh," he whispered against her lips.

He got up and made a beeline for their bedroom and returned almost as quickly as he left, a small box in his hand. When he opened it, Claire gasped.

"I bought this for ye, before we left for Colorado. I thought," he paused, voice breaking just slightly. "I thought ye might make a choice then, but then, weel...then ye didna. But I kept it anyway, if only for the chance that I might be able to woo ye properly if we decided to go another way."

He took the small ring out, a solid band with thistle and interlace overlay on top of the solid metal.

"Oh, Jamie," she sighed. "It's so beautiful."

"Will ye wear it?"

"Will you wear yours?"

He smiled at the glint in her eyes, the need to mark him showing strong on her face.

"Aye, I'll wear it and gladly. I'm completely under yer power and happy to be there, Claire."

"I am too," she breathed. "I wouldn't change it. I don't want to change it."

"Well that's good to hear, Sassenach. Perhaps, as we dinna really remember our own vows, we could do a wee thing now?"

Taking her left hand in his own, he lifted it to his lips and kissed it softly. He took a deep breath and prepared to slide the ring onto her finger. The light caught the inside and glinted, hinting that something was inside it.

"Wait, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"Inside the ring. Is it engraved?"

Her eyes darted up to his and his ears turned a little pink.

"Oh, ah... Aye. It's Gaelic, ken?"

Turning the ring slowly, she tried to read the foreign language.

"What does it say?"

"Mo graitdh, mo chridhe fuil."

"And what does that mean? For those of us who don't speak Gaelic?"

"It means 'my love, my heart's blood'."
The smile on her face grew as she stared at it for a long moment.

“I, um… I had something put into yours too…”

Taking the larger ring from her hand, he turned it to the light.

“My knight,” he said softly. “The keeper of my heart. Claire, that’s beautiful.”

“So,” she cleared her throat before she broke out into tears again. “Did you have something in mind for our sober vows?”

“Aye, it’s an old Scottish tradition, if ye dinna mind it.”

“I don’t mind.”

He stared down at her hand for a moment before sliding the ring onto it slowly. She did the same with his, pleased that the ring fit him well.

“You’ll have to repeat the words after me. They’re in Gaelic.”

“Alright.”

Claire stumbled over the foreign words, her lips and tongue making the unfamiliar sounds. But he could see in her face just how hard she was concentrating to say them correctly. Or, as correctly as she could.

When she finished repeating him, he leaned in to kiss her gently.

“So,” she asked, searching his face. “What exactly did I just commit to? What did I say?”

“It rhymes a bit, in English. But what we said was ‘ye are blood of my blood, and bone of my bone. I give ye my body, that we two might be one. I give ye my spirit, ’til our life shall be done.”

“I think I like that better than regular vows.”

His eyes moved down to her rounding belly, but he made no move to touch it. She could see the longing in his eyes, but he didn’t reach out toward her. He placed a tender kiss on her forehead before standing up and holding out a hand to her. On some level, she wanted to grab his hand and put it on her belly. But she couldn’t. Not yet.

Once again, Jamie proved to her that he wasn’t like any other man. As much as he wanted to feel their child, to touch her and hold her, he would never force that on her. He recognized and understood that she was uncomfortable with the changes in her body. She also understood that he wasn’t asking her to talk about it either; just let her feel what she was feeling.

###

She was dressed in the nightgown again, but he said nothing about it. He had no right to, it wasn’t his body that was changing. All he could do was give her the space she needed and support her however he could.

When she snuggled close to him, he did all he could to keep from touching her belly. It took her some time to fall asleep, constantly moving around to find a comfortable position.

They lay in bed, Claire sleeping soundly in his arms. He looked down at her stomach, bulging a little through the night dress. If he touched the bairn now, she wouldn’t know, wouldn’t shy away
from him. But it wouldn’t be fair to her. Perhaps she didn’t want his touch right now, what right did he have to force that on her unconscious body?

Then she did something that surprised him. Still completely asleep, she took his hand and placed it on her stomach. He froze in place, afraid she’d wake and find him touching her and be angry. Carefully, he tried to slip his hand away from her, but her grip tightened. She mumbled incoherently, sleepily patting his hand on her stomach and snuggling closer, a look of complete contentment covering her face. The stern lines that had been carved in her brow as she tried to get comfortable and fell asleep melted away as she nuzzled against him even closer.

He looked down at her, careful not to jar her and moved slowly to kiss the top of her head. She mumbled again, her grip on his hand slacking, but he didn’t move it. He couldn’t. He was so happy to feel her and the bairn, feel close to them both like this, that he would steal the moments that she gave him.

###

Claire woke suddenly, feeling a ravenous hunger surge through her. These damned cravings would kill her one of these days.

“Jamie,” she said softly, nudging him awake. “Jamie?”

His eyes opened slowly.

“...’s the bairn…”

“We’re both fine, but…”

One eye snapped fully open.

“Do ye need hot wings again?”

She shook her head, a guilty look crossing her face.

“No, I just… Doesn’t chili sound really good?”

“She can say it does just at the moment.”

Biting her bottom lip, she looked up at him.

“I could kill for some chili right now…”

With a sigh, he started pushing himself up.

“Alright. I’ll go and see if someone’s open and selling chili.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“Ye dinna have to do that, Sassenach. I’m pleased to fetch ye chili if ye wish.”

Swinging her legs out of bed, she fumbled in the dark for something to put on her feet and a sweater.

“No, I’d like to come. I feel terrible, sending you out at odd hours like my personal servant.”

“Are ye sure?”
“Yes,” she said with a nod. “And this way I won’t be eating it in our bed. Won’t be finding bits of nachos in our sheets for the next week.”

“Ye make a verra fine point, Sassenach. Let’s go, then.”

Luckily, the chili wasn’t as difficult to find as the hot wings had been. They had her small bowl of chili within fifteen minutes.

“You know what else sounds good?” she asked as Jamie pulled out of the parking lot.

“Ye mean besides sleep?”

“Ice cream.”

“I didna ken pregnancy would give a woman such strange tastes.”

“Do you think we can find someone who does ice cream all night?”

“The place we just left does.”

Licking the spoon, she looked over to him sheepishly.

“I’ll split it with you.”

“No, no. I’ll no’ take any of it. I canna really eat at three in the morning.”

Making a U-turn, he pulled back into the drive through and ordered one chocolate frosty for his pregnant wife. The young man at the window gave them an odd look, which Jamie ignored.

“Thank you,” she said quietly as they headed home.

“I put ye in this position, gettin’ ye wi’ child and all. The least I can do is feed whatever bizarre cravings our bairn has.”

She grinned as she finished her strange combination of chili and ice cream.

###

The following afternoon, Jamie was sitting on the couch doing a little reading while Claire worked on some things for her classes. Just as he stretched, he glanced over to her and saw her flinch hard. She stared down at her belly in complete shock, her hand almost went to touch it, but stopped. He looked away from her before she could see him watching. Wondering what had caught her so off guard, he forced his attention back to his book, but continued to glance at her under hooded eyelids.

That night, they lay curled up together as they usually did. Once she settled and fell into deep sleep, she moved his hand onto her stomach. It was the only time she was comfortable having him touch her and he cherished the feeling. As he began relaxing into sleep, he thought he felt something. A faint flutter against his hand made his eyes snap open. Surely it was too soon to feel the bairn move.

With bated breath, he waited to see if it would happen again. When it didn’t, he was sure he’d imagined the feeling. He felt Claire softly push his hand against her, burrowing farther into his neck and pulling him with her down into their dreams.

###
Claire woke up in the morning snuggled warmly into Jamie's side. She didn't want to disturb him, she'd done enough of that the night before. Slowly, her eyes drank in her sleeping husband's face.

*Husband*, he was her husband.

He had been since that first night together, of course, but now that they'd made the decision to stay together and married to boot, that word felt so important. She glanced down at his hand and saw the ring that marked him as hers. She smiled, but inside her emotions ran rampant with worry about what *could* be.

No. No, she wouldn't let her thoughts travel down that road. Jamie was a good man, a man who loved her, a man who did everything in his power so she was happy and well cared for. A man who she wanted to be hers for always.

A need rose up in her so quickly and so strongly she couldn't completely stifle the sound of distress that came out of her throat. Jamie stirred and she froze, still wanting to watch him sleep. He readjusted and pulled her closer, hand drifting towards her abdomen.

Suddenly, she felt it. A soft push from the inside of her belly. It had startled her the day before, the feeling foreign and somewhat frightening. Truly there *was* a child in there. Of course she'd seen their little one on the ultrasound screen, but it was another to *feel* her. To *know* she was in there and moving around. It was a different kind of knowing. And it amazed her.

She willed the wee one to do it again, to prove that it wasn't just a gas bubble. She was concentrating so hard that she didn't realize Jamie's hand was on her stomach, cupping the small swell lovingly. He hadn't woken, but a pure smile crept over his face; the same smile that came over him when she brushed his hair back while he slept. It simultaneous melted and broke her heart.

She knew she was being unfair to him, not letting him touch her, but she couldn't wrap her head around the changes her body was going through. *She had to make the effort*, she thought to herself. She had to do this for him, as he did all these things for her.

At that thought, another idea sprung to her mind. Another way to show Jamie that she truly understood and was thankful for everything he did for her. As if in agreement with her thoughts, the little peanut gave another soft kick to her abdomen. She smiled and snuggled back into him, letting herself drift back to sleep for a little while longer.
Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire discuss honesty

Jamie was bone tired after a stressful day of training with new horses and some new additions to their act, but he still stopped at the store before returning to their apartment.

When he opened the door, he couldn't help but smile. There was Claire, dressed in one of his shirts and a pair of long shorts, dancing haphazardly around their small kitchen, humming along with a tune that was softly playing from her phone as she made their dinner. She turned when she heard the door open and a smile broke across her face when she saw what he carried. She danced over to him, happier than he'd seen her in at least a week.

"More flowers, Mr. Fraser?" she asked, giggling and reaching for the roses. "6 more roses?"

She reached up on her tiptoes and pecked his lips, wiggling away again. She got fresh water for her roses and placed them in the vase that all the previous ones had been.

"What's got ye so excited, mo nighean donn?"

She turned and smiled brilliantly again.

"Nothing. I'm just in a really happy mood today is all."

She continued to flutter around the kitchen as Jamie turned to open the fridge for something to drink. He stopped dead as he opened the fridge all the way. It was stuffed with all different kinds of foods. He turned to question Claire.

"Ack, Christ woman!" he yelled, surprised by how close she was to him, Cheshire Cat grin across her face.

"What?" she asked, innocently.

"Firstly, I didna think ye were quite so close. One day ye'll have to put those CPR skills to use if ye keep sneaking up behind me," he scolded her. "Secondly, why is there so much food in our fridge? Are ye preparin' for an apocalypse?"

Her cheeks tinged pink in embarrassment.

"Well, no," she started softly, not meeting his gaze. "I just went to the store today and I bought everything that I thought looked really good or that I might have a craving for. You know, so I don't have to wake you up at night to go and get things."

He looked down at her tenderly and stopped her fidgeting by pulling her close and lifting her face to his.

He kissed her nose and said, “It’s a verra kind thing to do for me, Sassenach, but ye needn’t have done so.”
"I wanted to. I hate waking you in the middle of the night."

"I'm none so daft as to think ye did this just for me though, aye? This way ye dinna have to wait for me to find the food for ye and bring it back home."

She flushed again, but held his stare this time.

"Well… maybe a little bit for me too. You're welcome." She smirked cheekily up at him.

He laughed and bopped her on the nose.

"Aye well, it's you who must do the hard work until the bairn is born and it's only right that I do anything I can for you. Get that in while ye can, Sassenach," he joked, smile shining through his eyes.

She stole a few more kisses from him before returning to prepare dinner. He stood behind her, subtly distracting her by running his hands over her back, sides and bottom (but mostly her bottom). He took extra care not to touch her ever growing belly though.

He had seen the look in her eyes when he took his weekly photos of her; she smiled, but not the carefree smile she had on now. That was something neither of them had brought up or talked about, her discomfort with her body. But he saw it in her and tried to give her the space she needed. He did appreciate that she still allowed him to take his weekly photos.

“Oh!” she said suddenly, standing up straight. “Did you feel that?”

Frowning, he looked down at her and shook his head.

“Feel what?”

Setting the spoon to the side, she grabbed his wrist and slid his hand around to her stomach.

He was still for a long moment before he felt it. A little *bump* against his hand followed by two more in quick succession.

"Was that…"

"Yes! She’s been pretty active today. Dancing along with me, I suppose."

"He’ll be a braw lad if he’s already kicking like this!"

Unable to resist, Jamie leaned over Claire’s shoulder and kissed her cheek. The bairn kicked again, lighter this time, and Jamie’s breath caught. He could *feel* it now, his tiny child moving around on his own.

That night, while Claire slept comfortably, he stared down at her belly. The bairn moved a bit at night, Claire had told him, and he loved the way it felt. He wasn’t sure the child could hear anything yet, or if he’d understand anything Jamie or Claire said, but Jamie couldn’t help himself.

"Hello," he whispered, leaning down a little to be closer. “I dinna ken if ye can hear me or no’, but I’m yer Da. I canna wait to meet ye, to hold ye in my arms and hear ye cry. To feed ye and change ye, teach ye all the things a father should. Like how to love a woman well, how to be a good man to her.”

Claire stirred and Jamie dropped his voice lower.
“No matter what happens in the future, you’ll always ken that ye’re my son and that I love ye, that I love yer Mam and she loves me too. So grow well, wee Fraser, and try no’ to give yer Mam too much trouble, aye?”

Jamie lay back, smiling when the bairn moved a little once more.

“Oh,” he said, sitting up and glaring down at the belly. “And could ye maybe stop giving yer Mam strange cravings in the middle o’ the night? She needs her sleep. So do I, come to think of it. We both thank ye for accommodating our needs.”

The next afternoon, Jamie sat at the kitchen table eating a sandwich when Claire came home from her classes. He glanced up to smile at her, but stopped when he saw where his favorite shirt had gone. True, she looked great in it, but more and more of his shirts were going missing lately.

“So that’s where my favorite shirt ran off to…”

She smiled at him and put her bag down beside the desk.

“Sorry, I couldn’t find anything else that was clean this morning.”

“Sassenach, I do need clothes to wear when I go out places, ken? Why do ye not just go and buy some new ones?”

“Because, those don’t smell like you. And I like that. And so does the baby.”

He sighed. It was impossible to argue with a pregnant woman, especially one as stubborn as his Claire.

“Claire, ye canna wear all my clothes for the rest of the pregnancy.”

“Sure I can,” she said, opening up the fridge. “You’re much larger than I am. Your shirts will be just fine.”

“And yer trousers?”

She refused to meet his eye as she sat down.

“That’s what I thought. What if we went out tomorrow and I helped ye pick things out that ye liked?”

“They won’t smell like you.”

“No, but I figure you’ll likely be much more comfortable.”

She took a big bite of the pickle in her hand and sighed.

“Your shirts are comfortable,” she replied, and received a stern look in return. “Fine,” she pouted, wiping the juice off her chin. “We can go tomorrow. But I’m still stealing your shirts until I start popping seams.”

“Fair enough, Sassenach.”

###

Staring at the maternity clothes, Claire took a deep breath. A part of her hated admitting that she needed bigger things to wear comfortably. Jamie was right, though. She couldn’t wear his shirts for
the duration of the pregnancy. Something about using the words ‘maternity clothes’ though made her feel older, like she was already someone’s mother.

That someone reminded her of her presence with a solid kick. Claire grunted and rubbed the spot, glaring down at her bulge.

“Would you stop that?” she muttered.

“Stop what?” Jamie asked, picking a blouse off a hanger.

“Not you. She’s kicking hard today.”

That heartbreaking smile made a brilliant return and he looked down at her belly.

“Aye? Ye said he kicks like a mule?”

“Yes, she does. Might make a good footballer if she keeps up with this sort of kicking.”

Taking the things he’d begun to pick out, she voiced a sudden thought.

“Did you kick your mother this bad?”

His jaw clenched and he shrugged uncomfortably. The subject of his family hadn’t really come up again since Colorado and she tried to avoid it. She hadn’t really meant to bring it up now, the question had sort of fallen out of her mouth before she could stop it.

“Dinna ken. Mam never said.”

“Really? Never mentioned it in passing, or while complaining about your stubbornness?”

“No,” he said sharply. “She dinna. And I didna ask.”

They shopped for a while longer, both of them picking things out for her to try on. Jamie waited patiently while she found things that she liked and that fit.

“I like that one,” he said when she’d come out in a floral blouse.

When she’d put it on, she hadn’t liked it. The fit was fine, but she’d never seen herself as a floral sort of woman. But this was the first one he’d made a comment on, so she put it in her keep pile.

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They left the store together with a few pairs of trousers and a few new shirts for her. As they got into the car, she rubbed a hand on her belly.

“I’m sorry I asked about your mum,” she said quietly. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

He gave her a weak, half-smirk.

“Dinna fash. I just dinna like to talk about them. Not since… All that matters is that you’re my family now. Everything outside that doesna matter.”

“How long has it been? Since you left?”

Both hands on the steering wheel gripped it with white knuckles and he took a deep breath.

“Almost four years. Please, I… I’d rather no’ talk about it at all.”

“Alright.”
The silence inside the car grew painfully awkward.

“Thank you for going out with me today.”

“Perhaps now I’ll have more than one shirt to wear now.”

“Don’t hold your breath for that, Fraser. She’s gotten used to your shirts.”

Jamie snorted.

“I think he’ll be better for not being trussed up in a shirt three sizes too small for him.”

“I suppose we’ll just have to see, won’t we?”

###

A couple of weeks later, Claire stood in the kitchen making supper for herself and Jamie. He would be home any minute and he’d be starving. Claire had a large pot of stew that was nearly finished and it smelled amazing. For once she wasn’t wearing one of Jamie’s shirts, though she’d been tempted to wear the Excalibur Staff shirt in his wardrobe. Instead she was in the floral blouse he’d enjoyed and a pair of comfortable maternity trousers.

“Will you be like your daddy?” she asked her swell, rubbing a hand over it gently. “Will you eat us out of house and home too? Though I’m sure he’d argue I’m the one eating everything lately.”

His key in their door brightened her face with a smile and she left the kitchen for a moment to see him come in the door.

The smile faded almost immediately from her lips when she saw him. He looked exhausted and in pain. His keys dropped when he tried to hang them up and he left them where they were, heading straight for the bottle of whiskey they kept in the cupboard.

“Long day?”

“Aye. Verra long.”

As he poured himself a stiff drink, she went back to the stew. The stray thought she’d had all day came back to her, prompting her to ask.

“I had a thought today,” she said as she stirred the stew. “Do you happen to still have your parent’s number?”

When the apartment grew quiet, she wondered if he’d fallen asleep. It wouldn’t have been the first time.

“Why the hell would ye want that?”

Glancing over at him, she watched as he tried to roll his shoulder, but stop when he winced. It must have been a really rough day at work. After dinner she would need to look at it to make sure nothing was wrong before they went to bed. He was probably just bruised and sore, but she needed to see for herself it wasn’t something worse.

“Well I just thought they might like to know they’ll have a grandchild soon. And maybe that you’ve a wife.”

Jamie scoffed.
“They’ll hate the bairn as much as they hate me. It’s my spawn after all.”

She flinched a little at his words. Never once had Jamie called their child anything except babe, bairn, or wee one. Spawn felt insensitive and uncaring.

“Jamie, I just think-”

His glass slammed down on the table, spilling a little over the sides. Echoes of old fights with Frank began running through her head, all beginning with a glass of something being put down too hard on a table.

“Dinna speak of what ye dinna ken, Claire. They’re my family, no’ yours.”

*Why was he acting this way?* Turning the stove off, she stared at him with an open mouth and wide eyes.

“Not *mine*?! Who the bloody hell do you think you are, saying that to me? I’m a Fraser now, aren’t I? Changed my bloody name and everything.”

His tired blue eyes rolled and he pursed his lips for a moment.

“That’s no’ what I meant. You’re my family. The Fraser’s are a stubborn clan, they hold grudges for years. It’s only that ye dinna ken what they’re like. Ye never had a fa-”

Cutting off his own words, he looked away from her, shamefaced. He didn’t need to finish his statement for both of them to understand what he’d nearly said.

She’d never had a family, she wouldn’t understand, being an only child and an orphan at an early age. It took her three tries to put the lid on the pot of stew, blurry as her vision had gone. Finally she got it on, but couldn’t look away from it.

“I’m sorry, Claire.”

“I just thought it might be nice for our baby to know her grandparents. Or for her grandparents to even know she exists. That’s all I meant by it, Jamie,” she said softly, trying to placate him.

He growled in frustration.

“For God’s sake, woman! Let it go! I’m no’ gonna call them so I can hear about Da’s stroke and how hard it’s been on Mam! It’s my fault! I did that to Da! And I canna bear their shame!”

Not once in all the months she’d known him had he ever raised his voice to her. The anger and pain in his eyes hurt deeply and she didn’t know what to do about it. Both arms wrapped around her swell as though to protect it from this strange man standing before her.

“Jamie I’m sorry. I didn’t mean-”

“I’m going out. Dinna ken when I’ll be home, so dinna wait up. Just go to bed.”

“I can leave a bowl of-”

The front door slammed shut and Claire stared at the empty apartment in shock. *What had just happened?*
Jamie sat at the bar, drinking whiskey like it was water, his mind racing with mad thoughts.

**Where did she get off telling him to call his family?**

**Who was she to think it would be good?**

*Didn’t she understand what a disappointment he was to them? The shame he’d brought to his clan by refusing his father and running away? He was a bloody coward and she wanted him to call them?*

*They would ask questions, if they didn’t hang up on him outright. And what was he to say? This is my wife Claire, whom I married while drunk and got her pregnant the same night.*

“Lady troubles?” the bartender asked.

He was a gruff man, built like a tank.

“Aye.”

“Always is,” he said, heading down to tend another of his patrons.

Jamie had no idea how long he stayed in the bar, drinking. All he knew was the bartender took his car keys and said he’d keep them until the morning. When Jamie tried to fumble with his phone to call a cab, the bartender did it for him.

He lumbered up the stairs to his apartment, still angry with Claire. She just didn’t understand what things were like. So she kept pushing and pushing to reach out to his family, to tell them about the bairn. But he couldn’t - wouldn’t - subject himself, or his wife and bairn for that matter, to the shame they carried. It was better for everyone if he stayed away from them, out of contact.

The front door squeaked a little, as it usually did, when he slipped in. For a long time, he swayed in the living room, considering the couch or his bed. But if he went in to his bed, he’d wake Claire and she’d ask where he’d been. She’d smell the whiskey on him and the cigarette smoke in his hair. A small part of his brain knew that it would most likely make her nauseous and he didn't want to do that to her either. The couch wasn’t nearly as comfortable, but at least it wouldn’t ask questions and demand answers .

###

She knew, by the look on his face, that he wouldn’t come to bed. It was nearly two in the morning, but she hadn’t slept, not really. She’d dozed a little here and there, but always woke shortly after her eyes had closed. For the first hour, she’d paced the living room, angry that he’d just left in the middle of their discussion. The next few hours, she’d sat on the couch and wept, afraid that she’d pushed him too far. After that, she was just worried, cradling their unborn child in her arms as her imagination ran wild.

**What if he’d been hit by a drunk driver?**

**What if he’d gotten into a bar fight and was in the ER?**

**What if he’d had too much to drink and gotten alcohol poisoning?**

But now he was home, struggling to undress down to his boxers, before collapsing on the couch. Dressed in her blue kimono-style robe, Claire eased out of the bedroom and approached him. She stood at the end of the couch, staring at him in the pale light.
“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I shouldn’t have pushed you for something you weren’t ready for. And it wasn’t fair to start that conversation when you were tired and unrested.”

His eyes, which seemed to glow in the silver moonlight, met hers, but he said nothing.

“Will you come home?”

“I am home.”

She shook her head, taking a deep breath before letting the robe fall. Ever since she’d begun to show, she’d been incredibly self conscious about her body. Jamie told her constantly that she was beautiful, but feeling everything grow and swell felt strange.

And she’d never done something quite like this before, not even with Frank. The curtains were closed and none could see them, but she didn’t make a habit out of walking around their apartment naked. Yet here she was, standing before her husband, naked and pregnant, praying he would come back to her.

That was the thing. He’d come home and said he was home, but she saw in his eyes he was still angry and hurt. She knew his mind had not yet come home with him, it was still wandering and thinking.

As she lifted her leg over him, he began to sit up. His eyes couldn’t decide what to focus on, her face, her breasts, or her belly. He hadn’t been able to convince her to shed all of her clothes in months, and seeing her bared to him felt new all over again. They flicked between all three, finally landing on her face.

“Claire, I-”

“Shhh,” she whispered. “Just come find me, Jamie.” She took his hands and placed them on her taught skin. “Come find us. We are your home, your family. Come home, Jamie.”

Then, pulling her mass of hair to one side, she leaned down and kissed him. It was tentative, almost shy, at first. But when her belly began to press into his, she felt him return. Wherever his mind had been, it was finally recalled back to her and his mouth opened to hers. The whiskey was still sharp on his tongue, but that only made her more hungry for him.

He sat up a little, moving so his back rested on the arm of the couch. As he did, his hands had pushed his boxers down before finding her stomach again.

“I want you,” she whispered as he kissed his way down her chest. “So much I can scarcely breathe.”

When she reached down to guide him in, he grabbed her wrist.

“Wait. Is it safe? For the bairn? He’s a bit bigger than the last time we made love.”

Smiling, she nodded and kissed him again, sighing a little as his tongue mingled with her own.

“Yes,” she replied when he let her go. “It’s safe. You won’t hurt us.”

Searching her eyes, he nodded and released her hand. His breath caught when she took him in, though his gaze remained locked with hers. Moving was awkward at first, with her belly giving her limited options. But Jamie seemed to figure things out, his hands dropping to her hips and guiding her slowly.
It felt an act of intimacy more than love, in some strange way. As if she’d pushed on a sore wound too hard and had caused too much pain. This was healing the both of them, reminding each other two whom they belonged. While he helped her move, he leaned down and took a nipple into his mouth. It was a strange sensation at first, with her breasts being so sensitive from the pregnancy. But after a moment, it felt good. *Very* good.

Jamie let out a soft choking sound as he came to the end of himself, pulling his head away from her breasts and letting out a deep sigh. Claire kept moving, so near to that final moment.

“You are my whole life, mo chridhe,” Jamie whispered, pulling her head down to kiss her.

He accepted her moan of satisfaction, holding her close while she trembled.

“I’m sorry,” he said, when her breathing began to slow. “I shouldna have yelled at ye that way. Or stormed out. That wasna fair to you. Forgive me?”

“Forgiven. I’m sorry too, Jamie. I shouldn’t have pushed you so hard. Forgive me?”

“Oh, my love,” he kissed her as he helped her to her feet. “I’ve forgiven everything ye have done and could do a long time ago. That’s what ye do when ye love someone.”

He would have carried her to bed, but there wasn’t a way to make that happen without making her uncomfortable. Instead, he walked with his hand on the small of her back, sliding into the bed beside her.

She was on her side, though she was facing him this time. He toyed with a lock of her hair, twirling it around and around his finger. Would their bairn have hair like this?

“Sassenach?”

“Hmm?” she asked with a drowsy sound.

“I ken what ye did tonight, coming out to me like that. I ken how much ye havena like yer body lately.”

Her eyes opened slowly and lifted to meet his.

“I’m sorry, Jamie. I just feel… How can you want me like this?”

“Because *this* ,” his hand moved to her stomach that was pressing against his. “Is what *we* made. It doesna matter how it came about. But when I saw ye standing there, naked as can be… Thank ye.”

“Thank you for wanting me, all fat and bloated.”

He laughed and shook his head.

“Ye are’na fat and bloated, Sassenach, yer pregnant. But even if ye were, so long as I am still breathing, I will always want ye. Thank ye for giving me that gift, letting me see yer body.”

Sexy probably wasn’t quite the right word to describe how she felt. But she felt better about her body now, seeing how much he’d enjoyed watching her.

“Claire, I must ask something of ye.”

“What?”
When he didn’t speak again, she sat up and met his eyes.

“What is it?”

“I must ask that ye give me honesty. That whatever ye tell me is the truth, no matter that it may hurt me or no. I ask that ye tell me when things bother ye, dinna take the burden upon yourself. A good marriage has good communication, I think. I kent ye didna feel good about yer body, but only because I ken how ye are. Ye didna tell me.”

She looked away, a little ashamed.

“Yes, I know. I’m sorry. I should have told you how I was feeling.”

“I canna read your mind, Sassenach, though your thoughts move across your face plain enough. But if ye can promise me honesty, and that you’ll tell me when things bother ye, I’ll do the same.”

“Even if you know I won’t like what I hear?”

He nodded slowly.

“I’ll never keep anything from you that ye need to hear. Like how beautiful I think ye are, carrying our bairn, keeping him safe. Or how much I love ye. But I’ll give ye the same honesty.”

“Thank you. That means a lot to me, after…”

She tried not to bring up Frank as often as she could, it wasn’t fair to Jamie. And Jamie made it easy to forget how Frank had broken her heart.

“Aye, I ken it does. And, weel… I suppose I should follow through wi’ that now, aye? I’ve been considering something that will affect the both of us.”

“And what is that?”

“I’ve been thinking about finding a different job. One wi’ better hours, more normal hours. One that doesna leave me bruised and hurt so much. I havena found anything I like yet, but I think it would be good for us.”

Her eyes went wide and she pushed herself all the way up into a sitting position.

“For us? You want to quit your job for us? Jamie that’s… Thank you for telling me this.”

“You and the bairn are my life now. I want to be a good husband to you and a good father to our child. I canna do that if I’m working shows every night and training horses. I want to be home, wi’ you. Though I willna leave my job until I’ve got something else lined up, ken.”

Grabbing his face in both hands, she kissed him hard.

“I love you. Thank you. That feels so inadequate, but all I can say is thank you.”

He kissed her softly and pulled the tartan blanket up over them.

“It is my pleasure, Sassenach. I mean to provide the best I can for you and the bairn. It might take time to find a good job, but I’ll find a better one.”

###
He was glad he’d told her that he'd been looking for new jobs, something where he would have normal hours. Something with set days of the week to work rather than the chaotic schedule of the show. He could spend less time working the afternoons and nights and more times during the day to be at home with his wife and child, whenever that child decided to make his appearance.

He smiled. Claire was so set that this baby was a girl, yet he was sure that it would be a boy. Maybe out of habit of disagreeing with her to watch her face scrunch together trying to hide a smile at his teasing. While she slept, he reached out and spread his hand across her swell. Her skin was so soft and smooth, stretched tight across their child. He was proud of her, shedding her clothes and insecurities for him. That familiar bump against his hand made his heart thud unevenly.

“I’m promise you too, wee-un,” he whispered, caressing the small spot that he felt moving. “I will find something better for all of us.”
Chapter Summary

The relationship between the Fraser's continues to grow. Claire struggles with her schooling and with the pregnancy.

“Miss Beauchamp? A word please?”

Claire’s instructor stopped her as she was picking up to leave class for the day. She was exhausted. She saw the woman’s stare lingering on her protruding belly; she had taken to wearing the maternity clothing that she and Jamie had purchased, but right now, she longed for the comfort and security of one of his big shirts.

Claire nodded and followed her professor to her office. She didn’t bother to correct her on her name change. She was almost done with school anyway, so it didn’t really matter much.

“Have a seat.”

Her instructor met her with a steely glare and stood before her, frowning.

“Do you recall what all of the instructors stated at the beginning of each semester of this program?”

Claire’s hands moved to cover her bump, shielding her child unconsciously from this woman’s stare and made eye contact, not willing to be brought down this easily.

“Yes, I do.”

“And?”

“And what?”

Her instructor sighed and pointed at her stomach.

“You’re pregnant.”

“I hardly see how that is relevant or anyone’s business but mine or my husband’s.”

“I see,” she said, eyeing Claire up and down. “You do realize how hard this is going to be for you, correct? You know that most women who decide to become pregnant during nursing school do not finish, and those that do very rarely pass boards. This is why we tell you not to make choices like that until you are finished.” She pointed again to her stomach and made a face akin to disgust. “How do you expect to have time to study for your boards with a newborn? You look as though you’re about to pop any day now. What are you going to do if you have this child before you’re done with these last classes? Who’s going to help you?”

Claire’s mouth opened and closed, trying to contain her rage. She couldn’t very well lose her temper when she still needed a good grade to pass the class.

“Am I not meeting the expectations of the class right now?”
“Well...yes, you are. You are one of the top students in my class. I just think…”

“So if I’m doing well,” Claire said, raising her voice above her instructors. “I don’t see what my being pregnant has to do with anything.”

“All of us are concerned that you won’t be able to finish. Children are hard work, Claire, and you need some support to get any of the daily tasks done. With school and work, I think you’ll not be able to complete all the assignments and projects before the end. As I said, you look as if you’re about to pop any day.”

“For your information, I am only 29 weeks pregnant. My husband is an amazing support system for me and I will finish. I’m still doing incredibly well and I’m working very hard to do so.”

“I just don’t know that you can do it.”

There was a hard silence that rang out through the room and Claire stood.

“Did you need anything else from me?”

Her instructor sighed.

“No. No, that’s all.”

“Then I have to be leaving now. I have a lot of studying to do. Good day.”

###

At home, Jamie had dinner simmering. He was starting to get a little worried as Claire wasn’t home yet as she was rarely late.

“Aye, Henry, thank ye. I truly appreciate the call,” he said, walking through the front room. Henry had called him with a job opportunity he had come across that he thought Jamie might enjoy.

“Of course. You’d mentioned you wanted a job with regular hours and a good schedule. This supplier’s got a spot open for a distributor. Not sure how being a ‘knight of the realm’ will help get the job, but I thought it sounded like something you’d be interested in.”

Jamie nodded, glancing to the door expecting to see Claire.

“Aye, verra interested. I thank ye. How do I apply for the position?”

“I’ll give the supplier a call, tell him I’ve got someone for the spot. He’ll interview you and talk to you about it, but I think you’ll be fine.”

“Would ye mind being a reference for me, Henry?”

Jamie heard a warm chuckle on the other end of the call.

“Not at all, Jamie. I’d be more than happy to be a reference. Do you have something to write with? I can give you his number.”

Jamie opened his mouth to respond, but the door opened. Claire was finally home and...she didn’t look good.

“Ah, I’m afraid I’ll have to call ye back.”
Jamie hung up and put his phone on the counter, worried at the expression on her face.

“Sassenach? What’s happened?”

Her face was completely flat, devoid of any kind of emotion. For once, he wasn’t quite sure what was going on behind her eyes. He took a cautious step towards her, trying not to spook her.

“Mo nighean donn, are you alright?” he asked gently.

She came back to herself all at once. She had dropped her bags on the floor and looked up at him with tears shining in her eyes and sighed shakily.

“No,” she whispered. “I’m not.”

“Come wi’ me. Tell me what’s happened.”

Leading her slowly to the couch, he sat beside her, holding her hands in his.

“Jamie you promised me honesty, yes?”

“Aye.”

“Then I need you to answer my next question honestly.”

“Of course.”

Another shaking breath, she looked up at him.

“Do you think I can do this?”

“Do what?”

Claire looked away from him then, her voice going soft.

“All of it. Be a mother, finish nursing school successfully. Do you think I can actually do any of it?”

Letting go of her hand, he held her face and forced her to meet his eyes.

“You are the most amazing woman I’ve ever known, Claire. I’ve never seen ye put yer mind to something and fail. You’re easily as stubborn as I am, and ye ken how bad I can get. If anyone in this world could be an amazing nurse and a great mother, it’s you.”

He maintained his gaze until he saw her relax. Gently brushing the tears from her cheeks, he smiled softly.

“Would ye mind telling me what’s brought this on, a nighean? You promised me honesty as well.”

“My instructor… She pulled me aside after class today. She reminded me of something we’d been told at the start of the program and said she didn’t think I could make it. What would happen if I gave birth before the end? What would I do? What kind of support would I have? And I just kept hearing that in my head as I drove home. She thought I couldn’t do it.”

“Ye have me, Sassenach. I’ll do whatever I can to support and help ye. If the bairn comes early, I’ll stay home wi’ him as much as I can.”
She gave him a weak smile and nodded.

“I know you would. You’ve been nothing but amazing through all of this. I can’t tell you what it means to me. And I think—”

Tears filled her eyes again and Jamie worried something else had happened.

“What?”

“You brought home new roses.”

He followed her gaze and turned to look at the flowers he’d put in the vase.

“Aye. Seven roses for seven months gone.”

“No no, not gone. Seven months started.”

“Aye, as ye say, mo nighean donn. Seven months begun on our bairn.”

“I know you’re excited to finally meet her, but you will not put me further into this pregnancy than I am. Not with all the things I still have to do before she gets here!”

Hands up in surrender, he leaned in and kissed her softly.

“My apologies, mo chridhe. Would ye like some dinner, then?”

“Yes. That sounds lovely.”

###

“I’m supposed to survive two more months of this?” Claire asked and groaned as she sank heavily onto the couch.

“Aye, and get a wee bit bigger too, I reckon.”

She turned her head and glared at him.

“If you make one more comment about my size, James Fraser, I’ll have you sleeping outside.”

“I think you are the most beautiful woman on the face of the planet,” he said, kneeling in front of her to kiss her stomach. “And I am verra honored to be in your presence.”

The baby kicked again and Claire winced.

“Did ye say the gardens would put ye on lighter duty now?” he asked, rubbing a hand softly over the swell as it moved around.

“Yes, they will next week. I’m training the new girl to take over some of my work.”

“Give me yer foot,” he said, sitting on the floor.

Frowning at him, she lifted one foot cautiously.

“Just give it,” he said in a flat tone. “I’m no’ going to bite it.”

“I should think that would be worse for you than for me…”
“Aye, it probably would. But. I was doing a little reading today.”

He set her shoe down very gently, as if it were made of glass, and pulled off her sock.

“About feet?”

“Aye. I was reading a woman’s blog through her pregnancy. She blogged through the whole ordeal, though she took a wee bit o’ time off to have the bairn o’course. But I’ve been reading in line wi’ where you’re at and she said her feet hurt like hell, ken? So I thought perhaps yours might too.”

“And just what are you going to do about it?”

Locking eyes with hers, he dug his thumb into the arch of her foot where the ache was. She flinched at first, not prepared for the feeling, but she forced herself to relax. Continuously, he kneaded her foot until the pain was completely gone. Then he repeated his ministrations on the other.

“Oh Jamie, that’s amazing.”

“Aye, the woman on the blog said it always helped her feel better too. Legs too?”

“Oh God yes.”

He laughed as he move his hands to her calves, massaging them as best he could.

“If ye keep makin’ noises like that,” he muttered with a smirk. “The neighbors will think I’m making wild love to ye.”

“Let them. I don’t give a rat’s ass what they think right now.”

Offering his hand, he helped her to her feet and lead her to the bathroom.

“You,” he said as he turned the water on. “Have been working so hard, both at uni and at yer job. And above all that, ye carry my bairn. Let me take care of ye for a bit.”

“Jamie all you do is take care of me.”

“Weel if ye dinna want a cozy bubble bath wi’ yer husband, I can just leave ye here.”

Claire laughed and glanced at her large belly and the tub.

“You really think we’ll both fit in that?”

“I said it would be cozy.”

“You’re the next best thing to a Viking warrior, and I’m more than a little pregnant with your huge baby. There’s no way both of us can manage in that without breaking something.”

The water was warm now, so he put the stopper in the drain and got the bath soap. He stripped out of his clothes quickly and helped her out of her own.

“We’ll just give it a go. If it doesna work, I’ll think o’ something else.”

With the water turned off, Jamie stepped into the tub and helped her in. He sat down first and she moved awkwardly and settled into the water with him. She sighed and leaned back against him for
a few moments.

“This is nice.”

“And the tub’s no’ broken yet.”

###

A few days later, Jamie filled up a basket with sandwiches, some snacks, and some cool drinks. Claire didn’t know he was coming to meet her for a picnic lunch, but he knew she’d love the surprise. She loved her job at the botanical gardens, the fresh air and the plants brought her such joy. It made him happy every time he saw it.

Her belly was getting quite large these days and he loved to watch her. She’d lost a little of her natural grace with her increased size, but she still amazed him. The fact that she kept up with a good job, a demanding school schedule, and had a healthy pregnancy had him falling for her harder every day.

###

Claire checked on the watering system one last time, pressing her hand into her lower back. The tour this afternoon would be nice, to be moving around the gardens rather than standing or sitting for long periods. But before that, she would have a nice cool lunch in the cafe. The baby started kicking, as if in agreement of getting some lunch.

She caressed her bump and said softly, “Are you hungry too, little lamb?”

“Well well,” said a familiar oily voice.

Taking a deep breath, Claire turned to face Frank for the first time in months. His eyes went wide as he noticed her belly, his mouth falling open. Claire’s eyes locked on the woman hanging off his arm. If she squinted, Claire recognized her as the ‘woman’ Frank had been with in his office. She looked different with her clothes on and her hair perfectly in place. The girl couldn’t be more than eighteen or nineteen, taking an Introduction to History course at UNLV.

“Hello Frank, she paused, looking from him to his arm candy. “Frank’s mistress.”

The woman gave her a tight smile, one that was polite without being kind.

“My name is Ginny, Miss Beauchamp.”

Claire laughed but gave no other response to the harlot.

“You’ve clearly thrown your life away after that Scottish bastard.”

“Excuse me?”

“There’s no way you’ll graduate with a newborn. The time you’ll have to take off for a child will just be too much for you, Claire. You can’t be a good medical student and a good mother.”

Fists on her hips, she glared hard at him.

“For your information, Franklin Randall, I’m at the top of my class and my child is perfectly healthy. And I didn’t have to fuck any of my professors to get there. Unlike little miss tart over here.”
“Excuse me?! I didn’t fuck Dr. Randall to be top of the class!”

“Was that just an added bonus?”

“Now, Claire,” Frank started, condescendingly. “I know that what you saw was shocking, but really, there’s no need to be rude.”

Claire looked at him for a long moment and then turned, refusing to be spoken to this way in one of the places that brought her peace.

###

*Miss Beauchamp.* That’s what the wee lass had said. Claire didn’t correct her, though he didn’t blame her. The last time she’d seen that woman had not been under the best circumstances and she had not made a good impression on Claire, though it was a lasting one. Basket in hand, he approached the small group with a large smile.

“Jamie!” she said in surprise, eyes going wide.

“Hello there, *Mrs. Fraser*. I’ve come to feed ye, if ye’ve a break coming. And allow me to say how verra beautiful ye look in the sunlight this fine afternoon? Ye look like ye have a halo o’ gold on yer head.”

Her cheeks flushed a little and she grinned widely. As she accepted a kiss from Jamie, she caught Frank’s face out of the corner of her eye, his mouth slack with shock and eyes wide.

“Well thank you, Mr. Fraser. And yes, I do think it’s about my lunch break.”

“Good, then we’ll- Oh! I didna realize ye had a tour group.”

“I don’t. They’ve just come to see the gardens.”

Jamie put his free arm around Claire’s waist and beamed at her.

“The gardens that have bloomed under yer careful eye?”

“The very same. You remember Frank and…”

“Ah! That’s the harlot then?”

“It is. Come on, darling. Your little girl is hungry. She’s really kicking up a storm today.”

Leaning down, he kissed Claire’s cheek and smiled, rubbing his hand over her belly.

“Then let’s get ye both fed. Always a pleasure, *Frankie*."

###

A week later, Jamie and Claire were out shopping for the new things they’d need for their little one. They’d successfully picked out the big things: a crib, a car seat, a pack-n-play. Jamie had thought only of the big ticket items they needed and not so much of the accessories. And there were many accessories.

“Oh, look at these little onesies!” Claire cooed at him, picking up all different outfits that seemed much smaller than he thought they would, like they were meant for dolls, not bairns.
Claire had started to wander away and he could see her picking up different items. As he came up next to her, she turned, arms now full of goods, and smiled brilliantly at him.

“Do we need all these things, mo chridhe? And in the different colors?”

She dropped her finds into their cart and looked up at him.

“Yes. Yes, we do. She needs toys and pacifiers and we need bottles in case I need to pump and…”

He leaned over and kissed her to silence her ramblings.

“Alright, we’ll get it all then if he needs it.”

They continued walking around, Claire leading the way and looking at clothing as she went along. She was trying to pick out gender neutral colors, still not knowing the baby’s gender, but it was impossible not to stop and look at the adorable outfits colored in pinks and purples.

Then, she saw them. Two little onesie outfits. One, a little black onesie that was made to look like a suit. It had a tie printed on it with a “white” shirt underneath it. The other was a pink onesie with a tutu sewn onto it and sequins decorating the entirety of the front. She was drawn to them like a moth to a flame and Jamie dutifully followed behind her.

She picked them both up and turned around suddenly, fixing Jamie with a hard stare.

“Remember when you didn’t want to find out the sex of our baby and I told you I would wait because I love you and also because I had to so you wouldn’t find out accidentally and we compromised? Well I’ve decided that this is the other half of that compromise and since I don’t know for sure what this baby is, I want both of these.” She looked up at him, steely eyed, and held up both outfits to him. “And I want some nachos.”

He couldn’t help but laugh at the determined pout marring her face.

“Aye, aye. Alright, we’ll get both then.” He kissed the top of her head and sighed, pulling her close into his side. “And then we’ll find ye some nachos.”

“Spicy nachos,” she corrected, looking up and batting her lashes.

“Spicy nachos,” he chuckled. “We’ll find ye the spiciest nachos around and then I’ll rub yer back when ye’ve got heartburn later on. May as well buy some antacids while we’re out too.”

“Such a planner, Mr. Fraser,” she teased, smiling up at him again. “But seriously, the baby and I need some spicy nachos.”

###

Claire had had a rough week. She spent all her time studying for her exit exams, finishing her classes that included a greuling clinical rotation, and working at Springs Preserve. She made sure she still made dinner for Jamie when she got home before him, but she was so tired that some nights he would come home and she’d be asleep, sitting on the couch. He’d gently wake her, get her to eat, and tuck into bed with her, feeling her melt completely into him. That had been the best feeling; Claire’s body completely slack and secure in his embrace.

Late into one night, Claire jerked awake, jostling Jamie in the process. He didn’t fully wake and she tried to still herself, hoping he would continue to sleep. She took some deep breaths and tried to relax. Surely she had been dreaming. Or maybe it was just the baby moving around. When was the
last time she'd felt the baby move?

She thought she felt a soft movement against her stomach and rubbed the small spot. But now she wasn't sure that it was a kick.

“You alright in there?” she whispered to her stomach, bending her head low.

No movement answered her and she laid back again, trying to relax all her muscles. The pain she had felt must have just been the baby. Maybe the baby was sleeping now.

A few more minutes passed and just as she was about to drift back into sleep, another pain shot through her. She tried to stifle the groan that accompanied it, but wasn’t successful. It had taken her breath away. Claire started to panic, breathing heavily. She desperately needed to remain calm and she didn’t want to frighten Jamie, but she didn’t know what to do.

“Sassenach?” came a sleepy voice beside her. “Are ye alright?”

As she was about to answer, another pain came and she sucked in a sharp breath. She felt Jamie sit up quickly beside her, reaching out to her.

“Claire? What’s the matter? Is it the bairn? Are ye ok?”

His words came out rushed, the sleep fading from his voice at once. She didn’t realize she was shaking until he pulled her close to him.

“I think…” she started, and breathed in tightly again, pain rippling through her abdomen. “I think we need to go to the hospital, Jamie.”

She tried to keep her voice steady, but her fear betrayed her as her voice cracked. Jamie was already out of bed, pulling his clothes on and getting something for her to put on. She couldn’t move; she felt like she was welded to the bed. ‘This can’t be happening. Not now. Please not now,’ she pleaded silently. ‘It’s not time yet.’

“Claire, I’ve got some clothes for ye,” Jamie said softly, reaching out to help her off the bed.

She moved as if she was in a dream. Everything seemed to be going so slowly.

“I need to pee first,” she whispered as she moved around him to the bathroom.

There wasn’t any blood, but the pain was still coming. Tears filled her eyes and her whole body quaked, trying to keep the intense anxiety from crushing her whole.

“Mo chridhe? Are ye done? We need to go now.”

He heard her sniffle and opened the door. Large blue eyes looked up at him, filled with tears and pure fear. He was able to stifle the sound of distress he felt rising, but only just. She wasn’t able to speak, but he knew what he had to do. He needed to keep calm for her. He needed to be a rock for her to hold on to.

“It’s alright Claire,” he said softly, reaching out for her and guiding her towards the door. “Come on, mo graidh, let’s get to the hospital, aye?”

The drive took longer than Claire thought it possibly could. She knew Jamie wasn’t driving slowly, but it seemed to take forever. All the while she waited to feel something, anything move from inside her. Why hadn’t she been paying more attention?
“Can I help you?” the receptionist in the Emergency Department asked.

“Um, yes. My name is Claire Fraser. I’m about 31 weeks pregnant and...I have been having some contractions tonight.”

“Alright ma’am, let me get you into a wheelchair and we’ll bring you up to the Birthing Center alright?”

“Yes...yes thank you.”

Jamie helped her into the chair and followed the receptionist to the Birthing Center.

“Here you are. Good luck dear,” the receptionist said, leaving her with the nurses.

“When are you due, hun?” one of the nurses asked.

“March 11th.”

“Who’s your doctor?”

“Doctor Moss.”

“Alright, Melissa is going to take you to a room. Do you think you can pee for us?”

“I’ll try.”

After settling Claire in a bed and getting her hooked up to the monitors, Claire and Jamie both breathed a heavy sigh of relief as they heard the baby’s heartbeat, loud and strong. Claire started to cry softly, rubbing her hand over the swell of her belly in gratitude. She answered all the questions the nurses asked of her and tried to calm herself as much as she could.

About 15 minutes later, a nurse walked into the room with two cups in her hands.

“Claire, how much water have you been drinking lately?”

She blushed sheepishly.

“Probably not as much as I should be. Why?”

“Well, your urine sample shows that you’re incredibly dehydrated. Many times that can cause Braxton-Hicks contractions. Have you been doing a lot of strenuous work?”

“Well I…” She cast a covert glance toward Jamie, who was eyeing her. “Yes probably a little bit. I told you, I’m in nursing school and I have my job as well.”

The nurse smiled at her, a look of understanding on her face.

“I remember what that was like. I’m going to give you some IV fluids and you need to drink these two cups of water. We’ll see if that helps with the contractions. Usually they’ll abate with some hydration and some rest. I know that’s hard with school, but try to do less and sit more. How much more do you have to go?”

“Not too much longer.”

“Well, your doctor wants you to take it easy for a while. We’ll see how the fluids work with the contractions. Baby still looks really good so we’ll just monitor for now and see how it goes alright?
Would you like a blanket, Dad? You both look as though you need the rest.”

Jamie smiled at this nurse who was providing all the answers Claire seemed to need.

“No, thank ye though. I’ll be fine.”

“It’s because you’re a furnace,” Claire joked, visibly relaxing and sucking down the water while the nurse started her IV and connected the fluids to her.

The nurse laughed and said, “If you need any more water, let us know alright? I’ll be back to check on you.”

“Thank you,” Claire said.

The nurse nodded and turned to go, but looked back at Claire for a moment.

“I got pregnant in school as well. It’s going to be ok, you know. I know it seems scary and it is really hard, but you can do it.” She had said it softly, conveying it almost as a secret shared between close friends in the night.

Claire’s eyes blurred over and she blinked back tears.

“Thank you,” she said again, softer this time, voice full of gratitude for the gift she’d just been given.

She felt Jamie’s hand entwine with hers and she turned to see him smile at her.

“See, mo chridhe? Everything will be alright.”

Smiling, she accepted his kiss and laid back, enjoying the feeling of Jamie’s hand running through her hair. She drank all the water she was given and was brought 2 more cups.

Eventually, Claire dozed off, but Jamie sat, ever vigilant, watching her for any signs of distress. After about an hour, the nurse came back in. Claire was more than willing to provide them with another sample and not long after, the nurse returned, smiling.

“Your strip looks very good. I haven’t seen any contractions. Have you felt anything?”

“No, they’ve stopped a while back. I actually was able to sleep a bit.”

“Excellent! Your sample was much better this time as well. The doctor has ordered that you can go home, but she wants you to follow up in her office this week, so I want to schedule you in, is that alright?”

“Yes. I’d like to see her too after this.”

“Good. She’s also giving you a note for work and school to try and put you into a lighter duty. And you also need to drink a lot of water. The rest is really important too.”

“I will. And if I don’t, I’m sure he will make sure I am.”

“That’s good. Sometimes we need the people around us to give us a little kick to remember to do things for ourselves.”

Claire smiled at Jamie as she was unhooked from the monitors and reached for his hand as they got ready to leave. He sighed wearily, but returned her smile and pulled her close, tucking her into his
side.

“Thank ye for all yer help.”

“Oh, it’s not a problem. Remember, lots of water and lots of rest.”

“I will. I promise.”

###

Back at home and back in bed, Jamie and Claire faced each other, pressed as close as they could be with her belly in between them. Claire was the first to break their silence.

“I was so scared.”

“I know, mo chridhe. So was I.”

“You held yourself together pretty well. I hope you do as well during the delivery,” she giggled softly and reached her hand up to his face, brushing away a stray curl of hair.

“I’ll be just fine, thank ye, Sassenach. You just worry about yerself and the bairn, ken?”

She giggled again at the indignant look across his face and pulled him in for a kiss. She sighed against his lips and pulled back to see his eyes.

“I love you… I love you so much.”

His arms came around her and maneuvered her to lie with her head on her chest.

“Tha gaol agam ort, mo nighean donn. Until the last breath leaves my body.”

Claire nuzzled in further, trying to meld into Jamie’s side and squeezed him softly.

“Even then, I think I’ll always find you Jamie Fraser.”

“Aye, I suppose ye will. Or I’ll find you. A stubborn lot, we Frasers are.”

She heard the smile in his voice and kissed his chest. Then a thought came to her.

“Tha gaol agam ort,” she whispered. He quirked an eyebrow at her.

“Remember the first time you said that to me? In Colorado? And then again before we moved me into that apartment? And you told me it was ‘just words’?”

He nodded slowly, searching her face. She looked up at him with deep sadness, that look she got whenever she got caught up thinking of the biggest mistake she almost made that might have completely separated them. After the night she'd had, worried about their baby, the dam utterly broke.

"I'm still sorry for that, Jamie," she croaked out softly, trying to hold in her tears and failing. "I do love you so much. I loved you even then. I was just frightened."

"I ken it, Sassenach. Dinna fash about it now. We're here, with each other. That's all that matters, aye?"

"Yes, I just… I just wanted… needed you to know. It was the same for me then as it is now."
Except maybe now I love you even more."

He smiled that bright smile of his at her, the one that made her feel she was staring into the sun, being bathed in warmth and joy.

"I've told ye before. It has always been forever for me, mo nighean donn," he replied as he gently moved the hair off her face to kiss her forehead. He wiped the tears from her cheeks and held her closer.

“Lay yer head, mo chridhe, and let’s get some sleep, aye?”

She nodded her head in assent and closed her eyes, breathing in the scent of him as he did the same, burying his face into her unruly curls, breathing deeply. He rested a hand upon her belly and said a silent prayer for his wife and unborn son: *Let them both be safe, my beautiful wife and our bairn.*
Fraser Bairn Watch: Month 8

Chapter Summary

Claire and Jamie during her 8th month of pregnancy.

With a yawn, Claire stretched and pulled herself out of bed. She’d taken a long nap while Jamie had taken care of some things at his work. Something about a new knight to train or somesuch.

A savory scent drifted into the bedroom and she smiled. Jamie must be home. Pulling the tartan blanket about her shoulders, she rubbed her eyes and went out.

“Ah, my sleeping beauty arises!”

“Why didn’t you wake me when you got home?”

He leaned away from the stove long enough to accept her soft kiss.

“I went in to make sure ye were still breathin’. But you’re eight months gone now and I thought ye could use the rest. I’m nearly through wi’ dinner, if you’re hungry.”

“Definitely hungry. Can I help with anything?”

“Aye, if ye want to slice the bread for us, it’s just there.”

Taking the bread knife out of the drawer she turned and found the loaf of French bread on the counter behind Jamie. As she took hold of the bread, she saw in the corner of her eye the vase had been refilled with fresh roses.

“I was wondering when you’d bring those home.”

“Aye, I ken I’m a wee bit late. But there’s eight there, for eight months. Thank you, my darling Sassenach.”

“At least she’s stopped kicking for a bit,” she said, rubbing her belly briefly.

Jamie laughed.

“Aye, I ken he’s been kickin’ a bit more lately. Perhaps it’s because ye insist on eating spicy nachos or chili dogs in the middle of the night.”

“At least I’m not making you go out for hot wings at three in the morning anymore.”

“No, no that’s true. Dinner’s ready, go and have a seat.”

They ate happily and Claire listened to Jamie talk about his day. He’d be taking some well deserved time off for the Christmas holiday, which she was looking forward to.

“Are ye ready for bed, mo chridhe?”

Stifling a yawn, she shook her head.
“No, no I’m alright. It’s still early. And I took a nap.”

“And you’re eight months pregnant. Go on and get ready for bed. I’ll clean up the kitchen and join ye presently.”

Shuffling into their bedroom, she pulled on a loose pair of shorts and Jamie’s old Excalibur Staff shirt. He shook his head and rolled his eyes every time she wore it, but she refused to give it up. It was the shirt he’d worn when doing his initial training to become a Knight of the Realm and it was deeply imbued with his scent.

She was laying on the bed when Jamie came in. He took one look at the shirt she’d stretched out, not fully covering her belly, and sighed. All she could do was smile.

The bed creaked as Jamie joined her and she turned to look at him. His hand was on her belly, rubbing it gently.

“How’s our bairn tonight? Any heartburn?”

“We’re doing just fine. No heartburn, no nausea, no headaches.”

“That’s verra good. Think ye can get some good sleep tonight?”

“That’s the idea. And tomorrow’s your last day before Christmas?”

He nodded and took a deep breath, holding her as close to himself as he could.

“Aye. It’ll be our first Christmas as a family.”

Tears pricked her eyes and she pulled his face up for a kiss.

“Yes, it will be. Our first as a real family.”

###

Trudging up the stairs, Jamie sighed. Finally. He had three whole days off - three days to spend with Claire and no one else. No job, no workouts, no dealing with the crude jokes of the other lads in the show. Just his wife.

Just as he put his key into the door, he paused and listened.

*Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock*

Frowning, he opened the door and his mouth fell open. Claire had on a red and white Santa hat, and the ugliest Christmas jumper he’d ever seen while she danced around the apartment. He slowly closed the door behind him, staring at the apartment. Had he made a wrong turn? Somehow fallen through a portal and landed in the North Pole?

“Jamie! You’re home!”

“Am I? I’m no’ so sure…”

“You had no decorations to put up anywhere. And with this being our first Christmas together, I couldn’t stand the apartment looking so bland.”

Despite her growing size, she bounded over to him rather nimbly and smiled widely. Her eyes shone with a delight he hadn’t seen in some time and he found himself grinning back at her. She
popped up on her toes and gave him a sweet kiss. The taste of her was different and he recognized the flavor of peppermint.

“How many candy canes have ye eaten, Sassenach?” he asked when she pulled away.

“One.”

He narrowed his eyes at her.

“Or maybe three… Or-”

“Never mind. I dinna want to know.”

“Can I show you all the things I put up?”

“Of course, love.”

Taking her hand, he followed her around the (now very cramped) apartment. She was overjoyed to have so many decorations up and to show them off to him. When she finished, they sat down on the couch with a sigh.

“It looks verra bonny, Sassenach. Truly.”

He noticed the wrapped gifts beneath the small tree.

“And ye wrapped presents already?”

“I did.”

“Ye wrapped some of the pictures on the wall too?”

“There was a sale on the wrapping paper,” she said as she shrugged. She had seen the idea in a magazine and thought it would make their apartment even more Christmas-y.

“It looks verra nice, Claire. Truly.”

Her blue eyes shone up at him.

“Really? You like it?”

“Aye. It’s fitting for our first Christmas.”

She snuggled down against him for a moment, breathing deeply.

“You didn’t shower before you came home.”

“I just wanted to get home. Didna want to be at work a moment longer than I had to be.”

“I have something for you. You should go shower.”

Looking down at her curiously, she gave him a sly smile and nudged him in the side.

“Why? What have ye got planned?”

“You’ll just have to shower fast to find out. Go on now. There should be at least one more candy cane left for you…”
“Alright, alright.”
Jamie came into the bedroom to change into fresh clothes only to find Claire waiting for him.

“Wait!”
He halted, foot halfway to the ground, waiting for her.

“What? What’s the matter?”
She swayed over to him slowly, hands behind her back.

“Nothing's wrong. But you should look up, my sweet ginger Scot.”
Warily, his eyes lifted from hers to find a small bushel of mistletoe hanging from the doorframe.

“Ah. Mistletoe then. I would have thought ye might have put it near the front door.”

“Oh I did. Why do you think I kissed you before you came inside?”
He shrugged, looking back down at her.

“I had this notion ye liked kissing me.”

“Well, I suppose it’s alright. You're not too bad.”

“No’ too bad?!”
Giving her a flat look, he grabbed her face and pulled her into a very thorough kiss. He kissed her as intensely as a man shipping off to war.

“Well,” she said breathlessly, tongue running over her swollen lips. “That was pretty good.”

“I shall endeavor to make each kiss curl yer wee toes in delight.”

“I suppose you should keep a look out for all the mistletoe in the apartment then.”
He smirked at her before realizing her arms were still behind her back.

“What’s this?”

“I have a jumper for you.”
She held out something that was equally as hideous as the one she wore.

“I’m no’ wearing that.”

“Oh come on, Jamie! Everyone wears ugly jumpers at Christmas.”

“It’s awful!”

“That’s the point!”
Sensing he was determined to resist, she stuck out her bottom lip in a pout. He didn’t know how she made that face, but every time she did, she reminded him of a sad puppy. How was he supposed to say no to that face?
“Fine! Gi’ me the damn jumper.”

Immediately her face lit back up and he shrugged the thing on. The delight in her eyes was worth the humiliation of wearing the ugliest article of clothing he’d ever seen.

“I’m not taking you out on the town in it, at least.”

“Better no’ be.”

“We have to take a photo. Come on!”

She dragged him to the spot he took her weekly pregnancy photos and she pulled out her phone. It took several minutes and dozens of tries to get the perfect picture.

“Thank you,” she said, pleased.

“I’ll do anything for you, mo ghraidh. Even wear a horrid jumper.”

They had a nice, simple dinner before preparing for bed. He watched with amusement as she dressed in yet another of his old shirts and flopped into bed. He lay down beside her, preparing to kiss her stomach as he always did.

“Hang on a minute, love muffin,” she said, pulling on his hair.

“What? Can I no’ say goodnight to my own child?”

“Not before you keep your word and make my toes curl,” she said, quirking an eyebrow and looking up.

He didn’t need to look up to know there was another small bushel of mistletoe hanging above their bed.

“That’s a dangerous place to put that, Sassenach,” he said as he nuzzled her neck.

“Oh? And why is that?”

“Now I’ll have to kiss ye all night and no’ stop.”

Her blue eyes rolled hard as she tugged on his ears.

“Just kiss me now and kiss me in the morning and I’ll call it good.”

“If all ye have to say is ‘good’, I’m no’ doing my job right,” he said, voice dropping into that sultry register he knew she couldn’t resist.

She shuddered slightly as her fingers traced up his neck. He touched his tongue to her lips gently, teasingly. Her mouth sought his, trying to catch him, but he was too quick. Carefully, her took her lower lip between his teeth and held it for a moment, watching her eyes narrow at him. Christ she is an amazing creature, he thought to himself.

Before she got cross with him for taking too long, he let their lips meet in bliss. Her entire body went slack with pleasure as she tasted deeply of him, and he of her. He would not let it end until he was sure her toes had curled.

“Well done, Fraser my lad,” she whispered against his mouth.
“Did yer toes curl, a nighean?”

“Mmm. On both feet even.”

With a nod of triumph, he settled down beside her once more.

“Tomorrow, at some point, I’ll need to keep ye out of our room.”

“What? Why?”

“So I can get your gifts wrapped wi’out ye seeing them first!”

She giggled and breathed deeply before falling fast asleep.

Some time deep in the shadows of the night, Claire woke. She had been having a very, very nice dream.

Sleepily, she reached over towards where Jamie lay, groping blindly for any part of him. He made a low, guttural sound when she finally made contact with his flesh, maneuvering herself so that they faced each other.

Jamie made a sleepy sound akin to a question and Claire responded by kissing him softly, wiggling herself closer to him. He made the sound again.

“Mistletoe,” she replied in answer, sleep still thick in her voice as she kissed him again, deep and slow.

She felt him smile against her mouth as he woke more fully. His hips moved forward in question and she answered, moaning quietly.

He slowly turned her away from him, lying flush behind her as he pulled away the barriers of clothing between them. Her moaning was getting louder with each touch, spurring him onwards.

“Are ye sure, mo chridhe?”

“Yes, Jamie please. I need you. Please,” she panted.

He couldn’t deny his wife, not when the need in her voice was that strong. She reached behind her and grabbed onto any part of him she could touch, firmly embedding her fingers into the flesh of his arse.

He came into her slow, rocking forward and back, hyper aware of her every movement, every sound, every breath. He reached around her, over the swell of her belly and down to where their bodies joined. She made the sweetest sounds when he touched her there, melting and tightening all at once. He lived for these moments with her. When it was only them, nothing else in the world seeming to matter or even exist.

She pulled him to her as he pushed in, trying to turn her head for a kiss at the same time. It was slow and tender, sleep still floating on the edges of both their consciousness. Jamie felt her body tighten and knew she was close to the end.

“Jamie,” she moaned, over and over with the sweetest of sighs. “Ohhh,” she squeaked as he pushed her over with a sharp thrust and a slide of his fingers against her.

She shuddered, her whole body clenching around his, causing him to find his own end.
The sound he made when he finally let himself go was one of the most sensual sounds she could ever wish to hear. It held something primal that always sent an extra shudder through her and caused her blood to rush a little faster through her veins.

Jamie’s mouth clamped down on her neck, biting her gently, but enough to leave a wee bruise.

“Mistletoe, indeed,” he chuckled.

Claire breathed a laugh then sighed back into him, still sheltering him inside her, as she did their child. Her body slackened as she relaxed and fell back into slumber, Jamie not far behind her.

The next morning saw him cooking his usual breakfast for her, while keeping an eye out for all the mistletoe she’d hung about. She’d refused to tell him how many bushels she’d hung and he was inclined to think it was because she couldn’t remember.

With her breakfast on the table, she came out of the bedroom and sat down.

“Eat up, my love. I’ve presents to wrap.”

She nodded groggily and took a sip of her tea. He knew how much she missed drinking her coffee, but it just wasn’t safe with the bairn. It was his job to keep her happy with a steady stream of good tea.

While she was busy with her meal, Jamie snuck into their bedroom to wrap her gifts. All in all, he was rather proud of his purchases. It took a little creativity to wrap the plushie that he’d gotten her, but he made it work.

He put the gifts under the small tree she’d set up, realizing just how little this apartment was now. It had never been intended as a home for two, nearly three, people. Perhaps…

“Sassenach?”

“Hmm?”

Rousing herself from her near-dozing at the table, she grunted to her feet and shuffled over to him.

“What would ye say to maybe finding another apartment? Something that’ll fit the three of us more comfortably, gi’ us enough space.”

“You mean you think this tiny apartment won’t fit two adults and a newborn!?”

Shooting her a flat, unamused look, he rolled his eyes.

“Aye, ye wee, cheeky vixen. I’m trying to be serious. I think it would be good for us to choose something together. Something that would be our home. With only our memories in it.”

Glancing from the tree down to her, he watched the warm smile come to her full lips.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Jamie. Perhaps we can start looking at the newspapers tomorrow?”

“Perhaps no’ tomorrow. I’ve only got three days off and I dinna plan on spending them in any place but this, wi’ you.”

Those fathomless blue eyes of hers glinted up at him.
“Good boy.”

“Oh!”

She jumped a little, her brows lifting in question.

“I forgot. Merry Christmas Eve, mo graidh.”

Then he lowered his face to feel her smile against his lips.

Jamie would always remember this day as one of the best of his life, just spending time with Claire. No stress of work or university, no pressures, just the two of them in their own little bubble of bliss.

They cuddled on the couch to watch one of the marathons of Christmas films on some TV network, neither of the really paying attention.

“Are ye alright, love?”

“Yeah,” she said groggily, nestling under his arm a little more. “Why?”

“Ye’ve just gone a little quiet.”

“I’ve just been thinking.”

Adjusting himself to be more comfortable on the couch, he looked down at her.

“That’s never a good sign. What about?”

She pouted and nudged his side before answering.

“Us, mostly.”

“Oh?”

“Nothing bad, I promise. Just… Can you believe it? Not only us having a baby, but that we actually fell for each other? I can’t stop thinking about how this shouldn’t have worked, shouldn’t be working. And yet I wake up beside you every morning and smile. Well,” she corrected after his snort. “I at least fall asleep beside you every night. But we’ve hardly known each other a year.”

He nodded slowly, understanding exactly what she was saying.

“Aye. I’ll admit it’s a bit strange, how we happened. I didna ken what my life was missing until I got drunk and married ye. Unusual as our start is, I wouldna change a moment of it. Though I do sometimes wish I could take away the pain of what Frankie did to ye. You’re better for it, now, but I ken it hurt at the time.”

“But I got so much more because of what he did. What we have is more real than anything I’ve felt in my life. And we’re growing a child out of that. Oh don’t mind me,” she shook her head. “This time of year makes me nostalgic.”

“It’s good to remember things,” he said, kissing the top of her dark curls. “This is the time of year for it. Looking back and seeing what’s changed. There’s nothing wrong wi’ that, Claire.”

She tried to hide her yawn in his shoulder, but he laughed. After getting to his feet, he braced himself and helped her to her own.
“Come along, my wee vixen. If ye dinna get to sleep, Father Christmas canna come down the chimney.”

Claire giggled and leaned against him.

“We don’t have a chimney. And I already watched you put the gifts out.”

“Ye dinna need to ruin it!”

They settled into their usual places in bed, Claire letting out a satisfied sigh.

“Goodnight, my Sassenach,” he whispered, kissing her sweetly. “And goodnight, my wee Fraser lad,” he said before giving her belly a kiss.

Claire smiled when her stomach rippled with the baby’s movement.

“I will never get used to how that looks.”

“Perhaps you’ll get used to it with the next one.”

Jamie’s mouth fell open, having not even considered the possibility of more bairns with her. Was that something she wanted? If it was, they definitely needed a larger home.

“Is that what ye-” he stopped and looked down at her, realizing she’d fallen fast asleep. “Aye,” he whispered. “Perhaps we’ll have a whole Fraser clan of our own someday. Wi’ beautiful girls that are just like their mam.”

Planting a warm kiss on her forehead, he too went to sleep.

###

Jamie had turned off all the alarms in the house before going to bed, intending to sleep in and cuddle with Claire a bit before starting on their Christmas breakfast. But when he rolled over to hold her, he noticed the bed was empty. The space beside him was still a little warm, but was cooling quickly. He couldn’t remember the last time she’d gotten up before him.

Then he smelled it: bacon. Not only was she up before him, she was making breakfast. This he had to see.

The sight that greeted him was even more surprising. Claire stood in the kitchen, picking the cooked bacon from the pan and putting it on a plate. She was still wearing the same flannel pants she’d been in the night before, but had no top.

Well, she wore one of her new sports bras, but no shirt. The same fluffy red and white Santa hat sat atop her wild hair, looking almost like it had grown there. Hearing him come out, Claire turned and beamed at him.

“Happy Christmas, Daddy!”

A large, purple bow sat on top of her massive belly, shimmering in the morning light.

“What’s this?”

“You always make breakfast for us, so I thought today I’d treat you. And, well… You can’t exactly open this gift, but I couldn’t help myself.”
“And the bow?”

“Purple because we can’t agree on the sex of our baby. But I think she’ll like the color purple anyway.”

Jamie smiled, taking a moment to enjoy this image of his wife.

“Aye. I’m sure he’ll like that shade. It’s a verra fine color. Almost eggplant, would ye say?”

Claire snorted and returned to the stove, continuing to cook their breakfast. It was a fine, hearty meal and he was quite full by the time he was finished.

“I ken it’s not the usual day, but would ye mind taking a special photo for today?”

“I actually thought about that when I bought the decorations…”

He broke into a wide smile.

“Did ye?”

“I did! I thought we could maybe take a few photos, other than the usual belly shot.”

“I’ll take whatever ye give me, a nighean.”

With a delighted little squeak, she got up and went to rummage through a bag he thought had been pure decoration. When she returned, she held a few different props: a miniature Santa hat that matched her own, a tiny stocking, a little red and green elf hat, a headband with reindeer antlers that had little jingle bells on them, and a small black velvet top hat.

“Christ woman, did ye raid the whole toy section?”

“No! But I saw them and they were so small I couldn’t help myself. And I thought you might enjoy taking so many photos of us.”

“Aye,” he said with a smile. “Aye, I’ll enjoy it verra much! Come on, then. Let’s start this photo shoot!”

First, he took several pictures of her and the purple bow. There was a particular glow about her that he found simply intoxicating. Next was the tiny Santa hat, which sat on the top of her belly. For a brief moment, he wished he had someone to send Christmas cards to. These pictures of Claire’s pregnancy with the little hats would have made beautiful cards to send. Perhaps in another life…

When he was satisfied with the Santa hat, she held up the stocking and he realized she’d written something on it.

‘Wee Fraser’

“Since you insisted we not learn the sex,” she said with that familiar tone.

“Aye, I ken. Ye’ll no’ let me forget it.”

“Damn straight.”

He took a few photos of her holding the stocking on her belly or up by her smile. Then he stood beside her, kissing her cheek while he took another picture. She only giggled in response, then stood up on tiptoes to kiss him back.
“I have something for us for the next round of pictures!” she squealed, eyes twinkling with happiness. Jamie’s heart felt like it would burst with the happiness that filled her and flowed into him. *What did I do that allowed me to have this woman as my own?* he thought to himself.

Claire’s thoughts flowed along the exact same lines. *Whatever I did to deserve this man,* she thought, *I will never know. But God, am I grateful.*

She reached around Jamie to grab two more sets of reindeer antler headbands.

“As long as mine isna the pink one…” Jamie started, then laughed as Claire tried to force the smaller headband with the jingle bells to stay stretched across her stomach without having to hold it.

“Stay! On!” She glowered down at her belly, watching their baby’s hand stick out against her skin.

“Yes, yes,” she muttered, tapping it and laughing when it popped back in.

Eventually, she was able to make the headband cooperate, having to compromise and hold down one side. When Jamie came toward her, she pulled him down and shoved another set of antlers on his head, giggling as they lit up with Christmas lights.

Her own antlers securely settled in her hair, they both squeezed together to get another “family” photo. She felt a soft pang of regret that her child’s extended family would never see these pictures, never know the sheer joy that she and Jamie shared waiting for their baby to be born.

It was a fleeting feeling though, as Jamie caught her off guard with a kiss for another picture and she smiled, feeling more complete than she ever had in her life.

“What do ye have next for our bairn to model for us, mo nighean donn?”

“The little elf hat!”

After a few more pictures she told him, “I almost bought the little shoes to go with the hat, but I knew she wouldn’t be here to wear them until next Christmas. Now the snowman hat!”

And so it went on in the same fashion; for every accessory Claire had for the baby, she had one for herself and Jamie as well.

When they’d exhausted every possible prop she’d bought, she went to the bedroom and put her ugly Christmas jumper back on.

“Have ye any other plans ye need to share wi’ me?”

She shook her head, pulling the Santa hat back down on her head. He still wore the blinking reindeer antlers, if only for the smile it put on her face.

“I don’t have any plans, no. Perhaps we should do the gifts now?”

“Aye. Go on and settle yourself down on the couch. I’ll bring the gifts over to ye.”

“Oh, well… Ah, one of yours won’t be under the tree.”

His brows drew together in minor confusion.

“Sassenach, I thought we already agreed that we’d no place to put a pony.”
The comment caught her off guard and she burst into a fit of giggles.

“No,” she said, finally getting a hold of herself. “No, it’s not a pony, you cheeky Scottish bastard. It’s one of the pictures on the wall. I put a tag on it with your name so you’d know which to open.”

“So I’m to hunt for my gift? Ye dinna make it easy on me, do ye?”

“You’d get bored if I did.”

After settling the other gifts on the coffee table, he moved around the apartment looking for a tag. He found it, wrapped in plain red paper, beside her uncle’s Viking sword. Carefully, he pulled it off the wall and sat down again beside Claire.

“Did ye no’ want to open one of yours first?”

Her head shook emphatically. Genuinely curious, he tore at the red wrapping and thought his heart would stop in complete shock. It was a beautiful shadowbox with a dark fabric in the background. But inside was the dirk he’d nearly forgotten about. Staring at it, bright against the backdrop, he realized why Lamb’s Viking sword had looked so familiar all this time.

Tearing his eyes away, he looked up at Claire.

“Claire, I… I dinna ken what to say.”

“When I found it, I realized it looked like Uncle Lamb’s sword. And I got to thinking… It’s an unlikely pair that should never have found each other… Just like us.”

Setting the box down carefully, he reached out and pulled her close. Holding her face in his hands, he kissed her fiercely. After a few moments, he released her lips but still kept her close.

“I dinna think anyone has ever done the things you’ve done for me, mo chridhe. No one’s ever been so thoughtful before, Claire… Thank ye.”

“You’re welcome, love,” she said sweetly.

After a deep breath, he got up and put the dirk back on the wall beside its mate. An unlikely pair that never should have found each other, yet here they were. He decided in that moment, no matter where they lived, these two weapons would always have a place of honor, somewhere they could be seen and appreciated.

“Alright. Your turn. Which do ye want to open first?”

Her eyes narrowed before she pointed at the plush.

“That round-y one.”

Smirking, he picked it up and handed it to her. Before she opened it, she held it down beside her belly, comparing their relative sizes.

“Whatever this is, I think I’m considerably more round.”

“Aye, weel, ye’ve got a whole wee person inside ye. That’s just got… Stuff.”

With a rueful shake of her head, she tore the paper off and burst out laughing.

“Oh… my… GOD! Jamie, where on earth did you find this?!”
The furry pinkish blob in her hands stared up at her with too-big eyes lined with thick lashes.

“Ye can find just about anything on the internet these days.”

“It’s a plush of Epstein-Barr!”

Frowning, he thought back to when he’d ordered it.

“I thought it was mono?”

Hugging it close, she smiled at him.

“Yeah, it causes mono! It’s like a herpes!”

“I dinna ken what it is you’re saying, but ye look happy. I’m glad ye like it.”

“I do, very much. Thank you.”

Tucking the awkward little plush in beside her, she picked up another package and moved it out of the way.

“Here, open this one.”

This box was smaller than the first gift, though it was wrapped with sparkling snowmen on ice skates. Inside the plain brown cardboard, he found a dozen new shirts. Sitting atop them was a small handwritten note.

*For all the ones I’ve stolen from you and ruined. I won’t steal these. They don’t smell like you.*

“Finally! I dinna have to wear the same four shirts over and over now!”

“Oh stop, it’s not nearly that bad!”

“I canna wear half of the other shirts because they’ve been stretched in the belly. *I* certainly havena stretched that part on my own.”

Glaring at him, she huffed and snuggled with her new plush.

“Keep that up, Fraser, and you’ll be sleeping on the couch tonight.”

“Thank you, mo nighean donn, from the verra bottom of my heart,” he replied, stressing the thanks in his voice and looking at her with his own version of “puppy eyes.”

“Much better,” she said, sticking her tongue out. “And you’re welcome.”

Jamie looked at the other two gifts he’d gotten for Claire and decided to save the best for last. This one was much smaller, but something he thought she’d truly enjoy. She untied the little ribbon bow and her brows rose.

“A coupon book?”

“Read the whole thing.”

“Love coupon? What does that mean?”

Grinning, he leaned back against the couch and waited.
“Redeem this coupon to get out of ALL cleaning chores for ONE day. Really?”

“Aye, but it’s only good for one. No’ all of those are to get out of chores, mind.”

“Oh, I’m sure some of them involve naked arses, yes?”

Winking, he shrugged. She flipped to another page.

“Pantsless night in?”

“Instructions are on the back.”

“What sort of coupon needs instructions?” Despite her complaint, she turned the page over and read the back. “Dinner is your choice, but once delivered, wearing of any clothing below the waist is strictly forbidden.”

That won him an interesting look.

“Do ye approve, then?”

“Is there one in here for a foot rub?”

“I believe there’s a dirty massage or two. And one is blank, to be made up of your own choosing. But I’ll throw in a foot rub for free. Just because I fancy ye.”

Setting the little book down on the end table, she chuckled.

“Fancy me, do you?”

“It’s that huge, rrround arse of yours,” he growled, rolling his r’s in round.

“You’re as bad as a teenaged boy, Jamie.”

Leaning over, he stole a sweet kiss. There were only two gifts left now and Claire was suddenly afraid to give Jamie the last of his.

“Nearly done,” he said, reaching for the box with his name on it.

“Let’s wait for that one,” she said quickly.

“But we’ve been taking turns.”

She shrugged.

“I want to know what’s in that box. Pretty please?”

Smiling at him, she knew he couldn’t say no to her. His aim for his last box shifted to the last one he’d give her. The childlike merriment that had been in his eyes most of this morning faded a little. Instead, he grew serious, though no less joyful.

After peeling off the wrappings, she looked down at the long black box. For a moment, she thought he might have gone and gotten her expensive jewelry, but neither of them were materialistic. Her hand covered her mouth when she saw what was inside, eyes darting up to meet his.

“Do ye remember asking me if I thought ye could do this? Be a mother and a nurse? I promised ye
honesty then and told ye that I thought ye could. That I believe there’s nothing ye canna do if ye put your mind to it. This,” he nodded to the box. “Is me reminding you of that.”

Gingerly, as if it was made of thin glass, Claire took the brand new stethoscope from it’s box. Her initials were engraved in the shining metal: C.E.F.

“Jamie, this is…” Her eyes, somehow, went even wider. “This is too much! I know how much these cost! We can’t afford this!”

“Dinna fash, lass. Whenever I can, I’ll make sure ye get the verra best of everything. And I want ye to remember that I will always believe in you. I wouldna have bought that and put your name on it if I didna think ye’d be the best nurse in the world.”

She stared down at the tool in her hands.

“I’m not a nurse yet,” she muttered.

“Aye, ye’ve no’ passed your exams yet, but ye will.”

Tears burned behind her eyes, that ever-present worry creeping back.

“How can you know that?”

“I know it as strongly and deeply as I know that I love you. Trust me, aye?”

She nodded slowly, setting the stethoscope back in its box for now. Jamie made to reach for the last present.

“No, it’s alright. You don’t have to open that right now.”

He fixed her with a curious look.

“It has my name on it…”

“Well, yes, but… You don’t… It can wait.”

For a few months, Claire had been planning this final gift. It was supposed to be from her and the baby, but after the big fight they’d had about his family, she was more than a little hesitant to give it to him. She’d seriously contemplated removing it from under the tree, and had tried to hide it until the end, still trying to decide whether or not to give it to him.

Jamie quirked an eyebrow at her.

“I… well…”

“Why do ye not want me to open this one, Sassenach? What are ye nervous for?”

He picked up the box and shook it, smiling at her. She paled slightly at the thought of starting another argument, but finally nodded, giving him the go ahead to open it.

“I had it made a while ago…” she trailed off as he opened the box and stared at the fabric in his hand.

She cleared her throat. “It’s… it’s really for the baby. I thought- I thought you might want the baby to have one. I know you think she’s a boy, so I ordered a baby kilt, but we can use it for a girl too, just as a skirt…” she rambled on and on, praying this wouldn’t spark an argument.
He gingerly lifted the small cut of fabric out of the box, holding it gently between his fingers. *It was even Fraser colors.* When his eyes met hers, she let out a breath at what she saw in them.

“Thank ye, mo chridhe,” he said, sincerely. “I want him to know where he comes from.”

He leaned in close and kissed her softly, as if she were made of the most delicate of glass. Then he pulled back and bent down, kissing her belly as well.

“She will know, Jamie. We’ll both make sure of it.”

She caressed his face and pulled him close to kiss him more thoroughly.

When she was finished with him, she pulled back slightly, laughing at the thought that had flown through her mind.

“What?” Jamie asked, eyebrows raised.

“I’ve had a thought. What if we make things more interesting?”

“If ye mean me takin’ ye to bed this minute, while I’m no’ opposed to it, I fear we might forget about our food in the oven and burn the whole building down. And I know you and the bairn will be hungry sooner rather than later.”

She swatted at him playfully, still grinning.

“No, you arse. Although,” she trailed off, thinking of all the things she could do to him in bed.

He laughed at her glazed over expression and bumped her gently, bringing her back to present.

“Ye’d had a thought, a nighean?”

“Oh, yes. How about we make a bet?” She waggled her eyebrows at him suggestively.

“A bet? About what?”

“Who’s right about the sex of the baby.”

He laughed loudly.

“And what, exactly, would the stakes be then?”

She tilted her head, as if thinking thoughtfully, and then grinned.

“How about whoever is right gets to pick the first name of the baby?”

“Are ye sure ye want to give up the option to name the bairn should I be right, Sassenach?”

“You won’t be, so I’m ok with it.”

“Are there restrictions then? Are there names completely off the list?”

“Frank.” She’d said it without even really thinking, a blush immediately crawling up her face from her neck. Jamie’s face went completely blank, then he laughed loud enough to wake the building.

“I canna say I disagree with that one,” he continued, chuckling still.

“Do you have any that you don’t want for a girl? When she comes out and I’m right, I don’t want
you to absolutely hate her name.”

He rolled his eyes at her but thought about it for a moment.

“None that I can think of at the moment, Sassenach.”

“Really? No crazy ex-girlfriends that I should know about?”

For a few minutes, he appeared to be considering her question. Truth be told, she didn’t know much about his romantic history, while he knew hers in painful detail.

“Weel… There was a French girl I fancied…”

“A French girl? Should I be worried about her coming and looking for you?”

Jamie smirked.

“I havena seen her in… Almost ten years? Even if I ever see her again, it wouldna matter. One, because I’m married to you, and two, because the boy I got into a tussle wi’ o’er her was the one she went out wi’. They stayed together, from what I understood. Married later and had a bairn or two.”

Claire stared at him in shock.

“That’s it? One girl you fought over when you were a teenager?”

Jamie shrugged.

“Didna find a woman who fit me. Went on a few dates here and there, but nothing ever too serious.”

The baby nudged her stomach and she began rubbing the spot absently. A sudden thought came to her and she gasped. After that drunken night, every time they slept together they’d used condoms. He’d had them in the drawer beside his bed, but…

“Jamie, was I… I mean, I didn’t think I was, but…”

She trailed off, thinking over all the nights (and days) they’d spent together.

“I canna answer a question that’s no’ been asked, love,” he said gently with a faint smile.

“Well, if you never had a serious girlfriend, did you…” She stopped again, suddenly bashful. “I mean, that night we… That wasn’t… Your first, was it?”

“You mean was I virgin when we slept together?”

Embarrassed heat crawled up her neck and settled in her cheeks.

“Yes, I suppose.”

He smiled at her blush, which only made it worse.

“No, I wasna. Though… You’re the second woman I’ve ever been with.”

A wave of jealousy overcame her, irrational as it might have been. Some part of her wanted to be his one and only, to be his first everything. It wasn’t fair, she knew, especially given her own
history. But no one ever accused a couple in love of being rational.

“Second?” she asked, trying to sound nonchalant. Jamie smiled, reading the emotions as they crossed her face.

“Aye. The first was…” He glanced up for a moment, asking a silent question.

Do you really want to hear this story?

The silver ring on her finger caught the sunlight as she continued to rub her belly and she nodded to him. Maybe she wasn’t his one and only in that regard, but she would certainly be his forever.

“Weel, she was a nice lass. I kent her back in uni, before… Before. I felt anchorless there, like I’d lost the path my feet had been walking and found myself floating in the ocean. I needed something, some one to hold on to, to keep me grounded…. or at least, I thought I did. It didn't end up working out that way.”

Jamie broke eye contact with her, reaching out to hold her hand that lay on her belly, caressing the ring he had given her.

“I knew her for a bit and thought she might be able to help me find some sense of meaning at a place I was unhappy. It was a short fling. I kent almost immediately that the sex wi’out any feeling left me just as empty as I'd felt before. Not long after that, I went home and… weel, ye ken the rest.”

“So… That night… I know I sort of threw myself at you, but I was also much more drunk than you. Why did you stay? We barely knew each other.”

“You asked me to. And… I didna have to stop at your bar after my shows, but I wanted to. I wanted to see you, even though I kent you were wi’ another man. In time, I think, I would have asked ye out to dinner. I’d started to feel… something wi’ you, ken.”

Turning her hand over in his, he traced slow circles in her palm.

“I…” she stopped, having no idea where she’d been planning to go.

“I wish,” he said abruptly, not meeting her eyes again. “That it had been you, or that I’d no’ been so foolish to think sex would make me feel something. But I swear to you that I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you.”

He looked up at her with heartbreaking sincerity.

“Oh Jamie, I know that. I never doubted it for a moment. I feel… I should tell you something.”

Determined to meet his unwavering gaze, she took a deep breath.

“You’re… You’re my second as well.”

His eyes went a little wider and she watched him try to contain his surprise.

“I thought… Truly, Sassenach?”

“Truly. I fooled around with boys every so often, but besides you, the only man I’ve ever slept with was Frank.”

The strangest expression crossed his face and he was suddenly hugging her tight. It was made
awkward by her position on the couch and by her massive belly, but she hugged him back as best she could.

“God, Claire. And that rat bastard went and… Christ. No wonder it hurt you so much. No’ that something like that wouldn’t have hurt anyways, but… I’m so sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault. But that night… Our first night together… It was different. Everything about that night was different. It felt like we fit together, like we’d been made for each other. Not to mention, you are a fantastic lover.”

Jamie gave her a very tender smile then and kissed her softly.

“Aye. It was verra different.”

“I’m sorry to have gotten things so serious,” she said with a faint laugh. “Happy Christmas?”

That got a bark of laughter from him and he kissed her again.

“Happy Christmas indeed.”

The rest of their night had been perfect, if Claire said so herself. They stayed close after their talk, constantly touching, leaning on, and kissing each other.

“Sassenach, would ye maybe be alright wi’ using one of our family photos and make a Christmas card for Henry?”

She frowned, lifting her head to look up at him.

“It’s a little late for a Christmas card, don’t you think?”

“Aye, it is, but… He’d like it anyway. And I dinna really have anyone else to send one to…”

“I don’t mind at all. But… Why Henry?”

Claire had assumed that Jamie had just met Henry when he found her the apartment, but now she could see she was mistaken.

“Ach, I’ve known him for quite some time now. He was my first landlord, ken?”

“Really? I didn't realize…”

“Aye, he still is technically. But Henry became a good friend. When I first came out here, he rented to me and I helped him wi’ odd jobs around the building. Henry’s no’ so young anymore, and I was willing to help when he needed it. After about a year…”

Jamie paused, remembering.

“Weel, the doctors said he had a heart attack, but he fell. I…I helped him when he came back, taking care of things for him as he mended. He became a much needed confidante for me.”

“It sounds like you became very close.”

“Aye,” Jamie said, smiling. “He’s verra much become a…weel a father figure I guess ye could say. He’s family here. I know I couldn’a survived for that first while wi’out his generousness.”

Claire reached for him, pulling him closer so she could snuggle into his side.
“I think that's a great idea, then. You said he's been helping you find another job too, yes?”

“Aye, he did. He's looked out for me a lot since I came here and he's not stopped since. He's no family of his own as far as I ken. His wife died a few years ago.”

“Maybe we should invite him over tomorrow? For a nice dinner for the holiday? I hate to think of him being alone.”

Jamie beamed down at her, catching her by surprise with a fierce kiss.

“I think he'd love to have a chance to come over and embarrass me in front of ye, Sassenach. I doubt he'd pass up that opportunity.”

“Excellent. Call him tomorrow and let him know when to come then.”

As they readied for bed, Jamie turned to watch her. She was magnificent still, even growing rounder each day with their child.

“What? Do I have something on my face?”

He laughed, gathering her to him and kissing her soundly.

“Nah, only ye look so gorgeous. I canna help but stare.”

“Ohh, that was a very good answer, Mr. Fraser.”

“Aye, I've learnt the error of my ways,” he replied, rocking her gently in his embrace as they slowly danced towards the bed.

“I think you should remind me just how much you've learned,” Claire purred, pulling away from him and arranging herself on the bed, trying to look as alluring as possible.

She watched his eyes turn, assessing her as a predator does his prey before pouncing. She loved the feeling of his gaze on her, burning her skin without even touching her. He stalked closer to her, eyes still glinting with mischief, taking in her whole body.

“Ah Dhia, mo nighean donn, ye are beautiful.”

She crooked her finger at him, prompting him to remove the clothes he'd just put on for bed. He watched as her hands ran down her body; he wanted that to be his hands, his mouth on her.

“Put yer hands by yer head, Sassenach.”

She quirked an eyebrow, but didn't stop. Lurching forward, he grabbed both her hands and held them in one of his, dipping his head to her chest.

“Ohh,” Claire moaned as his hungry mouth found her breast. She struggled against him, wanting to sink her fingers into his hair and hold him there.

“Struggling will only make it worse for ye,” Jamie breathed against her, the cool air from his mouth pebbling her nipple even more.

“Jamie,” Claire whined, still trying to break free.

He ignored her, moving to the other side, paying court to that breast as well. Never content, his other hand roamed her body, feeling the slippery wetness between her legs. He kissed her slowly,
up the slope of her chest to her neck, stretched taut with wanting. Nibbling on her neck, he continued to take his time, pulling out every last strand of want from his wife.

When he finally made it to her lips, she was mumbling incoherently, not straining any longer. He let her arms go, but she knew better than to move them if she wanted any relief from the torture.

“Jamie. Please.” His fingers found purchase in her soft, wet skin and he slowly pumped two fingers in and out of her.

“I promise I won't leave ye wantin’, mo chridhe.”

“I want to touch you,” she whined softly.

Their eyes locked and before he could do more than smile, her hands sank into his hair, dragging him down to her. They didn't stay there for long though, as she roamed his body urgently, as if she was starving, and he, her last meal.

She couldn't get close enough to him, her belly causing more strife than usual given the circumstances. Her grip on Jamie only tightened more as he went to move behind her.

“No. No, no. Come back.” She pulled at his arms, but to no avail.

Repositioning her was a little more difficult as she'd gotten rounder, but eventually they found their way, Claire grabbing frantically at him still, reaching for kisses at every turn.

Jamie pushed inside her in one hard thrust, Claire's body already shuddering with pent up energy. She pushed back against him just as roughly, feeling the threads of pleasure coursing through her.

“Oh, God, Jamie,” Claire moaned loudly, spurring him ever onwards.

His hands continued to roam over her from behind, not sure quite where they wanted to stay, breasts or arse or belly. Claire’s arse thrust against him with each push of his hips forward, each seemingly harder than the last. It didn’t take nearly as long as he thought it would for her to come undone, her body clamping down on his as she let out a guttural groan in satisfaction. He wasn’t far behind her, shuddering in his own completion.

They lay together for a few minutes, breathing the deep, heavy sighs of post-coital bliss.

“I don’t think I’ll ever tire of that,” Claire said softly. Before he could respond, she continued, “Of you loving me.”

“Me either, mo chridhe. And I will love ye anytime, as long as ye’ll allow me to do so.”

Claire turned, breaking their connection to meet his eyes.

“I would never dream of stopping you,” she laughed. “And I don’t think you would ever stop me either.”

“Nah,” Jamie laughed in return. “Would be too much trouble to try.”

She pinched the skin of his bare chest muttering, “Arse,” then snuggled into his side.

He breathed a laugh again.

“Maybe, but I am your arse, so I suppose you’ll have to just live with me.”
He kissed her riotous curls as she chuckled and reached over to turn off the bedside lamp, plunging the room into darkness. Claire curled closer to him, breathing in deeply as his scent permeated her senses and she relaxed, safe and secure in his arms.

She couldn’t be sure, but as she fell into her dreams she thought she heard him whisper, “Sleep well, mo chrìdhe, and know that I love ye more than my own life.”

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For once, they actually woke at nearly the same time. Jamie caught her in the middle of a yawn and large stretch, grinning at her straining belly.

“Good morning,” he said, kissing her lips softly.

“Good morning to you too.”

“How’s the bairn?”

She shrugged and began the irritating process of getting out of bed. Finally on her feet, she lurched up and staggered for the bathroom. Jamie was still lounging when she emerged after her shower.

“Are you going to just lie there all day?”

He shrugged and folded his arms behind his head. She didn’t miss the way the morning sun caught on his down hairs, framing him in gold.

“I might. Dinna have to work today.”

Pulling a dresser drawer open, she started the next process of getting dressed.

“But you can’t stay there all day. I have to get started on dinner preparations for Henry tonight and you need to call him. And, didn’t you promise me the crib would be built before you went back?”

His blue eyes narrowed.

“I swear, wi’ this pregnancy, half the time you’d forget yer bloody head if it wasn’t attached, but ye remember perfectly words I said near three weeks ago.”

“Just don’t say something you don’t want me to remember and we’ll be fine. I can make a quick breakfast before I take over the kitchen.”

With a grunt of mild frustration, he got out of bed and came around to stand near her. Stark naked, he was a mighty sight to behold and she felt a chill run down her back. He must have watched the thought move across her face, because he smiled and leaned in for a long, slow kiss.

“I was given to believe pregnancy made a woman less needy. But wi’ you, it’s like ye canna get enough.”

“That’s probably because I can’t. And we’re getting close to the end of this thing. Our lives are changing.”

“Aye,” he said, kissing her neck. “They are. And I’m verra glad they’re changing wi’ you.”

She giggled and gave a playful smack to his arse as he headed for the shower.

“I’ll have breakfast ready when you’re done.”
Claire set the eggs, bacon, and toast down on the table as Jamie came out, running a towel over his head.

“The crib is still where you left it,” she said, nodding to the wall the box leaned against.

“Aye, I ken. I nearly stub my toe on it every night. Can I no’ have my breakfast first?”

A rather loud gurgle filled the apartment and they both laughed. Jamie’s iron stomach could handle just about anything, but it refused to be taken from its routine of being regularly filled.

“Of course you can. And call Henry. Oh! Ask him if he’s any food allergies.”

Jamie pulled out his cell phone as he sat at the small table.

“Henry? It’s Jamie. Aye, I ken it’s early, but you’ve never been one to sleep in late. No, no we’re both good. All three of us, aye… Actually, Claire, the bairn, and I wanted to invite ye over for dinner tonight. Excellent! Claire will be pleased to hear. Have ye developed any food allergies lately?” Jamie nodded and smiled. “Aye, see you tonight. Claire thinks around six thirty?” Jamie raised his brows at her and she nodded. “Good.”

Putting his phone down on the table, Jamie set about eating his breakfast. Claire nibbled on her own while she began running through her mental inventory of their kitchen. With only the three adults, they wouldn’t need a massive amount of food. But Henry was clearly important to Jamie, so she wanted it to be nice.

Reaching around her, Jamie put his dishes in the sink and kissed her cheek, one hand on her waist. She turned to him, not satisfied with the small peck, and accepted his real kiss.

“Do you need help moving the crib?”

He shook his head and patted her bottom.

“Nah. I’m gonna push the couch back a bit and set it up all in the living room here. Gi’ myself some space to get it all together. Is our wee tool bag still in the closet?”

“It is. I haven’t had a need to touch it.”

In short order, he’d demolished the box (Why the hell did they child-proof a bloody cardboard box? I dinna think God himself could get into this thing!), set all the pieces and hardware out in neat piles, and gathered the tools he’d need. Claire smiled to herself as she began the dinner. She began mixing together cake batter while the oven warmed.

“Why does it need to be so big? The bairn’s going to be the size of a watermelon, aye?”

“Did you really just ask if your daughter was going to be the size of a watermelon?!”

“No, I asked if my son would be that size. But why does a crib really need to have so many wee parts?”

As she poured the batter into the cake pan, she snorted.

“Because it needs to hold together. Son or daughter, your child is going to be sleeping in that. You want it to be secure, don’t you?”

A few moments of silence passed.

“Have you lost the instructions?”

“No, they’re right here.”

Claire eyed the cake pan and the oven, trying to strategize how she’d lean over to open the oven and insert the cake. It took some creative maneuvering, but she got it in without losing anything.

“Alright. That’s going to bake for a few minutes. Then I can let it cool while I get-” she turned to check on Jamie’s progress and stopped.

He sat cross legged on the floor, leaning over and poking through a pile of screws. His red curls, still a little damp, fell in front of his face and he pushed them back habitually. For the first time since she’d known him, Claire saw Jamie in his reading glasses. She’d had no idea he even had glasses. The black, square frames continuously slid down his nose, which he hardly seemed to notice.

Finding what he needed, he sat up and began to assemble something. At one point, he bent his head forward to peer over the top of his glasses and Claire just lost it. Maybe subsequent pregnancies wouldn’t make her quite this needy, but this one certainly did.

She dropped the hand towel on the counter and made straight for him like a heat-seeking missile. Hearing her coming, Jamie turned his head and looked up at her.

“Do ye need me to open something again, a nighean?”

Gracelessly, she plopped herself on the ground and pulled him to her. Her kiss caught him off guard, surprise jolting through him as he leaned awkwardly to reach her.

“I take that as a no, then?”

“You never said you wore glasses,” she said, tugging and pulling at her shirt.

“Ah…” he said, puzzled. “I dinna wear them verra often. Dinna need them unless I’m verra tired or the print is too small. Sassenach, what’s-”

“Shut up,” she said, silencing him with another kiss.

With much more dexterity than Jamie had had with the box, Claire had him on his back and his trousers around his ankles in less than a minute.

“Christ, woman!”

Looking down, over her belly, at him, she winked.

“Claire will do just fine.”

His hands came up to spread over her belly, the baby inside announcing her irritation with being jostled.

“He doesna seem too happy.”

“For this moment in time, I don’t care.”

Struggling with her own trousers, she finally got them off and sat up, preparing to swing a leg over.
“I canna say I mind this neediness of yours, mo chridhe.”

“I’ve never wanted anyone so much,” she said, watching his lips part as she stroked him. “Even when I’ve just had you, I want you so much my chest feels tight and my fingers ache with wanting to touch you again - to have you again.”

Slowly, his body began churning, trying to create friction with her hand.

“Aye,” he breathed. “I feel it too.”

“So I’ll have you again,” she settled her knees down on the floor. “To feel that tightness release. To feed this addiction I have.” She held them both right on the edge, so near to that soul-deep connection. “And when the need strikes me again, I’ll have you again. And you’ll have me.”

His eyes peeled open just enough to meet hers and he nodded.

“Please, Claire.”

Her head fell back as she took him home once more. Despite her increased size, she had full control of most of her body and used it to torture him sweetly. Grinning down at him, she began rolling her hips in a slow, exaggerated circle. Jamie groaned beneath her. He reached up to remove his glasses, but she caught his wrist.

“I don’t think I said you could take those off.”

“It’s just a pair of glasses, Sassenach.”

“Yes. And they’re rather… different. Don’t take them off yet.”

Giving her a curious glance, he settled his hands on her thighs.

“Different? Like bedding wi’ someone else, then?”

She shrugged and twisted her hips from one side to the other.

“Maybe a little.”

When his hands moved from her thighs around to her backside, she stopped.

“Why’d ye stop?” he asked, voice a little pleading.

“Did I say you could grab my arse?”

His brows shot up.

“I need permission to fondle my own wife’s arse, then?”

“Don’t you remember last night? Struggling will only make it worse for ye,” she said in a sorry attempt at a Scottish accent.

His chuckle quickly faded into a groan as she moved again, slowly. No matter how much he tried to make her go faster, do something else, she refused. After a few minutes, she took his hands and moved them up to her breasts.

“Have I permission then, madam?”
“What do you think?”

“I think I’d much rather ye no’ torture me into an early grave.”

She couldn’t help but giggle a little.

“Oh we can’t have that. I’m nowhere near done with you yet.”

Picking her pace up slightly, she enjoyed him for a moment. Until his hands moved. Coming to a full stop, she glared down at him.

“What did I tell you?” she said sharply.

“Christ, Sassenach!”

“That’s not at all what I said.”

Squirming beneath her, he tried to lift his hips and recreate the friction. Her substantial weight, however, kept him pinned. For once, she had all the leverage.

“Damn you, woman!”

“No…” she said slowly. “I definitely didn’t say that either.”

“First ye couldna keep yer hands from me because of my glasses! And now ye wilna move. MAKE UP YER DAMN MIND SASSENACH!”

Reaching down, she grabbed his face in one hand and glared into his eyes.

“The more wrong answers you give me, the longer this is going to take. And not in the fun way.”

He fixed her with a stern look of his own before finally answering her.

“Ye said,” he responded through clenched teeth, “no’ to move my hands.”

“And?” she asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“And I moved my damned hands. For the love of God, Sassenach, do something!”

His hips moved involuntarily again, pushing just slightly against her, making her shiver.

“Good boy,” she purred. “Though if you’d followed the directions like you should have, we’d be nearly done by now.” She wiggled her hips a touch to illustrate her point.

“I swear to God ALMIGHTY Claire if ye dinna do something soon, you’ll be a widow.”

Turning his head, he looked up at her and glared darkly. His blue eyes were magnified through his glasses and she remembered the feelings and naughty thoughts when she’d first seen him. Assembling the crib for their child, glasses on the bridge of his nose as he read the instructions.

“Damn,” she muttered.

“What now!?”

“Something about you in glasses… I just… it makes me want to ravish you. Don’t you move a bloody muscle.”
He muttered something in Gaelic that she didn’t care to ask him to translate. The combination of his glasses and his rough Scottish burr lit something in her on fire and she rolled her hips hard against him, riding him as hard as she dared. Somehow, he still didn’t move his hands from where she’d put them.

With all her teasing and waiting, neither of them lasted very long. Claire leaned forward, breathing heavily but never ceasing in her movements, pulling Jamie with her over the edge. Her whole body shuddered against his as she went limp, planting her face into the crook of his neck.

**BEEP BEEP BEEP**

Claire groaned, not wanting to move ever again from the position she was in.

“I think yer cake’s done, mo chridhe,” Jamie breathed softly, running his hands down her back along the bones of her spine and up, enjoying the gooseflesh that rose up under his fingers.

“Damn the cake,” she mumbled against his skin, tasting the salt of his sweat from their exertions.

“I ken ye dinna really mean that. Besides, we dinna want to burn the building down. Henry would be verra cross with us if we did.”

She laughed softly and groaned as she tried to push herself off of his chest.

**BEEP BEEP BEEP**

“Yes, damn you, I hear you. I’m coming.”

After a moment of maneuvering, Jamie helped her off the floor, bending to get her clothes for her.

“I don’t have time for those right now. You’re right, I don’t want the cake to burn.”

“Sassenach…”

Claire moved, naked as the day she was born, towards the kitchen and the oven, but he stopped her before she could open it.

“Yer going to fall in there, Sassenach, and then ye’ll be burned and it’ll ruin yer day. I’ll get it out for ye. Dinna fash.”

She eyed him, but took her clothes and started to dress herself again. *Why had she not just worn a dress? Easier to get into and out of...and easier for other things as well...*

“Sassenach? Where are ye right now? Ye’ve the look of a cat that’s had cream for it’s supper on yer face and it’s makin’ me a wee bit nervous.”

He made a silly face at her and she stuck out her tongue back, earning a swat to her still nude bottom.

“Go and put together our baby’s crib so I can finish making this food. Oh, and...can you keep your glasses in our room? Just, um, in case we need them?”

He gave her a sly smile, watching the rosy blush cover her cheeks.

“Aye. If that’s what ye like, mo chridhe, who am I to say I won’t wear them for ye on occasion?”

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Claire fidgeted with her hair, which she’d fought down and pinned back. Jamie had said he enjoyed her wild hair, but she didn’t need tendrils taking on a mind of their own.

“Relax, mo chridhe. Ye’ve met Henry before.”

“Well, yes. But I thought he was just a landlord before. This is like… Well it’s like I’m meeting your family for the first time.”

A flash of hurt and regret moved over his face, but was gone when a knock came at their door.

“Come on, a nighean,” he said smiling, hand on the small of her back leading her forward.

Henry smiled on the other side of the door and Claire saw he had his arms full. In one hand was a nice bottle of whiskey and the other was a bouquet of flowers.

“I know you can’t have any of this yet, Claire, but I thought it would be a good thing to celebrate with later, when you can.”

“Oh Henry, that’s so sweet of you. Thank you!”

Claire took the flowers and put them in the vase that usually held her monthly roses. Jamie put the bottle up in one of the cupboards and came back out to the table to help Claire into her seat.

“This looks wonderful, Claire. Thank you for inviting me over.”

“You’re welcome, Henry. Jamie’s told me how much you’ve done for him since he came out here. You’re like family to him - to us.”

Henry blinked quickly and smiled fondly at Jamie.

“Oh! I almost forgot! Claire and I made ye something. I’ll be right back.”

Jamie hopped to his feet and dashed off to the bedroom for a moment.

“You are far too good for him, my dear. He can be a thick headed idiot sometimes. And you are sweet as an angel.” Claire flushed red at his praise.

“I know very well just how stubborn he can be. Unfortunately love doesn’t often follow logic. I couldn’t leave him any easier than I could take out my own heart.”

“I have to say I’ve never see him so happy. I’ve known him a number of years now, but there’s a life to him that… Well, I’m sure you see it as much as I do.”

Claire looked up to see Jamie returning with the card they’d made earlier.

“Yes,” she said, watching him smile back at her. “I do see it.”

Taking his seat again, Jamie handed over the card.

“I ken Christmas was yesterday, but we didn’t get this done until this morning.”

Late morning, Claire thought with a smirk.

Henry opened the card to see one of the ‘family’ photos she and Jamie had taken.

“Happy late Christmas, Henry. Thank ye for all ye’ve done for us. For both of us.”
“It’s been my pleasure. You’re both good kids.”

Jamie took Claire’s hand and squeezed it, grinning between both her and Henry. After that, they served themselves and had a delightful meal. Much to Jamie’s distress, Henry told a few stories about his first few weeks in Las Vegas.

“It wasna that bad!” Jamie protested.

Claire was giggling so hard tears streamed down her cheeks.

“Jamie, my boy… Yes, it was. You always got in the wrong side of the car. Every time.”

“Well it’s all backwards here!”

“For some reason, I can see that happening. I’m a little disappointed I never got to see it.”

Henry chuckled, a deep, soothing sound.

“I only wish I’d taken pictures. Just hearing him curse, early in the morning, in that odd language of his. God I hadn’t laughed that hard in ages.”

Jamie helped clear the table of dishes while Claire sliced the cake. The three of them settled in once more and Claire rubbed at her belly.

“You two…” Henry said quietly, looking between the two of them. “You remind me of me and my late wife.”

Jamie’s hand tightened on hers.

“Ye dinna talk much about her.”

“We married young. She was the prettiest girl on the block and I was in love with her the moment we met. Lucky for me, she had low standards and settled for me. My Julia was…” Henry paused to clear his throat. “Julia was my best friend. I loved her more than anything in the whole world. When I see the way you look at each other, it’s like watching me and Julia over again. It’s a rare and beautiful thing, what you both have. Cherish it.”

“I intend to, Henry. Claire’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I won’t ever forget that.”

“Same here,” Claire said softly.

Henry yawned and Jamie smiled at him.

“It’s getting late,” Henry said. “I should head home. Let the mother-to-be get some rest.”

They all stood and shuffled to the door. Henry paused and turned to hug Claire tight.

“He can be hard headed, like I said,” he whispered in her ear. “But he’s as loyal as they come. You hold onto him.”

“I will, Henry. I promise.” She hugged him back as strongly as she could.

Henry shook Jamie’s hand and headed out of the apartment building. As soon as the door was closed and locked, Jamie pulled her into a fierce hug.

“Thank ye for having him over, Sassenach.”
“Well you said he’s family. I wanted him to feel welcome here. And, well…” she wiped at the tears streaming down her cheeks. “I wanted him to like me. He’s basically your father here and I wanted to make a good impression as your wife and…”

Claire leaned heavily on Jamie, crying quietly.

“Hey,” Jamie said gently. “Hey, mo nighean donn, what’s the matter? What’s happened?”

“I don’t know why I’m such a mess! I just… He thinks I’m good for you.”

“Oh, my love,” Jamie chuckled. “You are the very best thing for me.”

Jamie rubbed her back softly, murmuring to her soothingly in Gaelic. She really ought to have him teach her enough to understand what he was saying all the time.

“Jamie, I had an idea while we had dinner.”

“Did ye? Come and tell me about it. Your feet must ache.”

Her feet were beginning to hurt, so she settled herself on the couch, stretching so her feet rested in Jamie’s lap. Pulling her shoes off, he began pressing his thumb into the arch of her foot, where it ached the most.

“So what was your idea, mo chridhe?”

“What if we asked Henry to be the baby’s godfather? Not that I expect anything to happen to either of us, but he’s our only family here. And, well… He’d be a great person to have around, to ask advice and all that. Do you think… Is that a stupid idea?”

It wasn’t until she looked up that she realized Jamie had stopped rubbing her feet. Tears were welling in his eyes and he nodded slowly.

“Claire… I think that’s the best idea. Henry will be so touched. And that ye’d ask it… Just when I think I canna fall more in love wi’ you, I get surprised. Aye. I’d love to ask Henry to be our baby’s godfather.”

“I think he will too. After all, he did a good job getting you acclimated to Vegas life. And he’s a good man,” she said, giggling softly.

“Aye, that he is. Come on, Sassenach. Let’s go to bed.”

“To bed…or to sleep?” she asked, wiggling her eyebrows at him.

“I guess ye’ll have to come and see, won’t ye, my wee vixen.”

She watched him with hungry eyes as she followed him down the hall to their bedroom... definitely not to sleep.
Chapter Summary

The final month of Claire's pregnancy.

“We’ve some things to do today, Sassenach. If ye’d rather stay home, I can get everything done.”

“No!” she said, setting her book down and struggling to get off the couch. “No I want to come.”

Jamie’s mouth quirked.

“Running low on your craving snacks?”

Pursing her lips, she glared at him.

“Maybe. Or maybe I just want to spend time with my husband.”

“Oh, weel then in that case, shall we waddle out to the car?”

This time she let the glare drop and threw a pillow at him instead. It got him right in his smug face, making her smile. But they joined hands and headed out to the car. Jamie helped her into the seat, refraining from saying anything more about her size.

They made a stop to pay the rent on the apartment before the rest of their shopping. Jamie, Claire had learned, loved to cook for her. Whenever his schedule allowed he took advantage of it to feed her properly. As they wandered around the grocery store, Jamie with his list in hand, while Claire picked things up at random and put them in the cart.

“What are ye gonna do wi’ that, Sassenach?” he asked, glancing down at a large bag of carrots.

“Your little girl is a fiend for veggies,” she said, eyeing the sale on cucumbers.

“I think,” Jamie said, shaking out a produce bag. “You’re using the boy as an excuse to eat whatever ye want.”

“Are you going to try and stop me, Mr. Fraser?”

Jamie snorted.

“God no! I prefer my bollocks remain as they are, I thank ye.”

Claire rolled her eyes and filled bag with cucumbers while Jamie held it open for her. As she did, she noticed a blonde woman behind Jamie look him over with obvious interest. When her eyes met Claire’s, she backed away hastily.

At the deli, Jamie spoke to the butcher about different cuts of meat. Claire pulled a grape off the stem in their cart and popped it into her mouth.

“If ye keep doing that we’ll have no grapes at home, mo ghraidh.”
“Are you going to stop me?”

“No. I’m only wondering if maybe I should get another bushel so I can have some too.”

The butcher stepped away to fill Jamie’s order and a lanky woman in heels stood next to him.

“I’m afraid I’m hopeless when it comes to meat,” she said in a voice pitched too high.

“I’m no’ a butcher.”

“Oh!” The woman said, practically quivering as she stood beside Jamie. “That’s such an interesting accent! Where are you from?”

Jamie flashed the woman his polite smile, but Claire knew just how deadly it was. When she saw it in the morning it struck her to her heart.

“Scotland, originally.”

“Oh wow! I’ve never been outside of Nevada, but Scotland must be amazing.”

“Aye,” he said. “It is.”

Claire, giving the woman her blackest look, came up on Jamie’s side and put her arm around him.

“What have you gotten for us, darling?” she asked sweetly.

Jamie gave her a curious look before putting his arm around her as much as he could.

“Thought we could have some steaks tomorrow night.”

“That sounds good to me!”

The butcher came back with Jamie’s request and handed the paper-wrapped meat to him.

“Anything else I can get you?”

Jamie shook his head.

“No, that’s all I needed. Thank ye.”

Finished with the week’s grocery shopping, they headed to another store for laundry detergent and a few other housekeeping things. When they walked in, she took his hand and walked close to him. The action made him smile down at her fondly, though he didn’t ask why she’d become suddenly clingy.

“Are we going to get you new boots for work?” Claire asked as they got back in the car.

“Well we canna go right now. We’ve got three different kinds of ice cream in the boot.”

Ignoring his comment about her inability to choose a flavor of ice cream, she went on.

“But this is the only time we both have off right now. How about we drop the groceries off and go get you the boots?”

“Alright.”

After the groceries were put away, they went out to the shoe store. Claire wandered through the
clearance racks while Jamie hunted for what he wanted. When things got quiet, Claire went in search of her husband.

She found him sitting in a comfortable chair, his leg extended and his foot in a woman’s hand.

“‘You’ve got very large feet, Mr. Fraser.’”

“Aye, I do. Look, I dinna need to be sized, I ken-”

“No no, Mr. Fraser. I want to make sure you get just the right shoe.”

Claire’s mouth fell open when the woman held Jamie’s leg just a little too long, her hand almost caressing his calf. To his credit, he pulled his foot away from her and gave her a tight smile.

“I thank ye, lass. But I ken what boot I want.”

The woman, whose nametag read “KELSI”, got up from the floor where she’d been kneeling and let out a longing sigh. Jamie fetched the boots he needed and took the box up to the front to pay for them. The woman’s eyes were zeroed in on Jamie’s backside, making Claire’s blood boil.

Stepping up beside him, she let her hand slide down his back and slip into his back pocket. Once there, she gave his buttocks a firm squeeze. He stiffened and cast her a strange look from the corner of his eye, but said nothing. The girl Kelsi was staring at them in open shock as they left.

“Not that I mind ye fondling my arse from time to time, Sassenach,” Jamie said, closing the boot. “But can I ask why ye felt it necessary in the shoe shop?”

“That girl was trying to fondle your calves. Had to mark my territory.”

“Oh,” he said with a bright smile. “I see.”

As he drove them home, she watched him. Blue eyes moved cautiously around, taking in everything to drive safely. Claire put her hand on his shoulder and smiled, rubbing it gently.

“Are ye alright, Sassenach?”

“Oh, quite.”

He pulled to a stop at a red light and took a deep breath.

“Would ye like that cucumber salad wi’ your steak tomorrow night?” he asked, voice thoughtful.

“Sure,” her hand slid down his arm and back up before moving to his chest.

Jamie gave her a warning look.

“As much as I enjoy the way you’re touching me, I canna say it’s a good idea just now.”

“You didn’t even see them, did you?”

Frowning, he pulled away from the intersection, her hand moving down his torso to his upper thigh.

“See who?”

“Those women today. Besides the one that was trying to feel up your trouser leg.”
“Didna-” he stopped and yelped when she reached between his legs. “Christ almighty, woman! I’m driving a bloody car!”

He swatted her hand away, gripping the steering wheel tightly.

“Then pull over somewhere.”

“We’re less than ten minutes from home. Surely ye can wait that long.”

Slowly, she shook her head, trying to reach for him again. Once more, he slapped her hand away. Stopping at another red light, he turned to her and glared, shaking his index finger at her.

“Beee. Haaaaaveeeeee. Behave!”

Huffing, she folded her arms over her protruding belly and glared out the windscreen.

Finally home, they climbed the stairs to their apartment and Claire felt his gaze on her backside. She let her hips sway a little more than necessary, thinking over the looks the other women had been giving him. Jamie hadn’t really seen them, taken almost no notice of their attentions.

Leaning against the wall, she waited for him to pull out his keys and unlock the door. She’d left hers on the hook inside before they’d left. He smiled as her arms wound around his waist. Difficult as it was, she moved in to kiss the side of his neck. He smirked as the deadbolt released.

“Feeling a bit needy, mo chridhe?”

“Two different women flirted with you today and I lost count how many others were staring at your ass. But you didn’t hardly look at them.”

“That’s because,” he held the door open for her. “I’ve the most beautiful woman waiting for me at home. One whom I love and am married to and who carries my child. Why would I need to look elsewhere?”

Keys in his hand, he reached to hang them up on their usual peg, but she caught him up and kissed him. The door behind him was still open, but neither of them noticed. His smooth lips moved against hers hungrily, as if he needed to devour her then and there. The box with his new boots dropped to the floor with a loud bang. Both his hands held her face between them pulling her closer to deepen their kiss. He kicked the door closed and she pushed him against it.

He hit hard enough to drive the air from his lungs. She began pulling his shirt up, nearly desperate for a satisfaction only he could give.

“It’s been a while,” he said, voice muffled as his shirt came off. “Since ye’ve been like this.”

She bit his neck gently, smiling at his sharp intake of breath.

“Do you want me to stop?”

“God, no!”

One hand reached up and tangled in his hair as she bit down harder on the side of his neck. Her other dipped below the lip of his jeans, fumbling with the button for a moment before feeling it finally release. Jamie grunted a little when her hand wrapped around him.

“Easy there, Sassenach. I ken yer excited and all, but maybe no’ use your vise grip, aye?”
Letting go his neck, she met his eyes and smiled.

“Am I being too rough on you?”

“A bit. Hold too hard on that and we’ll have no more fun wi’ it.”

“Mm… That’s a good point.”

His own hands, which had been toying with her curls, slid down to cup her backside.

“Christ you’ve the roundest arse,” he mumbled against her lips.

“Always been fond of that,” she muttered back, and felt his answering smile against her lips.

“We canna exactly make love in this position.”

She looked down and saw his point, with her belly keeping her from getting her hips closer to his. After a moment of consideration, she stepped back and began unbuttoning her shirt before working hastily at her maternity trousers.

“How about the back way?” she asked, using him to keep her balance while she stepped out of the trousers. “And who said anything about making love?”

“My God ye look so beautiful.”

He reached out and put his hands on her taught belly, smiling as the baby moved. She smiled up fondly at him for a brief second before reaching for his trousers. This would never get started if she let him feel the baby forever, and she needed this to happen.

Turning, she put her palms on the door, looked over her shoulder at him, and very purposefully wiggled her arse at him.

If Jamie hadn’t been ready before, that look certainly would have done the trick.

He’d stepped forward before he was even aware of it and pushed himself home much more roughly than he’d intended. Claire gasped loudly at the contact and, all at once, Jamie came back to himself.

His hands were on her hips, holding her steady. But he was going slow and tender, definitely not what she needed from him. Grabbing his left hand, she moved it up to her breast, where he held its heavy weight for a moment, but still not giving her the result she was looking for.

Instead, she pushed away from the door and spun around. Jamie let out a cry of surprise and displeasure, staring at her with his mouth open. Hands on his shoulders, she shoved him a little away from the wall. His brows lifted in silent question, but she gave no answer. Glancing pointedly at the floor, she waited for him to lie down.

“Are ye sure?”

“Oh for Christ’s sake, Jamie!”

Making the wise choice to not argue with her further, he lay down on his back and watched her. Stepping above him, she looked down and tilted her head to one side.

“Do you love me?”
“Aye. Verra much.”

He lifted his hands to help her ease down, which was surprisingly difficult given her altered center of gravity.

“Good. Because you’re mine.”

His back arched as she took him in again. Back in control, she could get what she needed, move as hard and fast as she wanted.

“Aye,” he moaned beneath her. “Only yours.”

“You are mine, James Fraser! MINE!”

She rode hard, fingers digging into his shoulders as she lost all control. They were both crying out by now, his eyes squeezed shut. He let out a strangled string of words that might have been Gaelic at the same time her back arched and she wheezed.

It was some time before they both came back to themselves and Claire smiled. Jamie pushed himself into a sitting position and held her as close as her belly would allow.

“Weel… I dinna think we’ve been like that in weeks.”

“Well, I haven’t watched women ogle you in public in a while.”

“Were ye jealous, then?”

She shrugged and smiled as he chuckled and pulled her face down to his own.

“That’s a good thing, aye? Being jealous.”

“Is it?”

“Aye, it is. It means ye still care. For ye canna be jealous over something ye dinna care about.”

With a smirk, she met his eyes.

“Well I suppose I care a whole hell of a lot then, don’t I?”

For a long moment, he silenced her with his lips. Her heartbeat began to slow as his hands wandered over her body.

“Ye ken I love only you, aye?”

“I do,” she smiled warmly. “All these bloody hormones make me a little crazy sometimes, that’s all.”

“Weel if this is what yer hormones make ye do, I canna say I mind them.”

“And you know I love only you, too. Right?”

She searched his eyes for a moment before he answered

“Aye,” he said, voice vibrating against her lips while she kissed down his neck.

Her lips visited his sweaty skin down to his chest, his heartbeat strong beneath her kisses.
“Ah… Sassenach, I hope ye dinna want to do that again just now.”

“No, no. Not yet, anyway. I only wanted to leave you with a … lasting reminder.”

“Of?”

With a wicked smirk, she met his eyes before sinking her teeth into the hard muscle of his chest. He yelped in pain and flinched, but didn’t escape her. She held on until she was sure the mark would last for a while.

“Who you belong to.”

“Because my bloody wedding ring wasna enough!?”

“Well… This seemed more fitting.”

He chuckled again and kissed her lips, her cheeks, down her neck, and-

“Ouch!”

“As they say, turnabout is fair play, no?”

“You bastard!”

“Wait a moment. I’m no’ finished yet. That willna stay more than an hour or two.”

The sweet, strange mixture of pain and pleasure pulsed through her as he went about marking her in turn. Her pulse throbbed in her neck where he bit her, but she smiled anyway. Satisfied that she was marked as solidly as he was, he released her and lay back again.

“Never kent a woman like you, Claire Fraser.”

“I’ve never known a man like you either, Jamie Fraser.”

###

Jamie sat on the couch, reading through one of his books. Claire was at the table with her study materials spread out, having outgrown the desk. Out of the corner of his eye, Claire began running her hands through her hair only for them to get stuck.


“Problem, Sassenach?”

“No, I’m fine.”

Trying not to smile, he waited a moment before she gave in.

“Alright no, I’m not fine. This is a bloody mess that I can’t make sense of, your bloody child won’t stop kicking me in the kidneys, I’ve peed six times in the last half hour, and I really, really want a glass of whiskey.”

Setting his bookmark to keep his place, he put the book down and got up.

“Well, I canna help ye wi’ all those things, ken, but I can help wi’ some.”

Her blue eyes slid off the papers in front of her and met his.
“You’ll let me have the whiskey?”

Pursing his lips, he sighed dramatically.

“You willna drink any whiskey, no’ until after the bairn’s born. I canna help ye with the peeing either. But I think he kens that you’re stressed about all this. Perhaps I can help wi’ the studying a bit?”

Claire heaved a sigh and leaned back in the chair, rubbing her belly.

“Maybe that’ll help.”

“Where would ye like to start?” he asked, collecting the scattered flashcards from the table.

“Um… Start with cardiac diseases. I’m rubbish.”

Flipping through the cards, he found the ones she’d requested and began asking her to recall the information. At first, she stumbled through, not giving all the information. He continued through the cards until she began reciting everything flawlessly. By the time she was satisfied, it was getting late.

“Come wi’ me, mo graidh. I’ll no’ have ye stressing yourself half to death.”

“But if I could just study the-”

“Nope. What was it ye said? If ye dinna get enough sleep, your cognitive function decreases, aye? So ye need to take a rest.”

Reluctantly, she labored to her feet with his help and stretched.

“Don’t use my own words against me, Fraser.”

Fixing her with his most stern look, he waited until she met his gaze.

“Then dinna argue wi’ me, Fraser.”

Her mouth opened to say something tart back, but closed it.

“Fine.”

Taking her hand, he lead her to their bedroom and sat her down on their bed.

“Jamie, you can’t possibly-”

“Hush, lass.”

Walking around the other side, he eased himself up behind her and pulled her to lean against him. He pressed his thumbs against her spine and dragged them down its length. She groaned and leaned into him further. Several minutes passed while he worked the knots from her back, helping her to relax.

“That’s better,” he said softly after a while. “I ken ye’ve a lot to do, and I ken ye can do it. But I hate to see ye in such a state. So relax, get some rest. I’ll help ye study until ye have yer exams, aye?”

“Jamie,” she said with a sigh as her head nearly flopped against his shoulder.
“Aye, my love?”

“Thank you. For helping me study and for helping me relax.”

Smiling against her hair, he let his hands slide around to rest against her belly.

“That’s why we’re a team, Sassenach. And see? He kent ye were worked up. He’s calmed down now you’ve relaxed.”

“She has, thank God.”

“Can ye get some sleep now?”

Her eyes opened and rolled hard.

“No. I have to pee.”

“Ah. Well I canna help ye wi’ that.”

“Unfortunately you can’t. But if I’m not back in five - no ten - minutes, come in after me.”

Jamie nodded gravely, helping push her to her feet.

“Aye. Ten minutes. Unless I hear a crash. Then I’ll kick the door in.”

“Good.”

###

Claire shuffled into the apartment after her short work day. Jamie had had training earlier and had promised to have dinner ready by the time she came home. But it wasn’t the food on the table that had her smiling.

“You’re a bit late with those,” she said, nodding to the nine roses in the vase.

“Ye havena delivered him yet! I’m no’ late!”

They sat together and discussed what they’d each done during the day. Finished, he cleared away the dishes and boxed up the leftovers while she got ready to continue studying. She’d asked that he help her study again, but to give her a few minutes for review. So he looked at the books on his shelf, choosing one he hadn’t read in a while. He couldn’t help but smile at the collection of pregnancy books at the end of the shelf. When Claire had read through them, she’d put colored tabs on important sections. He’d simply read them from cover to cover a few times each.

Claire was near the end of her pregnancy now, but he wouldn’t get rid of these. Each one reminded him of that night when she’d told him, when she’d come home to him and shown her heart. He grabbed The Expectant Father off the shelf and began flipping through it. Claire had actually been the one to purchase this book.

“I may be the expectant mother, but you’re involved in this too. And 90% of these things are written for the women. You deserve your own book.”

He frowned when it fell open and he felt a lump. Pushing the page over carefully, his brows lifted in surprise. Nestled in the pages were three dried rose petals.

“Sassenach?”
“Hmm?”

“Do ye ken why there’s rose petals in my pregnancy book?”

He turned to look at her and he saw her cheeks flush a little.

“Well… You’ve been bringing home roses every month and… Well I couldn’t just let them go. They meant so much to me. So I saved a petal from each flower each month. I was going to make a little book of them after I dried this month’s.”

“Ye… Ye kept them?”

“Of course I did, you sappy, romantic Scot. You brought me flowers every month after we found out I was pregnant. They meant so much to me and I wanted to keep a piece of them forever.”

Reverently, Jamie closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. He knew women liked to be appreciated, liked to know they were being thought about. This pregnancy hadn’t had the easiest start, so he’d tried to make it easier for her. He hadn’t thought it would mean quite so much to her, though.

“You think it’s stupid, don’t you?”

Joining her at the table where she had her study materials spread out, he bent and gave her a swift kiss.

“Nae, lass. I think it’s verra nice that ye kept them. Now, are ye ready for me to quiz ye?”

With a sigh, she pushed the flashcards over to him and closed her eyes in concentration. As he got them all facing the same direction, he thought about the rose petals. Perhaps he could combine them with something he’d been putting together, a family book of sorts.

###

When Claire came home a few days later, Jamie was waiting for her. It had been the last of her exams and he had been wondering all day how she’d done, knowing that she had prepared herself as well as she could. She was a smart lass, much smarter than he was if he was honest with himself.

“Well?”

“Well what?” she asked as she toed her shoes off, not looking at him.

“How did ye fair then?”

Finally, she looked up at him and for one moment, he thought she might burst into tears. Then, she smiled.

“I passed! I passed and I wanted to rub that instructors face in it, but I did the polite thing and only flipped her off once I left the class.”

He grinned at her, enveloping her in a bone crushing hug and felt a nudge to his lower abdomen as the baby let him know that it did not appreciate being squished.

“I’m so proud of ye, mo nighean donn. I knew ye could do it!”

“Well, I still have to pass the state exam, but I’m done with school! Something to celebrate, I
“Indeed it is. What would ye like for dinner, love? I’ll make ye anything ye wish.”

“Anything?” she responded as she grinned. Jamie sighed.

“Aye, even the hot wings, if ye want them,” he said, laughing at the look of excitement that cropped up on her face.

“I swear yer more excited about the hot wings than about yer school being over.”

“Yes, well,” she said, pointing to her stomach. “She’s happy about them as well.”

She took his hand and pulled him into the kitchen.

“Come with me, darling. I’ll help you make dinner. Then we can celebrate with… dessert,” she said, eyes glittering with mischief.

“Aye. Aye, dessert,” he responded, swatting her backside.

It would be a long night and not in any way a bad one.

###

A few nights later, Jamie noticed Claire pushing peas around her plate. She’d been quiet all evening, hardly saying a word.

“Sassenach, is something wrong?”

“Hmm?”

“Are ye alright?”

She nodded and gave him a shy smile.

“Yes, I, um… Well… I’ve finished my classes and… There’s a sort of…” Huffing, she folded her hands in her lap and looked down at them. “There’s a pinning ceremony and…” Her voice dropped to a near whisper. “I was wondering if maybe you’d like to pin me.”

“Do what?”

“The pinning. It’s… Well it’s a special thing and I thought… Nevermind. It’s silly. You don’t have to.”

Reaching over, he covered her hands with his.

“If it’s important to ye, then I’ll be there. I’d be honored to be a part of this ceremony. When is the graduation?”

Now her eyes rolled.

“Like I’m going to go and sit in that hot building for two bloody hours? I’m not going. The pinning will be long enough and I will not sit still for that long again. Not with this one constantly nudging my bladder,” she pointed at her belly.

“Aye,” he said, rubbing their child gently. “I ken it’s no’ so comfortable anymore. But surely ye
dinna want to miss your own graduation. It’s no’ every day ye graduate.”

“That’s true, but I’ll only ever have one pinning, and I would rather sit through that than graduation. Besides, then everyone will be able to see my handsome husband pin me.” She smiled coquettishly at him under her eyelashes as he laughed.

“Well, I dinna ken if that’s a good enough reason to pick one over the other, but whatever ye wish, mo nighean donn.”

“It’s not like I won’t still get my diploma. Besides, the graduation date is much closer to my due date with her and I don’t want my water to break mid-ceremony. I can’t imagine that would be good for anyone.”

“True,” he said, kissing her forehead lightly. “We’ll do the pinning then. And I’ll be more than happy to be there wi’ you for it.”

A few days later, Jamie helped Claire down the stairs to the car. She was dressed in a new white shirt and nice black trousers. After finding a place to park, they walked to the fieldhouse and took their places. He’d expected her name to come up in the very beginning, but they’d read through every ‘B’ name and hadn’t mentioned hers.

“Claire Fraser.”

He accepted the pin and went to stand in front of her. She hadn’t told him that she’d changed her name with the school.

“Jamie, I wouldn’t be standing here today without your support and encouragement. For helping me through the long study days and nights and continually giving me the support and love I needed to finish this, I will always be grateful. I love you.”

As they moved onto the next name and read the next dedication, Jamie brushed the tears from her cheeks.

“Thank you,” he whispered, kissing her cheek.

They waited patiently for the rest of the ceremony to be completed, Claire quietly trying to keep herself together. When it finished, Jamie took her hand as they walked slowly out to the car.

“Would ye come out to dinner wi’ me?” he asked.

“Eating out? We haven’t done that in ages.”

“Aye. And ye deserve a fine night to celebrate what ye’ve done. Completed your schooling wi’ a bairn on the way. It’s incredible, mo chridhe.”

With a sigh, she leaned against him.

“I meant what I put in that dedication, you know. I couldn’t have done all this without you.”

“Aye. I love ye too. Come on or we’ll be late for our reservation.”

They had a lovely evening out, laughing and enjoying their time together. Claire looked longingly at the wine as the wait staff constantly walked by with it.

“Soon, a nighean. Soon and we can share the whiskey Henry gave us.”
“As long as ‘share’ means I get most of it.”

“Naturally.”

Back home, Claire changed out of her nice clothes and into her comfortable pajamas. Jamie locked up and drew the curtains on the windows before joining her in their room.

“Thank you for taking me out tonight.”

“It will always be my pleasure, my love. Always.”

“You work late tomorrow?”

He sighed and lay down beside her.

“Aye, a bit. It’s a long show tomorrow night. Ye dinna need to wait up. Ye’ve a bairn to take care of.”

Claire sighed and kissed him.

“I’ll make sure to leave a plate of dinner in the microwave for you, then.”

“Thank ye.”

###

The show was finally over, long and taxing as always. The other lads were already showered and gone, leaving with a few of the bar wenches to go drinking next door. But he had a very pregnant wife to get home to, so he opted out of the gathering. Grabbing his towel from his locker, he hung it on the hook in the wall and got into the shower. He hissed as the water pelted his chest and he looked down. A slow smile came to his lips as he touched the dark bruise just over his heart.

“You are mine James Fraser. MINE!”

He hadn’t realized at the time that she’d bitten him with the full intention of marking him. It made him oddly happy, though. Claire was right about all of it. He was hers, mind, body, and soul. Having the marks of her passion on his skin was satisfying in its own unique way. Naturally, he’d given her a mark or two of his own. She belonged to him, after all.

Jamie turned off the shower, feeling the full weight of the exhaustion from the end of the show hit him. All he wanted was to go home and see his wife and feel their baby moving in her huge belly. He heard the locker room door open as he pulled his locker door open to get dressed.

“Have ye forgot something?” he asked without turning around, assuming it was Geordie. The lad was as forgetful as a goldfish.

“I thought they’d never leave us alone.”

Jamie whirled around to see a perky young blonde he’d seen before. She’d replaced the old princess in the show a few weeks prior, now known as Princess Geneva, but the recognition up close was more than that. It couldn’t be the same lass he’d seen with Frank, could it?

“What the hell are ye doing here, Ginny?”

“Hopefully you.”
“Excuse me?”

She untied the sash of her robe and began to slip it off her shoulders.

“Don’t you feel it? That connection between us?”

“No. I dinna feel a damned thing between us. I’m a marriet man. A *happily* marriet man.”

“Oh come on. I saw that look in your eyes tonight.”

Painfully aware he was only in a towel, he glared at her.

“No. I dinna ken what ye think is going on here, but I’ve no interest in anything wi’ you. Ye need to leave.”

The robe was still coming slowly off her shoulders, getting dangerously close to showing him far, far too much. As the robe began to fall, Ginny inched closer to him, looking up through her lashes.

“Are you really gonna go home and be with that woman?” She asked in a warm, honeyed voice as she reached out a finger and touched the bruise Claire had left on him. It took all his control to keep from grimacing as she poked it. That mark wasn’t hers to touch. Nor was any other part of him.

He lurched back from her into the lockers, his back hitting hard on the cold steel. She had him relatively cornered now and showed no sign of letting up. Eyes darting around, he tried to look for a way out.

“If ye mean my *wife*, then yes. Ye ken, the woman who’s currently carrying my child.”

“She’s not here. She won’t know. Take a shower after and she’ll never find out. You know that phrase that gets thrown around here? What happens here, stays here.”

“I’ll no’ be unfaithful to my wife. Ye need to leave. Now. The other lads might be gone, but security is still about the place. Dinna make me call them.”

###

Claire had been standing outside of the locker room, listening to this exchange happen. More than once, she had to stop herself from storming in there and ripping this little harlot to shreds who dared to try and take away the happiness and love that had surrounded her since she met Jamie Fraser. But she had stopped herself. She had focused on Jamie’s words and found herself getting more and more tearful at how he defended her. How he proclaimed his love for her. How he shot this girl down at every turn.

He hadn’t known that she was coming. Claire had decided to surprise him because she’d known that he’d been working hard, picking up some extra time so that they could have a few weeks together once their baby was born. The shows were beautiful and fun to do, but he ended up exhausted every night, sometimes not even making it all the way into bed before falling asleep. She wanted to ease his burden a little, give him something in return for all the things he did for her. But this, hearing him denounce this woman, was the best gift he could have ever given her. His commitment to her wasn’t just strong when she was around him, but when he didn’t even know she was there. She knew that, of course. He told her often how deeply he cared for her and loved her. More importantly, he showed her that he did, convinced her every day that they were in this life together, no matter what might come.
Jamie’s loud voice brought her back to the situation at hand. *Would this woman not give up?*

Claire opened the door to the locker room slowly, trying to make no sound. As she turned the corner, she saw the back of a blonde head that seemed oddly familiar, though she couldn’t immediately place why. Jamie noticed her edging into the room and his eyes widened. She saw his naked fear at seeing her, seeing how the situation presented to her looked; but it wasn’t fear of being caught in the act, it was a fear that she wouldn’t listen to him explain. The blonde head bobbed to one side, giving Claire a glance at the bite mark she’d left on Jamie’s chest. Whatever might come, the memory of when she’d given him that giving her strength. *He is hers.*

The woman standing before him, mostly naked from the waist up and Jamie looking resolutely away, turned to see what he was looking at behind her. A smile crawled over her face and Claire’s heart lurched a little in recognition. This was the same girl. The exact same one that she had seen briefly in Frank’s office, then again at the *Springs Preserve*.

“Well, hello there,” she cooed, malice coloring her tone as she took in Claire’s appearance. “Fancy seeing you again. Under the same circumstances even.”

Claire refused to make eye contact with her, eyes set only on Jamie. She could see in his eyes how much he wanted to explain to her that this isn’t what it looked like.

“How’d you get this one to stay with you?” Ginny piped up before anyone else could speak. “Couldn’t get knocked up by the first one, so you went and fucked someone who would? I’ll bet you tricked him into it in hopes he would stay.” She looked her up and down. “It’s no wonder Frank had to fuck someone else, with how you look. You’re so...plain! And you’re huge! You can’t be surprised that this one would pick me too. I mean, look at him and then look at me. Why would he ever say no to me? How sure are you that kid is yours anyways? She’s probably fucked every knight here trying to ‘mend her poor broken heart.’”

She had directed the last two statements to Jamie, mocking, fake sympathy dripping from her every word.

“I’ll thank ye not to insult my wife. She is, and always will be, the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen. And I’m damned lucky that she decided to pick me. She’s never had to try to win me.” He moved toward Claire, reaching out an arm to bring her closer.

Her eyes glittered angrily and she turned back to Claire.

“It’s alright. I’ve already had my way with him. Why do you think he always stays late after shows? I mean look at him! He’s basically naked now in here and he’s been in here with me! He’d say anything to make you believe him, just like Frank did.”

Jamie’s grip tightened around Claire as he pulled her partway behind him to shield her from any more from this woman, but she resisted being completely hidden from view.

“I’ve told ye I want nothin’ to do wi’ ye and I meant it. I havena done anything wi’ ye and I never would. There isna one thing you could do to make that happen.”

Before the girl could respond, Claire’s voice rang out, clearly and cold as ice.

“You should leave. Now. And stay away from my husband or I promise you’ll come to regret it.”

Ginny opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the sound of another voice entering the locker room.
“Everything alright in here?”

The night shift security guard, whose name was Rupert, had walked in, eyeing Ginny.

“What are you doing in here, Ginny? This isn’t your locker room. And by the sounds of things, you should probably leave now, or else I’ll have to let your boss know what you were doing in here.”

Ginny looked around to the three sets of eyes on her, gauging the reaction from each of them.

“Fine,” she huffed, hoisting her robe back up onto her shoulders and flicking her hair behind her as she strode out, tripping over a lone shoe and nearly falling down. Her face turned bright red in embarrassment as she rushed the rest of the way out of the room.

“Everything alright, Jamie?”

“Aye, thank ye, Rupert. We’re fine. We’ll be leavin’ in just a few minutes.”

Rupert nodded to the pair of them and left them.

Claire sagged against Jamie, feeling the baby tumbling and stretching inside her as her heart had raced.

“Sit, mo nighean donn, and I’ll finish getting ready.”

Claire sat in silence as Jamie got dressed and held his hand out to her to leave.

“Are ye alright?”

She had been watching him, eyes ablaze with anger still, but appreciating every part of his body as he’d dressed.

“Yes,” she answered. “I’m fine. I just want to go home.”

“Come on then. Let’s get you home,” he said, opening the door for her and rubbing the lower part of her back. “After you, mo chridhe.”

####

The following night, Claire chopped carrots with barely contained rage.

“That little… Little… UGH! How dare she think she can seduce my husband! Just because Frank was an easy lay, she thinks…”

“Sassenach, mo chridhe, I’d never-”

“And the nerve of her! To insult me, to my bloody face!”

Holding his hands palm up, he approached her slowly.

“Perhaps if ye just put the knife down,” he said carefully.

“It makes you wonder, doesn’t it?” she asked, turning toward him suddenly, knife still in hand. “What’s Frank done to make her look for someone else?”

“Claire, how about ye let me fix dinner, aye? Ye said your feet were hurting again.”

Huffing, she put the knife down on the counter and made her way to the couch. Just before she
plopped herself down, someone knocked on the door.

“Don’t worry your pretty ginger head,” she said as Jamie turned to move towards the door. “I’ve got it.”

Pulling the door open, she stared at the strange man in the doorway.

“Who the hell are you?”

He had a bushy black beard, a black mop of hair that was rather untidy, and dark, narrow eyes. His clothes were well worn, but not oversized.

“Have ye seen a big red-heided Scottish man about?”

Yet another person after her husband? Was there some sort of waiting list for him or something?

“Why, do you want to fuck him too?”

The dark eyes went wide with shock.

“Ah, no. I dinna want to bed the lad. I’m only lookin’ for him.”

Was he a Scot too? This strange furry man, Scottish, and looking for Jamie?

“Claire? Who’s at the door?”

“I think a homeless man got into the building again,” she called over her shoulder, not taking her eyes from the stranger.

The knife clattered to the counter and she heard Jamie’s large footsteps come closer. She finally turned when Jamie’s approach stopped.

“No,” he whispered, his blue eyes wide and face drained of color. “It canna be…”

“Been a long time, lad. Will ye no’ invite me in yer home?”

“Jamie, who the hell is this?”

Shaking his head, he looked at her for the first time, his mouth opening and closing.

“Ah… This is Murtagh, my godfather. Murtagh, this is Claire… my wife.”

Bushy brows shot up in surprise, looking her over again, his eyes lingering on her huge belly.

“Is she, now? Weel, I suppose we’ve a lot to catch up on.”

“Aye… I suppose we do.”

Rolling her eyes, Claire held the door all the way open and moved to let Murtagh in. He walked in and began looking all through the apartment.

“Your godfather?” Claire hissed under her breath to Jamie.

“Aye. I dinna ken how the hell he found me, or why he’s here.”

“Let’s find out then, shall we?”
Claire, holding onto Jamie’s arm for support, eased herself onto the couch. Murtagh pulled a chair from the kitchen table and sat down across from her. Jamie sat beside Claire, taking her hand in his.

“Marriet, then? I suppose my invitation was lost in the post?”

“Ah… That’s a bit of a story.” Jamie said with a little embarrassment.

“How long?”

Claire rubbed her stomach unconsciously, shielding the bump and feeling the baby somersault inside her.

“Almost nine months.”

Murtagh’s brows went up again, but he didn’t say anything.

“Why are ye here, Murtagh? Da made it perfectly clear that I wasna to set foot on Lallybroch property again.”

“As soon as Brian was able, he and yer mam both sent me off to find ye. They kent ye’d run to America, but didna ken where or what ye were doing.”

“So they could be sure I kent that I wouldna get any inheritance? I figured that happened soon as I left.”

Murtagh shook his head slowly.

“Yer a clotheid, ye ken that? Ye really think yer own family doesna want ye back? That they dinna miss ye?”

“Aye!” Jamie launched to his feet and began pacing. “I do! Da had a stroke because of me!”

“Ye canna cause a stroke any more than ye can cause the sky to rain. Ye’re no’ God Almighty, ye fool!”

Jamie’s jaw clenched as Claire reached a hand out to him and he sat back down beside her, putting his arm around her again and pulling her a little closer.

“It doesna matter, Murtagh. Nothing’s changed. No’ for them, anyway.”

“Come back to Scotland. Just to show them ye’re alive.”

Claire watched the two men carefully, sensing Jamie’s temper was barely restrained.

“I canna come now, no’ with Claire so close to her due date.”

Murtagh waved a hand in her direction dismissively.

“Leave her then. Just come wi’ me and-”

“Excuse me?! ‘Leave her then?!’ You expect Jamie to just drop everything and leave his pregnant wife behind for an international day trip? Are you mad?”

“This doesna concern ye, lass.”
Jamie saw Claire's mouth open, her face turning a delicate shade of puce and stepped in quickly.

“Aye, Murtagh, it does. She’s my wife and the mother of my son. I’ll no’ leave her behind, alone, so late in her pregnancy.”

Murtagh got to his feet and began pacing, muttering darkly in Gaelic.

“Fine. Then I’ll stay wi’ her and you go. Brian’s been worriet sick o’er ye.”

“ I think not,” Claire interjected before Jamie could speak. “Who the bloody hell do you think you are, coming into our home and demanding that my husband leave me alone when our child is so close to being due?! You think you can just disrupt our lives and he’d just leave me?! Leave our child?! Not be here to see her born?!”

Claire struggled to get off the couch, but when she did she stood up to her fullest height, eyes still locked on Murtagh’s shocked face.

“And you think that you'll just ‘take over and watch me’ like I'm some sort of family pet? I'm his wife. I love him more than my own life and I know he loves me too and I am beyond tired of people treating me as if I'm not important enough to be treated how I deserve!”

Her chest was heaving with her exertions. Even at her angriest, Jamie had never seen her this way and he was glad it wasn't him on the receiving end of that glittering, angry stare.

“So let me put this in words you'll ‘ken’,” she said to the deathly quiet room. “I dinna think so.”

Murtagh’s mouth hung open and Jamie was afraid to say anything. Claire stormed out of the front room and went straight to the kitchen, still fuming. Jamie gave Murtagh a look that clearly said don’t-follow-us-if-you-value-your-life and followed his wife.

She whirled on him as soon as he set foot on the linoleum floor.

“Don’t you dare tell me that was out of line. He has no right barging into our home and telling you to just leave me behind while I give birth to our child!”

“Claire, I-”

Tears suddenly filled her eyes and she shoved past him on her way to their bedroom. The door slammed closed and Jamie sighed, waiting to hear the sound of her crying. Her mood swings had improved lately, but this wasn’t a normal situation.

“Why the the hell did ye marry her? She weeps at the drop o’ a hat!”

Jamie glared at Murtagh.

“She’s my wife, Murtagh, and she’s verra pregnant. It’s no’ her fault and you’ll do well to speak of her wi’ respect.”

Murtagh pursed his lips, folded his arms over his chest, and lifted an eyebrow at him.

“I can still hear you!” Claire’s voice came through the closed door. “I haven’t gone bloody deaf!”

Jamie stood close to the door and dropped his voice.

“And yer a verra bonny pregnant lady, Sassenach. Whom I love wi’ all my heart.”
On the other side of the door, he could still hear her muffled sniffles. Turning around, he looked Murtagh in the eye.

“I think I need some time alone wi’ my wife, if ye dinna mind. Leave me a way to contact ye and I’ll speak wi’ ye later, aye?”

Murtagh sighed.

“Can I at least tell yer mam and da that I’ve found ye?”

“Aye, if they want to ken. But I think ye need to leave now.”

Murtagh nodded and left. Jamie took a breath and walked slowly into his bedroom.

“Claire?”

“You can’t just leave,” she said, wiping her nose with a tissue. “Jamie I’m so afraid.”

Sitting down beside her on the bed, he pulled her to lean against him.

“I know, lass. I ken how worriet ye are about the bairn. I am too.”

Suddenly her sadness was replaced with anger and she got to her feet and began to pace.

“First with that bitch Ginny trying to take you from me and now this? I just want to live my bloody life! Everyone is trying to take you from me!”

“No, mo chridhe! No one’s taking me from you.”

Hands on her hips, she kept walking, chest heaving in her rage.

“Ginny and this Murtagh… And here I am, big as a whale, which is your fault, by the way, about ready to push a person out of me. Let’s just hop a plane to Scotland! We’ll have a grand time! Just leave the pet behind, no big deal.”

“No one’s called you a pet, Claire.”

“As if,” she continued, ignoring his response. “You didn’t want to see the birth of your first child. I mean, what do I know? We’ve not even been married a year yet. Perhaps you don’t want to see it. Perhaps we don’t mean that much to you. If you were in Scotland, you could do whatever you wanted, be whoever you wanted. Wouldn’t have the responsibilities I’ve saddled you with. Maybe I should just go.”

Lurching to his own feet, he grabbed her shoulders and forced her to face him.

“Claire. Elizabeth. Fraser.”

She stopped and met his eyes. While she was still a bit angry with Murtagh and Ginny, he saw what was beneath it.

“I have never, ever seen you as anything other than the woman I love. You are the mother of my child, my wife. There is nothing in this world I want more than to be there wi’ ye when ye give birth to our boy.”

“Girl,” she corrected out of habit.
“Ye havena saddled me wi’ anything I didna already want. You are my “responsibility” because I love you. There’s no’ question of ‘if I were in Scotland’ because there would be no point wi’out you. If I ever, ever, went back, I’d have you at my side.”

Letting go of her shoulders, he reached up and brushed the tears from her cheeks.

“I love you more than anything I’ve loved my whole life. And Christ Himself couldn’a keep me from being wi’ you when our child comes into the world.”

Jamie kissed her forehead and looked down quickly when she gasped.

“Claire?”

“Just a cramp, it’s nothing. It’s been a bloody long day.”

“How about we have our dinner and go to sleep?”

Sighing heavily, she nodded. Offering his arm, he took her out to the kitchen where they finished making dinner. They were both quiet, Claire growing tired after her burst of energy.

As they got ready for bed, he knew something was still bothering her. He gave her space to get her thoughts in order. Pulling back the sheets, he lay down in the bed. She hesitated.

“You know I didn’t mean all that, right?”

“Of course, Sassenach.”

“I know how much you love me and love her,” she looked down at her bulge. “And we love you, too. I didn’t believe for a moment that you’d leave with Murtagh. Not when it’s so soon.”

Jamie smiled up at her and nodded.

“Aye, I ken. As ye said, ye’ve had a verra long day. Come to bed now, mo chridhe, and rest.”

She grunted and her face crumpled in pain. He sat up.

“Claire?”

“It’s fine. Really.”

He’d noticed her cringing a few times through dinner, but she hadn’t said anything about it. Being the medical professional, he assumed she’d know when her labor started. She climbed into bed beside him, sighing in relief as her feet were finally allowed to rest.

###

Claire woke sometime in the middle of the night with a strong desire to pee. Throwing the sheets off, she started to sit up before realizing she’d had an accident.

“Oh…” she said. “Oh no! No no no!”

Jamie stirred beside her, sitting up slowly and rubbing sleep from his eyes.

“Is something the matter, love?”

“Nope. Nothing’s the matter. Nothing’s happening.”
He frowned at her.

“You’re no’ making sense.”

Pain in her belly had her nearly bending over again.

“Damn it! Jamie, my bloody water broke.”

“Bloody water?”

She huffed in irritation.

“I’m in labor.”

A sudden burst of bed sheets announced Jamie’s attempt to fling himself out of bed.

“Christ! It’s time! Already? Where are my bloody car keys?!?”

“Jamie. Jamie!” Claire raised her voice, breaking Jamie of his panic. “A little help please? You won’t get anywhere without me with you.”

“What do ye need, mo chridhe? What do ye want to wear? Where’s the bags for you and the bairn?”

Pain rippled across Claire’s belly and broke across her face.

“What I need,” she started, “is for you to focus on one thing at a time.”

A startled look crossed his face when she breathed out a laugh at him.

“The bags are by the door, where they’ve been the last week and a half. I need to change because…” Red heat crawled up her neck to her face as she looked down at the bed.

“It’s alright, mo nighean. We’ll take care of it later. Let’s get ye ready to go.”

Freshly changed and packed, which Jamie had checked twice much to Claire’s annoyance (“Jamie, it isn’t like you can’t come home before we leave the hospital if we forget something but I don’t want to have this baby in our car so let’s go!”), they drove to the hospital, Jamie speeding the whole way there.

After they got Claire checked in and confirmed that her water broke, they played the waiting game. Claire had seen deliveries during clinical rotations, but she wasn’t sure how long it would be before they met their own little bundle.

After being in the hospital for a good 5 hours, Claire was defeated that she hadn’t made much change.

“She’s going to stay in there forever, isn’t she? She’s just never going to come out and I’m going to be pregnant for the rest of my life.”

Claire glared at Jamie as she started to cry. The contractions had kept her from being able to sleep, but she was determined to not get an epidural. She could endure the pain of childbirth without the medicine.

“Mo chridhe, why do ye not get the medicine? Ye’ll be able to sleep a bit.”
Jamie tried to soothe her, but Claire was having none of it.

“I can do this without the medicine. I can. *I can.*”

“I have no doubt ye can, but ye dinna need to.”

“I just want her to out, Jamie.”

“I ken that, but he’s going to take his time. He’ll eventually come out Claire. Yer doctor won’t let him stay in there forever.”

He brushed her hair from her face and leaned down to kiss her. She groaned and swatted at him.

“This is your fault, Jamie Fraser, with your giant genes.”

He smiled down at her as she scrunched her nose at him.

“Aye, I ken, Sassenach. But soon ye’ll forget all about my giant genes because ye’ll have our bairn. Right?”

“I won’t. I’ll remember this forever. *For. Ever.*”

###

As the hours passed, Claire made progress little by little.

“I’ve changed my mind,” she started as one of the nurses came to check on her. “I want the epidural now. I want it now.”

She was rounding out 12 and a half hours of labor and she just wanted to sleep.

“I’m sorry, Claire, but you’re 9 centimeters now. It’s too late for an epidural.”

“No, no it can’t be. I’ll hold her in. I’ll make sure she won’t come out.”

“Claire, you can’t. It’s too late. You can do it.”

Her eyes turned to Jamie’s, fear and pain plain in them.

“Jamie…”

“It’s going to be alright, mo chridhe. Yer almost done.”

“I can’t, Jamie. It hurts.”

“Ye can. You can do this.”

She reached out for him and he came to her side, giving her his hand to squeeze.

After another hour or so, Claire was finally given the go-ahead to push.

“Aaaaarrrrghhhhh!!!”

“Claire, channel the yelling into pushing. I know you’re tired, but yelling’s going to make you even more so, ok? You’re doing great,” the nurse said calmly to Claire.

“I know,” Claire said through clenched teeth. “*I’m trying.*”
“And yer doing excellent, mo chridhe,” Jamie whispered in her ear. “Just a wee bit longer and we’ll have our bairn.”

“Jamie, I’m so tired and it hurts so much,” she whispered back, face crinkling in pain.

“I ken, love, but you can do it.”

“You don’t. I’m in so much pain, you can’t begin to understand how much it hurts.”

She gripped his hand as another contraction came and she bore down as hard as she could, mentally counting to 10 with the nurse.

“Ok, Claire, deep breath and right at it again!”

Twenty minutes of pushing later, there was a break through.

“Ok, I can see the baby’s head, Claire!” Dr. Moss called out. “Let’s get this baby out!”

“About… damn… time!” Claire wheezed as she got ready to push again.

The counting started and Claire couldn't help but scream.

“That's it! Baby's head is out Claire! Give us one more good push!”

Claire met Jamie's gaze and held it as she took a deep breath and pushed with everything she had. Suddenly, there was no more pain, just relief.

“Congratulations!” Doctor Moss exclaimed as the baby started crying. “You've got a beautiful baby….”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The Fraser Bairn gender reveal!!!

Chapter Notes

Previously...

“Congratulations!” Doctor Moss exclaimed as the baby started crying. “You've got a beautiful baby….”

... BOY!!!”

“It’s… he's a boy?”

Claire's vision of a little girl with fiery red hair and a combination of their eyes slowly faded from her mind’s eye as Jamie cut the baby’s cord. She had been so sure the baby was a girl. She peered down at the baby on her chest being vigorously dried by the nurses.

“He's a boy…” she said again, so quietly she didn't think anyone would hear her. She reached her hand up, ignoring the muck and blood on his little back and touched him, just to make sure he was real. She could feel like small body moving with every breath he took to cry.

“We’re going to measure him now, alright?” A nurse gently reached for the baby to lift him off Claire’s chest.

“Oh. Oh, yes. That's fine.”

“Give me one more push, Claire, and then we’ll get you cleaned up and you can hold your son!”

Doctor Moss’s voice pulled Claire's attention back to her, but her eyes kept wandering back to the warmer with the baby in it. Their son.

Jamie saw the look of confusion on her tired face. The long labor and no pain medication had completely drained her. She looked exhausted.

“Are ye alright, mo nighean donn?”

Once she had been fully settled back into the reconstructed bed, she couldn't take her eyes off of where they had taken their son, but when Jamie’s face appeared in her field of vision, she looked up.

“He's a boy,” she said again.
“Aye…” Jamie responded slowly. “Aye, he is. A braw lad by the sounds of him.”

“But, he’s a boy.”

“What’s the matter, a nighean? Are ye no’ pleased by it?”

“No, no it’s not that. I-I just… I thought the baby would be a girl.”

Jamie looked down at her again and quirked an eyebrow. He wasn't quite sure what to say to her, but she spoke up again a second later.

“I… I’m not prepared for a boy, Jamie. I assumed… a girl… and I…”

He saw that her emotional turmoil mixed with the bone weariness was going to come out of her, mostly likely in the form of confused tears. Her eyes searched his, so confused it broke his heart a little. He reached out and brushed his hand over her hair, trying to calm her.

“It's going to be alright, mo graidh. Yer tired is all.”

“Ok Mom, did you want to put the baby to breast?” The nurse strode over, holding the little bundle in her arms that was squirming, rooting for his first meal.

“Oh, um, yes.”

Claire reached awkwardly towards the squawking bundle and held him close, the nurse helping her with her gown.

After some maneuvering, they finally got the baby to latch and Claire felt the strange pull that came from nursing an infant. She couldn't take her eyes off of the tiny face. She traced the shapes of his cheek and head over and over, familiarizing herself with her son.

Her son. Their son.

She smiled and cooed softly to the baby as he nursed, mouth already slacking. He was as exhausted from this whole ordeal as she was.

“He’s so perfect,” she whispered.

“Aye, mo chridhe. He is.”

She met Jamie’s proud gaze and laughed.

“Ah well, I guess you won the bet.”

She chuckled again at the look of triumph on his face and the movement jostled the baby, causing a small snort until he relaxed again against Claire's chest.

“Aye, I did. Which means I get a pick of the name. But we can talk about that later, a nighean. Yer tired now. Let's rest, aye? I'll look after our wee bairn.”

Claire’s focus was back on her son’s tiny head.

“He's so small,” she marveled, barely touching his sleeping face. “I don't think I've ever loved anyone this much… except for you.”

Jamie looked down at her, eyes wide and clear staring back at him. He smiled and leaned down,
kissing her softly, then the bairn.

“I love you, too.”

###

After Claire and the bairn had fallen asleep, Jamie settled himself on the couch bed to rest, but found he couldn’t. Instead, he got up and watched his son sleep. He knew he really should get some sleep as well, but the steady rise and fall of the boy’s small chest was mesmerizing. This tiny person was his—his and Claire’s.

Eventually, he was forced to catch an hour or two. Claire and the bairn would need him and he’d be useless if he was asleep on his feet. Waking from a light doze, he saw Claire smiling over at him.

“We did it.”

“I didna do much,” he said, getting up. “No’ more than hold your hand while ye did the hard work.”

Claire sighed, looking over at their boy again.

“I was thinkin’...” he said softly. “Would ye mind if I called Henry? Invited him for a visit?”

“Mind? Jamie, he’s our son’s godfather! Of course he should come and visit!” she answered, smiling widely at him. “But first, will you hand him to me? I think he’s hungry.”

Kissing her forehead, he nodded, picking up their wee lad, who was fussing now, and handing him to Claire. He watched her smile and coo at him while she adjusted herself.

“I’ll just go make the call then.”

Jamie stepped out to call Henry. He began to pace, waiting for the ringing to finish.

“Jamie?”

“Henry! She’s had the bairn, Henry.”

“She has? That’s wonderful! Boy or girl?”

Jamie smiled to himself, throat growing tight as he thought about his son lying with Claire only a few feet away.

“Boy. He’s a braw lad. Would ye like to meet your godson, Henry?”

“Give me about half an hour. But I’ll be there.”

Smiling, he hung up and reentered the room. Claire was humming softly to the bairn while his arms jerked.

“Well?” she asked, not looking up from the baby.

“He’ll be here soon. He’s verra glad ye delivered a healthy bairn.”

“With his godfather on his way to meet him, perhaps he should have a proper name?”

Jamie grinned and took his seat in the chair beside the bed.
“Oh, would ye like to ken the name I’ve picked, then?”

Shooting him a flat, unamused look, she waited.

“What do you think?”

“I think he should have a manly name, and verra Scottish. Like his da, ken?”

“Somehow ‘James’ doesn’t scream Scottish to me.”

Pursing his lips at her, he sat back in his seat.

“ANYWAY… I thought our bairn should have a name that goes wi’ his kilt, aye? There, in yer arms Sassenach, is Dalhousie Fraser.”

Her mouth fell open in shock.

“And remember the terms of our bet! Ye canna veto my choice.”

“But… Dalhousie?! Jamie you can’t be serious!”

“Dalhousie James Fraser. I think it’s got a certain ring to it.”

She began to shake her head, holding the boy closer to her chest as though to shield him from his father.

“He’ll never survive school with a name like that.”

“He’s a tough lad. He’ll make do.”

Looking down at the baby again, he watched her try to come to terms with the name. She looked as though she’d eaten a sour grape and was trying her best not to spit it out.

“Jamie,” she finally pleaded. “You can’t really have chosen… that.”

With a sigh, he chuckled quietly.

“Of course not, Sassenach. That name might have done alright in 18th century Scotland, but we aren’t in Scotland. I thought the name Fergus might fit the lad.”

“Well… It isn’t Dalhousie.”

“If ye dinna like it, we can-”

Claire shook her head, tracing one pudgy cheek with her finger.

“Hello Fergus,” she whispered. “Fergus James Fraser. I think it’s perfect, Jamie.”

“Weel… I think he’ll need a few more names in the middle there, Sassenach. But we can figure those out later.”

Her eyes rolled, even as she smiled.

“You want him to have fifteen names like you?”

“Aye!”
Jamie took Fergus back from her and cradled him in his arms. A while later, a knock came at their door.

“Come in,” Claire said, pushing herself up.

Henry walked into the room, carrying a bouquet of flowers and a blue balloon. His eyes locked on the bundle in Jamie’s arm and tears sprang to his eyes.

“Oh Jamie, I’m so proud of you. And Claire… God you look wonderful.”

“I look horrid,” she said, smiling. “But thank you, Henry. And thank you for coming.”

“Of course I came! I’ve… I’ve never been asked to be a godparent before. Oh! I got this for the little guy too. I hope you don’t mind.”

Digging in the small canvas bag he carried, Henry removed a stuffed blue horse.

“Oh Henry, that’s so sweet. Thank you.”

“Would you mind if I held him?”

Jamie’s eyes went to Claire and she nodded.

“Certainly. Here.”

Carefully, Jamie transferred his son into Henry’s waiting arms. Henry’s face lit with untold joy as he began softly crooning to the baby.

“Have you decided on a name?” He asked softly, keeping his voice low so as to not cause disruption.

“Fergus James Fraser,” Jamie said proudly. “Though I think that isna enough names for the lad.”

Henry laughed a little, bouncing Fergus to keep him happy.

“Fergus. How very Scottish of you.”

“It’s better than Dalhousie,” Claire muttered. “Jamie, I think I’ve just thought of another name for our boy.”

Jamie’s brows lifted as he looked at her.

“Oh have ye?”

“Fergus James Henry Fraser?”

“Henry sounds a bit… English, don’t ye think?”

She huffed at him.

“Well his mother is English. And Henry has been like a father to you. It feels right, doesn’t it?”

“Aye, it does.”

They both turned when they heard a soft, strangled sound. Henry had tears streaming down his cheeks, staring at the both of them in awe.
“No one has ever been so kind to me, not since I lost my wife. Thank you.”

“You’ve done so much for us, Henry and we consider you family. I hope you know how much we both care about you.”

Claire’s eyes were full of tears again, but she was smiling widely at Henry, silently urging him to understand the feelings of gratitude and the amount of love they had for him.

Henry sat in the rocking chair, still holding Fergus, his face pleased.

“Thank you, Claire. That means more to me than you could ever know. When do you have to go back to work?” Henry asked Jamie.

“Och… weel, I dinna want to go back to *Excalibur*. I’d like to have better hours, especially wi’ the bairn born now.”

“Well… That distributor I told you about still has a space open. You’ll need to do a little bit of training, but I know how you are with people. You’ll do well with it.”

“I canna thank ye enough for this, Henry. I kept meaning to get a hold of him, but things got a little hectic towards the end here. I’ll be happy to have a more ‘normal’ job. If he hires me that is.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that, Jamie. I’ve known Chris for many years. Besides, he owes me a few favors.”

Henry winked at him causing Jamie and Claire both to laugh, which startled Fergus and brought the attention in the room back to him as he started to cry. Henry softly bounced him in his arms and Fergus quieted almost immediately, staring intently into Henry’s face.

“I think he likes you,” Claire said, smiling over at Henry as she watched his face, as mesmerized by Fergus as she and Jamie were.

“I agree,” Jamie added. “He knows you’re good people, Henry. Already an excellent judge of character.”

Henry chuckled continuing to talk to Fergus amid conversations with Claire and Jamie. After a couple of hours, Fergus began to make his empty belly known.

“Ah well, I think that is my cue to take off. I’d love to come back tomorrow to see you three, if it’s alright with you,” Henry said, grinning as he handed Fergus to Jamie.

“Of course!” Claire responded. “You can come and visit whenever. We’d love it.”

Henry leaned down to hug Claire in her bed.

“You’re going to be a wonderful mother, my dear. I can just tell. And he’s a beautiful baby. Congratulations.”

A tear leaked out from Claire’s eye.

“Thank you, Henry. That means more to me than you know. I’m so glad you came to visit. And thank you for everything you’ve done for us and for the gifts. They’re lovely.”

“Not a problem at all. It makes me just as happy.”
“Let me give you the information and you can give my friend a call. I would suggest you give him a call today and just let him know you’re still interested and he is pretty good at setting up times around your schedule to get you in for your ‘official interview’ with him. I think you’ll like him.”

“Thank ye, Henry. Claire and I both appreciate it,” he said, reaching to hug him. “I canna thank ye enough for the opportunity you’re giving me.”

“Think nothing of it. I know what a good person and worker you are, Jamie. I know you’ll fit in well with the company and with the people who work there. Besides, this means that you can help me out with some things around one of the buildings I’ve got,” Henry said, clapping Jamie on the shoulder as Jamie laughed.

“Aye, ye’ve got me for at least a few projects I’m sure.”

“I’ll hold you to it. I’ll see you both tomorrow. Don’t forget to get some rest.”

“Bye Henry! See you tomorrow!” Claire called as he left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Claire moved her gown aside, helping Fergus to latch the way the nurses had shown her.

“I’m so glad that he could help you find something else to do. You’ll have a lot less physical stress it sounds like in that job.”

“Aye,” Jamie replied. “It will be nice to have more normal hours as well. I like the idea of being home wi’ you and the bairn at night. I’m gonna give him a ring in a bit and set something up.”

“We’d like that too,” Claire said, smiling up at him sweetly. “It’ll be nice to have you home with us. Go ahead and call. We don’t have much else going on, do we?” she laughed, rubbing Fergus’s back as Jamie dialed the number.

###

Three days after Fergus’ birth, they were given the green light to go home. Claire was antsy to get back to a familiar, comfortable place. They packed up their belongings and bundled Fergus up as best they could. He was a happy boy, seeming to enjoy the world around him. Jamie had the rear passenger door open of their car, sprawled awkwardly on the seat as he struggled with the carseat.

“What the hell is this bloody mess!? Do ye need to be a genius to put the damn thing in?!”

“It’s a car seat, Jamie. It can’t possibly be that complicated.”

“Would YOU rather do it, then?” he barked, the car shuddering as he tried to force the plastic into place.

“I offered to, but you said you had it handled.”

He huffed and glared at her.

“I practiced this for hours! I broke my own record of five minutes to get it in and secured. But I canna do a damned thing right now!”

“Perhaps you should have gotten everything in there before we left, Jamie.”

All she got in response was an irritated grunt while he continued to struggle.
“When you left to get the car and bring it up front? You should have checked the seat. You could have broken your five minute record!”

His head popped up only long enough to let her see his eyes roll hard before disappearing again. Eventually, the seat snapped into place and Fergus was strapped in. Jamie drove carefully while Claire sat beside their son.

It seemed like it had been years since they’d been back here. Between the two of them, they got all of the accessories that came with a newborn out of the car. The stairs presented a new problem and they made the awkward climb. Jamie nearly dropped the stuffed horse Henry had given Fergus trying to get the apartment keys out of his pocket.

When they stumbled in the door, one of the bags dropped on the floor the same moment Fergus began crying. He’d been silent the entire drive from the hospital to the apartment, hadn’t made a sound while Jamie had fussed with the carseat. But now that he was home, he let it out.

“Is it his diaper?”

“It doesn’t smell bad,” Claire said, trying to shift Fergus to take a sniff.

“Hungry then?”

Claire huffed.

“I don’t know! I just got in the door half a second after you did!”

Jamie took a deep breath and closed the door behind them. It took Jamie and Claire both humming to quiet the boy down. Fergus fed and settled in to sleep after burping up on his father.

“What do we do now?” Claire whispered, staring down at the pudgy little face.

“Weel, I expect we get as much sleep as we can. I dinna think he’ll be down for long.”

“I’ll go put him in his crib and how about you make us some sandwiches? I’m starving.”

Jamie leaned in and gave her a quick kiss before heading to the kitchen. As carefully as she could, she lay Fergus down in his crib. Jamie had two hastily made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, on of which was halfway in his mouth. Claire took the one he offered and took huge bites, eating it as quickly as she could. Jamie filled a glass with water, gulped it down, refilled it, and handed it to Claire. Satisfied they were both fed and watered, he looked down at the items littering the floor.

“Should we…”

“Later. We should get sleep while Fergus is down.”

Jamie nodded in agreement and they went to their room, collapsing on their bed. Just as her eyes drifted closed, Fergus began to cry. Both parents groaned, but it was Jamie who got up.

“Rest, Sassenach. Next one’s on you.”

Not bothering to argue with him, she curled up snugly on the bed and fell immediately to sleep. It was one of those sleeps that were deep and hard, so when Jamie woke her, she wasn’t sure what year it was.

“Sassenach,” he grumbled.
“I’m going,” she slurred.

Tiredly, she picked the baby up and felt the heaviness in his diaper. Still half asleep, she got him changed and back in his crib before collapsing beside Jamie again. For a brief moment, she was deeply happy to have Jamie at her side, always encouraging and helping. She’d wanted to be a mother, though she didn’t know how to be one. But she didn’t have to learn any of this alone. In one crazy night, she’d gained a husband, son, and a place to truly belong. Jamie’s arms came around her, holding her snugly against him and she smiled, letting herself drift back to sleep.

###

Jamie bounced a little in his walk around the couch while Claire finished her breakfast. Fergus wasn’t crying at the moment, and, tired as he was, Jamie didn’t dare stop moving.

“Sassenach, would it be alright wi’ ye if I called Murtagh today? Let him come by to see our lad?”

Claire sighed and he watched as she pulled herself together.

“Yes, that would be alright. So long as he doesn’t try to take my son away from me. Like he tried to take you.”

Jamie bounced over to her and kissed the top of her head.

“Dinna fash, mo chridhe. I’ll be wherever our son is. I didna think I’d love him this much. I kent I’d love him because he’s mine, but…”

Looking up, he saw Claire beaming at him, her eyes twinkling.

“You look good with him.”

“Thank ye,” he said, returning her smile.

When she was ready, she took Fergus and sat down to feed him while Jamie called Murtagh.

“Jamie?”

“Aye. Sorry it’s taken me so long to ring ye back. Claire went into labor just after ye left, so we’ve been a bit busy.”

The line was quiet for some time and Jamie worried Murtagh had hung up.

“Christ! Yer a father, then!” Murtagh shouted, jarring Jamie from his thoughts.

“Aye, I am, and couldn’a be happier about it. If ye’d like to come visit the bairn, you’re welcome to come.”

“Now?”

Jamie looked to his wife.

“Murtagh’s askin’ if he can come now.”

He saw her take a visibly deep breath before she nodded.

“Aye, ye can come now.”
“I’ll be there presently.”

A short while later, a loud knock sounded at the door. Claire tried to steady herself, trying to not assume that Murtagh would start in again as soon as he walked in, but she couldn't shake the intense feeling of wanting to take Fergus and go into another room. She knew Jamie wouldn't let anything happen to their son, but she needed to be near him. She needed to hold him. It was irrational fear, but it was still fear. And Claire knew all too well how powerful of an emotion it could be.

Jamie opened the door, clapping Murtagh on the shoulder.

“So, where's yer bairn then? I have a wee gift for him.”

Jamie turned to see Claire, still standing a few paces away and showing no sign of moving forward.

“He’s just here. A braw, wee lad if I've ever seen one. A set of lungs on him as well.”

He motioned Murtagh forward and silently urged Claire to bring the bairn into view for Murtagh to see. Claire tilted Fergus so his face was out, eyes closed in sleep still. Murtagh reached out to touch his head and Claire had to hold herself back from stepping away from him. She knew Murtagh wasn't a bad person; Jamie knew him well and wouldn't allow someone to come into their house if they were, but it took a lot to keep her rooted to her spot.

Noticing she didn't seem to have any intention of letting go of the bairn, Jamie stepped in.

“Here, mo graidh, let me hold him a moment.”

He noted the brief flash of panic in Claire’s eyes, knowing that Fergus would eventually be in someone else's arms than their own. She resisted him a little, but let him take him out of her arms, still making a face.

“Ye might want to hold him while he's still sleeping, a goistidh . He can be a right wee devil when he wakes and starts his hollerin’.”

Holding out the sleeping bundle, Jamie readied to hand Fergus over. Just as he was about to do so, Fergus woke, crying out his displeasure at his dirty diaper.

“He, I'll take him,” Claire said, stepping quickly between Murtagh and Jamie to take hold of their crying baby. “I think he just needs a change. He might be hungry too. I'll just be a minute.”

Murtagh looked quizzically at Jamie.

“It's just been the two of us,” he said, reading the thought Murtagh had. “Dinna fash. She'll bring him back.” I hope, he thought to himself.

15 minutes later, Claire returned with a wide-eyed bairn.

“He's all better now. I almost thought he needed a bath, but he's ok.” Claire laughed softly, cooing down at Fergus as he waved his wee arms at her, squeaking.

Jamie smiled and motioned for Claire to sit next to him. She took a deep breath as she sat down and readied herself to hand Fergus over, fighting back all the contradicting emotions.

“I promise I willna drop him,” Murtagh said gruffly, watching Claire’s emotions play across her face.
“I know that,” she snapped, pulling her extending arms back to her body.

Fergus, sensing the tension in the room, began to cry again. Claire bounced him in her arms, still feeling the tension surrounding the three of them.

“Hush, now. I'm sorry I startled you,” she whispered at Fergus. “Hush now, love.”

Jamie and Murtagh continued a conversation they started before Claire had come back as Fergus quieted and went back to sleep. Jamie nudged her softly and she sighed.

“Here. He's sleeping now. You can hold him,” Claire said, not looking at Murtagh, but down at her sweet son’s face.

She moved and allowed Fergus to leave her grasp. Jamie wrapped his arm around her, trying to give her some strength.

About ten minutes went by before Fergus started to squirm. Claire reached out like a flash of lightning, snatching him from Murtagh’s grasp.

“It's time for him to eat. He didn't before and he needs to.”

Jamie watched as Claire took Fergus and headed to their room. He knew she was wary of Murtagh and he couldn't blame her. Lots of things had happened in the last few days and he knew she was tired and overwhelmed still.

“Before ye start,” Jamie said, louder than he intended as Murtagh opened his mouth, “Claire has had a hell of a few days. She had a long and tiring labor and we havena gotten a lot of sleep. Ye didna exactly instill confidence the last time ye were here. She’s still rememberin’ that. So dinna start.”

Murtagh looked taken aback at his godson’s sudden outburst, and then really looked at him.

“Aye. I can see ye both havena been getting much rest.”

“No, we havena. We sleep when he sleeps, but I sleep much lighter right now. Feelin’ like I must get up and check on him. And I like to get up wi’ Claire at night. Be together with the bairn when he wakes.”

Jamie tried to stifle a yawn as Claire walked back into the room, yawning herself.

“I fed him and I put him down for a little nap.”

Murtagh looked between them, feeling a small soft spot of understanding for her actions.

“Aye, weel. I'll leave ye both be then so ye can sleep a wee bit. Gi’ me a ring when it's good to come by again. I'll bring a meal for us to eat and toast the new bairn.”

“Thank ye. We would appreciate that sometime soon. I'll call ye later, a goistidh .”

Claire retreated back to the bedroom as Jamie showed Murtagh out. When he came back into the room, Claire was sound asleep. Smiling tiredly, he leaned into Fergus’s pram and kissed his head lightly, trying not to wake him.

As he slid in next to Claire, she cuddled close to him in her sleep, finding her favorite spot on his chest. Jamie closed his eyes, breathing in the smell of her hair as his lips brushed her head, following his two loves into sleep.
Claire had woken sometime later, hearing Fergus beginning to fuss softly. Jamie was finally completely out, sleeping hard and not stirring an inch. Silently, she tiptoed to the pram and picked up her son.

“Let’s let your Da get some sleep now, huh?” she posed to Fergus as he gurgled, happy to be picked up and moving around. She quickly changed his diaper and then sat at the table, holding him snugly against her shoulder as she pulled out her notes and opened her test study questions app. Studying had been hard while she had been pregnant, but studying with a newborn felt almost impossible. It had only been a few days, but it was still overwhelming. Either way though, she still had boards to take and a license to get, so she kept on with it, trying to get through at least 50 questions a day.

Just as she was getting into a good flow, Fergus started to snuffle, getting ready to cry.

“Oh no, my sweet lamb, are you hungry again?” she cooed sweetly, nuzzling the soft brown fuzz atop his head before moving him to allow him to get his meal.

“There we go, love. Is that better?”

Every time she looked at Fergus’s tiny face, she felt more amazed and more love than she thought possible. *This is just how I feel about Jamie*, she thought to herself while staring down at Fergus’s pudgy cheeks.

Jamie woke from his sleep to no wife in bed with him and no son in his pram. Panicking for a moment, Jamie stumbled out towards the kitchen, but stopped when he heard Claire humming softly. She was nursing, but her eyes were shining with tears as she stared down at Fergus.

“Are ye alright, Claire? Is he hurtin’ ye?”

Claire jumped in her chair, startling Fergus in turn who started to cry as he dislodged from his meal.

“Oh, Jamie, you startled me.” Claire’s voice broke as she started to speak, not realizing that her eyes had filled with tears. “No, he wasn’t hurting me. I was just thinking about how much I love him and you and...these post-birth hormones are making me over emotional.”

Jamie came to sit down next to his wife and child, reaching over to plant a sweet kiss on Claire’s mouth.

“Ye didna wake me?”

“No. I didn’t want to steal any more sleep from you. Plus, I was awake and needed to study some.”

Jamie glanced at the clock.

“Weel, I guess 3 am is good a time as any, aye?”

Claire laughed softly.

“Well, I’ve got to work with what I’ve got right?”

She leaned into his open arms and just sat for a while, content and surrounded by her family.

“Oh, I almost forgot to tell ye. I got a phone call from that distributor that Henry told us about. He
offered me a job, to start whenever I felt ready. I told him to gi’ me a couple weeks to get settled wi’ you and the bairn and he said to not worry, that the job would be there for me. Apparently I come highly recommended.” Jamie chuckled at the thought of what Henry must have told his new boss about him.

“That’s wonderful, love. I’m so glad that you'll be home for normal hours and have normal days of work.”

“Me too. That way I can spend more regular time wi’ you and the lad.”

“I'm sure he'll like that too. He already loves you.”

She smiled up at him as he gently took Fergus from her and held him up to his still bare chest. He relaxed immediately, feeling the warmth of his Da permeate him as well, falling right back to sleep.

“He's going to be a wee heartbreaker. I can just tell.”

Claire giggled.

“Hopefully not for a while yet. I'm still getting used to him as a baby.” Claire sighed, feeling suddenly melancholic.

“Dinna fash, mo chridhe. He’ll still be a bairn a good long while yet.”

Jamie snuggled her close once more, more content than ever.

“Ye will, eventually, have to learn to get on wi’ Murtagh. I dinna think he’s plannin’ to go anywhere.”

“Shhh,” Claire hushed him. “Don’t ruin the moment!”

Jamie chuckled and winked down at her.

“As ye say, Sassenach. As ye say.”

###

Jamie had desperately needed to get to the store. While the bairn had his meals fresh prepared and ready whenever he wished them, he and Claire were not as lucky and were in desperate need of groceries.

“I’ll be but a bit, Sassenach. If ye think of anything else, send me a text,” he’d told Claire, pouting as she had to stay behind.

“Fine. Just don’t forget anything on my list!”

“I swear. I wilna forget a single thing.”

Now that he was out of the bubble they’d had the last few days, he felt as though he’d forgotten how to interact with other people. Strolling from aisle to aisle, he passed the flowers and had an idea. He already had a wee gift for her, but special flowers might just be the icing on the cake for this gift.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Claire get closer to taking her nursing exam while she and Jamie learn how to take care of wee Fergus. They have Henry over for a family dinner and an unexpected visitor drops by.

Chapter Notes

There is smut in this chapter, toward the end.

Jamie had called the florist shop as he left the grocery store, knowing he only had so much time before some of the food Claire asked for melted. The florist had been helpful, as he had for the last several months. Jamie hadn't been sure if what he was looking for even existed, but he had to try. Thankfully, the florist knew the exact thing and had the flowers ready by the time Jamie arrived.

When Jamie had finally emptied the boot of the groceries, he made one last trip down to pick up the last of the gifts. He'd been working on it for a few months now and he couldn't wait to see Claire's face when she opened it. He'd asked for another piece of ribbon to match the bouquet to wrap around his gift for her and he carefully tied to together before heading back inside.

Claire was still putting the groceries away as he walked in the door. She was holding their fussy son to her shoulder as she reached up into the cabinet, putting the last few items away.

Claire turned to look at him, eyeing him suspiciously as he held his hands behind his back.

“What do you have there, darling?”

“Why don't we go and sit in our room and you'll find out?”

Claire giggled at him as he turned with her so she couldn't peek behind him and moved down the hallway to their room and sat down on the bed.

“Alright now close yer eyes.”

She made a face, but did as he asked. He stepped closer to her and made sure the bouquet was exactly how he wanted it to look.

“Ok, mo chridhe, open yer eyes.”

Claire smiled widely as she looked back up at Jamie, then her breath caught in her throat at the sight of what he held.

“Oh my… Jamie, they're beautiful!! Fergus, look at what your Da brought home for us!” Claire cooed at the baby. Fergus was not nearly as impressed with his Da’s gift as he was with the ringlet of Claire’s hair that he had grasped in his tiny fist.
"They're the flowers for February, ken? I asked the florist about it and he said that violets and primrose are the flowers for people born in February. I thought it fit."

"They're so beautiful, Jamie. I love them. Let's put them in a vase right now so they don't dry out."

Jamie set the other part of his gift down discreetly before following his wife and child back out into the kitchen.

With the flowers safely put into the vase with fresh water, Jamie led Claire back to their bedroom.

"I've something else for ye too, a graidh. Here, let me have the lad a moment so ye can open it unhindered," Jamie said, reaching for Fergus and laying him down on his chest and picking up the other gift.

He handed it to Claire and sat down next to her, watching as she fondled the ribbon.

"Open it up, mo chridhe," Jamie whispered.

Claire pulled at the ribbon and stared at the book in her hands. On the front was a picture of them together, when she was really showing with her pregnancy and a heart on the front of the book beneath it held their initials.

Claire opened it up tentatively and felt her eyes well up with tears.

"Oh, Jamie," Claire gasped softly, lightly fingering the edge of the first picture. "You put them all in here? And the rose petals too?"

"Aye, mo graidh," he answered, smiling slightly. "I thought ye might like a book of them to remember by. I know it wasn't the easiest pregnancy, but ye looked so beautiful through it… I wanted to make it for ye. Once I'd seen ye kept the petals, I thought I'd put some in to match wi’ the months. Seemed like a good place for them."

Claire sniffled and turned her face up to Jamie's, searching for a kiss.

"You are, without a doubt, the sweetest, most dedicated husband. Even the nurses thought you were so sweet at the hospital. I don't deserve you."

She gave a watery chuckle at the look of surprise on his face.

"What? Did you not think so?"

"Ye do deserve me, mo nighean donn. We are made for each other, are we not? Us and our wee laddie," Jamie said, looking down and stroking wee Fergus' head.

"We are. We're perfect," Claire replied, watching Jamie look at their son.

Jamie turned his attention back to his wife as she continued to thumb through the book. He watched her face change into a forlorn look as she stopped in between two pages.

"What's the matter, mo chridhe?"

"It's… I just noticed how… sad I look in these pictures."

Jamie glanced down, noticing the pictures she'd stopped on. The ones where she had felt so uneasy with her changing body.
Claire could feel her cheeks burning with shame, thinking back to that time of her pregnancy. She was smiling in the pictures, but she knew what she had been thinking then. *How uneasy she’d been in her own skin. How much Jamie had tried to reassure her. How much she thought pregnancy made her look awful.*

But looking at it now, looking at how Jamie had seen her then, she wished she’d taken more time to enjoy it. *Well, there's always next time.*

Startled at the thought, she looked up at Jamie. *Yes.* she thought. *I want to have more children with this man and watch them grow with him.*

"I ken ye didna like it much at the time, bein' pregnant and startin' to show like that, but I loved ye so much then, and I love ye the more now, mo nighean donn."

"I love you, too, Jamie. So much." Claire smiled again as he leaned in to kiss her, careful not to crush their sleeping bairn between them.

"Did the nurses really speak of me like that?" Jamie asked after a while, still looking through the pictures and watching Claire read his wee captions below them. She laughed, loudly, startling Fergus.

"Yes, they did. You were quite the popular man. But none of them were after you," *for once,* she said, eyeing him as Jamie bounced the baby to soothe him again. "They said that we made quite the team. That we seemed to fit together."

Jamie smirked, ignoring her snide comment.

"Aye, well, I'm just glad they think the same way we do."

Claire continued to look through the book, carefully reading each piece under the pictures. When she got to the end, she saw one last picture on the last page of the book, taken in the hospital after Fergus had been cleaned up and she’d been able to shower. Their first family photo.

Claire’s breath hitched in her throat.

“Thank you, love. This is truly amazing. I love it so much.”

“Of course, my Sassenach. I’m glad ye like it. I’d had the thought for a long time,” Jamie replied, smiling as he leaned down to kiss her again.

“’Tis perfect. It’s just… perfect.”

Claire sighed happily, wiping a stray tear from her eye and watching Fergus as he’d started to root at his Da’s chest, looking for his meal.

“Ye willna find anything there for ye, my lad,” Jamie laughed softly, moving Fergus to Claire’s open arms. “There are many things I can gi’ ye, but *that* is no’ one of them.”

Claire laughed as well, already moving her clothing out of the way.

“I’ll go and finish our food for the evening while ye feed him,” Jamie said, smiling at his wife and child, happier than he’d ever been.

“Sounds amazing,” Claire said, smiling back at him. “I’ll put him down when he’s done and come join you.”
Jamie went to turn, stubbing his toe on the edge of the pram. Things had gotten even more cramped with the addition of Fergus and all the things that went along with him that it seemed they were constantly tripping over one thing or another. They definitely needed to find a bigger flat, and soon.

###

“Have ye got a burp rag?” Jamie called from the bedroom.

“Damn it! They’re still in the wash. Um... Here!” she said leaning in the doorway and tossing him a washcloth. “It’s not perfect but it’s something.”

Getting the washcloth as situated as he could, he got Fergus into the right position and began patting his back gently.

“There ye are, lad,” he murmured. “Have at it, then. I ken ye’ve got something waiting to come out. Just try and make it come out the right end this time, aye?”

Claire snorted and giggled as he walked out to where she was studying.

“You volunteered to take care of him,” she said, carefully not looking up at Jamie.

“Aye, he’s my son. Of course I’ll care for him. I wasna expecting him to shi-” he changed the word at the dark glare from his wife. “Poo. I wasna expectin’ him to poo all o’er me.”

“Well I’m not sure what you’d expected, opting to not put on a fresh diaper.”

Walking around the living room, he bounced the boy on his shoulder.

“Do ye hear this, Fergus my lad? Your Mam has no sympathy for my plight. Wouldna even give me a kiss after I showered!”

Claire looked up from her studies for a moment, intending to smile at her son and get back to work. But the sight of her two Fraser men stopped her cold. Jamie had on only a pair of old sweats and the washcloth over his shoulder, Fergus wearing just his diaper. Seeing a man of Jamie’s size tenderly holding his son stirred all sorts of things inside her.

Get a hold of yourself, Beauchamp! That’s how this whole thing started!

“You don’t smell like that anymore,” she said before she could stop herself. “I’d be willing to kiss you now to make up for it.”

“Och,” Jamie said, bouncing toward her. “Do ye hear that, now? She’s offering a kiss only because I told ye she denied me earlier. But she also kens I canna say no to her.”

Claire stood up to meet her boys, smiling at Jamie. Both of his hands holding their son secure against his shoulder, he leaned down and kissed her. It was warm and soft and safe, feeling like home. He pulled himself back before either of them could get too heated.

“Keep that for a bit longer, Sassenach,” he said quietly, his voice a little husky. “It isna time yet, according to your doctor. But when it is, I’ll be here for ye.”

“You’d better be.”

Giving her cheek a quick peck, he stepped back and turned for their bedroom.

“Henry should be here soon.”
“Then you should get yourself and your offspring dressed.”

Jamie disappeared into their bedroom with Fergus, muttering to the boy in Gaelic. Claire bent back to her studies to get a few more minutes in before Henry arrived.

When Jamie came back out in fresh clothes, he was still crooning to Fergus in Gaelic. Claire gasped when she realized Fergus was wearing the wee kilt she’d given Jamie for Christmas. Despite being a newborn, he looked good in the tiny outfit.

“Oh, Jamie! He looks fantastic!”

“Aye, he’s a braw lad in a proper kilt. I thought he should look his verra best for Henry.”

Claire smiled and kissed the top of Fergus’ head.

“Henry will love it.”

The timer in the kitchen went off and Claire took Fergus while Jamie pulled the casserole from the oven. A quiet knock on the door announced the arrival of their dinner guest. Henry beamed at her, holding out a bouquet of flowers to her.

“Come in!” she said, holding the door open. “Oh Henry those are lovely! Thank you!”

“Claire, my dear. You’re looking wonderful as always. And how’s the little man of the house?”

“He’s doing well. Not screaming today, so we’re counting it a good day. Would you like to hold him?”

Henry’s eyes lit up as he put the flowers down on the table, beside the small box he’d carried in.

“Hello handsome boy,” Henry said in a gentle voice as he rocked the baby. “Don’t you just look dashing in this little outfit. I bet your daddy’s proud of it, isn’t he?”

Claire picked up the flowers and put them in an empty vase, deciding to make them the centerpiece for the evening.

“Henry, tell me this isn’t another stuffed animal for Fergus,” she said, nodding to the box.

Henry chuckled.

“No, no. That’s for your husband. I pulled a few strings and got a tasting sample of the whiskey he’ll be distributing. Speaking of… Where is that husband of yours?”

“Right here, Henry,” Jamie said, coming around the corner with the casserole in his hands.

“That smells wonderful, Jamie,” Henry said, bouncing Fergus gently.

Jamie set out the silverware around the table and released a sigh of satisfaction.

“Hopefully it’ll taste just as good. Come, lets eat.”

Handing the child over to his father, Henry took a seat and Jamie put Fergus in his little bouncy chair. They each served themselves from the dish and had taken the first bite when another knock sounded at the door. Jamie tensed up, frowning.

“Are you expecting anyone?” Claire asked, eyes on her son.
“No. Ye both stay here I’ll go see who it is.”

Nervous and irrationally afraid, Claire picked Fergus up and held him close. It felt like forever before Jamie returned, a thousand different scenarios running through her head. When he came back, however, he had a guilty look on his face.

“Oh… I’m afraid there’s been a wee mix up on my part. I invited Murtagh over for dinner so he can see the lad.”

She met Jamie’s gaze and had to resist the urge to glare at him. They would have a long talk about this later.

“Oh,” she said instead. “Well, I suppose we have enough food for everyone.”

Murtagh came around the corner and smiled at everyone, frowning a little at Henry. He held up a bottle in his hand and handed it to Jamie.

“Fine Scottish whisky,” he said. “In celebration of the bairn.”

Claire sighed heavily. All this whisky in the house and she couldn’t drink a drop of it. Jamie gave her a sympathetic smile and put the bottle with the one Henry had given them.

“Murtagh,” Claire said. “This is Henry. He’s Fergus’ godfather. Henry, this is Murtagh Fraser, Jamie’s godfather.”

“Nice to meet ye, Henry,” Murtagh said, glancing at Henry then back to Fergus.

“Why don’t you have a seat, Murtagh?” she asked, purposefully putting Fergus back into his bouncy seat beside her. “Jamie can grab you an extra plate. We were just about to eat.”

She watched him take his seat, looking at Fergus as he disappeared from view.

“Aye, I thank ye, Claire.”

Claire wasn’t sure how this was going to work, now that Murtagh was here. But she put on a smile and tried to think of some conversation topic to break the awkward silence. Thankfully, Henry came to her rescue.

“So Murtagh, is it?”

The bearded man nodded.

“How long are you in Vegas?”

Claire resisted the urge to groan. That was not the question she’d have asked.

“Dinna ken just yet, Henry. Might be for a while.”

Silence descended again, the lighthearted tone in the room from before their unexpected guest had arrived slowly disappearing.

“How have you been doing, Claire?” Henry asked, turning his attention to her. “I know that new parents can have a really hard time when they come home.”

“Oh yes,” she replied, grasping for some normalcy. “We’ve both been pretty tired lately, forgetting things, ” she said, pointedly looking at Jamie.
“Aye,” Jamie responded, not meeting his wife’s eye. “But he’s been pretty good for us overall. I dinna think we’re doing too bad wi’ him.”

“I’m sure you’re both doing wonderfully. Fergus has a good strong home life to grow in. Speaking of Jamie, have you thought about any of the other apartment options you’d told me about? If you want to move into another building, you know that I’m here to help.”

Claire glanced at Jamie again. She hadn’t even thought to ask Henry; she really should have, given that Henry had been an owner and landlord for years. It settled her fears about moving a little, knowing that Henry could help if they needed him.

“Yer going to move?” Murtagh interrupted.

“Aye,” Jamie answered. “Do ye no’ think it’s cramped in here? Claire, Fergus and I need some more room. Especially with all the things that we have for the lad. He’s more things as a newborn than I think I’ve ever owned.”

The tension broke some as everyone chuckled. After that, everyone settled into polite conversation. Claire ate quickly, watching Fergus as he began to grow restless. When she finished, she put her plate in the kitchen sink and gathered up her son.

“I need to change him,” she said to the table, giving Henry a smile. “I’ll be back out in a while.”

In the safety of her bedroom, she leaned against the door and sighed. Fergus was rooting at her shirt, obviously hungry.

“Alright, darling. Don’t get yourself worked up. Mum just needed to get herself together.”

Sitting down on the bed, she got the wriggling boy’s diaper changed before feeding him. He suckled eagerly, settling down now that he’d gotten what he’d wanted. Her own mind started to settle as well. Murtagh was a part of Jamie’s family - she knew that. But having to deal with him unexpectedly was difficult.

As his frantic feeding began to slow, Claire looked around for a burp rag. Abruptly she realized the cloths were still in the wash. With a sigh, she put herself back together and took Fergus into the bathroom, using a clean towel to burp him on. If it so happened that he threw up on Jamie’s towel, it wouldn’t be any skin off her nose.

She sighed as Fergus finally let out a burp and checked the towel on her shoulder. Fergus didn’t usually spit up a lot, but there was a bit on the towel that covered her shoulder. Gently, she moved Fergus to her other shoulder and tossed the towel in the hamper. You’re lucky I love you so much Jamie Fraser, she thought to herself as she readied to go back into the living room to face her guests.

The men were all seated on the couch, carrying on some conversation. Jamie saw her first, only meeting her eyes for a moment. Murtagh stood, ready to accept Fergus from her, but she placed him in Henry’s arms instead. Jamie frowned at her, but didn’t say anything.

The conversation from before Claire came back to the room started again, something about Jamie’s new job.

“So what’s this new job?” Murtagh asked.

“I’m workin’ for a distribution company. I’ll be deliverin’ beer and such for a bit. A few o’ the bars around town have an account wi’ my company.”
Murtagh’s bushy brows went up.

“That’s it? Ye deliver alcohol to bars?”

“It’s a bit more than that,” Jamie said, a little offended. “Aye, I’ll be drivin’ the truck. But I have to take the orders and talk wi’ the bartenders to be sure I get them what they need. I’ll be makin’ better money, too. Steadier hours. So I can be here wi’ Claire and Fergus.”

“Jamie’s got a knack for dealing with people,” Henry chimed in. “He could sell ice to an Eskimo, as they say.”

Jamie nodded his thanks to Henry. Fergus, nestled in Henry’s chest, yawned and stretched. Henry gazed fondly down at the baby before he sighed.

“I suppose I should let you put the little guy to bed.”

Jamie took Fergus and stood to see their guests off. Murtagh followed Henry out, pausing in the doorway.

“I spoke wi’ yer father a few days back,” he said.

Henry, who was shuffling down the hall, stopped.

“Murtagh…” Jamie said, glaring. “This isna the time or place.”

“He wants to talk to ye, lad.”

Claire stood up straighter, resisting her urge to push the man through the door and slam it on his face.

“Have a good night, Murtagh. I’ll speak wi’ ye at a later date.”

Jamie closed the door and turned the lock before Murtagh could say anything else. He looked up at his wife apologetically.

“I’d hoped he wouldna bring that up,” he said softly.

“It’s fine. We should put Fergus down before he wakes himself up and gets cranky.”

Jamie nodded and went down to put Fergus to bed. Claire took a moment to collect herself before joining him.

That night, Claire lay in bed wide awake. Jamie stirred beside her, his arm coming around her waist.

“You’re stiff as a board, Sassenach. What’s botherin’ ye?”

“Nothing. I’m alright. Just restless.”

“Is it what Murtagh said tonight?”

While that wasn’t the main thing that was bothering her, she couldn’t lie and say Murtagh’s words weren’t on her mind as well. Jamie pulled her closer.

“I’ll no’ do anything wi’out ye, Claire. If I speak to my family again, it’ll be wi’ you and Fergus beside me. Ye ken that, aye?”
“I know. I just worry… He brings it up almost every time he’s here.”

“He can say it until he’s blue in the face but I willna do this wi’ out ye. You’re too important to me and I need ye too much to even try.”

Rolling onto her other side, she faced him and smiled.

“I trust you,” she said. “You’d never leave us.”

“Never ever.”

His kiss was sweet and soft. Her fingers combed through his hair, drawing him closer. The warmth of him soothed her worries, allowing her a few minutes to forget about her exam. He pulled away from her a little, his chest heaving slightly.

“It’s too soon for ye, aye?”

“For me,” she said, sliding her hand down his torso. “But not for you…”

His breath caught when she found her way into his boxers. Keeping her eyes on him, she began stroking him.

“Christ, Sassenach!”

“I’m hardly touching you!”

“Weel it’s been some time, ken?”

His eyes squeezed shut and he moaned.

“It hasn’t been that long. Our son is only two weeks old, after all.”

“Oh God!”

“Hush now,” she said quietly. “If you wake Fergus, this is over.”

One of his hands gripped the sheets with white knuckles and Claire smiled. When his mouth opened again, she muted him with a kiss. His free hand moved down her back, settling on her arse. For a moment, his hand didn’t move while he returned her kiss. But then his other hand came and joined the first.

He was hard and hot in her hand and moaning softly still into her mouth as they kissed. She found herself breathing ever harder as well, taking in how completely Jamie filled her senses in the most sensual ways. After a few minutes though, it just wasn’t enough. Slowly, she kissed along his jaw, moving down his neck. An odd sound had her looking up at him. But rather than say anything, she drifted her lips down his chest. Her hands followed down with her, tracing each part of his upper body as she kissed lower and lower. As she kissed below his navel, feeling the hair there under her lips, he spoke.

“Claire, ye dinna have to-”

“Unless you have to moan in delight, just hush and leave me to do what I want,” Claire cut him off, giggling softly as her hands floated down a little farther to squeeze around his cock again, making him moan.

She continued down, kissing ever lower, but never making contact where he wanted her most.
“Cl-Claire… please,” Jamie stuttered out, moving his hands to tangle in her hair.

All at once, her mouth was on him, warm and wet. The suction she was creating along with how she was running her tongue along his cock with each bob of her head… *Christ*, he thought, when a coherent thought could come to him. *This wasn’t going to last long.*

His hands were still tangled in her curls, holding her to him. She started to move her hand slowly, up and down, with her head movements and it pushed him to the edge. She could feel it, how he tensed as he neared the end. He tried to move his hands off her head so she could move but instead, she redoubled her efforts and sucked greedily until he fell off the edge, finally letting go.

Sighing softly as Jamie’s hands finally left her hair as he relaxed, she moved back up his body kissing sporadically as she went.

“Feel better?” she asked, snuggling in close so that she could still hear his heart beating strongly in his chest.

“Aye, mo nighean donn. Verra much. I’m sorry I canna return the favor,” he whispered as his fingers found her curls again, running through them and down her back.

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ll remember and you can pay me back in kind later,” she giggled, squeezing him to her as she relaxed as well.

“Aye, mo chridhe. Whatever ye say.”

###

The next day, Claire sat nervously in the waiting area of the testing center, leg bouncing quickly as she stared at the number 6 in her hand.

*You can do this,* she thought to herself. *You can.*

She pictured Jamie, sitting next to her while she studied, Fergus tucked gently into his neck and shoulder, and calmed. Jamie had offered to bring her to her exam, but she hadn’t even told him when it was. She didn’t want anyone to know, should she fail.

She twirled her ring round and round on her finger, remembering what Jamie had put inside it, finding a calm again.

“Numbers 4, 5, and 6! Please come up so we can get you set for testing!”

Claire jumped, startled from her thoughts of her husband and took a deep breath as she stood on wobbly knees. As the woman settled her into the cubicle and explained how the exam worked, she tried to clear her mind. She knew she could be asked anything about *anything,* so she tried to not focus too much on any one thing.

Question after question came to her, and to her relief, many had been about pregnancy and neonatal cares, which she’d had quite a lot of experience with, literally and figuratively. About 50 questions in, she froze. It was a question she could remember Jamie going over with her. One she hadn’t known the answer to but had drilled it into her brain after. But now, now her mind was completely blank.

As her brain started to spiral, she thought suddenly of Jamie’s voice. Not saying anything in particular, just the soothing timbre of it. It made her refocus.
Alright Beauchamp, just read the question slowly. You've got time, she thought.

So slowly, she read the question over again. Went through each answer, one at a time. And it suddenly hit her. She knew the answer. She'd missed a single word that would have made the difference in right or wrong when she was rushing.

Confident now, she picked the answer and was rewarded with a more difficult question. She sighed to herself and continued on.

At question 75, Claire sat and stared at the screen. This was the make or break question. If the computer shut off after this, she either had passed, or had really failed. She read the question slowly, knowing she had more than enough time to contemplate it. Picking the answer she hoped was right, she closed her eyes and hit NEXT.

When she opened her eyes, the computer screen was black. Well, she thought. Hopefully that means good news.

Claire sighed as she got up, turned in all her papers, and headed out. The woman had told her she'd likely receive pass/fail confirmation sometime later in the day. She had nodded and walked out, trying to put the exam behind her. It hadn’t taken too long and she’d taken her time; hopefully, luck was on her side.

As she walked up to their door, Claire heard Jamie cooing softly at Fergus in Gaelic. She closed her eyes and pressed her forehead against the door, listening. He’d begun to teach her some Gaelic and she had some words and simple phrases down, but she couldn’t quite tell what he was saying to Fergus. Her heart warmed all the same though, listening to him talk to their son in Gaelic. She almost forgot what she was doing, lulled as she was by Jamie’s tone that she didn’t notice until the door swung in that Jamie’s voice had gotten closer and he’d opened the door.

“Ack!”

Jamie sucked in a surprised breath and jumped as well, startling Fergus in his carrier.

“How are ye doin’ standing out here by yerself? Are ye alright?”

Claire righted herself and met Jamie’s eyes. Taken by surprise, she blurted out, “I just went to take my licensure exam.”

Jamie’s eyes widened as he startled again at this new information. Moving aside so she could enter, he followed her to the couch and sat beside her, Fergus still blissfully unaware in his carrier.

“Were you going somewhere?” she asked, trying to distract him. It didn’t work.

“Ye took yer exam? Why did ye no’ tell me, mo chridhe?” Jamie held her gaze and waited while she worked out what to tell him.

“I… I don’t know really,” Claire started. “I just… I didn’t want anyone to know. I didn’t mean to tell you like that. I meant to wait until - until I got the results later today.”

“Oh, so ye don’t know yet then? That’s strange they make ye wait.”

“Yes well, I don’t really know why. I just know that I’ll be getting information about it later today.”
Jamie leaned in and touched their foreheads together, holding her hands in his, fingers brushing along her wedding band.

“Ye didna have to do this alone, Claire. Ye could have told me.”

“I know and I wasn’t alone,” Claire responded, filling him in on how the exam went and how the many question were ones they had gone over together. “I just heard your voice and… it just calmed me enough to slow down and answer. Knowing you and Fergus were at home waiting. And then I heard you speaking in the hallway and it made me feel peaceful again.” She paused. “That sounds mad I know but…”

“It doesna sound mad at all,” Jamie replied quickly. “I wish ye’d have told me, though I understand why ye didna. How do ye think ye did?” He’d asked the last part quieter than the rest.

“I don’t know. All I know is that I’ll get my results in a little while. Were you on your way out somewhere?”

“Well we were, but now it looks as though our wee man might be a bit hungry,” Jamie laughed softly watching Fergus sucking on his hands.

“Well, how about I feed him and then we go and get some lunch together?”

“Sounds wonderful to me, mo nighean. Come on, Fergus. Come and see yer Mam. She’s been hiding from us all day!” Jamie joked as he picked Fergus up and held him out to Claire who laughed as well.

“Your da is such a drama queen, isn’t he darling lamb? I wasn’t even gone for but a few hours.” She laughed and tsk’d as Jamie made a playful swat at her bottom as she walked to their bedroom where she’d last left the boppy pillow.

After she’d gotten Fergus latched and eating heartily, she started to relax again. She couldn’t place why she’d been so worried about telling Jamie, but she could only guess that it stemmed from not wanting to be any kind of failure in his eyes. Silly, she thought to herself. But love makes people do strange things. She knew that all too well.

She smiled, watching her son’s face slacken into sleep, full from his meal. Gently, as to not jostle him awake, she rose from the bed to place him in the bassinet. They really really did need to find a bigger apartment. Thank goodness for Henry. Just as turned on the baby monitor to go out and join Jamie, her phone pinged.

She had a new email. From the state of Nevada.

It was now or never. She closed her eyes, and opened it.

###

In the kitchen, Jamie was getting some lunch ready for the two of them whilst Claire fed the bairn. Just as he was putting the food out on the table, he heard Claire’s soft footsteps coming toward him. He looked up to see her face completely slack, eyes wide as saucers.

He was to her in a flash.

“What’s amiss, Sassenach? Is something wrong wi’ Fergus?”

“No, no,” she said, still stunned.
Jamie pulled her closer to him, leaning down to meet her gaze.

Before he could ask again, she took a deep breath and turned the phone in her hand over for him to see.

“Jamie, I passed.”
Chapter 18

Claire and Jamie continue to adjust to having a newborn. Jamie starts his new job and they are finally able to make love for the first time since Fergus' birth.

Claire sat down with a hard thump, still looking at the picture of her license on her phone. Jamie knelt down in front of her, taking in her vacant expression.

“Are ye alright?”

“Yeah, I’m just... I passed. It doesn’t feel real.”

“But ye did it. I’m so proud of ye, mo chridhe.”

Her eyes drifted up and met his.

“I couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you.”

“I didna do much. It was all your brilliance. Because this is what ye were meant for.”

Leaning forward, he pressed his lips to her forehead, as she breathed out a laugh.

She pulled her head down to his, kissing him.

“Well,” he said as they maneuvered into their chairs for lunch. “Now that yer a real, licensed nurse, perhaps ye can gi’ me a physical sometime soon?”

Jamie waggled his eyebrows at her, giving her his version of a wink and sending her into a fit of giggles.

“Maybe sometime soon,” she said, still laughing. She pulled him close again, licking the tiny bit of mustard left on his lips before kissing him soundly. She pulled back, mischief sparkling in her eyes. “But it’ll cost you... by the hour.”

###

Claire had Fergus laid out on a blanket on the floor, playing with him and giggling.

“Who’s a handsome lad? You are!”

Jamie watched her for a moment before he broke the spell.

“Sassenach, would ye do me a favor?”

“Sure. What do you need?”

“Weel... I’m no’ sure we can do what I need just yet,” he said with a smirk while she rolled her eyes. “But since it’s a big day for ye, I thought ye should get a nice dessert for us to have tonight.”
“Oh! Sure, I can run down to the store for a moment.”

Fergus kicked his tiny legs.

“No, no’ just to the store. Ye should pick up a cake from that bakery ye like. This is a celebration, aye?”

“Are you sure? That’s a little further than the market.”

“Ye deserve the best, mo graidh. Dinna fash.”

She stood and took Fergus with her.

“Ah, could ye leave the lad here?”

“I… Well I was just going to take him with me. It would be good for him to get out, too.”

Jamie shrugged.

“Aye, it would. But… I think we need some manly father and son bonding time, aye?”

“Manly bonding? What exactly does that mean?”

“Och Sassenach! I canna be tellin’ ye that! It goes against the code! We mustn’t tell the womenfolk.”

Laughing, she handed the baby over and shook her head.

“Fine. I’ll leave my Fraser men here alone for a little while.”

He reached out and pulled her back for a moment, stealing a quick kiss before she grabbed her purse and keys. She faltered a little as she got to the door, looking back with a little panic on her face. But Jamie just smiled and raised Fergus’s wee hand to wave at her, saying, “It will be alright, mo nighean donn. We’ll be here when ye get back.” Nodding at his statement, she blew a kiss at Jamie and Fergus before turning back around to open the door. Once the door was closed and she was out of earshot, Jamie looked down at his son.

“Alright, lad. There’s a lot to ken about women and I think you’re a wee bit young to tell too much to. But… it’s important to celebrate them. Especially when they accomplish something as impressive as your mam has. So you’re gonna help me make her a nice dinner, aye?”

Fergus just gurgled in reply, which Jamie took as an agreement. Grabbing the swing, he brought it into the kitchen and settled Fergus into it before getting to work in the kitchen. He was sure to explain what he was doing as he went, so his son knew what was going on.

When Claire came back, Jamie was taking the stuffed noodles out of the oven.

“Sorry that took so long she said,” dropping her purse by the door. “They were bloody busy and-”

She stopped, staring at the table. A tall candle sat in the center of the table, waiting to be lit. Fergus was dressed in clean clothes, quietly flailing his little arms. Jamie set the dish down on a trivet before taking the cake from Claire.

“Jamie… what is all this?”

He put the cake down on the counter and pulled out a chair for her.
“Weel, see Fergus wanted to do something nice for his mam, ken? So he thought we should make ye a nice dinner and surprise ye wi’ it. The stuffed noodles were his idea.”

“Oh? And he told you this?”

“Aye. Ye can say a lot wi’ your eyes. He didna need to speak a word.”

Wiping at the tears leaking down her face, she hugged Jamie hard.

“This is wonderful. Thank you both.”

“I also thought, if ye wanted, we could have a wee bit o’ the whisky Henry gave us.”

Her smile faded and she glanced at Fergus who was currently blowing drool bubbles.

“Jamie, I’m still breast feeding. I can’t feed Fergus if I’ve had whisky.”

“Ye still have that pump, aye?”

“Well… I could feed him now and pump after the whisky…”

She looked worriedly at their son.

“I… I suppose I could…” she repeated, still feeling a bit uncertain.

“Just a wee bit. But if ye dinna want any, we can save it for later.”

Her gaze moved to the bottle on the table and she licked her lips.

“I’ll go feed him right now. Pour me a wee dram, would you darling?”

“Of course, my lady.”

While she was busy with the bairn, Jamie lit the candle and poured them both a dash of the whisky. It wouldn’t be fair to Claire if he had a full drink while she did not.

She came back out to the table, wiping Fergus’ face before setting him back in the swing. Jamie handed her the glass and took up his own.

“Might I make a toast?”

“Sure,” she said.

“To a woman of vast intelligence, who kent what she wanted and didna let anything stop her. To the woman who blessed me with a braw lad and gives me more joy every morning when I wake beside her. To the one woman who means the world to me and grows more beautiful by the day. To my wife, Claire Fraser, licensed nurse.”

Claire clinked her glass with his and took a sip. Her eyes rolled back and she let them close before she swallowed.

“Oh… Henry knows good whisky.”

“Aye, he does.”

“This means so much to me, Jamie. Thank you.”
Pulling her chair out for her, he got her settled before taking his own seat. He served them both, fully content with his life.

###

After a hectic week of packing, Claire, Jamie, and Fergus finally moved into their new apartment.

“Jamie? Where’s the box with Fergus’ clothes?”

The ginger head popped around a corner.

“In the nursery,” he said with a grunt.

Jamie and Murtagh finished carrying in the couch, setting it down in the new living room. The one bedroom apartment they’d had before had become far too small. Henry had found a new place for them, cutting them a fantastic deal on the rent.

The three bedroom apartment was in a decent neighborhood and it was in a newer building. Fergus would have his own room now, leaving them with an extra room to use as they needed.

“Was that the last o’ it?” Murtagh asked.

Claire carried Fergus down to his nursery and dug through the box to put him in fresh clothes. Murtagh had offered to help move them once Henry found the apartment. She hadn’t been thrilled, letting him paw through their things, but it was free labor.

“Aye,” Jamie answered, sitting down on the couch he’d just carried up.

“No,” Claire said, taking Fergus and walking out to sit beside Jamie. “There’s still the last box of kitchen things that needs to come up. I think it’s the heavy one or I’d get it.”

Murtagh swore quietly in Gaelic.

“That bloody box… I’ll go and bring it up then.”

When the door closed, Jamie turned to her. She hastily cleared the sour expression from her face and gave her husband a serene smile.

“Claire…”

“Yes, darling?”

Jamie sighed and shook his head slowly.

“Murtagh volunteered to help us. Ye couldn’a carry that bloody couch up here.”

“No, I couldn’t. And I appreciate him helping us move.”

“What would ye say to us takin’ him to dinner, then? Or ordering something in and having him over?”

She fought back her urge to grimace.

“Perhaps once we’re settled and have everything put away.”

Jamie nodded.
“Thank ye, mo nighean donn.”

He leaned in and stole a kiss.

“You’ll owe me for this, James Fraser.”

“Aye. I suppose ye can put it on my tab then, Sassenach.”

###

Two weeks after they’d moved into their new apartment, Jamie prepared for his first day at work. He walked frantically around in circles, trying to remember where things had been put away.

“What are you looking for, love?” Claire asked, bouncing Fergus.

“My bloody keys!”

“They’re hanging up beside the door.”

He turned and found them, clutching them in white knuckles.

“Fergus, my darling, do you think your da might be nervous about his new job?”

“Aye!” Jamie said. “O’course I’m nervous! Henry got me this job and I dinna want to mess it up.”

Claire bounced her way over to where Jamie stood beside the door.

“Come here, love. Give your da a kiss before he goes off to work.”

Jamie took Fergus into his arms and relaxed.

“Take good care of yer mam, lad. I’ll be home for dinner,” he said, giving Fergus a kiss on his his head.

“You’ll be great, Jamie. I know you. This job is perfect for you. And you won’t be home at three in the morning.”

She took Fergus back and smiled up at her husband. Holding the baby carefully, she gave him a sweet kiss which ended far too soon.

“I love ye, mo chridhe.”

“I love you too. Now go, or you’ll be late on your first day.”

“I’ll call ye later.”

Taking Fergus’ tiny hand, Claire waved at Jamie as he rushed out the door. After it closed, the apartment felt big and quiet. Fergus gazed up at her, his expression curious.

“I guess it’s just you and me, lad,” she said.

The day passed slowly for Claire. It was strange to be in the apartment without Jamie. Some part of it didn’t feel quite like home yet. Their bedroom didn’t even smell like them yet, which made it feel more like a hotel room than a home. But that would change.

When Fergus went down for his nap, Claire pulled out her phone and snapped a quick photo to send Jamie. She wasn’t sure when, or if, he’d be able to look at it, but he’d have something to smile
After eating a sandwich for lunch, Claire rinsed her plate off and set it up to dry. Her phone rang and she jumped to answer it before it disturbed the blissfully quiet baby.

“Hello?”

“Sassenach!”

Everything inside her relaxed at the sound of his voice. She was proud of him, but she’d gotten used to having around and she missed him.

“Hey! How’s everything going? Did you get the photo I sent you earlier?”

“Aye! I did get it! I made it the background on my phone so I can see the bairn while I’m no’ wi’ him. How is he?”

“He’s quiet at the moment. We’ve had a good day though. But how is your job? Is everyone treating you alright?”

It was quiet for a moment and she thought he’d hung up.

“Aye,” he said, his mouth obviously full of his lunch. “Everyone’s been verra good. This is a great job. I’ll be home in a few hours and I dinna have any new bruises!”

Claire couldn’t help but laugh.

“That’s good, Jamie. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank ye, a nighean. Are ye sure you’re alright at home?”

“Yes, we’re just fine. I’ll have something nice ready for dinner when you get home. To celebrate your first day.”

“That’s verra sweet of ye, Sassenach.”

The line fell quiet again and Claire suspected he was eating his lunch.

“Would it be silly for me to say I miss ye, Sassenach?”

Her chest warmed at his words, taking comfort from them.

“No, it wouldn’t be silly. We miss you too.” Jamie could hear the tinge of sad longing in her tone as she said it, though she’d been trying to hide it.

“Good. Because I do. I miss ye both terribly. I’m verra glad to have regular hours.”

“We’re glad too.”

Fergus started to fuss.

“I’m afraid I need to change your son’s nappy again.”

“Gi’ him a kiss for me, aye?”

“Of course. Have a good rest of your day, Jamie. I love you.”
“I love ye too, Claire. I’ll call ye before I head home.”

Between feeding and changing Fergus, Claire somehow got dinner made. She’d just finished setting the table when Jamie came home.

“Sassenach!”

“You’re right on time!” she cried, rushing over to him.

Jamie hung his keys up and gathered her in his arms.

“Whatever ye made smells wonderful. But Christ it’s good to hold ye.”

“I feel exactly the same way,” she replied, gripping him tightly to her and taking a deep breath. He smelled so good and she could feel the tension in her body release a bit. Jamie felt it too, not realizing that he had been tense all day as well. He took a deep breath in her curls.

“How’s the bairn?” he asked after a moment, swaying with her.

Reluctantly she let him go so he could see his son. The apartment felt more like home now that Jamie was there. Everything else would find its place in time.

###

Jamie was enjoying his first weekend off from his new job. It was a satisfying feeling to wake up and lay in bed for a while, no demands on his time. He’d made the executive decision that he didn’t have to change out of his pj’s since he had nowhere to be. So he stood watching wee Fergus sleep in his crib, tiny lips moving as he dreamed. He couldn’t get over the fact that he and Claire had created such a sweet wee thing.

“Jamie?”

“Aye, Sassenach?”

“Fergus is sleeping,” she said, leaning against the doorframe.

Her voice felt like warm honey, sweet and thick.

“Aye, he is. Sleeping well too, for such a wee one.”

“We haven’t made love since he was born…”

“It wasn’t safe, according to yer doctor.”

Her lips pulled into a slow, sultry smile.

“It wasn’t. But it is now.”

Turning away from their sleeping son, he nearly ran to her and gathered her in his arms.

“Thank God! I must have ye.”

Her legs wrapped around him as her mouth found his. Pressing her back against the wall, he squeezed her arse.

“Jamie, lad. Would ye mind if I borrowed yer car tomorrow?”
Claire whimpered as he set her down just in time to see Murtagh come around the corner. He'd taken to coming to their house a bit more often, not always knocking or announcing himself, often scaring the daylights out of Claire. After the first time he'd done it when Jamie was at work and Claire was home alone, he'd taken to only doing it when he knew Jamie was home to avoid getting hit with any projectiles.

“What’s wrong wi’ yours?” Jamie asked, surprise bolting through him at seeing Murtagh in their flat.

“Tire’s gone flat. Had to take it in. I’ll get it back tomorrow.”

“Aye, fine.”

They heard Murtagh grab the keys and close the door. Just as she reached out for him again, Fergus woke.

“Well there goes that plan,” she muttered, heading into the room to tend their son.

“I’ll have ye on the kitchen floor if I must,” he said, coming up behind her to gently nip at her neck as she reached for their son.

“Well I won’t have you with your bloody godfather lurking about every corner.”

Jamie heaved a deep sigh and nodded.

“Aye. Perhaps tonight?”

“We’ll see. Hand me a nappy?”

Later, they sat on the couch while Fergus lay in the pack’n play looking dazedly around at the world.

“Where’s Murtagh?” Claire asked. “He’s not still here, is he?”

“Ah, dinna ken. I dinna think so.”

Before he could do anything, she’d crawled onto his lap and kissed him furiously. She was fumbling with his belt while trying to run her hands through his hair, neither being very successful. Giving up, she slipped one hand down the front of his trousers. His heart was beating so loud in his ears he almost didn’t hear the front door open.

“No!” he muttered against her lips.

This time it was Claire that pulled away.

“So Jamie, I’ve been thinkin’ that…”

The furry Scotsman looked up and his eyes went wide when he saw the pair on the couch.

“Oh! Ah… Seems I’ve interrupted ye…”

“Yes,” Claire said shortly. “You have. Now if you’d kindly get the fuck out of my house for two hours, I’d appreciate it.”

Murtagh stare at her, his bushy black brows high.
"Ah…"

Fergus began to cry and Claire closed her eyes slowly. She got off Jamie and went to the pack’n play. Gathering up the crying boy, she sighed heavily, looking him over and realizing he needed a wee meal and a new nappy. Jamie had grabbed a pillow and held it over his lap, slightly embarrassed at his current state. When Claire emerged again, she had Fergus’ diaper bag and car seat.

"Take him. And don’t you dare come back for at least an hour. Two, if you think you can manage."

Jamie stared at her in shock. She’d been reluctant to let the child out of her sight for the last several weeks and now she was handing him over? To Murtagh of all people?

Murtagh took the boy carefully in his arms and looked nervously at Jamie.

"Best do as she says, Murtagh," Jamie said slowly as he looked at his wife curiously. "She’s worse than Jenny."

The man disappeared out the door once more, taking their son with him.

"Now," Jamie said, reaching for her. "Where were we?"

But her eyes were locked on the door. Jamie pulled her onto his lap, but she turned her face away.

"What if he just leaves Fergus somewhere? What if he starts crying again and Murtagh just gives him to a stranger? What if his diaper is wet? What if there aren’t enough diapers in the bag? What if-"

"For God’s sake, woman! We’ve the flat to ourselves for the first time in weeks! YOU were the one that gave Fergus over to Murtagh!"

"I know, but what if he won’t stop screaming? Oh God what if he drops him?!"

"Mo nighean donn, please. Ye’ve started something and you’re no’ finishing it."

Claire shook her head.

"I’ll make you a deal. Get our son back and make your godfather go away and you can have me any way you want."

For a moment, when her hand reached down, he thought she’d finally relieve the ache in his balls. Until she pulled his cell phone from his pocket and held it up.

"It’s verra unkind, Sassenach," he muttered, taking the phone from her. "To treat a man this way in this condition."

"You’ll be rewarded handsomely when our son is back and your furry godfather is gone."

Punching the number, Jamie glared at her while it rang.

"What? I’ve barely got the lad strapped into the bloody car. Do ye ken how complicated this bloody thing is?"

"Aye, I do. I had to bring him home in one. Bring the lad back up here."
“Ye canna be serious.”

Jamie sighed.

“Aye, I am. Bring him back up. Claire doesna want to be wi’out him.”

“It was her damned idea!”

“Please, Murtagh,” Jamie said, closing his eyes and hoping Claire couldn't hear Murtagh’s words. Claire’s blue eyes were burning when Jamie looked up and he knew that she did.

“BRING MY BLOODY SON BACK UP HERE YOU DAMNED STUBBORN SCOT! OR SO HELP ME I’LL-”

Jamie put a hand over her mouth, which she promptly bit, and hung up the phone.

“Our son will be returned to us promptly,” he said sweetly.

“Good. I don’t like him being gone. I don’t know what came over me.” Claire started to feel panicked, the weight of her snap decision coming down on her.

“Tell me, Sassenach. Just what will we do when our lad is back? Ye ken he interrupts us nearly as much as Murtagh does.”

Claire wasn't listening though, still looking distractedly at the door. She turned, took the phone from his hand and put it down on the end table.

“Promise me something, Jamie.”

“What?”

“That you won’t ever let Murtagh take our son anywhere ever.”

Frowning at her, he wondered if pregnancy hormones lingered this long after the birth.

“Why?”

“The man can’t even put a bloody car seat in the car. How the hell will he keep my son safe and alive? The car seat is not that complicated.”

“Do ye no’ remember when we brought him home? It took me almost an hour to get that bloody thing strapped in.”

Rolling her eyes, she got up again and began pacing. When they heard Murtagh’s footsteps outside the door, Claire pulled it open and immediately took Fergus into her arms.

“Hello there lovie,” she crooned. “Are you alright?”

“The lad likes the outdoors. Must take after his Da. Ye’ll be chasing that one down when he starts walkin’ about on his own,” Murtagh said with a slight smirk.

“And what would you know about children?” Claire snapped.

Murtagh took half a step back and Jamie stood. Claire had been irritated with Murtagh since his arrival. At the start, Jamie had understood the feeling and hadn’t blamed her. But enough was
Taking Fergus from her, Jamie handed the boy over to Murtagh and steered Claire back to their bedroom.

“T’’ve been silent for far too long. I ken ye dinna like Murtagh o’er much, and I’m no’ asking you to change that. But that was harsh, what ye just said to him. Ye ken he’s never had any children of his own.”

“So you told me, yes,” Claire said defiantly, not able to meet Jamie’s gaze.

“I’ll no’ have ye speaking to him that way. He’s family, whether ye like him or no.”

Claire gritted her teeth.

“Jamie, he-”

“No,” he said sharply. “Me and Jenny and Willie were the closest he ever came to having children of his own. And ye heard him speak of Jenny’s children, how he helped care for them before he went looking for me. Ye willna speak to him that way again.”

Defiance sprang up in her eyes for a moment, but she gave in.

“Alright.”

“Thank you. I believe ye owe him an apology.”

After a long hesitation, he followed her out to the living room. Murtagh was walking around, bouncing Fergus in his arms and muttering in Gaelic to him.

“I’m sorry,” Claire blurted. “What I said was cruel and unfair to you.”

“Aye,” Murtagh said. “It was. I ken ye dinna like me. But Jamie is like a son to me, and yer bairn is like my grandson. I’ll thank ye to keep that in mind next time ye try to bite my heid off, aye?”

“And I’ll thank you to keep in mind that Fergus is my son and since you clearly don’t consider me to be a part of your family, and in fact tried to talk Jamie into leaving me here alone before our son was even born, I feel I’ve every reason to.”

Jamie clenched his fists, sensing Murtagh’s quiet anger beginning to boil.

“Enough! The both of ye!” he said loud enough that Fergus startled in Murtagh’s arms. “Look. Ye dinna like each other. Murtagh was wrong in asking me to leave wi’ ye so near yer due date. I ken he’s made ye feel like you’re no’ a part of the family. But remember what I told ye? YOU are my family, Claire. You and wee Fergus. And you,” Jamie turned to Murtagh. “Are’na helping one bit. She is my wife and you’ll speak to her wi’ respect. I dinna ken how many times I’ve told ye that. Whether ye like my choice or no, she’s no leaving me nor am I leavin’ her. Ye had no right to come into my home and order me away from my family. Ye completely dismissed her like she wasna a human being. I canna have that in my home.”

Fergus began to let his displeasure at the feeling in the room be known, and Jamie didn’t blame him. Reaching out, he took the boy back from Murtagh and laid him against his chest. He rubbed his wee bairn’s back soothingly, trying to control his temper. He took a deep, slow breath.

“Now. Murtagh. I think ye need to go. I’ll give ye a call later because we’ve things we need to
discuss,” he said, tartly but calmly.

Murtagh nodded and left without another word. Jamie took another long breath before turning back to his wife. Claire walked up to him, arms out to take the baby, but Jamie shook his head.

“No, mo chridhe. We need to talk first.”

“About what?”

“I believe I’ve done ye a disservice and for that, I apologize.”

She looked at him, brows knit in confusion.

“What are you talking about?”

“The last man ye loved betrayed you and hurt ye deeply. He shattered your confidence and made ye doubt your self worth. I hated to see ye in such a state. I kent ye had strength inside ye that ye hadn’a used yet, so I helped ye discover it. Ye ken I will do, and have done, anything for you and for Fergus. But I think that’s set ye up to assume everyone will treat ye that way and that they should.”

Claire sat down on the couch slowly.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that the way I treat ye is because I love you and I’m your husband. But ye canna expect that from everyone. That doesna mean ye dinna deserve to be respected by everyone, ken. But what ye said to Murtagh today was downright cruel, Claire. I’ve never seen ye speak to someone that way. Ye always speak your mind, but this was more than that.”

“I know I shouldn’t have said that to him,” Claire said softly, shame flushing through her face. “You’re right, it was mean.”

Fergus began to wriggle and fuss and Claire's face crumpled, looking with longing at their son. Jamie sighed softly and handed him over to his mother. He went into the kitchen to busy himself with something, anything. After years of having no contact with anyone in his family, he had his godfather back. The strife between Claire and Murtagh hurt Jamie deeply, but what was he to do? Claire was, and would continue to be, his life. The joy he had with her and their son was something that would always come first. Silently, he cursed Murtagh’s not-so-subtle way with words that he’d had upon his arrival. Perhaps, if he’d been a bit more tactful, things would have gone differently.

He knew Claire didn’t act this way out of spite; that wasn’t her. She’d lost a lot in life, he knew that, and he wanted her to feel safe and loved and cared for. He wanted her to feel like she belonged, when she clearly hadn’t in a long time before him. He sighed again, looking down at the countertop he was wiping up, wishing there was an easy fix to this problem.

When the countertops were as clean as they’d ever be, Jamie put his rag down and went back out to the living room. Claire was cooing to Fergus, tracing his pudgy cheek with her finger and smiling fondly at him while he gurgled happily back. The sight of them gave Jamie such joy he couldn’t describe, but Jamie couldn’t help but notice that her eyes sparkled a little with unshed tears and there was a little hitch to her breathing. She got up from the couch, still speaking nonsense to the lad, and disappeared into their bedroom.

Jamie followed after the pair, curious about Claire’s sudden retreat.
“Hello, darling,” she said softly as she adjusted her shirt. “Are you a hungry boy? I do wonder, you know, if you’ll have his bottomless stomach.”

He watched as she cradled Fergus in her arm and guided his seeking mouth to her nipple.

“There you go, handsome. Goodness you’re just like your father, aren’t you?”

Sitting carefully beside her, he couldn’t take his eyes away from his son, finally content and nursing heartily.

“I am sorry,” she whispered, not looking up. “About what I said to Murtagh, and all of it. It isn’t fair to you.”

“I ken ye are, Sassenach.”

Bending her neck down, her hair fell and hid her face, as her breath hitched a little louder than before.

“I’m so afraid, Jamie.”

That caught him off guard.

“Why?” he asked incredulously, staring where her face was hiding behind her hair.

“I’m afraid because I’m so happy. I’ve never had anything like this before, never had a real family. But I found you and then we had Fergus. I just… I’m afraid that loving you both so much will kill me if I lost you.”

Her words made his heart ache. He knew it was mostly fear that ruled Claire’s outburst, and more importantly, he knew that she hadn’t felt that way before Murtagh had shown up back into his life.

“Oh, mo chridhe. You’re no’ going to lose us.”

“But I could. You could have left with Murtagh when he first showed up here. I worried you might. I don’t have a family besides you and Fergus. I couldn’t… Just the thought that you could up and leave at any time terrifies me. I thought I wouldn’t lose Frank either.”

“I’m no’ him, Claire. I think I’ve proven that by now,” Jamie answered a little stiffly.

The dark curls swung as she nodded, still not looking up at him.

“Yes! Yes you have, over and over again. I’m not doubting you at all. But that’s why I keep lashing out at Murtagh. Because I’m afraid that if he says the right thing, you’ll go off to Scotland and leave us behind. That you’ll never come back. Or worse… That you’ll take Fergus with you and leave me here. And I couldn’t… I couldn’t survive that.” He saw her hold tighten slightly on the bairn, securing him against her out of that fear.

“I know that’s irrational because I know deep in my heart you wouldn’t, but…”

Reaching out, he turned her face to meet his, waiting until her eyes drifted up.

“Hear me, Claire Elizabeth Fraser. You are my home, my life. There’s no’ a damn word that anyone could ever say to me that would make me leave you or our son behind. If I go to Scotland, it’ll only be wi’ you at my side. I couldna face my family wi’ out you. And I would never ever take Fergus from you. He is our son. Murtagh willna steal me away from ye. I’m yours, no’ his.”
Tears leaked out the corners of her eyes and she nodded jerkily.

“Tears leaked out the corners of her eyes and she nodded jerkily.

“I know,” she said, not breaking eye contact with him and sounding more confident. “I do know

that Jamie. I’m sorry.”

A quiet ‘pop’ made Jamie look down and smiled at the pleased look on Fergus’ face.

“I think he’s full,” Claire said, her voice trembling a little.

“Would ye mind if I burped him?”

“No, of course you can,” she replied softly.

She handed the baby over to Jamie, who spread the burp cloth over his shoulder quickly.

“That’s a good lad,” he said, patting the tiny back gently. “Eat up so ye can grow strong like your

mam. If you’re lucky, you’ll have her brains too.”

A soft sound rumbled through the small body and Jamie felt the heavy wetness on the cloth.

“That wasna too bad for a man your size!” Jamie said proudly.

Laying the little boy down in his crib, he couldn’t stop grinning. His firstborn was a son, a braw

lad, one he loved with every part of himself.

“Thank you, Jamie.”

“I dinna mind burping him. I canna feed him, wi’out a bottle anyway, but I dinna mind cleaning up

after the lad.”

“Well yes, thank you for that. But that wasn’t what I meant.”

He sat down beside her while she tucked herself back into her shirt.

“What was it ye meant then, mo graithe?

“I meant thank you for saying all that. It isn’t that I don’t trust you or that I don’t believe you.”

“Aye, ye just have a few insecurities left. I canna say I blame ye.”

She let out a deep breath of relief and leaned against him. He put his arm around her shoulders and

hugged her close, glad they’d talked this out.

“It’s so quiet,” she whispered, afraid to break the spell.

“It is,” he replied equally as soft. “I could give Murtagh a ring and get him back if ye miss the

noise s’much,” he continued, laughing softly, knowing without looking that the look on his wife’s

face would be one of disdain.

Her head lifted and she pulled his face so she could look through her lashes at him. She had the

most beautiful eyes, like the depths of the ocean, mysterious and fathomless.

“Perhaps another time. I think I owe him a proper apology, but I’m enjoying our time alone.”

“Aye,” he said, hooking one finger under her chin, stopping her from laying her head back on his

shoulder. “So am I.”
Her kiss was soft, gentle, and hungry. There was a hint of vegetables on her tongue, making him smile as he recognized the flavor of cucumbers. They hadn’t kissed like this in weeks, usually only a quick peck here and there while one of them tended the bairn.

But that bairn was asleep and there wasn’t another soul drifting around the apartment. They were as alone as they’d ever be and he planned to take advantage of it. By unspoken agreement, they moved further onto the bed, Claire laying down on her back as she pulled Jamie above her.

“If I recall,” he said, sliding his hand beneath her shirt. “You promised me anything I wanted if I got Murtagh to go and kept wee Fergus home.”

“I was hoping you’d forget about that.”

“No’ a chance,” he laughed huskily, wiggling his eyebrows at her.

Slowly, teasingly, he began kissing down her neck, tugging her sweats down with him.

“Really?” she asked, glancing at him with a quirked eyebrow. “That’s what you’re doing first?”

“Never heard ye complain about it before. And besides, I believe I ha’ a debt to repay if I’m no’ mistaken.” She smiled widely.

“Oh that’s not a complaint, I just thought-”

He didn’t need to hear what she thought. All he needed to hear was her wee squeaks and groans as he tasted her.

“Ye ken,” he said a moment later, pushing her thighs apart so he could breathe. “Some women shave or wax their honey pot?”

“How the hell would you know that?” she asked, chest heaving.

“I heard talk, from some of the women in the show, but also from the lads I used to work wi’.”

Forcing her eyes open, she looked down at him.

“And why, exactly, are you thinking about shaved honeypots right now?”

His tongue darted out and she flinched.

“Weel… It’s only I’m glad yers isna. I think it’s verra sexy to keep ye as natural as can be.”

“W-would you rather I s-stop shaving my legs too?”

Enjoying himself too much, he delayed answering for a little while.

“I think I’d leave that to you,” he said as he caught his breath. “I think you’re verra beautiful anyway, that would only make ye better.”

“You really want me to walk around with gorilla legs?!?”

“I said,” he breathed the scent of her arousal deeply. “I’d leave it to you.”

He cut off whatever her next statement was by burying his face between her legs. She filled each of his senses until they nearly overloaded, but he didn’t stop until she was shaking.
“Jamie, please,” she begged. “I need you inside me.”

“Oh I’m no’ done yet. Just be patient, mo chridhe.”

She groaned and tried to roll onto her side, but he kept her pinned down.

“Oh, fuck me,” she complained.

“I promise I will. But it’s been some time since I made love to ye properly and I’m gonna take my time about it, aye?”

“You dirty Scottish bastard. You’re torturing me on purpose.”

Pulling himself up, he turned her face to his and kissed her deeply.

“Ye sound surprised, Sassenach.”

“I’m not. Not when I promised you anything, which I now regret.” She took a steadying breath. “Well… Maybe I’m a little surprised.”

He gave her a reproachful look and clicked his tongue at her.

“Thought ye kent me verra weel by now.”

He bit gently on the side of her neck while one hand moved slowly down her stomach.

“I do. Which is why I thought you’d want the back way with my ‘sweet round arse’ in the air.”

She’d tried to mimic his accent which only made her sound silly. He smiled into her neck, releasing the skin for a moment.

“I’ll work my way there. But how can I no’ worship the body that carried and delivered my son? My first born? How can I rush loving you when I’ve no’ been blessed wi’ the ability in so long?”

“My. God. You’re such a romantic! Where’s the crazed passionate knight I knew only a few months ago?”

“He’s waiting. Now hush, Sassenach. Can ye no’ see I’m busy?”

Returning to the faint red spot on her neck, he dipped his free hand between her legs. She was slick and sensitive from his attentions already and it didn’t take long for her to start whimpering. The way her moans got louder nearly drove him into a frenzy. But he’d meant it when he’d said he would take his time with her.

Watching as her face contorted in her pleasure, he captured her lips just before her cry released. One of her hands let go of the quilt she’d been gripping and instead took hold of his hair, pulling him harder against her. His scalp stung and he felt a few hairs pop free.

He could feel her heart thundering in her chest as he kissed the valley between her breasts. Sweat covered her pale body and he longed to taste every bit of it. Her hand shook as she combed her fingers through his hair.

“Are you… ever going to make love to me properly?” she asked, breathless.

Looking down at her, he gave her his best ‘you canna be serious’ face.
“Do ye really think, after all this, that my balls are’na aching something fierce? Or that my cock isna throbbing painfully?”

“If it’s so bad, darling,” she said too sweetly. “Perhaps you should do something about it.”

Both blue eyes glittered at him, filled with lust and longing.

“Perhaps,” he said, pulling her up with him as he got to his knees. “I just might.”

“Finally!” she moaned loudly, eyes raging with lust.

Arms tight around her, he kissed her for a long while. One of her arms wrapped around his neck while the other snuck between his legs and stroked him slowly. Before long, she had his hips rocking in time with her strokes and she smiled against his lips.

“Still throbbing?”

“No’ for long.”

Reaching down, he grabbed the backs of her thighs and pulled her legs around him, which forced her onto her back again. She was smiling and giggling up at him and he prepared himself to finally have her again. But then he stopped.

“Oh for Christ’s sake, Jamie!” she yelled when he hopped suddenly off the bed. “What the bloody hell is wrong with you?!”

“Safety first, my lady,” he said, digging in the nightstand drawer for a condom.

They hadn’t needed to use one for some time, with her being pregnant. But now that she’d given birth, they had to be careful again.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I’m no’ sure if you remember, Sassenach. But something happened that first time we had unprotected sex. I just canna seem to recall exactly what that was…”

“You’re a cruel man, James Fraser.”

Her glare intensified as he opened the foil wrapper slowly.

“I told ye I’d take my time.”

“And if you take your time any slower, I’m going to finish without you and make you watch.”

Rolling the condom on, he smirked at her.

“Perhaps another time, Sassenach. I think it would be interesting to watch ye pleasure yourself.”

“Interesting?”

“Aye. I ken my way round your honeypot pretty well by now, but I think I’d enjoy seeing what ye do wi’ it yourself.”

Eyes narrowing, she began to run her left hand down her body, her ring catching in the silver moonlight.
“Keep talking and you’ll find out.”

“I said another time,” he growled, crawling above her. “No’ now.”

Pushing her hand away, he nudged her legs apart and guided himself home. God almighty, he thought. If she was any hotter, she’d burn him on contact. A choked groan of pleasure escaped him at the same time as her sigh.

“Yes,” she said in a dreamy voice. “Much better.”

As much as his aching balls told him to ride her hard, he moved slowly instead. For one thing, he was still aware that his son was asleep only a few feet away. For another, he didn’t need Claire’s screams to wake the boy and force them to end early. Above all else, though, he didn’t want to hurt her. This was their first time after she’d delivered Fergus and he was aware it could sometimes be painful or uncomfortable. That had been the other part of him teasing her for so long. Claire thought he’d stopped reading the blog he’d found online, now that their son had been born. But he wanted to be able to care for her as best he could, so he’d continued reading and absorbing the information. Hopefully he’d done his job and it wouldn’t hurt her too much.

So he loved her slowly, tenderly. Her hips lifted to meet his in their gentle rocking. Each time he was fully inside her, he felt her relax a little more. The tension in her legs released little by little, her fingers stopped digging into his shoulder and buttocks. When her breath caught and she made a tiny sound, he thought he’d pushed too hard and hurt her.

“Are ye alright, a nighean?”

“Yes! Yes I’m alright.”

“I didna hurt ye?”

“No. No you didn’t hurt me one bit. Actually, I think you could move a little more now and I’ll be fine.”

He searched her eyes for a moment to be sure she wasn’t saying that for his sake. Deciding she was ready, he let his body rock a little harder. Still, he was careful to not let it go too far. The last thing he wanted was to damage her.

She’d been right, she was ready for it. As soon as he’d picked up his pace, she began to shudder and squeak the way she usually did. All his teasing earlier ensured this would not be a long night for either of them, but it would be enough. He pulled himself up just enough to watch her full breasts bounce in response to his thrusts.

Her eyes opened slowly and she met his gaze.

“I love you,” she said in a strong voice. “I love you.”

Fire erupted in his veins and he lost all sense of reality. Nothing in the world was more beautiful than those words coming from her lips. He collapsed down on top of her, still mindful that he didn’t crush her.

They lay with their heads nearly hanging off the foot of their bed, both breathing as heavily as if they’d just completed a marathon.

“I almost forgot how good you are at that,” she panted.
“What!? Ye forgot ?!” he whisper-yelled with faux indignation.

“I said almost!”

Rolling his head to glare at her, he caught the twinkle in her eye as she fought to restrain her giggles.

“Clearly I canna be that good if ye forgot after a few weeks wi’out!”

“I said almost !”

“I’ll just have to take it upon myself to remind ye every opportunity I have. Make sure ye never come close to forgetting that again.”

Claire rolled onto her side, arm tucked beneath her head, and yawned.

“You’re a good man.”

Fergus started to fuss and Claire made to go pick him up.

“I’ll get the bairn. Rest now, mo graidh.”

Jamie hastily cleaned himself up and slipped back into his boxers before lifting his son out of the crib. Something they’d learned early on was how much little Fergus loved skin-to-skin contact. As soon as he felt his father’s warm skin on his cheek, he settled himself. Jamie eased himself back onto the bed, using the wall as support. Sleepily, Claire turned herself around and crawled up to rest her head against Jamie’s shoulder. He’d settled the lad in the middle of his chest, his tiny body moving with each breath they took.

“He really is a beautiful little boy,” she murmured.

“Aye. That he is, my Sassenach. That he is.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Claire and Jamie, along with wee Fergus, celebrate their first anniversary.

Waving at his wife and son, Jamie left for work. His day went smoothly, though his mind wandered to Murtagh. He hadn’t seen or spoken to his godfather since the showdown with Claire. When lunch rolled around, Jamie took the time to call Murtagh.

“Fraser,” came the gruff voice on the other end of the line.

“Murtagh, it’s Jamie.”

“ Took yer sweet time callin’ me back,” the other man muttered.

Jamie sighed and got his thoughts in order.

“I have some things I need to say to ye and I need for ye to listen. Can ye do that? Wi’out interrupting?”

“Aye,” Murtagh said. “I can.”

“I’ve spoken wi’ Claire about why she snapped at ye. I’m sorry for what she said to ye and I ken she is as well. But ye must know something. She and Fergus are my life, Murtagh. This relationship I have wi’ her is the most precious thing I’ve ever had. I’ll no’ let it fall by the wayside. Do ye understand?”

There was a long pause and Jamie wondered if his phone had died.

“Aye. And I’m no’ tellin’ ye to abandon yer family, ken? I’m only sayin’-”

“No,” Jamie said sharply. “I willna gi’ them up. No’ for anything. You’re my family, Murtagh, but if ye force me to choose between you and Claire, I’ll pick her. Ye might want to keep that in mind next time ye come by.”

Jamie waited patiently for Murtagh to formulate his response.

“Maybe yer right, lad,” he said. “Ye arene the same man that left Lallybroch, that’s for sure. I ken I had no right to demand ye leave yer pregnant wife behind. And I havena treated her verra well since. Pass on my apology?”

“Aye. But ye can apologize to her in person when we have ye over sometime. I canna say when, I have to talk wi’ Claire first.”

“Of course, ye should speak wi’ her about it first. Do ye have some time?”

Taking a bite of his sandwich, Jamie nodded.

“Aye, I’ve a few minutes. Why?”
“There’s some things I think ye need to hear, about yer family.”

For a moment, his blood ran cold.

“What’s happened? Is everyone alright?”

“Oh aye. Everyone’s doing verra well. I want ye to consider taking a trip to see them. Introduce them to yer wife and son.”

“After what happened? They dinna want to see me. No’ after the way I left.”

Jamie took a long drink from his bottle of water, trying to ignore the feelings that came with thinking about his family.

“Christ, lad. Yer mam cornered me no’ long after ye left and begged me to find ye. They miss ye and want ye to come home. I spoke wi’ Ellen a few days ago and she wants to see ye.”

“Ye expect me to just show up at Lallybroch wi’ my Sassenach wife and newborn son in tow?”

“Well ye did just get through wi’ tellin’ me ye’d no’ leave them behind. I’m no’ sayin’ it needs to be right now. Just think on it a bit, aye? Talk to yer Claire.”

“Aye,” Jamie said, mind racing at the new possibilities. “I’ll think it over. I need to get goin’.”

Jamie gathered up his garbage from his lunch and threw it away.

“I’ll let ye go, then. Thanks for callin’.”

“I’ll see ye later, Murtagh.”

Claire and Fergus waved Jamie off as he left for work. Once he was gone, she turned her son and smiled at him.

“Alright my darling, how about we go out for a little while?”

He stared up at her, mouth opening and closing with a soft popping sound.

“My thoughts exactly. Come on. A few of my friends are working at my old job and I know they’d love to see you.”

Claire parked the car in the lot outside Springs Preserve and settled Fergus into his sling. She walked the grounds for some time, enjoying the sunny spring day, murmuring softly to Fergus as he gazed up at her, wide awake.

“Claire? Is that you, Claire?!”

She turned at the sound of the happy voice and grinned as a woman bustled over to her.

“Mrs. Fitz! Oh it’s so good to see you!” Claire exclaimed, returning the woman’s hug, trying to not squish Fergus between them.

“You too! Last I saw you, it looked like you were ready to pop!”

“Well, this is him. Fergus Fraser, meet Mrs. Fitz.”
Claire maneuvered and got Fergus out of the sling so Mrs. Fitz could see him.

“Oooh he’s so handsome, Claire! Those eyes!”

“He takes a bit after his father. But he’s a good lad,” Claire joked, cooing softly at Fergus as his eyes tried to focus.

“Ooohhh! That handsome knight you told me about?”

“One and the same.”

Mrs. Fitz squeaked in joy and clapped her hands.

“Are you here for a few minutes? I’m about to go on my break and I’d love to treat you to lunch.”

“We’d love that! How about we wait here for you?”

“Perfect! I’ll be back soon!”

Claire found a small bench and sat, cradling Fergus against her.

“Now that is Mrs. Fitz. She’s one of the reasons I enjoyed working here. She is quite a character, but a very sweet woman.”

When Glynnis returned, she bustled over and lead the way to the cafe. Once they were seated, Claire tried to get Fergus comfortable in her arms.

“He’s a beautiful boy, Claire. I’m so pleased for you.”

“I didn’t think…” she looked down at the little boy. “I didn’t think I’d love him so much.”

“Motherhood suits you.”

The waiter came by and took their lunch orders, leaving them in peace once more.

“Would you like to hold him?”

Glynnis’ face lit up and she gasped.

“Oh! I would love to! It’s been such a long time since I’ve held one so small.”

Claire handed the baby over and laughed as Fergus cooed up at this new face. It was delightful to have some time out with a friend. She and Glynnis talked and caught up all through lunch. When she had to return to work, Claire promised to have her over for dinner.

Glancing at her watch, Claire decided to wander around the preserve for a little while longer. Jamie wouldn’t be home for a few more hours and she was enjoying the sunshine.

“Alright, little one,” she said to her son. “I’m going to tell you something but you have to promise you won’t tell your da.”

With his tiny fist in his mouth, he looked up at her.

“Good. I’ll hold you to your word. But… I’m working on a surprise for him. Our first anniversary is coming up soon and I wanted to do something special. So would you like to help me?”

She smiled down at Fergus and he gave her a slobbery grin in return. Deciding they’d been out
long enough, Claire buckled him back into his seat and drove home. After all his excitement, Fergus was asleep before she got back, so she settled him in for a nap. That gave her a few minutes to clean up a little and get the leftovers warmed up before Jamie came home.

###

Claire sat down at the table with the project she’d been working on for the last week. Fergus burbled happily in his bouncy chair, fumbling with one of his stuffed toys. She finished the last piece of the gift and put it all together.

“There,” she said to her son. “Do you think your da will like it?”

Fergus looked up at her, completely unaware, arms starting to wave around erratically.

“Yes, I think so too! Now I just have to get dinner together and in the oven, so you just sit tight.”

Gathering her supplies together, she followed a recipe she’d found for a cheesy chicken broccoli casserole. Once it was cooking in the oven, she cleaned the table and set out the dishes. She changed Fergus into his wee kilt before sliding into her own black dress. Claire smiled as she looked at herself in the mirror, remembering the last time she’d worn this.

The memory of watching him joust and fight in his knight’s costume made her smile. That night had been the first flower he’d given her. Now they had a son and had reached their first anniversary.

When the keys clicked in the door, she gathered her son up into her arms and went out to greet the man of the house.

“Sassenach, I’m home,” he called over his shoulder, putting his keys on the hook.

“So I see,” she said, waiting for him to turn around.

He held a small bouquet of roses in his hand when he turned around and his mouth fell open.

“Happy first anniversary,” Claire said, smiling brightly at him.

“Claire…” he breathed, eyes taking in everything she’d done. “Ye look…”

His mouth opened and closed half a dozen times as he tried to find the words.

“Well,” she said, walking toward him. “Fergus and I thought it was important that we celebrate this properly. So I’ve got dinner ready and a gift for you.”

He looked away from her, his ears turning a little pink.

“We havena talked much about what our actual anniversary is, so… I didna ken when ye wanted to celebrate it. I ordered somethin’ for ye, but it’s no’ come yet.” He paused for a moment, before adding uncertainly, “I brought ye flowers in case ye wanted to do somethin’ tonight.”

“That’s alright, darling,” she said, smiling softly at his wavering voice. “We’ll do something special later for our other anniversary.”

Jamie nodded, lurching forward as Fergus decided he wanted Da rather than Mum. He took the boy into his own arms, giving Claire the roses and accepting her quick kiss.

“Aye, mo chridhe. We’ll do something verra nice. And look at my braw lad! Wearin’ his kilt like a
Claire lit the candles and set the table. The casserole sat in the center with a nice cucumber salad beside it. Jamie walked around the front room, bouncing Fergus as he moved.

“We agreed we should both dress for the occasion.”

Jamie tore his eyes from his son and gave his wife a proper once-over.

“Ye look verra bonnie, lass.”

She turned in a slow circle.

“Do you recognize the dress?”

“Aye,” he said, settling Fergus in his bouncy chair again. “Ye wore it when ye came to watch my show.”

He came around the table to stand closer to her, wrapping his arms around her waist.

“You really remembered it from that night?”

Jamie nodded slowly.

“Of course I do,” he said softly. “We went on a proper date that night. How could I ever forget that?”

“You,” she said, draping her arms around his neck. “Are a rare sort of man.”

He smiled and kissed her.

“Indeed I am.”

Jamie pulled her chair out for her and helped her settle close to the table. With a large spoon, he dished up the casserole for both of them before taking his own seat.

“Fergus seems to be gettin’ bigger,” Jamie said, stabbing a cucumber with his fork.

“He is! He’s growing very well, right in line with where he should be.”

Jamie stared at the cucumber on his fork for a minute before he spoke again.

“Is he big enough, ye think, for a trip on an airplane?”

Claire chewed slowly, looking up at him.

“A trip where?”

“Scotland. The three of us could go together.”

He busied himself with his salad, giving her a few minutes to sort through what he’d said.

“You want to go to Scotland?”

“I… I dinna ken yet. But I willna go wi’out you and Fergus,” he added quickly, remembering her anxiety.
She sighed, setting down her silverware.

“Why do you want to go?”

Jamie took his time in answering, getting his thoughts into order.

“D’ye ken what ye said to me when ye had Fergus’ kilt made?”

She nodded.

“I wanted our son to know about his family history.”

“Scotland is a part of that history,” Jamie said. “I want him to ken his family, to meet his granny and grandsire, to meet his auntie.”

Claire watched him for a long moment before reaching out and taking his hand.

“But that isn’t all of it,” she said, her voice gentle.

Staring down at their hands, he took a deep breath.

“Ye ken me too well, it seems. No, that isne all of it. It’s… Since Murtagh came and found me, it’s been weighing on me.”

“What has?”

“The last conversation I had wi’ my Da, all of it. I thought… I thought he hated me and when I learned about his stroke, I blamed myself. I ken I canna cause a stroke, but it all felt like that. I ken he’s alive, but nothing more than that. I hate that the last words we said to each other were full of anger.”

Claire gave his hand a squeeze.

“So you want to try and make amends?”

“What amends I can, at least. I canna take back what I said, or gi’ back the years lost between us. But I can speak wi’ him, introduce him to my wife and son. Maybe begin repairs on our relationship.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Jamie. I think we can start looking into how to make that happen.”

He looked up at her, eyes wide and bright.

“Ye mean it? We’ll go to Scotland?”

“Did you think I’d say no?” she asked him, a short laugh erupting from her at his astonished face. “Scotland is your home. I couldn’t bear it if I was the reason you never went back. So long as you take me with you. Take us with you.”

“When I moved to America, I didna ken when, if ever, I’d get back to Scotland. But it hasne bothered me since I met ye, for you are my home.”

He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed the back softly.

“And you are mine, Jamie. I love you.”
“I love ye too, Sassenach.”

With an immense weight off his shoulders, he dove back into his dinner. Claire got up and poured him a generous dram of whisky before pouring herself a glass of sparkling cider. It was a non-alcoholic drink, which made her more comfortable with it.

Leaving the dishes rinsed in the sink, Claire ushered him to the couch while she tended Fergus.

“I’ve got a gift for you,” she said, sitting beside him.

“Have ye? Claire, ye didna need to get me anything.”

Her eyes rolled.

“Just open it.”

Smiling, he tore the wrapping paper to reveal a picture frame. He frowned down at it, trying to understand what he was seeing.

“I saw this idea on the internet,” she admitted sheepishly. “And I decided to make one for you. Each of those is a location that was important to us.”

She pointed to the first and he realized it was a cut out of a map with a small heart drawn on it.

“That was the bar I worked at, where we first met.”

He nodded, looking to the second.

“Ah! My old job at Excalibur!”

The third was the address of his old apartment, where they’d lived before Fergus was born.

“Okay, I dinna ken what this one is.”

“Well, it’s sort of our firsts. First jobs, first place we lived. That’s our first vacation together, when I took you to Colorado.”

Closing his eyes, he could remember those cool nights spent cuddling together near the fire, or teaching her how to fish. A faint tinge of bitterness swept through the happy thoughts as he remembered his decision to let her go. He’d already fallen in love with her, but she hadn’t fallen for him.

“Hey,” she said softly, her hand gentle on his cheek. “What’s wrong?”

He shook his head.

“Nothin’. Just rememberin’ things. What’s the next first?”

She hesitated a moment before looking back down at the map cut outs.

“Oh! That was our first time at Lake Mead.”

“And the hospital where Fergus was born.”

They smiled at the second to last cut out.

“The first place we got together,” he said, kissing her cheek.
“Our home, wi’ our son.”

The final piece was blank, Claire’s fine handwritten ‘Our Future’ replacing the map pieces.

“I was thinking… When I made this, I decided to leave this blank so we could fill it in later if we wanted. But… Maybe, in the future, we could put Scotland there.”

He nodded, grinning.

“Aye, Sassenach. I think that would do verra well. Thank ye, lass. This was a lovely gift. I’m sorry yours isne here yet.”

“Don’t be sorry, love,” she said, leaning over to kiss him. “We hadn’t talked about it. And I think we should celebrate our other anniversary too. That one is just as important as this.”

“Aye, it is.”

They cuddled on the couch for a little while before Claire fed Fergus and put him to bed. Jamie groaned and stretched before he too got up.

“Come to bed with me?” she asked sweetly, batting her lashes at him.

“Aye, in a moment. I didna get to shower after work. I stink to high heaven.”

“Alright.”

Jamie headed for the shower, already unbuttoning his shirt. He turned on the shower to let the water warm before he turned to close the door. Claire stood in the doorway, watching him with open appreciation.

“Fergus is fast asleep,” she said, walking slowly into the bathroom and placing the baby monitor on the counter.

“Aye, he is.”

“So I thought…” she trailed off as she took the pins out of her hair. “Maybe since our alone time is so rare…” reaching behind her, she began to unzip her dress. “I should join you.”

He smiled slowly, moving to help her out of her dress.

“Oohh… I canna complain about that, Sassenach.”

It was his turn to enjoy the sights as she stepped out of her panties and let her bra drop to the floor. Quickly, the rest of his clothes joined hers on the floor and he offered his hand. She took it and followed him into the warm water.

The water pelted his back as he brought her with him. She brought herself closer and reached up to kiss him. Her left hand began a downward descent, but he grabbed her wrist and shook his head.

“Nay, lass. Ye made me a fine dinner and took the time to make me a wonderful gift for our anniversary. Let me love ye.”

For a few moments, he kissed her hungrily, hands wandering aimlessly over her whole body. His lips traveled down her neck, pausing to nip here and there. His hands finally settled on her backside, squeezing firmly.
Making his way down her chest, he nipped a circle around one breast. In answer to his ministrations, Claire moaned just loud enough to hear over the water.

“Harder, Jamie, please,” she panted, squirming against his mouth as he finally, gently, bit down right where she wanted him and suckled against her.

She moaned again, spurring him on to the other breast, following her chest as it heaved with each breath.

“Ahh!” she cried out as he moved to push her against the tile wall again, cold against her heated skin as he skimmed himself further down her body, pausing to kiss and nip her sensitive skin as he went.

Her hand fisted in his hair as he reached his target. He gently pushed one leg out a little, granting him easier access. The sweet, heady scent of her surrounded him, filling his lungs with each breath.

“Oohhh…” she moaned.

He smiled to himself as she began directing him with the hand in his hair. She continued to squeak as he tasted her, growing ever closer to her climax. But he had other plans.

Standing suddenly, he caught her as she sagged against the wall. She was panting heavily now, her mouth hanging open.

“Why did you stop!?"

“I’m no’ ready to let ye off just yet.”

“Bastard,” she wheezed.

He chuckled, hooking one leg around his hip.

“Do ye ken, mo graidh, how much has changed in a year? How ye turned my life upside down and showed me all I was missing?”

As he spoke, he probed a finger into her.

“Jesus H…”

“Ye’ve given me so much, Claire, and I dinna just mean Fergus. Ye truly gave me something I’ve never had, not wi’ any other person. I love ye.”

“It’s the same for me,” she whined into his ear. “I love you too, Jamie, but…” her back arched a little and she gasped as he added a second finger. “Christ! Please, Jamie! Stop torturing me, damn it!”

Kissing her deeply, he reached underneath her arse and hitched her other leg up around his hip. One arm stayed entwined around his neck as her other reached between them to guide him home. He pushed in hard, making her breath catch and a high pitched noise leave her throat as her had raced back up behind his head and into his hair, holding on tight.

“Yes! Oh God, Jamie!”

Sensitized as she was, she didn’t last long. Her fingers dug into his shoulders as her body shook and contracted around him. Keeping his hold on her, he moved until he reached his own end. He muttered quiet praises in Gaelic in her ear, trying to catch his breath.
“Happy anniversary,” she said with a lazy, sated smile on her lips, leg still wrapped around him.

“Aye,” he answered, kissing that smile. “Happy anniversary indeed. I canna wait to see what the next year brings us.”

He turned the water off and they towedled each other dry. They crawled into their bed, tangling arms and legs together. Claire started to get up when she realized they’d left the baby monitor in the bathroom, but Jamie stopped her.

With the monitor within earshot, he settled in beside her, holding her body close.

“You don’t work tomorrow,” she said quietly, tracing the lines on his face.

“Aye. It’s my day off.”

“What would you say to having breakfast in bed tomorrow? Having an exceptionally lazy day in bed?”

He gently bit the bottom of her ear and smiled.

“Mmm. I could go for a full English breakfast tomorrow.”

“What if I want a Scottish breakfast?”

“Och, well I’ll no’ deprive ye of that! I suppose we’ll just have to wait and see who gets to eat first.”

She giggled and kissed him sweetly.

“I do love you.”

“And I love you. Thank ye for doing all this today. And for agreeing to go to Scotland, Sassenach. I canna tell ye how it lightened my heart to hear ye say those words.”

“Whatever comes, we’ll face it together. As a family.”

“Aye, mo chridhe. As a family.”

Jamie pulled her close, tucking her into the hollow in his shoulder as he kissed the top of her head, and settled in to sleep.
Chapter 20

It was done. He’d booked their tickets for Scotland and while Jamie felt a little weight lift from his shoulders, his anxiety had peaked.

Alone in their bedroom, he heard Claire bustling about in the living room, babbling to Fergus and listening to him make his wee noises back. He opened the bottom drawer of their dresser and pulled out the faded tartan, holding it gently between his fingers. He hadn't taken out his kilt in many years, but knowing they'd be heading to Scotland made him pull it out.

Carefully, he laid it out on the floor and plaited it, lying down and wrapping it around his waist. When he stood up, he took stock of himself in the mirror. He hadn't worn it regularly beforehand, but he had missed the feel of it. He felt like himself in it.

"Jamie! Can you come out here for a second?" Claire called to him, pulling himself out of his memories.

"Aye," he replied. "I'm coming."

"Bring me a burp cloth, please!" she called back.

###

Claire heard Jamie come into the room and turned to him.

"So I was thinking..."

She turned and stopped, struck dumb by the sight before her. She hadn't even known he had a kilt, let alone that he'd brought it with him when he moved to Vegas.

He was enjoying watching his wife's features change, from surprise, to lust, to blatant appreciation. He smirked cheekily at her as all at once she came back to herself.

"Oh, I... umm..." she stuttered, trying to find the words.

"Aye, mo chridhe? What's amiss?" he asked, smiling all the more.

At the sound of his voice, Fergus turned bodily towards his Da and started to flail his arms. Claire patted his back as she walked closer to Jamie, prowling up to him like a predator to her prey.

"I didn't know you had a kilt," she said softly, fire in her eyes as she held his gaze.

"I do. I havae taken it out in a long time. Thinkin' of going to Scotland made me want to get it out."

"I do. I havae taken it out in a long time. Thinkin' of going to Scotland made me want to get it out."

"Well... I like it," she said, still staring hungrily at him.

Fergus, unhappy with being ignored, flopped towards Jamie, making wee babbling noises as he came closer.

"What do ye think, a bhalaich?" Jamie asked as he reached out to take the bairn into his arms. "I dinna think I look as handsome a lad as you, but I think yer Mam likes it."

Jamie looked up and gazed at Claire whose mouth was hanging open in unsated lust. Seeing Jamie,
in his kilt, holding their son to his chest. It was all too much for her. If he'd had his glasses on she may have just taken him right there.

Jamie stepped up closer to her reaching one hand out to touch her cheek. She had some spit up on her shirt, her hair was up in a haphazard bun on her head and sweatpants with one of his t-shirts on. She'd never looked more beautiful to him.

"Ye look so beautiful right now, mo chridhe."

"Ha," she responded sarcastically, reaching up to self-consciously sweep at her hair.

"I mean it," he said strongly. "Ye look beautiful, especially with the spark in yer eyes right now. I ken what ye were thinking."

He wiggled his eyebrows at her as a blush flushed beautifully over her cheeks.

"Yes, well," she started. "When you surprise and completely disarm me like that, what am I supposed to do?"

He chuckled low in his throat, which didn't help Claire's want of him.

"So, dare I ask," she started playfully. "What DOES a Scotsman wear under his kilt?"

He laughed again, deeper this time and eyed her.

"I guess ye'll have to find out for yerself."

Claire glanced down at Fergus, now peacefully asleep against Jamie's broad chest and stalked towards him.

"Meet me in our bedroom," she said as seductively as she could as she grazed the front of his kilt with her fingers. "I need to get to the bottom of what YOU keep under your kilt."

###

Jamie laid Fergus in his crib, eyes still closed and dreaming.

"Please, a chuisle," he whispered. "Let yer mam and I have a wee time to ourselves before ye wake, aye?"

He turned on the baby monitor as he left the room, gently closing the door.

As he walked into their bedroom, he was met with Claire, dressed in her blue kimono robe, holding something behind her back.

"What do ye have there?"

"Oh, just something to add to your… outfit."

He raised his eyebrows as she brought her hands from behind her back. His glasses.

That same rosy flush brushed across her cheeks as she took in his response.

"I just… I think you'd look really sexy with your glasses on as well. I promise I won't make you wear them the whole time."
He smiled at her and stepped closer until they were nearly flush together and picked them out of her hands and put them on.

"I'm glad yer askin' for what you want, mo chridhe. I dinna mind it a bit."

He'd expected her to move closer, but instead she took one step back and pulled out her phone.

"Can I..." she paused, blushing even harder. "I want a picture of you like this. So that I can look at it while I'm pining for you to come home from work."

She'd said it in jest, but there was a bit of truth to her words. He knew she missed him while he was at work. He missed her too.

"Aye, of course," he replied.

She took a picture or two before pulling him closer to take a picture of them together.

"God, I really DO look a mess Jamie. And you look so... so delicious."

He laughed.

"I think ye look beautiful."

She smiled.

"You have to say that because you're my husband."

"No, I dinna. I think ye are the most beautiful creature I've ever seen."

He held eye contact with her, hoping she could see he meant it.

"Well, since you are all dressed up for me, I have a surprise for you."

"Oh do ye now?" he asked, eyes alight with what it could be.

Holding eye contact with him, she slowly undid the sash to her robe. Carefully, she opened one side to reveal her shoulder and a hint of lace just above her breast. Without realizing he'd moved, Jamie took a step toward her only to be met with a step back from her.

"No, no," she chastised him playfully.

"I want to be the one to unwrap you," he nearly growled. "Isn't this my surprise?"

Claire sighed heavily.

"Well... I suppose it is your-"

She was cut off quite abruptly by Jamie's hands reaching out to her. She thought that he would pull her robe straight from her body, but was pleasantly surprised when he began peeling it down her arms, following it down with his mouth.

As the silky material slipped down her body, Jamie got a good look at what Claire had been hiding underneath her robe.

"Is this another gift for me to unwrap?" he growled, voice low and filled with lust. His eyes were staring fixedly at the deep blue, *quite skimpy*, lingerie that barely covered Claire’s assets.
“If you think you’ll be able to figure out how, exactly, to get me out of it,” she laughed softly.

“Dinna fash yerself about that, my Sassenach. I ken my way around yer fancy underthings now.”

He grinned cheekily up at her as she let the robe fall fully to the floor, pooling at her feet.

###

The next morning, Jamie made the call to Murtagh, inviting him to dinner before heading to work. Claire spent her day planning and preparing the meal in between feedings and nappy changes.

That evening, the doorbell rang and Jamie answered it while Claire finished making their sandwiches. Murtagh greeted him and Jamie waved him inside.

“Thank ye for coming, Murtagh.”

“Aye. Ye said ye wanted to talk wi’ me?”

Claire set the plates down on the table, including one for Murtagh.

“Come and sit with us,” she said. “I’ve made an extra for you.”

“Oh,” Murtagh said, surprised. “Thank ye.”

They sat down and ate quietly, Jamie sorting through his thoughts before speaking.

“Claire and I have come to a decision,” he finally said.

“About what?”

“We’ve bought tickets to visit Scotland, wi’ the lad.”

Murtagh was obviously surprised, but pleased as well.

“That’s good to hear. Will ye be goin’ soon, then? Is it safe for the bairn?”

“A few weeks from now. I couldn’t get the time off sooner than that, and we wanted the lad to be a bit bigger.”

Nodding, Murtagh sat back in his chair and sighed.

“Claire,” he said softly. “I wanted to apologize for how I treated ye. I shouldn’a have spoken to ye that way, or suggest you stay here as if ye were some dirty secret. Jamie loves ye and I was wrong to act as I did.”

Claire took a deep breath and glanced at Jamie. He nodded at her, though this was mostly between Claire and Murtagh. She was doing this for Jamie, because Murtagh was his family, though it wasn’t easy.

“Murtagh… Thank you. I… I don’t want to make Jamie choose between our family and the Frasers. I hope you understand now that Jamie and I, along with Fergus, come as a package deal. You don’t get one without the other.”

The little Scotsman had the decency to look abashed at her words.

“I do understand, Claire. Jamie’s no’ whole without ye.”
"Then I accept your apology."

With that awkward conversation out of the way, Murtagh joined Jamie and Claire on the couch for a glass of whiskey. It was good to have the air clear between them and she could see how much Jamie appreciated it. An idea struck her and she sat up, putting her glass down.

"Murtagh, you should come with us."

"Eh?"

"To Scotland," she said. "You haven’t been home in a long time either. You should join us."

Jamie brightened at the idea, nodding as he set his own glass down.

"Aye? Are ye sure?"

"Yes," Claire said, taking Jamie’s hand. "You’re a part of the family, Murtagh. We’d be happy to have you with us. Plus, Fergus knows you, so you’ll be a familiar face for him."

"I’d love to go wi’ ye to Scotland. Thank ye for inviting me."

Pulling out his phone, Jamie pulled up their flight itinerary and sent a copy to Murtagh so he could make his own arrangements.

"Ye’ve booked a hotel?" Murtagh asked with a frown. "Will ye no’ stay at Lallybroch?"

Jamie took in a deep breath.

"I didna want to burden the family wi’ three people they didna expect."

Murtagh looked like he wanted to argue, but took a sip of his whiskey instead. When Fergus began to cry for his evening feed, Claire got to her feet and fetched him from his bouncy chair. Anticipating her desire for whiskey, she’d done some extra pumping earlier in the day. Once the bottle was warm, she picked up her son and began feeding him. Jamie, to her surprise, had followed her over. He extended his arms with a shy smile.

"May I?"

"You want to feed him?"

"Aye. I’m no’ always home for his meals. Would ye mind?"

She smiled widely at him.

"Of course not."

Acting like the boy was made of glass, Jamie tucked him into his arm before accepting the bottle from Claire. Fergus excitedly began suckling, staring intently at his father. Claire took the opportunity to get a fresh nappy and burp cloth ready. Fergus wouldn’t need the nappy immediately, but he’d need it soon.

"Ye make a bonnie family," Murtagh said softly.

Claire couldn’t help her smile.

"Thank you, Murtagh."
The Scotsman nodded and took their three empty glasses to the sink.

“It’s gettin’ late and the bairn will need to go down soon,” he said, turning to face Jamie and Claire. “I’ll leave ye three alone.”

“Come over next week for dinner?” Claire asked, extending the olive branch further.

“Aye,” he said with a smile. “I’d like that.”

Walking him to the door, she accepted his hug and locked up behind him. Jamie was already burping Fergus by the time she got back.

“My, he ate that quickly!” she said.

Jamie grinned with pride.

“Aye, he did. He’ll grow up to be a braw lad like his da.”

With the boy taken care of, they worked together to clean up dinner. Once the dishwasher was running they headed to bed. Fergus was already asleep in his crib, a happy smile on his face.

“Thank you, Claire,” he said seriously. “For tonight. Ye made a fine dinner, but I appreciate what ye did wi’ Murtagh.”

Leaning down, he kissed her passionately, nipping gently at her bottom lip.

“I couldn’t see you hurting anymore. I love that you stood by me, but Murtagh is your godfather. Fighting with him hurt you.”

“Aye, it did. Thank ye for helping me fix it.”

Stretching onto her toes, she kissed him again. It had been intended to be a sweet, goodnight kiss. But she recalled the way he’d looked as he’d fed Fergus and her kiss turned hungry. Jamie didn’t hesitate to return the embrace, gathering her into his arms and carrying her to their bed.

“I love you, Sassenach,” he whispered against her lips.

“I love you too.”

He sat up and began tugging at his clothes while she wriggled out of her own. As much as he wanted to be sweet and take his time with her, he knew their time was limited. They both needed their sleep and Fergus could wake at any moment. Claire’s hands traced his spine up and down, sending goosebumps over his flesh. Blindly, she fumbled with the drawer on her nightstand before pulling out a condom.

“Not ready for a second one yet,” she said breathlessly.

Yet. The thought of her pregnant with another of his children filled him with such joy he nearly forgot to use the condom she’d handed him. Suitably protected, he kissed her gently as he slid home. She moaned beneath him, fingers clawing at his back. He knew what she wanted and was more than prepared to give it to her.

Moving deliberately, he watched the faces she made. Her legs wrapped around him, driving him harder against her. Sliding one hand between them, he teased her, making her whimper quietly.

“Jamie!”
“Are ye there, mo chridhe?”

“Yes!” she said as quietly as she could. “Oh God yes!”

He dropped his head to her ear, biting it gently.

“Come wi’ me, Sassenach!”

And she did, her body trembling beneath his.

“I love you, James Fraser,” she whispered.

That sent him over the edge, his body jerking against hers.

Later, Claire snuggled closer to Jamie, drowsy and satisfied. The baby monitor crackled as Fergus began to fuss and she stifled a groan.

“Dinna fash,” Jamie said, patting her bare hip. “I’ll check his nappy.”

“Thank you. If he’s hungry-”

“Just stay here and I’ll take care of the bairn.”

Clutching the sheets around her, Claire relaxed into the bed and waited for her husband’s return. Through the monitor, she heard the door open and Jamie started speaking to the boy.

“There ye are, lad,” Jamie said a few minutes later. “All cleaned up and half asleep already. I ken it’s late, but do ye think it’s time?”

Fergus made some gurgling noise and Claire could just picture his face.

“Aye, I agree. I think it’s time I gi’ yer mam her wee giftie.”

“It’s not that ‘wee’,” Claire muttered to herself with a smile.

She didn’t hear Fergus’ door close, but she felt when Jamie came back in the room. He carried such a presence with him that she was always aware of him.

“So, my Sassenach,” he said softly. “Would ye like yer anniversary gift?”

“I thought you already gave it to me,” she said, keeping her eyes closed as she smiled.

Jamie made a Scottish sound of derisive amusement and she couldn’t keep her giggle quiet.

“Weel, I ha’ something else for ye. The thing I said I’d ordered but hadn’e come in yet.”

She sat up, adjusting the pillows behind her. Jamie bent over and pulled out a long box from beneath their bed. He slid it over to her and sat at the opposite end of the bed, facing her.

“Jamie, you really didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Just open it.”

Taking the lid off the box, she stared down at the dark contents, confused. The bed shifted as Jamie got up and turned the light on, allowing her to properly see what was inside the box.

“Ooohh Jamie…” Claire said, stroking the soft wool. “This is beautiful.”
“It’s the Fraser tartan,” he said softly. “I wanted ye to feel a part of the Fraser clan. So the three of us will match.”

Carefully, she removed the wool tartan from the box and shook it out. Unable to resist, she wrapped the shawl around herself and grinned up at her husband.

“I suppose we might’ve looked silly if we’d all three had matching skirts.”

“Aye, it would. And I ken ye like to wrap up wi’ the blankets in the flat sometimes.”

“It’s lovely, Jamie. Thank you.”

Glancing down, she realized the shawl wasn’t the only thing inside the box.

“Jamie! What is this?”

Looking up at him, she watched him shrug and keep his eyes down.

“Ye get cold at night. And I thought it would be nice to have something Fraser to put out. So ye’d ken that no matter what happens wi’ my family or anything, you are my family. That this is our home.”

Without a word, she reached out and cupped his face in her hands. Tentatively, he met her gaze. He sat up as she moved toward him, pulling her into the circle of his arms. She pressed her lips to his as her legs wrapped around him. Both of his hands slid down her back, settling on her hips.

Moving to kiss his neck when he pulled back for air, Claire’s own hand reached down and pulled the blanket out of its box. Gently, she draped it around the pair of them, holding it tight as she kissed him.

“This is a wonderful gift,” she whispered. “It’s perfect. Now I won’t have to make you yelp at night with my cold feet.”

Smiling, he gave her a soft peck.

“Aye. It was purely selfish, buying the blanket. We’ll be a united front when we see my family. I dinna ken how they’ll be when they see me wi’ you and the lad. But this will show them we’re a family of our own.”

Claire nodded and kissed him slowly again. Laying her back, he drew the soft wool up over them and held her close. He rested peacefully, knowing whatever happened in Scotland, he’d have Claire at his side.

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