IN THE BEGINNING WITH YOU

by tayrn24

Summary

What if at the moment when Claire approached the stone circle to go back in time, the soldier was coming too close for comfort for Jamie's taste, so he rushed to protect her with his body, only to be whorled back in time to where the story all began. Everything is just the same but this time he seem to remember everything that had happened, does she? Lots of Jaime and Claire private moments, new little twists (while trying not to damage the big storyline) and a little more of all the things we didn’t get to see and keep imagining by ourselves.

Notes

First, let’s get this out of the way…I don’t own these characters, Starz stuff, events, places, scripted words or anything alike….. I have read all 8 books and watched the series. That being said I ask you all to be kind (constructive critic is much obliged) I have n e v e r wrote for public viewing before and I'm very nervous. I can never expect to be as good as stars/DG/some of you, which I read here: but …. I'm home stuck, sick, hurricanes winds and floods outside and completely suffering from droughtlander, so…..

*****spoilers to all those who haven’t read the first and second book of the amazing DG or saw (not that I think it possible) the series on starz.

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter Notes

dictionary in the end

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 1: Sassenach

*People disappear all the time…. Most are found eventually… Disappearances after all have explanations.*

I knew that!

And as I laid on the ground with my eyes closed, letting my heart try and steady himself back to some resemblance of a normal heart rate, I knew that, this would soon be said about me.

Probably, plastered as a headline in some newspaper, while underneath would be a picture of me looking disoriented, confused, miserable and with...
O dear Lord, child.

With that thought in mind my fingers traveled instinctively to my womb, trying to estimate by touch all the goings on there.
This I did with my eyes still closed, of course.
Opening them would mean accepting my new reality, without him.
And that I wasn't ready to do even if I was capable of such an act;
my eyes seemed to be glued together.
Dried tears I assumed.

As I moved my hand to a spot just beneath my navel, I found that it was hard to move any of my ligaments.
Naturally it would.
Everything would be hard from now on,
and no one to truly share the burden with.

Something felt odd, different, queerer then before.
It wasn't as if I could feel the child previously to my crossing, but something was definitely wrong.

I suppose it was all those thoughts, feelings, heartache and the detrimental physical effects of going through those blasted stones that were the cause, I didn't actually realize that it wasn't a woolen dress that my fingers were skimming, or that my surroundings were not as mute as I perceived them to be.

All of a sudden I could hear the shooting all around.
Loud sounds were starting to rumble and multiply in my ears as if earplugs were suddenly removed from them.

Wait!
Another thought jumped into focus: Jamie!

Suddenly events leading to my crossing were beginning to come back.

Jamie… the soldiers that were after me… the stones.

It was most assuredly not the soldier's hands that grabbed me, it wasn't his body that flung itself wildly on mine and it wasn't without a shadow of a doubt the soldier's last breath that whispered "I love you" before everything shattered; Before I shattered, into a million pieces.

I could feel him there with me, screaming in the dark, being split into nothing. But, then, I thought it only a wish of the heart, not something rooted in reality.

I willed my eyes to open wide. Pain and stickiness be dammed.

No, he was definitely not with me now.

O God, did he die right there? by that fucking soldier's hands? Stabbed in the back? Shot? Only to protect me?

I felt my throat clench, tears were streaming down my face, unbidden. He was dead and I the cause of it.

I curled myself into a ball on the ground and decided that despite my promise to him, I would simply lie here and die.

It isn't quite breaking my promise to him if I would just freeze to death on the ground. It's not as if I did it to myself. It will happen on its own accord, or perhaps one of the muskets shooting….

Muskets?

I suddenly brought to mind that piece of my reality.

Why were there muskets firing?

A sudden, sharp, familiar shout pierced the ether and made me jump to my feet at once. This was accompanied by the most familiar shouting and cries; war cries. Highlander's war cries.

A freezing gust of ice-cold wind blow between my … "What on earth?"

I looked down at myself to find I was wearing my oxford loafers, my rayon and linen white dress, belted with a thin light brown belt. I was wearing my silver wrist watch for Christ's sake!

I begun panting as if I had run for hours.

This was not possible!
I must have hit my head or gone bat mad crazy because of those bloody, bloody stones.

Still in a state of complete dazed mystification, my feet began moving by themselves. By the time my mind caught up with what my body was doing, I simply theorized that my body was probably searching for someone or something else that could verify my delusional state.

*It may be that Jiminy cricket will show up on my shoulder as a tour guide to Gepetto's house.*
I joked with myself

I was so clearly stupefied, that I just allowed myself to wobbly wander on, unable to construct one coherent thought.

A discharged shot piercing my ear drum, sent my crouching to the ground. Two seconds later and I was running.

*Running from what? What was going on?*

Just questions sprung to mind, not a single answer given in return.
I just ran.

No, this was not a set of a Cinema Company, filming a costume drama; I reprimanded my brain for even suggesting such a thing again.
Hold on… again?

I have been through all of this before, that much I realized and even if this was a dream, the man awaiting me at the end of this delusion was…..

I whirled myself around in order to backtrack my steps, but ended up only losing my footing over the muddy earth, which sent me falling down the slope.
When I finally did manage to get up, I could see them.
And then I could see him

'Yes, it was him!'

Angus had whizzed by, then turned to discharge a musket ball and by the large seeming to have a very good time, before commencing to flee again.

I cried out, but then immediately desist.
No sound that I could possibly make would carry above this hullabaloo.

'Good Lord, what would I even say? They don't know me yet'.

And then I remembered, this was a hallucination, it really didn't matter what I would-
But there wasn't even time to ponder that.
Or why in hell, am I trying to play along with this phantasmagoria?
The redcoats spotted me and had begun firing.

Apparently, when fired upon, or so I was discovering, your mind and body do not care if it is real or not.
And yet again I found myself running without me giving consent to such a thing.

If I have, if I for one instant had my wits about me, or if the men were not so hot on my trail, almost reaching me,
I would have remembered.
I would have remembered that this exact path took me to stand face to face with… Jonathan Wolverton Randall, Captain "Black Jack" Randall, that is.

"Shit" I said aloud.  
That was all I could come up with at that moment.  
And it was a very grave mistake to make.

He rose to his feet, sword maybe sheathed, but still very much at hand.  
Dream or no dream I preferred the soldiers’ company, even if they were to shoot me.  
I took a few steps backwards, but he followed.  
"Shit" I repeated and turned to run.  

'Dear Lord, will I never learn?!'

He reached me within seconds of my dash and I found myself fastened and incapacitated against the side of the mound, sword at my throat, **again**!  

'This is not funny' I reflected angrily.  
Holding me barbarously and churlishly, his breath came into my face as he said  
"I am, Jonathan Randall, Esquire, Captain of His Majesty's Eighth Dragoons. At your service" he added cynically at the end.  
"Who the bloody hell are you?" He demanded of me.  

'This is demented, this is not real, he is not real, he can't be'  
I screamed in my head.  
But last time, I was also quite sure all this was a dream and I was, thank the heavens, smart enough to collaborate,  

I wasn't about to play dumb now.  

*I couldn't say all the same things again as before, could I?*  
I mused  
No, that would be truly moronic.  

Luckily, if one could say such a thing with a straight face regarding my situation at the moment, Randall didn't wait for me to reply.  

"You must think me the fool. You'll be well advised to tell me exactly who you are, and why you are here."

I kept silent.  
I needed to stay alive just long enough for **him** to come, I remembered that much at least.

'Just live long enough for **him** to come'  
I recited to myself.  

Unfortunately, Randall was not a patient man.  
He shook me hard and my head rebounded on the mound.  
I, instinctively, swung my hands up toward my head in order to protect myself, but he must have thought I was trying to get away, for he fastened his blade to my throat and I could feel him...
compress it firmly to my skin. 
The acrid smell of blood tickled into my nostrils.

"Madam, you will find my patient is not infinite" he announced needlessly.

But all I could think was 'ha all of this is new'; 
for things were becoming blurry after that for the first time.

I suspected that the blow to my head was a bit more serious than I could afford at the moment and it was showing. He slapped me hard to awaken me.

"No one would help Alex now" I mumbled losing coherency.
I was really wobbly, but if I lost conscious, now, I was sure it will be the end of me.

"What?" his eyes popped open and the cords on his neck were straining and bulging out. 
Just like Frank's did.
And all of a sudden I had an urge to touch it, to say goodbye.

The urge left me, as Randall began jerking me unmercifully now.
He had heard me and was truly taken aback by my words.

That gave me a tinge of satisfaction, which was rapidly replaced by annoyance.
It was hard to faint properly and be done with it all, while being rattled like a moppet.

"You fucking bastard. Stop it" I shouted at his face and spat at him.
Fuck it indeed; if I was going down, I was going down fighting.

"Ha. The speech of a lady, the language of a whore" he smiled at my stirring and twisted me around.

With my face now buried into the rock, Randall was lifting my dress from behind all a while panting in my ear
"We shall see what you will or will not tell me now..."

There was a load thump, and the pressure that his body exerted on mine eased.

"Took you long enough" I said aloud and fell like a rock to the ground, 
everything fading to black.

He was dead.

This much he knew.

And oddly enough, that was a great comfort to him.
'Twas over, everything was over.

Of course everything was over the moment she left, he thought and felt a very sharp tightening in his chest.

She was gone.

_Dammit, this shouldna hurt this much._

That’s why dying, the moment after she would leave was so crucial.

To avoid feeling the pain of their separation.

He kent he would probably feel regret for dying before going back to save his men and said he must find occasion to pray for each and every one of them and for their safely return home, to Lallybroch.

O, Lallybroch, he would miss his place so.

No.

'Tis no his place anymore, he reminded himself, 'twas wee Jaime's now.

He will take good care of it though, when the time comes, Jamie was sure of that.

For first and foremost for Jamie kent who his parents were.

The tightening in his chest returned yet again at the thought of no seeing his sister, brother- in-law and best friend once more.

Worse than that, he felt very badly for taking so many men into this pointless, futile bloodshed.

'Merde…. Salope Charles Stuart…. Casse-toi!'

he muttered.

_But what was he to do?! What could he have done differently?!_

And why, for heaven's sake, wasna anyone coming to tell him where to go next?!

_By the Saints above, what was it, that did him in at the end?_

He remembered Claire running to those t-olc rocks with a redcoat tight on her trail.

He killed the redcoat's companion first, but that only slowed him down in such a way, that He had to wield his own body to save her.

Which, of course, he did.

Hurling himself on her, just as she reached those bloody things.

He was sure he would feel the rock hit his face just as a bayonet would spear him in his back.

He was stabbed before;

why, she even dressed such wounds for him herself.

He smiled a little at that.

_God as send him his own private, beautiful, knowledge beyond his time, healer._

His smile widened.

But that, dinna feel the same, he frowned as he returned to his original thought a moment later.

That felt like naught he ever endured.

That felt as if he dinna exist anymore, but he was aware of it.
As if he was shattered to so many parts that he couldna ever be put back together again.
And then an instant later a force, which, he assumed, must be divine, for naught on earth could yield such power, sucked him back together;
and made him into what?
He wondered.

And the screams,
o Lord have mercy,
the screams.
He was afraid that they would come and take the pieces that were him away.

So small he felt.
Like the things Claire would tell him about, what were they?
Gerrrms, he recalled.
He also called to mind her smile when he would say the word.
How he loved that he could make her smile like that.

Now 'twill be Frank that will make her laugh such.
Jamie said a lot of very bad words at that realization.
'Tis wasna enough though.

He could still feel the anger sear him from the inside, spreading, making it impossible to lay still.

No!
He couldna stand the thought of that man touching his women, his child.

Jamie won her.
She loved him.
She chose him.
He sired her children, Frank did no.

O Lord, the pain in his chest was now going to burst and it would take him with it.

But, wait, was he no already deid?

He opened his eyes, flung his body and screamed at the top of his lungs;
His right shoulder, the whole right side of him was erupting with currents of pain.

He screamed again, trying to rise to his feet and collapsed straight down, only at the last second remembering to shift and fall on the left side of his face.

"Ça me fait chier" he said wholeheartedly into the grass.
He was obviously no dead.

All of a sudden, hands were griping at him.
Someone was trying to stand him up, he shrieked and then to his abashment he whimpered.
They laughed at him.
Great!

Hold on.
That laugh, he kent that laugh.
The laughing man, gave up on trying to stand him up and had now slung Jamie across his shoulders as if he was a carcass.
Jamie couldna see his face, but that laugh, he'd ken it anywhere. He laughed with the man enough times to have it cauterized into his brain.

Rupert. Rupert MacKenzie. But the man was deid, he saw him die.

*I am deid,*

he returned to his original assumption. And Jamie supposed that to send a friend as a guide in purgatory was a very kind thing to do.

*But what in all that his holly, is Angus doing here?!!*

He must have died too, the poor bugger.

Jaime found just one thing, weel no, to be fair about it, he found three things very unclear. *Why was he in so much pain if he was deid? Why was he pained with an old injury?* He ruminated deeply on the matter, as he grimaced and keeked at his shoulder joint again, which was, just as last time, completely out of place.

*And by God and Mary bless her, why where they going into the cottage where he first saw-*

"A Dhia, cuidich mi"

Would he be allowed to see her again?

An awful thought struck at him. *Were she and the bairn deid?* He gasped and could no longer feel his body, or the jolts of pain from being moved around and placed to sit on a stool near the hearth.

He no longer saw faces around him. *If she died, she and the child-*

Tears were blurring everything. He dinna care. He stared at the floor, choked, preferring her to be with Frank. Happy, safe, even wi'oot him, but alive.

They were sounds around him, people trying to talk to him, but it was as if they were a thousand miles away.

*Leave him be.*

Leave him be to mourn, to cry for his love, for his heart and for his second child.

He shuddered and was about to fall completely apart when a big thunk was heard and the door swinging open, made him look up.

As the only ray of light from the outside entered the cottage, so entered the shape of Murtagh hauling the unconscious form of-

"Cl..." he was rising to his feet, trying to reach her. But the shoulder wasna a force to be trifled with and he fell back into the stool, clutching his arm and gasping for breath.
He could only tilt his head, but it was enough to see that she was only unconscious, for she was stirring and moaning, as she was lowered from Murtagh's shoulders and was propped near the other fire, leaning on Murtagh for support.

All the men rallied around her.
Some were baffled but all were completely taken aback.

*What was wrong wi' them? Did they no ken his woman?*
He was about to speak up, for He couldna seem to manage to go to her, or move an inch for that matter.
Beside his injury there was also a hand on his good shoulder, holding him down.
*Was he that feeble?*

He dinna care who it was though, he could only see her.
Lowering his gaze from her face, which were slowly awakening, he noticed her clothes, or more accurately the lack of them!!
*What was the lass up to?*
Last he saw her; she was fully dressed.

*O Lord, did someone hurt her?*
He made to speak yet again, but Rupert inquiring Murtagh about her gave him pause.

As he heard the man speech he realized the oddest thing.

He heard these exact words three years ago.
He remembered all right, he took it to mind.
Every second of the day they met.

He told it many a times to Claire's belly, while Claire herself was sound asleep, laughing, privately, with faith, telling her of the first day her parents met; swearing her to secrecy to no divulge to her mother all the things the men had said, behind her back.

The hand on his shoulder was lifted and Dougal appeared before his very eyes.
Jamie drew a sharp aching breath and almost fainted.

he was sure his eyes were bulging out but he couldna adjust himself right or move a muscle to save his life.
He was in a complete state of shock.
He had just killed the man!

Surely, in purgatory the devil himself wouldna put the man who was killed with his own slayer!? If he dinna ken that Dougal would have much to recompense over before being granted such a gift, he would have been more rattled.

With his mind easier from the concern of such retribution being exacted at this exact moment, realization dawned on him.

He touched the stone with her this time, which he hadna done before.

The stones were a way of moving through time and it was quite clear, that what happened before was happening again. Now!
He also just realized that if he wasna dead and this was nay a dream; the woman he was forced to part with was right there, in front of him, as the day he met her. In the day he met her.

He got her back.

Incapacity be dammed. He'd go to her, now!

Dougal was shaking her lightly. She was still leaned on Murtagh's side. Her arm was drooped around his shoulder, hardly any weight was on her feet but she did whine a bit at Dougal's jarring of her.

He'd kill whoever hurt her.

"What's wrong wi' her?" Jamie asked Murtagh, his voice sounding breathless to his own ears. He was trying to rise on his feet, but with no more success then the first time.

Claire was now blinking her eyes intermittently and making light groaning noises.

"Jack Randall" Murtagh answered matter-of-factly as if naught else needed to be said. Naughting else was indeed needed.

"What o' ye laddie? How r'ye faring?" "I'll do" he answered dryly "what's wrong wi' her then?" he asked again, as he was also trying to rise on his feet again. Such actions only led to Murtagh thrusting Claire into Dougal's arms and rushing come to his side

"Hi, ye big clot. Dunno ye be doin' that!" "Dunno ye be doing that!" Jamie cried back to him and flung himself up, trying to reach Dougal and his wife "Ye'll hurt her".

Murtagh seized him by his good shoulder and lowered him back down to the stool.

Jamie was now seeing stars inside his heid and wondering how they got there.

*Ifrinn! He was weak!*

"Jamie" Murtagh exclaimed "Dè tha thu a dèanamh burraidh?" "Let go" Jamie tried to wiggle away from him "I'm no doing anythin', I wasna the one throwing my...." He stopped himself, realizing.

She wasna his wife, yet. They all dinna ken her or of her, yet.

And then the most horrifying thought came to him after that. *What if she dinna ken them back?* And as a perpetuation to that crushing thought was... *What if she dinna ken him and who he was to her?*
He had to be cautious and shrewd here.

He got a second chance, he wouldna get another.
And he wasna willing to lose her again.

'A Dhia Mòran taing' he indebted to the heavens.

"Tha mi duilich a charaid" he said in the most penitent tone he could contrive
"'Tis the pain, a ghoistidh. Tis making me soft in the heid. canna think straight"
"Aye" his godfather nodded but seemed to stay dubious.

This was interrupted by coughing sounds from the circle of man, who were now surveying Claire, who were the one that was coughing.
This due to the whiskey that was poured down her throat by Dougal.

All the other men were looking at her in a very animalistic manner and they seemed to be closing ranks around her.

Jamie was going to wring their necks, one by one and very slowly.

"What?" said Murtagh, and Jamie realized he was growling.
"Naughting" he squirmed a little, which made him let out a very low grunt o'fpain
"'Tis the pain. 'Tis really bad. Can hardly sit still"

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ" Claire blurted out as gasped for breath pounding at her chest with one hand, and using the other to wave for the flask to be taken away.
"You're not supposed to give alcohol to head injury patients"
She wheezed but then began to relax.

That made him smile.
She was all right then.
Ordering men around in a reproaching manner and spouting medical facts, was Claire at her best.

"A Sassenach wench, then?" exclaimed Angus.
"Aye" said Dougal and Jamie could almost hear the scheming and plotting going on in his heid
"Now lass, if ye're quite recovered by now, ye'll be telling me, what is your name and who ye are?"
Claire looked around at all of them and then glanced a swift peek at Jamie's direction.

_Did she recognize him?
_He couldna see her eyes over the dim light.
_If he had, he would ken.
_If he could touch her he would ken for sure.

He knew what his lass looked like, what she felt like, how she touched him before and after she was his.
And Jamie could ken the difference very weel indeed.

"I'm Claire, Claire Beauchamp" she said staring straight into Dougal's eyes.
She always had the devil's own courage.

Please let her remember him, please let her come to him and heal him so he could see her, touch her.
It's fine if she wilna remember him,
Jamie composed himself for the possibility.

He'll earn her back.
He did so before, he could do so again.
And now he knew exactly how.
And then-

"I am not a whore" her fierce tone, brought him back from his own scheming and plotting,
but his were for a noble and righteous cause, he assured his conscience.

"We can put it to the test" Rupert joked with Angus, thrusting his hips forward in a lewd gesture.

If Jamie had a gun it would be empty by now.

"I won't hold with rape" Dougal chastising put a firm stop to their laughter
"And we havna got time for it anyway" he added,
with a little regret in his voice?!

"Dougal, I have no idea what she might be or who, but I'll stake my best shot she nae a hure"

It was the 'what' and the way Murtagh said it, that made Jamie's ears itch and made his skin to crawl.

What did he know? What did he see?

"We'll puzzle it later. We got a good distance to go tonight. And we must do something' about Jaime first"
Dougal came to stand in front of Jamie.

"I can help" Claire cried out following him swiftly.

Three men drew out their blades and aimed them squarely at her throat.
Claire froze and stood back half a step.
The other men, on the other hand, seem to be contemplating other parts of her, licking their lips and suggesting some things regarding yon parts, in the Gàidhlig.

Men are bad!
He determined.

"I only meant…..." she said, cautiously maneuvering through the blades, inching her way as to come closer to him.
She moved and talked to them as if they were a skittish horse she was trying to tame.

Sweet bleeding Jesus. She learned that from him.

"You have to get the bone and the upper arm in the correct position before it slips back into joint" she explained, aiming her words to whomever the power laid with.

Dougal stared back, surveying her yet again, then nodded and moved back.
At this, all of the other men stood back as weel, just as last time.

She came to him and he had to bite his lips as to no smile.
Her eyes were in his.

Did she remember?
He was almost sure she did, but could he take the risk?

As she bent to him, her drenched hair slipped over her face and he instinctively lifted his hand to
tuck it back behind her ear.
He stopped himself a little too late.
His hand was an inch from her face, suspended in mid-air. Jamie lost as to what to do next.

Claire smiled softly to him and then gathered his palm in hers.

O Lord, her touch.
She placed it on his good shoulder nodding to him as she said out loud
"Yes. You should hold your hand here"
Then nodding to Murtagh she ordered
"Hold him steady"

Jaime inhaled sharply when she took his wrist.
"Don’t worry" she said a hair distance away from his face
"I've done this… before"

He wanted to tell her he Kent that very weel, but she was already aligning his arm and twisting it in
such a way that he couldna articulate words any longer.

"All right, this is the worst part"

"I remember" he strained very badly to let the words out.

"Ye whelp, when did ye e'er put aff your shoulder" said Murtagh, his snickering tone in his ear.

But he got what he sought after.

Claire's face lit up and her lip quivered as she fought the urge to smile.

She remembered!

I popped the joint back into place.

The grinding sounds of cartilage and bone troubled me much more this time around though.
I did not enjoy hurting Jamie.
Well, not usually I rectified for honesty sake.

His breathing was slowing down from the procedure, more now, that he was able to draw full
breaths, without pain.
He sighed with relief and a smile that spread from lips, to eyes, to... even his nostrils were flaring up.

He was holding my hand in his, tight, not letting go, and his eyes bore the look he usually has just before-

Ho dear, if we stayed locked eyes like this, he might well pull me all the way to him and…
When fully aroused a Fraser will do anything, anywhere, any time and the devil may care with who might be watching.
I mean, you do learn a thing or two in almost three years of marriage.

I swallowed hard and his grip tightened on my wrist, to the extent that it was my cartilage and bone that were making rasping sound now.

His look now shifted to one I would catch him giving me, when he was unaware I detected him watching me.

He would Survey me and I could hear the wheels of his brain turning, making plans as to what to do to with me later I asked him once what he was about and never again.

His mouth opened slightly and he gave the hand he was holding a quick glance, slanted eyes narrowing.
Surely he wouldn't bite my fingers right now!

Well he did.
Many times, I reminded myself.
Sometimes in company, I added.
But certainly he won't now?! Will he?

Just in case, I cleared my throat and inclined my head toward Angus as I decreed "Give me your belt"
and stretched out my hand to him to receive it.

Both his eyebrows shot up at that.

_Seriously?_
I thought,

_Must we really go through ALL of it again?_
I looked at Dougal and elaborated.

"The organ his tender and at risk to be dislodged again without proper support. I need to make him a sling.
Do you have a cloth or something else I can use?"
I asked, knowing full well what the answer would be "Well do you? Any of you?"

Exasperated, I repeated my request
"Then give me your belt"
Angus stared at me open mouthed, until yet again, Dougal gave his acquiescence and I was in possession of a belt.

I went about the task of repeating everything I said, 'before', regarding the care of the joint and how it would feel, just in case straying from the script would cause a massive cosmic disturbance.
I was, apparently, not very subdued in my tone, for that received me a strong glare from Jamie, strongly suggesting I toned myself down.

'Sorry' I answered back with a look of my own, that awarded me a warm reassuring squeeze at my wrist, which he was still holding for dear life.

I extricated my hand very gently out of his- not- so- willing- to- free- me- palm, and resumed my administration, trying as much as possible to covertly caress him while doing so.

"All right, how does that feel?"
I asked straightening up.
Funny enough I knew the answer to that as well.

He smiled knowingly at me and then shifted back to his earlier looks
"Better, thank ye".

"Can you ride?" Dougal was irritated, more it seemed then last time, I mean this time…that was… then.
*O my, this will not be easy.*

Dougal tossed Jamie's coat to his lap
"Good, were leaving” and with that he went somewhere.
Some back room perhaps.
While the rest of the men were seeping out the door.

I remembered this moment.

While setting his arm, Jamie gave me the gift of forgetfulness and denial to my situation.

An escape, if only for a moment, from the complete terror I felt the first time I went through those stones.

When the moment ended and I returned to my prisoner stature, I felt dread, panic and complete loneliness at the enormity of my reality.

My reality, now, was just as confusing, complicated and scary.
I still had the same enemies and with none of the friends I made.
None of them knew me yet.

I still had to watch what I said and did, for one small faulty move, could take back the only miracle I wished to preserve in all this nightmare; Jamie.

I looked up at him, and my glass face must have showed my distress for he gave a side-glance at our surrounding, gathered me with his good arm into him and kissed me fervently.
His tongue was inside my mouth, as he moved his soft lips to cover, suck and caress mine.

He brought his hand to be placed on the back of my neck pulling me more and more into him and up, so I found myself standing on my toes and leaning on him with hardly any weight on my feet.
It was passionate but brief.

As he released me, our foreheads clasped together, he whispered ardently into me
"Not alone“ and immediately unhanded me, coming to stand by the exit awaiting me to follow.

My lips were tingling, my mouth seem to still hold the ghost of his demanding tongue inside it and my knees seemed to be surprised at all the returning weight on them, all at once; so they fittingly
buckled a bit leaving me to sway lightly.
"Right" I murmured to myself.
Definitely no loneliness this time.

And with that I was out the door, with him very lightly letting his hand hover at my back.

***

When my lips could move again I said
"That's how I knew I wasn’t in my own time anymore".
I was standing in the doorway, taking a gulp of freezing air into my lungs, standing shoulder to shoulder with Jamie.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked, while trying to settle is right shoulder, that was strapped in the makeshift belt-sling I made for him and had probably skidded as a result of his prompt act of affirmation to me.

I instinctively, half turned to him and was unbuckling and re-buckling it for a more comfortable angle.
He, also quite instinctively, half turned and naturally came much closer to me.
The palm of his good arm was gently placed on my hip.

This was not done as some illustrious invite, but simply as a man whose wife nursed him many times and was just allowing her- me- free excess to his body.

It was so naturally ordinary, I thought nothing of it.
I should have been more aware though, we were much too comfortably intimate with each other.

"'Before, the first time that is, when you told me that was Inverness" I inclined my head at the now fully dark village "and I realized that there were no electric lights, I did tell you about electric... Jamie?" he was not listening to me;
his face was looking at the other party of men who were staring at us.

A few, I could see, even in this dim light of the moon, had frowns of bewilderment on their faces.
The other which gazed protruding eyes at me were wondering can they have a go at touching me so.
One was stabbing another in his side, pointing, licking his lips in a very crude way.
O dear Lord, I realized what they were staring at and I backed away quickly from Jamie.

He realized too and was quicker with his wit than I was.
He pointed his thumb at me and said something demeaning in Gallic, which I only gathered through his expressions and their laughter.

I half coughed under my breath, while he, very intelligently, walked to his horse, not looking back at me.

Serve him right if I didn’t follow him and went to ride with someone else.

But then I remembered the smell of the other men.
Jamie it is then.
The other men were, slowly returning to mount their horses. Dougal came from behind me, roughly seized my arm and shoving me toward Jamie, who was mounting his horse with Mutagh's help.

"Get yourself up" he ordered
"Ye'll be sure to stay close to the rest of us. And if ye to try anything else I shell slit your throat for you, do ye understand?" his mouth was viperly whispering in my ear, closer and meaner than last time. Did I do something wrong to earn me such behavior?

All of a sudden another hand snatched at me, on my other arm. Jaime was bent on his horse, with great difficulty, I saw and was pulling me to him.

"Aye, she understands uncle" he sounded very menacing himself, which I knew was directed at Dougal and not at me.

Dougal seemed completely baffled by this
"What on earth were you thinking? Saying Uncle?" he berated Jamie in Gallic.

Jamie used to ask me 'what on earth were you thinking?' so many times in the duration of our marriage, so I understood the phrase quite well.

Jamie realizing the shaky ground we were walking on, replied in a reconciling voice "I only meant the lady has been cooperating thus far, treated my shoulder and such, answering your questions and…"

"So what? ye purpose we let her go then?" Dougal raised his voice, that held a distinct tone of aggression.

It was not lost on Jamie, so he snorted slightly and said
"Ho, no uncle, believe ye me, I swear it to ye I'm not 'bout to let this woman 'oot of my sight! She goes nowhere. Dunna be worrit. I'm the one with the most to lose if she disappear.
I promise ye, she'll ha' to answer to me if she strays" at that he pulled me closer to him and to the horse, bent his head to me and said with a glint in his eyes "and she kens it verra weel indeed" And before Dougal could dare respond, he nodded to Murtagh to help me mount.

Murtagh, who I had to remind myself, did not know me yet, so I couldn’t take to heart the unnerving looks he was giving me, reluctantly hoisted me up while Dougal, now awaken from is outright dumbfoundness at Jamie's behavior, left us to take the lead with his own horse.

"Seas" Jaime calmed the horse, who didn’t seem to remember the feel of our combined weight from before and was not pleased about the new addition.

So were the rest of the men, I noticed.

Looking away from Murtagh to their faces, which I knew so well but theirs showed no recognition of that, they were eyeing me in a way that ranged from licentious resentment, menacing bewilderment or outright blinding hate (that I sincerely hoped was based on my English station and not anything else).

"Seas a leannan" Jaime kept whispering in balmy tones, sweet, calming words while petting the horse's neck. The horse didn’t seem to be distressed at all and I realized that he was talking to me. I relaxed my body, which I only now noticed was stretched tight; probably over coming face to face with Dougal, his sudden resurrection and a rough reminder of his true nature.
I exhaled deeply, relaxing further at feeling my lover's hand caressing the horse's mane and my hand that laid there.

"Math baagh" he turned to gesture to Murtagh " Tha gu matha a charaid" and with that his thighs were working the horse to forestall any further invasiveness or inquisitiveness from the throng of people around us.

***

As we gathered enough security under the blanket of darkness, he gathered me into him so tightly, that his breath came strong and hot in my ear and his chest was close-fitting with every inch of my back.

I in turn scooped my derriere taut and fixed it right between his inner thighs. This recompensed me a very low hum of approval from the 'driver seat'.

I smiled to myself. Finally the reason we both played along with this masquerade; to be together. To just be.

However, feeling complete contentment is still not enough to brace the elements, so I sarcastically muttered
"This wasn’t for your benefit young man" I rocked my hip again "I'm cold, a gentleman might offer to have his plaid loose in order to cover a girl.... or woman"

He's chest vibrated a smidge from repressed laughter and he replied "Weel dinna want to give them more reasons to talk and speculate 'obout us, now did I ?"
But then he sobered and said quite seriously
"Sorry lass, I thought you were scared nay cold. That's why I'm shivering! Can ye reach? I canna do it…"

"One handed, I know, I remember" and we started an awkward dance of tugging and shifting, until the plaid came loose and could be wrapped around us both.

This time, luckily, it covering more of my frozen limbs, mostly due to the non-existent distance between us this time around.

Once covered and regaining more secrecy under his plaid, Jamie's good harm came around my midsection and was caressing, thawing, and lightly massaging me.

I inadvertently closed my eyes in the sheer pleasure of it and ever so lightly began rubbing myself on him as if he was a big scratching pole and me a kitten.

I heard him whisper in my ear
"'Tis nae that I'm no enjoying it a ghraidh, but watch yourself"
I nodded and hastily gathered all my features.

While riding though, I was so tired, I kept finding myself leaning my head on his chest, snuggling affectionately into him, clinging to his arm and not the pommel.
Which was probably a more befitting behavior of a woman who was kidnapped and was surrounded by strangers.
'Stop it Beauchamp!' I berated myself after I almost drowsily reached a hand to caress his stubble chin.

'Why on earth can you not control yourself?!' I reproached myself. But I knew the answer to that.

I went through quite a lot these past two days.

I began at resigning myself to never seeing Jamie again, to saying a heartrending goodbye from him;
to then being filled with Disbelief, anger and denial for losing him,
to reaching acceptance of my world collapsing from now on and acceptance of a life of hollowness and abandonment that will be with me always.
To being filled by the sense of black rage and betrayal by the knowledge that I had never taken him for granted, then why was he being taken away from me?!!!

And after all that emotional ride, I went through the stones and then, there was:
Running, being chased, shot, beaten, saved, and threatened again.

All worth it to be back in his arms to be sure, but very, very exhausting.

The problem was not that I could feel that exhaustion take more and more hold over me, the problem was that With all that was happening, I was not afraid.

I had Jamie.
And no matter what was the occurrence around me, my body knew that in his proximity, it could relax.

Now was no exception and I was left fighting hard against myself to keep conscious and awareness against my body's instincts.

When this all happened, the first time, it was sheer panic and adrenaline that was firing my synopsis into complete wakefulness and alertness, now I had no such physical help against myself.

Pondering all that I have been through though made me start to feel concerned.
This could not be good for the baby, I mused.

I was snapped back to full attention now.
MY body tensed and I began breathing shallowly.

"what's wrong wi' ye, a nighean?" I heard Jamie query.

A single tear ran down my cheek, I swallowed hard and in a choked voice, which was very hard to eject, I said broken
"The baby".

No sound came from my back, but I felt his body react the same as mine did, his voice too.

"Are ye bleeding Claire?" Jamie asked sounding broken too.

I stopped him from halting the horse by putting a hand on his thigh.

"No Jamie. He's gone. I thought something wrong when I first awoke from crossing through the stones, but now.... I can feel it, he's not there anymore, he's gone"
"How can ye..." he interjected, trying to grasp at something to rebut me. I squeezed his thigh again, tears running down both cheeks now. "I don’t know h o w I know, I just do" I simply said.

"but-" he tried again. "Jamie" I said very coldly "I know what it was like when he was inside of me and it doesn't feel like that anymore"

Silence, and then I felt a single tear at my nape as we continued to ride, thankful for the darkness that sheltered us from the others.

Neither of us could pretend now.

It was mid- afternoon when they were nearing the rock.

Cocknammon Rock.

The ambush would be here.

Soon he will have to warn Dougal. But for now-

Claire dinna speak another word to him since she told him 'about the child.

She just went in and 'oot of conscious. Body so rigid he couldna tell when she awakened and when asleep.

She thankfully dinna shy away from him, but she felt so unyielding to his touch.

He remembered that feeling after faith, when he ran after her at Louise De Rohan's garden and she wouldna even look at him.

Would this be what breaks her? Tear her apart from him forever? Did he get her back only to lose her to sorrow and pain?

He knew her heart to be so wide.

What happens when such a size breaks?

'Gone' that's all she said.

Nay that she lost the child, as she said wi’ faith, but gone, nae there.

'Gone', as he felt himself to be as he went through those rocks.

Did the force that gathered him back, dinna return the child to them?

If he had any vitality left in him he would be mad, but he couldna even do so.

Soon, verra soon, they were coming closer to the spot.

"Jamie?" her voice was coarse from lack of use. But his heart leapt at the sound of it.

"Aye?" he swallowed trying to lubricate his palate and throat in order to speak. In order to speak to her.
"You remember about the…"  
"Aye. I do" he replied.  
Her tone was so dry, so uncaring. He felt his heart broke at the hearing her such.

But she did care. Enough to nae wand to die and maybe enough to nae want him to die too.

He tried to grasp at anything.  
For if he stopped... if he stopped and looked at what he lost, what they lost, he would fall to the ground and never move again.

"I'll be telling him shortly. But Claire?"  
"What?" she said wi' almost no voice left in her.

He had so much to say to her, but couldn'a find the words. Dinna ken where to start.

"Ye will go and hide yourself properly, aye? From the red coats I mean.  
I shall come to ye where I found ye then, where you tried to...escape" he clarified "it..... it will maybe give us some time to talk awhile, aye?"

"Fine" she said sounding so far away from herself, from him.

"Good than" he said trying to sound consoling and reassuring at the same time and managing only to sound a complete fool to his ears.

Fine then, but first thing first, he had to keep them alive, he thought, as he goaded his horse forward to Dougal.

Jamie rode us up to Dougal, leaned to him and told him in Gallic, about the soldier's ambush that await them all.

Dougal stared at me, eyebrows raised and then with the utmost earnest intent, inquired  
"Now, ye'll be telling me exactly how and why you come to know there's an ambush up ahead?!"

I stared back.  
Even in my dazed state I could feel anger seeping into me.  
I couldn't open my mouth though, for all I wanted was to scream at him and say 'because I'm from the future, and if you hadn’t decided to try and murder me, you effing piece of shit, I would still have my child'.

Jamie must have seen my tell-all face, for it was his voice that answered, while his arm, literally, crushed all the angry wind out of me.

"She said she heard in the village that red coats like to lay in wait here 'obout. And it seems a real bonny place for an ambush, bràthair-athar"

"Aye 'tis that" Dougal was eyeing me as if to yank the truth out of me, but then looked around, resolved himself and gestured to the other men.
This time, I was lowered very gently to the ground, instead of thrown. I supposed carnal knowledge of the man in charge, granted me better handling.

That should have made me at least crack a smile but it didn’t.

I didn’t roll on the ground this time, I didn’t run, I simply walked away.

I heard them galloping and whooping out loud, heard the shooting commence, heard the fighting ensue.

To the outside observer I might have seemed so odd, walking slowly away from a battle field, like someone just strolling through the ether.

Could this even be called a battle field or just a fight or perhaps a brawl? The mind thinks of the most ridiculous things, I observed coldly, striding along, on the soggy ground, lifting my hands around me to move the branches at my path as if in a dream.

I looked straight ahead but seem to see nothing in front of me; my brain seemed to not interpret what my eyes were seeing.

'I should really watch where I was going' I noted to myself but not caring. I wasn’t in the right place or in the right time to go so unguarded, but still I didn't care.

Did I want to be killed? I asked myself and found I didn’t have an answer to give.

It was the second time, my second child.

And when that thought sprung to me, my feet seem to stop working and I crumbled to the ground.

Wet, muddy, cold, dangerous…. Random words seemed to be forming in my head, floating about with no meaning to them.

"Lost your way?"

"Very funny" I answered very dryly to the voice that spoke above me. Was Jamie actually making jokes?

"Now, did I no tell ye what will happen if ye wander away?"

"What?" I blurted out raising my eyes to find the very conniving, shifty eyed Dougal MacKenzie look back at me.

"Shit!"

***

Dirk in hand he was surveying me and I could tell he had it in mind to conduct an investigation and get all his questions gratified.
I knew he wouldn’t like or believe any of the answers I would give him. He didn’t before.

And unless I came out with a divulging confession that I really was a spy And commence into a speech involving all the trade secret of the British army.... well without the restrains of his brother Colum, I was pretty much in the hands of a misogynist, impulsive jerk.

A very strong misogynist, impulsive jerk, I mused.

Let the laying for my life begin. Again.

She walked like the deid on their way to Hades.
She dinna even glance back at him when she left.
Just wandered into the trees and disappeared. The sight made his inside cringe.

How was he supposed to fight for his life, now?! Last time 'twas even a wee bit fun.
Fun? Would he ever feel that again?

Christ, he got shot again.
And if she was in her right mind she would be killing him for that alone.

He always found it funny that she was so furriest wi' him for getting hurt, as if he hurt her deeply, by bleeding.
Even before they wed.

He hadna found anything funny at the moment though.

Beside, he reasoned protectively, preparing his plea for forgiveness.
He had to choose the path he went before at again, The path that got him shot before that is.

He chose it for a reason the first time!
The other way meant running straight into the red coats.

By the time he took his eyes away from her receding figure, there wasna another way to go but-

'The less of two evils' he'll say to her in his defense. Would she even care this time?

Beside it dinna feel as bad as before, forbye.
Maybe 'twas really just a graze this time.

At that moment he realized that he had already reached the place he caught up wi' her last time and was just sitting on his horse looking at a verra small, verra empty clearing o' woods.

He dismounted looking frantically around.
He should ha' tracked her as he did before, nay just walked blindly to the same spot.
"Claire….. Claire….." he cried 'oot in sheer panic.

O God, nay her too.
He couldna lose her too, nae her, never his Claire.
A Dhia, cuidich mi!

He was going through every prayer he knew.
Even the one's involving, for some reason, sheep and cattle.
He dinna care or seemed to be able to stop.

A rider was coming. Murtagh!

"I canna find her Murtagh!" he bellowed to the man before his horse even reached him.

He circled himself panting. Where would he even start looking?

"Ye great clot!" Murtagh rushed to him, dismounting and half leaping at him to get him to calm down
"They'll hear ye! shouting like that, what r'ye trying to do?! Make sure they'll finish the job?!!"

Jamie was wriggling violently from his reach
"I lost her, I lost her" he couldna stop repeating it. Still panting and turning to all directions.

"Who? The lass?" Murtagh was trying to get a good grip on him and to silence him "What 'rong wi’ ye, a bhalaich? What's wi’ ye and that woman? .... Jamie!!"

Seeing that his tactics of reasoning was failing, Murtagh clotted Jamie's ear, jerked him to face him by grasping both of Jamie's arms wi' his hands and hissing loudly into his face
"Be still ye burraidh! She's wi’ Dougal"

"What?!" Jamie grasped Murtagh arms in return "Why?"

"Now ye'll be telling me what's wi’ ye an' that lady, Jamie"

This wasna said as a request. Jamie kent an order when he was given one.

Calming himself at once, which he was now able to do once he kent she was found, he got his wit 'about him and answered verra calmly
"Naughting! I was only worrit I lost her.
And after me making such a fuss to Dougal 'about how I'll be the one minding her"

Seeing he wasna winning his audience, he added wi' as much of a genuine tone he could muster
"We're 'about to walk on verra dangerous ground ye and I" he put his hand on his godfather's shoulder reassuringly
"If I was to lose the woman, I would lose favor wi’ Dougal. And when Colum comes to ken about it. That I lost an English spy? Ho, that willna do at all, now would it"

"Did she tell ye she's a spy, then?"

"Nae" he waved the idea wi’ his hand bunching his face "I ken verra weel she isna.
But what I ken and what my uncles think they ken are two different things. And if we were to stay in their house, then…"

"Then their way o' thinking is law, aye. I see your meaning" Murtagh took a deep breath and sighed
"Christ ha' mercy wi’ ye lad. Ye had me really worrit 'bout ye.
I thought ye're heid went to mash" he let 'oot a small laugh "Aye, to worry for ye makes a man age.
But dunno ye be worrying your heid o' the matter, Dougal caught her only a few steps from us, sitting on the ground. The lass was even too stupid to try to make a good run of it"

"Aye, weel, we should go" Jamie said, trying for all his might to nay sound angry at the slights against his wife.

When the caught up wi' the rest o' the men though, Claire was sitting rigidly and wi' as much distance as possible (and it wasna verra possible) on Rupert's saddle. Rupert firmly behind her, his belly rubbing itself at her back.

"A charaid" he called to him and had to adjust his tone to sound much less darker. "One o' ye on a horse is plenty, another one is just 'oot right killing the animal" he led his horse beside them "Come. I'll take the woman" He was holding 'oot his hands to her, when Rupert cradled her more firmly into his arms, preventing Jamie reach to her.

"Ouch nae. Much oblige to ye, but no need" Rupert grinned "Beside ye had a go of it enough lad, let the others play too".

Jamie's horse snorted and geared its head for Jamie inadvertantly squeezed his legs together and pained him.

"Besides" added Rupert excitedly, while lifting one curl o' Claire's hair wi' his fingers "she doesnae feel so heavy" he put the curl to his nose sniffing at it as he added "smells good too, better than the horse at least"

"Has very strong, very long fingernails to claw the eyes of very rude persons, too" Claire added dryly, just before Jamie's fist was launched to meet Rupert's face.

"Its fine" she said with a knowing look to Jamie "He'll behave, now! Won't he?" and she lifted her hand wiggling her fingers in illustration.

"Aye o' course mistress" said Rupert apologetically. Jamie wasna convinced but what could he do?

He rode alongside them though, asking Rupert anything he could think of, moving back when the road couldn'a allow for two riders, but returning at once to her side.

He was however feeling verra dizzy, tired and stiff and was becoming more so as the ride went on. Goddammit the shot was has bad as before.

That was what made him a bit distracted, so when the whiskey goatskin, who wandered around the men was handed to Claire by him (all the while Rupert making affronted noises behind them for he nae being served first) he was shocked to find her shivering so violently she almost dropped the jag.

"Jesus Christ!! Your frozen" He was loosening his plaid struggling to remove his coat, one handed, to no success "Infrenn thing willna come off"

His dizziness grow and grow as he moved and twisted himself, and all of a sudden her voice came from inside his heid but a million miles away.

"Jamie….. Jamie….stop all of you, he's going over"
So she does still care; he smiled to himself hearing the panic in her voice and then his body hit the ground and he heard naughting else.

****

He awoke to full darkness surrounding him and a verra familiar scorching feeling in his shoulder.

"You idiot, you bloody dumb, fool" she was pouring the alcohol vigorously, unbuckling the sling and tearing her shift for bandages, all the while berating him and sounding panicked and annoyed at the same time.

"O no! The bloody buffoon doesn't care how others who care and worry for him would feel, seeing him hurt and unconscious. Falling off horses. always playing the hero, bloody, bloody…." She was grasping to find more insults.

"Scot" he gasped, clenching his teeth against the pain and smiling for the first time in days.

"I never heard a women use such language in my life" Dougal said and the other men stared at her unable to comprehend what in God's eyes was this creature.

She is mine he said to himself. This magnificent creature is mine, he answered the unasked question. Every zesty emotion, every fiery word, every touch, all her heart everything that she is….. Mine!

He had awakened wi' a realization that made him verra happy and he needed verra badly to tell her about it.

In the meantime, though, he was enjoying himself, listening to her shout orders, yelling at the bandage for nae complying wi' her demands and frowning at the rude comments the men were saying regarding how proper women should conduct themselves.

He looked at her, half naked, marching everything and everyone in sight, so fearless and feisty.

He remembered when he first awoke looking up at her face boring into him. How he couldna understanding why, but suddenly feeling warmth spread inside him and a yearning. A verra strong yearning.

To be honest, he felt something when she first touched him, while setting his arm. Her hand on his good shoulder, his holding on to it. But there was too much pain to be sure.

When she took her hand away, he suddenly wanted to grab it and put it back in its place, he couldna exactly explain it, but he felt as if it was missing; which was ludicrous of course, at the time. He had only known her a minute, how can she be missing from his life when she was never there to
As Dougal came to tell him they were to leave now, he felt a shiver go through him at the thought of never seeing her again.

He remembered staggering to his feet, nae knowing what to say or what to do wi' himself. He ended up leaving her wi' nae words but a knot at his stomach;

When Dougal announced her coming along wi' them and placed her on his horse, he just wanted to hold her and stare into her face, to make her talk to him in her English voice.

When the fight ended and they realized she was gone, he was the one who spurred his horse before anyone could speak and went on to say he'll bring her back.

Dougal might no have thought the trouble worth it and Jamie wasna 'about to let that be a consideration.

At the time, he convinced himself that his insistence to return her and his refusal to let her go, when he finally caught up wi' her, even though she helped him, was that it wasna safe!

She was stubborn and he thought she wouldn'a listen to reason. And he had to keep her safe, if she would allow it to him or no.

But when he grabbed her arm to stop her from running saying "I shall pick ye up and throw ye over my shoulder, do ye want me to do that?" and she inturn hissed into his face, he started doubting his unselfishness motives.

All his mind and body said was 'dunno ever let her go'.

Christ, if she dinna comply as swiftly as she did, he might ha' pulled her to him and kissed her, she was so feisty and to his surprise he liked it.

And then, after that, when we awoke under the tree in the dark, wi' her berating him. His chest felt hallow and he wanted her badly.

He dinna ken what 'twas then and dinna ken what 'twas now but after three years together 'twas still verra much there!

***

"I wasna gone lass, I just havena come yet" 

"What?" she stopped doctoring him and stared at him worriedly. The other men had already left to their horses, at Dougal announcement that they were to ride as soon as she's done with her administration. Murtagh left to fetch his horse for him.

They were nay alone, but he could perhaps slip in a word or two wi'oot being heard "I just havena come yet" he repeated.

"Are you delusional?" she sounded truly frightened "I couldn’t take it if you are!"
"Claire" he pleaded for her to really hear him "They havena come yet"

"What?"

"The bairns" he said lowering his voice as much as possible and glancing around to see no one could hear, "Nay gone…"
His gaze returned to her, her face frowning in thought at his words.
"They haven't happened yet" she finished the sentence for him, realizing his meaning
"You think-

"I dunno think, I ken! I wasna shot yet, until now that is" he tried grasping for a better explanation
"I was shot before ye see, it did happen, but when I … when we went through the stones it dinna happen yet! I had no scar, no pain on really cold days; I kent it had happened, but it dinna happen… yet"

"But then…" she said sad.
He stopped her, seeing her point.

"No, Mo nighean donn, I could of chosen to no get shot, simply by going left instead of right, only in that case, 'twill also mean I would ha' been down right killed.
So I chose getting hurt a little, over being deid a lot.
Thought ye might like me better hurt than deid, but if I was wrong I ask your pardon"
That got him a look
"Aye, weel. but my point is, that once I was shot the result was the same, the exact same, I mean 'tis nae?"
He side- glanced at the affronted part
"It feels the same to me, but your the healer, is it?"

"Well" she glanced at it herself, checking it and continuing to finish his dressing "Well, yes it is. Exactly the same"
Then she clubbed his ear and said wi' some asperity
"Could have told me you were shot, again, before falling off your damn horse, again, you big oaf"

"Dinna hurt much at the time" he said amused at their little game o' repeating past words.
It seemed his love was as adamant as him in remembering their first encounter
"That's why I thought it wasna so bad as before"

"Does it Hurts now?" she asked, lips yearning to curl up.

"Aye" he answered returning the joke.

"Good" she said shrewdly and smiled wi’ a smile she usually preserved for their private moments.
It made his heart flatter.
She wasna mourning anymore.

"Aye, that’s the thing Claire" he held the hand she placed on his shoulder smiling back to her
"Claire, once shot the exact same thing happened again. Once choosing the path and taking the same action, the result was….”

"Are you trying to say, that once we were to….. Mmphm" She was getting quite good wi' her Scottish noises
"The same action will result with the same outcome?"

"Ho, aye, to be sure. And if ye havena been noticing Sassenach, I tend to get ye on your back quite
"Jamie!!" she hissed at him low voiced.

"What's wrong wi' that? Ye seem to like it just fine" he pretended to be hurt.

"You know perfectly well that I do. You bloody-minded barbarian" she answered indignantly, eyes narrowing at him, nostrils flaring and trying to take her hand away.

He wasna having none of that.

He was now fondling her hand, trying to think, could he manage to bite her knuckle quickly wi'oot anyone noticing.

He was feeling quite giddy at his realization that the bairns are still here wi' them and that all it took was him plunging himself into her depths and rocking until pure ecstasy ensued.

Murtagh was coming close. She noticed that and went to stand on her feet saying

"Well I, suppose, that's all I can do"

She reached her hand to him giving him a verra double meaning look, one eyebrow cocked

"The rest his up to you".

He looked up at her eyes intensely, took her hand to help him rise and immediately, as it was the first time, he felt the fiery heat inside his stomach ignite and excitement to what's to come now that she was here, ensue.

The same action and the exact same result.

"Thank ye Sassenach, truly".

He said and dinna mean his arm.

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Chapter End Notes

dictionary:
salope= bitch/whore
Casse-toi= piss/bog off
t-olc=The bad
Ça me fait chier=this pisses me off
keeked=Peep surreptitiously
A Dhia, cuidich mi= Oh God, help me
A Dhia Mòran taing= Oh God, thank you
Tha mi duilich a charaid = Sorry friend
ghoistidh = godfather
hure = A whore
Castle Leoch

Chapter Summary

I'd love to hear what you think and to those who wrote: thank you, means a lot and to those who like my writing I would love to get new prompts ideas you'd like me to write about

Castle Leoch

We arrived at the castle the following morning.

I rode with Jamie again, after I informed Dougal in a very stern matronly tone, that if he insists on not allowing Jamie to rest a bit and could not afford me the proper means to treat my patient; He at least could allow me to make sure he stays conscious during what was left of the ride.

Jamie on his end played his roll wonderfully (with such a flare for the dramatics that he has) and contrived himself to look bamboozled, bewildered and in a complete stage of disarray, so much so, that at one point I had to elbow him to not take it too far.

He smiled under his noise at me, nodded and went back looking exactly the same.

"….And your arse is a wee bit smaller too, Sassenach" he said disapprovingly as we arrived at the courtyard of castle Leoch "What have they been feeding ye at your time?"

Through very skilful caresses, done under the shelter of his plaid, we discovered that our bodies did indeed seem to regress to the exact state they were, when I first came through the stones.

Jamie's hand was perfect. Perfectly healthy, whole and elastic.

And once alone, I was sure that we would find that any scars that were left from his encounter with Black Jack or the scar left from Murtagh cutting off Randall's brand on him (Effing degenerate), will be gone as well.

"Well it was only six month after a very bloody, draining war, that I came here, and with me trying to get my head around returning so civilian life, handling all the fallout, finding a place to live at, building a life-"

And my outright nervousness at resuming my full marital life with frank and all that came with it, I thought to myself, but wisely decided better than to say that part out loud.

"I didn’t have much time or appetite" I concluded.

"Dinna take proper care of ye, did he now?" Jamie said pleased "Dunna fret we'll see to that"

Jamie was outright giddy and wringing on my very last nerve.
Ever since we remounted and were coming closer and closer to the castle, he was talkative, excited and very annoying.

I understood, truly I did. I knew that we couldn't have received a better gift then this breathtaking start.

Instead of a life of separation, we had a clean slate.

Instead of vaguely trying to figure what was to come, from my almost nonexistence and not accurate knowledge of events, we knew exactly what will happen, when and how.

I was happy!! Genuinely and profoundly happy!

But while deep emotions, such as these, made me experience content and serene happiness, they made Jamie jump out of his own skin and in need to extricate all that built up energy into action, usually involving some sort of sexual act.

I could feel the hum of his body, glued to mine, eager to finally be alone with me.

He surveyed my body with his hands as best he could under the cover of the plaid, and I knew he was estimating exactly what to with it once he got me alone.

That part was fine by me as well, truly. Only with the lack of capacity to perform any act of release on his part, for awhile at least; my dear, Wonderful husband could not keep his big mouth shut!

He told me how inappropriate my wardrobe was and how he could not believe any man in his right mind would allow his woman to go outside like this, that my hair was too smooth and too short and how horrible it was on frank's part to not let it run wild and free and how I should be very careful with my glass face, for we needed to be clever and not let my deep love for him show.

Which really wasn't a problem at this exact moment for I was quite sure all that was showing on my tell-all face was annoyance.

Jamie persisted for a while about how this and how that… ho, who the bloody hell cares!?

I stopped paying attention at some point (it was important for his health that I do so).

By the time we reached the castle I was pretty much fed up and in need of space.

Besides, I thought a little vindictively, if he was so displeased with anything regarding me, he shouldn't be anywhere near me!

All around us the men were dismounting and the same reception as before was unfolding.

Old Alec came to joyfully greet the arrival of his dear horses more than the men, I looked up and saw Colum scrutinize me from above, through his study's window.

Ho dear, that needed to be dealt with as well, and again; I mused to myself and managed to exaggerate my exasperation further all by lonesome.

But first thing, first…. Mrs. Fitz bountiful figure and smile arrived from the side door of the kitchen.

A smile almost as wide as her heart, I thought, as I was staring longingly into the face that was welcoming the men so lovingly.
I could feel my insides calming.

When she noticed me, as before, I couldn’t help but beam at her, wholeheartedly. Remembering what a true friend and comfort she was, when I first came; bedraggled and defiant at all that stood in front of me, trying so hard not to show fear.

I remembered the story I learned from Murtagh, about how she fought for me during my capture and trial at Cranesmuir.

It sprung in me the need to run and hug her.

I have always regretted never gotten to say goodbye to her.

"And what do we ha' here?" she came close

"Claire Beauchamp" I answered instead of Jamie this time, and curtsied slightly, wanting to show her proper respect this time.

I did learn something during my time here, after all.

At the last second, I couldn’t help myself and took her hand in mine, holding it very lightly and said

"You must be Mrs. Fitz, I mean Mrs. Fitzgibbons".

She looked at me with complete bewilderment, but I didn’t pause

"The men, they told me of you while we rode here, told me how you would welcome and care for them and well" I stared down at my bedraggled self "me" I added apologetically.

"Ho..." she muttered unsure what to make of this.

"Excuse my forwardness, but I simply wanted to meet the women that inspired such praises from those who know her" I smiled kindly.

"Ouch! Come now" she waved her hand as to minimize the complement.

"I wish very much for us to become friends" I endured kindly.

"Ouch, m'dear" she was blushing, she did not get many complements and I thought her very deserving of them "verra kind, verra kind o' ye".

At this Jamie interjected (who asked him) "Murtagh found her, Dougal said we must bring her along wi' us...so-

"So..." she repeated a bit wary, but resigned herself to her role "come wi' me, we shall find ye something to eat and something to wear that a bit more... weel... a bit more"

"Thank you kindly, I don't usually look like this" I said apologetically again as we started to walk toward the castle.

A strong distinct cough stopped us.

Jamie coughed again waiting to be understood.

Unlike him though, I kept my mouth shut. See how he liked that!

"What's a miss wi' ye then?" Mrs. Fitz enquired.

He stared at me waiting; I cocked my eyebrow at him and gathered my arms together, claiming complete ignorance.

I wasn’t really going to let the opportunity for us to be alone pass, but I could make him sweat a tad (it was a very long ride).

He made a very distinct Scottish noise, but I stood my ground.
"Jamie are ye ill a balach?" she was truly worried.
"Aye, I am" he said in clipped tones "and Mrs. Beauchamp has been saying how she has to attend to me properly, once we reached our destination. A matter of life and death she said" he added narrowing his eyes at me "inflammation, fever, swelling, she said"
He turned to Mrs. Fitz pleading for compassion "I was shot ye see"
she gasped "Fell off my horse and everything" he added for dramatic affect.

I sighed and resigned myself to my role as well.

"Yes, I bandaged his shoulder, but I wasn’t able to clean and dress it properly, I do must tend to it. Wouldn’t want him to swoon again” I said only light mocking in my voice, but he heard it and his now perfect hand clenched.

"I’m a healer, a wisewoman, I know how to tend to such matters” I added, ignoring him and explaining to Mrs. Fitz still not convinced face.

She considered my closely as before and I wondered for the thousand time how rare were physician in this time?

"Jamie ye heard the lady, ye need tending. This way" she ordered.
Jamie was already at our heels before she finished her commands.

****

As we walked through the corridors of the castle and to the chamber that will be our- I mean- my home for awhile, the feeling of déjà vu engulfed and moved me. So much so, that I wanted to caress the walls as I walked.

This time it wasn't the memories of frank and me exploring a decrepit ruin that triggered it, but Jamie and me and our time in the castle.

Even the time before we married. Such innocent times against what's to come.

Even though we were surrounded by ill-wisher, sly devious minds that tried to control and manipulate us to gratify their own ambition and aspiration, they could not come close to events that followed them.

The watch, Wentworth, Jack Randall, The Duke of Sandringham, losing Hugh munro, King Louis, bloody Bonnie Prince Charlie and his ego-driven war, oh Lord, the war.

I had more on my list, and realization seeped into me. For better or worse, right in this moment, we were far from these things, people and event. And we were together, our future not determined yet!

Whatever annoyance or prickliness I felt, evaporated and by the time I looked at my, now, half naked husband sitting on a stool by the fire trying to be covered in a blanket by Mrs. Fitz, I felt so tender I could have melted.

Evidently, toying with Jamie for five minutes was more than enough and too much for me. I wanted one moment alone with him.
We stopped in the kitchen for all of the supply I needed, but I wanted to offer an olive branch.

"I want to give him a sponge bath" I declared "I mean, I must wash the area around the wound, not just the precise place, to make sure no other part is ruptured or bleeding internally… from the inside I mean. And for that I need to see the color of the skin when it is completely clean of dirt and muck" I said at her gaped mouth and bulging eyes at my request for provision needed for a bath.

"And I wouldn’t mind having one myself" I added as an after thought, examining myself up and down and flinching in aversion.

"For later of course, after I'm done treating the young man… and I am alone, by myself, with no one around" I added promptly, for at this point she was clutching her chest and seeming either about to faint or suffer a myocardial infarction.

The scandalous expression on her face reseeded a fraction and she nodded.

"Aye… of course, I shell just go and fetch some ewers then"
But then as remembering something she added "maybe for young Jamie I'll apply the washing …I mean ye… it willna be proper"

"Tis fine Mrs. Fitz, I'm sure Mrs. Beauchamp as seen worse than my poor carcass or back" he said with a teasing smile "And I'm obviously no threat to anyone in my current state…. well maybe I am to anything ye can find in your heart to bring me to eat. To that, I canna guarantee that there would be any survivors or even crumbs left"

As always, Jamie knew what to say and how to say it and my reasoning was sound enough that she smiled, gave him a quick squeeze on the shoulder and went to leave.

She was so protective of him it almost made me love her more, if such a thing was possible.

I looked at her receding figure and thought; she, was truly the heart and soul of this place. The sun that kept all the little rats and their intrigues scatter back to their holes, when she shined.

I missed her so, amongst all the self-centered, vain, vapid people in Paris or at the fields of battles fought, hopelessly, under Charles's flag.

She would have been able to force all those nurses -wives to listen to me and use my disinfected methods that could have saved some of the faces that would sometimes haunt me at my dark moments of regret.

"Thank you Mrs. Fitzgibbons" I said when she hurried toward the door. Could these mere words say all that I was feeling?

"Everybody calls me Mrs. Fitz. Ye may also" she said kindly and smiled.

Joy filled me to see that one future friendship I was interested in saving was beginning to form and I smiled back.

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I didn’t even hear the door clink before a hand descended on my nape, brought me straight into his lap, his mouth on mine. O Lord, that man could kiss.

After awhile he pulled me a little back from him, his forehead on mine, eyes closed as he let out a very long shuttering breath, as if he had been holding it forever.
"Ye'll pay for that" he said breathless, opening his eyes slowly.

"What?" I was a little breathless myself, not Perceiving his meaning.

"Outside" he said, taking a long needed breathe into him, rubbing his forehead to mine.

"Hooo...." I smiled pressing my forehead to his, making him pull back a bit in a mockingly menacing manner "We'll you deserved that for all...."

He silenced me by kissing me again, I cradled his checks with my hands as his good arm made its way down my spine, grabbing my right buttocks and giving it a very firm squeeze.

That made me shriek and jounce slightly on his lap, which in return made him grunt in pain.

I broke off standing to my feet and returned to treat my patient, and not my husband.

"I should really tend to it, I wasn't lying, even then, about the complication involved, if not dressed and cleaned properly"

"So ye dinna just want me alone with ye, then?" he said amused "too bad, I did"

"Liar" I said chaffing back "You didn't want me to treat ye 'I'm fine' you said 'fend for myself' I seem to recall"

"Weel....." he seemed shy all of a sudden "'twas only.... Weel ye see the blanket. D'ye no?"

I was in fact just removing said blanket, that was kindly wrapped by Mrs. Fitz to cover his back. I was so accustom to his scars, I would almost be shocked myself at others reaction to them. For me it was just Jamie, just part of the man I love. I would notice the scars as I would notice the shape of his nose.

I'd forget sometimes what it meant to bear these scars, what was done to him.

"It was only she could smell the fear coming off me, over you seeing my back" he said explaining the existence of the blanket, as if it was not obvious.

Then he added in a sad manner "So was I'.

I circled from the back of him, to crouch in front of him "What?"

"She ken that's why I dinna want to come and let ye doctor me" he said with a rueful smile "otherwise I would have... weel to have the chance to have ye lay your hands on me just for a little longer.... it did hurt the first time, but some of it felt...." He shifted a little in his seat to seemingly ease some pressure.

"You said, you didn't mind me seeing your back" I added feeling a tad affronted and not knowing exactly why "that I didn’t make you feel pitiful".

Then It donned on me;
It was silly, truly, but him claiming to have trust in me, without even truly knowing me; well I remembered it felt more than a little heartwarming when he first said it to me.

later during our lives together it was one of the things I said to myself to fortify the strong assurance I felt, of us belonging together.

To be told by him, that even before I fell inlove with him, or had the chance to learn through experience how to be with him; that I just knew instinctively how to treat him, to make him feel at
ease with me.
That was important to me, for he knew very well from the start how to handle me.

He must have sensed the small pang in my voice, for he said apologetically "Weel I dinna ken how ye would react before hand, now did i?"
I must have looked bewildered for he said
"I mean…. Christs, do ye no ken what ye look like Sassenach!? even covered head to toe with muck…. Ye still are…. I mean ye still are one of the most beautiful thing I ha' ever seen, not to mention all proper and dainty…. I mean I dinna think ye could have seen so many misfortune or ugliness in your life…. even with a mouth that those not even belong to a wench working in a bawdy house" he ended with a winking smile, which for him meant the most owlish blink of a child.

Even though he was injured, seeing him half naked, large muscles glinting in the fire, looking very much as a big Viking hero returning from pillaging (he could pillage me any time), I was starting to feel a very distinct heat rise from my core.
But I just smiled, kissed his hand and went back to treat my Viking.

"Mrs. Fitz will bring the water and I will give you a very long, warm proper bath" I said re stationing myself at his back. I could not with good conscience allow neither me nor Jamie to go to sleep at such a state.

And knowing him, if I didn’t take care of him he would just collapse and go to sleep dirty, hurt and alone.
I shivered thinking that, that's what must have happened Last time.

"Is it worse then before?" he asked curiously "ye dinna ask for it last time"
"Well the fear, terror and heartbroken loneliness I felt, last time, made my fall off my feet and go to sleep like this" I spread my hand displaying the foulness that was I
"Besides I wasn’t married to you then" I added hugging him from the back and applying a small bite to his earlobe "phew" I spat the taste in my mouth
"I want my husband kissable. And now that there is no issue with proper conduct…"
I whispered in his ear and let my words trail off, letting him fill in the gaps with his very active imagination.

With that offer, He straightened in his seat, and I could feel more than see his face light up.

Then he winced from the pain in his shoulder and arm that his movement must have jarred.
"I'm sorry" I came the crouch in front of him again "I should have already strapped that arm to your side".

"Ouch, I dinna like it the first time as weel" he said while I did so "another reason I dinna want to come with ye, I dinna want to be fussed over".
I was wrapping the bandage around him, my hands coming around his waist and I was sited just between his legs. He smiled then and said "I dinna like to hinder my arm such, but I do so remember the applying of it"

His other hand came to my chin held my face up to him "Not lost your touch have ye?"
His said, face coming close to mine
"Your husband is a lucky man indeed" and his tongue immersed into my mouth, opening mine as his hand moved to the back of my neck-
Then I felt him wince again.
"What's wrong?" I said releasing my mouth for his. "Nothing" he said inching toward me, eager to get back to our previous engagement, but I was backing a way. "No, come here" he whinged.

He was almost falling from his chair, leaning more and more to me "I wanted so much to do that last time, please come here". This was followed by a very low growl when I rose to my feet and went to his back "What is it then?" I asked again.

"I was verra wrong 'bout the kind women part though!" he said grudgingly and waved his hand in the vicinity of the strap "donna ken, something grazed my skin there" "The strap isn't positioned properly, I'll fix it"

He moaned at that, making it clear he did not care.

When I was done I touched his back tracing the scars. "I wished we could have gone back to before he had ever done this to you". I could hear him smiling but his voice held a remorseful tone in it. "And be alone wi'out ye all that time? Na lass, I need ye by my side, especially as how I would have been so scared, As I am now. Aye, nay knowing what was happening to me and to no have ye wi' me to explain and share the burden"

"You would have figured it out, I'm sure of it. And maybe it would have been worth waiting the time before me, so you…." I protested.

"There wasna a time before ye" he stopped me. "Jamie" I frowned at him "you don’t need to say that"

"I'm nat trying to humor ye, mo chridhe" he added indignantly "I have lived without ye, aye, but my life began the day I met ye." He rose to his feet and turned to face me/ "How can I make ye understand?" he cupped my face with his good hand, caressing me with his thumb "It is like I started to be aware of life, of my actions, feelings, decision, of what it meant to truly be a man, and I don’t mean only the bedding" he gave me a wanton smirk, and one ruddy eyebrow shot up. "Only when I had ye" he said so amorously "When I needed to protect ye, when I wanted to have ye, when I did have ye" the smirk widened "when I hear what ye tell me regarding things, when I can tell ye all the going on with me, all of my heart and mind" his face were serious now. His thumb caressing my lips very lightly. "Aye, I have lived before, but I didn't truly feel it" taking one more, small step to me, he bent and very gently placed his lips to mine, skimming, gliding "I have lived before, but my life began with ye!"

What could I have said to that? How I wished I had something to say to that.

All I could do is look into his eyes beseeching him to see my heart, my feelings, my need for him. To hear the words I couldn’t find but felt. To give him all he gave me.

I closed my eyes, one small tear ran down my cheek "I love and need you so much James Fraser".

"Really? Well that's verra good Sassenach" he smiled contently "Although" he added putting his forehead to mine and we swayed a little together "I'm afraid it willna matter if ye did or no. No It would" he corrected swiftly "but I need ye so much, a ghraidh, to much, to ever let ye go"
"Beside" he added after we stood there just locked with each other "there was no way I wouldna protect Jenny from those bastard that tried..." he choked a little at that "I canna see what I could've done differently, Claire. And I couldna imagine going through that again"

"Ho Jamie..."

"Dinna fash, lass, it's over and done wi'... Beside" he lifted his head from my forehead and was returning to his usual lighthearted manner "I have it, on good authority that the women I will marry, willna mind it so much" it was a statement but I heard the inquiry in his tone "And as she is the one that will see me the most times bare as a new born bairn" he said In a very inviting smile.

Wanting to answer this plea of confirmation, I sent one hand to his buttocks pulling him to me as he did many times.

"I happen to know" I said, sending my fingernail to his nipple flicking and circling imaginary circle on it until it stood taut and he closed his eyes and shivered "On good authority mind you" I added mockingly, not stopping my motions. 
"That your future wife adores, will adore, I mean, your body" my other hand trickled up and down his backside until I dipped it inside his kilt taking in a handful 
"and will enjoy every part of you" using the hand on his chest I ran my fingers through the little short, springy hairs on it.

He was looking down at me, straight into my face, his tongue peeking outside a little.

Whatever Mrs. Fitz was about to bring him to eat, wasn’t the only thing at risk to be devoured. He was now looking at the hand on his chest.

"Jamie" I said stilling my hands on him, he raised his stare directly into mine "you are beautiful to me" I said with all seriousness.

"Beside" I added with an unchaste look of my own, after a moment of standing there intense stares between us "I know for a fact that your future wife often feels as if she cannot control herself with the wanting of you"

He stood there not moving, eyes creasing into slits, fixed on my eyes and not moving.

I felt a rush go through my spine. An adrenaline zest that caused me to flash red all over and made my breath come short.

"You, bed, now!" he said abruptly, seizing my hand.

At the exact moment I was starting to be tugged to bed, came the sounds of heavy footsteps down the hall, and the voice of Mrs. Fitz talking to someone came rumbling behind the closed door.

*****

"Be careful wi' the water lass, there hot. Ye willna be wanting to scorch yourself, not wi' dinner not ready ye.... Ouch, I think I left the stew too long, I must hurry to go back".

When the door opened, I was already by the window, Jamie sitting at his seat by the hearth. Each of us looking at different directions.
Which was understandably, much bizarre then if I stood near him, as we were when she left us.

So it was quite reasonable for Mrs. Fitz and the now coming in after her, Laoghaire Mackenzie to stop dead at the doorway and stare at us bewildered.

I sprung to them, taking the jugs, bar of soap and strips of cloth mumbling something about how we were waiting for them and how I couldn’t do anything else until I could clean all the injured surfaces.

Yes, I thought to myself, that sounded plausible.

"Aye" she said still staring very oddly at Jamie, that wouldn’t lift his head to save the world at the moment, and was taking very long deep breathes.

"Well, I thought it better to ask my granddaughter to help me carry all these water up, instead of troding back and forth" she added kindly losing interest at the wired Scotsman behavior and was helping me to put thing on surfaces around the room.

"Laoghaire" She indicated for the girl to come closer "Claire Beauchamp" she introduced.

The girl with the pouting face, beautiful long luxuriant yellow hair, perky round breasts and a very fleshy mouth that looked like a soft pillow waiting for someone to rest their lips on-well we shall see about that!- emerged for the shelter of her aunt form.

She curtsy not even daring to raise her eyes at me "mistress" she said half choked.

She could be choked all the way as far as I was concerned; I thought very unchristian of me.

Well, she bloody hell tried to have me burned at the stake, for God's sake, how Christian could someone be? I was neither Job nor yet a martyr.

'Dance on your ashes' rang in my ears.

Yes, I was fully justified in my hate.

Besides, I reconciled my conscience, I did tell Colum not to do harm to the girl for vengeance sake.

I smiled back at the bowed figure and returned, as best I could, a polite nod.

'Ve have to be smart, canny and not let our feelings show', that was the main thing Jamie kept pestering me on the ride over. And I wasn’t about to let him have the satisfaction of scolding me in a superior fashion that he so loved to do.

I had the best revenge after all, I reminded myself.

It was Sitting, boring into the fire and shaking with his wanting me.

Laoghaire was acting her best too, insufficiently to say the least, to not look at Jamie half naked, glowing and emitting all the testosterone scents and signals a big male animal exudes in order to attracts its female counterpart.

Not for you, you little-

I had to calm myself down and fast, me and my 'I'll tell you all my secrets, and no lies' face could not afford such thoughts or emotions.

Jamie sat there. The blanket was back, Covering only his back, I supposed he felt it improper and too intimate for her to see his scars. To see him. He did not trust her!
With a final glance at her, and seeing how I wasn’t the only one that found his body appetizingly beautiful, I turned to Mrs. Fitz thanked her and assured her we didn’t require anything, not a single thing more, and wasn’t there a stew I heard she said needed her attention.

"HO" she exclaimed "ho dear, I must go, sorry Mistress, I must go" and without another look back she was out the door.

Laoghaire kept standing there, completely unaware of what just transpired.

"You should join your grandmother, my dear" I said, the acidity in my voice quite clear.

"What?" she looked up at me then tearing her stare so reluctantly from Jamie. Then looking around she realizing her kin was gone "What?" she said, complete boggled, wondering what had happened.

"I'll walk you to the door" I suggested helpfully in my tone but half throwing her out the door with my body.

"Ho, aye, thank ye mist….."

I slammed the door at her face and after a moment could hear her leaving.

As soon as the door's lock made a small 'tink' Jamie's good hand grasped my neck, turned me and took my mouth into his.

He lowered his arm scoping my right buttocks with his palm, gathering me into him in such a way a pin couldn't be inserted between us.

Once I was surely stretched tight along his body, his palm started exalting a few familiar maneuvers on my backside, alternating between squeezing, caressing and pinching.

"Jamie...." I gasped to let out a word

"Hush now" he ordered softly

"But what if som.....mmm" his mouth engulfed mine, his body starting to rub himself on mine causing me to swallow my words and omit a pleasurable sound.

"No one we'll come" he said growling slightly.

Finally releasing me and with a hand on my nape again he turned me to face the door.

He placed my palms, one by one, flat on the door. Poor thing, he only had one hand to use.

"Jamie. You don’t mean….."

"I mean it just fine Sassenach. Now hush!" his hand left my second palm and was caressing her way down my arm, breast, hip, outer thigh, calf, sleeking its way to the hem of my dress and on to my bare skin, lifting it back up on my leg, this time caressing naked skin.

my dress complied with his touch and was obediently hiked up, staying put on my hips while his hand moved to a spot between my thighs, that by now was sleek and wet "This isn't much a show of resistance" he said amusingly in my ear when he felt that.

"S h u t  u p" I said panting at every syllable, as two fingers were moving inside me, penetrating, Circling and wiggling.

My forehead was pressed to the door, fingernails scraping the smooth wooden surface making
small scratching noises that were swallowed by me, omitting an array of sounds.

Jamie body was compressed at my rear and was vibrating with repressed amusement at my behavior and vocals.

"Careful!" I hissed "vengeance is mine saith the lord"

"Ho, really? ye have a really high opinion of yourself, Sassenach. Beside what do you purpose to do about it?" and he proceed in placing one fingertip at a very tender spot and applying pressure.

I let out a very deep groan.

The bloody bastard was laughing at me.

I started rocking myself with the rhythm of his fingers, moving up and down his body, rubbing. Inchin myself at first but slowly gathering speed.

"tha I s na f a i…..mmm" it was his turn to pant. He clenched his lips trying very hard not to get to excited "I'll g e t ye for this Sasse….. for the love of god, hoick up my kilt!"

"Helpless am I ?"

"Sassenach! now!!"

I obliged him and also spread my feet further apart.

I took my hands from the door and sent them back to bunch up his kilt all while caressing his unclad thighs.

With an idea springing to mind, I very lightly scraped his upper thigh with my nails very close to base of his yearning.

"I love ye so much" Jamie quivered with such devoted earnestness in his voice.

I peeped at him over my shoulders.

His eyes were closed, head thrown back in sheer ecstasy, his face frowning a little as if he was trying to concentrate on only feeling the sensation of my touch.

Suddenly the door shook and I could hear someone trying to open the door from its other side.

Thank to all that is holly, I locked it.

We both froze completely and stared at the door.

"Jamie, r'ye there man?" Murtagh voice came through the door.

"No, no, no, no" he whispered under his breath non- stop

"No, no, no, no" he was trying to lift up my dress and his kilt.

This done with only one hand was absurd.

whatever fabric he let go of, fall back into its place.

But, I supposed there wasn’t much blood rushing into his brain at present for him to realize that.

He did it twice to no avail.

"No, no, no, no, no, no"

"Jamie ssshh..." I whispered and addressing the door called out a little louder "yes he is, just a minute. I'm just finishing the bandaging and I'll come to open the door"
"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no" he was giving me his best impression of a pleading puppy while I straighten my torn, dirty, crumpled remains of a dress "no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no."

I was leading him back to the small Stool by the fire

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no…." I sat him down and he grabbed both my hands in his very large, strong one, with eyes begging me for dear life.

"What am I supposed to do!?" I hissed, pulling myself free of his clutching hand and reaching for the door "beside his your godfather" I remarked trying to shift the very accusatory look I was getting in the direction of his true culprit.

I heard a few more "no, no, no, no, no" coming from him before I opened the door, Which was now occupied by the always, but now much more than ever, grumpy, suspicious Murtagh.

"I'm so sorry" I smiled, in what I really hoped, was nonchalant manner "when Mrs. Fitz went out I must have inadvertently locked the door, I'm so used to doing that from where I lived before, so I just…." I shrugged praying for dear life that even if he didn’t believe me, it will be the end of it.

I turned my back to him coming back to stand by the fire, pretending to be cold, so he couldn't see the face, that told a thousand secrets, and always against my will.

"And that would be oxfordshire you say?" he followed into the room

"Yes, of course" I half glanced at him, praying, that there are locked doors in oxfordshire, at present time, and good reason to do so.

"Aye.….." Murtagh as always seemed suspicious but then, I guessed, realized he didn’t care all that much who the hell I was, and he turned to Jamie.

Jamie was sulking, staring into the fire, refusing to look up.

"What's a miss then?" Murtagh was frowning inquisitively at him now, giving me some freedom, thank God.

"Nothing" he blurted angrily.

"I swear to ye, a gòrach, the way ye been these days….."

"It’s the pain" I interjected helpfully "I swear, almost all the Scottish men I treated, deal with pain by becoming angry and grumpy" I laughed a little trying to make light of the situation.

"Have ye found yourself in many occasions treating Scots?" he asked and it was clear that the next question would be: where? In what circumstances?

How am I supposed to explain that?

The truth was, I was treating Scots on a battle field that hadn’t happen yet!? Or should I mention that I was also married, for almost three years to one big accident prone Scot!?

"I …." I had no idea what to say.

But as always, no matter at what state he was in, Jamie always did come to my rescue.
"Ye wanted something of me?"

"Aye, Mrs. Fitz said to come and tell you, that Dougal says ye were to sleep at the landing up in
the…" Then remembering I was there, stopped, cleared his throat "maybe I should just come and
show ye, then? do ye' need help moving?" he made a gesture toward Jamie as if to grab him and let
him lean on his shoulder

"No. I dinna need your help, I….. I need to sit a minute".

At that I turned bolt right to my vanity mirror, my back to them, so my now, very red face was
completely covered

"whats wrong with ye?"

"Nothing" his tones roared a little as Murtagh advanced towered him, which made Murtagh freeze
at his track "I just need a minute!"

"I'm afraid, I hurt him quite badly" I turned back around, face, I sincerely hoped under control "I
mean, bandaging him, I had to prod the joint and clean an open wound, it hurts quite a lot" I
hurried to explain myself "dizzy too. He needs a minute to recuperate" I added trying to help my
man back.

"Aye, I'll wait wi' ye then" he answered starring at me.

We stood there for what must have been forever but probably only a few seconds.

The more I thought about the situation, the more I had to bite down on my lips which seemed to
want to curl up, if I allowed them or not.

That rewarded me with two looks: one of complete bewilderment, and the other, well Jamie's look
was… Ho dear I was going to pay for this.

Then I realized what was the correct course of action here, that, hopefully, will redeem me In a
very scary looking, flushed Scots eyes.
And perhaps pave the path for us to have more undisturbed time alone "The wound needs to be
cleaned d a I l y, that means every day, and bandages replaced. Its important to keep the wound
irrigated" I explained to Murtagh in my most Mother Hildegarde tone "so I'll need to see him once
a day at least".

"Aye" it was a Jamie who answered rising slowly to his feet smiling, very little, but smiling, I did
see it.

"we should go….." but he remained standing looking at me. Neither of us wanted to part.

"Ye shouldna be scared mistress" he said, and there was a seriousness in his voice now "of anyone
here"

'as long as I'm with you' I concluded quietly in my head; knowing I was promised, again, what was
offered to me almost from the first moment we met.

I swallowed and met his eyes directly "thank you. I won't" and hoped what he heard was simply 'I
love you'.

His smile said he did.
"Coming then?" Murtagh was growing quite impatient of this spectacle.

"Aye" he said moving his feet in the direction of the door while Murtagh took sward, shirt and coat for him "Try to sleep a bit ye'r probably worn out, and sassen…. I mean mistress, watch yourself” he said as we stood shoulder to shoulder.

And with that the two of them were gone.

****

I did bathe after they left. Concealing brassiere and panties. Remembering how they were taken never to be seen again.

I also slept again until five o'clock the next day.

I was fed the same hot broth, and clothed with all the essential undergarments and clothes that were required to make me a proper 18th century women.

And as I looked at my, this time very familiar, reflection in the mirror, Murtagh knocked at the door and beckoned me to come and to start it all again.

Events progressed frighteningly the same after that. And I do mean the same.

Colum at the study, same lies from both parties.

This time luckily, for me that is, I was very much pleased to receive the lie regarding Sean Pityr, the tinker, and his assistance of my leaving.

I obviously did not want to leave in five days but he was not going to let me, so it was working quite nicely for everyone involved.

I got Jamie back; I wasn’t living my life without him.

We will be alright; we would follow the time line this time, not changing anything until the time was right.

Up until the wedding almost everything needed to stay the same, we know that much.

After that, we said we would sit, plan everything one by one. Make lists draw charts if need be, destroy them all after, of course.

But be thorough, so we could keep what we wished and avoid…. I shuddered at the thought of what awaited us in the shape of the things we wanted to prevent.

Jamie was right, we weren’t trying to change a destiny of a war, a huge piece in history that was caused and will cause too many ripples, for us to be let to change such a thing.

We were only trying to change small things in the universe, and surely their was a reason we were brought back after all.

Thinking what we did try to change I shivered. It was one of my biggest regrets.
I tried to console myself that I suggested such a thing at the time, in the thought that it will be an active anchor to pull my, then, very broken husband back to life and I honestly did not know where else to go or do for him and all the people that we both wanted to protect and save..... I really did see it as the best option.

I pushed such thoughts a way, we were together and we had a plan.

All will be well.

****

It was at dinner time, that my own husband decided to break our plan.

I had to remind myself I loved him and killing him will solve nothing!

I walked as before to the dining hall.

Suspicious looks and gossiped whispers – check.

A brief nod of recognition from Murtagh – check.

Dougal sitting me down in the main table – check.

Drinks – thank God in heaven, check.

More lies and investigation camouflaged as polite conversation - double check.

But thank the Lord with Rhenish.

ENTER one wayfarer husband – What in hell?!?!
If I thought my entrance created a ruckus his entrance was the second coming.

They all stared at him.

Dougal's hand tightened on the leg of his glass and I thought it would break any minute.

Murtagh had his mouth open and a piece of unchewed bread peeping from it.

Angus… well, Angus was Angus, he was scratching his arse.

Jamie's eyes narrowed for a split second once he saw I was sited in the main table and not with the rest of the castle inhabitants.

But in true Jamie fashion, did not lose his composure and was coming to pay his respects to the laird and his wife. I took a very big gulp of Rhenish.

As he came to stand before us Dougal rose to his feet.

"My laird" he bowed his head to Colum "my lady Leoch" a deep bow to Letitia.

"Dougal" this was said to the man with a one hand leaning on his dirk. For Christ sake he wasn't going to stab him now. Was he?

"Mr. McTavish, welcome. We were wondering when we will see ye "Colum waved a hand at the other tables "should ha' known you would come for the food. Come, sit. And after that ye'll be joining me at my chamber for a word." He added pointedly.

"Mr. McTavish?" asked Lattisa bewildered. This time around I didn't inquire about the young man to have it be reviled to her they were to use a false name on my account.

"Aye, surely ye remember young Jamie" Colum addressed her.

"Ho, it's been awhile uncle, I'm sure I changed quite a lot from a sixteen year old paitçhey "

"Christ lad" Dougal was muttering through clenched teeth. Probably the uncle comment, again. His grip on the dirk tightened.

Jamie didn’t seem to care; he addressed me quite cordially with a deep bow "mistress, ye'r servant ma'am. I hope to find ye well" so that was it, he was worried about me; I wondered what brought that along.

"Yes, thank you kindly, Mr. McTavish. Quite well, Although, to tell the truth the hardship of the last few days have been catching up with me" I addressed Colum and stood to my feet "if you'll excuse me I think I'll retire early tonight"

Letitia did not seem happy, I supposed she wanted to have her round at 'investigation of the English spy' game.
Colum scrutinized me, reluctant to let his captured pray go. Dougal at my back holding my chair stared at him waiting for his word, either to let me go or kill me right here, by the look on his face. Thanks to Jamie revealing his kinship to them.

Jamie on his part just seemed annoyed at his wife leaving when he has just arrived.

I didn’t care, I was sticking to the plan, and at this point, last time, I excused myself also.

I didn’t want to take further risk, that both brothers will find new questions I wouldn’t be able to answer or new ways of interrogations that were not as pleasant as food and drinks.

"A good night to ye then… Mrs. Beauchamp" Colum finally said and I left swiftly not looking back.

The big oof can fend for himself.

*****

It was the next day. And according to what happened, before, I was to go and visit Jamie at the stables under the pretense of wanting to change his dressing.

After collecting my supplies and a basket filled with food, Complements of Mrs. Fitz.

Which wasn't my idea now or the time before, but I was very thankful for it, especially now. Jamie seemed to always be in a constant state of starvation and I missed taking care of him.

I paused to wonder if Mrs. Fitz picnic had ulterior motives then, as it now seemed to have, according to her looks at me, but departed with only a nod and a smile of gratitude to her.

I made my way to the top of the meadow, Rupert at my heels. Business as usual.

I walked on, cherishing the serenity of life in the castle, the laughter of children playing, the sounds of the hard but earth bound labor around me.
It was so different from city life in the aristocratic Paris, from the battle fields we marched on until Culloden.
It was no Lallybroch. But it was the next best thing.

And this time, I thought, I could appreciate it fully with-

Jamie was taming the white colt as before. As I watched him I wondered if the changing of the dressing wasn't an excuse, then, as it is now.
No, I reasoned to myself. I really did want to check on my patient as I was accustomed to do.
Daily rounds for the patients under my care during the war, was a custom rooted in me by years of practice and being so scared and extracted so rudely from my time and place, I clung to any normality I could have.

And he was kind, caring, promising me in true chivalrous manner his protection. who wouldn't choose that over the others that surrounded me?

But here and now with the discretion that one holds in his private mind, I had no one but myself to
lie to, so I let my mind tell me the whole truth.

I didn’t think I had amorous feelings for him at that point, yet. But his gentle strokes at my time of need before the hearth, his eyes locking on mine so I could see him as a man for the first time and not a threat, watching him speak softly to the horse, now and then, in the Gaelic, so gentle but clearly in control, Luring her to him, which I wondered all of a sudden did he use such tactics on me....

I could feel now and remember then, the heat I felt, the deep breath I inhaled and did again, feeling soft inside wanting to touch... I closed my eyes as the thought washed over me.

"What are ye thinking of mo ghraidh?" I opened my eyes to find a smiling mouth, twinkled eye, face. Watching me and leaning on the fence. I smiled feeling absurdly shy at being caught, but simply said "You".

He looked at me softly back and after a moment called to Roderick, the stable boy, to come care for the colt, signaled his head to me, and we walked side by side without speaking, the fence between us.

We reached the padlock and he came out to me. "Rupert" I said in a whisper when I saw he reached his hand to me.

He licked his lips and made a face as if he didn’t like the taste of something, but simply nodded. "Aye" and his offered hand stretched to the side to indicate the place we will sit for our light snack.

As we sat on the ground I stood on my knees behind him pretending to adjust his bandages. I couldn’t really replace it without removing his shirt and I remembered his apprehension to do so in front of old Alec.

I settled instead for caressing his nape and shoulder, covertly. I just wanted to gratify my need to touch him, to connect, but I wasn’t about to forget the going on at the dining hall.

He was purring, his head pressing into my hand. "Jamie, you can't do that. Were out, in bright day light" "The devil wi' the lot of them, Sassenach" but he, at least, did open is big cat eyes, I didn’t think it was enough. He was still rubbing his head to my palm "Ye'r my wife, not theirs. I waited too long to ha' ye to now go back to not being able to touch ye as I please. Christ 'tis torture!"

"I'm sorry I shouldn’t have started this" I was straightening his collar intending to rise, when his sharp tone stopped me.

"If ye move your hand an inch, I'll take ye were ye' stand and will see what they all say to that, aye?" "What the hell is wrong with you?" I said indignantely. But did not move my hand. I wasn’t taking risks with a mad man.

"Me!?!" he answered offended as if he was the injured party. "Yes, you" at this I did let go, not caring any more "first at dinner, now here. I knew I shouldn’t
have come” I was gathering my medical supply, deciding I would leave him the food. I still wouldn’t want him to starve and I seemed to have lost my appetite completely.

"Did ye now?” he said In a very provoking manner "ye knew that did ye?"
"What the bloody hell, do you mean by that!??" I said annoyed beyond measure at this point.
"Sit down Sassenach, I wasna kidding before, I'll do it"
"Ho really!?" I was making ready to rise to my feet. Let him even try.
"Aye, I told ye once, I dunna make idle promises and I dunna make idle threats" he grabbed my wrist pulling me down to the ground "Now. Do ye want me to do that?"

Was he really serious? He looked genuinely steamed, but surely he wouldn't?

"Jamie, what the hell is wrong with you?” I asked appalled
"Sit down and I'll tell ye"
I obliged him that, only because I truly wanted to know and this seemed the fastest way to get to the truth behind this preposterous spectacle.

I sat down, crossed my arms and glared at him.

"Why'd ye leave me yesterday?" he started with no preliminaries.
"Leave you? You mean at the dining hall?"
"Aye, aye…why?" he burst out "I wasna going to say naught about it, but the way ye'r been acting"
"The way I've been acting?! Jamie I think all the blows to your head have-"
"Why'd ye leave me?!" he hissed in my face
"Because I left then the last time!" I hissed back.
"What?" he pulled back bewildered

I cleaned nonexistence strew off my dress, out of sheer exasperation.

"When you marched in, I was already about to rise and leave, reaching to the point in Colum interrogation of me, that it reached last time! I as oppose to others!" I said making it clear who I meant "was sticking to the plan, I was making sure I won't be asked something I couldn’t answer or that would change things too much. I was keeping everything under our control by fallowing what I know had and would be suspicious enough but sill sufficiently murky so I wouldn’t be executed on the spot!"

"Well ye weren't making a go of it" he lashed out.

"What?!!!" I said, beyond upset at this point.

At that he relaxed, took a deep breath, let go of the elbow he was holding to keep me from moving and said in an apologetic tone
"I'm sorry lass, I'm a pig, a stinking bloody clot and whelp to boot” he took my wrist discreetly and gently this time "I'm so sorry itsna your fault.
I just had a verra bad two days, and the bastard that I am, I took it 'oot on ye” he sounded so Scottish, every r rolled, every second word shortened and almost misunderstood, not that I thought otherwise, but that was a clear indication to how upset he really was.

"Maybe if you'll talk to me an explain I could help or…. Maybe even apologies for my wrong doings” that was truly an olive branch. And he smiled and relaxed recognizing it as such.

"I'd like to live to see that Sassenach" he teased and I snorted in fake indignation at his reply, but smiled.
"I had a plan, ye see" he said, serious now.

"Yes, we said we wouldn’t change…"

"Aye, but I had to ha’ another plan, after hearing Rupert and Angus" he rushed into my words
"Only after waking up at that blasted horse box, being caught by Alec in the state I was in” he
rolled his eyes appalled at the memory "I wasna in my right mind to form a GOOD plan or even a
sensible one."

"Wait, I'm sorry, I don’t understand. What state? Is there something wrong with your shoulder?
Did it get infected? And why were you even at the stall I remember you told me that last time as
well, did they not offer you a room?"

I was already standing on my knees wanting to check the injuries, when he said quite roughly but
not angrily this time, sounding even embarrassed??

"Nought wrong wi’ me Sassenach, sit down and I’ll tell ye, but just sit down and dinna speak"

I sat down gingerly, quite apprehensive as to what he had to say.

"Alright" I said "tell me"

He sighed and reluctantly began "WEel ye saw the way I was in when... when I left ye" a giggle
that became a couch slipped out of me.

"Mmm, I seem to recall, yes"

He gave me a dirty look but continued.

"Last time, before" he elaborated "when I left ye, I slept all the day and night and the next one too,
only ... only this time it wasna the horse nibbling at my ear that woke me, but Alec coming wi’
Rupert and Angus. Thank the Lord for his blessing, they, dinna see me!" he crossed himself and
shivered
"Alec was coming to check why the horse was all prancing at his loose box and then he saw me at
such a.... anyway he nudged me wi’ his boot and at least tried to give me back some dignity by
leaving me wi’oot a word or a look, returning swiftly to Rupert and Angus at the box on the other
side"

"Why did you sleep in the stall and what was the awful state you were in?" I couldn't understand
anything from the way he was telling me what happened and Jamie was a born storyteller.

"They were talking" he ignored my questioning "Alec was telling Rupert, how he needs to change
her hoofs" he smirked but not with glee "I suppose all that double riding ye did wi’ him did make
the damage worse this time, cause they dinna come the first time.
Anyway Alec was threatening Rupert that if he ever wanted to ride one of Alec's horses ever again,
he better tend to it himself and at present. So Rupert was bursting wi’ good moods as ye gather"

"What did they say? Jamie did they say something that made you come to dinner that time?"

He looked down from me and began playing with the string of hay that laid there "they were
talking about how they both got stuck wi’ guarding ye, and they were making jokes as to what they
would like to do wi’ ye instead"

"But Jamie that’s to be expected" I dismissed the matter knowing both of the parties involved and
the parties mouths.
"Not by my eyes. Ye're a lady and they'll treat ye wi' respect or ha' their teeth crammed down their gullet." he asserted.

"Jamie" I sighed.

"Ye're my lady Broch Tuarach for Christ sake, Sassenach" he raged.

"Not yet and not to them, Jamie" I cautiously reminded.

"Aye, I ken that, but still!" he said jerking his arms "Beside" he added "it wasna that, that made me come to ye"

"What was it then?" I asked inquisitively.

"I dinna ken what ye did different…" he said delicately

"What?" I cried out defiant at the accusation.

"I dinna say I blame ye, or that ye did something wi' cause" he tried lowering me from the high tree I was beginning to climb "'tis only Angus was complaining how ye should be on your back and not on your feet wi' all that walking ye do"

"Lazy sot" I exclaimed not feeling so forgiven of the insults to my person all of a sudden.

"Aye, he said ye need a man to take the wind 'oot your sails and then maybe ye'd settle. And that wasn't the worst he said."

"I'll kill him; I'll actually ring his neck. No better yet I have a concoction that will give him loose stool for days, that bloody primate"

"Bloody what?"

"Never mind, I'll get my revenge"

"Not if I get it first!" he cocked an eyebrow at me "But that wasna what caused me to come to ye either"

"What then?" I was starting to lose patients "And why do you think I did something"

"I dinna ken what it was or even if it was ye, but Dougal last time dinna even consider letting ye out of his sight. So when Angus said what he said, I was shocked to hear Rupert laugh, agree and say something about how it probably willna be for long, that Dougal wasna exactly sure were ye worth the cost to keep ye here and it isna as if ye ken much anyway"

"So you were afraid they would send me on my way and you came to the hall and started calling them uncles and…"

"I was going to spill a lot more if ye stayed. Only by accident ye ken? Only ye left and I was scared it wasna enough and that ye'll be send away and I dinna know what else to do" he adjusted his shirt as if it was to tight.

"And that’s how you came up with rolling me to the ground and having your way with me in front of witnesses?" I said remembering the outrages threat.

He blushed and said "Weel, worked last time dinna? And if I debauched ye, they had to let me marry ye, to save your honor. Although after what Alec saw…" he grimaced
"What was the state dear Old Alec exactly caught you in, that caused such an uproar? And why where you at the stable stall?!!" I wanted answers and I wanted them now!

"I was doing the exact thing I did when I first met ye!" he blurted.

Jamie is a big man no one can repute this, but at this moment he seemed to shrink into his own skin. Red faced and abashed.

"And what was that exactly? " I wasn’t letting this go and he saw that.

Though his eyes were boring into the ground not looking up avoiding my gaze at all cost.

"One of the boxes on the far side of the stables has a window" he said matter-a- factly as if this explains everything.

"And why is this window relevant?" I pressed.

"Well, it isna exactly the window ye see. It is more what ye can see through it..... I really think ye should get back before…" I laid a hand on him to keep him sitting still.

"And what do you see through this special window?"

"Well…” he made a very deep cut throat noise to clear his voice and turned his head a way from me, twisting his neck as far as it could go. But my hand tightening on him made him finally release the gist in a flood of hurried words

"Weel-'tis-a-small-looking-window-one-that-when-ye-look-at-it-ye-can-see-your-room"

"Or the window of your room at least" he added very, very quietly

"Ho?" I still found comprehension alluded me.

"And the first time when I left ye, I wanted so badly to see ye again, I couldna sit still ,or eat, or sleep!" he said a little accusingly "I'v never felt like that in my life! It felt like ants were crawling under my skin and I couldna flick them off. So I wandered all around the castle trying to find an excuse to see ye, or at least as an attempt to calm myself down and finding no excuse and feeling worse then before I-" he let out a low groan

"I wanted so much to touch ye again" he was turning his head toward me now just a little at a time still staring only at the ground, pleading tone in his voice "I dinna ken that was love I only kent I couldna make it stop!"

His gaze bore deeper into the ground in front of him "I thought I'd just go and look, maybe ye'd look through the window or such. Only I stood there, kept yearning for ye to come to the window and kept thinking of ye all wet, crying in my arms, me caressing the back of your neck and the feel of your hair on my cheek and... hoch…” he lifted his head to the heavens pleading for.... well for something I couldn't understand.

"A n d?!!" I was at my end.

"Weel before I kent it, I was sort of..... Well rubbing myself under my kilt and...."

"Ho no" my hands went to cover my open mouth.

"I see" I said striving for maturity.

"No, Michel defend us, ye dinna see!" he said with heartfelt gratitude.

"And this….well did this happen again, this time I mean?" One hand was on my mouth, the other one was fisted. My fingers clenched hard leaving nail traces in my skin, reminding me to not laugh.

"Weel it dinna get better by the knowing" he said again matter-of-factly.

"I….don’t…seem…to… understand" I was letting every word out slowly, choking, trembling with the effort to not burst.
please by the virgin Mary, don’t let me laugh! I prayed.

"The wanting dinna get better by the knowing what it feels like to have ye" he added slowly, quite angrily at needing to clarify. His words were clipped, he was looking straight at me daring me to laugh "I had more memories in my heid this time, ken?"

"Ho…yes I ken" knowing I wouldn't be able to stop, I reached and stuffed a piece of bread down my throat as deep as I could.

"So… when Alec saw me, that morning, I wasn’t only dirty, cranky with my hand down my kilt, and splotches of my…. Of my own spunk" he said resentfully "I was also in a box stall with a cranky horse in it"

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!"

"Exactly Sassenach"

"You poor thing"

"Yes I a m"

"Surely he doesn't believe that…."

"No, at least I dunna think so, or he would have killed me for debauching his mare, he did worse to others for a lot less than that! But still….

Remembering something he said. I inquired "only you said a few times, I mean before, the first time. I can understand feeling a bit, how shall I put this, a bit unsatisfied now, with knowing what you know, but then?"

"I dinna plan it!" he cried out defensively "it was only… well only I would finish and…. And I kept looking to your window, and kept thinking of you, and …. O Christ, it kept getting itself up Sassenach, happy?"

I was actually, the laughter was so near the surface that I could feel my all face contort with the effort to hold it in.

If I let it out now, I would be rolling up and down the hay, and I could not do that to him.

Not after his very brave confession, which I recognized as a very humiliating apology on his part for snapping at me before. He did deserve to save some dignity for that.
It was hard though, I was clutching my midsection, gasping for breath.

"Ye laugh, I'll bloody throttle ye" he hissed.

I nodded unable to open my mouth, I couldn't move or I would explode.

"My point being Sassenach!" he said in measure tones seeing the state I was in "That I'm obviously losing my mind and sanity. Can I, please, share your bed before I burst or get myself killed? I'm too old for all of this"

"You are the exact age you were, when we first met" I said taking control of myself.

"Aye. But I'm much wiser. And I ken what it is like to sleep wi'oot ye and wi' ye, I chose, nay I need the latter. So…"

"So…" I answered back smiling and cocking an eyebrow "how do you suppose we should handle that?"

****

The decision was made. Or to be accurate about it, I decided that since Jamie knows every nook and cranny of Leoch, it will be his job to find the place and time and I…. well, I would be agreeable and compliant to whatever and however he decides things should be.

Those were his exact words.

Alec did not interrupt us this time; he was obviously keeping his distance from his young protégé.

After what transpired at the stables, I was sure Jamie preferred to be awakened by having the horse kick him in the head, than to being caught such.

I felt sorry for him and truly hoped it wouldn't cause him much trouble or unwanted gossip.

Jamie was one of the smartest, quick wit men I knew. He know how to control and conduct in almost any situation he found himself in.

All proper and etiquette were thrown out the window when it came to the people closest to him.

Jenny could make him lose his temper and composure in a heartbeat, Ian could docile him just as fast with his kindness and reconciling manner.

And then there was me. We both could never be indifferent or quail about each other or to each other. For better or worst we affected each other in the most profound and gut deep way I ever know was possible.

I feared what would happen if we couldn't find a way to do so now. We had to!

To show our feelings to one another was to risk Colum taking steps to keep us a part so he could bequeath his position to Jamie as the next laird of castle Leoch.

Jaime was quite equivocal in his manner when he explained that to me, and I quickly gathered that, quite like I had words with Dougal and found out regarding his ulterior motives for me and Jamie to be married, so was there another exchange between Jamie and Colum.
And Jamie seemed quite scared of his reaction.

And then there was Dougal.

If he was to realize that he wasn't merely using Jamie's good heart and compassion to save anyone from a fate worse than death in the hands of Randall.

If he was to realize that it was our will to marry, he would probably try to extort Jamie out of everything he has, especially regarding Lallybroch and its involvement in the coming battle.

We couldn't have that.

We wanted to wash our hands, completely, of what brought us to that point in time were we held each other thinking it was the end.

The moment where he would die and I was to live without him for a child that will never know its father.

No. we had to find a way to control ourselves.

We needed Dougal to give us the opportunity to marry under Colum nose, to make a priest perform the ceremony without reading the banns so as to not give occasion for someone to try to forestall us.

We couldn’t just run and marry by ourselves either.
We did consider that. But with a price on his head and Randall after us both, we needed Colum's and castle Leoch's power to protect us.

It was choosing the devil we could manipulate instead of the devil's we couldn’t.

Jaime pointed out that he did manage to fool Dougal once, making him think he was only fallowing his orders when he married me.
He could do it again.

But above all things, he claimed smiling, he really wanted to see my in that dress again!

I smiled at my husband tete-a-tete, as I walked on.
Dear, old, faithful Rupert at my heels.

*******

For the next few days I had to maintain a simple routine as before.

And at Jamie suggestion add a few unexplained acts and wayward question aimed at the 'wrong' man in order to keep the suspicion surrounding me ongoing.

Not too much to create a protective, violent, preventive action against me, but just enough to want them to keep me around under their watchful eye.

Unfortunately that also meant Jamie could not come close to me without being spotted by Angus or Rupert or even Dougal, who sometimes surprised me by popping up from a dark alcoves.
Despite my constant questioning and the insistence that he needed to be treated, I was dismissed and told that Jamie was fine, and did not require to see me.

I did not think that was coming from Jamie's side, but more to do with their fear that he might blurt something else damaging in my present, to be carried off to the English.

Jesus, what did they think, That I had homing pigeon in my room?

Which, I discovered when I noticed some things moved, was being searched daily, during the time I would be send to help harvest food for the kitchen at Mrs. Fitz suggestion.

I know it wasn’t her, but after a few scientific experiments my hypothesis was confirmed. Someone was making sure I did not have a single thing more then what was given to me.

It did start to feel as a prison. And without Jamie at my side to make any discomfort bearable, I was growing restless.

I needed him. It wasn’t even that almost a week had passed since we went through the stones and could not find one bloody occasion to be alone. Well it wasn’t only that.

I wanted my husband in my bed, I wanted to see him devour his food across the dinner table all awhile telling me about his day between bites, I wanted him to be the last thing I saw before going to sleep at night, and to wake up feeling a worm spot where his lips left a mark, a bite or even a scratch of unshaved bristle on me, before he left for his day.

I wanted to hear him curse and get upset at other people's stupidity or unaccepted behavior, or see him turn green when I told him what a very interesting fistula I encountered treating a patient, and yes goddammit, yes I wanted him inside me.

Both of us becoming one, leaving the world and all the people in it to fend for themselves, in order to enjoy the pleasure of our flash and the joining of our souls.

I was going so mad that I actually started standing at my window trying to see him on the ground below or hoping he could see me.

Something would have to be done and soon.

****

"God bless Mrs. Fitz and her so welcomed idea to put me to work outside foraging and touching growing things or I would become a homicidal murderer” I told myself bending to pluck a mushrooms.

"Those kind are poison". Bloody hell again? I thought rubbing my head, again, having bumped it on the tree brunch, again and turning to see, yet again….

"Geillis” I said mad at myself that being so absorbed in my own little melodrama, I forgot my friend, for she was my friend.

Giving her own life for mine. O God, how could I forget!?
"How do ye ken me?" she looked taken aback at that.

"Ho… I don’t" I grasped for an explanation "I only… Well as you see" I pointed at the mushroom "I dabble at plants and medicinal remedies, and was told that there was another in Cranesmuir just like me. I was actually hoping to meet you. I’m-

"I ken who ye are too Claire, the village has been humming of talk of you since you came to the castle. But how did ye ken it was me they talked of?" she smiled interrogatively, as always, pushing to unnerv and get to ones secrets.

"Ho, I hope you will not think me too forward, but you are very memorable and unique, or so it seemed at least to those who told me of you" I said smiling, proud of my cunningness.

"Why, I take that as a compliment. One wouldn’t want to leave this world unremembered or uninfluenced by him, don’t you agree?" she giggled in true Geillis fashion.

I nodded, and the conversation continued exactly as it did before.

Thank the Lord for that, because I could only spare half a mind for it. The other part, most of me to be exact, kept asking, should I tell her?

How much should I tell her? Only about us both being, time travelers (good Lord, I was actually a time travel or!) Should I tell her about the trail, the danger, the failed cause?

If I tell her now before we became friends, will she even believe me or just be set in her ways?

She was such a devoted Jacobite.

I suspected, she traveled intentionally, more than two hundred years to the past for it, giving her life and money to its goal.

Will she give up now?

What if me telling her will mean something bad for me and Jamie? Can I take the risk?

Do I even have the right to make such a decision regarding both our lives without at least telling him first?

What if she was really so in love with Dougal she would confide in him? I didn’t think so, but she did seem genuinely hurt when I told her he left.

Or worst what if she will see me as a threat to her precious cause and decide to eliminate the obstacle, meaning me.

Her station as sharing a bed and an ear with Dougal, while still being married to the fiscal…O Lord Arthur.

she was capable of murder, I reminded myself.

All of that and all the unknown allies she must have gathered during her fight for the cause, will make me a very feeble rival.

For the love of God, I was bested by a sixteen year old girl with a crush!

I decided to keep my mouth shut, at least until I could speak with Jamie on the matter or gain
Geillis friendship and trust.

"You should come visit me sometime down in the village" she brought me back from my deliberations.

"I have a cabinet full of potions and medicinal, I wager will tickle your fancy"

I nodded again kindly, thinking to myself, that should I choose to tell her anything, that will be a much appropriate venue.

"But I hope I'll see you tonight at the hall" she added.

The hall!

I forgot. I would be able to see Jamie!
The hall, as everything else, was exactly the same.

The bagpipes, Colum taking his seat on his 'throne', Dougal at his side and tenants pouring in, one by one pleading their cases to be answered by their laird.

The only thing that wasn’t the same was the huge gaping hole in the shape of my husband, on Murtagh's side.

I kept glancing to all directions, seeking him amongst the crowd, hardly listening to Geillis translation and explanations regarding the proceedings.

Where was he? Did he not want to see me? I knew we would not be able to touch or be alone, but to just see him or maybe to slip in a word or two? Surely he would want that too?

"What wrong with you Claire?" Geillis was looking at me all inquisitive and suspicious "you been wiggling about like you got snakes crawling under your skirt. Who are we looking for? A new lover perhaps? Or an old one that you came after?" she was looking around as well.

"What?" I was giving, what I hoped was my best impression of contempt, at the thought of such notions "come now Geillis don’t be ridiculous. It's not that at all. Its only if you heard one you heard them all" and if you heard them once no need to hear them again I thought to myself. "I'm just-"

My words trailed off as Laoghaire appeared, dragged merciless by her father, humiliated but silent and submissive.

I could almost feel sorry for her, but remembering the lashes on my back... well, I did say I could not that I would.

"Her father accuses her of loose behavior" Geillis voice chimed in my ear while said father stated his claim.

Geillis sounded excited for something interesting developing.

"Her father wishes the Makenzie to have her punished for disobedience" she continued.

Silence.

I already knew what the decision would be.

I bowed my head and thought that I would excuse myself not wanting to watch it being done. There was nothing I could do to stop it, I thought after empathy won over all my other emotion. But I wasn’t going to watch.

Colum spoke his decision, and three men came forward to grab her.

"Geillis, I don’t think I want to watch this" I said making myself ready to leave.

Jamie's voice rumbled across the hall and the throne of people parted at his wake.

The figure of my disappearing husband appeared as he came to stand in front of himself.

"His offering to take the girl's…"

"Yes I know!" I said my face contorted, lips pulled tight to a nonexistent line. Surely he wouldn’t, he wouldn’t dare.

"How do you know?" I didn’t answer her, so she continued, more interested in the goings on than
at my blunder "there arguing it now".
I couldn’t. There was no way I could go and slap him in front of everyone, no way.
"He allows it" she said, and I will kill him I thought!

Laoghaire extricated herself from the men and ran to the loving arm of her grandam.
"He chooses fists" Geillis said.
"And I'm not interested to watch" I answered, turning on my heels and storming out.

Gossip and scandal by dammed.

****

I half ran down the corridors. Going left or right but seeing nothing.

He wouldn’t, he couldn't, this is not happening.
But he would, he did and as I left the hall I could hear the ricochet sounds of Rupert fists rebound off my husband's body.
This was happening.

I collapsed in the hallway leaning against the cold stone wall.
To see me he didn’t come, to save the girl he did.

Maybe he thought just a glance at me is not so significant, I tried to excuse him.
But saving that girl was? My anger replied.
Don’t be silly, stop this at once. I berated myself.
You are not a stupid love crazed girl; you are his wife, the women he loves. He had proven that time and again.
But he never said he didn’t love the girl as well. Retorted the same, angry, dark part of my mind.

Jamie is an honorable man, I countered back, maybe he felt compelled to try and save her.
As he saved you. By marring you, by saving you from Randall, by fighting for your life and honor.
The same way he is doing for her now. The dark part was not backing down.

Yes Jamie was and honorable man, he would stand by his vows to the day he died.
But what if he would have made those vows to someone else?
What if Dougal did not plot and conspire to marry us and what if Jamie was a good enough match for Laoghaire and not an outlaw with a price on his head?

What was it he said to me "I'm not much of a prospect for a wife… no father wants his daughter married to a man who might be arrested or hanged any time".
I was a good match at that respect, I had no father or family to object on my behalf. I was a runaway just like him.
Was ours a love born of necessity and convenience for him?

I lived here long enough to see how complete strangers that hardly ever spoke, marry at their parents arrangement and are as committed and loving to one another as much as Jamie and I are.
Were, added the part that held all my fears and insecurities.
What if he loved us both and it was me being available that made the decision?

Jamie his a very passionate man we wanted, needed a wife.
And Laoghaire was young, healthy and could probably bear him a lot of healthy, living children. Give him the big family he craved.

Tears were running down my eyes and my feet plumped to the floor losing all their strength. She wouldn’t have lost their baby. She wouldn’t have gotten to trouble that would cause him to get hurt or be in danger in order to save her.

No, she was the meek and obedient type. she would wait for him at home and when he'd come, she would rise from the sewing she was probably so talented at, bring him his supper, that was probably only one thing of the so many Mrs. Fitz tutored her on how to make. She could keep him clothed and fed.

All the things I could not do, all the things I couldn’t be.

What started as an angry session regarding Jamie's actions, ended as me realizing my own fault and imperfections and concluded with me feeling as If I have done wrong by him by marring him. I cradled my head in my hands and just fall apart.

"Mistress? Are ye well, mistress, should I fetch someone?"
I raised my head to lock at a very, very handsome face, brown chestnut hair and very light blue eyes, looking at me and appearing extremely concerned.

I stuttered something in thanks and that I was fine. I also tried to rise on my feet to prove so. I swayed and he caught my elbow swiftly and skillfully. Instinct obviously finely tuned.
He smelled of vinegar, olive oil and steel?
He was very sturdy for such a lean physique, I thought absentmindedly.

"Nay ye'r nay fine, come I'll help ye to your room shell I? Which way is it?"
His accent wasn't Scottish it was... Irish, yes I recognized the pronunciation.

"Its fine, I'm fine I assure you, my room is right..." I looked around.
In my distress I have completely wandered around and managed to get myself lost.
"Fuck" escaped my lips.

His eyes gaped open for a second but then returned to their cordial expression.
I bet Laoghaire wouldn’t have cursed, I berated myself.

"I spend some time in England and heard the word, but I must say, I never heard it from a beautiful women before" he smiled joshing me.
He was doing it, in such a warmhearted way I found myself smiling at his kindness of my bluntness.
"I'm sorry I..." I fumbled apologetically.
"Ye'r upset and by the look on ye'r face a bit lost? And felt the need to articulate it properly" he explained myself to me still remaining ever so kind.
Jamie does that all the time, I thought, and a new tear fall on my cheek.

"Ho dear, do not feel sorry on my account" he hurriedly handed me a beautiful fresh white linen kerchief and widened his smile "I always thought the world would be a better place if everyone spoke their truth no matter what it was" he confident, leaning a bit closer to me.

"Yes INDEED" I said feebly, thinking of Jamie and Laoghaire.

I felt bad using such a beautiful embroidered cloth but he insisted and I blotted my face.
When I tried returning it to him he pulled his hands in protest and refused no matter what I said. "Ye keep it. If ever the occasion arise, I would feel it a personal honor bestowed by ye, to allow this small token to assist ye again" he said sincerely. "I thank you for your kindness Mr……"
"Ho dear, you must forgive me mistress. I'm MacIiver, Luke MacIiver. Your servant ma'am" he bowed.

A gentleman then.

He straighten and spoke as a confidant to me once more "It is actually Lucas, but after such intimate exchange of words between us" he said teasingly "I'll find myself especially in ye'r debt, if ye would find me affable enough to call me Luke"

Dear lord, I must look a frightful mess, to spur such sympathy and manners. "I thank you kindly Mr. MacIver…. I mean Luke" I corrected seeing his cocked eyebrow at my formality.

"Shall we begin our hunt for your allusive chamber then?" He offered me his arm and in my need to not be alone right now and the remembrance of what happened last time I wandered the halls of this castle unchaperoned, I took it.

Jamie fell to the ground with the final blow.

Christ, was it even harsher this time?

Never mind, she'll fix him right, she always does, he thought as he was rising to his feet, with Murtagh's help.

He bowed in thanks to Colum, knowing it foiled any attempt to further trash him from Dougal's side. He bowed to Rupert to show nay hard feelings and leaning on Murtagh for support was carried away.

He raised his head to where she stood, but was unnerved to find only the foul conniving but always inviting smile of Geillis Duncan.

Where was she?

Murtagh dragged him on.

"Blubbery, stinking fool of a child ye are! What in all that is holly, did ye go and do that for, then?" Murtagh was scolding him profoundly, but he had no ear for it.

She was waiting for him at the room near the kitchen where they put him last. That was it, he concluded.

Poor thing, could never stomach seeing him get hurt. He smiled at that, and at the thought of the scolding his wife will give him.
That scolding he'll listen to.

He'll watch her eyes flare out, her exasperation making her breasts rise, her face so close to his to make her point verra clear….God it has been too long.

"What r'ye smiling at, ye clot?"
"Naughting" he wiped his smirk "only thinking of the rewards of a good deed"

It was more than a week since they been together,
Three days last he spoke to her.

He laid every night unable to sleep, turning and twisting.
Couldna find one position o' comfort.
There was a big lump the shape o' his wife missing to cuddle to or to nae even touch but to at least feel and hear by his side.

'Twas like that tale she told him 'obout, one night in Paris, when he couldn'a sleep.

Her voice rang in his ears and the remembrance o' her touch lulling him back to slumber was almost felt on his skin now.

'Twas 'obout a princess and what was it, a seed? Nay, a pea that was it, aye, a pea.
It made him laugh, how could one feel a pea?
She must ha' been a verra cockered princess.

His wife was high born as weel, but could sleep anywhere 'twas needed, he thought proudly.
Nae shying away from earth, soil, dirt and hay.
O Lord, what he'd give to roll her up in hay right now.

He covertly adjusted himself under his kilt.

They arrived at the room, as last time and Murtagh lowered him to a small bench.

"What r'ye looking for?" he looked him over concerned, two brows becoming one.
"Naughting" Jamie said as his eyes darted every shadowed corner in the room
"I just thought…” maybe she went to bring supplies and such so that Mrs. Fitz, would nae need to disturb them later?

"Nay, lad ye weren'a thinking" his godfather lowered himself to crouch in front o' him "Jamie, e'er since we reached here, ye've been runnin' around acting like, like… I canna even find the words" his tone was accusatory but with so much concern Jamie was compelled to tear his eyes from the searching o' his wife and look at the man's face
"I think we should leave here, I think ye truly are going mad. Nay that I ken why, for the life o' me".

He was right.
Away from her, he was going mad.
Jesus, would this be how he would have been, once she would've left through the stones?

But he was doing them both no justice going on and caring himself such.

"I'm fine now, Murtagh, or I'll be fine. 'Twas truly just an act o' kindness on my part.
D'ye no remember what happened to me? Lashed in the hall over what I did to Mrs. Fitz?" he leaned and put a reassuring hand on his guardian shoulder
"Figured I owe her something for that."
"And all the other?" Murtagh looked unconvinced.

"I told ye, the pain in my arm"

"Ye'v been hurt worst before" Murtagh added pointedly "are ye feverish then?"

"Nay, I dinna think so, 'tis only the strap holding my arm, 'tis making me feel as if I'm crippled"

"Remove it then"

"I canna, Mistress Beauchamp said-"

"Mistress Beauchamp, Mistress Beauchamp…. That's another thing lad, what's wi' ye and the Sassenach? Ye think I dinna see the looks?"

"I was just looking, she's pretty naught else!" he seen others look as weel, and as well he wanted to kill them, 'tis was a good excuse as any.

"Aye, and the running e'ery day from the stables and hiding behind walls and climbing trees to see her, why do that then? Good heavens, do ye think, they dunno see ye?"

"Who?" he asked stating to be slightly concerned himself now, at being spotted.

"Everyone! But Dougal and Colum in particular!" Murtagh rose to his feet.

That shocked him 'oot o' his stupor.

He was angry, restless, impulsive and couldna think right.

But that needed to end and now.

Why, Jamie almost stabbed himself wi' the fork while gathering straw, almost clipped his foot right off wi' the axe while chopping wood, quarreled wi' anyone that dared approach him and thrown things, many things to be exact, when he was told he wasna allowed to see her for his mending.

Christ, how was she doing this? Just going on wi' her life wi'oot him?

He would spy on her, watch her from a safe distance. Or at least so he thought.

Saw her when she went around the fields and gardens, talking to herself (he could see her mouth move), yearning to hear what she was saying.

He did it before, last time that is, but no as much. Did they all notice then too?

Is that why Dougal was all smiles and smugness when he proposed the marriage to him. Did he ken he would never refuse?

Mrs. Fitz entered wi' her tray o' Leeches and remedies and Murtagh shrugged and concluded

"Weel I hope we wouldna need to speak o' it again lad. Now get ye'self mended and get some sleep ye lock ratchet!" and wi' a nod to Mrs. Fitz he left.

"Here ye are lad. Let's ha' a look at that eye. Still bleeding under the skin. Leeches will help" Jamie brought to mind how Claire marveled at the sight o' his closed eye becoming open again.

It made her put her hands on his face caressing him. She wasna here to do that though.

She was smart, she heard the rumors, saw people looking and probably took care to avoid him. Otherwise she would be here attending him as always.

She was caring for their future.
"Twas him who was the blubbering fool. It had to stop.

"Rinse ye'r mouth wi' this; t'will cleanse the cuts and ease the pain" said Mrs. Fitz
"Ye'll be a sight tomorrow, lad, no mistake," she said shaking her head, “But at least ye’ll be able to see oot o’ that eye".

"Tapadh leat" he said to her kindness, but wanted his wife's touch on him instead of her warmhearted squeeze on his shoulders.

"what ye did was kindly meant, lad" another squeeze.

"And If she has any mind at all she'll thank ye herself, and I'll tell her so" she said, walking a way wi' her tray.

He looked at the fire at the hearth remembering how at this point in time, he and Claire said goodbye, thinking Claire will be gone the next day. It felt like a shot to his chest and he was sure his heart stopped for a moment.

It came back as thunder, when he wondered, will she let him kiss her goodbye? 'She couldna go nae now' Jamie thought, then. He hadna had time to court her properly and he surely meant to.

Only he thought to wait 'til after her mourning, after things subsided wi' the rumors o' her being a spy and so she could also come to know him a little and nae fear him.

He always saw her anger and defiance as a veil to her fear. He kent that once held and comforted she would melt and subside. And he was surely nae wrong, Claire was soft and tender as no other. To him at least. And good Lord, how he needed her.

He heard the door creak behind him and a smile so wide he thought himself to burst spread on his lips. "I thought ye wouldna come lass, couldna stand it If ye dinna" "I had to come" Christ this wasna Claire's voice. Jamie whirled around in his seat as his shoulder made him grapple 'oot in pain.

A small slender arm reached for him
"Are ye weel, Jamie? Should I call for m'grandma?"
"No, dinna fash, I'll do, Miss MacKenzie" he rose to his feet wi'oot looking at her. Damn damnation, she heard him. He couldna let her think he meant Claire, or within an hour the whole of the castle will be buzzing wi' the gossip.

She was a child, she couldna be trusted to act differently, he thought, remembering the ill-wish doll under his and Claire's bed.

He had to be smart though, or at least start bein' one now, after mucking everything up for them. "Ye should go lass, ye wouldna want them to talk o' us". "I wouldna mind" she peeked at him blushing, she could hardly look up at him.

Jamie looked back at her and couldna help feel sympathy for her shyness form.
Whatever she done, she hadna done it yet and If he really at to admit it, it wasna all her fault. He did kiss the lass.
But that piece o' confession will nay be admitted in Claire's ear.

"Did ye mean what ye said, Jamie?" she asked taking a step closer.
"What?" he was awakened from his thoughts, realizing he was smiling, thinking o' Claire.

He rubbed a knuckle down the bridge o' his nose, adjusting his features.
"I think we should go!" he said as he put his arm on hers to distance her away so he could take his leave.

"But ye said--" Her hand went to where his was placed on her.
Holy Mary, this wasna going so weel.

"Aye, I ken what I said" he said sharply and she clenched her arm on his "but we should really go, now" he added more softly.

Murtagh entered the room, and Jamie rolled his eyes to the heavens as thanks.

"Aye, ye be needing me for something a charaid? I'll come wi' ye then" he added not waiting for an answer. He felt woozy and pain shot in all his insides, but a bullet to the heid willna stop him from leaving this room.
He progressed toward Murtagh.

"Nae I simply…." Murtagh struggled to let 'oot his words.
"Tis fine. we're done here, true lass?" Jamie said reassuringly.
"Weel, 'tis only" she took another step toward them "'tis only I wished to say thanks to ye".
"I'll leave ye to it then" said an embarrassed Murtagh, who was about to take his leave.

Jamie's arm shot up at him grabbing him to Jamie tight.
"Nae" Jamie cried 'oot to him "I mean, I must ha' your help wi' the reaching o' my bed Murtagh" he hastily explained.

"As for ye lass" he only slightly turned to her "Surely there is nay need. 'Twas the right thing to do nay more, I assure ye. Keep yourself weel then" he concluded leaning on Murtagh as if feeling faint.

"I'm verra tired a ghoistidh, best get some sleep" and he half dragged them both away by his own merit .

Nay. From now on he'll behave right by them. she deserved no less.
The way out

Chapter Notes

I am soooooooo sorry for not posting sooner. This one is where I started to really switch things up and a lot of decision had to be made, some research of some history and medical facts to verify and I did promise hotness, which will only boil and boil during the parts of this chapter. PLEASE TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK. I really like reading what you have to say. (I have never written love scene before, I really hope you'll like it)

The way out:

I was given Davie Beaton surgery. As before.

To mend and tend to all, but myself.

It was two days after the hall and no sign of Jamie. He had not tried to see me or explain his actions even once.

I had turned to be voiceless and sad.
I had become trapped in my own mind, which seemed to only indulge itself in thoughts regarding Jamie,
Jamie's feelings for Laoghaire and my new-found disparaging recognition and admission she was probably better for him then I could ever be.

Why as he not tried to come to me?

In my darkest moments, I even wondered whether it was me and Jamie, that the stones reversed time for, or was it for her and him.

Perhaps the universe wished for the young couple to receive the chance they did not get over me and my intrusion.

My mind was relentless and I could feel myself starting to listen to it.

I was driving myself mad.

My thoughts and feelings were against me;
they were unceasing and tormenting to say the least.
Breaking one by one my resolution, that Jamie and I belonged together.

And my coup de grâce?
Jamie had made no move to see me, to be with me, to explain himself.

The most horrifying thought crossed my mind.
We were not married at the moment.
He was free to do as he pleased; with anyone he would please.

He had a nice little loophole, all wrapped up in a bow.

Should I go after him like a crazed fan? Just one amongst his many admirers?

For I wasn’t blind to the fact that although Laoghaire was the one I saw him kiss in the past, there were others who noticed the handsome, well-mannered and well-form Mr. MacTavish.

And to those that knew him as Fraser... well, it was a fine dowry to be had, in the shape of Lallybroch, even with a price on his head.

For some, it only meant that if he was to be captured or killed, the property will transfer to his wife.

He told me that himself after we married.

So here I was finding myself peeking into alcoves, wherever I walked by one, dreading to come across a lustful exchange involving my husband.

No. Not my husband, not anymore, I reminded myself.

Luckily if I was good at something, it was at putting myself second after the caring for my patients.

I was forged during a great war.

Adjusted myself to go on working, even when bombs fell from the sky no more than ten feet away.

I was already most skilled at caring for my patients regardless of my body's reaction and desire to break down, run or in my case mourn and wallow.

So I did just that. Thanking the Lord for the labor and distraction.

For all my shortcomings and my new comprehension regarding my low worth as a wife to anyone in this time;

I had one great advantage as a time traveler.

Christ, I really do must find another name for it, I sound like a science fiction heroine.

So as Dougal and Colum closed the surgery door on me, leaving me in the dark after informing me that until they will be sure that my secrets won't pose a threat personally to them, to Leoch or clan MacKenzie,

if they only knew,

I will remain as a ‘guest' and a healer;

I did not break down this time, and went straight to work on my plan.

****

The next morning, as Mrs. Fitz bathed me;

Good Lord were the water getting colder each time?,

I went about to set my plan in motion.

"Your next husband will be a lucky man" she complimented my complexion, again.
'Yes, but does he still think so?'
My dark mind wondered, as she combed my hair.
'Or the temptations of another flash caught his eye?'

"...Ho aye, hundreds of MacKenzie's will be turning up the next few days for the gathering... ye're listening to me child?"

"Yes" I snapped myself into focus and played dumb "the gathering? I'm not familiar with that term".

"It's were all the MacKenzie men throughout the highlands come and plight there oath to the clan and HIMSELF.
Last one was decades ago, when Colum was made laird.
I'm fair glad ye'r here to handle the physick', ha' enough to manage wi'oot folks 'illments".
That was my cue.

"Yes, I have quite an extensive knowledge in treating illnesses, of any kind" I began with my elucidation.

"Aye, Colum said as much" she smiled kindly and braced my shoulders "Ye do well wi' that, Dougal and himself will nae forget it" she said comfortingly
"Ye'll be in their good graces, make no mistake".

I supposed my, now fake, pleads for them to let me go were common knowledge.

And for a split second I thought, maybe for HIS sake, I should leave?

The sadness must have shown on my face for it made her hug me tight and add "'twill be fine Claire".

In an attempt to liven my mood, she changed the subject and afforded me another chance to continue with my truly important task

"r'ye sure ye're no kin to clan Beaton than? They're quite famous up aboot these parts. The traveling healers their called" she said giving my shoulders another squeeze
"Would explain how ye come aboot here" she added to herself with a lift of the eyebrow.

Apparently the snoopiness and the gossip-mind attributes of the highlands, did not pass over, good, warmhearted Mrs. Fitz.

None were immune if she was inflicted, I said amusingly to myself.

"No. As I told Colum I'm not" I said smiling kindly.

Maybe if I knew of that excuse beforehand, last time that is, I might have been able to go free, I reflected to myself, but was snapped back to current events when the comb struck an unruly curl at his path.

"My point is Mrs. Fitz" I was not going to be distracted from my goal this time "that I heard, about Mrs. McNeil's son, wee Lindsey?" I had to tread lightly, but I wasn't missing my opportunity at trying to save a life.
Two lives that is.

She stopped at her tracks; I could see her face through the glass and hurried to explain.
"I heard it from a servant girl, forgive me, I don’t know their names yet, she mentioned Colum’s chambermaid son was ill".

Her face lightened a bit at that and sorrow replaced suspicion "Ho aye miss, so sad that is"

"Well, I was wondering if I could go visit her, to see if I can help"

"Ho no mistress, what 'ills wee Lindsey, has no mortal cure" she crossed herself and waved at her right shoulder as either to repel evil or throw imaginary salt, both will work with my plan.

"He went to the old ruins of the Benedict monastery. The folk here o'post call it 'the black kirk’" she whispered in awe.

"I know… I mean I heard" I corrected myself, watching her face.

"Only I think I can help." I turned to her pleading "Please, I asked the girl to describe it to me. She told me, that he has these…maybe what seems like violent attacks of speech in odd sounds or language, but he has no fever, that he's breathing quite hard and slow and when his eyes are opened they look like small dots"

"No one was opening his eyes“ she took a step backwards, I had to do better.

"Mrs. Fitz please” I put a hand on hers, which were clutched together, protectively "I know you don’t know me, yet, but I'm very good at what I do" no sign of the horns, that’s always good "I used to work at a hospital"

"At Oxfordshire?" she asked prying

Really, Mrs. Fitz? I wrinkled my nose at her; do you not know curiosity killed the cat?

"Yes there" I said exasperated "I used to treat a lot of patients Mrs. Fitz".

"And some there were possessed?"

"Well no, not possessed, but poisoned".

She crossed herself again "Poisoned, nay, no one would want harm wee-"

"No, I think it’s the kirk" if at any point logic wouldn’t work I would switch to the other plan, but I must try honesty and sense first.

"Aye, the demons there, they-"

"No, you said Benedict monastery, correct?"

"Aye."

"Well, the monks I knew that came to the hospital…to…to perform last rights, they told me, how most of the monasteries in Prussia grow Convallaria majalis, lily-of-the-valley.

Only they talked how it looks exactly as wood garlic and a child who visited there once ate it. The plant is poison. We treated the child with something to counteract the poison and all was fine, but it has to be given promptly".

I showed her what I made at the surgery "this is a concoction of Belladonna. If it works it would normalize his heart rate, lower his blood pressure and bring him back to consciousness within moments".

She was not convicted and tried to back further from me.

Fine! Logic and sense out the window, time for plan B.

"The flower is also known as ‘Our Lady's tears' or 'Mary's tears'. Why, I'm surprised you did not recognize the name from Christian lore” I said.
"Aye of course" she was obviously lying, but to admit to not being a good christen was a sin these days. A fact I relied on.
"Then you know, that it sprang from the weeping of the Virgin Mary during the crucifixion of Jesus" I sat back down, taking dramatic pauses, using hand signals.

I learned something about story telling from my husband.
God, Jamie I miss you, why have you not come to see me?

Her eagerness was shown all over her face and body. I should have started with this.
"Some even say they came from Eve's tears after she was driven away with Adam from the Garden of Eden".
"Aye, a holly plant, then?" she said, raising her eyebrows at awe and curiosity.
"Yes. It is a symbol of humility or even considered by most monks to be a sign of Christ's second coming soon to arrive". She was wowing and cooing with amazement at my performance.
"You see Mrs. Fitz, it may be an evil place, but in it grew something quite divine. Only...."

I let my words trail off intentionally. I have captured my audience I must be careful at pulling the hook (fishing was also something I learned from Jamie).

"I see. Why is the bairn sick then? Is it too holly to be eaten by man?" she asked frowning.
I remembered Jamie's story how the black kirk was a rite of passage for children to prove their manhood.
"Well. Not man but men"
"I dinna follow ye'r meaning?!"
"I mentioned the Virgin Mary and Eve, but have you notice, dear Mrs. Fitz, I did not mention Adam or Christ"
She crossed herself.
"I don't mean blasphemy Mrs. Fitz, I only meant such things should not be eaten by men." I emphasize "Joan of arc, Mrs. Fitz, was a women not a man, after all" they were many men who were prophets, but I was pleasing to her sense of superiority over the men folk that I concluded from seeing her managing every man in this castle including Colum, that she possessed.

Mrs. Fitz had a proud bone in her body, she knew her place as women in this time, of course, but she also knew men!

She would have made quite a women's rights movement activist in my time.

"Did you not say little Lindsey is speaking in tongues?" I reminded, striding lightly.
"I said so?" she knit her brows surprised.
"Yes" I hastily confirmed the fiction "maybe it's not demons who speak to him?"
"And him canna understand, for him a man no woman. So he falls ill?" she was reaching all the conclusions I wanted.

I know that, at the end, last time, she did allow me to examine and cure Tammas but it could be too late for little Lindsey, and I did say I wasn't losing a chance to save a life.
Brimstone and miracles it is then.

"This concoction" I handed the vial to her, now, eager hands "it will stop the working of the plant".

silence.
"Then will you give it to the boy?" I asked after no comment came from the gallery.
"No" she said in determination.
"But Mrs. Fitz-" I started protesting, so disappointed that I failed.
"Ye better do it. Come up, wheel?" she rushed me to my feet "Wi' me to Colum. Right now, up wi' ye" she dressed me so swiftly and skillfully, I felt woozy at the end "come, I'll have a talk wi' HIMSELF for ye. So ye will go to the Lindsey's house"

"Do you think he'll allow it?" I asked remembering what Angus said about Coulm reaction to me meddling and 'interfering in the working of the spirits', that time I scampered off on my own to the Baxter residence.

"Aye, Mr. MacIiver has been up to see him already, begging him to high heaven, to allow ye to see to his good-sister. Now wi' this" she waved the vial "I think I'll agree"

"Wonderful. I did promise Luke, I mean Lucas, I mean Mr. MacIiver" I corrected myself time and again seeing the suspicious cringes, regarding my informality with the young man "that I'll come and see Isabella as soon as It be allowed".

****

As we walked to HIMSELF.
I tried to recall, what were the symptoms Luke mentioned the young girl had?
I wanted to come prepared to treat her, not knowing when or if such a thing will be approved again by Colum.

I also wanted to offer Luke some good news and results as soon as possible.

That wonderful, altruistic man.

That wonderful, altruistic, poor man, I added, remembering, how tired looking he was and how by the look of his clothes, which were finely made, but were hanging a little loose on his person, he was also someone, how had not sat down long enough to have a proper meal in weeks.

He was so kind. One of the most kind-hearted people I ever met.

That night, he actually succeeded in doing the impossible, by making me smile, at least twice.

I needed the distraction, anything to just not think about Jamie one more minute.
Since I met him, Jamie had slowly but very surely, seeped into every cell of my being, be it physical, or emotional.

He did own me, as he wished so fervently many times to do.
He occupied my mind, my heart, my soul, all the time.
This has never presented itself as a problem, because it was never a source of weakness for me, but the base of my strength, joy, comfort and security.

Only now, apart from him, watching him act and do things for another women, which he knew was in love with him and wondering whether he reciprocated such feelings back;

That glorious ownership was extracting all vitality out of me.
So much so, that it made it impossible to go on.
All the strength and growth I received from us being... well us, as now become my downfall and left me weak and acting and thinking as a silly, love scorn child.

So I would take what I could get, I thought, as I turned to Luke, that night and asked him why I have not seen him before in the castle (I didn’t recall him from last time as well).

He told me that he didn’t take residence at the castle and only came here in regard to his commission as requested by Colum.
To procure more than a dozen dueling swords, by the time of the gathering, to be bestowed to the finest warriors and the most influenceable heads of families of the clan, and another dozen of the finest broadswords that he didn’t seem to know for what, were commissioned by Dougal.

I did know. Dougal and his bloody Jacobite cause!

"They would usually, commission such things from their own copper or smithy, but when they heard I've taken residence here, at Cranesmuir, I mean. They begged me to fill the order" Luke was telling me as we wandered left and right across the corridors "Paid handsome for it too, so I thought I best agree".

He told me all that and more, in such uncharacteristic openness, voided so completely, from the restricted tight lip manner I was so accustomed in the highlands (from almost any person I encountered thus far at least), I felt like reciprocating the favor.
So I told him about me, where I came from, how I grew up (without dates or stones of course).

It was truly refreshing to speak to someone so unguarded or unsuspicious regarding your reasoning for asking question.
And after almost two weeks of being surrounded by inquisitively hostility, without the one man that made it bearable, I longed for it.

"Why were they so adamant for you to take the job?" I asked truly curious.
"Ouch…weell" he said quite shyly all of a sudden, rubbing the back of his neck, making the very nice fluid mane of brown hair to ruffle "’tis only they ken were and wi’ whom I apprentice at.
And…weel…’tis really them wi’ the name and famous skill-set…” he was stuttering truly embarrassed and lowering his eyes to stare at the floor.

It was so endearing and child like innocent, that you couldn't help but strike a liking to him.

"I take it to be, that you are very good at your calling craft?” I suggested.
He suddenly raised is eyes to my face and stared right to me in a very surprised look.
"Calling craft?” he repeated my words, to my astonishment, for I did not know why I choose to say them as well.
"Well yes, I meant no offense" something in the way he spoke made my think of my work with the sick and the belonging I felt to such work.
"Nay, I took not as such, ’tis only…weel-" he regained his polite formality and bowed "I thank ye for the compliment".

When he straightened, he continued to say "I was only taken a back from ye chosen words…ye see, I work very hard on each sword. I ’craft’ them, so much so, that when I am done and take a step back to look at them... weel…weel, it does feel like a painting or a piece of art that came out o’ me and I feel as if I was born to do this”.

He went red with embarrassment, and his eyes traveled downward again "I hope ye nay take me a complete fool"
"No, not at all, I feel the same about my ...well, I guess they call it healing. When I'm done helping someone I take a step back and all of a sudden, I'm amazed at the result. It's as if it has nothing to do with my or the treatment I applied. As if the patient is now a beautiful, healthy, piece of art that was created from thin air and I am only left with thankfulness that I could have assisted in any way to this creation and thankful that this is my place".

Now it was my turn to blush "I hope you will not think me daft".

"No" he hastened to assure, touching at my arm very lightly as if pleading with me to believe his honesty.
"I think 'tis the most beautiful way of looking at, weel, e'erything. Especially when sickness and blood is involved" he added grinning.
"To be able to see, the beauty and art in all things. And if ye can find ye had a helping hand at the making of it, weell I think it a right way to happiness, do ye no agree?"

"Yes, I do" I said smiling back, staring into his face, feeling a little lighter then I have in days.

It was that reminder of the joy and wonder of healing, which propelled me to come up with all these plans to try and help those I could.

By the time we reached my door, he had told me he came from Ireland to Scotland, from Ireland to Cranesmuir to be exact.

The rolling of both our eyes, indicating our thoughts and feelings toward the fine people of Cranesmuir had us reeling from laughter.

Finally another glass-face friend in arms I mused.

He had come here after his brother's passing. His twin brother, to be exact.

The brother had married a Scottish wife and in his desire to not uproot her from her family and place, he moved to Scotland only to perish in an epidemic six months ago.

Luke knew the family lost most of their funds and stature during the past years and that the girl, Isabella was her name, was a sickly soul at her best days.

So Luke, heartbroken over his brothers passing and caring the knowledge of what great love was between his brother and Isabella, Left home, craft and family to take residence at his late brother's house, to tend to her every need and help support the family.

At Ireland, he was what was called a specialist swordsmith or specialist bladesmith.

He was trained by the Rigby family, that is considered as one of the best at this field of work.

"Ye see-" he explained entering a world in his mind with eyes glinting "their are four key prerequisites to generate a truly grand sword: the hardness, the strength, the flexibility and the balance. All are different from one man to the other. So much so, that the true swordsman makes a sword only by studying and learning the man he makes it for" he was so engaging and descriptive with hands and body that I felt drawn into a world I had no inclination to know.

It felt magical at his illustrations.

It felt as if I was listening to a lecture of a painter describing his brush strokes and muse.

"I'm sorry" he concluded "I'm going on and on and probably boring ye silly".
"No it's quit alright" and was surprised to find I meant it "It's nice to hear a man take pride of what he does" I assured him "passion too".

He blushed at that.

"I guess I'm trying to apologize to ye, about me making two dozen swords to men I know naught of." He tried to excuse his fiery speech.

"'tis the coin ye see. As I mentioned, I ha' a lot o' new mouths to feed" he concluded apologetically yet again, when we reached my door.

"In that regards mistress" he said after we stood in the doorway for a while and it was obvious he wanted to say something more "if ye can find it in your heart to, maybe, come and see what ye can assist regarding Isabella….if ye will, if ye canna I fully understand" he mumbled remorsefuly at even asking for such a thing.

"No, of course not, I mean of course I'll come. We'll consider it a debt returned, if you will allow it" I said giving him my most amiable smile to indicate the friendliness I was feeling toward, this nice, intelligent, kind-hearted, self-sacrificing man "I was going to suggest it myself only I feared to be intrusive not knowing what steps you made in such regards".

We departed, after he told me a little of her symptoms, smiled deeply, bowed and kissed my hand politely as the true gentleman I learned him to be.

Mrs. Fitz was now exiting Colum study, smiling a very triumph smile as she informed me of his answer.

I, now, happily moved to step two of my plan.

****

Good graces indeed, as Mrs. Fitz declared in my ear.

The day after the miraculous recovery, of little Lindsey McNeil and Tammas Baxter, which I felt very badly at uncovering as the other culprit who joined little Lindsey in the trip to the black Kirk.

Which I must regretfully admit, I did in quite an untactful way.
I simply grabbed the boy when he came to his hunt and informed her that he looks as if he ate the same plant as little Lindsey and must receive the same treatment at once.

After the miracle I performed on one, she was inclined to believe me, rather than the dismissal and assurance of a lying child who did start to look a little green around the gills.
And there started the rumors of "my powers", which were greatly exaggerated and too much appraised.

****

"But why were ye so apprehensive, then?" Luke asked sitting in my surgery.

Which now held a very long stream of patients and lookie-loos all coming either for council or just to stare at the new attraction. Radio had nothing withstanding against word-of-mouth in the highlands.

After I performed my circus act though, I found the time to pay a visit to Luke and the now, diagnosed, Isabella.

She suffered from a very bad case of diabetes type one, which over the sickness already looming in her since childhood, she was manifesting almost every complication known in my time to be connected with the disorder.

On the one hand she was exhibiting all the signs of dehydration, on the other, she seemed to be always in a state of insatiable thirst. She was constantly emitting very large quantities of diluted urine, suffering from extreme hunger but no gain weight. She was always in a state of tiredness, had blurred vision, constipation, but the worst of it was her susceptibility to be infected gravely from almost any infection caused by an open lesion or gash on her skin, which seemed to hardly heal once it transpired.

Without insulin there wasn’t much I could do for her for the long run, but I wasn’t giving up on her just yet.

Luke without his knowhow managed to sustain her quite well.

He made sure she was cleaned daily, even twice a day, which was unheard of in these times. He did so even when she complained she had no strength to endure it. By doing this he managed to prevent infections from developing and was able to monitor any and all grazes or even the smallest scratches that inflicted her skin. He ordered her chambermaid to check every inch of her skin daily, he even fired three maids for not examining her exhaustively enough.

When I told him what a great, lifesaving labor he did, the blush I so recognized, from my own tell-all-face, appeared.

I knew I shouldn't delight myself in making a grown man blush, but it did make my smile. And I needed to smile.

After three days of no word or even sight of Jamie, anything that caused me to not want to close my eyes and crumble into a ball, was a blessing from God himself.

"Were ye no sure 'twas the right cure?" Luke asked curiously, after I confided in him that behind
this great masquerade of charms and religious naming, was simply a medical problem with a very simple remedy to rectify it.

"Well no, I was sure about the cure, it worked before… I mean when I tried it on other patients" I added promptly
"It's only if I would be mistaken about the proper dosage or even if he had taken something else than Tammas...
I mean what I thought the boys took"
I said coming to stand by the table near the hearth, which he was also leaning on
"Then I would have done more harm than good and all of this-"
I waved my hands in the direction of all the people outside waiting their turn after Luke
"All of them, would be my downfall instead of my rise to fame" I said mockingly, making a stunned face and went back to ground some plants that contained or regulated insulin in the body for Isabella usage.

He laughed warm-heartedly at that and sighed
"Thank ye kindly for that, Claire. I ha' no laughed such…. weel I dunno seem to recall o' the last time."

"I can sympathize with the feeling" I said as my smile withdrew a bit, remembering how I laughed every day in my husband's arms.

"Aye, I heard ye're a captive audience, o' a sort, at this castle" his smile now faded as well, but mine returned.

"I think I like your description better than the one my mind conjured up" I said theatrically in accordance to my new witchy state.

"weel, at least between them folk" he pointed to the door
"to them folk" he pointed to ceiling indicating Colum and Dougal
"they keep ye quite humble and honest. wouldna want ye to grow to such stature ye willna help poor buggers like me, excuse my language" he teased reminding me of my blunder at our first encounter.

"Ouch, don’t worry, I'll still mind the little people" I said laughing earnestly and was thankful to him for that.

I straightened up and handed him two jars.
One with the Gymnema Sylvestra plant and the other with the Funugreek seeds, both grounded well.
He took it smiling from ear to ear, acknowledging the jest and thanking me for the reprieve and the medicine.

I looket at him and wanted to offer him some comfort as well as care, so I added,

"I don't know what saint you pray to, but he has given you great homage" I said, holding his hand in reassurance when he took the jars "These plants are rare and unheard of in the highlands or even in Europe.
For me to find them here, amongst old discarded medicine is-
I mean to have the late Beaton travel to such places that have these plants, to have the luck that he would keep them and for me to find it while cleaning-
Well I do believe it is a sign Luke.
A sign, that Isabella will get better".
I wanted so much to help this man who sacrificed everything he had in order to cherish and treasure his brothers word and honor to people he had never met. He deserved to at least have hope.

His gaze was on my hands that cradled his, at the end of my words he lifted his face to me and with tears in his eyes, he smiled and bent most cordially and kissed my palm
"I thank ye, Claire, for everything. Truly"

"Hmm, hmmm" a small cough from the staircase announced the arrival of Tammas.

Probably, to tell me-

"The MacKenzie request your presence in his chamber mistress Beauchamp"

Yes right on cue, I thought, remembering the last time.

"Right" I said and turning back to Luke I said "will I see you tonight then?"

"Tonight?" he inquired.

"Excuse me, I thought for sure all were invited tonight to hear Gwyllyn, the bard, perform, I thought I could use the chance to ask you of Isabella's reaction to the remedies"

"The MacKenzie is waiting" Tammas was not pleased with me or of my rudeness at making his laird waiting. A thing unheard of in HIMSELF own's castle.

"Yes, of course, I'm coming at present" I said smiling apologetically at Tammas, apparently saving his life granted my no favor with him.

"I am sorry Luke, I really must depart. Goodbye" I half cried out to Luke and ran after the boy up the stairs.

It was a very rude way to take my leave of him, but I couldn’t afford to ruin all the good graces I accumulated these past days.

"Goodbye to ye" I heard Luke cry back.

He kept praying for sleep, maybe so he could just dream of her. But none came.

He wandered through the day feeling as a ghost.

Once he let go of all his anger regarding the circumstances.

He became withdrawn, sad and lonely.
'She is right here', he tried to tell himself. And soon she will be his again, he promised himself.

Christ, how long 'till the blasted wedding? How long has it been last time?

And then he could touch her, hold her, talk all night to her in their shared bed. Dear Lord, he'll never let her go again.

He imagined again and again their first kiss at the altar, the day they married. Thought of the first time he, truly, touched her, when he took her hand before the ceremony. How will he ever let her go, long enough for them to marry this time?

Christ, this was worst then before!

Nay. He'll have to find occasion to touch her before. He must or he willna survive. He must have the chance or he'll die long before the nuptials ever happen.

'How is she doing this?' He thought a bit resentfully.

He heard of the stories about the new beautiful conjure woman. A real live charmer found wearing naught but a white shift, wandering, lost, wet and hungry. Heard how she was, generously, adopted by the MacKenzie's gracious laird; to mend and care for all ailments that might bother the clan.

The miracle worker!

Colum and his manipulative, exploiting ways. Why, even him declaring to Jamie he wished him to succeed his place when the time came, was just another way for him to insure his son will inherit the station when the time was right, knowing full weel that Jamie willna deny the young kin his birthright.

One could claim he was also looking out for the clan's best interests, no wanting Dougal to be laird, but wi' what price and whose back is paying for it?

Jamie looked to his right and saw a horse loose himself and awkwardly enough it made him think of his wife again. Her with her odd fascination and inquiries to everyone's bowel movements.

He couldn't begrudge her for saving those bairns' lives. Her heart wouldn'a let her do otherwise, even if it put her at risk. He only feared that all this praises could easily become damnation.

For every healer word, there was another for witch. For every charmer or wise women, came white lady or fairy.

And he wasna there to guide her, wasna there to protect her.
That was his role!
He'll happily take it up again.

Lord, he prayed, just allow me to have it once more.

She was right there, why as she no come to see him?
Saying he must have his bandage replaced or invented something he'll be inflicted wi'.

He'll gladly drink another potion that will cause him to piss red and have lesion or spots or anything else on his skin.
He did it in Paris, to apprehend Le Comete st. Germain's cargo and save Scotland, he'll sure as hell is hot, do it again to just see his wife.

But he knew as he promised to no approach her, she probably did the same.
For the sake of their future.

She still loved him, was devoted to him. 'twas the smart way to act.

They couldna afford any more mistakes!

Only it dinna feel as if she was right there, it felt like she was slipping away from him.
"Ye are being silly and childish" he berated himself over having such thoughts.

Besides, tonight he will see her.

Gwyllyn, the bard, will be playing in the hall, tonight.
The first time this was, they sat together and it did nay harm so-

He recalled being so close to her, then, he could smell her hair, her scent.
Ho, by the Lord's name, her scent; her verra special full of herbs and medicinal aroma wi' an essence that had no other name but – Claire!

He remembered how she tried talking to someone else near them, who was it?

But he decided he willna miss the opportunity to have her for himself, even if only by speech.

If she spoke, HE would be the one to answer, leaning each time a bit closer as if no to disturb the others.

And if memory serves right, he did manage to sneak away wi’ her to the surgery.

He remembered those moments.

Her unguarded looks, talking to her in earnest of his feeling and mind and having her nay only no laugh at him but understand him.

He dinna ken before, one could talk to a woman so.

"Aye lass" he said under his nose "there wasna one mind or thought ye dinna break and change from me, regarding women".

She changed him, made him grow.
He had to;
in order to protect her, to be deserving of her. 
Before her, he wandered the world, unaware he made decision or choices that spoke on his behalf. 
Only having her, he had to truly think and choose the paths he wished to walk on and the man he desired to be.

And, weel, the bedding part... weel, it certainly dinna hurt to have her fieriness and bravery in life come to their bed as weel.

She was passionate, giving and yet didna shy to ask in return, tender, strong, loving and was giving him a good fight in the imagination part too.

"Ye were made for me and we truly belong together" he said, remembering she told him that once.

In a way she was indeed right. 
She was pulled from her world, her time to be reborn in his world and time. 
Made to come to him.

God gave her to him, twice now, so all will be right, he tried again to calm his nerves.

Tonight though, there wouldna be much talking when they'll sneak out.

He would take his wife in his arms and subdue any thought or sensation his crazy mind made him feel these past days.

She will take him into her and show him how much love, passion and belonging they have between them. 
As she always did from the first time he took her.

She would hold nothing back from him, let him see into the depth of her soul and push his body to ecstasy, so much so that he would reach a point he would no longer feel himself at his own body's limits but infinite.

And he will have it tonight, for he waited and did naught to arouse further suspicions or idle tongues from havering about them. 
So tonight he deserves his recompense.

He was rising to his feet to make himself ready for Claire, when he saw her. 

It has been days now that Laoghaire was cackling around him; 
thanks to his remark to her after the hall.

He would go about his business for the day then turn around and suddenly she would just be there smiling shyly, shuffling her feet on the ground.

In a way it was doing Claire and him a braw service, for when he smiled, politely, back, or returned her wave from a distance, he could hear chuckles or feel elbows being thrusted on his side, from whomever was there. 
Indicating, what others thought was happening between him and her. 
He usually smiled dryly back to them, then to her and went on to let them think what they want.

As long as they dinna think it of him and Claire, they would slowly, slowly, lower their guards and no find it strange or suspicious the slightest when he will be with his wife.
He just hoped he wouldna be punished by the heavens for deceiving the poor lass.

He hasna actually done a thing to deceive, but he did allow the impression to linger.

'Your pardon lass', he said to her under his breath all a while nodding politely to her yet again, as she came, for the thousandth time, to see if the mare had given birth to the new colt, claiming Colum wanted desperately to ken.

Sorry, he thought to himself, but no the one I want, lass.

She will be waiting for him at the hall tonight!

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He entered the hall and hardly could keep himself from looking directly where she was to be; or was, the last time that is.

He somehow managed to hold himself at bay; greeted back those who greeted him, hardly noticing what they were saying. Mostly just making sounds and nodding himself.

He bathed, wore his best clean clothes, weel his mostly clean clothes. Never mind, he willna be staying clothed much longer, he determined.

Now, should he take her in the surgery or in her chamber? He couldna decide. Weel, he never had her in the surgery and he did want to, verra badly, the first time that is. Surgery it is than.

With those thoughts in mind, Jamie finally allowed himself to turn and look for her, reminding himself he couldna swoon wi' joy once he saw her.

She wasna there! Laoghaire was though.

'Obviously she wouldna sit wi' the lass ye gomerel' he berated himself. Only he moved his eyes a little too late and Laoghaire noticed him watching.

She straightened herself in her seat and her hand grazed the empty vacancy beside her. 'Sorry lass' he apologized to the lass in his heid for the thousand time 'right position, wrong woman'.

He searched covertly as he could for Claire – there she was.

He swayed a little at her beauty. He thought he kent how he missed her, but to actually see her... It took his breath away and showed him that the pain and yearning he felt were naught to how his body and soul reacted to having her right there in front o' him.

She was sitting a few rows further back. Smart lass. 'twill be easier, to slip away from the back. She was holding a glass wi' Rhenish. Good, he liked her a bit worse from drink.
This will be a better night then he spaed.

He had to apply a small tug to his kilt, as the thoughts of what's to come occupied his mind.

Then he noticed her leaning to her side, bending as if to speak to someone and as the man in the next row shifted, the man near her revealed himself.

The man was smiling and whispering in her ear, she laughed and nodded in agreement. He said something else and her eyes opened wide with surprise and her hand slapped his arm in a verra mocking manner.

Jamie was at her other side two seconds past.

"Mrs. Beauchamp" he said hoping he dinna sound as the murderer he wished so vehemently to be right now. Who was this man?!

She looked up at him and her expression changed, but nay to what he thought it would be. Her smile disappeared and her lips tightened.

"Mr. MacTavish" she said politely, Verra cold, but polite. What was wrong wi' her?

She kept her stare fixed on Jamie, as if expecting something and seemed genuinely furious at him. When he, obviously, dinna deliver what she wanted of him, she simply straightened her gaze to where Gwyllyn was sitting preparing his instruments and disregarded him intentionally.

What right does she have to be inflamed? She was the one talking to another man!

"Mrs. Beauchamp" he repeated a bit more firmly so as to let her ken he demanded an explanation. She kent the tone verra weel.

The stranger was looking from her to him and back to her again, eyes lingering on her, scrutinizing her expression and body. Jamie recognized it. He had done so every time he saw her, since first they met. Christ, he still did it today! The man was watching her, studying her. To memories what she looked like happy, sad, calm, how she looked when she told the truth, when she tried to lie.

Jamie did it so he would ken all about her, so when the time came, he will be ready to have her, deserving, could know how to fulfill every desire and need she would require; reach her soul, possess it, so she will never let him go.

Aye. Jamie kent from personal experience what the stranger was doing. And it stops now.

One man will know and possess her so. And it wasna a tall weak, feeble, brown haired man!

Jamie coughed strongly "And I dunno believe I had the pleasure" he narrowed his eyes at the young, handsome, verra well-
dressed man.

He bathed too.

"I apologize, where are my manners?" Claire was the one to answer. She narrowed her eyes back at Jamie as well and said acidly
"Mr. MacLiver, Mr. MacTavish"

"Your servant sir" MacLiver rose and bowed. A well dressed, bathed, Irish gentleman, than.

Weel, Jamie killed one or two gentlemen before, one more made no difference.

"Sàmhchair" a woman at the row in front of them put her finger to her lips and hissed at them.

"Absence of sound you, the person I address. You perceive with the ear you carry, at a time before that, all this" Jamie hissed back at her, verra rudely, in the Gàidhlig. The women stared at him shocked, mouth open and dangling. He was 'bout to yell something else quite as bad, for he was in no mood to be trifled wi' at the moment, only Claire's voice stopped him.

"You should go and find your seat, sir" she said and he turned his attention to her. What was wrong wi' the lass?!

She stared back and without neither of them breaking the stare, Jamie plumped himself right on the lap of an unsuspected, verra surprised, young man sitting to her left.

"Hey, what's 'rong wi' ye?" the young man exclaimed at him.
"Then move!!!!" Jamie returned the cry and felt how he was emitting verra dangerous fumes. He dinna care.

He waited all this time, did everything right, refused his every desire, need and act involving her. All those urges reined in, were now about to explode and sear the world. And at this point he was beyond caring.

The harassed man took one look into Jamie's face and moved away to the very far end of the row. Jamie plumped himself hard in a way the shook the bench from under them but still managed to land very skillfully tight against the form of his wayward wife, so much so that their knees touched.

"Jamie!" Claire hissed at him and moved hers away "I mean Mr. MacTavish" She was regaining her composure as fast as Jamie was losing his
"Maybe over there you would be more comfortable or find the arrangement more amicable" she hissed at him.

Dumbfound, he looked where she pointed her chin at "I'm sure the 'lovely' Laoghaire did not decorate herself such on my account" she added acerbically.

That made his lips curl up. So that was it?!!?
'Twas jealousy for him that brought ALL THIS on. Whatever this is, Jamie mused, looking at the handsome man at Claire's other side. That he could handle.
Aye, her and her over thinking heid and hogwash notions, filled of worry and jealous about him, that he could handle, discard with, and have her under him and back where and to whom she belonged in a heartbeat.

"Who? The wee lass, wi' the moose'y face that keeps looking here?" the gentleman asked craning his neck prudently in order to no attract attention.
Jamie wasna suffering from such reservation at the moment.

"Yes" Claire said coldly and Jamie realized she was looking straight at his, now, lip curled up-face, which were such over him being pleased as how she was envious of him.
Only she must ha' thought it to do wi' Laoghaire.
He arranged his features straight away.

"Is she your betrothed then?" the gentleman inquired of him "R'ye too shy as to sit wi' her then?"

"Why, I do believe you might have stumbled on to something there" Claire was playing along wi' the stranger
"Is that what it is? Mr. MacTavish, do you find yourself to timid to take what you obviously desire?"

He stared straight into her face and wi' clench teeth answered
"Dinna be worry misses, by the end of this night I'll claim mine!"

"I ask your pardon?!?" the gentleman gasped astonished.

"Don't worry Luke" Claire leaned into the man, touching his arm lightly "I'm sure Mr. MacTavish over here-"

she gave Jamie a cold side-glance and returned cordially to this, this- tòin
"only meant he was biding his time, waiting for an opportunity to appear itself. Isn't that so Mr. MacTavish?" she turned very slightly to Jamie while still half leaning toward Lu-

Did she just refer to this man by his Christian given name?!?!

"R'ye then? Just waiting for the chance to appear itself?" this was asked by LUKE who looked at Claire instead at Jamie, making it quite clear that he was biding his time as weel.

Claire as always, seemed unaware of her influence on other men and was concentrating on Jamie's expressions and words instead;
and seeming verra intoxicated as she did so.

"Luke, was it?" Jamie asked, ignoring his, 'soon to pay for this', wife.

"Aye, Luke MacLiver, your servant s…"

"Aye, aye, no need for that. From Ireland I gather?"

Jamie, as any good respectable man should, would have prodded further into this man's family, relations, upbringing and a sort;
all in order to have a clear transparency grasp of the man to be sure.
But there was no time and he wasna in the right state of mind at the moment to do so.

Besides, Jamie concluded to himself, ye dunno need to ken someone ye're about to kill, even better if ye dinna.

So he returned to his main concern regarding this man
"And ye'll be telling me, how exactly have ye come to ken my wi-, I mean the widow here?" Jamie spoke in a low, harsh tone, ready to pounce, if this Luke, found his speech insulting and would try to protect his honor.

'Please, try to protect your honor' Jamie wished vehemently, caressing the hilt of his dirk.

"Will I?" Luke inquired Jamie back. Fine the man was obviously smart enough to no take offence to that. Merde, Jamie mused, the smart ones are harder to kill!

"I'll be telling ye that, will I?" Luke said again and to Jamie's surprise dinna seem intimidated by Jamie at all. Which was unheard of wi' Jamie's size and girth.

"You'll have to forgive him" Claire chimed in apologetically "Mr. MacTavish was one of the man who found me, I think perhaps, he's just feeling a bit over protective of me" she gave Jamie a direct long dirty look.

"Who captured ye, ye mean?" Luke said.

So this Luke kent the art of sardonic interchange, Jamie concluded. Aye, weel two can play that game and Claire was right there to muzzle him up, Jamie thought approvingly.

"Capture, forbye" he added extricating the best fake calm and collected smirk he could muster "Rescued! Have ye' no heard what people ha' been saying? Rescued from the blasted English who attacked their own!" Jamie waited in vain for Claire to verify his words.

Catching this, Luke retorted with his own false smirk back to Jamie and said "I ha'. Only I tend to go to the source o' the truth" he squeezed Claire's hand lightly in a reassuring manner, giving her a genuine warmhearted smile, which Claire reciprocated with a genuine warmhearted smile of her own back to him!!!!!

"And so I dunno listen to idle gossip" Luke went on.

Jamie was about to riposte to this wi’ a fist, but a small side-long-look that went on to say 'don’t you even think about it' from his wife propped him back to his seat.

Gwylllyn began his song and play.

Claire straightened her gaze to the bard, ignoring him completely and sipping her Rhenish. How is she doing this? Just sitting there so still, **enjoying** the music.

Sitting next to her was torture. After so long apart, he felt himself wanting to tear all her clothes off and have her right here on the floor, even half mad and furies as he was with her. How is she staying so collected and calm near him? And who in bloody darnation was this Luke? And why was he no allowed to kill him?!

"Colum's Rhenish, is it?" Luke asked after a moment
"Yes" she swallowed in delight, Jamie thought he would never feel delight again. "It's very good" she said obviously a bit worse for it "I had three, no" she squinted her nose trying to recall. Jamie had to hold on to the frame of the bench as to no kiss that wrinkled sweet nose, as always.

Blasted beastie, how is she doing this?

"This is not my third-no –yes, this my forth glass. But I seem to have retested my limits quite enough. Would you like the rest? You should really be celebrating tonight" she handed him the glass, with a knowing look at this private remark and the arse of a man took it smiling and lightly caressed the hand that handed him the glass.

Jamie recognized the maneuver as one of his own as weel and if he wasna killing the man. For he was under Claire's orders; this was still noo about to go on under his nose or any nose for that matter.

Luke was teasing her "r'ye sure ye havena the Irish in ye then? I ha' ne'er–"

"This dressing been chafing me for days, do ye mind helping me wi' it?" Jamie wasna waiting for them to finish their little flirting speech.

"I'm sure it's fine" she said withdrawing her smile every time she spoke to him "and if its bothering ye so much, just rip off the bandage when ye get the chance" she wasn't playing along.

But this was **his** Claire. Jamie knew how to manipulate his own wife.

"Ho lass, I wouldna ha' asked only its feels so stiff, oozing somethin' grand. Why even Murtagh got a scare o' it, saying how it gone- what was it? Black and green so…"

"What?" she exclaimed falling for the ruse.

For all her shortcomings and even at her worst temper, Claire wilna let Jamie suffer or ail. She will tend to him always and at once, no matter what was in her heart and mind.

And being married to a healer... weel he kent what words would make her take heed.

Her having a few lubricants liquids in her, only made her more gullible and giddy to swallow every lie.

"O dear Lord, did it pus? Did you get it infected? What did you do **differently** this time?" she was already on her feet fumbling at his jabot and collar trying to get a peek.

Hushes and shushes all around them

"Hash now yourselves. You have all heard it before" she hissed back.

Jamie smiled in amusement.

"Are you lying to me?" she asked, bending to him, cocking an eyebrow at him, she was staring right into his face.

His lips almost curled out to be kissed by her.

"Surely ye' dunno mean now?" came a voice from their side "I'm sure it can wait for tomorrow, so as to be tended in her surgery. Why she is in no condition, tonight, to be nursing anyone!"
That got Luke a very dirty look from Claire. Jamie would've kent better.

Jamie ignored him and kept his eyes steady and firm on his Claire. "Am I laying to ye lass? Or do I really need ye?"
That was the honest to God truth and she felt the depth of his sincerity.
Jamie broke her.

He knew he swore honesty to her, but he was only half lying.
He did need her or he would surely die.
Besides this was an emergency, three lives were at stake.
Claire's decree or no if he wouldna get her away for this man he would kill him and then what will be of the two of them?

"It's fine" she assured Luke with yet another light touch, she was feeling very loose tonight indeed!

_She mustna be allowes to drink such wi'out him ever again!_ Jamie determined

"I'm fine, besides" she added, with a smirk that ripped Jamie to splits
"the little people, remember?" Luke laughed at this their _second_ intimate exchange.
He placed his palm where hers touched his and squeezed.

"I'll see ye tomorrow, then!" Luke said smiling

Not if I have anything to say about it, Jamie determined under his breath, as he followed her.

They were making their way out of the hall, when Jamie took one more look at his prey.
Luke looked deeply sad, as his new favorite toy, was taken from him.

"Nay yours to begin wi', no ever" Jamie said harshly.

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Once 'oot of the hall, he grabbed Claire by her elbow and yanked at her.
She was staggering, swaying over the drink, but she still fought him fiercely.
God help him, he even loved that 'obout her.

"Let go" she cried 'oot, but he wasna 'obout to do any such thing.
He simple fortified his efforts by grabbing her by the waist and was propelling her toward the surgery, this has gone far enough!
He was here now! And t'was time to lay down the law in a way his wayward wife will obey.
The surgery was far enough, that no one could hear him make sure his wife would comply.

"You lied, you bloody bastard, you effing baboon of a man, you….you tòn an eich,"
Horse's ass? Good one. She remembered their lessons in France verra well.
"You lied to me!!" she cried 'oot again.
"And I'll do a lot worst to ye if ye no be quiet and come wi' me!"
He yanked her hard.
"And what if I don't?" she stomped her feet on the ground, almost hurling herself to the floor in order to free herself.
He lifted her back on her feet by her arms, clutched her to him and said to her face.
"I'll gag ye wi' my kerchief, put ye over my shoulder and-"
"Heard that before!!!"
"Wasna lying to ye then and lass?"
"What?"
"Look into my eyes. Am I laying to ye now?"
She stared right into his face, flamed hers in return, released his hold on her elbows and stormed forward to the surgery not looking back.

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He closed the door after her. Blasted thing couldna be locked from the inside.
He took a verra deep breath fortifying himself and went down the small flight of stairs.
She was leaning on the large table in front of the hearth.
Hands crossed at her lap, no looking at him and preparing herself for a fight.
"First thing first" he said and took her mouth to his, clutching her to his body.
She resisted at first, clenching her teeth and lips not allowing entry, he was relentless, and she was drunk.
Slowly, whatever force that was between them took control of her and she yielded to his touch and mouth, he was half leaning her on the table, methodically positioning her further and further on the surface of the table and putting himself between her legs.
He would scold and handle her in a minute, he thought, just first-
But once he started, he couldna stop himself.
His hands traveled to support her back while his other hand went under her skirts.

Where he found that his wife's resistance wasna where her true feelings laid.
He went down her neck, kissing, biting, licking and getting verra excited, forgetting anger and insult.

He would forgive her anything, to be allowed to touch her so, to love her, to be hers.
Her heid was leaned backwards in ecstasy over his touch.

Good, he thought, recognizing the hunger and need in her, no other man touched her.
He removed the flap under the laces of her gown and freed her breasts, suckling on her nipples 'till her hand came to his hip, urging him to come closer.

He pressed himself to her, half atop of her, putting one hand, behind her on the table to still keep them leaning on the table but not lying.

Her legs wrapped themselves around him.
He placed his other hand under her knee and raised it almost to shoulder level. She was tight, wet and ready to be taken.
"Mine" he said into her ear lifting his kilt up. He was already, fully prepared for the proceedings at hand "mine and nobody else's"

Her head snapped forward from its inclined state "what?!!"

"Nobody else's" he repeated more firmly and guided himself between her legs.

Just as he was about to enter heaven, She braced her forearms which she was using to lean on the table with, and pushed her whole body, sending him staggering a step or two backward, jumped off the table and was furiously readjusting her skirts.

"So that's it then? You leave me alone for almost a week to fend for myself in this shark infested waters, you disappear from my sight but not from others, not explaining your behavior, but see me with another man for one second and you swoop in, lie to me, grab me and try to debauch me on the table to prove your ownership. What were you hoping Luke would come in and see?!!!"

"Luke is it?" he was feeling all the anger come back tenfold "and who in the bloody hell is this Luke??"

"This is what you find important to reply to, out of all the things I said?!!!"

"The others were lies, I choose to acknowledge the one thing that was verra real"

"Lies? Lies?! You were the only one that did that. You lied to me James Fraser!!!"

"Weel it was either taking the bench and hitting him on the heid until I cracked his skull or lying to get ye alone to let ye try and explain ye'r actions. What would ye preferred me do?!!?"

"My actions?? My actions?!!" she was almost hoping up and down being so infuriated with him.
"Y e s !!!!!!" he bellowed into her face "what r'ye on 'bout touching and talking to other men as if
ye're a free women. Christ Claire, they all ken ye're a widow and lining up men to find ye a husband, to make ye stay."

"I am a free women" she hissed at his face "and apparently so are you!!" she pushed him back wi' all her might, but being drunk and hardly as strong as him, he stood his ground.

He caught her wrists as she was curling her palms into fists, intending to pound his chest no doubt. He pulled them behind her and held them tight making it impossible for her to move wi'oot hurting herself.

She would be fine as long as she doesna move or thrash 'obout, and listen to him, as weel she should be doing!

"You are not a free women. You do belong to me, I own you" he said every word fully expressed wi' high proper English dialect, to get it through her thick, stubborn heid once and for all.

"Ho aye? by all means speak to me as if I was your property, as if I was somethin' that ye paid and bought for. A collector's piece that ye own. That belongs to ye and that no one's permitted to touch"

she was mimicking his own Scottish tone now

"That always seem to go so well for you when you do!!!" he ended with her proper voice again ower being so fumed

He tighten his grip on my hands, after a moment of looking at me as if he was about to break me in half. He took both my wrists and clapped them together in one palm of his. The bloody man had huge hands.

His face came boring into mine, an inch apart that I couldn’t see anything but blue orbs becoming one and flashes of red rising from his skin.

"Ye do belong to me and ye ARE my property. It's written in the law of T H I S time, ye are my wife!"

I shook the iron grip by flinging the entire weight of my body on his arm and twisting it, in order to be set free "Well lucky for us I'm neither at present time now am I?" I was screaming at the top of lungs

"I'll take ye where ye stand, put a bairn in ye and will see who will be forced to marry who, ye ragmhuinealach, craicte air fad, Mo chreach!!!"

"YOU STUBBORN, CRAZY NUTTER yourself, and good heavens indeed!!" I roared back "and if you think that I will ever marry you again you have never been so wrong!!!!"

My throat was aching from screaming so loud.
"If ye dare to nae-"

"DARE? DARE? You wouldn’t dare!!" sore throat be damned I would keep yelling at the bastard.

"Ho, I wouldna?" his hands came to the clasp on his belt and was starting to fumble with it

"Ho no James Alexzander, Malcom, Mackenzie, Fraser, you can huff you can puff but this house isn’t going down without a fight!!" I bellowed.

"What?" that took him completely by surprise, I guess the three little pigs did not yet build their houses.

"Never mind" I was in no mood to settle in for a bed time story, in fact there will be no bed in this story at all if I can help it.

What he put me through this past week was excruciating and I wasn’t about to let it slide only because my body screamed and pleaded to feel him again and let him take me to sheer happiness and forgetfulness.

Either from my threats or the bafflement from the pigs, Jamie did manage to bring some composure back to himself.

When he spoke again, although his hand were tight on the side of his body, clenched into fists and his entire skin seem to match his hair color, he still managed to speak in measured and quiet tones.

"Claire, please" he pleaded "threaten me wi’ anything but yourself."

He took a long breath and shut his eyes "Ye can take anything o'me ye like... but nay you. Please, to hear ye say such things…. It makes me mad and I go wrong in the heid wi’ my action and my speech. But please anything but you"

As usual a word from him could break my heart.

This was not a imagery. I was sure if one would look to the ground at my feet, right now, they would find the shrapnel of my broken heart.

"Then why?" my voice was shaky, sad and with no spirit left in it. That was gone with the anger.

Everything in the past two weeks came crushing down. I sniffed, trying to not fall apart.

I really should not have drunk so much, I mused to myself.
But it was the only thing that kept me from breaking into complete shambles when I saw him walk in to the hall, I reminded myself.

At my words and tone, he opened his eyes inquiringly.

"Why what?"
"Why would you do that, for another woman? Knowing what you know of her feelings for you? Of her intentions? Of what she did to someone you claim you love and cannot live without?" I sniffed again "why would you hurt me like that? and then disappear without a word" I looked straight into his face with all the pain and hurt and humiliation that were hiding behind my fury.

Whatever he saw made him rush to me, clasp me to his chest in a tight embrace and whisper

"Mo nighean donn, mo luaide, I will never hurt ye, you have my word, my oath, my heart, my soul all o'me" he kissed my forehead fervently and said into my skin "Please say ye believe me Claire" he distended me from him, lowered himself on the ground, one knee on the hard, cold stone floor holding both my hand in his, bending his head to our joined hands as in an act of absolution, pleading "please tell me you believe me Claire, I will die if ye don’t!".

"Then why?" I asked again sounding so cold to myself, I felt numb after feeling so much pain and insult.

He looked up at me.

"I told ye then and I tell ye now, it would have shamed the lass to be beaten like this-"

"Why do you care so much for her?" I burst out.

"I dunno!" he exclaimed angrily, but then reined himself in "I told ye what happened to me at sixteen in the castle, Claire. How I was beaten for all to see and me a lad and nay a lassie. I canna imagine such a thing for a lass, I wouldna go to dinner for a week after it was done, only Mrs. Fitz coming after me dragging me from my ear screaming 'go on Jaime, go on wi' ye'rself and eat' that finally brought me 'oot"

His imitation of the dear Mrs. Fitz made me smirk, but because there were tears on the surface of my skin it came out as a watery snort through my nose.

Jamie did smirk at that, rose to his feet, took out is, always ready kerchief and blow my nose.

"There, there, a ghraidh, ye silly lass, do ye no remember what happened next?" he returned to embrace my tightly.

"What?" I said muffled, face still buried in his kerchief.

He removed it, lifted my face with a finger under my chin to look into his eyes and smiled. "Do ye no remember what happened after the beating in the hall?"

My face must have shown my incomprehension.

"Ye came to me, mo chridhe, ye came to me and tended me. Holding my face in ye'r, bonny hands, such" and he cupped one hand to my cheek caressing, with the other one moving a curl from my face and tucking it back.

"Ye caressed my so gently, so lovingly, I would have gladly taken a beating every day after that to ha' ye touch me so" his thumb was now caressing every inch of my face slowly and softly "when ye told me ye would be leaving the next day I thought… I canna describe it. It was like a hole was opened inside me and I thought it couldna be so. God wouldna make me feel so to ye and take ye away, I was…. I was…"

"Heartbroken" I ended for him.
"Aye, I was. Still am, for ye no coming after me this time"

"What?"

"Aye, why do ye think I waited so long to come into the hall?"

Again the vacancy in my face compelled an explanation.

"I ha' been fighting like crazy wi' Dougal and Murtagh and the lot, to be allowed to see ye. Saying how my injury needs looking after and how I might die if they no let me see ye. I had to finally stop because they were growing so wary. When it was finally time for the hall, I knew once I saw ye I would run to ye and hold ye, the hell, wi' our plan and the future be dammed. But my mind kept telling me how that was no good and I couldna do so, or I might lose ye forever. So I resigned myself to come at the last minute, knowing that once the beating was done I will have ye, for a little while, even if it will only mean ye caressing my face and naught more"

His hand came around my shoulders and drew me in "I wondered could I maybe kiss ye, nay too long as to no get caught but just a brief touch on your lips, a second o' comfort" At that he showed me what he meant, only halfway through the kiss he couldn’t control himself and his mouth came fully into mine opening it with his tongue.

"I need ye so, a ghraidh" he whispered into my lips, his entire body pulsing with mine and shaking with desire.

"Beside" he said when he finally let go for a moment so we could catch our breath "wi' all we done, they were growing so suspicious of us, that I had to do something to make them lose our scent."

"What do you mean?" I said, breathless but feeling so relaxed then I felt in a very, very long time. Having him like this was everything.

"Weel" he looked a little shy all of a sudden "twas only I throw a milking chair at Murtagh when he said he wilna let me go and see ye and I called Dougal a lot of verra bad things to his face when he stood at the entrance to the castle and said that me and my big careless mouth werena to go anywhere near ye"

I wrinkled my nose and laughed "Really? What did you call him?"

He smiled, kissed the creases of my nose and sighed in contentment.

"I dinna remember, I was so angry I just opened my mouth and according to his face and those around him it was verra bad. One man crossed himself at some point" he frowned trying to recall what his head came up with. He had a good grasp of curses in many different languages.

"Really?" I smiled wholeheartedly, feeling giddy rapped in his very warm, very large arms.

"Aye, I tried saying afterward that it was the pain and I couldna think straight but that dinna seem to convince anyone"
"And you thought-?"

"I thought letting them think I just had a wandering eye and will go to any lassie around, weel, I thought that will make them think me just a young lust crazed lad, no need to worry 'obout" he kissed my forehead again and tighten his grip.

"Do ye forgive my love? As ye see I go crazy wi' the missing and loving ye and no being able to be wi' ye" he then distanced me a little to look at me and with a solemn face said "I would ne'er ha' touched ye wi'out ye saying so!"

"I know that Jamie" I said, tightening my own grip on him "I didn’t think before, when I spoke as well, I am yours" I looked at him with a plea for forgiveness as well "Being without you, I thought I couldn’t bare it for one more moment, and it made me think all these things about you and laog….well, I was mad too"

I cupped his face in my palms this time "I would never leave you" I stretched my body on to his deepening myself into him as if wanting to become part of him "and I can't wait another minute to be married to you and back in your arms".

He sighed so deeply I could feel the oxygen drain itself from every tensed muscle he had been holding.

"it's now the two of us, that got the wrong idea regarding the other" I said taking my thumb and caressing the sides of his slanted eyes, the high cheekbones, gliding the tip on that full bottom lip, his entire body was humming to my touch.

"We, really, must stop behaving as two horny teenagers that cannot control themselves"

"Horny what?" he frowned bewildered.

"Never mind, I just mean we need to think and behave more rationally and stop letting our emotions get the better of us and most of all talk to each other before jumping to the wrong conclusion, instead of playing pin the donkey in the dark!"

"WHAT??"

****

"What did you want to do to me, last time?" I said pulling back for his embrace.

He was whispering Gallic words to my hair, while we stood there swaying together.

Not willing to let each other go.

"Mmmm?" he played coy, pretending he was half asleep.

"You just said something about, wanting to do something or have it done, I didn’t understand that part, but something about my-"

"Naughting, naughting, I said nay a thing" he wanted to pull me back to him "I talk nonsense from the missing ye, that is all"
"Well, we are alone" I pulled back from his, reluctant to let me go, arms.

I thought it was only curiosity to where I was going with this that won me my release.

"Aye?" he rubbed his finger to the bridge of his nose, intrigued to where I was headed.

"This was a nice little moment we had here, last time I mean" I added seeing him not grasping.

"Aye, I remember" his fingers tappet his thigh gently.

"And I didn’t quite understand what you said, but it was about the last time we were here" I was walking to the table we only a few moments ago left. I ran my fingers lightly caressing the worn-out, cracked surface.

It still held the heat of our bodies in it. It ran a shiver down my spine and I could feel goosebumps forming all over my body

"Is that what you were doing with me before?"
I asked, circling the table to the far end, all a while caressing it lightly with my fingers feeling the pleasurable tingling feeling return to me.

I peeked at him around my shoulder to allow him to see all I was experiencing in my face. The tell-all face have one, very good advantage when it comes to telling one's spouse what you are thinking without a word.

Jamie started walking, or should I say shuffling is legs toward the table. Toward me, as if he wasn’t even aware he was doing so.

He were now standing on opposite sides of the table. Both holding to either side of it; so tight I was sure I could hear the wood cracking.

Jamie was holding on to his end so hard I saw his knuckles whiten and was sure that if he let go of it, I would be able to see his big paw print cemented forever into the wood.

The thought of him doing that to me, made my gasp for air quietly in my throat and my hands came to lightly to touch my nipples through the opening Jamie widened when he 'handled' my laces .

That made him growl, his nostrils flared and now I was sure I could hear the wood crack under his fingernails, he seemed to resemble an ox. An ox, ready to charge.

And me, with not a single red fabric on me.

"If we were to stop or be interrupted this time-" he said growing more and more red-faced with restraining himself.

I came very slowly to his side of the table, fearing he would actually drag me across the table to him, or leap on me and on to the floor.

"No one will stop us this time. Don’t you know by now Jamie. Its only you and me. Only you and me, Jamie, it's all I can see" and I reached my finger to gently caress his cheek.

He grabbed and lifted me to the table spreading my thighs with his torso and placed himself precisely between my legs. He did it in such a skillful, surgical one-sweep motion that it made me
release a small "hoop" and left my feeling very lightheaded.

His eyes were fixed on me; his gaze penetrated into me so intently, that when he moved toward me, I leaned back not even knowing why.

The feeling of unbearable anticipation was spreading all over me.

He made another step, and I took both hands to the back of me, leaning on them for support and to signal he could do anything he liked.

Still he didn’t move further but stared as if he was still planning his massive elaborated plan. I swallowed hard and he saw that.

But still he didn’t move. It was as if he was studying everything about me anew.

His eyes were moving slowly from my eyes, to my lips, to my flaring cheeks and burning skin.

He examined my breasts that stood taut in close proximity to their master, stared long at the small part of my nipple that peeked from the now half open front of my dress. It stood hard from the wanting to be touched by him.

The whole experience was agony.

Why won’t he touch me already?

"I think I was mistaken in asking…." I said letting out the air I was holding inside me as I waited.

"Sssshhhhaa" he placed one finger on my lips to silencing me.
We stood a few inches apart, my hands and buttocks leaning on the table
"Ye asked a question. It is polite to wait for a reply" he said in a low very deep voice and continued with his observations.

Well two can play that game, I decided.

I opened my mouth and bit the finger on my lips, sucking at all the nerve ending at the tip. Remembering from my nurse's schooling, that a professor once joked that one could ensued pure ecstasy or frenzy only by applying pressure just right on it.

He apparently, wasn't wrong, by the look of the man attached to the finger in my possession.

Jamie straightened bolt up on his feet, forgetting his examination, almost rising on his tippy toes. His mouth opened slightly and he drew in his breath as his other hand came onto my thigh and enveloped it with one big palm, pressing hard.

"Well" I said releasing his finger after a moment "you aren't speaking"
He seemed completely lost regarding what I meant or even who he was.

"You said to be quiet and you would answer, but you are not talking".

"Ho, aye" he said staring at the, now released finger and seem to be still experiencing the sensation.
I was done waiting though.
I pushed him back, hopped off the table, crossed by him and stood at the spot near the stairs were we first stood when I checked his wound and he gave me that look.

"Well if you won't tell me yours how about I tell you mine?" I said peeking sideways at him and beckoning him with my finger to come to me, which he did half hypnotized, dragging his feet on the floor.

If there would have been anything in front of him, he would have fallen straight on his face.

He stood in front of me not moving, and I began to loosen his jabot and opening his shirt front, all a while explaining myself.

"Now, if I remember correctly, we were standing right here" I positioned him right "and I was opening your shirt, like so" I demonstrated "to check on your -yes, still healing, nicely scabbed, no drainage wound" I moved the bandage to check.

No point to not make sure given the opportunity "You big liar, I'll get you for that" I warned teasingly, he didn’t move.

Then I started moving my hands lower and opening his shirt further finding his nipples.

They were completely erected. His all body, it seemed, was.

Although completely immobile, it was stirring. His hair was standing on ends, every kind of hair, I saw.

Muscles were pulled back and tensed.

"You, on your part" I continued, while letting my hands roam, skim and undress "were staring into me… yes exactly like that" I said looking up at him to see the same expression of intense hunger looking back.

"Hardly moving" my hands caressed his shoulders and down his arms "I was sure you would say something but I didn’t even feel your breath on my, and I was standing close enough that I should have" I took a closer step to him.

"Do you have anything to tell me now?" I inquired, his chest heaved himself up and down very slow, his mouth was closed, pressed lips and both hands closed very tight into fists to the side of his body, but yet he said nothing.

"Well if you don’t, I suppose you leave me no choice but to do what every physician does when his patient is uncooperative" I gave him a very licentious look, he moist his lips and straighten himself further "I would have to examine all of you to make sure there aren't any more injuries I must have missed."

I lowered myself down on to my knees "I'll start at the bottom shell I?"

I caressed his naked shines above his boots "This should really be done when the patient his naked, but will have to do" I remarked in my most professional voice.
I traced his knee remembering to apply light pressure on a spot behind them, a small whimper escaped him "no that seems all right"

I massaged his thighs advancing slowly higher and higher up "my, my quite a healthy strong lad you are, aren't you?" I said feeling his solid, firm, very well shaped muscular legs.

His fingers were fumbling themselves over and over again closing themselves tighter and tighter every time, his knuckles gone completely white by the time I reached….

"Ho my, I do believe I found something that does require my attention" I said my voice muffled from inside his kilt. His hands came to my covered head and he made a very low deep throat sound when I took him into my mouth.

"YE ARE A VERRA GOOD WIFE" he said sometime during the presiding "A VERRA, VERRA GOOD WIF….holly mother of God and all her….." he let out a short gasp, and I peeked from my hiding place, smiling very innocently "was that something in the lines of what you had imagined?"

He was panting quite heavily but managed to blurt out "I couldna have imagined ye even had I kent such a creature as ye exists!"

"I think we should go to our… my room now, don’t you? This room doesn't lock, and I don’t rely on us not being disturbed again. Do you think you can walk?"

"Yes" he said fervently.

****

We were stumbling through the hallway so carelessly entangled in one another.

When we reached the first corner, I peered from it to see if the next stretch of the passage was clear.

Jamie was pressed behind me, nibbling at my nape, at my ear, biting, kissing. Licking lightly at my clavicle.
I could feel his desire pressed to my back and not for the first time wondered, how was he able to move so athletically fully aroused.
He was making it very hard to keep a watchful eye to insure our safe arrival to my chamber.

When we arrived at another bend in our path, he pined me against the wall and took my mouth.
"If you behave as such we will be caught!" I said when he finally released my mouth to go further south of my body.
"No we won’t" he said muffled, his mouth on my laces "ye'r keeping an eye, no?"
"Well I can't do that while you are doing this" I said seeing only the crown of his head while he was now using his teeth to untie any string that his mouth came across.
He growled in displeasure and stopped his treatment of me, looking around "what good are ye, then?"

"Why you….oohhh!" He hoisted me on his shoulder as a sack of grain

"Sàmhchair, no sound now!" he ordered slapping my buttocks lightly. I slapped his shoulder blade back in indignation

"Now which way to ye'r room?" he twisted himself to one direction and then the other. obviously losing his way over his handling of me before.

"To the left" I said exasperated, after realizing that my pointing was futile, him not having eyes at the back of his neck.

"Aye" not that it matter, he had already realized where we were and began to stride with me still on his shoulder in the direction of my room

"What if someone will se…"

"There all at the great hall, and if ye'll be quiet I could listen for footsteps. Christ do ye want to get caught? I tell ye Claire the way ye'r acting" he smacked my bum again

"Me?!?"

"Shah!!"

I crossed my hands and kept my mouth shut. Creating 'the lack of any sound' he ordered of me before.

Serves him right if we were actually caught. And if so, I wasn’t giving him any more ammunition against me!

****

We reached my chamber quickly and safely. Jamie, as always, knew every secret passage, safe route and contingent escape plan, at every place he resided.
I should start doing that as well; I mused to myself, but was interrupted by being flung on the bed quite abruptly.

A boot flew across the room its twin soon joined him.
Watching this and other clothing items being hurled in different directions I said "You'll never find them back in the dark like this"
"The HELL wi' the lot of them, ne'er wearing clothes again" he growled which was followed by a clash of his dirk hitting the floor.

"Innnhh" he was making noises and indicating with his head that my garments should receive the same treatment, all awhile bunching his face as all men do when fighting to remove their collar. "Innhhaa" he repeated when I did not comply forthwith.

He was unbuttoning his waistcoat, that flew all the way to the other side of the room, lawn shirt
that landed straight inside the ewer, belt, sporran half ripping them off himself, as I stood on my knees on the bed completely mesmerized by the tableau and hypnotically untying my attire.

I lowered my gaze for a second to undo a knot and when I lifted my gaze back up, I was confronted all at once, with an image of a well over six feet tall, stoic, red- mane (red everywhere I remarked), Viking warrior - naked as the day he came into the world.

Jamie was cupping the very bare, aroused part of him that differed greatly from the childish, hungry-eyed, anticipating expression he seemed to possess at this moment.

I smiled at the image and he disapprovingly wiggled his fingers at me, indicating he found the fact that I was not as nude as him very insulting! Apparently once he would start, he wasn’t tolerating anything that will slow him down.

"Well, mine do take a bit more time on my own, are you sure you wouldn’t like to help?" I asked letting another part falloff the side of the bed and into the floor.

Still very naked, Jamie was rubbing his knuckles on his mouth, signaling that I needed to take care of my own and eyeing appreciatively while I did so.

"The door, did you lock it?" I said removing yet another vestment, teasingly enjoying the look of him every time another glided off my flash.

He tore his gaze, reluctantly from my body and for a minute couldn't quite understand the meaning of words.

"The door" I repeated slowly pointing at our only protection from nosy eyes.

By this time, I only had my shift and bodice on me, and was toying with the strings.

"Ho, aye" he side-walked to the door not able to remove his eyes from me. Groping blindly behind him for the latch at the door and locking it.

"I do wonder" I said examining him.
"About what?" he said licking his lips as he came close to the bed in such a way I found myself lowering myself from my knees to a half lying position on the bed as if preparing myself for what seemed to be a very long ride.
"Well, about the virginity" I said, mind not realizing what my mouth was saying.

That, made him stop dead at his tracks.

"Yours?" he asked pointing astonishingly at me.
"No" I said playfully "I wasn’t a virgin when I first went through the stones. You were!" I added teasingly.

I only meant it as a joke but he seemed slighted by that.
"No. I was just wondering that's all" I said hastily trying to explain.
"About what?" he straighten himself and looked down at me.
"Haaaa?" I replied trying to play dumb and distract him by releasing my curls to fully cascade around me, gliding out from my corset and allowing my shift to slide off my shoulders and exposing my breasts.

I was launching all my missiles. Full torpedoes ahead!
"You were wondering, what about my virginity?" he clipped every word not being distracted after all, though he still managed to extract a very distinct tilt to his head surveying what unfolded in front of him, rubbing his chest and making appreciative sounds.

He was not in the mood for stopping himself once he'd started but he wasn't about to start until I spill it.

"Ho…" I said complying finally "really nothing important only I was wondering flippantly…." Trailing my words hoping he'll let it go

"If it nay important it willna trouble ye to say it, no?" he growled.

The effort of holding himself at bay, questioning me and each time getting nothing, was taking its toll, and between reddened skin, flaring nostrils, shaking hands and more.

It was quite obvious that I had to let the cat out of the bag and now.

"Well, it's only because I saw you naked without the new, I mean the new-old scars that I only wondered...
well, if the return of your former physical state includes also…."

He towered over me, I sank myself into the bed apprehensive as to what I got myself into "if you are technically-"

"What's that? Tekhanikaly?" he asked irritated.
This was no time to say things he couldn't understand.

"Something like" I stuttered "if according to all the facts is something really or exactly…. It means I was wondering if-you-were-a-virgin-again" I blurted hastily almost as one syllable.

"What?" he blushed. His whole, naked, body blushed, into a shade very close to his hair and he froze, hands on his chest, his cock making it quite clear that he was still thinking about his former intentions but the rest of him seemed appalled and taken aback.

"I didn’t mean to imply anything bad by it" I hurried to try to correct the situation.

He looked like a very big, naked, aroused, Viking warrior that was just surprised by a sward to his guts.

Utterly humiliated.

His abashed face made me cry out "I don’t mind Jamie. I really don’t… I mean" I was seeking for words to amend my offensiveness "it wasn’t bad the first time, it really wasn’t" I added more firmly seeing him cringe away from me at my chosen words, but I couldn’t stop the flood that took over my mouth.

"It really wasn’t! I wasn’t lying to you then! I swear, it did feel good…. Very good indeed… only it was over quite quickly".

He yelped. He actually yelped and I, half naked myself, shift bunched around my waist by now, sprung to my knees on the bed trying to reach him as he took two steps back.

"Jamie it wasn’t your fault, it's what happens the first time, its physical, I think, I mean I don’t
know for sure…. I mean that's why I wondered, if it was because you never… o God, I should really shut up right now".

Too much too late I thought shamefully at myself.

Helplessly I plunged my buttocks back onto the mattress feeling much deflated, staring down to the floor.

"I really did like it" I added feebly.

"Open your legs to me, Sassenach" a firm masculine voice came from above me "and we shall see who will be the one to last".

I looked up to see that the insult had now became a challenge.

The look he had was now replaced by a look that left no doubt that I would be the losing party in this scenario.

Although technically, me losing meant I would be the clear winner, I kept my mouth firmly shut.
I was in no position to articulate anything to him at the moment.

He came to the side of the bed where I sat parallel to it.

Seized both my ankles and yanked, I was pinned to the bed by my shines, pressed to the mattress, sprawled on my back.

Then he let go of me and clutched the hem of my shift pulling it right off, through my legs, as if this was a magic trick were the magician pulls the table cloth from underneath all the dishes leaving the table completely bare and still, which was exactly the state I found myself in.

He griped my hips on either side of me, as he came into the bed leaning on his knees.

"I am your husband, Sassenach and 'tis m' duty to keep ye satisfied. From the first time to the last. Ye'll nay want or need another.

"Jaime" I hastened to apologize.

"No Sassenach! Ye're mine now" he spread my thighs with his knee, lowered himself as one hand came near my head, the other guiding himself into me.

Then his hand came to the other side of my head and he sheathed himself fully into me in one clean trust.

"Lord Jesus Christ," he cried out.

I gasped curling myself to him with both my hands coming, by themselves, to cradle his head to me.

I had imagined the sensation during our forced celibacy.
But no imagination could hold against the real thing moving inside of me, with me, whispering "O Lord I need ye so".

I climaxed almost instantly.

I could almost feel my blood bursting into every cell in my body engorging them to their full extent, causing them to push their way up against my skin, affecting it to redden and steam.

The craving of my body and soul to him did not fully reveal themselves until this point, and were now blissfully exploding inside me in streams of exhilarating electric currents.

I could almost not contain the sensation fully and could certainly not carry it for long.

Jamie was getting his stride and now instead of us gliding with each other, he was plunging into me as if this was a fight and not an act of love.

It wasn’t. This was a forcible encounter of needs that were too long not met.

At some point I could hear him say "ye feel so good Sassenach, how do ye feel so good?"

I was wondering the same of him.

A moment later and I heard his pleasure become a struggle "Haaaa…. 'GOOD LORD, GIVE US COURAGE IN TIME OF TRIAL’"

He invoked any prayer he could think of, trying to hold on.

He shock violently every time he was near, which was every second thrust.

I could have told him what will happen if he continued as such.

A moment later and he was rocking atop of me, red faced and holding his breath, still trying to not end this.

"Jaime its fine-"

"No, be silent a nighean" he said through clench teeth.

I wanted to explain to him it had nothing to do with his virginity or manhood.

We were apart from each other for so long (for us anyway) that the feeling of us joining was too arousing to last.

"Jaime-" I tried again

"Cha" he replayed and was pushing himself to go on and giving himself no pleasure.

Resigned I sighed and squeezed the inside of my thighs tight and drew my fingertip very gently near his backside.

He roared, spilled himself completely and collapsed over my, his mouth sinking exactly where my nipple was.

We laid like that for about an hour, I assumed, by the changing dark shades coming from the window.
Jamie's body seemed to relax further with every stroke of my hand.

I ran my fingers through skull, nape, backbone, vertebrae, and buttocks.

When he could form words again, he said into my nipple "That wasna fair."

"Well they do say all is fair in love and war" I quoted and added my other hand to caress the crown of his head.

"Why did ye do that?" he asked, his face still buried in my chest, tongue flicking playfully at my nipple.

"Because you have not been sleeping or eating properly" I said, which I shamefully only noticed in hindsight "I don’t know what's been going on in your life but with all that was happening in mine and what happened tonight. I didn’t need for it to be long and neither did you, next time-

I stretched myself fully as he went to my other nipple "mmm…that feels really good" I shuttered.

"Ho, is that so?!" at my vocal approval he was now hastening his pace and applying himself more industriously to his task.

"Mmm" I nodded "one of these days you will have to tell me, how was the one that taught you how to use your mouth like that"

"That good is it?!" he smiled into my skin.

"mmm" I nodded more vigorously this time "your…ho…"

Gooseflesh rippled all through my skin, causing me to squirm, unable to lay still.

"Your dreadfully good with that…hooo…" he lowered himself between my legs chuckling at my racket, which awarded him a kick to his side, only half not intentionally, over the vibration it stirred in me.

"Jaime, please" I gasped for breath "please come to me, come to me now!"

"arre ye surrrre?" he was rolling his R's on purpose and I rose almost sitting up fully, my hands clutched to his head, crying out "please Jaime, I need you.

When he entered me this time, He mumbled something in my ear that I couldn’t comprehend except for "…. So wet…o Lord so wet".

He slid into me, time and again his body contracting and spreading atop of me. I bore my fingers into his buttocks hard for anchor.

He was enjoying himself fallowing me with his gaze, while he moved inside me.

He brought his mouth to my face, which were, twisting all around. Side to side, up and down "Ye' like it then?"

"Yes Jamie, yes, please don’t stop, forget what I said, please don’t ever stop" and with that I cried out from the wave of ecstasy that crashed into my body.

"I won't" he chuckled in my ear and continued.

He brought me to fulfillment twice more and took his by the last, rolled down off me, gasped and
fall straight to sleep, with his always sweet smile, that this time didn’t disappear but stayed whispered on his full red, much used by now, lips.

When my own breath slowed back again I realized that he will not be going anywhere tonight, as we agreed that he should; in order for us not to be discovered.

I confirmed with the list inside my head of things that happened before, making sure it will be all right. Took another deep breath myself and fell limp, satisfied and happy to find my own sleep.

A moment later I felt a whisper in my ear as he curled to his side and gathered my spoon fashion "Good lassie, I wouldna have moved if the Pope was coming in the morning".
It was dinner time and we were sitting across from each other.

Jamie was devouring everything in sight and was looking as his old well-rested, healthy-appetite, content self.

I couldn’t stop myself smiling at the sight.

"What’s got in ye, burraidh?" Murtagh reproachfully barked at him when Jamie (for the third time) abruptly and ill-mannerly, outstretched himself in Murtagh’s direction to reach for yet another tray of food.

"Can ye'na sit still?" he asked accusatory.

"What amiss wi' ye?" answered a full mouth, huge grin still spread on his lips, Jamie "ye been pester ing me for more than a week now to eat something!". 

"Weel, I dinna mean ye to recompense for it all in one meal, ye gomerel, now did I?" Murtagh replied, tossing his food back on his plate, exasperated and obviously losing his appetite from watching all this plundering.

"Canna help it. I'm starving, a charaid. Worked out quite an appetite last night and today" Jamie answered him but was looking squarely at me, taking a very gluttony bite out of his own bread.

"Think I might be so, tonight as weel. Better tell Mrs. Fitz to nay lock the door to the pantry. I feel insatiable" he continued, giving me a look to inform me that I was the food in the pantry and my door better not be locked tonight.

I blushed and meekly looked to the side, burying my face in my drink, which apparently delighted him greatly for he laughed warmheartedly.

Fine, I plotted, two can play this game.

"Your lip looks a little swollen Jamie; did you get stomped by a horse?" I teased returning my gaze to him, just as he tore another piece of mutton hurling it to his mouth.

I was playfully provoking him back, Knowing full well that it was me, that bit his lower lip, hard, when he caught me, this afternoon, sitting near the kitchen picking the odd and bits that came at my path. 

Trying not to look completely obvious while I stared into the alcove where I first saw Jamie and Laoghaire locked in a steamy embrace and kiss.

It was silly; of course, Jamie was in my bed almost the whole night, last night.

And was fully satisfied before I fell asleep to awake to an empty bed, which even though, did not hold the real thing, contained very much his scent, his warmth and his satisfaction.
But the day stretched out, the patients in my surgery had such superficial injuries that my free mind could recall the kiss in details and play it on a loop in my head.

So here I was, at the same day, at the same time, sitting in the same spot as last time, peeping into an empty alcove and feeling a complete and utter fool.

"Beauchamp, you are a complete idiot" I whispered under my breath frustrated and ashamed of myself.

"Weel, I wouldna think one should say such a thing of his wife, but ye do ha' ye'r moments, Sassenach. This is defiantly one" said a warm soft mouth nibbling at my neck and I felt rather then saw a roaming finger gliding itself into my décolletage under the covering of my shoulder piece.

I swallowed hard.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean" I answered back, trying to regain a speck of dignity. "I'm simply taking a small break from my hard working day, to have some air".

I closed my eyes as the finger found my nipple and was slowly rubbing it.

I swallowed again

"You…you can ask Angus over there, he went for… for a drink wi-" I was pointing vaguely in the direction where I last saw the kitchen, quite sure it didn’t move in the last minute but not exactly caring if it did.

He pulled me back to lean on his other hand that was placed on my nape, supporting all my weight with only one large wrist of his own.

Still with my eyes closed, I felt a warm breath on my face, soft lips and at the last, a prodding tongue.

"Someone could see" I said into his mouth really not caring about that as well. "Then come here!" he ordered and dragged me into the alcove.

He pushed me against the barrels that stood there stacked on each other by the wall, took another peek to all sides to make sure of our privacy and was about to return to what I hoped would stop at only what is called a snog fest and no more (we were in public!);

When I placed my palm to block his mouth from mine at the very last second.

"What exactly do you think you're doing?" I asked cocking and eyebrow at him and conveying serious displeasure.

"Weel-" he spoke into my palm "I thought it quite obvious, but if ye be needing the telling-"

"If you think I am about to canoodle with you in the same place you had another girl in, as if the women involved are exchangeable"

"What's canoodle?" he asked clearly missing the point.

"Kiss and cuddle amorously" I answered unmoved from my original displeasure at being fondled where he had another.

And another that tried to have me burned, no less!

"Hoooo, I like that word. Much better than 'fucking' or 'sadist', to be sure" his eyes lit up "then choose a place Sassenach, I want to canoooodle wi’ ye" he said pressing himself into me.

"Where's that bloody Sassenach wench? Thalla’s caic! Canna leave her for one second" Angus voice coming from where I sat before, broke us abruptly apart.
Jamie adjusted his kilt and took three steps back away from me; I wiped my lips as if erasing any trace of the kiss and adjusted my cowl to hide any shift in clothing Jamie produced.

"Aye, I thank ye for the advice sasse- I mean misses Beauchamp" he said loudly and I heard Angus strides coming closer.

"Yes quite. Just remember, Mr. MacTavish if it doesn't subside in the next couple of days, come see me and we will see what we can do" I replied just as Angus face appeared from behind me.  
"Well, good day to you, Mr. MacTavish" I nodded graciously.  
"Good day to ye, misses Beauchamp" Jamie answered grinning from ear to ear and bowing slightly.

"Well, shell we go back then, Angus?" I addressed my shadow "I do believe I got what I came for".  
"Haaa?!" he said perplexed.  
"Fresh air I mean" I waved my hand to the dusty, suffocating air around us "shell we get back to the surgery then? Time waits for no man!"

And with that misunderstood idiom, he turned scattering back toward the surgery mumbling "Stuck guarding às a chiall Sassenach" under his breath.

"Fuck it" I whispered at the last second, turned, grabbed Jamie by his coat and gave him a very amorous kiss; leaving him behind staggering and giddy as I ran to keep up with Angus.

Same kiss results I was, now, teasing him about.

He looked back at me, slanting his eyes and putting a piece of mutton very slowly in his mouth  
"Aye, swung its heid when I wasna looking" he replied while chewing.  
Then he smiled, picked up his mag and stroked it with his fingers "Donna ye worry mistress, she willna catch me off guard again, I'll surely get her next time".  
He took a very long sip, not breaking his stare from me.

"Is that so? Too bad. But I don’t know about the getting her part, I heard those fillies can be dangerous" I said not wavered by his warning.

"Fillies? Alec has ye working the fillies now?" Murtagh eyebrows shut up.  
I suppose he didn't like the thought that the laird of Lallybroch was to be labored as a mere stable boy.

"Ouch no" Jamie addressed him, placing a hand on his shoulder, recounting "This was a full grown mare, a charaid. ye ken the one" Jamie returned to caressing his mag salaciously.  "The light brown one wi' the verra wide hindquarters. She'll be a good breeder, that one, ye can tell. We just need to find a good strong stallion for her, to put her in her place".

I kicked him under the table, he didn't even wince or falter at his words, just pressed harder on his mug and said "only she's verra seductive that one. Draws ye in, ye let your guard down and she-"  
Before he could finish that remark, I kicked him under the table in earnest and he spilled his drink, droplets spattered all around.

"What's 'rong wi' ye?" Murtagh wasn’t pleased with is young protégée this time around as well. Jamie didn’t move his gaze from my eyes, smirked and simply said "Bit my tongue".
"Ye clumsy dolt" Murtagh reprimanded Jamie, shaking his wet hand.

"Best go and get us another drink, shell I?" Jamie rose making his way to the jag at the end of the table greeting anyone in his path in quite an exaggerated manner.
I could hardly contain the smiles and amusement bursting out of me as well.

"Hi" a very critical Murtagh tore me from viewing my husband in delight.
He slid to where Jamie sat before, looking straight at me.

"If ye're teasing the lad 'obout Laoghaire-"

"Laoghaire?" my outraged voice rose a little too high than it should have and some of the dining hall occupants around us turned to stare at me.

Murtagh gave me a very irritated look, which for him only looked as all his other expressions, but my manic mind would not dither.

"What on earth are you talking about?" I hissed low voiced at him.

"If her father or Colum comes to know about it, young Jamie could get more than a blooded nose"
He didn’t know who right he was I would break Jamie's neck myself!!!
"What are you on about? Did they…where they…" I gasped trying to find the right terminology.

"Weelllll…." Murtagh leaned closer to me as if sharing a secret "the lass has been spotted going to the stables almost every single day and coming back all flashed".
I was beginning to flash myself.
"And there was that matter in the hall wi' the beating and later when I caught them together"

"What?" I said choked, my voice trembling.

"And there's the look of her ye see?" he said straightening himself at his seat.

"The look?!?" I grabbed his arm forcefully commanding the truth "what look?!?"
He looked puzzled at my reaction and stared at his arm which I hurriedly released in order to get to the truth faster.
"Sorry, you know us women and gossip” at that he shook his head heartily "please go on".

"Weel, Jamie spend awhile in Paris, for a short time ye see" he bent again as if divulging state secrets.
"Yes I'm aware" I said and quickly added seeing the expression on his face "He told me once".
I made a gesture of dismissal with my hands urging him to go on.

"Weel, there was this lass, ye see, Annalise de- what was her name?" he tried to recall.
"Annalise de Marillac" I finished coldly for him remembering the name and the women attached to it.

"Aye" he stared at me suspiciously.
"He told me of that as well, please go on" I spoke very coldly but every piece of my skin was burning.
My mind was painting me the picture of the very petite, beautiful, graceful, perfect Annalise de Marillac and Jamie's starry eyes.

"Weel then ye ken how he was deeply in love wi' the lass, aye? I think I never seen him feel such to any other. Couldnna eat or sleep then as weel, come to think of it, just like now".
I could hardly take another breath as my chest was so tight. Food and sleep was the further thing from my mind as well.
"Weel they donna look exactly the same but-
"But they are both petit, blond, delicate, refined, young girls" I said concluding for him.

"Told ye that too, did he now? Quite honest he is wi’ ye". He said cocking an eyebrow at me, not sure what he thought of that.
"So I thought" I said swallowing hard.

"Weel if ye ken all that. Ye shouldna be harassing the lad now would ye? Why if ye ask me his only having a wee bit of fun, the lad needs a women not a lassie and- "

At that moment, the young lad came back, three drinks at hand, still all smiles.
I wasn’t delighted by the look of him this time.

"Brought ye one too, mistress Beauchamp, wouldna want to be rude, now, woul…where r’ye going?" he asked bewildered as I was raising to my feet extracting myself from the bench

"Lost my appetite" I simply answered. And left not looking back.

Jamie snuck to the castle through the secret passage he found as a sixteen year-old lad playing on the grounds of Leoch.

The night was freezing cold and his hands almost felt numb, as they grazed through the high wild grass, that was frosted in snow itself.
He dinna care, he’ll ha’ Claire warm them up for him.

He smiled trying to decide if he’ll bury them between her warm milky thighs or under her sweet, round rump.

He grinned to himself wider and felt the cold withdraw itself from his heart and chest as he remembered the sight of her peeking jealously into the alcove, trying and miserably failing to do so covertly.

How on earth could any man think her a spy? He puzzled, and not for the first time, regarding the true motives of Dougal Makenzie to take her against her will, when first they stumbled upon her.

Not that he was in any position to complain about such goings on, only he felt a ting in his heart, when he thought how scared and alone his wife was.

"Ye think I dinna ken so lass? Ye think I thought it all dinna bother ye? Ye'r wrong my love. I watched ye when ye thought none could see.
I saw every tear shed, all the heartbreak and most of all, the fear behind those eyes, that couldna lie even wi’ the tough demeanor and plotting and planning stares ye had.

"I'm verra sorry for nay helping ye my heart, but in my desire to have ye, nay my need to have ye, I thought I must keep ye here.
I wouldna fault ye your plans or hinder ye but I willna help ye either” he said in a prayer for forgiveness to the howling wind that shirked in his ears.
He must seek penance from her for it one day.

But nay tonight. Tonight he’ll have her pleading and begging him to never leave her, to never stop.
He was reflecting 'bout the alcove again.
He kent verra weel she'll be there.
Kent her relentless, over thinking mind willna let her go ahead wi' her business.

So he stood there, waiting in the kitchen, claiming to old Alec he felt weak and feeble from not eating or sleeping the past weeks.
They've all seen him, whispered behind his back and to his face.
How badly he looked, how he ate naught but crumbs and how he roamed the fields at night hardly sleeping.

How could he explain to them nightmares from things that havna come to pass yet, how could he rationalize being scared of a war that he had not fought at and 'bout a cold hand reaching behind him in the dark hissing in his ear 'I will have your surrender before you leave this world'.

And how could he admit the need to wake and see his wife lying there, serene and so beautiful that it took his breath away each time he saw it.
When she wouldna awake when he woke of such things, he only needed to hear her breath and know he is safe.

So when Angus came prancing through the kitchen, yelling how he's stuck guarding 'that women' in the dark, clammy surgery all awhile Rupert is sitting on his fat, lazy, bastard of an arse, Jamie crept to stare at her leering restlessly into the alcove.
Amusing himself how jealous she was for him.
How she couldna let go of the fright he would want another.

He felt jealousy for her at all times, it will do her nay harm to feel it a bit herself.

Men were drawn to her behind her beauty.
She compelled all to act by their conscience and heart.
Couldna fully understand how one could do true evil or hurt another.
But most of all, how one could give up.
She wouldna have it. Willna let him either.
La Dame Blanche indeed.

But she was his.
To him she showed her softness, her breaks and cracks, her everything, that others wouldna be allowed to see.
When he loved her, he loved all of her and unlike the others, he kent what she truly was indeed.

He reached her door and turned the screeching doorknob.
He must oil it so he wouldna be caught coming to her.
For he surely wasna going to stop coming to her.

But all of a sudden he was rebounded by the lock not turning and the door not jarring.
It was locked.

"Lass" he whispered to the door "'tis I".
No reply.
"Claire, the door is locked, mo chridhe, I canna enter" he tried again whispering a bit louder this time.
Has she fallen asleep?

Poor thing, she probably tried so fervently to wait for him.
He couldna come sooner, he had to wait 'till they all fell asleep.

But, why lock the door then? Wouldna she leave it open for him to come in on his own?
Did she think he wouldna come?!
Once he had a taste of her (again), he couldna stop, wouldna stop.
How could she think otherwise?

Something was amiss in the way she walked from the dining hall this evening, he recalled.
But they promised each other, if any such things will bother them they will talk to one another.
And he was going to ask her 'obout it tonight.

Nay, it couldna be that. She must've simply fallen asleep and forgot to unlock the latch.
She wasna safe in the castle, wi'oot him by her side, always.
And she kent it weel.

"I love ye Mo nighean donn" he whispered to the locked door and left.

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Claire was nowhere to be found! And he looked.
Furiously and methodically.
No sign of her.

It started in the morning, when he told Alec he 'must go to the surgery to get something for his aching gut and will return promptly' he added the last, after Alec dinna seem impressed that the infliction excused one from his daily labor.

He just wanted to see if all is weel wi' her after last night and kiss her good morning, to start his day properly.

"Aye fine, 'oot wi' ye. But no need for a healer for that. Mrs. Fits has some syrup of figs to loosen ye straight away and the next day just eat ye'r porridge, Fhrisealaich" said Alec finally dismissing him.

"Ye're nay eaten again today. That what's 'rong wi' ye. Not slept by the look of ye either. Maybe a little of Colum's Rhenish to calm ye down, tonight during the show in the hall" he added sounding fatherly in his tone.
Weel, Jamie has been very respectable of late to the horses and no more 'incidents' regarding him sleeping wi' Alec's horses occurred again.

"Aye, all good thoughts, a charid" he smiled kindly to the man "I shall go and do that now, but maybe some peppermint from mistress Beauchamp as weel."
"Why do ye call her mistress?" Alec inquired.
"What do ye mean?" Jamie puzzled back.
"She a widow no?" Alec stumped back "they say she told Colum her husband deid."
"Aye" Jamie smiled shyly "I suppose she's still wed in my mind's eyes"

'To me of course', he added to himself.

"Aye, the ring ye mean?" Alec nodded.
Understanding seemed to be dawning on Alec as it was leaving Jamie.
"What ring?" Jamie startled.
"She 'till wears her wedding ring. A gold one. Fine looking too. Her husband probably was a good provider" Alec smiled approvingly.
"Aye" Jamie agreed begrudgingly "Next one will be better I think".

"Oh aye" Alec knowingly nodded wi' a smirk "Mr. MacIiver ye mean?"
"What?" the question came out of him as if someone hit Jamie's stomach and took all the air 'oot.

"Hoch. Come now lad, have ye no seen the looks between them?" Alec said currying the mare near them.
"Looks? What looks?" Jamie might ha' seen Mr. MacIiver look at Claire but Claire would surely nay look back.
"Aye it's quite obvious he bides his time 'till that ring comes off and then he'll ask"

"ASK? Ask what exactly?"

"Aye" Alec continued as if he dinna hear the question "between the looks, the secret meetings and Mrs. Fitz shoves, they'll be marriet in no time past. Best thing for her if ye ask me"

"WHAT R'YE ON 'OBOUT?" Jamie could feel the heat reddening his face, could feel his breath forced powerfully through his nose and his ears could hardly hear naught but the thundering of his heart.

"What's 'rong wi' ye?" asked Alec startled by his bellowing.
"Naughting it's the stomach. What secret meetings?" he was leaning very close to the old horse master, which seemed to ken things that were going on wi' his wife under his own nose.

"Weel, she's been seen leaving his hoose many times" Alec unveiled wi' the joy of having the latest gossip in Leoch.
"What? Ye'r mistaken! Misses Beauchamp is a lady, she willna conduct herself such" Jamie refused to believe it.
"Aye. A pregnant lady if she no careful" Alec sneered.

"WHAT?!" Jamie's eyes flow open, he could feel them unable to go back to normal, as if wood sticks were holding them open and he swayed a little where he stood losing the ground he stood upon.

"Aye." Alec laughed, thankfully unaware of Jamie's reactions, while stroking the horse's mane
"Weel that is what Mrs. Fitz told Colum this morning, that if he willna let them marry soon a bairn is bound to occur.
Why wi' them circling each other such, sniffing their back sides as two stags in rut- HEY, WHERE R'YE OFF TO?"

"TO TEND TO MY INFLICTION" Jamie bellowed back to a hardly seen Alec by now.

So here he was, searching everywhere, Up and down the castle.
Flirted wi’ one chamber maid, one of Laoghaire friends that worked the dairy wagon near the entrance to Leoch’s court yard and a laundry women which he dinna quite ken what she could know, but he was at his last ends to think rationally.

He charmed the ladies for a minute or two and then tried to ask, covertly, did they see the Sassenach today, for the surgery was closed and he needed some herbs.

They were all very charmed, complemented by the attention but had nothing to add regarding Claire.

When the day stretched, his anger had become worry.

If she was truly wi this Luke character (the man better have his affairs in order for he dies as soon as Jamie finds his women), the gossip mill would ha’ spread like wild fire by now.

Could something ha' happened?

O Lord, Jamie suddenly felt his stomach surge, what if she ran?
It was just ’obout last time she plotted and tried to escape.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, that was it!!!
He has lost his mind completely if that ridiculous notion is what his mind is peddling him now.
'Why would she ever do so?' Retorted his sensible mind.

'Because she now has the chance to return to her husband'. Apparently, his insane mind, wasna giving up wi'oot a fight.

Nay! He has given her the chance before at the stones, she chose him!!
And when given the chance again, she begged to die wi’ him than to leave.

But what if Claire thought it too late by then? That too much time has passed and that Frank dinna wait for her and moved on.
Absurd as the notion is, that any man willna wait for her forever.

Nay! This canna be!!!!

But Claire was also an extraordinarily loyal women; she will stand by her vows no matter what.
Only, now, the only vows that bound her where the exchange between her and Frank.
What was between her and Jamie hadna happened yet.
At the moment she was still-

"FRANK’s" he hissed and could feel the bile in his mouth rise.

How can she think him the right man for her?
Time itself brought her to HIM not to frank.
Jamie couldn’a think of the man or say his name and not feel hate and the extreme desire to break something to a thousand pieces.

Nay! he determined. This was, by far, the most outrages and preposterous thing his mind could think of. The only reason she would ever leave him-
Realization descended on him.

What if She dinna really believe they could change things? That would be a reason to leave.
If she thought, they would fail as they did before and this was her only chance to return to frank wi' nay much time passed, unwed and wi'oot a child by another man in her bally; and most of all wi' 'oot all the pain and hardship she endured in her life here wi' Jamie here.

"He isna ye for yee lass. Our union was blessed wi' child not ye'rs and:-". A whimper escaped his throat at the thought of Frank and Claire's union.

"Weel it nay happening lass. Nay as long as I breathe" he said marching back to the stables to saddle a horse for riding.

Ignoring Alec's shouts of inquiry as to what took him so long to come back and outrages cries of "what in the Lords eyes, ye think ye're on 'bout??!!" while he took Donas out of the loose box and prepared him for riding.

"I need to go" he simply said wi' clenched teeth and said no more; no matter what his friend said, shouted, threatened and profaned at him.

None mattered. He would ride to the stones, surely he'll get there before she could ever and convince her that this time they will succeed in their endeavor. That he wouldna send her back to nothing.

He wasna sure himself, but he wasna 'bout to let her go. He couldna go on wi' his life wi'oot her.

She came into his life, she couldna just leave him and his love behind. Not wi'oot a fight.

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A rider coming caused Alec to stop his yelling at him and go attend to one of his beastly bairns returning.

A moment later and Dougal's voice came down the stable's corridors "So where is the fat, forsaken slough then?"
"Dinna ken, but if he dinna take a horse from here, best chance ye find him in the kitchen. It is Rupert after all" a trying to calm Alec replied.
"Weel, I'll go ha' a look then, but best fix a horse for him to ride, I need him going to take Mrs. Beauchamp from Cranesmuir before dark…. what's in all the saints r'ye doing??!!"

At the sound of her name Jamie had rushed behind Dougal making him jump in surprise. Jamie dinna care and was half on the man.

"Mrs. Beauchamp ye say?" he could hardly form the words, feeling so suffocated against his pounding heart.
"Aye, what amiss wi' ye?" puzzled Dougal, moving a step backwards to distance himself from an over towering overbearing Jamie who pressed himself to him.
"Naughting just lost my balance" Jamie tried his best impression of a calm and collective man, instead of a flaming, fury, chocked, heathen that he felt.
"Dinna get ye now did I ?" he said pounding on Dougal clothes as if straightening and cleaning them "what were ye saying about Mrs. Beauchamp?" he added hoping to sound flippant.

"Let go, ye clout" Dougal flung his arms to make him stop "Aye, I took the mistress to see the fiscal's wife".
And your mistress, Jamie added, resentfully in his heart, remembering what that relationship cost him.

"Met Mrs. Beauchamp last night in the garden, she was sobbing, so I offered to take her. Mistress Duncan has the odds and beats Mrs. Beauchamp might need to restock her shelf's before the gathering. I thought might shut her up for a bit".

"Aye, I remember" Jamie blurted out of the sheer relief at his wife's whereabouts and his sheer stupidity of not remembering how last time he worked at the stable as weel, when Dougal came, as now, looking for Rupert and finding Jamie who offered himself to bring Mrs. Beauchamp back.

But then he recalled Dougal saying Claire was sobbing, why was she sobbing this time?

"Remember? What?" said a confused Dougal and took him out of his heid.
"Nay, I only meant I remember mistress Duncan dabbles at such things" Jamie explained.

"Aye, weel, I want Rupert gone and getting before the Sassenach might get the half-witted idea of trying to get away. Took her horse back wi’ me but wouldn’t put it past her to be foolish enough to try even wi naught at hand."

She would ha’ done better then ye ever could, Jamie mused to himself, against the slight on his wife; remembering how she, being torn from another time and place, fooled them all into believing her a women of this time and ruled them all under her thumb.

"Ye want me to go and fetch her then? For ye I mean" Jamie said calmly, separating features from feelings.

Dougal scrutinize him up and down not being able to decide.

"What ever suits ye. Wanted to help" Jamie added in mock insult "Just thought ye wanted it fast and now. Go! Look for ye'r allusive Rupert then. I'm sure he'll happily leave the lass I saw him pawing a while ago. Aye, no trouble there to be sure" he was turning as if to leave when his uncle put a hand on his shoulder and said.

"Be gone wi ye lad, just hurry back!"

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Jamie strode to take Claire's clock, hop on Donas, nodded to an astonished, bewildered Alec, who couldn't stop muttering prayers for the poor souls of the insane and soft-heided under his breath and departed.

He'll have to account for this behavior to be sure, but he could only think about his wife rolling on the ground, holding her stomach at hearing what crossed his deranged mind when he couldn't find her.
If he teased her for her suspicious, salacious, over thinking mind over him and others; she was, apparently, no match for his.

"FRANK?!? ye ana-caitheamh of a man" he scolded himself "ye're about to ride to the God-forsaking stones????
To catch her return to frank?!?" he spoke to the ether while riding to the village.

"O Savior of the world, give me strength to not completely go mad by the time these trials are through" he prayed in the Gàidhlig, truly abashed at his conduct and thoughts.

"Good Lord, have mercy on us sinners who miss their wives, there anchors, that they go mad and senseless" he added in the English.

What was it he wandered. Why are both of them acting as… as- for once in his life he couldna find nay words.

"What's 'rong wi' us, Sassenach? Our love and our bound stood much hardships than this!"

But even as he spoke he kent the answer.
The ghosts of a king, former lovers and spouse that were left behind and fear of him and Claire letting each other go when all was lost were not to be trifled wi'.
Those ghosts endured the ride through the stones as weel.
They were wandering alongside them; entering throw cracks that were forming from their separation, a separation that couldna be truly bridged 'till they were not properly married and joined as one again.

He took her out of wedlock. There is a price to pay for it.
Even though they were married already and belonged to each other completely, he still craved to have her the right and holly way.

Not enough to nay lay hands on her 'till they do; but enough perhaps to comprehend the insanity of late.

With that concluded and the joy of having his wife crafting another opportunity for them to be alone, he dismounted and went to knock on the Duncan's door.

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"What is it?" he heard the witch bawl as last time.

"In here" the young house keeper walked him in and gestured to her mistress.
He walked in and addressed the witch first, as proper, "Mistress Duncan".
Then he turned to the window to claim his reward,
"Misses Bea-" he stopped, bonnet in hand watching an empty space where his wife stood last time.

He gaped at it for a minute until a hand came to set on his shoulder.

"Mr. MacTavish" said a sweet-sharp seductive voice, with a small high pitched chuckle "Is it the view from my window ye came to see or me?" another searing pitched chuckle.
She sounded pure evil to Jamie and he couldna realize why none saw that from the start. Especially poor Arthur, God rest his soul or would rest. He crossed himself wondering what can be done in the matter.

She laughed at the spectacle.

"Dougal was called back to Leoch. I was sent to fetch Mrs. Beauchamp" he said still watching the window heartbroken to find Claire still missing and now he had no clue where to look.

He also realized, that the hand on his shoulder still remained and was now commencing to seductively and playfully tap her long slim fingers on it.

"I was told to come here for her" he said gathering his wits, turning to his side and taking one big step back from his assailant.

He unfortunately also realized by now, that she was probably is only source and chance to uncover where his wife might be.

"If ye would be so kind as to inform me where she could be found-" he inquired politely.

The roaming hand attached to the predator he addressed, withdrew back to his owner, but only to roam lewdly on its own form instead of his.

Was she openly trying to seduce him? He pondered appallingly. Why he is a merit man!

Weel, No if he dinna find his roving wife first, he reminded himself.

He drew the nicest smile he could extricate, while feeling those sparkling green eyes pierce into him threatening to swallow him whole and get at all his secrets and worth.

And asked again "Her whereabouts if ye will?"

"Mrs. Beauchamp ye say?" the witch returned his ungenuine tone back, growing tired of toying with uncooperative pup.

"If it wasna me ye came to see, I thought ye must ha' come to watch the boy from my window" she went to the other side of the room to sit by her hearth and to lean back luxuriantly in her chair propping her legs on a nearby footstool, red witchy shoes peering from her dress which she seemed to pull a little higher than commonly appropriate in the present of a man that wasna one's husband.

"For a better look ye see" she said gesturing at the window he was addressing, but seemed to not refer to tanner lad.

But Jamie was too startled from the realization to care.

Novely Tanner! That's what caused the odd feeling he couldna comprehend when he knocked at the door to the Duncan's house.

There were nay people at the square, gawking, smirking at the lad, happy to see their idea of justice being served.

Nay small bairns pulling their ears and pocking their tongues in mock, only escaping such a faith themselves over having been born to a family that put food on their tables.

But most of all; there wasna any sign of the tanner's lad anywhere; certainly nay nailed to the pillar.

"They got him 'oot, ye see" an acrid-sweet, clairvoyant voice behind his shoulders brought him back from his daze and he realized he moved to the window and was holding it's frame tight, lost in
the puzzlement of what was happening wi' today?

"'oot?" he queried, turning to her and realizing how close she stood to his person.
He tried to pull back but was bumped by the window's shutters, while she took another step toward
him.
Christ, the woman had a husband and a lover (which was Dougal and he kent his uncle appetite
and potency regarding women. Was that nay enough for the lady?)

Claire once said something 'obout 'being caught between a rock and a hard place'.
He couldna ha' described his current situation better.

And it wasna only the physical position he found himself in at the moment; for He could easily
fling her bodily away from him (although that would maybe cause and outrage, as the scandal of
him touching her roughly would spread; by her nay doubt).

Nay, it wasna only that. The witch was the only one who kent what happened here and perhaps
where Claire was now.

A hard place and a rock indeed (although if he did possess a rock at the moment he might ha' found
himself tempted to hurl it at her).

For all her shortcoming Geillis Duncan was nay fool.
Not once has she touched or even grazed him wi' nay reason. She only hovered tight 'obout him,
making her intentions clear wi'oot needing to fear any consequence regarding her actions herself,
no matter his reply.

The future did make his lady's smart, he deduced from his experiences wi' two such women.

"Aye, her and the man" continued Geillis letting her head tilt to one side and then the next as a
slow metronome, surveying his form and making him feel so uncomfortable he was 'obout to throw
all good and proper 'oot the window and move her forcibly away from him.

But she mentioned Claire and a man, so he stood silent.

She had information he needed, He had to play along.
She kent where Claire was and apparently it involved another man.
(That is it! he is getting his Sassenach back and locking her in a room not letting her 'oot unless wi'
him!).

"A man?" he inquired wi' mock calmness, standing stiff not moving a muscle and not letting
revolution or fear show in his eyes.
Two can play this game, he thought. And he was good wi' games.
Fooled the entire French court and the pretender himself, who was she against that?

She surveyed him, narrowing her eyes weighing how much she should tell and what she'll be
getting from the telling.

"'t'is only Dougal willna be pleased to hear, ye allowed his Sassenach guest, to come to any harm
or perhaps helped her escape?" he narrowed his eyes back at her.

He was moving his pawn forward and beginning his attack.

At Dougal's name and wrath she did retreat, walking back to her hearth all awhile peering at him
above her shoulder.
"Escape, forbye, I thought her a guest nay prisoner. Is she?" she questioned.
"Is she what?" Jamie replied her question, wi' one of his.
"A prisoner?" she reached the hearth and leaned her hand gracefully over the mantelpiece playing wi' the base of the candlestick turning half to stare at him.

Smart lass. Never turns her back completely against a foe and always has a weapon at hand be it literally or figuratively.

"Nay if I find her, soon enough, for us to get to dinner on time" he countered smiling slightly as he moved his bishop "Nor will Dougal be the wiser once she is safely between the castle walls, or Colum to that matter. Nay need for him to throw a stramash in ye'r husband ears".

He was afraid he should ha' moved a rook first and not use his king, but there wasna time to lose, his queen could be in danger.

She sighed wi' exasperation, dropped all pretense and acknowledged her defeat.
"She and the new arrival to the village, the MacIiver fellow I believe his name is.
Birds of a feather those two if ye ask me" she teased, trying to not leave empty handed wi'oot a sting.

Weel, he wasna giving her the satisfaction.

He had Claire on her back all night, there was nay chance she left unsatisfied, running to a new lover and after his hot-heid assumptions this morning he wasna repeating his mistakes again.

He trusted her! From now onward anyway.

"That's verra good then, I shell go and collect her there, shell I? can ye inform me where he resides?"
"Are ye sure ye want to disturb them in their private time?" she was relentless.
"I'm sure I must, mistress" he was too.
"Too bad. They did seem awfully giddy and content wi' themselves once they freed the lad. I thought, that to allow them a little more time together was the kind thing to do.
'Tis no as if there is any danger in the matter, now is it?" she straightened to stare right into him, her back to the hearth, arms slowly caressing the sides of her thighs and coming to rest on her hips.

Apparently she recognized his check and was trying her best to disconcert her opponent, by any means possible to prevent him reaching checkmate stature.

Surly she dinna ken his feeling for Claire, though. Did Claire let anything known?

"I'm sure I dinna see ye'r meaning, mistress. Surly ye' nay think it suitable for a proper lady to conduct herself as such and enter into a strange men's households?" he said, explaining his haste to retrieve Claire.

"Ouch, come now... Mr. MacTavish, is it?" she said
Christ, did Dougal tell her his true identity and stature?
He kent himself, verra weel, that a man would say all during a moment of passion.

"I thought ye a man of the world and as such ye ken these things happen between the best of people" she continued when he dinna answer.
"And as I said, it nay as if there's any danger or price to pay for such actions between them, such as unwelcome pregnancy is there? Why, she was married for nearly six or was it seven years before? and no bairn? And they tried she told me how much they tried".
He couldna react, he couldna react. Jamie kept saying so to himself, trying to block her words from his heart.

"Poor lass I do believe our fair Claire is quite barren. That would be a thing for her next husband to ken and consider, do ye no think so young fox?"

"I'm sure Mrs. Beauchamp next husband will love her no matter what. Even if what ye say might be true" he fumbled with his fingers over again and again trying to prevent them from clutching into a fist.

"Why ever would ye think otherwise?" she was leaning forward, eyes opened wide, eager to hear his response.
She thought she got something from him.

"perhaps he was the wrong man for her, so God dinna bless the union wi child and it will all be right wi' the next one" he answered giving nothing back and glad of it.

She sighed obviously not receiving the answer she wanted and leaned back to her place. "Men and there notion of fate and bedding. ouch! Fine, if ye say so. Mr. MacTavish" she smiled wickedly.

"Just the same though" she was making her way back to him "If ye nor I, say a word, the whole thing can be done quite discreetly"
"But I'm afraid I must" he said still holding for dear life to the smile on his face "Dougal and Colum ye ken".

She was now circling around him, surveying her pray anew. He was taller than her but she was looking down at him. He dinna dare to move.
For the first time ever in life, he wanted to strike a women.

Jamie held his breath letting nothing show on his face.
Unfortunately, in hindsight he realized, that was as strange as if he would ha' taken the table on his left and smashed it through the window. Which was what he desperately wanted to do. Throw her after it as weel.

"So to his house ye say they went?" he asked, staying on his mark.
She sighed as if recalling the image and ignoring his inquires.
"Ye should ha' seen them, so amorous wi' each other. Him bursting in here while we put some herbs to steep, saying how she send for him to come wi' my housemaid regarding his good-sister"

She now stood in front of him so coldly unnerved "I believe he hurriedly explained for my benefit, so I wouldna think ill of Claire" she cocked and eyebrow at him.
"I thought his good sister already dead by now, as rumors say it. And perhaps she did? and they just use this as an excuse to ha' her under his roof?" she laughed.
Her laugh sounding as frozen knives stabbing at his skin.
"Beside it's no as if the poor lass does have anyone else, now does she? Better let her ha' some fun".

She kens, Jamie was almost positive she kent something of him and Claire.

"It canna be easy to be a Sassenach in the highlands all alone. Assuming that is what she is"

Jamie reluctantly had to admit that French court had nothing against the witch and Tcharlach ... weel, he was nincompoop if he ever saw one.
If Jamie had a white flag he would pull it out now, begging for mercy and for his wife.

"Perhaps it was being a Sassenach that was why she couldn’t stand the boy’s punishment and begged Mr. MacIiver for his assistance to free the boy before they left"

She did move away from Jamie at that. Thank the Lord for small blessing, for he needed some air, urgently and she seemed to take it all ‘oot where she stood. She went to pour and fetch two glasses of port for them. Jamie needed something stronger.

"Now there was a sight to watch" she dramatically recalled in pseudo amazement "Her fainting falling on the road dragging a man and women wi’ her and him pulling the lad’s nail from his ear and running to carry her into his lap and high on his arms as if she couldn’t stand the sight of blood" she laughed again handing him the glass of port which he took but nay drunk.

Only a fool will drink and eat what she served.

"Heard them plotting the whole thing once the left my room and went ‘oot the stairs" She was brushing his shoulder as if there was dirt on it.

She left him and walked to the window leaning on its sill and throwing the invisible crumbs she picked from his shoulder away.

"Stood right here and saw the whole thing, I did." She inclined her heid outside "He was so happy to assist her. Our Claire his quite the seductress would ye no say so? I do wander though, what kind of recompense she will offer him for such assistance?"

"I’m sure the man helped her from the kindness of his heart, I willna expect no less from a gentleman or of myself”

The only thing keeping him sane right now was the knowledge that the witch will soon burn for her wicked and murderous ways.

"Weel maybe so for that. But what of the other?” she said, mock wondering in her voice. "Other?” that confused Jamie further.
"Aye, as they were leaving, they stood right under my window and as he mounted her on his lap” she smirked "sorry I meant his saddle, she was pressing her head to his, thanking him in sweet whispers, him waving his hands as if it was naught but nothing and her caressing his arm asking will he help her again"

"Again?” Jamie dinna drink what she offered, but felt himself drunk, hardly able to stand steady on his feet.

"Aye, and wi’ all the spectacle dispersing once the fun was gone, I could hear every word that was said. When she said how it will be worth his time, for she would be able to reciprocate his kindness greatly" she concluded, great smile on her face as she turned back to him "Did I no mention her way wi men? Now will ye no sit and have some port wi’ me?"

"No. I thank ye mistress, for ye'r help. I should go. Good day to ye” he felt he needed a bath and a scrub after all that.
"I donna think they will be at his hoose though" she tried crying after him, as he went to the door and descended down the stairs. "I did warn her to wander around the village wi' Father Bain Hearing what she's done for the boys and stole his opportunity for a good public exorcism. She only replayed she willna stay long here and holding the gentleman's arm left hurriedly."

"It's fine I ken verra weel the place she went to" Jamie hissed, already outside and on his steed.

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Jamie approached the black kirk, furious and prepared for mayhem. He was trying to plan how to get Luke unconscious first, so he can get him away from under the protection of old nick in his very own kirk yard and kill the delightful (or so all that kent him referred to him as such) Mr. Macliver wi'oot being dammed himself. He had a holly right according to the bible; the man took his wife!

And the heavens themselves must realize that they were already married, all this time changes meant naught to them!

Ye dinna mess wi' another man sacrament!

All reservation regarding killing an unconscious man left him when he arrived at the first passageway into the kirk and heard the sweet-wine, playful sound of his wife's laughter.

He stopped dead in his place, suddenly petrified of the image he was about to see. She wouldna bed him here, surely no?

"Now are you sure I'm not too heavy for you?" he heard her and found himself tight press on a wall listening to them talk on his other side. "Nay I lifted heavier then ye' lass" replied a slightly strenuous Luke. She laughed wholeheartedly and Jamie felt an ashen taste in his throat. Luke voice sounded extremely happy as well, matching hers "can ye reach everything right?" "y e s , just about, you'll tell me if it gets too much though?" "Dinna worry on my account. Ye just tend to ye'r work". She laughed again sounding giddy.

"I don't know why I haven't thought of it before; I really should have done it much sooner than this". "What do ye mean?" Luke inquired. "Well I wouldn't be here long enough now, to come here again and see if it's effective"

"WHAT? YE'R LEAVING?"
"Well yes I ...Luke, Luke... " A thud and a swirl of clothes and skirts were echoing through the ether.

Jamie, dirk in hand, feeling no more reservation about killing in a holy place, came 'oot of hiding and saw-
What he saw, made him lose the grip on his dirk, his wame felt like all the air was punched from it and his feet refused to move for a minute.

But only for a minute.
The way out (no more) 3

Chapter Summary

A good fight,
Some secrets come out,
Hashing some things out,
And some more love and flirting scenes.

And I added another section at the end cause it should be together with what came before

Chapter Notes

Some mentioned and asked for me to clarify why don’t they / how could they not
Trust each other or why are they so jealous and suspecting of one another?

Well, I'm psychology major and one thing is always true:
People act and think as they feel
and they feel according to their unconsciousness and consciousness mind that is
mostly filled with the experiences that happened to them

After the hard traumatic experience our heroes endured during DIA and the most
traumatic one: almost separating from each other forever (in their eyes before I came along) and going through the stones (which is an experience that jars anyone emotionally- cause to me it means being ripped back to your very own particles so your form can break the speed of light and move through time and Jamie himself as never been through that experience)

Their fears, worries and lost (like a second child gone, for right now, losing friends and the war),
left them with a strong abandonment issues.
I also read once a very compelling relevant article that said that when a man goes through something big and there aren’t any consequences or scars to "prove" it, it can mess with a person's mind quite strongly – makes him create discord when none is needed.

The earth shifted (well I shifted it for them ) beneath their feet and they are in a constant state of confusion, fear, anger and terror about each other and at what’s to come.
Especially having failed the last time.
This puts them psychologically in a flight or fight mood.
Which in term, creates a very intense storm of feelings and situations and also makes them question and requisition all their past.
I am sort of slowly rebuilding and maturing them up again (so if sometimes they seem to regress to their Outlander stage instead of DIA state, know that I do it on purpose so I could "grow" them up and have more drama in the story).
I especially put an emphasis on them finding anchor in each other and their relationship now.
I really hope this clarifies this.
p.s.: regarding Luke- Claire does as she always does:
She is being kind to those that are to her and she seeks a friend (which was Jamie last
time).
The man helped her in a time of need, he needs her medical assistance and she finds a
kindred spirit in him: rooted from home and family by choice (she choose to stay with
Jamie)
dealing with hardship and loneliness (that because I separated Jamie and Claire, for
now, she feels very strongly) and her not having any more friend cause I brought her
back to a place and time she is still very alone with no allies.
To her he is a man, that could easily be a women that her unconsciousness and
consciousness mind is filling a void with.
She has done nothing wrong in her eyes (and in mine) she has had many man
companions through the years (war, going on archaeological digs) and feels more
comfortable with them.
P.P.S: If you do ignore the fact that he stands between our fav' couple, he really is a
good, smart, kindhearted, selfless guy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Claire was lying sprawled out on the ground, hand behind her head, Luke was also laying on the
ground, his body close fitting to hers, leaning on his elbow as his other hand was cupping her
cheek.

"O Lord, Claire r'ye weel? I'm so soooooo-" Luke dinna ha' the chance to finish what he so
affectionately started to say.

Jamie pulled him by the throat, slammed him to what remained of a wall to their left and began
choking the man in earnest wising only to see the man's terror and life leave his body.

"JAMIE!!" her cries came from behind him, but were a million miles away to the anger ringing in
his ears.
He needed the man dead. Then he'll handle her.

But the man wasna afraid, either of him or of dying.
Luke pushed all the weight of his body against the wall sending a flying fist straight into Jamie's
jaw and face.

Jamie's face flung to the side and he saw stars twinkle, one even winked at him.
He dinna waver though.
He kept his hands tight and strong, continuing to strangle the life 'oot of the man that laid wi' his
women.

Luke wasna wavering either and kicked Jamie in the groin, hard enough to make Jamie buckle.
Jamie retorted at once by rising and swinging a fist into the man's gut, that sent Luke gasping for
air and falling to his knees on the ground.

He was 'obout to lunch his coup de grace; in the form of a fist, down into the man's nape, hoping it would cause his spine to sever as it did once in France against an unknown enemy.

Jamie dinna enjoy it then, but he was sure as hell was hot going to enjoy it now!

A slender but stern hand placed itself on Jamie's chest and he froze at once fearing to hurt Claire. Luke was bestowed her other hand, which she placed on his back, as he was still bent, no yet recuperating from Jamie's right hand jab.

Good he wasna even using his left one. Next one he would!

"Move aside Claire, I'll deal wi' ye at present" he ordered, spitting to the side the vile blood that trickled from his open lip, due to Luke's punch.

Luke's chest was heaving, trying to put air in his lungs and Jamie's finger markings were shown clear and red on his throat.

"I'll do worst to ye" Jamie said under his breath.

Claire, recognizing the expression he obviously held, placed herself in front of Luke, protecting him bodily from sight and 'oot of Jamie's reach.

No he couldn'a reach the man, nay wi'oot hurting her at least, and that he couldna do, even wi' being so deadly hurt from what she inflicted on him.

But he did wonder for more than a second 'obout the thrashing.

The oath to never do such a thing again, wasna yet given to her, so-

"Now explain Yourself, James Fraser and at once!!" she said wi' her stern doctoring voice and a look that said 'don't you dare move or else' accompanied with tight lips and flaring nostrils.

Would she really fight him for this cac muc?

"EXPLAIN MYSELF? EXPLAIN MYSELF?!?!" he thundered "ye're whoring around and I am to explain myself? I told ye once. The man that touches ye dies, now move and see your lover perish".

"Ye will address the lady with respect!!!!!" Luke wasna too happy wi' Claire positioning herself between them as weel and wanted 'oot from behind her protection in order to persist wi' the fighting.

That suited Jamie just fine!

Claire half turned to Luke holding him at bay.
She held his upper arm, no letting him move and then frowned and seemed truly concerned for the man.
"Are you well Luke? Can you stand up for me?" she asked softly.

Jamie couldna contain his ire over this display of care and if he couldna reach the man over Claire, he would at least relieve some of the pressure in him by yelling at the top of his lungs.

"M O V E  CLAIRE!!!!!!! AND AS FOR YE" he pointed at Luke "ye will hurt verra badly" he finished wi' a hiss.

"S T O P   I T at once!!" she shrieked so high, she couldna carry the tone all the way through her words.

When she saw no one was about to listen to her, she took a short determent breath and opened her eyes wide with rage  "Well I am not going to move!! So killing each other means killing me first!! And if any of you think of throwing me aside" she hissed and gave Jamie a look that knew quite well that was his next move "I will just throw myself in the line of fire, time and again and get myself seriously hurt in the process!!!

She has done so before, Jamie recalled.

Still, none of them moved.

She persisted "So....you" she pointed at Jamie "take five steps back and sit on that hedge! And you" She turned to Luke pointing at a rock on the ground in the other direction "over there!!!!"

Still no movement came, from either side.

"Did I not make myself clear or shell I pick the dirk off the ground and stab someone? I'm a healer I know VERY WELL where to cut!!"

Jamie moved as Luke moved nay taking their eyes off each other, accompanying the other step by step. They dinna even turn their heads to look where their assigned verge and rock were.

Neither o' them were 'obout to sit down, they just stood rigid near their appointed places.

"Now" Claire said exasperated, but managed to regain every bit of her venom's when she turned to Jamie "Whoring am I?"

"What else do ye call fornicating wi another man!!! And In a holly place o' all places?!!!" Jamie spoke nay carrying 'obout the blood that ran into his mouth from the open gash. He dinna care if it kept opening up when he clenched or moved his lips, he would speak his peace before committing murder.

He was truly afraid to stop his anger-raged tantrum and think of the fact that his wife was unfaithful to him. If he did that, he would surely fall from his feet and cry.

So he spat to the side again and returned his hatred stare to its source.

"Luke, give me your kerchief!" she ordered, outstretching her arm to Mr. MacIiver. "What?" Luke dinna seem to understand her words. "Now!!!!" she dictated again
"And nobody moves" she added wi’ his nice embroidered cloth at hand.

‘For the love o’ Christ, Claire, the man is a dandy, how could ye choose a dandy over me?’ Jamie raged in his heid.
Naught that any other person would be better, he reasoned.
How could she do this to him?

She took the kerchief, came near Jamie, just enough to hand it to him, nay more and commanded sternly,
"Put this on your lip and squeeze hard. Don't say another word or it will keep oozing. Not that anything you said so far would be considered the word a Solomon.
Best you'll be silent, trust me!!!!"

She returned to Luke wanting to check his ribs, but Jamie sprung to his dirk and signaled an attack is emanate if she dares lay a finger on him.

"I am only going to apply a little pressure to check if something is broken" she frustratingly explained.
"No" Jamie declared pointing the dirk at them wi’ one hand, while applying pressure to his lip wi’ the other.

"Jamie there wasn't any lying going on" she scoffed at him "and if you inflicted internal damage –" she added sobering up.

"I saw ye two lying on the ground!!!! Him on ye!" Jamie shrilled at her, tossing Luke's soft, obviously costly, bloody fabric away.

"Ye need no excuse yourself Claire in front o' this… this hogwash fucker" Luke was still ready to fight, even clutching his midsection.

"That’s it. I had enough of this!!!!" Claire was screaming at the top of her lungs now, putting the men yelling to shame.

"YOU" she pointed to Jamie "LISTEN TO ME VERY CAREFULLY, because I will only say it once and will not speak to you a long time after that!" she smiled a malicious angry smile lifting her chin in certainty "believe you me James Alexander Mackenzie Fraser!!!!"

"Malcolm" he rectified irreverently.
“What?” she huffed, confused.
"Ye forgot Malcolm" he added, now a little shyly, as if that was the right thing to say at this moment?!

"SHUT UP!!!!" she shrilled almost jumping up and down from aggravation.

"Now! What you saw" she narrowed her eyes at him, pointing an accusatory finger "was me, falling flat on my arse, thank you for your concern by the way" she berated him "holding my injured head-"

"Which is bleeding right now" noticed a suddenly concerned Luke, straightening himself and stretching his hand to her injured part.

"What?!?!?" Jamie exclaimed and ran to his wife side, dropping the dirk in the process "Claire r’ye weel? How do ye feel?” his hands hovered around her heid afraid to touch it.
They were flanking her on either side.

"I'm fine, I think it's just a slight graze" she said lifting her own hand to the bleeding spot "Luckily Luke blocked my fall" she smiled kindly to him.
At this, Jamie's fury returned to him and he could only see black, only Claire had already placed her other hand on his chest, as if anticipating his eminent response, backing him a way toward his allocated hedgerow.

"Why was he lifting ye anyway?" Jamie asked as he was pushed away from his soon to be victim "Why were ye here wi' him?!!!" he pointed back at the out of his reach Mr. MacIiver.

"This is our place" he whispered down to her.

"We owe ye nay answers!!" Luke cried out after them and Jamie side slipped Claire's hand and began striding back to this conasse, wi' fists raised ready to pounce.

Claire came in front of him, again, in a matter of seconds, hurling all her body on to his chest to hold him at place.

He was about to just pluck her aside when she said in a strained exerted voice "**Convallaria majalis**"

"What?" Jamie stopped his advancements, frowning down at her in complete bafflement.

"lily-of-the-valley" she straightened herself as much as she could trying to speak to him in eye level "The plant, **remember**?" she pointed at the half wall on which the poisoned growth was unmistakably displayed.

He remembered him showing it to her and her nimble fingers caressed it, declaring its true nature.

"I was trying to tear it all out from the root so it wouldn't grow anymore and endanger anyone, but it weeded out during the years. It spread even to the top of the wall, so even if I plucked at its bottom parts, the top would just spread down again. I asked Luke to give me a hand and lift me, so I could reach the high spots" she concluded, sure she exonerated herself.

"Why were ye even here wi' him?" Jamie asked still accusatory.

"I dinna ken who ye think ye are, that we need to explain ourselves to ye!!!" This Luke was really pushing Jamie's patient to new heights and Mr. Macliver shouldna be surprised to find that when it came to his wife and other men, Jamie had none to begin wi'!

Jamie growled, his body making himself ready to-

"The Bilberries" Claire cried out in alarm noticing his movements and flinging both her hands on his chest, as if this would stop him.

"What?" Jamie stopped his advancements, again, frowning down at her in complete bafflement, again.

"Or Fraughan as they are called in Ireland" she twisted her head to Luke in order to clarify it for him, but swiftly returned to address Jamie, before such action would cause any further trouble.
"They are black berries for Luke's good-sister. I told you I'm treating her, remember?" she nodded her head as if waiting for his mind to clear enough so he could recall the exchange of such words between them.

But that was when she mumbled something in the surgery before they….

He couldna remember anything from then, except her mouth on his-...

"I saw them when we were here befo… I mean when I… I mean I just knew that there quite rich throughout the highlands and I figured the monks must have grown them here" she returned him from his recollections.

"There wonderful for the Mellitus, the sugar disease, Luke's good-sister, Isabella, is inflicted with." she nodded again repeating the details slowly, waiting for Jamie's memory to jar.

"Their leafs contain a substance that is the closest thing to insulin I can provide for dear Isabella" she continued.

"Closest to what?" Luke frowned not recognizing the cure, which probably meant it was from her own time and Jamie kent that.

Jamie knew that about her and of her, more than this Luke could ever. Than how could she go to another when he was all she needed?

Wait! Was that what she meant, when Geillis heard her tell Luke it will be worth his time?

She dinna come here to bed him, Jamie was realizing.

She came, as always, to save a life.

A lot of lives he mused thinking of the lily as well.

Weel, one thing was understood now, only a thousand things left to clarify.

"I wanted to show Luke where he could get them and how they looked" she continued in that clairvoyant instinct she seemed to share wi' the witch "so when I'm gone with the rent party he could mind it himself and continue to make Isabella the tea she required. Although now-" she breathed fire through her eyes at him "I'm not so sure me and my whoring arse really want to go on that trip. Nothing good is waiting for me there!!!"'

'And I do mean the wedding' he completed what her expression, but not her mouth said.

"My second plan, was regarding the lily and that's what I was doing when you came storming in, exactly as poor Luke lost his footing, probably over you" she blamed "sending us both to fall flat into the ground"

"POOR LUKE ??? He was lying on ye!!" Jamie said recalling the scene.

"Not that I find myself in need to explain naught to ye! But for the lady's honor, I will inform ye I was already laying on the ground from the fall, I only rose on my elbow and tried to reach for Claire, afraid something happened to her when I saw she dinna rise from me at once" said a resenting Luke.

"Ho, I am sorry for that. I felt a bit dizzy and thought it best, with a head injury, that is, not to move straightaway" Claire apologized, blushing over her behavior.

"Do not apologize, my dear Claire" he rushed to her side, hand hovering at her palm.
"Never, I dinna even see why ye're explaining yourself to this, this- ingrate excuse o' a man" Luke spoke to her with consoling admiration. 
"Weel, m'dear Claire, I suppose ye are right to explain, we canna expect much as he is a Scot after all" he tried to lighten the mood at Jamie's expense.

"Ye will address her wi' respect and nay by her given name, do I make myself clear? Ye Irish, drunkard, chriosdaidh siùrsach and I wish ye yedith-bhith ort!" Jamie wasna having any of that.

"Ye heathen whore yourself and regarding annihilation I promise ye, that is exactly what I will bring upon ye!" Luke bellowed back, translating everything for Claire sake, to be sure.

"Beside, how should I call the lady that is my friend? Maybe I should do as ye and come to her screaming and calling her demeaning and insulting names?"

"He does have a point there" Claire chimed in.

"Sassenach??" Jamie cried out insulted to his core at her agreement wi' this tòn an eich. 
"What?" Jamie bewildered, tore his gaze from his offensive wife, wondering what was the man on 'obout. 
"I ken what that word means, even if perhaps she doesna" Luke continued his scolding.

"I Ken wha… I mean I know what that means too" Claire chimed in again, but this time on Jamie's behalf "Its fine Luke' she placed a hand on his arm but at Jamie's chest muscles constricting under her other hand she withdrew it. 
"Jamie doesn't call me that in a hurtful manner" she explained.

"Why are ye even justifying the lout??!!" Luke cried out, outraged, seeking clarification from her condoning Jamie's behavior and words.
"Why I should-" Jamie got a dirty look from Claire that said 'you move you'll get smacked', and he thought himself in enough trouble at this point.

"Stop it the two of you!" she said determined "I am feeling a bit faint and I would like to know that if I collapse I wouldn't wake to find two bodies!!!"

"Claire r'ye weel?" 
"Sassenach r'ye weel?" They both spoke and came closer to her in unison. 
And they both shouted at each other for doing so. 

"Stay away from her" they cried, also together.

"I wasna the one that did this to her, I'm nay the weakly sod that canna carry a woman" roared Jamie. 
"I wasna the one that caused her turmoil after an injury and forced her to nay take care o' herself by the need to restrain me" Luke thundered back. 
"I wasna the one that was touching what isna mine" 
"I wasna the one that wasna invited"

"I wasna the one taking married women alone un-escorted and at the risk of destroying their good name. some gentleman ye are" Jamie disrespectfully scorned him back.
"She isna married she's a widow" Luke yelled at him, horrified at the thought, and Jamie saw that; even if Claire did no.

"It's nay proper for an unmarried lass as weel" Jamie said, feeling a sting to describe Claire as unwed, to him that his.

"Why ye stinking clot. Speak to me o' proper? I should march at present to Leoch and inform Colum o' his man's behavior" Luke said menacingly back.

"Ye ha' to live long enough to do that" said Jamie smiling at another reason to shed the man's blood.

"STOP IT or I will faint and when I die from a concussion and you two need to carry my carcass to Colum, you will both have to answer to him" Claire was hoarse by now and was swaying a bit from all this combativeness.

"Maybe that will scare the two of you, because you obviously don't care about me!!!!" And with this, she plumped herself to the ground on her rump panting from all the exertion. "If I lose consciousness and wake to see any of you laid a finger on each other..." Her voice almost a whisper from all the trials she sustained during this situation, but still she managed to stare up at Jamie to give him a look, which went on to say 'lay a finger on him and you won't ever lay one on me, got it?'

Jamie slowly backed up, hands slightly lifting to the air admitting defeat.

"And as for you Luke" she turned her head to him "You are my friend are you not?" she was still panting, it worried Jamie, what if she wasna only making idle threats?

"Yes of course" he bent to her holding her arm. If Jamie wouldna have been worried that him ripping said arm and feeding it to the man, might make her faint he would be doing so right now.

He remained silent. She better appreciate the effort it was taking from him.

"Good" she smiled kindly to him again. All these kind exchange will have to end, Jamie decided, but only to himself at the moment.

"Then you will not, I repeat will not go to Colum and speak of me regarding anything. Especially Mr. MacTavish"

"But-" Luke staggered, suspicious at such orders, for he did at least recognize them as that, orders. "Do I make myself clear??" she pressed the arm that was placed on her.

"Yes" he reluctantly obeyed.

Helen of troy held no candle to his women, Jamie mused, and not for the first time.

"He was only worried about me, as you would be if you would see me lying with another man I
"just recently met" she continued to docile him. "What is it concern of his!" Luke protested "ye'r a free woman to do so. Beg ye'r pardon not that I'm suggesting that-

she silenced him

"No Luke, I'm not" she said not without sympathy, the only question was to who?

"WHAT?!" Luke was taken aback, quite literally, almost falling from his crouched position. "I'm very much still in love and devoted to my husband and Mr. MacTavish knows that " She turned her head to give Jamie the warmest 'you know which husband I mean' look and Jamie felt himself take the first breath in all this retched day.

"I have confided that to Mr. MacTavish countless times" her look to Jamie was now replaced to a look of exasperation, in needing to redefine such proclamations, again, and Jamie did lower his gaze at that, feeling a tad ashamed.

Receiving what she sought after from him, Claire turned back to Luke.

"I have told him how dedicated I am to my husband and how being apart from him tears me inside and I cannot even think of the preposterous idea of another man".

Jamie's insides were burning up and he thought he must be blushing.

"So knowing all that" she laid her logic neatly "he would never think me going willingly with any man and was sure he was protecting my honor and person. Will you not do the same yourself?"

"I would check the facts before thrashing all in my wake" Luke said, but in a tone that took her a meaning.

"Well that's what differs you and me greatly, and thank the Lord for that, from this red headed, stubborn, moronic, quick-temper, ridiculous ...."

"We gather ye'r meaning, Sassenach" Jamie was defiantly blushing now.

"Scot" she concluded ignoring him.

"Aye, they do say they are not the cleverest bunch. My time here has afforded me nay different of an opinion on the matter" he mocked gathering her palms in his.

"Why, I'll show ye ..." Jamie took a step forward.

"Your words gentlemen!!!" a threatening finger flew in his direction, holding him at bay. "What?" they asked, again, in unity.

"Your word this stop right here and right now!!! No more yelling, no more fighting and no one hears of this" she rose to her feet "I really don’t want to be in the center of any sort of scandal or hearsay even when this is clearly not my fault"

That was aimed directly at Jamie, and he kent it.

"Do I make myself clear?"

No one spoke again.

"And if any of you decline this, it will be my friendship and my presence that they will be losing from their life"

"Ye ha’ my word" they said together, again, submitting to her, again.

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"Ye should go. I'll be helping Mr. Beauchamp gather her belongings and return home, wi' me" Jamie added again for emphasis sake, after a moment of them all just standing there.

"I could not in good conscience agree to such a thing, leaving her defenseless with a brute. We shell both go together"
Mr. MacIiver insisted.

"No Luke" Claire put an end to another brawl igniting "I would like to have a few words with Mr. MacTavish and I prefer the whole castle not hear me yell and curse in a very unlady like manner".

That made Luke verra happy.

"Ye could always forgo wi' the yelling and cursing" Jamie suggested trying to be helpful. Which awarded him a look that said how highly unlikely it was, that his helpful suggestion will be taken.

"Now you" she addressed Luke yet again "Sit down and let me examine you"
Luke very happily complied and sat on his rock, as she bent to her knees, in the grass in order to examine him.
To Jamie, it just looked as if she was touching and caressing him all over his body, and him knowing what her hands felt like doing so, hovered menacingly above them.

Luke seemed heartbroken all of a sudden, staring at her with longing in his eyes. He was trying his hardest not to show it, though, which was futile, for he had the exact lack of ability to do so, as Claire did and Jamie could almost start to feel bad for the man.

Almost.

If this man cared for Claire half as much as Jamie did and Claire would not be his- He shuddered at the thought of being in those shoes. It wasna the men fault for loving her, he couldn't understand how one couldn't do such a thing.

And him thinking her unwed and newly widowed- Weel, she was fair game, open to all to try.

But not for long, Jamie devised under his breath.

"Are ye really leaving soon?" a despairing Luke brought him back to present.
"Well... yes" she answered still examining him, but Jamie saw her eyes dot away, realizing what she revealed
"I mean, I was not told so yet... I mean by the people in charge of such things" she was stammering her words, seeking for a plausible excuse.
"Do ye mean, ye think Colum will let ye go?" Luke inquired "to France I mean, to ye'r kin?"
"Well no, not exactly, I mean" she fumbled again still finding nothing.

"We are leaving wi' the rent party soon; Mrs. Beauchamp will be joining us" said Jamie, doing for one another as they always did - completing each other's needs.
"Only Dougal and Colum have not yet informed her of such a decision and the poor chambermaid that discreetly and in peril to her station informed her of such verdict, will find herself in an awful swivet if it let it be known the mistress is already aware".
He dinna think telling Luke that he told Claire, will do much good, but maybe for a poor lassie sake, the man will keep silent.
As much as Jamie hated to admit it, the man did seem an honest, kind, well-schooled gentleman.

"Yes quite" Claire braced in, this time eager to support his words.
"Ho, I see" said Luke, looking exactly as Jamie felt when she first informed him that she will be leaving wi' the tinker the next day, never to be seen again.

Maybe he'll seek another woman's arms for comfort as Jamie did with Laoghaire, after this. He is more than welcomed to try the lovely Miss Mackenzie herself, for all it mattered to Jamie, as long as it distanced himself from Claire.
It will also be verra good to have both of them out of his and Claire's lives and sight, he mused, trying to come up wi' a plan to move affairs in that direction.

"Then ye will be returning" Luke seemed to almost jump of joy after realizing the outcome at the end of her news.
"Well yes…"Claire admitted apprehensively not knowing quite how to say-
'But married to me' smiled Jamie to himself.

'And damned if she will be allowed to roam free then' he added to himself, trying to contemplate how that decision could be enforced on his wife wi'oot her killing him in the process.

"… but not for a very long time" she chose to say instead
"I'm afraid, I am leaving you without assistance as far as Isabella is concerned" she added remorsefully and ashamed of her abandonment.
"I am so sorry for that. But I can assure you I will come as much as possible before and show you how to brew the leafs properly and I will pound, prepare and parcel all the herbs I could find beforehand as well-"

she was rushing through all the possible things she would do, that will provide for any contingency that might occur to the poor lass, not seeing that the tear and saddens in Luke's eyes had nothing to do with his good- sister, as much as he might care for the lass, Jamie added feeling a bit more charitable toward the man.

He was obviously not infatuated or lustful for Claire.
The man was unmistakably deeply in love.

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They departed from 'poor Luke' or she did, at least; with a kiss to her palm in thanks for everything she has done and everything she is Jamie rolled his eyes at that.
And not before she promised, nay, gave her oath, that Luke will see her again before she leaves, or doesn't leave as suggested, for the hundred time, by a hopeful Luke
"For perhaps Colum and Dougal might find ye indispensable to the castle inhabitants, to be sent such, ye canna ever ken the future"
he said.
'I can' Jamie thought.

She was waving her hand to his departing horse, as Jamie straighten himself fully, to accept his
No one could ever blame him for not stepping forward to claim his punishment.

She just turned and stared at him, not moving, not saying a word.

"To my defiance" he coughed and said after what seemed like forever "you did do this behind my back, knowing that I will come to take ye from the Duncan's" he searched her eyes for a response. "And leaving me in the mercy of that woman's hands is already a verra cruel chastisement, Sassenach. Why, I should be angry at ye for it, ye should have heard the things she was saying" 

"I don't care" she simply said, marching to gather her belongings and seeming, to his horror, extremely calm. "Where are the horses?" she said while she gathered her things, seizing back at anything Jamie tried to pick in order to assist with the arranging.

"Donas is over there" he pointed at the direction of the horse, he stood, shuffling his feet, embarrassed and dinna know what exactly to do with himself. "We rode together, last time that is, I thought it nice to maybe do so once more" he coughed again.

"Well you should have thought of that before you acted the way you did" she said snatching her cloak from his hands and trusting her medical kit, now neatly closed, into his arms. "Let's go then" she said dressing herself.

"Sassenach?" he probed gingerly.

"What?" she blurted savagely.

"No that I am complaining at the lack of chastising but-"

"I'm tired and hurt, Jamie" she said sounding exactly that "I don't want to talk of this or to you" she added knotting her cloak around her neck "If I had a car at my disposal I would be hundreds of miles away, putting hard miles between us, right now!" she said longingly, for the object she described, many times to him, which he only gathered to be a really fast, strong, moved on its own carriage, but also had to do with a horse's power of a sort.

"Unfortunately, I'm stuck with a suspicious, liar, self-centered Casanova, which still seem to manage to be a misanthropic! Who is also a lout barbarian, grouch Neanderthal clown of an effing husband and ONLY ONE HORSE" she finished in a scream after properly steaming herself wi’ every insult, which Jamie only recognized half of and knew better than to ask regarding any.

This was more in line of what he was awaiting for though.

He wasna about to return her back to a castle where she could ignore him for days and disappear again wi’ strange men or wi’ this Luke, which seemed more than willing to replace Jamie's position in Claire's eyes and heart.

He was getting his wife back.

"For the Lord sake, what were you even thinking about? He is my friend" she said starting to stride away from him and in the direction of the horse.
"I was your friend" Jamie blared seizing her arm and bringing her back to him. "What?" she exclaimed, bewildered. He now held her face an inch away from his using only her arm to maneuver such standings. "When we first met... ye always say that I was ye'r friend from the start" "Well so..."

"So if his thinking of half the things I was thinking I wanted to do to ye, as ye'r friend of course-" he added sarcastically and then roared at the memory of what he did truly think to do to her then "ye'r not to see him any more Sassenach!"

"Jamie you can't tell me who I can and cannot see" I bawled back releasing myself from his grip. "Of course I can I'm your husband"

O lord, here comes the generation gap between us. Jamie always struggled, deeply, at my incomprehension (or so he saw it) to the fact that if he truly wanted to, he could control every aspect of me. I was after all, by law and religion, h i s property.

The fact he didn't established it often, only meant he was being a good husband that knew how to handle his wife while still maintaining world peace.

Jamie was very good and very smart at getting what he wanted.

He knew things were different from where I came and he respected that fervently and always tried to find a way to bridge the chasm of time between us.

But For him; in return for him giving me his protection and care, he earned the right to say the last word.

Besides he also related his protection of me, to him protecting me from the advancements of men who he thought were a threat to my virtue and to his property.

"Ye are not to see him, unless one more time to tell him ye are not to see him anymore" he unwaveringly resolved "and if I had a frhone ye would be telling him through that and not seeing him at all"

He repaid me in kind for my slight that held a word from my time. Showing me two can play that game.

"Phone" I smirked
"What?" he bellowed
"Nothing"
"My decision stands, Sassenach"
"Ho really" I put my foot down with my hands on my waist "and how do you purpose to stop me?"

His hand clenched and he came very close to me, looking down at me, choosing his next move very furiously.

"You gave me an oath!" I said seeing his hands settle on his sword belt.
He took a sharp breath through his nose and hissed very quietly
"It willna b'ye I b' hurting or murdering".
He was really upset If I could hear the Scottish accent run a muck and every R' cutting the ether.

"What?!" I asked not understanding.
"If ye" he narrowed his eyes into slits "come near him again" he said as if tasting something vile
"the man is deid" he resolved with a very malicious tight lip smile.
"You wouldn't dare" I blurted incredulously.
"I would. And look into my eyes Sassenach" he inched toward me "I'm nay jesting wi' ye.
Him seeing ye again, will be the last thing he ever sees"

"I don't believe you would ever..."

He turned away from me in the direction of the horse.
"Where are you going?" I cried after him.
"To call him out" he said still marching.

"J a m i e!!!!" I cried out again to his distancing back.

"Ho no Sassenach, I told ye once and never again. No one but ME!!!!"

I had to think of something fast, if he was comparing what happened with King Louis to my friendship with Luke, ho dear.
Jamie did not get his retribution on the king and Luke did not have an army at his side.

"I wasn't the one kissing and frolicking with others" I squawked at him.
To my relief that did stop him.
"What are ye 'bout?' he narrowed his eyes at me
"You know who I mean" I came in front of him, making sure there would be no calling out.

"I d i n n a kiss or frolicked with Laoghaire and ye ken it weel. Ye are just trying to save your lover".

"Ho really I didn’t see you last time?" I had to keep him here, I might as well pick a fight about something, even an old one.

"It was you. Ye made me do so" he snapped as if letting something buried deep inside out.

"What?" I gaped at him in misunderstanding, but he did not desist in his berserk revelation.
"She was less than nothing Sassenach. It was you" he pointed a finger at me opening his eyes to me.

"Did you imagine she was me?" I struggled to understand.

"Nay I would never do so" he wiped the sweat from his filled with dry blood lips.

"Although sometimes I wonder if that would be better than the truth" then he shock and bent his head down.
"But nay, she wasna even that. She was naught more than something to release my unwavering waves of lust that I felt ever since ye entered my life. That even after three years, dinna seem to falter the slightest" that he said with a little smile but then sobered quickly.
"Why, the lass, dinna even have a name for me, or she wouldna if I no ken her from before. Just a body to hold, fondle and kiss" he lifted his eyes to me then, needing to make something clear.

"I wasna the one asking for what she offered, but I was the one that took it when she did." He lowered his eyes to the ground again pressed his lips and said "And for that, I will carry the guilt all of my life. Knowing I used someone such".

"Maybe you do feel something for her?" I asked trying to ease his conscience and self-accusation and if to be truly honest, I wanted to know once and for all.

"Have I ever tried to touch you like that?" he retorted, surprising me "after that time in front of the hearth I mean? Even once, even that night in the surgery when you said you could feel my desire mounting, and ye were drunk" he cocked an eyebrow at me at that.

I was silent, which aggravated him considerably.

"Weel did I?!!" he demanded

"Well no..." I choked out

"Ye mattered!!!" he pointed a finger at me "Ye mattered too much. I wouldna have dared to touch ye wi' oot knowing ye mine or promising marriage to ye"
He took a step closer to me moistening his dried, poor and whitened by now, lips. He seemed determined to make me believe his next words.

"I would never allow for ye to be a tool of satisfaction, To ease the pressure of my desire. Ye I wouldna dare touch, even if ye asked it of me, nay until I truly knew ye to be mine".

I started to realize what he was telling me.

"So, this time, now, I mean you took the beating for her, over guilt?" I came one step closer to him as well.

"Aye" he nodded "All that I told ye is still true, but above all else there is always so much guilt when I look at the lass, knowing that she is naught but nothing to me. So much so that I wouldna even remembered to ask her name or feel the need to smile at her not I ken her family and grandma"

His hands clenched into fists at the side of his body.

"I just felt all these things inside me after talking to ye, Claire. After being wi' ye… I needed… I needed verra badly-"

"A release" I cupped his check, smiling lightly, which he did not see for his eyes were to the ground as if he couldn’t bear to see my face looking back at him.

"Aye. Do ye think me disgusting now Sassenach? I feared so to tell ye. To make ye think of me so".

"Jamie" I lifted his gaze to me so he could see all the compassion and understanding I was feeling
for him.

"I try to be batter, but I am a man Sassenach" he tried to excuse himself.

"No Jamie, you are human that’s all. And you must stop trying to be more than that" and with that I held him tight to me.

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A moment later and I was trembling with laughter.

"Ye find me laughable, Sassenach?" he inquired into my hair, his arms tight around me, but I could feel his smile to.

"Well no" I said, sounding very unconvincingly through my snorts "it was only I was so angry with you for taking the beating and not realizing why you would hurt me and after what she did to me"

"The ill-wish ye mean? Or was it the trying to seduce me?" he said whimsically relishing in the idea of me being jealous on his account.

"Amongst other things" I snorted at his satisfaction.

Before I was about to reveal the true hurt she inflicted on me, I began to feel bad for the girl, now that I learned what she truly was to him.

I also surely didn’t want to risk him marching to her and blaming her for things that haven’t happened yet, risking our future together (which meant her getting what she wanted in the first place).

No. We had both made to many mistakes of late, based on our past.

Better let sleeping dogs lie.

So I waved away the ill-wish doll, the trial, the flogging, the 'I shell dance upon your ashes' and the trying to have me burned at the stake, with a wave of my hand.

"And what Murtagh told me about her and you at dinner yesterday" I said instead.

"Me and her?" I could feel his frown of incomprehension from the top of my head "What did he say, what could he possibly say?" then he realized "Is that why ye left the way ye did from the dining hall? And is that why your door was locked last night?" he distanced himself from me by holding both my arms looking straight into my eyes cocking an eyebrow at me and smirking

"Is that why ye brought this…. This… what ye call them gerrrmsss here?"

"Jamie" I cocked an eyebrow back at him, scolding him for the insult on Luke's behalf.

"Weel, he makes me feel sick every time I see him and ye did say that’s what they do, so-" he
reasoned "Is that why he and no I were here wi’ ye?"

"Well it was one of the reasons, yes" I admitted, blushing, lowering my gaze to the floor "but not in
the way you thought" I hastened to add "I was truly only trying to help him, I mean his sister-in-
law and because I didn’t want to see you or ask for your help I… well, came with him".

I continued, defending myself "I stormed out of the dining hall yesterday, ran to my room,
slammed and locked the door in anger, throwing everything in sight and wearing out the carpet and
when I finally laid to sleep, not that I did sleep, and heard you behind the door I was so furious
that-"

"By Christ and St. Agnes, What did the man tell ye ‘obout me?” Jamie seemed amused more than
upset which aggravated me greatly.

What did comfort and delighted me, was that he didn’t seem to look even remotely guilty over the
accusation. He obviously felt he hadn’t done anything to feel guilty about.

"Well he mentioned Annalise de Marillac and-"

"What?” Jamie obviously did not expect that name to pop up.

"Yes, well just as an example of the type of women ye might feel yourself attracted to and how…
well, no one in the castle is closer to resemble her then Laoghaire"

"I see” he couldn't prevent his lips from bursting into a grin at my stupidity.

"Well it wasn’t only that” I hastened to explain that I wasn’t so foolish as to fall only for that.

By the time I recounted the whole conversation that included secret meetings in the stables or
being caught after the beating in the hall, in a cozy randevú by Murtagh, I thought I laid a good
case for my actions.

He return the justification of actions by telling me of secret meetings I, apparently, been having
with Luke and looks exchanged between us and something about Mrs. Fitz and me getting
pregnant??

He both seemed truly astonished at the other gullibility, but had to admit that by those accounts we
did sound quite guilty and deviant.

"Ho dear lord” my hand came to clasp my mouth as another realization struck "The sheets!!"

"The what Sassenach?” he stopped his recalling of all the reasons that brought him to act as he did.

"The sheets Jamie” I moved my hands slowly from my mouth to be clear "Mrs. Fitz or one of the
chamber maids under her command, they are the ones that clean my room and change my sheets”.

"So?” he asked even more confused then before.

"Well” I pressed the matter further "Two nights ago, my sheets must have had a very distinct
masculine aroma about them, having do to with a certain man in my bed that also might have left-"

His eyes shot up at that "Holly Mother of God and all her disciples"
His hand came up to his mouth now "me?"

"How else?!!" I said indignantly "only they don't know it's you so they think-"

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ" he muttered "and the secret meetings?"

"Me going to care for Isabella" I said exasperated "And I don't know how secret they are if every time I do so, I must ask Colum's and Dougal's permission and have a leech always at my side, which is Always either in the room with me, Luke and Isabella or waiting outside with Luke as I examine Isabella.

I must say it's a very poor affair I'm having if me and my supposed lover are never in the same room alone together. And you?" I inquired back

"The lass keeps popping like a toadstool everywhere around the stables but I dinna ken she was there every day. She surly dinna come to see or talk to me every time" he said that in a tone that truly wondered what was she doing in those times "Not that I said more than good marrow, good day and no there is no new colt yet, when she did" he shrugged.

"And as for the look of them" he grabbed my backside clutching me to him "I couldna dream to have a beauty such as you Sassenach, so I might have settled in the past for what I thought was true beauty" he squeezed harder and scrutinize all of me in a ravenous stare "I ken the difference quite weel now" and with that he claimed the kirk as our place again.

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When he finally released me, he smacked my backside and said

"That's for leaving me to handle the witch alone, dinna do that ever again!"

He shuddered at the recollection.

"Jamie" I said as he began guiding me to Donas to return to the castle.

"Mmm?" he answered still walking in front of me, but reaching his hand back for me to take.

"That was the other reason I left Geillis in a hurry and sent for Luke to come to me quickly"

I fumbled at the fact that I must open another Pandora box so soon after our badly needed, but still tender, reconciliation.

But I fortified myself by acknowledging that we must step out of our little bubble and begin to handle the responsibilities our second chance bestowed upon us.

"What do ye mean?" he paused and turned back to me.

"Well, Geillis was the other" I lowered my gaze to the ground my hand still in his.

"The witch. Why? Did she do something to ye?" he took a step toward me frowning worriedly.

"Well no, not exactly"
"I'll kill her" he pulled a sharp hiss of a breath.

"I would like for you to stop threatening to kill all my friends" I looked up, exasperated, glaring at him "I would like to have some left in the end". "Stop choosing such people who require to be killed so badly" he grinned with mischievous eyes.

"I tell ye, did ye no chose me" he added pleased with himself "I would call ye a verra bad judge of character". "Why you little-" he pulled me to him only by a flick of the wrist that held my hand and kissed me, not letting go until he felt me melt and leave my anger behind.

"Ye were saying?" he smiled into my lips after a while. "Well" I said feeling very calm and collected "I stood there looking and searching for some way or moment to tell her about what was coming-"

"WHAT?!!" he broke our embrace at once holding me by both arms, truly afraid and searching to meet my eyes "No I donna believe ye to be so reckless and silly. Surely ye dinna do so. Claire, tell me ye dinna"

"Jamie!" I tried extracting myself free but settled in the end to just lifting my eyes to his with a furious glare "burnt at the stake, Jamie! You can't possibly mean I am to let that happen to her again".

"Stay out of it, Claire! And that is an order, Claire!" he glared back trying to shake, what he obviously considered, maddens, from me.

Ho may, the use of my name, reserved only for great passion and fury situation and used more than once without him adding a few O God or dear Lord, was not a good sign.

"Jamie, what if it was me, would you not want someone to save me?" I tried pleading to his heart. He snapped instead, shaking me again "ye are nay……"
He then caught himself and let his words trail off, letting go of me and striding from side to side rubbing his knuckles across his dried lips. "What a witch? Neither is she!" I stood my ground unnerved. "I was going to say you're nay…. evil" he stopped and side-glance at me obviously trying to make something up. Jamie didn't actually think I was a witch, but he (nor I for that matter) had not been able to explain me or what I was either.

"She did save me" I returned to my original argument "at the price of her own life". "She would have burnt anyway" he went back to pacing only this time back and forth.

He always did so, to think more clearly. Only I didn’t see what was there to think about or how could another course of action be even considered.

We must save Geillis.

"She could have taken me with her. Misery does love company" I added pointedly, crossing my arms to my chest. "What, who said that?" he stopped and stared at me. "Right now me" I said not knowing myself where that idiom came from. It seemed to exist since time began.

"She killed her husband" he pointed a finger at me as if making his point.
"Well yes, but she did it through simple medicine not witchcraft. Its simple science or chemistry what she did with the poison" I added trying to show him the only silver lining I could counter that 'unfortunate' incident.
He gave me a look knowing as I did, that I was grasping at straw.

"Murder is murder" he determined "and all murderers must pay" his finger still pointing at me. "Didn't your uncle try to kill me for the same cause she is fighting for?" I said remembering Dougal charging at me, nothing but murder in his eyes. "Didn't Colum, your other uncle, threaten my life once he discovered that we wed; for the sole reason I didn’t fit with his plans for you?" I added with a righteous tone gathering my stride. "Didn’t the old fox offer to have my passed around your kin as a whore, all for the same battle and war Geillis holds so dear? Didn't-"

"Fine, I get your meaning" Jamie bunched his face and began striding again more ferociously this time. "Are you sure, I have so much more examples to draw from" I added smirking at my little victory "or is it because they are all man and she is a woman, is that why you can't see logic?" I pressed my advantage further.

"I noticed all right" he rolled his eyes recalling something, than looked right at me and said appalled "she tried to seduce me"
"Jamie! I don’t believe that" I looked down at him inclining my head to the side. "Do ye call me a liar?" his eyes shut up at astonishment "No." I hurried to calm the spirits "I'm sure you just misunderstood" I added helpfully. "Hard to misunderstand that" he urged what he preserved to be his advantage at convincing me of her wicked ways, for surely I wouldn't adhere to someone how tried to allure my husband.

"Well you not had much experience with women before" I tried to be reasonable. "I beg your pardon??!!" he said flabbergasted. "I only meant that-" I needed to fix this and fast "well it’s not you; it's the way she moves and speaks to everyone, Jamie." I offered again trying to placate.

"She came after me, timewise that is, two decades after me" I took one step forward to him resting my palms on his arms "my behavior is considered rude and unthinkable for a women of this time, perhaps her behavior is considered even worst here, but is acceptable at her own time. Maybe in the 1960's people were freer with their bodies and speech. Maybe in the sixties people are more-"

"I find it hard to think so" Jamie dismissed my reasoning.

"Beside she is very clever" I tried a different course of action. "Your point?" he raised his eyebrows with a snort, recognizing that as a truth. "She knows exactly who to unnerve and manipulate a man to get what she wants" I said. "Ye hear no argument from me on that account" he added reinforcing yet another truth. "Well Jamie, in this time if you are a women, your looks and your cunning ways are the only ways to get what you want and gather power. And the highest form of power is knowledge. And you must admit the woman does know how to get the information she wants from anyone".

We were standing in front of each other and slowly but surely I was also sinning, by using my womanly ruses to get my way.
I was rubbing the side of his arm, opening him to me until he hugged me and let me in, while he considered my words.
"A woman has her husband to take care of her, she need no seek deviant ways to obtain her needs" he said as he grabbed my bum, sighed, docile himself and rested his chin on my shoulder.

That statement and belief made me annoyed, but standing there in each other arms I found myself docile and amicable as well. Apparently this approach was a two edge sword.

So I sighed, grabbed a handful of his nice hard derriere myself and let that comment go, for now anyway.

We have had too many fights and disagreements as of late, to not find these moments to be precious to throw away too soon.

"Besides" he added, knowing full well that I disagreed with that comment, without me needing to say a word "before ye had a husband, here I mean" I felt his face on my neck and shoulder conveying the usual displeasure at the thought of my first marriage "Ye did no conduct yourself as such, even when ye needed verra badly to get your way".

"I had you" I said simply and was awarded the feel of huge smile spreading on his features. "B U T not as someone to get me the things I wanted" I added with a light squeeze to his buttocks "but as someone that kept my heart open, loving and honest and in that state my conscience did not allow me to act as such. Besides I just wanted to get home, Jamie, not change the face of time and history" I pulled a little back to look into his face

"Did we not lie and deceive in Paris? Speaking of, do you not recall a young boy you guiled into telling you where the English encampment was?"

His eyes went to rest on my décolletage probably at the memory of my white shiny flesh glistening against the darkness of the night where he sacrificed my modesty to prevent doing worst to another.

"Did you not use sexuality to get your way as well?" I cocked my eyebrow at him "The only difference is, it wasn't your own" I took another firm squeeze where my hands laid and pulled him closer.

He deepened our closeness with his own body, initiating a sinuous squirm of his own

"What did you tell me then? That you didn’t like to do it, but sometimes you would need to do worst? That in a war you sacrifice honor for expedience" I quoted his own words to him for my benefit.

"We had each other to keep ourselves from going too far. We were each other's light to come home to.

Geillis what… who does she have for a moral compass? Dougal?" I snorted in derision.

I could feel Jamie's body seeing my point and heard a soft snort in the ear that had his mouth on it, nibbling, while he listened to me.

Walking wasn’t the only way Jamie found could help him think, my body parts were accepted as well.

"She acts as such to everyone in order to gain more knowledge on anyone and everything, not just you. She probably feels something strange about me and you and is trying with all her facilities to uncover it. Dougal and Colum kept me prisoner for six month for the same reason" I reminded him of the man equivalent.

"Would ye prefer she locked you up in shackles?" I cocked an eyebrow, laughing to myself at the image "She is only using what is offered a woman these days".

"Ye would never do so” there was a question in his statement and I answered it as such, with complete honesty and seriousness.
"I have done close in order to find where you were, when the English captured you and took you to-" I didn’t want to mention Wentworth or Randell not now, not ever.

"What did ye do?" he asked seeming more concerned at the moment at my action than what happened afterward.

"Me and Jenny we…we interrogated a soldier. First we captured him manipulating his manly-weakness to help an innocent women lying on the side of the road and then we… I … well Murtagh killed him but-" I started to break at the memory.

Apparantly I perceived myself as good and conscientious and it was hard to confront myself with the truth of my corrupted humanity and willingness to do all it took to get what I needed. I suppose that what I told Jamie, before; I must also apply to myself.

"He wouldn’t tell us anything and I begged him to tell us" tears escaped the corner of my eyes at the memory of what I was willing to do to get my husband back.

"Sassenach" he was soft and wanted to keep holding me, but I couldn’t be held right now, I backed away and let out my hand to distance him from me.

"No" I signaled him to stay back awhile "when that young boy attacked you" I said trying to change the subject, so I may change my state of mind "and you tortured him"

That awarded me a frown "Tortured forbye, Christ Sassenach, ye and I ken torture and a graze under the ear is nay that"

And before I would add it, he said "Broke his own arm Sassenach, remember?"

"Well fine, when you singed him lightly around the edges, you told me that war's war correct?"

"Weel… no that I'm complaining regarding the happy fact that you do actually hear what I say, but that was told about a very fondly remembered ravishment of a sort, I performed on your person and not regarding the lad" at my face he added swiftly "but I do get your meaning, Aye"

"Well, Geillis came from the future to save her people, her country, your country" I pressed on "For her the war or the battles and trials that need to be fought and conquered in order to win the war, had begun the moment she crossed those stones, from her time to here. She is acting and behaving as in a time of war"

I could see the effect of my words on him. His body was more relaxed and his knuckles grazed his long straight nose thinking, willing to weigh things over.

"And one should also consider the fact" I added in order to lighten the air "that she doesn't know we are…well what we are"

"Husband and wife" he said, adamantly, with a pointing finger at me, as if to leave no doubt regarding that fact.

"Well of course we are" I rolled my eyes at him, indicating how he could ever think I would think otherwise "To us, but for the rest of the world?"

"She is still marreit" he tried his luck.

"Yes but we both know she only married Duncan for his position and money" I retorted.

"That makes it right?" he said placing his hands on his sword belt, making a stand.

"For the Lord sake, Jamie, we have spent a considerable time in Paris where you had no problem justifying your uncle Jared liaisons to married mistress, plural. Must Geillis stand to a different standard? Why because she is a woman?" I said again crossing my arms in irritation.

Jamie remained silent, realizing where he put his feet in.
"Jamie I must do something" I determined and started to march at Donas direction ending the deliberation.

"Nay 'till the wedding" I heard him whisper behind me, pleading. "What?" I turned flustered to ogle at him. "Please Claire not 'till the wedding after that we will see. But, please, mo nighean donn, we mustna change things that will stand in our way to that" he stretched his arm to me beseeching me to come back to him and to reason.

"Jamie" but there was nothing I could possibly say to that, I wanted this wedding just as badly as he did.

I wanted the husband and the life I chose, I just couldn’t take them on the blood of another and most of all not of a friend's, would be friend that is.

"Claire, I have nowhere to take ye that is safe for ye and I now" he pressed his lips and recounted all we have already spoke of. "Nay Lallybroch, nay nowhere in Scotland, where the price on my head or Randell's reach canna touch us. We have talked of France and I would like nothing more than to sweep ye there, save Fergus from that hell hole he consider his home now and marry ye. But I canna do so from here!"

He was adding new information that he never devolved to me and seemed extremely sad at the need to do so.

"If we were to try our luck at the nearest port we take a huge chance to be apprehended by the English, not to mention my uncles will no let me go, not when one head wants my men and property for his cause and the other wants me to take his title and position. If I willna be good to them, who kens the retribution they'll afford me."

He moved a little away from me and half sat on the relics of a law wall, covered with flora. They shadows of the light crossed his face and seemed to age him adding creases and nonexistence lines to his skin.

He took a shuddering breath and when he finally spoke his voice was hoarse and broken with emotion.

"When we did leave for France after the abbey a..after what Randell did to me" his head dropped to his chest and he stared at the ground.

I ran to his side and crouched between his knees. "That is not happening again, listen to me James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser " I swallowed hard holding the tears at bay cupping his face to mine so he could see the determination and assurance in my face "Jamie, that will not happen again I won't let it"

He smiled ruefully at the promise neither of us could guarantee, no more than we could guarantee our success and triumph against all that was coming.

"Please believe me" I pressed my forehead to his and couldn’t stop the tears from running on my check.

"Aye, as ye say" he brought his hand to cup the back of my head "But Sassenach, what I was trying to say to ye, was that we managed to secure safe passage through a port near the abbey, which is much closer to the border of France and has a smaller foothold o' the English there".

"After what" he took a sharp breath through his nose "after what was done to me, we took the risk
not caring of the dangers for the worst had already happened and we had no other choice wi’ the English at our tails"

I nodded understanding and he caressed my cheek with is finger.

I took the hand that stroke me and bent my head to kiss a perfectly healthy, agile, mark free left palm, he caressed the crown of my head.

"Now" he continued, his mouth poised at the top of my head "we canna reach the same port from here wi’ot crossing lands which hold rival clans, watch parties at every mile and the English everywhere else" he kissed the top of my head lightly "When ye and Murtagh scoured the land to find me… well, you past a great bit of distance 'till ye reached me"

"I didn’t mind" I said into his now wet palm from my tears.

"No I dinna mean that Sassenach, I meant to remained ye, that we are a long way from the spot we eventually departed to Paris from" he lifted my head to him cupping one check with his right hand while I still stroke the left.

His thumb caressed my skin, the side of my nose, across my checkbone and at my temple

"Claire" he finally spoke and sounded apologetic "Me… as soon as I left Lallybroch's lands I was captured and- " his eyes darkened at once and his gaze left me, his body stiffen a bit and all of a sudden I felt as if he wasn’t whole but seemed to be compose of broken pieces, fragment that aren’t glued properly together and if I would touch him the wrong way, he would shatter.

"Jamie" my mind showed me what his mind must have showed him at this moment,

That damp, rotten dark cell, his hand nailed to the table while he still clutched me not willing to let me move.

And when I raised my imaginary stare I could see him clearly – Randell. Looking back, smiling and promising 'we will remember this moment for the rest of our lives'.

"I ha' explained it t'ye Claire" his voice was a whisper now "If I could think of a better way, I would have taken it and ye away, long ago" his lips tightened and the hand that I held clenched hard in mine.

"Christ Claire! Do ye think I enjoy this?
Us apart, ye right here and yet so far, men around ye not knowing who ye belong to"

"You heard me tell Luke I'm devoted to my husband. I would tell anyone you wish me to" I exclaimed, a bit angry at still needing to prove my commitment and loyalty to him, but willing to do all he asked and needed of me at this moment.

"Ye'r deid husband Claire!" he said but in a tone that exonerated me from the blame "they care not what ye say but for that fact. Why ye think I dinna court ye from the start, he's biding his time as I was!"

He stood up and started pacing again

"Why, I nay neither sleep nor eat wi’ot ye. I can only come to ye when all are sleeping and must leave ye before the cock cries out. Do ye think it enjoyable for me?"

"Well, you must admit the sneaking around is sometimes fun" I tries to appease him.

That rewarded me a stop and a soft smile.

"Aye, I dinna say all was miserable" he rolled his eyes exasperated "I would be deid long ago if it
was so. But I need ye Sassenach to talk to, to love, to listen to, in the middle of the day as weel, no just an hour or two at night. Everyone is odd to me all of a sudden; friend and kin do no feel close or reachable in a way, only ye”

"It’s the secrets and deceiving" I explained "they built the tallest walls, too tall to cross, I felt the same when I came here" I said, recalling "and when you look at everyone and know their future its as if you are looking at pictures and not real life". "Aye, that’s it" he nodded understanding himself a bit better and looking lighter for it.

But then getting annoyed again he darkened "Christ, I canna even see ye during the day. Everyone whispering in my ear telling me this and that. Everyone but ye." He stood towering above me as I took his seat on the low wall.

He looked exactly as he described he felt. A beacon of light, to all but himself, separated and placed to stand on a deserted island.

I remembered the feeling quite well, it could drive a man or women insane. Looking at the world, but not being apart of it.

But I had Jamie, then, to cross the sea and come live in my ivory tower with me. Even just as a friend at first.

"I must hide from all the only thing I do no want ever hidden" he was still releasing all the things that were locked since we crossed those bloody stones.

Apparently second chances are never easy, or so I was learning.

"And It feels as if their all trying to take it away from me wi'oot them knowing 'tis mine to begin wi'" he placed his hands on his sword belt and his chest heaved a deep sigh "how can one think properly such? Plan sensibly for a future? I keep fearing, what if there is a better way and I canna see it for my mind is mad dealing wi' all the nonsense around me".

"Jamie, I'm sure it will be alright" but he wasn’t listening to me, he didn’t need advice or kind empty words he needed to say something that weighed on his heart greatly.

"I canna do it again, Claire" his pleaded down to me "I willna ha' the strength to send ye away again or lose a child or-" he couldn’t finish what came next and before but I knew.

He lowered himself to one knee took both my hands in his, bent his head to our joint palms and pleaded.
"Please forgive me Claire, for nay being strong enough to send ye away to safety, back to your own time"

"I wouldn’t go if you tried" I retorted horrified at the unexpected notion "Why would you even think of such a thing"

"For we dinna ken what will happen, mo chridhe" he lifted his gaze to my face "If we succeed or only go through … go through everything again" his gaze now went to some distanced point far away from where we sat.

"I ken all this and I fear you ken it to, so you would want to leave, to be safe and happy but I cannot let you go, I canna let ye go and know that I will live after ye, that I might survive everything and go on to live
a long life wi'oot ye".

He looked back at me then, took one wayward curl that wiggled its way from my pines and placed it behind my ear smiling longingly and looking so lonely and sad at the thought of never being able to do such simple act again.

"I am sorry Claire, so sorry for not being strong enough or wise enough or just enough to do right by you"

"Jamie" I cried out but could not compose any more words or gestures. I felt as vulnerable and as fragile as he did.

I wished I was strong, wise and enough to console and heal him, but I wasn't.

"I'm so scared to run wi' ye and chance that what was done to me, would happen again" his eyes shone with moisture as he looked straight into my eyes "So we are forced to live like this and to obey by all these rules and insanity to protect our lies".

He raised his hand to the back of my head cupping it and bringing it to his. Shook his head lightly and mumbled

"I'm sorry, I am so sorry Claire, I am too afraid it will happen to me again, please forgive me and dinna leave me"

He was shaking all over now, from sorrow, frustration but mostly fear.

I felt dizzy with my inability to take breath into my lungs, seeing him so. I rose a bit only to cover him from above with my arms.

Holding on to him for dear life, as if I could be his protector against all these things that happened to him, to us, to the people around us.

As usual, I wasn't the one in our joint life that could find the proper things to say.

I didn’t want to make promises I couldn't keep; he would recognize them for the hope and not the certainty that they were.

But I could offer something now; small as it was, faced with the huge chasm that was our future.

With the strength that I held him, I pleaded with him to hear and believe my words.

"WE will make plans together for the future, WE will make a schedule during the day to see each other, WE will come to each other not just you to me, WE will fool them all"

"We will?" he whispered under me

"Yes. And I will not risk us by telling Geillis anything yet, or doing even the smallest thing without consulting you I swear that to you.

You have my word now Jamie, my oath".

I lifted his face to me with a finger to his chin, as he has done to me many times "But after the wedding?!!" I cocked my eyebrow "we will talk then? Right after? So she will not start poisoning poor Arthur yet, and she will have enough time and means to get away? After the wedding we will talk then?"

"Aye. Ye have my word" he smiled looking sooother now.

He brought his arms around my waist, rested his palms straight on my buttocks, executed a very firm squeeze and sighed with his head leaned to the side on my chest.

"Good" I cuddled myself to him.

It has been a long time since we were simply with each other.

The last time we were here, no one interrupted us, so we could let our, always up lately, guard
down and just be.
"And If you feel you need to do it again please do" I laughed and kissed the crown of his head and sure enough a second later he did.

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"Will ye really no do anything foolish or reckless wi'oot talking to me first?" he asked mouth buried in my chest.
"Of course I won't. I am a very sensible and responsible woman" I caressed the cow lick at the top of his head.
"Ye are?" he snorted and I smacked his shoulder.
"Of course I am. I wasn’t the one hitting poor souls or blaming someone of polygamy"
"Of what?" I could feel him frown.
"Of having more than one spouse. I didn’t want to use your word 'whoring' was it?" I shifted my weight a bit, but I supposed he feared me intending to leave his arms for he tightened his gripe and said apologetically
"Weel ye might have a point there, Sassenach. I am truly sorry Claire, I-"
"It's done and over with" I stopped him "and it will not come up again. Correct??"
I voiced my tone to indicate that I will not stand for it again and I could feel his chin nodding on my body.

"You should have brought food we could have made a picnic of it" I finally said after a while, when we finally did shift our position.
I was stretched on the grass and resting my head on his thigh, hearing his stomach rumbling, while he picked chosen parts of grass munching on them and spitting them out.
"Aye I'm hungry" he said.
But neither of us were willing to move again.

They returned after it was obvious that they couldna wait no more to show their presence at the castle gates.
He was stroking the horse, cleaning his mane wi’ the hay as before.
Claire's shadows or Dougal's intelligence force, depending on who ye chose to ask, ha' no yet come to her side, so they were alone.
Claire was leaning very close to him on the side of the horse as he moved to stroke the horse's hind legs.

"I remember these moments" she said sounding very tender and reminiscent "where we would just be together, talking, laughing. I think without them I would not have married you, to tell the truth". She said looking into the horizon but seeing the past.
"What do ye mean?" he asked hardly noticing what he was doing only enjoying seeing her more relaxed and serene than she has been for weeks.

"You became my friend in those moments" her hand stroked his left arm lightly, hardly touching more than his sleeves, up and down. 
"I could talk to you, you would talk to me, so openly, honestly, intelligently" she rolled her eyes suggesting intelligence was sorely lacking at her life at that point.

Her caress went to his palm that was leaned on the beast’s stomach, her touch again hardly touching at his skin, gliding through his fingers. 
"I wasn’t scared of you like the others"
She turned herself to her side which now meant that she was standing fully to him "I wasn’t scared when I was with you, and I was scared so much, all the time, then".

"Claire" his voice seemed hoarse to his ears. 
He dinna like to hear she was scared.
From the first moment they met, all he wished was to protect her, desired to see her smile and feel her joy, to hold her in his arms and never let go.
After all this time, that need did not waver.

"It's fine" she came a step closer "I am not reliving my sad story of woe. I just meant that I trusted you, as much as was possible in my condition, and I enjoyed being with you so I could-" 
"Stand the idea of being marriet to me?" he mocked her but only slightly.

He broke off abruptly walking to fill the bucket at the trough, greeting hello to the man he saw coming near them above her shoulder.
As the man left and he returned, she was still flaring her nostrils at him for his comment. 
"Aye fine I get ye'r meaning"

She shuffled her legs at the ground "I was just trying to say that before you were my lover, you were my friend and.. well that you still are" she returned to face and look at him.

"And Luke, he can never be the friend you were, because with you in my life the need and desire for a friend such as you, is... well, filled" her hand came to caress his again, her eyes following her strokes.
"He might find a place for himself in my heart, but he can't ever take it. You already did that" Wi’ that she lifted her gaze to look straight at him with an expression that held the essence of softness, fragility and love.

He grabbed her wrist, and dragged her to the open cottage a few feet away that housed the hay that was gathered. 
He had only enough mind to spare a thought to wonder was the horse he was tending tied, before he whirled her on the inside wall, pinned her, took her by the nape and pressed his lips to hers.
He kissed her fervently at first but then slowed himself, striving for tenderness and comfort. This wasn't an invention for something more; he just wanted to hold her, to connect.
He released her mouth after a while just a little, still locking her in a strong embrace, his hands on her narrow beautiful waist.
He was alternating between brushing his lips to hers, to bumping his nose lightly on hers, his eyes
opened.
He needed to watch her.

"Jamie" she had her eyes closed, but had a dreamy smile slightly curling her lips, her hands hovered near his face and her fingers were lightly touching not touching his cheek "but what if someone will come?" she whispered but didn't really seem to mind.

"Just kiss me Mo nighean donn, I ask no more" he said softly.
They were swaying a little, his arms locking her tight to him, his forehead on hers.
"I ache with the knowledge I canna just reach and touch ye as and when I wish."

"I miss you to" she whispered, her eyes still closed, as if she was savoring the moment between them as he did.

"I see ye almost every day but I feel as if ye are far from me, as if there is a thin veil between us, so I can see ye but not truly touch ye"

"Jamie" she opened her eyes at that and the sudden revelation of them looking at him, so tender and loving made his stomach lurch and for a moment he forgot how to take a breath.
Her hand was now fully stroking his check, nose, lips, which made it his turn to close his eyes, as he heard her whisper on his face
"I'm right here"
He grabbed her finger with his mouth and bit it lightly.

"I ken that" he said softly when he released it "only what my minds ken, my heart doesna seem to hear".
He distanced his head a little so he could look into her face but still wouldn't let his arms slacken his embrace "I think that is way I being going around like a chicken with its heid hacked"
She laughed. He liked making her laugh.

It was as a new corked wine bottle being poured into a glass for the first time, flowing smooth, shattering when it touched the glass and warmed the heart.

"Aye, laugh at me Sassenach" but he was laughing too, for just like wine she was intoxicating.
"ye are nay the one that’s been acting crazed wi’ lust and madness, stomping around like a bull in heat, how did ye no run away from me yet?"

She stopped laughing at that, but kept a teasing smile on her face "well I first tried, no I would try at the Gathering. Yes, that was the first time, wasn't it?" She squinted her eyes trying to recall.
"Do you want me to have another stab at it?" she put a finger on her lips mulling it over.
"Now that I know the area and the dangers I think I would actually manage a good distance, this time, before being captured" she narrowed her eyes again this time calculating "If any, I might actually reach the bloody things" she provoked.

He did break their embrace at that, but only to grasp the back of her head, imbedding his fingers into her curls, pulling her head backward.

"Ye once told me ye would fallow me, drag me back by my thick red curls" his nimble fingers flicked off a few pins that held her thick chestnut at their tips curls.
"And I wouldna like it one bit" he took his other hand to coil one curl around his finger.
"I wouldna dare to touch your locks" he bit the tip of her nose "but ye wouldna like what I'll do to the rest of ye".

With that, he devoured her mouth pressing her firmly to the wall.
Leaving no chance of escape.

When he finally did release, a now flustered, blushing, swaying Claire.

She took her well deserved breath, with eyes still closed and a dream-like guessing expression on her face and said

"You shouldn't tempt me such or I will try"

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They were sitting next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, listening to Gwyllyn play and sing. They sat so close, the whole side of their bodies was touching, unfortunately they were wearing clothes.

That was, exactly, how Jamie imagined their time in the castle before.

And when a man gets his wish granted… well, happiness was a poor word for what he was feeling.

No Luke tonight (he searched thoroughly) and Laoghaire was sitting at the far end of the room, he made sure of that before finding his seat, taking his only when she was already settled in hers.

He might have scared some poor souls when they tried to sit by his side, but he did that before, last time, wi' no harm done, so he dinna mind. Couldna stop Murtagh though, as last time.

But the man did sit with enough space amongst them to allow another man or woman to sit in the breadth between the two, so all was still well.

When she entered the hall, drink at hand he dinna need to wave or come to fetch her as before. She entered the hall already searching for him with her eyes. He could see her hurrying to come to him, then remembering they had to be discreet.

She stopped half turned to another direction, walked five steps trying not to look at him, then when she stopped again, she noticed where Laoghaire sat and tried verra hard to stifle a smile. She failed verra well at that. The lass thought she was only being kind to her and smiled politely back.

She came to him slowly from the back of the room, not before she circled it whole; trying to not seem so obvious to where and to whom she was trying to reach.
Sweet bleeding Jesus, her a spy?!
The Scots would take hold of the entire British kingdom if that was so, he mused to himself, trying very hard not to laugh at the sight of her.

He especially had to trial his self-control when she finally did sit close-fitting to him and greeted him wi’ a bit too loud “O Mr. MacTavish what a coincidence. I just saw and open seat from the back and didn’t recognize you”.

He was so aroused by the spectacle; he almost griped her face and took her lips ferociously right there and then.

He settled for scraping her hand lightly under her skirts, and making her face flash red. She tried to hide it and the soft smile that curled her lips, by bending her heid slightly into her breast and lowering her gaze into her glass.

That only made him notice how her breasts stood verra taut and verra round this evening.

A smile curled his lips, and he fought with all his might to uncurl them. He could only do so when he kept reminding himself of the dangers they faced if found ‘oot. At that he felt his face sober and his skin tighten and he tried to listen to the music and song.

Only the smile kept creeping out when he imagined what he would do to her if they were them, marreit, that is, openly for all the world to see. If they could touch and be as they were, not so long ago, sitting in one Parisian parlor or the next, listening to Herr Gerstmann, master of song and music to the king, as he orchestrated over one of his latest arrangements.

How if this, was the same as then, she would lean her heid on his shoulder and his arms would come around her and caress hair, neck and the side of her body.

He remembered how one evening they came so late to the soirée, only wanting to make an appearance in order to introduce his and Jared's new acquisition of wine. They sat far in the hall, so far everyone’s back was to them and they couldnna see naught only hear the music. He dinna care, it’s no as he had an ear for it. It all sounded the same when it had no words, only a tune that he couldna tell if it was pleasant or not.

But it was him and Claire alone, even surrounded with people; and that he could appreciate.

At one point he bent to her leaning figure, intending only to look at his wife's face to see if she enjoyed the music and perhaps just to stroke her cheek fondly, but somehow his tongue found hers or was it her tongue that found his. She started suckling it in earnest as he fought his hands from going to her breasts. He finally had to place them between his legs and fasten his thighs tight.

When she did release his mouth and he leaned a bit backward she pouted her lips with a sweet smile to him. So he in turn did the only proper thing to do and bit her lower lip softly while he felt her smile expand.

The perfect kiss.

Ten minutes later and they almost broke the chaise in the alcove nearest to where they sat.

The reminder of that forced his thumb, now (which he couldna remember how it found its way
under her green dark skirts and on to her hand) to begin stroking her palm harder and faster.

How did she call their behavior of late? Secret high-school sweethearts?

He didn’t ken very well from her explanation what made it a high school, couldn’t the building be short?

But the secret part was titillating and the sweetheart was exactly what she was to him, his sweet heart.

What would he have become if she dinna melt that heart, every day anew?

"Did we not retire by now, last time?" he asked close to her ear, between pretending to translate the song to her.

He used it as an excuse to come closer to smell her, to linger a glimpse into those small soft hills moving up and down slowly, to sense her skin, so close he could almost taste it, floating and gliding so close to his.

Their skin touched only by the heat that he was emitting in her direction.

May the Lord save him, why were they other people in the world?

"No" she answered and was trying not to look at him, but looked straight ahead at the bard, pretending she was nodding as a reply to whispered translation.

"Yes, I see, what an interesting story Mr. MacTavish, became lovers and friend I see" she said over Murtagh peeking at them and at her blushing cheeks.

She was fighting so hard (to no avail) not to let her own aroused smile spread.

"We actually didn’t leave this time, I mean that time, before" she said when Murtagh grew tired of his inquiries.

"Ho, are ye sure?" he was teasing rubbing his thumb harder on her knuckles "ye dinna check my dressing or had an emergency somewhere private needing your attention? I am sure I remember something of a sort".

"y..e..s" she closed her eyes inhaling deeply "I mean no, I mean we...we... only Listened to the music" she swayed lightly when he started scraping her palm gently with his nails.

"This is where...where I got the idea to run" he didn’t think she was even aware of what she was saying.

he on the other hand, know exactly what he was doing when he was now using his fingers to slither under her seat and under her, Jesus bless her, wide sheltering skirt, to reach-

"be... because...ho" she jumped slightly when his hand reached her destination "because the story ye told... Jamie, stop it at once" she caught herself recuperating her composure and hissed at him "I can't contr... I mean just stop"

"Ye canna – what, Sassenach?" he asked smiling mockingly at her. She didn’t answer.

"Ye canna control ye'rself Mrs. Beauchamp?" he wouldna let this go.

"stop it" she pulled her hand and put it on her lap in the open, rubbing at it, as if it would take away the sensation he created and moved a little further away on the bench.

"Ho my, I think ye should go to your surgery to have a look at that hand, it's looking a bit...." "Silence!" she hissed again but couldn’t stop her smile.

"And if I don’t?" he queried hitching closer to her.

The music was now peaking up, people were clapping and jumping in their seats so they dinna
notice all the jumping and shifting going on between them.

"Then I will bid you goodnight and retire to my room" she replied striving for poise "you know what? I think I shall do that anyway" she rose to her feet, arranging her dress. He stared at her, surprised and hurt she would leave him, but a second before departing she bent, handed him her drink and whispered

"I shall expect you to fallow in five minutes pass"

she straighten and with a "Goodnight Mr. MacTavish" she left smiling publicly goodbye to all she passed by; letting it be shown, she was walking safe and alone to her room.

He aligned himself as well, on his seat. Feeling his entire face light up and a smile so wide he thought would crack his lips, spread. "One, two, three..." he counted to himself with the music playing and everyone cheering and applauding around him.

He was thrusting himself into me, time and again, ferociously and frantically. He wanted to reconquer what he felt was slipping away from him, I supposed. I also supposed that I as well wanted to be retaken.

His trusts made me feel as a pier standing at the point where the waves crash into it and the sensation was not unpleasant. I wanted my husband back.

After a few minutes of this he let out a moan. No, not a moan but a roar. Exactly as a lion would after fighting a battle; reclaiming his crown as the king of the jungle. A roar as if all the aghast that was bottled up inside him, was now coming out in the shape of vocal release.

The roar ended and I would have been sure he reached his completion, were it not for his very unmistakable and still very firm cock inside me.

All the other of Jaime's limbs though, had collapsed in full weight atop of me. His body covered all of me as he laid there not moving a single muscle; head buried on the pillow near my left shoulder.

We laid like this for what seemed like forever and I was just about to enquire whether I should take matters in to my own hands, by slowly trying to move my hips, which were like the rest of me buried under a very large, very still Scot.

"Dinna move" I heard his voice muffled by the pillow "don't dare move Mo nighean donn. Please" this was not a threat or an order but a plea. As if me moving, meant moving away from him, which in our current situation was extremely odd and unlikely but I complied.
He needed to get something from me he could not yet put into words and I was more than willing to let our bodies engage in the negotiations that will result in his questions and needs answered by my flesh.

They have done so before and had never failed in leaving both parties completely satisfied and content.  
And By the way Jaime was behaving lately… a little satisfaction and contentment were sorely lacking and highly in demand.

His right hand had pulled up to caress the side of my body, lingering awhile to fondle the side of my breast which was still flattened, like the rest of me, under him.  
He drew a light breath through his nose and let it out softly through his lips, as his hand continued its path down the side of my body.  
I could smell the Rhenish I left behind on his breath.  
It entered through me as ripples at sea.  
I took a big inhale of it, taking with it, the special musk that was Jamie and the sweat of exertion from today’s strains and tribulation.

The fight and the release of words (that needed to be said), took their price on both of us; and the mental as well as physical exhaustion they left in us, made every sense tender and acute at the same time.

His hand reached the back of my right knee and pulled it from under him to settle on his hip, my ankle on his buttocks.  
At this I allowed myself to squirm a bit and grazed my ankle up and down, from top thigh to buttocks and to the curve of his lower back.  
His sounds made it clear, that was fervently appreciated.  
Slowly his voices of approbation became humming sounds, coming from deep inside his throat and chest.

He skimmed his lips slowly om my skin from my chin, neck until his mouth reached my left breast and was alternating between cracking a very wide smile that I could feel but not see on my bosom and very lightly suckling my breast.  
That made me, arch my back and my ankle pushed him fiercely to me.  
He started rocking his body with the movement of my grazing leg and lifted himself on his arms.  
My arms now released, came up. One hand, very lightly almost hovering, caressed his face, touching his nose, his lips, chin and neck.  
He had his eyes closed completely absorbed in the sensation of me; of us together.

When he sensed my fingers on his lips, he opened his mouth lightly and bit one, not hard, but just enough to give me back the knowledge of how sensitive the nerves ending in the fingers, really are.  
This time it wasn’t only my back that arched, I brought my hips to meet him as well.  
He released my finger opened his eyes looked straight into my eyes and I to his.  
He began moving harder and faster.  
the other hand coming to my left knee and applying it the same treatment he afforded her companion one.
I was holding on to his hips with my legs almost floating between him and the mattress. With each thrusts I felt him lifting me and could feel the air slither under me. His hand came to cup my left cheek for a stronger hold all awhile leaning on his right.

I smiled in delight at him biting my lower lips and he smiled back. And then I saw it.

Jaime!

There he was, the Jaime I missed so much, the one I didn’t even know had left until I saw that smile looking back at me. There he was, innocent and strong, tough and beautiful, mischiefful but wise; all at the same time and so much more. And mine.

I felt a complete fool for the fighting, the yelling and the mistrust from my part as well as his.

How could I forget who we were, who we still are!

Jamie that aroused in me so much love, compassion, desire and a need to protect. And the only man's protection I wanted back.

He was the man I wanted to cradle, to ravage, to nurture and to devour, all in the same time. And most of all to be with, always and forever.

Although in retrospect, I realized that all those things that kept us apart lately, were the ones that were helping us find each other again, in a better, honest, deeper way. Fewer secrets between us now, fewer mistrusts or things that were left unsettled. We have learned our lessons and now we'll know better than to listen to others over our own hearts.

"I love you so much" he said overcome with emotion and sensations. I chuckled but only because I felt the words about to erupt from me.

"Why are you laughing at me?" he inquired but with a smile, still rocking inside of me and pulling his face into mine so our noses bumped up and down. I reached for his cheek because I was about to say the same exact thing in the exact same tim… haaa" I pulled my breath in and closed my eyes, hands griping at the covers, hard.

I was coming to an end myself. as waves of pleasure took hold of me and were coursing through my body.

I grabbed his shoulders, eyes closed tighter, realizing that I was so consumed with watching Jaime feel his pleasure that I completely forgot about mine and did not notice the surges assembling inside me; they were now erupting and revealing themselves to their full extant.

I felt my hips completely airborne, tight to him, trying to contain the stimulation and afraid to move or I would shudder. Jamie did not suffer from any such need for stillness and was moving harder and deeper.

I raised my left hand to his nape, while grabbing and squeezing his buttocks with my right, pulling myself to him. I felt myself about to cry out, when I heard him say

"No. not yet Sassenach, wait… please wait….wait wi' me"
They were a few times when we had climaxed together and usually it would happen naturally without us trying to induce such a thing.
But he needed it this time.
I could feel the knowledge of it with every bone in my body.

We were returning to ourselves (slowly but surely) and we just knew.

Since crossing the stones we were so absorbed in manipulating and deceiving all around us, that we had started suspecting all in having some secret agenda and wicked motives and once that was determined in us, we forgot to look at each other in different eyes.

We feared so much to lose control over everything and to make the same mistakes again, that we forgot to use each other as the isle in the eye of the storm were one could settle and feel safe until it blew away.
So we could make it on the other side, whole and together.

I breathed very deeply and calmed myself as best I could. It was almost insufferable.
I could feel my body gush and tremble.
I squeezed my inner thighs but Jaime wouldn’t have it, standing on his knees he took the hand he leaned on and spread my thigh very wide and farther and farther apart until I moved the other one on my own accord. Only then did he let go.

As he continued his inexorable ways he said "Say it, than. Tell me, Sassenach, tell me"

It took great effort to open my eyes to stare straight into his.

I cupped his cheek that hopped up and down in my palm, ordering my eyes to give him the most honest, bare, loving look I could master, especially under the circumstances and said gently but very firmly

"I have never loved anyone as much as I love you, and I **never** will".

He stopped moving abruptly.

After a second his hip made a small jerk inside me, but the rest of him did not dare move as to not break our eyes, our stare into each other.
He saw me as I saw him.
He made a few more small but hard movements in me, only with his hips and we both let out a heartfelt, heartbreaking and shuddering breath.
Feeling our releases crush into each other so hard, I cried out loudly and he almost tore the mattress he was griping near my head.
I knew that his finger marking on my left buttocks will be left for days.

When he stooped shaking he collapsed burying his face into my breasts.
"No. Stay" She said when at last he made a move to slip away. Her hands held him tight atop of her, and when it was obvious he was not going anywhere she allowed her hands to roam. Caressing, stroking, loving him all through his nape, back, buttocks, every inch that was afforded to her grasp.

One hand continued to wander aimlessly while the other nuzzled into his hair interchanging between massaging his scalp to running her fingers through his hairs.

Both maneuvers left him praying to never need to move again in life; even if his body was not so completely flaccid and informed him that any attempt to such a course of action will be rendered futile.

"I'm sorry" she said "I failed you". He frowned not knowing what she meant. She must have sensed the movement on her skin for she went on to clarify her words "you needed me and I failed you and I am sorry for it".

"I…. you…" Jamie started to say, but his mind was so relaxed he could not form words or meaning in anything.

She must have sensed that too, for while her caresses continued she added a small amount of pressure to pull him even closer to her, if such a thing was possible. She sighed and said "All the times I needed you; you were there, sometimes even before I knew I needed someone, something.

You always watch me so closely, so I will be safe and mended; so I will never feel alone or unloved" a faint of a smile and a laugh rose in her chest "even when I am very angry at you or at the world; you try to make me laugh and if you fail, you make sure I know that when it is right you will be there… with a smile, a hug or very good whiskey".

His own mouth curled a little, but even that took great effort. His body never felt as heavy and as dead then it did right now. He really hasna been sleeping weel lately, he inferred. He needed to be still for the moment and she kent it first.

"And I-" she searched for words, always fearing and mistaking, that her ability to say the right thing was any less than perfect in his eyes "A little while after we were married, or would be married" she snorted "I tried to do the same, to you, for you"

Her arms came and rapped themselves on his neck "I ….. I wanted you to have the wife you deserved"

"Have you lost all reason?" the question seemed to leap from his lips. "What?" she laughed surprised.

With very great difficulty he raised his face to her. "The wife I deserve? Have I ever given you the thought that you were less than my wildest dream manifestation? Then I failed you mo nighean donn. To think when I imagined my future wife, Sassenach, That I could ever -"

"Hush" she put a her finger to his lips "I talk now! You listen!" she pointed at him ordering and
glaring her eyes in jest.

So he lowered his head back to her. Cheek just below her breasts so they rested on his heid.

He did lift himself just enough to slide out of her, but returned to lying atop of her as he did before. Her hands, her magnificence hands, continued with their Administrations.

"You gave me everything, from the very beginning, even before we were married… will be… ouch you know what I mean" she said a little exasperation in her voice regarding all this confusion.

"I could not. Not at the beginning, it was too much at the beginning- Not you I don’t mean" she said, explaining herself hastily "The voices of the past, my past I mean, the threats from all the people that surrounded me at the present and the horrible fear of what will become of me in the future. I felt as if I needed to keep up walls. Walls for protection, walls of deceit. For how and to whom could I ever tell what and who I am?!" she sneered mockingly at the thought have ever explaining what she was and where she came from to another. "You did not know if I would ever love you like I do now… and I do Jaime, o God I do"

Her voice broke as in a plea to make him believe it and he felt one single tear glissade from the corner of his eye without him ever remembering feeling sad.

All he could feel lately was just anger all the time, anger and suspicion. He couldna shake it, he could not run from it and he felt even more enraged at himself for being that irate and not being able to control it from seeping onto his wife. His would be wife if she'll still have him.

At the beginning, he thought his anger to her was owed to the ridicules accusation she thrust at him regarding Laoghaire.

After a while, he bound his anger to all the deeds and say from people around them, who seem to be if not outright pulling them apart, were plotting to do so. And her listening to them! (not that he dinna do the same, but when angry one tends to look at others not at himself).

And then is ire truly found a home in the form of Mr. MacIiver, the Irish bastard.

He liked to contemplate the possibilities that he would have, if he was allowed to call the man out, to shoot him? Run him through? Or just possibly could he find the occasion and justification during the duel to come close enough to wring his neck completely? It's always good to have choices.

but none of those were her fault. After all she ever done for him (and would have done). How could he mistrust her? Think she would leave him for another. When she not once but twice said that she will die with him than live without him.

The blame was his and his alone, well except for Laoghaire. But he could see how the fault of her suspicion wasn’t entirely on Claire's shoulders.
A slender finger took him out of his own heid and wiped the single tear away.
Who could she have sensed it?
He ridiculed himself at the reminder to never doubt how she did the things she did, she just knew.

"I'm sorry lass. I don't know why I'm-"

"You are crying because I failed you!" she interjected into his words "because you needed to know; no you needed to feel secure in our love, because ever since this thing happened" she gestured to the void as a sign to that unknown force that did this to them "you have been feeling everything I felt when I first came 'through'" She sighed
"You told me at the kirk, but I should have seen it earlier and I should have known what to say the moment you told me" she sounded annoyed at herself.

Although he wished her not to blame herself; When annoyed the lovely Mrs. Beauchamp was not to be argued wi'.
He would have to wait his turn.

"Instead of me being the anchor you were to me I ….. I left you alone to understand for yourself your own feelings, to try to make sense of everything on your own.
Me!!! That felt that anger, that rage that wouldn't stop” now she was truly fuming at herself.
"Of course you listened to others and not to reason, of course all this happened, I should have minded more to you" she made a fist and thumped it on the bed, vexed. Then she took a breath, calmed herself as possible and said.

"I should have told you Jamie, that as scary as it is to think of stopping and letting this anger catch up to you. That as terrifying as the idea to stop and be forced to look straight at that big dark menacing black hole that’s feels like its chasing you, wanting to swallow you whole;
You must do it.
You must feel the fear that hides behind it, to feel the hopelessness and helplessness. It is the truth after all".
She lifted his head by pulling his ears and placing him that they were staring at eye level to each other, so he could see her, truly see her.
"Because we don’t know why or what happened and we don't really know what's coming next or will we be able to change the things we want and not destroy the things we so desperately want to keep".

She sighed and her breath came to his face caressing him as her fingers did before.
As if it was the breath of life.

"But Jaime it is WE! When you are done with feeling all you are feeling, you would look up and see me there.
You would understand that you are not alone, that I'm right there.
And that is what I failed to come across to you at the kirk and before.
I'm not leaving for a better life in the future, I am not searching for another man to live an easier life with.
It cannot be an easy life without you and there is no future that I want if I cannot share it with you" she interlaced her finger in his "It is we. You and I. this is my time, this is my place now".

She bent his head to brush her lips to his, so lightly she could utter the last word into him without sound "forever".
His strength was returning to him now, all the tiredness, the anger that left him so weak and miserable were all gliding from his body as tide retreating away, back to the sea and far from him.

"I dinna ken" he whispered, and now wanted to weep. He let his head drop to her chest holding to her tight "I dinna ken".

"How could you?" she pulled his ear playfully and began caressing the tip "It wasn't you that been through this before, now was it? It was me" she chuckled then "I don’t know how you did it though"

"What?" he ask, lifting his heid to look at her, not understand.

"Before, when I just came. You didn’t know me or of me and yet-" her eyes darkened as memories and feelings seem to cross behind them "You knew" she said admiringly "You knew I needed an anchor, something real to hold on to. Remember I told you how everything from the past seemed to me like pictures?"
He nodded but couldnna speak.
"You never did" she chuckled again and shrugged "Lord if I know how, but from the first moment, you never did"

Then she pulled herself a little higher on the pillow one hand behind her head as the other stroke his heid back down to her and then commenced caressing his soft curls all awhile cradling his head.

Christ all mighty, how he loved his woman.

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They lay there. She just stroking his head and shoulders, him breathing deep, head serenely lolled on her stomach regaining all his strength without a single minute of sleep.

The shadows from the window retreated slowly and the light of the day began to raise painting the outside with bright colors and shine, threatening to expose all the secrets of the castle inhabitants.

"I need to go soon, the castle would be awaken by now, even now I take the risk of being seen mo chridhe" he dinna want to go.
"I know" she sighed.

She pulled him back up to her by his ear. He came easily. To reach her he found he had strength, to walk away from her nay.

The loft above the stables Dougal allocated for him, since they first came to Leoch, felt like a freezing lonely hell hole and she felt like home.
He shivered a little and not from the cold.

She let him lay fully atop of her again, by sliding back under him, both still naked. Bodies cooled from the chill of the night.

She held his gaze and said.

"But now you know, now we know" she took his hand in hers interlacing their fingers again.

"You told me once that I should not be scared anymore as long as you're with me and after we were married you said that I shouldn’t be afraid because there were the two of us now.

You didn’t know then what it meant for me to have you. You do now" she smiled softly and knowingly at him.

"At Lallybroch, I told you that we will handle whatever comes no matter the cost" she kissed him lightly.

"Soon my love, very soon, and then no more hiding or concealing" her fingers held his tighter.

"And my bed" she kissed his nose "my body "she skinned her lips on his "my soul" she kissed his forehead "will be openly yours instead of only secretly" she added in gaiety.

"I love you Mo nighean donn" he replied raising his lips to meet hers opening her mouth with his tongue , engulfing all of her mouth with his, Caressing those breasts that were so soft but seemed to stand taut to his demanding hands.

After a moment of which she was returning the same penetrating kisses to match his own and lightly biting his lips, he couldn’t stop his other hand from roving lower and to her back. Taking a handful of that sweet, round-

Arse.

Lord, he loved this women, his women.

And that was no blasphemy but a prayer of thanks.

"Mmm..." she murmured into his lips "I think you better stop and leave, before….ho…. never mind, a bit too late for that" she parted their lips and squinted down to see how late it was for him.

She clenched her lips trying to keep a serious face.
"I shouldn’t have waited till dawn to…Jaime!" she slapped his not so stravaig hand from between her legs, trying to direct his entry "why I ought to"
"Itna just me, Sassenach" he dinna stop his maneuvering "Jesus Christ, you are as wet as a-"

"Well unfortunately, my body quite recalls what you're like in the mornings and so" 
"Ooo, I like that. So your body is conforming itself to me, then?" he asked mockingly "good, it kens its master."
He frowned after deep contemplation and added "can ye make your arse return to his full size then? Ye havna been eating properly at dinners lately, I ha' been watching"

She pounced on him, rolling him to his back, her perched atop him, holding both his hands hostage, wi' his permission and she kent it.

She bit her lip then licked it. He made a deep throat sound of approval at that.

"I thought, ye said my arrrsse is perrrfect as it is, mmmmaa?" she rolled her R's and strove for a meaningful sound as in imitation of a Scottish accent. His? He wondered.

It dinna matter, it only made her sound more English, more like a verra, verra fine lady, trying to sound like a pirate.

"Mine" he whispered menacingly raised his upper body, grabbed her by her waist, whirling her back into her back, hearing her faintly cry 'oot "but Jaime everyone...." Before plunging his verra awake and fully engorged cock into her.
"Dunno be worried lass, it willna take long"

It didn’t.

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"Tha gaol agam ort" he whispered to the ear his mouth was closes to, rubbed his face on her neck and shoulders which made her squirm, flail her hands at him and laugh.

He finally rose, feeling the chill of the day crash into his heated body that no longer had another heated body pined to it.

He was standing at the foot of the bed and looking at his wife, his heart, lying in bed prompt on her elbows.
Her hair an explosion of curls, an eruption of Medusa snakes, all pulling in different directions, all floating around her face, that held patchy reddened cheeks and chest by his stubbles brushing her. Did he mark her on purpose?

In the past, the future that is, after they married, he had made sure that they all kent she was his and so he could distance himself from her, but they dinna ken that now, do they?

Is that why he felt he needed to be with her always?

He kent that feeling, that longing, verra well.
He had it since he held her first; sobbing in front of the hearth.
But it was milder then now.

Or was it?
He would be able to go 'about his business (he was no sloth), he talked wi' other people, think of
the trade while they were in Paris and so on, but it was always there.
She was always there.

Simmering inside him, thoughts of her at hand.
He suddenly would crave to see her, as if it wasna only a few hours after he left her.
A sudden need to touch or be touched by her.

So was that the truth then?
He desired, needed her, just as before. It was only that then he could be free to do so and now-

He returned to his memories of Paris and their time there, all awhile dressing himself as she
watched him.
She laid completely naked on the bed, smiling at him and sheepishly blinking.

She loved sleeping late, but was now trying so hard to stay awake to have one more moment wi' him.

He remembered once he caught her sleeping while she sat, waiting for him and when he tried to lay
her down she cried "no I'm a wake I'm a wake" he laughed in his heart at the memory.

Aye, Paris, he returned to his original thought, tearing himself from looking at her so he could go
on the ground to pleat his kilt.

Where they truly started to be, an 'old married couple', as she called them.
A completely 'old married, trying to save a whole country, ordinary time traveler-English-wife and
a red-headed-laird- Scot warrior husband, couple' she would correct herself.

He remembered how he would see or hear something only to smirk under his breath at the thought
of her reaction to the spectacle.

He remembered how he would always return home and gratified those feelings he had for her
during the day.

Not just the bedding (though most times it was, he had to admit to that; wi' her consent of course)
Also a mere kiss would do, a smile, her look of opened mouth astonishment at what people "are
like at this time" and how her mouth opened again in outrage after he closed it the first time wi' his
finger and continued to tell her what the other man did,
Her reaction and inquires when he told her the going around during his day.

He found that his opinion on one matter or the other, would become clearer through her, even if he
did not agree with her comprehension of the situation or person, her reaction helped him deduce his
own.

He has grown so much with her, needed her to become the man he sought to be – whole with
himself or "a work in progress" as she would say.

Even the times he returned to her and she was already asleep (poor soul she did try to always wait
for him);
her being there was enough and he could always speak to faith, that seemed to ken when her father came home and would move under the sheer shift his wife wore or didn’t (she did try to wait for him properly to welcome him back).

"Madainn mhath to ye, Sassenach" he said, now, when he finished his dressing and was wearing his shirt and plaid. He was battening his waist coat and could feel his grin widening as he looked her over. He bent to plant a very small kiss on her lips "a verra bonny madainn mhath indeed".

He opened the door, peeped at the corridor to see if it was clear, all a while searched for a plausible excuse in his mind, if he was to be captured or seen and slid out.

Just as her door was about to close, he heard her whisper and the words trickled through the small crack

"I love you too"

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Chapter End Notes

I hope you understand now why I couldn't post until I finished the whole chapter giving them a chance to correct all the wrong impressions, to hash everything out of their system And to find their ways back to themselves and in each others loving scorching arms.
It has been five days since me and Jamie reconciled and patched all between us.
And not for the first time, I contemplated if great passion came with stormy weather emotions or
was it only that we were both such drama queens.

Ho well, no one ever declined to have their life compared to Claudette Colbert or Katharine
Hepburn's life on the screen.
And I did remember a thrilling and delightful squabble between two soldiers in my care, during the
war, fighting almost to blows over who do I most resemble: Maureen O'Hara or Hedy Lamar?

Needless to say, they both received a chaste kiss for even suggesting such generous affinity.

Jamie knew nothing of these women, to inquire whether or not he found such likeness in me.
But if it was affirmations that I sought after in such comparisons, I certainly received my share of
it, in the shape of my dear husband's acts these past few days.

Jamie, methodically and with not the slightest faux pas, prevailed over weather, people and even
stone walls to reach me every night and leave before I could even see one ray of shine sprout from
the dreary November clouds that held the darkness during the night.

I kept my door unlocked, of course and so every night I would retire to bed alone
and awake in the middle of the night to find myself curled up in his arms.
Spoon fashion if I slept on my side.
If I was to sleep on my back I would find his head lolled on my chest or stomach, arms around my
hips with a palm tucked somewhere, always placed strategically on one of his favorite parts of me.
If I was to fall asleep on my stomach I would awake to find him laying half atop of me, head on my
shoulders blade, his hips leaned on the curve of my back, his hand holding mine just at the line of
my sight.

How on earth was he able to do that without me waking, was beyond my comprehension.

I really must sleep like the dead if such maneuvers did not wake me.
Apparently his teasing of me was correct.
Or perhaps it was that it was so natural for me to have his presence there, that my body did not
register him as any disturbance that needed my attention.

Though the excuse I felt most comfortable to use when he would josh me on it- saying how thank
the Lord, I had him to keep me safe, for any foe would best me and have his way with me as he
liked, as long as he would attack at night – was to simply say in justification, that I was forged in
the fields of war, which were bombed day and night and therefor instructed me to sleep during
anything.
He didn’t seem convinced the slightest. I wasn’t the only one who lived on fields of fire.

Jamie was always gone in the morning, though; when I would reawaken to start my day.
I thought it ridicules to first await all to retire, then walk all the way from the stable attic, through
Alec's quarters, through ether, through castle, castle-guards, lookie-loo's and what not, to reach up
to my room always in the dead of night and dark, in order to hardly spent a few hours sleeping with
a comatose body and then to accomplish all the way back, before even the cocks awoke and castle life began.

But I tactfully had chosen not to mention that to my, now, over sensitive husband. And it's not as if I didn't enjoy it wholly. I wasn’t unconscious the whole time he accompanied my bed.

So that was how I found myself, at this moment, cracking my eyes open and finding his nose perched perfectly on my nipple, his face nudged my breast to the side so they could lay there, his hand across my midsection and his leg between mine.

I only stirred ever so lightly; I could not think any other man could ever notice. But he, of course, did. Blue water clear, orbs peeked from two tiny slits and a warm breath through a light smile woke my nipple to perk and stir at once, quite like the rest of me. This was also done in perfect accordance with our, now, new ritual.

He would come, cuddle me close, awaiting (patiently and politely I might add) for me to stir and find him in one of the positions I aforementioned and myself without a stitch on.

Two days of this (and finding my clothes crumpled and disheveled on the floor) I decided to ease the process and just ceased wearing anything as I went to sleep. My enterprise was acknowledged in the shape of him informing me that it was very good to know that I had some sense and was capable of learning. That in return awarded him to come the next night to find me in complete attire. Cloak, cowl, gloves, skirts, over skirts, bum roll and corset bound. He was silent after that.

At the moment though, he relinquished another warm breath, smiling so innocently that it should have taken me completely unexpectedly when he just slightly turned his head and began to fully suckle on my breast; of course it came as no surprise to me, as I was exhaustively familiar with the man involved. His right hand snaked its way through my skin to my rear and took a handful of my upper thigh. When he turned on his back I was so fastened to him, I was simply rolled atop of him. The leg that he placed, before, between mine, was now fulfilling its duty and beginning to nudge my legs apart.

This was also done every night so skillfully, I had to wonder whether as he entered my chamber, did he just stand there watching me and planning it all in details?

Every night, once he sensed my conscious state, he would commence with the main event, sometimes as now, with no preliminaries. Once done, I would fall back asleep tangled with him and by first light he would be gone.

These were our only moments together. The castle has been overrun with new arrivals. The grounds filled from inch to inch, with families, tenants and friends to the clan. The inside of the castle was no better. There would always be people eating in the kitchen, talking in the corridors, drinking in every corner with old friends who they have not seen for quite a while. The more respectable families occupied every spare room that could even be remotely considered appropriate to be inhabited.
And as with every healthy Scottish family, on came the bairns, which surrounded us by the dozens.

Which also meant that with all the coming and goings from my surgery, I was made to feel as if I was living inside a constantly working, revolving door.

I enjoyed the noise, the clutter and the warmth all these smiling, pure, young souls brought with them.
But children as children would be; would mention all to their parents if they even noticed a holding of hands between their grown-up counterparts.
Jamie could not even smile at me during the day without opening the flood gates to a million questions from small giggling children.

Not to mention even showing himself in my surgery. For that led to:
"Why was he here?"
"Was he injured?... He didn’t look injured…. If he was injured could they see the sore?"
"What did he need if he wasn’t hurt?
"Where did he come from?"

And once horses were mentioned-

Well, Colum did have the reputation of grooming the finest Scotland had to offer in terms of steeds.
And Jamie was tugged away, willing or not, by screaming children dying to 'see the pretty horsey, see the pretty horsey' and the new colts.

And then, there were Luke and Isabella.
I fought fiercely with Colum and Dougal to be allowed to see her as much as could be possible.
Her health worsened.
She had the smallest cut, none of us noticed, on her head, covered by her hairs and probably accrued when she would tumble out of bed, on her way to her frequent visits to the privy in the middle of the night.

The wound did not heal and went unnoticed until it began festering and oozing.

Luke was beside himself, I could hardly make him eat or drink anything, which the chambermaid informed me he only did when I came and forced him.

He blamed himself for not taking better heed of her.
"I have put her in harm's way" he cried in front of me, once, after she had an exceptionally bad night, again and was fevering.
I was called urgently the next day.

I stroked his back as he sat at the dining table which was filled with untouched foods and drink.

"I ha' betrayed his memory, Claire. He would look down in such disappointed at me from the heavens" he said in such anguish.
"She canna die. She is all I ha' left o' him Claire." he shivered.
"When she smiles and she is weel, I ken he looks from above at us happy. For how can one feel any differently seeing his love mended?"
He quivered again and looked up at me.
"When there are days she can walk outside and talk. We talk and laugh at remembrance of him"
He pleaded with me to understand
"Claire, I pray ye may ne'er lose someone and ha' no other soul to feel the pain and sorrow o' his lost wi' ye. There is no greater pain!"

Tears were running from my face as well.

"If ye ha' but one more person to share the burden wi', then some of the time ye can laugh and cherish your memories of him. But if ye are alone, God, Claire if ye are alone wi' that. Ev'ry memory of him weighs ye down, every sight o' his face in your mind drowns ye in such sorrow ye are left wi' nothing but-

he broke down completely at that, half turned and buried his face in my palms.
"She and ye are my only connection to life Claire, I have no other here.
My family his scattered, my brother deid I … I am.. a.. all alone. Please I beg ye, Claire, save her". He clutched my hands that held his face harder, dragging me into the ground with him.
I could feel every tear that was ripped from his heart and escaped through his eyes.
My heart broke and not only for him.

In another life, in another time line, it would have been me, holding memories and sights of a man no one around me would ever know.
A man that would have died two hundred years before, in a battle those around me would only read in books.
I clutched Luke's back with one arm, praying to be able to take such distress from another.

We must have been some sight to look at, for a second later, Angus left the room unable to be confronted with such sadness and helplessness.

Jamie was pacing up and down the court yard, it was one of the mornings Claire would leave to visit Isabella and…. Luke.
This time, it was planned as the last time she would go to them before the gathering, before they would leave wi' the rent party.

Last time wasna planed though.
She was only meant to see him the once more, now. Only a small boy, Isabella kin nay doubt, appeared at the castle, two days past, beseeching her arrival to come to Isabella's aid urgently. Colum couldna look at the boy's distressed face and refuse.

She cried in his arms when she returned that night, when he came to her, unable to think what else she could do for the lass.
Telling him how Luke could not be consulted or even carry the slightest bit of hope anymore.

She broke down completely as they sat on the bed and she held him tight, saying to him, that he was her connection to life and if he ever left her she would kill him.
"I'll hunt you down and kill you" she said face buried in his chest, her arms fastened around his waist.
"You will?" he smiled to the top of her head, while he caressed her curls, feeling truly sorry for the situation and the poor souls involved, but flattered at the fieriness her words were spoken at, daring him to even try her.
She distanced herself ever so lightly, only enough to look into his eyes with all seriousness. "Of course" she said deeply shaken that he would ever think otherwise. "Be it two hundred years or two million miles, I would always come to you James Fraser, I would always find you, don't you ever forget it!"

He did forget in that moment, but luckily only how one should breath.

It was she that broke their stare, returning to the comfort of his embrace. "To be alone like that, it's... It's heartbreaking Jamie. He gave up all connection to everything and everyone in his life to be with her and for her to be taken now and as such... no I can't... I can't think of that and think that there would be a worthy God that would allow for this to happen... it's... it's so unfair" she failed to find a harsher word than that and just carried on crying hard for the man and his good sister's fate. "His kind and has done nothing bad to anyone for him.." she couldn't speak nay more, only laid in his arms crying, until he was forced to leave when the sun began to rise.

She felt guilty, she said, that she was offered great health and prosperity, a great love that broke all of nature's rules so they could find each other and then a second bend in reality so that they could stay together, all awhile others suffered so.

She always wanted to mend all that ached and always found herself lacking, as any human would. He couldn't begrudge her that, couldn't think it was to do with loving another when she went to them. No, not for her- For Luke it was love, for her compassion.

But still that dinna stop him from always claiming to Alec he needed to walk a moment and will quickly return, while he would stand and wait 'till she and her shadow arrived back in the castle.

It wasna all about jealousy, weel not anymore. She would be upset and of need of his strength when she'd return.

Last time, she came wi' Angus. When Jamie helped her off her horse, for he was 'by chance around' as he informed Angus, she had tears in her eyes and she didn't care for secrets or camouflage, she just fall into his embrace and broke completely. When she calmed a bit, she simply told Angus that at such times, she missed her husband so and needed him to comfort her so badly, she lost all sense and fall on the nearest body. She even asked for Jamie's forgiveness for her outrages behavior.

Apparently whatever transpired at Luke's resident fortified her words such, that it was not thought so odd and suspicious in Angus's eyes. Of course Angus was Angus so-.

He kept holding tight to the elbow he grasped when she dismounted, almost feeling his heart breaking in needing to finally let her go and watch her and Angus disappear into the castle. As she glanced back to him, one last time, tears still in her eyes.

He felt the ache of it again, now, at his chest, so he reminded himself of a much pleasanter moment between them.

The night after they resolved all maters between them. They sat on the bed, both completely naked, still warm from their earlier activities.

It was the first night he stole away to see her, after they reconciled, so they both had ample vitality
to stay up all night with each other, not wanting to forgo of a second they could share together.

He had a deck of cards in his sporran from playing and trumping Gordy and Willie, at an earlier card game.
He really shouldna cheat against poor, baoghalta, really bad at cards, lads so.
It was too damn easy.

When they finished their playing with each other and she left to the privy, she returned to stumble on the thing- where he throw it; undressing himself as quickly as possible to already be inside her- she laughed and said she always wanted him to teach her.

So there they were on the bed, as he was trying to teach her how to play Pharo, which was the game she saw him play while they were in Paris, when he didn’t play and bested Mr. Duvernay at chest that is.
Where oddly enough that was where he learned the game in the first place; during his early studies in France.

It was to his delight when he returned to Scotland and discovered (for the French ban against it) that it was just as popular here, only called under the different name: Pharaoh.
Why, he made a small fortune those days in taverns he snuck to, or playing against the Lallybroch tenants, that is until his father found out and 'banned' him.

He liked the game, it was quick, each round only took about five to ten minutes so he could double his wager in a matter of minutes, when it was played honest (which he mostly did), the odds for a player to win were the best out of all the gambling games and it was SO easy to learn.

For him that is, judging from Claire's protruding tongue, when she tried to understand him and her hateful looks, when she failed horribly to do so, it apparently wasn’t.
Claire has it seems was a verra, verra bad card player, worst than Gordy and Willie and he thought them to be the worst he ever saw.

Which was a fact he was going to his grave with than share wi’ his lovely wife, To be sure.

So they moved on to loo, but that only strengthen his first assumption.
If such a thing was possible, she was worst at that then at Pharaoh!

She was frowning at the five cards (he played the other four hands), he dealt her, looking as if they deeply insulted her for being what they were and said
"Wait, I don't understand. What do I do again when I have this one and that one, is that called I 'lom' you?"
"Ye are showing me all your cards again Sassenach" he replied averting his gaze, yet again, as to not see them "and it is 'loed'.
'Lom' is naked in the Gàidhlig" he gave a pleased side-peek at her form.

"O right, sorry" she said gathering her cards back to her bare chest, as if he didn’t already count the cards and knew quite weel what she held.
"Only I keep losing" she tried to defend herself.
"Because ye keep showing me all your cards mo chridhe"
"Because apparently I keep forgetting the rules!" she cried out "I mean it looks a little like poker, but I'm much better at poker. The yanks taught it to me during the war and I end up winning a few rounds or hands whatever their called, but we have been playing for more then two hours and I
keep losing every time!!!

"What's poker?" he queried, actually much interested in that future word, if it meant a new card game he could learn and win at.

"Never mind" she waved her hand dismissing the matter, but doing so with the hand that held her cards, exposing them once again for all to see.

He rubbed the palm of his hand on his face surrendering.

"So what do I do again?" she asked, now spreading all her cards on the bed, to make sure that if he missed even one during the first dozen showings, he could complete his knowledge. He rolled his eyes to the heavens, wondering was she naked when she played with those soldiers, for he couldna think of any other way she could possibly win at anything otherwise.

"Well fine, show me yours than, so it will be fair" she said in answer to his exasperation.

"No" he protested.

"Why not?" she asked protesting back.

"That would be cheating" he said, protecting all four hands in his possession. With her 'dazzling' skills he would actually be able to win, even if she did see all his cards, but the mere thought went against every one of his competitive bones.

"But you saw... hold on... James Fraser are you cheating your own wife?"

"Never in life" he said in a mock scandalous tone.

"I meant at cards" she replied piqued.

"WeelIll" he couldna stop the grin from spreading.

"James Alexander Malcom Makenzie Fraser" she glared her eyes at him.

"Weel ye make it impossible no to cheat Sassenach" he told the honest, obvious truth.

"Why Mr. McTavish!" she scolded him in mock uproar.

"Beside half the time I dunno need to! Ye keep showing me ALL your cards!!!"

"Well it's because you said I needed three of those and I only have two. But that one looks pretty close to that one. Can't I just use that instead?" she showed him the spade and the club, offering a solution, she obviously considered as completely logical in her mind's eyes, which were looking at him saying 'why not?' and adding 'I won't tell anyone'.

"Sassenach -" he started saying but could not find the proper words to answer the absurdity.

"Well what am I supposed to do then?" she said to his silence, dropping the cards on the bed, giving up and crossing her arms to her bare bosom. It made her breasts rest on her arms, looking very round and plump.

Aye that's how she won wi' them 'yanks' or what she called them.

He looked at her amused, then took two of her cards and said "Discard of these, replenish those from the undealt stock with-" he shuffled the cards 'till he found the right ones "aye, with those" He handed her the new cards

"Throw this one away" he picked another from her stack.

"Take that one instead" he handed her one from his five cards.

"Then lay them all on the bed for all to see and then... Weel then Sassenach, ye should Kiss your husband"

"Why?" she asked suspiciously, looking at the spread of Ace, King, Queen, Jack, ten and nine he arranged for her.

"Because ye just won for the first time and he lost for the first time, satisfied?"

"No" she said smiling "but you will be" she leaned forward to him, putting her palms to engulf his
"Thank you for my win Jamie" she said skimming her lips across his laid, naked form.
"Weel, m..y pleasur..e" Jamie strained to let the words out, as her head lowered itself on his body
"Ho Lord, it's my pleasure" he cried out when her mouth was on his-

"Mr. Fraser… Sorry, Mr. MacTavish" said a shy, squeaky voice at his back, bringing him back from that sweet, sweet, enjoyable memory.

Ho, may the lord save him, he forgot to stay 'oot o' sight.
'Oot from the open space of the yard where her silly little friends could see him and go round to fetch her.

God's eyes.
He took in a sharp breath.
If Claire was to come before he would dispose of the lass-
"Fuck" he said his wife's favored curse, under his breath, thinking how he'll probably hear it a lot if he dinna resolve and disarm the situation hastily.

Claire wasna the jealous wife, but something with this lass dinna agree wi' his wife the slightest.

"Miss Mackenzie" Jamie turned and smiled politely to her.
He could swear he heard giggles behind the wagon that stood nearby them.

Christ, she was a child, how could he e'er kiss the lass and regard her body as a woman's?
He felt deeply ashamed of himself.

"Mr. MacTavish" she said again nodding slightly, then she dared to look up at him, straight to him and seemed a lot daring then last he saw her.
A Dhia, she willna offer herself to him again, will she? Out in public, here?
She was at least fully dressed this time, but still he recognized the look of her, as it was before, that day in his secret place.

Then as now, there was something different in her eyes and demeanor, as if her shyness had retreated to make room for a much determined, baggage beast instead.
Perhaps his lack of availability to her, made her desperate.
And when desperate... Weel, people turn to nay such savored, decent, roads, when desperate.

This wasna good. But his heid drew blank at what to do or say.
Luckily or nay, depending on one's point o' view, the lass dinna seem to need him to speak or act the slightest.

"I was only wondering ye ken?" she inched closer to him and another giggle came from behind the wagon.
He simply nodded for her to continue, remembering at the last moment to smile at the lass, so as to nay scare her with the annoyance he felt filling his eyes and body, regarding this whole spectacle and his forced display in it.

"'Obout the Gathering, ye ken?" she tilted her heid, playing coy wi' him.
Another nod and a slight quiver to his lips, what could she possibly want?
"I heard ye to be verra good at the dancing and such-"

There were sounds of horses coming behind him and he turned straightaway, recognized the riders and turned swiftly back to her to say
"Ye should go lass, I must tend to the horses arriving, I'll speak to ye again soon"

"Do ye promise, Jamie?" she cried out, standing her ground as he tried to scurry her away.

Claire was coming closer, nay doubt she has already spotted Laoghaire, he needed the lass 'oot and away.
"Aye fine, fine, ye have my word"

****

When Claire dismounted this time, again wi' his help, for he was, again, 'just 'round for a stroll, saw them coming and thought he best take the horses back to Alec',
Or so he explained to Rupert, which dinna seem to care any more than Angus did, she dinna care or seemed the slightest disturbed by Laoghaire and her presence.
She even seemed happy over something, almost giddy.

The moment Rupert turned for a second, she whispered in his ear.
"Come to me as soon as you can my love" and skimmed her lips to his cheek, discreetly and hastily.

This time, as they were entering the castle, she turned wi' a verra inviting smile to him and nay tears, before disappearing through the door at the top of the steps.

"Right" he examined himself "Now what can I break that could get me to her?"
THE GATHERING 2

Chapter Summary

You didn't really think I would leave you with nothing for the holiday now did you???:)

I hope that when you read it, you will realize why it took so long (as you see it is loooonnggg- I told you I worked hard)
this was not planned as such especially cause a lot of this stuff was already written and planned before, but it did come out a little Christmasy, so i pushed it all the way.
So-
to all that are still cleaning and cooking for tonight and want a break,
to those who want to read something before sleep after returning from the festivity or to those who want to read something with the morning tea tomorrow under the tree
I hope you will consider this as good company and think of it as a gift from me to you

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

THE GATHERING 2:

****

Jamie was slammed into Claire chamber's door.
He staggered and tried to regain his balance, but she pressed her whole body on his, pressing him back to the door and taking his mouth quite ferociously.

"Claire someone could seeeeee" she was biting and pulling his lower lip.
"Don’t care" she answered her voice muffled, for her lips was devouring his again, but he could also feel her hand by his heid as she fiddled with the latch in order to open her door.

When it finally opened they almost fell to the floor.
Claire kicked the door behind her, as she saw him do many times.
Once it was closed though, it was he who pressed her to the door.

"How much time do we have?" she asked when he finally relinquished her mouth to go down to her neck.
"Mmm?" his voice was now muffled in her skin.
"How long do we have before you have to go?" she said a little breathless and panting "what did you tell them anyway, to make old Alec release you from your servitude?"

Jamie lifted her bodily, still in a standing position, turning and marching with her to the bed.
"Rash" he said as he flung her on the mattress.
"Rash?" she asked, rising from the bed to a sitting position to help him undress.
He was unbuttoning his waist coat, while she was removing his dirk and belt. Thank the Lord he wore no cravat or jabot while working the horses. He half turned intending to throw the coat aside, just as she guided her hands to pull his shirt from his plaid and then placing her fingers under it, touching his skin, guiding his shirt up and away from his body. He stood eyes closed, feeling her hands skim and glide his shirt up and away, while she ran her lips over stomach, chest, neck—every inch o’ him that now stood bare.

He lifted his hands and when he remained shirtless, he wasn’t willing to turn or even half turn again to discard of his waist coat and shirt. Claire was now biting his skin so he just dropped the damn clothes by his foot.

He finally did open his eyes and began pulling the strings that corseted her bodice. His fingers encountered the most irritating, inappropriate, badly timed knot in it and he was using his teeth to try and pry it open. Thinking frustratedly, that every moment it would take him to untie it, will be one less moment he would ha’ to enjoy more pleasurable and satisfying things.

She willna be allowed to wear anything anymore but a shift, he decided. "Told Alec I ha’ verra bad hives on a very tender part that needs tending straight away" he said through the side of his mouth trying to pull the cursed thing open.

She smacked him a way and applied her thin agile fingers to it, as he watched with his hands hovering ready to continue wi’ the undressing himself once the bloody thing will open. "And he let you go with only a mere case of a hives? I find it hard to believe" she said "Haaannn" he made a Scottish sound to indicate his displeasure with the questioning and her insufficient hurriedness at untying the obviously demonic tie. "’Tis nay the rush, but where it is, Sassenach… Ouch, give me that" he said shooing her hands a way, just as she almost got the better of the knot and replacing her hands with his.

The first one to ever touch her naked skin would be him and no one else, not even her. "And what does that mean?" she asked lifting her hands in surrender and moving out of his way. The lass does take direction weel. ’Tis nay a frequent occasion but when she does, she does it verra weel, Jamie looked pleasingly at how adorable she looked doing so.

"Wait! You don’t mean?!” her eyes popped open "No surely you didn’t tell him that.. that… you know" she inclined her heid down to signal the location.

"Of course I did" he said joyfully, as he already managed to remove bodice, undersleeves, bum roll, which he removed by lifting the front of all her skirts and untying it, thank the Lord for small mercies, wi’ no further hindrance. He was now, finally seeing petticoat.

"No man will ever risk another man's good parts" he said opening his eyes in bliss and satisfaction at her now exposed breasts.
He took one hand to them as the other guided her by the nape to lie on the bed. Now came the difficult decision; should he start handling wi' the skirts removal or just take her as such.

"Offered to show it to him to get his advice, if he felt I souldna go to the healer for mending, made a verra agonizing face and everything" he said

Skirts were now being stripped off, as she raised her sweet bum to allow them to skid from her body.

"Used all your disgusting little words that ye used, when ye so 'generously' described such a growth to me, from that time ye said ye saw that man at L'Hopital des Anges for such a matter. Never in life did I think that could e'er come useful, except for making me mad and threaten to kill the man"

Jamie stood with his knees on the bed between her legs, nudging them apart and surveying the landscape he was about to stroll on and plotting where to go first.

"Nice to know you actually listen" she grinned "But what would you have done if he would have agreed to have a look?" she asked amused and probably flattered at his willingness to sacrifice his good name and dignity only to bed her. She bloody hell should be!!

Christ, the other way was to break his whole arm, for a mere finger wouldna do in Alec's eyes. Not that he wouldna ha' broken it to come to her when she is in such moods, only he wanted to be all put right to thoroughly enjoy it and her at such a state.

"Sassenach I ha' failed to see, even once, a man look at another one's part, even if they stood side by side pissing in the field. If one has no such taste for my kind, I doubt my part and an inflamed one at that, would be of much interest or desire for someone to ogle at, especially not by dear tender-hearted Old Alec" he ended with a grin.

"Well I don’t know if I'm partial or not, but I’m kind of fond of yours, inflamed or otherwise" she laughed teasingly. "Good" he said smirking as he lowered himself to her "tis of great consequence for the next part". He lifted his kilt and began the event he sacrificed his reputation and honor, in Alec's eye and who he would probably share it wi', in order to participate at.

"Aaaa that's nice" he sighed as he glided into her. He began rocking himself. "Aaaa, verra nice indeed" he said closing his eyes and relishing the sensation "I thought I'd ha' to wait 'till tonight to feel this nice wi' ye. Mmmm, I'm varra glad to be 'rong"

She sniggered at his sighing and gratifications sounds. He ignored her. "This feels verra nice indeed" he said striving to go deeper, keeping the pace slow and controlled in order to savor the moment and in order to feel her fully.

"Enjoying yourself are you?" he heard her now fully laughing at him.
She dinna get much chances not to be the lead vocalist during their joinings.

He still dinna care. Let her ha' her fun, he was surely having his at the moment.

To be able to have the vigor and stamina to properly serve his wife and himself and nay be drained from the day's labor or from all the things he had to do in order to reach her at night and all the thoughts in the back of his mind of needing to return to the freezing accursed hole he called his quarter these days.

"Aye, I am" he answered her question ardently, slowing himself even further to feel every second of pure wakefulness.
A few more slow blissful movement such as those and he found it in himself to care and to be able to ask-
so he opened his eyes and looked down at her, curious
"Aren’t ye?"
"Mmmm" she made a pleasurable sound, while biting her lower lips and smiling from ear to ear. All done verra dramatically, for his benefit and a bit to josh him for his performance. But he could tell she was happy and enjoying herself also.

"And ye? I'm always willing. But tell me my fair lady, why was I bestowed the pleasure of your company at this moment?" he asked, bending his head to bite the tip of her nose lightly, then rising back on his arms and continuing with slow, deep strokes into her.

"Luke" she said, between now genuine sounds of delight.
"What?!!" he said and ceased his rocking.

"No silly" she said, pushing him to start again by clapping his buttocks and pulling him to her
"Explain woman" he said in serious tones but began his movements again. He could be just as mad at her after the act as he would be now, only in one path he could be making love to his wife and then scolding her and on the other path he could just be scolding her.

Any man wi' half his wit 'obout him would ken the right choice here.

"Luke and Isabella" she said smiling at the absurdity she assumed his mind conjured up.
"Further explain woman" he said, but now could free half himself to continue genuinely enjoying himself wi' the pleasures his wife's body held for him.

No betraying or unchaste routes could involve Luke and his good-sister.

"She's getting better Jamie, so much better" Claire said beaming "The gash is almost sealed, the nutrients must have finally been assimilated properly in her system, to have her body be able to absorb and equalize her glucose levels. Which means her metabolism will be working; her white cells count would raise and fight all infections. Lord I should have known homeopathists herbs would take longer to come to affect ... mmmm, that does feel nice".

She stopped saying things that dinna make the slightest sense to him, although he did manage to understand 'she's getting better'.

She was now absorbed in the feeling of him inside her and his maneuvers. And it was always good to be appreciated.
"Very nice indeed" she said slithering her other hand into his kilt and applying it to his other cheek.
"And now I'm free" she added stretching her upper body and arching herself to him.
"Free?" he inquired, happy that she moved on to something he might be able to comprehend and that she did so before the mention of oozing and festering things came up.

It would ha dampen the pleasure of the situation. It wouldna have stopped the proceedings, but it would have certainly crack a chink in his pleasure. For the oddest reason it wouldna bother hers, though.

"Free to go and marry the man I love, not fearing to come back during a friend's mourning period and lost. Free to leave with nothing weighing on my heart and mind regarding what I could have or should have done differently or better" she rose to him and kissed him lightly before arching herself again and yielding to him completely.
"And free from feeling as the most awful, selfish person, for leaving such a man in a state of need and with no other proper medical help"

she moved her hand to his nape grasping him and bringing him to her mouth, kissing him passionately and circling her fingers through his locks applying rough and soft pressure together. He felt his whole body blaze wi' goose flesh and he purred as a big cat. He raised himself up on his hands doubling his efforts, tilting his head further back into her palm.

Feeling the hard stiffness between his legs increasing more and more and in complete contrast to his head feeling lighter and ethereal under her palm's strong caresses.

"Free" she whispered and her sweet, light, voice felt as it was floating into his ears, just as the both reached their end, one second apart from each other.

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"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ" I screamed as I was awaken so crudely from sleep.

"Sshh" a big paw like palm with light ruddy-copper fuzz on it, came from the back of me and placed itself on my mouth "Ye'll wake the whole castle. Be quiet"

"Christ Jamie" I exclaimed "Even doctors, considerately, warm their hands in their armpits before touching their patients and they're not touching them in their private part! Well not usually"
I added, suddenly remembering in the most oddest of memorial flashbacks, that I had… no will have… a gynecologist appointment back in the future to check on my worrisome fertility, which I didn’t cancel.
Well that conundrum was solved I mused. 'Beauchamp, the way your mind works, dear Lord' I scolded myself.

"Weel 'tis cold outside! D'ye have no sympathy for a poor, canny gawk, trudging around the ether trying to come to his wife's side?" he added deeply affronted "I would think I should be rewarded for such efforts and nay kicked and screamed at. Beside" he added starting to wiggle his naked body closer to mine "I came, now, 'tis your part to warm me. Come here to me, my Sassenach, take
care o' your cold, lonely husband" he wrapped himself bodily to me, arched behind me, rested his very frozen, cringe arousing, hand between my thighs and his head on my shoulder blade.

"What did you have in mind?" I asked feeling sympathy and guilt for my covered, warm state, as I took my hand to the back of me placing it between us.

"Sleep" he determined, removing the limb, kissing it and returning it back to its owner "I canna do a thing else" he added cracking a deep yawn "I'm so tired, I canna even move. Old Alec and Colum ha' been working everyone to clean and shine stables, horses, pile up enough hay for those here and the more coming. So amongst, hauling, dragging, chopping, two foals being birthed today" he yawned again.
"And after what ye did to my parts today and Alec is doing to all my other parts"
"Me?" I indignantly objected.
"Nothing in me can rise, stand up straight or perform anything for yours or even my pleasure" he concluded.

"So why did you come?" I asked trying to defense myself "You could have stayed in your warm, cozy bed for one night"
"I missed ye" he answered simply, as if it was the most obvious thing "But Sassenach?" he added.
"Yes?"
"We willna be sleeping every night only this one" he professed in a tone that made sure I understood this was not to be the status quo in our rendezvous.
"Oh" I said "How encouraging to know, I was worried there for a second" I added smiling to my pillow.

"Ouch, I'm still cold" he complained frustrated "I need ye Sassenach, turn over"
Jamie rolled to his other side and stretched his neck several times signaling me my next appointed step.

I rolled to my other side also, to face him or to face his back to be exact, laying my body tight to his and placing my chin just below his shoulder blades where there was the smallest nook between muscles at Jamie's back, which also meant my lips rested squarely on the connection of nape to shoulder on his person.

He made a Scottish noise and again I knew my agreed upon move.
I brought my left hand around his hip placing my palm just above the bush of red-auburn mane between his legs.

Jamie had the smallest, softest trail of short delicate hairs that led to his umbilicus.
He discovered that he liked me caressing them gently. Not to tickle, no, never to tickle, but stroking them was most welcomed; it relaxed him.

It also meant that if he was ready to start something regarding other more laboring actions I would be the first to know of it, or so I was informed and then shown a close personal demonstration.

This time though two seconds after such maneuvers and I could hear the softest wheezing coming from him.

"Ho dear lad, we must make sure to double your vitamin c intake so you wouldn't catch an ague. Hate for you to miss your own weeding"
I said and ran my nail ever so lightly on his skin just below his navel.
I felt the skin on his neck twitch lightly and knew what it meant.
I propped myself on my right elbow, looked at his face and made the same movement with my fingers again.
And there it was, good as money in the bank, Jamie's sweet, sleepy smile.

A small stretch of his lips and his big-stern- Viking warrior features were transformed to the most lovely- innocent- child like- sweet- endearing- enthralling man expression I have ever seen, letting me know he was happy and content.
And with the next tic it would be gone, leaving me with the memory.

I could feel a rush of pure love go through me every time I saw that smile; now was no exception.

"Ho, may the Lord help me, how I love you" I whispered so vehemently.

My big red-head worrier extorted a small snore.

"How did you do it James Fraser" I asked but expected no answer "How?"

I have loved frank in every way I thought possible at the time, but I could be apart from him during the war.
It was hard, I had my fair share of emotional and physical breakdowns, where I craved him so much and couldn't stand the separation no longer.
But it would be gone by morning and I could go with a clean mind and joy to return to the calling and vocation I found during the war.
Fighting, helping in what I thought was the rightest war in history and healing.

But Jamie -
Jamie seeped into my being, penetrated every cell in my body, until he was vital to my survival as food and air.
To be apart from him was -
An unbearable thought surely to never be actualized.

To love Frank was a choice and at the time I made it gladly and with a clear mind.
But to love Jamie was no choice it was a fact.

It never asked me my preference or my approval on the matter, it simply washed over me, surrounded me, entered and lived inside of me.

With Frank that love could become caring, companion, friendship- if ever our paths would cross again.

For I was told many times that high-flamed loves do not last.
They either extinguish completely and the two lovers part, mostly in a vicious explosion that matched their fiery feelings to one another, or it would become a comfortable, slow-burning bond of two alliances, that care and love for one another without all the fireworks.

With Jamie the feelings were too passionate and uncontrollable to ever be less than what we were. For better or worst we burned for each other, we fought as we made love, ardently and with every piece of ourselves.
We talked and yelled, played and worked always from the core of our being.
It always burned high.
The soft, quiet, gentle part of our relationship was apparent and well established, but it also sprang from those soaring flames.
Which seem to burn taller and deeper the more we knew of each other and lived with one another.
Like a sweet smile that when revealed, each time and from the first, almost forced me to ravish him with lust, desire and most of all love; everything with Jamie was lived as I was experiencing it for the first time.

Whatever lay between us could not be mistaken for anything but a lovers bond, never only a friend, never only a mere companion.

As I said, from the start, we couldn't and will never, be able to be less than what we were.

Yes, Loving frank was a choice I made; loving Jamie was a fact intertwined with my life.

I was not asked, 
I fought against it, 
I resisted as much and as long as I could, 
And when I was given a choice, by him, to go back to my time, I tried to leave it behind-

"How did you do it?" I questioned again, but didn't really seem to mind the answer. 
My chin and lips returned to their assigned places and his sleep joined mine in dreams.

"Good night my one true love" I mumbled just before slipping out of consciousness and wasn't sure but thought I could feel another twitch to his lips.

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"Woooff I hate sunrises" she exclaimed firmly.

"'Tis nay sunrise Sassenach, 'tis dawn, twilight dawn to be exact. 
If it be sunrise I couldna be here wi' ye, now could I? I'd be needing to be back to the stables" 
Jamie illuminated his wife.

"Aaarrrr" she glared at his clarification "I don't care, whatever it is I hate it!!" she carried on declaring. 
"I don't understand why people excite themselves to see it" 
His dear wife clutched the covers and lifted them way above her head.

She hated to be awoken so early in the morning and even more so, to have the first crack of dawn hit her face so mercilessly right between the eyes.

"I mean it comes every day; we understand how it works already!!! Can't the bloody thing or the sun come a bit late at times!!! 
I myself will not hold it against them, I assure you!!!" 
She cried out, her voice muffled under the coverlet.

"Sassenach" Jamie was trying to yank down the shrouds, she was holding so tight to her face.

"Besides" she said, emerging from her screen and trying another tactic on him. 
"Every sunrise, at the moment, means you are taken away from me" she said, turning to her side to face him and away from the window.
She buried her face into his naked chest, replacing the bedspread with his body.
He groaned when her lips caressed his nipple, but dinna falter from his mark.

"S...sa...Sassenach " he clasped her upper arms, to distance her just enough to compel her to stare into his eyes, which he adjusted to hold a disciplining look and cocked his eyebrow at her.

"Fine" she rolled her eyes giving in.
"I understand Jamie, I'll do it, stop...stop 'fashing and fretting forbye" she said, trying to imitate a Scottish phrase, using either his or Mrs. Fitz's voice while doing so, he couldna tell. She did sound verra funny, but he wouldna return her grin at her witty retort.

He had only a few more moments before he had to go and this must be made clear.

"Then say it Claire, repeat my words to me, so I Ken you heard them A L L"

"Wooofff" she exasperated again "fine, fine".
She sighed submissively and recited his speak.

"Once on the road with the rent party, I will not distance myself from you!
I will not disappear without making sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that you 'ken' exactly where I am. At all times, with no exception!!!
I will not speak to strangers, for I am not of this time and I do not fully know how my words will be interpreted by Scots that dislike strangers that are Sassenachs, especially at this point in history!
I will not see some 'bonny' plant and run off without you, in order to pick it"

"Not even if said plant could heal the dead" she added swiftly when she saw his mouth open to further clarify that point.
When it came to the healing, his wife could always be trusted to forget herself.

"I will wait until you could come with me!!!" she opened her eyes wide, as he did when he said it to her and pointed her finger to his face, again just as he did to her.

"I will…" she desisted wi' the declaim and folded her arms in protest "Haamm ...you do know I was doing quite well without you, before, I mean?"
She lifted her eyebrows testing his memory.
"Managed to get myself not killed or mishandled all by my lonesome"
She smiled gloating
"Even more than that, I got YOU to fall in love with me"
She leaned to him and kissed the spot between shoulder and neck
"Got YOU to marry me"
She flicked her tongue at the hollow of his throat and then very lightly tasted him.
"Got YOU to get me pregnant"
She inhaled his morning musk into her
"Twice"
He could feel her lips spread into a smile on his skin.

'Don't give in, don't give in, don't give in, don't give in, don't give in, don't give in'.
Jamie held tight to the belief, that if he would say it enough times, other parts of him willna hear her morning call and awaken wanting to join the proceedings.

He frowned disapprovingly and tightened his clasp.

"Fine, fine" Claire yielded.
"I will not take further risk at anything changing, so any step I take will be discussed at length between the two of us. To be agreed upon by both parties before ANY further steps would be taken" she proceeded to quote him back to himself in a monotony chant for another minute or so.

"Verra good" he said when the address was done "Ye might actually make for a proper wife someday"
Now he was willing to return her grin to her and retort wi' some wit o' his own.
While his wife on her end, took his first looks and was cocking her eyebrow at him, frowning and glaring

He kissed that frowned, wrinkled, nose he loved so much and was heavily rising to return to his lonely hole in the ground, that dinna hold neither smell, warmth or sight of her.

He was really starting to dislike sunrises as well.

He wore breeks and a shirt this time, when he came to her, in order to save the five minutes it took to pleat his kilt and put it on, so he could spend a few more precious moments still entangled in her.

"You think I can't ?" she asked, probably thinking his deep sigh came from his disbelieve in her ability and not for how his body always seemed to weigh double his size when he was forced to put distance between them.

"You'll see" she said "I'm a great communicator"
"A what?" he frowned, finishing to dress.
"Someone how is able to transfer the information required quite skillfully" she replied. He snorted.
"Ye!?? Half the time I dinna Ken what ye're saying and I've been marriet to ye for almost three years"

"Watch yourself James Fraser, the wedding didn't happen YET, now did it?" she said, using her trump card.
How was the clot-heid that said the lady dinna Ken how to play?

"I'll show you!" she said rising to her feet as well, shivering from the cold and saying "Right! Now I am walking to the hearth to light the fire" and so she did.
"I am lifting the flint, hoping it will actually ignite in the first hundred tries and not the three hundred"

 Jamie crossed his arms looking amusingly at the narrated story and play before him.

"Please tell me if there are only enough peats for a small fire, we wouldn't want me to burn the whole place down, now would we?" she said; hand on her chest in mock fright.
"Never mind" she waved her hand dismissing the matter when he didn't reply.

"Now, I am doing this" she emphasized her words as if speaking to a soft in the heid patient "for I intend to have a quick wash before my day starts and maybe have some tea... Which reminds me, are there some leafs left in the drawer of the dresser behind you?"

 Jamie poked at it and handed her the folded, fragrant kerchief she always kept such thing at.

"Ho dear!!!" she said stunned "Don't you want to smell it, to know which kind I'm having?" she asked sarcastically.
"I mean how could I ever be safe if you wouldn't know if I'm having Jasmine or Camellia
Sinesis?"

"I get your meaning Sassenach" Jamie soured his face

"OoooH no Mr. Fraser I'm not done yet" she came closer to him
"We didn't even reach the part where I tell ye what I will wear today. Will I wear boned bodice or a lacy one…"
"Sassenach"
She carried on ignoring him.
"Then you simply must know how many steps I will take to reach my surgery...mmmmm" she put a finger on her lip musing "Now I can't tell you what will happen when I get there, that of all things, did change a bit for I do spend more time there, now that I am not planning my escape this time, so I tend to more patients"

"SASSENACH" Jamie tapped his fingers on his thigh

"I'm pretty sure Malcom the… well I forget what he does, but I promise to take notes in the future!! Well, he will surely come to see me about his wart today; his black and green wart. See I had to tell him not to wash the place where it grew and apply daily only what I concocted for him as a drying solution, now the top layer I already peeled off. And now that the main body slowly became a scab with the treatment, I need to remove it today. He can't possibly do it alone for it might ooze and bleed"

She narrowed her eyes at him and held a pleased smile on her face as he made faces of disguised at the imagery she was unfolding before him. Thank the Lord he had naughting in his stomach yet. She didn’t desist though, enjoying her true win. Who needed cards; she was a true winner in getting her way in life.

"What I'll do is probably clean his big, fat, ripe, blistered toe… woww"

Jamie hurled her back to the mattress by her waist, laid atop of her, rubbing his face and stubble over her face and neck. When she finally silenced from squirming and begging for him to stop he said

"Fine, fine, no every step then, but Sassenach-"

"Don't worry Jamie, you will know where I am at all times my love" she brought her hand to the back of his heid, caressing and toying wi’ his hairs, he hummed enjoining the feeling. This was better than warts!

"And will you grant me the same?"
She asked softly.

"That's easy Sassenach” he said quite seriously "look either to your left or your right, that's where I'll be. Always" he finished and kissed his wife good morning.
We were lying entwined with each other.

A tangle of extremities.
I thought that if I squinted down I would not be able to tell which limbs were mine or which ones were his.
When I finally did so, I found myself very much mistaken, for Jamie's legs were much hairier than mine and I could hardly call his strong torso narrow and delicate.

In between such massive bare masculine appendages, an observer might find my parts looking like white-opal, glazed adornments on his skin; soft and almost seem to be melting into him.

My foot was rubbing his shin up and down as he fitted himself closer to me.

It was a very cold night, so cold that everything was tinged with a soft, dazzling blue hue at its tips. Still we laid completely naked, leg crossed into the other's leg, me lying on my back as Jamie laid on his side propped up on his elbow enjoying himself by blowing hot breath on my skin and watching its reaction in the form of gooseflesh appearing when the hot air evaporated and the cold air touched me anew.

My breasts reaction pleased him the most, but arms, shoulder blades, breastbone and their connecting collarbone received their fair share of joyful retorts.

Reaching my neck his brows creased,
"Sassenach, does gooseflesh no show on a person's neck or do ye no like it?"

"I like it just fine Jamie" I said smiling with my eyes closed again, trying desperately not to fall asleep.
This will be our last night before parting for two days.

Last time, without my knowledge, Jamie and old Alec took one of the new colts to be given as a gift to a neighbored clan and that was when Jamie pretended not to return to Leoch's grounds, there making himself scarce and unavailable to be bullied into giving his oath to the Makenzie Laird. It was also getting to dangerous to carry on with the sneaking around to my chamber at night. There were to many prying eyes around and the new guards were starting to be posted to make sure all will be well and safe during the Gathering.

"Goose bumps or Cutis Anserine as their called" I said to a smiling Jamie that loved learning the Latin names of anything I could come up with.
"Are formed when a person is cold or experiences strong emotions such as fear, nostalgia, pleasure, euphoria, awe, admiration and sexual arousal"
I cracked my eyes to find an enlighten, exhilarated Jamie, which accoladed himself as being the source of all these feeling awakening in me.

"I did also say cold and fear" I tried to diminish a tad his inflating ego.
"Ye're never scared o' me, Sassenach" his smile broaden.
He kissed my breast "and your skin in nay so cold".

He brought his lips to the base of my throat.
"Go on than, tell me more of Cutis Anserine" he began nibbling "Is your neck, no aroused like the rest of ye by me?"
"I can assure you that my neck, like the rest of me, is very much of awe and admiration of you" I said, now inflating the same ego.
"Really???” he rejoiced doubling his efforts.

"Than why?" he asked moving back, disappointed to find no affect anywhere, although he was performing braw work indeed.
"Because Cutis Anserine are caused when those emotions erupt and the hairs stand erect and pull the skin at their base"
"So?” he asked now adjusting himself to lie more atop of me and really applying himself to break the rules of my epidermis.
"So, I might not have much hair there or their fine hairs that their follicles aren't strong enough to lift my skin at that exact spot" I explained
"Really?” he pulled back "that’s odd I seem to possess plenty there. Here take some of mine than" he said rubbing his short beard on my face, throat and chest

I cried out with laughter and squirmed.

When he was finally done with me, I felt as if I was sand papered all over, while Jamie held the man smugness of having my body, finally, react properly to his possessor.

He snuggled atop of me, making me feel so warm and protected.

A wide-mouth, deep yawn escaped me, as another bodily reaction of mine to him began.

I always seemed to want to sleep in his arms.

"Are ye tired a ghraidh?” he queried.
"Yes” I answered truthfully “I didn’t have a chance to sleep tonight before you came. You managed to slip in quite early this time” I said with a smile, making sure he knew that this was a better gift than sleep any time.

"Before? Ye manage to sleep before I come?” he puzzled, but smiling back, appreciating the complement.
"Well yes. I usually sleep as much as I can until you come, so I may be able to stay awake and act properly during the day and not slobber into my breakfast landing face first in it” I grinned and shifted our positions so we laid spoon fashion on our sides.

"Besides I must. For when you come… well, you have become a very demanding husband as of late… I mean lover"
"I'm a lover am I? I don’t believe I e'er been a lover before.” He said, obviously amused at his new title.
"I must be bound for the devil then, since I seem to be enjoying it verra much” he said nuzzling closer behind me and interlacing our bodies from head to toe.

"Does that mean that when the time comes you wouldn't want to marry me?” I asked taking my hand around me to stroke his face, knowing I would be able to feel-

The frown presented itself instantly and I could feel the temperature of his skin rise a few degrees.

"DO NO EVEN JEST OF SUCH MATTERS!!!” he ordered firmly "Why between trying to remember every little thing we said and did, as to not foil the blasted thing from coming to past, to ye and ye're ifrinn, bull-heid thoughts of me and Laoghaire"
I opened my mouth to protest "Jaime I -"

"To no have ye in OUR bed every night and in MY arms every day" he went on ignoring me completely "to hearing other people try and put others in your arms that are nay me" he was getting himself truly agitated and upset now.
"If ANYONE will stand in my path to this bloody occasion I will ring his throat with my bare hand and I care not the slightest will it be ye, a saint, a sinner or the archangel himself coming down, sword in hand from the heavens!!"
He was actually arguing with himself but I wasn’t inclined to be the idiot to mention that to him.

"Do ye hear me Claire? This is coming to pass. Dress, priest and MY ring on your finger!!" he ended with a pointing, menacing finger, coming to my line of vision to make sure he was understood.

"Well I would think a bride without a head on her shoulders would not be such a good choice, but whatever you desire my love" I said and snuggled my derriere a bit further into is hips, that being the quickest and full-proof way to make him forget whatever he was on about at any given moment.

He sighed, grabbed the appendage in question and began mumbling all the things he would like to do with or to said part.
I smiled to myself for my cunningness.

I shouldn't have joked about such a thing, but I knew what I was saying bringing up the option of not marrying me into light.

Fun, sultry and very passionate as the "lover" title provoked Jaime and me to be in our love making of late, Jamie was very much a devoted catholic how believed In the sacrament of marriage.

My smile widened at the memory of all the times when, even for all his jests and flirting the idea of him lying even in the same room as me or to have it be considered by others, forbye, that my reputation would be damaged by him was unspeakable in his regard, not to mention how he disapproved of all the liaisons and such going around at French court and if to be perfectly honest everywhere in Paris.

"Serve him right, a man ought to be married" I recalled his words regarding bonny prince Charles, when he had himself miserably bitten by a monkey and bedraggled through Paris's roofs returning from his 'consorting' with the lovely, married Louise de La Tour de Rohan.

I knew he loved the knowing that his love for me and his loving of me, was a virtue blessed by a priest, the church and the holy ghost.
And to be perfectly honest so did I.
for me Jamie and I were right for each other in every way and how I knew to be possible, and this was just another aspect of that.

It made me feel fortunate in a way.
The man I was so deeply in love with was mine, not only by the bounds of say but by rights of the heavens and the holly order.

Perhaps in a way, I also hoped it will play some part at protecting our union and keep us safe and together.
So many dangers and bad men threaten our lives and our very souls.
I wanted whatever help I could get!

Was this not one of the reasons man began to lift his gaze from the earth and pray, to something larger than himself?
Is this not the reason man sought and founded religions, or at least big part of it?
The knowledge that what he was doing is right, that the path he was guided and walked on was the true and blessed way and it was leading him to a 'bonny' place.

We all traveled in the trails of life, scared, confused and seeking reassurance that we could be free, happy, secure and loved!
From the moment, the first man realized the vast that surrounded him, realized how small he was against all around him; he as well as us, sought the sense of safety and love.

O God how I wished that for Jaime, for me. For us!

Religion to me was
To aspire and not dwell on fear.
To strive for kindness and virtuousness and not to fall prey to the darkness inside us and around us.
My marriage to Jamie was a big part of my path to that.

"Jamie" I said in a way that made him stop a VERY picturesque way of-
"Hamm?" he inquired.
"Nothing I ….I just…. I love you Jamie" I said, craving very badly the day I could lawfully call him my husband again.

"HOCH You made me lose my place of thought now… where was I?" he said with mock affrontedness, but I could hear the smile widening in his tone.

A few more minutes of descriptions in the Gaelic, which I finally got around to listen to and I raised my voice in some affrontedness of my own "JAMIE…. I would never…. And I do mean never would do such a thing"

He laughed.
"Finally Sassenach, I was beginning to think ye forgot all your Gaelic ….besides" he said, turning me to lay on my back, him atop of me, spreading my legs apart slowly, but with enough of a stern hand to make it quite clear that all resistance would be futile.
"It willna be YOU that will be doing 'it"

"Lord, how did I ever find myself at this time and place" I said wiggling my body under him, raising my head to bite his nipple and feeling happy.
He sighed with pleasure from my chosen moves.
"Ye couldn'a be anywhere else Sassenach. Nay wi' all the machination and espionage I performed to get ye, ye would ha' fallen for one or the other"
"Really? Thought a lot on the matter?" I bantered, rising on my elbows.

Jamie looked into my eyes with much seriousness.
"Claire from the moment I decided ye to be my wife, I had hardly any other thought in my mind but how to make it so" then he added with a mischiefful smile "that is 'til I married ye"
"Is that so? And after the nuptials?" I asked amused and I must admit flattered. "Ouch, then" a huge grin began spreading from his lips to his eyes to…. Were the hairs on the crown of his head erect? No they couldn’t be, could they?

I dismissed that, but he did seem entirely transformed to a little cartoon devil; horny hair and mischief all about. “Since then” he empathized "almost every thought I ha’ is how to get ye alone and what to do wi’ ye once I do!” he concluded and I realized how close his face had come to mine.

"My, my, grandma such big eyes you have" I said to the now very open enlarged pupiled eyes who bore into mine.

His forehead connected with mine and was guiding me to a more inclined position into the mattress.

"My, my" I said a little breathlessly "what big teeth you have"
I mumbled when his teeth closed very gently on the root of my neck.

He continued to nibble his way down my person, using only his head, nose, mouth and tongue to further explore my body, all awhile leaning on his hands.

Something came to him and he chuckled into my skin and I sensed the words more then heard them
"Which one am I then? The wolf or the hunter?"

“Both” I cried and arched my back as he reached a very, very tender spot between my legs.

"Even little red riding hood herself" I humorously concluded in my head, once I had returned to some capacity of thought and found that my hands were anchored firmly into those cooper-auburn locks.

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"WHAT? How can you send me away after…. after that?" he asked truly affront.

His resemblance to an abused puppy, if puppies reached such sizes, was apparent.

He stood there completely naked, holding the items of his clothing that I was amassing one by one on his folded hands.

He looked as a lamb that got kicked in the teeth by a mean ram.
He stood there with a quivering, pouting lower lip and with eyes wide opened almost tearing-up, un-willing to believe his abuser actions.

Well I wasn’t taking on that role, thank you very much.

"I also made lists, you see?" I tried clarifying what might seem a slightly heartless behavior to the outside observer or to Jamie "of everything I can remember about what happened during our time in the castle-"
"I remember quite weel that I have ne'er done THAT to ye in here. In Paris though" he added for fairness sake "and ye always were verra tender to me later, all 'canoodles' and happy to reciprocate" his eyes lit up at the memory and his tongue peered as he licked is lower lip, but then remembering the insult of my action he added "Never this, no, never such a thing as now!"

"Tomorrow or today, I should already say" I hinted to the window that showed no moon by now, but very few, very light, pale rays of sun that were threatening to be followed by their source. "Mrs. Fitz will yet again not take heed of her hand and I was, no I will" I corrected myself "be awakened very, very early, to knocks at my door accompanied by the very lovely Laoghaire" That was said in a very acerbic edge to it, that I saw did not go unnoticed. "Begging me, to please ‘come, come quick’" I tried my hand in imitation before, this was no more successful.

He laughed, saw my face and covered it with a cough.

Then trying for a last Hail Mary, even though he was already beginning to dress himself, I assumed this was an attempt to humor me.

"Would that no put an end to her fictitious fancies?"

I scrutinize him very thoughtfully and stared straight into his eyes.

"And if I were to agree and reciprocate, these delightful - I do must admit to that- 'Administrations' that you afforded me this fine morning-"

That awarded me a heartfelt smile, that almost did make me want to pull him back to bed and cause him to cry out in a way that the whole castle would be knocking at our door; no, my door, I reminded myself and at that I was snapped back to our reality and stood my ground.

"You would just chuck all your clothes and put yourself on display for her?"
I asked making my point.

The smile promptly disappeared and I could see the wheels of his mind trying to come up with the right answer.

Were he to say no, I could think this due to his feelings for Laoghaire, which he was working so hard to debunk; were he to agree, I might be enviously deranged enough to allow such a thing and by the day's end we would be the tale for generation to come.

‘The scandal of Castle Leoch’, which would also put a firm end to any marriage-filled- bliss life we hoped to accomplish.

After what seemed like a very long silence, I decided to let the worm off the hook.
I mean, if I wasn't going to give him any pleasure I at least could offer him some peace.

"No you wouldn't!" I determined firmly, and he sighed in relief that he tried very hard to disguise. "Hoch weel" he replied promptly and persisted in dressing very quickly before I might change my mind "if YOU say so".

Before leaving though, he touched my arm very, very softly "An toir thu dhomh pòg?" he whispered. ‘at least?’ his eyes pleaded.

"Of course I will give you a kiss you big dupe!" I answered feeling so tender, moved and guilt -
ridden for me having to send him a way.
I came up to my toes and kissed him passionately, letting my arms clutch his buttocks and pulling
him firmly to me, his arms went around me so unyielding, his mouth devoured mine, my tongue in
his, my hands squeezing hard.

When we finally parted ourselves, I swayed a bit and felt my lips tingling to such extent that I knew
that I wouldn't be able to move them properly for a while.

My eyes just dazed into his chest and I could do nothing but breathe through my nose smelling the
scents of sleep, testosterone and Jamie.

He snuggled his forehead to the top of my head “I miss ye something awful lately, I canna ken why.
I find myself wanting only to wrap myself around you and sleep. I donna sleep verra weel wi'oot ye
near, I need ye and more than just for the bedding.
Although that part I canna do wi'oot as weel” he clarified sternly.

I enveloped his hips with my arms, holding for dear life.

"Soon, so soon Jamie. We have a plan. We know what to do this next week with the Gathering and
everything" My voice was tender but unshaken "We will play our part right, we would go on the
road with the rent party and Dougal will not be able to resist marrying us under Colum’s nose to
get you out of the running of Laird"
I smiled at the thought
"And then you could have me” I looked up at him "everywhere, any time"
I brushed my nose to his
"any way"
I teased with a bite at his lips
"freely given, very welcomed, and this time-"
I paused, looking and holding his gaze
“forever”.

He looked back, expressionless, hardly breathing, but electric currents flowed between us, so
intense that I thought if light bulbs were invented already they would surely explode now and burn
with the rest of the world at our feet.

We both knew there was so much more: Faith our second child, Fergus, the Jacobite rising, Charles
Stuart, Lallybroch and his men, Mary Hawkins, Alex Randell, Dougal's death and as a result our
almost forever separation and… "Black Jack” Randall and Wentworth.

"He will not hurt you again. I will not let it happen again! I swear it on my life, Jamie” I said tears
streaming from my eyes without me even blinking, so great was the sorrow in me of the things to
come.

But my voice once again stood very clear and infallible.

"I'll protect you, I won't fail this time” I resolved.

He touched my face very lightly with his fingers, tracing my tears, not to blot them, just to trace
their path, his lip curled in the most rueful smile.

"No" I freed myself from his grip.
"No" I said much more sternly "No Jamie, not like before, it will not happen again"
I came back to him quickly holding his face with both my hands, pleading for him to believe "No
Jaime. It is different than before. We are not trying to change a big piece of history this time"
"We’re no?" he said so sorrow stricken "I’ll tell ye Sassenach, I do not consider myself and the happening to me so important as to be written down in history but…. They are big a ghraidh. Faith is verra important to me, what happened to me is….."

"No, please forgive me" I held on to him shaking "I didn’t mean it like that…. No I only meant-"

"Aye" he smiled, gathering me in "I ken fine weel what ye mean, mo chridhe. Ye mean that it will be easier to change things if they are small to the world. Ye mean that this time we do no ken vague, obscure facts that we donna ken how they came to path, but the exact way of things to come" he stroked my neck with one hand as the other held me close in the small curve of my back, my body and face buried into him.

"So we ha’ a good chance” he said distancing me just enough to look into my face and move my curls away from eyes

"But first I’ll ha’ ye properly married and back in my arms for all to see"

"I never left" I smiled Shakely back to him. Taking his palm and putting it to my lips

"Besides" I added looking back to him "if we can not change a thing, why did this all thing come to path?’ I looked at him pleading for his understanding.

"If there are no second chances, why did we receive one?"

At that his smile widened sincerely.

"Aye, whatever did this, might help us” he said, a bit unsure what it could be, but glad it was on our side.

We were interrupted by a very excited knock at the door and Laoghaire's, damn her eyes, voice came after it "Mistress Beauchamp, Mistress Beauchamp, r'ye waken yet?"
The pounding on the door became more vigorous “Mistress Beauchamp, please come, come quick it's my nana mistress"

"See? I told you" I whispered in his hear, for yet another reassurance of our success.
We knew what was coming.

"I will dress and come swiftly" I rebuked at the closed, and thank the Lord, locked door.
"Ho" she answered surprise in her voice at my harsh tone to her "I can wait for ye here if ye like"

Perhaps she wanted her love potion, I thought, thinking of all the occasions she was hovering around me, waiting to get me alone.
But just like all the other times I avoided her, this will be no exception.
The magic shop is closed dearie! Find some other fabricated accusation against me.
'His mine' I declared to myself, watching the man who didn’t seem to want to release me from his arms, not now and not ever.

"No" I stated "It’s fine! Go the kitchen I won't tarry" I managed to answer with only a slight rebuff in my tone this time.

"How did ye ken…?" She started to say, but I replied swiftly.
"You did say Mrs. Fitz, did you not? Where else would she be at such a time but at the kitchen?"
"Aye, of course mistress" she giggled "I'll be telling her ye’re coming. I thank you" she added and I could hear her feet pitter-patter on the stone floor pulling back.

"Well, I suppose I should go and treat your girlfriend's nana then" I said already putting on my shift and stays.
Jaime came behind me to help with the binding and tying and was doing it in such away it was clear he did not appreciate my last remark.

"Ye do remember that I was the virgin when we wed?" he said tartness to his tone "and 'tis ye who were the one-"

"That knew the flesh of another?" I suggested fearing maybe he would choose something more hurtful to say.
"Aye"
My petticoat was pulled atop of me in a very harsh manner.
For a minute I thought he might choke me inside it, but a minute later, my head peered from its opening, one more minute and my bodice lacing were tied very skillfully if not a bit too sturdily for breath.
He was getting quite adroit at dressing and undressing women.
I intended myself to be the only one he would go on practicing such things on!

"Yes I remember" I said "But how would you feel if the whole castle kept talking about me and another man and how it was clear to all that it is only a matter of time before he and I would finally marry? Or how would you act hearing that the man has been seen wherever I am at all times? Or to hear that I must marry for I am in such a state that it would do me only good"
I pressed my defense.
"why, young Jaime is such a good young lad but he needs a good lass to take care of him’" I quoted "and they never let me or the rest of the world forget how you so chivalrously took the beating for her!!"
I added, getting myself all worked up and almost stomping my feet.

Jesus Christ, what was it about this girl that boiled my blood and made me so?!!
I couldn’t explain it myself.
But there it was, the relentless, nagging, feeling that if I would leave Jamie alone, too long with her, I would return to find she managed to seduce and scheme herself right into his arms.
It was absurd of course, but something inside me wouldn’t subside when it came to Laoghaire Mackenzie!!

Jamie on his end smirked
"Really?" he said steering me to the door, fully dressed.

Seeing my face, he removed his hands and maneuvered me using only one finger.
The bloody man was strong, I concluded for the million time.

"Weel except for what happened with Luke" he pointed out in a very logical tone, side-looking to the sheet that probably held his scent again and were one of the reasons Luke held my 'lover' stature at the moment in everyone's eyes.
"Such a thing can never happen" he determined.

"Ho really?!" I turned to him when we were just at the door "You don’t think I could attract such attention from another man?!!" I demanded a bit slighted.
Other men could find me attractive, maybe not many, but at least some.

He looked at me in complete bewilderment,
"Of course ye can Sassenach. Do ye no ken what ye look like for Christ sake?"
He opened the door behind me, checking the passageways to make sure the coast was clear and handed me my shawl (when did he pick it up?)
"’tis just, such a man will simply no live long enough for such rumors to begin in the first place" he added very logically, turned me around, patted my backside, kissed my cheek while still looking around to see if the lack of wandering eyes state remained.

A last “I love ye” and he disappeared down the hallway.

I blinked twice, all of a sudden a bit unsure how I got to be dressed and in my current location. I took a long breath, a glance down at myself to check I was decent and began walking to the opposite side from where Jamie left, on my way to the kitchen.

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We were sitting with everyone for lunch. To be more accurate, Jamie was sitting with everyone for lunch, I was standing like a simpleton, hovering near the doorway.

He was angry with me, I could tell. Well it really wasn’t hard to tell. He was eating his lunch in big un-chowed bites, swallowing them whole, ripping into bread and meat in rage and every few seconds he would side-glance to my direction and flared his nostrils at me.

To my defense, I was only late by a few minutes, (half an hour maximum) over a delay of treating a very small child's broken finger.

I mean, for the love of God, was I to just leave him to fend for himself?

Or to just see to him as he screamed and wiggled?

No, as with all small children, they had their own rhythm and way of doing things and it involved exercising patient, tenderness and care.

Which apparently my husband wanted as well, before he and Alec, who sat right beside Jamie, would depart and be off, precisely after being done with their sustenance, not to be seen around the castle until after the Gathering would conclude.

But I came late. Too late to say goodbye, too late to even touch a hand in passing, Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ, I was even too late to find a seat anywhere in the overcrowded dining hall, not to mention a seat near the one I came here for.

I stood there for a while, not knowing exactly what to do. Should I just leave?

It will look extremely odd to just stand here and gawk at everyone and to not simply pick up a plate with food and evacuate the premises, as accordance with the rest of the straggler that came late as I.

But walking away, meant walking away from him so-

To my luck, or so I thought at first, I had some pull with the main-head of the kitchen.

Mrs. Fitz while helping her subordinates to bring more trays filled with food from the kitchen, saw me standing there, cried out in shock, simply dragged me to stand by a man I didn't recognize and began releasing such ire looks and words on him in Gaelic and English, which I gathered were regarding, sitting on his, fat, lazy backside while fine ladies, such as myself, where standing and starving and after me tending to his cousin's hand but only a few minutes ago.

How on earth could she know who was in my surgery???
Two seconds later and I found myself sitting three seats to the right from the only thing I hungered for, unable to plan what to do to reach him.

Mrs. Fitz disappeared, but returned a few moments later having prepared for me a very full plate of nutritious substances, I had no stomach for.

Would he really be gone, with me unable to say goodbye to him? Jamie and I never left for our day or anywhere before departing for one another properly, not to mention if days were involved.

I learned in the war to always take leave from the ones you love as if this will be the last time you would ever see them, for it might. Even with only a soft chaste kiss.

It didn’t matter what the gesture would be, only that it will be done.

Have the last thing you'll ever share with them be a moment of love that you gave and received from one another. For no better reason, as it will always leave your soul more at ease when you do, like a small reassurance all will be fine.

It was silly, I knew, I would see him in a few days. But that need to execute that small sign of adoration was acute in me and by my very furious husband's face, which kept placing his spoon and mug forcibly back on the table, it was so in him as well.

"M'dear what's that on your neck right below your chin?" Mrs. Fits asked appalled "And on your… weel down your neckline there" she continued astonished pointing and gasping "and right there on your… weel.."

She waved her fingers in the direction of my left bosom. She was standing right above me, which afforded her a bird sight view of my entire décolletage. Jamie that sat near enough to hear such inquiries (as did a great deal of other people) began choking in earnest coughing and spouting his food all while being roughly handled with a strong harm to his back by Alec.

"What e'er 'rong wi' the lad?" She frowned peeking at him.

"Probably went down the wrong pipe" I said, but then I looked down at myself and was horrified to find a big red bite mark right above my left breast with a bit of blue and purple decorating its ends and what looked like very bad rug burns on what I could see in my eye of vision of my chest and neck line.

I choked a little myself.

All right then, the small little tingling sensation I was feeling all day was not due to my woolly shawl which, how convenient, I wore all day long and removed in the last second to be left in my surgery, before I came.

"I'm fine… fine a charaid " Jamie was saying between droplets of drink flying from his mouth as he coughed exasperatly, but slowly returning to normal, red faced from the exertion, but normal.

"And that mark on your neck near your chin as weel, why 'tis almost black" she said when she saw my observing the bite mark.
I placed my hand immediately to the place she was pointing at. Just as Jamie began choking again this time almost retching his food out and half bending on the table trying to take breath.

He was so red and his eyes were actually popping out in a way that if I wasn't too busy holding my palms to my 'injuries' I would have probably reached for him.

"I'm sure it's nothing contagious, maybe just an allergic reaction to something" I said apologetically embarrass. "Contiges? alerjeck?" she frowned, hand on her chest afraid of the ominous sound my not understood words conjured up in her.

"Nothing just probably a bad reaction… an aversion to something in my surgery, with all the late Beaton's cures, one must have gone bad. Best I go have a look immediately, shouldn't I?"

I said hands still placed to cover myself and rising from the bench. Half running to the surgery to look for something that could cover love bites, I had just enough sense to glance a final peek to see a mortified with a "I'm soooo sorry" face Jamie still choking.

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When I was done with the task of simply arranging items of clothing to cover myself up, in the absent of a good foundation make-up, I hurried to the court yard, holding the perfect excuse, that I remembered could help my other unsolved condition.

Some ointment of oil and tallow for Alec's Rheumatism that I had in my surgery. It will be aggravated by the ride in the cold.

Uncharitably of me though, I was performing this door to horse service for the most selfish of motives. I simply couldn't let Jamie go without even the smallest token of farewell.

And now, thanks to the "damages" performed by him on my person I would surely be awarded instant forgiveness from any unplanned steps, which diverted me from our plan to meet before he departed.

It was always quite enjoyable to see Jamie squirm with embarrassment and mortification of his action; he had the sweetest 'I'm sorry' smile with the 'you forgive me don't you?' eyes I ever saw.

"Here" I said handing the small wrapped jar to Old Alec "just make sure you don’t over heat it before applying, the tallow heats faster than the oil does, you don’t want it to scald you"

"Why, I thank ye kindly misses, most kind o' ye to consider me such" he said, truly moved and making me feel very self-seeking for my true reasoning for doing this.

My true reason was standing just behind Alec, shuffling his feet, smacking his lips and trying very hard to look everywhere but at the affronted parts of me he handled.

When I was done with Alec, Jamie coughed lightly and said "I… I mean we" he corrected himself looking down to the ground "heard ye had some trouble
"yourself before" he coughed again as if a whole chicken was stuck in his gullet
"I only wondered ye ken, if all is weel wi’... wi’..." he waved his hand in the vicinity of the areas in question, now looking to the sky.

"Yes quite well, I thank you, no lasting damage or further un-pleasantries" I replied, trying very hard not to laugh and to sound assuring, the poor man might think he actually injured me and he might nor reprise such actions again and that would be the true damage in the situation.

"Ho weel" in reply to my tone he lowered his gaze, saw my smile and a smile spread on his lips as well "I only worried ye ken"

Once our eyes locked neither of us moved any further or saw anything but one another. Two seconds later and our breathes equalized and our chests went up and down in perfect unison.

"I only worried ye ken" he said and I knew he was apologizing for being mad at my tardiness. "Ye said so already" Alec looked from Jamie to me and back to Jamie. "Aye, I did" Jamie admitted, still seeing only one thing "But I always do, worry I mean" "You shouldn’t" I said "Not good for your health" I smiled "Besides, what could possibly go wrong?"

"Aye, aye I ken that but still... I worry... I worry at all I canna hold in my own two hands and protect" he said, with pleading eyes for me to take special heed when he wasn’t near me.

"Christ lad! Do ye think yourself the almighty?" cried out a very bewildered and confused Alec, still looking from one to the other between us "The castle will still stand when ye return"

"Some parts of her might even last over two hundred years into the future without any assistance" I said trying to lighten his worry; it did rewarded me a warm smile. "Aye, future does tend to make his things strong" he said

"What?" cried out again an even more disturbed Alec, then he lifted his hands to the heavens, relinquished any caring and went to mount his steed.

Our eyes never wavered.

"So perhaps this is goodbye" I said shivering slightly and feeling gooseflesh appearing all over my body from feeling strong emotions, only pleasure, euphoria and sexual arousal were not the cause this time. But I was trying to make light of the situation, repeating his words to me when we first thought we would never see each other again and that I would be leaving with Sean Pitry, the tinker in the morning.

We were proved wrong then; his fears would be proved wrong now!

"I suppose so" he said, recognizing the words but not seeming calmer for their meaning.

"R’ye no coming?" asked a now very upset Alec, not that he wasn’t before. Jamie would have to spin a lot of lies to fix what we did, but he was very good at that and maybe Alec will be the one Scotsman in the whole of Scotland, that will keep his big yap shut.

"Safe journey to you, Jamie" I said still holding to my encouraging smile. "Goodbye to ye then, Claire" he said still holding to his sadness.
I kept smiling until I couldn't see the horses any more.  
If he would turn, I would have him only see me smiling, no matter what I felt.

**THE GATHERING continues:**

I was staring into Rupert gloom, irritated face, not without sympathy, as Angus went traipsing along, almost skipping, toward the woman he "won" in my little game of pulling sticks.

"Never dismiss a lady's choice Rupert" I said, feeling giddy and elated and wanted to spread the joy by being charitable to my ever present shadow.  
Besides in the future, I was, I will be that is, really fond of dear, smiling Rupert.  
Seeing him gone as he did, broke my heart and was defiantly one of the things I would talk to Jamie about, trying to see if something could be done to rectify his fate.

For now though, I simply felt happy to see him follow me around cursing and complaining at my own existence.

"Mistress?" he queried.

"I just mean that you two may think it was your choice to who's 'arms' the lady should find herself tonight," I said reserving the right to not mention their chosen body part to bestow on the lady "but I can assure you Rupert, it is always the lady that will have the last say" I tried to hint.

"I dinna follow your meaning mistress" he tilted his head probably to try and stir his brain to comprehension.

"I'm simply saying that if it was me" I laid another thick clue "I'd prefer the gentleman to the horny toad, no offense to Angus" I said remembering how he grabbed my breasts, that day by the water, as me, Jamie and Murtagh raised anchor on the Cristabel.  
Putting my insult aside, his hands felt quite awful and painful (he pinched them!!!).  
There for, I had every reason to believe once experienced, the (by the lack of a better name and may the women party forgive me) 'pie eater' they both fancied, would be running back the other way, ready to be taken by a much gentler man.

"And despite all suggestion to the contrary and some remarks I heard you say to me when we first met, I do believe, dear Rupert , that deep, deep, deep inside, you are a gentleman"

A smile spread on his good jolly face and he straightened himself proudly.

"I am?"

"Yes" I determined, trying very hard not to laugh "so if I were you I wouldn't give up on...well the..the.. Good Lord, that 'pie eater' over there" I must ask for her name the first chance I get I decided.

Rupert Mackenzie blushed.

"Come along" I said "I'll need to pick a horse for the hunt tomorrow; the laird wants a healer to go
along just in case".
This time I let him lead the way and as he happily, light-heartedly, now doing some skipping of his own, marched on his way to the stables, I strode behind him.

At least this time I wasn't told 'Thalla 's caic' by anyone.

Sometimes change is a welcomed thing

Chapter End Notes

I always planned from the beginning after I did what I did to them, that I would give them a sort of honeymoon period before blasting again- this was it.
It's kind of like in the books and the show:
where they had a lot of trouble to get together than the sort of worked on finding themselves and recommitting to one another and then they..... (well I won't tell you what comes next :)
now-
for new years......
now we really are picking up speed
hope you'll stick around
THE GATHRING continues

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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I was standing in the stables caressing and getting to know my fair Brimstone anew.

"Poor thing you are" I said placing a sweet kiss on her forehead "Named either for a sulphury hell-fire or for a troublesome and angry woman who disturbed some silly public peace by arguing and quarreling with her surroundings too much"

I caressed her behind the ear just as Jamie taught me and smirked to myself "I wager they call me that behind my back here as well" I said. As if sympathizing with me. Brimstone gave me a light push on my shoulder.

"Yes, a fine pair us two make"
I kissed her again
"Although according to Old Alec YOU have done nothing to deserve such fame"
I sighed with the acceptance of my 'never being able to freely say my mind and opinion without such repute and there for retribution' stature, in this time.

"Tell you what" I jested "you'll keep me safe during this preposterous Tynchal tomorrow and I promise you I won't let no one put a scold's bridle on you, to keep you from speaking your piece" As I knew was done in Scotland for punitive or even preventive measures for dealing with women of this time, which were considered an offense and a nuisance to society. That is when they didn't place them on the ducking stool or throw feces at them.

I had no regrets regarding my decision to stay with my heart, but my head did sometimes wonder about all I left behind. Who I could have been, what I could have done. I sighed again.

"There stands, my friend, in yonder pool,
An engine call'd a ducking-stool;"

I quoted dear Benjamin West to the snuggling, friendly brown snout under my palm.

"By legal pow'r commanded down,
The joy and terror of the town.
If jarring females kindle strife..."

Every hair in the back of my neck suddenly stood erect, my breath came short and I could feel myself standing taller as if a spring was coiled inside me and
I was set to jump from my little jack in the box.

"Brimstone?! Ye thought o' escaping on Brimstone???"

I let my breath out of me, not looking back but feeling his steadfastly, warm presence, closing at my back. His silent laugh washed over me as warm echoing water droplets being poured under my garments drop by drop and slowly becoming waves.

It had been a long two days without him.

His hand came to caress the horse and placed itself by mine. His fingers lightly touching—not touching me and the 'Jack' was released as lightning inside my stomach. "Jamie" I said a little breathless.

I had just enough sense of mind to glance sideways to the far entrance of the stables where Alec and Roderick, the stable-lad, were currying a black horse. There were four box stalls between us and them and they were tucked deep inside the one they stood at, so-

"You are supposed to be in hiding! We agreed that you would return from your trip with Alec and make yourself scarce" I whispered, knowing that if I turned around I would be forced to jump into his arms, compelling him to catch me and kiss him with all the energy that Hooke's law could ever come up with, in my springy state.

"Weel I hid here last time too" he pointed logically, as his manifestation made its way closer to me "Just behind ye there's the wooden door that leads to a verra ghastly, foul, rain-sapped cubby where I am staying this time as t'was the last time" I heard the smile in his voice "I only came 'oot last time, during the Gathering to sleep dry and warm in the straw, when a sprite fell into my lap" he was one inch closer, I could feel it in the rumbling of his laugh "Dinna weigh as a fairy though, when she landed atop o'me"

He was so near, I griped the wooden fence, to force myself to not turn around.

"Heard ye talking to yourself" he said and I felt his breath on my nape as I swallowed hard, forcing all my desires down my larynx.

It was a LONG two days and I kept myself so busy, not allowing for one moment of peace, one moment of rest, so I wouldn’t worry or yearn for him. I even refused to know the location of where he would be at, during the Gathering, as to not be tempted to come to him.

I fortified myself mentally and physically to not see him for the total of four to five days, after we parted and he rode out with Alec. I told myself I will not see him until the rent party will ride on her way; out of the castle walls and away from the manipulations of her dwellers.

But here loomed his apparition at my back, seducing me to turn and see my heart's desires and at a time I resolute myself to live without him for a while. Despite the not knowing when or how we would find the opportunity or the time to even glance at one another during our voyage around the Mackenzie's land. But I kept my needs at bay, recognizing it will mean our happiness and prosperity in the future.
So I knew with all certainty and no doubt that if I turned around at this moment, he would be molested.

"So here I stand answering the bean bhàsail call, to find she wouldn'a even turn to take my pitiful soul to the abyss" his deep Scottish voice came so close to my ear, my eyes shut themselves without my saying so.

"She can't" I said breathlessly "the siren is lured herself and could not be held accountable for her actions at the sight of her prey"
He laughed and the depth of his sound rippled into my body in a way I wanted to show him every Mata Hari inducement I read she practiced on her poor objectives, twice.

"Aye, but one should inform the temptress that trying to get away from her game by riding Brimstone is verra ill-advised and will only end wi' her capture"
Jamie said placing his hand on the fence, right atop of mine.

"And what do you mean by that?" I said, as my hand clenched itself to his, interlacing our fingers to one's another.

I was going to turn to him eventually, but the seduction dance began to free its pleasures and I wished every sensory and move to be felt and savored before its end.

Hearing was already established, touch was being explored, the smell of dried hay, masculine light sweat, the dries apples I forced him to take on his trip and Jamie's bouquet were rich in my lungs. Sight and taste will soon join in; to leave me dwindled completely of my self-composure and restrain.
And by his tone I wasn't the only one enjoying the slow renew acquaintance.

"The mare is known for never crossing Leoch's boundaries" he said sounding very amused.

"What?!!" I was snapped back to myself at this new divulgence.

"She never fails to halt a few feet from the edge o' the border" Jamie said almost giggling at me "and If one tries to push her to much, she just turns 'oround and comes right back to the stables if ye like her to or nay"

"What? Why on earth… are you just making things up to laugh at my thwarted attempt of escape? Which you are probably to blame for its ill-fated outcome" I demanded and accused crossly.

"Me?! Forbye. The horse is the laughing joke o' the whole castle, mo nighean donn. Only given to children on their first ride alone" he was chaffing me in such derision, I found it completely safe to turn and glare at him, feeling only a slight weakening at the knees from seeing those summer misty blues look back at me and the crooked curve of his full lips pulled slightly up…. Ouch who was I kidding?

My hands cupped his cheeks and forgetting to even side-glance at the other occupancies in the stables, I closed my lips on his, almost swallowing him whole.
His body pressed on mine in less than a second, pining me to the fence, which he held on either side of me, fastening me to it and to him even further.
My hands came to bury themselves in his soft copper-auburn locks while his took a handful of my rear, which he used to almost pick me up my feet, finding some way to tighten my body to his even
"Finally Sassenach" he said, closed eyes, smiling in contentment and without the slightest taunting in his tone when I released him "I missed ye badly". I pulled back, moistening my lips to one another, smiling in triumph and satisfaction myself. "Welcome back" I replied picking up his teasing tone "Now what were you saying about Brimstone?"

"Once on a wager" he opened his eyes still smiling with contentment "Hamish tried to goat her further" Jamie went on Illuminating me, peeping to the front of the stables, making sure that the most welcoming acts on my part, caused no unwelcome consequences. "He was pulling at her reins, loosening her girth every time she went forward, as if she would be let free if she only cross the damn line" he laughed wholeheartedly at the memory "End up getting head-butted quite forcefully and went tumbling into a bog"

He returned his gaze to bore into me and his smile spread "So ye see, mo maise, I wasna the only one who plotted to keep ye here"

"Why Alec that little -" I glared at his direction, wanting to say a word to the conniving horse-master.

"Weel, for his defense, she was probably the only horse here who wasna claimed for the Tynchal tomorrow and he thought ye no need to go further than Leoch's terrain" "I bet he did" I said disbelievingly.

"Wonder why she does it though" I pondered, letting go of my pique as I looked at what or who I got, from such machination being performed at my expense.

"Look" he whispered, inclining his head to a spot further into the stables. Where right at the edge of the last stall there was something I have not seen since my childhood years living between the pyramids in Egypt. He stood there grazing; the most beautiful purebred Arabian stallion I have ever seen.

He towered over; so unlike the Clydesdale breed of draught horses around us and all over Scotland.

All the steeds here featured broad foreheads and wide muzzles, high withers, sloped shoulder, but most of all the thickest, sturdiest bulky muscular legs and hooves, to match their heavy hauling and logging throughout Scotland's marshlands and crevasse's scenery. All were features that granted them the appearance of the gaiety, amicable, mild-mannered, sweet beasts that they were.

In complete contrast, there stood poised and proud before me, a tall, concave profile, refined wedge- shaped head, small muzzle, long arched neck, finely chiseled bone structure with the leanest muscled mass enveloping it, ending with a high-carried tail and hindquarters- Arabian stallion. He was painted in a chestnut- roan coat with rabicano patches. He was truly a magnificent sight.

To the untrained eye, a comparison between the two breeds might end with the findings of the roan stallion lacking; perhaps over his skinny poor appearance when equated to the others.
But I have seen his kind before.

"Scheherazade" I said transfixed by the sight.
"What?" Jamie puzzled
"Well she was the storyteller from 'One Thousand and One Nights' but what I meant was, that in our time in Egypt; mine and uncle Lambs that is, that's what the locals used to call them, the thoroughbred anyway. They said they served the realm just as she did when she made the king fall in love with her and by doing so, calmed his murderous temper" I said, marveling at the sight of the steed and from the memories the vision of him awakened in me.

"If ever we took one to ride on, we needed to pay for two more guards to keep them safe. 'Worth more than their weight in gold' we were always told, made us sleep with them in our tents so they wouldn't be stolen"

"Aye 'tis a fine horse" said a very confused Jamie over hearing too many references he couldn't place and we were far from being in the proper time or place for him to inquire or for me to begin to clarify them all.

"They run like a blazing sand storm" I said recalling "No horse is faster than them; I actually did see one outrun a real sand storm. I used to watch them in awe all the time. Once they were free from their restraints and saddles they would just go. Uncle Lamb even took me to the race tracks one time to watch them at all their glory. Ho Jamie, you should have seen them run, the earth shook under their hooves from the power of their speed and you could see every muscle in their body springs and pulse as they dashed". I laughed recalling "And they are very clever to; over living with people as part of their families. I think I actually saw one read a newspaper once or at least look at the pictures" I laughed again, at the memory of a white horse using his snout to flip through the pages.

"Aye, only in the Highlands there's hardly a place flat enough to let them truly roam and gallop" He said, obviously feeling bad for the beast. "Colum found him as a foal near his deid mater" he explained the horse existence here "looking so frail and hardly standing on his legs. I figure he felt sorry for him o'er his shaking slimly legs so he took him in"

"But what does he have to do with Brimstone?" I quarried Jamie smiled patting the mentioned mare.
"After he was brought here, they curbed him near her, so they could clean him from all the blood and dirt he was covered at. Brimstone being newly birthed herself was fed handsomely to build up her strength and had lots of hay in hand by her, so naturally he came to stand closer at her side and…. And that was it" he concluded in a knowing tone.

"No one kens what transpired between them, but from that day on Brimstone would nay leave Leoch's grounds. Contrary to your experience, yon stallion is much a brainless wee thing. Ye see, once freed he would run and nay stop. Colum used to say if one wanted to cross the whole of Scotland in one ride, that be the horse to do so on"

"I should have taken him for my escape plan" I said joshing.
Jamie coked a brow at me conveying his displeasure at the idea of me being allowed on anything that could distance me so from him.

"Aye" he said with a glare at me, but returned to his story "Only we canna truly free him, never. For his own good that is." He said defensively for him hindering such a creature. "His mane willna survive the Scottish cold and the poor thing is too tall for his own good to roam where there are too many hills and drops of land. We let him out a bit each day, unfortunately we canna do so wi' no tether." He turned his attention back to my docile mare, speaking with such affection "Brimstone on the other hand would go and do as ordered in such a way you'd swear she spoke our tongue. Why, she kens what she is told and what's needed wi'ot the telling, she recognizes voices and faces. Aye, the smartest mount I ever did see, but-

"But she won't leave without him" I said looking up at Jamie.

"Aye, nay further than the grounds that is. Colum once tried to trade her, but she was returned after reaching the ground's end and no matter how they tried to pull her or budge her, she willna come across. Alec brought her back claiming they were thrashing her senseless so she would go athwart and he wouldn'a have it. 'If she finds this place home and him the cause o'it' he said 'she will be deid in a matter of days o' a broken heart, even if they managed to make her pass. And then Himself will be found in a real swivet, needing to explain the selling of a failing horse'" Jamie ended the recite with a reverent expression to all the ploys old Alec maneuvered on her behalf.

"He went on saying how Colum would ha' a blemish on his reputation as the best breeder and grower 'oround these parts-" he laughed "I tell ye Sassenach, when it comes to his beasts the man is as guile as the best o'them. So Colum returned the coin and Brimstone was returned home" he concluded giving her another warm pat.

"His her True North" I said looking at the beautiful Mediterranean stallion, so uprooted from his place and climate here.

"I dinna ken what that means also and ye will be telling me later" he rubbed his chin dubiously "But I do remember, when I was here at sixteen, trying for the life o'me to realize what could possibly have happened between the two in those few minutes" he smiled and his eyes deepened their color to the color of a tranquil loaches in sunset as he looked at me.

"And now?" I asked looking up at him, feeling the heat of his body radiate through his clothes to me.

He smiled with such tenderness "Now? Nay Sassenach, I havna wondered for some time now 'about such a thing. Now I simply ken".

There was a shuffling of feet from the stall that held Roderick and Alec and I turned to face Brimstone again, to hide the blush on my tell-all-face.

I placed my hand on her neck to the side that was opposite to where they stood, so my palm and Jamie's, who took my meaning and added his on mine, were hidden from the outside world.

We stood, his face to my back, only palms touching lightly.
Brimstone helping a kindred spirit brought her head forward to almost block me completely from view.

I wove my hand in his.

"Ye will come to me tonight" he determined "Ye Ken the way that none will see ye?"

"Yes, through the kitchen basement, where there is a hidden tunnel that will lead me next to the stables entry, but Jamie we said-" I said, whispering with no breath, closing my eyes, very willing to let his voice in my ear persuade me differently than our agreed upon rules.

Instead though, I felt as if a gust of freezing cold wind attacked my back, making me stagger forward a bit from the impact.

"So made a new friend did ye now?" said a gruff, cracked, deep voice at my back "had me a feeling ye'll strike a liking to her"

"Yes" I turned to Alec smiling "Seems as we were destined to meet and share a fate"
I said enigmatically and took my leave politely.

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I stared at my reflection, twirling a bit in my floral and plaid dress with an l'anglaise style back and lace trim ruched sleeves.
My pearl ear bobs dangling from my ears, my hair pulled up quite nicely, I might add and a striking neck ribbon tie neatly in a butterfly knot at my nape.

I felt pretty and all dolled up.

I was marveling at the notion of letting Jamie see me fully, this time around, instead of being all swaddled up under my cloak as last time.

He always made it clear he liked to see me all swathed in splendid attires.

Although I couldn't for the life of me understand it.

Jamie was fast acting in getting me out of everything I wore and very forthright about telling me, in what condition he would prefer to see me when I did wear something.

Once, in Paris, as we returned from one or another of our many evening engagements and were preparing for sleep;
He watched me begin to undress and said he would most want to have enough coin in order to buy an isle so we could roam freely naked on it, with no other people around.

He was most gracious at sighing and saying that if I insist, he might be persuaded to allow me to keep a shift or two.
I laughed and said "With all the Robinson Crusoe characteristics you possess, I must agree we could live and thrive on such an isolated piece of land by ourselves"

He missed the joke. Although already published and highly acclaimed Daniel Defoe was absent from Jamie's reading roll. A mistake he corrected two days after, coming to me and then laughing at my joke.

"Fine Adam and Eve than" I adjusted myself to the times and company.

"I dinna Ken Sassenach," he grinned "for I canna for the life o'me resolve whether ye are Eve or the snake"

"What?" I said a bit miffed

"A temptress as ye. Ye could make me do"
He came behind me to kiss my nape
"Say"
He slid the dress off my shoulders.
As usual, not noticing the fine French handiwork or embroidery details. Not caring the slightest about the fact that it pooled at my feet wrinkling and particularly not noticing as his boots stomped on the costly garment as he gathered me from it, lifting me to the bed "Or eat anything ye wish me to" he said as his smiling face disappeared between my legs.

I shivered at the memory and observed myself in the glass again. "Perhaps for the two seconds I would be in possession of my clothes this time, he would enjoy the spectacle".

For all my 'don't tell me where you'll be' or protestation to meet tonight. I found myself since his departure, inducing a game of pull sticks to relieve myself of one shadow, gathering Valerian roots to dispose of the other and asking Geillis if next we meet, could she afford me some port, which I received with a very discordant, unpleasant exchange of words between me and her.

It varied from inquiries regarding all the cheeses, bread and fruits I gathered, this time, for a hungry, wet and cold husband (as if one needed more proof of my preconceived intention for tonight), it shifted to subjecting me to a cruel and ruthless dialogue in respect to Frank and her need for me to acknowledge my husband's death, which I found myself unable to say this time. I truly felt I could not say such a thing, when my mind only regarded Jamie as my current husband and will not allow me to jinx his well-being by saying such words.

So I settled for divulging that my first husband is indeed dead at this time insisting not to say any more on the subject, over the sorrow it caused me.

As much as it pained me to admit, Jamie was right, Geillis's attitude did alter from last time. She was much forceful in her tries to uncover information in relation to myself, my marital stature and my fertility state.

At the very least that was the one subject that hurt less this time, knowing that soon Jamie and I will be able to start our family.

But through all her questionings, I did still see my friend try and advise me to walk the new path I was given and reach my 'bonny' new place.
When she warned me of how the Highlands are no place for a woman to be alone at, I had to grasp the table's edge as to not grab her arm and warn her back for what's to come.

But I swore my oath to Jamie and he in return came to me one night with a first attempt for a solution regarding her situation. He said he spoke to Ned Gowan, in passing of course (I missed dear Ned and couldn’t wait to re-acquaintance myself with the lawyer that held a heart of a poet, during our ride with the rent party) Jamie said there was a law called 'To plead one's belly' which meant an execution will not take place, if the defendant is with child and once the capital punishment was discarded, the perpetrator could plead to be transported and not killed, no matter what was the accusation.

I remembered looking at Jamie standing stark naked by the bed, bursting with pride and joy at his found solution. He hated Geillis, zealously and vocally and was sure that in the future our endeavors to save her will come back to bite us in the arse.

'For wicked does as wicked does and a snake as loyalty to no other but himself' were his exact words.

But there was nay doubt in his mind that it would be OUR endeavors. If I felt it was worth the fight, he will fight it right by my side.

He made sure I knew quite clearly he only searched for a way to rescue her for MY benefit but he still did it, putting aside all of his feelings and thoughts on the matter.

"But we are one Sassenach. What is your cause is mine as weel" He said not understanding the deep gratitude and surprise I conveyed to him for his actions.

That was the only reason and the only way I could keep my mouth strongly shut as I stood face to face with Geillis now.

As for the idea though- It broke my heart to inform, a waiting to be thanked and kissed grinning Jamie, that this could not even be considered a partially adequate solution to Geillis predicament.

To allow her to kill her husband, go through a trial- alone this time (for I had no intention to stand on the accused podium again)- get pregnant from a man that will forsake her, only so she could be exiled to the Americas alone and penniless.

He stood there so deflated, after being so secure in his triumph upon one of the many problems we faced. So I devoted the rest of the night to put that triumph expression back on his face.

Just the memory of his trying so much for me, made me grin and bear it while I stood opposite to my friend, not to mention made me think of tonight.

So I departed from her, with no secrets being told from either sides and went to put Angus to bed in order to get my husband in the same position.
Later tonight all the fighting man of the Mackenzie clan will gather in the hall and make their oath of allegiance to Colum.

No one will be watching the stables

I could hardly see a thing before me.
I kept caressing the walls of the cellar, trying to find the damn tunnel.

I was more than annoyed.
I constructed my plans so exhaustively, leaving no room for error.
I included all of the paths I needed to take and all of the people I needed to 'take care' of.

But there was no way, no how, I could have accounted for Muriel.
May her skin burn in the fires of hell!

Muriel was Laoghaire best friend.
And so with my painstaking efforts to avoid the one I ran smack into the other.

I just past the store room to the right of my surgery, intending to cross the kitchen and go down to the basement, when Muriel popped in front of me.
Yes, she actually dashed and popped herself before me, as if we were playing a stupid childish game of tag.
She grinned from ear to ear, delighted at catching her patsy and calling out at the top of her lungs.
"Laoghaire, Laoghaire I ha' her! She's here, come quick"

"Look child" I said sternly. I had to keep her silent and away, so no one could hear or come to us.
It wasn’t only not seeing Jamie that was at stake.
I was standing here, fully cloaked and carrying provisions for Christ sake.
Although this time I wasn’t intending to run, it looked to be exactly that.
And all I needed was someone suggesting going to the stables to check if I had help or a horse standing by-
Well, my head would not be the only one being removed and served for dinner.

"As I said" I said more harshly, as she ignored me and looked around for her friend to come
"I don’t know what game you're playing at, but I have no time for you or for your inbred friends, stand aside at once and let me pass!"

She surveyed me through and through, from top to bottom and all of a sudden I startled to recognize the same guile, malice, fueled with evil stares that Laoghaire gave me, as she stood at the trial, pointing an accusatory finger and peddling lies about me.

Was this idiot child a force to be reckoned with?

"Ho no Mrs. Beauchamp 'tis nay game or inbre.. what ye said, 'tis I" came the panting voice of Laoghaire Mackenzie at my back "Muriel dinna stare at the mistress such 'tis rude"
A flushed Laoghaire appeared in front of me.

"I'm so sorry mistress Beauchamp, 'tis only we ha' been searching for ye high and low"
They two stood side by side opposite me. How is two against one fair!?
One all excited with twinkling eyes, fumbling her fingers fretfully, the other measuring me suspiciously with narrow eyes and tight lips.

"We do apologize mistress, 'tis only we tried talking to ye for quite some time now. Couldna get ye alone for a moment. So when Muriel saw ye leave the hall"
"Wi'oot Angus or Rupert mind ye" chimed in a helpful Muriel crossing her hands to her chest.

Who was this bloody child?!

"Aye" said a missing the point Laoghaire. She seemed to have only one thing on her mind and there was no way in hell I was supplying it!!!

"Look you two, I'm sure whatever it is, I will be able to assist you at another time. Tomorrow perhaps in my surgery" I persuaded myself to be civil, as to be done cordially with the matter and let Jamie have a good laugh about it at my expense, where upon I would be the one curled up in his arms.

"Tis only we… I mean I… If I can only trouble ye for a wee favor" Laoghaire wasn’t budging the slightest.
"No" I determined quite forcefully, losing my cordial intentions "I'm sorry, I'm quite busy at the moment I must go and-

"Wi'oot your escorts" Muriel was doing her best at being helpful again.
"What?" I said discomposed.

"Wi'oot your escorts, that's what ye meant to say.dinna ye? Ye must go Wi'oot your escorts"
I must say Laoghaire could surely choose her friends.
Her conniving, stinking, blackmail bitches friends,
I thought as I soured at Muriel.

"I don’t see why this is of any concern of yours" I said in clipped tones.
"'Tis nay m' concern, m' affair or o' m' caring" she said, placing her hands on her hips "Might be to others though" she added cocking an eyebrow at me.

"Look, I see no injury or bleeding in the two of you" I said, acknowledging my inferior standing at this moment, but not giving in on the harsh tone front "and as for ONLY that I may be good for you… so if you will please excuse me-

"No, dinna be worrit mistress, we're quite raw. 'tis o' another matter" carried on a starry eye Laoghaire "Weel I was wondering if…"
"Out with it" I said, ready to refuse and hoping it will be the end of it.
"Oh aye" she stuttered, but her friend gaze never left my eyes, daring me to not fall in line.

"Only if ye had a potion that might open a lad's heart to a lassie"
She hurried on to explain, taking my silence as misunderstanding.
"Ye ken, a potion or a brew o'some kind… help a lad…. Ye ken…” she giggled, lowering her eyelashes demurely.

I wanted to throw-up
"Look, I'm neither a magician, a dragon, a fairy or a witch" I said reciting any kind of creature I knew from mythology and literature that dealt with such potions. "Nor am I an old one, a Selkie or a kelpie" I added all I could remember from Gaelic-Scottish folklore taught to me by MY HUSBAND.

"I don’t conjure anything, or associate myself with such things or people who involve themselves in such matter" I was really picking my stride here. "Unlike others" I cocked an eyebrow at Laoghaire remembering the ill-wish doll.

"I dinna mean to offend ye mistress" Laoghaire, who had not yet purchased the item in question, missed my point entirely (again) and also seemed to ignore all my other protestations "I just.. I had it in mind that… weel ye aid so many wi’ your healing that... maybe ye had somethin' in your keen knowledge that could help a lass holds a lad's attention"

"Look Laoghaire, I don’t know what YOU think happened between you and Mr. MacT-" I said, losing my restraint and good sense, caring only to make sure there will be no more attempts of seduction against dear old, unwed Mr. MacTavish.

MY dear old, soon to be wed to me, Mr. MacTavish that is.

"That's nae exactly true, what ye say" brought me back from my outrage tantrum, a wicked Muriel. "What?" I half shouted, forgetting myself over my anguish.

I just wanted to be in my husband's arms, why was this happening?

"What ye say afore" Muriel preceded to enlighten me "'twas ye who told Mrs. Fitz ye're a charmer, 'twas ye who healed Tammas Baxter and Wee Lindsey McNeil using potions and 'twas certainly ye that been seen dancing naked wi' mistress Duncan in the woods north o' the foot hills"

"What?" I gapped opening my mouth and eyes at her "No one could claim such a thing! It is complete fabrication!"

"No according to our friend Jeanie Hume, the Duncan's housekeeper, or at least that will be her telling once I ask her to" she said with sinister eyes, glaring at me back "They all ken ye and the mistress commune wi' the spirits there. Ye ha’ been seen quite friendly wi’ each other as o’ late"

"She is my friend that is true, but the rest-"

"STAD Muriel" Laoghaire, of all people, was the one to come to my rescue "There is no need for this, the mistress helps anyone who asks, ye ken that! She'll help"

She turned to me pleading "'Tis nay for harm mistress I pledge it to ye, 'tis for moving his heart forward. He himself said he holds me in his eyes, only shyness seemed to take a much too sturdy hold on him o' late"

"I… I…L." I was so flustered from all the disclosure regarding my perception in the public eye, again; at being blackmailed and threaten by a sixteen year old child, again; and at a kind and choosing to do right by me Laoghaire, that I stood there completely immobile and speechless.

"Wait there" I said, comprehending at last, that if I didn’t comply with one child, the other will stir up trouble.

Muriel knew I wasn’t supposed to be here and she seem to know how to get me in deeper trouble than Laoghaire could.

Beside, Jamie and I were to leave the day after tomorrow, get married and the question whether to get back here or use our chance and try to escape to Lallybroch was still very much at deliberation.
This was certainly an enormous merit for Broch Tuarach.

I hoped Jamie would find this funny.
Me, being bested by two teenagers.
And I hoped he could help ME find the humor in it!

But as I turned back to my surgery, to bring a jar of my finest dried horse dung, I knew I could never tell him about this.
Although he wouldn’t admit fully to the extent of it, Jamie was terrified about the past replaying itself again.
So was I.
But I have worked too damn hard to assure him that we could change things to our benefit.
And hell if I was to let these narcissistic, conceited, brash, filthy adolescence arseholes ruin my second chance at happiness.
Laoghaire Mackenzie and her like will not be my downfall.

I hated to even think of hiding something from Jamie (and I was damn afraid of not being able to fool my very perceptive husband), but deep inside of me was always a strong terror of my own as well.

That if Jamie would think the surroundings and what's to come to be too dangerous, he might try to send me back through the stones again.
He tried to, three times.

I didn't believe he wished me gone of course, but Jamie was very good at sacrificing all he had and all he was for those he loved.

I feared of the day he would leave me no choice and try to protect me against my wishes.
I truly didn’t know how I could live without him.

Moreover, this was harmless, Jamie loved horses but I doubted very much a jar of dung and a Wizard of Oz chant will send him on an amorous spree to someone else's arms.

Although, if he ever comes back smelling of it, it better be because he stepped in it.
Or he might find himself being circumcised, religious beliefs notwithstanding.

And with the decision to forestall the whole witch trial completely, for me and Geillis; this gave dear olc, striopach, nighean na galla Laoghaire Mackenzie (Jamie would be proud. I was putting his lessons to good use) no weapon against me.

"Here" I said returning and trusting the jar to Laoghaire eager hands, almost making her drop it
"Sprinkle the content of this at his threshold. Stand outside the door tap your heels together three times and recite 'there's no place like love, there's no place like love "
I repeated my past words only this time sounding cold and mean in my own ears.

"Thanks to ye Claire" said Laoghaire, sure that we reached a more friendly intimate stage in our 'relationship' and missing the truth before her yet again.
"Good night to ye mistress" said a cynical Muriel that seem to see too much of the truth before her.
They both turned to each other, jumping up and down with glee and scurrying along. I ran to find the secret passageway and be reassured and secure in the arms of the man that loved me.

But here I stood and could not find the cursed thing anywhere!!!

All of a sudden my hands stumbled on a torch and a flint strung to it, just by a jagged formation of stones on one of the walls.

"Jamie" I felt the smile spread to the outside of me, as the heat of his protection and care for me warmed my insides.

I pushed one of the sharp points and could feel the wall being pushed inward. I slid myself inside the crevasse.

*****

I walked into the stable, trying to hearten myself that if I couldn’t escape my encounter with Laoghaire, I at least arrived unharmed or molested by drunken clansmen or Dougal.

I placed the kindled torch inside one of the sconces in the stables and walked in.

"There's no place like love, there's no place like love, there's no place like love"
I recited my own creation to myself, hoping it will conjure my love and bring me back to my rightful place between his arms.

"What's True North?"
A soft but no less deep whisper came at my back.

How on earth was he always able to sneak up on me?

"Weel Sassenach" he summoned me back from my wonder "I've been waiting for my lesson all day. What's True North?"
Jamie circled around me, coming to stand face to face to me.

I watched him move, observed his face; so filled with confident, joy and a blazing passion waiting to ignite.
All the things I lacked at this moment and badly lusted for.

"You" I simply said looking up at him with longing "You are True North. My True North".

Jamie smiled at me with shining eyes, conveying understanding beyond any further explanation I could afford him regarding those words.
And some of the pieces I felt threatened to break from me in my fragile state, were glued back together again.
"Come" he said extending his hand to me, as he did the first time I came here wanting to escape.

He was asking my permission, then, to lead me to safety.

I took it, now, for the same reason.

******

He was warm as always and his hand was so big that when it engulfed mine, my palm almost disappeared in it.
I brought my other hand to clasp and caress that perfect whole left hand, bringing it first to brush my cheek and then guiding it to my lips, kissing it lightly.

No, I vowed, I won't let you be hurt again!
I lifted my gaze to his smiling, free of burden face, that lightened my burden in return as I allowed him to tug me behind him strolling further into the stables.

'See' I told myself 'things can change.'
Then, I was strolled to the cold outside, led by a stranger; a friendly, kind, beautiful stranger, but still a stranger at the time.
Now, I was being led to the warm inside, by the person I knew and knew me back most in the world.

I viewed my surroundings, to find that the familiar, stuffy, coziness of the stables have transformed itself to an unknown serene vastness of free space.

Without the constant coming and goings of the people it usually held and with more than half of the horses gone; taken to stand for the night near the tents of those who claimed them for the hunt tomorrow, the stables seemed as free and limitless as the outside land.

The extremely high walls and ceiling that held a row of windows at their point of joining, were a complete contrast to all our past rendezvous in my, perhaps luxurious but - confronted with this place - still a chamber.

A big, comfy, warm bed, even placed in a big, comfy, warm room seemed all of a sudden as if it was oppressive.
As if until now, we made love in a room that was made for concealment and shelter;
a small bubble hid away from prying eyes.
But here outside (in a way) where the expanse of space was evident and its location outside the castle walls held everyone far and away from us, I felt as if I was liberated.

Free to live, free to speak and shout, to run and to choose which direction to take -

"Free to love" I told the back of my tugboat, that led me to some undisclosed location.

The stars that glistened from the outside sky shone bright enough that I was able to see more than just shapes and lumps, so when my assumption that he couldn’t possibly have heard me was proven wrong, as he halted abruptly at my spoken words, slowly turning to me to reveal his face, I was quite capable to see and read his expression; every line, every note and every facial muscle movement.
So I can say, beyond any reasonable doubt, that his face was completely incomprehensible to me, which for Jamie meant he was feeling something quite strongly or too complex to be expressed. For a fraction of a second I feared I said something wrong.

I had no more time to ponder such a thing, for he grasped me by my nape and pinned me to the nearest wall. Taking my lips with no gentleness right from the very start. When he finally did ease the pressure on my lips, he did so only so he could begin to suckle on my lower lip, as I closed my upper lip on his.

"Ye smell nice Sassenach" he said, beaming with pleasure as he stood close fitting to my side when he was done with my lips. His front stood to my left shoulder and he was enjoying himself watching me, closed eyed and panting, while he ran his hand up and down my clothed body, slowly.

"Ye smell o' Colum's Rhenish, Mrs. Fitz's venison wi-'" he brought his nose to sniff my neck "wi' black berries and…. mushrooms" he added as he licked me just below my chin and then closed his mouth for a small soft bite.

"Now I know you are just making this up" I smiled teasingly, still keeping my eyes shut and leaning on the cold, damp wall that he restrained me on "I haven’t had any food at all today, only wine" I had to admit. I knew what he smelled were the provisions I brought for him; that now stood at my feet, where they were dropped as I was fastened to the wall; but it was nice to be attributed such fine smells.

"It clings to your skin, my love" he took his finger and traveled it across my face as if he was a blind man studying another's face so he could 'see' him; from the tip of my nose, to my lips and down my décolletage between my breasts "your skin is so fine other things imbed themselves into ye wanting to seek entry"

He came closer. The side of my body felt his front tight to me "I ken I do, so badly" he said bringing his palm to cup the side of my face, half turning them to him, just enough so he could bring his tongue into my mouth, finding mine and coaxing it to move with his.

"Always" he said as he released me with a content smile "It doesna stop Sassenach. Ye" He moved his thumb to my chest, sloping it to my left breast and when he reached where my nipple rested, beneath my very tight, un-layered dress, he pressed it hard. With no shift or corset and only very light stays under the thin fabric, it stiffen almost immediately. A sob escaped me as I moisten my lips together.

"Ye" he repeated himself in my ear, as my eyes were closed shut again "never stop".

He began to circle his thumb around my nipple, as his palm cupped it from below.

"Do… ye... want me… to?" I strained to let the words out, pressing myself to the cold wall, trying to find a loosened protruding brick or something, so I can sink my fingers in it, in response to what his touch released in me.
"No, mo nighean donn" he said and I could hear the puzzlement in his voice for me even considering such a thing "Ye misunderstand me, mo chridhe, 'tis nay a complaint but a pray of thanks"

I strained to open my eyes to look at him, panting from his touch, feeling my thighs as the stand on my feet slippery.

"Then you wouldn’t want another?” I would never ask such things, or act as a spoiled girl seeking acknowledgements, only tonight I wanted his assurance and recognition, but could not ask for it any differently without letting the reason slip and there for take the chance to injure and scare him.

He didn’t stop his maneuvers, thank the Lord, I couldn’t stand it if he did, I was so aroused that if he wasn’t inside of me, hard and filling all of me, I needed his touch on me at least.

How could he sense it, was the real puzzlement. That I didn’t care to solve at the moment.

He came so tight to my side I could almost feel his long lashes on my temple as his mouth was in my ear.
His hand… Well his hand, by now, felt like it was about to dissolve my clothes and reach my skin just by the sheer pressure and circular motion he was applying to them, again and again.

My breath was so shallow I couldn’t take long inhales into me.

"Listen to me Claire" he said in a commending voice, which pierced my eardrum in such a way I could almost imagine seeing the vibration of the echoes his deep, deep voice conjured in me. "Ye will be no one's but me, Sassenach and I ha' been yours from the day ye were born. I have waited two hundred and then three and twenty years more for ye to come to me and I willna let ye go for at least that long"

His other hand came to my neck ribbon and was pulling at one of his ends.
I swallowed hard, as I could hear it rasp in my ear slowly, slowly unraveling.
I could hear the first loop surrender and dissolve into the knot, I could sense as the pressure loosened itself on my neck and gradually slithered on my skin falling to the floor.
Not before caressing the bare part of my décolletage.

"Jamie" I gasped the word, pleading.
"Not yet, mo nighean donn" he said and the pressure on my breast increased.

I actually saw flashes of light and felt my knees give-way.

I felt him holding me still.
I was standing only by his hand at my elbow and his other hand at my breast.

"Please Jamie" I implored again.
"No, nae yet, my love" he whispered into me, sounding so in-control and collected.
So oppose to me being a pool of desire that he was not willing to plunge himself into.

When I accustomed myself to the level of pleasure he inflicted on me and he felt me stand a bit firmer on my own, he moved his hand from my breast down to my navel, applying the same maneuvers he afforded my bosom.

He was so close to my core, I tried to urge his hand to come between my legs but he wouldn’t have
"Do ye ha' any notion how much I wanted ye after that moment before the hearth? Do ye ken how much ye possessed my soul from that first night 'til now?" he asked and I was beginning to think I was being punished for all I put him through.

"I'm sorry Jamie, but please come to me I …." I wanted to tell him that I needed him inside of me, I needed him to tell me over and over that there was no other for him, that we could not even see those lassies around him that wanted him, especially Laoghaire.

I wanted to tell him that it wasn't only envy I needed to resolve; I wanted to know he wouldn't send me away, that he wouldn't be so worried that I was bested by two small girls that I couldn't possibly survive here, in this time, even with him by my side.

I couldn't ask for all of that though; but I could ask to be connected to him, I could ask for his body to protect me from my own thoughts, from myself.

It was a rough night and what her and her friend did to me, forced me to do, to play along with- I wanted to lose myself at how good he felt and how much he loved me.

However, I couldn't tell him that either; couldn't explain myself to him.

For the first time, since my reveal from where I came from, for the first time since my disclosure of my truth, I couldn't be honest with him.

She took that from me, that retched girl took that from me, from us. I hated her more, now, than when she plotted to have me burned at the stake.

I brought my eyes to meet his. I didn't know what he would see in them, but I was willing to deny all I wasn't prepared to say. Only I still longed for him to see my need.

"Please" I said looking into him "I need you"

He looked back into me and to my surprise whatever he saw did not only make him not desist with his roaming hand at my navel, but made him slide it between my legs. With layers of fabric still between us, but it was progress.

His other hand came to my bare nape and enveloped it whole.

He brought our foreheads to meet and did not break our stare.

"Ye are mine!" he growled "Do ye hear me Claire?" he asked forcefully  "Mine" he repeated "and I will never let ye go"

"Thank ye" I whispered in gratitude, marveling again at how he knew what I so desperately required to hear.

He came to stand in front of me, taking my mouth and pressing himself on me, making it quite clear that he may seem in control but his body surged with desire for me. I could feel it pressing at my hips all through my lower stomach.
He asked into my lips
"May I take ye as I want Claire? Or d'ye need differently o'me?"

He pulled back, looking into my eyes, holding himself, awaiting my command.
I nodded my acquiescence.

He distanced himself from me further, holding his palm to my throat, his thumb caressing my jaw line and settling on my lips pressing on them.
He stood at the distance of his stretched arm from me, only touching me with a palm at my neck and his thumb at my lips.

His words to me silenced my insecurities in such a way, I found myself capable of curbing my desire and need of him to await our encounter to begin.

He took his other hand and plucked out my stomacher, exposing my stays.
I witnessed his satisfaction as he saw I came prepared to be taken and there for wore no more than the bare minimum.

Still keeping me in arm's length, he pulled on the strings that bound me; again I could hear the rasping sound of it as it past every loop and every cross knot that held it skintight and binding to my form.

It flopped opened, to each side of me and my chest swelled as I took a full long breath into my now released torso.
Jamie's eyes become slits and his expression blank again.

He placed both his palms to my throat and his thumbs lifted my chin a bit so I would stare into his eyes

"Undress me" he ordered.
I took my hands to his waist to release him of his dirk and belt.

The outside terrain was so quiet in contrast to the very loud noises coming from the castle.
As if nature itself could not win against the uproar its human inhabitant could Emit.

So when belt and dirk fell to the ground, their clamors echoed through the air and into my body making me shiver.

I brought my hands to his neck untying his jabot and collar.

Once removed and his shirt front slightly open, I meant to relieve him of coat and waistcoat, only his lips distracted me and I found myself smiling as I traced my thumb on his full lower lip.

Jamie smiled back at me, parted his lips slightly and bit the tip of my forefinger, never breaking his stare from me.
He used his tongue to flick its end; so it was I, who broke our stare and closed my eyes at the sensation.

He didn’t wait anymore for me to go on with his undressing, as I felt his thumbs lift my face higher as his mouth came under my chin, nibbling its way to the base of my throat where his tongue licked a small circle at the small arc at his base.
His lips spread to a smile into my skin and he said
"Aye, ye smell and taste like fine game Sassenach" he chucked into my larynx "most o' the time I canna believe I trapped such unattainable quarry"

He lifted his eyes to meet mine
"How did I do such a thing Sassenach? Can ye tell me?" he inquired truthfully.
I looked back at him and said with that same truthfulness
"You were you, Jamie. That’s all I needed. You"

His stare intensified; his hold on me hardened.
He lifted my dress high to my hip and lowered himself between my legs.

He enveloped his palm around the upper thigh of my left leg and brought it to lean evenly on his right shoulder.
His other hand drew my right thigh to spread allowing him to reach me.

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!" I cried out

"No Sassenach" he peered to me from under my dress, grinning "just me"

and with that he slipped back under my garments.

"Free to love"

That’s what she said and that’s what did him in at the end.
"Free to love"

He was intending to take her up the stairs to where he slept all those nights wi’oot her.

He had only one more night to sleep there, alone, before the rent party will be on its way.

But he wanted the feel and smell of her on it, even for that one night.

He planned to borrow into the sheets of his cot, having her scent, her warmth and the memory of her, engulfing him.

Lying in his private secret, amongst the other stable's workers, them nay the wiser o' what transpired a night before between yon sheets.

Only then he heard her say "Free to love"

And he lost all reason and self-control.

"Free to love"
She was free! He saw to that.
Made sure she was no threatened or coerced by no one, no even himself.

It may ha' taken him some time to reach the bravery and strength it took to do so, but he fought his battles from the start and won.

He gave her free choice to go and do as she pleased, wi' no impending punishment above her heid.

And she in return chose him.

She came back to him.

**She chose to FREELY LOVE him.**

Earlier tonight he feared she wouldna come.
In the stables, this morning, he had to leave her side, as Alec came close to them.

Just as he slipped away, he heard her say something about their previous decision not to meet and he couldna stay to persuade her otherwise.

Jamie tried telling himself ’twas for the best if she willna come, ’tis the right and sensible thing to do'.
And he and Claire were sensible, pragmatic people, or at least so she said once.

Only his memories of how miserable he was here last time.

All curled up on the ground muttering to himself foul words regarding the situation and the people involved.

Hating the feeling of being hunted and forced by his own uncles!
Trapped in a dangerous tag of war between the two.

And then, he thought he was being attacked as something heavy kicked and landed on him.

He rolled on the form that hurt him, feeling so angry he wanted to kill the poor soul that was probably ordered to bring him to the hall.

And there she was, under him, scared and alone.

And he forgot.

He forgot what cold felt like, how loneliness stabbed him in his wame all night, how wrath tasted vile in his mouth.

There she was, soft, scared and alone wi' pleading eyes open wide, unsure what to do now that she was caught.

He watched the changes in her as she regained her determination to run, to escape, to be free.
Aye, she dinna sit and feel sorry for herself, as he did that evening, she kept fighting no matter what.

Christ, she inspired him so.

But tonight when she will come, if she will come, he speculated, as the light darkened to black and still no sign o'her, it willna be to escape him.

Tonight she will come 'free to love' and will choose to love him.

She willna be running from him, she will be running to him.

And the coherent, rational side o'him stood aside to a selfish, indulgent man that wanted to see her verify her love to him time and again.

It came nay from a need to be proved that, but simply from the joy of seeing it manifested each time.

For she was his.

For every uncertainty he had, she demonstrated the real truth, wi'out being asked. For every disbelieve he felt, she brought him to his knees marveling at the miracle of her love and passion for him. For everything he needed the woman beside him to be, she left him more than satisfied and in awe o' the many new things she could give him.

The part of him that still held that small nagging insecurity regarding such matters, was due only for his disbelief to the fact that the woman he craved more than life, the woman he dreamed of, the woman that was brought through time and magic here, was his.

How on earth could she be his?

How can such a thing be possible?

But there she was, crying 'oot his name, wanting him as he did her, if one could believe such a thing was possible.

But most of all here she was moaning and gasping, crying and sobbing from the love o' him.

The pleasure acts of the flash are for all to know and try, but between him and Claire they were an exchange of love beyond the exultation. Nay a mere act of unbridled carnal hunger that one could exchange with another no matter the man or woman involved, these were things that could only happen if he was him and she was her and they were together.

"Aaahhh" Claire let out her breath as a sob, as he added his tongue to the play and not only his lips. His hands came up to side of her hips pinning her further into the wall, as he let his heid go deeper.

"O my. G. O. D" she cried again completely unraveling "o my God" she dinna seem to be able to
stop saying it over and over again.
Her hands were holding on to the roots of his hair, pulling at them as if wanting to distance him from her, but he kent she was only trying to hold on.

"Aaahhh" another breath she couldn'a fully take into her, was forced 'oot.

Serves her right, under her command, Jamie mostly thought he would swoon wi' the lack of air and that is when he dinna think he was 'about to outright die from his heart erupting.

He chuckled at himself for his earlier fear that she would think it nay prudent to come.
She was coming along quite lovely, he thought amusingly, as he felt her heat gather and rise.

She hissed at him, feeling his chuckle go through her,
"I'll kill you for that" she threatened feebly, as she arched her back from the wall, her hips coming closer to his mouth.

Jamie was done applying soft kisses to her core, he was now doubling his efforts making sure he wouldna miss one spot of pleasure he was so intimately familiar wi'.

She clung to him, shaking and desperate "Please," she begged.
"Please I can't stand, Jamie, please stop so I can lie down. Please Jamie, I can't stand" she cried 'oot again and again then shivered and lost her footing on the remaining leg in the process.

Jamie simply caught her by her right upper thigh, lifting it, so it rested snuggly in the palm of his left hand.

He turned his face to the newly lifted leg; applying gentle kisses along her soft, sensitive inner thigh as he did wi' its predecessor.

Once he was done wi' that though, he began nibbling on it exchanging between teeth and tongue, coming closer and closer back to her center.

She rested enough, he determent, as he placed her other leg on his left shoulder.

He rose higher on his knees and he could hear her back graze the stone wall as she was lifted higher from the floor, losing all connection to the safe, stable ground.
Her nails were now drawing blood at his scalp.

Her entire weight and safety, quite simply, rested on his shoulders.

He liked the feeling o' having her security completely under his control.

Earlier today between the uncertainty whether she would come or nay, there also came the fear that something would happen to her on her way to him and his brainless desires.

He feared she would ha' another "encounter" wi' drunken clansmen in the corridors or with Dougal; even though he told her o' the path to avoid them, gave her directions to a place no one ken of and snuck at the dead o' the night before, to leave her a light to find her way to him.

He suddenly was succumbed to a wave of self-loathing, for even suggesting her to come to him and
was preparing to go to her, to see to her wellbeing; when he saw a single torch hop up and down, at
the pace he ken for certainty was hers.

He accustomed himself to walk beside her a long time ago.

He smiled as he saw her approach, his heart uplifted when he saw the first glimpse o' her face,
searching all around to make sure she was alone and no followed; just as he taught her.

She realized what it meant for him to ha' her, here, today, at this time; wi'oot him telling her o'it.

Her right calf was, now, rubbing his shoulder blades, running up and down his back, the soft part
of her inner thigh grazing his face.
He increased the pressure he was applying and clutched her thighs wi' his palms.

He felt Claire's legs stiffen as she released a high pitched cry, shivering.
He willna stop though, nay 'till the wave o' desire left her completely.
She cried out again and convulsed.

He felt her trying to find an anchor of a sort, felt her try to grasp the flat wall, finding naughting to
hold on to and returning to him, buckling almost completely onto him.

She quivered one more time and let out a shuttering breath becoming completely helpless.
She was ravished by him completely.

She was gasping for breath unable to return to herself.
But Jamie was far from done wi' her.

He lowered one leg at a time, returning them and her to the ground.
But her legs seem to dissolve into naughting as the rest o' her. She needed him to hold her.

She was panting and still whimpering from what he did to her.
When he finally finished placing her straight and fastened to the exposed brick wall, standing only
by his support;
he began moving his hands on the naked form, he undressed earlier but dinna give proper homage
to.
And her body deserved worship.

He took his hands to all o' her.
Using his fingers to stroke her face.

Moving his thumb to her temple, that throbbed.

To her nose, so refined and narrow wi' the smallest perk at its end.
He found it so adorable and always felt the need to bite it, especially if she would wrinkle it wi'
worry or thinking too much, which she did much more than he liked.

He held back now though, following the plan he constructed, all day, sitting in his wet, cold, putrid
cubby, dreaming o' the moment he'll ha' her comfort and body under his hands and dominant.

He glided his thumb on her exquisite fine chiseled cheekbones, adding his other hand and holding
her upright just by pressing his body so tight to hers. This was also done to signal her they were far from over, surely she could feel it.

Her hair drizzled from his binding to her face and he pulled it back to expose more of her countenance to him.

He reached her lips, which were still quivering and were engorged wi’ blood; so much so that when he pressed them they turned white and when released they snapped back to their flaming crimson-cherry ampleness.

No, he'll stick to the plan, he told himself He willna lose himself in her, as always.

It was a rare treat to ha' her so at his mercy. So succumbing to him and nay beginning her wild dance o’ seduction on him, which caused him to lose control and hold o’ himself.
He wanted this time savored and lasting.

If he would kiss her, she will take his mouth and all it took was one small bite to his lips and he would be inside her before he could even remember hoicking up his kilt.

He pressed harder on her form, even though she was slowly taking hold of her standing.

He slopped his hands to her shoulders, remembering to trace the clavicle she schooled him on as he laughed and marveled at how pleasant it felt to make love to a physician; told her so as weel. And it only got better wi’ time.

Her dress was so tight on her slim body he had to peel it from her as he released her arms slowly inching the garment down, sliding it 'till just below her waist.

When he was under her, he had the good common sense to remove bum roll and under skirt, so it was possible to expose more of her to him.

That's what ye get from following a plan, he deduced cheerfully.

He brought his palms to fully engulf her waist and glide his fingers on her stomach; her hips shivered under his palm and ensued a small sinuous squirm. She was telling him she was ready to endure more, now.

Not yet-

Everywhere he touched her, his hands received an answer o’ some kind wi’oot him asking naught in the first place.

Her skin coated itself wi’ gooseflesh where his hands would just touch, they moved wi’ his touch to wherever he would go, warm flashes o’ heat coursed through her and light sweat glistened from her navel, which was inching away from him, only to return wi’ her breathing, which was heavy and long now.

He made sure to nay linger too much near her navel or her soft belly; he wanted to force her delight to shift away from her depths and into the rest of her. He wanted to still keep her at the edge o’ ecstasy but as to make her able to receive him into her, soon.
Although his wife's body reaction to him was, has always, enough to make him want to watch it and her forever.
He wouldn'a be able to hold himself for much longer.

Her breasts… Weel her breasts were a marvel into themselves, they moved and hardened but still was the softest, smoothest thing he ever touched; as to be almost as if he was skimming water in an untouched loch only given to him to bathe and immerse himself in.
White opalescent misty water loch.

Soon, he promised himself in order to receive leniency from his own body's demands, so he could ha' a few more moments of adoration at her feet.

Her pulse was so strong, it echoed in different parts o' her, which in turn resonated in him.
It was slowing down to her usual heartbeat though.

It was time.

May the Lord forgive him, but he loved to make her so pliant to him, to shatter her by his own body and lust.

'Tis nay sublime to own such women who desired to be owned, who were fragile and o'need o' protection and care, he thought.
To serve and marry such women was a call of duty.
An honorable and moral act to serve a lady's need as such.
A worthy cause for any gentleman to take upon himself, to be sure.

But to own a creature that could role the world if it desired, to take a woman such as Claire that knew how to talk back, fight her battles, take care of others and nay only herself.
Weel, mastering such a vision was nay a show of strength from the vanquisher side but of trust, given to so few, if at all, by his ethereal holder.
And she bestowed it to him.

Besides 'tis was nay only him that requested such actions to be made. Tonight she came craving naughting but subjugate herself.

He placed his hands under her oxters and lifted her high above him, hearing her skin brush the wall behind her again.
A louder rasping sound was made as he glided her back to him.

"Wrap your legs around me, Sassenach, I'm no done wi' ye yet"

Claire curved her legs around his hips obeying.
Jamie tightened his body to hers again, placing one hand under her to keep her steady and used his other to lift his kilt up, to finally join her.

When he entered her, it took her breath away and she gasped, holding tight to his nape as begging to be fortitude by him.

He trusted into her hard, so hard he needed to let go of her body and brace his hands on the wall, shaking, trying to grip it to reach deeper.
The skin o' her which he touched and clutched at all night was cool from the night air but the inside of her was a blazing heat.

He could feel how sensitive she was from his handling of her before, but he could also feel the slickness o' her inviting him in.

He pushed into her again
it made her arms wrap themselves around his neck, her hands clutching to the back of his heid.

He trusted again and she enveloped him deeper, bringing the crook of her arms around his neck placing one palm to claw at his dressed back the other coiled itself around the back of his head her fingers inserted into his hairs. She let 'oot a moan.

He stopped, letting her accustom herself before each trust; he needed the same.
The feel of her was exciting him too much and the elation raptured surges that were enveloping his cock was so intense they almost made him spill himself wi' each shove.

He could, she signaled him wi' her hips that he could. She had her pleasure and wanted him to ha' his as he desired, but he desired it to last.

From the moment she came to him this night, he felt feverish pleasures gush inside him and the whole night seemed as one long release for him.

"Every time ye come to me in a place I wanted ye, a place I dreamed to ha' ye wi' me" he whispered in her ear as he plunged into her again.

She arched herself in order to contain it, creating some distance between their chests.
He took his left hand which was placed on the wall and ran it through her front.
Caressing and gripping hard on breasts, hips and stomach.

He brought his mouth to her breast, opening his mouth further and further suckling it and no forgetting his companion.

With his next thrust into her, he had to release it, as his own breath escaped him in a cry.
He brought his hand back onto the wall, almost pounding into it.

"Ye heal all that I ever felt there" he panted "The loneliness, the hurt, the need of another to spend my life wi', to share wi'"
He thrust again and this time added a strong pull to him wi' his, now, two hands under her.

"Ho Lord" he cried at the sensation, letting his heid fall back.

He brought his heid back so that his lips rested on her shoulder, as he hoisted her up around his hips for a better grip.

"Aaahh" Claire called 'oot, puling at his clothes as she stiffen once more, her heart pounding on his chest, so loud he swore he could hear it with his ears and nay through his skin.

He bit her shoulder, suckling it at the end as if to ease the hurt.
Christ he is marking her again.
Never mind, he eased his berating conscience, one more night and they'll return as a married couple and wi' no more need to hide their love and the repercussion of it.

Their breath was so warm from the exertion and so conflicting wi' the cold air outside the steams they were emitting coated them in misty fumes. They seemed to be the only two people in the world and they were being protected from all around them by the foggy air itself.

"I love you" she cried 'oot as he resumed his thrusting, her voice sounded hoarse as if she dinna use it for a while, even though she dinna cease calling 'oot her pleasure for him to hear the whole o' this night.

She swallowed hard, seeming able to only feel him and do no more. She had her eyes closed and her heid tilted to the heavens, as she did for the most of this evening, wanting to feel him, more than the need to see him.

"I had to have ye, I kent it from the start, Sassenach. Ye had to be mine" he said again and again, as he entered her, pulled back and returned into her depth.

He stilled for a moment as he pulled back again, grasping her nape, placing his forehead to hers, taking his much needed breath. He couldna speak and do what he was doing to her.

Jamie lowered his gaze to their bodies and there obvious connection, wondering how he reached such a position as to be inside her, when all he could remember o'this place and time were dark, cold corners he had to hide in, smiles and lies he had to tell to two kins who plotted against him and only one beacon of light he just met, that he couldna stop thinking 'obout since she literally fell from the sky and into his path.

"I dinna ken how to have ye mo nighean don, how to court ye, how to reach ye" His raised his gaze to her now "But reach ye I must, have ye I will; that I knew and never kent a stronger truth than that"

Claire felt his movement and opened her eyes to him. There were so close, he saw naught but a large orb of bright blue light, which seemed almost to swallow him completely as it consumed his whole line of sight.

He pressed his hands on her arse hard and made those orbs flare wi' ecstasy.

"And then ye came to me" Now he moved in her and dinna stop. She cried 'oot again, her scream echoing through the stables and they horses began to stir.

"Shah my love, I would ha' ye cry 'oot for me for all the world to hear and envy, but after we be wed, now ye must brace yourself and cry only for me to hear" He teased, but dinna ease his efforts as to afford her such capability.

He was grinding her so forcefully into the wall wi' all his wanting of her, that if she wasna making sheer sounds of bliss he would ha' been worrit he was hurting her.
"Jamie" she cried out loudly, shivering, screaming to the ether unable to heed his warning

It was nay only him that was so insatiable tonight, she came to him, as such, invoking it from him.

She came as a doe eyed –timed -verra frightened sparrow.
She came to him needing and asking to be conquered, to be owned.

Aye, there was no doubt in his mind the minute he stood in front of her, offering her his hand to take, something scared his woman before she came to him and it wasna there this morning, when he saw her first.

Every act that followed that first glance of recognition only intensified his assurance.
Something or someone pained her.

Whatever it was would soon meet his maker, to be sure, but he let it bide for now.

She needed differently o' him.
She required security his words or his brawn could nay afford her. She needed his body to tell her he would never let her go and if she thought that she could receive it only by proof of his scorching passion for her, then let it be that for now.

Naught could hurt her at this moment.
He was here!

He would make his inquiries later, when they will be done; she might even be submissive enough to tell him what she obviously dinna want to divulge.
But even if nay and she will try to lie about it or deny its existence, she will fail.

She was bound to him by word… Nay an oath of honesty.

She could try and act differently, but even if she wasna the worst liar he ever did meet,
her conscience willna let her tell him false.

Or at least nay wi'oot every sign on her features showing contrary to her words.

He moved harder and faster now.

Claire was pressed so tight between him and the wall he had no need to hold her by his hands to keep her on him.
So that was how he found his palms pressed to the wall and felt his fingernails trying to crumble pure stone with the power he felt he possessed at the moment.

He felt the grains of sand and dust and the small springs of wild grass that sprouted from the wall graze him under his palm and her bare breasts grazing themselves on his chest,
He felt her warm slippery thighs trying to close tighter and tighter around his hips, her hands squeezing his arse, losing hold with each plunge into her.

"I want to stay inside o' ye so much, forget the world, the danger and evilness in it"
He was moving so fast and powerful he had to return one hand to clutch at her; needing something soft to grip at, as his other hand now seemed to try to push the wall to move.

Both her hands gripping into his pounding hips, she was panting in his ear.

"I want my only fear to be, that my cock might snap and break in ye from all the loving o' ye Claire! For I do mo nighne donn, I do love ye"

He sped up even more wi' the exhilaration he was feeling.

"I need ye"

"Hhhaa" she sobbed as she stiffened again, he should've slowed down to allow it to her, but he couldn'a.

Nay, he couldn'a anymore

"And may the Lord guard me always, I want ye so bad, that when I'm in ye I want ye even more"

All of a sudden his back curled backwards and a shot of pure, inexorable sensation fired from the spot of their connection, straight into his heart, almost piercing it wi' its force.

He cried out himself in such a thundering voice he could hear the stirring o' every kine and animal that lived about the stables, no only inside it, follow.

His hips made one more uncontrolled jerk even though he could feel himself already going soft and couldn'a tell to save his life what happened next.

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"I never knew there were bats between the rafters here" she mocked the sound he made at the last, no heeding or caring o' his own warning from before.

She sat atop of him, still connected to one another as he laid flat on the ground, which probably was where he crumbled onto after his release, unable to do more.

'Tis was probably also him who dragged her down wi' him, to lay wrapped in his arms wi' his eyes shut.

A few drops of sweat ran down his back and made their way between the cheek o'his buttocks and he shivered lightly from the ticklish sensation.

Claire let 'oot a small "Hoo" and laughed at the ticklish sensation it made in her.

'Aye, he served her weel tonight.

She sounded calm and happy and when he reluctantly cracked his eyes open to look up at her, as she laid both palms on his chest still straddling him only coming to a sitting position atop him, he saw no more worry or sadness in her eyes.

'Aye he served her verra weel tonight.

"And you laugh about my noises, at least mine don't make the sky above us filled with winged animals, running away from fear of what made such racket” she said sounding as if she was looking up.
He cracked his eyes, reluctantly, again, just in time to see a bat almost run into a bird, both frantically flying to find new shelter, probably thinking it wasna safe to be where such sounds were made.

It made him smile.

He stretched his back luxuriously, skimming his fingers at the slope of her still exposed belly and bringing his other hand to rest under his head.

"Now if only my sounds could make the world's people disappear as weel, so I can stay wi' ye like this forever" he said while returning his gaze to watch his glowing wife.

"I wonder what you would sound like trying to come up with such a voice" she laughed returning her gaze to him as weel.

"Want to hear me try?" he said threateningly, taking a deep breath to fortify himself to stand the challenge.

"Well no. Not while you are… well we are, in this specific position" she said blushingly glancing at where their connection laid, under the layers of her dress.

She returned herself to lie atop of him, burrowing into his clothed torso, while she was still as bare as he made her.

"And I surely don't feel like letting you move right now" she said and lifted her face to kiss the line of his jaw.

"Good! I dunna think I can, even if I wanted" he said and brought his arms to gather her to him deeper.
But that was truly the best he could possibly move at the moment.

A moment later she shivered slightly and Jamie frowned

"Are ye cold my love?"
He asked pulling her back from him to watch her face.

He was still swaddled in his coat and kilt, fully dressed and in possession of his boots.
Claire had lost her Moroccan heels somewhere during his positioning of her on his shoulders, her dress was completely compressed from both sides, as he pulled it down to touch her and up to have her.
Its resemblance to a verra thick belt and no a full attire was evident.

Jamie was forced to admit she could never be warm enough wi' only his arms for cover.

So he un-eagerly lifted her by her hips so she will be released from him and peeling himself from the floor, brought him and her to a standing position.

"Why?" she protested wi' her words, when she realized what he was doing, unable to object physically as her arms were clutched around her as she began shivering again.

"Because ye'll freeze, mo maise" he said and disentangled her arms to dress her.

Now how on earth will he find her shoes, he dinna even hear them thump the ground when they
left her, did she fling them across the stable?

"No I won't" she lied with blue lips and skin filled wi' goosebumps.

"I'll be fine" she said shivering violently now.

"Aye, weel I won't be if you'll catch your death from the cold or fall ill. I'll ha' my heart broken and die too.
I would still join ye that way in the life there after, but I'd like to keep playing with this corporal form of yours some more, before I die.
So do a poor lad a favor and dress" he said while helping her do just that.

Now the cloak HE threw away, where did he throw it to?
He should really start paying more attention to such things, he thought, 'tis no as if such encounters willna repeat themselves again and again and again, he concluded wi' a smile.

Claire hurled herself into his arms, just as he was searching for her cloak, it surprised him and he almost dinna catch her.

"Don't worry nothing bad can happen to you" she said with a voice full of confidence, as she cradled his heid in the crook of her arms, letting their noses meet and moistening her lips seductively.
"Remember 'only fear that my cock snaps and break'??"

"Woww" he yelped wi' surprise as she made and experimental tug at it.
"No" she smiled lusciously "still very much attached and whole so I think were all healthy and sound"

"No if ye put those frozen paws o' yours on it" he exclaimed breathlessly.
"Jesus, Sassenach, one could think ye want it gone and lost"

"Never" she teased in mock outrage, lifting her hands as a show of good faith on her part.
"Best part of you" she determined.
"Really?" he put her back on her feet, going to fetch her cloak, which he noticed when his heid snapped at her tugging.
"Yes the others I'm not always so pleased with, that one hasn't failed me yet"
She was indeed in verra high spirit at the moment; Jamie thought, pleased he played a substantial role in the matter.

"Careful" he cautioned mockingly "or ye no see it again. Ever" he strengthen his warning, trying to no show his proud feelings regarding yon part.

"Ho aye?!!" she tarted in a Scottish… weel what Jamie was sure was supposed to be a Scottish accent "Wonder how long that would last"
She said finishing her dressing by herself as he came back to her, cloak at hand.

"Two days at least" he said, but then he reconsidered when he saw the fabric of her dress glide on her skin, he reevaluated as he watched how it was tightened on her slim form and he certainly regretted his say as he observed her white, glistening, virgin- snow skin disappeared further and further under that beautiful tartan dress and her breasts vanished when the stomacher was placed in his proper place.
"Weel a few hours" he corrected himself "aye, I think I can hold for a few hours at least"
A day had a night and day in it. That was too long as weel!
She laughed and lowered her hands to the side of her body finishing her dressing and sighing with the comprehension there was naught left but for her to take her leave.

"Well I suppose I'll be going back now" she smiled a warm smile with ruefulness hidden at it's corners, as she came to take her cloak from him.

He hated to do so, but there was one more unresolved issue between them.
And she willna be freed 'till it be resolved.

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"Nothing's wrong!!!"

Claire cried 'oot again, trying to still hold on to her lie.

Jamie crossed his hands on his chest to signal he was no buying what she, so desperately, trying to peddle.

And doing a fine job o' it too, he detachingly perceived. Why, if he dinna ken her earlier state of mind and feeling, he might ha' actually believed her words now.

"Really nothing is wrong, now" Claire tried for a half truth, but Jamie knew that ploy as weel.

He kent Frank taught her to say a word o' truth inside a lie, so that the feeling o' the truth will obstruct the feeling o' the fabrication.
Claire told it to him just before his first appearance in French court.
'Just in case you run into any trouble there' she told him wi' a farewell kiss.

If he dinna ken it came from such a place o' pure worry and care for him, Jamie would surely feel himself insulted and mad at her doubts regarding his devious twofaced talents or affronted by Claire's perception that there was anything he should be schooled upon from Frank and his 'intelligence' espionage skills.

Wasna so 'intelligence' as to keep his own wife at his side. Now was he?

Jamie has learned, all by his lonesome, to be anything Claire could ever need of a man that walked by her side.

Aye, no help required, chiefly nay from that man.

'Besides,' Jamie smiled to himself, looking at the spot on the wall where they just had their verra insatiable, licentious encounter
'bet ye havna done that to her'.

Christ, he was a jealous man, he deduced and nay for the first time, must be all that damn Mackenzie blood in him, he eased his conscience.

But he was also an acutely observant man and he dinna fail to notice the word 'now' between her words.
Claire had one maneuver left in her bag of tactics and according to her, now, new positioning of body and face, she was just about to give that one a try-

"Really I don't know what is going on with you that you are so suspicious" she said vexed. "Good Lord, can't a person just feel a bit under the weather and not let it be perceived as if world war three was starting...or...or do you think once you finish 'handling' someone as you did just now, that this person can't be anything but deliriously happy... can't possibly be anything but ecstatic to the moon?" she leaned her palms on her hips to convey exasperation. "Well I tell you, James Fraser, I don’t know where you come from, but where I come from….

Aye, if failed to protect herself, the lovely Mrs. Beauchamp will try to go on the offense and adding the all 'we come from different times and places' was a verra nice touch indeed, Jamie appraised. She was getting better at the lying game. Forsooth! He was surely corrupting the lass weel.

"Christ Jamie" she carried on wi’ her mock indignation speech, all a while gathering her things and making herself ready to leave so she could escape his interrogation. "I do have other things on my mind but you. I mean ye keep me quite busy with all-"

"CLAIRE" Jamie said in a tone that made her stop deid in her tracks as she was wrapping her cloak around her.

"What?" she said breathless, keeking two frighten-quail eyes at him and truly seeming shaken at the thought o’ him disclosing the secret she held.

He moved a step closer to her.

and she moved a step back from him.

This was nay good she was too timid to allow him the truth.

The question remained was she afraid o’ what has hurt her or o’ his reaction to it. If she was afraid o’ his reaction, yelling and demanding will only cause more harm and cower and will grant him nay answer.

And he already gave her his best try at seduction and tenderness.... Christ, they always seem to work when she employed them on him.

Weel, either way t’was quite clear, that no knowledge would be bestowed on him by his bull-headed, stubborn, wee besom of a wife.

He rubbed his chin weighing matters and sighing wi’ the acceptance of this predicament.

"Fine" he resigned himself "kiss your husband goodnight, march straight to your room and retire for the night. 'Twill be an early rise tomorrow for the Tynchal and ye be needing your wits about ye, to keep yourself safe.

But chamber and bed Claire, nowhere else, no one else!!" he ordered.

"Thank you Jamie" she sighed herself wi’ relief of him agreeing to let the matter go. Her shoulders slumped down and the stress seemed to leave her body. She was back to being calm and collected again.

Perhaps what scared her was long gone, so it will be safe to let her go wi’oot the knowing of such
matters, Jamie mused, trying to calm and collect himself at the need of letting his woman go, alone, wi' some sort of menace lurking 'obout.

Claire came to him unafraid now and kissed him.

"O Lord how I love you" she said

"Good" Jamie replied, kissing her back, letting his hand gather her in through the arch in her back. "I despise o' the need of telling and nay to be the one to come wi' ye to see to it, but, please, be careful on your way back, my Sassenach, and bundle yourself good and tight in your bed. I will lie here warm and happy only if I ken ye there and as such" he said wi' a rueful smile of his own now.

'Christ Jamie' he told himself 'soon, so soon and ye will never let her go alone again'

"Of course, my love, anything you say. Your wish is my command"

"Hamm" Jamie snorted, rolling his eye to the heavens as if praying "That I would live long enough for that to be true, Lord"

Claire laughed, kissed the top of his nose and turned to leave

"You never know what the future holds" she teased, as she went across the stables to where she left her torch.

"Bed!" Jamie called 'oot after her, preparing himself to return to his delightful cozy hellhole cubby. Or so he'll have her think...

I walked across the stable's strip by the stalls, feeling happy and secure in mine and Jamie's triumph over whatever obstacles might present themselves in the future and of our feat against all that wanted us harmed or apart. At this moment I felt as if nothing and no one could.

So from that prospective, I reasoned, there was also no need to tell or rehash anything that might make such proclamation be doubted by either party.

"You will not malign, defame or condemn me, Laoghaire Mackenzie" I avow "And you will not create more chaos and hardship in mine and my love's heart. I won't allow you that satisfaction" I said as I affirmed my decision to not tell Jamie what was wrong.

I was blissfully happy and so was he. Why ruin it?

Besides, I required to be through with all the drama and wanted to let sleeping dogs of hell lie. If not dead and buried at least lie.

I sneaked one final quick look back, to see Jamie go through the wooden door, where he would stay for the rest of the night; until all this Gathering occurrences will be done and gone with. He wasn't the only one who would sleep warm and happy knowing his better half to be safe and
secure.

I turned back around to continue with my unscathed return to the castle and crashed right into-

"HO MY GOD" I cried out horrified as I looked up to see the face of the obstacle that trudged into my path.
"You're the one that tried to rape me in the corridor last time" I gaped at the short, portly, round-bulging eyes with long, disgusting, yellow thatched hair man (if one could call such a specimen a man), that currently held my arms in an iron grip, smiling a half toothless malicious grin at what he got (for the second time around).

I was so stunned and surprised that the words escaped me without thought.
So after his grin, his words of 'pretty lady' to me in the Gaelic and the licking of his repulsive lips, I stupidly put in his mind what to do with me next.
To my defense, in spite of the shock my appearance must have caused him, he didn’t seem to need any help in deciding what to do with what he inadvertently captured, AGAIN.

But I wasn't as perplexed as last time and I have lived in this time long enough to acquire some protective skills, I resolved, as I geared myself for a fight.

I was going to drive my knee to his groin or slap him hard enough to sufficiently make sure he either couldn’t perform such an act on me or to be so thrown back to allow me my escape.
I mean it was only him this time, and without the two drunken clansmen at his side this time, I thought I could at least make a good dash for it and outrun his big, disgusting, sloshing belly.

Only I did not receive my fair chance to execute my plan.
Where my hand should have met bone and cheek, I found nothing but air.
The man was already half way to the other side of the stable's corridor, flung through the air by the force that discharged him.

This proceeded with the weapon that implemented the hurling to pound vigorously into the ejected form.

Jamie was straddled atop the man and was pinning him down to the ground by the sheer forceful blows he was hammering into him.

The brunt of them resonated through my own body and not just the ether.

As the third blow hit his face I could hear, quite clearly, the nasal cartilage being slivered clean, another blow and I could hear as well as see a tooth launching itself from his mouth.

"JAMIE!!" it was Rupert's voice that cried out from the back of me.
I turned instinctively to where the sound came from; other than doing that I was too shocked to even breathe.

Rupert and three other men carrying torches, entered through the stable's entrance.

"Fuck" I said, again from pure instinct.

Without warning my mind, suddenly, brought into view the sights of the first oath taking I
attended.
I was standing at the balustrade of the second floor mezzanine, Murtagh by my side, translating the
goings-on.
Me having a clear sight to all that stood in line to pledge their oath of undying fidelity to Colum.
So I saw quite clearly, Rupert standing and searching for someone in the hall and Murtagh seeming
very dis-pleased when he saw it.

I also recalled Rupert's satisfaction as he apprehended and dragged the unconscious young laird
back to the castle last time-

I put two and two together and realized he wasn't there by chance the first time around, he was
probably then as he was now searching for Jamie all along.

The only question remained did Rupert want him in peril by Dougal or inline to succeed the current
laird?

Ho dear Lord, I should have comprehended the truth of it,
I should have warned Jamie,
but most of all I shouldn’t have come here tonight!

Another blow thundered and hurled me back from my thoughts; which seem to be the only activity
I was capable of doing at present.

It was so loud that when I snapped myself back to where the un-reigned rampage was taking place,
I actually cringed at my standing spot; sure I could feel some of the blow's ricochets vibration
going through me.

The next fist landed squarely on the man's kidney, making him spew out blood.

His face now was unrecognizable.
His nasal bone was broken in two different points and his septum seemed clogged with blood,
closing his air supply as he tried whizzing from his mouth, that featured much less teeth than
before.
The rest of his face seemed as if they were pounded into his cranium and were also covered with
blood, but not only from the blows.
I saw he had lines on his face which looked as if something or someone clawed at him.
His palm held a smashed index finger and his clothes seemed as if they went through one of those
military shredder I once saw, exposing black and blue contuses all over his body.

Rupert pounced on Jamie, trying to take control of the berserk gladiator with a taste for blood in his
eyes and fists.
the other men stood shocked and rooted as me.

After a moment, one of them did stir himself enough to come and try to restrain Jamie's hands who
were now choking the air from what was left of the would be rapist.

I just stood there in complete dumbfoundness; my mind unable to fathom what was happening at
this moment.
It was as if past and present occurrences could not merge in my psyche.

Guilt and shock from all that transpired from the beginning of this evening, over my decision to be
in my husband's arms tonight, left me completely void of muscle and mind aptitudes.

I was has frozen as lot's wife and quite dumb as a pillar of salt too.

"Dunno e'er dare to touch my wif-
"Jaaammieee" Rupert's cries drowned Jamie's yelled words and cut his saying before the telling one could be uttered.

Not that it would have mattered what Jamie would have said. Rupert and the other two men that joined him to try to settle the run amuck savage, were too busy in trying either to extract Jamie from the man or to at least pry his hands from his gullet. They were failing at both equally miserably.

My would be assailant's jugular vein seemed ready to erupt any second now.

Jamie on his end, saw only two paths before him; to either squeeze his throat for one more minute or just lift the man's head two inches off the ground and slam it back down.

And he was going to do so.

I saw it in every one of his veins that pooped to the surface, in the color of his skin just under his collar, in his missing compressed lips and bared teeth, but most of all I saw it in his eyes that saw nothing but death and retribution.

He kept holding himself at bay though. For his crime to me, Jamie was going to make sure that the man's path to purgatory would be as excruciating as he could inflict on him before relinquishing his soul to be tortured by the almighty.

O dear Lord his crime to me!!!
I remembered my earlier words now, 'tried to rape me'
Jamie must have heard me and knowing something had to be very wrong for me to conceal and lie about something to him, he must think that-

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!" I cried out. Speech being the first facility to return to me.

Now there was no doubt in my mind to the fact that Jamie was going to truly kill this man. It was clear to the frantic men around him and it was clear to me.

The man was half dead already.

Something needed to be done.

And apparently it would have to be me to do it, I determined, as I watched Jamie release himself from Rupert's and the other men hold on him, again, and propel himself right back to his victim.

I walked to where he crouched on the man, beckoning the other men to stand back. I think they only did so, from the sheer shock of having any woman come near this manic beast on her own accord.

I didn't know where I established such skillful accurate hands, or it might have been only all the luck that I have ever accumulated in my life. Either way I found myself able to successfully cup Jamie's cheek and raise his face to meet my
I took a great risk doing so when Jamie was in this state.

No matter how soft, tender and loving he was with me, no matter how much sweetness and innocent his facial expression held
and no matter how he could be just the right amount of soft-rough in our love making and never cross the line;
it was nothing to what Jamie could become in true battle.

He didn't unleash it often or wouldn't at all if it was up to him.

But inside my sweet, gentle, be it stubborn and hot-headed, loving husband laid a true barbarian.
A true highlander, Viking, barbarian-warrior.
A legacy from the Norwegian- Scandinavians giants that plundered and ruled anything in their path.
And Jamie was no less dangerous.

"Jamie it hasn't happened, it hasn't happen" I said, truly scared he wouldn’t be able to understand what I was saying in his demented state.
'Yet' I mouthed with my lips in silence, as to not make things worse for him and I.
I have done plenty of that tonight to last a life time.

He was still red faced and frenzied, but I could see some form of recognition in his eyes.
Even if it was only the shock of seeing me in his view in the beginning.
A moment later and I saw a small glimmer of the logical man that will not swing a killing blow if I was near.

"That's it, come back to me James Fraser " I pleaded, as much with my eyes, as with the whispers from my lips.
I cupped his cheek firmer and guided him to rise from the man.

The carcass under him groaned with pain and spat out blood; Jamie's eyes darted on him and his nostrils flared.

"No Jamie... No... Look at me not at him" I added my other hand to cup his other cheek returning him to me, to see only me.
Wheedling him with sweet, calming tones and smiles to rise to his feet and follow me as I backed up, distancing him from the half corpse man he made.
"That's right, just come to me... Look at me... Follow me"

I guided him using only one cupped hand at his cheek, as my other one took hold of his bleeding at the knuckles palm, covertly checking for any damages.
I didn't dare break my stare from his eyes.

Slowly but surely, Jamie began breathing deeper and slower.
I could feel his pulse still frantic beneath my fingers, but I held on to him and bore my eyes to the spot in his eyes, where I saw my Jamie stare back at me and not Attila the Hun.

I smiled the smallest smile at him and he intuitively smiled back, I didn’t think he was even aware
of doing so, but he did smile back.

It was the smallest twitch of the lips, but it was enough. It broke through the veil of violence and my husband returned to me and with that his capacity for speech.

"But, ye said that he tried to-" he frowned, trying to honestly comprehend why I would ever stop him. Jamie was a firm believer in revenge and man's right to it.

Striving for honesty myself, there was a part of me that didn’t quite know itself why. Although this man didn't actually try to rape me this time, he was the exact same man that tried to, before. And would have had him and his cronies pass me around, as the evening's entertainment, if Dougal hadn't come to scatter them away and sent me still chaste and with only one forced vile kiss claimed as payment for his 'kindness'.

Also, from what I managed to experience tonight, the man- which was being tended by Rupert and the others now, as they ignored me and Jamie for the moment- didn’t require his buddies to want to give it and me another go this time around as well.

I looked at his bloody, broken form, as the others gingerly tried to lift him from the floor, but returned my gaze swiftly back to Jamie. It was not yet safe to leave him to his own thoughts. The beast was still roaming inside of him wanting to come out.

"I know Jamie, I know" I said, stroking his check with the fingers of my cupping palm. Covertly as possible of course, we had already amassed quite a lot that needed explaining to the strangers around us, especially regarding the Pied Piper of Hamelin act I performed. I didn’t want to add more to the pile.

"But he hasn't Jamie; he hasn't done that this time. Yes he tried in another life" I whispered, as I saw from the corner of my eye, that the men were still occupied at trying to stop the man's bleeding and arguing who will carry him back to the castle, as to pay any attention to us.

They did send a few glances our way a couple of times, but once they saw that Jamie had no intention to move from my side, they gladly relinquish the care of the criminally insane man the perceived him to be, to my charge.

"Even with that fact, you cannot kill someone for something he might do, but hasn't, yet. You must give him the free will, the second chance to amend his ways and that's the Lord's truth and not just silly Mrs. Beauchamp's" I smiled

I wanted to say 'and not just YOUR silly Claire's truth' but the smile that now appeared across his lips said he took it as such, without the need for me to say so in front of our audience. That by the way also included the same young man that grabbed me from behind, last time, asking 'can I keep lassie for myself?' and which was now hovering around us both.

I felt it was safe now to remove my hand from Jamie's cheek and hold him to me by our shared faint smiles at the corners of our mouths.

But just as I did so and was trying to imagine what could we possibly say to make this right in the
eyes of our beholders
and wondering whether there was even the slightest chance Jamie would let me come within two
miles of the beaten man, to see if I could help in some way-

A big wooden pew, probably used to assist children to mount their horses, came crushing down on
Jamie's head and he crumbled to the floor.

Dear old, distant-cousin, Rupert was not taking any chances for the beast to come out of its cage
again, he just put him down. As last time!

"Rupert!!!" I scolded him and would have said a lot worst, if I wasn't too busy launching myself
after my husband's flailing form, taking hold of his head before it hit the ground and placing it in
my lap.

******

Jamie was stirring in my lap.

We were no longer in the stables though, but in the small, cramped, candle-lit, storage room,
where a proper attire and sorted possession will be brought forth for the laird's nephew to wear, as
he will 'take' his turn in front of Himself pledging his oath, against his will. Again!

Or at least that's what the bloody filthy beasts that dragged us in here thought.

I had a small moist rag in my hand and I dampened his face with it, as he very slowly opened his
eyes to look up at me.

His head very much still placed in my lap, as it was the moment we reached the room and the men
meant to hurl him to the ground to 'sleep it off' and I dived head first myself to secure him on me.

A soft smile appeared on his features.
Jamie had his usual sleepish, tranquil expression which he always held when he awoke in
the Mornings.
I myself saw it very few times, but it was very recognizable.
It was my sleepy, beautiful Jamie, thinking it was morning and he must rise for the day's labor.

And as with the mornings Jamie awoke in bed with his wife awake and in hand -
His tender smile became a wanton one in a heartbeat and his hand came up to caress my face,
that stared worriedly down to him.

When his palm reached an inch from my cheek, Rupert's big fat paw appeared and clutched at it
and used it to pull Jamie to his feet.

"Aye, we all fancy a sweet plump lass by us as we wake, but nay Jamie, 'tis only mistress
Beauchamp insisting to physic ye 'til ye wake.
Couldn't get her to go back to the hall 'til she saw ye up an' 'bout.
Takes her job verra seriously that one. But nae so much as to bring around your fancies for ye" he wiggled his eyebrows at me, questioning the matter and received in turn a vexed look indicating what I am willing to do for him. "Aye weel, dinna think otherwise. So rise to your feet lad, dunno try to paw the lass. She nae want ye"

That’s what you think, I mused, remembering the stables and according to the twitch in Jamie's lips so was he.

Jamie groaned loudly as he tried to stand on his own two feet and find his balance, the ramifications of the blow manifesting themselves to their full affect. Jamie floundered and staggered until he reached some sort of stable standing, as Rupert went on to pat him down roughly from the strew and dust that covered him.

"You didn't have to hit him so hard" I protested to Rupert's back, as he came to stand between me and Jamie, carrying on with the poking and shoving of Jamie's body, in the pretense of awakening him up and cleaning the oatstraws and dirt from his hairs and skin.

I covertly tried to extract some oatstraws from my own hair, which just like Jamie's had nothing to do with the fight.

"I'm sure he would have been willing to come" I said, as I quickly removed one strand from between my breasts. I had another one itching somewhere else, but I would definitely need to be alone to remove that one.

"Aye, but I dinna want him maiming half the clan while he was making up his mind" said Rupert looking back at me and catching me with the strand in hand, which I discarded swiftly and smiled innocently at him.

He returned back to Jamie, clobbering him one good one on his head, as if trying to sweep the muck from his hair.

"Be careful" I cried out, pushing him aside to reach a still shaky Jamie "You have to be gentle with head-injury patients, he might have a concussion"

He didn’t before, but I wasn’t taking any chances, I mean Rupert took a whole bench to my husband's skull this time.

"A what?" both Jamie and Rupert asked in unison, looking at me with the matching Mackenzie feature frown.

"Sort of a cracked head" I sighed with exasperation, rolling my eyes to the heavens.

"Ouch weel, 'twas cracked long afore I came along" Rupert belched his rumbling, jolly- deep laugh, spurting fumes after fumes of liquor.

"Got the rest o' your clothes Jamie" said the young man, that this time wasn't nurturing a sore or a cracked head for wanting to 'keep me'. In fact he was doing his best to not even acknowledge my existence.

A result from needing to carry what remained of the man Jamie 'handled' and trying to find him some medical assistance that wasn’t me, I presumed.
After I explained the situation to them, I was actually prohibited from coming near the man, undoubtedly over their apprehensiveness that I would like to follow through Jamie's intent to its end.

"Taing dhut" Jamie thanked the young man and took the pile from him.

"Weel that should be suitable for the laird's nephew" approved Rupert, content at succeeding in his assignment to deliver Lord Broch Tuarach to the hall.

The question still remained by who?
I remembered how surprised Rupert seemed as he saw Dougal return to the hall after he awakened from my clout to his head and how truly afraid Rupert looked as he saw Jamie kneel in front of Colum with Dougal form looming above him, grasping the hilt of his dirk.

Did he bring Jamie back, thinking Dougal already gone after his own oath?
Did dear Rupert only mean to allow for his distant kin to still hold the right to one day become laird of Leoch, or did someone bequeathed it on him?

"Christ Jamie!" Rupert's exclamation brought me back from my contemplations, just in time to see Jamie's arse peek from under his shirt as he bent to put on his new given clothes.

"Dinna dress yourself in front o' the lady. God's eyes lad, first ye rescue them, letting them think ye fine and proper, then ye try to slip it to them yourself?"
Rupert mocked and hooted so loudly with the rest of the men in the room, I was sure he was about to choke himself on his own laughter, or at least I hoped he would.

"Watch your tongue in front of the lady" thundered a red-faced Jamie, pointing a menacing finger at Rupert "Or I'll cut it for ye, wi' other things to boot" he pointed further down on Rupert's body.

Jamie obviously didn’t think twice about undressing himself in my presence and his anger wasn’t only aimed at Rupert, he felt embarrassed at making such a silly mistake.

"I wasna the one bein' indecent afore her, showing her my wee man now was I? She'll nae want your bigealas in her no matter how much ye save the lass"
Rupert said ant turned to bellow a gut-deep laugh with the rest of the room's inhabitants, as Jamie and I exchanged looks filled with memories of everyday life where his mentioned part played a central role in;
and I found that my husband wasn't above causing me to blush shyly.

Jamie grinned, forgetting his anger at my expression.

"Besides" Rupert turned back, to now two solemn faces, as we both adjusted our features swiftly "heard the lady already goes wi' the Irish lad, Jamie. That man has fine crown in him and there is much talk 'obout how good he is wi' his crafty hands. Ye no agree mistress?" Rupert poked an elbow at me, using double entendre regarding Luke's smithy vocation.

Jamie darkened.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Luke and-
Jamie coughed at my words
"I mean Mr. MacLiver and I are just good friends"
"Aye, seen your friendship all the times I followed ye, running time and again to his hoose, closing the door behind ye, telling me to await ye outside as ye be needing a private word wi’ the man” Rupert's gruff guttural jeering, rumbled even louder this time, spouting droplet of the alcohol, he so obviously have been consuming all the livelong day.

If he wasn't putting me in hot waters with my husband, I would perhaps be feeling a bit more charitable toward him and would have offered him to shut his mouth, because he was attracting flies.

"Slàinte mhór" said one of the men, which fortified the hilarity and brought about another pitcher of whisky. Why did I leave all my Valerian dosed port to Angus?

"I need to examine my patient” I said as an alternative of getting Rupert's mouth away from my husband's ear.
"As I said, he might have a concussion! There are tests I need to perform on him, please walk away now” I summoned my best Mother Hildegarde tone.

"I need to examine him!! Will you not leave us alone for a moment” I almost yelled, when Rupert didn’t budge "For Christ sake, you're in the room with three other men, where would he go? Besides you want him safely on his feet standing in front of your laird or take the chance for him to swoon in front of all to see?!?" I glared at him

"Look" I added to fortify my case, for he was rubbing his chin still mulling my plea "The common symptoms for a traumatic head injury are headaches, confusion, disorientation, amnesia and vomiting.
Which can easily lead to a loss of consciousness.
Do you want me to continue or is this enough for ye to realize you can't afford for even one of these symptom to appear in front of HIMSELF?!?" I demanded from a complete flustered Rupert, which looked at me as if he was suffering from exactly everything I just described.

"WHAT? Can ye ne'er speak proper English mistress?” he asked honestly "I swear ye no sound like any Englishmen I ken”.

At that moment one of the other men found it in his rights, to lift Rupert's mug and begin drinking its content.
While he was being scolded, cursed and smacked by Rupert and as the other two men in the room tried prying them apart; me and Jamie were finally left to our own devices.

"Sit" I said "I wasn't joking, I need to examine you"
"Ouch lass, dinna fash yourself on my account” Jamie dismissed the matter "'Harder than an iron pot' remember? And Jenny never lies”
He was trying to lighten my mood but I wasn't having it.

I hurt him,
I endangered him,
I caused history to repeat itself.

If I thought myself half broken from the Laoghaire and Muriel encounter, the rest of this evening occurrences and this last coup de grace left me shattered, ashamed and wanting to curl up and cry.
"I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry" I kept saying as I sat him down on the pew. Did the bastard bring the one he hit Jamie with??

"I'm so sorry…. Do you feel as if you want to throw up or do you have nausea of any kind? ... Ho Lord, I'm so sorry Jamie" I sniffed pushing down the tears, trying to do a proper examination of my patient. "Do you feel you can stand or bend forward and touch your toes without wanting to swoon? Ho Lord, how I am sorry Jamie" I was going through a mental roster of questions one asks after a head contusion blow, but found I couldn't stop apologizing vigorously.

"I'm no doing that in front of them Sassenach" he frowned angrily at me. "And 'tis fine Lass" he said, as I stood in front of his sitting figure, my back to the others, which were now opening a new barrel of very cheap and potent spirit of some kind. Which also meant Jamie and I, could stand on our heads, naked and we wouldn't be acknowledged.

"Look at me" said Jamie, placing a finger under my chin and making me stop and look at him, as I bent to check his left hand, which was a bit bruised but other than that completely fine. Remarkably fine as oppose to what it inflicted on the other man. 
"'Tis fine and I'm fine Sassenach"
"You don’t know that" I said not allowing his words to balm any feeling of panic, shame and self-flagellation, I so miserably possessed at the moment.

"A concussion is almost always associated with strong cranial sensation and memory lost" I went on with my inquiries "if you don’t have a vile taste in your mouth and if you don't want to hurl or if you don't have ringing in your ears and your not seeing stars. You're not are you?"
"Weel ye're quite a bonny, shiny…"
"Stop it" I refused to be complemented at the moment, if ever again

"And you won't let me test your equilibrium" I sniffed again "I want you to tell if you're having trouble remembering anything that happened tonight. I know I surely won't forget any second, so talk to me so I can see you're coherent and not suffering from any residual affects or memory lost" I ordered

"Weel I seem to recall a bonny wee…"
"stop it at once James Alexander Malcom Makenzie Fraser, I'm not playing with you" I hissed at him. "No ye truly arenae" he said, reading my harsh mood correctly "Full name, tone and all… Ye are angry!"

"Well not at you" I said, changing anger for the anguish that lurked behind it "I didn’t mean for you to stand up for me. AGAIN. And now you are in so much trouble. AGAIN And it's all my fault. AGAIN"
I swayed a bit feeling I could hardly stay standing.

"It's not fair" I sniffed again, trying to fight the 'I won't be able to explain them' tears down. "I try so much to protect you and I not only fail at that but I put you in more harm's way. No wonder that toad Laoghaire thinks her a better match then I. I'm starting to think she might have a point and I …."
Two strong palms grasping at my wrist shook me out of my pity party
"If ye think for one second I will ever chose Laoghaire-"
"Why not" I wasn’t letting him put one word in, that might give me joy or solace "better for your health"
I didn’t really mean it but I just felt so bad and mad at myself.
"Sassenach…"

The men around us broke into a full out spree of drunken hilarity as Rupert illustrated quite vividly his tales with the plump, juicy 'pie eater' and Angus's face when he saw them through the kitchen side door, where Rupert took her right there in the open. They were all rolling on the walls and floor.

Jamie and I were practically invisible.

I was still with my back to them, so I allowed myself to lower my eyes and let one tear fall down, as I sniffed to make sure not to fall apart completely.

Jamie looked up at me and then at the motley crew near us, he couldn’t fully embrace me or shake the absurdity from me and he seemed desperately to want to do both. I wouldn’t have let him if he tried; I deserved my seat on the court's dock.

"Do I need to sort all? regarding them I mean" he gestured with his head at the men around us, as if this was the chief problem at hand and not the fact that in a few minutes he'll be standing in front of Tweedledum and Tweedledee both ready for a fight as their literary counterparts; only real blood was at risk at being spilled here. Jamie's blood.

"No" I swallowed down another tear, feeling I was the one with vile taste in my mouth "I at least managed to take care of that"

"Is that so?" Jamie seemed amused and not at all angry at me, I didn't share his feelings. "What did ye say my beloved glass- faced Beauchamp?" he was truly happy and for the life of me I couldn't understand why.

"I simply told them my past truth" I shrugged.

"What's your meaning??"

Now he sounded worried???

"Not about trying to escape" I glared at him "but at simply strolling around to have some fresh air, running into a man that tried to rape me and as I managed to escape to the stables, I came crashing down, straight into my big Tarzan savior"

"What's a Tarzan?" he cocked an eyebrow at me, suspecting it to be an insult of some kind on his expense.

"King of the jungle" now I managed to extract a smile from myself. A small and weakly one but a smile. The part about 'king of the apes' I kept to myself.

Jamie straighten himself on my examining pew, expending his chest just as a true king of the jungle would do, only he didn't even know it. It made me smile against my will, again.
Jesus, what that man could do to me, even without his knowhow and against my resolve.

"What?" he inquired, seeing the genuine smile on my lips, it made him very happy to see it even if he didn't realize the cause of it.

"Nothing" I said with a short snort of amusement.

"Only ye dinna really say a 'Tarzan' did ye?" he frowned, thinking I couldn't be trusted to suit my sayings to this time. I couldn't fault him at this moment, but I still had some pride, as Jamie loved to remind me constantly.

"Ho dear lad, I did manage to fool and deceive all of them" I waved my hand to indicate the dwellers of the castle and the surroundings around it "For close to six month I might add"

I decided to abstain from mentioning my prisoner stature during that time and the being captured by the English and the witch trial and... Well apparently I was always 'bad' at being an 18th century woman. Why did I ever think this time would be any different?!

"Even you" I kept holding on to my pride though "You big oaf. And I was already in love with you for most of that time" Jamie smiled widely at that.

"So no." I concluded my case "I said I ran into 'A kind gentleman that would never stand for a helpless woman to be misused and abused. No matter if he had close relation to her or not"

"And they bought that?" he inquired, looking more and more as a pompous turkey than a king; over being stuffed with so much praises, no doubt.

"Well you sort of have a track record of pulling half-brained rescue missions when women are concerned"

"What is 'track record' and I DO??!?" Jamie puzzled looking completely perplexed "Who do I save?" then he smiled amorously and his eyes sparkled "besides ye I mean. Could I trust I will be thanked for it later perhaps?"

"Laoghaire" I said and watched all the air being deflated from him, the lustful smile vanished and now it was him who lowered his eyes to the ground. "All I had to do was remind them what you did in the hall for her and the matter was settled"

"Ho" he said still piercing the ground "No thanks tonight then"

"I didn't say that" I said to the eyes that came back to look at me, all mischievous and happy again.

"Is that so?"

"You did rescue me" I smiled mischievously back "besides it helps to know that the event in question actually end up assisting us in the end. Everybody sort of expect such behavior from you now and nobody suspects you'll be going for the Sassenach widow when you have the beautiful, maiden, Scottish Laoghaire at your disposal"

"Sassenach" he berated

"Calm down, I was just ridiculing the whole situation, that is all" I lifted my hands as a showing of good faith and to signal surrender of the ludicrous subject of Laoghaire MacKenzie and my husband.
"But most of all" I added, slumping my hands, my shoulders and my head down "after what I did to you tonight, after what I caused..."
I wiped the few tears that got away from me.
"I mean, Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ, Jamie" I said going back to being vexed at myself and rightly so "I would actually not blame you for leaving me to go to some safer wife that might be able to take better care of your well-being and health than I.
I have no words for what my colossal mistake after mistake did to you tonight.
Jamie what you are forced to do now, what I am forced you to-"

The tears won the battle against me.

"Ye must mean only the lying Claire, for all the rest wouldna be your fault even if ye tried" he said sounding truthful and not just kind.

"What?" I looked up at him, baffled

"Sassenach, ye ken yourself the men and Rupert came looking for me in the stables, which means they would have found me lying in the stables last time, even if I dinna walk ye safely back.
Probably would ha' fallen on me as ye did and I bet they wouldna ha' felt as good to roll atop of" he winked at me, which only meant he looked as the most adorable, huge owl I ever saw, closing both eyes and opening them again.
I snorted inaudibly to myself.

"They would ha' found me now as weel, me and my half-wit insistence to sleep dry tonight, even if ye havnae come to me.
But most o' all, Sassenach, before ye came to me, tonight, I kept thinking to myself that maybe I should go into the hall as last time and-"

"What??" I gaped at him, forgetting myself and raising my voice

All the men in the room remembered our existence now and looked at us puzzled.

"I mean, what do you mean you're seeing stars, Mr. MacTavish?
That's very bad, very bad indeed. Rupert," I turned to Rupert with the same disapproving, disbelieving tone in my voice I just used on Jamie.
"You really injured the man, you rash, hooligan gillie that you are.
His irritated, his speech is unclear and completely void of any logic"
Rupert had to find my words the truth, for they were.
They were also all symptoms of a concussion, but foremost they were all very obvious signs that something was definitely wrong with my husband's head.

Rupert did as he always did when he was told off by those he found nonthreatening and waved his hand dismissively at me, returning to his beloved drink, while laughing in Gaelic with his friends, probably at my expense according to Jamie's expression.

I ignored it, it was the outcome I expected and desired.

"Explain yourself, James Fraser and at once!" I hissed in a tone that prohibited anything but the truth to be said and promptly.
I cupped his cheeks in my palm and pretended to look into his eyes checking for dilated pupil, or for interruption in the retina to indicate abstraction in the eye or sight, I even grabbed a nearby candle to help with the fraud.

I did actually take a quick look to see if there was something there.
From his words, there was a part of me that did actually fear something was wrong with him.

I placed the candle aside when I glanced and saw we were not the main attraction any more and put both my thumbs under his eyelids forcing his eyes to open wide and stare directly at me; then firming my hold on his cheeks I commanded "And don't try to be funny"

He tried to not smile and look solemn and said.

"'Tis just, we ken what would happen if I do pledge my obedience to Colum as kin and ally and promise myself bound to his words as long as my feet rest on his land" he explained with no preliminaries and in accordance with my edict "and we dunno fully Ken the repercussions o' what he or others might do If I willna"

"What do you mean?" I frowned worriedly

"I dinna ken that Dougal willna ha' it in his heid to try and kill me for one preposterous reason or another. That he'll probably put himself in his own heid" he rolled his eyes in exasperation regarding how his uncle's mind works.

"Colum acceptance o' my friendship as laird and ally to the clan protects me, or will once he will make it for all to hear. And he will do so for his preposterous reason o' keeping me in the running to be laird. I'll be kept alive and safe for now and still ha' my way done! For if ye forgot Sassenach, let me remind ye, that I am 'about to perform the ultimate step to preclude myself from the line o' successor. One that will be so appalling, no man here will chose my arse to sit in Colum's seat"

"O dear Lord, what?" I asked, anxious as to what act Jamie's reckless mind came up with, that he hasn't shared with me.

Jamie grinned like a big fat Cheshire cat and now I did see something in his eyes; they sparkled and ignited in bright crystal blue.

"I am going to marry you" he simply said and for a moment neither of us spoke or moved.

"Are ye no done wi' the lad yet?" cried a restless Rupert from behind me, clicking his tongue at me in disapproval "looks all fine to me". He probably ran out of drinks and wanted to go back to the hall where there would be more.

"Just searching for blood or any other secretions from his nose and ears" I justified my standings in front of Jamie, my face an inch from his, cradling his face in my palms.

"Just one brief moment more" I added.

"Are you sure?" I asked, turning back to what I hoped was my healthy 'patient'. Head injuries are never to be trifled with and I didn't want him to start slurring his words while trying to perform this incredibly dangerous task he was about to take on. I also remained unconvinced that this was our best course of action.

"Aye Sassenach, I really see no harm and only gain such a thing can cause" Jamie said a bit miffed at my suggestion of something regarding his bodily fluids to Rupert, who seemed to take it as the
next topic that should be address in the men's obviously deep conversation, but he still acknowledged my concerns and answered genuinely and wholeheartedly.

"It forces me to do naughting in the future" he determined "Especially wi’ our plans to perhaps leave to Lallybroch after the wedding. And even nay, it forced me only to leave ye when Colum banished Dougal back to his home last time and I ha' no plans to do so again, promise or no. Besides wi' your … I mean our plan to save your 'dear friend' Geillis, there will be no witch trial to fear. Canna believe I am saying so, but apparently t'will be the best things for all concern if we do prevent the thing"

He looked into my eyes trying to fill me with his confidence. "Saying what I said in the past and acting as I did in the hall, only forced Dougal to look for a quick solution to 'take care' o' me and my chancy position as the next in line for laird. A solution that doesna involve killing me that is" he added in dry humor.

"Do you really think he would ever do such a thing?" I queried. Even as he tried to kill me, Dougal ordered his nephew to move aside from his way as to not hurt him.

Jamie darkened and stiffened all of a sudden, as he always did when he brought to mind a dark time from his past and said in a low voice "He told me so, a ghraidh. The bash to my heid wi' an axe? The one that sent me to heal or die in the Abbey o' Ste. Anne? He executed it, mo chridhe. 'Always ken it will be ye or me' he told me that himself when … at the day I slayed him"

"Jamie, you didn’t slay anyone" I protested vehemently, shaken from the discloser, but wanting to convey to him that it was self-defiance, mine that is and even then Jamie begged Dougal to stop the fight.

The 'incident' in question was just another validation in my hard-long-fairly won guilt-roll; that weighed my soul down in regards to what I did to Jamie's life.

"Nay matters now lass" Jamie said dismissing the matter. We were not in the right time and place to discuss such things.

He cocked and eyebrow at me returning to his original point "Dougal canna do a thing to me once I'm in Colum's favor, so he must think o' more creative machination and what Dougal came up wi' last time… Weel..." The Cheshire cat made another appearance and Jamie almost cracked his lips with his smile. "What Dougal found as a proper solution last time was..."

"Marrying me to you" I matched Jamie's grin, almost wounding my own lips in the process.

"But what if it will go wrong, what if this time it won't work, what-" I was still afraid of deviating from our original plan, which meant not allowing any of this to come to pass at all.

"Sassenach" he said in a tone that made me stop at once with my speculations and fears. "Ye told me once that only one of us is allowed to be afraid, mad or sad at a time and when it was your turn I canna be as such.
Ye actually called it your turn many, many, many times

I narrowed my eyes at him. Jamie always knew what to say and how. Making me annoyed with him was stronger than any daze of selfishness need of mine to blame everything on myself and carrying on as a hen with no head, running around crying for what has happened.

"Now I claim my turn Sassenach" he stated his need "It doesna take from me truly thinking this is the best path for us to take; but I am also afraid my love, I am also mad and sad for what I am forced to do at this moment even wi' knowing the consequences are at our favor. I dinna like being forced to do so then and I dunno like doing so now, even by my own choice. So I ask o' ye Claire, my lady, to be the one now that will stand in the hall by my side and be strong and brave for me to see"
He added his hands on my palms, that still held his face.

"And Sassenach a smile wouldna come amiss as weel" he cocked an eyebrow at me, smiling and without putting a thought before the act I could feel myself melt and smile back.

"Good" his smile broaden seeing mine "I meant what I said in the stables lass. Ye coming to me in the dark places I was wounded and alone at, heals me. I willna want differently to what happened tonight and Claire," he beseeched me to believe him "It willna hurt me as much if ye will be there in the hall, standing behind me, being truly mine. I will ken why I do this, ye will be the right reason to act as such and so it will replace the wrong reason o' last time."

He sounded as he really believed his words, could I?

"You will be my strength now, ye will stand by your husband in the great Hall and be the face of courage he needs... That I need to get through this. I need to see your smile and Ken why I am doing all this for, so let your face be the first and last thing I see, Sassenach " He said and I saw how he longed to touch my lips.
He clasped my hands in his, lowering it down from his face and bowed his head to our joined hands, as a knight asking his liege for fortitude before a battle, as he always did before going into danger.
I moved to hide the gesture from the still jeering men.

"Be my hope my Sassenach, be my joy, my comfort and safety amongst a sea of peril. Mo nighean donn, when I am surrounded with lies, deceit and schemes, be my honesty, be my 'True north' so I can find my way back home, my Claire" he looked up at me now "Can ye do so for me, mo ghràidh?"

"Yes" I answered without a moment pass "whatever ye need of me my love. And I know I can for I will stand in that hall, beside the man that is all those things to me as well" I caressed his cow lick spot at the top of his head "and if I forget how, I only need to look at you again, so I know I won't fail"
I extracted my hand from his and dug in my pocket, coming up with the Fraser badge Jamie bestowed on me for safe keeping. Only I knew the main reason he did so was to offer me some sort of protection, small as it would be, that if anything will happen, I will be able to say I'm under the ruling of the Frasers of Lallybroch and must be brought in front of the Laird of Broch Tuarach himself before any
judgment or punishment would be rendered.

"You will be needing this" I said handing it to him.

He lifted his face to me and smiled with pride
"Aye I will, Sassenach. Go, Stand by Murtagh that I ken ye to be safe and my soul could be at ease"

I wanted to say I'm sorry again, but he needed differently of me,

I wanted to kiss him, but we couldn't. Not in our current surroundings,

I wanted to say 'I love you'

But Rupert was coming to put a firm end to any more tarrying on anybody's part

"Go. Find your place in the hall" Jamie whispered with mouth and eyes.

I turned and left with the most ridiculous quivering smile plastered on my face.

*****

I entered the pine torch lit hall, ignoring their brilliant flares.

I walked disregarding the beauty the walls, decked with myrtle branches, yew and holly, held.

I stepped over the lethargic inert form of Angus Mhor that laid leveled with the floor, but managed to extract a toothless silly smile when he saw me pass above him.

I sidled through all the assemblage around me, praying for no further hindrances to come my way.

I didn’t cross the hall slowly this time though, but rushed to Murtagh's side, almost crashing into him as I dashed frantically in his direction.

I stopped myself at the last possible second and took hold of his forearms, which were poised on his chest.

I needed to convey urgency and to command his full attention and I didn’t care for good and proper behavior at this moment.

"Jamie is here" I whispered with no precursory to the stunned Murtagh, which was already completely befuddled by my disturbing conduct toward him.

At my spoken words he snapped himself around, just in time to see Jamie stand under the upper archway that framed the main entrance to the hall.
Murtagh, as me, ignored good and proper and shared my urgency at once, there for allowing me to be the one this time, to drag him to the side of the hall, to stand by the candelabra tables, so I can say my piece clandestinely.

And, as me, he brought himself to full alertness regarding both our heart's concern: Jamie.

"Christ, this is no happening" Murtagh disclaimed unable to believe his eyes "Forgive my blasphemy mistress, but what is the coot doing here!?!

Jamie had to just stay hidden 'til the gathering was ower, or both his uncles would ha' his heid on a pike and the craicte air fad kens it weel.
For heaven's sake what's 'rong wi' him?!!"

"Listen to me" I said again with no preliminaries.
Everyone in the hall as just acknowledged my husband's attendance and I saw Jamie fumble his fingers nervously.

I knew I didn't have long to implement my plan, he'll need me to stand by his side or at least to have my face be the first thing he sees after he takes his turn in front of Colum.

"PLEASE listen very carefully" I went on with my instructions "He was leaving the stables to escort me back safely after I was attacked"
To prevent any further delay I added
"And yes I'm fine" not that I thought Murtagh much cared for me at the moment.

He, just as me, saw only one thing or should I say only one man before us.

"And yes, this is all my fault and I know it" I said, making sure that Murtagh wouldn't waste any time with letting me know my role in all that was going on.

"Aye 'tis" he said disapprovingly, flaring his nostrils at me and not giving up the opportunity to make his feelings known, which meant making sure that I understood how Jamie's life have become more chaotic thanks to my presence.

"D'ye no ken, the lad got a price on his heid? Wouldna be long before captain Randell or the watch have him in irons.
We thought the only safe place in Scotland is here at Leoch" he looked at me with a twitch to his lips "'til now"

"Then help me make it right" I hissed in his face, not allowing his words to break my resolve.

"Ahh?" Murtagh gaped at me perplexed.

"Listen to me, I know what needs to happen to keep him safe, so I will know if anything changes and indicates something is going wrong"

If I was already demanded to be a conjure woman tonight, let me be one in others eyes when it suited me!

I knew how everyone in this hall should act and look if Jamie's words will be accepted; therefor I could tell if anything or anyone will deviate from it, which will signal menace for Jamie.
So I was alerting the only man on our side to be ready to act swiftly.
"Be prepared and listen to me!" I commanded as the wife of his chief. "I will tell you if anything is going wrong and when I do Murtagh… if I do" I pressed harder on his elbow, leaving no room for disobedience. "And if I do… Get him out of here Murtagh, I don’t care if you need to club him in the head and carry his carcass, you get him out of harm's way and tell him anybody here can take care of themselves as long as he’s safe"

"What?" Murtagh puzzled.

"I mean if he refuses to go" I hastened to explain "over worrying or something for someone here"

"And who would he be worrit ower?" Murtagh cocked his brow, surveying me.

He couldn't know about me and Jamie; could he? No! We were so careful.

"I don’t know" I exclaimed in a loud whisper. We didn’t have time for him doubting my words. Christ, He was much easier to rally when I was Mrs. James Fraser.

Jamie was already crossing the hall to come to the line of men taking their turn in front of Colum, just as Dougal entered through a side entrance.

He was adjusting himself as to suggest he probably ran into a willing hen this time; for he wasn't cultivating any contusion and wasn't nurturing an injured head. What he did still seem to be was very drunk and just as much violent as he noticed Jamie.

Rupert was surprised to see him, this time around as well and tensed, as did almost everyone else in the hall; holding their breath, as the two man walked side by side to their assigned stations.

Jamie stood awaiting his turn in the oath taking line, as Dougal came to stand at Colum's side.

I turned back to Murtagh, trying to hurry the conversation along. "Maybe he'll be concerned that Old Alec will be blamed for hiding him in the stables or… or…" I didn’t have any more time to waste so-"Laoghaire perhaps" I said, not minding the least to invoke her name. I only cared to keep my man safe. "You know him" I explained my point "Even if they're not involved, yet, this is how he acts. You remember how he never left Annalise de Marillac side, cackling and cooing all around her, no matter what danger he faced. Fought his first dual over her" I pressed my point further.

There was no room for petty jealousy now, if people thought it their right to stuff their noses in our businesses and deduce the wrong conclusions, than who was I, to not take advantage of it and use those assumptions for our own benefit?

What mattered was that if Jamie's life will be threatened, Murtagh will not let Jamie stay to care for me.

I knew Jamie will not walk away serenely into the night without me, but I was in no risk of harm and could calmly find my way to him later.
"Listen Murtagh, I know you said there is no place safe in Scotland right now, as long as he has a price on his head, but please, if anything goes wrong tonight take to the ether with him and hide. Please Murtagh promise me you'll run and take him with you"

"Aye, ye ha' my word"
I didn’t believe it at first, but Murtagh transformed his entire countenance and smiled kindly to me, placing his palm on my forearm as I did. Only unlike me, he did so in a reassuring manner.

The first act of true kindness from him to me, since he saved me from Randell and much earlier given than last time.

"Grown quite fond of our red-heid, stubborn fool, ha' ye now?” he asked but sounded as if he already knew the answer.

"Well, he is the first true friend I made here, since I first arrived" I said with complete honesty "and he does have a way of entering one's heart and making them care for him, even against one's will" I continued with only the truth between my lips, which was, fortunately, the best explanation at this moment.

"Not to mention" I added, turning back to see that Jamie was second to the next in line for the oath-taking "he seems to get himself in so much trouble, you can't help yourself but worry about the man all the time"

"Aye, ye surely canna" I heard Murtagh sigh and agree with me wholeheartedly.

"Besides" I said, turning back to Murtagh, pleading to see understanding in his eyes "I did this to him” I expressed my regret "I ask your help in relieving my conscience just the slightest, by making sure nothing worst will happen"

Murtagh looked into my eyes and whether he saw my care for the young laird, which matched his own, or whether he saw the pleading of an honest individual that truly sought absolution for her misdoings; he replied in the most tender friendly tone saying "Dinna be worrit mistress, I swore a long time ago that t'will first be me to see the heavens and nay the lad” then he added with a small amiable smile "And by the looks o'it, t'will probably be at protecting the clot-heid from himself”
It was the most faintest of smiles, but yes, Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser did smile at me. "So ye ha' my word, no harm comes to the lad, before I see the almighty myself"

"Thank you" I smiled back, placing my palm on his where it held my forearm, feeling a little lighter.

"Now" I said, returning to lay all the details of my plan before him "if I tell you the words 'be well' you take him away Murtagh and don't let him look back by any means. I don't care if he needs to be knocked and dragged away. His skull can take it. If I utter the words 'be well' to you at any time, it means it's your turn to carry him away to safety agreed?"

"Aye” said Murtagh, matching my look of determination and readiness for battle.
"Come" I said "I need to stand closer for a better look"
and for Jamie to have my face be the first thing he sees as he requested of me, but that I added to
myself.

We came a bit closer and I watched all the key players in the hall.
I even stared at Laoghaire that went pale but hopeful at the chance of Jamie becoming a Mackenzie
and therfore transform himself into proper marriage material, to bring home and be approved by
her father.
I didn’t care what her intent was, only that there wasn’t the slightest change happening anywhere
and by anyone.

I also hoped that if anything will happen she will be the one to swoon and therefore create the
distraction Murtagh needed.
It was either her or me.

"The slightest change and I'll make my move" I said again and again under my breath.

Bringing all my senses to full alertness, as the adrenaline coursed inside me.

"Je suis prest!" I said.

Jamie and Murtagh weren’t the only Frasers in the hall this time!

Chapter End Notes

So I used a lot of languages this time thought it will help to add some translation: (i'll
add as i progress with the chap')

craicte air fad [without exception; wholly; completely insane, demented]
I'm backkkkk....
So...
Basically I wanted to share only my stories and words with all of you (as appropriate here), only I feel I owe you an explanation for my disappearance. My mother was told she needed to go through two surgeries and as I moved back to my parents house for now to lend a helping hand I found myself completely swamped. For the icing on the cake after I finally settled, I found my laptop didn't survive the move and died on me. So I couldn't do more but see your comments on my mail (couldn't even go in the website through my cell) and cherish them as they made me smile in my hard times. God how much they did!!! Thank you all for that!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I got my back-up just yesterday from the Lab, so at least I can release the final chap' before they finally go on their way with the wedding party... Sorry rent party (although who are we kidding it's the wedding party) but I have to wait another 14business days for some part to get a working laptop.

I'm sorry for all those who didn't enjoy my story lately and wanted me to reach the wedding chap'. For me it was never about reaching somewhere with them, but more about writhing good, funny, passionate, loving moments between our fav' couple. I hope I'm doing that :)?/ But I want everyone to be happy so to those who want, please, feel free to skip to the wedding and to those who want differently I hope you will enjoy their moments with me;) As always good or bad, love or hate; I always love & need to hear what you think

P.s: dictionary at the end + I'm trying to incorporate new ways of reading so for one section I put in a link to listen while reading it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jamie accepted the pewter- silver quaich from Colum, bowing his heid in thanks to his uncle, smiling respectfully for the given honor.
And as before, instead of the ceremonial customary sip, he raised the nearly full vessel up above
him, working his throat strenuously until he drained every drop, hearing the crowd rumble wi'
laughter and woo wi’ respect as he did so.

He observed the smiling amused laird, as he swallowed all the drink down in an explosive gulp.

Almost tearing at the eyes, he handed Colum the bowl back and said
"The honor is all mine to be allied wi’ a clan whose taste in whisky is so FINE"

The hall erupted wi’ claps and hoots, as he turned wi' only one thing… nay only one woman in
mind.

Claire stood there, as promised and he could see her breasts rise and fall wi’ the first breath the
poor lass must'v taken since she left him at the storage room.
She was almost tearing up herself, only from joy and relief.

But she dinna abandon her promise to him, for she followed her breath wi’ the most incandescent
smile that could ha’ illuminated the whole castile on its own merit if she wished it to.

Claire clapped her hands hard and hooted wi’ the best o’ them in his honor, and the world did seem
brighter to him.

'Obout the whole theatrical showmanship he added to the performance, she will tease him in their
marital bed, wrapped in his arms and making him feel as a true man;
a truly happy man.
But for now she added a bit of flare o’ her own in reverence to him.

Now as ’twas then, the first time all this took place that is,
she was the only one he wanted to see and the only reaction he cared ’obout.

He began crossing through the sea o’ hands that were shaking his and thumping him on his back,
yelling and shouting merriment in his ear.

Someone even tried halting him by yanking on his plaid.
’Twas a woman’'s hand he plucked from it, but he dinna care he was being rude, he just wanted to
reach and be near her.

Wi’ that established, he maneuvered, yet again, through the scores of human obstacle at his path.

The music and dancing commenced and he now had a clear path.

"Christ" he said coming to stand in front o’ Murtagh, but had eyes only for the fair luminous Mrs.
Fraser "If I had me a woman right now I would kiss her so fervently her lips would bleed" he said
feeling unrestrained exultation.
As his eyes intensified on Claire he added "and I would ha’ her on her back…"

He wasna exaggerating before.
Either from the joy of their plan going weel, or a remnant from what he did to her at the stables, his
woman was absolutely glistening wi’ light tonight.
Much more than usual; and watching that skin so white and smooth, unblemished and ethereal, it
made him a lascivious man again.
He was feeling as if he had come back from a battle field. why, In some way he did. And after fighting his battles for the night, he wished to reap the deserving fruits o’ his victory. Her radiating heat and light only made it that more alluring. He wondered will she still ha' his scent on her.

"Jamie!" Murtagh's cries of reproach brought him back from his lewd mind "I ne'er heard ye speak such o’ women in m’ life, what's 'rong wi' ye?

Claire blushed and lowered her eyes demurely. Jamie found it amusing that he could still make her do so, after her living for almost three years wi’ his indecent mind and acts.

Weel 'tis her fault he is as such, she awakened that part in him. And other parts as weel, he mused in delight.

"Sorry a ghoistidh, 'tis all the aoibhneas coming 'oot o'me after all the nerves. I'm no too proud to admit a bancharaid, I was fairly scared there for a moment" Jamie apologized for his loose tongue. In effect he wished his desires to reach another mark; Murtagh's ear was an inadvertent casualty.

"I'm getting too old for this ye whelp" Murtagh admonished him, shaking his heid in disapproval. Jamie placed his palm on the man's arm and squeezed it, in an effort to appease his poor godfather, but still couldn'a wipe the wide smirk from his lips.

"There she is, m'dear Mr. MacLiver. Told ye I could find her. I ha' a snout as a truffle pig when it comes to finding what I seek"

Jamie's smile was eradicated now wi’ no difficulty; just as her ice piercing laugh indicated her smile dispersing.

"Geillis, Luke, what a pleasure to see you both" this was obviously said by Claire. Jamie himself dinna share the sentiment.

Jamie turned to his back to see the witch all dressed up in pure white, wi’ a big bonny lover's eye holding her arisaid, that hanged on only one of her shoulders. So unbecoming of a married woman.

For heaven's sake, did the wench desire the whole o' Scotland to ken her business wi' Dougal? Or did she ha' another lover in mind? And for the Lord's sake what was this gomerel Lucas doing here? And God, Jesus and Mary help him, what was he holding?

Jamie scowled, taping his fingers on his thigh in annoyance, as he surveyed the bright- amorous- glowing eyes Luke, clutching a bunch of wild weeds and shrubbery in his palm.

Just like Claire, Mr. MacLiver was much radiant than usual at this much eventful night; and his intentions for her were the clear reason for it.
Dear old Mr. MacLiver was also dressed to the tee this fine evening and doing a much better job o’ it than Jamie was. He was swaddled in a fine dark-green velvet coat, wi’ white linen ruffles coming ‘oot from collar and sleeves, indicating that the finery dinna desist at the top layers and consisted of striking attires underneath as weel.

‘No that Claire will ever see underneath your coat' Jamie determined in his heid.

Jamie scrutinized Luke’s embroidery shining wi’ gold trim and verra costly lace, he noticed his ruby cuffs holding all in place and observed his dark navy- blue breeches that were as everything else in his attire tailored to fit him to perfection.

Apparently Luke meant himself to be verra special and memorable in Claire's eyes tonight.

But it wasna his clothes, nor even the finest looking dirk and sword Jamie had ever seen that ruffled Jamie's feathers and caused Claire to cry ‘oot in wonderment.

‘Twas does goddamned white and pink Silly tussie-mussie that this galoot gowk brought HIS WIFE.

Claire's reaction, as always, when it came to her daft wee plants, put a firm end to all the joy, pleasure and happiness Jamie told Murtagh he was feeling.

"You must forgive my forwardness regarding proper salutation Luke, but are those what I think they are?"

"Aye, as promised. The first yield from Isabella's conservatory" Luke beamed wi’ all the joy, pleasure and happiness he stole from Jamie, as he handed Claire the sprigs, which she ACCEPTED?!?!

What was ‘rong wi’ his woman, as she lost all wisdom?
A married woman should receive naught from a man that isna her husband.
Proper adequate demands for the husband to receive it on her behalf, if such occasion should even arise.

Jamie kent it, all in the hall that slanted their eyes at the display kent it and Mistress Duncan that smiled as a fox in the hen house, while twirling her hair between her fingers, kent it more than all o’ them together.

Aye, the witch got her way.
Claire taking the posy meant she either had no one in her heart, which he kent the filthy beast suspected otherwise (be it Jamie or this Luke); or, and this was the more troublesome option of the two, Claire knew naught on how things should be done in this time, which meant she wasna o' this time.

"They are Thrifts" said Luke looking verra much a posey himself as he explained the pink globe-shaped core wi’ perky petals around it flower and their meaning to Claire, which could talk to any man or woman for hours on end about plants and herbs.

Luke, as Jamie, apparently, kent it weel.
Only Jamie kent it first and better than this burraidh would ever be allowed to.

"Armeria maritima" responded an already weel informed Claire.

Serves Luke right, thinking he can impress Jamie's woman wi' his knowledge.

"I mean that's their name in Latin, It stands for-
"Sympathy" they both said in unison and then they both began laughing at their harmony, also together.

"My, my" another laugh chimed in.
This one filled wi' malice and bad intent
"I did say ye make the sweetest couple, did I nae Mr. MacTavish?
Mind the time I saw them two galloping under the ether together?
Dinna I say how right they are for one another?"

The witch narrowed her eyes at Jamie, seeking his reaction, while she brought her hair to caress her lips in an attempt to conceal her amusement at the whole spectacle.

"And correct me if I'm wrong" she turned her attention back to Claire and Luke, when she got naught of what she sought for from Jamie.
"But is nae the plant also called ' Our Ladies Cushion' or 'Mary's pillow'?
Quite bonny names for a plant that will settle itself by your bed is it no Claire?"

"I…." Luke blushed, stammering to find words at the mention of bed and Claire "I assure ye I meant no disrespect-

"Aye, we all ken your mind. Do we no Mr. MacTavish?" Geillis was coiling her strings harder around Jamie's neck, daring him to lose his heid
"We ken our fair Claire has nae Welsh in her, so she willna ken the flower's name. 'Clustog fair' is it no Lucas? I suppose ye assumed ye could pass it by her?"
She spoke to them, but Jamie felt her words aimed at him.

Aye, Jamie kent her mind, after what transpired just a few moments past, the damn woman was making sure Dougal will ha' his answer regarding Jamie's feelings for Claire. To be used later to control him wi’.
The bloody blasted couple acted quite swiftly.

It needed to be done, but Jamie loathed giving Geillis and Dougal the satisfaction.

"I assure you I know all of the plant's names in Latin, English, welsh and Gaelic"
Claire burst into Geillis's words, regaining her composure from being stunned by Geillis's words before.
She stared into Jamie's tomb sealed face and understood at once the grievances her action had caused him.

"Thrift" she turned and addressed her friend furiously "is known as tonna chladaich in the Gaelic, meaning 'beach wave', it is also called Sea Pink or Rock Rose and the simple meaning of its name, in plain English- thriftiness that is- was also what awarded his station as the emblem on the threepenny-bit.
The Mint no doubt aware of the double meaning in its name"
Claire was really fuming at this stage and trusting every fact into the stunned Mrs. Duncan face as if it was a weapon.

'Twas.

Many in the hall were staring at them, taking heed.

"It is also what Isabella grows in her greenhouse, which she is sending me for helping her mend" Claire emphasized Isabella's involvement loudly, making sure that all that were listening will know from whom she was accepting the flowers from.

"Perhaps the same way you received this bangle on your wrist. A gift for your healing assistance perhaps? Or was it something else?" Claire ended wi' a low hiss between them, coming a step closer to Geillis.

She was referring to the trinket the Duke of Sandringham gave Dougal, which he in turn gave Geillis.

Claire told Jamie about it after Murtagh avenged Hugh Munro's murder by beheading the Duke.

She was warning him to nay divulge such a thing to Dougal by mistake and was telling him of the ornament as an example for Dougal's close relation wi' the Duke.

Claire could always be trusted to tell nae a single soul another's secrets, but apparently was willing to break her own word when it came to her husband's honor and well-being.

Jamie was starting to regain his aoibhneas back.

"How d'ye ken o' that?" the witch gaped at Claire and for the first time since first he knew o' her, Jamie witnessed Geillis Duncan truly appalled, startled and at a loss for words.

"There are many things in this world you can't explain', you told me so yourself, did you not, Mrs. Duncan?" said Claire wi' all the guile and cunningness of her time traveler counterpart. "Why, Have you never found yourself in a situation with no earthly explanation Geillis?"

Claire cocked her eyebrow and pressed her point further, adding a step closer to a now nay so entertained Geillis.

"So as you can see, my dear, there is no one here of need of schooling regarding anything. All here are well informed" she said narrowing her eyes.

That was a threat if Jamie had ever heard one.

They stood there head to head in silence, 'til Claire broke the wordless feud that was obviously taking place between them, but now sounding softer and appeasing.

Jamie dinna ken what truly transpired between the two in the past, but those moments and their shared time in the thief's hole, awarded the witch a friend for life in his Claire's eyes, so she was doing her best to sooth the waters again.

Christ his woman was loyal, he thought wi' pride.

"I think you should go Geillis, I mean no disrespect, but I will not have strife or have the reputations of those I hold dear besmirch" she took the witch's hand amicably "to none I hold dear. So please Geillis in the name of our friendship, which I hold so close to my heart, do not cause such an occasion to come to pass here"
"Smart lass that one" whispered the deep gruff voice of Murtagh in his left ear. "Aye she is" answered Jamie wi’ pride for his fine lady. He turned back and saw the appreciation and affection Murtagh's face stated as he watched Claire as weel.

Apparently his wife was quite busy tonight, doing Lord kens what, but the people all around her seemed to shift their sentiments regarding her and he was pleased to see 'twas for the better.

"A fine match to any man, will ye no say so mo charaid?" Jamie whispered back.

Murtagh made a low guttural Scottish sound indicating he might agree wi’ the statement, but that this was by no means Jamie's place to make it.

'Soon ‘twill be mo càirdeach, soon ‘twill be and I'll ha' ye at my side, smiling wi' the approval and joy my father would ha' granted me, if only he had the chance to meet this beautiful creature o’ mine'

Jamie answered Murtagh's comment wi' no words.

Murtagh was inclining his heid to the side door, suggesting they should depart before any more trouble will ensue.

It was true that the witch was already taking her leave, only the triantan gaoil was still carrying on between Jamie, Claire and Luke.

And Mr. MacLiver was making his intentions to reinforce his pursuit after Claire tonight quite clear.

Clear that is, to all but Claire herself, who kept insisting Luke saw her nay differently than a good friend and care taker to his good- sister, which he loved so. Therefor was by no means in love wi’ her.

Christ, how can someone so insightful be so blind?
If he dinna ken her inability to be false to him, Jamie would think her a liar.

On the other hand she did think Jamie was only her friend at the time as weel.

Though, under duress, she did admit that she suspected him to harbour some alluring feelings for her and that it did sometimes seem as if he slightly fancied her, but she attributed this to a young’s man behavior to all women, no more.

Slightly? Some feeling?
Any more 'fancying' and his cock would ha' fallen off from being tugged so fiercely, after EVERY time they spoke.

But she stood her ground regarding Luke.
Saying she was his only friend here and her knowing what it felt like to be in his shoes, willna mistreat or abandon someone who required someone on his side in this strange land and in the hard circumstances he found himself in.

Jamie loved and trusted her, but he wasna ‘obout to leave her alone wi’ this slinkin’- sniffin’ dog either.

Claire was a compassionate woman;
Jamie was an farmadach sod
and when it came to Claire he dinna mind acting on it.
"I thank ye kindly m'dear for holding me in such regards as to defend m' honor and reputation, even at the price o' your own friendship to another" said a beaming Luke, believing Claire's conduct to be on his behalf.

"Ho no" Claire muttered and side-glanced at Jamie "I assure you this was not done only for your benefit"

"Aye o' course, your good name is as much important if no more than mine. I ask for your forgiveness" Luke blushed

"No Luke" Claire placed her palm on the man forearm "Your reputation is important, you must never belittle yourself such. For my sake please don't. Ho, how I wish you would take better heed of yourself. Isabella is not the only one that requires to be cared for" she said wi' pleading and caring eyes. "That is why I'm so glad to see you here. Please try and enjoy yourself with no worry for others. I fear so much that your sweet heart will break if you won't allow yourself some happiness"

Luke placed his palm where hers lay upon him
"Your care for me… and for Isabella o’ course" he added to nae seem too impertinent.

Jesus, the man was clever.

"That gie me much joy" he said as Claire squeezed his hand again and removed hers.

"Good" she said wi' satisfaction "and I thank you for the flowers. More than anything, they tell me Isabella is doing well enough, as to be able to work at her garden and me knowing the joy of it could not but feel happy for it"

"Aye, I ken your love for all that grows." Answered Luke, shining as the rising sun wi' admiration "I told ye before what a beautiful sight 'tis to see a woman care for things so they may grow and live. Ye simply must take me at m' invitation to come to our hoose and enjoy our garden … I mean Isabella is pleading wi' me to bring ye"

The man, as it seems, was as shrewd as they come when it came to the courting and apparently kent his game verra weel, as to make her an offer she couldn't refuse. Plants and to please her patient? Jamie wouldna be surprised if Claire left wi' the man at present.

'One more day. One more day and then a way from ye' Jamie chanted to himself to curve his distemper. And the only thing Claire will be nurturing and caring for would be Jamie's and her's bairns!!! And of course her own private garden at the Lallybroch estate, Jamie added charitably.

He was ignoring his godfather’s tugs at his sleeve, beckoning him to take his leave. Jamie was going nowhere.

"Mr. MacTavish"
From the corner o' his eye, Jamie saw Claire crush the stamps in her hand and darken in an instant.

Jamie turned back to the source of that feeble, meek voice who spoke behind him.

Laoghaire, of course, for she was exactly the ingredient that was missing in this caldron of hot boiling cac.

"Merde" he said under his breath, just as he heard his wife whisper "Fuck".

"What's 'rong?" hurried a worrisome Luke to cup Claire's palm in his own in the pretense of examining it for a sore "There isna a thorn o' some kind in there is there? There shouldna be. They only other flower in there is the one I told ye o'. The Irish lady's-tresses orchid" And he took his other hand to the bouquet revealing the most ethereal creamy-white flower coiling in three spirals up from its stem.

'Twas beautiful and delicate and the formal coiling shape of it gave it the appearance of a majestic creature standing between the more usual looking pink thrift’s flowers.

Claire adored orchids. Jamie remembered her reaction to finding them amongst the gardens o’ Versailles, as they strolled in one of their many walks there and would have cooed and melted into Luke's hands seeing this entrancing exotic one. Which was what Luke so obviously had in mind.

Only his wife had no more eyes or ears for Luke and his flowers. She stood there transfixed all right, but by the image of the yellow-moonbeam-haired, round face, pouting lips lass that stood in front o' Jamie. The flowers long forgotten.

Quite a pair the two o' them made, Jamie aloofly observed. Both Claire and he were now ignoring those who spoke to them, only attentive to the other's conversation and companion.

"Did ye nae feel my touch, then?" "Forgive me, what?" Jamie frowned, bringing his attention to the glowing eyes girl before him.

There was defiantly too much light in the hall tonight!

"I only meant' Laoghaire giggled lowering her eyelashes coyly "d'ye nae feel me try to call 'oot to ye earlier? No I dunno suppose ye did. There was much noise around ye. Only I tried pulling on your plaid to stop ye" Laoghaire blushed at her conduct, but dinna seem as if it will stop her doing such things again.

And did she smell o' horse dung or was it Jamie's imagination?

"No I dinna think so lass” he smiled faintly to be kind “Couldn'a hear nought but my own heart thump at the exact moment when ye touched me” He only meant to be courteous and excuse himself over his excitement, but two sets of ladies eyes flared at his chosen words. One wi’ anger the other wi’ joy. Why? What did he say?
"… 'tis quite rare, but o' course a specialist such as ye must ken that too. I had some seeds wi' me from Ireland and Isabella managed to finally grow one. This one is the first to grow, ye see" Luke concluded his explanation over the flower, fulgent wi' pride and exuberant for what he perceived to be the perfect gift to endow upon his chosen woman.

He wasna mistaken; only Claire had other things on her mind at the moment.


"So 'bout the dancing than?" "Hamh?" now 'twas Jamie's turn in this shifting attention game, to tear his gaze from his wife and return it to his addressee.

"The dancing, Jamie. Ye gave me your word that day that we will dance and speak again when ye will be… Weel more free" said Laoghaire and caused Claire to take her turn at the game and snap her heid back to Jamie and Laoghaire.

Jamie loved games. He wasna enjoying this one though.

"Do ye enjoy the dancing than lass?" chimed in Luke, thinking Claire's attention shifting from him was due to the subject in hand.

"Haa?" Claire frowned and then collected herself "Ho no. I'm an awful dancer myself, quite clumsy with two left feet"

"Nay wi' me your nae" Luke teased invitingly "I taught Isabella and was the one all m' cousins practiced wi' before attending their social engagements. I dunna wish to crow my own praise, but I was told I am a verra bonny teacher" then he leaned closer to Claire, grinning as if he was sharing a lovers secret "And from past experience I'm much a custom to be stomped on, so I will feel no pain if ye find yourself in need to do so" He laughed at his wit and Claire joined him.

"I myself am a fine dancer Jamie" Laoghaire hastened to speak her piece and then blushed at her forwardness and informality wi' him for the second time this evening. Something 'Luke' and 'Claire' dinna seem to mind the slightest.

"I mean if one would ask me, one should ken his feet will be quite safe" she giggled thinking herself amusing at her retort.

Jamie and Claire covertly looked at each other in unison. "weel…" "well…" and they both turned back to their admirers, mumbling in embarrassment wi' the same synchronization.

"I thought 'twas the healer's orders that I am to enjoy myself tonight" Luke wasna conceding defeat "and 'twill be our last night before ye leave, we should spend it as…"
"LEAVE??" 'twas Murtagh and Laoghaire turn to speak in harmony.

"And where will Mrs. Beauchamp be going if I may query?" Murtagh eyebrows became one, as the shut up disclosing shock and suspicion.

Jamie and Claire looked at each other in alarm. Christ, they were so close to freedom wi' no entanglement menacing above their heids. Why was this happening?!

Weel this was Claire's fault! Jamie determined. ‘Twas her that refused to allow Jamie to end this conasse, Salope arse's life!

To both their astonishment though, ‘twas said arse that came to their rescue. "I … I mean .. I hope ‘twill be our last night together, as Colum, after all this display o' clan Mackenzie power tonight, will find it in his heart to release our poor beloved friend free, knowing she poses nay threat to anyone here and then-" Luke addressed Claire wi’ glowing eyes “then she’ll be free to go where her heart's desires"

He ended wi’ a cordially light squeeze to Claire’s arm in reassurance 'Not to ye, to be sure' Jamie added to himself.

Laoghaire, bless her heart, wasna that clever to begin wi', so she accepted Luke at his word and returned to her goal, which meant she was staring into Jamie, making him feel verra uncomfortable and in need of a bath.

‘Twas his wise, canny, godfather that was the trouble at the moment, and seeing his face and knowing the dear old man, Jamie prayed this willna present itself as trouble in their future.

"So lass, that settled" Luke afforded Claire his elbow "What d'ye say for a dance then m'dear?"

Claire stared to and fro, between Jamie and Luke. Obviously after all Luke had said, done and his last minute rescue mission tonight, she was feeling herself compelled to accede.

But Jamie and she ha' talked o' this. Jamie was forced to admit he did trust HER wi' the man. Although anything differently said, would cause the candle base she was holding to crack his heid.

But after a gruesome long negotiation, they finally came to agreement, that it dinna much mattered what Luke thought or felt for her (the hell it dinna!), but that she canna continue to conduct herself in a way that will inflame the rumors regarding her and Luke.

It might create new dilemmas that they ha’ no been previewed to in the past and ‘twill certainly be and ongoing conversation piece, that will last long after she and Jamie would marry and that will dishonor him.

To all her huffing and puffing o' men and their stupid honor and the blabbering wagging tongues of the 18th century Scotland inhabitants, Claire complied.

As Jamie knew she would.
Claire wouldna ever intentionally shame Jamie or put him at risk.

The times she did manage to do so, were completely accidental and once explained, Claire did try her best to follow proper conduct.

But there the three o' them stood, Luke awaiting his answer and she was biding her time, giving Jamie looks that went on to say 'It is just a dance' Jamie retorted wi' a 'no way in Hades lass' look o' his own.

'Please' her eyes said 'his my friend'

"Laoghaire, what were ye saying 'obout the dancing lass?'" Jamie addressed a half fainting Laoghaire that seemed to be almost jumping up and down at his words.

Let us see what Claire feels like seeing her love in the arms o' those who desired much more than a dance from them.

"I'm sorry Luke" said a stern cold voice coming from his wife, acknowledging her defeat "I seem to feel a bit under the weather all of a sudden. Best I retire for the night" she apologized.

"Jamie what were ye saying 'obout the dancing?" squawked a hopeful Laoghaire

"Aye" Jamie turned back to her wi' a wide smile at his victory "That ye should by all means nay stand here wi' the lot o' us and go and do just that miss Mackenzie"

"Oh dear, are ye feeling unwell? Shell I walk ye back to your room then? Or perhaps your surgery, if ye require some remedy for what ails ye?" said a worried Luke offering his arm to Claire again.

Jamie towered in his place at once and said before anyone else could speak further

"Why ruin your celebration Mr. MacLiver?"

Jamie took a huge step closer to Claire and Luke, placing himself between them and extracted his best genuine fake smile

"Besides this is such a marvelous occurrence; ye wishing so ardently to dance and this lovely lass here" he gestured wi' his arm to Laoghaire that stood to their side "awaits in eagerness for one to ask"

Jamie tried to direct Luke's standing to turn in the direction o' Laoghaire "Ha' ye had the honor yet? If nay, allow me to make the proper introductions. Lucas MacLiver may I present Laoghaire MacKenzie" Jamie inclined his heid to a no smiling anymore Laoghaire, that even seemed quite furious wi' him. Jamie couldnna care less even if he tried. "Laoghaire MacKenzie may I present Lucas MacLiver" he said ignoring the facts before him.

But Luke had nay eyes from anyone but Jamie's wife.

He side turned from Jamie's menacing form, to regain his standing in front o' Jamie's lady.
"Nay, I surely think m' services would be better rendered helping the young lady in her time o' need." He turned to Claire concerned. "Perhaps a walk outside for some fresh air or d'ye require any o' your provision to assist ye to feel better?"

Jamie coughed once and Claire hastily replied.

"No Luke, I would find it a great insult and hurt to know I have ruined the festivities for you. Especially when you are so deserving of them, I mean after all you been through. I beg you to stay and enjoy yourself".

"But Claire…" he pleaded.

"Ye heard the lady" Jamie returned to take his standing between them "Ye willna pain her heart such as to refuse her, will ye nae?"

He said smiling as sincerely as he was capable, especially under the circumstances. It helped that he was caressing the hilt o' his dirk and contemplating which organ o' Luke's to stab first.

"Ye're a gentleman r'ye nae?" He teased "One that wouldna think o' making such an offence to a true lady"

"O' course nay" Luke stared straight into Jamie's eyes and Jamie saw the man smirk as a soldier who just found an arrow slit in the wall by his heid.

Luke was ready for a fight.

"'Tis only" Luke winked at Claire over Jamie's shoulder "I also wanted to speak to ye regarding OUR matter"

He winked, the man winked at Jamie's wife!!

Jamie was 'obout to take a step forward and pull that winking eye 'oot o' its socket, when to his amazement he heard his wife gasp wi' joy.

"Do you have…” Claire voice broke in glee "...I mean we should go brin... I mean we should just go."

'Twas Claire's turn now, to move away from the obstruction that Jamie's body contrived between the two.

"Mr. MacTavish, Mr. FitzGibbons" she nodded to them in farewell preparing to take her leave. Frowned when she addressed "Miss MacKenzie"

Then returning to her elation, took hold of a grinning Luke and dragged him by the arm, as she ordered happily "Come then! I can't wait any longer"

They were off before Jamie could awaken from his shocked haze.

What in every saint's name just happened?

"Weel now that Mr. MacLiver is away wi' his lover and isna here to offer such services, will ye nae find it the gentleman's act to make sure a poor lassie would ha' her dance?"

Jamie tore his gaze from the spot where his wife disappeared at, lowering it down to Laoghaire.
which for some reason was still bloody here.

Jamie wanted to say aye to the lass, as retribution to Claire's actions, but wi'out Claire to see it, this was futile.

So he pulled Murtagh's hand from his folded arms, which were also attached to a verra stern disapproving face and yanked him to stand between himself and Laoghaire.

He placed the now stunned-faced man's palm into hers and said as he stormed 'oot o' the hall

"Enjoy"

*****

Jamie blew 'oot of the hall wi' such vigor he almost dropped poor Mrs. Fitz from her feet as he crashed into her on his way'oot.

"Where r'ye going as such mo ghille? Ye'll be missing m' cooking" she said as Jamie caught her from tumbling down and placed her back to her standings. "An' there's m' haggis an’ m' pheasant. I ken how ye love m' haggis"
She pinched his cheek fondly, indicating she wasna mad over the tumble.

Jamie smiled kindly to her, nodded in thanks but said he wasna hungry and canna tarry.

"Seumas, what's 'orong wi' ye?" she frowned at him "Ye ne'er leave when there's food, mainly nay mine"

She cried after him, as he was already at the bend of the next passageway "Seall sin! Where r'ye off to?"

"To see a woman 'obout a promise" he said wi' clench teeth before she disappeared from his view.

He was feeling such a knot in his stomach, Mrs. Fitz words dinna even entice him the slightest.

Christ, one act or word from that woman and his entire body rejected everything in this world it craved before she came along.
It only wanted her.
Even if 'twas, as now, only to scold and punish her.

And he was rude, he isna ever rude to Mrs. Fitz.
Weel no after what he told o' her when he was sixteen, he blushed bashfully at the memory o' him laughing nae so behind her back regarding her bountiful figure.
But he was almost six and twenty… Errr, no, he was three and twenty at the moment.

"Damn it, either age" he exclaimed in frustration "I kent better by now".

Only one word from that wench o' his and he acted as if he was sixteen again.

It wasna enough Claire kept referring to the man by his given name. In public!
She also went on to touch the gowk all the time! Also in public!
And refused to allow Jamie to kill the twat. That he was more than willing to perform in public!

Fine, Jamie will see to that first, he mused, as he began constructing his plan o' attack when he'll confront her; all awhile marching through the passageways steaming himself proper.

This future o' hers must be a free touching, expressing your emotion at will, speaking as ye wish kind of a place, thank the Lord she willna be going back there!!!

Jamie strode off through the storey of the east wing, unwilling to believe what just transpired.

Did she just break her promise to him?
Did she just openly defy his word wi'oot talking to him first?!
And did she do all this for that man?!!!

His wife and he butted heids on almost every issue that could be found. But once something was agreed upon, once a settlement would be reached neither o' them ever broke it.
Nay wi'oot at least speaking of the matter wi' each other first.
'Till now that is.

"Do ye no see how vital is the trust between us Sassenach?
I dinna ken what the future holds for us, Claire.
But there must be complete truthfulness and credence between us as to sustain it" he said practicing the speech he'll give her after scolding her proper.

"Besides Sassenach" he added, excusing his fury "'til ye fully trusted me and told me all o' ye, ye couldn'a open yourself to love me as ye do now.
And believe me when I say, mo chridhe, any obstacle that will come in the way o' that will suffer at my wrath!"

He wasna jealous, he would tell her, he was furious!!!!
Weel he was most a surely envious, but he was angry most o' all.

Now, where could his oath breaking wife be? He pondered heatedly.

"I swear it to ye Claire, if your heid was nay so bonny on your shoulders, I would rip it off ye in a second" he hissed, deciding his best shot was her chamber and nae the surgery.

Luke would nae doubt try to ha' her alone wi' him; at this, their 'last night' together, as he stated earlier; and she wi' her naive, trusting stupidity and future free conduct might actually consent.

"No that havin' a heid on your shoulders, comes to much use to ye Sassenach, for ye never use it!!!"
Jamie went on wi' his rant as he climbed the stairs to the floor where she resided.

He dinna really believe Claire would ever play him false or even do something wi' the man but Jamie refused to allow Luke the chance to even try.

Claire's empathy knew no bounds and Jamie witnessed how this mac na galla manipulated said compassion to get his way wi' her.
Luke contrived other things from Claire as weel...
Jamie seethed, thinking of the Orchid Luke presented her wi’ tonight.
Jamie knew ‘obout orchids.
Jamie knew verra weel o’ orchids.

“The orchid is all about love” Claire enticingly teased him on the walk Jamie couldna stop thinking of since Luke unveiled the elegant flower.

Jamie and Claire walked through the Versailles’s north garden for the first time as the lazy afternoon sun was warm and delightful above their heids and washed all the colors o’ the earth bright.

Every color that the good Lord ever made for this world was vivid and present on the ground beneath their feet.

All laid there for them to enjoy, in flowerbeds that were delineated by the clean low- cut grass.

Jamie himself was much partial to the grow wild, free and long grass wi’ his much deeper shade of green that decorated the forests and meadows of Scotland, but even he had to admit that these gardens were the vision of beauty.

“It’s the symmetry” Claire explained as they strolled arm in arm, walking snug and slow trough the foliage, so Claire could lean her heid in the crook of his shoulder.
Right by the hollow of his oxter.
’Twas also one o' her favorite spots to burrow into Jamie's body when they slept.

He loved the notion that his body built itself for her comfort even before he kent he will ever lay eyes on her.

“Our brains attribute symmetry with perfection and beauty so we find much pleasure at looking at things that are all organized and neat” she went on to illuminate him.

“Rather like your nose” Jamie said wi’ a small playful bite at the mentioned organ.

“Ho” Claire laid her hand on her belly announcing another companion in their walk that enjoyed Jamie's jest.

Nae that further proof was needed.
Faith’s presence was already weel acknowledged by the smooth round shape under the lairs of fabric Claire wore.

Jamie stopped now, at the first corner by the castle’s stairs, flexing his right hand as he recalled how from week to week Claire would place her slim fingers on his palm and showed him faith's size in her belly, until one week she said

"That it Jamie, the baby has grown too big for you to hold in one hand anymore"

As they walked through the Parisian flora, he peeped down at the big bulge

"Too big to hold in one palm? Weel how fortuitously that your mother made sure I’d ha' two” he said smiling to himself

"ORCHIDS, Jamie look” Claire cries broke the tender moment as she let go of him and dashed to the spot she saw the thing at.
As she sat on the ground, wi’ Jamie’s assistance, she caressed the long stems and the soft regal flowers attached to it.

“Orchids stand for the symbol of love and affection” Claire went on wi’ her schooling “They have immense resistance power to bloom under any condition and there are so many different kinds that one can sprout anywhere but still be only unique in the place he chose to grow at” she laughed adoringly “Just like love”. Then she lifted her gaze to Jamie who was crouched by her side. Her eyes holding in them all the memories they shared “Just like our love”

She went on to tell him that in the future after the war or even since Victorian times some orchids were so rare and special that they would be worn as jewels.

“An orchid means ‘beautiful lady’” she smiled lusciously at him “Tell me my lord Broch Tuarach have YOU ever brought a girl an orchid?”

She was teasing him over yet another, how did she call them? 'Serendipitous randevu' they shared wi’ Annalise de marillac the night before. Where the lovely widowed Annalise kept requesting to ”steal but for a moment, the enchanting lord Broch Tuarach” to introduce to such and such.

“No I don’t suppose you did” Claire answered for him as Jamie rolled his eyes at her words “You have to be quite rich to afford such luxury and I can’t imagine you being able to sway your uncle or father to lend a poor starry- eyed student, such as you were, the amount that’s needed for such a gesture. And from what you and Murtagh told me, I conclude that where she was concerned you seemed to lose the capacity to scheme such means from anyone, let alone them”

Seeing his expression, Claire astutely changed the subject and averted her eyes to examine another kind of orchid.

A moment later and she was laughing so hard she almost rolled herself to the ground.

“Too bad we can’t pick some to eat” she said. At Jamie’s worrisome looks that suggested she finally lost all reason over her pregnancy, she hurriedly explained “When me and uncle lamb traveled to Greece for an excavation, I got so bored over the four hour talks whether the hole they found was a lavatory or a guest bedroom that I went to drink sweetened ice tea with the women at the café nearby”

“Lavatory? Café?” Jamie frowned “R’ye just making up words now to confuse me?” he asked “I assure ye I’m plenty perplexed wi’ the eating flowers and germs statues and..”

“Ouch, be quite” she snorted at him “I only meant that, that was how I came to learn of the Greek’s folklore” she explained “See in ancient Greece they believed that orchids were a symbol of fertility and virility”

“Weel nay need for assistance in that regards” Jamie lifted both his eyebrows in smugness as he caressed the belly that held his seed.
It was Claire’s turn now to roll her eyes at him and his manly pride.

“Fine then, but I only meant about the second thing the myth spoke of. It was said that if consumed, the flower could determine the sex of an unborn child. If the father of the child ate large, new orchid tubers then the woman would have a boy. On the other hand if the mother ate small orchid tubers, she would have a girl”

Both Claire and Jamie’s eyes stared to and fro from the flowers to each other, awaiting to see what the other would do.

Finally they decided that the bairn will have its own say as to what he or she wished to be and the flowers remained in place unharmed and thank the heavens uneaten.

Jamie stood in place between the corridors o’ Leoch, marveling at the memory, longing to have his whole family back again.

But then darkened and returned to his indignation, as he also brought to mind the times when Claire spoke jestingly o’ moments when patients during the war that made her laugh, or moved her to such extent wi’ their story of woe, or even those that made grand romantic gesture to her, all received a kiss or a warm embrace from her.

All the ploys Mr. MacLiver wangled on Jamie’s wife tonight.

Also Claire's hardship when first she came here was verra known to Jamie and she always told him how him being there for her was a big part o' her falling in love wi' him.

Weel, Luke was new to this land and in obvious need for someone as Claire in his life and the resemblance between the two occurrences worrit Jamie greatly.

"Christ Sassenach, how can ye no see the man’s intention?"
Though he already kent the answer to that verra weel.

To her, Luke was as much her patient as Isabela was.
Luke needed her care as much as his good-sister did and to Claire it dinna matter be it the healing or a kind heart and hand, if she was needed and could help she would do so.

Those stories o’ hers wi’ the soldiers also told o’ those who laid alone in military cots, after every healing cure and care was already given to them; and still she spend her nights and days in her ward, even just placing her hand on their shoulders so they Ken someone was there for them.
She did the same for him and his man in this time.

"Just as important as the medicine if not more so" She told him.

Aye, his lass treated people, that’s what she did and he loved her more for it and he ken that's what she was doing now.

But that wouldna stop him from...from...from doing something to her.

He dinna Ken what, but something.

And she wasna 'obout to like it!!!!!!
Jamie reached Claire's chamber and put his ear to the door listening. No sound came from the inside but he did hear the pitter-patter of two young women coming his way from the passageway he just came from.

He opened Claire's chamber door and slipped in. He dinna ha' the chance to click the door shut all the way before the proprietors of the feet he heard made themselves known.

So he held the door just at its closing point, making sure it seemed as if it was shut and poising himself tight to it as to no let it ajar.

Only it wasna truly fully closed, so although he saw naught, as he hid behind it, the tiny sliver in it allowed him to hear all and recognize almost at once the women that stopped now just at the other side o' it.

"R'ye sure ye sae him come this way?" asked Laoghaire sounding worrit and frustrated. "Aye. Your own seanmhair said so too" answered one o' Laoghaire's friends. The one that was 'obout to marry the Kenneth's lad and worked in the dairy. What was her name? Something Màiri or Muriel. One or the other. Nay worry, It will come to him soon enough, Jamie never forgets a name or a face.

"Dinna fret" her friend carried on "Did ye use mistress Beauchamp's potion yet?" "No I ha' it here" Jamie heard a swirl of fabric as if she was rummaging in her pocket "Had no time to go down to the stables where he sleeps, wi' all the cookery and wi' scrubbing m'skin raw wi' the cleaning tonight. Besides, Nana will ha' my lugs if she kent what we took o' the mistress, so couldna excuse m' self to go put the charm on him, now could I?"

Potion? Mistress Beauchamp's potion? Apparently Jamie was right before. His wayward wife was truly fair busy tonight. And what exactly was the wee besom thinking she was doin’?

“Christ Sassenach, ye were blamed for witchcraft, d’ye care to give it another try to see can they fry ye proper this time and no just scorch ye round the edges? Weel I’m nae saving ye again!!” he said under his breath and obviously nae meaning his words anymore.

“Sweet bleeding Jesus! That is it! Luke, flowers, potions, broken promises; your bum is getting smacked tonight Sassenach and ye ha’ m' word on that!” he went on.

'Twas apparently a fine tradition this evening to break one's oath and Jamie had a fine belt in hand.
"I dunno ken will it work Muriel if I ha' nae put the hex on him yet, I dunno Ken how I could get him to-"
"To kiss ye?! Dunno be daft Laoghaire, to make a man touch a lassie ye need nay do more than to tell him to do so" Said the now known by name Muriel
"All ye do Laoghaire, is go to him and tell him ye ha' a word from another to tell him 'obout, once 'oot o'sight, take him by the arm and drag him to the nearest alcove, clutch his nape to ye, take his mouth and use your tongue"

Holy Mary, Mother of God, that's what she did.
That was word for word, act for act what Laoghaire MacKenzie did wi' him when they kissed in the alcove that time, last time that is.
Jamie felt himself blush wi’ embarrassment.

"I dinna Ken, somethin’ was a amiss tonight between them, Muriel, I tell ye that much"
"Who? Him an' the mistress?"
"That's just it Muriel 'tis nay mistress nae more, 'tis misses, the woman's a widow"

"Laoghaire” said Muriel exasperated wi’ her friend "Did he nae take the beating for ye?"
"Aye, only since then-"

"Sàmhchair now" Muriel went on wi’ her sermon "An' after? When ye came to him, when ye were finally alone wi’ him wi’ nae people around for him to feel shy ‘obout. Did he waste any time to put his hands on ye? And what was it ye told me he told ye just before he touched ye then, hamm?” Muriel asked commanding her friend to get her meaning.

"'I thought ye wouldna come lass, couldna stand it If ye didna’ tis nae the prettiest thing ye e'er heard? An' he said it such as if almost choked wi' lust” Laoghaire quoted Jamie in a longing tone, marveling at his words as if they were the holy scriptures
"'And tonight I dinna ha’ a chance to tell ye, do ye ken what he said in front o’ all to hear?' "De?" her friend inquired and so did Jamie for that matter, as he frowned trying for the life o’ him to mind what did he say?

"'Couldna hear naught but my own heart thump at the exact moment when ye touched me’” quoted him faithfully again a half swooning, breathless Laoghaire.

Christ all mighty protect him, he dinna mean it as such!!
"Fine Sassenach ye get to thrash me once for that, but ye dinna need to leave wi’ the man and break your word as retribution” he said preparing his argument to when he'll stand on the court's dock in front o' his wife.

"Perhaps the potion works if I hold it near him too, for tonight he seemed unable to take control o' his own words, e'en bein' in public and looked all flashed and smelling as a big beast in … Weel ye ken how…”

"Weel nay over ye lass” said Jamie under his breath thinking o' his time in the stables. And then realization descended on him from their words.
"Did ye give the lass a love potion against me Sassenach? Why in all that is holly would ye do so?"
He was regaining back all the fury his blubbering spoken mistake took oot o’ him
"Ye ha’ a lot o’ explaining to do Sassenach" he determined.

"Aye, an’ that is what ye need to be worrit ower Laoghaire, the rutting, I mean the bedding"
"The bedding?" Laoghaire queried.

"Aye, the woman was marrit afore, an’ they all ken it. The men folk always say that means a
woman is easier to bed once she’s ’open’ such.
An’ that woman is open a’right.
All in the castle ken what she does wi’ the MacLiver fellow. Ye heard what her chambermaids told
o’ her, nae?
They say that nae even for one night did her chamber nae hold a man’s presence in it"

"E’ery night?!" answered a scandalized Laoghaire "an’ ye think Jamie heard o’ this and wants his
turn?"

"Aye! Maybe ye should try it. Let him ken ye're nae afraid o’ such things and that ye're willing.
That way he'll ken that ye're good for marriage an’ some fun. So he willna seek it from her.
How do ye think I made Ailean Coinneach do the asking?
After I was done wi’ him,
weel after the third time I was done wi’ him, the first time I wasna much fun.
But after the third that we had a smashing time and I kent he was mine, I told him I was wi’ child
and he ran to my da’ to ask, afore I was e’en done wi’ the telling"

"R’ye wi’ bairn?"

"Cha. But once we're wed I'll get him to put a bairn in me or tell him I was ‘rong, what will it
matter then?"
Laoghaire once your wi’ child, anyone who's got some honest in him will leave e'en a wife to be by
your side, that's what m’ mam says.
Besides no one wants to entangle themselves wi’ the wrath o’ our MacKenzie families once they'll
come to hear o’ this shame"

May Christ ha’ mercy, Jamie just realized that this was what Laoghaire tried to do when she tried
seducing him by the spring after he was already wed.
She thought he was the honest man that will leave his own wife if another held his bairn.
And wi’ a price on his heid he couldn’a risk angering anyone in the highlands or they might call ‘oot
to the Sassenachs to come for him.

Sweet Jesus, he should ha’ kent the lass willna find herself satisfied at being his paramour, but
could she be this cruel? Could she care so little for another's life just to get her way?

"Besides e’en if the mistress is trying to get a husband, 'twill be the MacLiver man, and he will ask
soon enough anyway.
And ye ken as weel as I, that nae matter what she might harbor in the way o’ feelings to our dear
Jamie, no lass willna chose the security and prosperity that man is offering.
Think, would ye chose to be a mistress and a whore to an outlaw or a don’s wife?
We all ken what her friend Geillis chose and them two are thick as thieves"
"Aye, I suppose ye're true." Laoghaire agreed wholeheartedly

"So dunno despair m'dear and gie me your word that by the end o' this night James Fraser will either lay in a bed o' pleasure or at least be thoroughly kissed, wondering how he e'er lived wi'oot the woman he'll be doing so wi'" Muriel commanded and then added in soft concern
"I dinna want to wed knowing ye alone mo chridhe"

"Aye" Laoghaire sounded moved by her friend's sentiments, but then spoke wi' the same resolve and scheming tone to match her companion's
"Dinna be worrit for me, mo ionmhaunn, James Fraser was and is mine"

Jamie was appalled to find that the young, innocent, harmless lass he felt so guilty over mistreating all this time was in fact a conniving, no scruples, filled wi' dark… weel… bitch.

"He belongs to me and one day 'twill be so" Laoghaire vowed.
"Nay Laoghaire, tonight let it be so! An' dunno ye be worrit ower a shriveled English crone and a witchy- whore to boot.
Why, your bonny Jamie is a good catholic man he willna want winged bats instead o' wee bairns in his future"
And they both laughed sounding so as the wee childish weans that they were.
Only yon children were playin' wi' people's lives.

Jamie was so furious he was 'obout to storm 'oot and do some wickedness o' his own and be damned the consequences, only-

"Someone's coming" Muriel startled
"Aye 'tis her, this is her chamber here behind ye"
"So let's scamper awa' an' I'll teach ye all the little games ye can play on him an' some things ye can do to her if she'll e'er trouble ye"

And wi' that Jamie heard them running away, still laughing over their plans for him and Claire.
A second later and he heard the footsteps they spoke o' coming closer.

Christ, he was startled himself now.
He was so unnerved from what he just beheld, his mind drew a blank as to what to say if Claire and Luke enter the room to find him there. How will he explain himself?

Wi' no much thought to what he was doing, Jamie ran into the privy closet pulled the curtain shut and tried to stand as tight to the walls as he could, scrambling on his tiptoe, so his muckle sized feet willna be seen from underneath.

Bloody hell, what was he doing? He felt himself as the childish lassies that just left his sight.

But before Jamie could regain his composure and get 'oot from his ridiculous shelter, the door opened and Jamie forgo maturity and instinctively held his breath and rose higher on his toes.
to those who would like I highly recommend to listen to these tracks while reading the next segments (you will see why) or even hearing them first and then reading on. Thank you

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQfF84ackMM

Jo Stafford - You Belong To Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvq4OnhMEO4

Jo Stafford I'll Be Seeing You 1944

Jamie heard a rasp of cloth been laid on the bed wi’ a sweet sigh
and he let ’oot all the breath he held as if someone punched his stomach.

He was feeling enraged and violent now, nae a bit startled or confused as before.
Were they sitting on the bed?!?
Weel they better be only sitting and doin’ naught else!!!
Nae that they should even be near a bed!!!

They werena speaking though.
Aye, ’twas nay words he was hearing, ’twas the sweet, loving and gentle voice o’ his wife humming some tune.

"See the pyramids along the Nile
Watch the sun rise on a tropic isle
just remember, darling, all the while
You belong to me"

Claire was singing??!
Jamie had no ear for music but he kent how his lass sounded as she seductively loll’d his tired carcass to sleep.
Was she singing the man to sleep???????!!!
On our…. Weel her bed??!

Her voice now was just as celestial and enticing as when she sang to him.
As a bean bhàsail luring sailors to their death.

Murtagh once told Jamie that Claire had a beautiful singing voice and could surely draw a crowd.
But he refused to disclose how he kent that.

Aye, his lass held many more secrets he dinna ken a thing ’obout.
And this must stop now, he determined and lowered himself from his toes coming to take a peek as to why in damn damnation was Claire demonstrating any skill in front o' that man. This soon to be deid man that his. God rest his soul.

Only best nae repeat past mistakes and leap on the men’s gullet straight away as before. Jamie can murder him just fine once the truth will be observed.

"See the marketplace in old Algiers
Send me photographs and souvenirs
Just remember when a dream appears
You belong to me"

Jamie stilled at the word 'photographs'
“Pictures that don’t move and look more lifelike than paintings, exactly as life to be exact. As a moment frozen in time forever” he recalled Claire's description.

Claire was a lot o' things and she will pay for being most of them tonight to be sure, but she will na be so reckless as to be using such a wrong word to this time. Nay to no one but Jamie.

May Michel defend us, he crossed himself, she dinna tell Luke 'obout her did she? She will na share herself such wi’ none but him, will she?

Weel, she was already carrying ‘oround dispensing potions, why nae add one more log to the fire? Weel if naught else it meant Luke must die tonight and that was quite fine in Jamie’s eyes.

"I'll be so alone without you
Maybe you'll be lonesome too and blue"

Is she singing she'll miss the man when they leave the day after tomorrow? The room was ice cold but Jamie’s skin was burning so high he wanted to tear all his clothes off and run naked wi’ only dirk in hand to annihilate this Luke once and for all.

"Fly the ocean in a silver plane
See the jungle when it's wet with rain
Just remember till you're home again
You belong to me"

'Plane' Jamie kent 'plane'.
“Thousand of feet in the air if certainly” he heard Claire’s words echo in his ears. Jamie kent 'plain'.
'Twas one o' the first things she told him of, when she returned to him from the stones to be truly his. He was gutted now.

"I'll be so alone and without you
Maybe you’ll be lonesome too and blue"

Claire sounded strenuous for a moment and Jamie could hear her remove her garments as more fabric was being stripped from skin and being placed on the bed. The same stays he handled in the stables were being untied again, but nae by him.

Jamie couldna decide whether he was mad or sad, so instead o' running amok he peered through the curtain.

"Fly the ocean in a silver plane"

No Luke, just Claire.
She was undressing herself, alone in the room.

"See the jungle when it's wet with rain"

She surely would ha' noticed him by now, he thought, as he moved the curtain open and came ‘oot from the privy closet, but she only had eyes for some wrapped parcel, which was what Jamie must ha’ heard being placed on the bed before.

**Another gift.**
And this one was more than half Claire's size.
He'll break it on her heid, the stubborn bloody-

"*but remember, darling, till you're home again*
**YOU BELONG TO ME**"

BELONG? BELONG??
I’ll show ye who ye belong to, Jamie swore enraged.

Claire had her curls completely lose, which after a night of restrain exploded in such ferocity to all directions, making her seem as the wild thoroughbred mare from a faraway land Jamie always kent her to be.
Its effect on him now, as always, was as Medusa, turning men into stone wi’ only a glimpse at her hair.

"I'll be seeing you

*In all the old familiar places*”

Claire was starting another song.
Jamie kent ’twas new over the changing o' the words and something in her tone became more
heavenly- exquisite, holding so much passion in them.

Jamie kent when his woman was enthralled to passion.

She was slowly and seductively undressing herself and her eyes and soul nay budging from the apparition on the bed.

"That this heart of mine embraces
All day through"

She was almost if one could call it that… dancing, only Jamie as never seen dancing as this before. Her nubile figure stretched and arched itself, her hips swayed enticingly, her hands caressed her body as if it were his own making love to her, her heid was tilted back and he saw her grin from ear to ear wi’ complete satisfaction and bliss.

All the worry and guilt she felt tonight over him, were gone as if they were never there to begin wi’.

Jamie hated her to feel them, but they stood as the better between two evils if the other way meant another man stirring the kind of feeling he was seeing in her at the moment.

“*In that small cafe
The park across the way
The children’s carousel”*

She was happy and giddy, singing, dancing and touching that damn parcel and flowers again and again and again.

“*The chestnut trees
The wishing well “*

Aye just like Medusa,
He thought has he stood transfixed by the sight o’ her, all awhile his insides boiled and steamed. He was observing her mood and knowing it to be for the man she was singing this to, the man that this parcel belonged to.

He meant to scream at her, he truly did, he even opened his mouth to commence wi’ the yelling.

Only he noticed how long her hair was getting as it cascaded just under her shoulders making him want to bury himself into those soft, sweet, plants-smelling, swirls o’ alluring snakes and freeze so he would never leave her sight.

Jamie watched as her stitched at the waist gown was being removed inch by inch from her body in the rhythm of the song, releasing her breasts and her breath as to allow her singing voice to become
far more smooth and honeyed.

She was beginning to look more and more as she did at the point o’ time when he married her, distancing herself from the English future she came from and joining him here in his own time.

Wi’ longer hair, more curves to her body and the most well rounded, ample, plump-

“I’ll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day”

‘Nay ye are angry at her’ he reproach himself as he felt him wanting to glide his hands and help her to undress from behind, profiting the chance to skim his fingers on her smooth gleam-opal skin, exposing more o’ her and watch as her skin illuminated itself just by his touch.

He’s seen it happen time and again.
Her body called and succumbed to his touch much sooner than when her mind chose to do the same.

Although she was glowing now as such, after being wi’ another man!

‘Stop it at once’ he scolded himself angrily.
‘Thinking such things and being enthralled by her charms will be your downfall’ he chastised himself proper.
She must stand accountable for her actions tonight, he must stay irate!

This was easily accomplished once he saw his singing Claire moving her hands on her bare upper body and gliding them to Luke’s wrapped bestow and back on to herself.

" In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way”

She glided her hands from her almost unclad form, bringing them to caress the ‘light and gay’ flowers Luke brought her, that were tied by a string to the long oval shaped bundle.

The present itself was wrapped in black velure and two thick strips of white as snow flax.
Verra luxurious-looking black velure and white flax.

Her nipples stood taut as she took the white orchid into her bosom, inhaling its scent into her and closing her eyes in sheer ecstasy.

" I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
"But I'll be seeing you"

Seeing him in the moon, thinking o’ him when night will come?
Jamie has lost all sense as his heid seem to be running a fever from the fury that gushed in him.

His woman seemed so amorous and serene, Singing tender and doting words.
And he was no the cause o’ it.

“*I’ll find you in the morning sun*
*And when the night is new*”

Jamie swallowed hard almost choking on his own breath.

The song was beautiful but it was sung for a man and a parcel that had naught to do wi’ him.

It was thoughts o’ the man and his gift that flowed through her body causing her to act such.
It was obvious by the constant touching and caressing of her skin and then the package, her breasts and then the flowers.

"*I’ll be looking at the moon*
*But I'll be seeing you ”*

She bent to skim her lips lightly on the boon bounty.
So it will hold her kiss in it, to be kept for the man who owned this.

“*I'll be looking at the moon*
*But I'll only be seeing you”*

Claire repeated her last words again, nay in singing this time, but in a soft whisper to be pledged into Luke’s token for her.

“*AND WHAT DO YE THINK YE’RE DOING??*” Jamie bellowed, losing all control at the conclusion that she must ha’ done the same to the man she received this endowment from.

Throughout the song he inched nearer and nearer to her, so he had only needed to take one more step to stand tight and menacing behind her.

"*Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!*” Claire shrieked horrified, covering her bare front wi’ her arms, almost falling from her feet, as she tried to back away from what she perceived to be her attacker.

She wasna wrong, but he wasna ‘about to hurt her in the way she thought.
Jamie caught her by her elbow bringing her to a stable standing.

Once she could breathe again, she immediately side-glanced to the bed and the forbidden licentious-arousing tribute in it.

She tried to move from his grasp, most likely to cover the impure evidence, but he toke her other elbow fastening her to him and to the spot where they stood.

“W…what are you doing here?” she asked swallowing hard as her eyes dotted from the parcel to him and back to her lover’s gift.

“Me?!?” he sneered, feeling his nostrils flare and his lip twitch from wanting to yell so many things but unable to decide with what to begin.

“Why, I do as I do every night and come to be in MY WIFE’S BED is it nae where I should be?” he said looking down at her.

She wants to play coy, he’ll play too.

“And ye lass, what ha’ ye been doin’?”
“I … I …” she stuttered unable to look away from the package.

“This?” Jamie let go of one of her arms, pointing at the thing but still keeping his gaze on her, scrutinizing her reaction.
“Is that what ye ha’ been doin’?” Claire stiffened and snapped her gaze back to him.

“I think you should go Jamie… I mean we had our time tonight and you saw how much trouble we entangled ourselves with. I… I… think we mustn’t take any more chances”

“Ho, ye think that, d’ye?” he cocked his eyebrow at her.
“Well yes… I … or if you want maybe you could come later” she suggested helpfully.
“When everyone will be asleep, I think it’s far too dangerous right now to…”

“Ho, dangerous is it? To whom exactly? Who will find himself in trouble if I stay?” he interrogated ominously.

“What are you talking about?” she said looking truly apprehensive that he will chose to stay “I’m only saying it for your benefit”

“My benefit? My benefit?” he provoked

“Well yes” it was her turn now to get annoyed and that made Jamie all that vexed than before. What right did she ha’ to be mad wi’ him?

“And let go of me you’re hurting me” she pushed herself free from his grasp and he let her, she was running nowhere half naked.
“Look, I really think…” she started to say.

“Think, think?!?… Nay lass there was nae thinking from ye tonight. Nay when ye went wi’ him in front o’ my verra eyes, nay when ye received his gifts and nay…”

Nothing at all.

Go on, what do ye want me to say on a night like this?”
Christ Sassenach how can ye go wi’ him?!
Ye couldna at least spare me o’ that sight?
No that my heid requires the seeing, as to fill itself wi’ images o’ ye wi’ him.
I seem to ha’ my fair share o’ that at the moment”

“What?” she frowned completely dumbfounded “are you feeling well, Jamie? What are you even talking about? Ho lord your head” she exclaimed “Is something wrong with your head? I shouldn’t have left you…”

“NO YOU SHOULDNA. How could ye do so?!”” he bellowed into her face
“I thought you were fine” she bellowed back to his.

“Ho… so if I am weel ye can go and… and”
“And what?” she demanded

“And this” he walked to the parcel taking hold of it and tearing it open.
He dinna ken what he’ll find in it, but he was going to destroy it as she destroyed him.

“No Jamie, let go, don’t…” she shrieked pounding on his back as he pushed her back wi’ one arm, using the other to crush the flowers and toss them to the floor, rip at the plush fabric and plunk the content it held on the bed.

“NOOOO” she yelled at him “great! You barbaric jealous bastard, you berserk, barking mad, effing clodpole baboon”

Jamie kent his fiery temper couldn’a be bested, but his wife lived mood at the moment was a verra close second.

Jamie stared at what unveiled before his eyes and could honestly say that there wasna any way he could’ve ever imagined or even come close to guessing what that package held.

“You’ve ruined everything!!” she yelled at him.
She turned away from him, throw her hands to the air exasperated and hurt and plumped herself on the bed at the far end.

Jamie could only keep gawking at-

At the most beautiful, weel polished, handmade wi’ every detail one could think of – broadsword. A classic Viking-looking claymore.

“A claidheamh mor” Claire tried to say in the Gaelic still verra much seething at his actions, but seemed willing to put it all aside to observe his reaction to the object.
“Did I say it right? Did I say ‘great sword’ or something else?”
She inquired looking into his face as to read them.

“That one was a bit hard for me to pronounce properly"
She apologized at her perfect articulation. ‘Twas said wi’ a fine English accent but no less perfect for it.

“I asked Luke to make it as much as possible, and as much as I could recall to describe it for him, to your father’s sword’ she said looking so miserable at his discovery.
Said discovery, laid on the bed, looking indeed so much as a athair’s sword.

The hilt comprised of the long straight cross-guard quillon, the oval verra fine leather-wrapped grip and the same distinct five-lobed pommel, he admired as a lad, every time he snuck into his Da’s chamber.

The fuller, the edge, even the point of the sword’s blade were identical to its intended twin. Only the one before him was brand new. A virginal sword untouched by no other battle or warrior.

Its steel shone wi’ its satin finish, which enticed him to touch it as much as his father’s did.

So he did, feeling at once that the ethereal sense it imposed on him as he watched it was naughting to how heavenly light and airy it felt in his hand.

‘Twas as if it wasna pure iron he was lifting.

It sliced through the air as if air dinna exist. Jamie certainly felt his own leave his body at the marvel he possessed … only the grip felt a bit… weel a bit odd.

He must’ve frowned for-
“Try the left hand” he heard Claire say softly now, as she watched every line on his face and every movement he made, seeking his emotions regarding what he clutched.

He brought his left palm to hold it and gasped as it was so obviously made for a Cack-handed warrior to hold. But it wasna just any cack- handed man this sword was made for. Once placed in his grasp the sword yielded to its intended master. Every contour, its width and even its length was one wi’ his palm and arm.

Jamie couldn’ae explain it, ‘twas more than just comfortable or right, ‘twas as if he was Arthur and he was holding Excalibur. It was made only for him.

“How is it so light?” he said, too astonished to say more and having no idea where to start wi’ all the questions that thundered in his heid.

He wanted to ask why is Luke giving her a sword? Why a left handed sword? Was it for him?!? Why a sword for him?

He kent verra weel the man might want to stab him wi’ one, but he surely wasna ‘obout to afford Jamie such a privilege as to own such a masterpiece.

And at the mention of that, Jamie got more flustered. This was a most costly luxurious endowment. How on earth could Claire afford to pay the man for such a thing? She had no coin o’ her own and Jamie although no skint himself, most certainly dinna hold such funds.

The damn thing cost more than the price on his heid!

But instead of all that, what came ‘oot o’ his lips was “Is it nae real? I never felt such a thing” he said weighing it again in his hand, to make sure it wasna his daze that dimmed his senses.
“Less than 3lbs” Claire said wi’ pride at his astonishment
“wait let me…” she pouted her face trying to recall and proceeded as if repeating what was told to her “It’s iron and steel at its core, but Luke said he used high-tin bronze for the edges” she concluded wi’ a conquering smile as she remembered the details correctly
“That way, he said it will still keep it hard and unbreakable, but also make it lithe and with a sharp edge for longer than usual, which meant less need to go to the smithy so often.
I thought that could come in handy, with us traveling so much” she smiled, happy at mentioning how this was done to accommodate him and his needs.
“Luke said it was a ‘trick’ the Chinese’s bladesmiths use to make their swords more agile and lightweight as to not strain the one that yields them in the middle of a long battle.
Not that I intended it for fighting when it came to you”

“Then why?” Jamie blurted as he studied the hilt again, awed at how fine the workmanship was.
“I asked him not to build it as basket- hilted sword but have it as a cross so it will look like…” she said worriedly, thinking he’s query was to do wi’ the design of the thing.
“My … father’s, aye… ye said” Jamie was moved to such degree as to choke on his own words.
“Yes” she said wi’ her lips quivering in an insecure smile and then she asked looking gloomy and apprehensive “should I have asked differently? Is the other hilt better? Or is it over all the changes to the blade?” she asked unable to receive clarification from his overcome, loss for words and must be dumb expression, which he possessed at the moment.
“I’m so sorry” she frowned “he kept asking me what I wanted and telling me he can make it better, especially with me knowing how to answer all his questions. So I sort of chose the middle path.
So it will hold your father’s appearance but wi’ all the new improvement, that… I can’t believe I’m saying this… that the future held.
But he did tell me the basket woven was better for some fights and more appropriate as a gift… ouch did I muck everything up?”

“WHAT?” Jamie exclaimed, overthrown over her bein’ upset wi’ herself.

This was the best blade he ever did see, and Jamie managed to observe a lot through all the days of his life.
It far exceeded what Luke adorned tonight and surpassed greatly the ones Luke supplied Colum wi’, to be bestowed on the most distinguished clan member and most acclaim fighters.

“It was just” she lowered her eyes, fiddling her fingers wi’ the crumpled dress that was bunched around her waist “See I didn’t consider so much about the fighting as much as… Well when we’ll stand at the chapel at our, I suppose one could call it, our second wedding, I wanted you to have the closest resemblance of the sword you have in Lallybroch.
I mean your father’s sword so… so you could feel him there with you on your wedding day or at least a piece of him” she let ‘oot her breath in a snort
“It’s silly I know, so please don’t laugh at me for the idea.” She pleaded
“It’s only I thought about the fact that maybe if we were free to marry as we wanted, when we wanted…
That you would probably want your father sword along with your father’s ring, while wearing the Fraser’s colors.
You managed to procure the two on your own and I thought maybe I could supply you with the third.
So you will be one step closer to the wedding of your dreams. I mean you did so much for me. My ring, your mother’s pearls, that dress” she lifted her brows in fond remembrance “That magnificent dress”.

Then she sighed, “See, back in my own time I had my own money, I had assets, I could stand on my own. Here… Well, here I have nothing”

“I’m sorry lass” he said feeling bad that being wi’ him cost her that, and he couldna in return grant her such prosperity.

“No. I didn’t mean it like that” she hurried to explain herself “I never cared to buy or own things but… but being financially independent … Well it means that when you love and care for someone you can afford to show it with a present or a gesture of some kind and this-” she touched the sword lightly “I wanted it to be my gesture, so you’ll know”

“Know?” Jamie puzzled

“I had my perfect wedding” she said softly looking at him wi’ such thankfulness “You did not” she said sounding sad for that fact.

“What?” he gasped. He did! It was more than he ever dreamed of. And most o’ all it granted him a whole life to share wi’ the woman he yearned and burned for since the first day he met her.

“You stood there marrying someone who couldn’t give you what you gave her, what you felt for her” she lowered her gaze to the ground and couldna look at him for the shame she felt at her words.

“And now I can” she lifted her eyes back to him wi’ all the bliss, giddiness and desire he saw in her when she danced and sung. ‘Twas always ‘bout him; all for him.

“Only” her eyes darkened lightly “…see when we’ll stand in front of that altar… again… you and I. And we will!” she determined fiercely “Even if I have to build the damn chapel myself and stitch my own dress” she said leaving no room for argument.

Then she lightened again blushing “Even though we are already enamored and devoted to each other completely”

Jamie had to swallow the excitement from all the bliss, giddiness and desire he was feeling now.

“We’ll have to pretend that we’re not, because of everyone around us and…” She snorted in frustration “And I hate that. I truly hate that” Her stare intensified as she pleaded passionately for him to know her words to be true.

“You deserve to stand there and know that this time the woman at your side is so completely in love with you” she sighed and dinna seem to speak to him anymore as much as to herself “So much so that when bad people around her do or make her do things against her will, she is so
afraid to tell you of them, for she doesn’t want you to ever feel pain, sorrow or fear”
She was apologizing for her keeping a secret from him.

She knew and he realized anew, that his outburst and crazed insane mind that dinna trust her completely, was for him feeling her distancing herself from him and placing a secret between them.

To his defense there were many more things contributing to his actions, but, aye, Jamie couldna ever stand for anything to stand between them.

She was still obviously unwilling to tell him what it was, but she felt he needed her to explain her actions.

Claire swallowed hard afraid to say her next words
“She even fears sometimes… that you might… well if you think that …” she waved her hand dismissing the matter
“Well it doesn’t matter anymore what I thought” she said looking into his eyes crestfallen.

“I …I mean ye should ne…” Jamie began to protest that she should never do such a thing and to who and what was she referring to, but comprehension rumbled in him as thunder.

Laoghaire and Muriel they were what she held from him.
“What we took o’ the mistress” Laoghaire said.
“… all the little games ye can play on him an’ some things ye can do to her if she’ll e’er trouble ye” Muriel plotted.

They did something to his lady.
Something that made her risk her own neck and give them the potion.
And knowing his woman it was something that could have hurt his well-being or she wouldna ha’ done so.
And she feared to tell him o’ it for all the reasons she spoke of now.

He never laid a hand on a woman before, but he so fervently wished to do so now.
They will pay for this! He vowed.

“And if I can’t show that to you even in our second chance around” Claire pulled him back to her wi’ her words.
“Then I wanted you to have this as a token to carry it and touch, so you could remember” she smiled wholeheartedly feeling so happy to gift him wi’ that.

“And if you forget”
Her smile widened as she rose to her feet, took his free hand that dinna held the sword and guided his fingers to skim across the cross-guard quillon.

Something was carved there in the metal, instead of the ordinary diamonds and hearts that were the usual decorations.
It was imbedded inward so it would be invisible to a man looking at it.

One couldn’a ken it was there unless he caressed it himself and then brought it very close to his eyes as Jamie did at this moment.

Right there inserted in the metal stood the inscription-
“I give ye my Spirit, ’til our Life shall be Done”
Claire said “Well actually according to Luke the more correct term is
‘Yours is my soul until our worlds end’
for me both translation apply” she laughed a warm loving light laugh.

“He tried to tell me it’s a blood vow done for a marriage and shouldn’t be given to my dear uncle lamb, which I resurrected for the occasion, saying that when I will finally be free from here, there was only one man I wished to grant this gift to.
You don’t look anything like uncle lamb but I suppose you could play him for a sort while.
I mean with all that theatrical flair you displayed tonight” she mocked him slightly, as he knew she would.

“I said I read it somewhere and loved the purity and spirituality of it and I insisted it will be that”
she cupped his cheek in her palm and her big sapphire blue eyes looked into his wi’ pleading tenderness
“It had to be that” she repeated as she looked at him so amorously.
Jamie heid actually felt dizzy and he thought he might swoon like an exited lassie.
“like it had to be you” she ended her words

“I …” he said but couldna say no more, this woman kept taking all the breath and words ‘oot o’him every time.

“Do you like it Jamie?” she asked apprehensive o’ his reply.
“I…” he said again wi no idea what to say.

Christ he was an educated man, he should be able to assemble some word o’ gratitude and pleasure to bestow upon her.
But the words he kent at any language paled in the light o’ her gesture and his heid failed to find better.

“Well do you?” she asked concerned at his lack o’ words.
He could always be relied upon to crack a joke or speak fluency but-

“I am afraid it’s all I have to give.” She said ruefully
“Luke kept insisting to repay me for my help and I always refused, but when he suggested perhaps a weapon of some kind to take on the road with me, well …. I couldn’t help but think of you and our wedding day”

She covered her mouth wi’ the back of her hand embarrassed
“You should have seen me try to spin a thousand lies as to how I knew your measurements.
I do believe I finally learned how to fib, for he bought it”
she ended proudly wi’ her hands to her waist.

“Measurements?” Jamie puzzled.

“I measured your hand at nights when you came to me” she said, taking hold o’ his healthy whole left palm.
“That was hard” she rolled her eyes at the memory “you awakened almost every time and when I tried to measure the lower parts of you, you kept thinking I was… well you know what you thought when you woke up and peeked down at me by your waist” she snorted
“That was almost as hard as the times that I had to convince Rupert to leave me and Luke alone behind closed doors so we could sit for the hours it took for me to describe you to him. In the disguise of uncle lamb of course” she added for clarification.
“How you walk, what was the length of your stride, how strong you are, he had a million questions to fit it properly to you”

She smiled suggestively as she cocked her eyebrow at him.
“Thank the Lord I knew them all over being in very, very” she came and kissed his lips lightly and placed a small bite on his lower one at the end
“Very close proximity to you for close to three years”
She distanced herself from him to go and begin to tidy all the clutter and mess Jamie made tonight.

Ho Christ, he ruined her flowers.
He wanted to tan his own hide for that.

And he still offered her no response for what she did and gave him tonight, and he dinna only mean the sword.

Jamie perhaps couldna speak at present, but he could let his body do the talking for him.

He placed the sword gently on the bed and reached his hand to grasp Claire’s nape bringing her back to him.
He opened her mouth wi his, bringing his other hand to her nape also, as to hold her tight and still to him.

He inserted his tongue, finding hers and brought his lips to suckle it.
He cupped her face moving them from side to side to engulf her from every direction.

“I… guess… that means … you like it” she said into his lips as he wouldna let her go.

“’Tis the most beautiful thing I ever saw” he said into her mouth and dinna mean the sword again.

He began undressing what was left on her body as he stumbled wi’ her, inching her toward the bed.

“Ja..mi..e” she tried speaking but his mouth was relentless and all-consuming on hers and his hand on her nape dinna allow her to distance herself a pin distance away from him, his other hand engulfed her breast, as he used his palm to envelop it fully.
He began rubbing it until the motion caused Claire to lose the capability of coherent thought and speech as she inflicted on him.

“B..ut” Claire groaned at the sensation.
“I want to love ye Sassenach” he said into her “Let go and let me”.
He pleaded as he began removing his own clothes.

Jesus, he was really getting quite good at such maneuvers thanks to her, he observed aloofly to himself.

“What are you doing?” she asked as he sat on the bed, flinging his kilt to the floor.
"I’m going to make love to ye and I want to be naked wi’ ye when I do” he answered simply.

"Again??" she gasped
"Aye" Jamie said with all conviction.

"'Tis nay my fault" he explained in an accusatory tone "I canna keep my hands from ye when ye are near and ye ken it verra weel and then ye go on an’ do things such as this and expect no retribution?"

He clasped her arse in his palms bringing her to stand between his legs

"Nay Sassenach ye canna conduct yourself as such and no receive your punishment"

“But after…well after the stables…how can you possibly…?” she said biting her lower lip shyly

“Christ Claire,” he looked up at her as she brought her hands to caress the top of his head, making him lose his last shard o’ self-restraint

“I dunno think I could ever stop wanting ye, my love, even if I cared to try” he said.

“But dinna be worrit, I’ll be gentle” he wheedled just as her hand came to embrace his nape and his mouth went to her breast.

I was standing between his legs completely bare, as Jamie quite bare himself, sat on the edge of the bed and kissed every one of my breasts.

Slowly he opened his mouth taking more of me into him.

He skimmed his hands along my hips, thighs until he reached just below my knees. He applied a small tug to them, which made them buckle ever so lightly, but enough for him to lift and bring me to straddle him.

I let my hand come between us and guided him inside me.

He let out a very warm soft breath, which spread all over my bare chest, making me grab the back of his head and interlacing my fingers into his hair.

I began rocking into him; slowly bringing him to lie on his back on the bed.

His feet still stayed rooted on the ground and I felt his thighs stiffen and press themselves on to it so as to not thrust his hips into me.

He intended to keep his promise of softness to me no matter what.

I leaned back placing my hands behind me, taking anchor in his upper thighs, taking a firm hold on them and scraping them to add to his pleasure.

Jamie bit his lips at the sensation and moaned with delight.

He let me be in complete control; he dared not move.

I began riding him, moving my hips.

I rode him slow and fast at will. Caressing his thighs, squeezing slightly, scratching as my heart desired.
My head was tilted backward and my eyes closed as I allowed only the sensation to indulge and guide me.

I was a bit sore still, but Jamie never failed to feel good inside me and this time was no different. Apparently I was the same to him, for I heard him gasp a few times and twice he cried out my name.

“Claire” he said again for the third time in a choked wi’ emotions whisper.

His deep Scottish lilt -burr of my name echoed in my ears and resonated inside my body until it seeped to my center.
It compelled me to bring my hands to his chest, still wi’ my eyes closed and galloping my stride faster now.

I had no time to lit the hearth before all the events of tonight transpired.
And I was experiencing a very odd contradictory sensation of having my body frozen from the waist up from the chill in the air, to having a sultry, searing- hot male body between my thighs warming me from the waist down.
This did not feel unsatisfactory to say the least.

And where cold and heat collide, steam arise.

When it was done I leaned forward, sweaty and slippery, letting my curls cascade themselves all over his chest.

At a small after thought I bit his nipple, flicking it with my tongue at the end.

Jamie’s hips jerked up then, unable to control himself any longer at my chosen move.
Then he and every other part of him fell heavily back into the mattress.

He let out his breath in an explosive sound, sighed and his hands came to wrap themselves around me; he moved his hair from his face and placed his chin atop my head.

"I almost let ye go” he shuddered, letting out another heart wrenching long breath.

"What?” I rose from him, using my hands on his chest for support.

"I almost let ye go” he repeated ruefully.

There was a marked trail made by a tear that ran down along the side of his right cheek and his face was contorted from holding so much pain under its skin.

"Why would you think of that, right now?” I asked terrified.

"Because I am falling more inlove wi’ ye just now"
He answered sounding so matter of factly that I let out a small snort in response.

"What?” I asked again puzzled and apparently not very articulated.

"I’m falling more inlove wi’ ye at this verra moment” he said as if this explained it.

"Dinna fash, it happens once a day, every day. I would be lying, standing, working, fighting….. Loving ye” he smiled lightly at that, as if remembering how it all transpires.
He took one long curl that lay on my shoulder wrapping it around his finger as if it was the coil of
time itself; doing this so very gently and cautiously as to almost allow the curl to wrap itself on
him.

"Sometimes ‘tis when ye’re wi’ me, sometimes ‘tis when I’m alone.
But ‘twill happen every day and wi’ no warning."

Another tear came from the side of his eye, without him ever blinking to extract it.

"I would look, think or hear ye and I would feel an ache in my chest as if my heart would be
breaking, but I ken ‘tis only breaking to be rebuilt, bigger, stronger to hold a greater love for ye”.

"Every day?" it was a stupid question but I couldn’t think of anything else to ask.

"Aye" he chuckled lightly at that and the vibration of his body reminded me that we were still
linked.

"Even if ye're mad at me or even if we’re apart"
He opened his eyes wide to me and smiled amusingly as if revealing a secret and said "It started
long before we were even wed".

He rose on his elbows now, which brought his face closer to my own "It has to be so, mo chridhe,
or I’ll die wi’ the loving o’ ye" he smiled softly "There must be more room in my heart, a ghraidh.
For my love for ye spreads constantly"

"Then why-?" I blotted the single tear that was near his lip by now.

He smiled wholeheartedly at that.

"For I would’ve gone on loving ye more and more each day even if ye left that day I sent ye away"
he lifted his eyes to mine.
They were filled with sadness, fear and pain now.
"Only ye wouldna ha’ been here wi’ me to share it.
Ye wouldna be here for me to offer it to ye.
And that I think, Claire, I think that would be the end o’ me"

There were a few tears falling from my eyes now as well.
They ran from my cheek and on to my bare breast.

One landed squarely on my nipple and was glistening from it, which made him laugh, a real warm
laugh.

"Dinna be sad, mo maise, for we are nae apart, we are together.
And my tears are just the shadows o’ a pain that willna come"

He pulled me off his lap and out from our connection and on to the mattress.
“NEVER”
He said, as he laid me on my stomach and spread himself behind me almost laying fully atop of me
but still letting the bed hold most of his burden
“I willna let it”
He fortified his promise to me, as he spread himself further over every inch of me, all through the
back of my body.

It made me feel reassured and safe to have his weight on me.
"We are together and never again apart" we whispered, took my hand that rested near my head and wove it with his. We laid there together, watching the rain, which began to drip loudly on the window’s glass, cocooning us from the rest of the world and all the other noises the gathering’s celebration, which were still in full swing, brought from the outside.

A moment later I felt him shift a bit to his side, exposing my rear, smacking it ever so lightly and then kissing the spot softly.

"Why did you do that for?" I snorted a laugh.

“Someone gave his word this evening that by the end o' this night I will either lay in a bed o' pleasure or at least be thoroughly kissed, wondering how I ever lived wi'oot the woman that I will do so wi’.
Well…”
He stretched himself further atop of me, regaining his previous position
"Giving that I ha’ done all that, I just wanted to make sure that m’ word as to what I’ll do to ye tonight willna be broken either"
He concluded with a satisfied smile, kissing my exposed shoulder blade and cuddling back on to me.

“What??”

"You first class barbarian fool” she berated him as she was feeling his shoulder for damages.

“’You knew this will happen and yet you went on and got yourself hurt” she went on wi’ her scolding.

In his current mood he liked it just fine.

“Why were you even at that game? You knew he would come out of the woods looking for a fight” she glared at him as she stumped through the hallway they entered the castle from, pushing him forward through smacks at his back and heid.

She has done so since the moment they left Murtagh’s sight, after he informed Jamie no one won in the shinty match.
Too bad he had performed some choice moves during that game and this time he had her to play wi’ as weel.

Only Claire dinna seem to share this specific past desire o’ his at the moment and was chastising him proper.
“Come” she ordered “We’ll go to the surgery before he’ll come and I could examine if you need some patching up” she said leading the way exasperated wi’ him.

“What’s ‘first class’ mean Sassenach?” he stood himself taut to her back as he pulled her tight to him nae giving up on the idea to fulfill a past craving.

"I thought you said it was fighting that gives you ‘Mmphm’ afterward" she said, striving for subtlety, inclining her stare to his lower parts, which felt naughting but subtle at present time

“Was this something that arise after the first time you played as well?” she inquired getting his meaning.
Well it was hard to miss it in such close proximity.

‘Twas a bit crass, but he needed to make sure she kent subtlety wasna the course to follow at the moment.

"Weel, as ye saw, I was fighting quite fiercely" he said and turned her to him.
He walked her backwards to be pressed now between the wall at her back and him at her front.
“And aye, after the match last time, when I lifted my eyes and saw ye looking at me, knowing ye saw me wining such. Weel…”
He kissed her fervently.

Although it wasna the fighting or the game or even the rush that follows such occurrences that currently supplied him wi’ the firm cock-stand he was experiencing at the moment.

‘Twas the woman that came ‘oot of the woods saw him and then Dougal, who was bursting ahead to knock Jamie ‘oot and force him to yield.

Claire gasped in worry, pivoted and turned her back to him and the game, cradling her arms tight to her chest, wincing at every noise, worrying it was Jamie’s bones being broken that made the racket she heard behind her.

Every grunt or shout or even the slightest noise made her grimace and burrow into herself wi’ fear and concern for his weel-being.

She hated seeing him hurt vehemently.

Once the game was over, she strode furiously to him and Murtagh and clouted him one across his ear.

“You senseless coot, you imbecilic halfwit absurd…”
She searched for more insults
“Soct” both he and Murtagh concluded for her.
Against his usual response, Murtagh dinna frown at the spectacle this time but seemed amused.

Unfortunately ‘twas becoming common knowledge that Claire jumped ‘oot o’ her skin every time Jamie had a scratch on him.

“You’re injured!” she berated him “Why would you do this if you’re on the mend? I don’t even know why I bother to fix you anymore, maybe if I leave you damaged you won’t get yourself hurt anew to replace the old ones.
Maybe you find it a funny game in that barbarian head of yours.
Well Come on already let’s go get you sorted”

“But I thought ye said-” Jamie teased
“You be quite! You have lost all speaking rights at the moment. Come already!!”
She ordered in her best stern doctor voice, half dragging him after her to be looked and cared for.

She was most unhappy wi’ him.
He on his part always seem to feel quite happy wi’ the scolding that continuously followed his wounds.
Wonder why? He mused as he tried to take her berating lips into his.

"Jamie you reek of dirt and sweat" she turned her head waving her hand under her nose, but he could tell it was said in jest

"What ye’re smelling Sassenach is a man. A big strong" he lifted her by the waist tight to his body "passionate man" he bit her neck

"And apparently a hungry one to boot" she said swaying her feet in the air "Put me down you big oaf, someone will see and this cannot be good for your shoulder"

"Ouch, I'll do" he said wanting to go on playing wi’ his wife.
But then he reconsidering it, placed her back down and said
"but if ye feel we must go and ha’ it tended to, fine, lead the way" he let go of her and bent gallantly to allow her pass.

She kent his mind

"If you think anything else will happen there but first aid” she said narrowing her eyes at him.

Of course ‘twill he hadna had her fully in the surgery yet and they were leaving tomorrow.
‘Best nae leave anything undone for tomorrow, what ye can do today’
his da’ always said

“You are about to be set wrong”
She said stating a fact wi’ her hands on her waist.

"What's 'first aid'?" he queried smiling lasciviously “For I do find myself in need o’ some aid and I do find it must be tended to first and foremost"

She shock he head from side to side and said while trying to stifle a smirk
"Never mind, I just meant, Dougal remember? We can’t do anything, he is probably already on his way to the surgery and I doubt very much you would like me to miss my invitation to join the wedding par… I mean the rent party" she said unable to hold her smile at bay anymore.

Then she glanced down at herself in disapproval and said
“Last time I had a chance to change before he came. Now look at me I smell and look as bad, if not worse, than you do”

“I am” Jamie said in admiration “I always look at ye”
"He'll be coming soon" her voice echoed enticingly.
"I'll be gone before he comes" he answered reassuringly.

Dougal was standing inside the infirmary, leaning on the apothecary cabinet o' old, late Davie Beaton.
God rest his soul, he said, crossing himself.

Even before they both entered, he could hear their glee echoing through the upstairs corridors.
Apparently, his woman was right.

Now they were descending on the short flight of stairs to the surgery.
She had her back half turned to him, laughing giggly, leading Jamie by his hand?!?!?
Aye, there was nae doubt on the matter, they were holding hands.

Dougal was in a rare mood this evening.

After standing on Colum's side last night and hearing him accept a mere gesture o' friendship and good will instead o' an oath from the young laird, this appearance was 'obout to send him over the cliff.

Colum's consent and approval o' the weak words afforded to him, meant he desired the door for Mr. Fraser to be his successor, to remain open.

Dougal expected his brother to refuse such frailty promises, declaring Jamie an enemy to clan Mackenzie, thereof never to set foot on these lands or risk bein' outright killed.

Tis nae as if he wished his own kin deid, but the price o' him showing up in the hall, was now, too great to allow him to live.

If he had just stayed hidden as he told him he would, before the gathering when he confronted him, all would've been fine.
But the lad broke his words and the price for that was steep.

Dougal was nay fool. He kent Jamie knew he couldn'a outright refuse Colum; although that would settle quite weel as far as Dougal was concern.

Christ, if that be the case, he'd even fight on the laddie behalf in Colum's ear, telling him that the lad should be banished and nae killed.
But what transpired instead wasna to be accepted.

"We are honored by your offer o' friendship and goodwill, honored by your offer o' obedience" his
brother's words thundered in his ears.
"We accept them and hold them in good faith"
And what truly did him in at the end was-
"As an ally to clan Mackenzie".
Dougal actually felt his mouth drop from astonishment.

Colum chose his words so carefully, leaving Dougal wi’ all the room to doubt and nay certainty as to his plans for the clot-heid.
Douglas followers wilna in good conscience allow him to harm the boy now.

Nay, nae now, when he was declared friend to clan and to himself.
And Colum kent it weel.

They would argue that a friend to the clan is nae one o’ them, therefore there is nay reason to feel threatened.
And that would force Dougal to admit he was threatened by the whelp to begin wi’.
The lad could never be considered to be laird, they would say and wi’oot the certainty they wilna risk hurting a man which was under Colum's good graces.
Why that would be an act o’ outright rebellion on their part.
"Besides” they would undoubtedly say "The lad’s kin”.

Aye young Broch Tuarach was greatly loved and respected, which was what made him such a formidable foe, that needed squashing.

The fact that Colum protected the lad so, gave no other reason but for his desire for Jamie to inherit his position.
The obedience the lad promised can easily take care o’ that; forcing him when the time came, to swear his allegiance to himself.

But only “so long as my feet rest on the lands of the Clan MacKenzie” the lad said.

So-
That was the moment in the hall when Dougal looked at the other part o’ his plan for young Jamie, consoling himself that the match is far from over and he will get his way.

The lass was breathing lighter, her face ignited wi' relief at the realization that her young 'friend' was safe and sound.

He could feel his own smile spread under his whiskers, knowing now, that he was sure to prevail.

He almost dinna come to her though.
What happened to Geordie weighed on him.
Geordie was a friend and a true ally to the cause and to die as such-
It pained him.
But Dougal knew that battles wait for no one and one could ne’er wallow or sink when faced wi’ adversities.
One had to get up and fight to ha’ his spirit rekindled or risk ha’ing it put down eternally.

So, that is what he was doing now.
Standing in the surgery looking at his game; gathering as much fortitude that he could rally in order to ignore his feeling and go on wi’ the ploy.
For the Mackenzie's, for all the clans, for a free Scotland, that is how he'll honor the loss o’ his friend.
Dougal stared at her and Jamie and Mrs. Beauchamp after standing frozen for only a second, dropped the hand she held and said
"Well that's very good Mr. MacTavish I'm glad to see you can squeeze my arm as I asked.
I'm very glad to see it indeed. That means it's not broken"
she turned to Dougal glaring
"Count yourself lucky you didn’t inflict permanent harm on the poor lad and on his injured arm no less.
I've seen how you play the game and fair apparently means pretty in your eyes.
You, sir lack sportsmanship!"

"What?" both he and Jamie frowned in bewilderment.

"Never mind" she responded rolling her eyes in exasperation and coming to stand by the table were
her herbs laid awaiting her return.

She placed them in her mortar and used the pestle to pound them properly.
Dougal grinned at that, thinking o’ his love doing the same thing at the exact same way.
Creating something from nothing, all a while using strokes and movements o’ slender, agile,
graceful hands.

Once he lifted his gaze from her though, he noticed Jamie looking at the lovely Mrs. Beauchamp
wi’ the same admiration and grin to match his.
Jamie noticed him watching and shuffled his feet looking down.

'Aye, look all ye like laddie, ye only coil the rope tighter on your neck'
Dougal said under his breath.

After a moment where they all just stood there in silence, Dougal recalled he did ha’ something he
wanted puzzled, before he went on wi’ the business at hand.

"You've seen men die before, and by violence." He stated.
Claire desist wi’ the grounding and looked straight at him in defiance "Yes, many of them."
He was about to inquire how and where but Jamie coughing once took her attention and after
snapping her heid to him, she swallowed hard as if realizing she said something wrong and
silenced.

Dougal suspected the young laird to be infatuated wi’ her, but she seemed receptive to him as well.
He would ha’ to keep it in mind for later.

Best also to send Geillis to sniff at the matter.
The lass could lure man, woman or beast to tell her everything she desired and thank her for it at
the end.

Although when it came to the fair Claire, his woman dinna seem so quick to reveal all and betray.

"Ye’ve done a fine job here as healer" he said and meant the kindness "Mrs. Fitz will ha’ ye sit for
a portrait if it was up to her" he complimented in true but also to soften the mood.
‘Twas time for the plot to thicken.

He paused a moment then, turning from her and taking one thing or another from one o’ the tiny
drawers in the chest in order to hide the wave o’ ache that came at him for his lost
"And ha… I wanted to thank ye, personally, for what ye did for poor Geordie ‘oot there on the
She was humble and graceful in her reply freeing him from the need to extend any other gratitude to her.
"In truth I did nothing, I wish I could have helped him" she said sounding truly regretful on the matter.
That was kind o’ her.
It also meant that perhaps it wasna sentiments that drove her close to the young buck but truly her art and heart.
Good, she’ll be easier to draw to his favor if that be the case.

"Ye did!" he proclaimed and almost felt his voice crack, he kent the plan would work better if the lad was here, but he wished ardently that he wasna.
For a light moment he even wondered how consoling she would be to him if they were alone.

He needed some tenderness now and had none to give it to him.
His own lass might be many things but the kindness this healer could provide was missing from her skills.

'for king and country' he said to himself swallowing his need and saying
"You took him to a peaceful place and that’s all any o’ us can ask when we pass so-thank ye"

"You welcome" she nodded acknowledging and accepting the gratitude and sounding so understanding that for one moment he wanted to turn and kiss her.
But instead he added kindly but almost choking at his words
"I also heard ye went to his tent at the grounds last night, tried to make his wife to nae allow for his joining at the hunt today, said ye had yourself a feeling, a bad omen"

He heard a crash behind him and turned to see a glass tube o’ some kind at Jamie's feet and Claire rushing to crouch under him to pick up the pieces.

"Sorry, I'm fair clumsy today as it seems" Jamie uttered through clenched lips all a while erecting himself to full height and looking down at the lass menacingly.

For heaven's sake, she was a healer.
Did he no ken she had powers o’ sight and mend?

She on her end, seem to look everywhere but up at him and was cringing in her own skin.
If Dougal wouldna ken better the spectacle would ha’ seemed as a servant being scolded and begging for forgiveness from her master.

What’s ‘rong wi’ her, ‘tis he who broke the glass, no?

What was up wi’ the two o’ them?
And how did the lad manage to wield such power or position in her eyes to be allowed to act as such?

He was her only friend here, aye. Dougal kent that.
Jamie treated her wi’ great kindness and respect o’er his adoration o’ the lass and Dougal supposed it granted him favor in her eyes, mainly due to the fact that all that surrounded her here were either hostile or ordered to spy on her; mostly by Dougal.
But was there somethin’ more than that, that laid between them?
Did she no fancy MacLiver the sword maker anymore?

Claire rose from the floor and turned abruptly to Dougal as if trying to escape her berate. "Perhaps you came for something else as well-" she asked, but side-glanced at Jamie while waiting for Dougal to reply.

Dougal never did like knowing naught o’ what and how things stood. These displays were making him downright rabid.

These two seem to hold many secrets between them and he dinna ken even the slightest what they could be.

"I don’t mean to be rude but as you said ‘a fine job here as healer’; so you will have to excuse me I have much to do for clan MacKenzie in my little dungeon here"
She spoke taking him away from his outraged thoughts.

"Weel that’s why I’m here lass" he said settling to do for which he came, leaving other concerns to a time when his heid could be clear from grief and sorrow as to think straight regarding these two.

"To set ye free from this dank room" he declared, sure she’ll query his meaning.
But she in turn did and said naught.

In fact, all o’ a sudden, the two faces before him were beaming exuberantly at him.

"Ye’re coming on the road." He proceeded.
But again no question arose, she just nodded as acknowledging the information and Jamie seemed to be almost standing on his ends.
Did he injure the lad so badly at the game, his brain went to mash?

"I’m leaving tomorrow and I’m taking ye wi’ me"
Fine than, now he was ’bout to erupt; still nae a word Faither o’ them?
Somethin’ was most assuredly ’rong if she dinna at least ask where he was taking her.

This lass wilna ever go willingly anywhere wi’oot coercion let alone to an unknown place!

But there she stood before him, trying to discard her smile by biting her bottom lip in a feeble attempt to prevent it from curling up.

A soothing thought crossed his mind; the poor wee besom might think his intentions were to set her free.
Aye, that was it, that would explain all this.
Well it seems the woman is nay so bright as all assumed.

"We’ll be travelling through MacKenzie lands, collecting rents” he further explained.

Christ, she was still smiling. Did she nae understand what he was saying?
Weel, he’ll put an end to it.

"Colum doesna travel so- visiting the tenants and taxman that canna come the gathering, that falls to me… and to attend to a wee bit o’ business here and there"
He said side-glancing to observe his nephew, knowing full weel how crucial he was to said businesses.
To his astonishment the lad looked squarely at him, in what could only be described as a knowing look to match his own.

Dougal could ha’ sworn on his young daughter’s heid, that the young coot kent what Dougal had in mind for him and yet seemed to nae care the slightest.

But that couldn’a be. The only one he told of this was Geillis and she wouldn’a ever tell another. Foremost since this was her proposal!

‘Twas also for the cause and nae in life did Dougal see a woman… nay, nae woman or man more devoted to that end than she.

Dougal was surely nae in his right mind o’er all that transpired today and unable to truly read the people before him.

So he continued wi’ his purpose, rising to his feet coming closer to Claire.
"I think ‘twill be wise to ha’ a healer along, especially one that does weel under strain and there is a lot o’ that on the road"
At least wi’ that said, she seemed to lower her gaze in worry.

"So that’s the business settled" he concluded, coming closer to her side.
From the side o’ his eye he saw Jamie coming closer protectively to her as weel, matching Dougal step by step.
But he dismissed it also in order to take his leave.

"Mrs. Fitz will ha’ supper ready and ye dunna want to incur her wrath by coming late.
We leave at first light" he admonished and left climbing the stairs, hearing murmurs and whispers behind him.

He breathed easier now.
Aye, now that the task he assigned himself to do was done, he had only to wait to see if his woman was correct.

Dear Mrs. Beauchamp should count herself lucky to even ken o’ this trip beforehand, he mused angrily over the agitation an’ befuddlement they placed in him.
Should ha’ gone on wi’ his plan, of her finding herself awakened, thrust wi’ luggage filled wi’ clothes and amenities for her, which he already asked Mrs. Fitz to prepare for her, placed to mount a horse and depart.

Lord's eyes, what was ‘rong wi’ him when it came to that woman?
Why did he want to control and tame her so?
He scolded his feelings and thoughts o’ her.

She was a ferocious- combative- feral- rude- unknown mystery and he kent he wanted to puzzle her ‘oot.
But most o’ all she was free; even when she was obviously captured.

You couldn’a find a woman like that so easily.

The other which he found as such, he sought after and had on her back three weeks after they met. And for him that was more time than he ever devoted to bed a lassie.

Aye, he remembered bedding Geillis for the first time.
The enormous pleasure it was to ha’ a wild mare under and atop o’ him. Her knowing all the conceivable ways to please and be pleased in her bed.

He was no abbot but that was a religious experience if ever did he feel one.

And yet after a few nights o’ this and Geillis wasna yet his, he could sense it.

She was free like Mrs. Beauchamp, nae to be subdued even when under a man.

And he wanted to rule and own such rare and precious things, just as he desired to own Leoch or to ha’ a Stuart king at the throne.

And as o’ now, he was quite triumphant wi’ all his plans.

Geillis did finally submit to him, he could feel it in her arms, in her bed, between her legs.

Leoch would soon be his. He served his brother beyond everything one could ask for. He was a loyal and devoted soldier, givin’ his life and body wi’ nae regards to himself.

He had even given his seed and had to watch him grow, never to be able to hold him as his own. And this was a high price for him to pay; him nay havin’ another barin to call a son to.

He had also given his honest mind and best advice when asked by his brother. Offered and enforced orders for this castle and the lands around wi’ both their best interest at heart.

‘till now that is.

He would take the healer and wouldna tell Colum o’ it. Claiming ignorance to Colum’s need o’ her when they’ll return and giving all the reasoning he just informed the lady at, as regards to her joining.

For as much as he would like to tame the beast himself, for right now, he needed the spell she casted on the young laird to come to its full entrancing fulfilment.

If she was on the road, he would ask to join the journey. Even him knowing the risk to his own heid and the dangers awaiting him while being exposed so.

If she would come, he would follow. Dougal's could command and plot as his heart desired on the young buck's back, he only needed her to enforce it.

And the young man's back was one o’ the parts that interested Dougal the most, coming second to the lad’s estate and men under his command.

As much as it pained him to see it inflicted, Jamie's back and the marks he borne, would be a fine story to tell and show at the taverns and inns were they would go, collecting money to bring his country back to its past magnitude.

People kent the horrors that transpired, but seeing was believing. And young Broch Tuarach’s raw scabs and lashes couldna leave a man to hide behind reason. Even if the funds weren'a abundant, he would play his part at awakening this country to its truth. He will make them rise and take arm when the time came and nay settle in their stupor. That was the real dream, the real goal.

For his country to be truly restored to its rightful place and stature and away o’ those bloody,
heathens, English hands.

How could one want or even think differently than that?

To live as dogs under their command? To pay them from OUR own lands and hard worked labored earnings?

And what wouldna be paid would be taken, seized in the name o’ a Lord and sovereign Dougal refused to even address by name and wished only to spit on his flag.

He as seen his country only torn and hurt under that king's ruling.

Land plundered to naughting, women raped and their husbands and children forced to watch or even taken themselves.
Those sick, Twally- washer, Póg mo thòn, perverts Englishmen.

All those horrors unleashed and freed on his lands.

Aye, He'd live to see a free Scotland once more and he will be right there in those front lines to accept his dues for all he gave and contributed toward that end.

Him and Geillis that is, who would be so close and obtainable once this castle was his home and resident and wi’oot his wife being the wiser for it to be sure.

But first he would ha’ to bide his time, tread lightly, scheme, earn a small fortune and gather men and arms in secret.

‘Twas his green eyed beauty, who suggested such a course as he was ‘obout to take.

They laid in bed, sweat glistened from his chest, him panting as his heart threatened to burst from his chest after a verra long, verra hard ride wi’ her.

His companion to said ride was lying on her side, taut to his body, looking naught used or bushed the slightest, almost as to refute his own mood and state at present. For her this was the usual.

She was toying wi’ his chest’s hairs, curling them around her finger.

He told her, just before they started, that he must soon take his leave o’ her, riding wi’ the rent party and wondered who could he ever endure those long weeks and nights wi’oot her, as he was already feeling his balls bursting at the thought.

“Ho I’m quite sure ye’ll find a lass or two, willing to go a round wi’ the War Chieftain o’ Clan MacKezie and future laird o’ Leoch, Dougal” she teased
“Nae that ye require such titles to get them on their backs, my Lord Beannachd” She laughed at him and brought her lips to bite his nipple.

After that moment o’ pure sensation he let it ‘oot how he would at least be able to go to each man and village and ask for funds for the rebellion to bring back to her in pride.

When she released his skin, He gasped, rubbing at his sore wi’ pleasure and blurted how if only he could show them all of what he saw the soldiers do to the true sons and daughters o’ Scotland.
To show them what English justice looked like as displayed and proved on Jamie's back.

She lifted herself on her elbow and asked
"Why nae take him wi’ ye then?"

"The lad wilna leave the castle wi’ a price on his heid. ’Twill be as convincing a boar to lie still while the butcher is beside him holding a blade"

"Wield the lady" Geillis said simply adding a pair of cunning eyes to gleam at him. "What?" he stared at her in complete loss for understanding.

"Claire" she said again clearing her words wi’ a smile filled wi’ knowledge and secrets, all awhile running her hand in bigger circles on his chest.

"What’s your meaning?" Dougal queried strenuously, as she was now pulling on one o’ his chest’s hairs hard. The sensation nae completely unpleasant.

"Ye take the lady wi’ ye and he wilna be far behind" she skimmed her lips on his skin, then she raised her mouth from his body and laughed a much knowing crafty high-pitched laugh. "Why I do believe he might even beg ye to come”.

She slowly laid her logic for him to see and he felt a daft fool for noticing naught before; especially that which was so obviously clear to him now.

"Cherchez la femme" she told him in French. "What?" he bewildered, as he did so many times regarding the strange things she would say or do. "Look for the woman” she explained "Always search for the woman that will move the man ye seek to guile. In the eye o’ the storm there will always be the woman who caused it"

He took her meaning at once.
He needed the lass to rule and tame the young steed. A steed that has been growing too strong and too smart to be willing to go and do as Dougal decreed. The lad was nae longer a wee sixteen burke lubber willing to stand under Dougal’s thumb as before.

"Ye can try to bed her Dougal, but ‘twill do ye nay good, she wilna ha’ ye to be sure" Geillis added just as he was pondering on the fact did Mrs. Beauchamp feel the same for the false Mr. McTavish as he felt for her, for Dougal did desire a short ride on the young widow.

"Geillis” he rebuked indignantly "what d’ye take me for?"
He tried defending himself, fearing she could see the thoughts and dreams he had of the mistress of late. She wilna begrudge him to have her. She always allowed it wi’ others, sometimes even joining them by her own volition. But still he felt a small combativeness between Geillis and Claire friendship. And as oppose to men, women nay only hated or loved there were many layers in between. Best for all concern to nae enter those layers; or so he learned wi’ bloodshed as his guide.

Nay worry though, for Geillis kent weel, once he had a lassie good and properly used, he would lose interest and always come back to her.

But she also kent he wouldna be denied the sampling o’ such fine cuisines that crossed his path before giving them up, to be sure. There were far too many wonders in the world and he would ha’ them all.
"A collector" she answered his false outrage "Ye like the rare things that grow wild in the world" she said but dinna seem disturbed at all by the fact, but rather amused.
"Ye like to collect, possess and make them your own. To leave them shattered wi' your mark cauterized on them" her tone still seemed amused and approving of such things only she added a sigh, rose on her arm to sit on the bed by him and laughed lightly
"But I'm afraid ye canna ha' this one Dougal, nae, nay our fine Claire"

"I got ye dinna I?" he teased caressing her naked back, so smooth and unblemished.

"Aye?" she quizzed as if that wasna the whole truth.

"Believe ye me Geillis" he rose on his arm as weel kissing her back, her red fiery hair caressing the tip o' his heid "ye are rare"

"More than ye will ever ken lad" he heard but no saw her smirk at that.

"But m' notion of bedding and hers are quite different my Victorious conqueror. I'm afraid the lass will only bed for love and the unfortunate twist for ye Dougal is that she will never love what couldna love her back" she said gathering her flowing hair to expose more o' her skin to be afforded the treatment o' his lips.

"I dunno follow your meaning" he said, already applying his lips to the work he was assigned to do.

"Our Claire is what ye may call an idealist" she said reaching her hand back to his balls and lightly applying the same pressure his lips gave her back.

"Which means?" he increased his force so she will increase hers.

"She is attracted to the purity o' notions ye ken naught 'obout" she laughed and pulled her hand a way.

"Such as?" he grabbed her wrist and put it back in its place.

"True love" she cupped them both rolling them in her palm "loyalty to those she holds dear or o' need o' her protection and care" her hand now went to his cock "And ye m'dear Dougal canna truly love"

"Ye think me a monster?" he gasped wi' eyes closed and head thrown back, sure he might take offence to her words, were it nae for her strokes making it impossible to feel naught but pleasure at present time.

"Nay, I think ye a patriot" she laughed with admiration hardening her strokes.

Christ, he was close to exploding, but uttered his question trying to keep up wi' the conversation, trying to keep up wi' her as every time before.

To ha' Geillis meant to always 'oot run her or she'll be bored and leave ye bleeding; he has seen her do so to others before.

Christ, that was what he loved 'obout her.
To be wi' her meant one had to be the best and at his best at all times.

"A what?" he blew the words wi' no breath.

"Someone who'll put his own heart aside for honor and country" she snaked herself crawling on
him 'till she sat atop him letting her hand maneuver his entry, which was just as well, for Dougal could do naught but lean on his hands and clutching the covers.

"Ye are full wi’ passion and unwavering principals for your cause, but your cause can never be so small as to be only one woman"

He was inside her now, his eyes closed feeling himself shaking. He heard her voice, as always, slid as a snake, seeming to him as coming from all directions. Reaching and penetrating his ears in enchanting whispers.

"Nay. In your eyes, ye aspire greater, bigger" she rocket him to a lying position.

"The young cub now. He seeks true love, he desires to burn and perish only at the light o’ his true heart. He has no mind to conquer the world or even to be free. He will throw it all for love. Surrender to it and let it be his master" her voice came near his left ear now, as she bent and purred deeper into him.

"Ye would sacrifice love instead" she chuckled at his ear "that is what I find most arousing 'about ye. Ye would never think or look so small. Ye dream of a free Scotland o’ moving the heavy rocks o’ history at your feet. The young fox desires only happiness and to protect does he holds dear. He might grow, change and fight for code and glory but for now he will only fight, truly fight for love" Geillis’s soft tones became louder and deeper and his heid couldna hold naught but her words.

"Control the lady” she ordered sweetly “Dangle her as lure and the lad will beg and plead to come…hahah… ye'll see" By now she was rocking atop him ferociously, his hands clutching her white milky breasts, she was lifting herself on her knees inching higher and higher forcing him to thrust his hips up to her in order to keep their connection. He wouldna ever allow a woman ride him so. Naught but her.

Geillis could do all she desired to him. She kent ways in the bedding he saw nae the most prestige whore to ha’ knowledge of.

She moved his hands down to her stomach as she rocked into him harder and harder, he hardly dared to open his eyes, but when he finally did, he saw that she wasna even looking or minding him but eyeing straight ahead, smiling a smile that was thrilling as 'twas unnerving.

Teeth bared, eyes glinting, her body moving as she was dancing on him, moving as a snake slithering to all sides, touching herself, her breasts, her hair.

So consumed wi’ her pleasure he wasna even there, just a sacrifice in this maddening dance.

“Christ” he screamed and spilled himself ferociously. His whole body shaking as she descended from him and so-matter-of-factly took his hand, lay on her side, tight to his body and maneuvered his fingers to further satisfy her.

"Control the woman, you'll control the man" She said again and he wondered how can she even form words while she had his hands serving her so. She seemed always in control even in her moment of -
She cried ‘oot, releasing his hand, sighing and returning to full sense in a trice when he was still shivering and basking at the light o’ their joint second ride.

"Are ye hard yet?" she asked a few minutes later.  
To his astonishment he was.

She saw his puzzlement over it and laughed "Ye always are, when ye watch me"  
She climbed atop o’ him again wi’ no need for delay and rode him to oblivion leaving him incapable but always hungry for more.

The reminder of that bedding made him look at the direction of the surgery he just left, wondering did that lady in there acted the same as his own when one had her on her back.

"She's a rare one, just as me Dougal" Geillis told him just as they departed "But ye canna ha’ her. Ye'll see, for as a child that’s been denied, ye will try, fail an’ try again"

Of course he would Dougal resolute.

Lord save him that only made him love Geillis more. She Kent it o’ him and dinna care.  
She knew him and how to treat a man as him right.

This wasna enough though, to clench his curiosity and desire regarding the new widowed Mrs. Beauchamp but ‘tis why he would always return to his true lady at the end o’ every liaison he pleasurably entangled himself at.

And unlike Geillis that had nae mercy or softness to her, the healer once calmed seemed to possess it in spades and sometimes Dougal found himself craving it from another.

"She's rare as me" he heard Geillis's voice say again and wanted to hunt the fair English game to completion.

"Ye will sacrifice all for king and country" Geillis also said and so he did, willing to let the lad play wi’ the widow for a while until he'll get his way.

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He heard steps coming toward him and Jamie's voice frantically pursuing him down the corridors.

"Dougal, Dougal, can ye spare a minute a bràthair-athar?"

Dougal sneered to himself wi’ the satisfaction of a man whose plan is coming together.

He laid the trap and now could practically hear the coil snap on the moose's neck.

"Aye?" he turned to see a flustered Jamie come to stand by him, smiling in a pseudo polite smile.

"I heard what ye told Mrs. Beauchamp" Jamie said panting, then straightened himself, replaced his demeanor to an earnest and serious one; also quite false, Dougal could tell.
"Aye?" said Dougal harmonizing the expression before him.

"Only I Ken I was a bother o' late and hav'na been helping much wi' all the interests o' the castle and o' himself" Jamie said, sobered and heavy-thought looking.

"I'm sure I dinna Ken what ye mean. Old Alec speaks verra highly o' ye and your work in the stables"

He shouldna play wi' the moose as such, but this young, flushed, trying to con the highest conniver, a gòrach, made him want to play wi' the cheese and see Jamie’s mouth struggle to bite.

"But that’s nay help in the grand scheme o' things"

Jamie went on wi’ his reasoning

“Why I owe ye my life for getting me ‘oot from fort William and taking me to the abbey after… weel after someone bashed my heid in” he gave Dougal an odd stare but there was no possible way the lad could ken ‘about that.

That secret Dougal will take to his dying bed.

Jamie took him ‘oot o’ such pondering by carrying on wi’ his words

"And I feel myself in debited to ye for it" he said but looking verra peculiar at saying that.

“And feel myself owning ye harder labor than what I ha' given o’ late"

The moose went on wi’ a final try

"For ye to ha’ gathered me to my dear kins bosom's and offer such security… ouch, such things must be paid in kind uncle"

"Fine" said Dougal relinquishing his fun and letting the game end "What was your thoughts on the matter?"

Jamie cracked a brilliant, sincere, wide smile at that and said "weel 'about that then… "

“Hello wall” she said giggling to the stone rampart he leaned her on in order to open her chamber’s door.

"Leave the wall alone Sassenach. He as ye need his rest now. We wouldn'a want him to fall down like ye, now would we?"

Jamie said as he tried to take her back into his arms and off to bed.

"No" she waved his hands away from her and tried, in all the dignity she could bring about in her present condition, to enter by herself to her room.

To her acclaim she did manage to hobble and sway to it all by her lonesome, only slightly almost missing the door.
"I'm perfectly capable of walking" she said waddling into the chamber.

"Of course ye are Sassenach" he smirked unconvinced "only 'tis the talking to walls that make it hard to trust such statements, ye see"

Jamie watched her frown as she stood by the bed trying to recall either how she got there or what to do next.

It turned 'oot to be the latter for she squinted her eyes looking down at her clad body saying “That is it!” she declared formally “Tomorrow I am going to discover the zipper and no one here can stop me!” she finished her speech waving her finger to establish her point and Jamie kent better than to query at present time what she meant by her words.

Claire began removing her garments wi’ the door to her chamber still open.

Jamie hastily closed the door behind them, sliding himself at the last possible moment inside and glancing around the passages to see if anyone was there to witness him.

“No canna undress yourself such Sassenach, what if someone would ha’ come?” he said padlocking the door behind him.

Though by the way she was undressing, she wouldna ever reach such a state o’ bareness as to expose herself to another.

Nay wi’oot some assistance, he mused, wiggling his fingers at her as to indicate he’ll be taking the role for the time being.

He stood himself in front o’ her untiring her laces and pulling up layers o’ fabric through her hands.

She stopped resisting him after a while and was busy flicking her unruly- wild curls away from her face.

Poor wee thing o’ his, he sighed wi’ compassion for her, the past few days were such a whirl o’ strain, worry and scare for her, that at dinner she ate hardly naught again, which he suspected she had done verra frequently lately.

Mainly for he wasna around to glare at her proper in the dining hall as to eat something or simply there to inform Mrs. Fitz the mistress hasna touched her cookery at all and watch, thoroughly entertained, as Claire crammed and gulped, almost wi’ no chewing, all the food down and apologetically assured a much hurt Mrs. Fitz that her food was delicious and she meant no disrespect.

He should’ve had Murtagh see to her when he left wi’ Alec and during the gathering days, he berated himself.

For heaven’s sake, he kent that when worrit or too occupied wi’ the healing his love tended to eat naught.

And although tonight they had naught one worry left to deal wi’, all the past strains left his Claire still anxious and apparently in need to sip her nerves away.

When Laoghaire and Muriel came in for their food she gulped two glasses, one after the other.

No that Jamie would ha’ allowed them to even glimpse at Claire’s direction the wrong way.
And Muriel herself would be most surprised when her betrothed will find himself in possession of a letter informing him his wife to be, hasna a wean in her belly at present and contrary to what has been told to him by her.

A letter that is to be delivered by John the stable lad once the rent party would be on her merry way.

For there should be no need to create havoc beforehand as to perhaps endanger their departure in some way.

Dougal entering the hall for his supper and taking his seat at the main table, caused Claire to fill her cup twice over again.

During, hopefully, their last night between these castle walls Claire as it seems was as scared as a hare at anything going amiss.

She kept sipping her grog and once done wi’ her own and obviously being the worst for it, she reached ‘oot and took the one that belonged to the chatty lady at her right.

Which thank the good Lord was far too busy wi’ her conversation companion as to notice Claire’s thievery.

Claire kept timidly darting her eyes to and fro from one menacing threat to the other fearing their actions and mal-intent, dreading they will catch her and Jamie unvigilant and make a mess of things to come.

Jamie sat by the far end o’ the table unable to do much over the throng o’ people occupying the dining hall, at this, the last day o’ the gathering, or he would’ve surely seen to her or at least made sure that wi’ every sip she took she would’ve at least taken somethin’ to eat to sooth the effect o’ this cordial partaking o’ hers.

When she was finally done and staggered to the passageway that lead to her room, Jamie waited but a blink of an eye as to excuse himself and went a different route as to meet her in the next bend of corridors, praying she was still able enough as to reach him.

After waiting for what seemed as forever he doubled back to find her staring at a small window, enthralled by the moon and humming to herself.

“Sassenach?” he questioned her, amused greatly by the sight that presented itself to him.
“Hmmm?” she questioned back at him, glazed eyes and a silly smile anointed on her lips.
She was filled wi’ spirit alright.

“Come” he simply said softly and guided her wi’ an arm at her back from time to time when it seemed she was losing her footing at the floor.

To his dismay he couldna yet simply gather her in his arms and carry her to her bed but only walk a step or two behind her, nodding cordially to passersby as if he was inadvertently going the same way.

Claire walked as if crossing through a field o’ Scottish primroses, wi’ a half-wit smile nay budging from her lips.
The silly goon even closed her eyes a few times along the way.
Jamie had to make sure naught stood in her path as she glided dreamily through the halls.

“I was merely saying hello to an old friend”
Claire said bringing him back from his recollections to present time.

“You shouldn’t be so rude” she giggled thinking herself most witty.

"I’ll be sure to stop and greet the thing on m’way ‘oot” Jamie promised playing along wi’ her and trying to keep a straight face.

“Shows what you know” she said cocking an eyebrow at him striving for superiority.
Jamie folded his arms to his chest trying his damnest to nae laugh at her face or kiss her passionately over how cute she looked doing so.
“And what do ye mean by that?” he asked wi’ as much seriousness as he could muster.

“Now who’s drunk?” she joshed him for his lack of understanding as if she was the one that held reason at her side at the moment.
“You said the wall might fall” she explained as if that cleared all.

”Aye?” he asked wi’ quivering lips at the hilarity of it all.

”The wall… that wall that is” she announced ”Will remain standing for more than two hundred years into the future.
I saw it, when I came here with Frank… wait, no… will come here with Frank” she corrected herself
“We walked along, I mean we will walk along these very walls... I mean halls.
We even went down to my sur…” Claire began laughing in earnest amusement, cupping Jamie’s cheeks in the palms o’ her hand
“We went to the province of the castle hermit or perhaps the dwelling place of a troll or two”

she let ‘oot a small snort
“Although Frank said he didn’t think trolls live in pairs” she said wi’ a solemn expression “‘solitary creatures they’”
Claire brought her nose to rub on Jamie’s
“‘All this and no one to share it with’” she snorted again
“‘Well I suppose that changed” she said looking into Jamie’s eyes dotingly.

She was truly gone wi’ the drink if she mentioned Frank to him and he in return had to let it go for the same reason.
That was easily done, for although she spoke o’ words and times they dinna share together and Jamie had no idea of their meaning;
it was here and now that she was skimming her lips softly on his lips, cheeks, nose.
It was to his body she was bringing herself closer and closer into and signaling she longed for no other but him.
"Sorry" I said putting my hand up to suffocate a small belch that threaten to escape my lips "I do believe I drank too much".

"I believe that as weel, Sassenach" Jamie replied smiling a very broad salacious smile at me.

"Well I don't care" I adjusted my features and declared with as much bravado as I could muster "I'm celebrating".

"And what if I may ask r'ye celebrating?" he queried looking me up and down as if searching for something.

"Well" I leaned into him as if telling a secret.
It was my turn to join the fun gossip game that kept being played around me, usually at my expense, amongst these castle walls.

"I don't know if you heard the news but tomorrow I am leaving this castle to ride under the free open ether"
I throw my hands in the air as the Triumphant conqueror I felt myself to be at present. We were done Jamie and I. This was it, this time tomorrow we would be-

“Out of the confines of this suffocating lonely place where are love was secret and forbidden”
I said placing a finger at my lips
“Shhhh… and-" I added with a smile that felt as if it was bursting from my chest "I am going to get married".

I found that as I was talking I seemed to be tipping over; further and further forward; so much so that when I was done with my secret telling Jamie had to catch me from falling all the way.

"I might ha’ heard somethin’ to that affect" he lifted me to my feet holding me by my waist, I felt as if I was melting into the floor.
"Christ, Sassenach ye are stinking drunk forbye"

"Not you. You smell nnniiicccce" I leaned into his chest.

"Best get ye safe and tucked in bed and ‘oot o’ trouble, mo chridhe. We'll be leaving at first light tomorrow" he said trying to direct me to the bed in question.

"Well" I waved his helping hands off my body and continued with my speech, recalling my initial point "I don't know what you think of the news but I-

"Y e s??" he inquired, cocking his eyebrow at me, curious now at what I had to say. I giggled at the sight of him.

"I am very drunk right now and should maybe go to bed right now, before I put my foot in my mouth and bite it, right now"
I giggled again.

But instead of doing so I found myself reaching for my husband grasping him in an iron grip with my arms, burying my head in his chest, sniffing at him and purring like a big lazy cat.

"No Sassenach, as ye’re behaving, I highly doubt ‘twill be your foot that will find itself in your mouth being bit" he said letting his hands yield the same hold my hands offered him.

"Ho is that a fact?" I raised my face from his chest "And what pray tell did you have in min-"

His lips came eagerly to mine and I felt his tongue in my mouth, so as promised I brought my lips around it and bit it lightly playing a small game of tag with it.

After a moment of this, my hands came into his hair and I pulled his head back exposing his neck to my pleasure.

Nibbling, biting skimming my lips on his skin, all while using my hands to pull and loosen more items of clothing so I could clear a path for my mouth to continue its administrations.

I bit him hard where his neck met his shoulder blade pulling skin with my teeth.

His hand clasped my arse hard pulling me so tight to him, that our body's to the outside observer might have seemed like just one big lump.

He was purring too now; or perhaps it was me again and our bodies being so tight snug didn’t allow me the correct observation anymore.

When I finally released him, I circled my tongue over the bite mark as if to ease the pain I inflicted, but in truth I was simply savoring Jamie, making his male, testosterone-bursting intoxicating smell become taste in my mouth.

I couldn't help myself, the things he made my body feel, time and again.
The thought of all those sensations made me hungry for him, made me crave to ravish and devour him until he would tremble and collapse with exertion and fragility at what I would make his body feel in return.

I wished to pay homage to what he regularly inflicted on me.

For one second I mused to myself that my intoxicated self is quite a pervert, but my entire body and soul didn't seem to find this fact so disturbing.

They only urged me to fulfill my perverse needs even more.

"I want you inside of me" I said breathlessly as I almost ripped his waist coat, pulling at the opening of his shirt to reach his very taut, pink and getting pinker nipples, biting them in delight.

He swayed a little, losing strength to stand upright almost buckling at his knees and was making a lot of incoherent noises.

"Ye are nae playing fair Sassenach" he said trembling all over.

"Why?" I laughed into his skin which made him swing his head back and groan deeply.
"I'm celebrating. Do you not want to celebrate with me?" I teased.

He turned me so fast to my other side that I 'whooped' and almost tumbled if he wouldn’t have
caught me so skillfully and pressed me firmly to himself.

At this point and in my state he was the only thing preventing me from completely collapsing.

Although I was squirming and wiggling, the muscles of my body could not stiffen and stand.

I felt myself as being all the liquid I drank this evening. Soft, light almost translucent and wanting only to flow and slide on to and into someone else, unable to stop.

I was now propped to stand by him with my back and other parts of me to his front.

Jamie growled in my ear in a mock menacing tone
"I would show ye what true celebration is right now, only ye insisted that we couldna do a thing tonight over Mrs. Fitz coming to prepare ye and your things for the ride and we do leave at first light Tommmmmhh-
"

He moaned very loudly as I started to rub myself on his person enjoying the sensation of stretching every part of me to every part of him.

I really should not drink like this often.

But I wanted to feel good and I wanted him to gratify that need for me. And as the very spoiled child I was feeling myself at this moment, I wanted what I wanted now and without caring about the consequences and undesired outcomes that might spring from my actions.

I wanted him and I wanted him now!

"Please Jamie, I need you inside me" I whispered back to him as I lifted my hand to grasp the back of his head to me.

His hands were caressing my breasts, my hips, my thighs, he was pressing himself quite forcibly to me but he was still not ready himself.

I was beginning to glide my other hand between us to assist with that part.

When he whispered into my ear which he bit first and then begged me "Please mo nighnean donn, we mustna or we will risk all; now when we are so near"

I sighed with disappointment, but did release him and literally molten into the bed, that was, thank the Lord for small mercies, one step away from us.

I was sprawled on the mattress on my stomach.

There was dead silence behind me, so I peeked at his towering form from above my shoulder and said

"Fine than, you can leave now, I promise to not move from this bed until the morning… Although you might need to come and carry me from here when we do need to leave"

I said laughingly for I found myself quite amusing and witty at the moment.

I stretched myself further into the covers and buried my face into the soft feathery mattress. Everything I touched felt so nice.
"I don’t think I would be much capable of anything by morning" I said giggling at myself again and wondering how will I handle myself tomorrow.

Jamie stood there rooted in place not moving, hardly even breathing. He moved his knuckles on his lips looking hungrily and regretfully at me.

"I thought you said-"

"Sàn mhachair" he said commandingly "I'm thinking"

"About?" I queried frowning.

"How long mmphm will take and if I can get to the stables in time before Alec-"

"But I thought you said we couldn’t" I frowned further, wondering how this turn of events came about.

"Ye ha’ the roudest, sweetest, plump rump I ha’ ever did see" he said longingly reaching his hand at me, caressing the air as if it was the bulge in question.

"But I thought we weren't risking our future for mmphm"

"Some things are worth risking everything for" he said flinging his kilt to the floor "Your arse is defiantly one!"

He stated, worshipfully lifting both eyebrows and biting his lips as in an act of praise.

He came into the bed standing on his knees, using them to nudge my thighs to spread and using his hands to lift my hips up.

He took hold of my hair pulling my heid and ear to his mouth as he lowered himself to me.

Leaning on me he brought his other hand around my waist and in between my legs to a very tender spot, which once touched made me trust myself back into him.

When he finally did enter me, he whispered in my ear with joy "Besides we are celebrating"

When Mrs. Fitz did finally come.

I was still gasping on the bed, shivering from the fumes of our shared ecstasy not wanting to move from the memory.

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I was trying fervently to scurry the Misses along, to no avail.

She was staggering and wobbling to all sides through the castle passageways.

She was moaning loudly e'ery time we crossed a window or a crack in the wall where light shone from; shielding her hands to her face.
The lass was as drunk as Angus was the day and night afore, when we found his sprawled person in the hall by the hearth where the oath-taking took place.

Why, me and my Betties finally conceded and began sweeping ’round the man, for he wouldna be awaken to save his life.

Aye, men and their cordial partaking at celebration times.

In the past few days it seemed my art had become to scrape men that were distempered by the drink.
So badly, ye swear by the Author o’ our being himself, that they were devoted and bound for the devil, only to scrape them yet again the next day in the same fettle and us left to clean up their spew.

Perhaps someday the world would come to see those kind were nay the minds who should be left the running o’ the world. But then who would?
I pondered amusingly to myself.
Us women?

Galena m’dear ye and your absurd notions.

’Til then though, I laughed at myself again, the bloody carcass o’ Angus Mhor, an’ so many others, couldn’a be moved nae matter how many times we kicked him, yelled at him or e’en poured icy water ower him.

He just belched from the side o’ his mouth and scratched his-
Well, he scratched what the Author gave him, but shouldna be scratched in public.
Or in private if one had interest in my opinion; aye, that was what he scratched!
I quaked at the memory.

Mrs. Beauchamp has it seem was as bedraggled as he, at this moment.

Floundering at e’ery step and still wi’ the needing to sit or lean on something e’ery few paces or she would fall from her feet.

She was as this, since I came into her chamber this morning.
So much so that I was finally compelled to slash her from her bed, sit her down and take care o’ her toiletries for her.
Her shift reeking o’ Colum’s Rhenish.

"M’dear, how many o’ the cups were ye in last night?" I berated worriedly at a leaning on the wall figure, which moaned wi’ pleasure as she snugged her heated face to the cold stone wall.

"Hst, a nighean, how will ye e’er ride so? Why ye’ll flat-oot fall, straight from the horse and onto your face and ye canna treat your own cracked heid, now can ye?"

Though wi’ her awful way to cure distempers, I wouldna be at all surprised to witness that.
Fine healer that one, a fine one indeed.

"Hommma the madsaa" the misses said starting to snore ’oot her noose lightly.
Truagh lassie, she probably did so after being told she’ll be on the road wi’ the men-o’-arm.
What's Dougal's mind?
The road is nay a place for a respectable lady such as the Mistress to be on.

“I nae ken what ye ha' in mind for her, MacChoinneich, but I'll surely pray all day and night to the heavens to keep her 'oot o’ your scheming machination hands and thoughts” I said under my breath.
The truagh banntrach, has been through enough.
She deserves some joy and love in her life.
Here's hoping she'll find it soon.

Or perhaps she has, I brooded, considering dear Mr. MacLiver.
For drink wasna the only thing the woman was smelling o’ this fine morning.

"When Colum ken o’ this Dougal-" I sighed silently to myself afraid to be heard as I looked her ower again

"No as if there's a working ear 'round here at the moment to hear m'words" I smirked benevolently to the whining coming from the wall.
And I kent better than to go tell Himself's working ear and shake the soil under all our feet, I determined.

I may no be educated or gone round and 'obout to see the world, but I ken verra weel nae to lay m' carcass between two bovines heids in rut for the position o’ laird.
Besides, I thought as I saw young Jamie coming to take leave o’ me wi’ a warm embrace and smiling eyes, as always.
He'll look 'oot for her if I ask this o’ him.

Aye, she'll be in bonny hands wi' this one.

Why the lad had such manners and heart, pure as the snow that's nae fell yet.
Bred to be a mother’s dream that one, I mused, crossing myself at the sweet memory o’ kind, beautiful Ellen.
Him being her spitting image and nae missing o’ her wit as weel.

Nay wonder the castle lassies dressed a bit more… weel more since his arrival.
'Better get yourself good and properly marriet, before they'll take ye by force Seamus', I inferred to myself regarding the coming lad.
'Why, after what ye did for m’little chuisle, the lass is ready to read her banns and vow her troth to ye, outlaw or murderer be damned'

Jamie came and bowed so gracefully to me saying
"Your servant ma'am".
Then straiten and bundled me to him, laughing wi' a warm true heart.

"What's a miss then?" he asked amused by the figure that cracked an eye at him, smiled a silly half-twit smile, then winced and shut her eye again, inclining her other cheek to be Brisken by the wall wi’ a turn o’ her heid from us.

"Hardly could budge her 'oot o’ bed or keep her straight while I tended her, I dinna ken how she
could e'er ride so" I said justly afraid at her standings.

"Dinna fash. I ha' seen her worse than this" Jamie said surveying her up and down and quivering from hilarity.

"Ye ha'" I said, wondering in my mind's eye ha' I e'er seen the Misses in a bad way afore today.

"I mean she told me o' it, aye that's what I meant. Of times she would be much worst from drink than this" he stammered through his reasoning.

He was ne'er a bonny liar to me, but I dinna ken why to lie o' this.

"She'll be just fine in an hour or two, I'll see to her 'til then" he said and came near the lass turning her heid back to him e'er so gently and whispering in the softest loving voice I e'er heard him speak in, to man or woman.

"Sassenach?" he inquired while cupping her cheeks.

The bright blue eye split again and the most heartfelt smile spread on her face.

"Jamie" she whispered just as lovingly and tenderly as he did to her and then heaved herself to the other side o' the wall she leaned on, collapsed to her knees and began to retch her poor cridhe 'oot.

"Ouch m'dear" I said wanting to come to her aid, only to be outreached by Jamie holding back her curly hair, which was coming-'oot in all direction from under the pins I tried to arrange for her this morning.

"Shhh, shhh" he whispered supporting her from behind, caressing her hair and soothing her 'til she was done "Tis fine a nighean, I'm here, shhh"

"I hate everything" she said between the sickening.

"I ken that" he laughed nae wi'oot sympathy "Ye always do when ye're sick.

'Tis fine Sassenach, ye told me so yourself once, wi' me in the same bad way, that after a good retch ye feel much better"

she peered up at him, glaring and simply said "I hate you too"

He laughed and seemed verra unconcerned wi' her harsh words.

"Aye, ye always do. Though serves ye right for what ye did to me last time wi' all the things ye wanted to give me" he laughed shaking wi' joy and glee, seeming giddy as he was 'oot to a celebration and nay on a cold, dank, dirty ride through the ether wi' the rent party.

"R'ye all done now, then?" he queried softly after a moment "we should really go"

"No I can't, not on a horse" she tried protesting as he took her by the arm and lifted her to his lap

"No Jamie I really can't, I think... No I know I'm dying"

She said curling her hands round his neck.

"Ye are r'ye?" he asked, mocking tone apparent.

"Aye!" she exclaimed weakly, burying her heid against his shoulder and burrowing herself into him

"Please just let me die on solid ground".

He just laughed again.

Why, couldna stop wi' the constant laughing since he came to us.

He began pacing warily as to no shake the lass so.
Walking toward the opening that stood by the side o’ the kitchen that led to the courtyard where their horses awaited.

I myself was fully transfixed by the happenings and couldna do naught more but follow blindly after them wi’ her trunks.

"Ye canna be deid yet Sassenach" he whispered to her cradled heid at his lap.
"When then?" she mouthed her words so weakly, half gone’oot by now.

She seemed to feel so secure in his arms she just ’bout melted into him.

"After" he simply said "After ye can collapse"

"After what?" the words seem to leap from my lips as I was fully mesmerized by the spectacle.

"Dinna worry she gets my meaning" he blinked or rather just shut his eyes quickly and opened them again, all filled wi’ jokery.

I crossed myself again, smiling and thinking how Ellen couldna properly blink also.

"Are ye weel wi’ her things then? I dunno seem to possess a hand to gie ye at the moment” he said deeply remorseful as he noticed my burden.

"Dinna fash" I heaved the load for a better grasp "Nay worry lad, I daresay ye ha’ your hands full wi’ virtuous chivalry at present” I said only half noticing my words.

I simply couldna believe my eyes. I kent that young Jamie appreciated the Mistress beauty or e’en inclined himself to feel amorous feeling for the lass, but I thought her one o’ many he desired. Young lads being as they were meant to be.

Although the whole castle took to the noticing as to how he was, once she was near, how he would informally ask what she did today or where she was at one moment or the next, mostly sounding verra worrit after slinkin’ ’bout the surgery and finding her nay there.

But that was due to her being wi’ Mr. MacLiver or at himself chamber’s treating him.

I much assumed such things will blow away once he will come to see her feelings for the handsome, allegeable, fill wi’ crown Lucas were so rooted.

Why the way those two laughed was a sight for sore eyes, especially if one kent the poor lass was nay guest but prisoner o’ himself and his brother.

I so wished her to find happiness and security and young Luke seeming so willing to take her.

That was the only reason I told Himself o’ the why those two were to be wed and fast. It will insure her safe way’oot o’ this castle but still near enough to prove she wasna working for the Sassenach’s army.

She could be free and looked after at the same time, I told Himself.

Why, we all kent the man’s art and talent.

And he was a good man, kind and caring and also quite obviously love stricken wi’ our fine charmer.
And their were all the obvious signs in her room indicating a verra glaring evident o' male attendance there, for all these past weeks. She clearly was entertaining a gentleman caller in her chamber.

Nae that 'tis o' concern or mind o’ mine, I told myself, the lady is a widow and o’ age to do as she pleased and being locked here wi’ nay friends or freedom canna be easy.

So-
After the night me and my Abigail's found the telling signs, I addressed Colum informing him that if he willna ensure her a marriage stature o’ some kind, a scandalous illegitimate barin will soon ensued.

But the way Jamie acted just now and the smile she returned him, accompanied by the most trustworthy inclination she allowed him to carry her so. Weel perhaps the young cub did stand a chance to win her heart. He's sure to ha’ her alone and unguarded on the road wi’ him.

Perhaps that is why he made the startling announcement to Murtagh in the kitchen the day afore.

Saying that they are to join the rent party and he'll hear none different o’ it.

Murtagh thumped his plate and Murtagh ne'er abused his food, went on to yelling and stomping his feet, but to no avail. They were to leave, Jamie said and although he would usually gie' the man the right to decide if he chose to go wi' him or nay, this time it was most important that he came along.

"I need ye there standing by me for what's to come" Jamie pleaded wi’ the man. "Then why go, if ye ken problems might ensue?" his kin protested. "Tis nay only trouble that might come to pass a ghoistidh, it could be a merry occasion and such" young Lord Broch Tuarach told his unconvinced godfather. "And I'll ha' no other man but ye at my side when it… I mean if it does, whatever it may be" Jamie said, placing his hand on Murtagh's shoulder and wi’ a look that was no order but a plea, but also invoked the ancient sacred bounds o’ blood and oath between them, simply added "Please".

So here stood Murtagh, this fine morning, I saw as I followed Jamie 'ootside to the steeds.

Murtagh held his and Jamie's rains awaiting him to mount.

Jamie placed Claire back on her feet near her mare, making sure her threats o’ death were idle. He parted the curls from her face grinning. "All weel then Sassenach?" "No" she said and started to mount her beast.

"Aye, ye'll be fine lass, ye'll be fine" he helped her up, making sure o’ her sturdiness on the animal afore leaving her to straddle his own, all while still glancing behind him to make sure o’ her wellbeing.

"Jamie" I called 'oot to him. He came to me to embrace me farewell again, planting a firm kiss on m' forehead.

"She'd be so upset she couldn' say goodbye to ye" he said so sure o’ his words "she loves ye
greatly"
"And I her" I said peeking at a half-deid form sprawled on her mare’s neck.

"Ye'll mind and care for her mo ghille, aye? Poor thing doesna always mind our ways"
"Always" he said in a way that left no room for doubt.

"Miorbhaileach" I cried after him as he departed from me to go on his horse "and mind yourself as weel"
I added, knowing he'll be in m’prayers also.

"All o’ ye" I called ‘oot to the rest o’ the men, feeling the tears arise as I watched m'dear men,
m’grown children and kin mounting and riding away.

"Mind ye’rselves, be kind to all and-"
I choked wi’ emotion at the receding line o’ beasts and men.
Feeling m’heart flutter e’ery time one o’ them crossed the gate and into the wild.

"Tha gaol agam oirbh uile"
I said already to myself in an empty courtyard, watching them ride in such a time the sun has nae yet even come to shine their way.

Aye, m’love is upon ye all, indeed, I said again in m’ heart.

Chapter End Notes

aoibhneas [joy, pleasure, happiness]
bancharaid [person whose company one enjoys]
burraidh [stupid person]
mo càirdeach [related by blood or marriage]
triantan gaoil [situation in which two people vie for the love of a third]
farmadach [envious; feeling resentful of someone for a perceived advantage, material or otherwise]

conasse [idiot in french]
Salope [bitch in french]

Seall sin! {look (at) that! (How 'bout that)}
mac na galla [son of a bitch]
seanmhair [The mother of one of someone's parents]
Sàmhchair [absence of sound]
Ailean [Alan ] Coinneach [Kenneth]
mo ionmhaunn [precious to or greatly valued by someone]
athair’s [male parent]
Twally-washer [Cocksucker]
Póg mo thòn [kiss my ass]
bràthair-athar [brother (or brother-in-law) of someone’s parent]
a gòrach [obnoxiously stupid, vacantly silly, content in one’s foolishness]
sàmhchair [the lack of any sound]
Truagh [poor/ to be pitted at/ with no money or possessions]
banntrach [a woman whose husband had died]
Miorbhaileach [wonderful]

Betties/ abigail = maidservants
cordial = hard liquor used mostly for medicinal purposes to knock a man out
devoted = doomed
"Well I must confess that although I would love to pull my weight and supply you all with the ... Hmm... Well with the Substance in question, truly I would, I'm afraid that..."

I apologetically searched for the proper words to excuse myself from participating in that specific stage of the proceedings, as I sat in the women’s common room cottage in the small picturesque village which I and the rest of the rent party finally arrived to this fine morning.

I mean, if one could call such a small cluster of a huts and cottages that numbered so few, as to be smaller in length than the minute sweet-water glen that laid perpendicular to it, a village.

I did truly mean my words though, my reacquaintance with these lovely, good-hearted, sincerely-welcoming women, was one of the highlight I awaited with eagerness to encounter anew, during this, my second time around with the rent party; and in return to their graciousness I did find myself wanting to return the favor.

For it was more than just a delightful change from the company of the farting, smelly, lewd-joking involving farm animals and incest relation men that were my daily undergo on the road thus far, agian: in this point in time it was truly was a necessity.

Although I still regaled and found myself fortified greatly by the company of short, elderly, heart of a romantic, half-rimmed spectacles Ned Gowen, Solicitor at law, which once we reiterated our love for John Donne and I treated his already diagnosed case of asthma with the ample doses of thornapple I procured in advance to strengthen his cardiovascular functions for him, our long amicable friendship was fully blossoming and flourishing even stronger and better than before.

Due, I suppose, to the fact that once my mind and acts weren't only occupied as to how I would escape my captures, I was much better company to have around.
Only delicate friendly female companion was sorely lacking in my life.

I was also never a woman who could stand to be nonessential and in possession of idle hands, so I craved to be surrounded by hard working joyous women again with something for me to do.

I mean how long can one sit and stare as Ned collected his doits and pence? Watch as the others haul the bags of grain, or thrust fowl into the wagon and tie goats to its side? Yes, quite the ‘interesting’ life I led these days.

At some point, very early on, even the amusement of seeing Ned go through all the stages of grief as he realized that yet again he must receive another pig into our midst, despite his decree beforehand, had worn off leaving me bored and restless.

So once we arrived here, I jumped at the chance to rejoin my old friend, who didn't quite know she was an old acquaintance of mine, and hurriedly introduced myself anew to dear friendly Donalda Gilcrist.

She on her end took me in as the lost- in need to be put to work- lamb I was, and did so with just as much kindness and hospitable manner her and her gang of merry women Waulking wool did last time; after they warmed up to me that is.

My pleasure enhanced tremendously over now knowing all the words to the Waulking song.

One of the many benefits of being married to a Scot and having him at my disposal during the times we secretly shared between the castle walls at night.

I quite frequently asked Jamie to teach me all the words I wished to know or remembered would come up in my near-known future.
And enjoyed watching him tutor me with a very proud smile over his wife becoming more of a proper ‘Scot’.

The words that the rent party spoke about me during our travels were kept tactfully undisclosed, in accordance to the wishes of both parties involved.

“And now I ha’ a life time to teach ye Sassenach” he once said serenely, just on the verge of his sleep, cuddling me closer to him and kissing my forehead with the joy of knowing we did, now, have our whole life to share together; with no need to part as we thought we needed to when all was lost.

I was also feeling quite proud myself for managing to singalong quite aptly to the “Mo nighean donn ho` gu”’ song this time around.

“Chuirinn suas ri do chluais
ite chuachach an eo`in.
Mo nighean donn ho` gu
Hi ri ri hu ill
Mo nighean donn ho` gu”….

I hummed and practiced the tune a few times along our ride.
And always seemed unable to stop smirking under my nose as I did so;
over hearing Jamie’s voice recite it to me in my head along with me.

He refused to actually sing it to me, no matter what I promised to do to him, but he still sounded just as enticing repeating the words to me in a dry read.
Jamie had a good deep spellbinding voice for storytelling and poem reading.
He certainly put his spell on me every time he opened his mouth.

My smile always widened as I realized how appropriate to our current predicament the translation of the song was;
telling of a young man in the army who is unhappy there and longs to be reunited with his sweetheart that awaits him back home.

Jamie and I were in the midst of our own little battle at the moment as well, surrounded by an army of men and longing to be truly reunited with our sweethearts in the open.

Which in all truth, was also one of the main reasons I was happy as a lark, at this moment, to finally be rejoined with these fine women.

For besides their company, they were the first step in our travels to reach mine and Jamie’s goal.

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“I would place the curled feather
of the eagle against your ear

Ho ro my brown haired lass
Hi ri ri hu ill

I would be happy with my love
in the white hay barn.

Ho ro my brown haired lass
Hi ri ri hu ill

I would be happy with my love
in the soft hay barn

Ho ro my brown haired lass
Hi ri ri hu ill

my hand will go in your hand
despite any living person.

Ho ro my brown haired lass
Hi ri ri hu ill

forming the militia
took young lads away from us”

Ho ro my brown haired lass
Holding hands no matter who was near, rolling in hay stacks and of course the words Mo nighean donn, have never failed to ignite something in my core. The words all connected to mine and Jamie’s shared memories.

So they also made me quite reminiscent regarding the one more, immensely- pleasurable, source that aided and abetted with keeping my spirits up, during my ride through the crags and moors of this beautiful, but held in it hard riding conditions piece of land we found ourselves trudging on.

Jamie was so close now. There were no more stone walls, no miles of Leoch grounds to hold distance between us and no pesky sixteen year old vermin desiring to dance, touch, be rescued or charm my husband anywhere in sight.

We couldn’t touch. We couldn’t speak to one another. Well no more than a few words. We couldn’t sneak more than a glance or two at each other and even that had to be done sporadically as to not seem too obvious with our yearning for one another.

Only in true Jamie fashion, he made sure his presence was known and felt by me.

I would wake every morning and emerge from my little field- makeshift tent to find him loitering about near it. Picking up twigs for the fire, scaring a pest or a snake he informed the men he spotted, which didn’t seem to truly exist; or just be there for some reason or another, which he used to excuse his whereabouts to the people around us.

It didn’t really matter what he said, just as long as he got his wish, which was to be the first thing I saw each morning no matter what.

“Mistress” he would nod to me politely in greeting, with a smile that could only be described as Jamie’s. “Mr. MacTavish” I would smile politely back.

And just like that, another day on the road had become more tolerable.

He was seldom able to, but he did try to covertly caress my calf under the camouflage of my skirts during the times he could be the one that brought me my sustenance.

Which I must say that under his supervision seemed to improve greatly from the shriveled Easter rabbit meals I remembered accustoming myself to; last time around that is.

The assembly’s lascivious jokes and derision comments did go on as before, but now I could always tell when I was becoming the butt of the joke.

Jamie would darken at once and cease to laugh abruptly.

Depending how hurtful and demeaning the jest at my expense was, the following day the joker would find himself in possession of some sort of larva or maggots awaiting him in his meals or boots.
Angus’s japes at me were probably the worst, for he would find himself almost daily face or arse down on the ground as if he was the clumsiest man alive or as if the universe had it in for him. All the while Jamie would pop up from behind, walking the other way, whistling a joyful innocent off key tune, Looking up into the heavens as if he was completely ignorant as to what was going on on the ground below.

My sleeping arrangement had improved significantly as well.

I was quite miraculously, almost from the first night, in possession of two blankets instead of one and a thicker second cloak disclosed itself between my belongings. How did he manage that I wondered.

No matter how many times I tried to return the added coverlet to its dispatcher, it would make a returned appearance between my belongings the very next day; each time to no avail.

"Scotsman are none so thin blooded as ye bluenosed southern" Jamie once teased me about, as he bundled me good and proper in a cloak with him clad with no more than shirt and kilt. Apparently I was to be proven the truth of it again and again, resistance being rendered futile.

Although the gestures of warm-hearted acts of kindness and love granted to me by Jamie daily did make life on the road much bearable, I refused to allow them to distract me from my quest. To lawfully get back to my husband’s arms and return to my OWN 18th century life.

And it all starts today, now.

So I fortified myself and my expression of regret to these friendly women and apologist profusely for not being able to provide my urine to aid with the process of setting the dye faster. All so I could be ready for what’s to come, or for who’s to come to be exact.

"… well I’m afraid that in five, four, three, two, one, my companion will be coming to..." I said, staring at the rickety door, predicting the very rude entry of one yelling cussing Angus Mhor.

I was expecting him to walk in mid-sentence, so I let my words trail off, only to be met with dead silence.

“I… I’m s…ure he would…”I stuttered at my words, wrinkling my nose in puzzlement “You see, I … I thought” I bumbled again, quaking at the thought of things going terribly wrong.

To my surprise a voice did make itself heard at that exact moment, only it wasn’t the furious, squealing one I expected.

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Screened behind the door, a deep, polite, soft cough preceded a gentle, shy, oceanic-rich voice inquiring in the best of manners "Mrs. Beauchamp? Haa… R’ye all done wi’...?"
I mean… If all are decent and weel, could a gentleman find himself permitted to enter, if ye will?"

I marched and swung the threshold open, to find my very civilized but utterly embarrassed husband courteously and cheerfully smiling as he saw me.

"Ho, there ye are Sasse... I mean Mistress Beauchamp, I dinna want to disturb til ye be all done wi’… Weel, wi’ such matters that ye were dealing wi’. Ladies Latha math"

Jamie turned to address the other women and bowed most graciously

"Your servant Mesdames, Mademoiselles”.

And as always, when a well-mannered, by all means not ill-looking young man displays such curtseys and reverence, particularly to a group of women, which most have never seen further than where their feet could carry them, or as I mentioned before, no further than their own very, very small village;

Jamie’s bonny- blue eyes and remarkable features created quite a commotion.

I heard a soft thump and half- turned to see a young, fair- haired lassie had fainted at the sight of my esteem husband and the honour he bestowed on her.

Jamie frowned at the sight of her flailing form and would have gone to lend a hand to be sure and apologies profusely for the wrong-doings he perceived himself to have performed on her.

He most obviously did not understand what he had done, but to him it didn’t matter. Jamie was a gentleman through and through.

Only another woman, an elderly one this time, who was fanning herself as if in the middle of a heat wave, also caused by my precious husband, waved him off saying

“Nae, nae sir, she be fine” she assured him and then hissed from the corner of her mouth to the swooning girl

“Get ye up Dorin, ye’re embarrassing us in front o’ his Lordship”

and then she curtsied awkwardly to Jamie not knowing what else do to with herself.

Some of the other women gasped, some clutched at each other whispering "Ho my", some giggled and blushed and one very ancient wise- looking one was valuing my husband’s arse and seem to approve greatly of the appendage in question.

It made me smile covertly under my nose.

I regained my self-composure quite quickly though, as my wondering as to ‘what in hell was going on here’ thoughts resurfaced inside my head.

"If ye Ladies be so kind” Jamie bowed deeply again and the young woman almost descended back down to the ground, having just risen a second ago.

“As to permit me to take back custody of this lovely lass, so I may return her to our band of men, I would be much obliged and forever in your debt”

Jamie concluded this with yet another bow and I began to suspect that after not receiving his fair share of attention from his own lady lately, my husband was enjoining the effect he was having on these women and was milking it for all its worth.

I was so used to seeing it only applied on me; I almost forgot what a big flirt my man is.

“Mrs. Beauchamp” he addressed me now "Your presence is requested by Dougal and the rest of the men" he said offering me his arm “If ye be so kind”
"Right" I said confused by this exchange, but willing to put it aside to prepare myself for the fight ahead.

"Yes, I should leave" I turned to depart from my charming hostesses "Dougal will surely be fair steamed by now regarding my unannounced departure and disappearance act"

'Good', I added to myself, just as he should be for the plan to work.

"Ho nae mistress, no at all" said my dear unforeseen, sabotaging husband. "I took great pains as to convince him that I allowed ye to go waulk wool wi’ these fine, fair group o’ ladies here" Jamie beamed at them complimentary.

The other women sniggered gratefully.
I snapped my head from them to him and snarled unappreciatively "You did what?"

The shocking effect Jamie expelled from these women was starting to exude from me as well.

But if I thought myself completely bamboozled then, Jamie surprised me yet again by opening his big mouth and -

“And took care o’ the other matter as weel mistress” he said procuring a silver pewter mug the size of the biggest tankard I ever seen, with a hinged lid at its top.

Did Jamie hold it behind his back this whole time?
I mused as I watched him hold the damn thing by its handle, grinning from ear to ear.

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"Nae, dinna be thanking me, ‘twas the mistress’ idea” he said as the tankard, which turned out to be filled with goat’s milk for the teething toddler, was handed by him to a stunned, open-mouthed, Speechless Donalda, who almost dropped her bairn from being so in awe with my idiot husband.

“Claire ... I mean Mrs. Beauchamp, insisted she heard a wean cry earlier from hunger and asked me to milk the goat as she would go to look for him"

"When d’ye hear..?" Donalda exclaimed in perplexity only to be stopped by another wail coming from the needing to suckle infant, which obliterated any suspicion on her side and left her only with gratitude.

“Slàn leibh Ladies” Jamie nodded in kind farewell, as he took a stunned, open- mouthed, Speechless me away.

He placed a light arm in the curve of my spine and guided me out from the hut and in the direction the men of the rent party were gathered.

"Why would you do such a thing Jamie?” I asked when we were neither there nor here, placed just far enough as to not be heard by the place we just left and to still be camouflaged to the men that were our destination.
“I mean, I think it was extremely kind of you and I’m happy, really, truly happy it was done for the baby’s sake, to be sure” I said marching slowly in front of him and frowning in thought.

“And to spare me being grabbed, shoved and cussed at by Angus is never the wrong way to go, but preventing him from shouting at the top of his lungs that I’m drunk and smelling of piss. Or telling Dougal you allowed me to go about my business… I mean Jamie-”

I stopped and pivoted to face him, searching for the right words as I racked my brain to think what was I to do now to stir up a tumultuous hubbub around me.

“Is Dougal at least ‘been all about it’ as last time?”

I puzzled Jamie, wondering why, for the Lord’s sake, would he risk such a crucial stage of our plan?

"Errr, Sassenach, ye do smell o’ piss" Jamie said, sniffing at me and ignoring my inquiry.

"Well, we were walking… I mean waulking wool" I answered starting to get annoyed “But Jamie-"

"Aye I ken that. Only why would ye do such a thing, is unclear for the life o’ me. I mean ye do ken ye couldn’a sew to save your life in our last lifespan, right? D’ye reckon it changed this time around?” he teased me in merriment.

Now I was fuming.

No matter what absurd notion crossed his head and no matter for whatever reason Jamie was doing what he was doing, our plan must come to pass, I … we worked and desired it more than anything!

And I was in no mood to be teased when more important things stood in the balance.

"What are you even on about at the moment?” I said frustrated with the lack of answers I was getting.

"Besides I did sew your socks… that one time" I added to save face.

"Aye” he smirked to himself while rubbing his chin, as if that wasn't exactly what transpired “Ye did sew them. Only ye sew them shut Sassenach” he said smirking again but then added for fairness sake “Weel I suppose ye can still call it tailoring in a way. I mean ye did manage to stitch the hole close, ‘tis only ye did so by closing the spot where the fingers go as weel” he informed me, looking utterly amused “But nay worry the stitches dinna hold for long as to be a bother anyway"

"Liar” I said piqued.

"Aye. I always am when I tell ye things ye dunno want to hear a gaol” he said smirking for the third time.

I wanted to slap him.

“Right! Listen up you big bloody dolt, why did you do all this and why did you even come?” I demanded my questions to be answered and to be answered now.

I turned back to see if I could spot the men-at-arms and the mood that they were in, saying to Jamie “Angus is supposed to come and scream to high heaven’s how I’m ‘stonking drunk’ whatever that means and then they all need to fight me by the wagons over the goat, so that the Lieutenant…"
A big strong palm hooked my elbow and turned me to face him, fastening me in place, or so he thought.

"Weel that's exactly why I did so, and made sure to jest and jeer ‘about it wi’ all the rest of the men. Letting them ken what a good Scottish wife ye wish to learn to be, so ye asked to go wi’ the women.

Even laughed wi’ Dougal about it, as he said how it seems our little picked up on the road, feral cat, was pulling in her claws, to which I replied what a fine tamed cheetie ye were becoming; bringing forth to his mind how ye failed to try even once to escape during all our time on the road an’ in the castle, or how ye created no ruckus, only been trying to suit and please all” Jamie said in complete satisfaction into my stunned face.

“So good luck to ye picking your fights now Sassenach. For they are all in such high spirit an’ hilarity over ye at the moment, they’ll just laugh and pet ye on your bonny wee heid, not to mention how they all sae ye ‘stonking drunk’ before so they all ken nae to mind ye much heed now”

He brought his other hand to snatch my other elbow and said in a harsh hiss to my face

“No Lieutenant, no Corporal, no Brigadier General and most o’ all, by any means, shape, form or ancestor no FUCKING Captain Jonathan Randall, esquire, of His Majesty’s eighth dragoons in YOUR future lassie”

I knew Jamie struggled greatly with the part of our plan that involved me coming face to face with that man, that depraved, sadistic, degenerate rotten to the core fucking cur of a man, that is.

But I kept reminding him he did nothing to me last time (that Jamie knew of) and our plan THIS time involved me seeing him for only five minutes in a room full of people. Where, even Jamie had to agree that Randall wouldn’t dare lay a finger on me.

It took endless hours of me fighting, persuading, blackmailing, begging, crying, yelling and anything else I could think of, to get Jamie to the point where he even considered for such a thing to come to pass.

In the end it came down to one thing and one thing alone; we had no better plan than this to find ourselves back in each other’s arm, lawfully bound. And even my tenacious, pig-headed husband had to agree on that.

Then why was he doing this now?!!?

"Now" he unhooked me, looking to all sides, making sure none saw his behavior towards me. "Ye'll ha’ your choice ‘about it whether to come back and stand by Ned or if ye will do me the great honor as to sit wi’ me in the wagon. This I give ye free rein to decide as ye wish"

"Ho, much obliged to you for your charitableness, master" I said readying myself for a real fight now and not a staged one at all.

"Ye quite welcome subordinate" Jamie said in all seriousness, but then stole another glimpse to the sides to see no one was watching and clutched me tight to him for a rough speedy kiss.

“Christ Sassenach, tha mi gad ionndrainn” he said with such longing, ending the kiss abruptly,
which was more of an attack on my stern closed lips than a kiss.

“I’ll see to everything myself Sassenach. ‘Tis handled” he decreed, still clutching at where he grabbed me, wanting more and fighting against himself whether he should or be smart about it and let me go.

In a flash, he regained his self-restraint and ended in a commanding voice

“And we shall hear no more ‘bout it”

And with that he began marching away, in order to end the discussion and make it clear he was unwilling to hear a thing more or anyone else but himself.

He stopped around the next bend to make sure I followed after him though.

‘That’s what you think you big gorilla- stubborn -boorish Scot!’ I determined in my head as I stalked angrily behind him ‘I have a few more tricks up my sleeve’.

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“Hey, hey, where d’ye think ye’re taking that?”

Dear plump and portly Rupert scurried bouncily after me, as I pulled on the goat tether.

Jamie, sure I would do his bidding, had already progressed and was by the big assembly wagon were the bulk of the laird’s rent goods were stacked upon.

I waited until he would reach it before running to untie the rope that held the nanny.

Once explicit directions regarding our safety and our conduct in public were given to me by Jamie, no matter how I disagreed and raged inside myself about them, I would always follow his word in public, waiting until we were to be alone to raise a good proper, hurling things and even once chucking Jamie himself off the bed, stramash.

Jamie was sure this time would be no different.

But I wasn’t ready to give up this time.

This chance would come and go, leaving us with no other opportunities in our path for me to find my way back home.

Back to where I belonged now.

“Back to her owner, the family needs her” I said playing my little past game of tug-of-war with Rupert over the livestock again.

“Ths, ths, lass” he clicked his tongue at me

“Jamie already milked it for them” he said sounding tired from needing to yet again deal with the spoiled, daft woman he perceived me to be.

“So stop your whimpering woman, the goats ours, were taking her wi’”

“The hell you are” I said shrilling a bit louder than last time, for whatever Jamie told this motley crew around me, it was working;

and it was working against me.

Rupert looked exasperated but spoke calmly enough and no other member in the party seemed to be making his move to circle me and intervene.
And therefor no one made me seem as a poor, defenseless, Englishwoman in need of assistance.

Ned suddenly popped for my back instead of to my front as last time.

He stood himself by my shoulder, patting me lightly on my back in a fatherly manner. A father that was calming his unhinged infant daughter that is.

He spoke to me in soothing sedative tones

"Ho lassie, that's good and chattels and must be accounted for dearie. Come let us retire aside and allow these men to be men and deal with all this fowl play. Do ye get it mo luaidhe? Fowl play, as in foul play mo caileag, you see?"

He laughed with a twinkle in his eyes and witty mirth in his voice, trying to include me on the joke instead of me being the bud of the joke as always.
It was kind of him, but I wasn't amused or playing along.

Jamie satisfied with everything coming up roses for him, just stood there by the wagon, palms tucked in his sword belt, smirking in smugness, cocking his eyebrow at me as if saying 'See?' Adding a ‘Give it up’ look with his eyes.

"Go canny Ned, poor wee thing is so completely drunk. Be careful or she half-fall and retch on ye as she did on the ride from the castle" He told Ned aloud so that all could hear.

"Aye, I can smelt her from here to be sure" said Ned adding his own smirk of hilarity over the play under his kerchief.

People around us didn't pay to all the going-ons much attention.

Apparently a drunken disturbance wasn't anything more than a common day occurrence; even in such a small village as this.

Absolutely nothing was happening in order to lure a lieutenant out from his whereabouts. Wherever they would be.

From where did he show up last time?
I puzzled as I looked around, thinking I would perhaps fortify my efforts in that direction.

Jamie may think it was done, but he was far from right.

"Ouch, dinna be worrit lassie" Ned put a soothing comforting palm at my back "Remember ‘Humiliation is the beginning of sanctification’” he quoted John Donne to me as to make sure I wasn't too hurt by the joke I was becoming in everyone's eye.

But I wasn't letting go, not literally from the rope that was cutting the circulation in my hands by now and not figuratively of the opportunity.

Now that the opportunity finally presented itself. I was determined to reach my goals knowing this time I must not fail.

"Ouch leave it be ye bean craicte” Rupert wasn’t giving in either “Ye be givin' me the goat"
"Let go" I barked loudly and pulled harder.

A big tall form blocked the sun above my half bending- over, unyielding, yanking at the rope figure, as it appeared between me and Rupert.

Jamie took my hands quite masterfully and with no great difficulty, no matter how much I tried to be one, uncurled the rope from my wrists, skillfully opened my palms one by one and released the rope from my clutch, handing it to Rupert that stood behind him.

His furious glaring eyes and his sudden arrival made me inadvertently slacken my grip on the rope and I swallowed hard when I looked up to see how beside himself he really was.

It was what I planned and what I intended to happen, but Jamie was still a formidable foe to cross and come face to face with.

But, If I couldn't arouse Angus, Dougal or the rest of the men around me to look ominous and threatening to my wellbeing, I was still always very good and skillful at arousing more in my husband than his libido.

Jamie handed the leash to a flustered to his end Rupert and send Ned on his way by a mere flick of the head.

He stood towering over me; looking down at me and making me feel as if I was hardly a foot long.

“Do mi!” he simply said in Gaelic, in low tones and through clenched teeth. He was ordering me again to join him on the wagon and to not take this any further.

He was also, obviously, curbing his fury and voice as to make sure Dougal or any of the others wouldn’t notice or intervene.

But Dougal wasn’t the one I wanted. The man I meant to anger was just where I needed him to be, right in front of me. Now if I could just make him yell at me one time…

"How hard is it to keep watch and control one Sassenach wench?" Apparently Dougal wasn’t giving- up his chance to join the party.

Good, the more the merrier.

“Slippery as an eel that one Dougal” As it seems, Angus wasn’t forgoing his chance to put his own two cents regarding me also.

“Would you stop talking about me as if I am not here” I scolded them loudly above my husband’s shoulder and Jamie’s hand actually twitched as he fought the urge to either slap me or muzzle my mouth with his palm.

He did neither though, but growled instead, making sure I realized I should really stop this foolery and at once.

“There's a baby that needs milk” I rebuke them all with my past words, again, trying to side slip away from Jamie.
If he continued to keep his temper in check, I had others to play with.

“Stop your havering woman, the beast is payment for rent ‘fair and square’” said Dougal completely calm, waving his palm dismissing the matter and he and Angus were already walking away.

No one seemed willing to get upset at any of my past words.
What did Jamie tell them???

“So you let a child go hungry?” I cried persistently after them, and at least that awarded me some attention, even if it was only from the other tenants and cottars around me.

Only Dougal was already following my cries for justice with the story of how they kindly milked the goat dry so as to take care of all in his flock.
Ending his words with
“A Sassenach; fleeing drunk forbye” and receiving his fair share of jeers at my expense again. Only this time no Lieutenant followed!!!

"Sassenach” Jamie took hold of my arms bringing me to face him again as they all began to scatter.

This time every part of him flared at me.
He was unraveling.
His eyes narrowed into two tiny slits, his nose puffed as a dragon’s and his lips disappeared altogether.

‘Finally’ I mused.
It was the walking away from him that broke him, I thought, hoping I won’t ever need to remember that again.

“Ye will stop this now! They all ken the family got enough milk so ye ha’ naughting else left for ye-“

But I wasn’t about to listen or care.

This was my wedding, my life, my husband and my children at stake
And I would fight for them till the world’s end.
Even if it was against their own will!

"Urrrr” I yelled into Jamie’s stunned face.

Come on, you God damn bloody bastard.
You stupid Sassenach soldier, I raged in my head frustrated.
Come on, hear me already,
HEAR ME!!!

"LET GO OF ME" I cried at the top of my lungs

The menacing form of my husband, clutching my biceps, red-faced, furious and stunned to disbelief, as if he was a angry gorilla that one weakly sod from his pack dared to defy him, was even better than Dougal’s ire face.
"Dè tha thu a dèanamh?" Jamie hissed in my face, losing his English, which was a clear sign that an explosion was soon to come. Jamie could keep a clear head in front of almost anyone and in any situation, but not with me.

‘What do you think I’m doing you big oaf!? I pulling the best shrilling tantrum attack I can muster’ I said to myself.

"What do you think you’re doing Jamie MacTavish?! What, do you think that you are my friend so I'll obey your commands? Well I assure you, you're not! You’re just another obstacle in my path to return home"
I said matching his rage tight lip to tight lip, glaring eye to glaring eye.

Come on where the bloody hell are you soldier??

Jamie staggered back a step, from complete shock and let go of me, which didn’t bode well for me and what I needed.

Luckily, he was regaining his fury in such a way I could almost imagine his next move to be, picking me up bodily with a cloth at my mouth and hands tightly bound to stifle any other form of resistance on my part; so I made my move first.

"That’s what I want, I want to go home!!!"
I shirked again and the truth of my words resonated in everyone’s ears to hear.

It was the honest truth. I did want to go home.

I wanted to wake in the huge, fit for a whole family, comfy, goose-feathered mattress bed with huge plump pillows that awaited me in Lallybroch.

I wanted my first sight in the mornings to be of my husband pleating his kilt on the ground as he starts his day.
Or have my faith wake me with her cries in the mornings, as my second child kicked my kidneys from inside my womb.

I wanted MY home, the one me and Jamie were meant to build together.

All the frustration and agony I endured to reach this point, which I kept at bay and on a tight leash, were pouring out of me now and I was losing control in earnest.

‘I love you more than life James Fraser, but I will not stand here and watch as these things slip from my grasp’ I seethed inside myself
‘And I’ll be damned if I will allow you, my overgrown, overbearing, control-freak of a husband to stand in my path to that.
You are mine James Fraser, and I will see to it happening just as much as you could ever do so’ I said in a heartfelt prayer.

Although, according to the looks I was getting from him now, I was starting to wonder would he still say yes to the idea of marrying his stubborn, disobedient, unruly wife of his again.

Once given the chance that is.

Well, there was always the threat of me being delivered to the Englishmen to be tortured and killed
on my side to make him do so, I concluded as I watched his skin change colors.

And then I heard it.
That stern cultural couch and the inquiring politely, but by no means less commanding respect over his stature, British voice questioning

"Madam is everything all right?"

“I’m Sorry” I said, letting my breath out in relief and saying it, this time, to the man in front of me, that closed his eyes in defeat and not to the soldier that went on with the same script as last time.

“May I be of service?”

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“The land’s been good to ye this year…”

We were all, but one, from the rent party, sitting scattered in the tavern that this small village held.

Dougal was carrying on with his preliminary chit chat, in order to ply his audience good and proper, before disclosing the true nature of this cozy amicable drink fest that he was so generously holding on his own dime.

This time, I seated myself around one of the smaller, lower tables that stood more to the center of the room, just where Murtagh sat last time and did so again now.

This was in accordance to Jamie’s instructions to me.
I was to always be at Murtagh’s side, from the first moment Jamie would not be around himself to protect me.

“See Jamie, I do listen to you” I said in my head to my nonexistent husband at the moment “I’m not only the ill-tempered, shrew of a harpy you perceive me to be just now”.

He, as oppose to me, was fulfilling his word to me and was following our plan, which meant to make himself magically scarce, during the evenings were the places we resided in during the day boasted an inn or tavern, which were where Dougal displayed my husband’s back and heart-grueling, horror-stricken tale as to receive funds for his preciouses rebellion.

Before we embarked on this voyage of ours, I politely but firmly informed Jamie, that if I was to be subjected to the tableau of my husband’s honor and name being dishonored such, again, I would simply stand up and stab Dougal right in his nonexistence heart or in whatever shriveled raisin he was using as a heart these days, not caring the slightest what will become of me.

Now that we knew for sure how much Colum disapproved of the matter and would not allow Dougal the chance to ask or commit disciplinary actions to be made against Jamie.
And now that we also knew that the marriage was a maneuver designed to forestall Jamie’s station as contender for the position of Laird of castle Leoch and the next ‘heir to the throne’ for Chief of
clan MacKenzie,
and therefore stood in no danger of being sidetracked by anything.

Jamie could refuse to participate in this charade without any worry of undesired penalties done against him or against the ones he cared for.

Dougal would not send him back to the castle to accumulate more popularity amongst the clan’s members.
In fact Dougal wouldn’t make any move for that matter, not until he could come up with a suitable solution to the problem called James Fraser that ached his backside.

No.
Dougal was definitely the epitome of San-tzu ‘Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer’ mantra and could always be relied upon to follow it to the tee.

I mean that was exactly how I found myself in the position I am now at the moment, which was prisoner and captive healer of the rent party,
I reminded a laughing Jamie, that cuddled me to him during the night we laid in my chamber at Leoch and spoke of our future plans.

“Weel, hate to need to kill all those people just to save ye Sassenach. So I guess I’ll be staying far clear from such occasions” Jamie said as he held me closer to him, snuggling his frozen nose into my bosom.

So it didn’t matter what Dougal had in mind, or that this was his main reason for even bringing Jamie along.
We needn’t comply.

I was tired of being conspired upon and manipulated by him, or so he thought.
In this instance we could correct the wrong done to my husband and we will be doing just that!

And if Dougal had it in mind to try more forceful ways… well, Jamie only needed to dilly-dally until the wedding issue would arise, which now thanks to me was still proceeding on the right course.

The reminder of Jamie’s laugh and a night spent in his arms though, almost broke my already shattered heart entirely.

I sat, now, on the stool facing Murtagh, hardly able to swallow my ale down.
I felt so sick for my actions I couldn’t think of eating the fine beef and turnips lunch we were offered earlier or to drink a drop of anything affably given to us now.

I knew I did right by me and Jamie.
It was what needed to be done for our future, but seeing Jamie’s reaction when that cultured voice rang in our ears and that neatly groomed soldier appearance followed it; was painful to say the least.

My betrayal of him, my betrayal against his word was reflected in his eyes and I could hardly lift my gaze to look up at him.
Not that he offered me such preview to his countenance.
As the sentences of old echoed through the air, being told again by those who told them before,
Jamie averted his face sideways, unable to bear the sight of me.
It shattered me to pieces.

Luckily Angus required no reason to pick a fight with a Sassenach, be it an officer or me.
Once the man’s speech was sounded, I didn’t need to do naught else.
Not that I could at that point, once I saw Jamie’s response.

Angus and the others went on the attack straight away, with no need for me to add more kindle to
the fire.

“Aye, ye’ll keep your nose oot o’ our business” Angus began playing his role,
as the other men came to stand at the back and sides of their clan member, circling Lieutenant
Foster into acknowledging his inferior stature.

"I was speaking to the lady" the Lieutenant said in a stern voice that knew his true position and
strength, even if the others around him failed to know it yet.

Jamie, aware of the truth the man’s rank held, shut his eyes in pain and anguish at his words.
I swallowed hard as my throat went dry completely.

I suppose my reaction to Jamie’s response was just as good as any scared, timid face I made then,
for things went on exactly the same from that point on.

"The lady; is a guest of clan Mackenzie" Dougal came to stand by his gillie.

"Do ye treat all your guests this way?” the British officer, with no redcoat to show for his bravado,
inquired and Jamie pushed his breath through his nose with great force.

"Hey. Bugger off" the tones were intensifying now, centuries of animosity acting in my best
interest.
"Or maybe your lugs need cleaning ‘oot"
"I assure you sir my ‘lugs’ are perfectly fine" Foster persisted.
"Go home laddie and suck on your ma’ teat"

Words were darted between both sides now pointedly and snappily.
All the men-at-arms stood weapon at the ready, their hands caressing hilts of swords and butts of
pistols.

All except for one member, that is, that just slowly walked away not looking back to me or to the
men.

Jamie knew I would not need his protection and that a fight would not ensue, so he left without
another word or even a glance exchanged between us.

The last sight I had of him was of a face frozen and void of any emotion.

I sniffed now at the memory, wanting to weep.

“‘I had to do it’” I said into my cup, concealing my face from a few people that came to gawk at the
Sassenach healer.
Rumors flew about her across the MacKenzie’s land, faster than the speed our little gang of men rode at.

“I want you back Jamie” I said, again only to myself.
“And if you truly had a better plan for us then this, you would have proposed it to me a long time ago and not spring it on me at the last second.
You got cold feet that is all, you got too scared” I spoke to the air
“I’m scared too, but I had to do it. Please understand. We have no other way” I said into the nothing as I sniffed again.

Dougal was carrying on with his vulgar jokes and was winning his audience just as before.

I leaned forward to Murtagh and whispered
“How mad is he?” I queried apprehensively.

Jamie was very good at hiding and was nowhere to be found after the occasion, so I had no idea where things stood right now between us.

Murtagh looked mighty vexed at me himself, quite as his chieftain.

"I dinna ken how mad HE is, but between ye ordering me to look ‘oot for his wellbein’ and him informing me that I am to be your new shadow and no leave your sight long enough to even take a piss, beg your pardon for my loose tongue, but I must admit that I find m’self bonny maddened enough for the two o’ ye.
What pray tell-"
He said in mock English enunciation to indicate how inflamed he really was at me and my high-class English arse
"is bloody goin’ on wi’ ye two?” he said ending with his usual grave Scottish speech.

"Not a thing" I said looking down into my drink again, which was my only protection against my translucent face.
"I think we’re just looking after each other as good friends do and ..."

"Wi’ the good friends that ye two are, I shell pray to find m’self between m’ enemies and count m’self blessed” he growled his disapproval at mine and Jamie’s bond.

“May the Lord protect us all from the outcomes o’ your mutual affinity to one another.
For between the two o’ ye and your reaction to each other, ye might as weel kill yourselves and save us all from your blubbery, swine- stubborn, juvenile mistakes.
Which the two o’ ye keep making ower and ower again!!
What were ye even thinking getting into trouble involving a Sassenach?
With the lad’s havin’ a price on his heid an’ him so close to ye as too be seen?!
If ye failed to notice our stubborn fool is unmistakably conspicuous!"

"I didn't mean it as such… I just…” I stammered at my words.
I really didn't consider that, I did fail to recall that fact.

Last time, Jamie indeed was more of a stand-by observer than an active member in the scene that transpired; but now that he placed himself in front of me…

Well it was his own Goddamn fault!
I fumed defensively in my head.
If he hadn’t started this whole thing and played around with how things were, all could have gone on just fine as before!

"Never mind what ye meant or nay” Murtagh admonished me.
“Even before the Englishman came, did ye nae think the lad would come running to your side the minute ye might find yourself in danger or trouble wi’ the MacKenzie’s?!?” Murtagh demanded of me.

I ignored the fact that Murtagh seem to take it for granted that Jamie would come to my rescue, which was worrisome to put it mildly, but chose instead to address my main concern at the moment

“So how mad is he?"

"Let’s just say I ha’ seen the lad plenty mad and cussing somethin’ fierce over a few individual in m’ day, but the way ye seem to crawl under his skin and get to him…”
Murtagh said, now looking at me in wonderment
“Christ lass, an’ excuse m’ blasphemy, but ye make him go completely demented.
The man half bashed his own heid into a tree from your actions and words, and his knuckles bled somethin’ brutal from being smashed into yon tree beforehand.
And by Christ and St. Agnes, some o’ the things that came ‘oot from that man’s mouth…”
Murtagh crossed himself at the remembrance.

"Did he use the one about the cat, the snow or the ladder?" I questioned, trying to estimate how bad was Jamie’s state at the moment and therefor mine.

"Ye mean 'May the devil make a ladder o' your back bones while picking apples in the garden o' hell!'?"

"Yes" I said in trepidation "That one is reserved to when his really irate.
I prefer when he uses the cat one, or the one about the beggarman, those he uses when his just angry, I can handle just ‘angry’.
Besides I like cats, if I’m already dead, I don't think I would care that much if one ate me”
I tried making light of the situation
“And the devil can choke on the cat for all I care after that” I added remembering the second part of the profanity.

"Poor lass" Murtagh shook his head "He only opened wi’ the devil and the ladder! It got much worse after that and steamed much faster than usual as weel"

"Ho dear me" I said forebodingly.

"Did he curse just in Gaelic, English and French or did German make an appearance?
It's really, really bad when he uses a forth language" I tried to evaluate Jamie’s mood further.

"Lassie, there was Latin and Greek in there too” Murtagh said and my blood ran cold

“An' I swore on m’ mother’s grave to ne'er repeat what I heard him say today, so dunno even ask”
Murtagh said shivering at what he witnessed
“May God forgive him for it and me for even hearing it"

"Ho dear Lord, Latin is only reserved for the highest sinners in his eyes" I yawped in a short low exclaim.
"Aye" Murtagh nodded looking down at me disapprovingly and then shivered as he recalled again what Jamie had said.

If that be the case, his oath was fine by me. I really did not want to know what my husband’s frenzied mind thought of me at the moment.
Just as long as he didn't say in the Gàidhlig ‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure’.

With my mind so preoccupied with Jamie and our not so little drama, I didn’t even realize Dougal had already began with the business at hand.

The mood darkened all around, the atmosphere of hilarity and joy was now subdued.
Sober contemplative minds were pondering about the times and hardships that plagued their country.

It was hard not to want to cry out for them to stop.
Hard to not warn them that such actions will only make the body toll and adversities increase and worsen.
It was excruciating to not tell them that we tried already.
Tried to change history for them, only to find ourselves as Don Quixote.
Thinking we were on a mission to fight injustice and save a country and realizing that we were fighting windmills in a war that was doomed from the start.

But would it make a difference? Would they even care?
Would I have cared or listened if someone told me we stood no chance against the Nazis?
Would I have stopped fighting?

Even knowing what I knew today of lost causes, I would have still marched into those field hospitals, stationing myself at the forefront again.
Fighting and donating all I could, even under heavy fire for that cause.
Giving all in service to that war.
A war that was fought against such horrors that the world had yet to see or even dreamed of devising.

Only I was fortunate enough to play apart in a war that whatever force that allocates such matters had decreed the right side to win that time.

My heart ached for all the Scots; all the people I grown to care and love.
But what was I to do?
Sacrifice my husband’s life again and therefor mine and my children’s in the process, just to see the cause go out in flames again?

My husband’s… I mused again on the words. Does he still even want to be that?

Dougal inclined his head and Rupert turned on his back to close the entry doors he leaned on.

Tonight's patriotic speech has been carrying on for some time now, so I found it a bit odd Dougal was only now signaling for the doors to be shut.

But I tried to not dwell on the matter, or regarding anything else that surrounded me at the moment. It may sound cruel and selfish, but I couldn’t allow myself to get emotionally involved again or I would fall apart completely against my helplessness.
I had so much guilt and hurt inside of me already; I couldn’t by no means add on to it and go on living.
I wouldn’t even have come here, if it wasn’t for my promise to Jamie to be at Murtagh’s side once he wasn’t near me.

Jamie. That was the only ray of light I held onto in this time and place.
Thank the Lord Jamie was far and awa…

A heavy large body plumped itself on the third stool, just between me and Murtagh at our table.

My bottom lip dropped open and I couldn't close it, not even in order to swallow my stupefaction down.

I was surely seeing an apparition. He could not be real!

Yes that was it. I craved Jamie at my side so much I must’ve dreamed him up.

Brought him to life somehow.

For there was no way, no how he had just walked in, at his own volition and sat by my side.

Jamie's shirt was slashed brutally.
Down from collar to hem and before I managed to even focus my eyes at the vision that sat before me.

I gasped loudly almost choking on my own breath and clutched at my mag as if it was time itself and I could stop and freeze what was happening if I just grip at it with all my might.

My audible distress was swallowed by the spectators’ gasps.
Their reaction at the sight of my husband’s back, matched my own reaction for him allowing this to transpire again.

I tried springing to my feet to hit the foul filthy bastard who started it all.
I promised.
I said that I’d kill him and I meant every word.

I would silence him for life for all that he has done and cost me and Jamie, I thought enraged, as I went to rise on my feet.

But something hooked my knee in such a way I found myself dumped back into my stool.
Once seated, I found I could not get back up or even move to the smallest of degree.

My big barbaric, brute, knobhead of a man had me caught by my knee joint, and kept applying more pressure on it if I dared to move.
The pain I was inflicted with if I tried to stir the slightest was inexorable and even when I tried to endure it and press on, Jamie with only a flick of his fingers flopped me back into my stumped seat.
I was outright immobile.

As if I needed more proof to the fact, this finally sealed it shut.

My sodding husband was very, very, very strong.
He needed only his wrist at my knee to hold me put; looking as if rendering a whole person utterly disable fazed him not a bit and was done with complete control and hardly any strain on his part.

He calmly used his other hand to signal Murtagh to remain still.

As the bloody commander of his own battalion that he was, he mastered every detail and any subservient under his ruling magnificently and surgically.

I tried rising a few more times, but was rendered futile. Jamie kept applying constant pressure to my knee, which made it a doomed mission from the start. He was a big powerful windmill and me not even Don Quixote but Sancho Panza the squire at his feet.

When I remembered I had a voice, he must have felt me gear myself up to use it, because for one second his eyes came to bore into mine, giving me a look that said his other now free hand, for Murtagh already took his seat obediently, will be used to gag me if I were to let out a sound.

Said hand then came into view and placed a kerchief on the table to indicate his threat was ready to be administered if I so choose it to be so.

I had tears in my eyes from fury as much as from hurt.

But slowly and surely, as he knew I would, I found myself plumping myself submissively onto my pew, giving up, lowering my gaze to the ground, shutting my eyes and trying to shut my ears to what was happening around me.

No one paid any attention to me or my appalled grief-stricken suffering, they had the main speaker and the main attraction to keep their sight and ear transfixed upon. And my tormented response matched their own distress at the sight of my husband’s back and story.

A back that was mine, given to me by him to see and care for. Not to be ogled or pitied at for the man who had to sustain such atrocious acts, but for me to caress and adore as just another part of the man I loved. And by no means was it to be an instrument to diminish my husband’s true worth and value.

Was this Jamie’s retribution for my actions? Have I infuriated him so he cared none for himself, wanting only to punish me by forcing me to watch him treated such?

A small puddle of water gathered on the surface of the table below me.

I sniffed inaudibly as I could, blinking my vision to clear again and managed only to make the puddle grow.

If this was his reckoning, Jamie won by far.

“No” I said feebly into the ground. “Please no” I said again, as Dougal’s story telling voice had become an arousing to arm roar and Jamie simply shook his shoulders lightly to allow the raggedy ripped flaps of linen that were the last remnant of the shirt he wore, to slide completely off his back, as to allow all the lookie-loo’s to have a better glimpse at his humiliation and scars.
“Please leave” I whispered in a broken voice, my face still averted to the ground. I was unable to raise my eyes to watch anything to do with what was happening at this very moment. “Please Jamie for me”

When there wasn’t a kinder touch inflicted on my knee and not even one word came in response to my pleading, I forced myself to lift my gaze.

Jamie sat there, ignoring me as if I didn’t exist. If it not for his harsh holding of me at my knee to keep me in my place, I would think him completely detached from reality. He was staring straight ahead into nothing. As if the sounds coming from his right side were not the words uttered from his beloved wife but from an indefatigable gnat that needed to be snubbed so it will grow tires and leave. Only I couldn’t leave.

Jamie’s face was frozen as a stone aristocratic gargoyle; seeing and caring for nothing. I never saw that look in regards to me.

Murtagh would probably have wondered in dismay how was Jamie allowing himself to touch me so, only he wasn’t able to stomach the going-ons more than I could and he also looked away.

I had a small flash of memory to the first time this happened. And I remembered that as I watched in hurt and sorrow to what was done to him, Jamie very stealthily peeked behind his shoulder in the direction of where I sat. I thought nothing of it at the time. It was only later I realized how much more difficult this must have been for him because I was also there.

To bear the wonder of what I must have thought at what was happening in addition to all that was being inflicted on him. Or perhaps it was comfort he sought after, amongst the cesspool of Machiavellians exploiting him literally at the expense of his own back.

Whatever it was then, he wasn’t seeking anything from me now; and as I heard the clink clang of those coins being gathered for a cause that took everything from me last time, a burst of vile ran up my throat.

I narrowed my eyes at the taste of it in my mouth trying to swallow it back down and a few more newly made tears broke through my retina and ran down my cheeks.

I assume people around me just affiliated it with me being a dainty Sassenach woman, seeing such sights for the first time and was unable to endure them. Not that even the strong Scottish women around me were acting any differently.

"Why?" was all I could say as I averted my gaze to look straight ahead as well, trying to stare into the nothing as Murtagh and Jamie did, so perhaps I could force myself to feel nothing as well.

But I received no reply. I didn’t think I would. If Jamie had resigned himself to be this spectacle, he would bear it to the end, in the same harsh silence he bore it last time.
And just as last time what a spectacle it was.

"Ha, weel enough. 'Tis no a great deal, but we canna expect much from a small place like this though" Dougal said to the chiming leather bag Ned held for him to inspect
"'Tis a respectable sum" he came near me and Jamie, but I knew I wasn’t allowed to move or even look at him.

Jamie did relinquish his grip on me, at the very last second when it was all done. Only then did he acknowledge my existence and looked at me with a stare that made sure I knew, I wasn’t to say ONE word or pounce and scratch nobody’s eyes, as I so vehemently wished to do.

After this, his retaliation over my earlier actions, I dreaded the price of disobeying him again.

So I stared straight ahead frozen, blanked face and dying inside.

"... And wi’ young Jamie’s back to show, ‘tis money in the bank guaranteed"
Dougal slapped Jamie’s arm fondly.

"Be a good lass" he addressed me as he settled himself down on a stool, drink in hand, acting as if, after HE endured such a grueling and unpleasant task he earned his respite.
"Put ye’re needle and thread. Mend that” he pointed at what was left pooled around Jamie’s waist.

Jamie couldn’t remove it all the way this time, for he had one hand occupied with crushing my rebellious spirit to nothing.

I swallowed hard, pushing the tears that wanted to come out down and meant to reach my hand to take the much needed mending shirt, only to be outreached as Jamie pulled the cloth away from his body, rising to his feet and said angrily
"I’ll mend my own shirt. Heard the lady, we are all just bloody obstacles in her path" he added and stormed out.

I couldn’t stop the tears anymore, so instead of giving Dougal a more detestable look through my eyes, to match the hate I felt inside me toward him, which outdone the hate I felt for him when he tried to kill me, or instead of screaming, cursing and just outright opening my big, fat, filthy mouth that they kept shockingly tease me about,
I rose on to my feet, staggered a bit, for my knee still felt a bit numb from the lack of circulation it endured,
walked outside, managed to take at least a few steps away from the door, hunched over and heaved all the bad taste out from my mouth.

I couldn’t find Jamie anywhere last night and he wasn't nowhere to be found this morning.

He was definitely not the first thing I saw when today’s sunrise arrived; or even the third or fourth thing I saw
and I looked fervently, trying to make him so.

No twigs were gathered by my tent, no one packed their sleeping covers near my place of sleep although they slept on the other side of the encampment.
And I most certainly did not awake this morning, as I did a few mornings ago with a flower clutched in my hand.

"I am your husband, Sassenach. And ‘tis my duty to keep ye satisfied. From the first time to the last. Ye'll nay want or need another” he told me once.
And apparently, if my need for complete satisfaction included a joy from flowers, Jamie would fulfill all I ever wanted or needed in that regards as well.

Even in the dead of winter, which meant he would need to dig through snow or muddied soil to seek what lay hidden underneath, as the last remnant of summer or spring.
Or need, such in this case, to climb through rocky terrains, seeking between crevices and clefs in the bare limestone rocks of Scotland.

All, so I would awake to the sweet delicate vanilla scent of the Dark-red Helleborine flower.

The rare and most beautiful wild orchid was clutched in my palm when I awoke, as his most striking deep red-purple petals caressed my nose as saying good morning with a scented kiss.

Red is the color of joy, passion and love.
Pink signifies romance and love.
The purple color is usually associated with mystery, magic and wisdom.
Jamie’s flower with a heart of gold at its center, held the sublime combination of all three.

A love letter with no words.

I couldn’t put it down for days after that, not even long enough to press it.

When every small bloom on his stalk finally crumbled into nothing, as all growing living things do, I could have sworn I still smelled his bouquet around me, or felt the very fine short dense hairs of his flower- head caressing my nose.

Or was I imagining my husband’s fine short beard sprout as they began to spring, which I felt when he kissed my nose, as he loved so ardently to do?

Either way, I held none of them in my hand and grasp at the moment and wouldn’t, as it seem, for a very long time.

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I remember sitting in the Baird’s bed-and-breakfast library one day reading.

The library itself consisted of a shelf in Mrs. Baird’s parlor.
But as Frank was there, buried under the dozen books and papers who spoke of his genealogy, I found I wished to at least be close to him as perhaps to start bridging ourselves back to each other.

Two minutes past and I was more than bored, so I picked up a book by a Scottish writer from said
library, settled cozily by on a recliner and flipped idly through the pages.

The writers name is forever lost to me, but his words etched themselves into my mind never to be gone again.

“love is insanity.”

He wrote

"The ancient Greeks knew that.
It is the taking over of a rational and lucid mind by delusion and self-destruction.
You lose yourself, you have no power over yourself, you can't even think straight"

I don’t think better words could ever by written to describe my state of being at the moment.

They days went by,

Day chased night and night relinquished his hold to the next day.

We normally began our ride in the early daylight hours, with the freezing morning mist around us. But even as the day went brighter, I could still feel the same heavy mist in my lungs, shrouding my mind and burdening my heart.

So thick was the haze around me, literally and figuratively, I could hardly see who assigned himself to guard over me in this moment or the next. Instead of having only one shadow as usual, they all seemed as shadows to me now. Faceless shadows that all I knew of them was that they weren’t Jamie.

I always rode in the middle of the line of the twenty men-at-arms that comprised our little cluster of merry men, but I looked and spoke to no one anymore. Even my conversation with Ned died down slowly. I found I had no mood to engage in polite company, or to be a delightful companion to no one in return.

During the lazy afternoons or evenings spent in the wild, that stood as the outer limits to all the villages and farm-houses we patronize, the men all sat by the fire, ate, laughed and jeered.

I was seated outside the circle a few feet away. Sometimes I could understand a word or two, sometimes I could feel it aimed at me, but never a word from Jamie.

Jamie was closed mouthed, tomb faced, curled in himself under his plaid and mostly with his back to me as he laughed, ate and jeered with the rest of the men. When he wasn’t just outright disappearing to God only knows where that is.

I tried covertly looking for his eyes on me, or tried to watch him and read his mind to see if this storm inside him was making itself ready to blow-over and clear the path for our strong love to return.

But if he wished: Jamie could be as enigmatic and cryptic as the Egyptian hieroglyphs uncle lambs tried to decipher, as we scoured the pyramids of my childhood.
I thought he could hide himself from anyone but me. But apparently Jamie held back some tricks under his sleeve as well.

If I wasn’t so miserable and melancholic over being apart from him, I would probably be furious over his conduct now and his lies to me before.

A few days before we departed Leoch, we were in my chamber. Jamie had managed to sneak into my room just before the first star made itself visible in the night’s sky. Everyone in the castle being too busy with the cooking and the cleaning for the coming gathering to notice even such a conspicuous men as my husband frolicking about.

It was early enough that I wasn’t sound asleep yet, so as he leaned himself on my vanity to take off his boots, so he could join me in bed, I rose to help him and was using my lips to skim and kiss him all over his unclad form. That was fully exposed to my pleasure once I keenly pulled his shirt off.

I was going to reach there eventually, only Jamie lacked the patience to wait and was trying to haste my arrival at the destination of his desire.

“Sassenach” he whined breathlessly for the third time. “No” I said again, as I reached his stomach “I want to take my time!”

Once I was just below his navel he lost all fortitude and growled, “Sassenach, time is too much a precious thing to be wasted such, ye should really go on wi’ the business at hand”

“Good things come to those who wait” I bantered. “I waited long enough! I want my reward” he declared and demanded.

“You know, we are about to embark on a journey” I said rising to my feet, as Jamie frowned disapprovingly at my elected action “where we would hardly be able to find junctures to look at each other, let alone touch one another and then what will you do my impatient lover?”

“I dunno think I’d mind the no talking ower much” he informed me, affronted at not receiving his recompense

“I think I’ll find living without your taunting teasing tongue quite the peaceful circumstances”

After he caught the palm that came up to slap him on his head, twisted me around so that he was now tight-fitting to my back, he said

"See? Wilna miss the touching ower much either"

But then he gathered me further into him, kissed my thin-shift covered shoulder and said softly but earnestly

"I just need to see ye a ghraidh, I swear it. Just to see ye every day and all the time. To see that ye are weel and happy and I will be content and weel myself”

As I said; Jamie lied to me.
Dougal on his end remained suspicious as ever if not more so.

He would stare at me as if he was daring me to run. Yet again.

I suppose that being sad and mournful over my stature of being a captured and dragged against her will through the highlands woman then, looked the same as my wretched aching face over feeling like I didn’t have my husband by my side anymore. So in his eyes, I suppose, I seemed to be still very much a flight risk.

There were only a handful of things and people that could break my resolve or my spirit such. Jamie was very high on that very short list.

We had come on this trip to reunite again.

But now I could not help but feel as if I was only farther and further away from him. And with that, it felt as if my dream to return to my blissful married life was slowly, slowly slipping away.

All this was bad enough, but hardly the worst of it. That came as we visited village after village.

The faces of the dozens tenants and cottars, wives and children that we came across, were unrecognizable blurs in my tearful eyes. Which did not desire it, but could not see or gaze at anything but one man and his humiliation and exploitation.

Will I have to reconcile myself to watch my husband being misused over and over again all throughout this journey?

Hear that shirt ripped and slashed time and again? See men and women look at my husband’s back as if it was some shocking museum exhibition?

I felt more trapped here and now than between Leoch’s walls. Most of all for then I had Jamie and now I had nothing and no one.

Last time the desire to run, to be free, to return to my time and place was what sustained me. But now I didn’t even have that.

What I longed for and wanted to return to, would not even gaze my way; not even once, since all this began.

In the lowest points of my hurt I would, sometimes, find myself looking at my gold- wearing finger and wonder will I ever have my silver ring back? Will I ever have Jamie back?

Because for him to do this; time and again. For him to punish me so… I thought we would never come to such a moment or a time in our life together.

How could he be doing this?
Besides the damage has been done.

Lieutenant Jeremy Foster will return to his small brigade of men and will either scour for me or stumble upon me by mistake soon enough. It didn’t matter. What mattered was that the wheels have already began their motion and now Jamie had to get over himself and forgive me already!!!

But no. I was forced day in and day out to watch his pain. Mine being so great as to scare me enough to not dare to look at it.

But as every good psychologist or even a wise doctor could tell you. If whatever burdens your psyche will not be allowed to come out in order to be resolved, it will manifest itself as painfully as possible physically.

I had little appetite, if any. What I ate tasted as ashes in my mouth. As I sat there, in those local taverns and inns, surrounded by the sounds and visions of that shirt being torn repeatedly and frequently; as I watched all the people around the spectacle react to Jamie’s atrocious story and gasp, sob and look away at the sight of the marking he bore as the result of such atrocity being done upon him; my feeling of helplessness and sorrow grow even deeper.

I felt sick from all that was happening and so very tired as a result of my desolation.

The images seared themselves into my brain, so I didn’t even need to wait for the evenings where such things happened in order to feel so wretched. All through the day I could hear the cacophony that the crowd made as they were forced to bear witness to the terrors my husband’s back told. I still couldn’t understand all of the words, but Dougal’s cries for war and funds as if he was a General rallying his own men for battle, which he was in a way, played in my head in an endless loop.

Last time this happened, I didn’t really know the whole story. I only knew it to be truly dreadful from the bits and pieces Jamie told me beforehand, from the scars who told me on their own what acts needed to be done to birth them and from people’s faces as they were told about it.

But I really had no idea, not truly. Now I knew though. Now, I knew every gory, ghastly detail, every bloody lash. It was all endowed to me by the very man that performed them.

As I sat in those taverns and heard Dougal speak, the cold sneer of one Jack Wolverton Randall accompanied him from the shadows of my mind. As I sat on those wooden pews, I also sat in those luxuriously rich comfy chairs in Brockton, as Black Jack articulated every act and fact he unleashed on the young man that would not yield.

Romanticizing it, yearning for it and connecting himself to my husband forever.

And the most atrocious part was, that I now also knew what he subsequently did in Wentworth to the man I loved so much that I gave up everything for and was willing to do the same again.
Did he still want me to?

I couldn’t even imagine Jamie’s face anymore. My eyes were branded with only the sight of his bare back and his scars. I could see quite vividly the cat of nine-tails administering a hundred lashes upon a hundred lashes on Jamie’s back until slivers of bone appeared. I could see it as if I was standing in the court yard with the rest of the spectators, observing Randall flogging him until there was so much blood neither Jamie nor Randall could stand steady on the post’s landing anymore.

I could hear so clearly Randall profess to me as how he still carried on with the flogging, deciding to bleed my husband to his end, until Jamie lost not only his consciousness, but also his father.

And now just as then, Jamie was taking his punishment without a sound or a word said; or without surrender and mercy asked for.

The sight of his scars never bothered me. Never made me feel pity for the majestic warrior I always perceived him to be. To me he was so beautiful from the start. Even not in a state of complete enamor with him, I have never denied he was one of the most handsome, striking, remarkable men I ever did see. Only the retelling of his story of torture and scourge and everyone’s reaction to the vision and tale, made sure I would go about my days feeling weak, depressed and broken by the same sight that never caused me to feel such before.

I hardly ever slept anymore; too many dreadful images willing to come to view and hunt me through the night.

Out of sheer restlessness I would sometimes leave the little field-tent the men allocated for me from the start, sprawl myself on the ground nearby so I could look up into the skies in the Hopes of winning some respite from myself under their vastness and splendor. Only to find myself watching the most stunning shades of grays and blues, which were decorated with the most striking diamond crystals that brightened the heavens, and hurting even more over watching them on my own, as I made my own shining crystals descend from my eyes.

After the first time I allowed myself to cry I couldn’t stop it from happening time and again in random fits of sadness and fury; that were so great I thought I would shatter under their weight.

How could Jamie be doing this?

After a few times of feeling so sick by the sight of all those flamboyance tableaus Dougal and Jamie were creating, and needing to hurl myself outside for some fresh air or else I would swoon, or flinging myself out the door to retch and spew the very few things I did manage to eat, I simply stopped attending the common inns and taverns. I didn’t care for Jamie’s decree anymore. My wellbeing was in greater danger if I stayed to watch this, than if I remained unprotected and alone. I gladly gave up the couthy warmth and food they supplied, so I could sit alone in the dark-
It could be, that somewhere in my mind I hoped Jamie still cared enough to worry sufficiently about me not being at Murtagh’s side and under his protection as to confront me on it. To finally speak to me!

I just needed a chance, an opportunity. Perhaps this fight went on as long as it did, because we had not had time alone to settle it. Possibly, if we did have that time to yell, scream, plead and to be heard by one another this would have been over long ago.

I did believe Jamie and I could settle all. We have done so in the past.

I knew for a fact Jamie could reach me through anything. He did so through my rage over him 'punishing' me after Fort William. And I was more than furious then. I saw blood and wanted nothing to do with him anymore.

He did so without even saying a word or even being present when he relinquished me to the standing stones so I may return home and leave him. And I found myself returning, unable to part from him.

And he did the impossible and reached me through my mourning and sorrow after faith’s passing.

I, on the other hand, only truly did it once. After Wentworth. But the circumstances then were so dire as to convince me I could do it again through anything.

But no proper crack or fissure appeared itself in that wall he built between us and I was unraveling quickly.

What I forgot was, that just like my tell-all- glass face can’t wait to spill the beans when it comes to my emotions, so can’t the rest of me stay quiet.

An explosion was eminent and a long time coming.

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We were all sitting around the fire.
Me on one end and the rest of the men in their own circular cluster formation at the other.
As last time, Jamie was with them and not with me.
But this wasn’t last time, things were not the same now as they were then. Where they?
He was mine, not theirs.
I suppose in a way Jamie’s behavior to me over the years of our marriage spoiled me rotten. For I was most accustomed to the fact that once I was around, he would always look at me or touch me in some way. And if he didn’t do so, there was always something that connected us.

I remembered the last days I spent with Frank.

Both of us mostly sitting on two sides of the room we occupied. Each one of us busy with his own affairs.

The war made us both very independent and self-reliant individuals. We learned to live with ourselves and loved the company in question.

Before the war, I lived as a wandering vagabond that accompanied the men in my life. I was always strong-minded and self-sufficient, only I was all those things while existing as a complementary dish to the man beside me. I suppose I found it to be the most natural thing after traipsing around the world at uncle Lamb’s side, through all the years that constituted my upbringing. I never wished to be any different.

Only the war came; and everything and everyone changed.

Once we returned to one another, Frank and I had to sort of fight to meet one another or awkwardly insert each other in the other’s new vast world. Most times we easily met in our bed. We could always find our connection there. Only I was the one that usually initiated such things, thinking that he was feeling perhaps shy over our time apart to ask it of me.

It was certainly for my pleasure as well. We were a good match in that regards, always have been, which made me believe that with time we could find a way to make our two worlds combine into one again.

But it was never like that with Jamie.

Never.

From the first moment Jamie said he was bewitched by me, or so he so vehemently claims.

Jamie always wished to connect with me in any way it was possible or that was afforded to him. And he did, he could. And it was the easiest thing to let happen. It was me that fought most of the way against how natural it was for us to be together.

In the beginning it was being my friend, my confidante and without my knowledge, the one that kept a watchful secret eye over me.

Once married it was more than lust of the flesh that bounded us.

We always touched and looked. Somehow we were always together, even if we were physically apart.

Perhaps it was Jamie’s lack of knowledge and experience on such matters, that made it so;
but with the same deliriously enthusiasm he wholeheartedly, eagerly and excitedly discovered all he could on the act of making love;
Jamie was also unbridled, unconstrained and most irresistible in his zealously, feverish passion to know and discover everything about me.
Just to receive more and more of me.

So even as I tried building walls between us, Jamie with the same ungainly, blundering, eagerness conduct of his would naively crash into them and crush them into dust, leaving nothing between us.

Once I entered a room with him in it, I could feel him knowing I was there.
A hand with be outreached to me, inviting me to join him;
a look, or a smile would question my wellbeing even with no words.
And in those very few cases such gestures were not afforded to me, mostly when he was buried in the Lallybroch accounts or dealing with the espionage lettering in Paris, my presence was always quite noted and welcomed in some way.

Even to this day, we always seem to find ourselves enraptured, interested and enthralled at whatever the other had to say, or what we thought on this and that.
If we weren’t present ourselves in the occasions our life held, we would always end the day telling each other the other’s happening throughout our unshared hours.

So, I suppose all that pampering was the reason that seeing him now with his BACK to me as if I didn’t even exist,
as the rest of the men all sat in a circle lounging, joshing, gearing themselves to hear the evening’s folk-tale, told by Dougal this time;
was the last straw that broke this camel’s back.

I sat there and couldn’t see a thing but his red hair cascading on his dark-blue coat.
It was growing so wild and long and my fingers twinged with the yearning to comb themselves in it and watch as his eyes slanted with the pleasure and content my touch always aroused in him.

But my big cat was no more.

And his conduct and the lack of even one word to me were now triggering wrath and insult.
I was sick and tired of being sick and tired over him.

But then Dougal rose to his feet,
licking his fingers with sheer indulgences as to receive the last remnants of the succulent hare the men snared for dinner, which I couldn’t bear to eat myself.
He stood up, cleared his throat in preparation, so he may commence with the telling of his tale of The Mighty Bruce, one of Scotland's sons, which raids and mischief terrorized the Englishmen for years upon years and were the theme for many legends to come;
and all the fury and affront I felt a second ago toward Jamie shifted to Dougal.

I bore my eyes into Dougal heatedly.
He must be the cause to all that was happening now, I decided violently.
He must’ve said something to Jamie.
Made him go along with his plan somehow. He must have!
Jamie would never do this to himself or to me otherwise.

And with that conclusion the flood gates opened and all my abhorrence poured out.
That man, took everything from me, time and again.

Beginning with my freedom when first I came here, which I could only put behind me once I received Jamie in the exchange.

Then he went on to mould me into a pawn to control my husband. Planning and plotting all this time to take ownership of all I possessed as Lady Broch Tuarach, which was his main, if not the only, motive to marry me and Jamie.

Forging me into yet just another weapon to be used against the British.

And then he finally succeeded with his plan to take everything from me, when he tried to kill me, forcing Jamie to strike first and costing Jamie his life and future in the bargain.

I wanted to hurt him.

Dougal, just as Jamie, was a fine storyteller. Only he wasn’t the only one that knew the power stories held in them, or the benefit and influence the one utilizing them possessed over his audience.

I rose to my feet and said in an acerbic tone

"I have a story"

Every one of the twenty men-at-arms turned to stare at me, shocked beyond words at my little jack in the box burst. They gawked at me as if they didn’t even remember I was there in the first place. In their defense I did play mute and dumb quite frequently lately. So they all gaped at me, all but one that is.

Jamie’s lack of any sign of life or reaction to me made me take a determined step forward, not waiting for Dougal to clear the stage for me and carrying on with my anecdote.

“See, I lived in India for a while” I said speaking to all the men but was aiming all my elf-darts at Dougal.

"There I heard my fair share of stories, mostly about the gods they believe in. You see in Hinduism, which is their faith, there are many gods not just one” I went on with my elucidation.

"Bloody heathens" Rupert interjected in his gruff - guttural voice.

“Come now, come now, Rupert, old friend, the ancient Greeks were no different in that regards from the lands she speaks of and we still follow to this day many of their philosophies” dear old Ned jumped to my defense. I suspected he was most pleased to finally have some sign of life from his silent as a tomb journey companion, which he apparently missed.

“Still Bloody heathens” said Rupert staying closed minded and inflexible as quite obviously all Scottish men were. Nice to know my husband wasn’t the only one acting such.

"Maybe so” I said with asperity to make it clear that they should all just shut up and listen.

"But that is what they believe in. May I go on with my story?" I asked but awaited no reply
“In any case, according to their faith, each god is ordained with a specific role, a purpose you may say.

"Is a God no all omnipotent?" questioned young Willie curiously "I mean, if one god can do everything why would ye need othe…?"

"Hush now" I said harshly and repentant at once for my conduct toward him.

Willie as never been nothing but courteous and respectful toward me and most significantly he was the first one to come to my aid, with no qualms, when I asked for assistance in the life threatening task of rescuing Jamie from Wentworth.
I owed him better than this, no matter how I felt.

"I’m so sorry Willie. I only meant it’s quite complicated. I mean the whole religion is quite complex" I hasten to explain in a conciliatory tone.

"For the sake of this story though, just regard it as a fact and perhaps at a later time I would clarify it further for you if you'd like" I said and smiled as kindheartedly as I could in my current state.

"Aye" he smiled shyly back "I'd like that"

"Wager ye would" chaffed him a pounding on his back Rupert “ye slinkin’ dog ye. Wager ye LIKE that verra much”

I ignored all these exchanges and intended to go on with my fable.

Jamie was still seated with his back to me.

He was by now truly the only man whose attention I wasn’t fully granted and he was doing so in much a palpably manner.

The tone which I spoke now at, was a bit shaky over my hurt on the matter, but no less cruel and biting over his conduct to me.

"As I said, there were many gods, but they all originated from the three main gods. Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and protector and Shiva to destroyer" I said, averting my eyes and hate to their intendent man as I spoke the last name.

"Shiva alone is responsible for the destruction of the world in the end of days. All he does is to annihilate and obliterate" I added piercing my stare into Dougal as I took poetic license and simplified the story to suit only my needs.

"Then he’s a bad god?" queried Willie

"Yes Willie, quite the worst kind" I answered him with an edge to my voice, yet again having eyes only for Dougal.
He in return narrowed his eyes back at me, not yet quite getting my meaning but clearly feeling he wasn’t going to like where this was heading.

I was of course stretching the limits of my artistic liberties.
The Hindus did not really simplify their gods into the known patterns of bad and good.
Such thing meant a beginning and an end and anyone that ever read a single book on the subject knows that in Hinduism there is no end or beginning.
According to their faith destruction just means a beginning, a regeneration.
Shiva wasn’t good or evil, he just was. A force of nature if you will.

But I had a point to reach and I was going to falsify all the facts I needed to make it.

"The story is about Shiva and his son, his kin as you all like to call it" I moved things along

"It all began with Shiva’s wife. Her name was Pravati. Now Pravati was the goddess of love, fertility, devotion and divine strength"

"Got him a good one" Angus squeaky always lascivious-sounding voice joined in to say his piece on the matter.

I knew if my intent was truly to win my audience and have them eating from the palm of my hand, I only needed to tell the first few lines from the many tales that told of Shiva and Parvati sexual escapades, which described in great details all the situations and positions their union and spiritual release involved.

As a young girl, that wasn’t so genteel regarding such matter to say the least, they never failed to make me blush quite profusely.

But that was not the point or reason to my story-telling at the moment.

I did however steel a sidelong glimpse to see whether the man I did share such connections with was showing any inclination toward me; only to be confronted yet again at how deeply adamant Jamie was in his resolve to ignore and spurn me.

"One of Parvati and Shiva's sons was called Ganesh" I carried on feeling more and more vexed.

"Christ, those are some o' the oddest names I e'er did hear" whispered one of the men-at-arms called Dòmhnall to his friend named Pàdraig as he passed him the whisky flask.

"Ganesh is a god with a body of a man and a head of an elephant" I began to finally make my point.

"What?" I heard Willie gasp at the notion, as Ned chuckled finding the image most amusing.

"Yes" I said "But you see he wasn't born that way" I clarified for everyone "In the beginning he was quite a normal child, some even say a most beautiful one"

"Weel, one should think so, him having the goddess of love and fertility and all that as his màthair" said Ned obviously conjuring up images of a Venus or Aphrodite like goddess as reference.

"Yes quite" I agreed shortly, so I could go back to my tale "Now Parvati made their son from the dust she removed from her own body and then placed him by the entrance to their house so she could go bath herself and not be disturbed"

"Dust?" I heard Rupert sneer with disapproval "See, what I tell ye? Bloody heathens the lot o’ them”

One sharp glance from me and he was silent again.

"So here was this sweet newly-born child sitting and playing quietly as to not disturb anyone. Enjoying himself with watching all the wonders of the world for the first time, with the same unflagging joy a newly come into the world has” I described it all for them to see "Being happy and content with nothing but himself as only small innocent bairns can be”
Then I regained my shrewd- piercing- cold stare at Dougal again
“But then came Shiva”
I said and the acid in my voice was so rough as to fill my mouth with the bitter taste of it.

"Here came the great destroyer, the worst kind of slaughterer and saw a child he did not recognize near his house, playing pleasantly and harmlessly by his lonesome"
I lifting my nose at Dougal, who sent me knife-like stares right back, recognizing my evil intent, but still having no idea where or to what this was leading to.

"So what does this worst kind of god do when he encounters what he doesn’t know or what he finds a bit strange or misunderstood by him?” I asked tartly

“What? What did he do?” asked a most curious Willie almost jumping to his feet.

"Shiva burned his own son's head and laughed as the child was burning alive in front of him" I said dryly.

All the men's faces froze in astonishment

"His own son dearie? Are ye quite sure of such a thing?” asked Ned clicking his tongue in condemnation and displeasure of anyone let alone a father doing so to his own blood. The Scots placed family above all else and I knew that.

"Yes Ned. His own son, his heir, his most precious thing in the whole world" I said interlacing my arms into one another on my chest and cocking my eyebrow at Dougal
"He meant to burn his own son to ashes, only because he didn't understand what and who he was".

"Have you ever seen a man or woman being burned to death Dougal?"
I enquired bitingly
"Ever stood by and did nothing as another screamed and begged for mercy as you watched your own actions burning him to death?"

"So he died?" asked a man I never spoke to or knew his name.

"Well no" I answered him "After learning from Parvati what he had done, Shiva searched around for something to replace the child's head, his own child that is, so he wouldn't die, and the first head he found was one of an elephant.
So that was how Ganesh found himself with a body of a man and the head of an animal.
Only the main point of the story is not how Shiva rescued his son"

"’Tis nae?” asked Willie puzzled

"No." I asserted "The point is not even how Ganesh was the injured party, or how he so unjustly got mutilated by his own kin, his own father that is.
No.
The main point of the story is that Shiva the god of destruction and obliteration was so used to extinguishing all in his path without even giving a second thought anymore to what and who he was hurting that he didn't even stop to think;
to notice, that he was taking the head of someone he loved, someone he was meant to protect and care for.
He was so used to ruin and shatter all around him that he ended up ruining and harming his own life.
See, he lived the way he did, thinking he could do all he liked, hurt whatever and whomever he
wished. Believed that he could control the devastation and its results. But what the idiot failed to see was that, hate, destruction, decay they are all forces far greater than any man or god. If you play with fire you get burned" I said narrowing my eyes at Dougal "You may think that you are in control of your actions and can get away from all those wrong doings with your hands clean, only to discover your own heart and soul have become so black and corrupt that you can't stop hurting even those you love and should care for"

“What is it that your accusing me o' exactly?” Dougal hissed vehemently at me

“Suspicion Always Haunts The Guilty Mind; The Thief Doth Fear Each Bush An Officer” I quoted King Henry the VI in satisfaction.

"And what d'ye mean by such?” Dougal leaped onto me, clutching my biceps with his palms. I could feel his short nails imprint themselves into the skin of my upper arms even through all the layers of my attire.

"THAT'S ENOUGH" I heard the raging voice of the one man I longed to hear speak for weeks now.

His tone now was so harsh as to put my previous cruel tones to shame.

"I said—" Jaime thundered “LET HER GO!!" But Jamie wasn't waiting for Dougal to comply or refuse his order, he clutched Dougal by his shoulders and hurled him back and away from me.

Dougal stammered back and I found myself wobbling and falling on my arse from the impact of the catapult.

Jamie at once send out his arm to me, to help me rise, but I wasn't willing to give him the satisfaction of being my knight in shiny armor.

No, not now.

He had spent weeks refusing to even acknowledge me existence, shattering me to pieces until nothing was left whole anymore, making me so sick as to lose all ability to even care about myself or what I was doing, pushing me to such a point that I lost every ounce of good judgment.

No.
He wasn't about to receive clemency from me.
Just like all those long, lonely, agonizing weeks he didn't offer it to me in return!

"You let go of me!" I shrieked at him, rebuffing his arms away from me and rising on my own two feet by myself.

"At least Dougal has the courage to speak what's on his mind" I shouted at him as I stood up, dusting my skirts much forcefully than needed.

"At least he says when something or someone is bothering him and confronts them about it" I went on harshly, now expanding my hate to two men instead of only one

"Sasse... I mean Mistress" Jamie tried to interject.

"Mistress is it? Well the Mistress is not listening.
The Mistress is done with listening. The Mistress doesn’t care anymore" I screeched at the top of my lungs at him.

"You took me”
I cried out, my tears so close to the surface
“You took me against my will to do with me as you wish” I shouted at him, truly unraveling
"And now I'm trapped, alone and miserable and I'm tired of being silent about it" I bawled my truth.

He did.
Jamie took me against my will.
He stole my heart from me and kept it for himself.
Snared me so utterly, I was enslaved to him completely.
And then, so enamored with him and isolated from anything else I could possibly find solace in, he leaves me?!?!?

There was no way I would stand for it any longer.

Dougal, thinking my accusation of capture and my mutiny against it was aimed at him and his actions, was stampeding toward me, probably ready to set my head and wicked mouth on fire in accordance with my story.
Jamie saw it in my eyes, as I took one step back;
as all living things do instinctively when a locomotive comes charging toward them.

He flung himself bodily on the man, holding him firmly in place with his body and two arms that clutched themselves around him.
He was holding him so tight that Dougal’s eyes protrude out a bit.

"Stay put" he ordered Dougal “Ye’ll no come near her”

"Stand aside at once Jamie! This doesna concern ye" ordered Dougal back in a breathless strenuous hiss as he wrestled to free himself from Jamie’s tight hold on him.

“This is between me and the LADY. Someone should ha’ taught her proper manners a long time ago” he threatened looking straight at me.

"Ye'll no touch her" Jamie bellowed bringing his face into Dougal’s, glaring at him
“No one finger” he barked at Dougal.

The two man were almost forehead to forehead, eyes open wide in fury, their stand telling the story of a cruel, merciless, perilous fight soon to start.

"Come now, come now” said Ned after he and the rest of the rent party leapt to their feet and came to surround the gearing to fight men.

They all recognized that this was not some friendly brawl that was about to commence and looked most concerned.

“The lass is obviously in a state of some distress and in need to walk a bit to regain her composure” said Ned inclining his head to me as to suggest it will be best for all concern that the cause for all this trouble will not be present at this moment.

"If ye think I'll stand for such disobedience and disorderly amongst my man or anyone else under
my possession" Dougal spitted his words vexed to Ned and Jamie.

“Ye'll stand in your own blood if ye dare touch her” Jamie spit back.

“Come now Dougal, Jamie... The lass has quite the argumentative quarreling tongue on her, aye, we all ken it. But surely there is no need to act such over her havering it about” Ned endeavoured himself to resolve and disarm the situation with diplomacy, all awhile trying to place himself between the two men.

The others came to his aid to pry the couple loose from each other.

“Now, seeing as we havena got amongst us a branks or a ducking-stool to muzzle the lassie” Ned tried to lighten Dougal’s mood with humor “I say we let this go for now and leave the lass with her fine-bonny Oxfordsire- English- heid to comprehend her misdoing, curb her distemper and join us later with an apology” he spoke to Dougal but obviously dispersing such orders to me.

I turned my back on them and began walking away.

My last sight was of Murtagh standing by his chief’s side as Angus did the same at Dougal’s, Ned still holding his ground between them, as the rest of the men-at-arms divided themselves between the two.

The last sounds I heard, before I heard naught else, were in VERY loud Gaelic.

But I didn’t care anymore, I felt as a deflated balloon. I had no more air in me to be aggravated or concerned about anyone, not even myself. Besides Jamie was in no real danger with all the witnesses around them, who prevented Dougal from trying anything. And they could shout and cuss all they wanted I couldn’t be bothered.

I couldn't take it anymore, my body felt so hollow and sick, I couldn’t think or see pass that. I felt so tired, sad and beside myself. I thought letting some of it out from in me would help, but I was proven wrong.

Jamie was the reason I stayed here; in this time. He was everything! And I had to watch him slip through my fingers and still remain in my sight?

Why was he doing this? How could he do this?

I couldn’t think straight anymore over being so emotional, so I was truly surprised to lift my gaze from the ground and find that I had reached some place I did not recognize. I couldn’t even hear or see any of the men, the horses or any signs of the camp anymore. Any yet again I found that I still didn’t care!

I plunged myself on a small outcrop that was just by my feet. I crossed my arms together on my chest as if I was a sulking child, feeling my face was sending the same massage.

Every ounce of anguish he put me through with his childish pride and temper were boiling to their breaking point and were becoming pure steamy rage.
I was doing what was right by us.
I was making sure our plan stayed its course.
I ... I ... I ....
I was doing everything right.
And he?
What was he doing?
Punishing me by torturing himself?!?!?!

I wasn’t tired and heavy-hearted anymore, now I was restless, agitated and frantic to say the least.

Unable to sit no more, I rose to my feet, tramping and stumping from one side to the next.
Inept at succeeding to utilize one of Jamie’s tactics to calm himself down and only managing to make myself more fidgety, I marched to the mostly naked cherry blossom tree that stood poised a foot behind me.

Healing hands by damned;
I felt so furious I was going to smash and pound into the tree till I bled.

I couldn’t contain my feelings anymore.

I lightly spread my feet apart, positioning myself in the a boxing-stand I saw the soldiers use in their pass-the-time, place- bets-on, good-spirited brawls they frolicked with one another.
I curled my fists with my thumbs out just as Jamie taught me.
I pulled my left fist back, took one deep breath, knowing this was going to hurt beyond measure and finding myself still numbly not caring.

I launched my fist as hard as I could at the tree trunk, closing my eyes tight, awaiting for the outside pain to take my attention from my inside misery and fury.

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I frowned with my eyes still closed.

I was supposed to scream from pain at this point over hitting solid thick wood and instead it felt as if my hand had smashed into a cushion made of a tender rubbery substance of a kind.

‘Was the tree rotten?’ I puzzled to myself as I apprehensively cracked my left eye as to peak at what was happening.

Just between my fist and the tree trunk stood taut a flat fleshy palm that protected me from injury and pain.
I opened my eyes fully, only now realizing I was weeping.
I tried to clear my vision and follow the arm, that was connected to the palm, across its length.

I began to pant as I reached his chest and swallowed hard as I lifted my gaze to look upon my protector’s face.
I pulled my breath sharply in and almost choked on it.

Jamie stared back at me not moving.

We just stood there frozen, staring into each other with no words.

No one moved, no one even blinked.
One would have presumably think us statues, if it wasn’t for the fact that our chests moved up and down, slowly with every heavy breath.

Bit by bit our breaths were becoming one of the same.
Linking us yet again after we were miles apart from each other for so long.
The rhythm so as one that I didn’t know anymore was I taking my own breath or was my body only breathing because his was.

The longing of being apart for weeks was now more than apparent in both of us.

I meant to stay mad I truly did.
But it was Jamie that stood before me now, not the cold gargoyle I watched for so long.

He wore no mask now and my heart exploded into tears, revealing to me the true extend of my burning for him.

My breath shattered and my mouth opened slightly but I found I couldn’t speak, even had I had any words to speak of.
I didn’t remember what anger, frustration or pain was, it all vanished.

I wanted to run into him, only to find I couldn’t move a muscle.

So I just stood there and cried, went on crying that is; it felt as if I never stopped.

It was Jamie that broke our stare and lowered his eyes to the ground, swallowing as if he was preparing to speak and found his larynx completely dry.

“Ye canna” he simply said with such a broken cracked voice that he needed to let out a small cough as to not choke on his own words.
I couldn’t for the life of me grasp what he was talking about, but as I couldn’t do a thing but stare at him and let my tears fall from themselves at this moment, I didn’t even question the matter and just went on standing there transfixed to my spot.

“Ye promised” he said with such anguish, unable to raise his gaze to look at me.
His entire countenance expressed only desolation and he sounded so wretched and solemn.

“In Paris” he went on enigmatically, for I had not even one thought as to what he was referring to or talking about. “Ye promised we will always find a way back to each other. Ye gave me your word” he said and a tear glistened from his half-closed, lowered to the ground eyes.
“And-” he swallowed harshly again “And this time, when we were in Leoch ye said… ye said” He finally lifted his eyes to me and I saw they shone with moisture.

His face quivered with pain that was waiting to erupt from just below the surface of his skin
“Ye said, that;
Be it two hundred years or two million miles, ye would always come to me, ye would always find me”

A few days later and Jamie promised me that I needed only to look either to my left or to my right and that’s where he’ll be. Always.
That was what I should’ve said, but all I could do is begin to shake as the pain rose just underneath the surface of my skin as well.

“I’ll take ye against your will Claire” he said forlorn, unable to bare to look at me again and inclining his head down.

“I mean…” he stuttered “If it comes to it… if ye try to leave me, I’ll … I dunno want to do so, but if ye’ll try to run… if ye’ll leave, walk away from me… I canna let ye” he said, sounding more as a pitiful, weak child than a man that outweighed me by more than four if not five stones and could do to me as he liked.

“I canna let ye go” he said again sounding as if he was pleading with me and not threatening.

Let me go?
Was he serious?
What was he even on about?
My mind danced from question to question unable to understand what he was even saying, or from where his thoughts originated from.

Was I hallucinating all of this?
Is this why nothing made the slightest bit of sense at the moment?
And was this delirious state the reason why I couldn’t speak or move?

Yes, it must be.
This must be some sort of dream and as in all dreams I found myself with no voice to speak at.

But it wasn’t, it couldn’t be; I reconsidered the thought.
I could feel his heat radiating from the palm of his hand and into mine.
It trickled through my arm, it seeped into my bones.
I could feel it inside of me making me feel truly warm for the first time in weeks.

And his redolent, his musk, it was right there, a few inches from me.
It was exuding from him.
His light sweat, probably from the fight, was evaporating into the air and carried with it his masculine, deep scent to me.
He smelled of woods and fresh washed by rain soil, a light tangy virile horse fragrance and of the spice only known by one name; Jamie.

It covered me as a blanked, warming my insides much more intensely than his own true body heat, which intensified as he closed his palm around my fisted hand.

It made me let out a small squeak as if I was afraid, but I wasn’t.
My only fear at this point was that this will all end.

I wanted to bury my face into his chest.  
I wanted him to hold me so tight I will never be able to breathe again.

But he must have thought I was afraid over his threats to me for he went on apologetically.

“T’ma sorry mo nighean donn, I would ne’er hurt ye, ye ken that… only… Claire can ye no see ye are mine?”
he beseeched me to find that truth in my heart
“Ye canna be another’s anymore. Can ye no see that?”

I averted my gaze from his palm that held mine and looked back into his eyes.  
What was he talking about?
I couldn’t understand what was happening now, more than I could comprehend how could he torture me all these weeks before.

Jamie took one small step toward me.  
So small it was more a shuffle of his feet than a step, but being only an arm-length away from me to begin with, he was now so close to me, that I felt my legs buckle.
Jamie caught me with both of his arms around me and we just crumbled to the ground together.

It was Jamie holding me.  
Not the cruel, stone-faced man that held me in that tavern or that didn’t acknowledge my existence all that time after.
What touched me now was my husband’s love.
I felt it in his and my heartbeat.

And just like from the first time he ever touched me to the last, it affected and unraveled me to my depth.

I sprang on him, my arms engulfing his shoulders and crushing him to me.
I held him so tight, my muscles shock from the strain of it.

“Don’t let go” I said in a voice between a gasp and a sob “Don’t let go of me again”
He didn’t.
He clutched me rougher than I did him.
“Harder” I ordered him and Jamie did the impossible, as he always managed to do, and merged our bodies even closer than before.

I was held so tight around my torso, my lungs were crushed, but for the first time in weeks I felt I could finally breathe.
Jamie took one palm and cupped my head from behind, moving his face just far enough so he could place his forehead to mine.
“So ye still want me?” he asked in a breathless quivering smile.
“Want you?” I blurted out with the same lack of air in my voice.
“Jamie” was all I could say as my hands came to cup his face.

Our lips skimmed each other’s, hardly touching, our chest went up and down in heavy unison.  
We both knew that once we would connect.
Once our lips would meet, we would take each other in such savagery that our clothes were not the only thing that will be ripped to pieces.
I leaned into him through our joined foreheads, imagining what I will do to his body once he was inside of me.
I was going to ravage him in a way he would quiver and be unable to speak or walk for days after I will be done with him.
I was going to hurt him and he was going to like it.
And Jamie knew it.
He saw that look in my eyes before and he seemed more than willing to lay his body as a sacrificed lamb at the alter of my desire.
I could feel his consent to the slaughter through the thickness of his kilt, pressed into my stomach.

His tongue skimmed my upper lip, then came to part my lips entirely as to penetrate into me.
Just before though, he said, a bit incoherently over his protruding tongue.
“Ye see, ye canna leave me, ye still want me” and with that he took my mouth fully, rising to his knees and lifting me with him.

“No. No. Wait!” I ordered placing my palms on his chest to push myself from him and using all my strength to try and come to a standing position.
Jamie clutched my biceps and pulled me back to him
“No” he growled “ye canna change your mind!”
“Ye still want me, ye canna leave me” he informed me “And I’ll do it Sassenach”
he clutched harder into my arms
“I meant what I say. I will keep ye e’en against your will till ye be reminded of how much ye truly love me Claire. Ye’ll no leave me. No again” he ordered once more.

“Let go at once!!!” I wasn’t a stranger to giving orders as well.

Please Claire, dunno leave me. I will die if ye do” he said almost yelling into my face
“Or if ye do. If ye mean to go, kill me first”
He did let go of me then, but only to grip at his dirk and shove it in my direction hilt first.
“I wilna let ye go, so if ye must, go head, be done with it” he thundered.

And when I didn’t move he took my right palm by force and rammed the dirk into my hand closing my fingers on the grip of the hilt.
“I ha’ fallen more in-love wi’ ye since we crossed those bloody things again” he said furious as he began loosening his gorget and was undoing his collar ferociously
“And I canna… I wilna live wi’oot ye anymore Claire. So please” he nodded to me as to indicate some mad frenzied acquiesce as his neck was now fully exposed
“kill me first Sassenach for otherwise I take ye if ye like me to or no”

To say I was in a state of complete dumbfoundness and bafflement is not giving justice to what I was experiencing in this very moment.
I was a complete disorderly jumble of emotions and I have failed to recognize even one of them by name.

“Are you demented Jamie?” I puzzled in a weak voice.
I honestly thought he was.
Maybe that was why he was doing all he was doing these past weeks.
He had gone insane.

Dear Lord, he was crazy and I … I didn’t know what I was supposed to do now that he was so clearly not in his right mind.

Me leave him?
He was the one leaving me!!!
I mean he did leave me.
He ignored my presence, wouldn’t even look at me, and now made confounding accusation of me escaping?!?!
And demanding me to kill him if I go through with some plan I never had?!?!

He was killing me, day by day.
And he hadn’t even said one word to his dying, beside-herself wife all this time.
And now this?

I had an urge to stick his dirk up his arse for what he did to me, but not to cut his throat.

He stood there poised on his knees, awaiting my decision with his shirt half unbuttoned as I towered above him hardly holding myself upright on my feet, feebly holding onto his dirk in my right hand and entirely speechless.

"Please Claire. I canna do this anymore" he said heart-broken.

“Even havin’ ye here wi’ me, but nay truly wi’ me these past weeks.
I havena slept or ate, or drank a drop” he enlightened me “Or if I have. If by some miracle I found myself able to stomach a single drop or bite.
I would take one look into your face and I would find myself running to the woods to hide from the men’s eyes as I would retch it all ‘oot.
I havena slept in so many days now.
I keep trying to walk the woods to calm myself and I canna find solace or regain my composure as to come back to ride wi’ ye and the men.
I ride like a scolded dog behind the line.
I canna even dare to look at ye for I am too scared to fall to my knees and weep.
I'm lost and in pain without ye Claire, so PLEASE, dunno go from me or kill me. Either way this ends tonight!"

He pulled me back to him by grasping at my forearms and dragging me down to the ground with him.
His dirk thumped on the ground, just by our standing on our knees forms.
One of his hands came to engulf my nape to bring my face to his.

“When ye touched me just now. When ye wanted me… Christ Sassenach, can ye no wait till your love returns to me?” he questioned solemnly and awaited apprehensively for me to reply.

When I didn’t, still stupefied beyond words or capacity for movement, he took my lips fervently, his tongue piercing into my mouth demanding me to comply.
“Ye see ye still want me Claire… Ye still want me, so ye canna leave me” he said as he guided me into a more inclined position, coming to lie atop of me.
“What?!?!?” I tried to say but my words were swallowed by his mouth which was relentless, so it came out as a ‘wamm’.

“I’ll make ye love me again. I did it afore Sassenach. Our first night I took ye wi’ my body, until your soul was mine as weel. I’ll do so again ye’ll see” he informed me against my muffled objection noises.

"I was so scared ye wouldna forgive me” he said, sending his hands to the hem of my skirts again “Ye canna leave me ever again Sassenach no matter what happens. Do ye no see that by now? I canna be left to live wi’oot ye” he said fanatically as he rucked my skirts up

"WHAT?!? Jamie you have to stop!” I said trying to distance myself to look into his face so as to try and get answers to what was going on, but he wouldn't let me break away from our kiss

His hands slowly become more assertive on my body as he took hold of my breast and engulf one of them in his palm, closing my mouth and cries of indignation with his lips.

My breasts grazed and pressed themselves hard into the fabric of my garment wanting to be touched by him.

His thumb circled where my nipple laid under the fabrics and it ached with its desire to release itself from the confinement of the prison my apparels were right now.

It felt more than divine to be touched by him, but I couldn’t allow him to do this with so many things between us hurting and bleeding.

"No" I said firmly and put an arm length distance between us with my palm at his chest pushing him back.

"Sassenach, I assure ye I’ll prepare ye right” he said, trying to return me to a more inclined position on the ground.

To be truly honest, I was more than ready myself, as confirmed by the slickness of my inner thighs, but after what he put me through all these weeks and with all these disconcerting unfathomable happenings now, I found there was one more thing I didn’t need any preparation or help with at the moment; to fight.

And I was more than ready to have at it.

“And I assure ye, I’ll be quick and quiet, no one will ken” he said sending his hands now to scrunch up his kilt.

"Well I won't be." I determined "You need to explain this silly, vindictive course you placed yourself on and I will not be neither quick nor quiet with the things I have to tell you James Fraser” I said and half crawled on the ground as to get from under him and to be able to rise to my feet for a good proper stramash.

“Ye whit?” it was his turn to be utterly perplexed

“Vindictive? Who is trying to retaliate on ye Sassenach?” he asked worriedly “I’ll kill him!!!”

“YOU ARE” I said in cruel asperity and felt as if all my anguish was crashing back into me in alarming harsh waves.

“You proudful, conceited jerk.

Your vengeance against me over my disobedience is just about the cruelest thing I have ever seen you do to another living soul.

And I have known you to be many things, James Fraser but never cruel. No never truly cruel.
And foremost you were doing it to me!!!
To me!!
You…you foolish arse” I screamed at him in a frenzied, unhinged emotional storm.
“You keep joshing me time and again about MY pride Jamie?” I said angrily “But it is you that
lives zealously in a ‘my way or the highway’ fashion”
“Whit? What’s a high-?” he frowned in bafflement, but it was my turn to speak and I was more
than irate now and unwilling to stop and explain myself.

"Why? Why? Why?" I marched to him and pounded on his chest time and again, hoping he felt the
pain of my wrath for him making me sit and feel his humiliation and pain countless of times.

“Why would you ever conspire to punish me such?
And revenge over what?
Over me persisting with our plan, so WE could be married again?!?!?” I said clutching at his coat
lapel tight.

"Why? Why would you do this to me again?" I fall from my feet now sobbing and he had to catch
me before I collapsed to the ground.

He cradled me in his arms, crouching to the ground beside me.

I was so worn out and feeble emotionally, my physical state was exactly the same.
I couldn’t take it anymore.

"Why? Why Jamie? I can… not do this again… Jamie, I can’t see…see… you get hurt like that
again”
I said between gasping for air and sobbing frantically
"I couldn’t stop it Jamie… I couldn’t protect you then… and to make me… watch you go through
that again… and you doing this to yourself, to punish me"
I broke down as the pictures of all I been through these past weeks ran across my mind.

“You made me… live that… again and … I thought I could forgive you for this.
When you touched me again… I thought I could forgive you all of this but…”
I began to feel light-headed over my inability to take a full breath into my lungs, my nose was
running and I coughed and whizzed as I went on with my half gibber ramblings.
“Do you think it’s only your choice you bloody man? That you can do… what…ever you like… to
yourself and … that…that the people… who… love you must stand for… it?
You… broke me Jamie. You truly… did” I wept ferociously
“And why? For what? Because… I wanted… to marry you? Because… I implemented… our
ONLY… plan for it? Jamie you are… truly nefarious for doing this… this to me”

"Shaa, shaa lass” he caressed my curls and muttered sweet Gaelic whispers in my ear to calm me
down “Sàmhach sìth tha mo Sorcha. Sàmhach sìth mo maise”

"n…no.. I won’t. I will… not… make little sound… I will not… be… be in… peace” I said still
hiccuping, but already half lulled by his strong, warm, engulfing arms that I dreamt about for
weeks
"I’m …I’m mad at you…for what you… took from… me…, I need… to be able to protect y..you.
I n..eed… to know I can change the future and keep you safe this time and you did this…
wilfully… you.."
My face were buried into his shoulder and I was rocked to submission.
"I ken that lass… shhhh… calm yourself Sassenach… shhh… ye are to wild-up my love. You must try to breath a bit or ye’ll swoon… shhh… please try, ye’re scaring me such" he whispered into my ear.

"I … I… no…"
I tried to go on, but after standing my ground with Dougal, struggling with myself, having a heated moment with Jamie in more ways than one, being thrown for a loop and incomprehension and finally saying all that was burdening my heart and mind; I was done. I had no more strength in me.

And Jamie, as always, damn his wisdom, was right.
My head throbbed and pounded making me feel dizzy and shaky as if I was truly about to faint. Especially if I couldn’t slow down this hysteria attack. And Jamie knew that.
He didn’t prolong the fight, didn’t retort with his own words to my harsh accusations and blame. He only wished to soothe me down and to keep me safe until I would be well again.

"Aye, that’s it. Rest a bit on me my Sassenach. Dunno be so in turmoil, ’twill all be set right soon ye’ll see… Shhaa…
I love ye so my heart, I love ye so" he said “Bi suaimhneach mo ghràidh. Caidil a nighean. Mo tè calman, mo chridhe”

I heard no more before giving in unreservedly to the emotional and physical exhaustion that this day inflicted on me.

I will fight him on this, I promised myself, only his voice was rumbling in my ear.
His soft, but no less deep baritone speaking voice that could calm and wangle the wildest of horses, could always do the same to me as well.
From the first time I stood there by the stables and watched him entice and lure the colt to come to him, to heed his say, from first he spoke to me by the hearth in a sotto voce tone, caressing me; I knew it, somewhere, somehow, even then I knew.
I felt the magnetic pull that voice held on me.
And I wasn’t wrong, that voice could cajole me to do and forgive all.

I hungered for that voice for so long.
The voice that always held a smile for me in it, even in sleep.
The voice that his possessor would purr and murmur in my ear as he nibbled on it in the mornings, inquiring if I was awake, just before he would go on and wake me up himself.
The voice that spoke to me so many times and told me all its secrets from the first day we married.
The voice that if I asked, would answer truthfully.
A voice that made me laugh at what it said and how he said it.
A voice that professed his love to me time and again and was doing so now as well.

With such a voice in my ear, entering my mind and his arms around my body, draping me after being deprived for so long the chance to even graze his skin; those were a much too powerful forces.
So much so that I could not fight them even in my better days.

I needed sleep and I needed to be asleep in his arms.
Jamie could argue the fact all he wanted, but he held so much more control over me than I could ever have on him. So just as he ordered my body to do, I closed my eyes and slept.

I woke awhile later.  
It didn’t feel as much time passed, but I felt as if I slept for days.

Jamie was sitting on the ground with me on his lap, still rocking me and interchanging between whispering sweet-nothings to me, to kissing the top of my head and caressing my curls.

“My silly lass, my busy-bee-heid frivolous lass of mine” he said, thinking I was still asleep  
“Revenge? Vengeance? Retaliation?” he snorted into my head as his palm came to smooth my curls away from his nose  
“As if I could e’er plan to hurt ye such” he said half amused half truly shocked by the thought of such a thing even possible.  
“Christ, I’d rather lay in my own blood and let the crows peck at my flesh for all eternity than to allow one man to hurt ye, let alone me!” he stated appalled  
“Ye’re off your nutter my Sassenach. Jesus Christ, the itch must’ve caught ye to think such things”  
He said most certainly to himself, sure I was still dormant. I thought he must’ve cried for I felt as if my hair was a bit damp and his voice was still a bit brittle.

"I almost couldn’a do it" he said “I was so afeart.
Air chur eagal a’ mhionaich air.
In God’s name-“
He went on, speaking into the air in a mix of English, Scot and Gaelic  
"after the first night, after handling ye such, after I touched…” he couldn’t go on  
“I ran furth and heaved my heart ‘oot.
Christ, I couldn’a stop.
Ye looked so hurt and I was the one that hurt ye and ye cried. Christ Sassenach, ye cried, please dunno e’er cry such again” he said rocking me harder and now I knew he was weeping.

“I dinna take a braith the once the whole time we sat there an’ ye looked so-“  
A fresh new tear landed on the top of my head.  
"I kept thinking if I would walk for awhile after I could gather enough courage to face ye again, so I could come back and no throw myself at your feet and beg your forgiveness. But naught worked. I couldn’a even look in your direction.” He said as his voice trembled and quaked  
“For every minute I could stand to be around ye an' no fall apart, was an hour I trudged through the land trying to regain some strength back. And when I would look at ye... Christ in those moment when I would gaze upon ye… ouch, Jesus punish me” he growled "ye seemed so miserable and sad, I thought ... I feared... I dreaded perhaps ye were planning to escape again. Ye had the same look ’bout ye as last time when ye wanted to run.  
I thought ye were planning your escape, that I would wake one morning and find ye gone”

He almost crushed all the air from me as he enveloped me closer to him with both his arms and I felt another tear land on my head.

"So I stopped sleeping and watched ye e’ery night all through the night to make sure, only… Dear Lord ye ne’er slept, so I started making insane plans at how to keep ye here against your will.
Telling myself I had to do so, but that ye will eventually remember ye loved me. But I knew, I knew I would keep ye even by force if need be until ye will remember that. I dinna care. I was so scared ye would leave me. Dunno leave me Sassenach, dunno leave me, please Claire dunno leave me again” he kept saying over and over again swaying back and forth with me in his lap

"Or leave me for deid, Lord, for I wilna let her go otherwise. I wilna. Dia, I swear it on my blood. I'll never let her go. I canna" He spoke appealing to the heavens now, clutching to me even harder as if daring even the almighty to try and take me away from him. "Dia, leig le mi cum oirre. Please, let me keep her" he implored

"Then why?” I asked, my voice hoarse and quavering just as his.

Jamie jerked a bit. I startled him. He truly thought he was speaking to himself.

But I didn't know how long we had before any justification, he must have used to give us this time alone together, would waver and the men would come looking for us. If we were to settle matters between us, I would have to hasten my steps.

"Why?” I asked again with no preliminaries. “We said you will not put up with this. You said you would talk to Dougal and make it clear to him”

If Jamie wasn't doing this as some childish revenge plan, Then why in fucking hell was my husband doing this???

"Then Why?” I demanded again "What possible reason would you have to do this for? What good can come of…?”

I choked on my own words.

It wasn't only my sanity and quietude that having him and his touch back bestowed upon me. My wisdom and sense were the next to follow.

And realization came crashing down on me.

And he was going to pay for it!!!!

"You goddamn dirty, ridiculous, juvenile... no not juvenile, infantile, yes infantile! You preposterous, arse-hat, baboon’s faced, halfwit Neanderthal” I cried out in indignation.

Now that I had him in my arms again, now that I felt his love and care for me and my heart and mind weren’t only busy with feeling so scared, miserable and lonely. 
Now that my brain wasn’t occupied with only the question of what will become of us. Now I knew why he was doing this.

All this time I was asking the wrong questions.

It wasn’t how he was doing this to me that I needed to ask, it was what he was gaining from doing this that I needed to query.
I snapped myself from his grasp, backing away from him on hands and knees in fury

"You bloody ape, you silly yokel, you, you … SCOT!!!!
Sweet bleeding Jesus!
What did you think he would just give me to you????!!!!"

Chapter End Notes

Latha math{=homage; honour; hello; good day}
Slàn leibh {=formal goodbye}
a gaol [=darling or sweetheart]
tha mi gad ionndrainn [=I miss ye]
mo luaide [=my beloved, darling]
mo caileag [=A girl or woman with brown or black hair/ young female]
bean [adult female human being]
craicte [insane, demented, out of control]
Do mi! [to me]
Dè tha thu a déanamh?" [=What are you doing?]
màthair{=mother}
Ye whit? {=What? Pardon}
Sàmhach [= with little sound]
sìth {= peace, quietness, silence}
tha mo {=is that belonging to me}
Sorcha {=Claire/ light, bright, clear}
bi {= (to) be} suaimhneach {= motionless and calm; placid}
Caidil a nighean. Mo tè calman, mo chridhe {= Sleep lass. My female dove, my heart} 
afeart {=Alarmed, afraid, struck with fear}.
Air chur eagal a' mhionaich air {= be afraid to the belly}
furth {=The out-of-doors, the open air}
braithe {=To breathe}
Dia, leig le mi cum oirre {= God, to permit me to maintain possession on her}
RENT continues

Chapter Summary

No, this is not a joke- just me! :)
Happy April fool's day!
Again my apologies (aren't you getting tired of hearing me say I'm sorry? But I am afraid that the workload of my life and the people in them, that I care more than my own life, about are in great need of me of late)
But, I said that no matter how far I got, by April first, I will post.
After what all of you gave me, I owe you guys, at least, that.
And no matter what I got it's yours (so if its crap, I'm truly sorry again, I'll fix it in the future).

BUT!!! People it's 8 days to season 2!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
There was no way that I was going to leave you all with the angst and unable to- take- a full breath impatience that is are daily dose these days.
So, I will be posting every day a little of my writing (I hope I will be able to rise to my own challenge) just so, maybe, I could make one person wait, become a little bit more tolerable.
As always dictionary in the end.

Chapter Notes

By the way, a while back a person named JLYVR, approached me and volunteered her own time and braw talent to help me make my work better, by suggesting to assist me in the grueling undertaking of editing.
You all know that I used to post a lot faster with hardly any editing at first, which in turn caused a lot of stupid grammar mistakes all over the work (it's hard to concentrate on that when you're trying to write fast and are in the emotional heads/Hearts of the characters) and it did take me a while to find my voice and my writers legs (I'm still working on that- but always remember, I was a complete 'virgin' when I first started here and I think/hope I got better;).
I have not had a chance yet to do more than correct a few things in first chapter that she pointed out to me, but I think it already made the work MUCH better!!!!
So, I wanted to publicly tell her thanks' a dedicate the next chapter to her (hoping that she won't find too many faults in it.).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

RENT continues
“SEEEE?!” Jamie demanded of me.

“Couldna tell ye a thing ‘obout it, or you’d act such”
He said as he, also, rose to his feet for this celebratory occasion, folding his arms on his chest and signaling I wasn’t the only one ready for a fight.

Apparently, I was, also, not the only one that having the other in one’s arms recovered and livened one’s self.

Once he knew I was better and once he realized I wasn’t leaving, Jamie seemed to be truly mended from his previous desolated, bereft state.

Yes, once he had his wife back, even for a short while and I seemed to be in a good enough shape for it, Jamie had a few things to articulate to me as well and he was willing to go at it in full gumption;
just as I was, if no more so.

“Ye would ha’ acted such” he pointed at me as to indicate my current behavior.
“And if ye would’ve done so near the men, or worse than that, in Dougal’s vicinity … Sweet bleeding Jesus, Sassenach” he exclaimed
“I’d ha’ t’ kill the man all over again and then where would we be? Ha?!
Or did ye ha’ it in mind t’ drag me through those bloody things again?
For I dunno ken ‘obout ye Sassenach;
I, dinna appreciate the ordeal.
Nae. I dinna care for it one bit!!!” he reiterated the obvious, again, vexed.

“So couldna tell ye beforehand now could I?” he wiggled his pointing finger at me in order to make his point but succeeded in only making me feel as if I was a child being scolded, which I didn’t care for, to say the least.

“Couldna trust ye t’ no show your feeling on the matter all through our ride, now could I, glass-faced Beauchamp?” he exonerated himself, “Ye said so yourself;
‘Simply, stand up and stab Dougal right in his nonexistence heart or in whatever shriveled raisin he was using for a heart these days’.
Ye said so wi’ me in your bed and in your arms.
‘Not caring the slightest what will become of me’ ye said and brook no interference on the matter. So? Should I allow my callous, regarding herself, wife to act such? And watch her get ‘oot- right killed as she did so?
Which was what would’ve happened! For ye ken as weel as I, ye would ha’ failed t’ hurt the man. And ye do ken that weel!!!” he pressed the issue of my indisputable impending failure on the matter further.
“Ye forced me t’ do this, such” he went on with his vindication.

“Why, d’ye even ken how many machinations were needed on the matter?
Telling Dougal I’ll only enter at the last second, sitting myself by ye as to restrain ye from your own foolery.
Dear holly Lord Sassenach- the kerchief!!.
Christ! D’ye think I enjoy planning t’ details how t’ tether and muzzle m’ own wife?!?” He said, depicting all his grievances against me, as he became red-faced and flashed eyes.

“Only this ‘boorish Scot’, this ‘bloody bastard’, this ‘effing baboon’ or ‘gorilla’, depending on the day in question, or if I’m facing ye, or wi’ my back t’ ye.
This ‘misanthropic Neanderthal’, which I failed, still, to ken that word’s meaning.
This ‘barbarian Casanova’…”
He went on, recounting to me all my past slights against him;
which in turn, proved, yet again, how much Jamie listened to me;
if he liked what I was saying or not.

“YOUR-” he waved his finger at me, yet again, to make his point clear,
“lout, grouch clown of an effing husband ken verra weel who he’s dealing wi’ so…” he concluded,
“Scream, cry, bash me all ye want Sassenach, but I couldna do nay different wi’ ye”
He said, bringing his words to a close and returning to his folded arms stand.

He stood there as if he knew that this will happen; this fight.
And he was acting as if he was making himself ready to be admonished and chastised properly by
me, to be sure.

And as always, when it came to his requital over his misdoing, Jamie was willing to take it, but not
before he made it quite clear that, apparently, I forced him into this course of conduct and left him
no say on the matter!?!?!

Well, if he was ready for a fight, he was sure as hell going to get one; I resolved.
I mean, such an impetuous, Devil-may-care, loud-mouthed wife as he described me to be, would
never give up the chance to have a good proper brawl, now would she?!!!

“You unreasonable capricious child!!!” I bellowed at him, storming in his direction to face him
face to face, even if I needed to stand on the tip of my toes to do so.

"You put ideas and decisions in your head, refusing to even listen to other voices but your own, and
that one seems to think it runs the world!!!"
I roared into his face.

"I'm so sick and tired of having to argue over everything with you. Why can you not just leave
matters well enough alone?"

Jamie towered himself to his full height in front of me, but inclined his face down, as to allow me
the privilege to meet his furious face and burning with anger eyes, through and through.

"Because, ye’re m’ wife and ‘tis m’ job-” he spoke through a clenched jaw.

"To take care of me, yes, I know! Heard it all before” I retorted his own words back to him, losing
all patient with his red-blooded, domineering overly aggressive ways.

"Well, Jamie, don’t count your chickens before the hatch, mister, because I’m growing quite weary
of trying to put you back together, after each time that you keep ‘seeing to things’ yourself!” I said
and actually felt as if my eyes almost pop- out of their sockets over the open- wide glares I was
giving him with my eyes.

"And whit exactly d’ye mean by such?” he demanded, taking a closer, louring step toward me,
shortening the nonexistence distance between us.

"That you should let someone else sit behind the wheel for once” I yelled into his face nonplussed.

"Whit?” he frowned in confusion and seemed unsure as how to react to that.
"You thought that if you allowed this to happen again he'll… what?
Be inclined to… to… do WHAT?
GIVE you the wife you want? Without demanding more of you in return?
That he'll just turn around, then, and force me to marry you?
Which I haven’t got a good enough reason to do, if there isn’t an immediate threat on my life!
So that, in turn, will clearly accomplish nothing, but to solidify his belief that I AM a spy for the
English, and therefore should have my throat cut out and most assuredly not be allowed to plight
my troth to the man he intends to force or guile into bequeathing and relinquishing his men and
properties for his own precious cause”
I went on to yell the obvious facts that Jamie and I spoke at length about,
time and again, and were the clear reasons that brought forth the need for us to act as we did thus far.

“Why, of course! From all our past dealings with the man, he has always shown us his gracious,
generous nature and will, indubitably, reward you for your contribution to the cause by being your
genie and granting you three wishes!
What were you even thinking? That if you let him do this to you-“

"No ALLOW!! No, DO this t’ me… I volunteered" he answered, tapping his fingers on his thigh
and narrowing his eyes at me in some odd sense of victory???
For evidently, I wasn’t flustered enough by this point.

"W H A T?!?"

My shriek almost shook the trees around us.
Some nocturnal animals did stir from it and made themselves known through air and land.

His hand shot up to cover my mouth, as he berated me with his eyes and words.

"Nay. Ye listen t’ me now!” he ordered, bringing his other hand to the curve of my spine and
holding me between my gagged mouth and my pressed back;
and yet, again, proving, that against him, resistance was futile.

"Nae a nighean. Ye said your piece. Now ye listen” he said, fastening me to him so close that my
body was almost leaned on him entirely.
“Aye. I volunteered!!! Back in Leoch, when I left ye in the surgery an’ went after Dougal, to tell
him I wished to join the rent party,
I, also, went on t’ say how I wished to be more than a hoe wi’oot a handle to him and his raison
d’être.
Convincing him that I fully support the restoration of one Bonnie Prince Charlie to the throne, and
used the same words he spoke to me, as to persuade him of that.
Saying how me joining the ride will bring forth the wondrous opportunity for me to lend a hand to
what seems to be my only chance to save m’ own silly, lanky neck from the noose.
I laid ‘oot his own plan for him t’ hear, as how to gain more traction an’ funds on the road for his
precious holy grail”
he said, looking and sounding quite proud of his own shrewd and cunning ways, that apparently
started long before I ever supposed.

“To his shocked face, I grinned and said that he shouldna be so surprised ower me turning t’ him such, for my oath was perhaps given to Colum, but we all ken who is the Laird’s head, arms, and feet outside the castle walls; if no amongst them”

He added, sounding so proud of himself for choosing the right words to kiss Dougal’s arse properly.

“‘Besides’ I said t’ him ‘this is MacKenzie land and my obedience must extend and be enforced…”

So long as my feet rest on the lands o’ the clan MacKenzie’”

He austerely quoted himself to me, as if those words weren’t the words that fed some of my nightmares at night.

“… and that I will find it a great insult that the right hand of the body I gave my word too, which I hold to the highest regards, wilna utilize what I gave, freely, to the left hand of the body. And me knowing that this will all be done in the name of the same cause that is so near and dear t’ m’ own heart; as ‘tis to his… Weel, such a thing only makes the wine taste that much sweeter and satiating”

“Must I ask?” I tried hissing in rage to him, but my mouth and voice were still stifled under his palm, so it came out as a feeble murmur.

I hoped my eyes, who were darting from one of his eyes to the next in wrath, would convey my point.

I was truly inflamed;

Jamie, as it seems, as been deceiving me for a long while.

And more so, he had caused me so much pain, over letting his own back being exploited such, for a cause and words I knew for a fact he didn’t believe in anymore. If he ever.

Or even if he still believed a Catholic sovereign should govern Scotland, he most assuredly did not think that this preposterous pretender to the throne was the deserving face to fulfill the position.

No. Not the man that in the face of obvious defeat and against the advice and pleading of his best commanders and supporters, still ordered for his men to be sent to slaughter on Culloden Moor. To charge into the teeth of musket fire, and onto the grapeshot that were to be fired from the English cannons on flat, open ground.

All so he could conquer his coveted London, despite him having Scotland at his grasp.

And doing all that... or will be doing all that;

I corrected myself,

while, he himself, still held on to the privilege that his bonnie arse could always flee and rest in French exile, under the protection of a cousin, that may not support Charles’ bid for the crown, but would agree to anything if it meant he could stick it to English and continue his feud with them.

Then why in hell, would Jamie ever do or say such things? Or volunteer to have it done to him?

“I needed him to stand on tottery ground wi’ me, to unsettle all he e’er thought he kent of my motives or beliefs” Jamie went on, understanding my muffled question, but taking his sweet darn time answering it.

“And I kent that Geordie’s death, God keep his soul” he did let go of my mouth then, in order to cross himself
“Would lead to a gap in the chord of his trusted circle of devotees. One that I could fill...

BUT, only if my gestures and actions would be of such self-abnegation that there would be no doubt left to who and to what I serve.

So…”

He let out a short breath through his nose and the over-thinking, worrying crease of his, that runs perpendicular across his forehead made an appearance.

“So-

I sacrificed my own flesh, name, and dignity for it. Again” he said simply.

His eyes, now, were mystified and dimmed themselves, as they left me and bore themselves in the distance, giving away the pain and humiliation he endured, which he hid for me all this time; during all those evening and occasions that this abasement and belittlement of him was being done to… him.

He took one long, deep breath as to sustain himself further and went on with his exposure, returning his gaze to me.

“It had t’ be this grand gesture, Claire,” he said, his voice spoken in an undertone, making it almost impossible to hear it, were I wasn’t so fixed firm and tight to him by his arm at the curve of my back.

My eyes darted from one point to the next on his face, reading his pain.

“This… sacrifice of myself at the chantry of his beloved cause… I had to do it!”

He said, his skin tightening around his face and his lips hardly moving as he spoke.

“I couldna leave doubt in Dougal’s heart ‘obout me.

And the ramifications of the way I chose to do so had to be fast accumulated, or my whole plan wouldna ha’ worked and it would ha’ taken too long for the results to come to fruition and to exert the influence I required.”

One of his eyebrows shot up a little then

“So, I also added all the words and the feel of I saw ‘only him as the rightful Laird of Leoch, even if others doubted it’.

Colum doing as he did and saying what he said, made Dougal carry a great need for such approvals and had him bursting wi’ fear o’ me following my word o’ obedience t’ Colum.

So, such things only made the soil more pliable to be sowed and harvested by me.

So, I had to take advantage of it. Dunno ye see?”

But I didn’t see.

I didn’t see or understand a thing.

Why was he doing all this for? Why did he think such actions were needed, or that their results will force or guile Dougal into giving Jamie the wife he desired? Me that is.

“And it worked! Did ye no see?”

Jamie went on, still sounding inscrutable and making no sense to me what so ever, but for some reason sounding more revived by his words now.

“Ye no see me laugh wi’ the man, take private words wi’ him? Share m’ drink wi’ him?”

I wasn’t gagged anymore, but, I was so floored by all these preparations and arrangements,
beforehand, that all I could do, as I was confronted with all these disconcerting details, was to nod weakly, as I felt my eyes and face frowning out of sheer perplexity.

I did, though.  
Remember all these occasions he spoke of, that is.  
All the times I saw Jamie with the whole kit and caboodle of them.  
All massed and bundled together, crying out ‘Slàinte mhòr agad!’ to each other.  
The sight of it left me even more broken at his ability to do so, with us being so estranged to one another.  
I, myself, found I couldn’t even crack a smile; not even to Ned or Willie.

“‘Weel’ he went on, starting to sound even… cheerful???  
And fumbling his, free- hand, fingers exciitingly by his thigh.

“This time, I was privileged t’ so many other secrets than before. The men and Dougal confessed and bared so many more plans, methods an’ strategies wi’ me.  
Particularly, wi’ the ample amounts o’ tipple I procured at every inn after…”

He had the decency to avert his gaze from me then, lowering his eyes to the ground.

“‘After…”  
He moist his lips  
“After the all thing wi’ m’ back was done…  
People were most gracious t’ the poor tortured lad that survived such a…”

I swallowed hard and my vision blurred a bit, as my eyes glassed themselves slightly with water.

Jamie must have heard me swallow, for he hastily lifted his gaze to me and wanted to clarify something

“Claire,” he said apprehensively “I …”

He wanted to reveal the reason for all of this, or so I thought, but at the very last second he decided better of it and went on with HIS way to clarify his actions.  
His long, winding way, that is.

Jamie, as it seems, wanted to come to the reason he has been acting such, only after he would make some things very clear to me.  
This usually meant that he wanted me to change my mind over something and he was leading me on a long journey, so as to see things his way at the end.

Or at least, I was hoping all this plotting will be explained by some sort of plan, or reason for it when all this would be done.

I wanted to know what drove him to do this.  
For, as I said, he wore no mask now.

With me, alone, in the dead of night and in the depth of the forest, where only trees surrounded the little dell we found ourselves in, what held me with only one arm at the curve of my back was the much powerful, capable, canny, astute, sharp-witted man I married and loved.  
The much powerful, capable, canny, astute, sharp-witted, hurt, disgraced, unjustly forced into a degrading position, man I married and loved, that is.
And he was as such over all that he had to endure. **Again.**

**So why do this?**

“Ye see, I kent that no matter what I did or say, Colum’s action still forced Dougal to find a solution for me being the next in the successoral line to be Laird. So I kent no matter what I did differently, this time, that is, the wedding will no suffer for it”

“Nay. That wilna be changed! That is still happenin’”
He threatened fiercely, so as to make sure that if anyone was contemplating to derail the occasion, that person might think better of it, or else… And his arm pressing harder into me, at my back, made it quite clear I was included in that threat.

“So why do this?” I asked in a soft-spoken manner, but with a distinct impatient undertone in it, finding that I might now possess the scope of his vast schemes and concealing acts, but still held not even one reason for them.

**I have always claimed how good Jamie was at getting what he wanted. Didn’t I?**

“I dunno doubt who and what ye are, Sassenach”
He said softly and so earnestly, that I almost returned the ghost of a smile I saw wanting to spread on his lips, as his all countenance seem to thaw and ease with some light behind his skin now.

I felt my expression melt back in answer as well.

“Only ye wanted to, Sassenach.”
he said sobering up,
“It was your goal, just as much as ’twas mine.
But, Claire, if ye aren’ae supportive of the cause or its means, then… Sassenach ye’re as transparent as a shiny, clear as crystal, bright window.
One only needs to look at ye to ken what ye hold, or try t’ hold and hide on the other side of the glass.”
He said, as if adding to his roster of reasoning for not telling me about all these elaborate plans of his, that apparently ran very deep and for a very long time.

And here I thought that reaching me every night and working all through the day in the stables, under the very strict hands of one Old Alec, were enough to keep Jamie much too occupied as to conjure up, or muse about frightening images that might cause him to act and conspire such.

Apparently, my dear, soon to be husband, was one of the very few man that could perform multiple tasks simultaneously, or, at least, do so on some matters.

“Why do this?” I asked in a soft-spoken manner, but with a distinct impatient undertone in it, finding that I might now possess the scope of his vast schemes and concealing acts, but still held not even one reason for them.

“For Dougal kens my feelings for ye, and they are enough stray lobsterbacks around these parts.
that have naught t’ do wi’… wi’ Randall” he said the name as if tasting bile in his mouth, which in turn felt as if it ran down my throat as well.

“-, so as to execute my plan right.”
He ended his point, sounding so matter a factly, as if this was some obvious clear fact and explanation to all that has been happening these past weeks.

“What?” I gasped in surprise, not knowing what first to address and query.
“He does not!” I declared, choosing the initial.

I took both my hands to his shoulders as to push myself free from his grasp.

Jamie took his time in deciding whether to let me go or not, even with my glares at him and my demandingly thrashing about, but eventually, reluctantly, he gave his acquiescence and I was in possession of my freedom, with my feet squarely on the ground.

“Aye. He does” Jamie declared, using my own un-moot, assertive tone back at me, as I took a few steps away from him, trying to still find some sense of his words.

“No! We were careful! He doesn’t know about us! Or has any proof of it at hand” I said with conviction, truly believing my own words.

“Weel, perhaps no us then” Jamie, half-heartedly, forfeited, tapping his fingers on his thigh “but ‘bout me he kens, to be sure.”

“What? How? Why would you even say that?”

"Sassenach… I have… I mean, we, may ha’ fooled them all in Paris, as I say, aye. But, on two things I could ne’er fool any other souls about, or own the ability to do so even if I did wish t’ do it; and those are my devotion an’ my inescapable, inexorable drawn to ye.”

I found myself lowering my eyes demurely and noticing I did so, only after the fact. When I raised them up again, Jamie was fighting the desire to grin as he scrutinized me. It has been too long, for both of us.

“Dougal sent his witch to clear the waters for him many a times.” he said, exerting his self-restraint and choosing to move things along, rather than continue our little staring match. “And e’en told her to try and sample them, t’ see if I hold another in my heart.” He said, watching me closely again, and I felt myself blush over the manner he chose to do so in.

“Now, as ye say, he has no real proof or a clear wittins ‘about us, that is true. And me taking the beating in the great Hall for Laoghaire, and … weel, your, ‘dear’ poppy jay Luke and all your ‘dalliances’ wi’ the man, may ha’ kept them guessing and thrown them aff our scent a few times. As do all stinkin’, slinkin’, filthy pig’s trails do…”

“Jamie” I sobered, quite swiftly, from my blushing state, to glare and berate him for the slights against Luke. And his odor. After all, he had done these past weeks, Jamie had no right to besmirch or speak- ill of anyone, let alone poor Luke!
“Aye, weel;
I still say he must be a ‘germs’, or kin t’ one, for when he shows up, I feel poorly!!” he said in a resentful snort for Luke’s existence.

“But, as I was sayin’-”
he said, returning to the truly important issue here, with his next breath.
“We ha’ fooled everyone in Paris, so ye do ken I possess the knack an’ the clever mind t’ do so in Leoch.
And if it be my chief concern at the time, I would ha’ acted as such.
True, my mind and acts do go maddie from the wanting o’ ye, an’ the needing of ye”
He said half grinning and with a distinct tilt to his head, as the recollections, of him taking what he wanted and needed, crossed his mind.

It was quite obvious that was the case, for Jamie has a very trademarked set of expressions when such things are on his mind.
And I knew every one of them quite intimately.

A lowering of my chin and my brow lifting up, signaled there will be none of that without a point!
And an added glare, asserted it better come soon!

“Aye weel,” he straightened himself again
“as I say, although all the Luke and Laoghaire troubles made it quite impossible for me to keep m’ peace and tongue at bay, I still hold the art for such knavery to be applied when I ha’ need of it”
He cocked his brow at me as he went on,
“For ye do, at least, must, concede to me the fact that I most masterfully tied a bonnie flaxen beard to the face of Christ back in our time in Paris, did I no?
Leoch wouldna be much the arduous task than that for me t’ handle”

“And what does that mean?” I asked, vexed at his amusement and smugness, and at his, now, not-making-sense-at-all words.
Not that his previous ones, which I still didn’t understand the reason for them, made much logic to me as well, but still-

“Haha..” he expelled his breath out, in a loud explosive gasp, as he lifted his nose at me “Dinna much appreciate when ‘tis done t’ ye, now d’ye?”
he said, referring to my- I swear unintentional - habit of saying things he didn’t understand, or that were out of his time reference.

But then, he quelled his need to be one-up his own wife and said
“It means to hide deceit under a veneer of Christian piety, as we did in France under the excuse of devotion to the cause and the restoration of the Catholic throne.”
He humbly explained, unable to keep his wife in the dark for long.

“How” I said, hugging my elbows, appreciating the gesture, but still a waiting for all his explanations to come to an end with some point and reason to them!

“So as I say, I kent them all in Leoch were wary of us, and I let it be kept under a smoldering fire, knowing us being us might cause suspicion, but no outright fact or ill-denouement.
So, Dougal will still bring ye on the road as a mean of succor to him and as a tool to exert guideship ower me.
I mean the man his naught if no vigil and thorough.
So wi’ ye here and him wi’ his, almost, nae doubt regarding my inclination t’ ye-
he smirked at the word ‘inclination’
“the idea regarding the match between us would be brought firmly and firstly into his mind when
he’ll think of solutions for the two of us”

“And what to the lobster… I mean redcoats that have nothing to do with… well, Randall, have to
do with all of this? And what in Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, would be MY need to marry
you in this plan of yours? That I still don’t understand!”
I half-whined in exasperation, my palms clutching the fabrics of my skirts in frustration.
“And why, in the mourning, weeping Virgin Mary’s name, does it signify that Dougal will know
or, at least, suspect about your feelings toward me?”

So many questions and still not one answer granted.

“For, after, I showed him a proper degree of courtesy and acted as his social inferior, he’ll be fair
disposed t’ believe ALL I say”
Jamie made a step toward me and his index finger rose to make his point again.
Or at least, I hoped he was, finally, about to make his point in the wake of all these accounts.

“So, he’ll also trust me, fully, when I come to him and apologize profusely and beg his forgiveness
for my daftness and careless- should-be-thrashed -senseless- for it- acts that I did wi’ ye

“What? What do you plan to do with me?” I blared out half petrified, half hopping- mad.

"I’ll mortifyingly confess to him that for the past weeks I have been babbling-aff my mouth t’ ye,
an’ in my excited careless state ower ye, I let slip all the many secrets, they, now, ken I know.
Ye canna even imagine the man’s foreboding qualms, once he’ll realize that ALL this knowledge,
I, now, possess ‘about his, almost, sole reason for living these days, his cause, that is, are now in
your bonnie wee heid.
And him knowin’ my feelings for ye and how I go brainless as a March hare around ye- all
swerving around myself and ye- and staring;
Saints preserve us, how many times did they catch me wi’ the staring!?”
He said, rolling his eyes at the memory of those instances.
“Aye, all the lot o’ them are quite sure I go maddie as a dogge when ye’re near, so ‘twill make
perfect sense to him that I, did, act such wi’ ye!”
He smiled as he drew, in his eyes, his infallible yarn to an end.

“He’ll kill you” I exclaimed in horror, not seeing at all the trustworthiness of this unfailing plan of
his.
“Jamie, if you do such a thing, if you tell him such a concoction, he’ll… Jamie, I don’t doubt that
he’ll actually take out his sword and run you through with it where you’ll stand!”

“There will be retribution, aye, and a harsh one t’ be sure” Jamie agreed, nodding slightly “but no
before I’ll inform him of the rest”

“The rest?!” I quailed, truly afraid to hear my quiz being answered.

“I’ll explain that the matter itself wilna be of such calamitous ramification were it no that a
lobsterback heard of the English healer that travels wi’ the MacKenzie party and came questioning
the matter further.
There ha’ been enough talk o’ ye, around these parts, to make such a thing plausible. When I will go to Dougal, I’ll inform him that such an encounter between the two o’ ye had resulted-- after ye had endured and resisted his interrogations, to be sure-- wi’ him declaring that he wants to take ye to fort William for further questioning by the Captain that resides there. Which is a man, Dougal and I all ken by name, reputation and marked handiwork as ‘twas ‘betokened’ upon me and m’ back”

He said, his face hardening and every line on it emerging at that last remark. It made him seem so much older and tired than his usual jaunty sprite demeanor. For he, more than any of us, knew the truth of Randall’s name, reputation, and handiwork, and the knowing of it weighed him down, now, in front of me.

But, he bravely persevered, moving on with the analysis and breakdown of his plan.

“I’ll explain that by the end o’ this interception, which only came to a nonviolent end, over us being on MacKenzie lands, ye were teary and terrified at the prospect of finding yourself at Bridewell. And that is if ye ever get there. For ye remember quite weel your last stumble wi’ the man in question, when we first found ye naked wi’ naught on ye but your shift. So, ye are willing t’do all that one would suggest t’ye as to no ha’ your faith in his hands again. I’ll tell Dougal, I wilna stand for neither Randall nor any of us t’ harm an innocent lass, such as ye, mainly for the blame of all this predicament is o’ my own doin’ and if he be needin’ further proof, weel, as I said, there are enough redcoats, up aboot these parts, to arrange for him t’ see ye arguing wi’ one. We just need t’ find one that isna allied wi’ the Fort or Randall.”

He took one step closer to me, fumbling his fingers inside a fisted palm. “Listen t’ me Claire, I wilna let him fault ye for m’ deeds, or for the havering loose tongue I’ll blame myself for havin’. Ye ha’ m’ word on that!”

He professed, pressing the matter further, so as to make sure I knew I will not be held liable, or be burdened with the repercussions of his plan.

“All the fault will lie wi’ me and me alone”

He said, yet again laying his own body and well-being on the line, for me, or so he perceived himself doing.

To what end?
I questioned in my head.

“I’ll make it quite clear that ‘twas I and I alone, who made it so that ye, now, hold information in your heid that puts ye and us in danger. And I will inform Dougal that I most assuredly wilna cause nay trouble for MY dear cause, which I ha’ proven time and again how I feel regards.”

“Every night in those inns and taverns, I have proven time and again my devotion and loyalty for that darn, cursed thing, so he wilna doubt it, wilna doubt me; even in the face of my grave muckle size, faulty blunder.” He said in a certain tone. “So… I’ll tell him how I talked to the lawyer for a panacea for all this sad state of affairs an’… weel…”

He said ending the whole saga with his hand stretched a little high, so as to signal he would like to have me in his arms again, now.
I stared at him blankly and just blinked. When I eventually could speak, I blurted, “You are insane Jamie” I blatantly said, out of my dumbfoundedness. “I said it before, but, apparently, you have decided to prove it to me wholeheartedly as to abolish all doubt. I have a mad-hatter for a husband”

“I’m giein him his own idea back t’ him!” he rebuked angrily back at me “Dougal canna find fault at his own logic! So there isna a chance he wilna take it! He did so wi’ the idea regarding my back and he’ll do so wi’ ye! I paid the utmost price for it to happen, so—”
He raised his out-stretched arm to me another inch so I would come into his arms now. But, I knew that me taking it meant that his word would be law and that this will be the last we would speak of the matter, as we will be following HIS plan hence forth.

“So…” I exclaimed “So, nothing, Jamie! All you have managed to do is to put me in the gravest of dangers, more so than I could ever be in Brockton. You might as well have stood me at the gallows of Edinburgh and signed my stay of execution, so as to allow them to put the noose around my neck, or light up the match.”

“Whit?” Jamie puzzled at my reaction to his plan and my, inadvertently, mention of my time means as to how to light a fire. I didn’t mean the latter only the initial.

“You know perfectly well, Jamie, that you can lead a horse to water but you canna make him drink” I tried explaining myself in a sure about way for him to comprehend. I mean, I did reference horses.

“Whit?” Jamie still remained bewildered

“You can try and shove Dougal’s ideas back to him, just to have them all be rejected one after the other by the very man that came up with them. If only for the sole reason, he didn’t think of them himself!”

I was truly startled by this if Jamie implemented, or even suggested this plan to Dougal in any way—that was it, we were done! Not only the marriage but me as well. I’d have to run now. For there wasn’t one place in Scotland that Dougal won’t hunt me down to make sure that what he would think was in my head will die and stay buried there along with me.

And, now, after what I did; the Englishmen were after me as well, in the form of one Lieutenant Jeremy Foster and his regiment, awaiting to finish the job if Dougal will find himself incompetent. For once, they will take me to Brockton without Dougal’s last minute rescue mission and ploy to save me from Randall’s hands...

I could hardly feel my toes anymore over feeling so livid with him, especially, over the simple fact that we HAD a perfectly good plan at hand and now he ruined everything!

All the blood that was leaving my hands and feet was rushing to my head and making me feel
inflamed and dizzy with anger towards him.

“As I said before, Jamie! The man was never gracious or generous in all our past dealings with him, but what he has never failed to be, was suspicious and stubborn in HIS OWN WAYS! Something as it seems that all that have MacKenzie blood in them have in common”

Jamie narrowed his eyes at me, interlaced his arms to his chest and darkening over my comment.

“‘twill sure to work!” he said vexed, hardly moving his lips

*He was vexed? I might be of need to flee for my life at the moment! But, apparently, that didn’t signify for he was vexed!*

“No, it won’t.” I said returning his tone and standing

“And how d’ye ken that, so vehemently?” he sardonically enquired.

“Jamie” I answered exasperated “if you suggest such a thing to him and not let it come from his own mind, in his own time, on his own terms and adding to it that I, now, hold more dangerous discriminating evidence and knowledge of him and the cause... THE ONLY thing it will bring about would be my death! Last time, he liked me enough to feel some sympathy and kindness for a woman that had found herself at the wrong time and in the wrong place, by his own doing, but, I do believe he’ll prefer to be possessed by the devil himself, then to allow a woman that now possess, TOO much, knowledge regarding his precious rebellion to go on living. THE ONLY REASON he was willing to not kill me, then, was he’d have too much to explain to the Englishmen. Which he doesn’t have anyone to answer for it, now, if they don’t take me first! Now, he can do whatever he likes to the ‘too knowing’ Sassenach, and just claim, later, I departed from all of you on good terms, while all the while he’ll have Angus and Rupert dig up my grave in the back.”

“I allow no one near ye!” Jamie barked, wrathfully.

“You and what army?? Murtagh? Against eighteen other men?” I said exasperated and all-out frantic at him for refusing to see the truth of the situation and the individuals involved.

Jamie was a much better judge of character than I could ever dream to be.

What was blinding him in such a way to the truth? What was crossing his mind, blocking the sun from shining on his plan and showing him how many things were wrong with it?

“Ned dosena count, Willie wilna fight me and I can take half of them where they stand” He tried grimly to underrate my logic, but I could already, thank the Lord, hear his voice cracking with insecurity under the weight of the truth I impelled into his face, to see and act in accordance with.

“Fine!” I said, deciding to pull my last weapon at hand

“Jamie, the man is neither kind nor benevolent, but after I denied my prisoner stature in front of him, the Lieutenant and then in Brockton in front of Lieutenants, Corporals, Captains and finally the Brigadier General himself, only then, after MY grand gesture, as you put it. Not yours. Only ME, MYSELF AND I, making sure no harm will come upon you all, and not breaking my word, even after I fell victim and was rendered helpless against Randall’s threats on my person and on my freedom;
then and only then, did Dougal find it in his heart to offer me this solution of marrying you. Without all this indisputable proof at hand, he won’t associate and bind me with you!!! Not with you being such a crucial part of his plans for the rebellion. You are to him as you were to your grandfather the old Fox. You are just one of his precious, brilliant gems to display to Charles, so as to win acclaim and stature for. And just like dear Simon Fraser, Lord of Lovat, did not ask your opinion or permission on the matter, neither will Dougal! Yes, it still signifies, greatly, that you care for me, so he could utilize me for his means. Especially thinking that I am not enamored with you. But only after he would make sure, himself, that I am not a spy”

Jamie’s arm lowered itself as that past truth came to light again. His spirit and gaze downcast themselves to the ground, as I mentioned the time in our lives, where I didn’t hold him in my heart. Only I couldn’t let his pain for it distract me.

“I’m sorry Jamie, but it was true. Then. It had to be so. So when he’ll try… I mean, when he came to me while you were in Wentworth… it was what he relied on. It was what he relied on from the start!”

Jamie's eyes shot up back at me as I mentioned my encounter with Dougal. I was never quite so forthright with him regarding what really transpired then between us. I told him vaguely about Dougal’s proposal to me, but, not a thing concerning how Dougal ‘tried’ to get me to come under his protection and in what stature he demanded I do so, claiming it was the only way to keep me safe.

I doubted very much, Jamie won’t try to kill the man, all over again, for offering marriage to me as the price of his protection and even going as far as to lightly try to seduce me with a tender touch to my chin, as to persuade me it won’t be such an awful-fell thing to let happen.

“When he wanted to take me back to his home, to Beannachd… for my protection,” I chose to use the best of all of the terminologies I had in hand “he had to have some assurance, in advance, that I would agree to all this. He received his proof, when he saw that I would do anything for my survival, because… well because I married you without being enamoured… or ensorcelled … with … well… you” I said in a shaky, apologetic tone. “He thought, I had proven myself to be a woman that will do all and will follow anyone who will offer me protection. That I will use any means at my disposal, as to save my own neck”

Jamie snorted at that “Weel, a devious, scheming, conniving sly he might be, but he ne’er could figure ye ‘oot properly, Sassenach”

“No. Neither of the MacKenzie’s ever could. I suppose you need Fraser blood for that” I said with a faint of a smile in my voice, as a peace offering for my harsh reminder of my feelings toward him, or lack of them in this point in time, in the past.

Jamie looked deeply into my eyes and seemed to be eased greatly by the burden he has been carrying, alone, for so long now,
which I was only now privileged to see since all these events began.

“Jamie,” I said tentatively, feeling exceedingly sorrowful for the need to return to the matter at hand, but conceding to the fact that we had no choice.

“Only, after I told anyone that asked, or that was willing to listen, that I was guest of clan MacKenzie, no matter what they promised or did to me; only, then, did Dougal get his final validation that all I truly sought after, from the start, was to return home and be on my way.
You stopping all this ripple effect and suggesting what you want to suggest to, a Dougal that currently still very much holds to the belief that I am a spy…
Well, you might as well of excused me for witchcraft and made a day of it.”

“Jamie” I implored “please tell me you haven’t already suggested even a glimpse of your plan to him.
For if you have …” I took a deep breath
“If you have, then I am a spy that, now, knows things far too discriminating than just a mere raising of funds, which is an accusation he might think he could still find a way to exonerate himself from;
if such a claim would be made against him.
Saying, perhaps, I got confused over me having no Gaelic.
But this… I’m not worth the trouble of what he could possibly gain from me, if I know far too much.
And disposing of me is quite literally the only and best route for him to take.”

I hoped it will be enough.
I hoped that this time, after all I said, it will finally make Jamie stop with all his machination and espionage dealings.

“He still needs ye to control and manipulate me.” Jamie said, defiantly, still fighting against me and the truth.

He was still insisting on his way, I could tell, even though his tone and eyes already told of perturbations and trepidations bubbling inside him regarding what he suggested.

It was making me come apart at the seams and lose my temper again and completely.

He wasn’t listening to pure logic and I saw no reason for it!!!!

“I am not worth it, if I possess under my cloak too many of his precious secrets.” I said, through clenched lips in acerbic tone, feeling as if I was a volcano ready to erupt.

Why? What made him so?

No matter what, Jamie has always been a rational and sensible man, even when he wasn’t. Even in a state of complete lack of self-control, restraint, or tolerance, it was logic and sense that guided him to reach such tempers.

What or who did this to him?
Brought him to a point that no matter how right the other side was, he would not listen to none but the daemons yelling inside his head?
“Jamie” I cried out feeling myself losing my right frame of mind and fast reaching a point where logic and sense would not be my guidelines as well.

“Can you even comprehend what Dougal will do, if you tell him such things about me with him thinking, now, that you are a true ally to the cause? He doesn’t need a wife to control you or take what he wants from you. No. He doesn’t need me to take what he thinks, he, now, already possess!!!”

I said fixing him with flaming, piercing eyes.

“With you not standing up to him, as we said you would, when, we said you would; as to refuse to play along with this travesty of his, then you, NOW,.”

I certified, succinctly, in a tone that made it clear I will accept no opposition to my dictates now “have to defy and confront him, as you did, before, telling him you are refusing to be exploited such anymore and that your back and neck are your own concern from now on, or he won’t need me Jamie, not if he believes he already has you! You have done more harm than good, Jamie! And now you must act without delay to rectify it, or lose me altogether and I don’t mean just the wedding!!”

I narrowed my eyes at him in contempt, as my breath escaped through my nose and as the cold weather crashed into it, I was coated in a mist that made me feel as if I was a fuming boar, preparing to attack.

“All this, over your stupid, useless PRIDE!!!” I hissed, ending with a scream

“May I remind ye I, WAS, doing all this for the marriage? Our marriage? Do ye no want to marry me?”

He raged into my face, with that goddamned cursed finger of his again. Waving it to and fro as to make his point clear again and letting me know he didn’t much appreciate to be told off such by his own wife.

Well, what did he expect? That I’ll cuddle him close and thank him for mucking everything up? We had a perfectly good plan at hand. Why do this?

"But, that’s precisely my point, Jamie"

I came closer to his face just as enraged as he was

“You didn’t need to do this. ANY of this!!! That what completely baffles me.”

I jerked my hands in exasperation into the air

“Once everything with Randall would have happened, Dougal would have forced the marriage with or without you making a spectacle of yourself. I mean Jamie, YOU, are the one that always tells me that ‘you don’t change a horse midstream’, and in this instance, I must admit that persevering with what worked, before, is still our best, sure and safe course of action to reach OUR aim. So why even do all this fo–”

Realization flared up in all my synapses with such ferocity, that it didn’t feel as if these were mere impulses moving between my nerve cells, but as lightning hitting me in full ferocity.

“O my Lord, Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ! I am an idiot an utter obtuse idiot!”

I said, in a croaky low voice, mostly speaking to myself, swaying a little where I stood from the savage impact the recognition struck me at.
"You never intended to let me do this, did you?" I said feeling as if someone, meaning Jamie, had knocked all the wind out of my sails. I was utterly humiliated over my own stupidity.

"That's why all this planning, for such a long time, isn't it? That's why all these ploys were being done behind my back."
I said, looking at him and actually feeling light-headed from the blow he rendered me, that came so unexpectedly from nowhere.

"You were never going to let me go Brockton, were you? You said it before, but I only thought you were apprehensive. That you had already agreed in Leoch. That you already saw that this was the best and only way for us. But, all this time, not even once, were you even considering to let me go and face him, did you?"
I sneered, but at myself more than at him. I let out a deep snort at my own ignorance, my feeble-mindedness and blindness.

If I accused Jamie of not seeing the truth before his eyes, the joke was on me, for missing the elephant in the room.

"That's why you told me EVERYTHING from the start. That's why you went on and on, just now! That I will realize, that I will know for sure, that even back in Leoch you never had any intention to-"
I closed my eyes, wondering,

*were they even open this all-time?*

"What was it that you said?" I spoke, opening them, slowly, to look at him again.
"'By any means, shape, form or ancestor, no FUCKING Captain Jonathan Randall, esquire, of His Majesty’s eighth dragoons in YOUR future lassie’ Did I get it all right, now?" I said with quivering lips "Or did I miss a decree?"

The expression on his face spoke volumes. He half seemed as a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar and half as a large, unyielding hulk that was going to make good on his threats to never let me near that man.

The way he held his body, now, and the magnitude of all his undertaking and enterprises that he laid in front of me, were all to make sure I understood he was going to use all at his disposal and every ability he possessed to prevent me from going through with our plan. Our ONLY plan.

"Why?" I asked, my voice sounding as if no life was left in it, or in me. "We talked about this before. There is no other way and nothing bad can happen this way. Not in the way we contrived and hatched it all out. But only this way, Jamie. Only this way can we really be sure of our success. We talked about it all bef-"

"I ken, verra weel, what we talked 'obout afore" he said, standing rigid and cold as his voice. Only the wind moving the small ringlets at the end of his hairs, told of a man and not a statue standing before me.
“Or t’ be exact, whit Ye talked aboot an’, I, listened.”
He said, so matter-of-factly, but the curbing of his words to almost nothing and his Scottish lilt running wild spoke for him, and told me how upset he really was.
“An’ I ha’ listened t’ ALL ye said and ALL ye DINNA say and then I remembered myself”

I had no more fighting spirit in me left, so I couldn’t do more than cock and eyebrow at him in question.

“I remembered Dougal givin’ me the marriage contract and as part of his efforts to persuade me to do this…”
“You objected?” I blurted out, piqued.

His nostrils flared at me.
“Hash now!” he ordered in a severe tone “Ye talked, I listened, now-”

I nodded

“As, I said, at one o’ his tries to convince me…”

“It took more than one?!” I exclaimed, insulted, unable to keep my mouth shut over this discovery.

“The lack of any sound” he ordered in the Gaelic, as he clasped me as before, gagging my mouth and holding me by the curve of my spine.

_Again?!!_

_We will have to have a little talk about this hallmark move of his, which he so arrogantly and presumptuously was opting to use on me, whenever he wanted to silence me during our fights!_

I said in my head, making a mental note for that future fight!

_And, Goddamned, the man was not only stronger than an ox, he was, also, swift as a fox._

I only noticed my captured state, when he was done implementing it.

"Ye said it wilna come to it, aye. That ye wilna be alone wi’ the ma…”

Jamie could not call that cur a man.

“But, that. Even. If. It. Did.” he said every word slowly

“Even if our plan would fail and all will be as before, that …”

His voice shook when he spoke the name and as the thought of me, alone, with him crossed his mind, making the skin on his face stretch thin and become gossamery looking.

“Randall… that he dinna hurt ye that time.
That Dougal rushed in and… brought ye back afore he did anythin’ bad t’ ye.
So ‘twill be fine either way.
Ye said that if ye could handle the whole situation that happened before, ye most assuredly could handle following our plan and… him, now.
‘And besides’ ye kept saying time and again ‘Beggars should be no choosers and THIS is our only way’.

Am I right thus far? Or did, _I_, miss something of _your_ precious words?” he said, returning my own
harsh tone and words to me.

Having a lid on my mouth, again, all I could do, was to simply nod my approval of his reiterations.

“Or should I say precious lies” he added, his voice and grip on me hardening.

“Doesna signify at present.” he said, dismissing the comment for now, after I let out a sharp “mmmm?” to query his meaning.

He had his gaze looking squarely into my eyes, piercing me with his and making me feel as if I, truly, was the pellucid window he blamed me to be, earlier.

“Aye.” He said, taking a long breath as he studied me closely, choosing his next move carefully.

“See, lass, I do listen.” He said with a light, rueful twitch to his lips that was gone in an instant.

Something in his tone made my fingers twinge and prickle from wanting to catch it, to touch that smile, so it will freeze; so we would freeze, stand in place and not go on.

Something was wrong now, I could feel it and I didn’t want him to go on divulging to me what was that thing that made the hairs on my arms stand up, as if I was an animal recognizing danger was near.

There was a cloud behind his eyes and the feeling it gave me was known to me from a point in our past I didn’t want to be familiar with ever again.

“I, always, listen to ye no matter what ye tell me, Claire.”

He said with such zealous earnest and with the most controlled, pleasant-piercing voice he owned, which I felt penetrating straight into my bones.

“Ye are one of the wisest and most astute woman I ha’ e’er had the honor to ken, let alone share my life and soul with.”

I swallowed hard, feeling myself going soft in a blink of an eye.

*Christ!*

*Not only, was he strong and fast, Jamie could play me as a fiddle.*

*In no time and without hardly any words.*

He went on with his honey-tongued speech to me, speaking in a soft-silvery voice, varying the strength and pitch of his tone from anger to marvel.

“I dunno think I could e’er own anythin’ as precious as ye, ever.

No even if the High Priest of the Israelites himself offered me his breastplate with all the gold settings and the twelve jeweled gems that are embedded on it.

When I say that I never kent such a creature as ye existed, I speak no lie.

Claire, ye are more than just brave and capable, as some women I kent in life, are.

Your aptitude to handle yourself, even away from your own time and place are no a mere knack, no.

They make ye triumphant over all ye do and all ye meet.

Ye dunno only find resilience and spirit to handle your own distresses, no;

ye are as a protective rampart to all ye hold dear.

Ye ha’ in ye such beauty, virtue, courage, strength and your heart—”
he said, freeing my mouth from his constraint and placing his palm where the part he spoke of laid beneath.

“Christ! Your heart Sassenach. Ye hold and carry so much and so many in it.
And me! Ye carry me in it!” he said in a spellbound- awed wonderment
“Ye chose to carry me in it.” he added softly.

Only, it didn’t feel as if he was saying all this so as to praise me.
No. All these attributes, however, wonderful and although said with such conviction, were stated as facts.
They were spoken in a voice that embraced me and the air around us in a manner that will smooth and stilly the wildest of storms, but his eyes said that they were dry obvious, already known to him facts and he was merely pronouncing them.

“So, I, in turn, learned Claire. I had to.” he simply said, shrugging his shoulders lightly.
“If you were a woman I dinna ken of your kind afore and if I wanted ye”
He said, pointing that same flapping index finger of his from before at my chest to make his point clear yet again.
That it was me, only me.

“I couldn’t stay a childish three and twenty young glaikit gallus, who still believed his wife to be some helpless capricious thing that must obey him and should be cuddled in order to protect her from her own self.
I ken who I married, Sassenach, and no a day goes by that I am no as thankful and happy for it, as much as I quiver in dread at what next ye will get yourself into by bein’ such.
But, I do ken who and what ye are.
Aye, I do. Now” he said again and again, despite the fact that I knew it to be the truth, even if he wouldn’t have said it at all; not even once.

He raised his eyes to me, from the heart he acted as if he didn’t believe his own eyes and ears could actually exist.

His usual radiant- azure blue, with teal green in them- eyes, that could only be described as clear blue skies, merging into the ocean’s depth in a clear summer day, should have lit up the dark clearing, which we stood upon.
If they weren’t void of any light at the moment, that is.

He was mute and cold as hard steel, which in turn made every word that left his lips penetrate my skin in clean sharp stabs, reaching my core and making me feel the weighed and sooth of them.

They were words of love and sincerity to him, but he was not feeling them at the moment, only remembering.

My skin, that laid under my warm thick, layered garments, was filled with gooseflesh and small, cold driblets sprouted on its surface.

"I married ye, thinking I was about to embark on my greatest, hardest undertaking of yet. And I was right,” he smiled ruefully again
“only no at all in the way I thought.
I wanted to, aye, Claire, more than life itself, I wanted to.
But I was just as afraid of it.
I was thinking, I should be ready and ken how to cultivate m’ wife.
That I must be man enough to take care of ye, to look after ye at every moment, or to see to all your
needs always.
That ‘twas my duty, to be mindful and vigilant always, so ye wilna lead me false, or make me do
wrong or ill, as I was told, often, women do.
No ‘oot of disreputable, seedy characteristics of their own. No.
Only, from the feeble, fussiness and frivolous minds they have." he clarified.

"Knowing ye as I did, even as little as I did, at the time, I thought I would ha’ to change ye!
So as to make ye into a made to live at home woman, that canna be allowed to stray from yon
home, or she will transgress in public"
He snorted in surprise as to how far away from those truths and beliefs real women, let alone me,
are.

“I thought my biggest concern will be to ken how to treat m’ wife when she ill – behaves and to no
surrender till she finally learns or eventually exert herself.
Or in your case” he snorted at his foolery “till ye would exert my left arm from all the hiding ye’ll
force me t’ render on your back side”

Then he looked at me mesmerized, as if seeing me for the first time.

“How can a person be so wrong, Sassenach?” he inquired of me in such serious, deep astonishment.
“**I am** the one that needs ye to survive Claire” he said, taking my dainty, refined palm in his bulky,
light- callused, powerful one, turning it and kissing it lightly on its back so as to pay me great
homage, for who and what I am.

*Good Lord in heaven, will Jamie never allow me to even stay mad at him anymore!?!?!*

I mean how could I, after these words? How could anyone?
And he was right.
He did learn.

We have come a long way, him and I, from the couple that stood on the riverbank and fought tooth
and nails over disobedience or conceited manly and womanly pride.

We had so much more than raw lust binding us together now.

Most of the corners and edges between us were sanded and smoothed, to make the lines between us
blur and melt into each other.
We fitted each other, now.
Accommodated to one another slowly, with shared time and experience.

And when a sharp edge or a spiked corner set upon us, we had patients and willingness to see the
other’s side and find a way to molten ourselves anew as to be cast together once more.

It was the knowing, now, I think, that both of us belonged with, and to, each other and we were
going nowhere and to no one else but ourselves, that made it so.

*Well, they do say knowledge is quite a powerful thing. Don’t they?*

That, and our ever- growing love, appreciation and admiration for one another were the Rosetta
Stone to the undecipherable, unknown mystery of what laid between me and Jamie.

And the zestful desire to go on receiving what our better half had and was willing to give to the
other, was what made it that much easier to sustain.

Hearing that and being confronted by those facts anew from one’s husband, whom, I craved more than the capacity to taste food again and not be sick to my stomach over what was being done to him and over the dread and terror of what would become of us… well… I felt how my scowl was dissolving away to nothing, just as my lips unfurled themselves, becoming tender, as was the rest of me. I felt my body deliquesce itself onto his arm that held me and onto the body I was pressed so taut to.

I looked up to him and had to truly fight myself from beginning to nibble on the finger that was pointing to my heart and from there to move on to all the rest of him. Jamie felt that. I could see it in his eyes, only he was too troubled by something to reciprocate.

It was his turn to say his piece and he meant to take it. And after making sure I knew that none of his action were done over some misconception of my aptitudes, or from some 18th-century misguided assumption regarding women, he was, now, ready to say what started it all.

His eyes closed and slanted themselves, as they always did when his mood was reaching to its highest degree. Good or bad it didn’t matter, it was the depth of the sentiment that always transformed his appearance and accentuate some of his features.

‘Everything, however finely spun, finally comes to the sun’ I quoted in my head, as Jamie took one last breath, brought his palm to my lips again and let the secret out.

Chapter End Notes

dictionary:
a hoe without a handle {=something useless}
raison d’être {= reason to be, reason for the existence of something or someone}
‘Slàinte mhòr agad!’ {= Great health to you!}
wittins {=Knowledge}
maddie {= lunatic}
guideship {= leadership, management, a controllership}
maddie {=A lunatic}
Bridewell {—London’s prison for women}
naked {= Not necessarily entirely naked, just indecently dressed. Only a shirt or shift}
up aboot {= Somewhere in or near}
muckle size {=Huge, monstrous}
giein {=Giving}
glaikit (= Lacking good sense or judgement; unwise)
gallus (=rash, wild, unmanageable, impish, mischievous, cheeky)
‘Everything, however finely spun, finally comes to the sun’ (= Nothing can be hidden forever)

End Notes

Hi, I really hope you enjoyed this. There is a lot more....Meanwhile, there are some new characters coming up, to stir s**t up, some great fights, great romance, intimacy, etc. The beginning was kind of hard for me I really got inspired in the next chapters. Hope you actually want to read the rest, and to all of you out there I would love to receive new prompt ideas if you like my writhing.
Read me soon (I hope)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!