Lèirsinn dhen àm ri teachd - A Vision of the Future

by bs2sjh

Summary

Jamie is running from his Uncle when he encounters the stones at Craigh na Dun. Falling through time, he awakens in 2018, confused, disorientated and still running away from danger only to meet a more deadly threat head on.

Notes

My first fanfiction for a very long time (as in nearly ten years!) and my first Outlander fic. I'm a bit rusty so please bear with me whilst I get back into the swing of writing fiction. Chapters will get longer, I think, as we progress. I will promise happy endings but it will be a very bumpy ride. I'm aiming for a post a week at the moment but if I get a real spurt on I might up it to two. See how we're going. So please, enjoy (I think that's the right word) and feel free to leave any comments at the end. Thanks.
Prologue

May 1st 2018 - Beltane

“Go faster!” was the request and the driver was more than happy to comply.

A jacked car, the highland roads and fuelled by alcohol, the passing of the scenery was hypnotic. Swinging around corners, middle of the road, no light save the headlights; it was thrilling. So wrapped up in their fun they failed to notice the large, red-haired highlander running down the hill. Didn’t have time to react when he ran straight out in front of the car. It was only after the deafening thump of him hitting the bonnet did they think to brake.

Mere seconds passed before they skidded to a complete halt yet the highlander lay many yards back behind them.

“Shit!” They both got out of the car and ran back.

“He’s dead! Shit! We killed someone!” Stealing a car was one thing, manslaughter was another matter entirely.

“Hold yer wheesht! No one kens it’s us. I say we drive the car a bit further along and torch it.”

“But we can’t just leave him.” Just then, the prone man on the floor let out a small moan.

“Fuck this. Let’s go!”

“But he’s alive!”

“He willna be for long. We hit him at over fifty! Leave him.” The leader started walking back to car, grumbling how an evening’s enjoyment was thoroughly spoilt by a stupid idiot who didn’t know to cross a road.

The other, knelt gently beside the dying man on the floor. “I’m sorry. We didna mean to hurt ye.” And with that, stood and walked back to the car.

The highlander was dimly aware of them walking away, could make out two red lights getting dimmer, then surrendered to the dark once again.
I was driving back from yet another attempt to rekindle my pathetic excuse of a marriage. “Let’s have a second honeymoon” he said, “get to know each other again.” What a laugh! By getting to know each other again he actually meant for me to wait for him whilst he spent hours and hours researching in the libraries of Oxford. Then he dropped the bombshell that had me speeding along the motorway for Inverness. “I’ve accepted a job at the university. I thought maybe we could begin again. Here.” No discussion, no talking about it, nothing.

“What a fucking bastard!” I was so angry! “How dare he make a decision like that and not even think about how I felt!” I vented my frustrations to the empty car, at least it was willing to absorb the sound.

I had been working as a consultant surgeon in Inverness for a few years now and loved my job. I didn’t want to change anything especially when, to be honest, the thought of a divorce was getting more tempting as the months went on. It has been a whirlwind romance. We barely knew each other when we tied the knot. As the years passed, it became more and more obvious that maybe we should have waited. He was certainly not the other half of my soul.

I was driving along the dark, country roads near Inverness. The radio playing quietly, the windows wide open even though the evening air was cold. I was trying to stay awake! I needed to get back in one piece and the cool breeze was helping.

As I rounded a corner, I noticed a heap lying in the middle of the road. Swerving at the last second, I managed to avoid hitting it. Putting my hazards on, I reversed back down the road so that my headlights shone on the object. Pulling over, I got out to inspect. I was thinking it would probably be a deer or some other animal so I was shocked to find it was a man! It was obvious what had happened. The blood pooling around him, the splayed limbs, some pointing at angles in places where joints don’t exist. I ran to him, my doctors’ instincts kicking in immediately.

“Hello? Can you hear me?” Kneeling by his side, I gently felt his neck for a pulse. It was there. Just. Thready and weak, erratic, barely clinging on. At the touch, he moaned quietly. Eyes slowly blinking partially open.

Grabbing my phone, I checked for signal. A weak one bar but it would have to do. I dialled 999, requesting an air ambulance and the police near Craigh na Dun. I gave them coordinates using my GPS and told them to ring me with an ETA. Looking around, there was no sign of the car that had hit him. The bastards had left him to die.

Once off the call, my eyes and hands continued scanning his body, looking for injuries needing immediate attention. It was bad. The sound of his breathing alerted me to punctured lungs, rapidly collapsing by how shallow it was becoming. His eyes were dilated unevenly. Head trauma. His
hands were twitching slightly, one shoulder hanging out of joint. Nerve damage and ripped muscles. At least one femur fractured badly. Chances are that pelvis and spine were also damaged. God knows what he would be like inside. He was a mess.

“My name is Claire. Can you tell me your name?” Looking into his eyes, tried to get him to focus on me. I took hold of his hand, stroking his knuckles with my thumb. It was cold, shock setting in but still a weak tingle of electricity passed between us with the contact. He gripped my hand a little, the pressure slight but there.

“J...Jamie” It was so soft I could have missed it. It was a whisper as he exhaled, a bubbling sound accompanying the word.

“Right Jamie, I’m a doctor. An ambulance is on its way and we’ll soon get you to a hospital where I can have a proper look at you. Just hold on a little longer.” Another slight squeeze to let me know he’d heard.

For the first time, I noticed how he was dressed. Knee high boots, kilt in a tartan I hadn’t seen before, jacket that had been repaired over and over. He had a sword and dagger around his waist, a stock tied neatly around his neck. Releasing his hand, I started to loosen the stock to allow more air flow into his already compromised airways. I was careful to not move his neck. He smiled slightly as my fingers fumbled under his chin.

“What you smiling at soldier?” I injected as much cheer as I could manage into my voice. If he was smiling – he wasn’t feeling the pain yet.

Stock done, I sat back beside him and took his hand again. He was beginning to shake but there wasn’t much I could do, he was laying on his side already, breathing just about. He was almost unconscious but thankfully enough adrenaline was pumping to keep his heart beating and the pain at bay. I shrugged out of my coat and lay it over him, trying to keep some heat inside.

I started to work out a plan of action, what he needed first. Saline to help replace the lost blood until he could be typed and a transfusion set-up. An emergency chest drain to relieve some pressure in his chest until we got him into surgery. The fracture in his femur was bleeding but not spurting. A good sign that the femoral artery was intact. That would wait. Whilst I planned, his eyes watched me as if memorising my face.

My phone rang, breaking the connection – the air ambulance would be there in five minutes max. Sighing with relief, I looked back at him. A tear was running through the viscous, almost black liquid covering his face, leaving a streak of pale skin behind.

“I’m sorry. Claire” A whisper as his eyes drifted closed. The hand in mine relaxed, the bubbling noise ceasing

“Shit! Come back to me Jamie.” The sound of chopper blades cut through the silence as I carefully moved him and began CPR.

Chapter End Notes

Eek! I know, I know. Bad brain. I don't know why it wants to do these sorts of things to my favourite characters but there you go. Feel free to vent (nicely) in the comments.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

What happened after Claire found Jamie?

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the very positive comments so far. I'm glad you're taking this journey with me and I hope you continue to follow this story as it unfolds. I'll post the next chapter on Wednesday and I'll see if I can get a twice weekly posting schedule going. I'm up to the end of chapter 8 at the moment so fingers crossed I'll keep it fairly regular.

Enjoy and please, keep letting me know what you think.

Two weeks have passed since that night; the night I met a highlander called Jamie. I haven’t had a moment’s peace since then. Every time I close my eyes, I’m back on that road, holding his hand feeling the life flow out of him. Or I’m performing chest compressions, breathing into his mouth, trying to keep him alive a little longer. I could be in the air ambulance, injecting stimulants to keep his heart beating, squeezing bags of saline into him to keep his blood pressure up. Setting up the chest tube to release the trapped air in his pleural cavity. Some nights I’m up to my elbows in his blood, cutting out the damaged organs, catching and cauterising severed veins and arteries. Praying that he’ll wake up when the anaesthesia wears away.

When I’m not asleep, all my free time is spent at his side. Holding his hand. Talking to him. I don’t know what I’m saying really. Nonsense about the weather maybe. Or how Scotland is coming alive in the spring weather. I just need to make a sound, something for him to aim for, something to make him leave his comatose state and wake up to look at me with those eyes again. I’d rescued his plaid in the emergency room. Cleaned it as best I could; the blood had been everywhere. I lay it over his legs, allowed his hands to touch the familiar wool, feel the scratchy fabric that he undoubtedly knew well. Anything to stimulate his senses, to bring him back.

The damage to his brain was severe. Large areas of swelling where he had hit the front of the car and then the road. A specialised neurosurgeon, John Grey, had travelled from London to assist us. He specialised in this kind of injury and was keen to help. He had removed sections of Jamie’s skull in key areas to reduce the swelling. Some of the most badly damaged tissue had also been removed to give the healthy tissue more space to heal. Scans had revealed large amounts of scar tissue from a previous lesion at the back of his brain near the occipital lobe. Another recent injury. It was amazing he was still walking from that trauma. Who knew how this latest injury would leave him. We’ll only find out when he wakes up. If he wakes up.

Then the police. Questions and questions about what I had seen. Was there any sign of people leaving the scene as I arrived? Were there any clues on his body? It looked like a plain hit and run case until you took into account the bullet wound to his right shoulder. It had passed straight through his trapezoid muscle. No much damage when you considered what else had happened but it posed
interesting questions nonetheless.

Then there were the scars on his back. Terrible scars. The flesh flayed from his bones violently. Muscles ripped and damaged. I had an idea what had caused them. It was a barbaric injury and I could only attribute it to severe flogging. Who would do such a thing in the 21st century? The weapons he was carrying also prompted questions. They were antique for sure, supposedly 18th century but no less deadly despite their age. In fact, the police told me their expert had never seen such good examples of that age. The leather from the pommels was original and in excellent condition. Not that I cared much about those. My only concern was him.

He was a mystery that was for certain. The car that hit him less so. It was found a mile outside Inverness completely burnt out. No evidence of the drivers left at all. The damage to the bodywork correctly identified it as the vehicle that hit him. It also hinted at the speed at which he had been struck. The fact that even with life-support he was holding on was no small miracle. By rights he should be dead. But youth and strength had gotten him this far. He was a fighter.

I desperately wanted him to wake up. To get to know Jamie. All we knew so far was his first name and his blood group – B. Tall, red headed and high cheekbones. Definitely of Viking descent and his blood group supported that. Other than that, no other details about him are known at all. No one has reported him missing. Prints not on file. Nothing. It’s as if he’s appeared from nowhere.

Strange that I felt a connection with him. Possibly born from being the one to find him on a cold, spring night, I was sure it was more than that. He had to wake up. I needed him to. Who was this Jamie and what was story?

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I dinna ken the exact moment I awoke. It happened so gradually. First it was a smell. Clean. Too clean and no’ natural. It burned my nose, sae sharp and bitter. Then it was a feeling. I was warm, verra warm. But the heat was from all around me like I was in the fire rather than in front of it. I could feel something in my throat. It hurt, sharp and stingin’, like knives. I couldna swallow but it didna seem to matter. I felt my breaths in and oot like they were mine; like I wasna in control. I felt a hand holding mine, stroking gently. I didna ken who it was but I trusted them. Trusted I was safe with them there by me.

Sound next. It was overwhelming! Strange noises like I couldna ever have imagined. High pitched chirrups, a whooshing noise that came and went with my breath. Voices speaking low at a distance. At times, there was a voice much closer. Like an angel, whisperin’ tae me. Her words filled me with hope e’en though I couldna understand what she wa’ sayin’. She was the one holding my hand, giving me something to aim for as I swam through the fog. I was tryin’ tae reach her.

Finally, I blinked. The light was strange. Dull but no’ like anythin’ I’ve ever seen before. It was white, clean. My eyes couldna focus, everythin’ was blurry, colours mixed taegether, reds and greens with the white light from behind me. I figured this must be heaven, that I musta died somehow. I couldna feel much pain but I couldna feel much else either. My body didna feel like mine, it was numb. I tried to turn me heid, tried to focus on the lass whose voice had called to me. She was there, beside me, head resting on the bed, her hand holding mine. Brown, curly hair flowing over the sheets. I kent she was beautiful.

All at once, everythin’ came together, like I was suddenly thrown back into my skin. I could feel the urge tae breathe but I couldna take a breath! I needed to swallow but found my throat blocked. The pain caught up wi’ me and I could feel everythin’. I felt trapped. I couldna move. My heart wa’ racing, hammering against my chest. Another high-pitched chirp started causing the lass to startle
awake. She looked at me, focused straight away on my face. Her eyes widened as they looked into mine and I knew she was the one from that night. Claire.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

He's awake and in the 21st century, what could possibly go wrong?

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the lovely comments. I hope you continue to enjoy the story, it's gonna be a long and tough journey but I'm sure they'll get there in the end.

“Don’t panic. It’s ok. You’ll be alright in a second.” Startled didn’t come close to describing how I felt. I shoved my feelings to one side at once. All I knew was he needed to breath by himself and quick. I turned off the ventilator and moved to disconnect the tube from his tracheostomy stoma.

As soon as he could, he took a deep breath. It rasped painfully in his throat leading to a coughing fit that shook his entire body. His eyes scrunching shut in agony, his trachea raw and bruised as it was certainly didn’t need this let alone the rest of his injuries. I laid a hand on his forehead.

“Look at me Jamie.” He did, eyes focusing on mine, his breathing shallow and laboured. “Breathe with me. Deep breath in and hold…1…2…3…now breathe out…1…2…3…”

It was working and within a minute he was calmer, the shock passing. His eyes still held mine and I saw their true colour for the first time. Beautiful dark blue irises, a shade I’ve never seen before and doubt I ever will again. They were quite simply amazing.

“Is that better?” My voice was calmer than I felt at least. He was looking at me carefully, trying to assess what was going on. As I spoke, he watched my mouth, taking in all the words. I clicked a finger next to his left ear. A slight flinch was the response and a turn of his head towards the sound. Good, I thought, no hearing damage. Information processing issues instead. Not good.

“Confusion is normal. You’ve been very ill. You’ve been in a coma for a while.” I spoke more slowly, making sure he watched my words. Turning away, I checked his vitals once again. Heart rate was elevated but no surprise there. Blood pressure again, slightly elevated but within normal parameters. I reached for my torch to test the dilation reflex. As soon as the light hit his eye he panicked.

“It’s ok, shush, shush Jamie.” The alarm linked to his heart monitor sounded causing him to react further. He raised his arms to cover his eyes but then saw the cannulas in the back of his hands. At this he started to hyperventilate properly. His fingers ripping at the ports pulling them from his skin, oblivious the blood pouring from the wounds he was busy creating. I grabbed his hands to no avail. His strength impressed me. It was a good brand of adrenaline he was using that was for sure. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye from the nurse’s station.

“What do you need?” It was Gillian, the nurse assigned to him in ICU.
“Propofol. He needs sedating. Quickly.” She returned moments later, a syringe prepped. Both hand cannulas were dislodged but the one in his neck was sound and I hurriedly injected the sedative into his bloodstream. Within seconds he was limp again, eyes drooping. “I’m sorry Jamie. It’s for your own good.” He looked at me one last time before succumbing fully. I released a huge sigh of relief as he finally drifted under.

Gillian and I looked at each other before she patted me on the back.

“That is one feral fox cub you’ve go’ there Doctor.” Smiling at her, I nodded and patted the back of Jamie’s hand again.

“Yes Nurse Edgars, he certainly is. Now let’s get him cleaned up and hooked up again. We’ll wake him next time.”

“How is he Lady Jane?” Joe, my best friend. A fellow doctor but in intensive care medicine, originally from Boston, he had trained with me in Edinburgh before joining me here, in Inverness, two years ago. I could tell him anything and with everything I was currently going through with Frank, he and his wife Gail had been my support. He was also one of the best trauma surgeons I have ever stood across a theatre from. He knew everything that I knew about Jamie. We’d worked side-by-side to save him that night.

The pair of us had removed his spleen and his left kidney. We’d reset the bone in his leg, pinned it, tied up the damaged blood vessels. We reset his shoulder into its socket. Had sewn the muscles back together. Cleaned up the gunshot wound but ultimately left it to heal by itself. Strangely, it was possibly the thing that concerned us the least.

His pelvis was smashed upon impact with the car. Several fractures had caused massive internal bleeding and all we could do was find the bleeders, pack the area and wait to start the repair. We drafted in Tom Christie for that, the best orthopaedic surgeon in Scotland. He arrived a week after Jamie had been found and decided to operate almost straight away. Many hours, pins, plates and screws later, the pelvis was reconstructed as well as it could be. Thankfully, his spine was intact but massive bruising was obscuring the scan of his spinal cord. We couldn’t tell just how much damage there would be long term until the swelling subsided.

John Grey. the neurosurgeon arrived from London and worked on his brain on that first day. Relieving pressure was the first job. Fixing what was left would come later. All told, Jamie has spent over twenty-four hours under the knife so far. I was holding no illusion that he’d seen the back of an operating theatre either.

“He woke up.” I could barely speak. After sedating Jamie again and making him comfortable, I simply sat back into my chair and began to cry. It was too much, seeing him come around and then watch as the situation started to sink in. I knew to expect confusion, I should have foreseen it but…

“I’m in deep with this one Joe.”

“I know LJ. Its’s natural. You were the first on the scene, it’s understandable that you’ve formed a connection with him.” I nodded, letting myself relax slightly. “I heard about what happened.”

Naturally, Gillian was someone you didn’t tell anything to unless you wanted everyone to know about it. And quickly. “You did the right thing. He came around pretty rapidly for someone with his GCS score.” I knew that too.

Nothing had indicated he was about to come back to us. We’d expected a long period of low consciousness based on the damage he had suffered. His GCS score was six when we arrived at A&E. We’d had to argue for him to be admitted to ICU with that score, the chances of a positive
outcome were so low. Hence why the tracheostomy was performed on day three. We were convinced he was going to be under for a good, long while.

Joe crossed the room and put his arm around me. Pulling my head to his chest, I finally allowed myself to relax. I’d barely slept in two weeks, eaten only snacks and I was at the end of my tether. When I had slept, it had been at the hospital. I couldn’t allow him to be all alone. Coupled with the breakdown of my marriage on the run up to the incident, the situation was all getting a bit too much.

“Why don’t you head off home. Get some real sleep.” I stepped away from him, about to argue when he held a hand up to silence me. “He’s safe and well looked after. Gillian is doing a great job with him and I’m on call this evening. If anything changes, I’ll let you know.” I nodded, finally admitting he was probably right. “He’s going to be sedated for at least another 24 hours. You know that. We’ll bring him around more gradually this time. Let him have time to adapt to each stage.” Joe was right, there was nothing more I could do.

“You promise me you’ll let me know if anything at all happens to him.” He nodded, a small smile on his lips. “Fine then. I guess I could do with a sleep in my own bed. Maybe a bath.” At this he laughed.

“Just make sure you don’t fall asleep in there! I don’t want to have to look after you as well!” I smiled and hugged him.

“Thanks Joe. I owe you one.”

“You owe me nothing except a promise to rest and take care of yourself. Your young highlander isn’t going anywhere.”

“He’s not mine Joe.” I turned away, not wanting him to read my glass face.

“No? Then I admire your complete and utter devotion to the welfare of your patients.” A quick smirk thrown in my direction and he was off to continue his rounds.

I don’t remember the journey home. One second I was at the hospital, the next I was unlocking the front door. A build-up of mail was on the doormat, but I didn’t care. It would wait. I checked my phone, thirty missed calls from Frank. He would wait too. Right now, all I needed was sleep

Flipping on the latch on the door, putting my phone onto charge, grabbing a glass of water, shedding clothes on the way up the stairs. By the time I hit the bed, I was already gone.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I didn’t understand much about how I ended up dead for that is exactly what I thought I was. Bright lights and strange noises were how I always envisaged the afterlife except I didn’t think I would end up with such an angel lookin’ upon me.

The last thin’ I recall were red coats. I’d just returned from France having been brained by an axe a few months afore. I’d spent many weeks recovering my sight at an abbey where a Fraser uncle was the abbot. Murtagh, my godfather, had agreed to meet me when I landed back on Scottish soil and we’d run into the Mackenzie clansmen on our way back from the coast. My uncle Dougal, my mother’s brother, had spoken to Murtagh, unbeknownst to me, regarding my immediate future. When I left Scotland, I had a price on my head and had spent many months roaming the countryside with broken men. I didn’t like the suggestion, but I was to return with Dougal and the Mackenzies where they would give me shelter and protection. Rupert, a distant cousin of mine, had a knack for kine rustling and as we were on our way back to God knows where from the coast, an opportunity presented itself.

I remember the beasts doin’ exactly as Rupert asked until we encountered a brigade of red coats in the woods. I wasn’t sure about my uncle Dougal. I’m verra sure he was the one that hit me wi’ the axe in the first place and I didna fancy givin’ him another chance to finish me off properly. This was mebbe a chance for me to run. Most of the men were fighting with the red coats so I turned my horse and fled in the opposite direction.

It was more the impact from the bullet rather than pain tha’ I felt. Enough to unseat me from the saddle, I hit the ground and landed on my outstretched arm. My shoulder burst from its socket and blinding white stars shone afore my eyes. Agony surged through me leaving me breathless and feelin’ sick but I knew I had tae run. If not tae get away from the red coats then from my uncle who had undoubtedly fired the bullet at my back. Staggering upright, I ran up the hill in front of me, holding my arm pinned to my side. I was winded, the pain making my eyes water, but I knew if I didna run, I soon wouldna being doin’ anythin’ else agin.

As I reached the top of the hill, a set of standing stones loomed out of the darkness. I could hear a buzzing noise, getting louder as I ran towards them. I’d heard tales of the fairy hill at Craigh na Dun but never paid them any heed. I could feel my hunter following me up the hill and so I forged on. I headed toward the tallest stone in the centre, a cleft was hewn through the centre of the rock and I knew that if I could get through I’d make the woods o’er the other side and get lost in the darkness.

The buzzing was getting intense now and I thought that mebbe it was inside my own head. I was losing blood that’s for sure and the pain was starting tae make me feel ill. I lurched through the cleft in the stone and screamed as I felt myself being torn apart. Blinding light burned my eyes. I felt like I was falling, plummeting towards something unknown. Hundreds of voices screamed in my ears, so loud I couldna hear my own as it was ripped from my throat.

I landed with a thud on the cold damp grass behind the stone. I couldn’t hold my wame any longer and vomited into the grass. My arm and head throbbed but I couldnna move. Not yet. I needed to stay still a little longer for the world to stop spinnin’. I couldna hear the fight any longer, couldnna feel my hunter behind my back but all the same, I knew I’d better get back to movin’ once again once the world slowed down.
Carefully, I stood and looked around me. A dull, orange glow lit the sky and obscured the stars above me. I knew that Inbhir Nis lay in that direction but had nae idea of what the glow could be. Still, I headed in that direction, gaining speed as I descended the hill. I heard a rumbling noise, moving toward me quickly. Lights appeared that were unlike anythin’ I had ever seen before. They were bright, white, round and moving faster than any man or beast. I didna have time to react afore the thing was there then darkness.

All I can remember after is a soft voice speaking tae me. A Sassenach lassie wi’ kind eyes and the curliest hair I’d e’er seen. A hand holdin’ mine. And a name.

Chapter End Notes

Short one today but a little insight into Jamie's background. More on Wednesday.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

It's time to wake up Jamie.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who has commented on the accuracy of my story so far. I do like to research especially the medical side being a science geek but for the sake of pace and story progression, some facts might just get ignored to fit the story a little better.

Hopefully this one will leave you a little more satisfied and all the chapters from now are a little longer than the previous ones. Thanks again everyone for commenting and keep letting me know what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Jamie? Can you hear me?” His eyes were starting to open, flickering between the twin desires of facing reality or to sink into the darkness again.

It had been another week before we managed to bring him round. Each time we had started to lift the sedation, he would become tachycardic. The ions in his blood following his injuries were too low so what followed was a regime of ion treatments to even out his electrolytes. It started working after a few days and only then were we able to wake him.

We brought him out slowly. This time getting him breathing for himself before he was awake. We’d removed the tracheostomy the day before. A piece of gauze covered the incision that would heal over in a few days. We had increased his pain medications to help him focus on waking rather than how much everything hurt. Every day was a small step in the right direction, but now was the time for him to start recovering.

His eyes finally opened and he blinked a few times, clearing his vision, allowing everything to come into focus. He looked at me, scanning my face for recognition. My heart sunk as I saw him struggle. Amnesia of traumatic events is common, but I still couldn’t help being slightly hurt by his lack of memory.

I looked away, reading the monitors, making notes on his chart. Hiding my disappointment. I told myself off for being stupid. I knew he had massive head trauma. I knew he’d have lost memories - 24 to 36 hours being the common time given. He would be confused, irritable, tired. Give him chance!

Turning back, I saw a small smile on his mouth. A light in his eyes that were slowly coming back to life, that stunning deep blue colour. I smiled back, taking his hand in mine, gently stroking his knuckles once again.

“Claire.” It was a whisper, a voice long unused but it was there all the same. I couldn’t help the
sound that came out of me. He remembered. Against all odds, he remembered and was smiling! His face grew concerned at my reaction so I squeezed his hand and brushed away the tear that had escaped my eyes.

“Hello Jamie. Nice to have you back finally.” He nodded slightly, wincing as he noticed the stiffness in his neck. He started to look down at himself, taking in his surroundings. I could see the agitation manifest itself on his heart monitor. I laid my free hand on his shoulder and pushed him back gently into the pillow.

“It’s ok Jamie. You’re safe. You’re in a hospital in Inverness. You were in an accident and have been unconscious for a little while now. You were very badly injured. Can you remember anything?” I could see him thinking, wracking his memory for any clues. He finally looked at me and with wide eyes.

“Soldiers. Lights. Stones. Claire.” Again, he was getting agitated, looking around as if expecting someone to appear.

“Don’t worry! I’ll not let anyone get you here.” He relaxed slightly although his eyes kept scanning the room. He was used to being on the lookout. What was he? Why would soldiers be after him? I made a note on his sheets. He was obviously confused. Soldiers and stones? The lights I assumed were the headlights and whilst my name was surprising, it was somewhat more obvious.

“Can you think of anyone you would like me to contact? Family? Parents? Spouse?”

If he noticed my slight hesitation over the last option, he didn’t show it. He just paused then shook his head sadly. He had no one. I knew what it was to be alone in the world. I had spent years with no family. That was probably why I married Frank without thinking it through. Desperation to have someone else in my life.

“Right, well, I think that’s enough for now. You’ve been unconscious but it’s sleep you need to help you start repairing.” His eyelids were already getting heavy with the effort of being awake but still, he was fighting, desperate to not close his eyes, needing to keep watching. I took hold of his hand again. “You’re perfectly safe here Jamie. No soldiers. No stones. Nothing to hurt you.” He nodded, eyes gently drifting shut. “I’ll not let anyone hurt you again.” He was already asleep by the time I had finished the sentence.

I gave his hand one more squeeze and left his room. The hard work was about to start for him. Getting to know the full extent of his injuries, repairing what we could along the way, learning how to deal with what was left. The recovery process would start now and the first stage was the healing properties of sleep. I took a moment to compose myself. I knew that there was gossip amongst the nurses over how much time I was spending in ICU. I was a surgeon, not an intensive care doctor. I had effectively taken one of Joe’s patients for myself which has raised a few eyebrows. Walking past the nurses glassy eyed and sniffling was only going to fuel the rumours they had gleefully been spreading.

Passing the nurses station, I smiled at Gillian. A plucky, auburn haired Scottish nurse with the most piercing green eyes was one half of the double act assigned to Jamie. Her and Malva, a black haired, fair Scottish nurse had been looking after him around the clock for three weeks now. A third nurse in Mary covered for them on their rest days but otherwise it was the pair of them who were responsible for him.

“How’s our wee fox this morning?” I smiled at her nickname for Jamie. She’d been using it ever since the day he woke himself up and the name had stuck. Even the other nurses referred to him as that.
The wee fox is out of sedation thankfully but sleeping now. He managed a couple of minutes of lucidity before he nodded off. I’ll be back to check on him in a couple of hours. He’s going to need to be well rested for what’s coming next.” Gillian agreed, nodding thoughtfully. “And then there’s the Police. They’ll be wanting to question him as soon as they know he’s awake.” They’d been ringing every day to check on his progress. Waiting to question him as we all were if I was being honest with myself.

“Well, the answers will come when he’s ready.” She paused but it obvious she had more to say.

“Out with it nurse Edgars.” She smiled coyly.

“Claire, why is your husband ringing main reception every thirty minutes?” The question sounded too innocent coming from the young nurse’s mouth. Gossip was in the offing and I could tell Gillian wanted the scoop!

“Oh. Is he? I’ll make sure to give him a ring. Thanks for the heads up.” I smiled and hurried away, thankful to be out of the her piercing green gaze. My glass face was notorious around here, better to hide than be found out. I couldn’t stand the thought of being questioned just yet on that particular topic.

It was true though, I hadn’t spoken to Frank in weeks. I’d made excuse after excuse to avoid what I knew was coming. The argument, the shouting, the tears. I sighed knowing that my time was running out. If I wasn’t careful, he’d end up here and that was a confrontation I certainly didn’t need to occur in public. I doubted that stopping wearing my wedding ring had escaped notice as it was. I’d taken it off in a fit of pique on the journey from Oxford to Inverness three weeks ago. I’d not felt the need to put it back on, not since that night.

Making my way to my office, I decided to get it over and done with. Kind of like pulling off a plaster, just do it and feel all the pain in one go. Closing the door behind me, I took out my phone. More missed calls. More messages and voicemails. He must have thought I’d dropped off the face of the Earth.

It rang, once twice… “Claire? Is that you?” The worry in his voice at least sounded genuine.

“Yes Frank, it’s me.” My voice was cold, I was beyond pretending to care.

“Thank Christ! Where have you been? Why didn’t you call me? I’ve been worried sick thinking that something had happened to you when you left Oxford.” Ha! So worried that he hadn’t yet thought of jumping on a train to visit me in person.

“Oh God! That sounds awful. Are you ok? That must have been a shock…” The excuse sounded lame even to my ears.

“Sorry, I’ve been really busy. I came across a hit-and-run victim on the journey home and it’s all been rather hectic since then.” The excuse sounded lame even to my ears.

“Oh God! That sounds awful. Are you ok? That must have been a shock…”

“It was but he’s stable for now. It’s been a rough few weeks for him but…” The voice on the other end interrupted me. No, Frank Randall wouldn’t want any details about something like that.

“Oh, he survived. Good. I know we didn’t part in the best of circumstances last time. I should have spoken to you about moving to Oxford first. I didn’t think…” The anger at being cut off and the immediate return to the topic of this stupid move to Oxford burst out.

“No Frank, you didn’t. You spared no thought for what I might want to do or that I have a career here, a career I love.” My voice was clipped, a small part of my brain proud that I hadn’t yet shouted at him. “I don’t want to move Frank and that’s final. I know you’ve accepted a job and I’m happy for
you but it’s not the right direction for me.” Each time he tried to interrupt I talked over him. I laid out my reasons for not moving, not leaving my life as I knew it behind.

“Is it someone else?” Quiet. Accusing. Hypocritical. I knew he’d had at least one affair since we decided to live our lives in separate cities. At first, we lived together in Inverness, then he moved to Manchester. Assistant head of the history faculty at the Met. I was still needed here to complete my residency. Now, he wanted us to come together again. Well, I had grown used to him not being there. I didn’t need him, and he certainly didn’t need me.

“No Frank, there isn’t anyone else. I have patients here who need me. I have Jamie…”

“Who’s Jamie?” My brain finally caught up with my mouth at this comment. Shit.

“Jamie is the hit-and-run. He’s just coming around and will be needing a lot of help in the next months…”

“Help that isn’t usually given by consultant surgeons Claire. Just because you found a stray doesn’t mean you get to keep him.” I ground my teeth together, bit my tongue to stop the vitriol that was boiling inside me getting out. I took a minute to calm myself, my anger released as tears. I brushed them away, the fact I was crying making me more annoyed.

“I can sense I’ve hit a nerve Claire. I’ll call back when you’re thinking straight. We do need to do something about this situation though. You’re not getting any younger and the window for having children is narrowing…” I felt my mouth drop open in shock.

Outrage stole my words. I wanted to hit him. So instead I hung up before he could speak further. Tears ran freely down my face. How had my marriage ended up so bitter? So full of hatred for one another. A marriage could survive without love if there was respect. What if that had also departed?

Drying my eyes, I stood and left my office. What I’d said was the truth. My patients needed me, and I had rounds to do. Then I’d go and check on the highlander. I doubted he would ever treat me like a brood mare.

This time when I woke, I felt better. Refreshed and less like I’d been knocked out. My head ached, a thumping pain all along my left side. I put my hand to my head, half hoping I could stop the throbbing by touch alone. Most of my hair was gone. Perfectly smooth in parts, stubble in others, ridges of skin left behind. I took my hand away again, it was like being back at the Abbey. I woke from that experience with my hair shorn too.

The light in the room wasna too bright but still, my head burned with the feel of it in my eyes. Things kept jumping into my mind. Visions of lights, bright and unnatural. Sounds that I hadna heard anywhere else. Something wasna right about any o’ this. I couldna remember how I got here. I remembered the stones but…

The stones. I recalled the buzzing noise, deafening in my head as I ran up the hill. I remember falling, pain ripping through me, the screams. There were stories of the stones atop the fairy hill. Folks disappearing, gone wi’out a reason. I always thought they were auld wives’ tales, made up to explain why a man’s wife might’ha run off. Or other reasons more sinister. Words of a song I once heard sung at Leoch filtered into my mind. The Woman of Balnain. Had the fairies stolen me over on that hill? I dinna ken but somethin’ was definitely wrong.

The pain started to ease as I grew accustomed to the light. The image of things in the backs of my hands appeared and I raised my hands to look at them. Right enough, they were there. Made out of
somethin’ I had ne’er seen before. White, shiny, I could see my skin through the material around. I touched it, perfectly smooth like the patches on ma head. They didna hurt but I didna like lookin’ at them. My forefingers were in grey boxes, only down tae the first joint but a strange blue light shone from within. I could feel somethin’ touching my neck, cold against ma skin. I reached up, gently feeling something hard and smooth in my neck. It felt similar to what was in my hands. I left it. If she with the curly hair had put them there, it was for a good reason. Feeling my face, I felt a cold, smooth tube running across my cheek to my nose. I let my hand fall away.

Looking down at my legs I saw my plaid, draped o’er me. I felt the thick wool between my fingertips, glad to have something I recognised with me at least. The Fraser hunting tartan. My clan’s colours. Pulling it up to my face, I took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of the wool. There was another smell to it, a herbal scent, vaguely familiar. I held it close to me, a link back to where I had come from. God alone knew where I was right now.

There was a board on the wall opposite where I lay. It had numbers and names on it. I looked at it, thinking it in code. Was I a prisoner? I could see my name written next to another name. Malva Christie. Was this Malva my captor? It was true that the voices I’d heard were Sassenachs, including a nighean don, the brown-haired lass. Had the red coats gotten me after all? I’d seen the inside of an English garrison afore but it wa’ nothin’ like this. It was so bright, clean. Nothin’ was familiar.

Why code on the wall? I looked harder, tryin’ to make it out.

22/05/2018.

Suddenly it hit me. I ran to the stones on the first of May. Beltane. I had just turned three and twenty that day. May is the fifth month. Mebbe today was the 22nd. Had I really been asleep for so long? I kent Claire had said I had been unconscious since my accident but I had nae idea three weeks had passed since the stones.

If the first number was the day, and the second was the month, that meant the last numbers were the year… surely not. It was 1743 when I ran up tha’ hill.

In that moment, I kent what had happened. I hadn’ left Scotland. I had left my time. I was 275 years in the future. As this thought entered my mind, the pain returned sharper than before. Lights flashed before my eyes and darkness overtook me agin.

Chapter End Notes

Oh well, he was awake for a while. Next chapter on Sunday probably.

Please let me know what you think!
Again, thanks for all the lovely comments. So Jamie knows he’s not in 1743 anymore. It’s a shock, especially when you’ve been in a pretty serious accident too. So let’s see how he’s getting on in the 21st century.

“I’m afraid today isn’t a good day officer.” The police had somehow divined that Jamie had regained consciousness and appeared, first thing to ask their questions. I was in no mood to let them near him. “He had a bad night, he is very poorly and although, stable, he’s not up to your questions.” It wasn’t a lie. He had had a bad night.

I’d been alerted by Malva paging me at 2am. The message simply said to call, so I did. She filled me in on the details. Jamie had suffered a seizure. It hadn’t lasted long thankfully, he was back two minutes or so after it started. When he came too though, he was confused. Kept calling my name, hid his face from the light with his hands, kept muttering about stones. Joe had been on call and administered a mild sedative to help him sleep. It wasn’t surprising, seizures and confusion were to be expected but even so, to hear of it sent a jolt to my heart. I was getting far too close to this patient.

My first task the following morning was to contact John Grey again. It was obvious from the interactions I had with Jamie, there was quite severe damage to his language processing areas. I rang John’s office and spoke to him briefly, bringing him up to speed on the seizure as well as my suspicions. He assured me that he would be on the first flight up to Inverness and rung off. That task completed, it was time for a shower and to get ready for work.

The police were waiting when I arrived at the hospital. It was almost a demand they made to see him, ask him questions I genuinely didn’t feel he was up to answering. He’d barely spoken a word, certainly not full sentences yet. They were persistent however.

“Officers, he woke up yesterday. He’s confused and weak.”

“We understand but if he could give us anything at all, we might stand a chance of finding whoever did this. The longer we leave it, the less chance there is of catching the perpetrators. It won’t take many minutes.” I sighed and shook my head.

“I really am not exaggerating. Come and see for yourself and maybe then you’ll wait for me to call you rather than just showing up with your questions.” I was annoyed and they could tell. Nodding and accepting my offer, they followed me down the corridor.

Jamie was awake thankfully. He looked so worn out, black circles around his eyes, skin clinging to the bones of his skull. Three weeks in a coma leads to a surprisingly noticeable difference in a body. He was thinner, muscles starting to waste from lack of use. He’d been totally non-responsive for the whole time, not even opening his eyes in response to any stimuli. We were convinced he wasn’t going to make it at all, most patients with his injuries surviving less than a month after admission. It really was astounding that not only was he still alive, but he was awake and alert. His eyes lit up when he saw me. I couldn’t help smile in return. My heart beat a little faster whenever I saw him and I could tell he was similarly affected by looking at the trace on his monitor.
“Morning Jamie.” A little smile was the response. “How are you this morning?” He shrugged, never taking his eyes off me. Finally he touched his head and winced. “Headaches again? I’ll see what we can do.” I didn’t know whether he’d noticed the people following me into the room or whether he was simply ignoring them. I made a mental note of his non-verbal response. It wasn’t a good sign at this point.

“Do you feel up to answering some questions this morning?” His smile faded away, worry entering his eyes, a furrow appearing along his brow. He saw the officers behind me. Took notice of their uniforms, confusion crossing his face. He looked at me again, silently begging for my help. I gripped his hand, squeezing it in reassurance. He relaxed slightly at the contact but the worry was still there.

“These are two police officers, PC Murray and PC Grant. They’re working on finding out who hit you.” At this he did look confused. I turned to the police officers. “Could you give me a couple of minutes with him. As you can see, I don’t think he’s up to giving you any answers just yet. He’s suffered very severe brain injuries which seem to be affecting his comprehension and language.” They both nodded, looking at the still confused man in the bed who was now gripping the plaid tightly in his hands.

“It’s fine. I can see he’s nae well. Just let us know when he’s talkin’ again and we’ll be back.” I nodded and they left, leaving me and Jamie alone. He hadn’t noticed they were gone until I spoke to him again.

“It’s ok Jamie. They’re gone.” He looked behind me and confirmed their absence. His face relaxed at once. “I’m going to ask you some questions though.” At seeing his panic return I quickly reassured him. “They’re only going to be yes or no. You can respond by moving your head or vocally. Do you understand?” He watched my lips as I spoke, carefully taking in all my words. A second later, he nodded.

“Are you struggling to understand what I am saying?” Again, a pause, processing the information. He shrugged slightly. “Taking a while to understand what I’m saying, yes?” Eventually he nodded and smiled slightly.

“That’s because you’ve had a couple of very bad knocks to the head. You’ve damaged a part of your brain to do with language. But another doctor will talk to you more about that later.” He nodded again. “Okay, do you know who you are?” A pause and then a nod.

“James. Alexander. Malcolm. Mackenzie. Fraser.” It was my turn to look surprised. His voice was incredibly weak but he clearly spoke each name with pride.

“Wow! Yes or no would have done but that’s certainly a name and a half. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp. Nice to meet you.” He smiled and took the hand I offered him to shake, instead grasping it tightly between both his own. I didn’t ever change my name after I married Frank. I started out as Miss Beauchamp, became Doctor Beauchamp and then went back to Miss Beauchamp when I became a surgeon.

“Seeing as you’re talking, how about what year it is? What’s the last date you remember?” He looked away, releasing my hand suddenly. He instead reached for his plaid again, wrapping it around his hands, holding it close. He closed his eyes, inhaling the smell of the fabric he was holding close to his face now.

“Hey, Jamie! It doesn’t matter. If you can’t answer…”

“May. Beltane. Birthday. Mine.” He was shaking now, huge ripples coursing through his upper body.
“It’s ok Jamie. It’s normal for you to be disoriented and lose time.” I put my hand on his shoulder, giving him a few minutes to calm down once again. “So, your birthday is Beltane? I’ll have to look up that one.” He nodded, starting to relax again. “How about how old you are then, seeing as we have your date of birth now. Show me on fingers.” He smiled and then held up two fingers on his right hand and three on his left. “Twenty-three, yes?” He nodded. “So, I found you lying on the road near a hill called Craigh na Dun on May 1st. Does this sound familiar?” His eyes opened wide at the mention of the hill. Nodding, he looked almost excited. “You were hit by a car.” He looked away, brow furrowed once more. Finally, he looked at me again.

“Car?” An almost inaudible whisper but the question was evident. What is a car? I made another mental note to speak to his neurologist about this.

“A car is a box with wheels. It carries people around. Helps them get from place to place.” He listened carefully. I could see him picturing what I described in his mind. Finally, his brain made a connection to prior knowledge and he nodded. He looked at me again.

“You were brought here three weeks ago. Since then, you have been in a coma.” Confusion again at the word ‘coma’. “Unconscious. You’ve been very ill. You have suffered some serious injuries. We’re working on finding out how much damage you’ve sustained.” He nodded again, following my lips carefully. I was speaking more slowly to allow the words processing time. He was definitely suffering from some form of aphasia.

“We also had to remove most of your spleen and a kidney. They were too badly damaged.” His eyes met mine in surprise and confusion.

“How?” This question more mouthed than spoken. Genuine curiosity on his face.

“We made a cut here.” I drew a line a with my finger from his bellybutton to his breastbone. He followed the finger carefully with his gaze. His hand touched where I had shown him and I could see when he felt the staples holding his skin together. He looked at me in wonder tinged with not a little horror at how casually I discussed cutting a big chunk of him out.

“You also broke your left femur, thigh bone and your pelvis during the accident. You’ve had metal plates attached to hold the bones together whilst they mend.” At this he did look shocked, his hand moving to his left thigh, feeling the anterior fixings holding the bones together. “Yes, there is also some scaffolding outside to help too. That will be removed in a few weeks once the bones knit.” He took his hand away and swallowed heavily, looking away from me as he collected himself once more. He turned back after a moment, the knowledge of what was going on sinking in.

I was dreading this next question. I knew from having delivered the news once before to a patient that it was always hard to take. I swallowed, smiled and looked him in the eyes. I pleaded with him to trust me. Taking a deep breath, I asked it.

“You’ve also got some damage to your back. Your spine is intact but the nerves in your spine are swollen. We think they might be severed. Can you feel your feet or legs?” He looked away in thought. It was as if it hadn’t occurred to him yet, the concentration on his face as he tried to communicate with his lower limbs. His eyes widened as he confirmed what we had feared.

“No.” His hand touched his legs. Nothing. Then he started hitting them, willing them to awaken.

“Stop Jamie, stop.” I grabbed his hands, holding them. Tears were starting to fall down his face. I took one look at the panic in his eyes and pulled his head to my chest, tucking him under my chin, keeping him safe. I lay my cheek carefully on what remained of his hair, avoiding the various incisions and plasters that adorned his skull. A lot of his hair had been roughly cut and shaved to
allow the surgeons to treat the haematomas. Most was now just stubble, starting to regrow, fiery red and soft as silk against my skin. His hands gripped my waist as he turned his face into me. Hiding from the world as the sobs took over. I couldn’t help the tears that fell to join his.

It was like this that Joe found us sometime later. The sobbing had reduced to hiccups but still he clung to me, fingers gripping my coat. I looked at Joe as he looked at the scene in front of him and I knew that I had started to overstep the line between professional detachment and personal attachment. I nodded to Joe, agreeing with what would undoubtedly be his recommendation going forward. I couldn’t treat Jamie any longer. Pressing a kiss to his head, I broke the news to him.

“Jamie, listen to me.” He snuffled against me, nodding as he moved away, hands roughly brushing the tears away. “This is Doctor Joe Abernathy. He’s a friend and a colleague. He is going to be your doctor now.”

“No! Claire!” It was the loudest and more forceful voice I had heard him use and a I was so proud of him. I still held his hands in mine. Smiling, I continued.

“It’s ok Jamie. I’m not abandoning you. I just can’t treat you any longer. I want to be here as your friend instead of your physician. I can’t do both, it’s not allowed. Do you understand?” His eyes flicked from my lips to look at me. He nodded, slowly.

“Hello Jamie. You can call me Joe. Is that ok?” Joe had picked up on the way I was speaking to our patient, understanding the reasons for the strange dialogue.

“Joe.” Jamie nodded, showing his understanding.

“Right Jamie, I have to go now. I’m going to leave you with Joe and he’s going to ask you some more questions.” The grip on my hand tightened, fright and worry crossing his face again. “It’s going to be all right. I have patients to see but I’ll be back as soon as my shift is finished.” He nodded, the grip on my hand slackening. I tried to smile reassuringly and released his hands from mine. Walking away, I felt his gaze following me until I moved out of his sight.

I watched her as she left the room. I almost shouted for her but understood why she couldna stay. I wanted her as a friend, I trusted her, so I let her go. The shock of findin’ I couldna move my legs was slowly sinking in. I was amazed that I hadna realised earlier when I awoke. Everything has been sae fuzzy, like I’m in a dream. But here I am, a cripple in a century far from my own. Unable to move for myself, Claire was the light in a darkness I now saw no ending of.

She had held me so tightly while I cried. I could feel her tears landin’ on ma’ head and I held her closer for it. She shouldna be spending tears on me, someone she found half dead one night. But she did, and I will be forever thankful for her. But ma prospects as a husband were low tae begin wi’ in ma own century. Now they were gone altaegether. E’en if Claire was the woman I was told about by the seer in France, I would ne’er be anathin’ more’n a friend to her.

With her words, all my visions of my future disappeared. I couldna envision anything. All I could see wa’ things I canna ever do agin. Ride a horse, swim in the lochs, hunt deer. Each tear held somethin’ taken away from me.

I looked at my hands, dimly aware of the new doctor, Joe Abernathy, watching me. The numbers at the top of the board opposite read 23/05/2018 confirming my suspicions from yesterday. I was far from my own time. It was an era of medical miracles in that I wa’ still livin’ but happen I would ha’ been better if I wa’ left to die on that road.
“Right Jamie. It’s about time we had some more details about you. Do you think you can give me some one-word answers?” I was surprised when he finally spoke, sae lost in my thoughts was I. Nodding, he pulled up a chair.

“Ok then. So, what is your surname?” Surnom meant over name so family name was my guess. My clan. If I truly was in the future, what harm could come about from givin’ my true name? I’d given Claire my full name, I trusted her but this man was new to me. If he wa’ a friend of Claire’s though, surely I could trust him too. Besides, it was a damned sight easier to make my mouth say.

“Fraser.” It felt strange to say my name again. For sae long I’d been Jamie McTavish, hiding from the red coats, a price on my head for a crime I didna commit. But then speaking felt strange altagether. I could hear the words when people spoke tae me but it took an age for them tae make any sense in my mind. Speaking was equally hard, I couldn’t seem to make sound come out easily. It was making my head hurt agin.

“Right, Jamie Fraser. Do you have any family?” I thought of Jenny, the sister I hadna seen in almost four years. When Claire asked me before if I had any family, I had said no thinking I didna want to bring Jenny intae any of this. The last time I had seen her, I was being whipped in the yard at Lallybroch. I had heard what happened after and I didna want her tae see me, couldna stand to see the blame and hurt in her eyes. But, in my time, she was 25, in 2018…

I shook my head, hiding the tears that seemed to be never ceasing. I breathed deeply, it was all gettin’ tae much to take in. E’en if my sister had made it to a hundred, she was well dead and buried. A stab in my heart as I thought of everyone I had known in my own time. Gone. And wi’ mi legs being as they were, I couldna ever return to my home, tae mi family, e’en if I kent how. Covering my eyes with my hands, I shut out the light momentarily, the pain and grief starting tae return once more.

“Are you suffering from headaches?” I nodded, not moving my fingers from my eyes.

“Did you suffer from severe headaches before?” At this I did move my hands, it was another voice, different from Joe’s. A taller, fairer skinned man stood looking at the notes in Joe’s hands. He looked up, light blue eyes staring at me, waiting for an answer. I nodded again, looking at him warily. I dinna ken what a neurosurgeon was but it sounded important. “I heard you had a bad night last night. Is that correct?” I found it easier to watch people’s mouth as they spoke to help my mind make sense of what they were sayin’. But with Gaidhlig as my first tongue, and formal English being spoken so differently to Highland dialect, it was still a struggle. I finally nodded in response to his question. It had been a terrible night.

Findin’ out I was trapped in a future time, away from ma’ family had sent me over the edge. All I remember was a searing pain in ma’ skull, and lights in front o’ ma’ eyes. Then nothin. I woke up to several faces lookin’ down at me, callin’ my name in a panic.

“I heard about your seizure. Did you have those before as well?” So that is what they call what happened to me last night. I shook my head this time.

“Good. Right then, let’s have a look at you.” I flinched as he moved closer, staring into my eyes carefully. He held up a finger in front of me, an inch from me nose. “I want you to keep looking at my finger. Don’t move your head, only your eyes.” I did as he asked, looking left then right and back again. I had nae idea what he was tryin’ to prove and my expression musta’ said as much. I could hear Joe starting tae chuckle next to me.
“Your previous head injury affected your vision did it not? In fact, I would say you spent a few weeks without sight. Am I right?” I opened my eyes wide with shock.

“Aye.” How could he have known I was weeks with no vision at all by just moving his hand in front of my face?

“Blunt force trauma to the back of your skull, what, about a year or so ago?” Again, I nodded. If he was setting out to prove how good he was, it was working. “What was it? A brick? Fall off a ladder?”

“Axe.” It was Dr Grey’s turn to be surprised. Eyes wide, mouth dropping open, he coughed slightly and controlled his expression back to normal.

“Yes, that would do it I suppose. Fortunately, this shows great elasticity in your brain tissue. It’s got good recovery ability so I think your speech and language centres will be recover to some extent in the long run.” He laughed at my expression as I stared at him shocked. How did he know so much about my head? “These seizures and headaches are another matter though. I’ll schedule you another CT scan and an EEG for tomorrow. Let’s have a look inside that head of yours again.”

I must have looked panicked as he quickly put a hand on my arm and explained that ‘surgery’ wouldn’t be necessary this time. I ran a hand over my scalp once more, glad that no more cutting would be happening.

“Now, let’s try something more advanced. I want you to try saying a sentence. You’re doing well with single words but a sentence is proving difficult, yes? So, let’s try a sentence. A short one.” I looked away. For the life of me, I couldn’t think of anything to say let alone think of how I could actually make my mouth say it.

I looked back at him, swallowed and took a deep breath. There was one thing that might make everything a bit easier.

“Tha… feum… agam…. Air… uisge-beatha” They looked at me shocked, the neurosurgeon looking carefully at my notes, seeing all sorts of new damage he hadn’t spotted before. I smiled. “Need… Whisky”

Chapter End Notes

Tha feum agam Air uisge-beatha - I could do with a whisky
“Thanks for calling me Claire. I’ve been wondering how our patient has been getting along.” John sat down in one of the more comfortable chairs in my office. He’d just spent the best part of three hours with Jamie, performing some simple neuropsychological tests and was wanting to discuss treatment options. I had explained that Joe was the primary physician now but both he and John agreed that I should be the one to discuss the options with Jamie. Joe had popped by to let me know and that John and Jamie were getting on like a house on fire and that when he left both were busy laughing at a particularly bad joke.

“I’m glad you could come so quickly. There’s been some key indicators that gave me some concerns.” I sat in the chair next to him, placing my cup of tea on the table between us.

“Yes. His speech and language processing is impaired as you told me but not as much as his sentence formation. Broca’s aphasia would be my diagnosis and I’ve already arranged for him to have CT scan tomorrow to confirm this.” I nodded, agreeing with his deductions so far. “The good news is that there is a very good chance he’ll recover from most of this damage. His brain has demonstrated excellent recuperative properties already, I doubt this will be any different.” He moved to take a drink of tea.

“Is there anything we can do other than speech therapy?” I wanted tips, practical advice that I could put into practice straight away.

“Well, the strange thing is that he can speak Gaelic far more fluently than English. His first sentence was in Gaelic and was stuttering but complete. His second in English missed more than half the words. I asked him about this and he told me that his first language is Gaelic. Lord knows where he’s from. Must be one of the islands.” Learn Gaelic then. Great.

“What about the headaches and seizures?”

“Headaches are normal at this stage in his recovery as long as they don’t get any worse. If he starts to complain of nausea, dizziness or weakness then we’ll look again. I doubt anything will show up on the scan tomorrow that we can link with the headaches but I’ll look. As for the seizures, from his records it looks like he had two in the first week as well.” I looked up quickly at this.

“How can you tell? His brain activity was so low!” John smiled and nodded.

“Yes it was, but the signs were there. Very subtle. Tachycardia, hypertension and a spike in his body temperature. All key indicators of a seizure in this sort of case.”

“But he was given antiseizure meds.”

“Yes but this wasn’t typical. Anyway, I’ve also ordered an EEG to be performed tomorrow to test for epilepsy and I’ll compare his scan tomorrow with his first CT from three weeks ago, see if there’s any bleeds still. In fact, now we have his surname we should be able to trace his medical records from his previous brain trauma. He must have been treated in a hospital for that. I’ve set Nurse Christie on tracking them down. James Fraser is a reasonably common name but not many will have an axe blow on their records!”

“An axe?” I stared at him open mouthed?
“Yes, an axe. I couldn’t believe it either but right enough, there’s a scar on his head that matches the shape and the damage corroborates this. He’s very lucky. More lives than a cat that one!” I smiled distractedly.

An axe blow to the head, all those flogging scars on his back, Gaelic as his first language. It was as if he was from another century. John continued, interrupting my thoughts.

“So, his spinal cord. I’ve organised an MRI for tomorrow as well. Hopefully the swelling has gone down enough to see the damage clearly. As he hasn’t regained any sensation below the waist, it’s a case of whether he has a complete or incomplete cord injury. We’ll work out a treatment plan then.”

Taking a deep breath, I ran my hands over my face. It was all so daunting. John read my mind well.

“Claire, please remember. You know as well as I do that he only had about a 5% chance of surviving the first 24 hours when you found him. The fact that he’s awake at all is miraculous. You did everything right that night. I don’t really believe in luck but my word, to have you driving along that road minutes after he was hit. I doubt another car passed that night after you.” I looked away. John was right. Jamie should by rights be in the morgue, not breathing and talking however falteringly.

“So. I’m going to prescribe something for you as well. As a reward for being one of the best damned doctors in Scotland if not the whole of the UK.” I laughed, I could feel a slight blush developing.

“You’re going to accompany me to dinner this evening. You choose where, I don’t really know Inverness but it’s my treat.” Smiling at him I nodded.

“It would be a pleasure to show you the sights of Inverness Dr Grey.” I stood and offered him my hand. Instead of shaking it though, he gently kissed the back of it.

“Shall we say 7pm?” This time I did blush. Nodding, he released my hand and left my office.

“Shit.”

I was informed by Dr Grey tha’ whisky wouldna be the best choice o’ drink for me anymore. One kidney and a broken head didna work sae well with alcohol. He finished it with a ‘I’ll see what I can do’ afore he left. I like the man. We’d bin talkin’ for hours. Pins had been stuck in ma feet, I’d bin asked to memorise words an say the names o’ different objects. I was feelin’ verra tired by the end but pleased he didna treat me like a dolt.

I was just startin’ to fall asleep when Nurse Malva appeared with a tray.

“Right Jamie. Dr Abernathy has suggested that you actually try eating something, so I ordered lunch for you.” I looked at her puzzled. It was true I hadna eaten anythin’ in weeks. How was I not starvin’? “I can see that question written all over your face. You’ve had a feeding tube since you were brought in. That’s what’s running through your nose.” I touched the tube in question and raised an eyebrow.

“Not…verra…nice.” She smiled sweetly at my inarticulate sentence.

“Well, I can’t guarantee this will be either but it’s a start. It’s cottage pie I’m afraid.” I musta’ looked confused as she hurriedly told me what it wa’.

“Will…do.” She nodded and placed the tray on a table which she moved to be in front of me. I attempted to sit up further but was stopped by a small hand on my shoulder.

“It’s ok, I’ve got it.” She took hold of a small box with a wire attached and without me doin’ anathin’, it moved me upright. I stared at her in wonder. “That better?” I nodded, dumbfounded.
“Right, I want you to try only small bites. Your throat hasn’t had to do a lot these last few weeks so it will come as a bit of a shock.” I nodded nervously.

She uncovered the food and we both looked at it. I turned to look at her and raised an eyebrow in question. At this she laughed and patted me on the shoulder.

“It might taste better than it looks.” I was dubious. In my experience, thin’s tha’ tasted good usually looked and smelt better than this did.

I picked up what appeared to be a fork and scooped a little of the mush from the plate. Swallowing nervously, I tasted it. It was lukewarm. Mushy. Nae seasonin’ at all. I chewed slightly but only found the meat, if you could call it that, tough and foul. At the nurse’s insistence, I attempted to swallow it but struggled. I dinna know whether it was cause o’ the taste or my throat but it didn’t go down tae well at all. I coughed and sputtered and a drink of water was placed in my hand.

“Sip it.” I did as I was told and after a moment breathed a little easier. “Shall we try some more or…” I shook my head. No. I didna want any more o’ that…stuff. “Ok then. How about a shower?”

By now, everyone was used to seein’ my confusion at this new century. They all believed it to be ma injuries that caused the problem. I wasna gonna correct them else they’d ha’ thought I wa’ mad! Malva carefully explained wha’ a ‘shower’ was; like a bath, only standin’ up, or in my case, sittin’ down. Hot water sounded nice, so I agreed. She hurried off to arrange everythin’ thankfully takin’ the slop wi’ ‘er.

Minutes later she reappeared with another nurse. The things in my neck and one hand had been removed earlier tha’ morning leavin’ only the one in ma right hand. They carefully wrapped this with a clear, shiny material called ‘clingfilm’ to stop the water gettin’ in tae my veins. It was a sound plan and I agreed with their choice of action. They both giggled at my pathetic joke but it felt good to make someone laugh agin.

Next, they had to get me outta the bed. I wasna gonna be much use for this having no’ feeling in ma legs but they managed to use a strange pulley system. I felt ashamed and my face burned with it. They both did their best to let me know it was alright but still, a young man should be able to fend for himself. They put me into a chair on wheels and pushed me into a large white room. It echoed as the floor and walls were tiled fully. It looked what I imagined a torture chamber to look like, wi’ bars everywhere.

They’d asked if I felt like I needed any help in the shower and I had replied that I didn’t. I didna want young lassies seein’ me, it wasna right. I didna wan’ anyone seein’ me at all. I’d always been conscious of the scars on ma’ back, keepin’ ‘em covered at all times jus’ in case. If there were more scars now, it was more tae hide. I didna want anyone’s pity.

“Right Jamie. I’ll get the shower going for you and then you just have to take off your gown and move the wheelchair under the water. Do you think you can do that?” Looking down at the wheels on the chair, I could see a place for my hands to hold and turn the wheel myself. I nodded. She showed me the brake for the chair as well to avoid any accidents. She made me lean forward in the chair slightly and undid the ties on the back of ma gown, leaving me to remove it once she had gone.

“Oh. There’s soap for you by the shower and a towel here. When you’re done, pull this red cord and I’ll come back with Nurse Hawkins to finish drying you and getting you back into bed. Is that ok?” I struggled to understand such long sentences, so it was a few moments before I nodded. “Enjoy.”

And she left me alone in the room.

I turned to the falling water and prepared for my first shower. I could already see the attraction. Hot,
soothing water over the head sounded good. But mebbe not like this. Taking a deep breath, I took off
the gown I’d been given to wear. Nothin’ could have prepared me for what I saw.

I was no’ a vain man. I kent that some women found me attractive but I didna really understand why.
But to see myself, sae different from only a few weeks ago. I was much thinner but that was nothin’
new. After spendin’ a winter rustling kine with the broken clansmen and eatin’ grass, I looked
similar. But, now, I was a mess.

A long, jagged cut was healing the full-length o’ ma left thigh. There was a metal bar sticking
through the skin at two points holdin’ ma bones taegether. There was a metal framework around ma
hips, sticking through the skin agin. Scars ran red and angry over sae much of ma skin. The long line
of metal staples that Claire had told me about, puckered and sore. The worst was the pipe in ma
cock. It led to a bag that I assumed contained ma pish. All of a sudden, I needed tae be sick.

There wa’ somethin’ resemblin’ a basin nearby and I managed to get there in time. Just water and
spit mainly but the coolness of the ceramic agin ma’ face helped calm me. As I opened ma eyes, I
saw ma reflection in a mirror.

Black circles around ma eyes, cheeks sunken and clingin’ tae ma bones. I kent most of ma hair had
been shorn bu’ tae see it, the red stubble just startin’ to grow. There were scars all over ma heid. John
told me that I had to have holes drilled intae ma skull to keep me alive. Lookin’ a’ ma reflection, I
wondered why they all bothered. I was nothin’ anymore. Just a crippled collection o’ scars.

It had been hard not being able to go check on him during my shift. Relinquishing him to the care of
Joe had been hard but ultimately the correct decision. As his primary physician, I couldn’t be his
friend. I laughed at myself, it was rapidly becoming more than friendship and I kept telling myself
off. What did actually know about the guy? Not much. But I intended on finding out everything.

I’d heard about the food experiment earlier and decided to pop out shopping after my shift had
ended. Now he had re-joined the land of the living, it was time he had some proper clothes and
proper food. I had time to drop them off before my dinner with John. There was another problem.
How to make this dinner not turn into anything else. I didn’t know if John was doing this to be nice
or for some other reason, but I certainly didn’t need it to develop any further.

I entered ICU and looked for Jamie. His eyes were closed, fingers gripping the plaid tightly. It was
like a comfort blanket to him it seemed. Helping him cope with what was happening. I was amazed
he was still awake really. It was his first proper day out of sedation and it had been an active day
from what I had heard.

I walked to his bedside and touched his hand.

“Hello Mr Fraser.” His eyes opened and I could see the pain in them. He’d been crying, tear tracks
lined his face, his eyes red raw. He sniffled and attempted a smile which promptly dissolved into
more tears. “Hey, Jamie. What’s wrong.” I sat on the edge of the bed, ignoring hospital protocol, and
took hold of his hands. He wrenched them out of my grip and pulled the plaid closer to his chest,
closing his eyes again.

Malva caught my eye and motioned for me to have a quiet word. I patted his arm, saying quietly that
I’d be back in a moment and went to speak with her. As she explained, my heart broke for him.

“I suggested that he might like to have a shower and left him to it. After five minutes, I went to check
on him.” She sniffled quietly, looking down and brushing away a tear. “I shouldn’t have left him
alone, should have prepared him better. Told him what to expect.”
“What do you mean? What happened?” I was getting annoyed, what had she done?

“He was sitting there crying, his head resting on the sink. He had his arms wrapped around his torso and I couldn’t get him to relax. He was in such a state. It took me and Mary over an hour to calm him enough to get him back into bed.” I turned away, closed my eyes and released a sigh. There was nothing else to say. The damage was done. No, she shouldn’t have left him alone at all, he was only just coming up to 48 hours out of sedation. But, the young nurse hadn’t meant any harm and in fact thought she was giving him a treat. It was all just a big mess.

“It’s ok Malva. You weren’t to know. I’ll speak to him. See if I can get him to open up. But he’s still incredibly vulnerable. We have to treat him carefully. His mind can’t cope with any more surprises, ok?” She nodded. “Right, finish your shift and then brief Gillian fully when she arrives. Let’s give him a quiet night.”

I walked back over to Jamie, he was still gripping the plaid tightly in his fists. Pulling up the chair beside him, I put my hand on his hand, covering the fist, letting him know I was there. His eyes stayed closed but at least the tears had stopped.

“My parents were killed in a car crash. When I was a child. I was in the car with them and spent a few months in a hospital like you are now.” I could feel some of the tension leave his hand, his eyes opened slightly at the sound of my voice. I continued, speaking slowly and quietly, pausing regularly to let him keep up. I told him of how I had to have a metal brace on my arm to allow the bone to grow again. I showed him the scars on my left arm. How I had to have plates screwed into my left leg to keep it straight. He listened and as I spoke, he gradually relaxed.

“My uncle Lambert travelled back from Africa when he heard about my parents. He was my only living relative. It had taken two months for the news to reach him and a further month before he could come to get me. He didn’t want to have a five-year-old brat tagging along on his adventures and I didn’t want to go around the world, but we don’t always get to choose what happens with our lives.” His hand now held mine, his eyes clear and focusing on mine intently.

“You didn’t choose this Jamie, but it’s the card you’ve been dealt. You are so lucky to be alive and relatively unscathed.” He bit his bottom lip at this and looked at the ceiling, stopping any further tears. “You are going to have to make huge changes to your life, but you won’t be alone. I promise you that. I’ll be here. Every step, I’ll be by your side. Understand?” It was my tears falling now and I gripped his hand firmly in mine. He nodded, a weak smile forming on his lips.

“Dinna…deserve…Claire.”

“Yes, you do, you bloody Scot!” At this he laughed, a real laugh that made the nurses turn and look at us. He stopped and a smile lit up his face.

“Now, I have food that is actually edible and I have proper clothes. What would you like first?” He thought about it briefly, his answer surprising me completely.

“Shower.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think. Next chapter up on Sunday - possibly quite late as I’m playing out for the weekend.
Chapter 8

With one thing and another, my dinner date with John turned out to be a dinner date with Jamie. Together, me and Malva helped him ready for a shower and I wheeled him into the bathroom. As I turned to leave, he asked me to stay. I argued that it wasn’t right, that if he needed assistance, it should be Malva. But I couldn’t ignore the look in his eyes. He trusted me and wanted me to help him. After promising to be with him at every step of the way, I could hardly refuse.

He was very uncomfortable with his body. It was so different to the whole, healthy, strong and powerful young man he would have been only a few short weeks ago. The muscles in his legs were atrophying rapidly, not even a twitch had been through them in weeks. He looked away when he removed his gown, avoiding looking at all the scars, the reflection and certainly avoiding me.

I went to lower the shower head to a better height and turn on the water. Soon, it was gently steaming but no so hot as to burn his skin. I pushed the chair under the stream of water and at once he let it run over his head. Eyes shut, head tilted up slightly. I could see a smile starting to form. The water cascading over him, warm and cleansing. He’d been washed regularly by the nurses whilst unconscious, but this was different. He was no longer asleep and could start taking control back of his life.

He moved his head out of the flow and smiled at me, joyful at the experience.

“First…shower.” I looked at him bemused before smiling and shaking my head.

“How can this be your first shower?” He shrugged but looked away. “Ok, how about we wash your hair.” The pause, then a look suggesting I was mad for mentioning it. “No, seriously. Some is growing back and I’m sure we can avoid all those scars. Move back a little.” He did, still looking at me sceptically as I reached for a bottle of delicate shampoo.

Slowly, I massaged his scalp, avoiding all the incision locations and areas where his skull had been opened. His eyes had drifted closed and his head gently tilted closer to me. I was sure he would have purred if he could.

“Is that better?” He nodded slightly, smiling as his eyes reopened. “Right, let’s rinse this off and get the rest of you clean.” He moved back into the spray and let all the suds wash-away. Together, we managed to get him fully washed, he took care of his chest and thighs, I washed his back and lower legs. He blushed furiously as I moved the cloth over his legs, looking anywhere but at me.

“Strange. See. Not feel.” I nodded. He swallowed visibly, closing his eyes, biting his bottom lip. His middle and ring finger of his left hand tapping against the wheelchair.
“Right then, let’s get you dried, into some clothes and fed.” He nodded, eyes still closed.

Between me and Malva, we got him dry and into some dark grey jogging bottoms and a black t-shirt. He looked at the clothes as if they were completely foreign but once he was settled back into bed, on his side for a while, he agreed they were comfortable.

“Right, food.”

He chose the chicken soup, the others I had brought received dubious expressions which made me chuckle. It was heated and brought to him. He eyed the polystyrene container with suspicion and sniffed it carefully. After some encouragement, he tasted the soup and before long, the container was empty, bread rolls demolished and he was starting to look a little more normal. It was fun watching him devour food as I’m sure he would have done before the accident. At over six foot four and of muscular build, I should imagine his food bills were huge.

“So, dessert. Chocolate cake?” He eyed it very warily. “Have you never seen chocolate before?” He looked at me, gently shaking his head. How can he not have had chocolate before? “It’s delicious, you’ll love it. In fact, I may be creating a monster by giving this to you.” His eyes widened at this and I’m sure he moved away from it slightly. “Trust me.” And at that, I took a bit of the cake myself, enjoying the rich flavour and texture on my tongue. I could see him watching me eat the cake, heard him swallow as I put the fork in my mouth. He really was starting to feel better. “Mmm, it’s very, very good. In fact, I think I might keep this myself.”

He made a grab for the cake but I moved it out of his reach. Instead, I fed him a piece. As soon as it hit his tongue, he closed his eyes and let his head fall backwards, a look of pure happiness on his face.

“Oh, we like the chocolate cake do we?” An emphatic nod was my answer. Between us, we finished the cake.

I adjusted his bed so he wasn’t sitting up as far anymore and he settled back down, eyes starting to droop.

“You’ll be moving out of here soon I imagine.”

“Where?” A drowsy, slightly slurred question was my response.

“To the spinal injuries unit I expect. They’ll teach you how to adapt to your injuries. Or help you recover some feeling. I know John tried explaining what the next step is.”

“Aye. Dinna…ken…much” Eyes were closed now, face relaxing into sleep.

I felt my phone vibrate in my bag and reluctantly tore my eyes away from the scene in front of me. As he fell into slumber, all the worries off the day left him. No caring about whether he would walk again. In his dreams he would be strong and tall, articulate and agile. I smiled, he really was so very young.

Looking at my phone, I first saw the time. 22:10. Then I saw the messages from John. Locking my phone once more, I put it back in my bag and stood up. I’d spent hours with the one man I actually wanted to spend time with. Gathering my things to leave, I took one last look at him. A small smile momentarily appeared on his face before relaxing again.

I woke the next mornin’ feelin’ rested. I hadna dreamed of anythin’ save a pair of whisky coloured eyes and a nest of brown curls falling around her face. Her kindness filled ma’ heart, her laughter
eased ma’ soul. I didna want to ruin her life by havin’ her put up wi’ me but it was her choice. If she
wanted tae, I didna think I would be strong enough to stop her.

I asked her to stay when I had ma’ shower yesterday and I kent I shouldna done so. It wasna right for
a lady to be in ma presence like that but I couldna let her leave me. She is my strength and my
courage it seems. I also needed to see her face when she saw ma broken body. Many a woman from
ma’ time woulda run away and I wouldna ha’ blamed ‘em. Claire stayed. She didn’t look affeart and
she didna flinch. A rare woman and I knew at that point, she wa’ a gift sent from God to look after
me.

A thought crossed ma mind as she washed ma back that nearly made me laugh. I used to keep ma
back hidden, scairt that people would pity me because of my flogging scars. Now, they were nothin’
special. The rest o’ me was covered in as bad if no’ worse now. She ne'er showed me pity. I kent
she felt sorry for me, but it was no’ pity and I was grateful to her.

“Well good morning Jamie. How are you feeling today?” It was Joe. He had a strange accent that
agin my battered brain had all sorts of problems wi’ understanding.

“Aye, good.” It was the right response as he smiled and started making notes.

“Right, it’s a busy day. We’re going to remove your feeding tube seeing as you demonstrated a good
ability to eat yesterday.” He smiled at this and I couldna help smiling also.

“Only…Claire…” I couldna find the word. I scrunched my eyes in frustration. It was there but I
couldna find it! Instead I changed tack. “Nae…hospital…food.” Joe waited patiently, showing nae
sign of frustration at my inarticulateness. Instead, he laughed when I finally got my sentence out.

“Yes, sensible. I’m sure Claire will keep bringing you provisions.” It was my turn to smile, the
mention of her name sending a jolt through me. “We’re also going to give you a full vaccination
sweep today.” I musta’ look confused as he stopped and pulled up a chair.

“Vaccinations are drugs that stop you getting certain diseases. Because you’ve had your spleen
removed, you’ll find it a lot easier to catch these diseases and they might make you very sick. So,
we’re giving you everything to stop you getting ill.” Thankfully, he spoke slowly and let me digest
this new word and it’s meanin’. Why was everythin’ in this century so complicated? I nodded when I
finally understood what he told me.

“Then you’ve got a CT, and EEG, an MRI and an X-ray booked this afternoon. They are a types of
imaging machine that will look at your brain, your spine and your bones without needing to cut you
open.” God bless Joe for explaining it to me afore I needed to ask.

“Shall we get you some breakfast and get started then?” As he said this, Nurse Gillian appeared with
a tray. I looked dubiously thinking about the last time I was brought a tray but Joe’s smile gave me
pause.

“Claire had us stock up on a few things you might like. She figured you for a porridge with honey
 kinda guy. What do you think?” I nodded and smiled. Claire certainly did ken me well.

After breakfast was a couple of uncomfortable hours. I was given seven injections around various
parts o’ ma body. Thankfully, many were in areas I had nae feelin’ but just knowin’ I wa’ bein’
stabbed didna make me too happy. It was explained to me that I would need it repeatin’ in a few
weeks’ time to let ma’ body build defences. I just agreed and nodded. It was also explained that I
would need to take medicines to stop me getting sick for at least the next four years. Antibiotics is
what Joe called them. They kill germs (tiny things that cause disease is what I think the word means)
which my body can nae longer fight against too well. It was kenning this that made my mind up.

I must stay in this century. I can ne’er go home for two reasons: I canna walk and I need pills to stop me getting sick. I didna think they would gi’ me a four-year supply o’ the things. So, I made ma mind up to stay and learn. I had to adapt to not only my new body, but a new century. It was certainly different. Food wasna scarce. Medicine more advanced than blood-letting and leeches. I would need help but I was certain Claire would be wi’ me, e’en if only as a friend.

I joined Jamie for his scans in the afternoon. MRI and CT machines were loud, noisy and a little intimidating if you’ve never had one before. Jamie’s confusion and general lack of experiences or at least recollection of them made the decision for me. He would need help to get through it all and I intended to be there for him.

He was surprised to see me as his bed was pushed around the corner. I noticed something strange about him, something that was different from when I saw him the previous evening. He was back in the hospital gown ready for the scan. His feeding tube was finally gone now that I had convinced him that not all food was of the same quality as the stuff from the hospital kitchens. But that wasn’t it. Something in his eyes, a new light, a glimmer. Hope. That was it. He no longer had the look of someone whose life was over. He had the look of someone willing to fight for it again. I smiled, choking back the emotion I felt at seeing my Highland warrior ready to deal with whatever was thrown at him.

“Hello Jamie. How are you feeling today?” I held his hand as soon as he was within reach, squeezing it gently in welcome.

“Good today. Like pin-cushion. Vacc…va…” His eyes scrunched shut as he tried to recall the word.

“Vaccination? Yes, you will feel like a pin-cushion after all those. Not too bad though?” He shook his head and smiled. “Right then, MRI first.” I explained the procedure to him, stopping when he started to lose the thread and elaborating whenever he threw me a puzzled look. Finally, he nodded.

He was to be given a dye injection to highlight the blood vessels in his brain and spine. A slight risk considering he was down a kidney but it was deemed acceptable. I injected it into the IV in the back of hand and we waited a few moments for it to filter around.

“So, we’re going to get you into the machine now. It’s bit of a tight fit and it will be very loud. You might feel yourself getting very warm. Do you want to listen to music while you’re in there?” He was starting to look a little worried and kept glancing at the machine as if waiting for it to attack him.

“Canna…h…h…ifrinn” Verbs were a struggle for him, again, another key indicator of Broca’s aphasia. He was finding it increasingly frustrating, but I knew he had to work it out for himself. “Nae…music…nae melody…beat only.” I raised an eyebrow at this. “Axe…then nae music.”

“Let me get this straight, you’ve not been able to hear melodies since your axe injury? Only the beat?” He nodded, pleased that he had managed to get his point across. Alarm bells were ringing in my head. John had identified a prior traumatic brain injury, to have suffered permanent brain damage from two instances within the space of a year wasn’t ever going to be good.

“That’s fine. No music. You will have headphones on, these produce sound so you’ll be able to hear us talking to you.” He nodded, taking everything in, learning as if for the first time. We got him out of the bed and onto the platform. I put the headphones on his head. “Comfortable?” He nodded slightly, nervously swallowing, hands clenched by his side. “We’re going to put this coil over your head and tighten is slightly. You can’t move your head at all. Do you understand?”
“Aye.” It was a breathless whisper, his eyes closing tightly, trying to transport himself to a safer place. That done, I took one of his hands and gently unclenched his fingers. He looked at me as well as he could without moving his head. A tear leaked out from one eye and I ached to brush it away for him. I placed the panic button in his hand.

“If you need to get out, press this. I’ll be talking to you all the time, from that room over there. You’ll be fine. I know they’re scary but it’ll tell us exactly what needs doing to make you better.” He smiled and sniffed gently.

I could see him tense as the platform was moved into the first position. He was going to be in there a long time. Several areas of his brain needed scanning as did a good chunk of his spine. I spoke to him throughout, telling him what was going on, speaking gently and soothingly as the machine banged and clattered around him. The images came through nice and clear, not a muscle had been moved during the brain scans. We gave him a slight break before continuing with the spinal scans. His legs needed to be elevated and his head could now be released from confinement.

Over an hour later, he was finally moved back from the platform onto the trolley that would take him to the next scan. He smiled at me but I could see the stress and tension around his eyes. It had obviously taken all his strength not to press that button. As soon as he was on the bed, he closed his eyes, laying his hand over them to block out the light.

“Headache?” A slight nod. “I’ll get you some painkillers.” He was already on a cocktail of drugs to help him cope with the pain from the surgeries he’d had not to mention everything else to prevent infection, spikes in blood pressure, keeping his electrolytes up. Finding a painkiller in addition to all this that would treat the migraines was a challenge.

In comparison to the MRI, the CT and X-ray were relatively simple. He would out in the open for both and neither were as traumatic as what he had already been through. Finally, the EEG. It isn’t uncommon for people to develop epilepsy after suffering a traumatic brain injury and as Jamie had already had three seizures, it was looking increasingly likely.

The neuropsych. department explained what they were doing at each stage carefully to Jamie, and I just added in more detail when he was looking lost. As the electrodes were stuck to his scalp, he just laid there and closed his eyes, gripping his fists tightly. Finally, he was asked to open his eyes and take some deep breaths. Lights were flashed in his face and different patterns shown to him. By the end of forty-minutes, he looked sick and about ready to pass out with the pain in his head. After a total of four hours, he was ready to return to the high-dependency ward. It was right next door to ICU but he was deemed well enough to not need one nurse to himself at all times.

As he was helped back into his bed, I noticed how withdrawn he had become. When I’d see him at first today, there was a fire in his eyes. Now it was just embers, his eyes tired and dull. He was laying on his right side away from the door, away from me. Pulling the chair around, I went and sat facing him.

“What’s wrong Jamie?” He looked at me briefly before closing his eyes again. I thought he was going to ignore me until I felt his hand searching out mine. He clasped it tightly, pulling it towards his chest, where his heart lay.

“Chan eil nì orm a-nis. Tapadh leat, Sorcha.” (I am well now. Thank you) I chuckled at him, causing him to open his eyes in question.

“You barely said anything to me for hours, then you spill out a load of Gaelic perfectly. Bloody Scot.” He smiled back at me, squeezing my hand again.
“Gaidhlig easy. English hard.” I nodded.

“I know. You’ll have to teach me, then we can talk all day without worrying about stuttering, or verbs, or…” He laughed then, the light starting to reappear in his eyes.

“Sorry Claire. Poor company. Hard day.”

“You’re forgiven. It has been a hard day. I struggle to remember that this time last week you still weren’t even breathing for yourself. You’ve made amazing progress so far.” He smiled.

“Good doctors. Beautiful doctor Claire.” I blushed and looked away. I knew I had to stop this from going any further. It was breaching so many hospital regulations. He really wasn’t well either. How was I to know I wasn’t conditioning him somehow? Was it genuine or was it merely because I was the first face he saw? No. It needed to stop before hearts were broken. But every time I held his hand, there was that spark, the same one I felt in the middle of that road that night. This wasn’t usual, and I knew it.

“Claire? Wrong?” His concern was all over his face, he, had managed to lean up on an arm to look at me more closely. Damn my glass face.

“There’s something I need to tell you Jamie. And you must listen. I’m…”

“Doctor Randall, your husband is here to see you.” The nurse retreated leaving Frank standing there, staring at us, specifically my hand held tight to Jamie’s heart.

I looked at Jamie. I could see the exact moment his heart broke. It was far too late for all of us.

“Randall? Husband?” He turned to look over his shoulder and an expression of absolute horror appeared on his face. There was no time to react to it, a second later it was gone as a seizure took hold of him again.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t shoot!!! Next chapter will be up on Wednesday. Dinna fash!
She had gone by the time I awoke fully. I kent I had suffered another seizure. My head felt like it had been cleaved by an axe, bright lights flashed afore my eyes and I couldna speak nae matter how hard I tried. All I could do was let my tears fall. I was ashamed by my weakness but couldna stop it. I cried wi’ the pain and I cried for my heart breaking. She was marrit. To a Randall no less.

I musta slept. They gave me medicines for the headache, to stop more seizures, to help me sleep. All those drugs and not one stopped ma heart from aching. It wasna a proper sleep for I couldna bring myself around fully come morning. I was lookin’ through fog, listening to words but they were all muffled and quiet. I felt like I couldna move properly, like I was trying to swim through honey. I didna eat, I didna drink. They put another pipe intae my arm linked to a colourless liquid in a bag. I mighta asked what it was, but I couldna bring myself to care. One sentence is all it took to make me nothin’ agin.

As the morning wore on, I received visitors. A doctor named Tom Christie appeared. He explained that he was nurse Malva’s uncle and so had been hearing a lot about how I was getting along. I nodded, not paying much mind as he poked and prodded around the metal bars sticking through ma skin. He seemed satisfied, nodding lots and admiring his butchery skills for that it was it looked like tae me. Eventually he left me alone to ma thoughts.

Next it was Joe. His cheerfulness grated on me, ma anger making me turn away from him. He continued talking but I paid him nae mind. I let him move around, carry on talking until one word came through clearly that made me look up.

“Oh, I knew if I mentioned the fair Claire’s name, you’d look at me.” He looked smug, it didna suit him one bit. I turned away in nae mood for his jests. I heard him pull up a chair beside me. Evidently, he had more tae say on the topic.

“Jamie, I know you and Claire have formed a…a bond.” Aye, I thought we had. “But you only know the most basic of things about each other yet.” I thought that was enough. But I wa’ wrong. “All we know about you is your name, your blood type, where you were found and your date of birth. Oh, and that you wear a kilt and swords when getting hit by cars.” I raised an eyebrow at this. Before I could say anythin’, he continued. “What do you know about Claire? She’s a doctor, she has brown eyes and horrific brown, curly hair. Now you know she’s married. That’s it bud.”

I stared at the ceiling. He was right. What did we know about each other? I couldna tell her ‘bout who I really am. She’d think I wa’ mad. I had nae claim over her at all. All the affection I thought she felt for me was imagined. She was another’s wife. She would ne’er be mine, no’ that I would e’er be worthy of her. I made to roll over, away from Joe. It wasnae easy these days but I managed it. For once, I had nae tears left.

“It’s a hard truth Jamie. I know.” I could hear him standing and moving around to face me again. “I’m just giving you the facts. But I’ll tell you something else. Her marriage ain’t the strongest, she
does care for you, and she was real pissed at Frank when you started to come around.” He patted me on the shoulder and walked away.

I was still fully dressed when I woke up on top of the covers. It had been a horrible way to end such a positive day. Jamie was starting to open-up, trying to link more words together into something resembling a sentence. He’d survived all his scans and to be honest, I was looking forward to spending the evening getting him to try new foods and talking to him.

I don’t know what it was that caused the seizure. The news of my marriage was certainly a shock to him but my husband standing there seemed to have an even bigger affect. It wasn’t confirmed yet, but it did look like epilepsy and stress is a known trigger for seizures. In Jamie’s case, when his whole life seemed stressful now, it was unsurprising that he’d gone under again.

He was under for longer this time, we recorded it at over three minutes. Still not thankfully not dangerous but we were keeping a close eye on him. He didn’t come around well though. He couldn’t speak at all. He just cried, trying to curl up on himself. I couldn’t watch. I had to leave. It was all my fault. I had let the attachment form and now it was too late. I will never forget the look on his face when he heard I was married.

What happened afterwards was overdue, but painful nevertheless. I remember walking through the double doors and Frank standing there, waiting for me, a look of thunder on his face. At once my ire rose, how dare he just turn up unannounced and ask for Doctor Randall? He had hated it when I refused to take his name and now was his payback. I should have moved the confrontation to my office, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. My marriage had been over for years so why not have a dozen nurses and doctors witness the final blow?

“What are you doing here Frank?” I stood across the corridor from him, my hands on my hips, ready to fight.

“What am I doing here? I’m visiting my wife who didn’t bother to call or speak to me in three weeks and then when she did, she hung up and then ignored my calls. That’s what I’m doing here Claire. I might ask what it was you were doing. I take it that’s your stray puppy in there. Getting rather close I might observe. Tell me Claire, what is it about a beat-up cripple that you find so attractive?” Before I could stop myself, I was across the corridor and slapping his smug face.

“How dare you? How dare you come here and call me out on my professional relationships when you’ve crossed that particular boundary with how many of your students, Frank? Oh, don’t try to deny it. We both deserve the truth now. Here’s mine. I haven’t done anything beyond be a caregiver to my patients. I haven’t shagged any of them or made inappropriate advances. I haven’t slept with any of my co-workers and I haven’t slept with anyone but you, my darling husband, since we started dating. Care to tell me your truth now?”

I was livid. My hands were sweating but my voice was low and menacing. I’d be damned if he made me yell in my own hospital. I waited for his response but he merely stood there looking at me. He saw that I had removed my wedding ring and that it had obviously been gone for some time, the line almost the same colour as the rest of my hand. Slowly he nodded, moving back to lean against the wall.

“You’re right Claire. I have had affairs. Can you blame me? My wife, the woman who should have been at home supporting her husband, decided to put her own career before that of mine. She decided to live separated by hundreds of miles just so she could play doctor.”

I stared at him, hatred dripping from me. “If that’s all you wanted, Frank, a wife to make your dinner,
provide and raise the children, bring you your slippers when you got home, you chose the wrong woman. I am not the meek and obedient type, and I doubt very much I ever will be."

He stood up from the wall, coming to stand over me, trying to intimidate me with his height. Pity for him I was wearing my heels. The affect was rather limited and it irked him. “You are my wife, by the law and by the church. I’ll not grant you your freedom to run off with your stray Claire. That is if he is even capable of running anymore.” He sneered at me, turned and walked away. It was only once he was out of hearing range did I allow myself to sink to the floor and cry.

I was surprised when a chessboard and a bottle of whisky was put down in the table in front of me later in the afternoon. Opening my eyes at the sound, John Grey’s smiling face looked down at me as he started setting up the pieces. He was nae longer dressed in his formal shirt and suit. He looked decidedly more casual and relaxed. I moved the bed so I was sitting up further (the nurse having shown me how the day before) and gave him a questioning look.

“I’d heard you were feeling sorry for yourself today. So I thought I’d see how good you were at chess. And, I figured the aforementioned whisky might be needed even more. Only a small one mind, you’re on a proper cocktail of drugs and I don’t think we want a drunken Highlander on our hands.” I looked down at ma’ hands, looking at all the new scars, bright red and angry from when I had scraped the floor weeks earlier. It’s true, I was hiding within but that didna mean I wanted any help gettin’ out.

“Come on Jamie. Black or white?” I chose black, had to give him a bit of a head start. Chess wa’ one thin’ I could still be good at. We had been playin’ for a few minutes when the questions started. “I heard about last night.” I nodded but played my move, not sayin’ anythin’. “There’s something about Claire isn’t there? I mean, I asked her out for dinner the other night and she just didn’t show up! Stood me up cold.” At this my head whipped up to look at him.

“Dinner? Claire?”

“Oh, he speaks! Yes, dinner with Claire. It was two nights ago. Do you happen to know what happened to her?” He smiled at me knowingly and I looked back a’ the board.

“Aye. Claire here, wi’ me.” I muttered at the board. I heard him laughing and turned to look at him again.

“That’s the most complete sentence you’ve uttered in English so far! Well done Jamie!” I looked at him wi’ surprise. It was not the response I was expectin’. “I asked Claire out to cheer her up. She was upset about you and your injuries. I knew she was living separately from her husband so I just thought she’d want a friendly ear to vent to.” I sat back, absorbing the information fully. “Jamie, Claire cares for you more than a doctor usually cares for their patients. That’s why she stepped down from being your physician.” I swallowed the lump in ma’ throat.

“Married though.”

“Oh don’t be obtuse, man! From what I’ve heard, they’ve lived apart for years! Anyway, what was it that set you off last night? The marriage? Or the man himself?” I looked up at John then, shocked that he could know. “Right, man then. Go on, ‘fess up. I have a feeling there is a story there.” I looked away again, swallowing nervously.

“Jonathan Randall. Soldier. Flogged me. Was nineteen.” John nodded, no shock showing on his face. He hadn’a seen the scars then. “See scars?” At his he looked surprised but nodded after a pause. I leaned forward and he carefully pulled my t-shirt up to look a’ them. His intake of breath let me
know he now understood. “Two hundred lashes.” I felt his hand hover over the deepest ridges before covering them again.

“You were a soldier?”

“Nah. Boy. Tae stop family hurt.” He sat down in front of me again, the game momentarily forgotten. I kept staring at my hands, I didna want to see the pity in his face.

“Jamie, is Claire’s husband that man?” I quickly shook ma head.


We played in silence for a while. Nothing needed to be said. He asked and I told him. He had given me the gift of knowledge; that the feelings I ha’ developed werena false or one-sided. I still had one question though.

“Claire only friend?” I pointed to him as I said Claire, he seemed to catch my meaning. He laughed a little and then smiled.

“No. Not me and Claire. Jamie, I’m gay.” I must have looked confused as he then carried on. “I prefer men to women.” I nodded again. I knew that it happened. Men desired other men sometimes. I kent about that all tae well after Randall gave me ma’ choice at Fort William. I didna feel that John would ever hurt me though. I felt safe wi’ John.

I smiled at him and played my next move.

“Check. Mate.” At this he laughed, a real, deep laugh that made the nurses look across. I laughed with him.

We shared the whisky and played chess well into the evenin’. By the end, I kent I had a good friend.

A week later, I was moved from critical care to the spinal injury unit on the next floor down. The scans had shown that my spinal cord was damaged completely. I would ne’er regain the use o’ ma legs. I had already accepted this to be the case but hearing it put sae bluntly still shocked me. John broke the news tae me the morning after our chess game and just held my shoulder as I cried at the news. He talked to me, explained all the next steps. He made me feel better about the future, about how I would still be independent. Just it would be different. I smiled and again vowed to not let this beat me.

Sayin’ goodbye to all the nurses and Joe was emotional. I had nae idea just how much I had come to depend on them. They could all understand what I wa’ sayin’ and explained when I didna catch their meaning. Malva gave me a hug as I left, tellin’ me how she would visit when I wa’ settled. Joe shook ma’ hand and wished me luck. He also said how he hoped ‘to never see my pale Scottish ass in his ward again’. I couldna help but laugh and agree that I also hoped to ne’er be in there agin.

There was only one person missing and, a Dhia, I missed her wi’ every fibre of ma bein’. John had given me hope, now I only wished I could talk to her. See her.

The journey to the new ward was uneventful and before long I was in a new bed in a room with three others. Each of us were ‘paraplegics’; we couldna feel our legs. I got talkin’ to the guy next to me. His name was Tommy Baxter, a Englishman who happened to be moving up to Scotland when he came off his ‘motorbike’. I asked him what one was. His wife’s answer was abrupt. ‘A death-trap on two wheels’. I nodded still non-the-wiser.
Malva and Joe both visited each day bringing edible food, history books from the library (I had a lot of catching-up tae do) and news of the goings on in ICU. Neither mentioned Claire except to say that she had taken a leave of absence. They didna know when she would return and I didna ask. She had her own life tae live and I was determined to try tae live mine.

It was on the second night in the ward that Tommy introduced to me to TV. My mind couldna comprehend it at first. A thin box that produced sound and moving images. At first, I though I wa’ having another seizure, but after a while, I got used tae it. I couldna understand the words though, it was tae quick and muffled. Nothin’ went in. I got frustrated and wheeled maself away before losing ma temper. I had a short fuse since the accident and I was finding it equally frustrating that I was gettin’ sae angry all the time. It wa’ John who helped me out agin.

“Nae patients London?” He laughed at my question when I saw him walking onto the ward for the second time that week.

“Oh, I just like to keep tabs on my favourite Highlander.” I smiled back at him and we talked about what had been goin’ on. I told him about the TV and he nodded. He grabbed the box for the one above ma bed and pressed a button. All of a sudden, they were speakin’ Gaidhlig. I looked at him in awe. I could tell what they were sayin’! I understood what was happenin’. I laughed in amazement. I made him show me what to do and I repeated it a few times to make sure I had learnt it. From that night onwards, I spent each evenin’ watching and listenin’ to ma own language and didna feel quite sae lonely anymore.

The police constables had finally gotten past the nurse’s station and asked me their questions. I wasna gonna be much use tae them but still they asked. No, I didna know who shot me. No, I didna think it was the men in the car. No, I didna see them but I kent there were two in the car that night. Yes, I was carryin’ weapons. No, I wasna aimin’ to do any harm wi’ them (a small lie but they werena tae ken that). I asked if I could ha’ them back, ma sword and dirk that is. They said I could but only when I wa’ outta hospital. I nodded, it was a reasonable request. They left wi’ nothin’ of worth in their notebooks but I had sae many things I couldna tell them. How would they have taken the knowledge tha’ the man tha’ shot me was War Chief of Clan Mackenzie in 1743?

Afore I knew it, a fortnight had passed. I’d been doin’ exercises to strengthen ma arms agin, introduced to a ‘gym’ where machines helped me get stronger. Thankfully, I’d been strong afore, so I wasna startin’ exactly from the beginning. But four weeks in a bed does make it disappear and I was annoyed to feel as weak as a kitten when I first started. By the end o’ the first week, I was feelin’ better though.

After that, I’d been taught how to transfer from the bed to a wheelchair and back again, how to dress, wash myself, empty my bladder (thankfully, I didna need to carry around a bag of ma own pish anymore) and take a shit (probably the hardest thing mentally I’ve had tae adapt te). I hadna realised all the everyday things I would nae longer be able tae do until this. I focused on all the big things, but it was all the little things I had taken for granted that I missed the most. It had been tiring, and I wasna yet verra good at much o’ it, but finally, I was starting to feel like I could maybe do somethings on ma own.

I wa’ just about to settle intae’ bed for an evening of British history when she appeared. I smelt her first. That herbal shampoo she uses drifting through the air. It was her that my plaid smelt of when I first woke up. It had long since worn off but I still held it at night, imagining her taking care of it when I wasna able to. I turned the wheelchair and looked at her. I could see Tommy and his wife watching us from the corner of my eye. We were more interestin’ than the TV this evenin’ apparently.
I nodded for her to go outside the room and leave our observers behind. Tae much of our ‘relationship’ had been aired in public. It was time tae shut them out. I followed her and moved to an area between the rooms overlooking the car park below. I had learnt what a car was by watching BBC Alba, I had learnt a lot about the 21st century in fact from watching it. There was a chair there, waiting.

I turned to look at her expectantly. She merely moved past me to stand by the window, looking out. A few minutes passed before she turned back to me, tears were running down her face and I ached to stand and wipe them away. Eventually, she sat down, looking at her hands, conjuring up the words.

“Ciamar a tha thu, Jamie?” I laughed, of all the things she could have said.

“Cus nas fheàrr, tapadh leat. Better, thanks.” She nodded, turning once again to her hands.

“Jamie, I’m so sorry. I had no idea Frank was going to show-up. I was just about to tell you and…”

She started crying again. I moved forward to take her hands in mine.

“Claire. Doesna matter anymore.” She stood quickly, pulling her hands away.

“How can you say that? I…God…I thought you were going to die. You came out of the seizure so badly. I couldn’t be in there anymore. And then Frank. Oh God! It’s such a mess.”

“Why three weeks?” I broke through her ramblings. I was beyond Frank Randall appearin’. I wanted tae know why she left me. She looked abashed, the tears starting again.

“I had to work out what it was I wanted, Jamie. Do I want to give up on my marriage for good this time? Do I want to be a renowned surgeon? Do I want to be the doctor who got struck off for having an unprofessional relationship with a patient? Do you know what they say about doctors who end up in relationships with former patients? They say it amounts to rape. That I’d be using my power over you, using transference to my own ends. I could lose my job Jamie.”

I rested my elbows on my knees and held my head in my hands. It was all sae complicated. Why did this bloody century made everythin’ so hard? I kent what she was sayin’ but I couldna accept it. Why would it ha’ to be this way? We were both adults, yes, she has been ma doctor but no for long. I kent the moment she held ma hand on that road that she wa’ the one I wa’ told about. Mo ban-druidh. My white lady.

“What decision?” I couldna bear to look at her, her next words would surely seal ma fate as either a man o’ worth, or a man worth nothin’.

I didna hear any words, but I did hear her movin. Her hands came to rest over mine on either side of ma head. Her lips kissed the top of ma head, the hair longer now than when last she saw me. I moved to put my arms around her as she kneeled on the floor. I dinna ken how long we spent like that, nor what would be our future, but to have her in ma arms right then… I felt like a man agin.

Chapter End Notes

Hmm, has she made a decision do you think? Poor Jamie, abandoned by indecisive Claire but at least John was there to pick up the pieces. Let me know what you think!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the comments again. I know I'm taking a few creative licenses and making some situations a little more dramatic than they might be in real life, but I do a lot of research and they are based on truth and reality, just embellished a bit.

I know my Claire is a bit annoying too, but she's a 21st century Claire, not a 20th, and I think that would make her different in some ways. She's essentially the same though, just a little less grown up.

Anyway, enjoy chapter 10!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who dreamed of being a surgeon. She had lost her mother and father in a car accident when she was five. Ever since spending three months in a hospital, she wanted to be the one to fix people. To make people feel better. She thought that she would want to do nothing else but that in her life. She didn’t want a big white wedding like her friends did. Or to have children. Or to live in the country and be part of the luncheon crowd whilst her husband provided the London salary. No. She wanted to wield a scalpel and put people back together. That was until one day, she met the person who made her feel whole again, something she had not felt since she was five, in that car, moments before the collision that took her parents away.

But what could she do? That person was a patient, technically a former patient, but nonetheless, her name was on his medical files. She knew that once she started down that road, the scalpel could be taken from her, that she could be suspended for crossing professional boundaries, that she might no longer be allowed to make people feel better anymore. Could she forego the feeling of completeness that he gave her? Could she go back to being a surgeon having known what it was like to have met the other half of your soul?

She wrestled with the decision for a long time. Thinking, arguing, debating, working out all the scenarios. Neither one worked. Both lead to pain and heartache. Which would cause the least pain? Leaving her career? Or leaving him? She hadn’t made the decision, she hadn’t been able to choose. So she went to see him. It had been a while since she had. Would the distance have dimmed her attraction to him? Or would he burn just as brightly? As he sat there, looking at her, she watched him burn. And she knew.

As she felt his arms go around her, she felt the flames take her too. She welcomed them, letting them engulf her with heat and passion and love. She grieved for the life she had lost but rejoiced in the life she would have with him. But, this wasn’t a fairy-tale. And I had just made the biggest decision of my life.

The next day, I was stood in front of the hospital director. She was a stern woman, hard but fair. She’d worked her way up to the position and she was damned if she was going to let my romance get out into the public. No, Maria Hildegarde was not going to make this easy.

“Claire. Are you mad?” I laughed at this, not a great idea under the circumstances but I couldn’t help myself. I felt the lightest I had in weeks, decision made, there was no going back after this.
“I do wonder that myself. But yes, I’m serious. I am intending to enter into a fully consensual, romantic relationship with a former patient.” I looked her in the eyes, it was there for all to see.

“And by former patient you mean the man you found in the middle of the road? The one still on the hospital patient list? Christ Claire!” She was furious and I couldn’t blame her really.

“I know, I know. It was a stressful situation for both of us. I was the first on the scene. I was the first person he saw when he regained consciousness all three times.” Maria was about the interject but I ploughed on. “I’m aware that people will say this is transference, but it’s not. There’s something else, something far deeper. I felt it that first night and…”

“Stop. I do not wish to hear anymore.” Maria leaned her elbows on the desk and covered her face with her hands, rubbing her eyes as if blighted by a headache. She was. It was me today. “Claire, you do know that I’m going to have to refer this to the ethics panel for consideration.” I nodded. I’d researched what would happen during those three weeks of hell. “Right. You’ve given me no other option but to suspend you pending the enquiry.” I looked down and nodded again. I swallowed back the tears that were forming. I knew what would happen but hearing it was another matter.

“I understand.” I turned to leave, but Maria quickly stood up and reached me before I got to the door.

“Claire, this I’m telling you as a friend. You are one of the best damned surgeons I’ve seen in a long time. I really don’t want to lose you over some silly affair of the heart! I know you’ve been having a hard time with Frank but this is stupid and you know it.” I bristled at the last comment.

“This has nothing to do with Frank, Maria. This is different. If you think I’ve made this decision lightly, then you really don’t know me at all.” I took hold of the door handle intending to leave.

“Fair enough, then this is my second piece of advice. Get him out of my hospital. I don’t want a scandal and neither do you. If he’s gone, he really is a former patient. Do you understand me Claire?” I looked at her outraged.

“Yes, I believe I do. But I will not risk his recovery to avoid…”

“Yes, you will Claire. If you ever want to practice again, you will.” She turned and walked back to her desk. I swallowed and left, not knowing what to do next.

I was heading back down to clear out my office when I bumped into John. He seemed to always be around these days. I’d heard from Jamie the previous evening how John had helped him with the TV and how they regularly played chess until the ‘wee hours’ of the morning. Today he looked troubled though and at once I started to imagine the worst possible scenarios.

“What is it? Is it Jamie? What’s happened?” He shook his head, put his finger to his lips and gestured to my office. He closed the door behind us and turned to face me.

“Before you say anything, I have to tell you that I am currently suspended.” He looked shocked and went to sit down.

“Jesus, Claire! Is this…”

“Yes, John, it’s because of Jamie.” He nodded, then recovered himself.

“It doesn’t matter. I need your help whether you’re Doctor or Miss or whatever you call yourself when suspended.” I smiled at this.

“Spill it then. What’s happened?”
“There’s something not quite right about Jamie.” At this I laughed.

“You mean other than he can’t speak properly, can’t walk…”

“No. Those are completely explainable. I mean the fact that he had 18th century weaponry when found, speaks Gaelic as his first language, has received two-hundred lashes from a Randall who looks like your husband and has no medical records at all.”

“What? Two-hundred lashes? From a Randall?” I sat down on my desk, completely shocked. That would explain the horrendous scars on his back then. But a Randall that looked like my husband? Frank would never do anything like that, he preferred words to inflict his wounds.

“I like that you picked up on that bit first. He told me about it over a game of chess. We’ve gotten to know each other quite well since you…well, since you… took a time out?” I glared at him.

“It’s not really any of your concern…”

“Well actually, it is. He’s my patient and in the weeks since your ‘misunderstanding’, the poor man has barely had a moment’s rest from his headaches. He’s been on the highest dose I can risk of anti-seizure meds and has been stressed as hell because he’s had to learn to live as ‘half a man’ as he put it without you by his side! Do you have any concept of what he’s gone through these past three weeks?” John was pissed and he’d only just gotten started. “He’s feeling useless, degraded, worthless and unlovable. You needed to be there for him Claire! You can’t just run away from everything like…”

“Like what, John?” Now I was angry.

“You do have a history of sticking your head in the sand and ignoring your problems. I know this, Joe knows this and now so does Jamie.” I looked away, tears rolling down my face. I hated that he had pointed this out to me, but he was right. I did. I brushed things under the carpet and left them until later.

“Well, I’m here now aren’t I? And I’ve binned my entire career so…”

“Stop right there. Re-evaluate what you’re saying. Jamie doesn’t need your resentment, he doesn’t deserve your resentment. If that’s what it’s going to be like, say goodbye to him now and let his friends help him get on with the rest of his life without you.”

Oh God! He was right. As his words hit me and my brain worked out the truth for what it was, the tears flooded out of me and before I knew it was I was wrapped in John’s arms, sobbing my guts out. I cried for the breakdown of my marriage, I cried for the suspension but mostly I cried for Jamie. Cried for what he had lost and what I was doing to him. All my indecision and faltering. All those signals I was sending him and for me to then just disappear. For the heart-break I saw in his eyes the night Frank appeared and the light that returned yesterday as we talked for hours by the window.

Eventually I ran out of tears, John passing me a box of tissues and giving me a moment to compose myself again. Finally, I stood up straight and looked him in the eyes.

“You’re totally correct. He doesn’t deserve any resentment and he’s not going to get any. Now, what were you saying about medical records?” John smiled slightly, a quirk of the right-hand side of his mouth.

“Three weeks ago, I set Nurse Christie the job of finding me his medical records from when he was hit by the axe last year. She’s found nothing. No records whatsoever for a James A.M.M. Fraser. No
vaccination records, no indication of any medical intervention whatsoever. It’s as if he doesn’t exist.” I sat down again. There was only one explanation as to why he couldn’t be found.

“Why would he lie to me, John? Why would he give me a false name?”

“I don’t think he is. I truly believe he’s confused and thinks what he’s saying is the truth. It sometimes happens that people start to believe fiction they watched or read about before an accident. Comas merge dreams and reality together. I think we need to talk to him again, see if we can find any abnormalities in his statements.” I nodded.

“Let’s go.”

I was in the gym, workin’ on my upper arms to help with the transfers from the floors we’d been practicin’. It had been hard. I was getting stuck half way tae the chair and I was gettin’ frustrated as more and more attempts went wrong. I knew I should be able tae do it. I had been luckier than some of the others. I still had ‘abdominal control’ due to where ma’ spine wa’ damaged but still, I struggled.

The nurses said it wa’ cause I wa’ tired and mebbe they were right. I had spent hours talkin’ to Claire. Catchin’ up and such. The memory o’ it made me smile. She was like the sun on a dark day. I kent she was gonna talk to the hospital director today about the situation as it was. She told me that she would most likely be suspended and I tried to talk her out of it. I kent she loved bein’ a doctor, but she would have none of it. Her decision was made, and we would just wait and see what happened next.

I heard someone enter the room and looked over my shoulder to see who it was. I wasn’t surprised to see either of them really. John had been making trips up from London at least twice a week to see me. He spent more time here than he did at his hospital, but I enjoyed his company and I assumed mine wasna sae bad either. I smiled at them and moved to where they were across the room.

“John, Claire.” There was somethin’ odd about their expressions. Smiles that didna quite meet their eyes, they were standing stiffly. “Problem?” They looked at each other and then took seats, both facin’ me, like I wa’ on trial for somethin’.

“Jamie, we need to ask you some questions about your past.” I swallowed nervously and looked down at ma’ hands. I had expected this conversation weeks ago. I kent that everyone had a past now, written down and kept forever. I had nae such past o’ ma’ own. I was new here, an outlander, a stranger in a strange land. I had nae records or histories or files. And they knew it too. I nodded, there wa’ nothin’ else I could do.

“Jamie, we started looking for your medical records and we’re struggling to find anything. Could you tell me when you had the accident with the axe?” John’s question made me laugh. I could hardly say 276 years ago now, could a’?

“July. Last year.” It wasna a lie, just not too precise. John nodded.

“And which hospital were you treated at?” I shook my head for this one.

“Nae hospital. Abbey.” This caused John to shoot a confused look at Claire.

“An Abbey? As in where monks live?” I nodded. “Right, so where was this Abbey?”

“France.” I was worried by how quiet Claire was bein’. She was not usually a closed-mouthed woman and I was starting to fear what she might be thinkin’.
“Right, the full name of the Abbey if you can.” I shook ma head causing the pain that had been there for nearly a month to worsen. “Why not, Jamie?”

“I’ll tell you why not, cause he’s lying, that’s why.” Claire’s voice was hurt and angry. I shook ma head again, pleading with her to believe me.

“No! Truth Claire.”

“Why are you lying? You couldn’t possibly have survived that injury by going to an Abbey in France. You would have needed a doctor, scans, proper medical treatment. Not prayers.” She’d stood and walked over to face me directly now. I couldn’a look away from her. Gone was the calm, beautiful woman who had looked after me. It was all replaced with distrust and suspicion. I kent that if I didna tell the truth, she would leave me. But if I did, I would lose her too. I was trapped.

“Truth. Abbey. France.” She opened her mouth to speak more but John cut her off, worried about the pained look I was surely wearing. I was startin’ to feel sick agin.

“Claire, just, calm down. Please.” John’s voice was soothing, placating. She nodded and moved back a few steps. “Right, so, let’s try something else seeing as I doubt we’ll ever see those medical records. How about where is home?” He looked at me pleadingly, begging me to tell them. But what could I say ta’ this? I had nae home. I’d been livin’ rough for six months before the axe and before that I was a mercenary in France.

I shrugged. I honestly didna ken what tae do anymore. I was losing them both and there was naught I could do ta stop it. I rested ma elbows on ma knees and hid ma head in ma hands. The nausea was worse, lights were flashing afore ma eyes agin, the pain thumping inside ma skull.

“Jamie. Please, tell us.” I swallowed the bile that was slowly making its way up ma gullet. I wanted tae hide, to sink into an oblivion that would stop the questions that I had nae answers to. I shook my head to try an’ clear it. Then there she was, her face, right in front o’ mine. She’d ripped ma’ hands away, making me look at her. Eyes were red, angry and tear-stained. I made them like that and ma heart nearly stopped with sorrow for what I had done.

“Jamie, right now, our relationship is on very shaky foundations. I thought we trusted one another, but you’re keeping things from me. We have room for some secrets Jamie, but not lies. You do know where you’re from, but you won’t tell me. You’re betraying my trust.” I could feel the tears gather as I looked into her whisky coloured eyes. She had spoken so softly, so calmly. She was begging me to trust her, but, how could I? My truth was unbelievable. “Please. For me. For us.” I nodded and let my head fall to rest my forehead against hers. Closing my eyes, I whispered the words that would confirm all her suspicions. I sobbed as I spoke the words knowing that I had sealed my fate.

“Lallybroch. Broch Mordha.”

Chapter End Notes

So there we are, the truth is starting to emerge and it's not going too well. We'll see what happens next on Wednesday!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

A step closer to the truth...

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the comments again. I'll try to respond to them when I get a minute. Back to work this week so it's all a bit busy hence why it's a bit late this evening. Here now though. Enjoy!

I arrived early the following morning to collect Jamie. He didn’t know it yet, but I was going to take him home, to Broch Mordha. I’d found it on the internet but saw no mention of Lallybroch. It didn’t worry me, probably just a house name or something. I wanted to see where he lived and to see if it could be adapted for him once he was released from hospital. I also wanted to know why he kept it a secret for so long. What was at Lallybroch that he didn’t want me to know about? A wife? Kids? Part of me hoped not, but another part of me hoped that he hadn’t been as alone as he claimed.

Just thinking about the day before almost brought me to tears again. I didn’t mean to break him, I just wanted him to start believing in us, trusting me. Instead I had ended up holding him whilst he shook for what seemed like an eternity. Eventually, we got him back to his room. It took both of us to put him into bed but once we had, John told me to leave him for a while. It was then that I spoke to the nurses about today. I don’t know what John did, he never said. He just grabbed my arm on the way past and almost dragged me out of the building. If I thought he was annoyed earlier, it was nothing to what I saw once we were outside. I felt awful for what I had done. But I was determined to make it right today.

Broch Mordha wasn’t too far from Inverness and we could easily make it there and back in a day. I had bought him some jeans and a couple more t-shirts, a thin jacket and a baseball cap. It was June now and the weather was warm, a summer different to any that I could remember. Joe had taken him some trainers a couple of weeks ago for him to use during his physio. I’d brought breakfast too, a change from his usual porridge.

He was still asleep when I arrived but soon woke up as I sat on the edge of his bed. He blinked a few times to clear his vision before giving me a sad smile.

“Morning Claire.” He was getting better slowly, some words coming more fluently. He put his arm behind his head and looked at me tiredly. I tried to make eye contact, but he wouldn’t, his gaze fixed slightly to one of side, hiding from me.

“Morning to you too. Did you sleep well?” He smiled and shrugged.

“John gave sleeping medicine. Dinna fash.” I nodded, I figured that John would have given him a helping hand last night.
“You ready for an adventure today?” He looked puzzled at this. “I have breakfast rolls and coffee. Then we’re going to get you ready for a little trip.”

“Trip? Where?” A tone of distrust entered his voice as he manoeuvred himself into a seated position. He’d gotten quite adept at using the balls of his fists as anchor points to pull the lower half of his body to where it was needed.

“Not far. It’s been what, seven weeks since you’ve even felt the fresh air. I’d a thought you’d be ready for a spell outside by now. Especially as it’s glorious weather. The sun has been shining for weeks already.” He took the proffered coffee and took a sip. He liked it black with three sugars. I’d found out early on he had a sweet-tooth but was gently trying to discourage him on the sugar front by making the spoonfuls smaller each time. He grimaced, evidently I had cut back a little too far.

“How long?”

“We should be back for dinner but we’ll pack extra of everything you need just in case. We could spend a night away if you fancied.” At this his eyes opened wide and he choked on the coffee he was tasting again.

“Night? Taegether?” I laughed at him and his incredulous expression.

“Yes, but separate rooms if you’re worried about your reputation.” He narrowed his eyes at me then and put the coffee down. When he looked back at me, worry was written across his face.

“Claire, no outside sae long. Scairt.” I took his hand in mine, enjoying the tingle I always got by touching him, stroking his knuckles gently with my thumb.

“You needn’t be scared Jamie. There’s the two of us now. You’re not alone anymore. I’ll be with you at every stage. We’ll go as slow or a fast as you like.” He nodded, swallowing his fear. A small smile was the response.

“Breakfast roll?” He quirked an eyebrow and nodded in the direction of the paper bags. I laughed and grabbed one for him. Food was always a way to get him feeling happy again.

As we ate, he listed all the things he would need for a day out. I already had a list from the nurses, but it was good to see him take charge. I packed his bag as he got showered and dressed. In just a few weeks, he had become so much more independent and confident with moving and taking care of himself.

His physiotherapist had commented the day before on how well he was adapting to the situation. Some patients found it very difficult mentally to even try to get back to a semblance of normality. Jamie had just taken it in his stride, so to speak. It had helped that he’d obviously been a very fit and strong young man when he had his accident. Good abdominal strength as well as upper body strength had made it so much easier for him. He’d not developed any spasticity yet in his legs, but this could still happen as the spinal shock wore off. We had to keep any eye out for that just in case.

As he came back into the room, I looked at him with so much pride. Brushing the tear away, I smiled and stood up. He smiled and took my hand, briefly squeezing it before letting go to grab his bag. Slinging it over the back of his wheelchair, he grabbed my hand again.

“So, ready?” I nodded and lead the way.

**

To say I wa’ nervous woulda been an understatement. I was terrified. I’d just been gettin’ used to
way things were in the hospital, inside a nice, safe, controlled environment. Now, I didna ken if I wa’ ready to experience how much everythin’ ha’ changed outside. I kent Inverness in 1743. I could find ma way around, where to get fed or find horses. Where to buy ink, paper, weapons, books. I doubted if anythin’ wa’ still the same.

We went down tae the ground floor in the ‘elevator’. I had been in it a few times now but still, I didna like it when the doors closed and I could feel it start movin’. Claire kent this and held ma’ hand as it moved. I was thankful it didna take long for the doors tae open agin and let me out.

Going out of the front doors was like enterin’ another world. I felt the breeze first as we got close. The bright light of the sun shone through all the windows (it was a rich world now with sae much smooth and perfectly clear glass in all the buildings) and my breath caught as Claire turned to me. Looking at me with such an expression of joy to be leavin’ the building wi’ me. The colours of her hair danced and shone, her eyes beautiful and happy. I smiled back and carried on out through the doors into the summer air.

The sound hit me first. Sae loud and everywhere. Cars moved quickly by the entrance and the sound of aeroplanes o’er head. I’d seen them on the TV but actually to watch them go overhead, hear the roar and witness them staying up there in the sky without flappin’ their wings. There were loud sirens and bigger, noisier cars moving past. Some carried people – a bus is what they are called. Some people moved past on metal frames wi’ two wheels. I didna know where tae look – in every direction was somethin’ new to watch.

Claire laughed at me, watching me carefully as I observed the world as it is now. I kent she must think I’m mad, that I musta seen all these things afore. But I hadn’t. And I needed to act as if I had lest she find out ma biggest secret.

“Dinna…recall…noise. Loud.” She laughed and nodded again.

“Yes, it is. But I don’t think you spent much time in cities, did you?” I shook my head. Nah, not like this one. “Right, let’s go. I’m parked just over there. The blue one.” I looked where she was pointing and saw the car she was headin’ towards. I swallowed ma nerves. I would ha’ to get in one at some point.

I’d not transferred into a car before so it took a few minutes o’ workin’ out how tae do it but I managed. Claire took ma bag, putting it on the seats behind us and folded ma’ wheelchair into the back of the car. It was all sae shiny inside. Plastic. A new material that seemed tae be everywhere in this century. Even clothes were made from it now. Not sae much wool and cotton anymore. I’d packed my plaid intae ma bag when Claire was filling in the paperwork with the nurses. I couldna bear to be parted with the link to ma past.

“Right, seat belt.” I musta looked confused as she tutted and reached across be to grab a strap from next tae the door. It ran across ma chest and lap before it fit into somethin’ like a buckle on ma right side. I pulled on the strap but it caught and wouldna budge. I looked at her agin. “It’s to stop you flying out of the windscreen if we have an accident. Don’t worry though, I’m not planning on using it for that purpose today.” I nodded, trying to not think about what I’d had for breakfast lest it make a reappearance.

The noise of the car was like I heard tha’ night near the stones. A loud rumblin’ noise that I could feel right in ma fingertips. The car started movin’ and all at once, I wanted tae get out again. I kent I didna travel well from the trips to France I’d suffered through in that past. Seems cars were nae different. I closed ma eyes and leaned ma head back against the cushion.

“Try looking at the horizon, or at least straight in front. It helps with car sickness.” She tried to make
her voice matter-o-fact but I could hear the concern so I opened ma eyes and smiled at her.

“Fine. Get seasick.” She nodded and briefly reached over to hold ma hand. I looked ahead as she suggested.

I saw nothin’ at all that I could recognise. Cars were everywhere. Rumbling around at speeds I knew full well could do damage ta people. I saw children running along the side of the roads and parents tryin’ to keep them from getting’ too close to the metal boxes. I saw motorbikes and buses. There was sae many lights, flashing and all different colours. The noise was the worst. It started tae deafen me and afore I knew it, I was strugglin’ tae breathe.

“Seas! Thoir toileachas do Claire. Seas.” I managed to gasp out the words in between shallow breaths. She slowed the car tae a halt and pulled it toward the edge of the road. “Feum air ëadhar.” I struggled to release the seat belt, I couldna pull it free. I felt trapped, nauseas, scairt.

I felt the seat belt let me go and I fumbled wi’ the handle for the door. Eventually it opened and I fell out onto the street. My head hit the ground but I didna care. I only felt the cold, hardness of the road beneath my hands and cheek. Resting ma forehead against the ground, I closed ma eyes and tried tae stop the spinning. I remembered Claire’s breathing trick, in for three and out for three. I tried and eventually, the world started comin’ back tae me.

I could feel Claires hands on me, holding ma hands, stroking my head. Then I heard her voice, talkin’ tae me soothingly, tellin’ me it would all be alright, that I was fine. I heard all the other voices around me, asking if they should call an ambulance, if I needed any help; I just needed them to all go away. After a few minutes, I rolled ontae ma side and opened ma eyes. Claire’s face wa’ the first thin’ I saw, worry and fear in her eyes. I tried tae smile but failed, instead I closed ma eyes again.

“You scared the shit out of me Jamie.” We were sat in a coffee shop right next to where he had decided to flip out. I was cleaning the scrape on his forehead and chin from where he had hit the ground earlier thankful for having a first-aid kit in the car. It wasn’t bad, but it would lead to questions being asked by John when we returned.

“Well. Sorry.” I nodded, I knew he was and I knew that he really wasn’t too blame. His last encounter with a car had resulted in massively life-changing injuries. Little wonder he was terrified.

With the help of a police officer, who just happened to be on the same road at the same time, we I managed to get him into his wheelchair. I explained what had happened and we agreed that maybe a drink would help. So here we were, drinking water and patching up yet more contusions. Jamie sipped his water quietly, not looking at anything in particular.

“Don’t be. You have nothing to be sorry about. I should be the one apologising. Again. I should have warned you about this. Given you some time to adjust to the idea.” I felt his finger under my chin tilt my head up to look into his eyes.

“No. No blame. Accident. Unfortunate.” I nodded and smiled at him causing him to smile back. I loved his smile, it lit up his entire face making him look so much younger. He’d aged in the weeks since he’d awoken. The last flush of youth stripped from him by circumstance, but he hadn’t let himself become bitter, not by any stretch.

“Do you think you could manage to carry on? Or would you like to go back to the hospital?” He thought about it for perhaps a minute, I could see the cogs turning as he thought through each option.

“Continue. Night with Claire.” He grinned cheekily and I nearly kissed him right then. I laughed
instead and stood to pack everything away.

We got loaded back into the car without incident and continued on our way. I put the window down for him to get some fresh air and put the radio on to block out some of the road noise. He was calmer this time and, knowing what to expect, was dealing with it. As we left the city centre, he stared out of the window in amazement at all the different buildings. We crossed the Moray Firth and his face as we drove over the bridge was a picture. It was as though he’d never seen it before. I turned to look at him, his response was to smile like a kid at Christmas.

I followed the directions north-west of Inverness and it wasn’t long before we passed signs for Broch Mordha. As we did, I noticed his demeanour change. He turned to look at me, an expression of such hurt on his face for not telling him exactly where we were going. I pulled over just in the village and turned the engine off. I turned to face him, he stared determinedly out of the window instead.

“Jamie…”

“Why, Claire?”

“Why what?”

“Why not…s…s…say where?” He turned to me then, anger in his eyes.

“I thought it would be a surprise.” He laughed humourlessly.

“Surprise. Aye. Tis.”

“I wanted to see where you lived, to see if it would be suitable for when you’re ready to go home.” He looked away and swallowed nervously. “It won’t be long until you’re ready to be discharged.” He nodded. “So, are you going to tell me where to find Lallybroch or shall I ask for directions?”

“Dinna ken. Nae cars last time here.” He was whispering now, face hidden, his body turned away from me to face the door.

“Fine. Be like that. I’ll go and ask at that Post Office.”

I had no idea what was going on in his head. He was shutting down again and this scared me. Just what was he so afraid of? Part of me felt bad for pushing him like this, but the simple fact was, I needed to know what he was hiding. I glanced back over my shoulder briefly to check on him. I knew he couldn’t go anywhere but after the incident in Inverness, I didn’t want to leave him by himself at all.

The Post Office was actually more like a village shop with bread, milk and eggs along with various other treats and tinned food for sale. The woman behind the counter was short with dark, almost black hair. She was friendly and strangely familiar looking at the same time. She was regarding me curiously but smiled at me when I walked in.

“Excuse me, I wonder if you could give me some directions. I’m looking for Lallybroch.” She looked stunned at my question and then chuckled.

“Why on Earth would yer wan’ tae go there?”

“Erm, my friend is from around here and he mentioned it.”

“Friend? From around here? What’s his name? I ken everyone from this village.”
“Fraser. James Fraser.”

“Fraser yer say? We’ve no’ had any Frasers in the village for a verra long time. Nae, the last Fraser was in the 1700s, afore Culloden.” I stared at her in surprise. “The story goes that the last Fraser disappeared one night near the fairy stones but tis an auld wive’s tale. We have a few stories here abouts like that. Folklore and superstition is rife in the Highlands. We all love a good ghost story.”

“Right. Well, he knows Lallybroch and would like to see it.”

“Lallybroch was the name of the Fraser lands, Broch Tuarach. But nae one has lived there in many a year. Nae roof on the house last I heard. About to fall down. T’would be dangerous for yerself to go and visit it I reckon. But if you insist, just follow the road through the village and yer’ll see a track on the right just past the kirk. Just follow on there, you’ll find it in say ten miles or so.”

I thanked her and left the shop, her words sinking in. No Frasers in the village and nobody living at Lallybroch for so long the roof had caved in. He’d lied again. Enough was enough.

She didna say anythin’ as she got back intae the car. She just started driving agin’ in the direction of the kirk. I could tell that she’s been told somethin’ in the shop to break her faith in me again. I couldn’a lie tae her anymore, but could I trust her with my truth? Would she believe me? I didna have tae wait long tae find out.

It took mebbe twenty minutes to cover the ten miles to lallybroch. The road was bumpy and if I felt sick on smooth roads, I felt like I wanted tae die on this one. I could feel ma heart beating, fit tae burst as we got closer and closer. I kent ma time was up, that I could nae longer cover up the secret I had kept for all these weeks. I saw the gateway first. Images of red coats filled ma mind, I could still feel the sting of Randall’s blade across ma back as I was beaten. Then I saw the house and ma heart broke intae sae many pieces. I couldn’a help the noise, it was a wounded and feral sob that came from the depths of ma soul. It was gone. Ma home, ma family, ma history. It was all gone. Now Claire would leave me too. And I would be truly alone in ma misery.

Chapter End Notes

So, can he trust her? Let me know what you think.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Jamie finally tells Claire the truth but will she believe the impossible?

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the comments. It's great to hear your what you think and thank you for taking the time to let me know. It means a lot. I will respond to everyone who commented on the last chapter today.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The noise that erupted from him will be forever in my memory. I’ve never heard such pain and sorrow before. It was so real, so vivid, so brutal that I knew it was the truth. It wasn’t an act, Jamie truly believed that this was his home. And it was gone, just a shell of a house remaining. I held him as best I could across the centre console, stroking his back and his hair as the grief poured out of him. He kept murmuring something about Jenny and how he was sorry. My heart clenched each time I heard the name, a spike of ice that hurt more than I was willing to let on.

Eventually, he calmed down. His breathing started to ease and he sat up again. He sat staring at the derelict building in front of us. Disbelief written all over his face. I just waited. I knew he’d start talking when he was ready. It was time for him to tell his story.

“Last time here, was home. Four years gone.” I nodded. He looked at me then, deep into my soul. “Please, Claire. Hard truth. Unbelievable. But real. Heart will ken true words.” I nodded, I would listen with all my heart.


He told me everything. It all just flowed out of him in stuttering sentences, the dam opened and nothing could be done to stop it now. He told me of his family, his sister Jenny, the attack from the red coats, his flogging at the hands of Jonathan Randall, how he hadn’t gotten to bury his father or even to see his grave. He spoke of his time in France as a mercenary with Ian, his best friend. The story of the axe blow and his recovery in the Abbey in France, how he had no sight for over a month. He spoke of how he was travelling to his uncle’s castle when he tried escaping through Craigh na Dun only to find himself catapulted nearly three hundred years into the future.

He told me it all, gripping my hands in his, looking into my eyes throughout. I could see the truth, it was there, staring me in the face all along. The clothes, the weapons, the scars. His Gaelic language, his confusion at all things modern. I looked at him and saw him for the first time. He really was a Highlander from the eighteenth century. It wasn’t an elaborate construction in his mind. He was James Fraser, Laird Broch Tuarach.
I looked away when he finished and let go of his hands. I had to have space for a moment to let it all sink in. I got out of car and started walking towards the house. I heard his door open and his voice calling me, but I walked on, just for a few metres. As I stood in the kailyard, I could see it all, exactly how he described it. I could see him tied up in the archway and flogged. I could see the marks in the woodwork by the door left by the red coats. It was clear now.

“Claire?” He was scared. Scared that I didn’t believe him, scared that I would lock him away in an institution for being mad. Little wonder he had not told me anything. I wouldn’t have in his position. Now it all made sense. But what did the future hold for him? For us?

I hadna realised I wa’ holdin’ ma breath until she turned and walked back towards me. I had told her everythin’. It had spilled outta me, I sae wanted tae tell her my all, my history. I willed her to believe me, to listen tae the words and know the truth of who I was. Who I am.

She walked to my side of the car and knelt in the dust by my open door. I looked at her, trying to see if my words had made sense tae her, if she believed me truly. She simply put her hands on either side of me face and looked deep intae ma eyes and I saw. I laughed with relief, the joy I felt surge through me was sae great, I felt I could fly. Taing Dhia!

“I believe you Jamie. I don’t understand it yet. But I believe you.” At this I wrapped my arms around her and held her as close tae me as I could.

“Mo chridhe, mo Sorcha.” I whispered my words into her hair. “Luaidh mo chèile, tapadh leat mo gràidh!” She pulled away from me slightly, looking straight into my eyes.

“I love you Jamie.” The moment she pressed her lips to mine, the world stopped. All I could feel was her kiss, her hands holding me close. I threaded my fingers through her curls, feeling their soft, silkiness for the first time. I could feel our hearts beating as one as I ran my tongue against her lip and she let me in, to kiss her deeper. When we finally broke apart, I rested my forehead against her and closed my eyes.

“Tha mo ghion ort, Claire. Nae more lies. Nae more secrets. Only truth.” She nodded and smiled. Eventually, I made it tae the ground with her. Wrapped in each other’s arms, we kissed and whispered our feelings for hours in the shadow of my former home. My heart had felt sae sore at seeing Lallybroch, broken and empty. I kent I had nae family left, no link to ma past. But that thought didna pain me as much as it once might have for I now knew where my new home was, or rather who. Claire was the keeper of my heart and soul, and I hers.

We finally returned to Broch Mordha in the late afternoon. It had been an emotionally draining day for both of us and neither fancied the return journey to Inverness. I parked up by the Post Office again but this time, I helped Jamie also get out of the car. He wanted to have a look around the village where he had grown up three hundred years earlier. It seemed strange to think those words, but they were the truth. I was in love with a 300-year-old Highlander.

We both entered the post office and I said hello again to the lady behind the counter. She smiled in recognition and then looked at Jamie. He was busy looking for snacks having decided that breakfast rolls were only good up until midday and we’d gone well beyond that. I watched the woman’s face go from polite welcome to puzzled curiosity at seeing him. He hadn’t worn the baseball cap, so his head was auburn fuzz with the traces of scars still prominent. It wasn’t his scars though, that caught her eye.

Finally, he’d decided on what he was going to snack on until dinner and returned to my side. It was
then that he looked at her properly. His face paled as he took her in.

“Weel, you’re certainly a Mackenzie if ever I saw one.” He coughed and snorted at this. Evidently, he’d heard that before.

“Aye.” He nodded in her direction. “Definitely Fraser.” She was taken aback by this statement and not just by his directness.

“Weel, aye, there are Frasers a long time back. But I’m a Murray, no’ a Fraser.” He nodded thoughtfully.

“Janet Fraser, Ian Murray?” She nodded again, baffled by his knowledge of her family tree.

“Aye, in the 1740s.” He nodded at this. “Wait, yer said his name was James Fraser.” She addressed this question at me, so I simply nodded.

“Aye, James Mackenzie Fraser.” The pride in Jamie’s voice as he spoke his name made me smile. She nodded again, a question on her lips that she daren’t quite ask.

“Weel, I could discuss family history all day but I ken you’re probably ready to get back to civilisation. I’ll take them for yer.” She started tapping in the prices of the items Jamie had selected and putting them into a bag.

“Well, actually, I was wondering if you could tell me the name of a B&B nearby that has downstairs accessible rooms.” I looked at Jamie as if to highlight my point. She looked at Jamie again and I could see he was starting to get uncomfortable with the scrutiny.


“He wants to know, as do I, what the question is that you’re desperate to ask him.” She nodded, shocked at my bluntness.

“Och, it’s nothing. Just, weel, it was a Fraser named Red Jamie who disappeared. He was the last of the Fraser line in these parts. You look like a Mackenzie and he was half Mackenzie you see. But that would be…”

“Impossible?” Jamie quirked an eyebrow at her and took his bag of goodies. “Not dead after accident, impossible too.” He smiled and turned around to leave the shop leaving her looking absolutely incredulous.

“How much do I owe you?” She finally turned to look at me again, disbelief and awe written all over the face.

“Nothin’. Nae charge for him.”

“Are you sure?” I looked around, struggling to believe how this place was surviving in such a small town. She nodded. “Ok. What about the B&B?”

“Oh, try Mrs Byrd’s along the high street. She has downstairs rooms that’ll suit him, puir man.” I smiled again.

“Thank you, I appreciate all your help today.” She smiled distractedly at me and I walked out.

Jamie had made his way a little further down the main street to the Cuilc and stopped to watch the
ducks. He smiled at me as I approached and took a seat on the bench beside where he had stopped. He offered me a chocolate button and I laughed at his choice of snacks.

“I did say I might be creating a monster with the chocolate cake.” He laughed and nodded.

“Aye. Did.” He took my hand and carried on looking at the water.

“That woman in the shop, you think she looked like…”


“Do you think she suspects who you are?” He shrugged, finishing the buttons and starting on a packet of crisps. I chuckled at his blatant disregard for the proper order in which to consume food.


“Yes, it certainly is.”

We sat for a while longer before making our way to the B&B. I grabbed our bags out of the car and we made our way the rest of the way down the street. The lady in the post office was right, there was an accessible room with more space and wider doors. Strangely, Mrs Byrd wasn’t surprised at all to see us. In fact, I didn’t even need to ring the doorbell before the door was opened and we were ushered inside. Our room was already prepared, and dinner was to be ready at 6pm. Jamie looked at me with a knowing smile and thanked Mrs Byrd for everything. Neither of us said anything about only one room being readied.

I lay on the bed and let Jamie have the bathroom first. He’d already told me that one of the hardest things to get used to was that he no longer knew when he needed to go to the toilet having no feeling anymore. Thankfully, he had retained bladder and bowel control but still, he found it disconcerting to never feel the urge to go.

I must have dozed off. The next thing I knew, Mrs Byrd was knocking on the door asking if she could bring our dinner in. Jamie was asleep on the bed next to me, a look of utter peacefulness on his face. I brushed a kiss over his forehead and there it was, his sleepy smile. Getting up, I opened the door and indicated for Mrs Byrd to come in quietly. She looked over at Jamie and nodded.

“How long since his accident?” I smiled, evidence of the Broch Mordha news agency in action.

“7 weeks. I found him on May 1st.”

“Beltane? You found him? You didna ken him before then?” She looked at me closely and I was sure they knew the truth.

“No. I found him in the middle of the road near Craigh na Dun. Do you know it?” She stood up straight, shocked.

“Aye, I do.” We looked at each other in full knowledge that we both knew what had happened.

“Claire?” Jamie was slowly wakening, the smell of food and the whispering voices bringing him around.

“Right then, I’ll leave you both to it. Anything else you want, anything at all, you just knock on the
second door on the left.”

“Thank you, Mrs Byrd.”

“Och, call me Fiona. Mrs Byrd was ma mother-in-law.” I smiled and nodded. She took one last look at Jamie as he transferred to his wheelchair and closed the door behind her.

We ate at the table whilst I told Jamie about the strange conversation I’d had with our host. He laughed.

“Will Laird Broch Tuarach next.” I nodded and joined in with him.

“I’d better ring John after dinner and let him know you’ve survived your first day out in the big wide world.” Jamie nodded, pondering something over his glass of whisky – a wee treat in celebration.

“Claire, need tae… John needs tae… aye?” I knew he and Jamie had gotten close in the past few weeks and it was John who had noticed that something wasn’t quite right about the whole situation, but this?

“I don’t know Jamie. How do you think he’ll take it?” He shrugged.

“When back, will…story know. Aye?”

“If you’re sure.” He nodded and smiled.

I rang the hospital first, confirming that Jamie would be out for the night but back tomorrow. Then I rang John. He was insistent on details and I could see Jamie grimacing when I recounted the episode on the pavement in Inverness. Even as I was talking, it seemed impossible that it had only been that morning. It was like it was in a different lifetime. And maybe it was. Maybe my life had only just begun the moment I met the real James Fraser.

He wanted to talk to Jamie, so I passed the phone across. It was the first time Jamie had used a phone and at first, he looked a little unnerved. As I watched him cope with another aspect of this modern world for the first time, I was amazed at how well he was doing. He picked things up so easily it seemed. I wondered just how well I would have done if the roles and been reversed. Would I have managed as well as he was? I watched as he laughed at something John said. He noticed me staring and smiled at me. I was so lucky to have found him.

Eventually, we agreed it was time to retire. Both of us were exhausted and he had to get back to his physio and training tomorrow. We each used the bathroom and changed into our night clothes whilst each other was out of the room. He was in bed by the time I was finished with my teeth and already on the edge of sleep. As I lay next to him, he turned his head to look at me.

“Shouldna same room. Not right.” I nodded and smiled at him as I snuggled into his side.

“Always thinking of my reputation Mr Fraser.” He wrapped his arm around me and buried his face into my hair. I thought he had drifted off when he spoke.

“How will manage Claire? Nae work, nae records, nothin’.” I moved away slightly to look at him. Resting my hand above his heart.

“We’ll figure something out.” He nodded gently. “Besides, I think this entire village will be about ready to give you the keys to the manor by the morning. I assume a message has been passed round that one, James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser, has been spotted alive and well…ish… only three hundred years since he disappeared.” At this Jamie let out a loud laugh that lasted a good long
while. I couldn’t help but join in. It felt good to laugh in a man’s bed again.

He managed to turn himself to face me, grabbing the trouser legs of his pyjamas to make his limbs go where he wanted them to. His fingers traced over my eyebrows, my cheekbones, my lips. There was just enough light left with the summer dim to let us see each other in monochrome.

“Claire, dinna want tae ruin life.”

“Oh Jamie.” I kissed him then, letting my heart tell him what his needed to hear. That I would love him forever no matter what, that I would protect him with every fibre of my being and that I would be by his side always. We slept wrapped in each-other’s arms for the first night of many, content that we had truly now found each other.

Chapter End Notes

So she did! And they're gonna live happily ever after... maybe. Next chapter up on Wednesday. Let me know what you think!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

So what happens now Claire knows the truth and the entire village of Broch Mordha knows that Laird Broch Tuarach has returned a little later than planned?

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the wonderful comments I received for the last chapter. I'm glad you enjoyed it. Of course she was going to believe him. But will John when he finds out?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sun awoke us both in the morning, gently shining through the curtains and pulling us into wakefulness. I’d slept soundly and peacefully for the first time in months. Years mebbe. Wi’ out the need for drugs, my arms wrapped around Claire. For as long as I can remember I’ve slept lightly, ready for attack at any second. My weapons were always within arm’s reach, above or below where I lay ma’ head. No’ anymore. Now I could sleep deeply. Safely.

I kent we would ha’ to go back to real life soon but I wanted this to last forever. Just the two of us, nothing else interfering, hidden from the world and everythin’ tha’ wa’ complicated. Nae questions or suspicions. Nae more operations or scans. Just layin’ here, with Claire in ma’ arms wa’ enough to make me feel like a whole man again.

Her eyes fluttered open to look at me as I traced a finger down her face. She looked at me wi’ so much love and I felt my heart nearly burst. I kissed her then, gently. Before long, her tongue swept over my lips, begging them to open, to allow her to kiss me more deeply. The moan I let out surprised me but I did as she asked and before we knew it, my hand was inside her t-shirt, splayed against her ribs, savouring her smooth skin, inching upwards. She was writhing beside me, desperate for me to touch her more intimately. I broke the kiss and looked down her body, pressed close to mine, begging for more. I moved away suddenly, rolling onto my back, my arm covering my eyes as I tried to catch my breath.

“What’s wrong Jamie?” She was worried, her tone concerned. I could feel her hand touching my neck, checking my pulse. It was racing, I could feel ma’ heart trying to break out o’ ma’ chest.

“Not yet, Claire. Not ready.” I laughed at myself. I doubted I ever would be ready. One thing had been made blindingly obvious ta me in the last few minutes.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have pushed you…”

“Dinna fash. Need tae…” I pulled myself to sitting and made to get out of the bed. Her hand on ma arm stopped me and I looked down into her face.

“Jamie, if it’s about...”
“Claire, fine. Nae concerns.” She nodded and I got onto the wheelchair.

Once inside the bathroom, I allowed myself to release the frustration I was holding. I slammed my fist into the tiled wall, a burst knuckle spattered blood over the ceramic but I didna care. I lay ma head on the sink and counted tae ten, tryin’ to calm ma temper. It wasna Claire’s fault, she wa’ just being normal, wantin’ that connection that occurs between fully functioning men and women. But I wasna fully functioning, a fact that was made so painfully clear to me this morning.

I’d kissed a few lassies but never actually had the opportunity to bed one. My father was an honourable man and he’d wanted to make sure he raised an honourable son. He’d instilled in me a respect for women which meant I had ne’er slept with a lass. If I wasna prepared to wed them, I shouldna be sticking ma’ cock inside ‘em.

So here I was, twenty-three, a virgin and wi’ no chance of ever gettin’ tae do that. My broken back had taken tha’ away too. I would ne’er be able to satisfy Claire, and I would ne’er give her bairns. Ma heart felt sore for that.

I didn’t say anything when he finally emerged, didn’t mention the bruised and blooded knuckles, or the blood left on the tiles where he’d thumped them. I didn’t say anything as he grabbed his bag and proceeded to work through the absolutely huge array of drugs he now needed to take in order to stay alive, well and functioning. He swallowed them all without comment, used to it after several weeks.

Nothing more happened in Broch Mordha. We ate breakfast quietly, Mrs Byrd gave us a healthy discount for the night, and then we left. It wasn’t until we were about twenty-minutes into the journey that Jamie finally made a sound. I wasn’t quite expecting it, but it was a relief all the same. He started laughing.

He’d picked up the invoice for the B&B out of interest to see what it cost most likely. 18th century money was a little different to nowadays. It was this that made him start laughing. Quietly at first and then it built until I couldn’t help smiling along with him.

“What is it?” This set him off again.

“Name hotel…” He struggled to get his sentence out, every few words had him in stitches again.

“Lazy tower…!”

“And?”

“Lallybroch! Lazy Tower!” Suddenly, I understood and joined in with him. We had spent the night at Lallybroch after all.

We got back to the hospital in good time and I pulled into the car park. I wasn’t ready to give the care of him back over yet, somethings still needed to be said and I think he felt the same. He grabbed my hand and placed a kiss on my knuckles, holding it against his lips.

“Sorry, this morning, just, different. Too different. No’ ready yet.” I nodded. I knew exactly what he had found out that morning and I knew he would need time to get accustomed to that.

“Aye, I ken, Jamie.” He smiled at my atrocious accent and leaned over to kiss me properly.

“Need get better accent. Lady Broch Tuarach needs brogue right.” I laughed at his ridiculous emphasis on the rolled r’s and kissed him again.

“Was that you asking me to marry you?” He looked shocked and turned away.
“Claire…”

“It was a joke Jamie, don’t worry.” He turned back to me, a serious look on his face.

“Would…could…wed one day? When free from…” I swallowed, would one day I marry him? Would I want to get married again? I nodded.

“Yes Jamie. One day, I will marry you. If you wanted to.” He smiled a huge smile that lit up his face completely. His eyes shone brightly as he held my hands in his. He kissed me then and the world disappeared around us for just a little while longer.

It was later that week when we finally told John the story. I helped Jamie out this time. He’d been working hard on his physiotherapy, making up for our lost day, but was finding speech increasingly harder as the week progressed. Words were more muddled, more words were omitted, pronouns had disappeared again, and verbs were as always a huge struggle for him. He’d also fallen a few times when transferring from one place to another, his right arm shaking and failing when he needed it. John had immediately taken him for another MRI and CT scan. The results hadn’t been good.

Our meeting took place in my old office. John and I sat either side of Jamie, giving him our support as John showed us the scans on his laptop. The scar tissue build-up in Jamie’s brain was causing short-circuits leading to the chronic headaches and the seizures. As the scar tissue was hardening, it was having a more detrimental effect on Jamie’s health. To make matters worse, each seizure and the fall in Inverness had caused just a little more damage to the already weak blood vessels, leading to this definite weakness that was manifesting itself on Jamie’s right side.

“The simple matter is, your brain has been through just a little too much in too short a period of time. It’s not having a chance to heal fully before more damage can occur.” Jamie had his head in his hands by this point, rubbing his fingers through the roughly inch long, auburn hair. He was shaking so I grabbed his plaid and put it around his shoulders. At once, he grabbed the wool and held it closer to him. “If you’d only been treated by a doctor after your axe injury…”

“Truth, Claire. John have truth.” I nodded at Jamie’s whispered interruption. We’d agreed earlier on in the week how we would play this out. As soon as John mentioned anything to do with home or medical records or the past, we would tell him.

“What’s he saying, Claire?” John looked at me questioningly.

“John, Jamie has a past that is a little hard to accept. I believe him. Without a doubt, I believe him. But we need you to listen, with an open mind, and an open heart. Can you do that?” Jamie looked at his friend pleadingly, as did I. We both needed him to believe us, so that he could help us moving forward. Finally, John nodded and sat down facing us this time.

I told most of the story, Jamie filling in details I missed or things he wanted to add to make it easier to believe. An hour later, and John was staring out of the window, a look of profound shock on his face. He’d asked questions, cross-examined, put Jamie through his paces, even got out the neurological scans again to see what part of the brain this delusion could be generated by. In the end though, shock won out. As the truth started to sink in, he went from disbelief to incredulousness.

“Well, that’s answers a lot of questions doesn’t it?!” Jamie raised an eyebrow at this and John laughed when he turned around. “Well, yes. Why you always beat me at chess for example. No smart phones so you had to find a way to entertain yourself!” At this Jamie smiled.

“So, an 18th century Highlander. A laird no less.” Jamie nodded and turned away. The prognosis wasn’t looking too good for his recovery right now and it was weighing heavily on him. “Well, let’s
see if I haven’t got a 21st century trick up my sleeve for your poor, battered brain then.” At this Jamie looked up, as did I.

“I’ve been visiting you lots not just because I like having my ass handed to me on the chess board but because I’ve been assessing your suitability for a trial I’m intending to run. I believe I can certainly make some improvements if not fully cure your issues.”

“How?” It was my turn to speak. I narrowed my eyes at John and warned him against giving false hope with a miracle cure.

“Stem cells. I’ve been working on a way of isolating and growing a certain type of stem cell that only grow in the brain. There were found a few years ago and I think I’ve worked out a way to use them. Jamie’s case is perfect for this.”

“Stem cells?” Jamie looked at us, totally confused and feeling out of the loop.

“You, Jamie, are made from tiny things called cells. You have different types; skin, nerve, muscle, brain, blood. Stem cells are special types of cells that can grow into any kind. I can make you new brain cells.” Jamie pondered this, looking at the carpet, eyes scanning as he worked it out and processed this new information. I felt for him, it was a lot to take in. Eventually, he looked up and nodded.

“How?”

“Right, first, I’ll need some of your brain cells.” At this Jamie rightly looked very nervous, he evidently didn’t feel like he could stand to part with any more at the minute. “Don’t worry, it’ll be non-eloquent, not-used to control you, that I take. Just a little. Then I can get these cells and grow some of the good ones. All that’ll be needed is to inject them back into your brain when they’re ready.”

I saw all the blood drain from Jamie’s face as he took this in. I knelt down beside him and took his hands in mine.

“What are the risks with this procedure?” I looked at John, begging him to be truthful.

“As with anything concerning the brain, it’s delicate. Inserting the needle into the wrong place, causing more damage with invasive surgery as well as all the normal anaesthetic risks. It might not work even. I mean, I don’t know. There’s been success in chimps, but this is the first human trial. I don’t even have the license yet. It’s processing.”

“What if no?” Jamie watched my face as John outlined the future as it currently stood. Increasing risk of seizures, possibility of a stroke when the weakened blood vessels burst more dramatically than they currently were, more medications to reduce his blood pressure to minimise the risks, headaches becoming worse and more frequent.

Jamie looked deep into my eyes, asking for help with the right response. Should he say yes and take a risk? Or should he stick with what he has, debilitating headaches that were only getting worse with time and the increasing risk of seizures.

“It’s up to you Jamie. I will love you no matter what you decide to do. Only you can make this decision. It’s a trial, so it might work, but it might not. Trust what your heart is telling you.” He nodded. Minutes passed, the clock on the wall beating out the time, before he looked up and smiled at John.

So it was, that within 24 hours, Jamie was scheduled into theatre for a biopsy. We’d taken time to explain everything to him, how he would be anaesthetised, that a small hole would be drilled into his skull and a needle inserted. He listened carefully, nodding to show his understanding. When we’d finished, he excused himself and went to throw-up in the restroom next door.

I waited in the family waiting room whilst the surgery was taking place. It was a fairly routine procedure these days but even those carry huge risks. I couldn’t help but worry for him and I wished more than anything to be allowed in that theatre, to help look after him. I hadn’t held a scalpel in weeks now, hadn’t healed anyone save Jamie’s soul. It was enough, but right now I felt useless.

It was less than an hour later when John came out to see me. He smiled and nodded. He had what he needed and would get down to his lab in London to get working on the next steps. I hugged him then and went to see Jamie in recovery. Another bald spot covered in a gauze dressing adorned his head now and I feared that he would never get his beautiful auburn curls back again. I remembered them, blood covered but vibrant in the A&E that night. I recalled the moment they were sheared off, how they fell to the floor in clumps, matted together.

I stroked his head, his cheek, his hand. Then sat and waited for him to come around. I shouldn’t be here yet technically, but the nurses looked at me sympathetically. I smiled when he opened his eyes fully. He’d been blinking and muttering for a while, but when you finally come around, it’s like you’ve never been asleep.

“Finished?” I nodded.

“Yes. Step one done.” He smiled. We had hope again and right now, that was enough.

I ha’ tae stay in bed for a day after the surgery but then I wa’ back working on getting ready to leave the hospital. I had heard mention that mebbe in another week, I could move out. I didna really ken where I would be goin’ but Claire didna seem concerned. I asked her one night and she simply said ‘home’ so I said nothin’ and carried on.

It had been another hard week. I’d had ma’ second round of vaccinations, another x-ray on ma pelvis and more physio. They’d tried to get me walking wi’ leg braces but I couldna do it, not wi’ ma’ right side bein’ sae weak at present. But to stand agin and feel tall once more was exciting. I looked at Claire and saw the tears in her eyes as I stood at nearly ma’ full height, e’en if only for a few moments.

Claire spent all her time wi’ me now since she was suspended. She helped wi’ all ma’ exercises and they taught her how to help me if I fell or needed assistance in any other parts of ma life. Some were embarrassing, and I recalled bein’ mortified as she was taught some of the thins I might need help wi’. At one point, we were both called into an office for a discussion about sex and paraplegia by a counsellor linked to the department. I wanted to curl up an’ hide for tha’ one but Claire took notes. She wasna disgusted or put off by anythin’, and I loved her e’en more for it.

Tom Christie came to see me agin after the latest x-rays and decided that it was time for my ‘scaffolding’ tae be removed. Ma pelvis and femur were knitted back taegether and healing nicely. More physiotherapy would be needed to help straighten ma pelvis agin but I didna see any need point – twas no’ like I was gonna be walkin’ any time soon.

So, I found myself waking in the grey room once agin. Nae windows, just dim lights, and Claire, holdin’ my hand as I came around from the anaesthetic. This time with nae bars poking through ma’
skin, just small dressings coverin’ stitches. I’d been out for a few hours wi’ this one and didna wake up tae well. I vomited several times and had a drip put intae the back of ma hand agin to help me flush the poisons out.

One week later, in July, two months after I had entered that hospital, I left. It was an emotional day for me. I was leaving the safety and comfort of a small world to enter a much bigger, unknown place. I didna ken ma role in this new century or how I would cope with my new body, for that’s how it felt.

I had made friends there, Joe, Malva, Tommy, John. They all appeared tae say goodbye. Joe was a close friend of Claire’s so I kent I would be seein’ him and his wife soon. Malva cried a little as she hugged me, said I wa’ brave and tha’ I would be fine. I nodded, a little overcome. I would need to be. Tommy, my ward companion would be going home soon to face his own trials. His spine was injured higher than mine so had nae feeling below his chest. He’d found everything considerably harder than I, a fact that was not lost on me, reminding me that mebbe I had been lucky. We promised to stay in touch and tae meet-up afore the year was over. John merely shook my hand and said he would see me later. I kent when, he was comin’ over to play chess the next day. Said he’d been reading books and had some new moves. We would see about tha’ one.

I got into Claire’s car once again and she put my bags and wheelchair in the ‘boot’.

“Ready?” I took a deep breath and nodded.

“Aye. Ready.”

Chapter End Notes

The procedure I’m describing is real and as mentioned, is currently waiting to go through trials or at least the trials are in the early stages. It’s very exciting science that uses only adult somatic cells so ethically it’s on pretty safe ground. Stem cells have the power to really change lives after serious illness or injury and I pay a lot of attention to the scientific advancements in this area.

Let me know what you think so far!
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Time for Jamie to go home with Claire.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the fantastic compliments again. Xxx

I pulled the car onto the drive and turned to look at Jamie. He looked calm, his face not betraying any emotion. He’d been getting better at doing that over the last couple of weeks. No one was quite sure anymore just what he was feeling or if he was in any pain. His expression just remained neutral until someone asked him. Then the stock answer was that he was fine, or good or his new favourite word, ok. Since the diagnosis on the brain scarring, he’d started to shut down a little. Pulling back from those that care about him. It was concerning, but understandable. It was just his way of dealing with the unknown.

“You ready to come home?” He smiled at me then, a smile that lit up his face. He took my hand in his and held it.

“Aye.”

A few minutes later, we were in the entrance hall of our house. I’d had a ramp made outside to allow access up the front steps and had some furniture removed to give everywhere a little extra space for him. He waited for me to indicate where he should be going, not ever having been in a modern house.

“So, here we have the living room.” I showed him the first room we came too. I chose this house for the bay windows that were in the living room and master bedroom upstairs. They let in the most beautiful light. Along with the high ceilings and original plaster coving, original open fireplace surround and being huge, it was a lovely room. It was strange to see Jamie in it, but he moved right into the centre and looked around, high and low.

“Nice room. Good light.” I nodded. “Living room?”

“Parlour I suppose would be what you would have known it as. Basically, it’s where you are if you’re not in the kitchen or in bed.” He nodded, muttering the new phrase to himself again. “Right, next room is the kitchen.”

He followed me to the next room on the left. The kitchen was also huge having had a substantial side-return extension fitted by the previous owners. It had an island in the middle which had stools ready for eating at. I didn’t originally have a dining table, I usually just ate at the island but it was too high for Jamie. I had purchased a six-seater table and chairs which fit nicely in front of the bi-fold doors leading onto the patio. The units were all modern grey with solid wood surfaces and I only wished I was a better cook. This kitchen deserved someone who could do more than warm-up ready
meals!

“So, fridge is here. It’s stocked with bottled water, juice, milk for if you’re thirsty. Stuff to just grab as snacks too in there. I don’t really know what all your preferences are yet but…” He was looking out of the windows. I knew I was rambling, filling the quiet with nonsense. He didn’t know what his preferences were yet either. Everything was so new, so different for him.

I walked over and unlocked the doors, sliding them back so that he could go outside. The air was warm, we were really being spoiled with summer this year so far. He moved across the threshold onto the decking, his eyes taking in the long garden. I’d established my herb garden as soon as I’d moved in and he was watching the bees and butterflies flit between all the different flowers.

“I have an interest in botany and herbal remedies. I collect different herbs and plants when I visit anywhere new. Do you like it?” He nodded and smiled at me.

“Beautiful. Everything, Claire.”

“Right then, I’ll show you your room. Then we can decide what it is you want to do this evening.” He nodded again, distracted and distant.

We moved back into the house and through the kitchen again. I’d had the dining room converted into a bedroom for him with an en-suite. I’d organised the work after he came around from his coma and told us he had no one to look after him. Presumptuous of me? Possibly, but I knew he would need a place with help and I was willing to give up space and time for him. Even when I was having my crisis of confidence, I was getting the house ready for him to come home, with me. The signs were there all along it appears.

A double bed was in the centre of the room with fitted chests of drawers and a wardrobe along the far wall. On the right wall was the doorway into the wetroom. He looked around, no expression again.

“Well, do you like it?” He nodded. “I’ve bought you some more clothes. Jeans, joggers, t-shirts, shirts. Everything you need for the time being. I got you some shoes too and some more trainers. Shower room is through there, it’s a wet room so you don’t need to worry about shower screens or anything to contend with. I had it designed by a company who specialises in…”

“Stop.” I looked round at him then. He was breathing fast, his eyes closed, his head in his hands. “Just, slow. Tae much.”

I sat on the bed next to him, waiting for him to calm down, to open up and tell me what was in his heart. Minutes passed. His breathing slowed, I could see him counting as I once showed him. “It’s ok, Jamie.” He looked up at me and nodded.

“Water? Please?” His voice was cracked, tired and overwhelmed.

“Of course. How about we sit outside for a while?” He nodded and smiled a little.

He positioned himself to look over the herb garden again. I imagined that there had been a similar one at Lallybroch when he was a boy. The scents and sounds of the buzzing insects being more familiar to him than the sounds of the traffic on the road and in the sky. He was breathing evenly now, a look of calm on his face. I put the water on the table next to him and smiled. Standing behind him, I placed a hand on his shoulder. He took my hand and pulled me down so that I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, resting my cheek on his head.
“Sorry. Confused. Tired.” I nodded against him, not saying anything. “Just, not ken place world yet. All new. Was warrior, soldier, brother, farmer. Now…nothin’.” I tightened my arms around him and kissed his head gently, his hair now getting long enough to lie down and show the true depth of colour.

“You are something to me Jamie. You are the man I love. You are the strongest, bravest person I know.” He made to interrupt but I carried on. “You survived an horrific accident that gave you about a 5% chance of survival. Do you know, your heart stopped four times that night? Each time, you came back quickly, fighting. You fought your way out of a coma when we least expected you. You’ve gotten stronger and stronger with each week and faced everything with determination, not negativity. You have confronted all your fears and dealt with them. You told me the truth when you must have known the risk of me not believing was massive. You, Jamie, are amazing. Not nothing. To me, you are everything.”

I felt him shaking beneath me, felt the droplets landing on my arms but I held him fast, kissing just behind his ear.

“Don’t you forget that, ever, James Fraser.”

We stayed like that for some time before he pulled me around to sit on his lap. He held me then, tightly around my waist, anchoring himself to me. We watched the birds and the breeze through the trees, listened to the hum and buzz of life and were content.

We spent the afternoon with me teaching him how to work the kettle, the oven and the toaster. I’d had one section of the kitchen reduced in height for the kettle and toaster so he could reach. I always filtered the water before boiling it anyway so water was in the fridge door. He was a big fan of toast and honey I found out so that’s what we had for lunch. He’d seen refrigerators on the TV but had never experienced opening the door and feeling the cold himself. He was like a kid, amazed at everything. I got him to make us both a cup of tea. I was trying him on some herbal remedies for his headaches. It was a blend of feverfew and chamomile I was trying today. I’d made some different blends using herbs from the garden, had been drying them for a few weeks now to see if they eased his constant migraine. He managed the job well, using his left hand, which he had only just told me was his dominant hand.

We sat at the dining table with the doors wide open, allowing the sounds and smells of the garden into the house. He was starting to look more settled, the smile was returning to his eyes and his posture was less rigid.

“Where your room?” He’d noticed that only things for him were downstairs, I hadn’t wanted to assume anything, especially after what happened at the B&B in Broch Mordha.

“Upstairs.” He nodded and smiled.

“Ah, canna get there. Reputation safe.” He smiled at me and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“You, Mr Fraser, are getting quite cheeky.” It was his turn to laugh now. He stopped after a few seconds and looked at me questioningly. “You should laugh more often. It suits you.” He smiled and blushed slightly. It was true, he had a very good-humoured face. It told of laughing loud and often, of smiling and joking.

He was fully moved in by dinner. His plaid was in the bedroom, thrown over his bed, ready for whenever he needed it. He’d been given some books as leaving gifts by the Malva and Joe, these were now stood on top of his chests of drawers. His clothes he’d brought from the hospital were either in the laundry or put away and all his medicines and catheter packs were safely put in places
where they were needed. Sharps and medical waste bins were put where he wanted them and before long, he was moving around the house like he’d lived there for years.

I tried him with pasta for dinner. He looked at it a little strangely but soon tucked in. It was carbonara – bacon, mushrooms and white sauce seemed to go down well. He even ate some salad without me telling him to, which surprised me.

“Greens good. Aye?” I nodded and smiled.

I made him laugh by producing chocolate cake for dessert. We each had our own piece this time, but this didn’t stop him from stealing bits of mine or me his. It ended with bits of cake all over the table as we’d fought amid much giggling.

We finished with coffee and went into the living room where I had one final surprise for him. I handed him the box, wrapped and tied with ribbon. He looked at it and then at me with a questioning eyebrow raised.

“It’s a little ‘welcome home’ present.” He nodded and started to remove the ribbon and paper. Inside the box was an iPad and a pair of headphones. He looked at them and then at me. “There isn’t a TV in your room, and I know that listening to Gaelic helps you to sleep. It’s like a mini-TV.” He nodded and then put the box down on the floor. Moving to face me, he took my face in his hands and gently kissed me. I could still taste chocolate and coffee on his lips, feel the scratch of the beard he’d been growing. Too soon he broke the kiss and looked deep into my eyes before laying one final kiss on my forehead.

“Show me.” I smiled and we spent the evening learning how to use the iPad to watch videos and BBC Alba. He was a quick study and before long he was searching away on the internet. It again amazed me just how fast he learnt things. He was incredibly intelligent and committed things to memory rapidly. He noticed me watching him and smiled.

“You’re amazing, Jamie. You just adapt to everything so quickly.” He blushed and looked back down at the tablet in his hands. He gently put it to one side, laying it carefully on the coffee table before looking back at me.

“Well, I’ve never had to teach anyone from the 18th century before so thank you for the compliment. You’re my first. I’ll put it on my next end-of-year report as a new skill I’ve developed.” He laughed and took my hand, placing a kiss on the back of it.

It was getting late and as it had been a busy day, it wasn’t long before both of us were yawning. He picked up his iPad and headphones and put them on his bedside cabinet. I followed him into his room to check that everything was ok for him. He nodded and turned to face me. I could see he was nervous, he was playing with the rough skin around his fingernails. He’s taken to biting and picking at the skin around them, another sign of his anxiety.

“Well, I’ll let you get some sleep. I’ll be upstairs if you need me, just give me a shout.” He nodded and looked down at his hands. I turned to walk away when he grabbed one of my hands in his. He was looking at me so nervously but he quickly schooled his expression into a smile and whispered good night. I doubted it would be.

As I readied for bed and heard the sounds of someone else inhabiting the house with me and my heart contracted just thinking about him, alone, downstairs. Eventually, silence reigned and I must have allowed myself to drift off to sleep. It was the middle of the night when something woke me. At
first I thought I must have dreamt it but then I heard it again, a loud groaning noise, then another getting louder. As I jumped out of bed and ran downstairs, I heard a loud thump.

“Jamie?”

I have nae recollection of what happened after I fell asleep. I only know that I awoke wi’ ma usual headache, a swollen lip, struggling to breathe through a swollen nose and wi’ ma’ head in Claire’s lap as she held me tightly to her. Her right hand wa’ stroking ma head over and over, her left gripped my arm like I would float away if she loosened it. I could see ma blood on her creamy night clothes and I immediately tried to sit up, only to be pulled back against her. It was then I realised we were on the floor.

“It’s alright Jamie. It’s all ok.” I nodded and settled back, the movement having made ma nausea flair up.

It was morning, I could see the light coming in around the curtains, hear the birds calling outside and the noise of cars as people made their way to work. I felt her kiss my head and tighten her arms around me and I just burrowed further into her, hiding my face from the intensifying light. I could guess at what had happened, what would make Claire react this way. That and I genuinely didn’t feel as if I could speak at the moment gave it away.

About an hour later, Claire finally loosened her grip on me and turned me to face her. She smiled and kissed me gently before helping me move off her and lay ma head back down on a pillow. She left the room for a few moments before returning with the first aid kit. She cleaned my lip, the cut on the bridge of my nose and a cut above one eyebrow. She winced at this one and I felt the blood trickle down my nose as it reopened. She stitched it closed, her hands performing the surgical knots without a thought. After she had finished, I looked around the room and saw the mess I had made. The bedside cabinet was askew, blood was all over the carpet and the bed covers as well as blooded tissues laying everywhere. I hid my face with the shame, no’ even able to apologise.

“Do you want some breakfast?” I shook my head, I didna think I could keep anything down even if I did. I could hear her tidying the room, picking up tissues and straightening the furniture. She left the room at one point before returning with two cups of tea.

“Lemon and ginger. To help with your nausea.” I finally uncovered my face and looked at her. Taking the tea, I sipped it for a few minutes.

“Do you remember what happened?” I shook my head, unable to meet her eyes. “You had a seizure.” I nodded, I’d already guessed as much. “You had a tonic-clonic seizure that lasted approximately five minutes after I first woke up. I don’t know how long you were out before that. You hit your face and head on the bedside cabinet as you fell out of bed during the seizure. I found you on the floor. I pulled you out of harm’s way and let the seizure finish. You woke up briefly, confused and disoriented. I just held you you until you went back to sleep. You’ve made a bit of a mess of your face unfortunately.” I shrugged and continued to sip my tea.

“Are you struggling to speak this morning?” I looked up at her and nodded. “And your right side, can you make a fist?” I tried, but it wouldn’a close completely. “Ok then. I’ll ring John and see how far along with his science project he is. I know he’s coming around this evening but it might be that he needs to get a move on.” I nodded again. “Oh, and I’m sleeping with you from now on. That ok?” I smiled at that. “You could have just asked instead of pulling this stunt if that’s all you wanted.” At this I started to laugh quietly.

I took hold her hand as she made to leave the room again. Trying to get across how sorry I was and
how thankful for her help with just my expression. She crouched down beside me, gently kissing my forehead before standing again.

“I’ll be back in a few to help you get up and dressed. I’ll get the porridge on the go so it’s ready for when you are.” God, how I love this woman.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Some revelations and some moving forwards.

Chapter Notes

I’m going to drop to posting once a week from now on. And the next few posts will be one-shots. A significant period of time has shifted in this chapter and I’d like to explore Jamie's 21st century transitions a little before moving on to the next part of the story.

So keep checking the one-shot series. Some will be appearing soon.

But thanks again for all the comments. I hope you like this chapter just as much as you’ve enjoyed the previous ones.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s been over three weeks since I moved in with Claire. A routine was established quickly after that disastrous first night. She’s been by my side every night since, holding me to her for the first week and then the roles swapped. She’d had a nightmare one evening, woke me by shouting and crying my name. I held her then, waking her with whispered words of comfort and gentle strokes down her back. Since then, I have held her in my arms and sleep has ne’er been better. I’ve not had a seizure since, well, not that kind anyway. Absences are what John calls them. I don’t recall anything, I just become aware of him and Claire looking at me strangely as if I’ve been somewhere else.

John is here more often than ever. He’s taken to sleeping upstairs in Claire’s old room when he visits. I think she’s happy he’s here – it means she doesna have to worry about me all by herself. At 6’4”, I’m not the easiest person to pick-up off the floor. He’s also brought more drugs. Ones that Claire would give me if I needed bringing round. I had entered ‘status epilepticus’ that night – I had been under for over five minutes. John assured me it wasn’t dangerous in itself but any longer and my brain would be being starved of oxygen. I’d overheard Claire telling John of the entire incident. I didna want to put her through that again.

He says the project is going well and that he’ll be ready to drill holes in ma head in a couple of weeks. The thought scares me but excites me at the same time. I would be rid of these damned headaches as soon as I can. They’ve prevented me from attending all my out-patient physiotherapy which has frustrated me. I enjoy the physical exertion and to have it interrupted by my head has made me rather irritable. I’m also sick o’ taking so many pills and potions. Some make me feel ill, some make me feel like I’m swimming through treacle, others put me in a fog and numb my mind. I was irritable a lot of the time.

Claire has been sae patient wi’ me. Not minding when I snap, or when I’m quiet. She just carries on around me, letting me know that she understands and loves me. She’s still suspended. The ethics committee will hold its first meeting next week. John and Joe have both given statements about her professionalism whilst she was my physician. She remains hopeful, but I see the resignation in her
eyes. I dinna think I will be enough for her if her career is taken from her. I’m a verra poor second prize.

I try not to feel sorry for maself, I try to make the best of everythin. We’ve been out tae the countryside a few times. She’s taken me to Glenmore and Loch Morlich. To Loch an Eilean in the evening, just to sit and watch the sunset over the Cairngorm mountains. I breathe easier out there, in the wilds of Scotland. It hasna changed sae much in three hundred years and it feels more like home. She holds my hand as I tell her stories of my past. How I would go huntin’ with my father, how me Willie and Jenny would go out at dawn and return at dusk from a day’s playin’ in the burns and lochs nearby. How our mother would tell us off whilst feedin’ us hot bannocks wi’ honey for supper. She always listens and watches me.

Most nights, if it were jus’ the two of us, we would be on the sofa, huddled taegether. She would tell me stories of her childhood, wi’ her uncle who looked after her when her parents were killed. She remembered him wi’ such fondness. How we took her all o’er the world with him, how she would light his cigarettes and help catalogue his finds. He’d brought her back to England for her examinations when she wa’ sixteen and had settled in Oxford for a time for her to gain her qualifications. He died whilst she was at medical school leaving her all alone again. I kent how it felt to lose everyone and held her close as she cried that evening.

Something changed between us one day. We’d been very restrained when we first started living taegether. We held each and kissed but it dinna ever go any further. I still needed time to adjust to my situation and as such still had a problem with looking at myself when her parents were killed. She remembered him wi’ such fondness. How we took her all o’er the world with him, how she would light his cigarettes and help catalogue his finds. He’d brought her back to England for her examinations when she wa’ sixteen and had settled in Oxford for a time for her to gain her qualifications. He died whilst she was at medical school leaving her all alone again. I kent how it felt to lose everyone and held her close as she cried that evening.

I was on the verge of waking, on my side with Claire wrapped in my arms, her back pressed against me. My hand had wandered into her t-shirt at some point over the course of the night and was gently resting against her ribs. She pushed herself back against me a little before she stiffened an’ sat-up suddenly.

“What wrong?” I remember mumbling the question before closing my eyes again, trying to block out the August sunrise.

“Jamie. You, erm, you seem to have an erection.”

“What?” My tired brain was struggling to understand what she was saying, my processing was slowing further as the days went by. She took my hand and placed it over my groin. When I understood what she meant, my eyes shot open in surprise. I looked at her and then back at my lap. Sure enough, the first cockstand I’d experienced since afore the accident. I couldna feel anything but it wa’ there nonetheless.

“God, Claire, sorry. Dinna…where…what…” I was confused and embarrassed and ashamed. She placed her hand on my cheek and turned me to face her.

“Shh Jamie. It’s ok. It’s just a reflex. But it’s maybe a good sign that you still can achieve one with some help.” I nodded thinking back to the discussion with the counsellor a few weeks ago. I’d been scared to even attempt anything more than just kissing, but maybe she was right. “Would you be willing to try Jamie?”

I could feel my heart pounding, the blood rushing through my ears, deafening me. The thought of her having to see me, the same body that I found repulsive. No, it was too much. I made to move away,
breaking the contact between us.

“Sorry. Not ready. Sorry.” I saw the disappointment in her face and closed my eyes not wanting to see how I was letting her down again. I felt her move on the bed just before her lips grazed my forehead.

“I’ll wait as long as it takes Jamie. If and when you choose, I’ll be here.” I prayed that someday I would be ready.

John arrived later that day. He could tell there was some tension straight away and almost immediately pushed me – literally – out onto the patio and shut the door behind us. I was in nae mood for his high-handed manner though and made to go back inside (it was raining for the first time in weeks). He stopped me by locking the door and taking the key.

“Right, what have you done? Why does Claire look like she’s about to cry and is busy tiptoeing around you?” I scowled and turned to face the garden. At least I might as well have a view whilst catching pneumonia on top of everything else. “Jamie?” He walked around to face me, getting so I couldn’t see beyond him. He’d seen Claire use this tactic before and it had worked then, he was trying it now.

“Nothing concern.” I closed my eyes to shut him out.

“Right, so it’s about sex is it?” I could feel my teeth grinding together, he always knew, damn him. “I take that as a yes then.”


“Do you know what Jamie? You sound like you’re from the 21st century now. Gone is the confused but lovely Highlander. He’s been replaced by a slightly arrogant, angry young man who thinks the world owes him something because he’s had a bad time recently.” I opened my eyes at this, staring into his light blue ones looking at me, daring me to disagree.

“Not lost. Just…”

“Just what? Why are you afraid to let her love you?”

“Claire… she… do better than me. Not good enough.” John nodded before moving to take a seat in a now very wet chair.

“You don’t think she’ll find you attractive and you’re worried that you won’t be able to service her fully. That it?” I looked away annoyed, shaking my head at his turn of phrase

“Crude. But aye.” He’d have gotten on well wi’ Angus and Rupert.

“Do you not recall that that she’s seen you already in the altogether and didn’t run away in the opposite direction? She’ll have been one of the doctors who cut your clothes off the night you were brought in. She’s operated on your legs, pelvis, abdomen. She’s seen all your scars, given you a lot of them. Christ Jamie, she knows what you look like on the inside for crying out loud.”

“But doctor, not lover.”

“Maybe, but as a doctor, she is readier to accept what’s happened to you. She’s more understanding and a damned sight more patient than a lot of other people would be. She knows what to expect Jamie. She knows that it’s going to have to be different between the two of you.” I nodded, he was right and I was bein’ an ass. “What’s brought all this on any way? You were fine together the other
I gestured to ma’ cock and mumbled about what happened this morning. I wasna happy with the reaction. It took a good few minutes for him to stop laughing, me glaring at him seemed to spur him on further.

“You got an erection and that’s scared you off? Most men wouldn’t think twice about that. I know what you’re thinking – extra pressure, stress and you’re not sure if you can get one again let alone use it. But let me tell you a couple of things. One, you don’t need a cock to have an amazing time with someone you love. Secondly, you are still one of the most attractive men I’ve ever seen. Scars and all. Why? Because of who you are in inside, not who you are on the outside. Having said that, you’re still very easy on the eyes, especially now that hair of yours is growing back.” I sat open-mouthed in shock. It had never occurred to me that maybe John liked me in that way as well.

“John…”

“Don’t say anything. It’s not anything that needs a response. I’ve loved you from afar all this time. You inspire devotion from people without really knowing it. You’re easy to love Jamie, but sometimes, you’re damned hard to get on with. Now, close your mouth and think about all the naughty things you’re going to do with that beautiful woman who’s waiting in there. She deserves worshipping for having to put up with you, don’t you think?”

I didn’t move as he unlocked the doors and went back inside. I sat in the rain for a while longer, letting everything he’d said filter into my head. I was sad that I couldna return his love in the way he wanted but I knew that in a way, I did love him. He wa’ ma’ closest friend and he always kent wha’ I wa thinking. He deserved to meet someone who would love him like I loved Claire. And this evening, I was gonna show her how much.

When John had walked back into the living room, dripping wet, I wasn’t surprised when he said that he would get going and not actually be staying the night. I hadn’t mentioned anything but he sensed it and absconded with Jamie straight out on the patio. I’d sneaked a little look past the kitchen door and saw John giving Jamie what for in the rain. He always could tell whatever was wrong with our Highlander. And Jamie was ours. I knew John was in love him, right from the first time I saw them together. There was no professional reason for John to visit him so often and certainly no obligation for him to entertain him with chess and conversation. There was also the matter of this treatment, I knew that there was a waiting list of people who were willing to try it, but John had bypassed them all for Jamie. Yes, we both loved him. I only hoped that Jamie wouldn’t break anyone’s heart by accident.

John stayed for dinner and then made to leave. I was clearing up as Jamie saw him out. He’d spent another good thirty minutes outside after John had returned and was thoroughly saturated with the rain. He’d showered and changed before dinner and then sat quietly, just eating and answering the minimum. I heard the murmured conversation of the two at the door and then a brief laugh before the door shut and the latches were flicked on.

As Jamie came back into the room, he smiled at me and went to take my hand. Pulling me gently, I ended up on his lap with his arms around my waist and mine around his shoulders. He looked at me then, a gleam in his eye and I don’t know what John had said to him but he was due a thank-you text in the morning.

“Ready try things? I smiled and nodded.

“If you are.” He smiled shyly before kissing me. It was gentle at first but soon deepened. I felt his
tongue against my lips and I opened to meet his with mine. His fingers played with the edge of my t-shirt and slowly crept beneath to touch my bare skin. Our breathing was getting erratic, I wanted to touch him. I hadn’t seen him since that first shower, when all his injuries were still so new. I started to lift his t-shirt but he stopped me, holding my hand against him instead. He broke the kiss and looked into my eyes.

“Want me?” I could see the question in his eyes. Was I willing to accept him as he was? Did I want him as only a lover could want someone?

“God, yes.” We made it into the bedroom, he’d ripped my t-shirt off already in the kitchen. Now, I pulled his t-shirt off. He was glorious, scarred, but beautiful. His physiotherapy had only helped tone up his arms and chest further. His abs were still there but damaged by the splenectomy I’d performed months ago. As I looked at him, he watched my face, waiting for the look of repulsion he expected. It never came. I smiled at him and took his hand, placing it on my hip and I sat on his knees again.

I kept my hand over his as it moved up to cup one of my breasts. His sharp intake of breath told me of his interest in me and it wasn’t long before my bra was discarded and replaced by his lips and hands, sucking and licking, pinching and stroking. Finally, he broke away, his eyes heavy-lidded with desire.

“Bed.” I nodded and stood from his lap. I watched him move from his wheelchair to the bed before slowly removing my jeans and panties. I could see him swallowing, his eyes raking up and down my body.

“Have you never seen a naked woman before?” He dragged his gaze back up to my face.

“Aye, but not sae close. Not mine.” I crawled onto the bed, his eyes never leaving me. I unbuttoned his jeans and together we got him undressed, hands and kisses slowing the job down.

Before long we were both naked on the bed. I crouched at his feet, slowly stroking fingers up each leg, kissing each scar. He couldn’t feel me but watching was certainly having an effect. His breathing was fast, I could see his pulse beating wildly in his neck, his hands were gripping the duvet. He groaned as my hair drifted across his abdomen. He tensed as I moved over his crotch and I knew that he wasn’t ready to try that just yet. I smiled at him and he relaxed once more, a small smile playing on his lips.

I licked the scar from his splenectomy from end to end, a loud groan and his head being thrown back was the response. The scar was red and sensitive evidently. “I gave you this scar, to heal you, so you could be here with me.” I flicked my tongue across one of his nipples before biting gently.

His fingers threaded through my curls, pulling me up to meet his kiss. His tongue thrust into my mouth as soon as I was close enough stealing my breath. His hand held my chin, then slowly worked down my neck, stroking along a collar bone. He broke the kiss, looking into my eyes.

“Show how. Never done.” It had never dawned on me before that he might be a virgin, that inexperience might be part of the reason for his reticence. I kissed him again, our tongues twining around each other, exploring each other’s mouths. He didn’t kiss like a virgin, that was for sure.

I took his hand, still resting on my collar bone and dragged it down my body, over my breast, the nipple puckering with the contact. His tongue started to follow my hand, featherlike kisses caressing my skin, swirling around the nipple. I opened my legs and traced his hand over my outer then inner thigh, finally bringing it to my core. He took a sharp intake of breath and he held his hand over my centre, feeling the moist heat there. His mouth returned to mine as he traced my labia gently, his tongue entering my mouth as his finger entered me. His kiss stifled my moan, my body arching
against him, willing him deeper, to touch me more confidently. He complied, adding a second finger, slowly moving in and out.

“Touch me here, Jamie.”

I broke the kiss and laid my cheek against her wild, curly hair. I had my eyes closed, savouring the feel of my fingers inside her, enjoying how hot and wet she was, revelling in the knowledge that she wanted me as much as I wanted her. She moved my thumb to stroke a small nub just above her slit and the moan she released wa’ music to ma ears. I felt her mouth trailing down my neck, across my collar bones. Her tongue flicking first one nipple, then the other. I could feel her hand tracing the scars of my back, each ridge lovingly caressed. I could feel her tightening around my fingers and how I wished I could be inside her as a man should be.

“Don’t think Jamie. Just feel.” I nodded and surrendered to the feeling of her lips on my skin. She moved to be above me slightly. My new scars were incredibly sensitive and as her tongue ran the length of my abdomen again I felt a familiar tingle in my brain, pleasure and enjoyment coming together. I could feel her beginning to ride my fingers so added a third and before I knew it, she was bucking against me, calling out and squeezing ma fingers tight with the walls of her sex. I was lost just after as all my cells fired at once leaving me gasping. The exquisiteness of not feeling anything but pleasure if only for a few seconds was breath-taking. We lay panting in each other’s arms for minutes, eyes closed, not wanting to move. Eventually, it was Claire who rolled over, scooping her hair out of her face before looking at me with a smile.

“So, how was your first time? Like you thought it would be?” I smiled with her.

“Nah. Different. Good but different. How you?” Her smile widened and she looked at the ceiling.

“I think that’s pretty obvious don’t you?” I nodded and closed ma eyes agin.

“Jamie?” I looked at her, sleep wanting to claim me. “We’ll be ok you know. We’ll work everything out together.” I nodded and took hold of her hand bringing it to ma lips for a kiss.

“Aye.” We burrowed under the covers and I held her close to me. We fell asleep listening to the summer rain hitting the windows.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, John loves Jamie, as always. And Jamie and Claire have moved forward a little. What could possibly go wrong now?
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Where it all starts to go wrong, again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the following months, I wished constantly that I had spent more time enjoying the feel of being in Jamie’s arms. Memorising the feel of his chest rising and falling beneath my cheek as he slept, the sound of his heartbeat in my ear, beating a healthy tattoo, letting me know he was well. I would have told him how much I loved him more often, heard his faltering words back to me, locked them safe in my heart to keep me strong, to keep the hope alive. Instead, I had spent weeks by the side of his bed again, watching a machine breathe for him once more, seeing his heartbeat as a trace on a monitor rather than as a living, beating organ beneath his skin. He was barely recognisable anymore, all the healthy weight he had gained was gone. Muscles disappearing. His inner light fading as he spent longer and longer in a coma no-one knew the end to. I had been prepared by John for the worst. That this might be it, the final straw for my Highlander. He was living in the wrong century, maybe he just wasn’t meant to be here at all. Nothing could make me leave his side though, if this was to be his end, then he wouldn’t be facing it alone. I made a promise months ago, and I would never let him be by himself again.

*Two months earlier*

The days after our discovery of each other were hard. He’d woken the morning after feeling unwell and he deteriorated as the day progressed. He couldn’t keep anything down, he was weak and was even struggling to sit-up in bed. He wasn’t feverish but his pulse was rapid and I knew it was down once again to his headaches. They’d been getting worse; the medication he was being prescribed doing nothing to remove or even dull the symptoms any longer. All he could do was lay in the darkness, a warm towel over his eyes and forehead to try and ease the pain.

I made him herbal remedies for the nausea, tried natural painkillers to ease the throbbing in his skull. He drank them all dutifully and then promptly threw them all back up again. I stroked his hair, held him as he retched, sweat and tears of frustration rolling down his neck and face. He gripped me like I was the last tether to reality, like if either of us let go, he would just disappear. He barely slept, he barely spoke, didn’t eat. After two days of this, I was ready to beg any deity in any religion to give him some peace.

John arrived on the third day. I’d been in contact with him since it had started, either ringing him or him me for an update almost hourly. He held me as I opened the door to let him into the house. Stroked my back, kissed my hair and told me that it would be ok. That I wasn’t alone and that I had support. I was never so grateful for him as I was in that moment. He smiled and walked towards Jamie’s room. He spoke quietly but cheerfully, hoping to give the both of us a break from how serious it was getting.

As I entered the room, I saw than John was inserting a canula into the back of Jamie’s right hand and hooking up a saline pack. He was also preparing a syringe with what I assumed was morphine. Opioids were a last resort in this case and it was down to the severity of Jamie’s condition now that
John was taking this step.

“Right, I’m going to give you something that will hopefully knock those headaches out. The only trouble is, it’s probably going to knock you out as well for a bit. Is that ok?” Jamie blearily looked at John, his eyes red and glazed. He nodded slightly and winced as he felt the needle enter his skin.

“There now. You just let that work and I’ll see you in a few hours, hopefully looking and feeling a little better.” John held Jamie’s hand as the drug worked. First it was his blinking that slowed, his eyes losing focus, then the shivering calmed down before his eyes finally closed, his breath deepening gradually as he fell asleep. I watched John as disposed of the sharps and detritus associated with a canula. He gently patted Jamie on the back of the hand before following me into the kitchen.

For a while, we just sat there each nursing a drink that neither of us noticed was getting colder. The sky was getting darker, we were moving out of summer into autumn. The temperature was still warm but certainly cooling in the evenings now. The leaves were starting to change colour and before long, they would be fluttering to the ground like millions of butterflies falling from the sky.

“This week, Claire. We’ll do it this week. I think we’ve got enough of the right cells cultured, the testing license is due to come today or tomorrow. I just… I’m not… is he strong enough do you think?” His voice took me by surprise. The confidence had gone, replaced by a bone-deep concern I shared with him.

“He’s going to have to be. Where though?” John thought for a moment before answering, weighing up all the possibilities.

“It would be better with me in London. My team are all set-up and have practiced the procedure. I don’t know how well the cells will travel. They’re tricky fuckers, they like just the right conditions. Much like typical brain cells I suppose.” I nodded, a ghost of a smile crossing my face.

“We’ll get him down there. Tomorrow. I have a meeting in the morning at the hospital. This bloody ethics panel nonsense will be starting soon.” He took my hand and gave it a squeeze in reassurance.

“You’ll be fine Claire. They’d be mad to let you go especially for something like this. Anyone who looks at the pair of you knows that it’s an unusual case. Jamie is an unusual case. He certainly isn’t normal that’s for sure.” I smiled again, thinking of my Highlander asleep in the next room.

“My meeting is at 9am, I’ll get him down to you straight after. I think car will have to do, I don’t want him freaking out over a plane.” John laughed at this and nodded.

“Sensible. I’ll leave you with more morphine vials. Just get him in the car before injecting him again. We’ll get him out at the other end when it’s worn off a bit. He’s a big lad though.” I chuckled, nodding.

“He’ll be ok, won’t he?”

“I hope so, I really do Claire.” He looked away, gritting his teeth to stop any tears that may have started to well in his eyes.

“We’ll look after him no matter what, you and I. Together.” John turned to me, his eyes alight with the love I knew he held hidden for Jamie. “We’re his family, you and me. We love him, and he loves us. So let’s make sure we do everything to get him back with us, healthy and fighting fit.” I saw him swallow, looking down again, a tear rolling down his face. He looked up and me and smiled. I took his hand and we both went to see how our patient was doing.
I woke feelin’ muggy and disoriented in the mornin’, but thankfully nae headache for now. Claire was already up, dressed and making coffee in the kitchen. I could hear her moving around, the familiar sounds of the kettle and the mugs being prepared. I remembered John coming tae see me the day before and right enough, the canula was still in the back of my hand, where he placed it yesterday, nae longer attached to any saline now though.

My head started to clear and for the first time in three days, I felt up to leaving the room, feeling the fresh air on ma face and breathing in the last days of summer. Carefully, I managed to get tae ma wheelchair and made ma way slowly intae the kitchen. There she was, mo Sorcha, looking out of the doors into her garden, an expression of worry on her face. I was partly responsible for that, I kent it well and ma heart was sore to see the evidence. I was ruining her life, I knew.

“Jamie?” She turned and smiled at me, the worry being hidden for the time being. I smiled in return and moved to be near her. “I wasn’t expecting you to be up this morning. How are you feeling?” She moved to pour me a coffee and brought it to the dining table.

“Better.” She sat next to me, her fingers playing with the hem of the jacket she was wearing. I noticed it then, she was dressed in a suit and I remembered what today was.

“Sorry Claire. Didna remember. Meeting hospital.” She nodded, her gaze still firmly fixed on her jacket.

“Yes Jamie. It is. I won’t be gone long though. A couple of hours. I don’t like to leave you when you’re not well…”

“Dinna fash. Be ok.” I held her hand and squeezed it tightly.

“I know you will. You want any breakfast?” I shook my head and released her hand as she stood to walk over to the sink. She still hadn’t made eye contact wi me yet.

“Claire…”

“I’m going to be late. There’s stuff in the fridge if you do get hungry.” I made an noise in acknowledgement and accepted her kiss on my head as she swept past to leave the house. I heard the front door open and close. Her nerves had set me slightly on edge. There was somethin’ she wasna tellin’ me and I was gettin’ worrit.

I drained the mug of coffee and replaced it on the worktop. She’d bought me the mug a couple of weeks ago when we visited Leoch. It was the Mackenzie crest and motto. Luceo non uro. I shine not burn. She liked it, thought it was apt for my circumstances and with my being half Mackenzie she couldn’a resist. She said that everyone needed a special mug, and this was mine. I smiled at the memory before going and getting showered and dressed.

I was just finishing putting on my t-shirt when I head the front door opening again.

“Claire? Back?” No response. I moved out of the room and stared at the vision in front of me. Randall.

“Oh, so you are here then.” I looked at him in shock, my brain rebelling at the notion of being in the same room as a man such as him. But then I recalled myself back to the present, it wasna Black Jack, it wa’ Frank. Claire’s husband.

“Frank. What here for?” I moved to block any further progress he could make intae the house.

“My my, articulate aren’t you? Why am I here? Because I live here. My name is listed on the deeds
to this property. I might ask the same of you though. You definitely have no claim on this house.” He sneered at me, Randalls were all the same in every century it seemed.

“My home. Claire not in. Leave.” Randall laughed and barged past me to enter the living room, physically knocking me to the side.

“I’ll wait. So, you really are a broken cripple then.” I followed him into the room, watching him as he moved around, touching all of Claire’s things. It was when he came to my sword and dirk, only recently returned tae me last week, that he stopped. “Now, what have we here?”

“Dinna touch. Mine.” He smiled and picked up ma dirk anyway. Unsheathing it, he made an appreciative gesture before testing the sharpness on a fingernail.

“And where would you find such an example of 18th century Highlander weaponry? Stole it did you?” I ground my teeth taegether before moving across the room and taking the dirk from him, keeping it on my lap.

“Mine. What want?”

“Touchy aren’t you. What do I want? I want my wife, that’s what.” He settled himself in the chair by the fire, facing me.

“Why? Dinna love Claire. Why want?”

“Because she’s mine and I’ll have her even if she’s been sullied by a boy. But looking at you, I doubt much has been going on that I need to worry about.” He laughed and stood again, walking out of the room into our bedroom.

“Oh, I see what she’s done here. That’s going to knock a good ten grand off the place, that and the hideous ramp she’s had installed. Tut tut.” He started looking through all the drawers and wardrobes, noticing that they were full of mine and Claire’s things. “So, the little whore has chosen you over me.”

“Enough! Leave. Now. Will get police.”

“And what? They can’t remove me from my own house. I belong here, you don’t. Remember that.” I didna ken what tae do. I felt helpless. Afore the accident, I woulda had him by the throat and thrown him out, defended ma land. But now. My headache was coming back, the nausea that came wi’ it gettin’ stronger.

“How does it feel? To be so helpless?” I looked up at him. He wore an expression I had seen before. Black Jack wore the same expression when he asked me about the welts on ma back from the first hundred lashes he had laid on me. “I wanted to see if it was true, what I had heard about my darling wife, throwing away her career for someone she found dying in the middle of the road one night.” He sat down on our bed, pulling my plaid toward him, rubbing it wi’ his fingers.

“You know, I always knew Claire didn’t really love me. She was desperate. Desperate for a man to look after her. Pathetic really. I was the first one who proposed I suppose. I’d do because I had a cock and money. That was all she needed.”

“Seas! Dùin do bheal!” (Stop! Shut your face!)

“What’s up? Can’t speak English when you’re angry? Tell me, why did she choose you? No money from what I can see from her bank statements and no cock in working order I assume.”
“Èist do bheal! Trus a-mach!” (Shut it! Get out!)

“Has she screamed your name yet? She used to scream mine in the beginning. Loved it when I fucked her hard. You’ll never be able to satisfy her you know.”

I turned and tried to leave the room, I was gonna be sick, lights were flaring around ma vision. I hadnna had ma medication for three days now, nothin’ stayed down and now I felt I was about to collapse agin. His words sank intae me, like a knife stabbing deep, each one hittin’ a target. No, I wouldna be ever able to satisfy her in that way. No, I didn’t have any money and no way of earning any. She would have to pay for me forever and I couldnna cope with the thought of that.

“I’m here because Claire rang me. She wanted to talk to me. I assume it’s because she wants to take me back. After all, she obviously isn’t getting serviced by you and you’re doing a truly shit job of protecting her house right now. What can you offer her really?”

I made it to the kitchen. I needed water. Anything to try and stop the bile and panic rising up ma throat. I grabbed a glass and got the jug from the fridge. I gulped down the first glass and poured another. He came in then, holding the photograph of me and Claire. She was on my lap, her arms around me. We were both smiling, looking happy. Joe had taken it the first time he and Gail had come for dinner. I’d been home a week then. Claire had printed it for me, to put by my side of the bed so that nae matter which way I faced, I always woke with her in sight.

“Cuir sin sìos. Put down.” He laughed then, putting the picture on the dining table.

“A curious choice of phrase, Jamie. To put down. We usually put animals as injured as you were down. Euthanise them. Kill them because they’re more hassle than they’re worth to try and fix. You should have been put down.” I couldna breathe anymore, angry tears started to make their way down my face, my teeth were grindin’ taegether, my hands clenched tightly as fists.

“Claire…”

“Claire what? Loves you? No she doesn’t Jamie. Tell me, has she started shutting down yet? Has she started getting cold towards you?” I thought of this morning. It was nothing, just the stress of the meetin’ she wa’ going tae, but it wormed its way with his words intae ma mind. “So she has! Ho ho! She’s already bored of her little stray pet.” He moved towards me, coming to crouch right in front of me, face tae face.

“You’re nothing to her but a nuisance. Holding her back from everything she wants. Her career, her friends, even children. You won’t be able to give her anything. As for anyone else, who would want you? You can’t speak, you can’t walk, you can’t work and earn money. You are useless. You are less than half a man.”

My heart shattered at his words as they aimed true and hit every single one of ma fears. I couldna stay. I couldna ruin her life any further. He wa right, the bastard. I brushed the tears away and moved away from him.

“Leave Jamie. Leave before she truly gets rid of you. This will hurt less. Tell you what, while you pack, I’ll even get you a taxi. On me, one final gift from the Randall household.” I didna stay to listen. I grabbed the photograph from the table, grabbed ma bag and packed just enough medicine for what I needed. I took ma plaid and dirk, stuffin them intae the bag too. My tears blurred everything and I could barely see by the time I grabbed ma jacket and headed tae the door.

“Just in time. Taxi’s paid for. Just tell them where to go.” I nodded and opened the door. “Oh and one other thing, don’t you ever fucking speak to what’s mine again. Do you hear?” I ignored him
and left, praying that I would make it tae where I wa’ headed before I passed out.

Chapter End Notes

My Frank is horrible! For me, he had to be a bit more Black Jack in this story. And to some extent, he is. Will Claire find Jamie in time though?
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The meeting had been a disaster. They hadn’t wanted my statement at all, they merely wanted me to change my mind and leave Jamie before anything got out of hand. I had laughed at this suggestion before telling them that I was going to be initiating divorce proceedings so that I could marry my former-patient. They were unimpressed, Maria looking at me with disdain and disappointment. I held my own, spoke the truth about his condition and that he was currently unavailable to make a statement due to his ongoing brain damage. This was, as predicted, met with murmurings of concern and much note-taking.

It was two hours before I was allowed to leave. The panel would meet the following week to discuss all the evidence and options. I doubted I was going to get away from this lightly but right now it was of little concern. I only wanted to get home to Jamie. He’d been left over three hours already and then I had to get him to London this afternoon for his surgery in the morning. I was relieved that he was feeling better, I had no idea how I would have gotten out of the door this morning had he been the same as before. I hadn’t told him about the trip this morning not wanting to stress him before I left him alone for hours. I knew he could tell something was wrong but better that than having him panic about the surgery.

I drove home and noticed a familiar car parked outside the house. I swallowed nervously, nothing good could come of this. And if he wasn’t in the car, it meant he was in the house. With Jamie. I quickly parked up and got my stuff before entering the house. The first thing I noticed was music playing. Certainly not Jamie.

“Jamie?” I called for him, trying to get over the sound of the music. I looked in our bedroom, no sign of him but the plaid and our photograph were both missing. I started to feel a sense of panic. It wasn’t unusual for the plaid to move around the house, but the photo? I walked into the living room where I found Frank, laying on the sofa playing with Jamie’s iPad. I snatched it out of his hand, putting it carefully on the coffee table next to his headphones.

“Where is Jamie?”

“Lovely to see you too darling. I’ve ordered us some lunch. Thought it would be nice for a catch-up.” I was in no mood for his mind games.

“Where is Jamie?” I asked again, more forcefully this time.

“Come now Claire, we don’t need a gooseberry here to spoil our reunion.” The panic I was feeling was rising now. I checked my phone. Jamie had insisted that he didn’t need one seeing as we went everywhere together but I thought I’d check anyway. I could feel my heart beating in double time, my breathing getting more rapid.

I ran to our room, checking the drawers and cupboards for what was missing. No clothes, just his jacket. Most of his medicines were still there, just all the painkillers were gone.

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” I turned to face Frank. “Where is Jamie?” I was shouting at him now. He’d followed me into the room and was laughing at my panic.

“Well, now you mention in, I haven’t seen him for about an hour!” An hour? Fuck!
“What did you say to him?” I growled at him.

“Oh nothing he didn’t already know deep down. I told him that you rang wanting to speak to me and he filled in the blanks himself.”

“You bastard! I rang to get you to agree to a divorce. Nothing, and I mean nothing, would ever make me get back together with you.” I spat out the words as I ran past him, grabbing my phone and dialling John’s number.

“Claire? Are you on your way?” He sounded nervous but ready to hear that soon, he would be cutting into the man he loves to save his life.

“No! Jamie’s gone!”

“What? Where?”

“I don’t know! Frank turned up, spoke a load of shit and now he’s gone. His plaid and all his painkillers have gone. Nothing else.”

“Fuck. Claire, you don’t think…”

“What else am I meant to think? I’m going to go find him.”

“Right. I’m coming up there. I can guarantee that he’s not going to be doing well when you find him. He’s not had his meds for days. Take the lorazepam jabs and the duramorph. I’ll ring the hospital, get them ready to sedate him as soon as he gets there just in case the lorazepam doesn’t work.” I hadn’t thought of that and the knowledge of it brought me to a halt. What if it was too late? What if I didn’t find him in time? “Go Claire, you’ll find him. We’ll save him. We have to.” I sobbed a goodbye as he wished me good luck. Frank watched all of it.

“Claire…”

“Don’t fucking speak unless it is to tell me where he is. He’s dying Frank. He needs surgery now. I need to find him. Now.” I looked at my estranged husband, at least he did have the conscience to look slightly ashamed.

“I had no idea…”

“No, you didn’t. So, are you going to tell me where he is?”

“I don’t know where he is. I booked him a taxi and off he went…” I didn’t wait for him to finish. There was only a couple of places where he would go. I grabbed my medical kit including the recovery drugs to bring Jamie back from a seizure and my car keys. I didn’t even tell Frank to get out of the house. I wouldn’t be back here today anyway.

I don’t know how many speed cameras flashed at me as I made my way out of Inverness. I was against the clock and they could all go hang, I needed to find Jamie and find him quickly. I first headed to Craigh na Dun. It was closest and the way for Jamie to get back to his own time. It was a long shot, he knew he wouldn’t survive two minutes there, but I didn’t think he had survival on his mind. He wanted to die, that was becoming clear and where else but in his own time. I parked at the side of the road and ran up the hill. There was a longer path that Jamie could have taken but I ran up the shortest side. I was still in my suit and heels and I ripped off the shoes part way up to make it easier.

I got to the top but saw no sign of him. Nothing to suggest he had been there today anyway. There
was a faint buzzing as I approached the stones but I paid it no mind. I looked around, making sure to
not touch the stones or pass through the cleft as Jamie had described doing. I was sure he hadn’t been
here though and ran down the hill again collecting my shoes on the return. If he wasn’t going to die
in his own time, he would be going home then.

I got back into the car and headed to Lallybroch. It was early afternoon now, several hours since
Jamie had left the house after Frank had done the damage. It would take another hour to get to
Lallybroch at least, I only hoped I would make it in time. I tore through the countryside to Broch
Mordha, taking some risks but also remembering that it was a car travelling at dangerous speeds that
had gotten us all into this mess in the first place.

Finally, I made it to the dirt track leading to Lallybroch. It was getting dark as storm clouds began to
roll over. I couldn’t believe how contrived it was, to be raining at this moment. Why not bright
sunlight instead of the weather matching the mood. I reached the house and jumped out of the car.
Grabbing my medical bag and the torch from the boot, I started to look around.

“Jamie?” I called but there was no answer, the wind getting up, carrying my words away from the
building.

There were steps leading up to the front door and it was still firmly closed, barred and sealed against
the elements. He would have to abandon his wheelchair in order to get up there and it was clear he
hadn’t. I moved around the side of the building, through the overgrowth. Signs that someone had
moved through the plants was clear and I felt that he was close by. Around the back of the house, the
land was raised slightly and a ground level door had been pushed open.

Part of my brain noticed the overgrown herbs and plants that made up this part of the garden. I knew
Jamie had taken a great deal of comfort in my herb garden and this was why. The garden he
remembered from his childhood was also right by the kitchen door. I entered carefully, flashing the
torch over the floor to make sure I wasn’t going to fall into the cellar.

“Jamie?” Again, no response. There was marks in the dust where wheels had run, I just needed to
follow them.

From the kitchen, I followed the tracks down a panelled corridor, dust and webs, evidence of wildlife
was everywhere. The house smelt of decay and rot, not of animal but of wood. The wind blew in
from the top of the house where the roof was missing, carrying bit of dust swirling into my eyes. I
coughed, raising a hand to shield my face. The corridor opened out to the hallway where the main
door and entrance was. To my left, was a staircase and at the bottom, Jamie’s wheelchair.

“Jamie?” The panic was clear in my voice now. I knew he was here, but in what condition? It was
clear he’d dragged himself upstairs. The dust was freshly disturbed and so I started up the stairs too. I
kept calling his name but could hear nothing in response. The wind howled down the stairs from the
roof, carrying any sound that was made and scattering it around. I came to the first floor and
followed the trails down the corridor to a room at the end. I gently pushed open the door, scanning
the room with my torch. I shouted when I found what I was looking for, huddled in a corner, not
moving.

“What are yer doin’ here a brathair?” Jenny’s voice filtered through intae ma mind. I had dragged
maself up intae the room I had slept in as a young man and huddled intae a corner. Ma mind was so
tired that I just slept, ready to welcome any form of oblivion. I opened ma eyes and looked intae her
eyes, the same shape as mine.

“I dinna ken.” Speaking didna hurt anymore. Words were free and easy once again and I smiled at
her.

“Where have yer been? Yer a mess brathair.” I looked down at mesel and noticed that I wa dressed in ma Fraser kilt once more, ma dirk and sporren hanging off the belt as always. I must have changed intae it before collapsing agin. I wa covered in dust and looked ready for a bath.

“I dinna ken that either. The future I think.”

“Ha, the future eh? And what’s sae good about the future that you’ve stayed there instead o’ comin’ home?” Jenny knelt beside me, a shawl around her shoulders. She put a hand against ma face, stroking all my new scars.

“I met a lass. Claire.” She laughed and looked down at her shawl fringe, picking at it with nervous fingers.

“A lass, eh? What’s she like?”

“Beautiful and bright. She’s a physician. She put me back taegether, as well as she could do anyway. She’s a Sassenach, she’s loyal and kind and bonny.” Jenny looked at me, a smile on her face.

“A Sassenach eh? I’d ha thought you’d ha had enough of them.” It was my turn tae smile.

“Aye. But she’s different, ye ken.”

“Is that her?” Jenny nodded tae the picture I was holdin’ tightly, our photograph.

“Aye. Mo Sorcha.” I traced her face with ma fingertip, recalling the feel of her skin, her voice as she whispered to me just before the picture was taken.

“And do yer love her?” I nodded.

“More na’ life itself.”

“Then why’re yer here? Why not wi’ yon lass?” I looked away. My heart aching with the knowledge I would ne’er be good enough for her.

“Cause I’m hurt and canna provide for her. I canna help her or protect her, gi’ her bairns. I’m nothin’ anymore. I’ve come home to die, a piuthair.” I felt Jenny’s hand on ma face, turnin’ it back tae face her once more.

“Jamie, brother, had she said any of these things tae yer herself?” I shook ma head, trying tae look away. “Well then, she isna thinkin’ quite the same way you are then. You are more than nothin’, to her you are everythin’. That’s why she’s here Jamie. She’s come lookin’ for yer. Can ye not feel her? Next to yer?” I looked around, trying to see Claire.

“Jamie? Come back to me love, come on.” My heart started racing as I heard her voice, sae close to me, quietly pleading with me.

“Yer see Jamie, she’s here. Go tae her. Be wi’ her.” I nodded.

“Jenny? I willna be comin’ home. An’ it’s breakin’ ma heart.”


I came too to see Claire’s face hovering above mine, her hand on my face exactly where Jenny’s had
lain moments before. Her face broke intae the brightest smile as I awoke and saw her.

“Oh God, don’t do that to me Jamie!”

“Claire? Really here?”

“Yes, I’m really here.” She leaned down to kiss me gently and at once I kent it tae be true, she was real.

I kissed her back and then closed ma eyes once more. I was safe in her arms agin. I could hear her talking, but her voice was gettin’ further and further away. I tried tae open ma eyes, but they were gettin’ sae heavy. I felt her shake me, but only just, it was like a small vibration somewhere on edge of my consciousness. I tried to speak, but nae sound came out. Then everything went black once again.

“Jamie? Jamie?” I was screaming his name by now. He’d come around for a few seconds before going under again. I dragged him away from anything he could hit himself on and placed my suit jacket under his head to cushion the force of the impact he was making. His body was going into spasm again and there was only so much I could do. He was tonic when I entered the room but soon entered the clonic phase as I moved him into the recovery position. It had lasted over five minutes, so I injected lorazepam into his arm, holding it steady to try to not rip the vein. He’d recovered in a few seconds but had dropped under again less than a minute later. I had nothing left to try. All I could do was stay with him.

There was no signal anywhere nearby, I couldn’t leave him to find help. We were alone and I knew this was where it was going to end. I watched as his lips turned blue with the lack of oxygen, watched the muscles in his upper body rapidly contract, could feel the muscles tearing slightly with the effort. I just sat there next to him, begging him to stop and come back to me.

It was nearing thirty minutes when he stilled, eyes open towards the ceiling. I held his hand, talking to him quietly, touching his face, telling him he would be alright and that I loved him. The tears fell down my face and landed on him. I felt the moment he stopped breathing and made the decision. I would fight for him, no matter what, I would always fight for him.

“Come on you bloody Scot. Breathe!” I carried out CPR for minutes, checking his pulse every breath. “Come on Jamie. Not here. Not like this.” The room was getting darker, the torchlight starting to fade as the battery started to run out. I was on the edge of despair when I heard a voice.

“Hello? Is there anyone there?” It was a woman’s voice, faint but inside the building.

“Hello? Up here!” I yelled as loud as I could, breathing once more into Jamie, trying to keep him alive.

“There you are…oh no! What’s happened?” It was the woman from the Post Office. Mrs Murray. She shone the torch at Jamie and saw what I was doing.

“He needs an ambulance, right away. I need you to find some signal and get them here now. Can you do that?”

She nodded and ran out of the room. I heard the faint sounds of a car moving away from the house and continued the chest compressions. I’d already cracked a couple of his ribs again but it was the least of his problems right now. A minute or so later, I checked his pulse and felt it there, just. I held my ear over his mouth and felt the steady in and out of his breath.
“Thank Christ. Thank you. Come on Jamie, keep going.” I rolled him into the recovery position and sat with one hand holding one of his and the other on his pulse point. The torch went out then, leaving us in the early evening darkness made worse by the heavy storm clouds overhead. It was then that I let the events wash over me, allowed the tears I had been holding at bay to come out. I had never felt so alone in all my life as I did right then, in that room, with Jamie’s hand in mine as he clung to life.

I don’t know how much longer it was but I heard the same voice calling up the stairs from earlier. She’d returned and brought news that an air ambulance was on route and would be here in a few minutes. She sat beside me, looking at the state of us both.

“My name is Janet Murray. I’m named after his sister, my grandmother ten generations back. The names Janet and James have been passed down the Murrays. My brother is wee Jamie. E’en though he’s a little old to be called ‘wee’ anymore.” I nodded, watching my Jamie carefully for any changes.

“How did you know to look for us?” Janet laughed a little at this and smiled.

“Weel, not much doesna get noticed here. Especially when a taxi driver from Inverness stops by your shop and tells you that he’s just dropped a red-headed lad in a wheelchair at a derelict house just up the road.” I nodded, it all made sense now. “He’s special this one. There was a story that he had been visited by a seer in Paris. He was foretold that he would die nine times before he would finally meet his maker.” My eyes opened wide at this. Nine times? I only hoped that the last time hadn’t been his eighth! “He was also told that he would meet and marry a Ban druidh, a white witch.” She looked at me now, my hair wild about my shoulders from the run up the fairy hill, evidence of my ‘witchcraft’ littering the floor around me. “You’ll save him. There’s more for him tae do yet.” I nodded, swallowing back the tears as I let her confidence and certainty fill me.

We heard the sound of helicopter blades approaching and lights shining through the windows. Janet ran down to greet them but still it came as a surprise when I heard them running up the stairs with a stretcher. I was moved to one side as they worked on him. They had him intubated in moments, assisting his breathing to get as much oxygen into him as possible. The next moments were a blur as I was ushered into the ambulance with Jamie once again.

I stood to one side as John and his team took care of Jamie once we landed at Inverness. He quickly gave me a hug but was already in scrubs and was going to perform the procedure immediately to try and save Jamie’s life. I only hoped it was all in time. I sank to the floor in the family waiting room, covered in dust, blood on my feet and knees from the rough stones and splinters on the floor, and cried until I drifted into a dreamless exhaustion.

Chapter End Notes

Please only fling soft projectiles at me but please do throw them in the comments section.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s been two months since that day. I remember John coming to find me in the relative’s room, asleep in the corner, Jamie’s plaid wrapped around me. He’d woken me, told me that it was finished but he couldn’t be sure how well it would work. A lot more damage had been done, he wasn’t sure it would be enough anymore. We held each other as we both cried, John apologising for not being able to fix him and me apologising for not being able to find him soon enough.

We made our way into the recovery room and sat on opposite sides of the bed, each holding one of Jamie’s hands. He was going to be transferred to ICU shortly where they would look after him. Joe popped down, a sad expression on his face. He gripped my shoulder as he discussed with John what Jamie would be needing once transferred. It was clear that this wasn’t going to be a short stay by the long list of things John gave him. I barely noticed when Joe left, I was watching Jamie’s face too intently. Waiting for him to move, anything, to let me know he was still with me.

For the next few days, I sat and read to Jamie. His history books sometimes, other times it was some of my favourite novels that I thought he might find amusing or enjoy. Every evening, I would put on his headphones and let him listen to BBC Alba, the language of his family playing in his ears. I learnt some Gaelic too, borrowing books, doing an online course, watching the iPad with him. I spoke to him often, told him what was going on in the world, what he was missing, how much I loved him and wanted him to come back.

John took an extended period of leave and moved in to the house with me. He too spent everyday with Jamie. Between us, Jamie was never left alone, each of us taking shifts to hold him and talk to him. Most times we talked together, including Jamie as best we could. He taught me how to play chess and I taught him my bits of Gaelic. The weather was changing outside as summer gradually gave way into autumn and Jamie made no signs of waking.

My ethics panel meeting arrived following Wednesday morning. I had gone home at John and Joe’s insistence and attempted to get some sleep. I needed to be focused. I knew what they were thinking. That if Jamie didn’t make it, I would need to still have my job to bring me back. But right now, the idea of a future without him was too much to consider.

I woke in our bed, my head on the pillow that still smelt vaguely of him. He was fighting, and so I should fight also. I could hear his voice telling me to get dressed and get the job done. I closed my eyes, bringing back the sounds of him moving around the room, opening drawers and cupboards to get everything he needed for the day. I could feel the kiss he would lay on my forehead if he was up before me, telling me he was ok and that he loved me. As a tear ran down my cheek, I opened my eyes only to see the empty room.

I wore my second-best suit, my best one thrown in the bin after that day. I’d changed into scrubs before sitting with Jamie for the next several hours before Joe finally took me home to sleep. I’d spent a couple of nights with Joe and Gail, unable to go back to the house just yet. They looked after me, fed me, collected my car from Broch Mordha and taken me to the hospital to sit with Jamie whenever I wanted. It was when John moved up for a while that I went home, not standing to be in the house by myself.

I remember sitting at the dining table with my coffee. Jamie’s mug still sat where he left it, by the sink, ready to be washed and refilled. I’d looked out at the garden, the doors open allowing the
familiar scent of herbs to breeze over me, filling my mind with a calmness I struggled to find anywhere else. I could see Jamie in every room of the house now, his presence indelibly marked everywhere, and it broke me at the same time as being comforting. He would always be with me, no matter what happened to him.

I don’t recall the journey, just sitting there all of a sudden, across a table filled with professionals from various areas; different hospitals, different departments. All there to judge me on something they couldn’t ever understand. How was I to tell them that my relationship was foretold to a man three hundred years ago, that he would travel through time to find me. That this was anything but an ordinary romance, this transcended time itself. Why? I had no idea. But one day, I was confident it would all become clear.

They asked their questions. Had I set out to form a romantic attachment? Had I done anything to encourage the attachment? Had I done anything unprofessional to allow an attachment to form? Statements were read, Jamie’s case discussed. The issue of his brain damage being dissected to an impossible degree before they decreed that yes, he was capable of making a sound decision by himself. Four hours I spent in that room as they discussed, argued and ultimately made the decision about my future in medicine.

Afterwards, I made my way back to the hospital and went straight to ICU. It was Malva who first saw me and came to give me a hug, her words on encouragement just what was needed to tip me over the edge. I just sat and cried, the stress and pressure of the last few weeks overflowing finally. Malva just held me as I broke down, stroking my back and telling me everything would be alright. Joe followed her and then John. I was surrounded by love and friendship and for that I was grateful.

I had been given a reprieve. It was agreed by everyone that I hadn’t acted in an unprofessional or dishonourable way. I had severed the professional connection as soon as I became aware something deeper was forming and handed over care to a colleague. The fact that I disappeared for three weeks helped my case apparently. A long enough time for any false feelings to dissipate on Jamie’s part was the reason given and so it was deemed an unusual case. I was allowed to return to work and everyone was happy that no breaches in ethical conduct had taken place.

I told everyone what had happened as I held Jamie’s hand. It was warm, a sign of life flowing through him still. I felt his pulse, holding my fingers over his wrist, needing the connection. My heart rate fell to match his and I felt calmer for the first time in days. It was agreed that I would return to some short shifts the following week if Jamie showed no signs of awakening. The hospital was short staffed as it was and I was confident that I could carry out routine operations without distraction. In fact, getting back to what I knew would help me focus, to be strong for the man in front of me. I had to carry on.

So that’s what happened. The next week I back in scrubs wielding a scalpel again. I could switch-off from the world when I entered the OR. Just focusing on the job at hand, cutting and removing the dead or diseased tissues, allowing healing to occur so that the person on the table would live. I found the mental discipline comforting; for a few minutes or hours, I could stop thinking about ifs and buts and maybes. After every surgery, I would visit Jamie and tell him what I had just done, let him know that I was still there for him, but trying to live a half-life at the same time.

A month passed with little or no change in Jamie’s condition. John had moved up fully now, had gotten a job at the Inverness campus of the University of Aberdeen. He would be teaching medical students at the hospital for a while. It was a sabbatical really. He still went down to London once a week but stayed close by for the most part. He was intent on setting up a clinic like his down in London but North of the border. He joked that it was necessary for after Brexit and Indyref 2 but it was all a cover to be close.
Most evenings were spent in ICU, playing board games and talking about our days. Maybe reading or watching Gaelic tv. It was one such evening when Jamie suddenly opened his eyes. It was John who noticed it first and stood to look at him more closely. I stood too as soon as I noticed what was happening.

“Jamie? Can you hear me.” There was no further response, his eyes weren’t focused or aware, but at least they had opened. I lifted Jamie’s hand and dug a finger into just below his thumb-nail. His arm vaguely pulled away from me. I looked at John and smiled. It was a start. A few minutes later, his eyes drifted closed again, but we both knew he was fighting his way back.

The following week, I met with Frank. I’d not spoken to him since that day but after Jamie’s indication that he might wake up at some point, I decided to call him and arrange a meeting. I made it clear what the subject of the meeting would be and he still agreed. We met in Edinburgh, neutral territory for the both of us. He was at the café before me and stood when I walked through the door.

“Claire, you look…”

“Tired? Stressed? Yes Frank, I do.” He looked away abashed and I sat down opposite him. I ordered a coffee from the waiter and sat there waiting in silence.

“How’s… how is he?” I laughed bitterly at Frank’s question.

“Jamie. His name is Jamie. He’s in a coma. Has been for over a month now.” He nodded.

“I suppose I had something to do with that, didn’t I?” My drink arrived at that moment causing me to pause before spitting out a reply I might regret. Instead, I changed tack.

“I’m not here to discuss Jamie. I’m here because I want a divorce.”

“Well, it seems to me we are discussing Jamie then. He’s the third party in this marriage isn’t he?” I took a sip of my coffee and reached into my bag. I had been speaking to a solicitor regarding proceedings. I knew that Frank would likely not sign the papers and had discussed all available options. There was one thing that was certain though, I wasn’t staying married to this man one minute longer than necessary.

“I’ve brought papers for you to sign. I had them drawn up a few weeks ago when I called you originally. I’ve stated that you own your house in Manchester or Oxford or wherever you’re living at the moment and I’ll own mine in Inverness. I have proof that it’s my money and income that has purchased the property so don’t even try argue that one. Everything else is very simple, we have no other legal ties or financial obligations. It’s a simple case and should come through quickly.” I didn’t look at him as I spoke, I just pushed the papers and a pen across the table.

He looked down at them for a few moments before settling back into his chair, taking his mug with him. He was smirking when I finally looked at him, smugly sitting there, waiting for me to beg. I merely matched his posture, settling back and crossing my legs. Eventually, he broke the silence.

“And what if I don’t wish to release you back into the wild, my dearest wife.”

“Then I shall file for unreasonable behaviour.” My voice was calm, I had done my research.

“Really? And in what way would a court deem my behaviour unreasonable?” I smiled back at him, schooling my face into an expression of calm.

“Well, there’s the affairs you have been conducting whilst in Manchester…”
“Of which you have no proof.”

“Then you entered my property without consent…”

“My property too dearest, I have a name on the deeds and a key.”

“And you bullied my guest out of the door…”

“And where is the evidence all for that? Laying in a coma, unable to speak properly even when he is awake. No Claire. I don’t think it’ll wash in the courts at all.” I looked away, frustrated by his return arguments. “You see dearest, I’ve also spoken to a solicitor. Now, of course, they believe I should just grant you the divorce you so ardently seek. I have evidence of adultery on your part after all, it would be far easier for me. But no, I’m not going to make this easy for you.”

“Why not? What could you gain from allowing this to continue?” I was getting annoyed, I couldn’t see why he would even want this dragging out.

“Why? Because you used me, Claire. You married me without loving me, you took but never gave in this relationship. Oh, you were a good screw in the beginning, don’t get me wrong. But you used me, for your own ends. So why should I release you?”

“Frank, I…”

“It’s too late Claire. You are going to have to stay married to me for five years longer yet. Only then can you marry your broken Scotsman, if he’s even worth marrying in five years.” Frank stood then, throwing down a tenner onto the table. “There, I’ll even pay for your drink. At least I can earn money and pay for you. He can’t.” I stood then also, taking the note and shoving it back into his hand.

“Don’t bother. Jamie will always be a better man than you.” I dropped my own five-pound note, grabbed the pen and walked out, leaving him with the papers. I phoned the solicitor straight away and let them know what had happened. It was as we thought would occur. I would have to stay married to him a little longer but it didn’t matter. In the long run, I would be free.

Jamie continued to improve little by little as the weeks rolled by. He started breathing by himself, he opened his eyes more often without stimulus, he started reacting to sound, muttering the odd word here and there. It was on my birthday that he squeezed my hand as I said hello to him. It was so subtle but it was there, the best birthday gift I’ve ever been given. I kissed him gently, as I always did, thanking him for saying hello back.

My birthday party was held there; John, Joe, Gail, Malva, all with me as we ate chocolate cake and swapped funny birthday stories. I laughed for the first time in weeks, months, feeling more content that I had in a while. It was far from perfect, but the love that surrounded me, that surrounded Jamie that night, it made a difference.

I canna describe what it’s like. I was there at times, could hear them talkin’ tae me, holdin’ ma hand. Other times I couldn’a feel anythin’, only my own heart beating in ma chest. I felt trapped, like I couldna move at all, like I wa tied down and being held. I wanted to open ma eyes or shout but I couldna do anythin. I had nae concept of time or space. Only that I wasna truly there.

One day, I managed to force ma eyes open. I couldn’a focus or see anythin. I kent they were there, talkin’ tae me, asking if I could hear them. I tried, I really did try to see them, tae reach them. I felt a pain, not sure where but I felt it and tried tae move away from it. She sounded happy so mebbe I managed it. I wanted tae smile, to see her face, tae let her know I wa’ tryin’ tae reach her. Before
long, the nothingness pulled me back and I lost her agin.

I heard fragments of conversations, heard them talking in Gaelic at times. I wanted tae teach her, to correct her mispronunciations or sentence order. I tried but all I could do was mumble. Each word tired me out again and I sank away from her once more.

Then one morning, she said hello in the sweetest voice. She whispered it was her birthday and asked where her gift was. I wanted tae smile, to see her face once more. She held ma hand as always except this time I could feel it, properly, her hand in mine. I squeezed with all my strength and I felt her gasp. I managed it. I would have cried when I heard her response. I felt water hit my face as she thanked me for her gift before I felt her lips on mine, ever so gently. I sank away again, happy to have felt her so clearly for a second.

Laughter was all around me next time, different voices talking and I wracked my brain to remember all their names. Claire, mo Sorcha. John was nearby too, his clipped English complementing Claire’s. Joe, his Boston twang cutting through along with Gail and Malva’s Scottish lilts. I smiled, a real smile I could feel on my face. I managed to swallow the lump in my throat as I felt a tear form in my eye. I took a deep breath for the first time in what felt like forever, it filled my lungs and I could feel my chest rise. Claire’s voice was near me, I could hear her call my name, could feel her fingers wrapping around my wrist. I heard them all moving to be around me, felt John take my other hand, checking a pulse. I managed to blink and open my eyes. I tried to focus on one person but there were so many. Eventually, one took up my entire vision. Her brown, curly hair framing her face, the most beautiful whisky-coloured eyes looking directly into mine. Her smile was radiant and I couldn’t help smile back.

“Am I awake?” I mumbled, my mouth barely working after so long.

“Yes, yes you’re awake Jamie.” I nodded slightly. I turned to look at all the others around me before returning to her.

“How long?” She swallowed and looked down, the tears working their way down her face.

“Two months, over actually.” I nodded again. I let go of her hand and reached up to wipe her tears away.

“Dinna cry, Sassenach.” She laughed then, hiccupping through the tears.

“You’re in a coma for two months then you wake up and insult me?” I smiled again then.

“Aye. Had time tae think.” She laughed again and then stopped suddenly, looking at me intently.

“Jamie, say something else, another sentence.” I looked at her puzzled before flicking my eyes to John, he was also staring at me in wonder. I smiled and looked back to Claire, understanding what was going on finally.

“Have you s..s..aved some cake for me?” At this she threw her head back and laughed before kissing me firmly.

“Yes, you bloody Scot.”
He's awake! Yay! Let me know what you think!
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

He's awake! But I feel he might have some explaining to do.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jamie slept a lot for the first few days. He was moved to critical care the day after he woke up and slept for around 36 hours straight. He’d joked just after he came around that being in a coma was very tiring, always trying to wake up, navigating the fog that surrounds your brain. Of course, he hadn’t only been searching for a way out of the void; his brain had been busy growing new connections, new cells, replacing damaged scar tissue and forming synapses linking his memories together. It had worked, we were confident, but we now needed the proof.

John’s method was only at the beginning of the trial. The license had literally come through the day before Jamie’s cells were injected. To continue, John needed concrete evidence that it was the new cells that had worked and it wasn’t just down to normal regrowth. To assess this, more scans would be needed, more neuropsychological testing carried out. This had all be explained to Jamie before, but now was a different matter. John knew that his friend had been through a lot already, more than anyone else if you consider the fact he’d travelled through time. The added burden of being involved in a scientific study could be too much to ask for.

He spoke to me about it one evening at home. We’d both left Jamie to sleep, the need to keep a vigil seemingly over. We were in the living room; he in the chair, me laid out on the sofa. We were tired but overjoyed that finally, we had our man back with us. But I could tell John was worried about something, I’d spent two months pretty much in his company without a break. I’d learnt to read his moods, his body language. He was like the brother I never got a chance to have.

“What is it? Spill!” He looked at me, a slight expression of denial before he realised it would get him nowhere and started talking.

“I don’t know if I want to ask Jamie to undergo any further testing.” I sat up, looking at him questioningly. “I mean, I did the procedure as a friend, well, you know, it’s more than that, but the truth of the matter is, I need Jamie as evidence to move the study further.” I nodded understanding from conversations we’d already had.

“So? Jamie agreed to everything before the procedure. He’ll want to help more people get this treatment.” John nodded, looking at his hands clasped in front of him.

“I know what Jamie agreed to before, but that was months ago. He’s been through so much, Claire. I just think, that maybe, just maybe, he might like to have a few months without anything to do with a hospital. Let’s face it, he came through the stones, landed in the 21st century and he’s spent three months of his time here in a coma. He’s spent over four months inside that building.”

I agreed with everything John was saying but he was forgetting one, major point.

“Why don’t you ask him instead? Let it be his decision. He’s not been able to make many yet. He’s
had so many options taken from him in the last year or so. Let’s give him a little control back.” John
looked at me and smiled.

“You’re right. He has. But one thing he has chosen is to live. It would have been so easy for him to
bail out at any point. He’s…”

“A warrior. A fighter. And someone who is very brave and is used to leading people. He’ll help. I
know he will.”

So it was that two days later, when Jamie smiled at us, wide awake as we went to visit him, John
asked his question. It took all of three seconds for his decision. He didn’t disappoint me, his desire to
help others was strong and he was more than willing to continue to be John’s guinea pig for the
study. Scans and tests were scheduled. I recalled the first MRI Jamie had months ago, I knew he was
scared but knowing what I do now, it amazed me that he coped so well. He’d just been loaded onto
the platform in front of the tunnel and the coil was being fastened to hold his head in place.

“You look so calm.” He smiled at me and squeezed my hand.

“I’ve had a few of these now. Gettin’ used to ‘em.” His accent was slowly softening, he blamed it on
having Sassenachs as the only people he gets to talk to.

He survived the MRI and the CT scans without incident and was back in his room before he knew it.
It was dinnertime but he was still struggling to eat proper food. I’d been trying him with different
things to tempt him every mealtime so far, but nothing had clicked yet. It was hard coming back to
life after two months. Your body is wasted, every muscle so much weaker than it was before. Your
stomach shrinks and everything goes out of synch. He was barely eating enough calories to sustain a
rabbit let alone the red-haired Viking I had before me.

Tonight was the same chicken soup I had tempted him back with the first time. He smiled at the latest
try and ate a little of it before putting it to one side. I smiled, trying to hide my concern but failing
evidently.

“Dinna fash, Sassenach. I’ll be fine. I just canna eat sae much at once. It’ll get better.” I nodded. He
was still being fed through a tube too, every little helped I supposed.

“You did well today. You even looked relaxed during that MRI.” He chuckled and took my hand
again between both of his.

“Aye, well. Once you’ve been in one devil’s contraption and survived, you get a bit more
confident.” I smiled at looked at him with an eyebrow raised.

“A devil’s contraption?” He nodded and laughed.

“Aye, weel. We dinna have many MRI machines where I’m from. What was I supposed ta’ think of
it when ye first strapped me tae that thing?” I stopped smiling then, the horror of what we’d
inadvertently done to him becoming clear.

“Oh God, Jamie, you must have been terrified!” He gave me one of his famous (well, amongst the
nurses) side smiles.

“Aye, I couldna say anythin’ about it at the time. Ye’d ha’ though I wa’ mad. I just trusted you. I
kent you wouldna hurt me. So I did everythin’ ye asked.” I swallowed my tears and raised his hands
to my lips, kissing the back of each.

“You are so brave. I can’t even imagine what it must have been like for you.”
“I had a good guide tae help me.” He leaned forward then to kiss me. It was soft, gentle, a reminder of his love for me. I smiled at him when he moved away. We were quiet for a few moments, the hustle and bustle of the hospital around us filling the silence. Eventually, he picked up the soup again and ate some more.

“How do you think I’d have managed, if it were me that travelled to your time?” He looked at me appraisingly, thinking of his response.

“Weel, a Sassenach lassie wandering around near fairy stones would ha’ gotten you noticed for sure. Your tongue would ha’ got you intae bother, of that I am certain.” This earnt him a small punch on his shoulder causing him to laugh. “What would have happened if you’d ha’ come through that night rather than me? Hmm. Well, I should imagine you’d ha’ been doing exactly what you’ve been doin’ anyway.” I looked at him questioningly. “Fixing ma scratches.” I laughed then, agreeing that would probably have been what would have happened.

“I am certain that we woulda been taegether anyway, Sassenach. I was told about you, in Paris, when I was a lad. We were meant tae meet, on one side of the stones or the other. You were always meant tae be wi’ me, and I you.” He wiped the tears from my eyes with his thumbs before kissing me again.

We talked more and eventually he finished the soup. He settled into the pillows and looked at me with such an expression of love. I felt him gently tug my hand and I let him pull me onto the bed beside him. He wrapped me in his arms, kissing me on my forehead. I listened to the beat of his heart, letting it lull me to sleep against him.

I wasna surprised to see John the day after all my scans. He’d been pourin’ over ‘em all night accordin’ tae Claire, making sure there was nothin’ he’d missed. I was a little worrit but the headaches had eased to become bearable and I was startin’ tae fell more alert, more awake as the days passed. He smiled as he entered the room, Claire following him.

“Jamie! How are you doing?” He sounded cheerful which I took tae be a good sign. I felt Claire take a seat on the bed beside me and take hold of ma hand.

“Ready tae go home.” I was. I wanted ma bed and more importantly, I wanted Claire in it beside me.

“Well, that should be happening soon. If you keep eating that is.” I nodded and wrinkled ma nose. Food was still somethin’ I dinna have any interest in. “Right. Scans are back. So, the fMRI scan we did on you yesterday, that’s the one where I asked you to talk, to listen to music, to speak Gaelic…” I nodded remembering all the things he’d asked me tae do. “Well, that shows that the areas of your brain we were concerned about are looking pretty healthy. Better blood flow especially in your language processing centres. The MRI is still showing a lot of scar tissue and EEG is still indicating a chance of seizures though. The epilepsy medication is still essential, do you understand?” He was talking like my doctor, not my friend and it made me chuckle.

“Yes, Doctor Grey.” He chuckled too in response and continued.

“Headaches should be much better? Are they?” I nodded and we spoke for a few minutes about painkillers that I might need if I have a bad day.

“Other than that, your brain is looking so much better than the mangled mess it was in May.” I smiled and turned to Claire, she was beaming back at me and I kissed her then. She moved back and ran her fingers through my hair, it was long enough now to cover the areas where John had drilled for the injections and I was starting to look more normal.
“I’m just glad we don’t have to keep butchering this beautiful hair of yours anymore.” I laughed at this and kissed her again before turning back to John.

“Thank you, John. Truly. I dinna understand half of what you tell me but thank you.” I released Claire’s hands and held out a hand for John. He took it and sat opposite Claire. He was still holding a file, one having been put to the side.

“It was my pleasure, Jamie. You have an extraordinary brain, it’s potential for recovery is amazing. Not many would have recovered at all, let alone as well as you have. Thank you for trusting me to have a go at fixing you. And thank you for letting me use you as evidence. You’re the first of many people I hope I can treat with this method.” I nodded and gripped his hand harder.

“I hope so.”

“There is something else I want to talk with you about.” He looked down at the file in his hand and then passed it over to me. I looked at Claire but she was just as puzzled as me. Opening the file, we both gasped in shock.

“James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser was born on the 1st of May, 1995. He was born to parents Brian and Ellen Fraser in the village of Broch Mordha. He has a birth certificate, a medical file, a history based in the modern world. He has GCSEs and A-levels. I figured languages would be an appropriate choice. That and history seeing as you’ve read quite a lot already and have experience of the 18th century. You’re no longer a figment of the past. You’re a real person with a national insurance number and a credit rating. You’re part of the system now.” I looked at all the documents in front of me with amazement and shock. My name was on papers, on identification, on certificates.

“John, I…I dinna…”

“You don’t need to say anything. It was a pleasure. I wanted you to feel part of the world you’ve found yourself in. You can do anything you want now. Set up a bank account, get a job, go to college or university, get a passport and travel. Anything.”

I could only think of one thing to do, I was so overwhelmed. I grabbed him and hugged him as tightly as I could. I felt his arms go around me and after a few seconds, he relaxed.

“Thank you. I… just, thank you, for everythin’. ” He nodded and we moved apart. He stood and made to leave, his face flushed.

“Right, well, I’ve got a report to write. I’ll see you later.” Claire followed him out to the door and I just looked at each of the documents he had given me. I was overwhelmed. Claire sat beside me again when she returned and explained what each piece of paper showed. I put them all back into the file carefully afterwards, giving them to Claire to take home for safe-keeping.

“I’ll keep them next to mine.” I smiled, happy that I had a place in this world after all.

“Jamie, we need to talk.” I had expected that those words would be spoken tae me eventually. I had been awake a week now, had slept plenty of that time away but I could no longer hide from the fact that she would have questions for me. I nodded and she pulled up a chair beside the bed. She didn’t say anything, just looked at her hands, wondering how to ask the question.

“Aye. I did mean tae kill maself.” I whispered the words I knew she wanted to know. Her head whipped up at that, tears already forming and rolling down her face.
“Why?” Anger, disappointment, fear. All emotions present in that one word. Why?

“Because I felt I had nae future.” I spoke quietly, looking into her eyes, willing her to know how I felt. “I couldna see a path forward. I’ve lived a life different from other men. I kent that as a young man, you should have a plan, a purpose. I had nae such plan, I merely took a step, then another. Ever forward, ever onward. One day, I turned around and looked back and saw that each step was a choice. To go forward or left or right or to not go at all. Some choices were between right and wrong, some were between life and death. My life is the result of these decisions. But wi’ this, I couldna see the next move.” She moved to sit beside me, my hand now resting in hers as she wiped her tears away.

“Oh Jamie. Why didn’t you say something?” I looked down at our hands, the fingers entwined.

“I once thought I was in love, when I was a much younger man. I was at the Université in Paris, she swept into ma life and I thought that wa’ it. Until she swept back out and I kent that mebbe, it wasnae love I felt for her. The night I opened my eyes and saw you, your hair wild and curled all around yer face as ye’ tended me, I kent what we had was different. But by then I had nothing left to offer ye. I wa’ broken. Damaged beyond repair. I felt useless. A man, in my time, should be able to support his wife, to give her the life she deserves, to provide for her an’ any bairns. I cannnae do that, Claire. I’m no’ able to do that.” I hung my head, I dinna want to let he see my self-pity. Her hand rested gently on my cheek, making me look up at her.

“I don’t need you to do any of those things. I only need you to love me.” I smiled slightly before resting my forehead against hers.

“I ken that now. But then. I’d been so very ill for those few days, I felt that death would be a blessing to stop the pain. Then, ye were sae quiet that morning. Ye wouldna look me in the eye, Claire. Ye looked tired and I kent I wa’ the reason for that. Frank, he fired words that hit every fear I held...”

“Shh, don’t say any more about him.”

“I have tae. Ye must know. I love you, I love you sae much that I feel ma heart will burst, like it’s all too much to fit inside one man. I was willing to let you be free. Ye didna ask for this, tae be saddled wi’ a cripple. I kent ya wouldna get rid o’ me, so I chose to leave and let you get on wi’ yer life, wi’out me.”

“No, Jamie, no.” She sobbed the words as she wrapped her arms around ma neck, gripping me in a fierce embrace. I clung to her, my face nestled in the crook between her neck and shoulder. I breathed her in deeply, letting her soft scent fill me, calm me. I dinna ken how long we sat like that, gripping each other. Her breathing grew quieter, her shaking subsided and eventually, she sat back to look at me, her hands on either side of ma face.

“Do you have a path now?”

“Aye. I do, mo Sorcha. It’s beside yours.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the wonderful comments at the end of chapter 18. It’s great to hear you’re still enjoying it. Hopefully you feel the same after this one too. It’s time for our couple to get to know each other for a while. Let me know what you think!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the wonderful comments. I'll try responding to them all today.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next two weeks saw Jamie getting back into the swing of things. He was eating properly, finally, and had returned to the spinal injuries unit for a spell to get some strength back in his upper body. He’d been suffering from twitches in his legs recently and it was starting to affect his mood. He didn’t complain often at all, but this was starting to drive him mad. It woke him in the middle of the night, it stopped him from being able move from one place to another, it was starting to make his lower back ache. He’d been tried on diazepam which made him even more irritable, only he complained much more slowly and with slurred speech. Finally, he was settled on gabapentin which would also help as a second-line anticonvulsant for his epilepsy. He wasn’t too impressed at having to take even more drugs but conceded that it was better than his legs misbehaving.

I had returned to work properly by now, seeing him only when I wasn’t on shifts. John and I managed to work it out that one of use was nearly always available if needed but Jamie was slowly regaining his independence and needed us less and less each day. Before long, he was loading himself into the car and we were off home. He was still extremely weak and much too thin for my liking, he was struggling a little to transfer from and to his wheelchair, but he’d had enough.

The first evening he was home was wonderful. All three of us were sat around the dining table, laughing and joking about Jamie’s first impressions of the 21st century. A bottle of wine had been opened, John had cooked, which was a skill he’d been keeping to himself, and the traditional chocolate fudge cake made an appearance. We eventually moved into the living room with coffee and Jamie managed to get himself onto the sofa, groaning with pleasure as he did.

“Missed this.” He dragged his legs to rest them on the coffee table and rested his head on the back of the sofa. I smiled when I walked him and saw him. He looked so at home, so content and comfortable.

John had sat on the floor by Jamie, his head leaning back on the arm of the sofa. The pair of them had their eyes closed, just content to be exactly where they were. I grabbed my phone and snapped a photo of them before they realised. I sat beside Jamie and curled into his side. His arm came around me and his head rested on mine. No one said anything for a while. To most people, we would be considered a strange family unit, but for us it was just right.

We settled back into routines, John and I working, Jamie building his strength and deciding what he wanted to do with his life now he had options. John and I thought he would make an excellent counsellor for people suffering from TBI and spinal injuries. He had laughed at the idea thinking we’d gone mad.

“I ken nothin’ about that except my own experiences. Why would anyone listen tae me?” We just looked at him with raised eyebrows before he huffed and left the room. Next thing, he was looking up what qualifications he would need and researching colleges where he could study.

Everything seemed to be going well until one day, I arrived home to find John’s bags packed and
stacked next to the door. He was upset, shaking visibly. It was November but Jamie was sat out in
the garden, seemingly unaware of the cold.

“John? John!” He stopped finally and looked at me, panic and sadness all over his face. “What’s
wrong? What’s happened?” I nodded over at Jamie through the doors.

“I can’t do this anymore, Claire. I’m…I’ve… Just…” He slammed his hand down on the worktop,
hard. “Christ, I just need to leave.” He squeezed his eyes tightly shut, taking in a deep breath through
his nose.

“Ok. It’s ok. Just…”

“Don’t tell me to calm down and think it through. I’ve just made a huge mistake and now I need to
leave.” I looked over to Jamie who now had his head in his hands. Possibilities started to fly through
my mind as to what could have happened that meant John had to leave immediately. I nodded, sad
that it had come to this so soon.

“Where will you go?”

“There’s some research going on in Panama which I’m interested in. I think it would be best if I left
for a while. A long while.” I swallowed the lump in my throat, not sure how I was going to cope
without him.

“You’ll keep in touch? Let me know where you are?” He nodded. The doorbell ringing to let us
know his taxi had arrived.

“I will. Look after him Claire. Love him. And take care of yourself, kleine schwester.” I laughed at
his new nickname for me, coined a couple of weeks ago as him and Jamie were reading a book of
German short-stories. We shared a brief hug before he left, picking up all his bags and was gone.

I waited a few moments to collect myself before grabbing Jamie’s plaid and my jacket and heading
outside to find out what had happened. Jamie looked up when I opened the door and smiled sadly.
He took the plaid and wrapped it around himself before leaning forward to rest his head on his knees,
eyes closed.

“John’s gone.” He nodded slightly. “Do you want to tell me why he’s gone?” He didn’t respond.
Minutes passed without him moving, only the gentle rise and fall of his torso indicating he was alive
at all. Eventually, he sat up and stared out at the garden.

“It’s… something I should have foreseen. But didna. And now it’s a mess.” He laughed bitterly.
“I’m such a fucking idiot.” I started at this statement, Jamie never normally swore, well, not in
English anyway. He had an amazing repertoire of Gaelic curses much to mine and John’s
amusement. But he’d learnt not to swear in English by being punished severely at the Abbey in
France. His uncle Alexander had made him sleep on the cold cloister floors without a blanket every
time he blasphemed. He had learnt quickly.

“What happened?” I could already guess to some extent.

“I made a mistake…no, not a mistake, I… we… kissed.”

We’d been talkin’ about relationships, if there had been anyone I had left behind in 1743 that I was
runnin’ away from. I told him about Annalise, the lassie in France who I fought a duel over. He
laughed at how I nearly lost ‘cause my hair came loose and obscured my opponent at a vital point.
He laughed harder when I told him how she had chosen the man I had beaten and that was that.
“So, you didn’t have much luck with the girls then?” I snorted at this.

“Oh aye, they were all’as flinging themselves at me as a young lad but when I became a wanted man, that wa’ different. Non sae eligible then.”

“How did you become a wanted man?” I smiled humourlessly.

“I annoyed a certain Randall. Seems I have a habit of doing that nae matter the century I’m in.” He smiled back, nodding.

“That the one who flogged you?”

“Aye. First hundred was fer trying to escape Fort William. Second hundred delivered by the man himself was fer theft. One hundred lashes for a maggot infested bannock. At least I kept both hands.” I chuckled but John just looked at me, a sadness in his eyes.

“Christ Jamie.”

“Aye, it’s a lot nicer in this century from what I have seen. Anyway, I wasna doin’ sae great when some friends made shift tae get me out. I was clinging’ ontae the back of a horse, trying not to be sick, or pass out or fall off then a shot rang out and a red-coat private dropped dead nearby. I wa’ blamed for his death and have had a murder warrant ever since. Silly really, I couldna even ha’ held the pistol, let alone fired it.” I smiled at John again. “But, it was a verra long time ago now. I dinna need to worry about Black Jack Randall anymore.”

“No, you don’t. Just his ridiculous ten or eleven times grandson or whatever he is.” I laughed.

“Aye, him. He’s a bully too, jus’ wi’ paper.”

“Why did Randall have it in for you so badly that he would frame you for murder?” At this I looked away, it was still uncomfortable tae talk about.

“Weel. The captain had a certain…special request that I refused.”

“Ahh. Right.” I half smiled at John, still facing the garden outside.

“He offered me the chance to not be flogged a second time if I ‘made free wi’ ma body’. I couldna do it. Not that I didna think about it. I held nae illusion that being flogged wouldna hurt a lot more than getting buggered by that bastard, but, I couldna let him break me. So, I took the floggin’.” Neither of us said anythin’ for a while. The conversation had started so light and was ending verra darkly.

“I had a girlfriend a little like that at university.” I looked at him with a disbelieving smile. “Truly I did. In my first year. Very difficult to break up with, kept sending me threatening letters. Pulled a massive chunk of her hair out in my car once. Scary woman. Had her mates burn me at the pub, I’ve still got the scar!” He held up his hand for me to look at, right enough, a large white circle was still present. I looked at him then.

“A girlfriend? I thought you woulda had a boyfriend.” He laughed at me then before smiling back at me.

“Well, yes. I know I definitely would now.”

“So, how did you ken you prefer lads tae lasses?” He laughed again, surprised this time.
“Hmm, how to answer that. Simply put, I tried both.” I looked at him a little shocked at his forthright answer. “I can see I’ve shocked you. Yes Jamie, I’ve slept with both men and women. Enjoyed both to be perfectly honest but men, or rather, a specific man, seems to hold my attention more than any woman ever could.” I swallowed, the look in his eyes telling me everything.

He moved to sit in front of me then, taking ma hands in his. They were as big as mine, thinner, more finely boned, but large and strong. Surgeon’s hands. I didna stop him as his lips brushed mine fleetingly. He looked at me questioning before kissing me again, more firmly this time. I kissed him back, gently pressing against him. I felt his tongue against my mouth and I tentatively met it with mine. It was when I heard him moan in the back of his throat that I realised what was happening. It brought me back with a thud and I startled, pushing him away.

“No. John. I canna…” My heart was thundering in ma chest.

“Oh God. Oh God, Jamie, I’m so sorry. I…”

“Nae, I’m sorry, I…I… sorry”

I turned away from him and escaped out into the garden, heedless of the cold and rain. My thoughts were everywhere. I closed the door behind me to drown out the sounds of his anguished sobs. I couldna look at him, I was so ashamed at my behaviour. I’d brought it on with my stupid questions, as good as invited him to do it. Encouraged him. Kissed him back. I was confused, angry at myself and sad that I’d wrecked a friendship.

It wasna until Claire opened the door and wrapped me in my plaid that I knew he had gone. I had sat outside for over an hour, my fingers were blue and my shivering violent so I huddled into myself, still not daring tae return inside. I told Claire everything, every detail. I could keep nothin’ from her. She nodded understandingly, taking my hands in hers to warm them. She encouraged me back in tae the kitchen after my confession and made me drink hot tea. It was a while later, when I’d finally stopped shivering that she started the questions.

“What made you ask?”

“I dinna ken. Just wondered.”

“Are you wondering if you might be the same? That you might want John too?”

“No. I dinna think so.”

“Did you enjoy the kiss?” I looked at her. She normally wore all her thoughts on her face, not now. There was nothing there with this question.

“I prefer kissing you.”

“That didn’t answer the question Jamie.”

“Yes, it did.” My answer was unsatisfactory it seemed. “I…I did enjoy the kiss. But not as much as I enjoy kissing you.” She nodded.

“Would you like to… be intimate with John? I would let you. You can have the chance to experiment, if you wanted to…”

“I dinna want John in that way, Claire. I love him but not like that.”

“Are you sure? I mean it. It’s clear you’re attracted to him. You could, I wouldn’t mind.”
“I only want you, mo Sorcha. You are the only person I will ever want.”

“Prove it to me. Show me.”

She moved to crouch in front of me then. Taking my face in her hands, fiercely pressing her lips tae mine. This kiss I did respond to, increasing the pressure, winding my fingers through the curls of her hair as she wound hers painfully through mine. We were both breathless when we broke apart.

“I want ye Claire. I want ye so much I can scarcely breathe. Will ye have me?” She smiled, her lips against mine.

“Yes. I’ll have you.”

We made it to the floor, clothes were ripped and pulled away leaving us both naked and writhing on the wooden boards. I wanted to kiss her everywhere, claim all of her as mine, leave my mark. She was the same, I felt her teeth in my shoulder as I grabbed her buttocks, pulling her to me. Her nails were scoring my back, digging intae my flesh as I dragged my teeth across her nipples. I rolled onto my back and grabbed her hand. I kissed her deeply, my tongue duelling with hers and I moved to rest her hand over my cock. I couldna feel anything, but I knew she wanted to touch, tae feel all of me. I’d been scairt afore, now I was willing to give her anything she wanted.

She moaned intae my mouth as she touched and stroked me to life. I broke the kiss to look down and saw I was ready for her. She quickly straddled me, and I watched as my cock slipped inside her. My imagination ran wild, the feel of her moving on me, the pressure of her hands on my chest changing, my lower back telling me there was a moving weight on me. I moaned as I watched her, her hands running down my chest, tracing my scars.

“Tell me. Tell me what you feel.” I begged her to let me live the experience with her, needed to hear her words. She described the sensations she was feeling as she rode me. I watched her face, caressed her breasts, rubbed my thumb against her causing her to throw her head back, grabbed her hips so hard she would have bruises. She made me hers, claimed me as I claimed her. It was rough and painful but I didna want it tae stop. She moaned loudly at her climax, clawing my chest, blood seeping through the skin. I followed her, a shuddering breath signalling my end as my mind imploded and my upper body tensed, throwing my head back against the floor, neck muscles straining.

It was minutes before either of us could move or speak. Feeling slowly started to return and I felt the scratches and bites on my body stinging. I laughed gently and attempted to sit up slightly, a groan escaping me as my lower back protested at being abused on the hard floor. Claire moved similarly gingerly and rolled to lay next tae me. Our eyes met, and we laughed before kissing once again.

“You feeling a bit ragged around the edges?” Her question was spoken against my lips. I just nodded and kissed her again, revelling in the sensation.

“When you bed a vixen, you expect tae get bit.” She laughed at this and gently bit down on my lip causing me to wince slightly.

We finally managed to make it intae the bed, our bodies enjoying the softness after our exertions on the floor. We both lay on our sides, facing each other. Her hand was laid gently on my face, her forehead resting against mine, looking deep intae my eyes.

“You are mine James Fraser. I am your master.” I smiled, kissing her again.

“Aye. Ye are. And I am yours. I willna stray from ye my wee vixen.” She smiled back, moving a leg
over my hip to pull herself closer to me. I ran a hand down her back, over a buttock before finally resting on her hip, narrowing the gap further. Hours passed as we kissed and caressed and whispered our dreams for the future.

Chapter End Notes

Sadly, there was always going to be a winner and a loser in this story. John will return, dinna fash.

I will try to get a chapter up each week still but I'm at the end of where I had written up to over summer. I don't get a lot of free time for writing when I'm at work but I'll try. They might just have to be shorter chapters.

Keep following though. Miles left to go in this story.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

A little bit of domestic calm for a change.

Chapter Notes

NSFW from the off.

Fresh off the keyboard this chapter so apologies for any errors.

I heard myself moaning his name before I fully became aware of everything else. I opened my eyes to see a shock of red hair between my legs and his hands curled around my thighs. His mouth and tongue were busy unravelling me and I could do nothing but moan and grip the sheets in my fists. He was commanding yet gentle, pleasure so intense it was verging on pain as he woke me in his favourite way.

As the pressure in me started to reach critical mass, I ran my fingers through his hair and held him against me. He moaned, I felt the vibration as he continued his onslaught. He loved it when I grabbed him, when it was too much to simply lie back and enjoy the ride. His fingers dug into me, holding me firm and showing who was in charge.

Finally, it was too much and my body stiffened as the pleasure coursed through my veins. I lay there, stunned, for several minutes, aftershocks running along my nerves causing tiny muscle twitches here and there. He looked like the cat that got the cream when I eventually opened my eyes, smug and satisfied with his efforts. It was a far cry from the nervous, shy look from only days ago when he first plucked up the courage to kiss me in that way. He was a fast learner, a fact he showed every single day.

“Come here, Mr Fraser.” He smiled, shaking his head slightly before manoeuvring himself up the bed towards me. He amazed me at just how graceful he could be even without the use of his legs. His upper body was regaining strength and I could see the muscles in his arms and chest working as he moved towards me, the seductive smile on his lips telling me my invitation was not unwanted.

“Well, Miss Beachamp, what are you going to do with me now I’m here?” He kissed me and I could taste myself on his lips, the smile forgotten as he moaned and lost himself in the kiss. Since ‘that’ evening, we had spent hours exploring each other, finding ways to touch and taste and make love. As there was no rush this morning to rise from our bed, it seemed a good time to continue and as my tongue duelled with his, I guessed he was of the same mind.

It was some time later, when the sun had finally risen, that we decided to get out of bed and explore in other ways. That and the announcement by his stomach that it was well past breakfast time. I went upstairs for a shower leaving him the downstairs wetroom for his own use. My smile left over from our morning activities fell as I entered the kitchen. He was sat by the kitchen table, staring out into
the garden.

“What’s wrong?” He’d been quiet for a few days now. No, quiet wasn’t the right word. He still spoke and laughed, but there was a distance in his eyes. A smile just didn’t quite reach the same place anymore, like he was constantly holding back. It had been two weeks since John had left; a gap that was hard if not impossible to fill. If I had any idea of the depth of feeling Jamie had for John, I was now certain it ran deeper that I had first thought.

“Och, nothing. Just watching the birds. The squirrels have taken all the peanuts again.” I smiled and walked to the window coming to stand behind him. Leaning over, I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and rested my cheek on the top of his head, looking at him in the reflection. His hand came to rest on my arm, a smile gracing his lips as he kissed my skin closest to his mouth. He’d taken to not shaving, just keeping a covering of short, auburn scruff. He looked good for it. He’d gained weight in the time he’d been home, the gaunt look of long-term illness now gone, and his face looked healthy once more.

“You can tell me you know.” He barely acknowledged the sentence; a slight tightening of his jaw was all I saw from his reflection. “I know you’re missing him. That’s ok.” He swallowed and looked down at his hand, his index finger teasing at the dry skin around his thumbnail. “He’s your friend…”

“And I broke his heart.” It was my turn to swallow nervously and stare at the birds. I felt his hand move along my forearm to take mine, grasping it tightly, our fingers intertwining. He gently kissed the back of my hand and looked at me in the reflection. “My heart is yours, mo nighean donn, as well you know. Dinna worry on that account.” I smiled at him. He’d started calling me his brown-haired lass while still in hospital the first time, when Gaelic was easier than English. He’d only told me the meaning a few days ago, whilst wrapped in the duvet and each other’s arms.

“I know.” A few moments passed, both of us watching the birds outside.

“Aye. I miss him. John holds a special place in my heart, Sassenach. He has trusted me, believed me, healed me and loved me, just as you do. I was fighting tae return to ye both; your touch, your voices. Ye both called tae me. Now, I’ve broken his heart and mine doesna feel quite so complete anymore.” I didn’t know what to do or say, I simply kissed the top of his head and held him slightly tighter.

“I understand, Jamie. He is special not least because he truly knows your story. He believed when most wouldn’t, and he’s never questioned you.”

“Will he return, do ye think? Even if I can ne’er offer him an’think’t’ more than friendship?” My thoughts on this weren’t quite so charitable. As far as I was concerned, John could count himself incredibly lucky to still have Jamie’s goodwill and friendship. He’d broken trust, attempted to seduce my lover and sat there whilst I fought for my relationship and my career all the while wanting Jamie for himself. Yes, I loved John too, in a platonic way, but he’d pushed it too far for me.

“I can hear ye thinkin’, Sassenach.” I made eye contact again.

“You can’t hear thinking.”

“Aye, I can. And I can hear what yer thinkin’ too. Yer face has it written all over it.” I raised an eyebrow, daring him to elaborate. “He was in no danger of takin’ me from you, Sorcha. My heart has burned for you since I was a lad, mo buidseach ban. You have an ancient soul and it spoke to mine the moment we met. I feel you when you’re near. When we kiss and lie tagether; I’ve never even imagined such a connection could exist wi’ anyone else. I will ne’er part from you.”

Maybe he was right, and he could hear my thoughts after all.
“But I’ve lost so many people. Jenny, my sister. My oldest friend, Ian. My godfather, Murtagh. I’ll never see any of them again. They will have all died such a long time ago now. I canna bear to lose someone else.” I kissed his cheek and nodded. I understood completely. He needed family like he needed air. I was enough for most days, but he needed friendship too, and John was part of that.

“I’ll send him a message, saying how we miss him and look forward to his return then.” Jamie smiled once more and pulled me further down until my head was next to his. He turned and kissed me, the smile lingering on his lips. He pulled away and I opened my eyes to see the happiness returning to his eyes.

It was later that day when I finally got around to messaging our missing piece. We were out in the Highlands. My first day off work for over a week and I wanted, no, needed the air and space of the countryside. Jamie came alive with the mountains and lochs in his sights. He smiled and laughed more freely; exploring the footpaths, listening to the birds. It was his natural habitat and I felt instantly calm and peaceful when he was released back into the wild.

We’d spent a few hours meandering around Glenmore Forest Park. He was teaching me some Gaelic phrases using the signs, busy correcting my poor pronunciation. He’d told me how he was desperate to do that when in the lighter phases of his coma. He’d laughed about how he couldn’t stand to hear his mother tongue being butchered by two Sassenachs any longer, so had to come back to do something about it.

He was skimming rocks into Loch Morlich. Well, attempting too. He’d explained the first time he’d tried it at Lochan Eilean that he’d never realised how much you need your hips to skim. It didn’t stop him trying though. I was sat on a rock beside him, watching him laugh at each rubbish attempt. I’d been attempting to compose the message all morning. How to put it without wheedling?

In the end, I sent him the picture of him and Jamie on the couch. It was the day Jamie came home the second time. I looked at the picture closely, having forgotten just how thin and weak he was. Nothing like the man grinning beside me now, the Cairngorm mountains reflected in his eyes, the sun making his hair look like fire.

“We miss you.” Three simple words but heartfelt. I hoped he would read between the lines and know that there were no ill feelings from either of us. I hoped that the same could be said for John, and that he would return with his demons in check, and with open heart and mind.

“Message sent, Sassenach?” I smiled at the term of endearment. One evening, he explained that it was his sister who called me it at Lallybroch. I struggled to completely understand what had happened to him that afternoon. A vision from the past? A connection between the two siblings that spanned the ages? He didn’t know either, but it was Jenny who I had to thank for making Jamie fight, even if that did mean I had to live with being called ‘Sassenach’. He said it in such a way though, my heart caught slightly every time. It was spoken only in love. I was his Sassenach, even though he was the outlander.

I nodded and smiled at him. I put the phone in my bag, stood and took hold of his hand. “I think it’s definitely time for cake, don’t you?” He pulled me onto his lap and kissed me deeply. Moments later, he reached into my bag for the phone, unlocked the camera and took my photo. He smiled at the shot; the mountains and loch were behind me, my lips were red and thoroughly kissed, my eyes full of love and longing. Yes, he had captured just what he wanted.

“Will you print this picture for me? I want to carry my two loves around wi’ me. Mo Sorcha agus mo beanntan.” I nodded silently as he kissed me again in the setting sun.
“I haven’t had a Christmas tree in years.” I watched her as she stepped back to admire our handywork. We’d been out to a ‘garden centre’ that morning, a place full of plants in long, covered tunnels. I’d gone around amazed at the wealth of colour and variation still on show in December. Claire had watched me, enjoying yet another opportunity to show me how different her world truly was. After an while exploring, we finally got to her main objective: a Christmas tree.

It was a Norwegian Spruce or so the sign read. I wasna sure it was actually from Norway but it looked and smelt good. We selected one taegether, her commenting on the shape and me commenting on whether it would fit in our living room. We chose one that wasna too tall, else we would have to call Joe to help get it intae the house! Then we shopped for decorations, again, another new concept tae me. Shiny objects of every colour, size and shape was available. I didna like any of them, instead going for the more natural looking wooden, carved ones. Claire laughed at my choices but they ended in the basket on my knee.

Several hours later, we made it home and managed to decorate the house. Holly and ivy garlands were wrapped around the banister rails and along the mantel. The tree stood proudly (if leaning a little) by the window allowing all who passed to witness it. I sat back after hangin’ on ma new favourite tree ornament – a rabbit made from broom bristles. I’d always felt an affinity wi’ rabbits, I dinna ken why. They’d appeared tae me in dreams since I wa a young lad, givin’ me a sense of peace.

“What was Christmas like for you? Back in your time?” She’d moved to sit on the sofa now, grabbin’ her mug of hot chocolate, warming her hands around it. Her beautiful eyes looking at me, whisky warmth and full of love. I smiled at her before moving to be nearer to her. I made it from ma wheelchair to sit beside her on the sofa. She pulled me down so that ma head rested in her lap, her hand running through ma hair.

“We didna really do Christmas. We went tae Church and mebbe made more of an effort to have a finer meal but it wa’ Hogmanay that we celebrated. The start of the new year. When I wa’ a lad, my ma used tae decorate the whole house with pine and holly. The smell from the kitchens where Mrs Crook would be roasting all kinds of meat and game was as close tae heaven as yer could get. All the furniture would be moved tae the side and large spaces for dancin’ were made ready. There’d be a piper an a fiddler playin’ jigs n reels in the parlour.

“All the tenants would be there, laughin’, drinkin’, havin’ fun. Then after midnight, a tall, dark-haired man would knock on the door; The first foot. It wa’ usually ma father. It wa’ meant tae bring good luck tae the household for the forthcoming year. He’d then go an’ first foot all the houses in the village. Delivering black bun and coal tae everyone. I remember one year, tryin’ tae keep ma eyes open, layin’ at the top o’ the stairs, watchin’. Ma came up then and we sat together, waitin’ for da to come home. I fell asleep an’ next thin’ I remember is da is carryin’ me tae bed.”

I swallowed the tears that were threatening to spill over at this memory, feeling my chest tighten with the emotion. “Ma died that followin’ year, while carryin’ my brother, Robert. It wa’ the last Hogmanay celebration at Lallybroch. We didna celebrate anythin’ after that.” I closed ma eyes and let the feeling of Claire, stroking ma hair, soothe me.

“Well, let’s make this a good one then. We both have far too many sad Christmases or Hogmanay celebrations to remember, let’s replace them with some nice memories instead.” I saw the tear marks on her face as I looked up at her but smiled back as I wiped my own away.

“Aye. We shall.”

I kent it was now traditional to exchange gifts at Christmas and this gave me pause for thought. How tae get somethin’ for Claire wi’out her findin’ out. I now had a ‘bank card’. She’d been filling out
paperwork since John made me a real 21st century citizen and I understood that there was some money going intae an account as I was now classed as disabled. I didna like the phrase ower much and I also didna like that money wa’ bein’ given to me after I had given nothin’ in return. Claire was adamant though. I would need money to get my counselling qualifications and this was a start.

The what was the next big problem. She had given me sae much least of all my life, her love and a home. I asked Tommy and his wife about this when we finally got tae meet again. It was an emotional reunion. They had heard about my illness and had been to see me a couple of times when I was in the coma. We caught up on what had been going well over the past weeks and months. Tommy was home now and working hard to minimise the impact his injury was having on his life with mixed success. Needless to say, being restricted to four wheels instead of two was taking its toll on his sense of freedom.

“Surely you must be the same, I mean, they won’t let you drive now ‘cause of your head surely.” I looked at him with a questioning glance.

“I…I didna ken how to drive anyway. Ne’er set foot in a car until Claire took me out for the day when I was in hospital.” They looked at me astonished. “Truly. I didna even get taken tae the hospital on wheels. I was flown so genuinely, that first time was wi’ Claire.” They looked at each other incredulously.

“’Ow did ya get about then?” Tommy’s Yorkshire accent got thicker the more confused he got.

“Foot or horse mainly. Safer from my experience than anathin’ wi’ wheels.” I smiled at them both and took another drink of my coffee. They were right though, I did miss my freedom insofar as getting about. I couldn’a ride a horse or walk now. And they were also right about my brain injury. I had asked Claire if maybe I could learn tae drive but the answer was probably not. My epilepsy wasn’t controlled enough yet and I still suffered at times from absences. It wasn’t safe for me or anyone else. I had resigned myself to being reliant on Claire until I discovered buses. Not perfect, but at least I could get some places.

Today had been my first outing on my own. Normally Claire either took me tae the hospital with her for my physiotherapy or I was collected by an ambulance. I had taken a taxi that fateful day when Frank visited (Claire was about ready to murder the bastard when I told her everythin’ he had said one afternoon) but had since not felt like ever using one again. The bus was good enough. Space for a wheelchair and a regular service was available from near the house. I had planned this all out myself and had shown all the arrangements to Claire. I remember wiping her tear away as she told me how proud she was of me.

We chatted for a while longer before I put my question to them. “Can I ask for yer advice? What can I get for Claire? For Christmas? I have nae idea what I could buy.” I explained that I wanted something special, that would mean something to her. They suggested various things, but nothing seemed quite right. I thanked them for the ideas and said I’d think on them.

It was starting to get dark by now and lights were starting to be turned on in the café. I noticed a flickering light out of the corner of my eye but thought nothing of it. Until I woke up in hospital a couple of hours later.

It had been a busy day. Back to back surgery from the moment I started my shift to the moment I finally finished. I hadn’t even had time to check my phone to see how Jamie’s trip into town went. He said he would email me once he got home and I went straight to my inbox before stripping out of my scrubs and into my trousers again. Nothing. No email but no phone calls either. “No news is good news I suppose.”
I’d been telling Joe and Malva all about Jamie’s planning over a five-minute coffee break I managed to squeeze in between two appendectomies. They were impressed that he was doing so well at regaining his independence. Of course, they didn’t know that he was also learning how to cope in the 21st century for the first time either but still, they were suitably enthusiastic about his progress. I had invited them to ours for Christmas day. Joe and Gail along with Malva would mean lots of laughter and good company for Jamie’s first Christmas.

I was changed and packing my bags when Joe rushed into the room to find me. “There you are, I’ve been searching for you everywhere.” He was out of breath showing that he had in fact been trying hard to find me. At once I knew something had happened and ran out of the room to A&E, Joe following me. The nurses pointed me to the right cubicle before I even had to ask and there he was. Sitting up in the bed by this point, I could see the sutures in his forehead. He had his eyes closed but I could tell he was awake, just dealing with a post-seizure migraine. Tommy was with him.

“Claire.” I greeted Tommy as Jamie opened his eyes slightly to look at me. He smiled wanly before closing them again. “I dunno what happened to him. One minute he was talking, the next he was on the floor. Smashed his head on the table though.” I could imagine the scene all too well. I picked up his hand and felt for his pulse. Strong and steady. He was watching me again, tired eyes tracking my every move. “He came round after a couple of minutes but the waitress had already phoned for an ambulance. We asked the paramedics to bring him here and Jamie had his emergency card with him with your name on it. They recognised you and in turn him pretty quickly after that.” I nodded, sitting carefully next to Jamie on the bed.

“How are you feeling?” He smiled again.

“I’ve been better but ok now.” I smiled back and squeezed his hand.

“Right, I’m going to speak to your doctor and see about getting you home.” He nodded and closed his eyes once more.

It was two hours later when we finally arrived home. He’d been given an emergency MRI for his head injury but that came back clear thankfully. No damage, just another scar to add to his already impressive collection.

“Do you want anything to eat?” He shook his head and went straight into the bedroom. He didn’t even turn on the lights, just moved from his wheelchair to the bed and lay down. I removed his shoes as well as my own and lay down next to him. He immediately grabbed his trouser legs and pulled them so he was laid on his side, his head on my breast. I wrapped my arms around him, holding him tight.

“I’m sorry.”

“What for?” I stroked his hair, pressing my lips against his scalp.

“For causing you to worry.” I didn’t say anything straight away, I just held him close to me, stroking and comforting him.

“There’s nothing to apologise for. You can’t control what happened anymore than I can. It was a light flickering at just the right frequency. That’s all. It could happen anytime, anywhere.” He started but I shushed him, kissing his forehead. “Don’t let one little incident set you back. You had your card with you, you’ve been taking your medication and you are fine. You’ve done so well today, Jamie. Don’t let it put you off.” He nodded against me. “But I’m getting you a bloody phone now whether you want one or not.” He chuckled.
“Aye, alright doctor.” He drifted off to sleep, gradually relaxing. I held him to me, thanking God that he was OK and, in my arms once more.

Chapter End Notes

Just a reminder that he's not entirely out of the woods yet but it's certainly better than it was.

Next chapter, Christmas. What do you think he'll get Claire?
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

It's Jamie's first 21st Century Christmas. What did he decide to get for Claire in the end?

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's taken me ages to update. The weeks leading up the Christmas were bonkers both at work and socially. I've never had so little free time! I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas if your celebrate and that 2019 is going well so far.

I'm not going to make any promises for regular updates on this story but I will promise that I will finish it. I have an incredibly busy 2019 ahead of me with some huge life changes so I'll get around the writing when time permits. But please, do keep pestering me. I love getting the odd reminder in my inbox letting me know that you still want more of my J&C. So yes, keep at it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Wake up, Sassenach.”

His voice washed over me, slowly drawing me out of my shallow, waking sleep and into the land of day. He was propped up on his elbow beside me, smiling, a look of excitement and impatience mixed with love and happiness on his face.

“What time is it?” I mumbled, my voice half asleep and whisperish.

“Does it matter? It’s Christmas morning. You told me that up-time doesnae matter today.” I closed my eyes and allowed my head to drop back into the pillow.

“I sort of meant if you’re a kid, then yes, up-time doesn’t really matter. Not when you’re a 23-year-old man.” He laughed and carefully moved my hair away from my face before settling a kiss on my cheek.

“Nolaig Chridheil, mo chridhe.” He kissed me again before gently putting something in my hand.

I opened my eyes and looked at him before turning my attention to the object in my hand. It was carefully wrapped in brown paper, string holding the wrapping together and tied in a bow. I sat up beside him, looking at the gift before me.

“Open it, Sassenach.” I nodded, carefully pulling on the string and letting the paper fall away. Inside was a wooden box. Intricate designs were carved over the surface; thistles entwined with a crown, strawberry vines and blossoms, planetary symbols. I could see a J and a C, a rabbit, a fox, the stones at Craigh na Dun.

“Jamie…it’s…” I smiled at him, feeling the tears start to well in my eyes.
“Open it.” I blinked my tears away before carefully lifting the lid. Inside was a pair of knitted handwarmers with a celtic knot design cabled into them. “I thought you might want somethin’ a little warmer now the weather is getting colder.”

“Did you…” He laughed and nodded again. “I had no idea you were so gifted.” He shook his head.

“Nae, not gifted. Just a lot of time on my hands. All highlanders can clickit and carve. No electricity in the highlands in 1743, mo chridhe.” I brushed my tears away before sitting up beside him.

“Thank you, Jamie. They’re wonderful.” I leaned to kiss him, our lips gently pressing together briefly. He carefully swept his thumb across my cheek, catching the final tear that escaped.

“Look in the bottom of the box, Claire.” I smiled at him before returning to the gift in front of me. I lifted out of the wristers and gasped. At the bottom of the box was ring. I carefully picked it up, holding it between my fingers.

“I ken we cannae be marrit for a while, but a vow doesnae need to be made in a church for God to hear it.” He took the ring in his own fingers before sitting up properly in front of me. “Claire, you have given me so much since we met, not least my life on a few occasions. I dinnae have much I can give you in return, but I will gladly entrust my heart and soul to your keeping, if you will have them.”

I couldn’t take my eyes off the ring he held in his hand, unable to believe what was happening. His words wrapped around me like a blanket. He was offering commitment; a promise to embrace his new life and to continue living, here, now, with me.

“Sassenach, will you have me? All of me, the good and the bad, the fixed and the broken?” This time I couldn’t stop the tears that flooded down my face. I nodded as I moved into his arms, holding him tightly as he gently rubbed my back. Quiet murmurings in Gaelic were spoken against my hair as he held me. Eventually, I sat back and looked into his eyes.

“Yes Jamie. I’ll have you, all of you. I’ll keep your heart and soul safe as long as you promise the same. You are mine. And I am yours.” He nodded, his own tears starting to fall.

“Aye, always.” He slipped the ring onto the fourth finger of my right hand. “When I’m from, a wedding ring goes here.” I nodded. “We also have a tradition, in the Highlands, called Handfasting.” I nodded, it was very popular nowadays to be hand-fast as part of a wedding service. “Seeing as we can’t wed, not yet anyway, would you want to…” I kissed him before he could say anymore.

“Of course I would. I love you, Jamie.” He smiled at my eagerness, apparently unsure as to how I would respond to this whole situation.

“It’s a blood vow, ye ken. If ye dinna want…” I jumped from the bed returning a few moments later with his dirk, disinfectant wipes and bandages. He laughed when I deposited it in front of him before returning to sit before him in bed. “I just need my plaid.” It had fallen off the end of the bed in the night so I reached over to grab it. As I passed it to him, he pulled me towards him, a kiss being delivered soundly to my lips. When he finally released me, he grabbed the plaid and ripped a narrow strip off the fabric. I gasped but he smiled. “We need a strip of cloth and what else other than the Fraser tartan will do?” I smiled at him, nodding in understanding. “Right then.” He carefully cleaned his dirk with one of the wipes then cleaned our wrists with another. “Are you ready, mo nighean donn?”

“Yes. I’m ready.” He smiled as he took my wrist in his hands. With a quick action, he slid the dirk
across the skin leaving a thin, shallow incision. Blood started to well and I quickly took the dirk from him to return the gesture. He was surprised for a second but relaxed and smiled as I cut him as he had me. He took my wrist again and pressed the wounds together, our blood mingling as he tied the strip of tartan around our hands.

“Repeat after me. Is tu fuil ‘o mo chuislean, is tu cnaimh de mo chnaimh. Is leatsa mo bhodhaig, chum gum bi sinn ‘n ar n-aon. Is leatsa m’anam gus an criochnaich ar saoghal.” He paused after each sentence, letting me attempt to match his words and pronunciation. When he finished, he leaned over to kiss me, deeply, soundly, pouring all his love into that one action. “Tha goal agam ort, mo Sorcha.” He kissed me again and together, we lay down and celebrated our new bond.

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The sun was creeping up as we lay in each other’s arms. She was admiring the ring I had placed on her finger only a couple of short hours ago. I kissed her forehead, then brought her hand to my lips to kiss the ring as well.

“Tis good that ye kept yer name, Sassenach. I wouldna be wanting anyone thinking that ye belong to anyone but me.” She chuckled then turned to look at me with a questioning glance.

“I won’t be a Fraser either though.”

“Nah, ye won’t. But ye will be Claire Beauchamp, a woman who kens her own mind and doesnae need to take a name to show who she chose.” She smiled and kissed me again before turned back to look at the ring now residing on her right hand.

“Does this mean we’re as good as married now, I mean, a blood vow is pretty serious stuff.” It was my turn tae chuckle as this.

“Aye, I suppose it does. Does that bother you, wife?”

“Nah. As long as you’re my husband, I’ll be happy.” She rolled to lay on top of me, stretching out full length above me, her chin resting on her hands laying on my sternum. “What did the words mean anyway?” I looked down at her, adjusting the pillows to support my neck as I did.

“They sort of rhyme in English. '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.'”

“We’re one now then, forever.” I nodded, tucking a stray curl back behind her ear. “We’ve always been one, Jamie. I’ll never part from you again.” I swallowed hard, biting back any tears.

“Dinna make promises ye canna keep, Sassenach. All we can do is try but who kens what the future brings? I can promise one thing though, that my soul will always reach out for yours, my heart whilst it beats will beat for you and when it stops for good, I will continue to love you until the end of time. I have lost six of my nine lives already. I choose to spend my last three with you and pray that they will continue for an eternity.” I wiped her tears away as she moved up to kiss me, wiping my own tears away as she did.

“Your lives are mine, Jamie Fraser. And I intend for them to be your happiest three.” I smiled as she kissed me again.

“They already are, mo chridhe.”

Claire moving around the room brought me out of my light sleep a little while later. The sunlight that squeezed its way through the chinks in the curtains just caught her bare skin here and there as she
walked from wardrobe back over to the bed. She held a couple of packages in her arms which she carefully lay on the bed beside me before clambering back under the covers herself. Her skin was cold so I pulled her tight to me, warming her once more.

“Yer freezing, a nighean.” She chuckled as she wrapped herself around me, taking all the warmth I could give her.

“I forgot it’s a weekday and the heating will be off. No-one’s usually in at this time.” Tuesday morning – Claire would be at work and I would be at the physiotherapist. Normally anyway. She sat up once she was warmed and pulled the covers up high to keep the cold air away. “It’s your turn now.” She gestured for me to join her sitting up, so I obliged, draggin’ my legs up the bed and leaning against the headboard, looking at her. She placed a large, soft package on my lap. “I can’t compete with the amazing gift you have given me this morning.” I tried to interrupt, she stopped me by placing a finger over my lips. “But I think you’ll like it all the same.” I smiled and kissed her finger before grabbing her hand, kissing the back of it before releasing it.

I looked down at the package in my lap. I turned it over to find my way in through the wrapping; tiny deer decorated the paper, all wearing tartan bows. I smiled and opened the parcel. I wasn’t prepared at all for what it contained. “How?” I picked up the fabric inside, amazed as we’d both spent hours looking for any trace or reference to it on the internet.

“I found someone who specialises in weaving tartans. I think the idea is you go with your own design but, well, I borrowed yours one day whilst you were out. She matched the colours as well as she could using authentic dyes from the 18th century. What do you think?”

What did I think? In my hands I held a Fraser hunting plaid, perfect in design and colouring. It was as mine was when I was first given it, hundreds of years ago. “Claire, it’s perfect.” I sniffed back the happy tears that were threatening to fall and pulled her against me. “Thank you, for everything.” I kissed her then before wrapping us both in my new plaid, holding us together as I showed her how much she meant to me.

It was well past noon when we finally made it out of bed. Along with my new plaid, a very detailed book on the history of the Highland clans was also given to me as well as a book on the Frasers of Lovat – my branch of clan Fraser. These would have to wait until later before I could devour them – I’d resisted the history of my own family for a while, not wanting to think of them in any other way than alive and well back in my own time. For that is how they were to me. I had passed through a door, one where they were still on the other side waiting for me. I couldna return but at least if I didna read about their future, they could continue living on in my mind.

I was saddened at the idea of ever wearing my tartan as a kilt again. I couldna do it; tae not be able to stand and walk about, my pleats swishing behind me. Nah. So I decided to wear it as a plaid across my shoulder and belted around my waist. With black jeans and shirt, Claire told me I looked “everything a proud Highlander should be in the modern world”. I laughed at her description but as I pinned on my brooch, still thankfully in my sporran, I felt a little more like the man I used to be.

Joe, Gail and Malva were all invited to Christmas dinner later that afternoon meaning that reluctantly, we had to start getting ready for guests. As we moved around the kitchen preparing food and setting the table, we couldn’t resist any opportunity to touch or kiss each other. A casual arm-stroke here, a stolen moment to pull her onto my lap for a kiss there. It truly felt different now, like our connection was a tangible string tethering us together.

It wasna just us that noticed it; our guests once they arrived commented on how different we were. Claire couldn’t wait to tell them what we’d done that morning, showing them her ring proudly. They were verra pleased and lots of hugs were given and received. I told them all about the ring – how it
was made from the key to my family’s ancestral home. I couldn’t tell them it was actually my key to the home I had left behind years ago, but they liked the story anyway. Claire kissed me when I had finished telling her the story. She understood what I had given her in that ring. It was made from iron, yes, and the silversmith couldn’t quite believe what I was asking of her when she made it, but she did a fine job nonetheless. To see it on Claire’s hand, a sign of our commitment to one another, it made my heart swell with joy.

Both Joe and Malva commented on my new plaid and agreed that it was definitely better than the now ripped, stained and worn garment I had been found in. My heart clenched at their words; it would always be sacred to me. Given to me with pride by my father on my eighteenth birthday, it was the last connection I had with him. Claire’s hand on my shoulder brought me out of my thoughts, a look of concern, the question on her face asking if I was alright.

“Aye, mo Sorcha, I’m fine.” I reached up the squeeze the hand on my shoulder. “Right, I think I’m gonna treat maself tae some of that whisky before ye lot drink it all.”

The meal was wonderful. I cannae remember laughing so much as when Claire tried to teach Gail how to win every time at ‘crackers’ or at the truly awful jokes that appeared. I shook ma head at how much difference a year could bring. A year ago, I couldna ever have dreamt of such things as fortune-telling fish and paper hats, turkey, pigs-in-blankets and Christmas pudding. It was another world tae me. The wine flowed, the conversation with it and I truly felt at home in this century for the first time. As I looked around the table, I was thankful for everything I had. A home, friends, much of my health now returned but most of all, my wife, sitting opposite me. We may not be married in the eyes of the law, but in the sight of God, she was mine, and I hers.

Just one face was missing from the scene. He’d not replied to the message Claire sent him weeks ago now. She’d not heard from him at all since the day he left. I’d been for follow up scans on my brain as part of the study but it was always someone else from his team in London who made the trip. They hadna heard from him either Claire discovered. He had disappeared.

“I’ll go grab another bottle of wine.” Three were already standing empty on the table and as I wasna drinking much, I laughed at the state of the others who had already imbibed plenty. I moved to the fridge to grab another bottle when the doorbell went. “I’ll get it.” They had barely heard they were all making so much noise for four people. I smiled again at the happy scene. My first Christmas in this time was a joyful one.

I moved down the hallway wondering who could possibly be calling at this time on Christmas Day. I slid the chain back from the door and turned the latch to open it. I couldn’t help my reaction as I saw who it was, standing in front of me.

“John!”

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think? Good choice of gift on both sides? and John? What on Earth could happen next?
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

John’s back and there’s a lot that needs to be said. I think whisky may be required.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He looked so bloody happy to see me. His face lit up the moment he recognised who it was calling at this stupid hour on Christmas Day. I felt my heart lurch and call out to him, but I resisted the temptation to show any emotion on my face. I hadn’t been gone long enough to erase the feelings I had for him; there was quite simply not enough time in existence for that. But I had learnt to hide my emotions, turn them off, replace love with anger and resentment. It was easier this way. Or so I kept telling myself. But as he smiled in front of me, the light in his eyes telling me that maybe he had missed me too, it was a hard resolution to keep.

“Come in! Claire!” He moved back away from the door as he yelled for her, the one who had what I could never have.

I walked in and closed the door behind me. The sounds of laughter in the air, the look of Christmas all about the place, the smell of home-cooked food and the feeling of happiness, all there, suffocating me. He looked at me with such an expression of joy, I could tell he wanted to grab me to him, check it was really me and not his imagination.

“It’s really me. I’m here.” He did grab my hand then, holding it tight in his as he pulled me down to embrace me. I didn’t return the gesture and I felt him stiffen the moment he realised. Claire appeared then, surprise and delight on her face too. Jamie released me, a hurt look on his face briefly before he schooled his features behind that mask once again. My heart hurt at seeing him do so; he only ever did that when he was upset and God, even now, I never wanted to be the reason for that to happen.

“John! You’re back!” She moved to embrace me too, but I stepped back, away from her. I avoided looking at either of them, instead gesturing to the briefcase I had with me.

“I’m not here on a social call. I’m here as Mr Fraser’s neurosurgeon.” I saw Jamie swallow and blink back the wetness in his eyes. I daren’t look at Claire, I knew there would be anger there and that I was not prepared to deal with.

“Aye, of course. Business on Christmas Day. Naturally, Doctor Grey.” His tone was devoid of emotion but I could hear the hurt and disappointment there anyway. “Well, living room?” Claire turned to Joe, Gail and Malva and told them that she and Jamie would return in a few minutes and to help themselves to the wine. Jamie merely watched me as I moved into the living room from the hallway before following. I sat in the armchair by the fire, putting my briefcase on the coffee table. Opening it, I extracted the papers I needed and waited for them to be ready for me to begin.

Claire closed the door behind her and sat on the sofa, Jamie remaining in his wheelchair to her right. I glanced at them; they were holding hands, very much a unit of two now. I could see the difference in them, the way they communicated in silence, the way he touched her with reverence and so much love, the way she looked back at him, reading him, making sure he was well. I saw the ring on her
finger and could guess what they’d done. This man from the eighteenth century was possibly the most progressive thinker I had ever met. He didn’t need a piece of paper to declare his connection to someone.

Jamie looked much better than last I saw him. He’d filled out a lot, got that healthy glow back into his skin. His hair was much longer and curling about his ears and neck, a beautiful, fiery auburn. He had a new scar, above his eye but as with all his others, it was fading now. He looked good in his plaid, new I noticed, not a trace of the blood that marked his old one. He looked every bit the Highland Laird, sitting alongside his lady. I cleared my throat; time to get this over with.

“As you know, I flew to Panama a few weeks ago to look into some new treatments being offered there. I went primarily to see if there was anything I could bring back to my own clinic but I stumbled on some therapy that may well be beneficial to you.” I looked into Jamie’s face finally. My gaze didn’t stay long before I had to look away. The distance in his eyes a far cry from the look of friendship that once resided there.

“Go on.” It was Claire that spoke, a tone of distrust in her voice.

“I have been under the tutelage of Professor Raymond – a neurosurgeon who is taking the world by storm with some of his more interesting techniques. He has developed a way of extracting stem cells from patients and using them along with ethically derived umbilical cord stem cells to repair complete spinal trauma. He’s had a lot of success and…”

“I’m not interested, Doctor.” I looked at Jamie as he interrupted me.

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

“I said I’m no’ interested in any further treatment.” I blinked once or twice as I looked at him, confused as to why he wouldn’t hear anything further.

“Why not may I ask?”

“You may ask. I have been poked, prodded, cut, stabbed, scanned and generally made to feel like some kind of science experiment for most o’ the time I’ve been this side of the stones. I’m no’ interested in anymore, John. I’m happy as I am. I’m used to it now, I dinna need any more surgery or treatments or stem cells.” I could see Claire out of the corner of my eye, looking at Jamie with surprise but pride as well.

“But Jamie…”

“No. You come here after disappearin’ wi’out trace for weeks. You walked out and left me because I couldn’a give ye what ye wanted and now, ye come back and act like our friendship ne’er happened. You call me ‘Mr Fraser’ and act cold and heartless, then ask me to subject myself to more pain and suffering. No. Ye dinna get to do that, John.” I sat there open-mouthed as he finished his tirade. He moved away from Claire to the window, looking out past the Christmas tree to the world outside. I could see his jaw clenching, his fists balling and relaxing as he worked his way through the anger.

“Please don’t be hasty, Jamie…”

“What do you want, John?” His voice contained all the hurt I knew his face would show if he turned toward me. “Is this because you want a real-life person to try out your new techniques on? Or because you want me tae owe ye something or…or… I dinna even ken what other motives you might have for this. You loved me once and now, now you treat me like I’m nobody but a patient number.” He turned to me then and my heart gripped painfully in my chest, letting me know that I
had made a terrible miscalculation. The realisation sent me reeling. Anger at myself and at him
bubbled up out of me as the accusations hurled against me sank in.

“Loved? If only it were that simple to make it past-tense. No, Jamie, I don’t want to cause you any
more suffering. You’ve had enough. I realised after I had left that I had caused you more without
conscious thought or intention. I believed I was making it better for both of us by leaving. I crossed a
line and I didn’t know how to un-cross it again. I’m a doctor. I made a vow to do no harm, but I
can’t help it, not with you. To be around you is the most exquisite agony, to want you but not have
you, to love you but get nothing in return.”

“Ye think I dinna love you back? Ye think I dinna want tae give you the happiness you deserve? Ye
think I want tae hurt ye? I do love ye, John, just not in the way ye need. My heart beats for another
and has done since it began. But ye had a piece of it, a piece that wa’ just yours. When ye left, my
heart ached, it has ached until I saw ye standing there this evening.” He moved towards me, to sit
face to face, looking right into my eyes. “But yer manner, yer tone, has broken it John. Ye treated me
sae callously and all because of what? I wouldna go tae bed with ye? Is that it? Is that all our
relationship was to ye? Well, ye were always gonna be disappointed because I cannae fuck anyone
anyway. I’m broken an’ always will be.” We stared at each other, both breathing heavily as we gave
free reign to the emotions bottled upside. I swallowed the lump in my throat and blinked back the
angry tears threatening to spill. All the while, he looked at me. Hurt. Anger. Disappointment.

“I’ll bring in a bottle of whisky.” I had forgotten Claire was there at all. So intense was mine and
Jamie’s reunion that we both jumped slightly at the sound of her voice. When she returned, we were
sat facing each other but with more distance between us. Nothing more had been said. She simply
placed the glasses on the coffee table between us, poured a dram into each and put the bottle down.
She reached over to squeeze my hand before walking back over to Jamie. A kiss on his cheek, a
whispered comment and she was gone, the door closing behind her.

We took a few moments to sift through our thoughts in the silence. Each now nursing a glass of
single malt, we both debated our next steps and words. I took the chance to observe the changes in
him more carefully. His back was straighter, arms more defined now and muscles evident through his
shirt. His face was filled out more and the strong jawline and cheekbones of his Viking heritage were
softer, less sharp. His eyes were awake, alive. Gone was the deep-set tiredness of ill-health and
recovery.

“You’re looking good. Well. Fit.” He simply nodded before throwing back the remaining whisky in
his glass. Putting the glass back onto the table slightly harder than was strictly necessary, he
obviously decided that the tone I was setting was the right place to start again.

“So do you. The sun of Panama suits ye.” I smiled uneasily back. The sun had indeed bleached my
hair and tanned my skin.

“I got your message. From Claire. I just didn’t know how to respond. What to say. Everything was
so raw still.”

“I ken. That was a bad day for me too. I recall Claire taking me tae the mountains to ‘see me back
out in the wild’ as she calls it.” I chuckled briefly, recalling that yes, that was indeed how she
referred to him back in his natural element.

“Jamie…”

“John…”

We looked at one another and chuckled. The anger starting to dissipate as the whisky entered our
bloodstream, calming our minds.

“Ye go first.” I smiled and he refilled both our glasses.

“I did a lot of thinking in Panama. About you, me, us. I spent hours analysing my actions, my words, your words. I made a horrendous mistake when I crossed that line, no please Jamie, let me finish. Your friendship has been one of the most important things to me I have ever known. Everything I did, I did for you. Not as some sort of favour, or as something to call in as a debt or to even buy your love for me. I did it because you are important, to me. I ruined everything that day and I am so angry at myself.”

“It wasnae just you, John. I, I could have stopped it. If I had truly wanted tae. I’m sorry too. For allowing it tae happen. If I had kent the rift it would cause…”

“Stop. It’s done. I have enough regrets of my own without yours as well…”

“No. Ye dinna understand. I only regret that it damaged our friendship. I did kiss ye’ back if ye recall.” He smiled at me then, the familiar look in his eyes, of trust and friendship, returning. I nodded.

“I suppose that it the only part I regret too. But this time away has given me chance to think, about what it is between us. I can tell that you and Claire have become even closer, if such a thing were even possible, since I left. I never want to damage that. What you two have is special, truly. But, I realised something; I actually just need you to be in my life, in anyway you can be, in order to be happy. Without you, I feel alone, a man living with half a heart. You understand, don’t you?” I daren’t look at him as I whispered those final words. There it was. My truth. I couldn’t live without him. I would take only friendship and be content for the rest of my days.

He moved toward me again and took my hands in his, pulling me into an embrace. I did return this one, wrapping my arms around his shoulders as we held one another side-to-side. I started to relax and then the tears started. His arms tightened around me and I heard him whispering Gaelic softly, his hand stroking my back. I started to calm down after a few moments, but still he held me close to him.

“Ye are so important to me John. I canna give you everything you want, but I can give you the love of a friend. I want ye tae find someone who fills yer world like Claire does mine. I want ye tae be happy and content and wi’ a person by ye side who will hold yer entire heart and soul safe. Dinna give up hope, a bhailaich. There’s time yet.” I nodded against him, enjoying how safe and secure if felt to be in his arms. “And ye ken ye’ll always have a place here, wi’ me an’ Claire, until ye do. Just dinna go running off agin, ma heart canna take it if this is how ye return.” I laughed at his words before wiping my eyes and sitting back to look at him.

“I say we drink to that. No more running away. No more line-crossing and, yes, I suppose, I may well try and look for someone to…”

“Nah. Dinna look. I ken that life has a peculiar sense of humour. The right person will find ye when ye least expect it. Like the middle of the road in the dead of night.” He raised a glass and smiled at me causing me to laugh in return. “Slainte!”

**

I dinna ken what time it was when Claire came to find us in the living room. I just know that I was asleep on the sofa, John laying opposite to me also asleep, our legs criss-crossed inbetween us. It was her shaking my shoulder that brought me around, a smile and a finger against her lips as I awoke. I
looked at the coffee table and saw a verra empty bottle of whisky standing there. I chuckled as I remembered the rest of the evening.

“Do you think you can get to your wheelchair?” I looked at her then, her face was blurry and the room spinnin’ disconcertingly.

“Dinna ken. Drunk I think.” She did laugh at this and nodded.

“Yes, very.” I felt the other person on the sofa begin to stir with the noise and laughed when John’s equally drunk voice entered the conversation.

“I’ll help you move him, Claire.”

“Why do I needta be moved? Canna no’ jus’ sleep ere?” My eyes drifted closed again, anythin’ tae stop the room turning.

“No, you can’t. Your back struggles with an hour on here, let alone an entire night.”

“I’ll just take more drugs. That’s what they’re for. Right?”

“No, that’s not what they’re for. Now, please, try sitting up. I’ll get your legs.” I laughed at the tone in her voice.

“Yes Doctor Beauchamp.”

“It’s Miss Beauchamp actually but we’ll not split hairs when, to be honest, you’re totally pissed.” John laughed at this one but between them, they got me sitting on the edge of the sofa and onto my wheelchair with no issues.

I was wheeled into the bedroom and thrown ontae the bed wi’ little ceremony. I’d taken ma new plaid off before settling ontae the sofa earlier so it was only ma shoes that were removed by Claire as I lay in the middle of the bed.

“I’d better call a taxi.” John was staggering towards the door when I grabbed his arm.

“Nah. Too late. Stay.”

“But where to sleep, Jamie? Spare bed not done and I’m not sleeping on a sofa either.” I hadna thought of that. Claire had evidently.

“One of the best things about sleeping with a paraplegic is that they barely move in their sleep. He’ll stay exactly where he is because it’s too much effort to roll over. So, less space is needed. It’s a big enough bed. Jump in.”

“What?”

“Claire?”

We both looked at her as she went to the bathroom to change into her shorts and t-shirt, a cheeky smile on her face.

I awoke the next morning, curled behind Claire, my hand resting as always on her left breast, her bottom tucked tightly against my groin. That was normal. What was not was the man curled behind me, his arm slung over mine and Claire’s waist, holding us both.

“Go back to sleep, Jamie.” Claire’s whisper made me smile as I kissed the back of her neck in
response. I closed my eyes again, content that our unusual family wa’ once again back taegether.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the lovely, supportive comments you’ve been leaving. I will try to keep writing more regularly but the story keeps evolving and I then have to re-write bits. Like this chapter, I've just re-done half of it after I was laid in best last night, thinking about my major story arc that will really start to hot up soon. This was meant to be twenty-chapters long! Haha!

Anyway, keep letting me know what you think and I hope you keep enjoying the story.
I just lay there, watching them sleep for a while. The trust they had shown me last night, letting me back into their life once more, was overwhelming. Of course, I saw it for what it really was. A test, a gauntlet thrown down by Claire to see exactly who Jamie would choose in his most vulnerable state; asleep. When only his subconscious was as work, would he choose her or me. Watching them now, his arms firmly around her, his chin against her forehead, his lips almost kissing her skin with each breath, she had her answer. She knew already, had been confident otherwise she would not have suggested it. But I now knew as well, and that would make her happy. It was also a peace offering, one which I gratefully accepted. I was forgiven then and that made me happy too.

I took a deep breath and carefully climbed out of bed and tiptoed out of the room to the kitchen. It wasn’t much later when a very sleepy looking Claire emerged also, her hair more wild than usual. Even when I had lived here with her during Jamie’s coma, she had always tamed it before appearing in the kitchen. I raised an eyebrow at her as she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and accepted the cup of coffee I handed to her.

“Don’t look at me like that.”

“Sorry, I’ve just never seen your hair like, well, like…”

“A bird’s nest? That’s what Jamie calls it in the morning.” She said the words with a slight smile as she sipped her coffee. I chuckled at the description, that is exactly what it looked like. “We’ve shared a bed, John, the state of my hair is inconsequential.” She smiled at me, a real, genuine smile that I couldn’t help but respond to. “Jamie is still out like a light. How much of that bottle did he have last night?” Ah yes, the whisky. It was nearly full when we started.

“Oh, a good half I'd say.”

“Jeez. He’s gonna be a bear with a very sore head today then.” She laughed before taking another mouthful of coffee. “Couple that with about a bottle of wine, not quite a complete liver anymore and all the medication he takes, that’ll be a brutal combination.”

She was right. A good two hours later and Jamie, very bleary eyed and rumpled looking, wheeled himself into the kitchen. He went straight over to the dining table, folded his arms onto it and laid his head on them, groaning as he did so. I looked at Claire and we shared a knowing smile as we finished cleaning up from the night before.

“I thought Scotsmen knew how to hold their drink.” A muffled “get lost” caused me and Claire to dissolve into a fit of giggles. Eventually, he managed to pull himself round enough to be up for the idea of a trip to Rosemarkie. He opted for the back of the car, his head resting against the window and his eyes closed for the entire duration of the journey. Me and Claire chatted about
inconsequential topics for the half an hour it took to reach the small town on the Black Isle. We’d packed a light lunch and flasks of hot drinks to picnic on the beach, it being quite warm for the time of year. I grabbed the bag from the boot as Jamie got himself sorted and Claire hovered nearby so as to help him if needed.

“You OK under your own steam today?” She asked him cheekily. He shot her a look that suggested he was not amused and pulled on the gloves he wore to help protect his hands. We meandered along the path running along the beach. It was a beautiful place, the bay sheltered and calm, waves gently lapping at the sand. I watched Jamie out of the corner of my eye, the sea-breeze restoring the colour to his cheeks and the light to his eyes. By the time we reached the picnic benches near the closed beach-front café, he was looking as good as new.

“How are long as you with us for then?” It was Claire who posed the question before taking a bite of her sandwich. Jamie’s ears picked up and he watched me, waiting for an answer, his expression unreadable.

“Well, that depends I suppose. I mean, I am expected back but…”

“You’re welcome to stay with us as long as you like. You know that, don’t you?” Claire looked straight into my eyes and lay her hand over mine. I swallowed and nodded. She smiled and removed her hand. I swallowed again and looked out to sea, unnerved by the feelings her skin on mine just evoked. The memory of the skin of her abdomen under my hand this morning returning full force, along with the feeling of being completely pressed against Jamie. I needed a few seconds to stop my heart from threatening to burst from my chest.

Jamie and Claire’s little conversation behind me finally worked its way into my consciousness again and I turned back to them. We continued that way for a while longer, listening to the sea and the birds as we finished our food.

“So, how long then John? I need to ken how many times I can beat ye at chess afore ye leave us agin.” He had that one-sided smile and a devilish glint in his eyes.

“I suppose that depends on you, my friend.” The smile remained but his eyes were puzzled instead. “Well, if you are to have this treatment, then as soon as possible would be for the best. The highest chances of success are within the first twelve months of the injury occurring.” When I looked back at his face, the smile was gone, replaced with a tightening jaw.

“I meant what I said, John. I’m no’ interested in anymore. Besides, I’m startin’ ma counselling course in the new year. I cannae miss that.” I nodded and looked away. It was quite a few minutes before anyone spoke again.

“Right then. I think it’s time for another little walk then back home. What do you think?” Claire stood and started shaking the dregs out of flask cups.

“Aye.” We packed up everything in silence and made our way back to the car and home, all lost in our own thoughts.

**

Jamie excused himself as soon as we re-entered the house. I could tell he was disappointed in John’s assumption that just because their friendship was repairing, Jamie would automatically change his mind about the treatment. John watched him and just stood by the door not knowing whether to stay or bolt back out of it.
“Come on. A cup of tea cures all ills.” I grabbed his hand and pulled him into the kitchen, he wouldn’t be running away again if I had anything to do with it. I placed the cup in front of him as he sat staring out at the birds in the garden. “You have to give Jamie some time. He’s had enough, John.”

“I just thought he’d want his mobility back again…”

“I know, but what you’re asking is for him to spend how many months in a hospital setting with who knows how many surgical procedures and without any guarantee that it will work. He’s just about worked out who he is now and you’re wanting to confuse him all over again.” He sighed and fixed his gaze on the floor, sight unseeing.

“What do you think though?” He looked at me then, exasperation on his face.

“I doesn’t matter what I think. It’s his body. His choice and I’m happy with whatever decision he makes. And he knows that.”

“But surely you’d want him to recover. I mean, it can’t be easy for you.” John’s eyes were pleading with me for the truth, not believing that I was content to live the rest of my life with Jamie just as he was.

“I want, I really want, whatever Jamie wants. And if that means him staying like he is now, then yes, I’m happy with that. He’s alive and well, that’s all that matters to me.” I put my hand over his and squeezed it tightly whilst looking into his eyes. “That’s what true love is, John.” I saw the anger cloud his eyes immediately at hearing those words, his hand roughly pulled from mine.

“You don’t think I love him as much as you do because I want him to get better? Because I want him to be able to walk again? To not have to use tubes to go for a piss…”

“Enough! For heaven’s sake, stop!” Both so engrossed in the discussion, neither of us noticed Jamie entering the room. “This isnae a competition tae see which of ye’ loves me the most. I am capable of making up my own mind and I have done. It isnae up to either of ye to decide which aspects of my life ye’d change or no. It’s up tae me.” He turned to John then, looking him square in the face. “Ye explained it all tae me last night and I thank ye for thinkin’ it might be something for me tae try. But I dinna want to spend six months in a foreign country bein’ stabbed and prodded. No’ even for the use of ma legs do I want that. I dinna mean anythin’ other than that though. Ye were happy for me tae be like this afore ye left, tis only now that ye’ve met this Professor Raymond that ye wanna change me. Just accept me John, as I accept ye.” I could see the pleading look in Jamie’s eyes as he looked deep into John’s. Eventually, John nodded, hanging his head low, not looking at either of us.

I watched as Jamie reached out, taking John’s hand so carefully in his own, his thumb brushing a caress over the back in a move so intimate, so gentle that I felt like an intruder. “I need my friend. Ye said ye were living wi’ half a heart wi’out me but ye see, I ken what that feels like too. Wi’out you, something has been missin’. Please dinna shut me out o’er somethin’ like this.” Jamie’s other hand reached out to John’s face, using the softest of touches under John’s chin to tilt his head up to meet Jamie’s eyes. “Please.” Moments passed before John finally let out a sigh.

“You are right. It is your life to choose to live how you wish.” John’s shuddering breath, Jamie’s expression of hope; I felt I should look away. But I couldn’t. Instead I stood and walked over to them both, my arms naturally going around John’s shoulders, my head resting on top of his, my gaze never leaving Jamie. I kissed the top of his head gently before laying my cheek against his soft, fair hair. Jamie didn’t look in the slightest bit surprised, he just smiled and nodded.

“Ye are loved, ye are cared for and ye are welcome tae stay as long as ye wish, be it another day,
another month or forever. Ye will always have a home here. If you accept me like this, that is.” I
could almost feel the emotions physically running through John’s veins with each heart beat. He was
shaking now, overwhelmed and not sure how to release what he was feeling. In the end, we just
stayed like that, me hugging his shoulders, Jamie holding his hands. It was enough.

We didn’t spend more than a few moments apart from each other for the rest of the day. No alcohol
was consumed (neither men being particularly inclined to even suggest a drink after the previous
night’s excesses) but we were drunk with laughter and happiness. It wasn’t as it had been before
John had left, no, something was different now. A subtle but significant change in the dynamic of
our relationship. Jamie was always very tactile – he had been since his accident and when he
couldn’t speak properly, he would touch and gesture instead. Even now his voice was restored, he
still used his hands to communicate. Whenever either of us would make to leave the room for
whatever reason, his hand would trail and catch an arm with a gentle squeeze or caress. It had been
that way between me and Jamie for months, but now John was included and it all seemed right. I
couldn’t explain it. Nor could I explain why when it came to bedtime, I had still not prepared the
spare room, instead pulling John along again into our bed. The feeling of being wrapped in not only
Jamie’s arms, but to feel John’s hand on my skin as he in turn wrapped Jamie in an embrace also felt
right. It was very non-sexual, but it felt good and all three of us slept soundly together.

**

“Shit, get the diazepam. Jamie? Jamie!” John’s voice sounded a long way away as I sat and stared at
the vision in front of me.

“Jenny?” She was there, in a heap on the floor in the corner of the parlour at Lallybroch. She was
weeping, her hand held to her forehead, the blood seeping between her fingers. I could hear the
sound of heavy boots on the floorboards above, the shrieks and cries of bairns, the threatening tones
of men. “Jenny? Can ye hear me a nighean?” I moved towards her, pulling myself across the floor to
reach her. I reached out touch her face but she flinched away from me. “Shush now, it’s alright. Tis
me, Jamie.”

“Jamie?” She slowly opened her eyes and her face dissolved into tears as she flung herself against
me, sobbing into my neck.

“What’s amiss mo piuthair?” I held her close to me and shielded her from as much as the noise and
commotion as I could.

“The soldiers, they keep coming to steal our supplies, our horses, our money.” I stroked her back as
she told me the story in shuddering breaths between sobs. “They’ve been coming for months but this
is twice in as many weeks. We dinna have anythin’ tae gie ‘em anymore, my bairns are half starved
and they’ve taken Ian tae the garrison.”

“What? Why, a nighean?”

“Cause they think we’re Jacobites!” She pulled back away from me with such force, the anger
suddenly turned on me. “Cause of ye!” I looked at her in shock.


“Aye. Dougal told them how you ran away tae join the rising, that’s why ye went missin’. He said
ye stole money from Clan Mackenzie and he set them after ye.” I looked at her in shock, not
believing or truly understanding her words. I sat back, letting her words sink in. “Ye have tae come
back, brother. Ye have to make them see reason.” I swallowed hard, looking away.
“I cannae come back, Janet. I’m…”

“Dinna do this brother, it’s time tae come back and help yer family.”

“But, I…I cannae walk. I cannae ride, I cannae fight…”

“Ye must. We need ye. Please brother. Dinna abandon us.” Her hand reached out tae touch ma face, a whisper of the sensation brushed my skin afore she faded away and blackness resumed.

**

The seizure finally stopped. I sat and looked at him, blood and drool dripping from the corner of his mouth as he’d bitten down on his tongue, eyes half lidded as he slowly started to regain a vague approximation of consciousness. His breathing was evening out, his heart-rate slowing. I’d never seen him reach status before; it was terrifying. Fifteen minutes. Fifteen long minutes, watching and hoping that he would come around. The recovery drugs didn’t work, again. It was unusual. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn’t. He didn’t even recover momentarily after the injection today and that scared us both.

I looked across him to Claire, sat on the other side, an equally shocked expression on her face. He had gone without any of his tells, just slumped out of his chair onto the floor with a sickening crack as his ribs hit the coffee table. I jumped up to pull him clear of any furniture, Claire grabbing a cushion to save his head from the hard floor. Five minutes came and went with no change other than the start of cyanosis appearing on his lips. I called for Claire to get the diazepam but it was no good. So we simply sat there, watching and waiting for it to be over.

“I’ll grab a bowl.” She ran to the kitchen, returning just in time for me to pull Jamie into a sitting position and for him to throw-up. He slumped back against me after, his head lolling back to rest on my shoulder, his body completely slack against me.

“You’re alright, Jamie. It’s all ok now. You’re safe. We’re here.” I stroked his hair back with one hand, the other holding him to me, anchoring him. He was slowly coming back, I could feel tension returning to the muscles in his body starting to hold himself up slightly.

“Jenny…” It was more a gasp than a word but it caused Claire to stop cleaning up and stare at the man in my arms.

“Jenny? Isn’t that his…”

“Sister. Yes. Jamie, what about Jenny?” Claire moved closer to us, putting her hands on either side of his face to look at her. His eyes were heavy lidded, barely open at all.

“Red coats. Blood. Screams.” He was struggling against the extreme fatigue he always felt after a seizure. I recalled what Claire had told me when he came around from his coma the second time. That he had seen his sister during the seizure that nearly killed him at Lallybroch. Neither of us could make any sense of it but a connection to this Jenny was still there is seemed.

“It’s the past, Jamie. It was three-hundred years ago…”

“No! Now!” He tried to sit up by himself but merely slumped against me once again. “No. Jenny hurt cause of me. Need tae go back.” He closed his eyes, fighting the waves of nausea again.

“But Jamie, my love, you can’t.”

“Need tae. Nae choice.” He whispered his next words as he finally slipped into unconsciousness
once again. “Go wi’ John.”

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think is going on?
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

A plan is being formed...

Chapter Notes

I'm not overly happy with this chapter. The trouble is, my story keeps evolving and I have to keep re-writing bits here and there to make it work. These characters have definitely got a mind of their own these days. Oh well, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I couldn’t believe the day had arrived where he would be leaving me for six months. His bags were packed and ready by the front door. Mine were too but only enough for a couple of weeks. I would be returning alone, to the house that now breathed the very essence of him. It was the beginning of March and the weather was slowly warming, bringing the garden back to life. He would miss the summer, instead spending his time in the ever-constant seasons of Panama.

Three months had passed since Jamie’s last seizure; the one that floored him in the living room, the one where he visited his sister at Lallybroch, the one where he made up his mind about returning to his own time. I’d sat by his bed in the hospital for hours as John ordered scan after scan to find the possible damage in Jamie’s brain that could account for what Jamie had apparently experienced. Jamie had slept through large parts of the night, getting increasingly grumpy with John’s paranoia about further damage that he’d missed.

It was morning now, the birds had started singing a while ago and the sun was making an appearance. John sat opposite me, on Jamie’s right side, his laptop balanced on his lap as he furiously looked over the latest PET scan to find something, anything that could explain what had happened. I jumped when he slammed down the lid of his computer and all but threw it onto the floor.

“Nothing. Not one bloody neurone out of place since the last scan. In fact, brain activity is looking better than ever!” He stretched his legs out in front of him, sighed and scrubbed his face with his hands. Crumpled would be how I would describe his appearance. That and defeated.

“So, what’s the alternative explanation then?” I spoke quietly but I wasn’t sure why. Jamie was still soundly asleep.

“What’s that Sherlock Holmes quote? When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

“You believe him then. That he actually saw Jenny.” I looked at Jamie as I asked John the question, half expecting him to disappear at any second.

“Who knows, Claire. I don’t know what to believe anymore. We live with an eighteenth-century
Highlander. My understanding of what is possible and impossible has…been questioned shall we say.” I nodded and smiled at him.

It was an hour or so later when Jamie finally awoke. His eyes red rimmed and tired.

“Ye finished prodding and poking now?” He yawned widely and ran a hand through his hair, pulling a face at the slimey gel that remained from the EEG performed the night before.

“Welcome back.” John’s voice was calm and cheerful, making Jamie look at him with a concerned expression on his face.

“Christ, is it that bad then?” John looked at me confused before looking back at Jamie with a questioning expression. “Yer bein’ nice tae me. Kenning you doctors, that generally only ever means bad news.”

“Well, that depends on what you consider to be good or bad news.” Jamie raised an eyebrow and looked at me with an expression of confusion. “No, nothing has shown up at all. You’re in good health. Better than since I’ve known you anyway.”

“Good. Weel, as long as I can go home, shower this…this… stuff… out o’ ma hair, eat and go tae sleep in a more comfortable bed, I’ll be happy for now. Ye can tell me yer bad or good news later”

“Definitely home time now that you’re awake.” We collected everything together and walked with Jamie as he gratefully escaped the hospital once more. He cheerfully bid goodbye to the staff – who had all gotten to know him quite well over the past few months – and smiled as the first breath of fresh air hit him at the door. It was part way through the journey when he finally asked the question we’d been waiting for.

“Do ye believe me now?” I looked at him from the corner of my eye before focusing once again on the road. John, I noticed in the mirror, kept his gaze fixed outside the window at the passing scenery.

“Can we talk about this later, when we’re home.” I watched as the small smile he’d had when asking the question slipped from his face, instead he chose to bite his bottom lip, his eyes darkening with frustration. We all remained silent for the rest of the journey, all of us thinking of the thoughts and questions that were waiting for us inside the house. It didn’t take long for outdoor clothes to be removed, the kettle to be put on and for food to be rustled up. All sitting around the dining table, the questions began.

“So, what exactly did you see?” It was John who asked the question. Jamie told us of his conversation with his sister, the concern etched on his face as he relived the moments. John took his hand to give it a squeeze as Jamie told us of how his uncle had convinced the Red Coats that he was a Jacobite. Jamie knew full well that it was more than likely that it was his uncle who was the traitor and using him as a scapegoat.

“So, you’re a wanted criminal twice over then.” I looked at John with some surprise.

“Twice?”

“Aye. Murder of a British soldier and escaping imprisonment would be the first thing I’m wanted for. A certain Randall has it in for me in my time too. Couple that wi’ bein’ a traitor…weel, they cannae hang me twice.” He laughed without humour as he took a drink of his coffee.

“So, what? You’re going to go back, and let’s face it, that’s still not looking too possible right now in that you can’t even stand let alone walk, or ride or…”
“I ken what I can and canna do, Claire.” I was slightly taken aback at his tone of voice, his anger was rare and not usually directed at me. “What would ye have me do? Nothin'? Would ye have me read about the death of ma family, my sister, nieces and nephews, ma family name in a book? I cannae do it. I have tae try.” The blue of his eyes had turned a stormy gray, the warmth normally held there cooling in the moment.

“Jamie, look at me.” After a second, he turned to face John, his breathing heavy with emotion, his jaw tightly clenched. “Now, let's think this through. Form a plan.” Jamie calmed slightly and nodded, teeth still ground together. “We need to think of logistics first. You said about going with me last night, what did you mean?”

“The treatment, the one you’ve been bangin’ on about for days. I want tae try it.” At this point I stood, throwing my chair back against the wall.

“Oh for fuck sake, Jamie.” I bit my top lip hard enough to taste the metallic iron of blood, my eyes squeezed tightly shut, my nails digging into the palms of my hands. “When will you ever do something for yourself?”

“Claire…” His voice was a growl, a warning that I chose to ignore.

“Why do you have to undergo six months of painful, invasive not to mention bloody expensive treatments so that you can go back to the fucking eighteenth century and probably get yourself hung for crimes you didn’t do? You said you were happy as you are! Why can’t you just be bloody selfish for once?”

“Dinnae do this…”

“Dinnae do what, Jamie? Say it as it is? I didn’t spend all those bloody hours up to my elbows in your fucking blood just so that you can waltz back to the gallows all because you dreamt your sister needs your help. She’s a grown woman, Jamie. And you’re a bloody cripple! How much help could you possibly be?” I knew as soon as the words left my mouth that I’d made a mistake. We just stared at each other for a moment. The words landing heavily between us.

“Thank ye. For bein’ sae honest. I dinnae ask tae be saved, Claire. In fact, no’ many days go by that I dinnae wish that I’d just died on that road. That it woulda been simpler, easier. Ye wouldna have tae be saddled with a useless cripple then.”

“Jamie…”

“I’m goin’ out fer a bit. I need tae think, alone.” I could feel the moment my heart broke as he looked at me before leaving the room. It was a clean, sharp crack. I didn’t hear much of anything after that. I didn’t hear the door open and close, or the sound of John clearing the crockery off the table. He said nothing as he left the room, just shot me a look of pity and anger as he too left the house, presumably in search of Jamie. I merely stood there, wishing that I could travel through time just a few moments, to take those words back.

It had been strained when finally, John and Jamie had reappeared some hours later. John had indeed found him, talked to him and they had formulated a plan together for Jamie to receive the treatment. I felt left out, like a third wheel. Jamie barely looked at me, spoke to me but only in polite sentences, the wounds I inflicted still very much on the surface. He slept on the edge of his side of the bed, not even in his sleep could he forgive me. John had retreated to the spare room too. After spending months being held by Jamie, and a few nights being held by the pair of them, I was suddenly all alone.
Days turned into weeks, and as arrangements were made for the treatment, we started to talk to one another with some degree of warmth again. I tried to be positive and encouraging, for Jamie. He was excited but nervous all at once. Flying for the first time, being in another country with a different climate, the procedures themselves not to mention the prospect of going through the stones once more. He had a lot to be apprehensive about, but the thought of standing tall, of walking once more, was steadily becoming a more attractive proposition the more he thought about it. It was now less about going back to his time to sort out the problems and more about him getting his freedom back. In this case, I was happy. At least it was now something he was doing for himself rather than his family. But I was still being left out. He reserved discussing his plans with excitement for phonecalls and Skype with John – he was back in Panama making the arrangements for an apartment – he never spoke to me about it. That is until two days ago, Jamie finally came back to me.

“Sassenach?” I was sitting at the kitchen table, allowing the heat from the coffee in the mug to warm my hands rather than drinking it. I turned to smile, endeavouring to hide my true emotions from him. “We need tae talk, Claire. Properly.” I nodded and put my cup back onto the table, the contents barely touched. “I cannae go in wi’…this…hangin’ o’er us any longer. We both said more than we meant, I think. I ken I did.” I nodded in agreement, yes, I certainly said more than I meant. “I’m not sorry that ye saved my life that night, or on any of the occasions since. Not a day goes by that I am no’ thankful that I have ye by my side. These past weeks, bein’ at odds, it’s breakin’ ma heart, mo nighean.” I nodded again, letting him take hold of my hands in his. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I gave voice to my fear.

“I just don’t know if we can survive this journey, my love. I don’t know if we are strong enough. One argument has taken all these weeks to recover from.” I looked down at our hands, felt the tears rolling down my face. He nodded, his thumbs stroking the backs of my hands, brushing over the wedding ring made from his key.

“I know. I’m a fool, Claire. I let my anger fester instead. But I ken that we can survive this, mo Sorcha. This first stage, tis only temporary, Sassenach. Six months will be gone in nae time and then I’ll return and walk back intae yer arms.” I roughly brushed my tears away and nodded.

“Yes, you will. And then you’ll walk straight back out of them again.” He nodded, I heard him swallowing hard to keep his own emotions in check.

“I have tae try, Claire. She is my sister. She brought me back tae ye once. I have to try and help her now.” I took my hands away from his and nodded.

“Yes, I get it, Jamie. You owe her, she’s your family. But aren’t me and John your family too?” He sat back in his chair, resting his hands on his thighs.

“Aye, ye ken ye are. I dinnae make oaths lightly, mo chridhe. I gave ye the keeping o’ ma heart and soul. But, ye still accuse me o’ doin’ this only for ma sister.” I started to interrupt but he merely shook his head, placing a quieting finger against my lips. “Ye were right, tae begin wi’, that’s what it wa’. But no’ anymore. I’m doin’ this fer us too. I ken I’m a burden, shush, let me finish. I ken I am a burden tae both ye and John. I meant what I said at Christmas, I am content tae remain this way but after what ye said, that I’m not much use…”

“No, Jamie, I didn’t mean…”

“Aye, ye did. I want tae be a good husband tae ye, tae love ye properly, tae be maself agin and I ken I’m willin’ tae try. I also ken that wi’out it we would definitely ne’er ha’ any bairns and…”

“I don’t care about children, Jamie. I’ve never planned on having them anyway.”
“Aye, but if ye ever changed ye mind... Christ, Claire, ye are the most important person in my life. No’ Jenny, you, my Sassenach.” I shook my head, ignoring the tears that were falling once more. “I would walk tae the end of the Earth for ye, do ye not know that by now?” I felt my anger rise immediately at these words.

“You stupid, idiotic, thick-headed, bloody…Scot! How on Earth could you think I would ever want you to disappear for six bloody months and go through all sorts of bloody unnecessary procedures just for some ridiculous thing I said weeks ago when I was dead on my feet from no sleep and worrying about you?” He was chuckling now making my blood boil further. I stood in front of him, balling my hands into fists as he laughed at me.

“That’s my Sassenach, right there. That’s the image I want to take wi’ me. No’ cryin’ and sad. Fiery and cross at me. My warrior wife, always fightin’ for me or wi’ me, doesna matter. I love ye either way.” I made to slap him but he caught my hand, pulling me so hard that I had no option but to end up on his lap. “Ah Claire, ye are a fine match for me in any century. But this I must do. For us. I ken why ye’r upset. Six months is a long time. We’ve known each other not much more. Ye’r worrit I’ll get myself kilt tryin’ tae save my sister and I canna promise that I won’t be. But I need tae try. I need to try and save Lallybroch and when I return, I intend tae be yer husband in every sense of the word. Nae more fighting, nae more time travel and nae more treatments. Just you, and me. And those bairns I hope tae change yer mind about. Here and now is my time, wi you.” He kissed my wedding ring then before kissing me so soundly that any further argument quite simply vanished into the ether.

Chapter End Notes

Well, at least they’ve cleared the air somewhat. Flying next chapter.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

It's time to get on a plane.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

We met John at Inverness airport. It was a short hop to Heathrow followed by another hop to Madrid for an overnight layover. Then would come the eleven-hour flight to Panama City. Jamie was quiet during the taxi ride to the airport and just stared at everything with wide-eyed wonder as we worked our way through security. His being in a wheelchair meant that we breezed through everything in good time and were left by the gate waiting for our flight. He sat watching the planes take-off and land with a smile, his face alight with awe.

“It’s amazin’, is it not Sassenach, that man can fly now.” I smiled at him and handed him a cup of coffee.

“Yes and has been able to for a while now. Even to the Moon and back a few times.” He nodded and took a sip.

“When will ye stop tryin’ to make me give up sugar ye wee heathen?” I laughed at this and brought out the spare packet I kept in my pocket.

“Ah, there you are!” John came jogging towards us and took a seat beside me. He’d been back to Panama since Christmas to make sure everything was ready for Jamie’s visit. Professor Raymond would be training John how to carry out the procedure using Jamie as his first patient. I’d had my reservations about this but John was quick to reassure me that Professor Raymond would be involved every step of the way. This was also how Jamie was getting the treatment for free rather than the hundreds of thousands of dollars it should have been costing. John really did know the right people when it came to this sort of thing.

“Are you ready for your first flight then?” Jamie looked at John, then me and then at the planes out of the window.

“I dinna ken. I dinna travel well by ship…”

“Oh don’t worry about that, I’ve brought some anti-sickness tablets for you to take and if that’s not enough then I have some diazepam as well. Once you’re up there, there’s very little to worry about. It’s actually quite boring after a take-off.” Jamie nodded, not entirely convinced.

“Gimme the anti-sickness ones. I’ll take them now, gi’ em chance tae work.” I nodded and laughed at John’s expression. Jamie really did know how to take medication effectively, a fact that still surprised John.

Jamie was the first to board the plane having to be carried up the steps. He’d been moved to the transfer chair before boarding, his own having to be stored in the hold for the flight. He wasn’t too pleased about it but felt better once he was in his seat. Then it was the long wait for everyone else to
board. All the while, his middle two fingers of his right hand were tapping his thigh. I grabbed his hand eventually. He was sat between me and John on the front row of the plane. He'd been knocked into a few times by people boarding; his legs might not have any feeling but they still took up all the same space as any person of 6’4”.

“Are you alright?” He never took his eyes off the control panels in front of us.

“Nah. But I’ll bide.” John took his other hand, squeezing it tightly.

“You’re doing well. Just remember to breathe every once in a while.” The doors were closed, seatbelts were checked, announcements made. It was almost time.


Flyin’, I decided a short way intae the journey, wa’ the best way tae travel. Weel, it certainly beat falling through time anyway. I had been able to watch the ground get further an further away through the wee window as we took-off. Claire pointed various things out tae me as we got higher, all the while keeping a tight hold o’ ma hand. John laughed at ma eagerness but agin, his grip on my other hand stayed firm.

“The trouble wi’ tavellin’ wi’ two doctors is havin’ one on each side checkin’ yer pulse!” They both chuckled and gradually relaxed their grips.

The flight to London was short and before long we were landing. I had tae wait until everyone else had disembarked. For a forty-minute flight, I had spent well over two hours on the plane already. Thankfully, we had another couple of hours afore the flight to Spain so time was not much of a concern.

“Mr Fraser? Are you ready to be transferred?” I looked at the young man in front of me and nodded. I moved from the seat into the ridiculous contraption they insisted you board using and allowed them to strap me in. Being carried on and off a plane is not the best feelin’ in the world especially when the attendants werena quite prepared to carry someone my size and weight. I was still a tall man and that meant quite a heavy one too. They were quite happy to put me down at the bottom and more than one red face waved me on as I wa’ moved to the terminal. I was reunited wi’ my chair there and gladly transferred to it more than ready to have my independence back.

The next flight was much better, I could use my own chair to board the plane and transfer myself. Nae steps, just a tunnel that connected the terminal to the aircraft. Agin, I was first to board and once more, Claire and John were on either side of me. This time, I kent what to expect so wa’ more relaxed. Our layover in Madrid went without incident and afore long we were back through security and getting ready for the long flight to Panama. That’s when thin’s started tae go wrong. The flight was delayed for starters. We were waitin’ around for several hours wi’ no idea if it we had another hour or another ten minutes. I needed to ken a time so that I could prepare myself for eleven hours wi’out a convenient bathroom tae hand. Having researched travellin’ by plane in a wheelchair, I wa’ thankful for the advanced warnin’ and advice. Mercifully, I had enough time once the plane had finally arrived.

Next came boarding. Due tae the delay, there was no-one to help me ontae the aircraft. I was at one point asked if I wouldna mind just tryin’ tae walk up the stairs. I didna get chance tae say anything afore Claire and John laid intae the puir lass. Everyone else was allowed to board before me, hopefully givin’ time for the right people to arrive. When finally I was transferred on board, I wa told there was nae room for my bag in the overhead lockers and it would have to go intae the hold. Several minutes of arguing followed between Claire and the flight attendant. I had grabbed my
cushion from my chair before it was taken to be put in the hold and John wa’ helpin’ me tae get comfortable in the seat. My bag stayed wi me.

“Are you ok?” Claire was looking at me when I finally opened my eyes again.

“Aye. I didna ken flying wa’ so stressful.” She chuckled and kissed the back of my hand.

“Sometimes. Not always. I think you’ve just caught it on a bad day. That and you need to have so many more dealings with the crew than anyone else on board, I think it increases the odds.” I smiled back and leaned over to kiss her.

John was across the aisle for this flight leaving just me n’ Claire taegether for eleven hours. Some of that time we watched the movie, some of it I watched her sleep, memorising her features for when it would be time for her tae leave me behind. I couldna imagine her doin’ this trip all alone. I kent she could and would but still, I wanted more than anythin’ for her tae stay wi’ me. The last few weeks had been hard for us both. I didna ken what tae do tae make things right between us after our argument. It had taken sae long tae get bring us back taegether, I was sad that I’d have her for such a short time afore partin’ once more. I didna want tae leave her. I meant what I said, that I wa’ happy to remain as I am, just tae be wi’ her. But my vision, it wa’ so clear, so vivid that I kent it tae be true. I couldna leave Jenny alone tae fix this. I hadta go back, even if it cost me everything. But I would always be thankful tae a girl wi’ whisky brown eyes and curly hair for lovin’ me.

We landed in Panama the following day, a whole forty hours after we had left Inverness. I wa’ tired, cramped, uncomfortable and ready for a proper bed. Getting off the plane and out of the airport was easy and it seemed only minutes before we left the air-conditioning and were out onto the pavement into a heat the likes of which I’d never imagined. The light was different, the air was different. I took a deep breath and let the air refresh me.

“Welcome to Panama.” John turned and smiled at us, evidently also happy to be on the ground again at last. “Ready to see your home for the next six months?” I looked up at Claire and squeezed the hand she was resting on my shoulder.

“Aye, lead the way.”

**

Jamie had handled the flying much better than I had ever imagined he would. I had expected needing to sedate him and all sorts, but he just took it all in his stride. It was wonderful to be there with him as he took such a huge step forward into this century. I can’t deny that in the beginning, the thought of spending six months with him, five of them just the two of us, was like a dream come true. But then I had watched them on the long flight, watched how he was with Claire. How he hung on her every word, always maintained contact with her, kissed her reverently but seductively. How he had watched her throughout the entire flight, committing her face to memory, the tears silently rolling down his face as he contemplated a future without her. He adored her and she him.

It had been hard seeing them so at odds, something not quite right about their relationship. The initial coolness hadn’t lasted more than a couple of days but the wounds inflicted remained long after. Jamie told me about it over the phone whilst we discussed arrangements. How he didn’t know how to talk to her, or what to say to make everything right again. It pained me to see them so far apart from each other, but watching them now, I had to smile. They had certainly found their way back. Now I needed to find my way back to them too. I hadn’t shared their bed since the day of Jamie’s seizure and my sleep hadn’t been as sound because of it. My heart longed to feel them both beside me again, to know they were safe in my arms.
I had rented a sizeable apartment for us to use whilst we were here. Two large bedrooms, both with en-suite wetrooms, king-size beds and plenty of room to move a wheelchair around in. The living space was all open-plan with a large kitchen-dining area and a balcony overlooking the beach. Jamie moved around exploring thoroughly before finally settling on the balcony to enjoy the view. Claire followed him, a look of excitement tinged with sadness on her face. She stood by me as we watched him take in the view.

“And I was worried I was going to lose him to the eighteenth century! He’s not going to want to come back to Inverness after this.” I looked at her then, the tears starting to well in her eyes. I put my arm around her shoulders and pulled her against my side.

“Now now. You’re tired and you’re not thinking straight. That man out there will want to come back to you the moment you’ve even started packing to return in two weeks’ time. You know that. He knows that, and I know that. And if you think he’ll decide to stay in his own time, then you’re a bigger fool than I realised.” I kissed her head then as she sighed and lay her head against my shoulder. “Dry your tears, don’t make this harder for him than it already is. Be strong.” She nodded and held me a little tighter. I couldn’t help but notice how my heart beat a little faster when she was in my arms. As she let go, giving me a little smile, to wash the evidence of her tears away, I realised that Jamie wouldn’t be the only one struggling to part with her in two weeks time.

We spent the rest of the day unpacking and fell into our respective beds early, the draining affects of travelling catching us up quickly. The next day was spent getting used to the time difference (at only five hours, it wasn’t too bad), exploring the city and getting to know our way around. Jamie’s first appointment at the clinic wasn’t for another couple of days so holiday mode ensued. Silly photos, souvenir buying, random food and drink being tried. It was bliss. The three of us laughed so much and it was a very happy time for us all. In the evening, we dissected the day over a bottle of wine before heading off to our separate rooms. As I lay in bed, my mind replayed the moment I bid them goodnight. I hoped it wasn’t my imagination that they were missing me as much as I was missing them.

It was the night before Jamie’s first trip to the clinic. We’d spent the day touring around markets before returning to cook a meal and relax on the balcony with a couple of bottles of wine. We had watched the sun set over the ocean and the conversation was starting to get serious as the night drew in.

“Yes, I ken that I willna be ready tae walk in six months, but I haveta go back and sort this.”

“And if the treatment doesn’t work?” It was an old argument now but none of us were any closer to a resolution.

“Let’s just see what the next six months brings. Who knows what will happen in that time? You might have another vision and it’s all cleared up or… who knows?! Why plan something so far in advance that you can’t possibly predict?”

“Thank you for being the voice of reason again!” Claire stood and started clearing the dishes when Jamie pulled her into his lap, holding her to him. He simply laid his head on her shoulder and she rested hers on top of his. Her arms wrapped around his shoulders and his around her waist. They both looked out into the darkness, the sun a distant memory on the horizon now, the flickering light from the candle playing on their faces.

“I’m no’ goin’ through this for amusement, mo chridhe. I dinna want tae leave you,” He paused and looked over at me before grabbing my hand, “or you. Ye are both ma reasons fer livin’. Ye’ve both brought me back from death and I’m no’ keen tae try and hurry back tae that point. I just need ye both tae help me. Tae love me and support me, whilst I try and save someone who has supported me
my entire life.” I saw the tears rolling down Claire’s face at his words and I moved to kneel in front of them both.

“I will always do both, Jamie and I’ll be damned if you’re going through any of this alone. I mean that, If I have to claw my way through time to come with you, I will.” Claire looked up at my words, a smile breaking across her beautiful face.

“Me too.”

“Ye’d come wi’ me? Through the stones?” He looked at us both in wide-eyed amazement, the possibility genuinely having never occurred to him before that we would.

“You try stopping us. If we can, we will be with you every step, and I mean every step, of the way.” His face crumpled with relief as our words sunk in. Both of us wrapped him in our arms and held him as he let some of his worries fade away, whispers of love and support between kisses shared as we all held each other together.

I woke the next morning having slept more soundly than at any point in the last three months. Jamie’s arm was wrapped firmly around me, my head on his chest. I opened my eyes to see Claire opposite me, our hands joined and resting above the beat of his heart. I felt the moment Jamie awoke, gone was the relaxed hand on my waist, replaced instead by a stroking hand along my side. I looked up and smiled, a look I’d never seen before on his face greeting me. Feeling brave, I leaned up and pressed my lips against his.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, I know that some people will have read that last line and gone 'not for me' and I appreciate that, I really do. I'm just adding in a little note here to hopefully make some people say 'but I'll give it a go'.

Firstly - it's not necessarily going exactly where you think it is right at this very second. Secondly - it's all part of a giant myth arc that I've been steadily constructing over the last 75,000 words. It's not going to be a traditional or gratuitous route through the end here.

Thirdly - if there are any scenes which I think might cause some people to run for the hills, I'll put a warning up. You can skip that bit if you like and just continue to enjoy the story at the other side. But like I say, I tend not to do gratuitous.

Just see what you think. There's a huge chapter in the works - it's building up with next week and the week after is gonna be massive. Just stick around and see what you think.

If this is the end of your journey with this story, then thanks for reading and enjoying it so far.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay. RL keeps getting in the way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“John? Ye awake yet, man?” Jamie’s voice broke through and pierced the dream I was having; waking in his arms, kissing him as I had longed to everyday since that first and only time. Scrubbing the remnants of sleep from my face, I quickly looked at my phone. Five thirty. Slumping back into my pillow, I answered that yes, I was and would be out in a few minutes, all the while begging for a few more hours sleep.

In end, I appeared twenty-minutes later, showered and dressed in a light gray suit and shirt. A wolf-whistle from Claire made me chuckle and we sat down to enjoy breakfast before making our way over to the clinic for Jamie’s first day. I explained briefly what to expect; scans, blood tests, record checks and then a meeting with Professor Raymond to discuss the finalised protocol for this round. Jamie would have having three rounds in total – each a month long with a month’s rest in between for rehabilitation and to decide the next plan of attack. Normally, they would have been spaced out further, but time was of the essence, especially in Jamie’s mind. He needed to return and quickly if he was to save his sister. Or so he believed.

I’d hired a car for whilst we were living here; it would be far easier than getting taxi everyday plus I enjoyed driving around the city. It was quiet when we set out as it was still too early for the big rush. Jamie was in the front with me this time; easier for him to get in and out. He was staring out of the window, enjoying seeing a different part of the world. He’d been telling us how he’d spent a long time in Paris as a lad and then in France fighting as a mercenary. For only twenty-three, he’d seen a lot of suffering but also hardly anything of the world. Of course, I was judging him by modern standards. For 1743, he was very well travelled.

We parked in the lot, moved inside the clinic and made our way to the reception. I bid them both farewell for a few minutes to go find his files and the admissions nurse so that we could get started. His file was already there, held in Professor Raymond’s hands as he waited for me to arrive. He looked excited, moreso that I had seen him with any other patient. He shook my hand quickly and then looked over my shoulder as if trying to spot someone.

“He is here, then?” I looked at him confused.

“Who? Jamie? Of course he is. He’s in the reception area.” His smile widened further if possible, he’d have rubbed his hands together if he hadn’t had already been holding Jamie’s rather sizeable file.

“I shall see him straight away.”

“Surely he needs to be booked in first…”

“Not necessary, we’ll do that after. I need to see him first.” I nodded, confused as to what was going on. Already, this was not the normal way of things.
“I’ll go get…”

“No need. I’ll go get him. You make a start on the forms for him.” He moved past me then, leaving me with a pile of forms and a pen.

**

I didnae quite ken wha’ tae expect from Professor Raymond but when he came boundin’ across the room tae greet me, I couldna help but smile. He grabbed my hand and held it sae tightly as he introduced himself in a mixture of rapid English and French. I looked o’er tae Claire tae see the same bemused, smiling expression on her face too.

“James! It is very good to see you! I have heard so much about you from John, you have quite a story to tell.” He turned then tae Claire. “You must be Claire! Again, John has told me all about how you found this young man and brought him back to life. A natural healer, if ever I saw one.” He wrapped her in a welcoming hug before beckoning us tae follow him tae his office.

Once inside, he shut the door and gestured for us tae join him by the window. Drinks were offered and accepted all with the minimum o’ effort from either me or Claire. Finally, he sat down and just stared at me. After a few seconds, I gestured tae the file on his lap.

“Those my medical records?” He nodded excitedly and handed them tae me. It wa’ a thick folder considering I had only spent ten months in this century. I opened the front cover and almost dropped the file. Pictures o’ me from the first night when I had been found. I wa’ covered in blood, ma red hair matted and almost black, tubes were running down ma throat, intae ma arms, ma neck. Deep black bruising co’ered all my stomach and chest, my pevis held nae shape and bone wa’ sticking out ma thigh and hip. I wa’ virtually unrecognisable.

“You’ve come a long way since that night.” Claire took the photos from me, looking at each one in a detatched, medical way, assessing each symptom and plotting the treatment necessary.

“Why take pictures?” The professor chuckled and took them from Claire when she offered them.

“You were an unknown person, with no identification. You had injuries that you sustained from criminal activities. All of this is evidence for the police and also for suing anybody for damages sustained, which, if we had caught the bastards that did this to you, would have been substantial.” I nodded, starting to understand. “It’s also fun to look back and think that this was the mess you were ten months ago and now I’ve put you back together. Not bad huh?” She chuckled at my expression before giving my hand a squeeze.

“Yeah, great fun, Sassenach. We should frame them and put them up on the wall at home.” The professor smiled at our banter and took the rest o’ the file off ma lap.

“They are important, but all of this file is. It is your story and it is my chapter now. I am here to see if I can make you stand once more. You are quite tall, yes?” I looked down at maself in ma chair and then back at him. He laughed once more. “Six feet four inches? Well, you will not be that height again sadly, your pelvis and your femur have been repaired well but you are considerably shorter on one side. I can see from the way you are sitting in your chair that you lean slightly.” I looked down at maself again and then tae Claire, her face also assessing my apparent imbalance. “You have suffered damage to the spinal cord in the thoracic and lumbar region. It is damaged in two places. Once where the car hit you, once when you hit the floor if I am not mistaken. I will try to repair both regions but it is very serious.” I nodded, taking hold o’ Claire’s hand again in mine. “What do you hope to gain from this treatment?”

“I need tae be able tae walk again.” I looked him straight in the eye as I answered wi’out any
hesitation. He sighed and looked away, closing the file and placin’ it on the table next tae him quietly. He nodded sadly and stood, a slight dejection on his face as he walked away. “Is that gonna be a problem?” He turned, smiled and shrugged.

“We shall see. The cells have been working well on fresh injuries. You are at the end of our research range and will be the oldest injury we have treated with this method.”

“I need tae walk. Nae matter how badly, or slowly, I must walk.” I would drag maself back if necessary. He looked at Claire then back tae me.

“We will try.”

The rest of our meetin’ wa spent discussing the first days. I wa’ tae have stem cells harvested from the bone marrow in ma hips this week, tae be screened, reprogrammed and then reinjected intae ma spine. They would be treatin’ ma upper injury first, tae help regain feelin’ in ma hips and groin. Then durin’ the next round, they would treat ma lower injury tae try and encourage feelin’ in ma legs and feet. The professor wa’ more convinced he could help me regain control of ma bladder and bowels rather than ma legs and part o’ me was thankful fer at least that. I prayed tae be able tae walk again though. I needed tae.

John eventually joined us and we planned the rest o’ the week taegether. He would be performin’ the surgeries on me and as we talked well intae the afternoon, I kent there were no one I trusted more na him tae fix me. As we made our way home from a long day, I started tae allow maself tae feel some hope that all would be well.

**

Jamie started his treatment two days after meeting the Professor. A strange character, I felt as though I’d known Raymond (as he insisted we call him) a lifetime. He spoke to Jamie and me with such familiarity that it was easy to believe that he would in fact perform some miracle and have my Highlander walking again. He made conversation easy and laughter returned to our lives once more. That was until we left the hospital and made our way home.

There was a still a distance between Jamie and me. We talked, held each other, kissed but there was always something missing. The spark that bonded us together was still there whenever we touched, but it was restrained. Hi eyes told the truth most of all; the light that was there whenever he saw me was gone. A wall had been built around his heart, one that I didn’t know how to breach of even start to scale. He spoke freely with John as always, their friendship having never been called into questions. John always firmly took the safer ground and usually against me. I thought I was hiding my turmoil well, wondered if it was something only I could see, a change that was only detectable by me. By the sympathetic glances I was getting from John, if I had been in any doubt that my relationship with Jamie had changed, John’s expression told me it was obvious to him too.

We’d not made love in any way shape or form since Christmas. I had tried to initiate something, anything, on a few occasions but each time was met with an excuse. They varied from fatigue to aches and pains, sometimes the blunt reply was simply he wasn’t in the mood. He’d slept turned away from me for weeks after the argument; his back like an unbroachable wall. At least now I had his arms wrapped around me once more but that was it. I had hoped that a change in scenary and a fresh outlook would heal the breach in our relationship, but even after our conversation the other night, the prospect of his return to his own time loomed over us and neither of us were destined to be happy any time soon.

We had just finished a late breakfast on the balcony. Jamie wasn’t due to be at the clinic for another couple of hours and so we had all relaxed and decided to take it easy for a while. He wouldn’t be returning with us to the apartment this evening but would instead be staying at the clinic under
supervision. He was to have stem cells extracted from his pelvis this afternoon and the Professor had suggested that he undergo the procedure under full anaesthetic. This was apparently to minimise the discomfort and trauma he felt Jamie would suffer as a result of the significant damage his pelvis had already received. I remember John quirking an eyebrow at this before whispering to me a moment later that is was usually done under local and the patient released a couple of hours later but having to negotiate all the screws, plates and pins holding him together was going to take some time apparently. Jamie merely accepted the suggestion and plans were made accordingly.

I watched Jamie as he left the table and returned inside to pack his overnight bag. I didn’t realise that I had started crying until John ever so gently wiped the tear away from my cheek with his fingertips. I looked at him, allowing him to see the depth of my unhappiness instead of carefully hiding it away. He smiled softly before taking my hand in his.

“How about we go get pissed tonight? Jamie is having his sleepover with Raymond, let’s have some fun and forget about everything, huh?” His whispered suggestion and the accompanying mischievous look had me smiling. I nodded and stood when I heard Jamie call out a question about the location of his iPad charger.

A few hours later, I was sitting in the waiting room outside the operating theatre for John to emerge triumphant. He walked towards me smiling, telling me that the extraction had been successful as far as they could tell. The cells were now going to be reprogrammed before being injected back into Jamie’s spine the following day. I went to sit with him in recovery, once again holding his hand as the anaesthetic wore away and he awoke, looking at me with those cat-like blue eyes. For a split second he looked at me as he once had done; like I was the centre of his universe. For a moment, it was there, before it went again, replaced by the mask of polite affection I had grown accustomed to once more. I continued to hold his hand as he was checked over, proved he could eat and drink and he was moved to the room where he would spend the night.

John had returned by this point from the lab and told us about what was happening to the cells right now. Jamie asked lots of questions – considering he hadn’t known of the existence of cells a few months before, he was certainly very knowledgeable in stem cell technology now. Before long though, his eyes were beginning to close, his breathing becoming deep and even. I kissed his forehead, whispered my love for him and stood to leave with John for our secret evening out in Panama City.

After a quick stop off at the apartment for a change of clothes, we headed out into the city. He’d found a few bars when we had been here following his and Jamie’s misunderstanding. Some, he said with a smirk, were suitable to take a beautiful doctor, others, were not. I laughed and told him to show me his worst and before long, we were propping up a bar, drinking shots of tequila and laughing at the state of some of the clients who had obviously started a little earlier than us.

The next bar saw us sitting in a booth, a little quieter and a tongue a little uninhibited thanks to the alcohol saw me telling John everything. I let it all spill out of me; the heartache, the loneliness, the lack of intimacy, my fear that I had destroyed everything in just a few words. He put his arm around me, pulling me to him, stroked my back, my hair. Told me that Jamie loved me, but that he was struggling with the need to help his family and his desire to just stay with me forever. I nodded and leaned into him, accepting the comfort and the warmth of his touch.

The third bar saw us taking to the dance floor, holding each other tightly as we moved to the music, the combination of alcohol, the atmosphere and the newfound lightness I felt from telling John my inner thoughts making us bold, each craving touch, to find where the boundary in our relationship was. He was handsome, very handsome and in a very different way to Jamie. John was a man of my own time, he knew how to live and love in this century. As the music wrapped around us, his lips
became increasingly tempting, his hands were hot against my back, his body moved in sync with mine. Where was the line that neither of us dared to cross, I wondered? As I looked up to him, my hand moving to pull his head down to mine and make our lips meet, I saw the exact same question in his eyes. The moment our lips met, the question disappeared into smoke, dissipating into the night around us. There was no line anymore.

“Let’s take this back to the apartment.” I nodded and let him lead the way.

Chapter End Notes

Not quite what you were expecting? Or maybe it was. Anyway, big, big chapter coming up next. #Exciting!
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

It's a big one. Thank you to everyone who has stuck with me so far on this roller coaster.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She was standing so close to me, her breath gently caressed my lips, I was sure she would be able to hear my heart pounding against my ribs.

“I thought it was just men that were your thing.” She ran a hand down my chest and stomach, her touch agonisingly light as she brushed a hand across my already hard cock. My eyes threatened to close at the contact but I couldn’t look away from her.

“Evidently not.” She smiled before squeezing me through my trousers, tracing the outline of my glans. I couldn’t help but moan as she continued to explore me.

“How long since you’ve fucked anyone? Or been fucked, I don’t know which your preference is, top or bottom.” A deliciously wicked smile appeared on her lips, an eyebrow raised as my breath hitched at her question.

“Too long.” She took my hand and placed it on her breast. Taking up the invitation, I moved my thumb over her nipple, feeling it harden at the contact. I repeated the action, licking my lips as I thought of what it would be like to taste her skin. I skimmed my hand down the hem of the t-shirt she was wearing, sliding my hand underneath to reach the flesh underneath. “God, your skin is so smooth, so soft.”

“Used to skin being harder and more covered in hair I should imagine.” I took her jibe as it was intended and smirked down at her. “Let’s see what other differences we can find, huh?” She licked her lips in response and that was my undoing. My lips crashed against hers then, teeth banging together, tongues caressing and fighting for dominance. Her hands wrapped around my neck and ran through my hair, gripping me tightly. I ran my hands down to her buttocks and then her thighs, picking her up, her legs wrapping around me tightly bringing my cock so close to the intense heat of her sex. I carried her to the bed, sitting on it with her straddling my lap. She writhed against me as we kissed, riding the hardness she could feel beneath her.

Her fingers made quick work of the buttons of my shirt and it was gone in seconds, I dragged her t-shirt over her head, breaking our kiss just long enough get rid of it. Her bra followed and once there were no more hinderances, I moved my mouth to her breasts. I sucked her nipple into my mouth, licking with my tongue whilst my hand squeezed and pinched the other. She moaned and thrust her chest towards me, her hands still gripping my hair, hips grinding against my now painful arousal.

“I want you inside me, John.” I groaned against her, more than ready to give her what she wanted. She stood, then, stepping back from me. She removed her jeans and underwear, watching my reactions with rapt attention. My hand had wandered to the fly on my trousers as she undressed, allowing me to reach my cock and start to stroke as she stripped for me. “How do you want me?” I raised an eyebrow at her, questioning my options. “You can have me any way you like. I just want you to move in me, I want to feel you swell as you get close to finishing, I want to feel you pulse and
twitch as you empty yourself into me. It's been too long since I’ve felt that. I need to feel it.” I quickly stood and removed the rest of my clothes. I reached over the bedside cabinet and found the condoms and the bottle of lube I kept there. Turning back to her, I held out a hand. She took it and I pulled her close to me, her body soft and warm against mine.

“Then I guess I’d better choose then.” Nothing more was said as I kissed her and we decided together.

I wa’ on the verge o’ sleep when the door tae the room quietly opened. The light from the corridor cast the visitor in silhouette stopping me from tellin’ who it wa’. They closed the door behind them and walked taewards me, slowing only tae grab a chair and pull it tae the side of the bed. I canna think why I didna say anything or question who it wa’, I jus’ lay there, watching the scene unfold before me. Eventually, they settled and reached o’er tae turn on the light above the bed.

“Professor Raymond?” He smiled at me, a full beaming smile.

“Do you mind me visiting? I’ve been waiting for an opportunity to talk to you, in private.” I looked at him puzzled.

“Privately? I dinna ken…”

“What I have to say is for your ears first, then you can decide what to share with those you trust the most.”

“Professor…”

“Please, you must listen, James. Your life depends on it.” From the look in his eyes, I kent he was serious. I nodded reluctantly, moving to be able to see him better. “It’s good to see you again, my friend. It’s been a very long time since our paths have crossed.”

“What?” I looked at him, not understanding what he could possibly mean by the statement. “Do we ken each other?” I wracked ma brain tae think of a time when I would have met this strange man.

“Oh yes. We’ve known each other for a very long time.” I scanned his face but could find nae hint of recollection from this life or the one afore the stones. Could he be a traveller too? “I’m not a traveller, not like you anyway.” My eyes opened wide at this, ma jaw nearly hittin’ the floor.

“Ye know about me?”

“Oh yes, I know where you’ve come from, how far you have travelled. We’ve met in many lifetimes before today. I’ve been waiting for you for many years.” I swallowed and just continued tae stare at him. “I suppose I had better start at the beginning, hadn’t I?” I nodded slowly.

“Aye. The beginning.”

“I first met you in Paris in 1744, no, don’t interrupt. This is a long story, hence why I have kept you here overnight. It needs to be told, to right the wrongs that keep happening, and to give you peace in this, your final life.

“You were young, damaged, plagued by horrendous nightmares after having been assaulted so horrifically by a mad man, his name was Jonathan Randall. You were newly married, to a beautiful young English woman, just starting to show with the child you had conceived before you were injured. She visited for herbs to help you sleep, a natural healer no matter the century she is in. Her soul light is blue, I can see it around her always. I called her Madonna in this life, and others. Her
name was Claire. Claire Beauchamp Fraser.

“You were in Paris to stop the Jacobite Rising happening, to prevent the Bonnie Prince from gaining the funds to mount an invasion. You succeeded too. The Forty-Five rising didn’t take place. You won. But at a price. Randall returned, you fought a duel and were arrested. Claire tried to stop you but collapsed in the clearing where you fought. Claire lost the baby and died in my arms that evening.”

My heart broke at the verra thought o’ causing Claire tae lose our bairn, tae not be there tae hold her when she needed me. My breath caught in my throat, almost choking me with the idea I could have caused such harm to my wife. He waited a few moments, allowing me tae absorb what he told me afore continuing.

“When you were eventually released from the Bastille by your godfather, and you discovered Claire’s passing, you ceased to live, following her not many weeks later. That was your first life.” He paused, letting the information sink in. He spoke wi’ such an earnest expression that I had little doubt he believed what he was saying. I couldna countenance ever doin’ such a thing tae Claire, my mind rebelling at the suggestion that I could ha’ caused her death in any way. He looked at me, smiled sadly and continued his story.

“I don’t understand what happened but once again, I found myself waking up in the 18th century. I met you once more in Paris following Randall’s assault. You were working to stop the rebellion once again, but you failed to save Scotland or your child. But this time, Claire survived. Once more you fought the duel you had promised to avoid but I saved her the night she lost your daughter. I recalled what happened the first time and worked to keep her alive, staving off the infection that was claiming her body. You both retreated to Scotland to heal mind and body but were eventually caught up in the Rising. You died together at Culloden, fighting at each other’s side. She was carrying your second child at the time.”

He stopped once more, this time to wipe the tears from his eyes as he re-lived the loss of us not once, but twice. I sat there just looking at him, completely at a loss as tae what response I should be givin’. Travelling through time wa’ hard enough tae believe, living the same life o’er and o’er, making the same mistakes, losing my wife…

“Our third life was slightly different. Claire wasn’t from your time, she was from 1946. She travelled through the stones to find you although she didn’t know that until later. You did save Scotland this time but by assassinating the Bonnie Prince. It was a daring move, one that was driven by a desperation to succeed. Sadly, you were found out. Your uncle Dougal caught you in the act and reported you to the gendarmes. Both you and Claire were apprehended and hung for murder. You gave yourself up to save her but she insisted on watching your execution. She smiled to you before the rope took your life, said she wanted you to see a loving face in the crowd. She was taken then but was allowed to give birth to your daughter before following you bravely to the gallows. I smiled for her.” He paused, o’ercome with emotion for a few minutes. I could scarcely breathe, a lump in my throat threatening to choke me as I imagined the scene he described.

“The child survived, and I took it upon myself to raise her. We were to escape to Scotland, to raise her with her kin when a smallpox outbreak hit the city. She died in my arms and I along with her, the plague killing us both.” The tears freely rolled down our faces now. My heart was numb, my mind still, empty of feeling. The pain of his words too big tae bear. I turned away from him, rolling onto my side, facing the window and the glittering lights of the city. He cleared his throat to start again but I couldn’a stand tae hear any more.

“Seas. Please.” He stopped for God knows how long. The thoughts whirled in my head, ma heart
beatin’ furiously in ma chest.

“There is more I must tell you, James. It is hard, I know, but you must know it.”

“How many must I hear of? How many times have I condemned my wife, my bairns, tae die?” He put his arm on my shoulder, pull me over to lie on my back again.

“At least you forget. I remember them all. The faces, the names, the happiness, and the sadness. I have not be granted the gift of starting from the beginning.” I looked at him then, the horror, the pain in his expression. He had seen it all. He was right, in some respects I wa’ luckier.

“Then let me hear the rest. And I can share the burden wi’ ye.”

“Your fourth life again had Claire travelling to you from the future. Your attempts to stop the rising in Paris failed once again and sadly, your first daughter was lost too but once more, I saved Claire. You both travelled back to Scotland to recover but were unfortunately dragged into the Rising by that foolish Prince. You make the ultimate sacrifice and decide to fight and die with your men at Culloden. You found Claire was pregnant just before the battle and sent her back to her own time, to deliver your second child. Claire moved to America and raised her there with her first husband, Frank. You had nothing left to live for so went to Culloden with one goal in mind. You killed and were killed by John Grey at Culloden.” He paused as I took in this information.

“John? Was at Culloden?” I stared at him, not able to comprehend all that I was being told.

“Yes. You had killed his young lover, Hector, at the battle of Prestonpans so he sought you out at Culloden. You delivered fatal blows and died in each other’s arms, your blood mingling and soaking into the soil. I don’t know what, or how or even why, but something happened that time around. As your blood spilled into the Earth, you formed a bond. John has been part of your story ever since.”

“But John is from this time...”

“Claire has been born in both times too. Only you are fixed in the 18th century it seems. I will come to this later. Please, let me continue.” I nodded, bracing myself for what would happen next.

“Your fifth life followed the events exactly as the fourth up to Culloden. You lost your daughter, the Rising happened, and Claire once again returned to her time. Except this time you survived the battle. John Grey’s brother found you very badly injured in a barn two days after. He had every other person in that building shot but not you. You see, you had met John earlier in this story, had interrogated him but then allowed him to live. He saw this as a debt of honour and consequently, his brother took on the debt himself. He believed you were mortally wounded so sent you back to Lallybroch thinking it would be a corpse that arrived. He was not far off. Your sister fought to save you and succeeded but you lived half a life after that.” I smiled slightly, imagining Jenny saving me but the thought of living wi’out a heart, Claire, gone.

“You spent six years living in a cave, years in prison followed as you gave yourself up to save your family, then more years as an indentured slave in England. In this time, you and John became firm friends and he ended up raising your son, William, begat from one night. His mother was high born but of low morals and manners. She blackmailed you to bed her, and once again, you did what was needed to save your family. She died in childbirth. I can’t say it wasn’t for the best.”

“A son?” My heart leapt at the prospect of knowing one of my children, e’en if he wa’ conceived in a questionable manner.

“Yes, William, or Willie as you and John called him. The image of you except for his hair.”
“Lucky fer him, then.” He smiled and shrugged.

“Not all is done with this life yet. After twenty years apart, she returned to you.”

“Claire? She came back?”

“Yes, she found that you had survived and returned through the stones. Two years later, she was followed by your daughter, Brianna Ellen, named for your parents. You finally got to know both of your surviving children. You all moved to the Colonies, North Carolina to be exact. You and your family played an integral role in the formation of an independent America. You lived to a be a good old age, raising grandchildren and great grandchildren, with Claire by your side.”

The tears that fell down my face now were of joy. I had lived, Claire and our daughter, lived. The professor patted my shoulder, a smile on his face.

“You did get to know happiness, James.”

“Aye.” He waited a while, pouring us both a glass of water.

“Ready?” I nodded. “The sixth happened much the same way as the fifth, you survived Culloden and end up imprisoned. But here the story takes another turn – you met John Grey during the rising and again when he was the garrison commander when you were at Ardsmuir prison. This time thought, you built a relationship together. At first, you became friends. He invited you to play chess and you would talk. One night, you spoke of loved ones lost to you. He told you about Hector, you talked about Claire. That night changed everything for you both. Over time, you became closer eventually becoming lovers. He secured you the indenture at Helwater to stop you from being sold into slavery in the colonies. William was still conceived as this time, his mother blackmailed you regarding your relationship with John. But again, she dies and John married her sister, becoming William’s legal guardian. Isobel died after a few years but she knew about the pair of you and about Willie’s parentage. You lived a long and happy life with him in many ways especially as you got to raise your son. You loved John and he you. Claire never returned.”

“Me and John?”

“Yes. John has loved you in many lives now. He loves you fiercely in this one too.” I looked away, focusing on how ma heart leapt at the thought of me and John as lovers.

“Those two were your happiest lives. The next two were disastrous.”

As he told me of the seventh and eighth lives, the happiness I had felt disappeared. They were variations on a theme, repeatin’ o’er and o’er, the same tragedies, and all the same mistakes. Scotland lost, my daughter lost. Claire died once more during childbirth in Paris, again caused by my hopeless duel with Randall. I survived and flung myself into the Rising, determined to die. But even then, I could not. I was doomed to live a long life of suffering, paying for my sins. I was a slave when I finally died, at John’s estate in the colonies. There was no happiness.

Then, she had been struck down on her way to the stones at Culloden, shot before my eyes. I died with her then, unable to live with all hope lost, John being the one to deliver the merciful bullet to my head. I had begged, he had wept but pulled the trigger anyway. Such sorrow tae be lived agin and agin wi’ nae hope. I wa’ numb, then angry at bein’ used by some unknown force fer a purpose still kent only by the universe. I balled my hands into fists, ground my teeth and prayed for the strength to endure what was going to be thrown at me next. I opened my eyes to look at my useless legs and knew that once again, I was the butt of this universal joke.
“I have been a part of all nine of your lives now that you have returned to me. John and Claire are part of you too, all parts of the same soul, forged in blood. Two of your lives have seen you love them both. And they have loved you. But you never manage to save Scotland and save your daughters in the same life. You never raise a child of you and Claire, and you never get to hold your first daughter at all. They are always the cost of trying to save Scotland.”

I gripped the sheets under ma hands, squeezing tae keep the tears from falling down ma face as my mind struggled tae take it all in, fightin’ wi ma heart which kent it tae be true. The seer in Paris and her prophecy – that I would ha nine lives, that I would marry a white lady – it all made sense now.

“James?” He touched my hand, bringing me back to the room.

“Eight lives…” I looked at him, waiting for more yet scairt tae hear the rest.

“Yes, eight lives gone. But, you were happy in some of them. John made you very happy, raising William together. You lived in Edinburgh before moving to the Colonies when John was given a tract of land in Virginia. You both lived well into old age, watching William grow and have a family of his own. And the the life when Claire returned gave you great joy. To raise grandchildren, to play a role in the formation of a new country, to have purpose. You thrived. Yes, you’ve known great sorrow in every life. The loss of your daughters, your wife…” I nodded.

“Why? Why do I keep living this life? Surely once was enough suffering. Why so many times? What did I do wrong at some point to have to endure so much pain?” The tears fell now, I had as little power o’er them as I did ma own destiny it seemed.

“There is a prophecy. Of a red-haired Fraser of Lovat being the key to the success or failure of Scotland. You already know of the nine-lives from the seer in Paris.” I looked at him then.

“How do you know that? That is from my life this time…”

“And every other time. The first part of your life is always identical. I have always met you during your second trip to Paris. Things start to change usually around the time that Randall…” He looked away then, unsure how tae speak the truth. I swallowed, nervous as tae hear what more I could have been made tae endure.

“The time Randall does what?” He turned back toward me, a sad expression on his face.

“In all your lives, no matter whether Claire starts in your time or the future, you are always captured by Black Jack Randall. He tortures you, smashing your hand to pieces with a hammer.” I clenched my fists together, a familiar ache in my right hand occurring at the memory. “Claire attempts to rescue you and you bargain for her life with your body. He brutally rapes you, breaking you in the process.”

I suddenly felt sick, Raymond noticed and quickly brought a bowl in time for me to empty the contents of my stomach. I lay back after a few minutes, breathing heavy, shaking wi’ shock over everything I had just been told.

“It’s the same every time?”

“Yes, apart from this one. We’ve never met before Randall attacked you.”

“Never?”

“No, remember only Claire has travelled before. You, me and John have always been in the eighteenth century.”
“Why?”

“I don’t know. I just know that this is your last life. And my friend, I wish for you to have a happy one, with your family, raising your daughters in the safety of this century. That is the only reason I can think of. We’ve focused on Scotland before but maybe we should have focused on you and your children. Now it’s time to change.” I stared out into the darkness beyond the windows, seeing the city lights shine and burn, casting an orange tint on the sky.

“Unless I can do both. Save Scotland and my family…” I looked at him, an idea startin’ tae come tae me…

“James, don’t go down that route…”

“But what if I’ve come here to find out exactly what I can do to stop the rising? What if…”

“Stop! I have seen you die eight times now, each time without holding either of your daughters when they were babes. It is your time, James. Not Scotland’s.” I shook my head, trying to work out everythin’ I had been told and gettin’ nowhere. “James, please, this time is special, I can sense it. Please don’t make me watch your family be torn apart again. Live this life in happiness. You’ve saved Scotland twice but at great personal cost. Don’t be fooled into thinking you can do both.” I looked at him with anger. He would ha’ me abandon ma people, ma clan, ma culture. “Look around you, has Scotland ceased to be?”

“Ma culture, the Highland way of livin’ has. Nay lairds or clans anymore. It’s all gone. What if I can save it…”

“God dammit James! You are the same in every life you live! I will not treat you so that you can get yourself killed for the final time. You mean far too much to those of us that have followed you through all your lives!” He stood and angrily walked to the window, staring out at the city landscape beyond. Neither of us spoke for several minutes, he calming his anger, me from digesting all that I had been told.

“Why can ye remember, but we cannnae recall any o’ it?”

“It seems I am a helper and an observer. I am here to learn from each of your mistakes and help you get closer what it is you’re meant to achieve.” He turned to me then. “For so long, I thought it was to save Scotland, stop the Rising. But since I awoke the in the twentieth century, I have wondered if we were wrong all along. I have been waiting for you three to appear for a long time. You are forged from the same soul, bound together in blood. You have all lived and died together for many lifetimes now. Every time, I have had to stand and watch your greatest misery, see you live with half a heart once Claire leaves or dies. But I’ve seen your capacity for love, to be a man different from any other. To cope with extraordinary challenges and become stronger. To continue to live, just as you are now. I know just how close you came to dying, John told me how he and Claire saved you. You are meant to carry on, in this world, not the past.”

“So what am I meant to do?”

“Not go back. Stay here. I can heal you, to a point. Your damage is far too much even for me this time. Have your children, raise them here, live an unusual life in a perfectly unextroidinary way. You’ve done it before – defied social norms. Do it again.”

“Ye cannnae fix me?”

“I am sorry but no, not fully. You are too badly damaged this time. Randall always broke your spirit.
In each life, you lived with horrific nightmares for your entire life. You were scarred but other than your hand, you were fit and well. This time, it is your body that is too far gone. I can maybe help you stand, walk with support, but not be as you once were. I am truly sorry, James.” I nodded.

“What of the prophecy?”

“It’s vague. But I always worked on you being the red-haired Fraser of Lovat. Maybe it’s not you, but one of your children.” We remained silent for some time as his words sank in. Ever since arriving in this century, the way forward always seemed obscured, now it wa’ e’en more so. I kent I needed tae tell John and Claire but how much tae say? It wa’ our story but how much could it help for them tae ken it all? I remember Claire’s words on us having children and grimaced. There wa’ a reason he ha’ spoken tae just me.

“Thank ye, fer tellin’ me.” He walked back towards me, starting tae tell me something else when I cut him off. “I’d like tae go back now. If I dinna need tae be here for any medical reason, I want tae go home.” He looked at me for a few seconds before nodding.

“I shall get my car and take you home myself.” He moved towards the door when I spoke tae him.

“Thank ye. Fer bein’ there, when my family need ye. Fer takin’ care of my daughter when we couldn’a. Fer keeping Claire alive, or tryin’ to. Fer rememberin’ everythin’. Tis a great burden, one I couldnae carry. So, thank ye.” He nodded, a smile on his lips.

“Anytime, my friend.”

We didnae speak on the journey back tae the apartment. I leaned ma head against the window and watched the world pass wi’out sein’. It was all tae much tae take in. How could I tell Claire and John, but how I could I keep it from them either? My whole world wa’ changed now.

I quietly unlocked the door to the apartment kenning that both o’ them would most likely be asleep. I noticed the empty beer bottles on the table and smiled, they’d been havin’ a good time wi’out me it seemed. I carefully moved towards the bedroom, trying no’ tae knock anythin’ or make a noise tae wake them. Me head wa’ too full of the conversation with Raymond, I wasnae ready tae talk about it to anyone yet.

I got to mine and Claire’s room and looked inside. No one. The bed wa’ undisturbed from the mornin’. Confusion and panic settled intae ma stomach as I thought o’ all the things that may ha’ happened. I quickly moved along tae John’s room, the door was slightly open and a light wa’ on inside. I started tae relax a little, as least they had been home. As I opened the door further, I felt my heart stop, a prickle of cold running o’er ma skin as I took in the sight.

The covers had been kicked off at some point. They lay naked taegether, legs tangled, arms around each other. Empty condom wrappers littered the floor at the bedside, the heavy smell of sex and sweat in the air. I dinnae ken how long I simply stared, takin’ in the scene. I could feel ma heart beatin’, but no’ like it once did. Three pieces o’ the same soul. That’s what I’d been told. I nodded and turned away. Seems we were.

Retreatin’ tae the living room, I stared out at the night skyline. Watched the ships movin’ across the horizon. Raymond had told me that this life wa’ meant tae be different and he wa’ right. It wasnae just meant tae be me wi’ Claire this time. It wa’ meant tae be John too. They would be his bairns in this life. No’ mine. I wa’ too damaged, Raymond had said so. He kent it all along, and now I felt a fool.

The hours dragged by the and the sun started tae rise. I kent what I must do, thankful for the clarity
that the dawn had given me. As the sunlight hit my face, I wiped the tears away and nodded. I had a plan. I had tae be the red-haired Fraser seein’ as there would be no children in this life. I would return tae my time. I would save Scotland and ma family and there I would remain.

I awoke feeling sore in oh so many places, all of which felt right and wrong at the same time. Memories of drinking and talking with John, of kissing and touching, of exploring our bodies. I blushed at how forward I had been, how turned on it made me to think of him inside me. As I watched the sun rise through the blinds, I pondered the guilt that I should have been feeling. I had cheated on Jamie, but it didn’t feel like I had. Something about sleeping with John felt right. Different. But like it was meant to be.

I looked over at him then, face relaxed and more content than he had appeared in months. He’d told me eventually that he’d not been with anyone since he’d met Jamie. A long time for him, he’d admitted. He liked sex, loved it in fact. But the idea of sleeping with anyone else didn’t appeal, until last night it appears. I smiled as I recalled the sound and feel of him finishing inside me. Yes, he certainly seemed to have enjoyed it.

As much as it had felt right though, I knew it had to be a one-time only event. Jamie would be returning today and my life was with him. It was good to get rid of the tension that had been building between us, but it was done and Jamie must never find out. I knew the damage it would do to him, knowing I had slept not only with his best friend but someone who was, to put it crassly, fully functioning.

I slowly made my way out of bed to not wake John and grabbed a towel from the bathroom to wrap myself in. Catching a glance in the mirror, I couldn’t help but smile guiltily. My hair was wild about me, my skin was flushed from remembering all the things we had done the night before. I felt a flood of desire ripple through me as I looked back to the bed and at John. Could I only do it once and never turn back?

I avoided my own question and walked quietly around the bed to the door, aiming for mine and Jamie’s room. Nothing could have prepared me for coming face to face with my husband as he sat waiting for me. He smiled as he took in my appearance but his eyes… My heart broke when I saw the unshed tears there.

“Mornin, Claire.” He sniffed and blinked and tears away, turning to face me fully.

“Jamie…I…”

“I came home early. Professor Raymond gave me a lift. I wasnae able tae sleep there, wi’out ye next tae me. So, he brought me back.” He glanced over to the bottles on the table. “Celebratin’ somethin’?”

“I…we…had a few drinks…”

“It’s good. Ye both deserve a night off lookin’ after me. Ye didnae have to keep watch o’er me, or help put ma tae bed or…” He stopped as his voice started to wobble with the emotion. “I’m glad ye had a good time.”

“Jamie…”

“S’ok, Claire. Truly. I dinna wish tae talk about it right now if tha’s ok. I’m tired. I didnae sleep much and I’m due back at the clinic in four hours. I’d like tae go tae sleep.” I nodded and watched as he started to move to our bedroom. Just before the door though, he turned and held out his hand.
“Come wi’ me?” I just looked at him, shocked. My guilt almost choking me as I looked into his eyes. “Please, Sassenach, lay wi’ me.”

Chapter End Notes

OMG! Let me know what you think.
I tried tae sleep, tae let ma mind shut down fer a few hours. But I couldn’t. Images of past lives kept dancin’ through ma head, of death and suffering, of pain and loss. I clung to her, anchoring myself to this world, this life, with her touch. But she was nae my Claire anymore. She held back from me, her body didnae mould tae mine like it once had. Her touch was soft, gentle as she stroked my back, but it was distracted. She dinnae trace the deepest ridges as she always had afore, drawing the patterns of my back so vividly I could see them. She smelt of him now. John’s scent had always calmed me too, my brain knowing I was safe when he was near, same as when I was with Claire. But not when he was mixed with her. All the same, I had tae hold her. I had tae know she was alive and in my arms. Not dead. Not dying. Not lost. Not missing in another time. But here. Wi’ me.

I knew she was awake by the tension in her body; coiled like a spring ready to defend against attack at any second. Tha’ used tae be me, always ready for anything. I’d slept soundly for most of ma time in this century, especially since I’d had her in my arms. But now, she wa’ scared of me. Of my reaction tae what I had seen. Was I angry? Nah. No, I couldnae blame her fer wantin’ somethin’ I was unable or at least unwilling tae give. Months of no touchin, o’ bein’ distant, keepin’ her at arms length to save us both the heartbreak of my return. I had been a fool. And now I wa’ payin’ the price.

I had tried tae talk to her about my journey through the stones, about my plan, tae try and make her see that I wasnae doin’ somethin’ sae foolish as tae prevent ma return. But she always grew angry, n’er seen’ that I had tae do this. She thought I wa’ puttin’ ma family first, ignorin’ her. It wa’ ne’er my intention for her tae feel like tha’ but I couldnae get her tae listen. So I shut maself away, tried tae stop maself from feelin’. Tha’ would be the only way I could go through wi’ this madness, tae let maself walk away from her. I’d done too good a job and now I had a choice; either repair our relationship, or let it be an end. I had apparently caused her death so many times from foolish actions. To save her in this life, mebbe this was what needed tae happen.

The moment that thought entered ma head though, ma heart stopped, skipping a beat. Ma breath caught and the tears stung my eyes. A pain appeared in ma chest right where ma heart should be making it hard tae breathe. I felt her arms tighten around me as I struggled tae draw a breath, felt her sit up, her laying me down on my back, her hands holding my face as she spoke to me.

“Jamie, open your eyes. Look at me, please.” I did as she asked and felt the tears pour freely as they were released. “Breathe in, hold it, 1…2…3…, breathe out…”

I couldnae do it at first, couldn’t get a grip o’ ma panic. The thought o’ losin’ her, of her not being wi’ me threatened tae choke the life out o’ me. I could see her talkin’ tae someone, John I imagine, but couldnae hear the words for the poundin’ of ma heart makin’ up fer lost beats. Ma vision shrank tae just her face, focusin’ on her eyes, their whisky brown depths never leavin’ mine. They’d brought me back from the brink that first night, in the middle of that road, layin’ in a pool of blood. They’d brought me back again. They were the only thing that could.

I dinna ken how long it wa’ but very slowly, I became aware of where I wa’ agin, ma breathing getting deeper and slowing, the roar gradually disappearin’ from ma ears. I wa’ leanin’ against somethin’ warm and solid now, surrounded by arms that held me upright. One hand lay over ma heart, almost willing it tae slow by touch alone. I could hear her then, speakin’ soothing words, her forehead resting against mine now that I was calming.

“You’re ok, Jamie. You’re ok, my love. It’s all ok. Just breathe.” I nodded, allowin’ my eyes tae close. It wa’ time tae make ma choice. Onwards taegether. Or separately. I could feel the panic
starting tae well in me again. She saw it too.

“Shh. It’s all going to be ok, Jamie.” Opening my eyes to look at her once more, I raised my hand to her face, grazing the skin of her cheek wi’ ma fingertips. Takin’ a deep breath, I chose.

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I could tell the exact moment he decided not to fight for us anymore. As I looked into his eyes, suddenly, all the pain and anguish disappeared. What remained scared me more than anything; nothing. No love, no anger. Just emptiness. The spark between us once was now definitely extinguished and I felt it like a punch to the gut. He let his hand drop from my face, the warmth of his fingertips lingering for a split second before also dissipating into the air.

“Jamie?”

“Claire.” His voice was different; hollow, flat. I’d never realised just how lovingly he had always said my name before. The ‘r’ almost purred. He made my name beautiful. Now, it was ordinary once more. Clipped. Devoid of anything other than vowels and consonants.

He sat up fully, moving away from John. I’d almost forgotten he was there at all until now. As Jamie moved himself gingerly to the edge of the bed readying himself to move to his wheelchair, I glanced at John only to see the same horror I felt reflected on his face. I turned away, not ready to see the confirmation of what we’d done written in his eyes. I watched as Jamie transferred himself and moved toward the bathroom all the while refusing to let my tears fall.

In silence, we all prepared ourselves for the day ahead. I readied coffee, John showered, Jamie washed unable to shower due to having open wounds from his stem cell extraction. I shook my head not quite believing that less than twenty-four hours had passed since that procedure. It was as though a lifetime had worked its way in-between, all of us irrevocably changed by the events of last night.

Jamie appeared first and just grabbed a mug and some coffee. He smiled at me, a supreme example of facadism – it didn’t reach beyond his lips never mind his eyes. He simply thanked me and drank it, looking out of the window at the bay below. John appeared then, taking the second cup, refusing to look at me whether out of guilt or sorrow, I couldn’t say. I felt alone. Cast adrift once more. I could blame myself but that wouldn’t be entirely fair. We had all played a part in this disaster but right then and there, my heart felt far too bruised and battered to be able to blame anyone but myself. I had been weak. I had crossed the boundary. I had wanted more than the beautiful relationship I already had. I had not supported my husband when he needed me the most and I had hurled hurtful words at him confirming all his darkest fears. I had called him a cripple. Inferred he was useless, that he couldn’t help those who needed him right now. Taken a proud man and stripped him of who he was. Last night had simply been the final nail in the lid. I knew he would travel back to his own time whether walking or crawling. And there he would remain.

This revelation hit me as water ran down from the shower head over me. I slid down the wall to the floor as this knowledge sank in and sobbed silently for the love I had let go of so carelessly.

The day went as planned with regards to Jamie’s treatment. I held him, allowed his head to rest of on my shoulder as John injected the newly reprogrammed stem cells into the spinal canal. Jamie’s hands gripped my arms slightly as the needle sank through skin and muscle into the area surrounding the spinal cord, releasing the breath he had been holding after each injection as a pained exhale through gritted teeth. Six injections later and he was laid on his back. He’d have to spend the next few hours lying there before he would be allowed to return to the apartment. I sat with him even though he had told me on more than one occasion that I didn’t have to. I wanted to. I needed to. If these were to be the last few days of our relationship, I wanted to suffer them with him. We remained in silence for the most part. Jamie stared determinedly at his book on the Rising, willing the words to enter his
“Learnt anything interesting?” My voice shattered the silence like a hammer to glass. It was sharp, unwelcome. He closed the book and lay it next to him on the bed. I saw him bite his top lip, his eyes drift shut as he contemplated his next move.

“I’m no’ angry, Claire.” I started to interrupt but he turned to me, stopping my words with his gaze. “Ye didnae think I would return so early, and I ken ye didnae mean tae hurt me. Ye wanted something I cannae give ye. I understand. I’m no’ much of a husband tae ye…”

“Jamie, please…”

“I’m no’, Claire. I cannae work, I cannae protect ye, I cannae satisfy ye like ye need…”

“Please…” A tear slipped down my face, begging him silently to fight.

“I understand. Ye needed tae be normal for a night. Tae feel alive. I’ve taken that away from ye. I’m a burden tae ye both. I ken that well enough. And I’ve disrupted ye life enough.”

“What do you mean?” I could barely breathe as I waited for his answer.

“I want ye tae go home. Tae Inverness. Now. No’ in a week’s time. Today or tomorrow. Now.” I couldn’t hold the sobs in any longer and buried my face in sheets at the side of him, my shoulders shaking with the effort of remaining silent.

“Shh, Claire. Come ‘ere.” Before I knew what I was doing, I was laid next to him, my head on his shoulder crying into his neck. He’d turned onto his side, his arms around me, holding me to him. “Ye need tae get back tae normal, tae be the amazing surgeon I ken ye are. People in Inverness need ye skills. All that’s here is waitin’ around and gettin’ bored.” I waited for his hand to move the hair away from my face, for his lips to brush across my forehead, but they never did.

I moved away from him slightly to look into his eyes. Still nothing. Without thinking, I pressed my lips against his, rested my hand on his cheek, willed him to be the Jamie I knew. He responded but it was cold and impersonal. I broke away, looked into his eyes again.

“Ye need tae go pack.” I ignored him and kissed him again, this time running my tongue against his lips. I wasn’t prepared for him to pull away from me so violently, his hand pushing my shoulder gently but with a firmness that enhanced the feeling of rejection. “Dinnae make this harder than it already is. I will see ye when I return in a few months.” At his lack of mention of the plans we had made for me to visit again in June, I knew he was for real. I swallowed my tears before standing.

“I’ll see you tonight, before I leave?” I hated the hopeful, almost pleading tone in my voice. Hated that I was reducing myself to begging.

“Aye.” He smiled before slowly returning to laying on his back, wincing. He picked up the book once again and pretended to read it once more. Our discussion evidently at an end. Picking up my bag, I kissed his forehead quickly and walked out of the room before he could pull away or say anything. As I passed the nurses station, I asked them to check with him regards pain meds and then left the building for the final time.

**

“Why has Claire gone home earlier than planned?” I turned to look at the Professor, a feeling of total surprise likely written all over my face. “Ah, you didn’t know.” I stood and walked immediately to Jamie’s room, praying that Claire would be there after all. He was reading or at least pretending to.

head.
Normally, if he was reading about Scottish history, he would be furiously scribbling notes into a small, leather notebook I had given him. He wasn’t though, his eyes staring unseeing at the page before him.

“Where is Claire, Jamie?”

“Packin’ I imagine.” He didn’t even look up, just turned the page and continued his charade.

“For what?”

“Tae catch the next plane home.” I walked over and snatched the book from his hands, throwing it down by his feet. He merely lay his arms across his abdomen and stared at the ceiling.

“What did you do?”

“Told her that she had patients in Inverness that needed her more than I do.”

“You what? More than you do? No one needs her more than you do. If this is about…”

“It’s not.” He sighed, rubbing his hands across his face. “It’s fer the best…”

“You’re being stupid, Jamie! That woman loves you…” At this he made a strange, Scottish grunt and turned his head away to face the wall. Neither of us spoke for a few moments, too much hanging unsaid in the air around us. “I’m going to go find her, tell her to stay…”

“NO!” His roar made me jump and take a step back. He closed his eyes then, lips moving in silent supplication as he brought his temper back into line. “No. She needs to get back to normal. I’ve disrupted her life enough.”

“But Jamie…”

“You need to concentrate on your work here. She needs tae get back to her life in Scotland.” He sighed again before turning to look at me for the first time since, well, since the night before. “It’s not about last night. It’s…complicated.” I could see he was struggling to hold himself together; his face totally composed a dead give away that turmoil was lurking beneath. I reached out a hand towards his shoulder.

“Jamie…”

“Dinnae touch me. Not yet.” Nodding, I moved my hand away. “When can we go home?” I grimaced slightly at the use of ‘we’ and answered soon. I returned his book to him and almost walked straight into Raymond. He beckoned me into his office and made me take a seat.

“I need you to tell me everything that has happened.” I shook my head and stood to leave.

“I don’t think it’s any concern of yours…”

“Everything about you three is my concern. Now sit and tell me.” Something in his tone told me to return to the chair. Clearing my throat, I started to tell him the basics of what happened. As I reached the end of the story, he was rubbing his eyes with thumb and forefinger, a thoroughly worried expression on his face.

“He saw you? Immediately upon returning home?” I nodded, shame pinking my face and forming a lump in my throat. “And he said that sending Claire home had nothing to do with last night?” I nodded once more, getting the distinct impression that this was far worse than we first imagined.
“Merde!”

“What happened before you brought him home?” He looked at me then, a look of fear tinged with anger on his face.

“Something I thought he would have you two to help him deal with. Now, he is alone.” He stood then and walked around to me, leaning forward, he put his hands on the chair arms and got close to my face. “You must help him deal with this. He will destroy himself, very willingly, if you do not. He has before. You have taken his reason for living away and only you can return it to him.” I looked at him, confusion and my own anger rising to the fore.

“What did you do with him that needed us so badly? Why didn’t you tell me before?” My anger was released in my voice as I spat the questions back at him.

“I trusted you to be there for him, like you always have been.”

“You know nothing about us! How could you decide something like that!”

“I know you better than you know yourself! I know that you have loved him since the moment you first spoke to him. I know that you three have a connection but are yet to realise how deep it goes. You were meant to be there to help him with this challenge – not to add to it!” I backed down as he moved away, a sad expression in his eyes.

He was right. I had loved Jamie since I met him. He broken speech, his lame jokes, his naivety with the modern world. His mind was amazing; fast, intelligent, caring. He never judged me. Although coming from a time when homosexuality was virtually unheard of in society, he never once shied away, treating me as an equal and simply accepting it as who I was. And how I had hurt him in return. Neither me nor Claire were truly worthy of him; both had inflicted wounds far deeper than the ones from a car travelling too fast late at night. Resting my elbows on my knees, I put my head into my hands, scrubbling my fingers through my hair in frustration.

“All is not lost, John.” I looked at him, begging his help. “You love him. And he loves you. He will need you most of all in these next few weeks. You need to be there for him, at every step. You will need to regain his trust and he will tell you his story. Until then, he will be under immense pressure and strain for what he knows now is almost too much for him to bear.”

“What did you tell him?” My anger at Raymond was returning; anger at the thought of what he had inadvertently done to the man I loved.

“He will tell you. In time. Just…take care of him until then.” I stared at him for a few seconds before nodding finally.

“I’m going to take him home now. I assume that will be ok.” He nodded and looked away, a hint of remorse at his poor timing on his face.

An hour later, I opened the door to our apartment to let us in. Calling out Claire’s name, I didn’t know how to react as I saw Jamie reading the note she had left on the kitchen table. His face crumpled as he read, a momentary expression of such pain and heartbreak, before composing himself once more. I wanted to hold him, kiss the hurt away. Instead I simply stood there and watched.

“There was a cancellation on today’s flight. She’s gone.”
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