With his brother gone and his father on his deathbed, womanizing bad boy James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, Prince of Broch Mordha, must find a suitable woman to become his queen consort when he inherits his father’s throne as King of Scotland. The problem is, per royal rules, he must marry a woman of royalty. Yet none of the princesses brought before him are to his liking. Desperate to get away one night, he runs into a young, beautiful nursery owner named Claire Beauchamp, who doesn’t care to give him the time of day.
Prologue

16 April 1746

_Culloden Moor, Inverness, Scotland_

Prince Charles Stuart was a pompous arse without the mind to think before he spoke, but he was charming, with the ability to persuade people to do things, even if it was against their better judgment.

The entire premise of the Bonnie Prince’s crusade against King George II was to unseat the blaspheming Protestant from what he believed was his father’s throne, or so God told him.

“God demands that a Catholic king sit on the English throne,” he once said to a trusted member of his inner circle.

Most of the Scottish Jacobite soldiers thought the young pretender to be a clueless wanker, but they nonetheless followed the young man into battle with the promise that Scotland would be ruled once again by a King who followed their Catholic beliefs. They believed, as Charles did, that God would lead them to glory.

And so He did.

In an unexpected, twisted turn of events, the Jacobite Rising of 1745 was a success, despite being outnumbered just under 1,000 men by their British foes. The Bonnie Prince led the surviving men straight to London, where they charged the front of Kensington Palace, killed everyone in their way, and forcibly removed King George II from his throne. Everyone who did not pledge their immediate loyalty to the newly restored House of Stuart was executed where they stood; only three servants to the Duke of Cumberland refused.

Two weeks after their victory, King James II came to claim what he, and the Jacobites, believed was rightfully his.

Another month passed before a decree was given.

Scotland and her people were rewarded for their valiant efforts, justified sacrifices, and fervent loyalty by the House of Stuart keeping their promise.

And within the year, on the 18th of December, in the Year of Our Lord Seventeen Hundred and Forty Six, Scotland was declared an independent sovereign, free to make their own laws, govern their own people, rule their own bodies of government, without any declared input from any other
governing body, least of all England. When the House of Stuart inquired which Clan should serve as Scotland’s very first monarch, The Fraser Clan stepped up first. James Kenneth Hamish Cameron Fraser of Broch Mordha, a high-ranking officer and the same loyal member of Charles Stuart’s inner circle, was crowned Scotland’s first King. He would go down in history as King James I of Scotland, a war-hardened soldier who’s kindness and compassion for the Jacobites’ English prisoners would be talked about for generations to come.

And since Scotland’s independence from Britain, Clan Fraser has been her ruling monarch.

On the first of May, in the Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Forty Six, just 200 years after the famous Battle of Culloden, another Fraser was born. And his name would become one of legend, even if nobody knew it yet.

His Royal Highness James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, Prince of Broch Mordha.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

With King Brian IV on his deathbed, his heir apparent and only son Prince James of Broch Mordha is set to inherit the throne as King of Scotland. But not if the foolish young man can’t get his act together.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the official start of my newest series! Thank you all for your love on the prologue. This is still being written therefore the posting schedule will be a bit erratic. Enjoy! Let me know what you think :D

For continuity’s sake: It should be known that Miphope Castle, aka Lallybroch, is really located in Abercorn, South Queensferry, Scotland. But for this series, pretend it’s in Inverness, aye?

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22 Years Later

February 1969

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of The Royal House of Clan Fraser
Inverness, Scotland

The morning papers caused the entire nation to go into an early mourning. The television programmes suspended all comedy shows scheduled for the day. Only a few who were close to the House of Clan Fraser knew this day would eventually come. But the rest of the world felt like it was just zapped with a charged electrical wire.

KING ON DEATHBED FOLLOWING SECRET CANCER
The Daily Scotsman had record sales that cold mid-February day, selling out their morning edition within just a few hours. Every newsstand’s labeled shelves for it would remain empty until the evening edition came out with a reprint of the story, and then they would be sold out again. Rinse and repeat for at least the next several days.

The House of Clan Fraser, which held regularly scheduled tours, closed its doors to the public for the rest of the week, citing privacy concerns for the prince and princess who still resided there. Princess Janet, or Jenny to those who were closest to her, didn’t come out of her room the rest of the day. She refused to make a statement on behalf of her father, and sobbed into the pillow her late mother, Ellen, Queen Broch Tuarach, hand stitched for her baptism as a wee bairn.

Her younger brother, however, Prince James, or Jamie as he was more intimately known, was in council with his father’s most trusted members of the Scottish Court. They had traveled all the way from Edinbrugh when the King had sent word that he was ceasing all medical treatments for stage four lung cancer, choosing to spend the rest of his limited days in the peaceful company of his children at his home in the Highlands. While the Scottish Court of Sovereign, which was where all official royal business was conducted, was located there, the family’s home palace was Lallybroch, just as it had been with their ancestors when Clan Fraser became the ruling monarch of Scotland.

Inverness, once a small farming town in the middle of nowhere, now outranked even Glasgow in size, population, and resources, thanks to the close presence of the Royal Family.

Jamie was only partially listening as the officials drone on and on about all the royal duties he would have to undertake once he became king. He chose to instead spend his attention on the poorly drawn doodle of heather and thistles in front of him.

“Eh,” Lord Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser nudged his godson in the ribs, causing Jamie to stifle a shout. “Ye need tae pay attention, lad.”

“I am,” Jamie annoyingly muttered, not bothering to look up from his drawing.

“No yer not, now pay attention. Fer real this time.” Murtagh grabbed the paper and pencil out of Jamie’s hands, ignoring his silent protests, and tossed them away so Jamie couldn’t retrieve them. Jamie glared at his godfather, but looked up at all the older men dressed in their official duty robes and wigs, continuing their talks like the young prince had been paying attention the entire time.

Jamie wasn’t a fool, despite being portrayed as such at court. He knew this day would come. He knew his father was living on borrowed time and that before he knew it, he would have to change his lifestyle habits, whether he wanted to or not. He just thought he’d have more time to live a little before being forced to settle down and rule Scotland.

He thought back to his family before everything went to shite.

Prince James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser of Broch Mordha, Second Son of King Brian IV and Queen Ellen of Broch Tuarach, had a good, healthy early childhood. He was treated more like a normal child living his best life in the Scottish Highlands, attending a public school and playing with the other children in Broch Mordha and nearby Cranesmuir, rather than the second person in line for the Scottish throne as was his birthright.

Then, when he was 6 years old, his older brother, the original heir apparent, died.

Prince William Simon Murtagh MacKenzie Fraser of Broch Mordha, or Willie, succumbed to
bilateral pneumonia at the age of 11 in June of 1952. Willie always had a weaker constitute than that of his siblings, but he always held himself like a natural born leader. Jamie used to follow him around everywhere like a baby chick, studying him, trying to be just like his big brother. Jamie idolized Willie. Willie was supposed to be sitting here where Jamie was now. He was supposed to have the isolated education that prepared him for sovereignty. He did, at first, and then he had to have a private tutor visit him while he was ill in bed. The short month and a half leading up to his death saw little Jamie, the curly red-headed boy with big blue eyes who dotted on his brother’s every move and every breath, sleeping with him every night until Willie breathed his last. Jamie never forgot that final breath, and sometimes he could still feel it on his cheek.

The funeral was the most heartbreaking scene for Scotland at the time. Newspaper clippings showed the entirety of Clan Fraser not bothering to hide their true emotions, as they always had; they all wept in each others’ arms, especially as Willie coffin was being lowered into the Fraser Family’s underground crypt.

Jamie and Jenny paid the ultimate price in the aftermath of Willie’s death. The Queen barely came out of her chamber after the funeral. She soon stopped attending Jenny’s dance recitals, or Jamie’s wee rugby games. The King buried himself in his royal duties; it was as if him and his wife had pretended Willie’s death had never happened, so as to shield themselves from the pain of their loss. In the end, the surviving royal children were left to the care of nannies and tutors. Which was all fine and well, were they not grieving too. They were no longer allowed to leave the castle. No longer able to go play outside with their friends, and their schooling had resumed within the great study hall at Lallybroch, rather than the public primary school in Cranesmuir.

Jenny managed to find a balance in her grief. But Jamie, being the youngest member of the family, could have really used the support of his mother and father, or even his sister. He would never find such comfort. He remembered all the nights he would cry himself to sleep, the pillow Willie used to sleep on clutches to his tiny chest, alone with nothing but his grief and pain to accompany him.

It was believed that things could get any worse than that, until the death of the Queen just three years later. It wasn’t known to anyone that she was with child again, save for the King, and the shocking news that the prince and princess could have had a little brother broke their hearts all over again. The blow felt like they had lost Willie all over again, a pain that Jamie didn’t think he could bear a second time.

Prince Robert Brian Gordon MacKenzie Fraser of Broch Mordha was laid to rest in his own wee plot between his mother and Willie, his life over before it could ever begin.

Like Queen Victoria of England, King Brian IV of Scotland wore black for what would become the remainder of his public life as sovereign. Jamie and Jenny soldiered on, doing the best they could with more nannies and tutors being brought into Castle Lallybroch while their father carried out royal duties on his own. As they got older, there were less.

When Jamie turned sixteen, he was expected to become a delegate on behalf of the Scottish crown, carry out some duties for his father and as future sovereign.

That’s when the troubles publicly began, because he defied his father’s wishes and outright refused.

The public speculated for the next few years that all the deaths in his immediately family turned the once sweet, well-mannered red-headed little boy into a brute of a man, disgracing his Clan’s name and, by extension, the Scottish Crown. Jamie would frequently start drunken fights outside of pubs, womanize any girl that came within half a metre of him, and regularly found himself in jail for various criminal mischief. The young man would sleep most of the day (with no less than a
dozen empty whisky bottles surrounding his bed), spend what little daylight was left in the gyms at Lallybroch, weight lifting and working out without a care in the world, and then stay out all night being the life of any party he came across.

By the time Jamie turned 18, he didn’t care about anything anymore. He was a prominent member of the royal family, of the famous Clan Fraser no less; nobody could tell him what to do. He was the heir apparent to the Scottish Crown; just try and start something with him. He won’t be in jail for more than an hour before one of the royal guardsmen came to bail him out on behalf of the Crown. He could get away with anything. He knew his life would be over the moment his father left this world.

“May as weel live mah life like there’s no tomorrow,” he would say.

The tabloids ate him up like he was gourmet chocolate, much to his family’s and the courts’ dismay. Every other day it seemed there was a new article about him, featuring some scandalous act of lewd conduct or yet another pub fight. He loved the attention, and he enjoyed the popularity he garnered from peers his age, especially the lasses. Oh, the lassies that all but threw themselves at his feet, calling him their “king.”

The previous year, on Christmas Eve, the King informed his children privately that he was dying. The King’s doctors had found three large cancerous tumors that had spread throughout his lungs, and they would soon consume his body. He was given til the end of next summer to live at best, and that time was going to be spent doing intensive and aggressive treatments to try and slow the cancer growth, but even that wasn’t a guarantee. The King’s days were officially numbered. Given Jamie’s recently scandalous behavior, Jenny was officially delegated to carry out all of their father’s official duties. And no word was to be given to the press; this was to remain within the walls of the King’s bed chamber.

Jenny immediately blamed Jamie for their father’s illness. Claimed if he’d been at home, following the King’s wishes like the dutiful son he was supposed to be, none of this would’ve happened. Jamie, the ever progressive-minded lad, told Jenny she had her “heid up her arse,” and said if “Da had quit smoking after Mam died, he’d live long enough tae see ye have bairns!” They argued for what seemed like hours, throwing back accusations and insults at each other, which only led to Jenny running off to her room to cry herself to sleep, and Jamie heading to his favorite pub.

Jamie ordered said pub shut down to the public, ordered everyone inside the establishment to leave at once, paid for all their tabs, and drank himself into a stupor. A true Scot through and through, Jamie drunk the entire pub out of their stores of liquor that night.

Now that the news of his father’s imminent death was public knowledge, Jamie knew it was time to clean up his act. He knew this, but that didn’t mean he had to like the notion. Nonetheless, here he was, preparing to rule his homeland.

Too bad he was shite at paying attention to anything that didn’t have tits.

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“How did it go?” Jenny asked Jamie quietly. They were sitting in their father’s bed chamber, a tray of tea and sponge cakes between them, while Brian slept. The drugs that were coursing through his system aiding in sleep. It was all the King was willing to take to ease his pain. Brian Fraser had stopped all treatments the previous week.

“About as well as ye’d expect,” Jamie replied dryly, wishing he was literally anywhere else in the world except here. He sipped at his tea, enjoying the flavor sliding down his gullet.
“Ye might have found it a bit more interestin’ if ye’d paid attention.”

“I did!”

“Murtagh tells a different tale, brother.” Jenny sighed, and set her cup down. “Ye ken ye need tae do more than just sit through meeting wi’ the court. Ye need tae participate, ask questions, aye?”

“Don’t, Janet,” Jamie glared at his sister, but she didn’t even stir at his anger.

“Wi’ ye preparing fer the throne, ye canna think tae rule as sovereign wi’out a wife by yer side. Weddin’ a princess is the law, James, and ye ken it’s what Father would’ve wanted.”

“Dinna speak o’ him as if he were already gone,” Jamie hissed, “he’s right over there, in case ye’av forgotten.”

“Dinna fash yerself, mah wee prince,” Jenny smiled as if Jamie and her were talking about a good rugby game, “I’ve taken the liberty of doin’ the searching fer ye. That way ye can focus on becoming a good king.”

“Ye did what now?!” Jamie bared his teeth at Jenny, his breath whistling slightly through them.

“I think a good royal lass will help ye find yer place in court. Yer already a laughing stock wi’ most o’ them, and dinna even get me started on what our MacKenzie relatives think. If mother were alive, she’d be-”

“If Mother were alive, Janet, then Willie would be too. And we wouldna be in this mess, aye?” Jamie was dangerously close to his sister’s face, not bothering to steel his raging emotions. “How dare ye drag ghosts into this conversation. Canna let em’ rest in peace wi’out jabbin’ me in the back.”

Jenny just rolled her eyes. “Yer the damned fool who’s a mess, Jamie. Ye’ll find yerself abdicated by force if ye dinna clean up yer act!”

“How can ye-”

“Your Royal Highnesses?” a small voice called from the doorway. Jamie was about to bark an order at them to go away, but he’d recognize his father’s nurse anywhere. His furrowed brows relaxed at the sight of her. The young woman curtsey’d as Jamie and Jenny made eye contact with her.

“What is it, Mila?” Jamie asked as politely as he could. His quarrel with Jenny wasn’t her fault.

“Erm, it’s time fer His Majesty’s sponge bath.”

Both siblings quietly extracted themselves from the room, an exiting curtsey from Mila bidding them farewell as she shut the door behind her. They both knew their father preferred to have his daily grooming and care activities done in private. Dying or not, The King still had his pride. They stood just outside the door for a moment before Jamie spoke, using the same quiet tone of voice.

“Do whatever ye like, sister,” Jamie growled. “But dinna think for a second that I’ll be pleased wi’ it.”

“Suit yerself,” Jenny retorted. “But before Father’s death, I’ll make a proper sovereign out o’ ye.” And with that, she walked away towards her bed chamber.
Jamie stood outside the door a moment longer, saying a silent prayer for his father, then walked back towards his own chamber.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

A day in the life of 21-year-old struggling florist Claire Beauchamp.

13 February 1969

Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets
Inverness, Scotland

—

“Oh, today is not going to go well.”

Claire Beauchamp was never the sort to be pessimistic by default, but that was before life gave her too many reasons not to easily give into such despair.

She ran a small floral shop in the heart of the shopping district in Inverness. A stranger in a strange land (despite living in Scotland for quite a few years) she was still known as “the blooming sassenach” to the locals. Not that they were trying to insult her. Quite the opposite in fact. Her knack for expert botany and love for all things nature was what brought her to Scotland.

After a dismal run at nursing school, where she found herself rummaging through the school gardens’, picking flowers to turn into head adornments and herbs for cooking, rather than studying for her exams, she dropped out and went to a local public college to take botany courses. She eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in botany, accompanied by an associate’s degree in business management.

Within a year of saving hardcore working for an elderly nursery owner, she bought the place from his widow after his passing and promised to do it justice. The widow gave Claire her blessing to have the shop renamed and she opened Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets, a floral shop that grew its own blooms and herbs in house rather than outsource their products. In addition to the flowers arrangements, she grew her own herbs for that organic cook in someone’s life. Her green thumb allowed her to build up savings for retirement in the hopefully distant future.

Business was grand the first six months of being open. The good people of Inverness were really impressed with Claire’s ability to turn any flower into one that would inspire paintings and other works of art. They came from far and wide, even as far as Wales, to purchase her creations. She’d
even won a few gardening shows with her arrangements. Claire was always proud of her work, and hoped her parents and uncle, all passed on, would be proud of her too.

But last summer, Scotland saw an unusually hot and dry season. It wrecked havoc on Claire’s gardens. Even herbs that thrive in hot weather like sage and lavender struggled to stay alive. It threw Claire for a loop and because she didn’t expect it, she couldn’t properly prepare for the season. Before she knew it, her business was at risk of going under.

She would normally grow things like crazy to stock up for the winter, for the occasional wedding or funeral arrangement order that would come to her seeking her creations for their loved ones. She regretfully had to turn business away. Even the local cooks who used her herbs stopped coming in. Nobody blamed her. In fact, most people were extremely sympathetic. One local mother of three prayed with her over her garden once, hoping that she would one day be able to come back and “supply mah kitchen wi’ those rare wee herbs!”

While Claire appreciated the sentiment, prayers and well wishes weren’t going to keep the shop open. Money was. And it only took one look at the once lush, green sprawl of an open air botanist’s wet dream to a dull brown dying shrill of dirt to know, without any shadow of a doubt, that today was not going to be a good day.

Despite knowing what was in her diary, she looked inside it anyway, flipping the page to the current date.

No appointments.

Sigh. With Valentine’s Day being the next day, she knew what was supposed to be one of her most profitable days of the year would see no sign of such.

Claire walked back towards the open air garden and all but burst into tears at all the dying or already dead blooms, waiting for someone, or something, to put them out of their misery.

Claire stepped back inside and started her daily routine of watering all the indoor plants as best she could. A spray bottle in hand and her rubber gloves donned, she moved slowly around the main area of the shop, humming a simple tune as she worked, as if the song would somehow bring her blooms, and business, back to life.

She heard the sound of the small bell above the front door chime as it was opened, and Claire’s heart gave an excited lurch. A customer?

“Och, there ye are, lass!”

Claire’s hopes were squashed as the sound of Mrs. Graham’s voice echoed throughout the store.

“Hello, Mrs. Graham,” Claire put on her most convincing smile and walked towards the older woman, setting the bottle down and removing the gloves from her hands. “What brings you by today?”

“I can teel yer havin’ a morn,” Mrs. Graham said sweetly yet sympathetically. She was always good at reading people, but with Claire, a blind man could read her glass face. “Come along wi’ me fer some tea and cakes, aye?”

Claire looked around as if she was thinking of declining the invitation, but Mrs. Graham’s hand gently touching her arm knew she wouldn’t be getting out of this one.

“They’re no’ going tae die while yer taking a bit of refreshment. Besides, I’ve just made some wee
cakes, fresh from the oven, and I wanna share ‘em wi’ good company. Aye?”

Claire sighed but smiled and nodded as she followed the older woman next door to Graham’s Reading Leaves. Named for the woman’s habit of reading tea leaves like a gypsy, her business was in no danger of being put out by weather. Everyone loved a good sit down with some hot tea and cakes, and most of the woman’s clientele couldn’t resist a bit of mystical indulgence. Claire almost wished she’d gone to culinary school instead. The smell of the shop never ceased to entice her.

“Ye heard the news lately, hen?” Mrs. Graham said as she served the two of them a pot of tea with two matching China cups and a platter filled with warm cranberry lemon chiffon cakes. Claire wouldn’t normally eat something that heavy, but the way Mrs. Graham made them was almost like magic. They were light and fluffy, warm and sweet with a bit of lemony tang.

“I can’t exactly afford a newspaper subscription right now, Mrs. Graham,” Claire said after she swallowed and washed her bite down with tea.

“Apparently the King is dying. Cancer. Any day now, ye ken,” Mrs. Graham said, taking a sip of her tea. She then got up and retrieved her copy of The Scotsman Daily and handed it to Claire. “Prince James is to inherit his father’s throne upon his death. Canna rightly say how that’s gonna work out. I hope it does. Scotland and her people depend on it.”

Claire took the paper from her. Despite being English born, she never really considered herself such. She’d lived all over the world; following the untimely and unexpected death of her parents before grade school, she’d enlisted herself as her Uncle Lamb’s personal archeologist assistant. She never really found a true place to call home before settling in Scotland to pursue an independent life after her uncle’s death. So, she always supposed King Brian IV and Clan Fraser was her sovereign.

His son, however, was another story entirely.

“Never really cared for the man,” Claire said nonchalantly as she gazed upon the black-and-white images of the King and his son, 22-year-old Prince James Fraser of Broch Mordha. It was hard not to know about the tall, long red-haired young man being a Scottish citizen. He was always in the papers for one scandalous thing or another; Claire didn’t really appeal to such men with those kinds of personalities. “If he’s about to become king, this country is in some big time trouble.”

“Och, dinna fash yerself, lass,” Mrs. Graham chuckled, patting Claire’s hand as she set the paper down next to her tea cup. “One way or another, the Scottish Court will make a fine monarch out o’ him yet.”

“If you say so,” Claire replied, helping herself to another tea cake. After a bite, she went on. “I just don’t get what all the fuss is about over him, you know? Sure, he’s a good looking guy, but that alone is not sovereign material. He just uses his status for personal gain. I feel sorry for whoever will have to be his Queen…”

Mrs. Graham made a light Scottish noise, but didn’t reply on the matter. Claire knew she was alone in her feelings for the Scottish royal. She couldn’t count the amount of times she was at the market and there were a group of young girls fawning over Prince James featured on the front of yet another tabloid magazine. If the Prince wanted to get people’s attention, he definitely had it. She wasn’t much for political discussions or conversations on matters of State, but she did keep an eye on the hot topics concerning Scotland’s status with the world.

She meant what she told her business neighbor. If Prince James was going to become King in short order, Scotland was, in the most polite terms she could muster, doomed.
“I better get back to my dying plants,” Claire said glumly, standing up.

“Yer always welcome here, hen,” Mrs. Graham gave her a hug. “Never forget that.”

Claire nodded and smiled, but she was dying internally as much as her plants were externally. She needed to figure out what she needed to do to save her business. Wondering about who ruled Scotland wasn’t going to fix that.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

A violent feud ensues between the Prince and Princess, and a visit to a failing floral shop will change Jamie’s life forever.

17 February 1969

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of The Royal House of Clan Fraser
Inverness, Scotland

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The poor maids and servants of the Royal Family were now hiding in the kitchen. Some were consoling the ones who were crying, even. A few of the Royal Guards were posted at the doors on the inside of the kitchen in the event the hostile war raging spilled into their temporary sanctuary. Despite their primary job being to protect the Royal Family, they knew it was also their job to protect anyone within the walls of Lallybroch Castle. The shouting, screaming, finger pointing, and now, flying objects, became too much for the serving staff them and they all feared for their safety. The Prince and Princess had been going at each other’s throats for the last two hours, with no end in the foreseeable future.

In the grand dining hall, Jamie and Jenny were both red in the face, breathing hard and heavy, and neither were ready to give up on their side of the argument. Jenny, being older and feeling like she was wiser (not according to Jamie, of course), believed it was her sworn duty to find a suitable bride for the future king. Jamie, on the other hand, was so powerfully against it, he'd broken several vases and replaceable object around the dining room. Most of them he attempted to throw at her, to which Jenny proved she had better aim with her own vases.

“I canna even fuckin’ believe ye, Janet!” Jamie bellowed for the fourth time in the last hour. “I told ye not tae pursue this! I’m perfectly capable o’ finding my own bride!”

“Aye yer obviously not since ye spend yer days in bed, and yer nights startin’ brawls in pubs, gettin’ arrested and what girls ye do end up wi’ are nothing more than common whoors’! None of that is Queen of Scotland material and ye ken it weel!”
“I will no’ hear of this any longer! Ye drop this stupid endevour of yers or-”

“Oh what? What will ye do tae me, James?!” Jenny’s voice went up an octave. “Ye canna throw me out, no until yer king, and father willna do it. He’s barely conscious these days, or have ye forgotten yer own father is on his way out to see The Almighty?”

“YE WILLNA SPEAK TAE ME THAT WAY! NOR WILL YE SPEAK O’ FATHER LIKE.”

“LIKE HE’S EXACTLY WHAT HE IS! A KING IN HIS DYING DAYS!”

“YE FOUL MOUTHED BITCH!”

“YE STUBBORN ARSE BRUTE!”

Both of them picked up a vase at the same time, not bothering to see if it was an ancient heirloom, and lugged it at the other’s head at the same time. Neither met their intended destination and both smashed against the wall opposite.

“ENOUGH!” A deep voice called out. Both Highnesses whipped their heads around to see Lord Murtagh standing there, a dirk in one hand and a broadsword in the other. If it was possible, steam would have been billowing out of his ears, long dark hair notwithstanding. Once the room quieted down, the older man took a breath before saying, “the two o’ ye havena grown up a bit, it seems. Yer father is tryin’ tae rest, and the two of ye are acting like bulls seeing red.”

Jenny took it upon herself to sit down in one of the dining hall chairs, pulling a handkerchief out of her pocket and dabbing the corners of her eyes and mouth. Jamie continued to stand, lungs heaving and his face still a deep shade of red. Once everyone had recovered their normal respiratory rates, Murtagh spoke again.

“Now, I ken both yer frustrations. Jenny,” Murtagh inclined his head towards the princess. Only certain members of the Royal Family were allowed to call the Prince and Princess by their nicknames and without their formal titles. “I ken yer just lookin’ fer yer brother. But, it’s no yer place tae find Jamie a wife. That duty, by law, formally belongs tae him. And Jamie,” Murtagh walked towards the tall Scot and placed his hands on his shoulders, as if to see how tall he’d grown over the summer. “Yer concerns are valid too. But ye need tae take this seriously. Jenny is doing yer job fer ye because you havena bothered to find a bride. Picking the country’s next Queen Broch Tuarach isna gonna be easy, nor will it happen overnight.

“And, ye ken this as well as I do, common whoor or socialite, if she’s no’ of royal descent, the marriage willna be approved.”

Jamie let out a frustrated sigh and ran a rough hand through his long, auburn locks. “Aye, I ken.”

“Then ye need tae stop foolin’ around and find yerself a princess, lad!” Murtagh spat.

“I dinna need a wife tae take the throne, and once I am king, I will put an end tae that bloody law once and fer all. It’s stupid tae keep marrying royals together. Ye ken the kind o’ perverted bloodline will exist in the next several decades?”

“Och, aye, and while yer sittin’ here wi’ yer forward thinkin’ mind, ye’ll also be defying over 200 years of Clan Fraser tradition!” Jenny butted in. Jamie was about to tell her where she could stick her tradition, when Murtagh intervened.

“Regardless, lad, yer no’ king yet, and that’s the law. Instead o’ sleepin’ all day long, spend that time findin’ a proper bride while ye have the freedom tae do so. It willna be long ‘afore we’re
planning yer coronation.”

“I do have a head start for ye, Jamie,” Jenny said, knowing it would incite more fighting but at this point, she didn’t care. “I made an inquiry last week with the court of King William Dunsany of England. Ye ken he had seven unwedded daughters at present? I received a response today and their first prospect would be his second youngest daughter, Princess Geneva. I’ave a photograph of her if ye like.”

Weary from fighting, and his throat sore from shouting so much, Jamie did the only civil thing he could and nodded at his sister. She pulled the small photograph from her the pocket of her skirt and slipped it into Jamie’s awaiting hands.

Princess Geneva was pretty enough, and boasted a nice pair on her chest, judging by the dress she wore in the photo. Jamie huffed, annoyed. He hated to lose, but losing a bit of his time was better than losing the Crown. His eyes softened, as did his voice when he spoke to Jenny.

“Arrange a meeting,” Jamie conceded quietly, his pride aching with each beat of his tired heart.

Jenny was the exact opposite of tired or weary. Her eyes shown bright and hopeful as she took the photograph back from him. “I can send a letter and have it in the post by tomorrow! Now, what I need ye tae do is go find a nice bouquet fer the lass. I’l be including it in the parcel, ken. Out wi’ ye, Jamie! Most shops are gonna be closing soon!”

Jamie didn’t make any eye contact with anyone. A noncommittal Scottish noise escaped his raw larynx as he strolled towards the car port, ignoring the scared looks of servants and maids that cowarded behind him.

At the car port, there were a few vehicles used for official royal duties, and then there were more personal vehicles for each royal family member. Jamie’s car was always the cleanest as he used it the most. His driver, Sir Alec MacMahon, was standing off to the side of the car port, a hand-rolled cigarette dangling from his lips. Jamie would recognize his face from any distance, considering a large black eye patch covered one side of his face.

“Oi, yer Royal Highness,” Auld Alec bowed slightly before the young monarch.

“Nae bother, ye auld coot,” Jamie smiled for the first time in what felt like days, painfully aware of the corners of his mouth’s existence. “Ye ken ye dinna have to brush wi’ formality when it’s just us two.”

“I dinna care what ye think on the matter, yer Royal Highness, yer mam is watchin’ me and I willna disgrace her or her heritage. Which is you.”

“Aye aye.” Jamie slapped the older man on the back as Alec opened the back door for him. As Alec slipped into the driver’s seat, Jamie said, “find me a florist in town. Dinna ask why, just do it.”

“Ye ken me, lad,” Alec started up the car, “I dinna ask questions when I’m no’ invited tae.”

It was times like these where Jamie wished he smoked. Alec was a slow driver and always obeyed all the rules of the road, therefore it always took longer to arrive at his destination. Even before cancer started slowly killing his father, he never had the heart to swipe a fag from Alec, despite the lingering smell of smoke acting as a lure to his ever-growing “bad boy” persona.

About twenty minutes into the drive from Lallybroch Castle, Jamie heard Alec called from the front. “There’s only one shop opened at this hour. I canna read the sign, but there are blooms in the
That’ll do,” Jamie responded, “park the car round the back. I dinna need the fanfare tonight.”

“As ye say, lad.”

Jamie donned on a dark wool coat with a tan tweed lining, an equally dark wool fiddler’s hat, adorned his neck with a dark green woolen scarf, and made his way towards the wee shop that was apparently titled “Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets.” The name was silly sounding, but the inside was incredibly sad.

Most of the blooms that were alive were close to dying, and everything else made Jamie wonder how the hell this place was still in business.

“I’ll be right with you!” Called a woman’s gentle English accent from somewhere in the store.

Och, that explains the dead blooms, Jamie thought bitterly. Never let a Sassenach be in charge of Scotland’s flowers. They dinna ken what they’re-

His thoughts were halted instantly at the sight of the apparent owner coming around the corner to stand in front of him. His heartbeat could’ve been heard audibly racing if anyone bothered to listen hard enough. His pupils dilated and he suddenly felt lightheaded and dizzy.

The Sassenach was the most beautiful woman the Prince had ever laid eyes on. And her voice was made of pure silked honey, warm from the comb.

“Welcome to Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets. My name’s Claire. How may I assist you tonight?”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

We know how Jamie felt when he went to Claire’s shop. But how was it for her before he walked in?

Chapter Notes

I’m sorry for the delay. I didn't realize until I posted Chapter 5 on Tumblr that I never posted Chapter 4 here! Oopsies! So, happy Sunday! Y’all getting 2 chapter today :D I know I don't really reply to comment, like, ever, I'm garbage at it, but I do see them and they make me extremely happy. I do see you. So thank you all for your love! Enjoy!

Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets
Inverness, Scotland
5:46pm Local Time

—

Another workday and another chance for no customers to come in and keep the business afloat.

Claire’s day was winding down to a close now, but that didn’t mean the stresses of this day would go away just because she flipped the sign on her business’ front door from “open” to “close.”

The day’s events kept playing in her mind like a scratchy vinyl on a broken record player, and she felt tied down, unable to get up and fix the machine or change the vinyl out for a better one. Her landlord had made an unexpected visit to the shop. Well, it would have been unexpected if she didn’t know why he came in the first place. She always dreaded him coming by. For one reason, he never gave her prior notice. Always just showed up and got her hopes up that someone, for once, was coming to buy something. And for another, he never gave her any inclination that he cared about her predicament.

So she put up with yet another scolding for not paying the rent in a timely manner. Robert F. St.
Germain, or “The Comte” as the Scottish people called him, was notorious for his intimidating demeanor, cold blank stare, and his wicked tongue had spooked off a number of tenants within the Scottish Highlands over the years. Today’s in-person visit marked the sixth one to her shop in the last two months. All of them for late or nonpayment of rent. Claire never knew why the Frenchman even bothered coming to Scotland in the first place if he was going to be this way. His ugly, protracted nose was consistently in the clouds at the notion of anyone not French by birth. But it didn’t matter; she was once again late on the rent for the shop and the flat above the shop and she had no means to pay it. And had no idea when exactly she would, which was not the answer Robert was looking for. She was at extreme risk of losing not just her business, but her home. She would have nowhere to go if she were evicted, and no funds to secure new lodgings. Which meant she’d have to go live in a shelter until she made a plan. Snap out of it, Beauchamp! It’s not hopeless yet.

St. Germain made all kinds of shameful threats and barked about how if she didn’t pay by the week’s end, she would indeed find herself homeless. All Claire could do was stand there, take it, and hope she didn’t say something that would change his mind from “next week” to “get off my property right now”. The Comte really was a dodgy brute.

At this point, she was willing to do some outlandish things to revamp her clientele. Her pride could take a hit if it meant she didn’t go hungry or without a roof over her head. She’d go into the market and hand out business cards, ask other business owners if she could leave a stack of cards as adverts, or hell, she’d be willing to take a day off and stand on the side of a busy roadway with a sign, advertising her business.

But acquiring signs and business cards that reflected the serious nature of her business required investment. Which required money. Something she was a little short on. And if she did any of those things, it would require closing the shop for a day, which she definitely could not afford. She was very thankful in that moment her wonderful business neighbor was kind enough to keep her modestly fed during normal business hours.

She was finishing the sweeping when the bell sounded above the front door, and she swore if it was Mrs. Graham again, it was going to take all her will power not to throw something at her.

“I’ll be right with you!”

Whoever walked in didn’t respond, which meant it was a customer! Finally, she thought. Her heart leaped at the chance to have a business transaction for the first time since…who was the King of Scotland again? Hell, if she really worked her charm, and did a good job convincing this patron that she really did know how to keep flowers alive, it could turn into a repeat customer. True, this one potential customer wouldn’t save her business or her home, but word of mouth was how she became so successful in the first place. Poor first impressions notwithstanding.

Claire dusted herself off and hurried to the front, not bothering to make sure her massively untamed brown curls weren’t sticking out at all angles, lest she lose her only chance at a successful transaction.

Before the customer saw her, she got a good look at his side profile.

And her world damn near collapse in on itself.

*Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ.*

It was the bloody Prince of Broch Mordha himself. James Fraser.

She swore her heart rate spiked to triple what it originally was, her palms became slick, and the
suddenly wished she’d taken a few moments to freshen her appearance up before meeting with him. But if she turned around now, he would hear her and probably leave. That could not happen.

Get ahold of yourself, Beauchamp! She internalized. Surely he doesn’t bite. At least…not your type of woman.

She made her footsteps a bit noisier as she walked towards the front of the store, but she decided to play things a bit differently. Before she said anything, he turned to face her. And her world stopped spinning for a few seconds.

“Welcome to Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquet’s,” Claire tried her hardest to keep her voice even. “My name’s Claire. How may I assist you tonight?” She almost didn’t curtsy towards him. Hastily, she added, “Your Royal Highness.”

Oh Lord, she thought, if he’s not willing to make a purchase, I might as well call The Comte and surrender my business and home now.

Another workday, another blown chance to save her livelihood.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Claire hasn’t a clue how to act in The Prince’s presence. Meanwhile, Jamie’s original purpose for being at Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets is derailed by the owner’s existence.

Chapter Notes

Here’s the 2nd chapter of the day. Woot! Thanks again for your love guys! You are all amazing! Enjoy and let me know what you think!

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Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets
Inverness, Scotland
5:54pm Local Time

Claire couldn’t remember the last time she saw a man so…beautiful…or was handsome the right word? She never found herself in a position to describe a full grown man as “beautiful,” but in this case…

Prince James was exactly how all the young girls on market day described him. Tall didn’t do the word justice. Neither did broad, but there it was (and he was just that every aspect of that word).

His long red hair was flowing around his face and the nape of his neck in soft, gentle waves. Hair like that could absolutely ignite wars. Women around the world would kill for a golden-red-auburn mop that gorgeous, she just knew it. Claire always kept her mouth shut on the matter because people could have said the same thing about her own brown locks. That is, when it was tamed a bit. Right now, people would be more likely to ask her to put a hat on rather than demand to know what her grooming routine was.

His physique also suggested that the rumors of him being a gym rat were true. Despite wearing layers to keep the February chill at bay, she could see the toned outline of his chest and arms
through his shirt and jacket. She imagined he had a chiseled set of abs too, though she couldn’t tell with those layers. He fit his clothing very well. Almost too well.

“Collect yerself, madam,” The Prince said, gesturing for her to stand. She did, and smoothed her trousers absently. If he wasn’t trying to smile, he didn’t do a very good job. At least externally. Did anyone at his palace own a mirror? They must because the way he was standing, regarding her existence, he had to have practice that posh stance in a mirror before leaving.

“How may I help you?” Claire asked again.

“I am looking fer a bouquet of blooms fer a young woman,” The Prince said nonchalantly, as if he were asking about the weather.

Claire’s heart deflated. Of course he would be treating her like every other subject in his father’s land. Soon to be his, as a matter of fact, if the newspapers were credible. He had a lover. Most likely a princess if he was following ancient tradition. Which she had no doubt he was.

“Oh, of course,” Claire said, trying her hardest not to sound defeated. He would probably think her insane and have her locked in an asylum for believing she had a chance with a prince. Her, a poor struggling business owner with exactly zero amount of royalty to her being.

She shook these thoughts away as she led the Prince towards the back of the shop, where she kept the last remaining living flowers in a refrigeration unit. They were the only flowers that could survive long term in lower temperatures and she only had so many of them prepared, not to mention lately those who came into the shop were people looking for large purchases, like for weddings and funerals, and she just didn’t have the blooms needed for such an endeavor.

“What colors would this young woman like the most?” Claire inquired.

“Erm,” The Prince stammered. He looked like she’d just ran him over with a car. He has no idea who he’s buying flowers for, Claire amusingly kept to herself. “I didna think tae ask…”

Claire couldn’t help it. She laughed. The Prince gave her a wry look, causing the laughter to die down.

“I’m sorry, I know it’s rude of me to laugh. I sincerely apologize.” She attempted to curtsy again, but abandoned the notion halfway. When he gave her no definitive response, she went on, clearing her throat. “So, a good go-to bloom would be this set.”

She showed The Prince a half dozen bouquet of red tulips. Hard to come by in Scotland, but easy to grow in the naturally harsh, cold environment Scotland offered. Had she remembered that tulips also grow well in the sweltering heat, her business wouldn’t be in the dismal state it was now.

She handed him the blooms. “She’ll want to keep them in a vase with cool water. Have her cut the stems at an angle every three to four days, and they should keep for about two week.”

“Weel,” The Prince began, looking rather flushed. “I, uh, willna be delivering them tae her directly. She’s in England, ye ken. My sister will be sending them out.”

“Oh,” was all Claire said, attempting to not make this conversation anymore awkward for either of them. She knew some of the story about Princess Janet of Broch Mordha and her steadfast iron will when it came to her royal duties.

That was another thing she guessed at. The princess is making him do this. If she had to make another guess, she’d wager what little money she had left that this was entirely against The
Prince’s will.

“I’ll go ahead and take them anyway though,” he said.

“Great! I can take care of the transaction up front.”

“Nae bother.”

When Claire was about to inquire what he meant, she saw that he was pulling a rather nice wad of quid out from inside his jacket pocket. She kept her eye balls inside her skull long enough to accept the money. But she paused.

“Hang on,” she said, “those blooms are only fifteen pounds plus tax. This looks like-”

“Enough tae get yer business back in shape?”

Claire stopped talking, stop moving, didn’t even breathe.

*Is he serious?*

“Claire,” The Prince took a step towards her. She caught a faint whiff of his cologne and wanted to inhale him further. “These blooms are verra bonny. Ye clearly ken what yer doing here. I canna have ye goin’ out of business because o’ a bad season. Take some time tae do some research on blooms that’ll keep during unexpected climates. Aye?”

All Claire could do was nod, praying the tears brewing in her eyes didn’t spill out.

“I really must be goin’ now. Thank ye, Sassenach. Truly.” And with that, he was gone.

Claire didn’t have time to curtsy at his exit, so she took a moment to count the money in her hand. Her heart dropped. It was over £3000.

“It was my pleasure,” she said to an empty store.

—

The entire time Jamie was in the shop, he took stock of the young owner, like he did any woman he met for the first time.

He would have found the Sassenach’s demeanor, mannerisms, mocking laughter, and her lack of proper etiquette in front of a Royal utterly annoying if he wasn’t completely smitten by her.

She had worn light green button down shirt, rolled up at the sleeves and covered in old grass and dirt stains, dirty brown trousers and a pair of even dirtier ankle work boots with the ends of the trousers tucked in. Her apron was certainly white when she bought it, but it was painted with a multitude of colors that only a botanist would acquire. Her hair was a bumbling brown mess but the way it crowned her heart-shaped face made his heart swoon.

She was incredibly alluring and she really knew her stuff about running a floral shop. He didn’t even have to ask how to take care of what he was purchasing. She just knew. Her apparently wealth of knowledge aligned to her being to a second skin.

Her voice was just as beautiful as her face, mocking laughter notwithstanding. Actually, when he thought about it further, her laugh was just as beautiful as her voice. Not mocking at all. He was convinced that voice alone could spare the world of famine, illness and death if she willed it so.
She sounded posh, but certainly didn’t act like it. At least, not in the presence of someone like him. Someone royal. He wanted to go back inside and make her laugh just so his ears could be blessed with the sound again. His trained demeanor was the only thing keeping him from going back and his heart rate under control.

She worked for a living, clearly proud of her wee blooms shop. Despite most of her stock being close to death, it was clear she took the best care she could of the place. It wasn’t her fault the previous summer was extremely hot and the following winter just as brutal. She tried, God bless her, she tried her damndest to make a living for herself. With no one else to help her or tell her what to do. She was her own boss. She made her own decisions on how her life would go. That fact alone would have been enough to attract his attention.

Add her natural beauty, spirit, and tenacity to the mix, and Jamie suddenly wished with all his being that Clare Beauchamp was a princess.

These dismal, nagging thoughts followed him all the way back to Lallybroch Castle, where Jenny was finishing the letter she would attach to the blooms from Mistress Beauchamp’s shop and send to an English princess on his behalf.

After meeting Claire, he no longer desired to seek a princess, or any other woman ever again. He wanted her. He wanted the Sassenach as his bride.

*A Dhia, Willie, Jamie thought, I wish you were here.*
2 March 1969

Lallybroch Castle  
Seat of The Royal House of Clan Fraser  
Inverness, Scotland  
3:00am Local Time

Jamie was having a hard time sleeping tonight. His thoughts kept wandering back to Claire. He didn’t want to question it, but his wandering mind wouldn’t allow him to dwell on anything else.

She was beautiful, in that plain, boring girl kind of way. His usual preference for women didn’t fit that criteria. He tended to gravitate towards flashier girls; the latest fashion, all that glittered in jewelry, busty and vivacious girls always caught his eye first.

But with Claire, there was something about her that, while it didn’t fit well with his last few shags, put her on a higher pedestal above the rest. Princess or not, she was strangely unique.

According to secret sources that Jamie may or may not have sent to keep an eye on her, when he first met her, she was behind on her rent for the shop and the flat above, which was her home. Her landlord, the infamous Robert F. “Comte” St. Germain (someone that Jamie’s father had unfortunately done business with in the past), had threatened to evict her and shut down her business if she didn’t pay the past due amount by the end of the week.

He was thankful he gave her the money, knowing this now. In addition to catching up on her bills, she’d purchased new seeds and seasonal bulbs in Glasgow and was already well on her way to restocking her store. Looking through the shop’s window, some of them were already starting to show from their pots. By spring, she would have a few gardens worth of blooms and herbs to sell. Her business was no longer in danger of going under.

But even if she wasn’t at risk of losing way of life, he still would have given her the money. If for nothing else, despite being a class above any other woman he’d encountered, money always bought
as equally as it sold. She definitely would have been swooned by such a grand gesture of good faith. Everyone loved and admired a prince for his immense wealth.

Right?

—

Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets
Inverness, Scotland
8:28am Local Time

With sleep as an afterthought, Jamie found himself standing on the walkway in front of Claire’s shop, not caring if anyone saw him. With his princeship coming to an end at any time, it wouldn’t be long before he wouldn’t be able to do this so freely. But that didn’t mean his presence in public didn’t attracted attention. He was The Prince, after all. Though, in his case, he was known to still be asleep at this hour. He normally wouldn’t be coming back to the castle until just before dawn.

“Your Royal Highness?” Claire said from behind. Jamie’s heart skipped a beat as he turned around.

When he was facing her, he didn’t have time to tell her she didn’t have to curtsy before him, but she was already doing it. They were both in the middle of the street, so if anyone saw her not greeting him properly… well she didn’t need the headache that could come from it.

He gestured for her to stand. She had both arms piled with filled, large paper sacks, and her head just poked over the top of them. It was really cute, in Jamie’s opinion.

She cleared her throat. “What brings you here at such an early hour?”

Jamie looked down at his watch. “It’s half eight, Sassenach.”

She quirked a teasing eyebrow. “And when was the last time you saw eight-thirty in the morning? Willingly, I mean.”

Jamie didn’t say anything, and Claire laughed in response. There it is again, he thought with bliss. Such sweet music.

“Well, I’m not open yet. Come back in another half hour.” Claire walked around him casually and disappeared into the boutique. When Jamie collected his jaw from the road, he followed her inside. Like hell someone was going to tell him what to do.

“Claire,” Jamie said, almost pleading.

“I said,” Claire said, the edge of her delicate voice bordering annoyed, “I am not open yet. Please come back at nine o’clock.”

“Oh,” Jamie scoffed, walking towards her as if the shop was open, “surely ye can make an exception fer your prince, aye?”

Claire gave him a cold glare that would have shook even Jenny. “No, Your Royal Highness. No one gets an exception. You of all people know how important respect is. It’s why royals have been revered for centuries. So, sir, you will respect that my shop isn’t open yet. And you will leave and come back when it is open. Now.”

Jamie could have jumped back like he’d been burned and it wouldn’t have displayed his feelings
properly. But it didn’t take long for that shock to turn into anger.

He stomped his foot, got right in her face, and said, “I am James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser. Prince Broch Tuarach, also called Prince of Broch Mordha. I am the future king of Scotland. You will obey me as I say, or—”

“Or what?” Claire said coolly, barely blinking or moving from where she stood. “You’ll stomp some more before storming out of here and telling on me to your father? Or your sister? And then what are they going to do? Huh?!”

Jamie froze, his heart hammering so fast the blood was rushing between his ears, and he leaned back slightly to stare at her, incredulously. No one had ever spoken of his family in this manner before. If he wasn’t so flabbergasted at her proclamations, he would have dragged her to the dungeons beneath the castle himself for her insolence.

But he stood there like a stump.

“Exactly. Nothing. See, this may work at court, or Castle Lallybroch, but in the real world, you don’t always get your way. Throwing a bloody tantrum won’t change that, Your Royal Highness. The sooner you learn that, the better and happier you will be.”

The bell above the front door chimed as it opened, and in came Mrs. Graham, oblivious to the tense conversation going on.

“Och, these blooms are gonna be sae beautiful when they finally—” The older woman looked between Claire and Jamie, blinked, then realized it was Jamie.

“Oh my goodness!” She immediately curtsied before the prince. “Your Royal Highness. This is quite the pleasure!”

“Speak for yourself,” both Claire and Jamie said under their breaths at the same time.

“Is it nine already?” Claire asked, stepping around Jamie dismissively. She looked at the clock above the door and it indeed was after nine. Technically, her shop was supposed to be open already. She flipped the sign around from “Sorry, we’re closed” to “Come on in! We’re open.”

“What a morning!” She told Mrs. Graham with a shy laugh. “What brings you by?”

“I brought ye some fresh lemon-orange scones fer later, hen.” Mrs. Graham set a warmed covered plate own on the front counter, looked up at Jamie, and she turned a few shades of pink. “I-If ye like.”

Jamie was never one to turn down free food, but his unpleasant talk with Claire smothered whatever appetite he would’ve had.

“More on time, I would, madam. But I must be off. Mistress Beauchamp,” he slightly inclined his head at Claire, hoping she would make an attempt to acknowledge him, but she didn’t. Much to his dismay. He turned his attention back to Mrs. Graham. “My apologies, madam, I dinna get yer name.”

“Mrs. Moira Graham,” she extended her hand for him to shake and curtsied again, uncertain of what else to do. “Yer servant, sir.”

Jamie grinned a bit and took her hand, kissing the back of it lightly. Mrs. Graham tried, and failed, to suppress a giggle. It would have amused Claire if she wasn’t so irked by him.
“Weel, Mrs. Graham,” Jamie said in a low tone, “I’ll be back fer a round of tea and cakes then, aye?” And with that, he left. Claire wished and prayed he didn’t come back for a long while.

Sadly for Claire, Jamie did in fact come back to her shop later that day. And every other day after that. Before she knew it, he was one of her regular customers. Which would have been nice if he wasn’t the bloody Prince of Scotland, and next in line for the Scottish crown to boot.

The only reason he hadn’t been straight thrown out was because every time he was in, he would buy a flower. A single one, nothing particularly fancy. And every time, despite her ire, he would pay for it with an obscene amount of quid. She would then explain how to properly care for each flower or how to extend their short lives a bit, just like she did with the tulips.

He was always courteous and reserve when other customers were in the shop, but the moment it was just the two of them, it would feel less like he was a customer and more like she was babysitting him.

Will this ever end?

—

29 March 1969
Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets
5:58pm Local Time

“And what about this one?” Jamie asked for what seemed the millionth time.

Claire gritted her teeth as she replied, “Violas, or pansies. They were one of the perennials the wholesale seed shop in Glasgow recommended.”

“And how would ye care fer them?”

“They thrive in partial shade locations that provide morning and late afternoon sun with shade in the heat of the day. Keep the soil moist but be careful not to soak it. Mulch in a garden is more ideal.”

“And how about-”

“Prince James!” Claire burst out, startling both her and Jamie. “As much as I have appreciate your company, I am closing now and it’s time for you to go.”

Jamie, trying not to “throw a tantrum” again, collected the blooms he’d already bought and replaced the fiddler hat on his head. “Alright then, Mistress. I’ll see ye again tomorrow.”

“No you will not.” Claire drew herself up to her fullest height and looked his square in the eyes. “I…I’m banishing you from my establishment.”

Jamie chortled at first, but when her expression didn’t change, his grew somber. “Ye dinna mean that.”

“I do. I can’t have you in here anymore. You’re attracting too much unwanted attention and, while your daily purchase of blooms have helped my business, I cannot let people believe the only reason I am still open is because of you. You’ve done enough of that already.”

Jamie became angry. “Aye, yer right. If it werena fer me, this place would be gone and ye’d be homeless! Ye didna do that, I did. Never forget ye owe me your true allegiance, Sassenach. For
without my help, ye’d be done for!”

“And why did you do that, anyway?” Claire’s voice became a shout halfway through speaking. His anger was reflecting onto her. “No, seriously. Why did you bother? I’m no one special and I didn’t need your help. I had people who could have stepped up, owed me a favor. I made this place what it is now. This is *my* business and I don’t need a spoiled brat prince in my debt!”

“Well, this ‘spoiled brat’ is the only reason ye’ve had customers lately, lass!” Jamie hissed, getting right in her face. She didn’t waver though. “Why d’ye think people flock here now?! D’ye really think it’s because of yer wee seeds?! Bah! Yer nothing without me being here.”

“I WAS NOTHING **BEFORE** YOU CAME IN HERE!” Claire bellowed, and the statement broke both their hearts. Claire reigned in her emotions, trying to keep the tears at bay. “And I’ll be nothing more than plain Claire Beauchamp when you become king. You should be spending your time finding a princess to marry. My future queen.”

Her words hurt. *Really* hurt. And it begrudgingly reminded him of the preparations he was supposed to be making for Princess Geneva’s imminent arrival.

“So,” Claire went on, barely above a whisper. “Just go. Please.”

Jamie softened at her tenderness. “Claire-”

“**GO!**”

Jamie collected himself before leaving without another word, with no plans to ever see “plain Claire Beauchamp” again.

Except…

“Like hell you’re nothing,” he said to no one as started his journey back to Lallybroch Castle. “Not to me.”

The only thing Claire’s words did was make Jamie even more infatuated by her. Her strong, iron will rivaled that of his sister’s. He was enamored by her heart, her courage, her strength.

He was always up for a challenge. Nothing and no one would *ever* tell him what he could and could not do. He was the future King of Scotland. And he would have his bride.

He just hoped one day, Claire Beauchamp would see that *she* was his future queen.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Jamie goes on his date with an English princess. Claire isn’t so lucky.

Chapter Notes

Hi, I’m a broken record here to spout my undying love and appreciation for each and every one of you giving this series so much love!

For continuity’s sake: The Eden Court Theatre didn’t officially open its doors in Inverness until 1976, but for the sake of the series, it’s been around since the 40s.

31 March 1969

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser
Inverness, Scotland
7:36pm Local Time

“I WAS NOTHING BEFORE YOU CAME IN HERE!”

Those words echoed consistently in Jamie’s head and reverberated sadly in his heart. The anguish in Claire’s eyes, the fight she was putting up not to cry, the grief she clearly carried. What kind of life did she lead before he stumbled upon her wee shop? Was she truly happy being just a florist? It was evident she had no one, other than her wee plants and blooms, otherwise she might have a cheerier disposition.

Jamie hadn’t been back to Claire’s shop since that day. Only two had passed between then and now, but it felt like an eternity to him. Since that depressing exchange, he’d slept poorly and was only eating enough to stave off certain starvation. Nobody had noticed, in the last few weeks, that he’d stopped going to the gym every day and he wasn’t seen much out at night.

However, there wasn’t a peep about it in the press. Usually, the paparazzi would follow him
around like a lost baby chick looking for its mother, hoping to sneak a photograph of him doing just
about anything worthy of a tabloid story. This ominous perception made the young Prince mindful.

The press only cared about him if he was making a fool of himself. They solely published a news
piece if he had his arm around yet another bombshell besom or was getting arrested for another
pub fight. So, who’s to say that they would pay attention to him once he became King?

He knew now that, once he took control of Scotland as her ruling sovereign, he wouldn’t be doing
anything of the sort. Would he be considered dull? Mundane? Would his people appreciate his
accomplishments? Or would they only focus on his past failures as a young, foolish prince?

“You should be spending your time finding my future queen.”

“Damn ye, Sassenach,” Jamie mistakenly said aloud.

“What was that, your Royal Highness?”

“Nothing, lad. Are ye almost done?”

“Aye, sir. Just finishing the final hems.”

Jamie was standing on top of a small stepstool and his official duty kilt was being tailored. Nothing
too special, just a hem or two needing some minor alterations. But if he was going to whoo one of
King William of England’s daughters into a potential marriage arrangement, he had to look his
absolute best as future sovereign.

But he couldn’t help the wistful feeling bubbling in his chest as his looked on in the mirror. In full
Scottish regalia, he looked every bit of his royal bloodline and lineage. So why did he wish he was
nothing more than a humble merchant?

“All…” the young tailor said as he snipped away one last stray thread from the edge of tartan,
“finished! Your Royal Highness.”

“Thank ye,” Jamie said as the young man bowed and took his leave, and his tailoring kit. Jamie
took one last gander in the floor-length mirror. He took a deep breath, grabbed his dirk, slid it into
its scabbard, checked his sporran was in place, and left his bed chamber.

At the bottom of the wide staircase that was something of a centerpiece in Lallybroch Castle stood
his sister, her dress glowing in the light, adorned with her shoulder-to-hip tartan sash and medals
and pins on it, Fraser colors bold as ever.

Murtagh was to her left, dressed just as regal as he was. Fraser tartan kilt, sporran bearing the Royal
House of Clan Fraser crest in shined sterling silver, the dirk Jamie and Jenny’s mother blessed him
with shortly before her death, his brooch also shown in the light bearing the Clan Fraser motto.

“Je Suis Prest.”

I am ready.

But was Jamie really ready for what the evening had in store for him?

—

Princess Geneva Monica Lauren Dunsany of England was a very beautiful woman. She did not
look like she was eighteen, but someone who was just starting her secondary education, maybe
fifteen or so? Jamie wasn’t much to judge. There were times when he looked (and acted) much younger than he was.

“Good evening, Princess,” Jamie said formally, extending his hand to her. Geneva allowed him to take hers and he kissed the back of it lightly as she curtsied for him.

“Your Royal Highness,” Geneva said with a much deeper voice that Jamie had expected from a lass so young. “It is good to finally meet you.”

“Likewise, milady.”

“Shall we?”

“Aye. Allow me.”

Jamie gestured for her to walk in front of him and he escorted her to an awaiting vehicle that would be their chauffeur for the evening. First, it would be a lavish, candlelit dinner for two at a restaurant that had been closed to the public exclusively for them. Jamie was at least thankful the Princess was of legal drinking age; he did not believe he would survive the night sober. After dinner, they would be treated to dessert at another restaurant, also closed to the public for them. Finally, there was a live drama being shown at the Eden Court Theatre near River Ness and the two royals would be seated in the private box top seats, providing them the best view in the entire building.

“You look verra lovely tonight, Princess,” Jamie commented as they entered the restaurant, more for the purpose of filling the silence than anything else. Though, he wasn’t lying. She did look like a dream come true.

“Thank you, Prince James,” Geneva said sweetly, “you’re not too bad looking yourself.”

Jamie smiled at that. “Aye, weel…a few hems go a long way.”

They shared a chuckle as they were seated at their table, and menus were opened for them.

The dinner itself would have been a lot worse for Jamie had the food not been made by God himself. He had a vague idea of the haggis and tatties he ordered, but wasn’t paying that much attention.

Since the menu was in Gàidhlig, he had to translate for his date. She ended up ordering a seafood platter filled with everything Scottish water had to offer; judging by the look on her face, she enjoyed her meal too.

They both ate in relative silence, the sounds of quiet chewing and the occasion clink of wine glasses filling the air space around them. Jamie wanted to spark a conversation to lift the reticence, but had no earthly idea of what to talk about.

Princess Geneva must have felt the same way because she appeared equally quiet and awkward. To Jamie’s knowledge, tonight’s entertainment was already paid for in full, so when they were done, all he had to do was signal to someone that it was time to leave.

Dessert was equally as good, both sharing a black bun cake topped with tablet flavored ice cream (“ye canna get more Scottish than that!” Jenny’s words entered Jamie’s head) but there was still silence between them, save for the audible usage of utensils.

The whole purpose of this date was to show Princess Geneva what her life would be life should she
become the Queen of Scotland, with Jamie as her King and husband. She would need to acclimate herself to Scottish life, their traditions, as well as their foods and entertainment, if she were to thrive in said position.

But the more Jamie and Geneva sat in each other’s presence, the less likely the chances of her becoming his Queen were. There was no hostility between them, no sense of animosity or ill wishes, just two people being forced to be compatible when no such thing would ever arise.

Halfway to the theatre, Jamie ordered the car to be stopped.

“What’s the matter, James?” Geneva asked, the worry on her pretty face evident.

“I’d like a moment fer us tae be honest wi’ each other, if ye please.”

“Sure.”

“I’ll never ask ye anything ye arena able tae give. And I expect the same respect, ken? So, when I ask ye something, I only ask fer yer honesty. Will ye give me the same?”

“Of course.”

Jamie took a breath. “Do ye really see this going anywhere? I mean…us…”

Geneva looked like the world she was carrying on her back was picked up by someone else. She visibly relaxed. “No, I don’t. But that doesn’t mean I haven’t enjoyed myself tonight.”

“Aye, I feel the same way. But there’s a big difference between a few nights out on the town, and spending the rest o’ our lives together.”

“I have enjoyed your company tonight, Prince James…but I can’t see myself being happy as Queen of Scotland.”

“And I wouldna wish that upon anyone. Especially someone eligible tae be my bride.”

Geneva and Jamie smiled at each other, finally feeling for the first time tonight comfortable in each other’s presence.

“So…now that that’s sorted…d’ye still wanna go see the play tonight?”

“Will we be in trouble if we don’t?”

Jamie chuckled, flashing her his dazzling white smile. “Princess…yer in my motherland. Nobody canna teel me what tae do. If I say the night is over, then it is. The question is, do you want it to be over?”

Geneva looked torn but only for a moment. “I’d like to retire now, Prince James, if that’s alright with you.”

“That’s perfectly well, Princess. I’ll have the driver take ye home. Fer me, I’d like tae take a walk, clear my heid a bit before heading back to the castle.”

“Do be careful, James.”

“Always.”

Jamie instructed the driver to take Geneva back to Lallybroch Castle with the explicit instructions
not to let Jenny nor Murtagh discourage Geneva for coming back early without him. They could bitch and moan to him later, but he wasn’t lying. He did need to clear his head.

While he was pleased with the outcome of this experience, it meant he was still nowhere near close to finding a bride to be at his side when he took the throne.

The air outside was slowly thawing with the coming of Spring, the temperature making it unnecessary to keep a coat on. But Jamie felt if he shed his coat, he would be left feeling naked and vulnerable. Though he had no idea why.

He wondered what Claire was doing now. Would she still be awake? Would she be still up and putting in extra hours for the shop? Was she still upset with him? Despite his better judgement, he decided to change his direction and head for the shop.

Not long after walking onto Cameron Road, where the shop was located, the air started to take on a different feel. And smell.

Was something burning?

Turning another corner, he was startled by the vision of a shop being quickly enveloped by hot, licking flames. A few sketchy blokes were cheering and jeering at their apparent creation, and Jamie was just about to run to a pay phone around the corner to dial for emergency services.

Until he witnessed one of them dragging the unconscious form of a woman into the street.

A woman who looked exactly like Claire.

Jamie’s heart all but stopped beating at the sight. It was Claire!

“SASSENACH!”

The men looked like deer caught in headlights when Jamie sprinted towards them. He drew his dirk as the men were gathering their clubs to defend themselves.

All feeble actions; Jamie was much faster.

Before Willie died, Jamie’s original role in The Royal House of Clan Fraser was to lead all of Scotland’s military forces. When he wasn’t in school or playing with friends, while his brother was being schooled on sovereignty, he was being drilled on how Scotland ran its armed forces, for he would be their commander one day.

A couple of street thugs were no match for him as he never forgot his training, which he kept up even after Willie’s death. More as a hobby than anything else.

The men put up a weak fight, but kicked and slashed at Jamie like nobody’s business. It wasn’t until they saw the brooch on his chest that they were fighting their future king.

Not wanting to deal with any repercussions of wounding a prominent member of the royal family (or by God, committing potential regicide) they left Claire lying where she was, her shop effectively engulfed in flames, and disappeared into the night.

Breathing hard, Jamie sheathed his dirk, smoothed his hair back with a shaky hand, and took a good look at the shop. Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets was definitely a total loss; even her flat was beyond saving. A small cough emanated from behind him.
“Mo nighean donn,” Jamie’s voice was soft and full of worry as he gathered her into his arms. She was battered and bloody, but still breathing, her eyes closed to consciousness. He held her close to his chest, his heart no doubt pounding against the side of her skull.

One last look at the shop and he made his way towards that pay phone booth around the corner. He somehow managed to hold onto Claire and dial the direct line towards Lallybroch Castle that made using a pay phone free of charge.

“Lallybroch Castle, how I direct your call?”

“It’s Jamie, and the black birds are a’raving out here!”

He always thought his secret identification code was ridiculous, but it could very well save Claire’s life.

“But white doves release all strife to God himself.” The female voice on the other end spoke the correct response and it was down to business. “Good evening, Prince Broch Tuarach. How may I be of service, Your Royal Highness?”

“I need Auld Alec sent a car to 83 Cameron Road, and teel him tae be quick about it! It’s a matter o’ life and death.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Jamie wastes no time getting Claire to safety. But not everyone is happy about Lallybroch Castle’s newest arrival.

Chapter Notes

Y’all, I continued to be floored by your enthusiasm. Thank you all so much!

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of The Royal House of Clan Fraser
Inverness, Scotland
9:36pm Local Time

Jamie clung to Claire in the back of the car like a lifeline as Auld Alec raced through the back roads of Inverness towards Lallybroch Castle, his heart pounding painfully with anxiety in his throat the whole time.

“What the fuck happened, Jamie?” Alec called out from the front. “Princess Geneva came back tae the castle and asked tae be taken home to England tonight. Did she break yer heart sae badly that ye went back tae the one person in Scotland who didna want ye?!”

Jamie scowled at Alec, but couldn’t bring himself to chastise him at the present time. The old man was the closest thing Jamie had to a friend at the palace, therefore they kept no secrets from each other.

Jamie knew all about his wife’s death from cancer ten years prior, and how he used to manage various stables in his younger years. How he wished he and his wife were able to bear children but never could. Therefore Alec always consider the King’s children like his own, treating them as such.

In turn, Alec knew all about Claire, and the events that led to him being banished from her shop. The old man quipped him, but Jamie knew deep down he wanted nothing but his happiness. He
couldn’t begrudge the old man for looking out for him. It wasn’t like anyone else was at this point.

“Things didna work out tonight and wouldna work out between us. And that’s that.”

“So yer settling fer an English pauper, eh?”

“She’s no a pauper, Alec!”

“Aye, as ye say except her business woulda floundered had ye no stepped up, ye daft fool.”

“Watch the road, ye old coot!”

The car swayed side to side to avoid hitting other cars on the road. Jamie kept a firm grip on Claire all the while. When they arrived back at Lallybroch, Jamie didn’t wait for anyone to open the door for him. In his mind, he wasn’t a prince right now. He was…Claire’s.

Carrying her still-unconscious form bridal style into the house, quite a few servants gasped at the appearance. There was a wing in the palace on the third floor that was reserved for all manner of medical things, from the simple check-ups Jamie and his siblings used to receive as children, to a fully-operational surgery theatre, where his father had undergone numerous surgeries to remove the cancerous tumors within his body. Obviously not all of them were able to be removed, Jamie sadly reflected.

Some of the servants were on his tail, ready to help when commanded; they were duly trained as surgery staff in addition to their housekeeping or wait staff duties.

“Get Beaton here now.” Jamie called out to one of them, “I dinna care where he is or what he’s doing, he will be here within the hour or there will be hell tae pay!”

Jamie slid into one of the examination rooms. He eased Claire down onto one of the white-linen lined tables. He moved to cover her up with an old tartan wool blanket; these rooms got very cold no matter the time of year.

“As ye say, yer Royal Highness,” the servant responded before disappearing out of the room.

“How can I help?” Jamie didn’t hear Murtagh come into the room but was thankful for his presence.

“I dinna ken yet,” Jamie started removing the worst of Claire’s bloodied clothing, careful not to expose her virtue too much. He slipped two fingers gingerly alongside her jawline, sighing in relief. “She’s still breathing at least, and her heart’s kickin’ like a mule on fire.”

Jamie then noticed Claire had opened her eyes. Seeing them up close, his own heart started kicking hard against his sternum. They were the color of finely aged whisky, warm and inviting, and he was almost afraid if he stopped looking at them, they would close forever.

“Sassenach,” Jamie breathed, a smile ghosting his face.

“Where am I?” Claire asked sleepily, rubbing her head then wincing at the pain. “Your Royal Highness? What? How?”

“Dinna fash yerself, Sassenach.” Jamie cooed. “While yer here in my home…everyone calls me Jamie. Please. I implore ye tae do the same.”

“Jamie,” Claire said slowly as her eyes fluttered shut, and the man mentioned felt his insides start
to melt.

“Your Royal Highness,” the servant called out from the doorway. Jamie grunted in acknowledgment, but didn’t take his eyes off Claire. “Dr. David Beaton.”

“Send him in.”

A short, stout man with a salt-and-pepper mix of hair and beard, and friendly eyes, walked into the exam room with his brown leather medicine bag in hand. Murtagh took this time to take his leave, seeing Claire was in capable hands.

“Good tae see ye again, Your Royal Highness,” the man said from behind, his voice deep and slightly gruff from sleep. “And who d’we have here?”

“Claire Beauchamp,” Jamie started, “this is Dr. David Beaton. He’s the primary doctor for the Royal House of Clan Fraser. Ye can trust him. Davey, this is Claire Beauchamp.”

“A pleasure,” Claire extended her hand but speaking caused her to cough violently. Jamie helped her sit up and rubbed her back gently.

“Your Royal Highness,” the doctor began, “if you could give us some space, I shouldn’t be too long with-”

“No!”

Claire startled both the royal and the doctor.

“Dinna fash yerself, Mistress Beauchamp, I assure you-”

“I don’t want Jamie to leave. Please. Don’t make him go.” Her pleading voice was enough to soften the hardest of warriors.

“If the lass says I am to stay, then stay I shall.” Jamie declared and took his place directly behind Claire as if to act like an armchair. Davey knew the look in the young royal’s eyes. Frasers were known for their stubbornness for a reason.

Without another word, Dr. Beaton got to work. He checked Claire’s vital signs, listened to her heart and lungs, checked her pupils, assessed her reflexes and asked her questions throughout while noting everything on a chart he kept in his brown leather bag.

After about fifteen minutes, he concluded his examination. “Fer a lass that was dragged out of a burning building wi’out gentleness, yer in tip top shape, I must say. Save fer some smoke inhalation, yer heart’s beating strong, yer blood pressure is fine, and ye have no injuries that will result in permanent damage.

“Yer pupils are a bit on the pinpoint side, so I do suspect a bit o’ a concussion. This would also explain the slightly slurred speech and lightheadedness, but ye’ll make a full recovery, lass.”

Jamie visibly relaxed. He’d been watching the old doctor he’d known all his life like a hawk as he poked and prodded Claire, and his stern looks weren’t lost on the doctor. But Claire… she couldn’t keep her eyes off the imposing Royal Scot holding her against him. He felt as nice as he looked, and the occasional warm glances he gave her for reassurance made her feel welcome.

“What does she need tae do, Davey?” Jamie asked.
“Stay hydrated and get plenty o’ rest. If the lightheadedness starts tae get worse, if ye canna get up without fainting, or ye start vomiting, send fer me straight away. Not to alarm ye but that would indicate a medical emergency.”

“Alright,” Claire said sleepily. The good doctor was packing away his things and walking towards the door. “Thank you, Dr. Beaton.”

The man turned around and beamed at her. “Everyone here calls me Davey. You may also.” With another warm smile, he left.

A heartbeat passed before either of them spoke.

“Jamie-”

“Sassenach, I-”

They spoke at the same time, which caused them to share a laugh.

“I appreciate you looking out for me, really I do, but I must be on my way. Mrs. Graham will be worried about me when she sees the shop in the morning.”

“I can send word of yer condition, ye dinna need tae trouble yerself over it.”

“But, I can’t stay here, Jamie.”

“Aye ye can, so long as I say so.”

“But-”

“Claire,” Jamie got up and faced her sitting form on the exam table. “Ye just lost yer home, yer business, and yer injured. Ye canna be thinkin’ o’ going out now. Not like this.”

“It’s against the rules, though. I know that much.” Claire’s voice was soft, timid.

“Only if I say it ‘tis, Sassenach,” Jamie assured her. “Dinna fash yerself on what others think here. You are my guest. And ye’ll stay as long as ye need.”

Claire wanted to keep arguing, but it was useless. He was right, on multiple points. This was his home and, royal or not, it would be his word that ultimately decided what happened. If he said she was to stay, he wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Besides, she was homeless now. And with no family to turn to, she didn’t have a choice but to stay here and work something out. Even if Mrs. Graham offered her a place to stay, she only had the small one bedroom flat above her own shop. She’d be sleeping on the tiny couch in the living room. How long before she would need a chiropractor?

What finally solidified her decision were the accommodations. She imagined she’d been staying in the softest, warmest bed she ever seen in her life, surrounded by people whose entire jobs were to wait on people hand and foot, and if anything, anything, were to go wrong in her condition, she had a feeling Jamie would be on it like white on rice.

But before she could say yes or no, one thought still bothered her.

“What is it Sassenach?” Jamie’s worried look ignited concern and prompted him to check her out more, as if she would collapse any second.
“Well…” she began, “aren’t you mad at me?”

Jamie blinked.

“I… I was so rotten towards you…you…why did you save me?”

Jamie softened, placing an arm around her shoulder.

“I never turn my back on someone who needs help. No matter how they’ve treated me. It’s just no’ in me to do anything else.”

“But, I was-”

“Claire.” Jamie took a deep breath and sat down across from her. “Ye think yer the first person tae treat me poorly because I’m a prince? Christ, o’ course yer not! No’ everyone in Scotland thinks Clan Fraser should be in power. My father has taken quite a bit o’ abuse in his time as King from those who think other clans should be given a chance…and…I understand why ye did it. It’s one o’ the things I admire about ye.”

“You…admire me?” Claire blushed, not sure what else to say.

“Aye,” Jamie smiled brightly, and it was like the sun came out in Claire’s face. She couldn’t help but smile a little back. “Aye I do. But we can talk about that later. Let’s get ye set up somewhere more comfortable, eh?”

“Okay.” Claire resigned, taking his proffered hand to stand.

More of a gentleman that he should have been, Jamie escorted Claire throughout the castle towards a room on the fourth floor, stopping servants and maids along the way to acquire things she would need. Blankets, towels for washing and drying, various toiletries for grooming and hygiene.

In the end, Claire was thankful Jamie had held her the entire way towards her new room, because after climbing several staircases, she was winded and in need of a good nap. She had a feeling she would have collapsed halfway there on her own.

The room itself looked like it belong to Jamie’s late mother, Queen Ellen, and not one of the many spare bedroom the castle had to offer. It was furnished in trims of gold, silver, and cyan, all the furniture looked brand new despite its 1930’s style. The bed could easily sleep four or five people of Jamie’s size. There was a small couch at the foot of the bed that matched the decor, a few matching dressers scattered throughout the large room, grand windows bedazzled with lush drapes and curtains, giving the room a mystical, ethereal feel to it. A door off to the side led to a full sized bathroom, complete with one of those vintage claw-foot bathtubs. Claire felt like she had stepped into another universe.

“This will be yer room, Sassenach,” Jamie said as he led her towards the bed. A maid beat them to it and pulled the covers back. “Someone will be in shortly to handle yer sleeping clothes and the like.

“This is a call box on the nightstand, just here,” Jamie walked towards the nightstand in question (there was one on either side of the bed, both adorned with jewel-shaded reading lamps) and pointed towards a small white electric box that had labeled buttons on it. “This one will call fer the kitchen, and someone will bring ye whatever ye like. This one,” he pointed to the next one, “will call fer assistance fer anything else ye need that doesnt involve food or drink. Oh, and this one,” he pointed to a red one, “will signal an emergency, in which half the castle will come running.”
Claire nodded. “What if…” she hesitated for a second, “what if I need to call you? Specifically?”

Jamie smiled. “Ah, that one…” He reached into the drawer of the nightstand and pulled out what looked like a bulky remote to a garage door. “Isna attached tae the call box. This will send a signal straight tae the operator who runs the telephones here. No matter where I am in the castle, this wee button will find me. And it’s linked tae this room alone, so I’ll ken it’s you.”

Claire didn’t know what she was so worried about; Jamie had gone through all this trouble to ensure her safety, despite her horrid treatment of him the last time they saw each other. Surely he wouldn’t judge her for asking such a question.

“Weel…I’ll leave ye to it. Dinna hesitate to call out if ye need anything.”

“Thank you, Jamie. Your kindness means a lot.”

Jamie quietly closed the door to her room, the voices of the maids drifting through the halls. When he turned around, his sister stood before him.

“Bringin’ home strays now, are ye?” Jenny’s voice was tense, as was her posture.

“She’s hardly a stray, Janet. I ken her.”

“Aye, and she’s no a royal! Why is she staying in one of the main bed chambers?”

“I dinna see how it’s yer concern,” Jamie brushed his sister off and kept walking, but Jenny followed.

“It ‘tis my concern, ye clothed! How d’ye think father would take ye bringing a commoner within the walls of the castle? What about-”

“Well, if he were able tae come and talk tae me about it,” Jamie whirled around and faced Jenny head on. “I’d be telling him same thing I’m about tae teel you. She’s my guest, I am welcoming her here, and ye’ll treat her wi’ respect. I’ll no hear of ye holding her in contempt!”

“Mother must be birling in her grave!” Jenny exclaimed. “As weel as Willie. They’d no approve of this.”

“Well, they’re no here now, Janet. I am. I mean it, sister, if ye make Claire feel unwelcomed in any way while she’s recovering, there’ll be hell tae pay!”

“And what about-”

“Janet Flora Arabella Fraser, by my blood and title, I am the head of this family. My will shall be done! Claire Beauchamp is my guest and she shall be honored as such! No more discussion on the matter! Is that clear?! ”


With that snide remark, Jenny left Jamie standing just before outside Claire’s room. He was breathing hard and still angry, but didn’t care a wick about what his sister said. He determined that it was still his pleasure that Claire stayed as long as she wished to.

Unfortunately, Claire heard the entire conversation, and despite what Jamie just told the princess, she no longer felt welcomed at Lallybroch Castle.

Sleep did not come easy for her that night. And she prayed she didn’t have to stay here any longer
than was necessary.

“A Sassenach doesn’t belong in a Scottish castle,” she said to no one. “No matter what her Prince says.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

While Claire recovers, Jamie enjoys spending time with her. Jenny has other plans.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for being so patient. I’d been trying to write this chapter for the last 2 weeks, but I sadly have a life outside fandom lol. Enjoy!

6 April 1969

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of The Royal House of Clan Fraser
Inverness, Scotland

Jamie did his best to make Claire feel welcomed at Lallybroch Castle. He gave her a grand tour, showed her the entirety of the castle grounds, introduced her to each and every staff member who served the Royal Family, and introduced her to his family.

Or, at least, he tried to.

Lord Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser was the embodiment of class and respect in Claire’s eyes. He made a point to stop her from curtsying in front of him and responded with a bow of his own, kissing her hand lightly. This cause Claire’s cheeks to emit a faint blush, much to Jamie’s amusement.

“Welcome tae Lallybroch Castle, Mistress Beauchamp, Seat of the Royal House o’ Clan Fraser. A pleasure tae have ye here. Glad yer up and feeling better now.”

Claire nodded her thanks, not knowing what else to say. All the while, Jamie was still grinning like a giddy child on a sugar rush behind her.

The introduction to Princess Janet was another matter altogether.
“Claire, ‘tis my honor that I present my sister, Princess Janet, The Princess Broch Tuarach.”

Claire curtsied before The Princess but felt a cold shiver run down her spinal column as narrowing, dark blue eyes did not leave her person. What made the feeling worse was The Princess was doing a terrible job at hiding her displeasure behind the fakest smile Claire had ever seen.

“Collect yerself, deary,” Princess Janet said sweetly, motioning for Claire to face her. “Welcome tae Lallybroch Castle, indeed. Please, make yerself at home while ye recover, aye?”

Claire figured if Princess Janet was going to be a two-faced trollop, she could play that game just as well. “Thank you, Your Royal Highness. Really, thank you all for your hospitality.”

“Nay bother, Mistress,” Jamie said with a warm smile that thawed the bones that Jenny’s stare froze over. “Yer my personal guest of honor, ye ken. Whatever we have is yers too.” Claire missed the fiery, dagged glare he sent to his sister.

Jenny didn’t say anything as she walked away from the two.

Claire had to say something the moment the princess was gone. “I can tell we’re going to get along swimmingly,” she said dryly.

“‘Tis no’ yer fault, Sassenach. My sister isna one fer…outlanders…” Jamie was trying to soften the blow with his tone, but the message was all too clear to Claire.

Outlander. Englishwoman. Foreigner.

Sassenach.

While Jamie’s little pet name for her held nothing but the sweetest of endearments, from Princess Janet’s perspective, it once again translated to one thing for her.

“You’re not welcome here.”

As the week went by, Claire realized it could have been a lot worse. Short of the Princess’ blatant disdain for her existence, her friendship with Jamie blossomed into something that would have rivaled anything in her floral shop.

They spent almost every waking moment together. With spring upon them, they found themselves outside more than inside, taking up tea in the vast castle gardens, walking along the paved paths that showed off the castle grounds, generally getting to know one another.

Jamie felt like his heart would burst at any moment. His love for Claire couldn’t stop its growth. The way her hair showed off a multifaceted rainbow of color in the sunlight, from gold to brown to bit of auburn just behind her ears. Her eyes were a radiant shade of the finest aged whisky that Jamie knew Scotland couldn’t possibly offer. The way her eyes crinkled a bit at the corners when she smiled and laughed at one of his corny jokes, throwing her whole body into it. Jamie spent more time that he was willing to admit wondering how her body would feel close to his, her skin white as milk brushing up against his toned, tan form in the heat of passion.

Meanwhile, Claire found herself staring at the Prince in moments of quiet. There’s no way his hair is naturally that color, she thought. There are too many different shades of red! He has to dye it! But the longer she looked, the more it was just impossible to recreate something so beautiful. His eyes were the color of the deep sea, their blue hues changing depending on his mood. They would
brighten slightly when he was happy or laughing at something, and darken anytime his sister would even think about opening her mouth to say something to him.

She wanted desperately to ask him about his father, but felt it wasn’t her place, and certainly not in the company of any of the other Royal Family members.

Fortunately, she wouldn’t have to. She was learning that Jamie had a knack for changing the subject.

“So, I imagine ye ken all about my family…” Jamie said one day while they were walking behind the castle. “Tell me about yers, Sassenach. Where d’ye originally come from? What of yer parents? Any siblings?”

Claire smiled. “Such a curious mind you have.”

“Never doubt it, Sassenach.” Jamie quipped. He made a miserable attempt at a wink, and it made her laugh.

“Well…” Claire began with a deep breath, “I don’t know much about my parents, other than their names. They died when I was a child. A car crash…I was raised by my uncle all over the world. He was an archeologist and a professor at the University of Oxford.”

“I’m sorry fer yer loss, Claire,” Jamie took the time to stop and he took one of her hands into his. It was warm and slightly calloused, as if he’d been raised to be a farmer rather than the future King of Scotland.

“It’s alright. I mean, it was a long time ago…” Claire let her sentence drift off. “If it weren’t for photographs, I wouldn’t even know what they look like.” She looked up at Jamie. “I apparently have my father’s eyes and my mother’s unruly mop of hair.”

Jamie smiled and took one of those unruly locks into his fingers, twirling it around to examine a strand.

“Mo nighean donn.”

“What does that mean? I don’t have any Gàidhlig.”

“It means…” Jamie hesitated for a second. “‘My brown haired lass.’”

“I always thought it was dull, but lately I’ve been seeing more shades of brown in it…could be the Scottish atmosphere.”


They both laughed at that and continued walking. As they approached the castle’s entrance, a maid came out to find them.

“Yer Royal Highness,” the maid curtsied before Jamie, then nodded her head towards Claire. “Mistress.”

“Everythin’ alright, Justine?” Jamie asked, concerned, and Claire could see why. He placed a hand on the girl’s back. Justine looked, and breathed, like she’d just run a marathon. “Yer damn near out of breath.”
“‘Tis no concern, Yer Royal Highness, I assure ye, it’s just…the Princess is lookin’ fer ye and she
isna pleased ye canna be found!”

“We’ve been just out here this whole time, takin’ a walk, ye ken,” Jamie heaved a frustrated sigh,
then smiled at the young woman. “Dinna fash yerself, dear. Tell Princess Janet we’ll be inside
straight away.”

Justine curtsied before him once more before dashing back in the castle. Claire looked up at Jamie,
and noticed they’d been arm-in-arm the entire time. They didn’t break their touching as they made
their way inside.

“Wonder what’s so urgent for your sister to want you right away,” Claire inquired.

“Whatsoever it is, it willna be good. It never is…” Jamie looked down at Claire, “dinna say a word to
her unless she speaks tae ye directly, aye? She’s a foul mule on her best day.”

Claire nodded curtly as Jamie led her inside and towards the grand parlor, where Jenny and
Murtagh were both standing. Jenny scoffed seeing Claire still in Jamie’s arms.

“There ye are, ye dolt. Canna keep yerself away from the stray, can ye?”

Jamie glared at her as Claire’s cheeks heated up in shame.

“Janet, I’ll thank ye tae speak of my guest wi’ respect. Now, why ye chasing Justine all about the
castle? She had quite the fright on her wee face!”

“Jenny has found another lass fer ye,” Murtagh said, giving what Claire had to surmise was an
apologetic look at her. As if to say, “sorry we’re dragging ye into this, lass.”

“Aye, and I think she’ll be the perfect one fer ye, brother!” Jenny went towards a lamp table
drawer and pulled out some photographs. A young, busty blonde woman in what looked like
traditional Clan MacKenzie dress.

Jamie blinked. “Is that who I think it is?” Claire looked at him and not only did the tips of his ears
go pink, but he looked angry.

“Aye. Lady Laoghaire MacKenzie of Castle Leoch!” Jenny was bursting at the seams with joy; no
one else in the room seemed to share it. And Claire was about to find out why.

“I dinna want anything tae do wi’ her, and ye ken it weel!” Jamie seethed.

Jenny just rolled her eyes and went on as if Jamie hadn’t said a word. “She’s coming over
sometime later this week, and yer to take her out much like ye did with Princess Geneva, so ye best
make sure ye can…present…yerself weel.”

Neither Jamie nor Claire missed the undertone of Jenny’s words, nor the icy look gestured towards
Claire. Before Jamie could become irate about it, Claire just put her hand on Jamie’s arm.

“It’s alright,” Claire breathed lightly. Though, in reality, it really wasn’t. But what could she do?
Personal guest of the Prince or not, she wasn’t royal. She had no right to speak on the subject.

Claire could practically see the steam rising from Jamie’s collar as Jenny and Murtagh left the
room. And little wonder, considering Claire’s suspicions of the Princess arranging for Jamie to
wed were confirmed.
“I am so sorry, Claire,” Jamie finally said through clenched teeth. “Ye shouldna been dragged through the muck as such. My sister can be…weel…”

“A bitch?” Claire said with no qualms nor care. Jamie smiled.

“I ken there was something I liked about ye,” he said with a cheeky grin. Claire returned it with a smug smile of her own.

“Look, I think I’m well enough to leave. I’ll pack what I have and go. I refuse to be a burden on you or your family any longer.”

“No,” Jamie said hastily, causing Claire to stop herself from exiting the room. Jamie took a deep breath before saying, “I willna let my sister’s devious plans scare ye away. Yer my guest. Unless…”

He let his voice trail and his eyes wander to the floor.

“Ye dinna wish tae stay…I willna keep ye against yer will.”

Claire could see the sadness in his eyes. *He really does want me here,* she thought sincerely.

“Why do you want me here so badly?” Claire asked. Jamie looked up. “I mean it, Jamie. Why? Why am I so important to you? I…I’m a nobody…”

Jamie crossed the room to stand in front of her faster than her heart could beat. He took her into his arms without warning and embraced her. His warmth cooled any lingering icy tendrils of Jenny’s affliction in her veins.

“I canna help but let ye down, Sassenach,” he said softly against her hair. “As…as I want ye. But I canna have ye…no’ while I am pose tae rule Scotland…it isna fair, I ken. But one day…one day when I am king…things will be different.”

Claire couldn’t help herself; a chuckle escaped her person, causing Jamie to frown down at her.

“Are you saying you have a crush on me?”

“Yer definitely not one tae mince words, Sassenach,” an honest blush graced the Prince’s cheeks, causing Claire to smile brightly. “But…aye…I canna deny I’ve a wee fondness fer ye. Yer…yer everything I could want in a wife…and what the Scottish people needs of their Queen.”

Claire’s heart skipped a beat. “Truly?”

“Aye…I’ve been a royal long enough tae ken…”

Claire and Jamie just stood there in each other’s arms for an uncertain amount of time. When Jamie let her go to escort her back to her room, Claire went to bed that night feeling something different for the prince.

Though she was anxious to admit what that something was.

—

Later that week, sure enough, Lady Laoghaire MacKenzie of Leoch made her grand, albeit dramatic, entrance. Her and Jamie exchanged pleasantries in front of Princess Janet and Lord Murtagh before a car took them off to their evening’s destinations. Despite Jamie’s insistence, Claire decided to keep well away from the dining hall until he and her potential future queen were
Dinner was served at her bedside by Justine, whom had become a close friend of hers in her short time at the castle. When most servant would just deposit whatever she needed and depart, Justine would sit and have a chat with her. Tonight, Claire invited the young maid to share her meal with her.

“It really isna allowed, madam,” Justine tried to shyly say but Claire wouldn’t hear any of it. Besides, if anyone decided it was a problem, she was certain she could convince Jamie she meant well. Eventually Justine acquiesced and joined her.

“So, I have to ask, and please forgive my nosiness. You can say it’s none of my business if you like,” Claire was talking while munching on roasted lamb. “But…what is the Prince’s deal with Lady MacKenzie?"

Justine did a double take at the door, almost to ensure it was indeed closed, and gave Claire her full attention.

“Lady Laoghaire has spent most o’ her life pinin’ after the Prince.” Justine kept her voice as low as she could, just in case someone was listening in. “Prince James doesna like tae talk about it, but Lady Laoghaire had once asked her fer his courtship, but he turned her down. Hard, ye ken. Didna feint any kindness about it, nay, certainly did not!

“It wasna long ‘afore she’d told all of Castle Leoch she and Prince James were tae be wed, and were throwin’ her a party to celebrate her apparent upcoming nuptials. All wi’out Prince James’ knowledge.”

“That’s horrible!” Claire said with equal quietness.

“Aye, ‘twas. When the King found out, naturally he chastised Prince James fer it, but the Prince claimed he’d told her the exact opposite. After a stramash at Castle Leoch, between Laoghaire’s parents, Lord Colum MacKenzie, the Prince and Princess’ uncle, Prince James and the King, Lady Laoghaire confessed tae her lies and she was heavily punished. Fifteen lashes by his uncle’s own hand, believe it was.”

Claire hummed, and finished her meal. She couldn’t help but feel zero sympathy for the young girl. She really didn’t look much older than Jamie’s own twenty-two, barely eighteen. She must have been very young when she did this to Jamie.

“How old was the Prince when this happened?” Claire inquired.

“Sixteen, methinks, which would’ve made Lady Laoghaire no’ even thirteen.”

Claire now had questions, but she wasn’t sure Justine was the right person to answer them. Mostly, she was just curious. Justine cleared away their dinner ensemble and bade the young florist goodnight.

Claire knew Jamie was going to be out for a while, so she took her time with bathing. The claw foot bath tub was so luxurious, she barely noticed when the water went cold. She towel dried herself off and changed into some comfortable clothes. While she knew Princess Janet cast a cold shadow upon her presence, so long as Jamie wanted her there, she was free to roam the castle. So, she did just that.

Claire took the first set of stairs down the hall to the left from her room and ended up on the third
floor, where the walls were covered with paintings and exquisite artwork. The paintings seemed to be portraits of all the Royal Family members, including those who were no longer with them.

The first one she came across was of a prepubescent boy with a younger boy sitting in his lap. The smaller child had a wild mop of red hair.

*That has to be Jamie,* Claire thought with a soft smile.

She guessed the other boy was his older brother, Prince William. From what she knew of the Royal Family, William died when Jamie was six years old of pneumonia. Painted in the bottom left corner of the portrait was “ECSF, 1951.”

“This had to have been painted just before William got sick,” Claire said quietly to no one.

She continued looking at all the portraits and paintings, stopping occasionally to take a closer look here and there, and eventually made her way towards the staircase to the second floor. If she continued on this way, she would eventually reach the kitchen. Perhaps she could trouble the staff for a glass of wine.

However, she would never make it to the kitchen. Just outside the landing between the first and second floors, in an alcove lit by moonlight from a nearby window, she heard what sounded like snogging. Wet and hot, passionate and fierce.

Turning the corner, she found herself staring at Jamie and Lady Laoghaire practically inhaling each other’s faces in that alcove.

Part of Laoghaire’s dress was hanging loose off her shoulders, showing a peek of her massive cleavage and bare shoulders. Jamie’s coat and vest were on the ground at his feet, his shirt was partially unbuttoned just enough for his chest hair to be visible, and the part of his tartan usually pinned at his left shoulder hung close to his ankles.

The second Jamie caught sight of Claire though, his eyes widened as she bolted back towards her room, locked the door behind her, and hurriedly tucked herself into bed.

Claire wasn’t one to cry over what would seem so inane, given she had no true claim over Jamie, and absolutely no right to be jealous, but tonight she sobbed her heart out. Because for the first time in her life, she felt like she’d found someone worth giving her heart to.

*You lying bastard,* was all Claire thought before she successfully cried herself to sleep.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Claire confronts Jamie about his interactions with Lady Laoghaire, but Jenny is determined to have the last word.

Claire’s dreams were horribly rough throughout the night.

At first, she dreamed of falling. No towards the ground, or towards an object, or even falling up, as strange as that would be. Just...falling. There was no sky, no buildings, trees or any landmarks that would confirm she was even still on Earth. It was as if gravity had eliminated itself from the Earth’s atmosphere and all she could do was fall, with nothing to stop her or catch her.

The falling created a dreadful sense of impending doom in her consciousness’ eye. Like, no matter what she saw or did, eventually it would stop. She would crash down towards something that would end her life.

Then, the dream shifted. And she found herself in the darkest of rooms. Or was she outside? She didn’t know. Soon, it became evident that the darkness wasn’t due to a blackout of light. At least, not entirely.

Her airway became constricted, like she couldn’t breathe. And then, she actually couldn’t breathe. There was fire all around her. The scorching flames caressed the walls in an upward spiral, incinerating everything it touched, bubbling the paint and wallpaper on its journey towards the sky. The bed she was on, the only thing in sight, was in the center of the room. It remained untouched as of yet.

Claire knew she needed to move, escape and get out of there before the fire consumed her, too. But she was frozen, because it was so nice to be able to have a lie down for once. Oh, this bed was the most comfortable and softest she’d ever owned! It was warm and so inviting! Her rational mind fought against this. Of course it’s nice and warm, the room is on fire, Beauchamp! You need to get out! GET OUT! GET OUT OF THERE NOW!

“GET OUT OF HERE!”

“Mistress Beauchamp!”

A jerking motion of her body brought Claire back to reality, and she looked upon the young maid
she’d shared a meal with that evening.

“Justine?” Claire was groggy, her voice was hoarse and she barely recognized where she was.
“What are you doing here?”

“Ye were shoutin’ out in yer sleep, ma’am, and thrashin’ somethin’ fierce! I’m surprised ye didna
wake the whole castle, ye ken!”

The maid dabbed at Claire’s brow, which was saturated with sweat, and smoothed her hair back.

“Do ye have night terrors often, ma’am?” Justine asked timidly.

Claire looked at her, then looked away, ashamed. “No…not usually…I’m sorry for disturbing the
household…”

“Och, dinna fash yerself, mistress! I dinna sleep much at night meself, and I’m just in the other
room down the hall, ken. I’m just glad I got tae ye ‘afore the Prince or Princess heard ye.”

Claire bit her tongue. That’s right, she thought bitterly. The Prince.

“I can call fer Prince James if ye need-”

“NO.” Claire’s words were abrupt and harsh, and she caught herself before she could insult Jamie,
despite the desire being very strong. “No, um, thank you but…I’d rather not trouble the Prince with
my troubles.”

Justine looked like she was about to argue, but blessedly kept her mouth shut. At least, on that
subject.

“I dinna ken if yer wantin’ tae know…but Lady Laoghaire left the castle in tears not long after her
and the Prince returned to Lallybroch. Dinna ken why, ‘tis no my business, foreby…but I dinna
think that relationship will go anywhere…”

She nodded at Claire as she left to drop the rags in the laundry hamper on her way out the door.
Claire took a deep breath and laid back in bed, her mind wandering to dark places.

It didn’t matter to Claire what happened between Jamie and Laoghaire after she found them
snogging in the alcove. The fact that she did find Jamie like that, with both of their clothes askew
from her person and clearly enjoying themselves…there really wasn’t any reasonable explanation
Claire could come up with to justify his actions.

She was right on her initial assessment of the Prince, thinking back to her conversation with Mrs.
Graham all those weeks past. And she left like such a bloody fool. She let Jamie, no, Prince James,
play with her heart like a damn fiddle. She actually believed him when he said he’d had a crush on
her. That he had a ‘wee fondness’ for her.

When in truth, it was all just a farce. James had probably said those things so she’d stay for a shag.
That would be his usual modus operandi, right?

Once a womanizer, always a womanizer.

Claire never went back to sleep, her tormented thoughts keeping her from unconsciousness. She
took her time rising for the day, bathing diligently and dressed with care. She wanted to just leave
without telling anyone, courtesy and honor be damned, but that just wasn’t Claire Beauchamp’s
way.
Sometimes against her better judgement, she always gave people the benefit of the doubt. And a chance to explain themselves. She decided she would give the Prince one chance to explain his actions to her. If he hadn’t told her the things he did, it wouldn’t matter. It wouldn’t bother her so. But it hurt, being misled. Especially when it came to matters of the heart.

So, she would hear the Prince out. But that didn’t mean she was going to actively seek his attentions.

—

Breakfast saw Claire eating alone at the table. From what Justine had said, the King had sought a private audience with his children and Lord Murtagh and it would take most of the day. Given the King was living on borrowed time, Claire imagined he would be speaking either very slowly or through a transcriptionist of some kind. Apparently when Princess Janet had no engagements during the day, she was cooped up in the King’s royal bedchamber. The one she’d shared with his late wife, the Queen.

“It willna be long now, mistress,” Justine had said to Claire while she was mending one of Lord Murtagh’s shirts. They were in Claire’s room. Claire had seated herself on the small couch at the foot of the bed, a book in her hands, and Justine was sitting in a chair pulled from to the bed from the desk, her feet propped up on an automan with the man’s shirt spread across her lap. ‘The King had been refusing anythin’ tae help him breathe, but I heard the sounds of a machine in there that wasna there ’afore. Must be some kind of oxygen tank, verra loud!’

“So, we’ll have a new king soon, I expect?” Claire asked dryly. She turned the page in her book despite not having read it.

Justine gave her a dark look but didn’t say anything more than, “aye, mistress.”

“Does Prince James have to marry someone in order to be King?” Claire asked.

Justine’s eyes shot up at her, and she almost pricked herself with her sewing needle. She opened her mouth, then closed it again, appearing to be deep in thought.

“I dinna ken, mistress,” she finally said after a few moments. “But it’s Clan Fraser tradition. Stretches back all the way tae King James I after the Battle of Culloden. The only difference between James I, and Prince James now, is James I already had his betrothed, Princess Catherine Elisabeth of Spain.

“The legend goes, King James I didna want tae marry his future bride, who would be kent as Queen Catherine of Scotland, until he knew the Battle of Culloden would be a victory. He couldna bear the thought of her being his widow, should be no’ succeed. Only once he returned tae her the victor, and was posed tae be king, did he wed. He felt it was only right tae be marrit ‘afore taking the throne. That tradition has been passed down through each Clan Fraser sovereign.

“But wi’ Prince James…it could go either way, ye ken. The Prince isna one fer tradition, given his past, but there’s enough influence around him. From the court, to his father, and wi’ that he could verra weel take a royal bride soon.”

And I suppose Laoghaire would be my future queen, Claire thought sourly.

Luncheon and afternoon tea passed by uneventfully and Claire was starting to wonder where the hell the Prince was. He’d been in his father’s bed chamber all day, with no signs of him emerging anytime soon. Claire started to grow concerned. Not for Jamie’s sake. But for his father, her King.
Would King Brian pass away today? Was the Prince going through his final preparations before becoming sovereign? Was he in there to declare Lady Laoghaire as his betrothed and future Queen?

Supper was served at approximately six o’clock. Just when Claire was about to seat herself, the chair was pulled out from behind her, almost causing her to fall over.

“Easy there, Sassenach,” Jamie said with a weary smile.

Claire’s heart raced with sudden anxiety. She wiped the smile off his face with a pointed glare as she allowed him to seat her. He cleared his throat and settled himself at the head of the table. To his right was Lord Murtagh, his left was Princess Janet. Claire was seated all the way down at the end on the right, but not the opposite end.

Scotch pie with baked beans, mashed potatoes and gravy was on the menu tonight and, while Claire’s stomach was aching for a hearty meal, being in the same room as the Prince for the first time since encountering him the previous night was stunting her appetite.

Meanwhile, Jamie was engaged in small talk with his sister and godfather, but he barely paid attention.

“Claire?” He asked across the table, halting the conversation with his family.

Claire looked up at him and his heart fell. She looked like she was on a distant planet mentally. There were darkening bags under her beautiful whisky amber eyes, and her face was in a set scowl. When she made eye contact with him, it was as if her anger penetrated the depths of his soul. She was angry. And she had every right to be.

Jamie cleared his throat. “Are ye unwell? Ye’ve hardly touched yer supper. If ye care fer something different, I can have something made fer ye in a-”

“Stop it.” Claire’s voice cut through the air like a hot knife through butter. “Just…stop. Don’t sit there and pretend you care about me.”

“O’ course I care fer ye,” Jamie said, feeling his temper rising, though he wasn’t sure why. “It’s why I brought ye here. So ye’d be safe.”

“Safe, huh?” Claire pushed her plate back, stood up and walked towards where Jamie was sitting. She bent low so she was in his face. “Is that why you brought the fair Lady MacKenzie here? So she’d be safe? Made her the same declarations of love you made to me not twelve hours before?”

“It’s no’ like that, Claire. Now, please, let me-”

“You know what?” Claire interrupted. “I will admit. I was a fool. I actually believed you when you told me you wanted me as your queen. But the stories of you in the market check out lanes don’t lie. You’re nothing but a-”

“Hang on a second,” Jenny interrupted, and for once, her cold gaze was upon her brother, not Claire. “Ye told this Sassenach she could be queen?”

Murtagh had taken this time to slip out of the room. He stayed close though, in the event the building tension in the room exploded into open warfare.

Jamie looked at Jenny. “Aye, I did.” He turned his eyes towards Claire. “And I meant it. Every word. If I had things my way, ye’d already be my bride.”
“Yer a damned fool, James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser!” Jenny spat loudly. “Tellin’ a bloody stranger such lies!”

“Tis no lies, Janet,” Jamie spat.

“Yes it is.” Claire said, bringing their attentions back to her. “If you did truly care for me, as you say, then why did I catch you snogging that blonde harlot in the alcove?”

“That is Lady Laoghaire MacKenzie of Leoch and ye’ll speak o’ her wi’ respect, Outlander!” Jenny told Claire venomously.

“I don’t care who she is, it’s obvious your brother cares about his next shag than actually finding himself a queen!”

“Ye’ll no tell us what is done in this house, ye wee Sassenach bitch!” Jenny shouted at Claire.

“You are in Lallybroch Castle, Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser, and ye’ll remember yer feckin’ place while under my father, yer king’s, house! If ye canna abide by that, there’s the bleedin’ door. Don’t let it hit ye in the arse on the way out!”

“Claire,” Jamie said softly. “Please, let me explain.”

Claire considered him for a moment, but ultimately went back on her better judgement.

“No, no I think I’m done here. I’d thank you for the hospitality, but what would be the point?” Claire snided at Jenny as she made her way back to her room. Within about ten minutes, she was as packed as she could be and out the door into the cool, Scottish night air.

She had a small purse on her and she walked as far as her legs to take her until she reached a phone box. She inserted some coins and rung the only person left in her life she could truly trust.

“Mrs. Graham? I need help.”

“And ye shall have it, a ghràidh. Where are ye?

It was only then that she allowed her tears to flow freely. They would not stop until she was walking through the threshold of Mrs. Graham’s shop.

—

“If our father were weel enough tae see this, heard how that besom spoke tae us, he would’ve had her hanged and quartered, twentieth century be damned!” Jenny was fuming.

“If our father were weel enough, then that’d mean Mam and Willie would be alive, and I’d be free tae marry who I want. But we dinna always get what we want, do we Janet?” Jamie had sat back down, intending to finish his dinner, but all he did was order a servant to bring him the most full bottle of whisky in the castle. He was going to need a few stiff drams tonight.

Jenny scoffed at him. “So, this is my fault then?”

Jamie nodded his thanks to the servant who had just poured him a glass. He downed half of it in one gulp before saying, “If someone puts a pot o’ shite onto boil, ye stir like it’s God’s work. If ye’d kept yer neb out of this, I would’ve explain tae Claire my side of the story! She thinks I led her on. But that’s the farthest thing from the truth…”

“So, ye snogged Laoghaire just fer the sick pleasure o’ it then? Verra noble of ye, Prince Broch
Tuarach.”

“I did it to see if it felt different!” Jamie spat back fast.

Jenny blinked. “If what felt different?”

“The wanting…my desire fer Claire. It’s no’ just lust, not this time. This isna the same as the women I’ve lied with in the past. It isn’t usual…whatever it is between Claire and me. I canna describe it any other way, Jenny. It…it just is. Claire makes me wanna be better…no’ just fer myself or Da…fer the Scottish Crown.

“I wanted tae see if kissing Lady Laoghaire felt the same. If what I felt fer Claire was a phase, or maybe to see if I just didna ken what I wanted. But the spark…the…love… I feel fer Claire, deep within my bones, doesna reside with Laoghaire. That’s why she left the castle in tears that night. I told her she wasna welcome here anymore.

“I canna muster the same feelings fer her as I do fer Claire. And I told ye it wouldna work out…” Jamie turned to glare at Jenny. “Scotland needs a woman as her Queen, no’ a lassie. And Laoghaire will be such ‘til she’s fifty. And even then!

Jamie blew out a frustrated breath before downing the rest of his dram and helping himself to another one.

“Ye ken the difference weel, Janet,” Jamie went on. “Let’s say roles were reversed and ye were next up fer the Scottish Crown. And ye loved someone ye couldna have. Would ye no’ be fightin’ it? Fightin’ fer yer God given right to be happy?”

Jenny stared at Jamie for a good minute. Neither of their stares wavered, neither of them blinked.

“I’m no’ up fer the throne. So yer hypothetical situations doesna mean anythin’ tae me.”

And with that statement, Jenny left Jamie to his drams.

He would have to be carried to bed by several strong servants later that night, and he wouldn’t remember the amount of crying he did before passing out at the dining room table.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

While Claire attempts to put the night’s events behind her, Jamie decides to pursue her, hoping he can rectify the situation. But an unexpected roadblock tries to stop him.

Chapter Notes

It might be my birthday, but this present is for YOU! Thank you all for your patience in waiting for this chapter. Now that all the graphics challenges I set out to make have been completed, I look forward to continuing the writing of this series :)

Graham’s Reading Leaves
Inverness, Scotland
7:34 pm Local Time

Claire hadn’t even been at Mrs. Graham’s for more than an hour and she was already feeling the repercussions of what had transpired at Lallybroch Castle. She was never one to cry, but now that she felt she needed to, she couldn’t. She could not for the life of her bring herself to cry over what had happened. Maybe it was for the best?

“I’m such a fool.”

“Aye, mebbe…but yer heart was in the right place at the time, hen.”

“I’m not so sure…”

As cramped as it was in Mrs. Graham’s small flat above her shop, Claire never felt more at home. The small couch would most definitely cause a crick in her neck over time, and she had little more than what the Prince had replaced for her in the way of clothing and personal items, but for now it was enough.

And if she managed to not look out the kitchen window that displayed the charred remains of her shop, she could almost pretend she actually lived there.

“The heart cannae help what it wants, a leannan,” Mrs. Graham said soothingly, handing her a hot
cup of Olog. Cupping the sides of the fragile China warmed Claire’s hands, if not her battered soul and wits. Taking a sip, the flavor reminded her of simpler times. Times of plenty…before Jamie came into her life and flipped it upside down.

“What am I going to do, Mrs. Graham?” Claire asked, unable to keep the desperation out of her voice.

Mrs. Graham sat down in a plump armchair across from her. “In regards tae Prince James, nothing. For now, yer gonna fill yer belly wi’ some leftover stuffed lamb, have a glass of port, and get as good a night’s rest as ye can. Everything else we can figure out when ye’ve taken care o’ yerself, aye?”

Mrs. Graham smiled at Claire, patted her knee, and got up to fetch more blankets and pillows. Claire was so grateful she had someone to rely on during hard times, even when her stubborn nature often forbade her from accepting it. But Mrs. Graham was right; she needed to focus on herself. Claire ate her fill of the leftovers, drank to her health, then bade the old woman goodnight as she settled for sleep.

Though it wouldn’t come easily that night.

—

Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser
7:48 Local Time

Murtagh didn’t even bother trying to intervene this time. He just did his best to keep the royal serving staff out of harms’ way while the Prince and Princess fought it out. “Best let them sort themselves out,” he’d told himself as he was ushering a frightened maid away from the dining hall.

Jamie threw another vase at Jenny as he shouted, “I SWEAR BY ALL THAT IS HOLY, JANET, YE WILL PAY FER THIS!”

“I CANNE PAY FER YER MISTAKES, JAMES, YE DID THIS TAE YERSELF! YE SHOULDNA NEVER BROUGHT THAT PEASANT BESOM INTO THIS HOUSE!”

“I AM THE FUTURE KING OF SCOTLAND AND I WILLNA ASK PERMISSION FROM MY SISTER FER ANYTHING! I TOLD YE TAE SPEAK OF CLAIRE WI’ RESPECT AND YE CANNA EVEN DO THAT! HOW THE FUCK AM I TAE RULE THIS COUNTRY IF MY DAFT SISTER CANNA HOLD HER TONGUE?!”

Jenny dodged the vase. It shattered against the wall and she hurled the one already in her hand at Jamie. It was also dodged and smashed against the wall right behind his head. “I KEN YE PREFER TAE THINK WI’ YER COCK RATHER THAN YER HEID, BUT THIS?! THIS TAKES THE CAKE. PURSUIN’ THE SASSENACH WILL ONLY BRING MORE SHAME UPON THE CLAN FRASER NAME! BUT HEY, YE SEEM TAE BE VERRA GOOD AT THAT!”

“YE FOUL WEE BITCH!” At this point, it wouldn’t surprise anyone of Jamie’s booming bellows weren’t rattling the pictures frames on the third floor wall. Exhausted from yelling, he sank into a chair, the fight leaving him at once. “Ye dinna understand shit, Jenny. And ye never will…” He wanted so badly to cry, but he couldn’t bring himself to act on it. Pride goeth before a fall, it’s been said.
Joining her brother in post-adrenaline drainage, the carnage of their fight surrounding them, Jenny sagged into a chair of her own. The sounds of their heavy breathing mingled with the waning tension in the room.

“I ken what love is, brother. I really do. And…I ken ye thought yer heart was in the right place. But…ye also have tae realize yer no’ just a normal person, no matter what ye tell yerself. Yer the Prince of Broch Tuarach. I…” she took a deep breath, “I’ve only ever wanted what was best fer ye.”

“If ye’d opened yer mouth to say anything of the sort, I would’ve told ye what I wanted, Jenny. I dinna doubt yer motives, as ire as they make me. But ye havena had the courtesy tae even ask me what I want. Or even consider that mebbe, just mebbe, we have different goals…Claire has helped me realize that I need tae clean up my act in order tae be a good king…” He let his sentence drift off. His heart raced at the notion that Claire was gone. And she wasn’t ever coming back.

Unless he did something about it.

Jamie got up from his chair and started for the hallway.

“Where are ye going, Jamie?” Jenny called out after him, but didn’t get up.

Jamie stopped, took a deep breath, and faced his sister with a determined set to his face.

“I canna say I regret anything that’s happened in the past few weeks, save for letting Claire go. I ken this will no doubt bring more shame tae this family, but I also canna deny what my heart wants. I want Claire as my bride. I willna stop fighting for her. Never. And nothing will change my mind.”

Without another word, Jamie fled towards his bed chamber. He changed into a white button-up shirt, tan slacks, put on a pair of semi-shiny black leather loafers, and slipped into a green corduroy jacket. He brushed his ruddy hair back with a side part and tied it into a neat ponytail, hiding it all underneath a tweed brown flat cap. This way, he hoped he would blend in more in public, maybe lessen the chances of being recognized.

Jamie made a mad dash towards the side door of the castle that led to where Auld Alec parked all the cars, but was stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of Beaton.

“Yer Royal Highness,” the old doctor bowed before him.

“Good evenin’ doctor,” Jamie replied warily. “Is somethin’ amiss?”

The doctor cleared his throat, his usual good humored expression nowhere to be seen.

“Your father wishes to have a word with you,” Davie Beaton said.

Jamie’s heart skipped a beat. “He’s…awake? Lucid?”

“Aye,” Beaton said, his tone suggesting something dreadful. *Might not be for long.* “If ye would follow me, please.”

Jamie didn’t have a choice in the matter. When the King summons you for a private audience, it didn’t matter if you were his son or a beggar on the streets. You answered the call with the quickness.

The closer Jamie got to his father’s bed chambers, the faster his heartbeat vibrated inside him. He
could no longer control the frenetic pounding sack of meat in his chest. By the time he was standing in front of the double doors, the sound of furiously rushing blood overtook any other sound or conscious thought. Beaton bowed behind Jamie, and disappeared down the hall, leaving him alone.

Slowly, he pushed the doors open.

His distressed, hammering heart all but stopped at the sight.

Brian Fraser was little more than skin and bones in this advanced stage of his disease. Which meant he was only taking on fluids through an IV, unable to swallow or chew. He was still on oxygen, but the thin, nasal cannula that once fitted neatly into his nostrils had been replaced by a full-faced mask that muffled what little speech he expressed these days. Jamie hadn’t been in to see his father since he’d had tea with her sister in February. Beaton, as well as his nursing staff, had given him regular updates on his condition, but in reality, it had been too hard for him to see the once braw, sturdy ruler of Scotland waste away to nothing more than a living corpse.

Seeing him now broke his heart even further. The end is nigh, his cynical brain told him. He swallowed a dry throat and fully entered the chamber, closing the doors quietly behind him.

One of the many nurses caring for the King was by his bedside adjusting something to his left. Upon Jamie closing the doors, the nurse turned around and curtsied before leaving the room in a haste. Jamie slowly approached the right side of his father’s hospital bed. He got down on his knees and kissed his father’s hand.

“Da,” Jamie said quietly.

The King opened his eyes. It took him a few seconds to even realize Jamie was there. Jamie ignored the pang in his chest.

The King managed a smile. “A leanabh ghràdhach.” (Dear child.) His voice cracked like chipped wood splintering in a forest before an axe.

Jamie managed a weak smile of his own. “Ye wish tae see me, athair?”

“Aye,” King Brian croaked. His speech was so slurred that Jamie almost didn’t understand the Gàidhlig that was being said to him.

“Do not pursue the Sassenach.”

Jamie’s own immense fluent Gàidhlig was the opposite of his father’s. Hurried, frantic, and quick.

“But why, father? Why deny me true love? I love her. And I want her as my bride.”

“I ken what love will make a man do, my son. It gives ye courage, but not always the sense to go wi’ it. But a Sassenach as Queen of Scotland? This is not our ways. Please. I beg of ye. Let her go.”

“I know I have been a shameful son, and I hate to hurt ye, I do. But I cannae obey that, father. I just can’t.”

“You have not been shameful. You were young, and impressionable. And, understandably, very angry. But… your mother and brothers still smile upon you from Heaven, Jamie. You’re a braw lad, my dear boy.”

The men sat in silence for the space of five heartbeats before the King said one more thing, in
“Promise me, Jamie. Promise me ye willna pursue the Sassenach.”

Jamie couldn’t stop the tears from falling down his face.

“I willna lie tae ye, Da. Ye deserve more than I can give. But I cannae give ye this. I cannae make this promise. I hope in time…ye will forgive me…”

Jamie silently wept as he held his father’s cold hand. He knew this could very well be the last time he sees his father alive. But he’s determined not to let that bother him. Something else does, though.

“How d’ye ken all this? Ye’ve been in bed fer months, foreby.”

The King just smiled a very tired grin, but it disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Jamie knew.

“Jenny.”

“Aye,” Brian groaned. “Yer sister’s heart is in the right place, Jamie.”

Jamie said nothing on the subject of his sister. He was starting to wonder if their latest brawl had woken him up.

“I’m sorry Da. I’ll never stop being sorry.”

Brian did something that caught his son off guard. He reached up and touched his face with the coldest of clammy hands. Jamie almost burst into tears at the feel of it.

“Ye’ve always had my love. And ye’ll have my forgiveness.”

Jamie held his hand over his father’s, kissed the palm of it, and laid it back down gently beside him, his tears transferring from his palm to the bedspread. Jamie stood up, bowed formally before his father, and left the room.

He almost didn’t leave the castle based on the King’s words alone. But he knew if he didn’t go after Claire now, he would spent the rest of his life regretting this more than any mistake he had ever made in his life.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Jamie goes the extra mile to win Claire back. But is he too late?

Chapter Notes

I think this is the longest chapter yet! Just short of 3K words. Woot! Though, in my defense, I accidentally combined two chapters into one. Oops! Lol. Thank you to everyone for their feedback, love and praise! It’s really helping me in writing this series :D

By the time Jamie was ready to leave to go find Claire, he realized it was probably too late to make the journey. The drive wouldn’t be too long, but it would require waking Alec up, and the auld man wouldn’t go anywhere without at least a cup of coffee and a cigarette. And he liked to take his time with such things; Jamie was never one to rush the man and wouldn’t start now. That aside, the last thing he wanted to be was more of a burden on her than he already felt he had been.

He was still angry with Jenny. Their relationship was already an unstable, rocky one since their mother’s untimely death, but tonight’s showdown took the fury further than it had ever been. He’d lost his temper to an unfathomable degree, and broke more vases and dishes than he’d ever be expected to (which was really saying a lot).

However, Jamie felt more than justified with his actions. How could Jenny be so bold and stupid, the wee besom? He thought. Going behind his back to find him a wife? Forcing him to date prospective princesses? And her treatment of Claire…his blood boiled at the thought of how Claire might feel about being treated like rubbish.

Jamie found it interesting that his father referred to Claire as “the Sassenach.” Traditionally, and literally, ‘sassenach’ translated to ‘englishperson’ or, for the Highlanders of Scotland, ‘outlander.’ But didn’t Princess Geneva count as a sassenach too, being from England? And an English princess no less?

No. He knew exactly what his father meant when he called Claire a ‘sassenach’ and no Geneva. Outlander as in “commoner.” Not of royal blood. Not worthy.
The hell she isn’t, Jamie thought.

He undressed and set his clothes aside for the morrow on the back of a chair, and climbed into bed, the anger still rolling off him in waves.

Jamie tossed and turned most of the night, either because he was unable to get comfortable, or his ravenous thoughts were keeping him from sleep.

At around three in the morning, he gave up any delusions of sleep and went down to the castle’s gym. Working up a good sweat always took his mind off problems plaguing his mind. But this night would bring no such relief. He felt like he couldn’t even lift the weights he lifted almost every day. Curling them towards his broad chest hurt for some reason. Even the record player blaring The Rolling Stones in the corner didn’t bring on the workout inspiration he was accustomed to. Everything just felt wrong. Being in the castle felt wrong. Jamie didn’t fight it. He left the gym, got cleaned up, and headed towards the kitchen for an early breakfast.

“Och! Good morning, Your Royal Highness!” Justine cheerfully greeted him with a small curtsy.

“Good morning, Justine,” Jamie replied, sitting himself at the outstretched dining room table. Justine fetched a fine China pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice and poured him a glass. “Where is Princess Janet?”

“Still asleep, sir,” Justine replied, placing a silverware set to his left on a large, folded cloth towel, “it’s no’ even dawn yet. Forgive my observation, sir, but yer no’ one tae be up before the lark!”

Jamie smiled softly at this. “Aye, verra observant.” A platter of eggs, sausage links, a hearty bowl of honey and strawberry flavored parriage, and more fresh orange juice. In true Scots fashion, he scarfed down his meal, gave his thanks and appreciation for the cook, and set back up to his room to dress.

Within about thirty minutes, Auld Alec had him on the road and set towards Inverness town centre. Pre-dawn light was barely breaking the surface as they rode in relative silence, as Jamie’s mind was preoccupied with other things.

What am I going to say to her? I should definitely apologize. Grovel and beg, if I have tae. I’m no’ above certain aspect o’ my pride, after all. Plus, she deserves it. Wait, what if she isn’t even here anymore?! Did I scare her away from Inverness altogether? But how would she have left? Did someone help her? A friend? That woman who runs the tea and cakes shop...what was her name? Moira? That’s it, Mrs. Graham! Could she have taken her away? Oh Christ, what will I do if she’s no’ here anymore?!?

Jamie’s heart raced at the thought. He couldn’t bear to think he would be the reason Claire would leave Inverness, or Scotland, altogether. When Auld Alec announced they had arrived and parked the car in its usual inconspicuous parking space between the alleyways, Jamie got out and walked towards the charred remains of her wee shop.

The standalone building’s study brick walls still stood, though its roof and ceiling had long since caved in and collapsed. There was no present evidence that anyone was in a hurry to demolish the building in the near future as there was no wrecking ball or equipment near the dammed site. There was at least a fence around the mess, so no one could potentially get hurt walking along the streetside, but that didn’t change the dismal feel of this particular stretch of Cameron Road.

So the remnants of a once-plentiful harvest and quiet peace of one woman’s livelihood stood in a painful reminder of how cruel humanity can be. While Claire recovered at Lallybroch Castle, Jamie
had inquired after the men who originally torched the place, but they were never found. A “random act of violence,” the police had said. They did however document his inquiry in relation to the assault that landed her at the castle in the first place.

There was an acrid smell of putrid fertilizer in the air, like it was embedded in the blackened walls and concrete. It was almost too much for Jamie to endure. The sight, the smell, all of it. How anyone on the block could stand it he didn’t know. Jamie made a mental note to put in a formal inquiry as to why the demolition hadn’t been completed, and what was needed to finish the job.

If for nothing else, Jamie was positive that the site alone would be enough to bring Claire to tears.

If she was still here…

“Claire.”

She could still be here!

He walked away from Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets’ scorched leavings, gloom clouding his heart, and went to the only place that made sense in his mind to ask about Claire’s whereabouts.

Given the hour, he was certain that while Mrs. Graham would probably be up with the lark, Claire might very well still be asleep. Jamie walked up to the external second floor front door, the flat above Graham’s Reading Leaves that served as Mrs. Graham’s home, and knocked on the door quietly.

No answer.

He repeated the knock, harder this time and with his whole fist, and heard the heated murmurs of a woman inside. He must have interrupted something important as the grumbles grew louder as whoever was inside got closer to the door.

“For the love of God, I-”

If Jamie’s heart were to stop beating at anytime, now would be it.

Claire stood before him in all her freshly-woken glory. She was the most beautiful he had ever seen her. And she clearly hadn’t been awake very long. He must have disturbed her making her morning tea.

Her hair was in a distressed beehive of wild, untamed brown curls, the pale green striped cotton sleeping clothes he’d bought for her a few weeks before were rumpled and smelling like fresh spring laundry soap, and she had on what Jamie could only assume were Mrs. Graham’s aging house slippers, the once-bright shade of blue now faded to an almost white. The robe she wore was a silky satin, buttermilk in color and dotted with realistic looking red roses, reaching down to her shins. It was the only thing she wore where a wrinkle couldn’t be found.

She’d barely rubbed the sleep from her eyes, and it took all the willpower and strength he possessed not to gently caress it away for her. She was a vision of divine, heavenly worthiness. He’d just hoped he could earn it back, no matter the cost.

“She could still be here!” was all Jamie could say, all but gasping for air as this view left him breathless.

Claire stood there, blinking slowly and no doubt provided air conditioning to all of Inverness with the door wide open. She took a breath, then collected herself before curtsying before him.
“Your Royal Highness,” Claire said, formally and without feeling.

“Please, Claire,” Jamie began, unable to hide the desperation in his voice. “I-”

“What do you want?”

Jamie inclined his head a bit in shame. He knew he didn’t deserve her kindness or courtesy now. Not after what happened at Lallybroch.

“A moment of yer time, Miss Beauchamp.” Jamie decided to play the game on her terms. In this instance, there were not friends, or even acquaintances. A business transaction, he concluded.

“Might I express my most humble permission tae enter yer dwelling?”

Claire considered him for a moment, by the look on her face, and Jamie wondered if she was going to decline his permission and slam the door on him. It would be no less than he merited, but that didn’t happen. Claire moved aside in a single step and allowed him passageway through the threshold. She closed the door behind her.

“May I inquire tae the whereabout of Mrs. Graham?” He asked, sitting down on the couch that he assumed Claire was sleeping on the night before, judging by the extra pillows sitting on top of a neatly folded plaid blanket to his left.

“You may.” Claire busied herself in the kitchen where a tea kettle was whistling. She poured herself a cup of tea, not bothering to offer one to the Prince. If he was offended, he didn’t show it. “She’s on a small holiday visiting family in the Lowlands. She won’t be back until later this week.”

Jamie nodded at this.

“Is there anything else I can help you with? I need to get downstairs to the shop for opening.”

Jamie blinked at this. “Ye…ye run Mrs. Graham’s shop now?”

“No,” Claire said, taking a sip of her tea, “but since I have no job and nowhere to live, Mrs. Graham offered me a part time position and the couch you’re currently sitting on. Until, I can get on my feet.”

Guilt taking over his conscience, his eyes wandered towards his shoes.

“Now, as I said, if there isn’t anything else-”

“Come back to Lallybroch Castle wi’ me, Sassenach.”

Claire’s sentence cut off, and Jamie looked her directly in the eyes. No turning back now. He immediately explained in detail all that had happened in the moments leading up to her finding him in the corner with Lady Laoghaire. The whole time, Claire had her eyes fixed on him, listening intently, as if she were willing her sight to turn into laser beams and burn a hole in his forehead.

“I ken it’s no a good enough reason, and I’m a damned fool fer allowin’ it tae go that far, ‘specily since ye were in the castle that night recoverin’, but I’ll never lie tae ye. I do care about ye. My heart burns fer ye, in a way that no other lass can conjure. Please…” Jamie got up, stood before Claire, and knelt at her sitting form. She almost dropped her tea cup; this was the last thing she ever expected to happen today, and she hadn’t even been awake a full hour.

Jamie put his right hand over his heart. “I come tae ye no’ as Prince Broch Tuarach, but as Jamie Fraser, a man in love wi’ the woman of his dreams. A woman he cannae live wi’out. Royal
tradition or no. I beg of ye, no’ as the future King of Scotland, but as a man pledging himself and his whole being, body and soul, to ye. If that means I’ll be spendin’ the rest o’ my life makin’ it up to ye, then that’s the price I’m willing tae pay. Will ye do me the honor of earnin’ yer trust back? Will ye come back to Lallybroch wi’ me, Claire? Please?”

Claire wanted to fight it. She wanted to get angry, shout all the nasty things she’d been thinking about telling him the next time she saw him, wanted to throw him out and demand that he never darken her doorstep again. Her mind told her it’s what he deserved. And that he deserved to be miserable for the way he treated her.

But her heart wouldn’t let that happen. Whatever feelings she had reciprocated for Jamie before… they never waned. They’d slowly grown over the course of those weeks at Lallybroch Castle. And, if she was being honest with herself, they’d began to mature and take on shape and color when she found Lady Laoghaire with Jamie that night. But now…she realized, like flowers that had frosted over during winter, they never died. Just…rested until the warmth of spring returned to breathe new life into them.

Claire sighed, and set her tea cup down on the end table to her right. Without warning, she wrapped her arms around Jamie’s neck and shoulders, breathing in his scent and a renewed sense of feeling.

“I can’t tell you right now that I forgive you…” she took a deep breath, feeling the girth of her breasts fill the already narrow space between her chest and his, “but what I can tell you, and promise you, that I will give you an honest second chance.” She pulled back just enough to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. She pulled back fully to look at him, and saw that his ears and the apples of his cheeks had gone bright pink. She stifled a giggle. “Your Royal Highness.”

The elation coursing through Jamie burst out in a gleeful fit. He hoisted Claire up into his arms and spun her around as if she were no more than a rag doll. That stifled giggle burst out on its own and filled the air space around them, Jamie’s own laugh mingling with it. When he set her down, his lack of judgement got the better of him. He smashed his lips to hers and drank her in like she was the Fountain of Youth itself. Realizing what he’d just done, he took a step back, wiping his mouth with his sleeve in a most unroyal manner.

“My apologies, Claire, I’m sorry,” Jamie was only momentarily embarrassed, quickly replaced with a short burst of joyous laughter. “I’m just mad wi’ joy right now!”

“I can see that,” Claire smiled.

“I willna hold ye any longer. I’ve a plan in place, ken. Tonight, after ye’ve closed down Mrs. Graham’s shop, I’ll send a car tae fetch ye. Tonight, I wish tae announce my courtship wi’ ye tae my family. And hell or high water, they’ll accept it and respect it, or else.”

“Are you sure about this, Jamie?” Claire moved closer to stand in front of Jamie. Their hands intertwined; Jamie looked down at them and brought one of hers to his lips for a chastising kiss. “The Royal Family isn’t exactly known for its kindness to outlanders within their ranks.”

“Aye, ‘tis true,” Jamie affirmed dismally. “But as the head of said Royal Family, my word is the last that is spoken. Ever.”

Jamie leaned in to plant a small kiss on Claire’s forehead, and she allowed it, leaning said forehead into his. They stayed that way for a few sensational seconds. Together. As if they had never parted. As if Lady Laoghaire had never interrupted whatever blossoming…whatever this was.

“Dinna fash yerself, mo nighean donn,” Jamie assured her. “It’s alright. I’ll see tae it.”
Without another word, Jamie left Claire and headed towards the car where Auld Alec was smoking a cigarette. He briefly the driver on what transpired, and they head back towards the castle.

Jamie is the happiest he’s felt in a very long time. But all that comes crashing down when he arrives back home to find Lady Laoghaire, her grandmother Lady Genna Fitzgibbons, Jenny and Murtagh, all standing around waiting for him.

“Welcome home, bràthair!” Jenny wraps her arms around Jamie, but he’s still angry about what had happened the night before and refuses to hug her back. The fact that she’s acting like nothing happened brings that anger back to the surface.

“What is she doing here, Janet?” Jamie points an accusatory finger at Laoghaire.

“Why, she’s here tae sign the weddin’ contract o’ course!”

Jamie’s heart actually does attempt to stop this time, the erratic beats correcting themselves to a normal, if fast, rhythm before he can even comprehend what’s going on.

“I- what?”

“We’re going tae be marrit, Jamie!” Laoghaire threw her arms around him and kissed him, sloppy and wet, on his cheek. A ice cold shiver ran down his spine at the realization. She reeked of whisky and wine, which meant she was most likely too gone with drink to realize anything herself.

“Aye, a happy union indeed!” Jenny chimed. “Now, let’s have a sit down and discuss weddin’ preparations, and while we’re at it, yer coronation ceremony!”

Jamie couldn’t speak, could barely move, and once again his entire world came crashing down around him.

Then a thought hit him harder than a rugby tackle.

*Coronation ceremony? We’re not supposed tae discuss that until-

“Oh Christ.”

His heartbeat became erratically charged again, only this time he felt dizzy and nauseous. The room started to take on a distorted shape and spin rapidly, white shadows creeping in towards his peripherals. He took in sharp, painful breath before his vision went completely blank, his full weight shaking the first floor as he collapsed into oblivion.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

As if things couldn’t take a deeper nose dive for Jamie and Claire, they do just that. But it doesn’t last long.

Jamie felt a slight pressure building in his head as consciousness slowly returned to him. Someone was holding his arm up, and two small, delicate fingers pinched the side of his wrist, no doubt taking his pulse. He heard muffled voices while simultaneously being hoisted up to a sitting position before he even had a chance to open his eyes.

“Up ye go, lad,” a gruff male voice said from behind him. It had to be Murtagh. When Jamie did finally open his eyes, Jenny, Laoghaire and Glenna had their concerned faces in his, and one of his father’s nurses was at his side. He couldn’t remember her name at the moment. His father had had so many over the course of the last several months.

“His pulse is steady but thunderin’,” the young woman said, and gently turned his face so her eyes bore into his. “Do ye ken where ye are right now, Yer Royal Highness?”

“I’m fine,” Jamie grunted as he shook the nurse’s grasp loose. Murtagh helped him stand and a maid brought him a glass of orange juice. He hesitated for a small second, but accepted the glass goblet of yellow liquid. Downing it in one large gulp, he made his way towards the grand dining table and sat at the head. He didn’t look at anyone in the room.

“Are ye alright, my love?” Laoghaire knelt to wrap her arms around his middle, “ye gave me quite a fright, I-”

“I’m no’ yer love,” Jamie spat in her face, hot and heavy with sheer animosity. “I dinna love ye, and I never will. I thought I made that plainly clear that night in the alcove.”

Laoghaire’s eyes widened with anguish. She was still intoxicated. “But…why did ye kiss me like that, then? If ye no be lovin’ me? Were ye playin’ me fer a fool, Jamie Fraser?!”

“That is Prince James Fraser of Broch Tuarach to you,” Jamie’s loud growlings could be felt rather than heard. “And no. I didna play ye fer a fool. I needed tae see if I felt anything fer ye. That’s why we got on as we did. It wasna because I…” a disgruntled Scottish noise erupted from his throat, loud and clear, “och, ye dinna need tae understand it, but I do need ye tae go. Now.”
“I will not be going anywhere!” Laoghaire shrieked. “I belong here! No like that Sassenach witch! She’s bewitched ye, I can see! That’s why ye fainted! Ye canna be apart from her fer more than a minute! Och! My poor sweet prince! My future husband!”

“I AM NOT YER FUTURE ANYTHING, LAOGHAIRE!” Jamie hollered, rising to his feet like a cannonball. “GUARDS! REMOVE THIS BESOM AT ONCE!”

Jenny was fuming but knew there was nothing she could do. She stepped aside as the guards took Laoghaire by the arms, kicking and screaming, away from Jamie and the grounds of the Castle.

“Lady Laoghaire MacKenzie,” Jamie called out before the guards could take her out of sight, her grandmother by her side. They stopped and looked at him. He took a step forward, bringing himself to his full height. “I, James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, Prince of Broch Tuarach, as the future King of Scotland, I banish thee from the grounds of Lallybroch Castle, Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser. Trespassing on royal grounds against the wishes of your sovereign is considered a threat tae the Scottish Crown. If ye are found on the grounds in the future, ye shall be prosecuted tae the full extent of the law.”

While the guards took her away, Murtagh continued to stand there, with the faintest hint of a smirk on his weather, wartorn face. If anyone noticed it, no one said anything.

Jamie sat back down after Laoghaire and Glenna were finally gone. “Princess Janet, come.”

Jenny walked hesitantly towards her brother. When he looked up at her, he could’ve sworn he saw the remnants of remorse on her face. But he didn’t acknowledge it. He was too upset.

“I shouldna had to banish a member of Clan MacKenzie from the grounds. We’re kin, after all.” Jamie’s voice was harsh, but calm. “But ye left me no choice. Whether ye like it or no’, Claire is the one I choose as my bride, your future queen, commoner or not. Ye will respect that going forward.”

Jenny bent her head forward in acknowledgement and left the room. Believing the matter finally settled, Jamie beckoned the servants forward to prepare a quiet dinner for two.

“Ye’ve been rather quiet this whole time, a ghoistidh,” Jamie called to Murtagh, not looking up. “What’s on yer mind?”

Murtagh stepped forward and pulled out a chair for himself. “Ye ken Jenny willna let this rest. She truly believes yer doin’ Clan Fraser a great disservice by pursuing Claire. She willna stop her mad pursuit until ye’ve settled wi’ a princess.”

“Well,” Jamie remarked, buttering a slice of bread as he did, “she can say whatever she wants, but at the end o’ the day, ‘tis no’ her that will be sovereign.”

“And that’s another thing ye forgot, Jamie,” Murtagh leaned in closer as Jamie popped a bit of buttered bread into his mouth, “Jenny is still officially the Royal Delegate tae yer father until his death. She does have the power to do just that. She hasna been actin’ on her feelings alone. She’s also doing this in the name of the Scottish Crown. And yer word, future sovereign status or no’, willna hold up with the Scottish Court. If Jenny doesna want ye tae marry Claire, they will side wi’ her.”

Jamie froze at that. Of course, he mentally berated himself. When King Brian announced to his children that he was dying, Jamie wasn’t exactly flying right in the eyes of the court, so his advisors recommended he appoint Jenny to continue all official royal duties, in the name of his
Which meant that, with Claire coming to the castle that night, if Jenny found her first, she could very well do anything to her and be justified. His heart dropped.

Jamie stood up abruptly, his appetite left on his barely-touched plate. “I need tae speak wi’ my father.”

He didn’t wait for Murtagh to say anything. He made a mad dash for his father’s bed chambers. Without knocking or waiting for an invitation, he threw the doors open and entered.

There was a quiet calm among everyone in the room. Davey Beaton was at the King’s left side, a few nurses were to the right, and a bunch of other men were in an adjacent corner of the room with strange looking medical equipment Jamie had never seen before. The equipment that had been used to keep his father comfortable was gone. The air smelled heavily of rotting flesh.

Everyone’s eyes met Jamie’s, everyone either curtsied or bowed in unison, muttering “Yer Royal Highness” in various tones of anguish and defeat.

Beaton walked slowly towards Jamie, but Jamie couldn’t bother to look at him. His eyes were fixed on his father. *Is he…*

“Yer Royal Highness,” Beaton said quietly. “It…it’s almost…”

“Aye,” Jamie replied with equal reserve, “I ken.”

“I can summon Princess Janet fer ye if ye-”

“No,” Jamie interrupted. “I dinna want her here…please…I’d like some time alone wi’ my father…I owe him this.”

Beaton just nodded his head and silently commanded everyone out of the room. When it was just Jamie and Brian, Jamie let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. He slowly approached the bed, knelt before it, then stood.

“Da…” Jamie said quietly, but his father didn’t stir. At first glance, it didn’t look like the King was breathing, but he was. The very slow movement of his chest and abdomen could only be witnessed if you were really paying attention.

Jamie did something he hadn’t done since his brother Willie was on his death bed. He climbed into the bed and laid beside his father, a hand perched on top of his chest, his head on his shoulder. Jamie couldn’t feel his father’s heartbeat unless he pressed down hard, which he wasn’t about to do.

“I was such a fool, Da,” Jamie said softly in his father’s ear. “Ye only wanted what was best fer me…and fer the Clan…and I-” he bit back raw emotion, “I threw it back in yer face like a lout. I willna ever stop apologizing fer it…even though he already forgave me…I dinna think I could ever forgive myself…”

His father stirred slightly, causing Jamie to rise in alarm. King Brian IV of Scotland turn towards his sons’ voice and with much effort, raised his hand towards Jamie’s face. Jamie grabbed his father’s wrist, steadying the shaky grip, and guided it to where he thought it needed to go.

With a thumb stuck out, the long fingernail already starting to turn dark colors of early decay, drew a small cross upon the center of Jamie’s forehead, just between his cinnamon-auburn brows.
“I…bless…ye…” he choked, gasping and wheezing as he scratched the cross into Jamie’s flesh, “in…God’s name…as…Scotland’s…new…sovereign…”

Jamie took a sharp intake of breath at what was happening.

“Go…my son…mo chridhe…follow…yer…heart…”

Brian’s arm grew very heavy and limp, his eyes became unfocused. And the wheezing stopped. Jamie’s eyes widened.

“Da?” Jamie shook the arm still in his hand.

“Da?!”

He slammed the side of his head into his father’s chest. He felt and heard nothing. Stillness, in an already still chamber. He laid there, gathering his father’s body into his arms. And wept quietly.

Jamie had no idea how long he laid with his father in his arms. Hours passed, the late morning turned into afternoon, which then turned into night, the light fading through the windows into darkness. The only reason he even bothered to leave his father behind was the sounds of a great stramash coming from the great dining hall.

When he walked out of his father’s bed chamber, most of the people who were in there when he arrived were waiting just beside the double doors.

“If yer willing, Your Majesty,” one of the men said, and the new title didn’t even register with Jamie. “We can begin the embalming process.”

Jamie just nodded, standing aside to let the men tend to his father’s body.

More crashing sounds erupted from the main hall, and Jamie made a mad dash.

There was a flurry of clashing voices, mixed emotions of anger and…worry? When Jamie got there, he saw Jenny red in the face and shouting at the top of her lungs towards an army of guards. And they were holding Claire by her arms.

“What is the meaning of this?!” Jamie shouted, cutting through the voices like a hot knife through butter.

“Jamie!” Claire called out, the tears shining on her face. She had weeds and bits of straw in her hair, a wide open cut on her face, and her clothes, which looked like Mrs. Graham had just bought them for her, were rumpled and covered in blood. Jamie’s anger flared, and his heart pinched at the sight of her battered being.

Did Jenny do this? Or the guards?

As small as her sister was, she could wrestle and win with the best of the men. She was no pushover, that was certain. But before Jamie could do or say anything, Jenny ordered the guards to take Claire to the dungeons for trespassing royal grounds.

“AS YER KING I ORDER YE TO UNHAND THAT WOMAN!” Jamie bellowed, and everyone froze in their tracks. Jenny looked like she’d been shot, with her face gone as white as a sheet, the guards immediately releasing Claire and getting down on one knee, heads bent low in reverence, and Claire staring at him from her crouched position on the ground.
“K-King?” Jenny asked, her voice wavering dangerously.

Jamie once again drew himself to his full height, and clasped his hands behind his back, but he felt anything but the sturdy figure now poised to lead Scotland and her people. Inside, he was dying and begging to weep over the loss.

“At approximately 11:00 this morning, King Brian IV of Scotland passed from this life to be wi’ God. He gave me his blessing as my father and my King. As his heir apparent and only son, I, James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, do rightfully and dutifully take his place as Sovereign of Scotland, and Leader of The Royal House of Clan Fraser.”

It took everyone a second to understand what that meant, but once they did, they scrambled to kneel before Jamie. Claire was still on the ground, so she just inclined her head further down, but winced in pain.

Jenny looked up and had just as many tears rolling down her face as Claire did. “F-Father’s…he… h-he’s-”

“Janet Flora Arabella Fraser, Princess Broch Tuarach, as yer sovereign, I released ye from yer duties as delegate to the Scottish Crown.”

With that, Jenny fumbled to get her feet working and raced towards their father’s bed chambers, her sobs turning into loud wails of anguish and distress upon seeing her father being prepared for burial.

The guards looked at Jamie and with a nod, he dismissed them. Then, it was just him and Claire in the desolate hallway. He all but fell in front of her, clumsily collecting her in his arms.

“Oh Jamie,” Claire sobbed in his chest.

“Mo nighean donn,” Jamie hushed in her hair. He pressed the side of her head to his chest, his heart a dull roar within him. His arms stayed wrapped around her for a long time, whispering loving things in English and Gàidhlig.

“Rest now. No one will harm ye. I’m here.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire spend time recuperating from the days’ events. Jenny finally sees what Jamie does. But will it be enough for the royal siblings to amend their fractured, damaged relationship?

Chapter Notes

Alright, guys, the worst is behind us! No more drama or angst (hopefully), no more Laoghaire (definitely) or Jenny interfering with shit (also definitely). Thank you to everyone who continues to give this series so much love and constructive criticism! Enjoy this installment!

CONTINUITY SIDE NOTE: in the UK, the Supreme Court is “the final court of appeal in the UK for civil cases, and for criminal cases from England, Wales and Northern Ireland,” (according to the internet) and doesn’t involve itself in Royal Family matters. For this series, the Royal Supreme Court of Scotland is 100% my own creation and is the governing body that handles all matters involving the Scottish Royal Family, great or small. I did my best with research on the proper terms for the Supreme Court, but I could be getting them wrong. Please forgive this if they are.

Claire wakes the next morning to the feeling of something soft, soothing, and cool against her burning cheek. Her head turns into the sensation, but she winces at the pain. Where am I?

“Dinna move, Sassenach,” a familiar Scottish lilt says to her left, a voice like a honey salve on an open wound.

When she opens her eyes, she sees Jamie kneeling beside her bed, dabbing her cheek gently with a clean, wet cloth. It smells of menthol and camphor. Was he using medicine?

“J-Jamie?” her voice cracks with raw thirst. A murky cold washes over her, yet her body is soaked in a sheen of fine sweat.
“Yer verra fevered, _mo nighean donn,_” Jamie coos in a low voice, “Beaton has already gone tae fetch some medicine fer ye. Dinna fash yerself. I’m here tae care fer ye. Nae harm will ever come tae ye again.”

Claire relaxes slightly into his touch, her head leaning into it. His hands, though calloused as a farmer’s, are gentle and compassionate. They feel warm and inviting, and she wants nothing more than to lay here forever. Jamie just smiles lightly at her, thanking God she was here.

“Yer Majesty?” a woman, presumably a maid, is in the doorway. Jamie signals for her to enter and she curtsies before him. “Dr. David Beaton, Yer Majesty.”

“Beaton!” Jamie calls, and the older man walks in with his brown leather medicine bag and a small vial of some kind of liquid. He gives Jamie a curt bow before saying or coming into the room further.

“Yer Majesty,” Beaton addresses, then comes towards the opposite of Claire’s bed. “I’ve bought ye some acetaminophen, Lady Beauchamp. It will help break yer fever.” The old man places a hand flat against her forehead, then moves it to her cheek. “Still verra high.”

“What happened? What’s going on?” Claire asks in a rush and attempts to sit up. Jamie casually pushes her back down into the mattress. With no strength to fight him, she relents, and lays back down.

“All will be explained in due time, Sassenach. Let’s get ye well first, aye? Let the doctor do his job. Please. Fer me?”

Claire notices the boylike glint of beg in his eyes, and she can’t help but submit to his pleading. Beaton administers the medicine orally. A nasty tasting, thick liquid that does not go down easy. Coughing, Jamie all but shoves a glass of water towards her lips, and she drinks greedily.

“Not so fast, milady,” Beaton says placidly. “Ye dinna want tae see it again, do ye?”

Claire gives him a sheepish look, then nods. She lets him examine her, all with Jamie looking on. That same, intense stare is on the doctor’s back as he listens to Claire’s chest and back, and it brings her back to the night her shop went up in flames. Only this time, she’s not only entranced by his caring hawk-like stare, but welcomes it with her whole heart.

“Heart’s a wee bit fast, but she’ll be alright,” Beaton reports to Jamie. “That cut is most likely becoming infected, hence the fever. Keep giving her the fever syrup, one teaspoon every six hours, and she should be good as new in a few days. Dinna hesitate to call upon me, should ye need anything else, Yer Majesty.”

“Thank you,” Jamie replies gratefully, and the doctor bows, taking his leave.

Claire craned her head again to look at Jamie. “Why are they calling you ‘your majesty,’ Jamie? I thought you were a prince. Unless…” Fear grips her heart.

“Aye…” was all Jamie said before he explained what had happened in the twenty-four hours before he found her at his guards’ mercy. By the time he was done, they were both weepy-eyed. More Claire than Jamie, though; there was only one time in is life where he’d seen his father cry, and that was at his brother’s funeral. He wanted to emulate that show of strength now that it was up to him to rule Scotland and her people.

“I am so sorry, Jamie,” she whispers. Jamie takes her hand into his and kissed the knuckles lightly.
“Dinna fash yerself, mo nighean donn,” he whispers back, a slight smile on his face. Though he felt like his insides were being melted at a boiling point. This could have been the time where he should start regretting not paying attention to all those lessons on sovereignty, but that sorrow wouldn’t do him any good. He was King now. But unlike before, it didn’t necessarily mean his life was over.

Jamie climbed onto the bed and got close to Claire. But stopped himself.

“May I request tae join ye?” Jamie asked.

“Yes, you may,” Claire smiled. And Jamie snuggled close to her under the covers, not caring that he was still fully clothed.

Unbeknownst to either of them, Jenny watches on from the ajar door. She has tears in her eyes.

“It isna polite tae spy on people wi’out their consent, Yer Royal Highness,” Murtagh startles Jenny slightly with his low-pitched voice.

“No’ tryna’ spy, a ghoistidh,” Jenny replied in a hushed tone.

The two of them gaze upon Jamie and Claire as they get comfortable in the bed. Neither of them can tear their eyes away as Jamie smoothes back Claire’s hair with the utmost care and caress. He plants a small kiss upon her temple and they see Claire smile at the touch.

“I’ve wrong him so badly and I’m so ashamed,” Jenny finally says after it appears Jamie and Claire are fast asleep. Murtagh closes their door, him and Jenny stepping away to talk. “I wasna tryin’ tae alienate him, I was just thinkin’ what was best fer the Scottish Crown. But now…seeing him like that…sae happy…I dinna think I’ve seen him smile like that since ’afore our brother died…och Murtagh! How will I ever earn his forgiveness? Can I ever earn it? Am I even worthy o’ it?”

Murtagh hugged Jenny.

“A nighean,” he said softly, “I have been yer parents’ advisor for many a year. I’ve seen them have tae make decisions in relation to war, peace, civility, even dealing with the English and Welsh Crowns… I believe I have served them weel. However,” he pulled Jenny away from him a bit so she could look him in the eyes. “This isna somethin’ I can advise ye on. Ye’ll need to decide fer yerself if yer worthy o’ his forgiveness. Fer only Himself can give it.”

Jenny sniffed and wiped her eyes. Murtagh pulled a small kerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed her eyes gently.

“It’s gonna be some time ’afore yer father can be laid beside yer mother and brothers. The Scottish Courts have tae declare Jamie king first. What advise I can give is…take some time to do some soul searchin’. Figure out exactly what ye want from him. I will never put meself in a place where I have tae pick sides betwix ye twa. However, Jamie has made his choice, and I’ll stand by him wi’ it. When yer ready, I’ll stand beside ye both. Both o’ ye are verra intelligent, just like yer Mam was. Ye’ll come tae the right conclusion.”

And with that, Murtagh left Jenny alone in the hallway.

Jenny paused for a moment before nodding to herself, dashing towards her bed chamber, and packing a bag. If she was going to soul search, she wasn’t going to do it at Lallybroch Castle.
Two weeks later, Jamie found himself standing before his government. He was dressed in his formal royal regalia, kilt and all. Claire, sitting in the audience, couldn’t help but admire him from his backside.

Looking around, she could see Jenny and Murtagh sitting closer to where all the magistrates were sitting (or were they called ‘justices’ like in England? She really didn’t know and made a mental note to ask Jamie later.).

Jenny was also dressed in formal attire, her long flowing gown of ivory shimmered slightly against the rare sun that shone through the courtroom’s windows. The Clan Fraser Tartan draped across one shoulder also had a bit of a shimmer to it, though not as luminous as her gown. She looked like the picturesque view of Scottish royalty, and it made her own attire look subpar.

Murtagh didn’t look half bad either, dressed almost identically to Jamie. But she shoved that thought away from her mind. Today was the day that Jamie would officially be proclaimed as Scotland’s King, though she knew his coronation celebration wouldn’t happen for another several months.

“James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, Prince Broch Tuarach,” one of the justices said, the President it appeared. “On behalf of this Supreme Court, we wish tae express our most heartfelt condolences on the loss of yer father, King Brian IV of Scotland. This court does find ye suitable, in health and of heart, to rule as Scotland’s next sovereign. De ye declare yer Oath to Scotland and Her People, this 21st April Day in the Year of our Lord, Nineteen Hundred and Sixty-Nine?”

Jamie drew himself up to his full height and replied, “I do, Lord President.”

A man from the pedestals of the Scottish Court stepped down with a rather large scroll in his arms. He undid it just as Jamie got down on one knee and furnished it so Jamie could read it aloud.

“I, James Alexander MalColm MacKenzie Fraser, Prince of Broch Mordha, do declare and claim my birthright as King of Scotland. I vow, as Sovereign, tae always rule with a benevolent heart, and all choices I make wi’ this title, will always be for the prosperity of Scotland and Her People. This vow shall be executed from this day forth, so long as I am Sovereign, and shall be discharged either upon my death, or the succession of a direct male heir of my bloodline.”

There was complete silence within the hollow shell of the courtroom; Claire swore she could have heard Jamie’s heartbeat from here. The magistrate stood up and returned to his seat upon the row of podiums. The man in the center of them then stood.

“Now fer the…other matter at hand. Have ye chosen Scotland’s next queen, Yer Majesty?”

Jamie stood. “I have.”

Everyone in the room collectively held their breaths.

“I declare it my will and pleasure tae take Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp, former nursery owner, as my future bride and Scotland’s next Queen.”

Everyone let out those breaths in a dramatic collection of gasps of shock and awe. Jamie ignored them and, with a smirk, turned to face her. Everyone sitting close by craned their necks to get a
closer look at her, like she was some kind of circus sideshow to be seen. He extended his hand, inviting her to join him.

“Come, Sassenach,” Jamie said, his heart showing in his words. A few people in the audience wrinkled their noses at the term, and Claire knew why. Technically, *Sassenach* was supposed to be an insult to her. But the way he always said it was anything but. Claire ignored everyone else too and got up from her seat to stand beside Jamie. He held her hand tight as they faced the court together, and Claire could feel it shaking slightly.

The Supreme Court justices looked as though they were about to all simultaneously suffer strokes.

“Let it be declared,” the Lord President said in exacerbated effort, “that this court reminds ye, Yer Majesty, that the heir apparent can only wed someone of royalty in order tae succeed as King! Ye canna marry a commoner!”

“Aye yer right,” Jamie said, “were we not months away from the 1970’s, Milord. The law was put into place by my sixth-times great-Grandsire, King James the I, the sovereign I was named after, at a time where those wi’ royal blood were being slaughtered for reasons we still don’t know. His objective was tae preserve Scotland’s royal bloodline fer future generations tae come.”

Jamie turned around to address the audience. “Now, I dinna ken about ye lot, but the last documented murder of a royal was in 1893,” Jamie winked (or tried to) at someone sitting near where Claire was, “and that was an accident.” He turned back to the court. “A case of…mistaken identity.”

Murmurs surfaced throughout the room. The head judge cleared his throat.

“If His Majesty could arrive at his point…”

“Why are we living in the past, Lord President? Justices of the Court, the future of Scotland is now. We are leading the way of the future as a nation! Shouldna the Royal House of Clan Fraser be settin’ an example fer the rest of the world?

“I willna sacrifice love and happiness fer anyone’s sake. No’ even Scotland. If marritin’ Claire means I canna be King…then so be it. Even if that means puttin’ a even greater burden on my family.”

Harsher sounded throughout the room, and Jamie felt Claire tense a bit. He put an arm around her.

“Are you sure about this Jamie?” She asked.

“Wi’ all my heart, *mo nighean donn,*” he placed a sweet kiss to her cheek, not caring that he was supposed to be the leader of his country now with witnesses to boot.

“The Justices of the Court call upon the stand Princess Janet Flora Arabella Fraser of Broch Tuarach, as delegate to the Scottish Crown, tae speak on the matter.”

Claire could see that Jamie wanted to protest, seeing as he released his sister from that duty on his own, but that was just it. He did it before being declared King. His words that night were meaningless in the eyes of the Scottish Court.

“Princess Janet,” the Lord President went on, “the Scottish Court would like yer insight on this matter. Please.”

Jamie and Claire saw Jenny take a deep breath. *Now or never,* Claire thought. This was it. Would
Jenny declare her an outcast to Clan Fraser, or her future sister-in-law?

“I believe,” Jenny began, “that my brother should be able tae marry whomever he wants, royal status or no’.”

More collective gasps, and even some from the justices, sounded.

“Duty and love shouldna be separate entities. I ken that, were I next in line fer the Scottish Crown, I would be fightin this law, as my brother is doin’ now.”

“And why do you believe such, Yer Royal Highness?” The Lord President asked.

Jenny locked eyes with Jamie and Claire. And for the first time, they shined with remorse.

“Because I wish tae wed a commoner meself.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Jamie are finally given a chance to reconcile. King Brian IV of Scotland is laid to rest.

Chapter Notes

I want to thank you all for your patience and continued love and support for this series. I know it’s been 84 years since I’ve updated. With COVID-19 trying to ruin our lives, I feel like I should be writing more. So I aim to do just that. But you’ll have to continue bearing with me. With my kid being out of school for the foreseeable future, my days aren’t mine anymore. Enjoy this latest installment!

Once again, the courtroom went more silent than a graveyard at midnight. Everyone’s eyes were boring into Jenny’s small frame. Though she didn’t fully understand the significance of it, the shock was taking its affect on Claire’s body more than she would have anticipated. Jamie, on the other hand, was shaking, not daring to breathe audibly. *Maybe he felt the same way?*

“And...what do you mean by such, Yer Royal Highness,” The Lord President asked, as though it physically hurt to say the words.

Jenny took a breath before speaking. “Like my brother, I too have been courting a commoner. Now, I ken that it’s no’ as big a deal as him, but still. Our father instilled in us, as the Royal Family, that royal blood must prevail. Must always succeed when no one else does. That was how he was raised, and his father before him, and so on dating back tae the first King James I of Scotland. But Jamie’s right...those times are long past.

“Because of Claire, I’ve seen a side o’ my brother that I hadna seen since ‘afore our brother, Prince William, died. That soft, warm, caring lad in the being o’ a man grown. A man sure of himself, and what he wants. His kind heart out fer the world to see. And it’s taken me this long tae see it.

“A farmer by the name of Ian Murray and I have been courting since four months past. Lord Murtagh wasna the only one who kent my actions were wrong. Ian had been teelin’ me too. But I
didna listen. I felt my heart was in the right place, being Princess Broch Tuarach and all…but I let my emotions fer this Kingdom cloud my judgement. It ‘twas never my intention tae hurt ye, Jamie.”

She removed herself from the seat without warning, walked over towards Jamie, and knelt before him.

“I ken…there’s no words I can say tae express how truly sorry I am, brother. I’ve wrong ye in a way that I ken can never be forgiven…I blackmailed ye…threatened ye…broke priceless family artifacts and irreplaceable valuables of our parents in an attempt tae hurt ye…I’m so ashamed!”

Jenny started crying. Jenny never cried. Or so Claire thought, as Jamie let go of her hand to embrace his sister with his whole body, silently weeping on the floor with her. This was a side of Jenny that Claire had never seen before. This soft, empathetic side…it was new. And, judging by the reactions to everyone in the courtroom, they had never seen it either.

“I ken I’m no’ worthy of it,” Jenny went on, a hiccup escaping between her words, “but I’ll ask anyway…I beg of ye pardon fer what I’ve done. I ask ye tae forgive all the wrong I’ve done tae ye. So that we may start anew.”

Jamie kissed the top of her head, wiped his eyes with his sleeve, and continued to stroke her hair gently. He breathed in his sister’s musk, and his senses flooded with memories of a simpler time. Of an easier time.

A time when he was no closer to being King of Scotland than was a flowerpot.

Willie sitting on a bench, showing him and Jenny how to eat ice cream on a cone without knocking the scoop off.

The excitement of Jamie learning a new math problem in school.

His father reading a bedtime story to him and his siblings with their mother trying to act out the scenes from the book.

Jamie beating both of Jenny and Willie at a game of marbles, with the rest of the children in Cranesmuir cheering him on.

Jenny covering him, Willie, the King and Queen from face to feet with bandages because she was obsessed with becoming a doctor.

That one time his father tried carrying all three children at once, and failed miserably, causing all four of them to fall into the large swimming hole on the castle grounds, laughter erupting from them once they surfaced.

Feeling his pregnant mother’s belly kick against his head as he told stories to what would have been his little brother.

“Jenny,” Jamie said softly. She looked up at him and he wiped away her tears. “Ye’ve been a right daft besom these last several months…and I was angry wi’ ye. Was, being the key word here.

“Nothing…nothing in this world… could ever make me hate ye to the point where I wouldna forgive ye. Aye?”

Emboldened, Claire stepped forward and placed a tentative hand on Jenny’s back. When Jenny
looked up at her, she almost burst into tears again.

“I ken I’m definitely not worthy of yer acknowledgement, let alone yer forgiveness,” Jenny sniffled.

“Jenny,” Claire said, with an air of sadness, “what kind of future sister-in-law would I be if I didn’t give you a second chance? Besides, I can’t exactly begrudge you for your actions. I may or may not have done similar, stupid things.”

For the first time ever, that caused Jenny to smile at Claire.

Both Jamie and Claire helped Jenny stand up. Claire hugged her first, and whispered something in her ear. Jenny giggled a bit, but neither of them clued Jamie into what was said.

“We’re family, Jenny,” Jamie said. “Blood or no, bone or no, we will always be kin.”

With the moment passed, the court resumed, the Lord President standing.

“This council will deliberate on all that has been presented here this day. As it stands, the coronation preparations may commence, whether the King is marrit or no’. This audience is finished.”

—

30 April 1969
Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser
1:00pm Local Time

**KING BRIAN IV OF SCOTLAND HAS DIED. LONG LIVE HIS SON: KING JAMES III OF SCOTLAND!**

“*Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit, in loco pascuae, ibi me collocavit. Super aquam refectionis educavit me; animam meam convertit.*”

There weren’t a whole lot of people in the Clan Fraser cemetery behind Lallybroch Castle as King Brian IV of Scotland’s urn was placed into the ground. The Royal Family’s priest recited Psalms 23 in Latin, as was tradition. Those who were versed in Latin said it with him, the others remained silent.

Together, Jenny and Jamie held onto the urn that held their father’s remains and gently placed it into the pre-dug hole, their hands held tight as they emerged from the earth. Jamie threw a handful of dirt on top of it first, Jenny after him. The urn wouldn’t be properly placed into the Fraser Family’s underground crypt until after everyone left, also per tradition. The topsoil funeral was really just for show; only members of the Royal Family, and those approved to bury them, were allowed inside the crypt.

The Frasers themselves, Jamie, Jenny, Murtagh, were naturally present. Also naturally present was Claire, right beside Jamie. Mrs. Graham was invited to attend as a personal guest of the Royal Family, and she was honored to the bone to accept. There were other prominent members of other clans in attendance, but no one that Claire would have recognized even if she knew of them.

Jenny’s side bore one Ian Murray, and she clung to him like a lifeline, his handkerchief being used
to dab her eyes and blow her nose. He was almost as tall as Jamie, but with long wispy blonde hair tied at the nape of his neck, a bit longer than Jamie’s own red locks, and all the men in attendance were wearing formal kilt ensemble, the women dressed in all black dresses.

King Brian did not spare a single minute detail in his will.

First and foremost, he declared Jamie as his successor to the Scottish Crown, and all that went with it; the castle, the land, all manner of handling laws and forming a government in his name. In the event Jamie refused to take up the role, while he would receive the scolding of his life from the council, he would be allowed to renounce his royal title, stature, entitlements, and all that came with being Prince Broch Tuarach and Jenny would then success Brian as Queen and sovereign.

Next, the King did not want his body to lie in state for a week, as was customary for the passing of the sovereign. He wanted to be immediately embalmed so his children could have time to make plans and preparations. He didn’t have a preference to burial versus cremation, or a combination of both; he was fine with letting Jamie and Jenny decide for him and trusted they’d use their best judgement.

Given the events that went on in the hours prior to and weeks after his death, Jamie decided to have his father cremated, then interred underground next to his mother, on the opposite from his brothers.

It was ironic in a way. The plots in the crypt were now arranged almost in order of birth: King Brian IV first, then to the right of his place, Queen Ellen, wee Robert, then Willie. Jamie had a feeling his would be right beside his big brother someday, with Claire either to his right or below him, and whatever children they would have somewhere close by.

But he tried not to dwell on that. He was still in his twenties, with no plans on dying anytime soon. Or so he hoped.

After the funeral, and a small reception with light refreshments, the clans said their goodbyes, gave their final heartfelt condolences to the bereaved, and went back to their own parts of Scotland.

This left Jamie, Claire, Jenny and Ian in the small parlor that was part of their father’s bed chamber prior to his death. Murtagh decided to spend the rest of the evening in his own estate. He promised Jamie he would have many drams in his father’s honor that night.

A lot of memories were held sacred in this room; the many times Jamie and his siblings would sneak in there to play when the King and Queen were on royal business. Jamie had declared it to be the gathering space just for them after the funeral. In his heart, it felt right.

“So,” Jamie said, breaking the silence that had kept everyone drinking their tea.

“So,” Claire echoed.

“When’s the weddin’?” Jamie looked at Jenny and Ian.

“We, erm, havena decided yet,” Ian replied, almost hesitantly. “We were thinkin’ about seeing what the council would say—”

“The only council ye need to concern yerself with is me,” Jamie said with a soft smile. “True, the council is in charge of making sure I act in Scotland’s best interests, but ultimately, I am the law. I make the final decisions on all matter of state and country, as well as being head of the family, and all the dramatics that come wi’ it. Ye have my blessing tae marry, whenever ye see fit. Though, it would be best tae wait until after the coronation. I’d like ye both tae be there fer me…if ye wish.”
“Och, Jamie,” Jenny set her teacup down to get up and hug him. “Thank ye. I dinna ken if-”

“Dinna fash yerself, Jenny,” Jamie kissed her cheek, “ye’ll always have me here, no matter what.”

“Do you know when your coronation will be?” Claire asked, and everyone turned their attention from her to Jamie.

Jamie sighed with a small grin. “Well, knowing how my father’s coronation went, even wi’ time tae prepare, probably not fer another six or seven months. It’ll be televised though, no doubt. His was not, to my knowledge. Gotta set up special telly channels, get approval from me and the council on every detail, and the like. Dinna fash, Sassenach. We have time.”

“No doubt that time will be spent formally preparing ye fer sovereignty,” Jenny chimed in, sitting back down next to Ian. “Wi’ father, while he completed his formal education, it still took time tae show him how his day-to-day dealing as King were to go. He told me once that it was hard tae get used to. Ye’ll manage.”

“I expect I will. Now,” Jamie said as he stood up, stretched lazily, and stifled a yawn with the back of his hand. “I dinna ken about ye lot, but ‘tis been a long day. I’m ready tae get some sleep.”

“Um,” Jenny suddenly looked sheepish, a look Jamie had never seen on his sister, “weel- do ye… maybe-”

“I’m sorry, Jenny, but until yer wed, I willna have ye sharing a room wi’ Ian. No offense, man,” Jamie nodded to Ian with regret, but Ian shrugged it off. “I’ll have the maids prepare a room fer Ian. As for Claire-”

“If you don’t mind,” Claire said before Jamie could go on, catching him off guard. “I actually planned to return to Mrs. Graham’s flat tonight. If that’s alright with you.”

For a split second, Jamie looked like he was going to get down on his knees and beg Claire to stay with him, but his face changed too quickly to even tell. He smiled. “Aye. Aye, that’ll do just fine. Been a whirlwind of a day fer ye too, Sassenach.”

Claire smiled back. Jamie extended his hand to help her up, nodded towards his sister and future brother-in-law, and walked Claire out of the room, arm in arm.

They made their way towards where Alec kept all the cars. The auld man was standing in his usual spot, a lit cigarette dangling from his lips and the edges of the day’s paper spread out in his hands. Claire could see a sliver of the front page bearing her late King’s royal portrait declaring his passing, and proclaiming the handsome man beside her as his successor.

“I’ll ring ye on the morn’, aye?” Jamie said in her ear as they got closer towards his personal escort car. Alec opened the door for her, but Jamie ushered him away for a moment. He bent low and kiss her on the cheek, tender and sweet. “Be safe, Sassenach.”

“I will,” Claire said lowly, “Your Majesty.”

Jamie blushed slightly at that. “Careful now…before ye ken it, they’ll be calling ye that too.” He winked at her, but it just came out as a clumsy, drunken blink, which caused her to laugh.

“Goodnight, Jamie.”

“Safe journeys tae ye…Claire.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Olive branches are formally extended, and Claire is now faced with the most unprecedented choice in not just her life, but Scotland’s entire royal history.

Chapter Notes

My goal during these hard times is to write, write, write as much as I can. With that being said, I am going to shoot for releasing a new chapter of TRHOFC every day until it’s complete. Thank you all for your love and praise! Enjoy this latest installment!

Claire awoke the next morning the smells of bacon, eggs, waffles and toast and, despite her back aching from Mrs. Graham lumpy couch, she welcomed the sensory intrusion.

“Ach, yer awake! Good mornin’, lass!” Mrs. Graham called from the kitchen. “There’s already coffee made, hot in the kettle. Help yerself while I finish our breakfast fixins’.”

“You’re an actual angel, Mrs. Graham,” Claire smiled as she stretched the kinks from her spine. She wrapped a shawl sitting on the armrest of the couch around her shoulders and made her way to the kettle.

“Och! I just realized I’m standing in the presence of future royalty!” Mrs. Graham made a show of curtsying before Claire. “Yer Majesty!”

“Oh stop it you,” Claire laughed, pouring herself a hearty cuppa and one for Mrs. Graham. The two of them gathered at the woman’s tiny kitchen table to break their fast.

“Ye canna deny the efforts Prince James went through tae name ye his future bride! And the council’s reactions! Och, tae say he’s fond o’ ye would be putting it too lightly. How d’ye feel about it all?”

“Well, from our conversation last night, my answers really haven’t changed,” Claire replied.
When Claire arrived at Mrs. Graham’s doorstep, she felt many emotions. Excitement. Love. Wanting. And yet, a touch of uncertainty and anxiety.

“Ach! Welcome home, my dear!” Mrs. Graham said as she opened the door wider to let Claire in. “I see yer a piece of history in the making! It was in the evenin’ papers.”

“Don’t remind me,” Claire mused, sitting down on the couch. Mrs. Graham sat in the old recliner across from her.

“Are ye no’ happy, lass?”

“I am happy, thrilled even! It’s just,” Claire sighed in resignation. “Like you said, history in the making. If my memory serves me correctly, and Jamie and I really do wed...that will make me the first Queen in the history of Scotland to not be born royal. A commoner queen. It’s a lot to take in. My growing love for Jamie isn’t in question, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“Och, no,” Mrs. Graham waved her hand dismissively in the air, “anyone wi’ functioning eyes can see there’s a strong spark betwix ye.”

“No, love isn’t the problem. And even if it wasn’t there...well, you know the Prince. He always gets what he wants. It’s a lot easier to just bend to his will than refuse him. I know that from personal experience. It wouldn’t be terrible if that was the case. He’s not a bad person. He wouldn’t mistreat me or disrespect or dishonor me.

“But that’s fortunately not the case. No, my hesitation is just the situation itself. I have a feeling not everyone in Scotland is going to warmly welcome me as their new Queen...”

“Dinna fash yerself on the gossip and misgivings of others. Ye’ll be their Queen, whether they like it or no’. They’ll come around. Just be yerself. Do what ye believe is right, and not only will things work out in the long run, but I think a certain Prince will happily back yer play.”

Claire smiled at the old woman. This was why she left the castle instead of staying the night with Jamie. She needed the perspective of someone who knew her, someone who possessed an unbiased ear. To listen to her without judgement or predetermined notions. Mrs. Graham always did just that to her tea-leaf reading customers. She was no exception.

“Thank you for letting me stay the night again, Mrs. Graham,” Claire said finally after a few moment’s silence. “You’ve been such a great friend. And if I do become queen...”

“Ye mean ‘when’ ye become queen,” Mrs. Graham winked at her. Claire rolled her eyes with a smile. Mrs. Graham leaned in closer. “Ye ken he’ll no stop fighting fer ye. Even if the council denies the marriage, even if he’s forced tae give up his royal status, he’ll always come back tae ye. From my auld eyes, and from what little I’ve witnessed, he’s no life but ye, a ghràidh.”

Claire nodded and went on. “Anyway...when I am queen, I will personally ensure you are always welcome at Lallybroch Castle whenever you want.”

“Och, ye dinna need tae go to such lengths fer an auld woman like me!”

“But I do. You may be just an ‘auld woman’, ” Claire tried, and failed, to mimic her accent, “but you’ve been my best friend, my rock and support, throughout these last few months, and I couldn’t have made it without you. You will always be family to me. No matter what.”
“I suggest ye go up to the castle and have a wee chat with yer King, aye?” Mrs. Graham said. “Maybe having Himself as guidance will help ease yer mind.”

Claire thought on it a bit, and decided that was the best course of action. She cleaned up, dressed, and kiss Mrs. Graham on the cheek before making her way towards finding a cab.

“Ah, there ye are! Was wonderin’ when ye’d decide tae poke yer heid out.”

Claire looked around and saw who she thought was Jamie’s personal driver. “Alec, is it?” She called out.

“Yer servant, madam,” Auld Alec bowed before her. “Though, given how Young Jamie is, it willna be long ‘afore I’m addressing ye as ‘yer majesty’.” He smiled and gestured towards where his car was parked.

“How long have you been waiting here for me?” Claire asked as Alec opened the back passenger door for her.

“The Prince ordered me tae find an inn tae sleep in overnight, and tae be here waiting fer ye before the lark. In case ye changed yer mind about stayin’ wi’ him.”

“Wait,” Claire paused before getting in, “he sent you to wait for me all night?”

“Aye, madam. And what Prince Broch Tuarach wants, he certainly gets.”

With nothing to add to that, Claire slipped into the backseat and Alec began their journey back to Lallybroch Castle. The silence only lasted about ten minutes.

“Do you really believe him?” Claire asked timidly. “Do you really believe I’m going to be the next Queen of Scotland?”

Alec smiled at her from the rearview mirror. “Mistress, I’ve been driving fer the Royal House of Clan Fraser since before Jamie was born. I was his mother’s personal driver when she was but a Clan MacKenzie princess. She didna hesitate tae bring me on as Clan Fraser personnel. I’ve bore witness tae the highest and lowest points of Jamie’s relatively short life. But one thing has always been consistent wi’ him.”

“And what’s that?”

“When he sets his mind tae something, no matter what, it gets done. His father, King Brian, God rest his soul, instilled in him that a man cannna be indecisive. He simply must keep movin’ forward. So, Jamie has always tried tae be a man o’ his word.”

Alec pulled the car aside just short of the private driveway that led to Lallybroch Castle.

“The only thing that will stop Jamie from making ye his queen…is yer word. As much as he prefers tae get what he wants, he’ll never force ye into a situation ye dinna wish tae be part of. Will he be heartbroken? Aye, verra much so. But he’d rather live wi’out a heart…than see ye unhappy.”

Claire chewed on that as Alec completed the drive back to the castle. He did have a point though; Jamie went through a lot of trouble for her sake. And despite not seeing it with her own eyes, she believed in her heart that if she said no to becoming queen, he would respect that.
“We’ve arrived, Mistress,” Alec called as he got out of the car to open her door.

When Claire stepped out, it appeared that half the serving staff was waiting for her. It took her by surprise.

“Welcome, Lady Beauchamp,” they all said in unison. Claire looked towards Alec, but the only help she got from him was him trying, and failing, to hide his smile.

“Erm…thank you,” was all she could say.

“Right this way, Madam,” said one of the maids. “We’ll take ye tae yer room.”

“My…room?”

Claire obediently followed the maid towards, ironically, the room she’d stayed in during her first time at Lallybroch Castle. Only this time, it was completely redone. Her jaw dropped to the floor at the sight.

Warm, earth tones flooded the vast space. Deep greens and vibrant browns accented the sunlight filtering through light green curtains. The four-post canopy bed bore illusions of a starlit forest getaway at sunset. Freshly cut flowers in expensive looking vases were on all the surfaces that could hold them; Claire recognized most of the floral arrangement and was in awe at the ones she didn’t. The furniture itself hadn’t changed, but it was a completely different atmosphere.

“Is this…” Claire began, feeling tears starting to edge the corners of her eyes, “all for me?”

The maid nodded and curtsied. “His Majesty insisted on yer space being tae yer taste and liking, milady.”

*His Majesty.* That was a term that Claire knew she was going to have to get used to.

“His Majesty has also made arrangements fer the castle’s entire garden space tae be yers to command. None, save yerself, Mistress, are allowed anywhere near the greenhouses wi’out yer expressed permission.”

“My permission?”

“Aye. Seeing as ye were a florist, His Majesty felt ye would…shall I say…flourish there. And as yer private secretary, I shall ensure that-”

“Wait, hold on,” Claire stopped her. “Since when I do have a private secretary?”

“Since Princess Janet gave the order fer ye tae have one, Mistress.” The maid answered like Claire had just asked her what color the sky was today. “Out of fourteen candidates, while I dinna have the most experience, I was selected fer my ability to learn about all aspects of a noble dignitary’s personal affairs in quick order.”

A tear escaped her eye, despite her fighting it. *Jenny ordered that?*

A *ping!* escaped the familiar looking call box on the nightstand. The maid raced to answer it.

“Lady Beauchamp’s room, this is Margot, how may I serve ye?” The maid said.

“His Majesty is requestin’ a private audience wi’ Lady Beauchamp in His private study.” Claire sort of recognized the voice on the other end of the call box as Lord Murtagh. She hadn’t heard him speak enough to know for certain, though.
“Right away, sir!” Margot, as she was apparently called, released the button on the call switch and went straight to Claire. “Well, ye heard Lord Murtagh. We have tae get ye ready!”

“Ready?” Claire said as the young woman was pushing her towards the large walk-in closet. “But I don’t have anything to wear!”

“Aye, ye do! Courtesy of the Princess! She cleared out her closet and that o’ her late mother’s. Ye have everything ye need in the way of dressing, Milady!”

Claire felt overwhelmed when she arrived, but now she was on the verge of tears.

“No no please! Please! I…I thank you for your help, truly, but this is all…all too much. May I please just go see Jamie without all the fuss?”

Margot looked like someone had hit her in the head with a cricket bat. Claire blushed and immediately regretted her choice of words.

“Erm, I mean, the King… that is…sorry.”

“Dinna fash yerself,” Margot smiled and stepped away from the closet. “Yer the only one other than Princess Janet and Lord Murtagh who is allowed tae address Himself by his moniker. Fergive me, Milady, fer my reaction. We staff arena’ among those privileged few. It’s tradition, ye ken.”

Claire just nodded, brushed away a few specs of dust from her dress, adjusted the laces on her shoes, and followed Margot towards Jamie’s study.

—

“If I ken Claire, and I do more than ye, Janet,” Jamie said, “ye’ll no need tae say it but once. And ye kinda already did at court.”

“My mind has a right tae be in a kebby-lebby, James,” Jenny shot back, but not out of malice.

She was pacing his private study (previously their father’s when he was king) as if to start a carpet fire. Both were dressed in more relaxed attire. Jenny in a form-fitting tunic dress of copper and gold, Jamie in black slacks and a button-down green shirt. A brown cardigan hung across the back of a large, worn leather chair centered in the cutout of an even larger solid oak desk.

Normally, Jamie would tell his sister to stop pacing as it was making him nervous, but knowing that Claire was in the castle itself created a peaceful bubble around his emotions, protecting his heart. Anytime she was near, he felt calm. Centered, and at peace. Like nothing else in the world mattered.

Perhaps he was just as nervous as his sister, but not for the same reasons. He prayed to God that Claire liked her new bedroom, as it would be hers until they wed. He hoped with all his heart that the garden space and greenhouses isolated just for her would be enough to make her stay. He remembered how she came to life when working at her wee floral shop.

Perhaps, if she were to be his wife, his queen, Scotland’s Queen, she could live that life again. Except this time, she’d never wants for anything ever again. As her King and husband, he would gladly provide for her for the rest of her living days.

But there was the chance that it could all be for naught.

Claire still had the choice; Jamie was adamant about that from day one. She could say no. It was
her right as a Scottish citizen to say no without repercussion. She could outright refuse to become his wife. And, while it would utterly destroy him, Jamie would respect her choice, wish her the very best in life, and live the rest of his days as the only monarch in Scotland’s history to never marry or bear children.

It would be up to Jenny and Ian to bear Scotland’s future sovereign, if they so chose. If Claire did say no, he really hoped they didn’t choose to be a childless couple. How would Scotland manage without royal blood on the Scottish throne?

He was resigned to that fate, should it be so. There was no one for him other than Claire Beauchamp. She was his heart and soul already. And the thought of wedding anyone else caused that heart to painfully skip a beat.

But he was getting ahead of himself. There was a knock on the door of his study. Margot, Claire’s new private secretary (he’ll never stop praising Jenny for choosing her) entered.

“Yer Majesty, Yer Royal Highness,” Margot curtsied before the Fraser siblings. “Lady Claire Beauchamp.”

“Send her in. Thank ye, Margot,” Jamie said curtly.

Margot stepped out of the way and entered actual sunshine, in Jamie’s eyes. While it was clear all she did was wash her hair and change her clothes from the previous night, she was still the most beautiful woman he’d ever laid eyes on. It was like the first moment he saw her. The door closed behind her.

“Your Majesty, Your-”

“Sae long as I am Princess Broch Tuarach, ye willna be doing any o’ that in this castle ever again,” Jenny cut her off, gesturing for her to stand. “We…the three of us, in this room, are equals.”

Jamie squared himself, his nerves, and his face as Claire smiled warmly at them both. He wanted to make sure she couldn’t see the evidence of pure elation, and sheer terror, coursing through his body.

“Let me speak first, please,” Jenny said just as Claire opened her mouth. “I ken I’ve already beg yer forgiveness, but I wish tae do it betwix ye, me, and my brother. Because I owe him an apology just as much as I owe ye. I’ve wrong ye both sae much and I meant what I said, I’m so ashamed. I canna have ye wed my brother wi’ ye thinkin’ I hate ye.”

Claire saw the tears blooming in the princess’ eyes. She took Jenny’s hands into hers and smiled. “Jenny…may I call you that?”

Jenny nodded. “Aye, please.”

“Jenny, I already know you’re sorry. And, while your actions aren’t excusable, we can’t change what’s happened. It’s in the past. So…let’s move forward. Onto better days. Right?”

Jenny nodded and smiled so widely Claire swore the room became brighter. “Aye. Tae better days.”

Claire and Jenny embraced tightly, and Claire felt the warmth radiate from her. She stole a glance at Jamie, who was also smiling.

“Now,” Jenny said, “I’ll leave ye twa to it.”
Before Claire could say anything, Jenny curtsied to Jamie and was gone, leaving Claire alone with the King.

Her potential future husband.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire have a heart to heart about their future. Will what Jamie has to say influence Claire's decision?

Chapter Notes

Here’s another chapter for you lovely, beautiful, quarantine-bound people of the Tumblrverse! And it’s almost 5K words long. Whew, that’s a record for me! I seriously hope you all enjoy this because I REALLY enjoyed writing it! :D

CONTINUITY NOTE: So, if you’ve ever watched The Crown, you’ll probably noticed that I took inspiration a lot of how Queen Elizabeth II was coronated in the show, and added a few differences for Scottish…context? Lol. I didn’t do any research on this part, just went by what knowledge I already possessed. As always, this is canon for this story only, and nowhere else, aye? :)

Silence enveloped the study. No servants or maids could be heard wandering the halls. If there were sounds from the outdoors, they weren’t permeating the confines of this part of the castle. Jamie could hear his own heartbeat loudly, and quickly, disturbing his thoughts. This was the moment he was made for. He was King now; the leader of Scotland and Her People.

And here he stood before the woman he loved, the woman he wanted as his Queen, and he couldn’t say a fucking thing to her.

“You wished to see me, Jamie?” Claire finally said after the air got too stagnant for her to breathe. Jamie breathed a sigh of relief.

“Aye,” he said softly, hoping she couldn’t hear how fast his heart hammered like a broken drum. “Aye I did.”

“This wouldn’t happen to be about me becoming Queen of Scotland, would it?”
She was trying to be coy, attempting to lighten the mood. Had Jamie’s nerves not been on pins and needles, he might have laughed, or cracked a smile at least. But he was wound too tight. This really was a big deal to him, and his nation, and the time for jokes was long past.

“It’s no’ funny, Claire,” Jamie said sternly.

“Oh, sure it is,” Claire made her way towards one of the guest armchairs, equally as grand and leather-covered as his desk chair, and lazily straddled it from the side. “I think this is the perfect time to have a laugh or two about it, no?”

“No,” Jamie reinforced his stern voice. “This is seriously. I’m no’ asking this o’ ye lightly, ye ken that weel.”

“Do you?” Claire shot back, catching Jamie off guard. “I mean, sure, you’ve just become King of Scotland before your twenty-third birthday, but you were raised in this life. You were trained to do something, anything, that only someone with your status could possibly do. You were born royal. This is your life. But what about me?” She stood now, jamming a finger between her breasts. “Where do I come into this? Do you not think this isn’t going to affect my life?”

“O’ course I do, Claire, I-”

“I am speaking, and you can speak when I am finished,” she interrupted, again, catching Jamie off guard. “And if you are fortunate enough to have me as your Queen, you will get used to being interrupted.”

Jamie relented, and moved to sit down at his desk. Once he was comfortably planted, he gestured for Claire to continue.

“I can feel your anxiety from here. But can you feel mine? This is a big decision for me. It’s going to completely change every aspect of my life. That’s why I didn’t stay with you last night. I needed…I needed to talk to someone who wasn’t directly involved in this. A fellow commoner’s perspective.”

“Ye went tae Mrs. Graham’s.”

Claire nodded. “Which, you already knew. But that’s not the point. I needed time to think, time to process. I mean,” she took a breath, “I kinda already figured the path would lead me here…but there’s a big difference between thinking how things will go, and doing those things.”

“Aye.”

Another breath, two heartbeats, and, “The truth of the matter is…I’m not sure I can give you an answer today. My answer isn’t no…but it isn’t yes, either…do you understand?”

The moment that Jamie thought his world would come crashing down after being told anything but “yes” never came. Actually…he felt satisfied.

Claire looked at him. “You may speak now, though. I’m finished.”

Jamie sat there looking down at what used to be his father’s desk. A lot of historical things had happened where he now was. Not just from his father’s reign, but his grandsire and his father before him, and so on and so forth.

Every Fraser born at Lallybroch Castle from the start of the Scottish Empire had their birth certificates drafted, stamped, and signed at this desk. Jamie and Jenny’s included. Jamie hoped and
prayed that his and Claire’s children would help continue that time-old tradition.

What was dubbed “The Second Jacobite Rising of ’45” ended with his grandsire drafting documents calling for Scottish military actions to be taken should the English invade Her borders. Those papers were signed just below where Jamie’s hands now rested.

When Willie first became ill, he walked into this study, hopped into his father’s lap, and puked all over the inside of “the King’s blue box” which holds all the paperwork He’s required to do as sovereign. The poor prince threw up so much at once, it overflowed and everything inside was completely decimated.

Brian had no trouble having them all replaced, and by the afternoon, he was able to get those documents back on his desk, puke free. Though, most of them weren’t touched until the end of the week as Willie’s health went downhill very fast. That horrible day would be the last time Prince William, the original heir apparent, would ever come into that study.

His parents’ marriage certificate was also drafted, stamped and signed at this desk. In fact, if Jamie remembered correctly, one of the drawers still held the original document. After his mother died, Jamie would sneak into his father’s study to look at it. To gaze upon his mother’s own signature. The only remnant of her existent in the eyes of his eight-year-old self.

Time stood still as Claire patiently waited for Jamie to respond. Part of her wanted to demand it, stop him from keeping her in suspense. But the other part, the more rational part, knew he needed time to noodle through what she’d just said. The moment he took a deep breath and stood up almost startled her out of her skin.

“Will ye stay wi’ me?” It was a simple question, but one with a significant impact. “Will ye live among us? Here at Lallybroch Castle?”

Claire didn’t answer right away. Jamie sensed trepidation.

“I may no’ be yer husband…yet…but I am yer King. Ye willna have tae want fer anything else ever again whilst ye live here. Dinna do it fer me though. That would be too easy. Do it fer yerself. Because ye want to."

Claire looked up at him; despite his words, he did want her to stay here. That was enough for her. She smiled.

“I’d be honored to be your guest here at Lallybroch Castle.”

“Guest?” Jamie said, confused, then chuckled. “Och no. Did ye no realize ye were given a title fer a reason?”

Claire’s brows furrowed as Jamie depressed a button on his call box.

“Yes, Yer Majesty?” Lord Murtagh’s voice rang out.

“Send in the Head of the Highland Royal Guard.”

“Aye, sir.”

A few minutes went by before a man knocked on the door of the study. Jamie called for him to enter. He saluted his King, bowed, and said, “ye requested an audience, Yer Majesty?”

Jamie pointed directly at Claire and said, in his most authoritative voice, “This is Lady Claire
Beauchamp of Inverness, originally of England. I am officially designating her with the same status as Princess Janet. She is tae be treated and revered in the same manner as any princess of the land. She is tae be addressed as ‘Lady Beauchamp’ or simply ‘Milady’ no matter the circumstances. Her word is final as if it were my own. I will have my private secretary draw up the papers to finalize it. Is that understood?”

Claire blinked as she looked from Jamie’s stern face to the leader of Scotland’s Royal protection guard. The man saluted him once more, then bowed, before saying, “Aye. It will be done, Yer Majesty.” And with that, he was gone.

Claire looked back at Jamie.

“Ye may have been born a commoner, but as of today, under my rule, ye are one of us. I’d like tae see the council try to fight that decree.”

“But, I thought a non-royal woman could only become a princess if she married a prince…”

“Yer right… good thing yer tae wed a king.”

Jamie regretted those words the second they left his mouth.

“I-I’m sorry, Claire…I didna mean tae offend ye…”

“No, it’s alright. Like I said…this is new for all of us.”

“Aye.”

Jamie summoned his private secretary and family solicitor, an older man by the name of Ned Gowan, and within an hour, Claire was now, official, a member of the royal family. So to speak. Her new status wouldn’t hold up in court, but at the very least, if a commoner tried anything against her, they’d have to answer directly to Himself for their actions. It was comforting.

The sun was starting to sink below the horizon by the time Gowan left. Jamie walked over to a cabinet that held a crystal glass bottle of a liquid that matched Claire’s eye color almost exactly, and two crystal tumblers.

“May I request yer company fer a dram, Milady?” Jamie asked.

“I think after the events of today, we could both use a few.”

“Aye,” Jamie chuckled. He poured her a glass first, then one for himself. “Sláinte mhath, Sassenach.”

“Cheers.”

They clinked their glasses together. The burn of the whisky felt revealingly warm, and Claire’s limbs started to emerge from their seemingly frozen state.

“Ye ken,” Jamie said after some time, “now that I think about it…this whole stramash between us bein’ together… ‘tis no different than when my parents were betrothed.”

“Really?” Claire said, suddenly very eager and excited to hear a story about Jamie’s family.

“Aye…well, ye ken, over the years, no’ everyone in Scotland was verra happy that Clan Fraser was the ruling clan?” Claire nodded. “Well…there were many times when the Scottish people, particularly rival clans, tried tae overthrow the Frasers in power at the time. My great-grandsire,
King James II, had at least one assassination attempt on his life.”

“Oh my,” Claire said, taking another sip of her drink. “You said King James II? Were you named after him too?”

“Nah,” Jamie sighed happily, reveling in the memory bubbling up in his mind, “nae, my mother was verra keen on me being named after the first King James, the one that started the Fraser Clan dynasty. There were many a story about him during the Jacobite Rising, where Scotland took its independence from the England. Stories of courage, and bravery, and, let’s be fair…stupidity. The stars aligned that night at Culloden Moor. So many things that could have gone wrong, should have gone wrong, and didna. We wouldna be sitting here, sharing a dram in the state of things, if Scotland had lost in the ‘45 rebellion.”

“True,” Claire said, remembering some things she’d learned in school. “Can you imagine not being able to wear your kilt, or any kind of tartan? Or being forbidden from speaking Gàidhlig? From what I remember, had the English won that fateful day, they’d planned to eradicate the entire Highland culture.”

“Och, I ken it weel. Part of a royal’s education, especially when they’re next in line tae be sovereign, is to have all of Scotland’s history embedded in our minds. Lest we forget…”

They both took another drink.

“But, I’m gettin’ off topic,” Jamie went on. “The Frasers have many an enemy among the other clans. Despite being distant kin, the Frasers and the MacKenzies werenae on the friendliest terms. No’ as bad as, say, Clan Grant, or MacDonald, but all the same…

“My mother was supposed tae wed a Grant. While my maternal grandsire didna want his eldest daughter in an arranged marriage, the council decided it ‘twas best if my father marrit someone from an opposin’ Clan tae bring forth some united peace among them. The Grants and the MacKenzies are more enemies than the Frasers and Grants. My mother’s father had had more death threats and assassination attempts than the king himself!

“Weel, as ye can imagine…my mother didna want anything tae do wi’ the Grants. She was worrit about it and was crying on the front steps of Castle Leoch during a gathering…when my father found her, offered her his handkerchief.”

“That’s how it all started?” Claire asked amused. “A simple handkerchief and it was love at first sight?"

“Aye, aye it did.” Jamie was beaming, his smiling stretching across his entire face. “They talked for what seemed like hours. By the end of the night, they’d made an arrangement. If my father could get her out of Castle Leoch wi’out being found out, she’d agree tae marry him. My father was still a prince at the time, but my grandsire, King Fraser of Lovat as was his official title, was on his way out. He’d had horrible health fer some time. He kent he needed tae find a royal bride before takin’ the Scottish Crown fer himself.

“So she slipped out that night, when they kent all the men of the Clans would be pish-blind wi’ drink, and everything was goin’ weel… until Da tripped over a tin can just outside the stables, causing all the horses tae start losin’ their heids!”

They both laughed. “That must have caused quite a stir!” Claire smiled.

“Ye have no idea. Lord Jacob MacKenzie ordered the best hunting men of the Clan tae find my
mother and track her down, hog tie her tae a car and drive her back to Leoch! But they werena able
tae find her. Once my grandsire had passed away, my father got the approval from the council tae
wed my mother. At that point, there was nothing Clan MacKenzie could do or say tae change it.”

Jamie sombered a bit, his smile fading.

“Fer the longest time, I’d never met my mother’s side o’ the family. Her father and mother were
both dead by the time I was born. All but her youngest sister were dead, and my Aunt Jocasta had
moved to the States to start a distillery business wi’ her husband, my Uncle Hector. Hell, my
grandmother Anne was gone while my mother was pregnant with Jenny. My uncles, Colum and
Dougal, were too busy tearin’ at each other’s throats tae concern themselves wi’ my mother’s
dealings. So, it was mostly just us Frasers here. But my father came from a big family. The oldest
o’ ten children in all, so lots of cousins fer me and my siblings.

“After my mother died though, my father pushed them all away. He was too swallowed up wi’ grief
and needed tae focus on ruling Scotland. Before Willie’s death, we used tae go to school with a lot
of them in Cranesmuir, the neighboring village. We didna have a royal education until it became
apparently it would be needed sooner rather than later. It…it got verra lonely.”

Claire’s heart broke for Jamie. “Is that where your ‘womanizing bad boy’ persona came from, do
you think?”

“Aye, mebbe,” Jamie said, not looking up. “I think it was all the incidents happenin’ sae close
together. First Willie, then Mam, and…and Robbie.”

“Robbie?”

Jamie swallowed. “My mother was pregnant wi’ what would have been my younger brother, when
she died. She…she bled too much during the birth…the, erm…the doctors couldn’a stop it.”

A tear escaped Claire’s eye, and she instinctively wrapped her arms around Jamie’s middle. She
half expected him to pull back, but her warmth rooted him in his seat. He wrapped an arm around
her back, and they sat like that for a while.

“I guess what I’m tryna say is, Sassenach,” Jamie disentangled himself from Claire’s embrace to
face her, eye to eye, heart to heart. “If members from two wartorn, feuding clans can managed to
make it work…so can we.”

Claire couldn’t stop herself. She pushed her lips onto Jamie’s and kissed him like she needed air to
breathe. Before she even realized what she was doing, Jamie wound a large hand into her hand and
pulled her closer into him. They were breathing for one another for a good minute or so before they
both got ahold of their faculties and separated. Neither of them said anything. They just stared at
each other, their racing hearts coming down to an even rhythm.

—

July 1969
Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser

Claire’s life did indeed flourish living at the castle with Jamie, Jenny, and the serving staff. True to
his word as King, Claire was treated with the same dignity and respect that Jenny was born with.
They truly were all equals.

After the first few months, Claire managed to rearrange the entire floor plan of all three
greenhouses and garden plots. The serving staff all proclaimed Claire to be “nighean Airmed,” or “daughter of Airmed.”

“Who’s Airmed?” Claire asked Margot.

“On Celtic mythology, Airmed is the goddess o’ healin’ and herbalism. Legend says that her father was verra jealous and killed her brother, Miach. When she wept over her Miach’s grave, her tears caused all the herbs in the world tae sprout at once. While collectin’ them, her father became jealous again and attacked, causing Airmed tae drop all the herbs on the ground. It is said that because of this, no human truly kents all the secrets of herbalism.”

This only influenced Claire’s decision to keep the garden stocked with as many useful herbs as possible, in addition to the flowers, fruits and vegetables flourishing already. Anytime she needed anything, just one word to Margot and the seeds would arrive the following day.

More time than not, Jenny and Claire found themselves enjoying each other’s company in the gardens, talking and laughing with each other as they pruned herbs or pulled weeds. Before she knew it, Claire and Jenny had become the best of friends. They found themselves sharing clothes and outfits, going on that rare shopping trip together (with ample security around them, naturally), and spending some night getting drunk on wine and talking until the sun came up. More than once, Jamie found Claire and Jenny passed out in each other’s arms with the record player blaring some latest upbeat jazz tune; it had been apparently the two women were dancing their hearts out. All he’d do was lay a large blanket over them and shut the door behind him, not letting out his busting laughter until he was far away in his study.

—

12 November 1969
Our Royal Lady of Divinity Abbey
Edinburgh, Scotland
7:00 am Local Time

The stage was set. The throne was brushed, polished and primed. The television cameras were ready to broadcast. Dignitaries, clans, and other royals from around the world had been arriving all morning and gathering at the sacred Scottish Catholic cathedral where royal members congregated for Mass every Sunday. Now, it was the site of history in the making.

Prince James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser was in a private, locked room, deep within the underbelly of the cathedral, being formally prepared for anointing as King of Scotland. His official royal title would become King James Alexander Fraser of Scotland, and informally, for the papers and television news segments, King James III of Scotland.

Jamie wore the same set of robes, jewels, and garments that his father wore at his coronation some thirty years before. His long red hair was styled in a way that would allow him to keep it down, but not get in the way when the illustrious red-and-gold Scottish Crown was placed upon his head. He knew somewhere in the cathedral, the Royal Sword that would adorn the empty scabbard at his hip, and Royal Scepters were being polished and prepared for the coronation ceremony while he stood on a stool, being treated like a doll being dressed up for a tea party.

“I dinna wish tae be painted, please,” Jamie said impatiently to one of the many makeup artists in the room. They gave him a strange look, but given he was about to become their King, didn’t argue. Jamie huffed in annoyance. They coulda put up at LEAST a wee grumble, he thought.

He didn’t know why he was in such a bad mood. Maybe it was factors from his past, the fact that
Willie was supposed to be here, not him. Maybe it was the months leading up to his father’s death were finally starting to take a toll on him, the guilt and regret of his actions weighing on his conscience. Or maybe it was the fact that, because Claire wasn’t royal nor yet legally allowed to be taken as his bride, she wasn’t allowed anywhere near the Abbey. She was given a lavish room at Lallybroch Castle to watch the coronation in front of the largest television money could buy. But she was just like everyone else in this scenario: once the actual anointing happened, the telly screens would show the Scotland National Coat of Arms until it was complete.

The way a Scottish monarch was coronated wasn’t that much different than the way the Church of England and Wales anointed their kings and queens. It was a sacred ritual, a sacrament between God Himself and the anointing monarch in question. Before now, this kind of event was not televised. King Brian’s was televised in a way, but only on Scotland’s own closed circuit television network. No one outside of Scotland watched as Brian Fraser became Brian IV. Jamie’s ascension to King would be watched by everyone in the collective United Kingdoms of Britannia, as Scotland, England and Wales were officially called as a singular unit of land.

The actual anointing would be covered up and hidden from even the dignitaries in the cathedral hall itself; a large blue and silver canopy mirroring Scotland’s flag would be placed above Jamie’s seated form. His hands, the hollow crevice at his breast, and his forehead would be adorned with a single cross with holy oil. This particular oil blend is only made when a new monarch comes into power and only one batch is created for the ceremony, then once the ceremony is complete, it is burned in a deep pit far away from civilization with only the officiating priest in attendance. That priest is bound by the Catholic Church and cannot to leave the burning pit unattended until the fire is completely out. Which could take several hours or days, depending on the weather.

Maybe that’s why Jamie was so bothered this morning; had Claire already been made his wife, she too would be anointed alongside him as Queen and therefore be sitting to his left. The fact that she wasn’t here in this building with him has his heart pounding furiously with anxiety and fear. But fear for what, he wasn’t sure.

“Yer Majesty,” Jamie looked up to see Murtagh standing in the threshold of the room. A small smile spread across the young monarch’s face for the first time that day.

“It’s time.”

Jenny, Ian, and Claire were in one of the less used parlors at Lallybroch Castle with an ample supply of tea, scones and cakes courtesy of one Mrs. Graham, who was invited to stay and join them for their “wee watch party,” as Ian called it.

Claire was enjoying the company, but she was edgy. This would be the first time she would be seeing Jamie as her King, in his full Sovereign regalia. The last time she saw him was very early this morning, around four, and he’d kissed her cheek in a quiet goodbye. She barely recognized it was him until she smelled the soap he normally used, fragrancing her nostrils with pine and mint, but by then he was already gone.

“Och, quiet, it’s starting!” Jenny exclaimed.

Everyone glued their eyes to the television set, and when Jamie started his slow descent towards the throne specially made for this ceremony, Jenny gasped aloud, Ian whooped in cheer, and Mrs. Graham dabbed at her eyes, saying he was “sae bonny!”

But Claire…didn’t say or do anything except stare, jaw agape and emotions awry. Despite color...
television being around for about a decade and a half now, the images dancing across her field of vision did not to her King justice.

She was informed by Jenny that the actual annointing and ceremony wouldn’t take but twenty minutes or so. Jamie would read from a scroll that more or less stated the same Oath he took at Court six months prior, and then he would be covered up for the actual annointing ritual. Once the anointing was over with, the bishop would then proclaim Jamie as King of Scotland, and he’d make another slow descent to the royal carriage and paraded around Edinburgh before several grueling hours of photography rounds.

“Dinna be surprised if Jamie comes back tae Lallybroch and wants tae immediately take ye tae bed and sleep for three days, Claire,” Jenny had laughed, which caused Claire to spit tea into her lap.

Watching Jamie in this manner, this fashion…it made her want to do more than just sleep, though. She knew well enough he was a beautiful young man. But that wasn’t what initially attracted her to him. When she finally got past the arrogant, seemingly egotistical spoiled prince side of him, she saw his true heart. What got her attention was the fact that when he loved, he did it with his whole heart, soul, and body. When he cared about someone, nothing got in the way of seeing that person safe and well. Now, seeing him as sovereign, she knew he was about to take that caring empathy and amplify it to a whole new level.

And oh, was she here for that.

Just like Jenny said, the ceremony was over in almost the blink of an eye, and once the Crown was atop his head, the Royal Sword sheathed in the jewel-encrusted scabbard at his right hip, and the scepters in his hands, all in the room proclaimed in unison.

“Dia ga dhìon fhèin! GOD DEFEND HIMSELF!”

—

Tired, aching, hungry, and in dire need of either a hot bath, a dram, three thousand hours of sleep, or all of the above, Jamie was escorted back to Lallybroch Castle at around one in the morning. He’d told everyone at the castle that there would be no need for a lavish homecoming or feast this night; he would be too exhausted to indulge anyone other than himself. So he grabbed an apple from one of the fruit stands in the dining hall and made his way towards the one person he hadn’t been able to get off his mind the whole day.

Claire.

Surprisingly, she was still awake as he could see the reading lamp on from the crack in the bottom of the closed doorway.

Did she wait up fer me?

He lightly knocked on the door, and didn’t answer until he heard a faint, “come in.”

“Sassenach,” he breathed as if it were his last.

“Welcome home, Your Majesty,” Claire smiled dreamily. Jamie walked across the room and sat on the edge of her bed. “I bet you could sleep like the dead if given the opportunity.”

He growled his amusement. “Dinna tempt me, Sassenach. I just might take ye up on that.”
“I never said you could sleep with *me*,” Claire laughed.

“Who wouldna pass up a chance tae sleep wi’ the King of Scotland?” Jamie mused, raising a ruddy eyebrow.

Claire playfully slapped his arm with a giggle. “Fair enough…”

Jamie’s gaze intensified into a more serious nature. “Will ye, Claire?” She blinked at him. “Will ye come tae my bed this night? I willna force meself on ye…I…I just dinna wish tae sleep alone.”

Claire had been secretly hoping Jenny’s words earlier that day would ring true. That Jamie would want a bed fellow after the events of today. She set her open book aside, not bothering to replace the bookmark, and slipped out of the covers and reached for his proffered open hand.

But when she took it, he immediately got down on one knee.

“I’m no’ asking this of ye as yer King… but as a man in love.” Jamie placed his other hand over his sternum. “My heart… beats stronger when yer wi’ me. I’m happier and feel lighter when yer in the same building as me. I dinna wish tae let ye go. I love ye, Claire Beauchamp. I am asking ye this night, no’ as Sovereign, but as a young man who’s found the love of his life. Will ye become my queen? My wife? Will ye stand by my side fer the rest o’ yer living days, as I pledge tae do fer ye?”

Claire didn’t even have to think about it. She already knew. She knelt down in front of him and kissed him with her own heart, full of love for him.

“It would be my pleasure, Jamie.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Not everyone is happy for the royal couple.

Chapter Notes

I know it’s been a long time since I last updated this series. My mind has been in a funk with my state officially being shut down. But, I am happy to report that I am COMPLETELY FINISHED with writing The Royal House of Clan Fraser! YAY! So, expect one more chapter, then the finale, in the near future! HUZZAH! Enjoy! :D

3 December 1969
Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser
9:46am Local Time

Jamie was sitting on a bench in the Royal Gardens, watching Claire work the ground, sipping his morning coffee.

“I won’t lie, even if you didn’t wish to marry me,” Claire said through huffing breaths, wiping dirt from her face (which only added more, Jamie noted amusingly), “I could live out here in these gardens for the rest of my days as a professional gardener and never grow bored. The ground here is so easy to work with. I feel I could plant anything!”

“Aye, well, seeing as I do plan to wed ye,” Jamie smiled, “while ye’d no’ be the groundskeeper, as Queen, these garden are yers to command. I’ll make sure o’ it, mo nighean donn.”

Claire smiled back at him before going back to her tilling. Jamie continued to watch her work, regularly impressed and amazed by her love for all things Mother Earth. Every movement she made was a pray of thanks to God himself. How her wrists bent holding her wee tools, the careful action of moving earth around some potted posey or new herb, the satisfied smile on her face as she watered the freshly buried plant. Jamie wondered if there would ever come a time where Claire would stop dazzling him with the way she…was.
“Well,” Claire said with a gratifying plop of gloved hands against her gardening overalls, “that’s all I can do for now with these particular herbs. The weather report says the first frost should be here within another week or so…these chervil plants should thrive.”

“Oh aye?” Jamie helped her stand up, and couldn’t help but brush away some of the dirt in her hair, which was bundled up in a loose, bumblebee-type bun with a bandana covering most of it, “and what uses will these wee chervil plants have?”

Claire smiled as they made their way inside, remembering how when they first met, all he would do is ask about the plants and flowers in her shop. A small pang of sadness crossed her heart as she remembered her floral shop. “Well, they have an aniseed taste to them, but like parsley, you can chop them up and use them as a garnish, or add them to salads, soups or sauces. If you eat them fresh, or grind them into a drink, they can aid in digestion and relieve head colds.”

“We havena lost yer knowledge wi’ wee herbs, I see,” Jamie chuckled as they walked through the vast hallways of Castle Lallybroch. The guards posted around the castle would stand at their tallest attention and bow their head towards their King. A few maids were passing by and they curtsied before both Jamie and Claire, addressing Jamie as “Yer Majesty” and Claire as “Yer Royal Highness.”

“It’s not something I’m likely to forget,” Claire answered, “but one thing I don’t think I’ll ever get accustomed to is being addressed so…formally.”

Jamie laughed. “Aye, well, it’s only gonna get worse when ye become queen.”

“I hope I can grow accustomed to it…provided we actually are allowed to marry.”

“Dinna fash, Sassenach,” Jamie said softly, kissing her cheek. “All will be weel.”

Though inside, Jamie was starting to grow increasingly anxious. Awaiting the council’s decision on whether or not to repeal the law forbidding him from marrying Claire was the most tedious thing he’d ever had to do in his life, if he was being honest with himself.

Rightfully so, he could have overturned the council’s decision to review the matter, but he remembered a bit of advice his father had given him years ago.

“The council is there to give advice to the sovereign, and to ensure he or she does not abuse their God-annointed powers as such. But, as King, ye are entitled tae denounce their decisions, if ye find the council’s advise tae be unsound, in regards tae the Scottish people. Ye safeguard Her land, and Her people. It ’tis yer duty tae always uphold that sacred bond betwix’ ye and Scotland.”

Jamie had decided his best course of actions was to let the council do their duty by him, as King. If their decisions did not fall within his favor, he would reject them, proclaim as Sovereign that Claire was to be Queen, and fuck all what anyone thinks. He’d thought long and hard about it, and determined that, while there would be people who didn’t agree with his decision to marry a commoner, it would not upset the balance of Scottish life, culture, or commerce, foreign nor domestic.

“Are you alright, Jamie?” Claire’s honey-smooth voice snapped Jamie back to the present. “You had a faraway look in your eyes. Are you well?”

Jamie stopped just outside the main living room and smiled. He took the hand that was previously affixed to his arm, and brought her knuckles to his lips for a kiss. “Aye, Sassenach. I’m well.”

“Yer Majesty! Yer Royal Highness!” a shrill voice called to them from down the hall. When they
looked up, it was Margot. And she looked as though someone just offered her a million pounds with no string attached.

“Margot?” Claire said, with some concern laced in her voice, “whatever is the matter?”

“A joyous day indeed! It’s all over the telly! Come quickly! Big news from the council!” Margot breathed, bending over to catch her breath but not daring to stop speaking.

Jamie righted her back to a standing position and lightly rubbed her back. “Easy, lass. Slow down a wee bit, or ye’ll run out o’ air! What’s all over telly, then?”

“Ye simply must see it fer yerself, Yer Majesty! Now, come!” Margot cleared her throat, curtsying before the both of them. “Erm, please, Milord, Milady. This way.”

Jamie smiled at her and gestured for her to lead them to the parlor, where the big television was still sitting from his televised coronation ceremony. When they walked in, Jenny and Ian were practically jumping up and down with excitement.

“Och, bràthair!” Jenny threw her arms around Jamie the second she was done with her own tight curtsy. She repeated the gesture to Claire as Ian came forward and bowed before them. “God has blessed ye indeed!”

Jamie watched as the Lord President of the Royal Council was making what appeared to be a prepared statement. He only caught the tail end of his speech, but it was enough to make him weep for joy.

“...the will and pleasure of the Royal Council tae declare that the Royal Marriages Act of 1764 shall, from this day forth, be repealed and dispelled from Scottish Law. Therefore, on behalf of King James III, we proclaim His will and pleasure tae marry Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp, on the 24 day of January, in the Year of Our Lord, 1970.”

Jamie and Claire shouted with delight, Jamie took Claire into his arms and spun her around, Claire’s joyous roars of giggles sounded throughout the room and halls of the castle. Most of the serving staff had crowded around the entrance to the parlor and were now joining in with the cheers and clapping soon intertwined with the sounds.

“Three Cheers fer His Majesty and his Future Bride, Our Queen!”

Three rounds of “hip hip, hoorah!” accompanied Jamie taking Claire into a more intimate embrace and kissing her to the point where she was left breathless. They smiled into each other’s lips.

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6 December 1969
Lallybroch Castle
Seat of the Royal House of Clan Fraser
4:14pm Local Time

The next few days were less of a weight on Jamie’s chest now that he knew he would not need to exercise his sovereign ability to overrule the council. He was free to marry Claire and she was now within His power to become Queen of Scotland. Hell, at this point, he could marry any girl he so chose. But from the moment he laid eyes on her at Beauchamp’s Bountiful Bouquets, almost a year ago, there was no other woman for him on the planet. She was his heart, soul, body, blood and bone. And he would make sure she always knew it for the rest of their lives.
He walked into the parlor where his future bride and his sister were watching the television. But he could feel the tension in the room. Jenny had a sour look on her face as she knitted a blanket in her lap, while Claire looked like she’d just seen a ghost.

“What’s amiss, lasses?” Jamie asked. Neither one of them stood to curtsy, and that was fine. He’d been telling Jenny for years that if it was just them in the room together with kin, there was no need for formalities. He was thankful Claire was taking his advice. Besides, judging by the looks on their faces, he could’ve come in and shouted that there was a bomb in the gardens about to detonate and they wouldn’t have heard him.

“Outrageous!” Jenny spat, “the audacity! Dinna fash yerself on their accounts, Claire. They dinna ken their words!”

“I’m not so sure,” came Claire’s abnormally feeble tone. Jamie was shocked at the sound of her voice, which was usually loud and proud. But grew even more shocked when he read the words on the telly screen.

Not All of Scotland Happy for the Royal Couple

“Iffrin,” Jamie cursed, and immediately, the doubts started rolling through his mind.

“I ken the King has suffered a lot in his short life, but takin’ a Sassenach as a bride, and a puir one at that?!?”

“King Brian, God rest his soul, must be rollin’ in his crypt right now!”

“She hasna pence tae her name! What makes her more special or worthy than the hundreds of actual living princesses around the world?!”

“I’m sure King James has his heart in the right place, but this breaks wi’ tradition! He canna possibly think just because the council approves-”

“Turn it off,” Jamie commanded, and a servant walked into the room, bowed before him, and switched off the television. He went to Claire and knelt down before her. “Listen to Jenny, mo ghràidh, and dinna fash on their words. Ye are about tae become Queen. They’re just jealous, aye?”

“If you say so,” Claire said somberly, without looking at him. She got up from her chair and left the room.

Jamie and Jenny looked at each other.

“I can go talk to her, if ye like,” Jenny started to get up, but Jamie held up his hand, stopping her.

“Nae, let her go,” Jamie said gently. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned from Claire, it’s that sometimes she needs her space. Tae think, ye ken. Best give it to her fer now. I can talk wi’ her about it later if it’s still on her mind.”

“Are ye alright, Jamie?” Jenny asked, looking up with concern.

“Aye,” Jamie replied, though his face was starting to betray him; his sister knew him almost as well as he knew himself. He could not fool her. “It’s just…I worry…”

“About what?” Jenny said, waving an arm at him to sit down. “Is it about Claire? Yerself? Gettin’ cold feet, are ye?”
Jamie knew she was only jesting, but it still stung a bit. “More like I worry Claire is gettin’ cold feet. It bothers me when she’s bothered, ye ken. I can feel it in my soul, when she’s unhappy. I dinna want her tae be unhappy here, but her future is no’ going tae be as pleasant as it was when she ran the floral shop. Times will be hard. It’s been hard fer us at times, and we were born to it. I want tae be able tae provide her happiness, peace, safety and security, but—”

“Ye dinna want tae keep her against yer will either,” Jenny supplied.

“Aye.”

“And, if she were to leave ye…”

“I willna recover.”

The finality of his words resonated with the princess. She felt the same way about Ian, though the circumstances were vastly different between the royal siblings.

“I ken,” Jenny said after a moment. “All I will say is…follow yer heart, Jamie. Ye canna get it wrong if it’s the truth.”

—

10:27pm Local Time

Later that night, Jamie and Claire were readying for bed. Claire was attempting to tame her hair’s ruthless curls in the bathroom and Jamie was already in bed, sitting up while reading the evening edition of the paper.

Claire crawled into bed and Jamie turned off the nightstand light.

“Are ye well, Sassenach?” Jamie asked tentatively.

“Yes,” Claire responded, but the tone of her voice proved her wrong.

“Claire,” Jamie turned her to face him. “I willna ever ask ye tae give what ye canna. But there’s one thing that we must be in agreement with. Honesty. When ye tell me something, let it be the truth. And I promise ye the same. Aye?”

After a moment, she nodded. “I agree.”

“Now…what troubles ye, mo ghràidh?” Jamie wrapped his arms around her, and her head dropped to his bare chest.

“Are you sure I am the right person to be Queen?” Claire asked. When Jamie looked down at her, she went on. “I mean it…if the people of Scotland can’t see me as being fit…how can you? They’re your subjects. Don’t you trust them?”

Jamie took a deep breath before answering.

“I only trust them as far as I can throw them. And that isna saying much.”

“But, wh—”

“Claire,” Jamie implored. He sat up, turned the night lamp back on, and faced her once more. “I didna choose ye as my bride because of some…old tradition that demands obligation before love. I chose ye because I love ye. When ye speak, my heart listens to ye ‘afore I do. When ye laugh, my
blood sings wi’ yer happiness. When ye smile, it’s as if the sun comes out on a cloudy day. Ye may think me a daft right fool, but I love ye.” He brings her hands to his lips, kissing them tenderly. “It doesna matter what they think. They willna have a choice but tae bow before ye as their Queen.”

Claire’s eyes filled with tears. She’d been feeling the weight of those people’s words on her heart all day. But it was like Jenny had said. They were just words. Jealous words. And Jamie was right too. No matter what the people say, it is his will that she become Queen. His Queen.

“I do love you, Jamie,” Claire whispered.

Their lips embraced, and their hearts beat in sync. “I love ye too, mo nighean donn.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

After much trial, tribulation, bumps and curves in the road to happiness, a royal wedding takes place.

Chapter Notes

I COMPLETELY forgot to update this, so SURPRISE! Here's the rest of the series!

24 January 1970
Our Royal Lady of Divinity Abbey
Edinburgh, Scotland
6:00am local time

Claire awoke that morning in a panicky daze. She couldn’t remember where she was or why she was there for a split second. But then, it hit her, and made her lie back down.

“Of course,” she smiled to no one. Giddiness and excitement began coursing through her veins at the speed of light. She turned her head to see a gorgeous, shimmering cream-white gown with three-quarter sleeves being displayed on a full-sized dress form. The tiara that would adorn her head and back-length veil were sitting on a red satin pillow on a counter next to the gown.

Today was the day she was going to become Queen of Scotland.

Her memory flashed back to the afternoon before. The last time she would see Jamie as a Scottish citizen. He was to stay at Lallybroch while she would stay the night at the Abbey itself.

“I’m grateful tae ye, Sassenach,” Jamie had said in the outdoor parlor. It was unusually warm and sunny for late January, and the royal couple were soaking up the nice weather while they could before they were to be legally separated before the wedding.

“Whatver for?” Claire asked. She wasn’t trying to play dumb, but her love for the young King had grown so much, she scarcely thought she’d be able to spend so much time away from him,
even if it was to get married. So, she lived for every moment Jamie spoke to her, whether it was praise or not.

“Ye ken why, Claire,” Jamie rolled his eyes, but indulged her. “Ye coulda run, coulda told me no. But ye didna. Ye love me, aye? I canna thank ye enough fer making me such a happy man.”

“Truthfully, I’m surprised you do still love me…I mean,” Claire took a deep breath, “I was so… rotten to you when we first met!”

“Aye…but ye had yer reasons…headstrong, stubborn reasons, but aye…” they both laughed. “But.. ye ken that’s what made it harder to let ye go… Ye dinna let anyone take advantage o’ ye. Yer determined tae see that ye get what ye believe ye deserve. Yer humble, and honest. I’m surprised no one else had a fancy fer ye when we met… God was lookin’ out fer me when he put ye in my path.”

She blushed at that. She never would have imagined her stubborn nature and headstrong determination to survive and live peacefully would attract a man. But then again, James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser wasn’t just any man.

He was her king. And the following morning would see her annointed as His Queen.

“Good mornin’, Yer Royal Highness!” Margot walked into her room, which for an abbey, looked like a royal suite at a glance, and pulled the curtains away to reveal yet another beautiful, sunny day in Scotland. “Today’s the day! Are ye excited? Nervous?”

Claire stretched and yawned. “Not as much as I probably should be.”

“Aye, that’s a good sign, is it no’?” Margot started making tea for the both of them. “Do ye mind if I have some tea meself, Milady?”

“Of course not,” Claire said with a look of concern, “you have to take care of yourself too. Have you had breakfast yet?”

“Weel, no, but I-”

“Not another word, Margot. I want you to go and have yourself a full breakfast before we even talk about my wedding alright?” Margot blanched a bit. Claire smiled. “Consider it your first order of business from now on. If you come to greet me and you haven’t attended to your own needs first, I won’t be happy.”

Margot smiled, her face going slightly pink around the apples of her cheeks. “As ye say, Yer Royal Highness.” She curtsied and left the room.

That did two things for Claire. One, it ensured Margot would always make sure she was taken care of before she attended the private secretarial duties of her queen. And two, it would give Claire some time to drink her tea in peace. Who knows when she’d ever be able to do that again.

An hour later, Margot came back, a full belly and wide smile in tow, and the two of them began the daunting task of preparing the future Queen for sovereignty.

“I hope yer proud o’ me Da,” Jamie said to the wind.

He was sitting in his usual spot just below the crypts where his mother, father, and brothers lay resting. The only time he actually went inside the crypts were for actual funeral services. Which, in
his twenty-three years of life, was only three times. Once for each passing, doubling up for his mother and younger brother.

“I have a feeling ye would be,” Jamie went on, taking a swig from his flask. “I ken I shouldna be havin’ a dram ‘afore my own wedding, but what’s a Scot who doesna have a dram on such a day?”

He laughed at his own joke, imagining his father, and mother, laughing alongside him in agreement.

“She’s a bonny lass, ye ken,” Jamie pressed, “beautiful, smart, wicked talented, quite the green thumb, too! I think…” he paused for a moment before going on, taking a deep breath, “I think ye twa wouldna mind her being English…or a commoner. I think ye’d be happy tae see me happy. Wi’ a bride o’ my choosing.”

He was about to take another swish of whisky from his flask when he was approached by Murtagh.

“Are ye ready, lad?”

Jamie smiled up at him. “Aye.”

“Yer Mam and Da are proud o’ ye, a bhithair. Dinna ever think otherwise.”

“I never believed otherwise. Though, it does make it harder with them no’ bein’ here. I…I wish they were…here tae see me wed…”

“Aye,” Murtagh stepped closer to Jamie. “But then again, if they were…yon Willie would be king. And ye’d be free tae marry whomever.”

“Aye, true enough.”

“Now,” Murtagh clapped Jamie on the back. “Ready tae greet the Queen of Scotland?”

Jamie looked up at his Godfather, a wide, cheeky grin splitting his face wide. “I was born ready.”

—

*Our Royal Lady of Divinity Abbey*

*Main Chapel Hall*

*9:30am Local Time*

In his full King James III regalia, Jamie stood in front of the alter, with Murtagh at his side. His heart raced with a plethora of emotions, sweat was gathering at the center of his hands, and…am I shaking? The Abbey in Edinburgh was decorated with Clan Fraser’s royal colors, the guests were all seated and dressed in their wedding best, and the production crew for the televised version of the wedding were all ready to go.

All they were waiting on…was Claire.

“How long does it take a bride tae show up on her own weddin’ day?” Murtagh grumbled in Jamie’s ear.

“There’s preparations she take tae undergo, being she’s tae be anointed today. Dinna fash, a ghoistidh. She’ll be here.” Though, if Jamie were being honest with himself, the longer he stood there at the alter, the faster his heart beat and the more sweaty his palms grew. The nerves were starting to eat his insides raw, when the organs of the church began to sing loudly. Everyone stood
up in reverence to the bride’s arrival.

The moment Jamie saw her, though, was the moment he swore his soul tried to escape his body.

To say she was beautiful in her cream-white gown, veil and tiara would have done Claire as great dishonor. Words in no language Jamie spoke could adequately describe his bride as she walked down the aisle, Mrs. Graham proudly on her arm. To Jamie’s surprise, everyone whom Claire passed curtsied or bowed as she walked. This made Jamie so proud; she wasn’t officially queen yet, not until she was anointed, but everyone was treating her as such. The respect she was being afforded made him smile. Truthfully, if he smiled any wider, his lips would probably fall off.

The priest came forward after Claire and Mrs. Graham made it to the alter and boomed, “who giveth this woman tae be wi’ this man?”

Mrs. Graham puffed out her chest and proudly declared, “I do!”

Claire hugged Mrs. Graham, and the older woman gave her hand to Jamie.

“If I speak on yer beauty this day, I willna do ye justice, Sassenach,” Jamie said in a low whisper, his eyes shining with unspent tears of joy.

“I love you too, my lad,” Claire whispered back.

The wedding ceremony was as traditional as Catholics make it. That was one thing Jamie was thankful of; he didn’t have to fight anyone on the law dictating all Scottish monarchs are to be either wed Catholic, or convert to Catholicism prior to marriage. Albeit being baptized as such, after the death of her parents and eventual passing of her uncle and legal guardian, she hadn’t exactly live up to being a dutiful papist. She hadn’t been to a Sunday Mass in several years, and don’t bother asking her what the Stations of the Cross were, for she wouldn’t remember. But, when discussing the finer details of the wedding with Jamie, she didn’t object in the slightest to being married in a Catholic church, nor did she have any issue with resuming normal Catholic duties. Jamie didn’t hold her “past transgressions” as he called it, against her.

“So long as ye dinna fall short once yer Queen, Sassenach,” he told her. “The Official Church of Clan Fraser is the Roman Catholic Church. It wouldna do ye or the family any good tae be seen as a heretic.”

Claire laughed at this.

When it came to the exchanging of vows, both Jamie and Claire welled up with tears as they exchanged their official love for one another before God and the people of Scotland. But when Murtagh reached out for each of their wrists and slashed them both with his dirk, Claire had a split second to wonder exactly what in the hell she was getting herself to.

“Say the words after me,” Jamie told her, which calmed her down.

The words are in Gàidhlig, and mostly unfamiliar to her, but when it was over and both of them were bandaged up, the priest barely had time to say “ye made kiss yer bride,” before Jamie’s lips were on top of hers.

The crowd cheered, and the now-married couple were led out to the awaiting crowd just outside the Abbey.

“God Praise the Frasers!” they all bellowed out. The crowd went nuts when the two of them kissed before their people.
“Well now, Sassenach,” Jamie said, “are ye ready?”

Claire smiled at him, glowing and radiant as ever. “I was born ready.”

—

Our Royal Lady of Divinity Abbey  
Ascension Hall  
1:00pm Local Time

After a plethora of photography and the guests giving well wishes and wedding presents, Claire was changed out of her wedding clothes and dressed in what felt like an ivory and gold, silk and lace maxi dress, matching house slippers (she couldn’t describe them as anything but given how comfortable they were), and her tiara was replaced with… a Juliet cap? A breathable, cotton bit of fabric that wrapped the top of her head, but without the veil that usually accompanied it, adorned her head. She assumed whatever crown that was to be hers as Queen would replace it. Pomp and ceremony, Claire surmised.

But during the anointing, while the actual use of Holy Oil was hidden from everyone else, television viewers and ceremony attendees in the room, Jamie was right by her side. Maybe it was because he had been anointed himself? Or maybe it was because he was King, and therefore was entitled to be present? She didn’t know.

It was the next business item on the royal agenda that sent shock waves throughout the land.

Jamie, dressed in his own kingly regalia, actually got down on one knee before her. A fancy scroll was produced by her side, angled in a way for him to read it. He took her hands into his, before saying:

“I, King James III of Scotland, do herein forth declare it my will and pleasure, tae have ye, Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp Fraser, as my Queen. My vow to ye shall always be true, shall never waver, and thus, our union shall be of two hearts wi’ in one body. Wi’ this, I give ye my fealty and pledge ye my loyalty as yer King, and as yer husband. If ever my hand or action are raised against ye in rebellion-” he drew a short dirk that’s scabbard was hidden beneath his royal robes, “so help me God, I pray that ye pierce my heart wi’ this holy iron.”

Jamie kissed the flat, shiny side of the blade and presented it to her, bowing his head further. Claire took it into her hands (what else was she supposed to do, say “no thanks you can keep it”?) and squeezed his hand lightly. The crowd was a whispering buzz of murmurs as this took place. Claire didn’t dare take her eyes off Jamie. Once that was done, that’s when the real pomp and ceremony began.

“In accordance wi’ the Laws of Scotland, God The Almighty, and on behalf of the Catholic Church and the Royal House of Clan Fraser, I hereby proclaim ye, Claire Elizabeth, as Queen Claire Elizabeth Fraser of Broch Tuarach, Queen of Scotland!”

“Sàbhail Dia a ’Bhanrigh!”

“God Save The Queen!”

Everyone in attendance replaced their respective crowns on their heads. Jamie replaced his own crown on his head, while Claire was formally crowned and given her own scepter to hold. When she stood, she was draped in many jewels and a velvet cape that hung perfectly still along her slender shoulders.
Holding his own scepter in his opposing hand, the two of them made their grand ascension towards the Throne Room inside Lallybroch Castle as King and Queen, husband and wife. Much more photography commenced when the Royal Couple were seated in luxurious thrones side by side, commemorating and revering Scotland’s newest rulers.

—

Lachdanan Castle
Isle of Skye
9:45pm Local Time

“What is this place again?” Claire asked, braiding her hair and wearing nothing but a thin shift. Or, rather, her “bridal underlings.” She felt like she was living in the 18th century wearing such an ancient garment.

“Lachdanan Castle, Sassenach,” Jamie replied, who like her, was wearing nothing but a long white shirt. “It’s been in my family fer generations, dating long before Culloden was a thought in Bonny Prince Charlie’s mind.”

“I’m surprised it’s so well kept. Though it looks like even now, no one’s been here in many years,” Claire said.

“Aye well,” Jamie turned around to looked at her. “It’s a castle reserved fer newlyweds of Clan Fraser only. So…the last time anyone was here…was when my parents were marrit. It’s maintained, o’ course. But two weeks ‘afore anyone’s tae be marrit, it’s given a good spring cleaning.”

Claire laughed at this. Jamie was pouring her a glass of whisky while she lounged lazily on the soft, wide, four post bed at the center of the castle’s main bedchamber.

They clinked their glasses together and drank. But Jamie could see something was bothering his new bride.

“Tell me yer troubles, mo bhanrigh.” Jamie sat down beside her.

“Mo bhanrigh?” Claire repeated, furrowing her brows.

“My Queen,” Jamie smiled.

“What? No more calling me ‘sassenach’ now that I’m queen?” Claire joked. “I was finally growing accustomed to that rather bemused petname.”

Jamie leaned close to her, nuzzling her neck with feather lightness with his lips. “Only when we’re alone…sassenach.”

She laughed. “Well…I have questions…on a few things, really.”

“I bet ye do. What is it ye want tae know?”

Taking a breath, Claire said, “No doubt you heard the stirring about the abbey as you proclaimed me as Queen?”

Jamie nodded. “Aye. I had a feeling it would. It’s no custom, ye ken.”

“What’s not custom?”
“Tae proclaim we are partners as rulers of Scotland, rather than I the King and ye my Queen consort. Traditionally, my father made all the decisions as sovereign. And while my mother had powers of her own, all choices were no’ hers tae make.

“Now, wi’ us,” Jamie came to stand before her, “we are equal in this arrangement. We both make decisions. And I vow tae ye, that no decision I make willna be wi’out yer approval or consideration. I canna run this country wi’out ye, Sassenach. It’s why I fought so damn hard tae make ye my queen. Yer gonna make a fine ruler here, mo nighean donn.”

“I agree,” Claire said slowly, “and I promise you the same. Any decision we make, it should be together, with a unanimous backing, or not at all.”

“Aye,” Jamie agreed. “This will be the future of Scotland, make no mistake. We are the spark that could one day revolutionize monarchy.”

This declaration stirred something within Claire. She stood up abruptly and walked across the room. When she turned around, Jamie had a concerned look on her face.

“Take off your shirt.”

The ruddy brows furrowed further.

“I want to look at you.”

Slowly, and rather seductively, Jamie stood and walked towards her. He unbuttoned the wrist collars, and pulled the shirt over his head, discarding it onto the floor and without breaking eye contact with her.

He stood before her in all his naked glory. Sunkissed skin from years of outdoor activity, broad, expansive, and well-toned muscles rippled throughout his body, from arms and belly, down to his thighs, and in between. His hands were wide and slightly calloused from the short time he did manual labor, and his hair accented his body nicely, the multifaceted shades of red, gold, copper, cinnamon, roan, auburn, amber, and more making his ocean blue eyes pop out more in the golden light of the overhead chandelier.

Claire slowly did a three-sixty walk around him, touching him in various places. From one bicep, to the cinnamon-auburn tuffs growing on his chest, caressing his lower back, cupping one firm, round buttock, she was constantly marvelled that he wasn’t born of a sculpted statue. She veered her sight towards the same tuff of hair between his legs, surrounding a decent sized pair of testicles and a cock that made her wonder if he was, well, too big for her.

“Weel then,” Jamie said in a low growl, said cock coming to full wakeness and attention. “Fair’s fair.”

Claire looked up at him. He didn’t even have to say it, but did anyway.

“Take off yers as well.”

She obliged him, slowly undoing the small strings that kept the shift from exposing her breasts, and let it fall to the floor in much the same heap as Jamie’s shirt was.

Jamie blinked, sucked in a sharp breath, and took a step back to admire her. She always believed she was blessed in the way of womanly bumps and curves, as well as aesthetic appeal. The thatch of dark forest between her legs was just a brown and beautiful as the hair atop her head. Her breasts were the perfect size in his mind. Not too big, nor too small, perfect for his hands to fit nice and
neat. Her hips were narrow but not enough to hide her rounded arse with bone. The look on his face stayed stoic, like he was studying her for a future exam.

“I take it, with your past,” Claire said, her voice dripping with lust, “that you’ve seen a naked woman before?”

“Och, aye,” Jamie again growled, his intentions plain as day, “many times. From up close, and from afar.” He reached out and cupped her left breast into his hands. Her breath caught as he maneuvered his fingers a bit, as if to judge their weight and girth. It thrummed slightly with the frantic heartbeat in her chest, and he felt it. This only fueled his desires. “But never…have I seen a woman naked…that wasna mine.”

They were on each other faster than either of them could say “sassenach.”

—

14 February 1970
Our Royal Lady of Divinity Abbey
11:00am Local Time

“Ye may kiss yer bride.”

Three weeks after Jamie and Claire married, they had the pleasure of watching as Princess Janet of Broch Tuarach married the love of her life, Ian MacLeod Murray, in the same kirk they wed in.

Jamie personally couldn’t remember the last time he saw his sister in such a state of pure bliss. She was smiling, laughing, and the blushing bride he always imagined she’d be. Claire was in tears seeing her sister in law marry, and Ian was just the perfect person to be her brother in law.

With Ian marrying the princess, he would be issued his own royal title, a list of rights and entitlements, protections and limitations, etc. etc.

“Ye ken it’s all just a formality,” Jamie told him, “but, essentially, yer a Prince now, despite no taking the Fraser name.”

“And…that’s legal?” Ian asked as he signed the documentation officiating his marriage to Jenny.

“Oh aye,” Jamie assured him, clapping him on the back. “Anyone who marries a member o’ the royal family, so long as they’re no heir or heiress apparent, are entitled tae be royalty. Welcome tae the family, Prince Ian.”

Ian laughed as Claire approached him for a hug. Ian made to bow before her, but since it was just the four of them, she stopped him.

“There’s no need for formalities when it’s just us,” she winked.

“Ye’ll get used tae it,” Jenny said from behind them.

“Alright, Clan Fraser, everyone gather ‘round fer some photos!” Said a waiting photographer.

Jenny and Ian aligned themselves in the center of the staged area outside the kirk, Jamie and Claire were too their left, Murtagh was behind Jamie, and Ian’s parents were to the couple’s right side.

“Everyone smile!”

The four of them would laugh for years to come as the official Fraser-Murray wedding photo that
was displayed in the following morning’s papers showed Ian blinking as the camera went off with a banging flash.
Day to day life for Queen Claire of Broch Tuarach took off after that. She and Jamie kept their word to each other in that, no matter what decision was made on behalf of the Scottish people, they made them together or not at all.

Claire never envisioned the actions in her life would make an impact on Inverness, let alone all of Scotland. But her goals, dreams, and subsequent actions and determinations would make a lasting impact on the world.

Just two short months after becoming Queen, in April of 1970, there was an explosion in a mine shaft that killed many hardworking and underpaid miners, leaving many families devastated and the small mining community in shambles. She went against royal protocols when she told Jamie she wanted to go see the destruction for herself. While Jamie was hesitant at first, she managed to reason with him.

“Think about it. Who does Scotland look to in times of great peril? Us. The Royal Family. We’re more than just the ones who make the rules. Our very presence inspires calm, rational thinking, and perseverance.”

Jamie chewed on it for a moment while sitting at the large desk in his study. “Aye…aye yer right.”
Within forty-eight hours of the tragedy being reported, the King and Queen were given a tour of the wreckage (naturally being kept away from the collapsed mine itself for safety concerns) and they personally spoke with many of the affected family members. Widows, parents, relatives and friends of the victims poured their hearts and souls out to their ruling sovereigns.

After the day was done, Claire had a brief talk with Jamie before getting in front of television cameras and news reporters and declaring that clean up would start immediately, reparations would be given to the victims’ families, new laws would be enacted to ensure the safety of all miners in Scotland, and fairer, more livable wages would be offered.

It soon became Claire’s mission to see a more prosperous Scotland, and she believed that started with its foundation: its citizens.

She frequently attended charity banquets for human rights organizations, was the guest of honor for climate change campaigns, donated money to organizations that fought for causes like gender equality and earth conservation, and her biggest and most outspoken achievement was vowing to end Scotland’s coal dependency by 1990.

“A cleaner, greener Scotland is not too far away. Solar energy is the way of the future!” She declared at a solar energy charity meeting.

Eventually, those same people who didn’t believe she would make a good queen were the first ones to praise her kindness, tenacity, generosity, and love for her people.

“I take back everythin’ I said. Maybe ‘aving a commoner as queen helps the Royal Family tae ken how the rest o’ us folk live our lives!”

“Queen Claire is such a sweetheart. She’s what Scotland really needed!”

“I love how she’s an advocate for human and women’s rights.”

“Given she used tae run a floral shop, her views on earth conservation speaks volumes.”

“God Praise Queen Claire! And, King James o’ course. The Royal family isna anything wi’out both o’ them workin’ together.”

“The King and Queen were made fer each other. The two o’ them ruling together have made such a difference in Scottish life.”

“Well, Sassenach,” Jamie said one night during their evening sit-down, where all they did was just catch up with each other. No discussions of state affairs, no politics, no royal matters were on the table. Just Jamie and Claire, a loving married couple who happen to rule Scotland. “I told ye they’d like ye.”

Claire blushed as Jamie brought her hand to his lips for a kiss. “I suppose you’re right. I can’t disagree with the people.”

Similarly, most of the Scottish people who were first to criticize Jamie’s actions as a prince were now the first ones to praise him as King. He more than made up for his failings, misadventures, and delinquency as a lad, not just in the eyes of his people, but with the Royal Scottish Courts. The courts now warmly welcomed him in their presence.

He made a name for himself within the Clan Fraser dynasty. In addition to supporting all of his wife’s endeavors, which meant standing right beside her throughout her tours, he campaigned for better youth education through a stronger home environment throughout Scotland, especially in
less-fortunate villages.

“My father, many years ago, instilled in me, my brother and sister that a well-established educational foundation is how ye make it in life. It’s no’ easy tae focus on an education as a wee lad or lassie when yer school struggles tae provide that education. While Scotland’s economy is thrivin’ now, I ken, as yer King, we can do better!”

This speech of Jamie’s, with his beloved Sassenach Queen right behind him, was met with fierce applause and feverish excitement. He then proceeded to announce improvements to school meal programs, including ready-to-eat meals for children who came from struggling families, access to more after-school help for homework, and an expansion of after-school activities, explaining that the ability to play more with school peers “increases a child’s productivity in the classroom.”

The Ruling Family of Scotland proved themselves to their people. Things could only go up from here.

Throughout the summer of 1970, Claire noticed certain changes in her body. She felt sore and stiff when awaking each morning, and she couldn’t keep her breakfast down to save her life. It wasn’t until Jamie noticed that he summoned Dr. Davey Beaton to have Her Majesty looked at.

It didn’t take long for the answer to be blatantly obvious.

Within a few days, news spread long, far and wide throughout Scotland, England, and Wales, as well as the rest of the world. The papers displaying a bold, black title with the King and Queen of Scotland’s beautiful faces blown up to cover half the front cover, declaring the most joyous news.

“Prince or Princess? The Sovereigns of Scotland Are Expecting!”

Chapter End Notes

DINNA FASH! THERE WILL BE AN ACT TWO!
COMING SOON TO AN AO3 BOOKMARKS SECTION NEAR YOU :D

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