Modern Glasgow AU

by gotham_ruaidh

Summary

Imagine Claire and Jamie as a couple in present-day Glasgow. Related ficlets written for Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!
“Jamie, please —”

His grip on her wrist tightened as he pulled her across the dance floor, away from the man at the bar, closer to the exit.

“Jamie —” But her voice was drowned out by the thumping bass as they wove through the crowd. He turned to make sure she was all right, but his iron grip did not relent until they reached the vestibule and he had to fish around in his pocket for their coat check stubs. Claire awkwardly rubbed her bare arms as they waited; Jamie wordlessly glowered at the attendant as she placed their coats on the counter. He helped Claire into her coat before winding the tartan scarf around his neck, shrugging into his own coat, and almost dragging Claire into the cool autumn night.

Claire’s ears rang in the sudden quiet – and she whirled to face her husband, yanking away from his grip.

“I cannot believe you did that.”

His brows shot up almost to his hairline. “What else was I supposed to do, Claire? The man was coming on to ye verra strong and his eyes were staring right down your dress and he didna give a damn about that ring on yer finger.”

Claire shoved suddenly cold hands into her pockets to prevent herself from slapping him. “I was doing just fine, Jamie. You know I can handle myself – I manage perfectly well with all those handsy doctors at the hospital. There was no need for you to threaten him with violence.”

“No need?” Jamie exasperatedly ran his hands through his hair until the shorter pieces stood on end. “No need? Am I to just stand idly by and enjoy watching another man try to get your attention? Watch him ogle ye, and then watch ye laugh at something he said?”

Furious now, Clare stepped closer to him. The mist of their breaths came fast in the chilly air. “What are you saying? Do you think I was encouraging him? Christ, Jamie – his brother was treated at the hospital a few months back and he was telling me about — ”

“I dinna care one bit, Claire.” He stood nose to nose with her, breathing hard. “He had this look about him – he wanted ye. And you’re mine.”

Claire narrowed her eyes, jaw set. “Oh, really? So I’m not allowed to make conversation with men I’m not married to, then?”

He huffed, frustrated. “That’s no’ what I mean, and ye ken that well.”

“Well, what does it mean? You can’t dictate what I do and don’t do. You left to go to the restroom, for God’s sake! He just started talking to me. I was being polite, Jamie.” She hesitated, but
continued. “I swear, sometimes I think you don’t know me at all.”

_That_ set him off. “What are ye saying, then? Ye ken fine that we’re still getting to know each other – but I _know_ you, Claire. Ye can be a bit foolish when ye’ve had some drinks, and I didna want him to think –”

Claire slapped him. The smack of flesh echoed in the quiet street, and Jamie could only blink at her, stunned.

“What the hell, Claire?”

She raised her hand again, but this time he caught her wrist. “Claire –”

“Foolish? _Foolish?_ You have no right to say that. Don’t talk down to me.”

“I’m no’ talking down –”

“Yes you are. You can’t stand the thought of me enjoying myself in the company of other men. Because only _you_, James Fraser, have the right to do that.” Her voice was livid, and she struggled against his grip. “Just like you can’t stand hearing about anything to do with Frank.”

“Dinna mention his name to me,” Jamie seethed. “I’m yer husband now. And how many times to I have to say that it’s the other men I don’t trust? I trust you implicitly, Claire. I trust your vow to me, I trust what’s in your heart.” He paused, and when she made no attempt to interrupt or strike him, he continued.

“I ken we may have rushed into marriage – we didna truly date or take time to _really_ get to know each other. But Claire –” He swallowed. “Claire – you are my _life_. I so worry about ye – working wi’ ill patients, or wi’ male doctors who only want to get up yer skirt, or taking the bus home by yourself late at night. Because if something were to happen to ye –”

His voice broke and he released her, quietly turning away. Claire watched his broad shoulders heave up and down in a tremendous sigh.

Touched, she rested a tentative hand on the scratchy wool of his coat. “Jamie –”

“I panicked tonight, Claire,” he said quietly. “I saw ye talking to that man, and laughing wi’ him, and I felt my own heart’s blood leave my body. Because I saw him, and I thought he’s the man ye deserve. He’s no’ a bumbling lad of twenty-four – he probably has a nice car and a well-paying job and he was wearing a nice watch. I canna support us in the way ye deserve wi’ my salary from the printshop. We live in a two room flat wi’ spotty heating and ye had to pay for yer own wedding ring. I have no idea how we’ll afford yer medical school but I’ll do whatever it takes for ye to achieve yer dreams.”

Claire softly spun him around, but still he refused to look at her.

“Jamie?” Her heart clenched at the tears shining in his eyes. “I know you’re looking out for me and protecting me in your own way. I _know_ you trust me. I _know_ I can get a bit ridiculous when I’ve been drinking. But you just need to relax – I’m not going _anywhere_. I want _you_. I want what we have together. Nothing else. Nobody else. We married quickly, yes – but we didn’t rush into it.”

Gently she rubbed his cheeks with her thumbs, tangling her fingers in his thick curls. His eyes – open, fathomless – bored into hers.

“You’re mine, too – you know that, right?”
He nodded. “I’m sorry for what I said, Claire. I know I need to think more –”

“Shh.” She silenced him with a finger to his lips. “I’m sorry, too. I shouldn’t have reacted in the way I did. Forgiven?”

“Aye,” he rasped. She tenderly grasped his chin – rough with the day’s stubble – and pulled him close for a kiss.

“Take me home, Jamie,” she murmured against his lips after a long while.

He exhaled, feeling the dark knot of jealousy loosen in the pit of stomach – to be replaced with joy, and something a bit headier.

“I love you,” he whispered.

He felt her smile against his lips. “God help me, I love you,” she breathed.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: imagine jamies thoughts when he first met claire and she was fixing him up

He feigned sleep like a coward, completely at a loss as to how to speak with her again. They’d been airborne for some time now, the rustle of her turning pages beside him the only noise save for the hum of the engines.

What was it about her that had his stomach in knots?

“Sir?” The weathered flight attendant had returned, and he rubbed his eyes against the harsh fluorescent light. “Something to drink?”

He sat up a bit straighter and undid the tray table. “Just water, please. With ice.”

He looked straight ahead as the flight attendant set a plastic cup full of ice and a little bit of water on the tray. The woman beside him quietly ordered a coffee – black – and he committed her preference to memory.

Just as the flight attendant finished filling the Styrofoam cup, the beverage cart jerked and she lost hold of the cup. Jamie started bolt upright as scalding hot coffee poured down the back of his neck.

“Ffrinnt!” he exclaimed, panting. Two seconds of numbness before a searing pain shot through him.

“I’m sorry, sir – I don’t know – ”

Quickly Jamie felt the woman beside him push up the armrest, turn him to face the aisle, and untuck his shirt. “Get me some ice!” she hissed at the bewildered flight attendant. “Or cold soda cans, if you have them. Now!”

Dimly Jamie sensed the flight attendant pushing the drink cart further down the aisle and heard her digging through it. But all he could feel was the sudden rush of cool air on his back, and the Englishwoman’s soothing hands as she drew his shirt over his head.

“Easy – just help me get this off,” she said gently. He ducked his head and shrugged out of the shirt, sodden and drenched in the scent of weak industrial coffee. She dropped the shirt on the floor and gently drew her fingers along his back, checking for blisters.

Heaven. And Hell. His body burned at her touch – and his back flamed in pain.

“Here you go – some cold packs. And the aloe cream from the first aid kit.” Jamie felt cold drops of water drip onto his forehead – that must be from the bags of ice.
“Thank you,” the woman said quietly. And his back was instantly cool.

He shivered. Was it due to the coolness of the ice, or the heat of her hands on him?

She rubbed the bag of ice gently up and down his back, soothing away the angry red burns. “It won’t be too bad,” she said softly. “It shouldn’t blister. I don’t think you’ll have any lasting marks.”

He swallowed. “I should hope not,” he said softly, turning his head over his shoulder to face her. “I’d expect no less from a doctor.”

She smiled despite herself. “I’m not a doctor,” she said softly.

He smiled back, meeting her eyes. “Not yet. But ye will be one day.”
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Original prompt: Imagine Jamie meeting Joe Abernathy

“Stop fidgeting.”

Claire lay a gentle hand on Jamie’s knee. He sighed and shifted in the uncomfortable plastic chair.

“I just – weel. I dinna ken how to start talking about –” he gestured vaguely, wedding ring glinting in the harsh fluorescent light.

Claire captured his hand and threaded their fingers together. “Relax. I’ll do all the talking. It’s all worth it, right?”

He licked his lips and squeezed her fingers. “Aye,” he murmured quietly.

“Mr. and Mrs. Fraser?”

Jamie rose – hand still linked with Claire’s – and allowed her to lead him across the waiting room, past the nurse with a pasted-on smile, and into the hallway beyond. They turned a corner and stepped into a small, bright office.

“Claire! So good to see you!”

Jamie blinked awkwardly as Claire dropped his hand and leaned across the desk to kiss the doctor’s cheek.

“Hi, Joe,” she smiled, standing straight beside Jamie. “Thank you for seeing us. This –”

“Ah! The Highlander I’ve heard so much about.” Dr. Abernathy’s kind eyes crinkled as he gripped and pumped Jamie’s hand. “I’ve always wanted to meet the brave man who stole the heart of this English rose.”

“Pleasure,” Jamie replied cautiously. “Claire didna mention you’re American.”

Joe gestured for his guests to sit, and stepped around them to shut the door. “Boston, actually. Came here on an exchange a few years back and never left. Scotland is a beautiful country – despite all the rain and fried food.”

Claire smiled as she settled into her chair, taking Jamie’s hand once more. “Joe and I were the only non-Scots here for a long time – we worked together to decipher what you all were saying. And he is one of the most well-known and respected doctors in his field. I trust him.”
Jamie’s thumb traced the back of her knuckles. “So. He knows, then?”

She squeezed his fingers. “Yes.”

Dr. Abernathy pulled a notepad from a desk drawer. “Claire tells me you’d like to start a family. Do you mind if I take some notes while we speak?”

“Aye. Ehm – no, no I don’t mind.” Jamie paused, uncertain. “You see, Dr. Abernathy – ”

“Joe, please.” The doctor smiled behind his spectacles.

Jamie uncomfortably cleared his throat. “Joe. Weel. Claire and I – we’ve been marrit two years now. She isna taking any birth control and maybe it’s the stress from her classes but she hasna gotten pregnant. And we want to know whether she can have bairns.”

Joe scribbled on his pad. “I see. And you’re both healthy otherwise?”

“Aye.”

“And how long have you been trying?”

Jamie’s brow furrowed. “We havena been *trying* - not officially, anyway.”

“I’ve been off the pill since before we married,” Claire said softly.

“I see. And how frequently do you have intercourse?”

*Intercourse?* Jamie’s face flamed.

Claire smiled. “Daily.”

“By daily, do you mean –”

Jamie muttered in the *Gaidhlig* under his breath. Claire ignored him. “Always once, usually twice a day.”

“I see. And your monthlies are regular?”

“Every twenty-nine days,” Jamie murmured, knee bouncing up and down beneath the desk.

“Have you ever been pregnant before, Claire?”

She shook her head. Jamie untangled their fingers and settled his arm around her shoulders.

“And you’re –”

“31 this October. Jamie is 26.”

Dr. Abernathy quirked a dark eyebrow at Jamie but said nothing. “Any family history of difficulty conceiving?”

“I don’t know. My parents died when I was five – and I was an only child. But definitely not on Jamie’s side.”

“Aye. My mother was pregnant wi’ my brother Willie when she wed my da. My sister has three children already. So.”
“So. You’re curious as to why two young, healthy people who – enjoy – each other daily and clearly want children have not yet gotten pregnant.”

Claire sighed. Jamie gathered her closer. “Yes.”

For a moment, Joe Abernathy watched them from across his desk. They were a decidedly unlikely couple – English and Scottish, medical student and typesetter, five years apart in age. But for all their differences, they were clearly devoted to each other – they hadn’t stopped touching since entering his office, and they clearly drew strength from each other amid an undoubtedly difficult conversation.

“There could be any number of reasons. Stress, for one. Timing with the woman’s cycle – but that isn’t likely in your case. The viability of the man’s sperm, for another – but that’s probably not the case, either.”

Jamie, alarmed, briefly glanced down at his crotch to make sure everything was still – there.

“I’ll start with a physical exam of Claire, and I’ll take some blood for tests. And I’ll need a specimen from you, Jamie.”

“Specimen?” he croaked.

Dr. Abernathy nodded. “And then if all of that is inconclusive, we may need to start with some hormone shots for Claire.”

Claire gently rubbed Jamie’s shoulder. “It’s all right, love. Whatever it takes, right?”

“Aye,” he replied quietly. “Ye’re meant to be a mother. Whatever needs to be done, I’ll do it.”

“Good. So – Claire?” Dr. Abernathy gestured to the exam table in the corner. “Shall we?”

She smiled tightly. “Only if Jamie is with me.”

The doctor nodded. “Of course. And then – I’ll need Jamie to give me that specimen.”

Jamie’s cheeks flushed. “Only if Claire is wi’ me.”

Dr. Abernathy gaped. Claire’s mouth split into a lovely grin, and she playfully shoved her husband’s shoulder.

“What? Whatever it takes, aye?”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

*Original prompt: I love the Jamie/Claire modern Glasgow AU. Can you write a story about why they got married so fast? Or just them getting to know each other. Thank you!*

The skin on his back was so fair that the burn looked much worse than it likely was. She had rubbed him from nape to tail with the aloe gel and helped him into the spare button-down shirt packed in his bag – “Just in case,” he had grinned at her.

Now they faced each other directly, cross-legged, the armrest still up between them. Any sense of awkwardness was long gone. They were three hours into the seven-hour flight – and if he never saw her again, he wanted to cherish every single moment he had with her. Every single moment God had blessed him with.

“You need to get some aloe cream as soon as we land,” she said softly.

He nodded. “Aye. Any particular kind?”

She paused, head down, considering. “Well – ” She hesitated, then drew in a deep breath. “I’ll be on duty tomorrow. You could come by the hospital and I could see to it myself.”

Jamie’s heart, already thundering in his chest, almost stopped. “Ye’d do that for me?” he said in a small voice, so full of promise.

She nodded, shyly. “I feel responsible for what happened to you. It’s the least I can do.”

“Dinna fash yourself,” he said quietly. “I’ve been hurt much worse, and by people much less pretty.”

She blushed prettily and held back a smile, eyes still downcast. Jamie watched her idly twist the diamond around her finger.

“You’re a kind woman,” he said gently. “Wi’ a good touch.”

He paused. What the hell.

“He’s a verra lucky man, your professor.”

She swallowed, and he hoped desperately that he hadn’t crossed a line – that he hadn’t severed the so very fragile connection between them.
He watched her slowly remove the diamond ring and hold it between her thumb and forefinger. “I’m leaving him,” she said softly.

“What?” Jamie said stupidly.

She licked her lips. “I came to New York to surprise him – his sabbatical is for a year, and I haven’t seen him for three months. I didn’t tell him I was coming, so I showed up at his flat without warning. Just in time to see him kiss his research assistant goodbye on the landing.”

Overcome, Jamie reached across the space between them – where their knees nearly touched – and softly, gently took hold of her right hand. He twined their fingers together, hoping she couldn’t feel how badly his hand was shaking.

“I’m so sorry.” And he was.

She nodded absently and gripped his fingers. “I confronted him. He couldn’t deny it, so he told me everything. About how – how he felt we’d grown apart. How I had my own life, separate from his. I decided not to move with him, you know – I fought so hard to rise to my position at the hospital, and I wasn’t going to give that up.” She sniffed. “He didn’t understand – he thought that I could just pack up and find another nursing job in New York. But I couldn’t, and I wouldn’t. So.”

She swallowed. “I didn’t even make it inside the flat. I couldn’t stay. So I hailed a cab, came right back to the airport, and got on the next available flight.”

He reached his other hand to tilt up her chin. Her tear-filled eyes met his.

God, she was beautiful. Trusting him with her vulnerability. It stirred something protective, deep inside him.

Softly, gently he traced her cheekbones with his fingertips.

“I’m sorry. I don’t normally break down, but - I gave him six years of my life. And now it’s all gone,” she whispered, closing her eyes.

She was ashamed. His heart clenched to see it.

He wiped away one tear with the pad of his thumb. And then before he could think, he gathered her into his lap and held her tightly against him, pressing her face into his neck.

She shook silently in his arms, gripping the front of his shirt. His heart surged with feeling. What kind of man would do that to a woman? Do that to this woman? What he wouldn’t give to protect her, to love her in the way she deserved…

So he did the only thing he could – offer her comfort, and whisper his feelings in a language she wouldn’t understand.

“Hush, my heart. Be still. No one can harm ye. I’m here,” he murmured over and over in the Gaidhlig.

She sighed deeply. He nuzzled his nose in the clouds of her hair. This was what Heaven must be like, he thought dimly.

“What are you saying?” she said, almost soundlessly, against his neck.

He swallowed. “Ach – just some silly things. Like what my Mam used to say to me when I was a
bairn, and needed comfort from her.”

She sniffed. “She must be a remarkable woman.”

Jamie grit his teeth and breathed in deeply. “She’s dead,” he said softly. “My father, too. That’s why I left home.”

She sat up straight, face level with his. Even with smudged mascara and reddened eyes she was so beautiful he almost couldn’t breathe. Slowly she cupped his cheek with her right hand. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered.

He closed his eyes and leaned into her touch. “Dinna fash,” he said, voice thick. “I can mind myself.”

“I don’t doubt that. When was the last time you let someone take care of you?”

His heart rose to this throat, a witty rejoinder dying on his lips. He opened his eyes and met hers, squarely. God, how he could lose himself in her…

No. Not while she still wore another man’s ring. He could never do that.

“I let you take care of me, just now,” he said softly. Teasing.

She sighed and shook her head slightly. “You Scots. Bloody effing heroes, the whole lot of you.”

His smile echoed hers.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

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Original prompt: Imagine the wedding night of Claire and Jamie in the AU fic in modern Glasgow

For a moment it seemed almost like any other day when they walked home together. But once they reached the landing and Jamie turned the key in the door and flipped the light switch – it hit her.

She was married. To Jamie. And now –

“Ach – Claire?” She turned to face him and watched him swallow, suddenly unsure. “Will ye – will ye wait here a bit? I willna be long.”

She nodded. He grabbed her hands, formally kissed her knuckles, and quickly disappeared behind the bedroom door.

Claire set down her purse and stepped out of her heels. They both needed the moment to breathe – to put some space between them, to collect their thoughts. Everything was about to change between them – for the better, she was sure of it. And even though she was experienced, this was Jamie. A man who clearly loved her with his whole heart, unconditionally. So her palms were clammy, her hands trembled slightly with nervousness. And excitement.

The door opened. Jamie stuck his head out. “Ready?” he asked softly, extending one hand. Before she knew her feet were moving, her hand was in his. He softly drew her inside and locked the door behind them.

He had turned down the quilt and lit three large candles on the bedside table. The flames bathed the room in a soft glow – just enough to see him, and to enjoy the way that the shadows played on his cheekbones.

“Is that verbena?” she asked softly, twining her fingers through his.

He moved closer and settled his forehead against hers. He breathed in deeply. “Aye. I remember it’s yer favorite. I – I want verra much to please ye, Claire.” His thumb traced her wedding ring, over and over.

“Shh. Just be still, Jamie. You do please me. I’m not going anywhere.”

For a long moment they breathed each other in, calming each other. Enjoying this moment on the threshold to something new and exciting between them.

“Claire?” Jamie rasped after a while.
“Hmm?” She kissed the tip of his nose.

He swallowed. “Will ye – will ye do something for me?”

She pulled back slightly and met his eyes. “Of course. What is it?”

He licked his lips and moved quickly to pick up something from the end table. The blade glinted in the candlelight. Claire raised one eyebrow.

“It’s called a *sgian dhu* – a small knife. It’s a ceremonial part of the kilt nowadays, but traditionally in the Highlands it was a man’s most intimate weapon.” Jamie’s eyes focused on the blade. “We use it for a wedding tradition. It’s – it’s a bit pagan, and some priests dinna like doing it in a church. But it’s just you and me now, Claire, and I want – I need to do it.”

“Do what?”

He inhaled sharply. “Do ye trust me?”

“Yes – Jamie - what –”

“Hold out yer right hand, palm up. Please”

She did, and watched him flick the blade over the tender skin of his right wrist before making a shallow cut over her own wrist. Quickly he dropped the knife and, cradling her arm with his left hand, brought their wrists together.

“Jamie – ”

“Claire. This is a blood vow. This ties you to me, and me to you.”

Her breath quickened as she felt the blood slowly ooze between their wrists. The fingers of his left hand gripped her forearm, fingertips caressing softly.

“Do I – do I need to say anything?”

He nodded. “Repeat the words after me.” He spoke in Gaelic, and she tried her level best to repeat. Her eyes locked on his the whole time, the pure intensity in his gaze absolutely riveting.

And then suddenly it was over. He pulled away and she felt a rush of cool air on her wrist. And a slight tearing sensation – their blood had started to clot together.

Jamie produced a damp washcloth and gently held it to Claire’s wrist, dabbing at the blood that still welled. She wriggled her toes at the sensation and was pleased to feel his own bare feet against hers.

“Will you tell me what we just said, Jamie?”

“Aye,” he said after a long moment, focusing intently on her wrist. “Later. All ye need to know for now is that the words are – weel. Basic. Serious. Deep.”

She raised his wrist to her lips and reverently kissed his cut. Then her lips anointed every one of his fingers, followed by the well of his palm.

His breathing picked up sharply. “Claire,” he said, breathless. “Claire – I dinna know how to start. Ye need to – to show me what to do.”
She smiled widely and turned around, pushing her hair off the back of her neck. She almost jumped at the heat of his fingers on her nape gently removing the pearl necklace. Then he unzipped her dress, slowly and deliberately. He snaked his hands through the open back to wrap around her front and cup her belly, drawing her tight against his chest. She swallowed and slowly turned to face him.

She caressed his flaming cheeks. “I’m yours,” she whispered. “And you’re mine. Don’t hesitate. I want you, Jamie. I want this.”

Effortlessly she shrugged out of the dress and let it pool at her feet, so that she stood before him in only her underwear and bra.

Jamie, thunderstruck, reached out to touch her and quickly lowered his hands to his side, at a total loss for what to do.

So Claire flung her arms around his shoulders, edged up on her tiptoes, and kissed him hard. He bent to pick her up and she wrapped her legs around his waist.

“Don’t think. And don’t stop,” she murmured against his lips.

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“No, Claire. I canna – enough!”

Jamie threw one elbow over his eyes, laughing. Feebly he swatted his wife’s head away from his belly, but she rested her cheek against his navel, nuzzling into the coarse hairs.

“What? You’re twenty-three – you’re supposed to get it up all the time.”

He tangled his fingers in her hair, grinning like an idiot. “Aye, ye ken that weel now. But Claire – I dinna want it to break off. That wouldna make either of us happy.”

It was dawn. Two of the candles had long ago burned out, and the single remaining flame glowed brightly within its hollow of wax.

They had slept in fits and starts, neither willing to lose one moment together, neither believing that this experience, the depth of feeling for each other, could be real.

But it was real. So real that Jamie had to push away his wife’s attentions.

He hissed as her hand wrapped around him, caressing gently. “Ye’re going to chafe me, Claire,” he gasped, turning his face into the pillow in ecstasy.

She smiled and released him, crawling up and lying on top of him, belly to belly. He opened his eyes dreamily.

“Am I awake? Are you truly here, with me?”

She kissed him long and slow and deep. He flipped them over and gently eased himself inside her. They gasped.

“What about the chafing?” she breathed against his lips.

He laughed, swallowing her moans. He held still inside her, not moving, feeling her pulse race.

After a long while he pulled away from her mouth to see tears glistening in her eyes. So much
emotion between them now. Gently he kissed her eyelids, the tip of her nose, then her lips, still not moving inside her. She arched against him, gasping.

“Jamie —”

“Hush, mo nighean donn. How I love ye so. I’m right here.”

Slowly he withdrew, then pushed inside. Gradually he increased his pace, marveling at how her body roused to his, memorizing the thousands of emotions flitting across her face. So beautiful.

Then he gripped her hips and surged into her hard. She cried out. Again. And again. And again. He swallowed her whimpers, her moans, her screams.

And some time later, still joined, he nuzzled his nose with hers. She wound her arms around his shoulders and pulled him closer.

“This is real, Jamie,” she whispered. “So real. If I’m dreaming, I hope I never, ever wake up.”
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might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you
have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: LOVE modern Glasgow AU I really do hope for more either to fill in on how
Claire left Frank for Jamie OR maybe some more fast forward to them finding out that they're
going to be parents.

“Claire?” Jamie appeared in the doorway. “We got the last box in the car. Murtagh won’t fit, so
he’ll meet us back at the flat.”

She nodded absently and set the note on the table, fished the engagement ring from her pocket, and
gently lay it on the piece of paper, weighing it down.

“I’ll never be able to give ye a diamond like that,” he said quietly.

She rose and slung her purse over her shoulder, smiling at him. “I wouldn’t want you to. It just gets
in the way.”

He licked his lips and ran his thumb down her nose. “I would give ye the world if I could.”

She grabbed his hand and kissed his palm. Warmth pooled in his belly.

“You’ve given me yourself – unconditionally. That’s more than I could ever want.”

He nodded absently, gaze unfocused. She tugged his hand to bring him back to the present.

“Come on. Let’s get back home.”

—

The men insisted she go straight upstairs, and for once she kept silent. Better let them deal with the
boxes – and make the phone call she’d been dreading.

She closed the door to Murtagh’s spare bedroom and sat on the bed. She knew she could have
asked Jamie to be with her, but this was something she needed to do on her own. Had to do on her
own, in order to move on with her life.

With Jamie. He was worth it.

Her hands shook slightly as she dialed Frank’s number.

Please pick up. Don’t make me call back. I’m not sure I have the strength to call back.
“Hello?”

She swallowed. “Hello Frank.”

“Claire?” The surprise in his voice was evident. “I didn’t think you’d be calling so soon.”

She licked her lips. “Of course. Frank – I – I can’t be with you anymore. I won’t be with you anymore.”

Silence. She knew he was there – could hear him breathing on the other side of the phone. “Just like that?”

“Just like that. It’s easy, right?” She paused. “When were you going to tell me? How much longer would you have played me the fool?”

He sighed. “I deserve that. I – Claire, you’re an extraordinary woman. You don’t deserve a professor.”

“Don’t you dare make this about me!” She rose, limbs shaking. “You’re the one who moved away. You’re the one who chose to see her.”

“Claire, I’m sorry. What else can I say? I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want or need your apologies, Frank.”

Jamie poked his head in the door, arching his eyebrows in a question. She nodded and he slipped in quietly, sitting on the bed.

“I’ve moved out of the flat. I’ve taken all my things – you needn’t worry about it. It’s waiting for you whenever you decide to come back. I even left my key on the table.”

Jamie’s hand found hers and squeezed gently. *I’m here. I support you.*

“Claire, don’t be rash. I’ll come to Glasgow, we can talk about this – ”

“No, Frank. It’s done. There’s nothing to talk about. I’m not going back.”

“This is foolish, Claire. You can’t do this.”

“I’m not foolish. And I can. No need for you to sneak around – you can see her – them – openly. I won’t get in your way anymore.”

Jamie’s thumb traced the lines on the inside of her palm.

“Claire, I’ll be back in Glasgow in a few weeks. We should meet then.”

“No, Frank. I’m finished. I loved you, you know. But you threw it away.”

“Where are you staying?”

“That’s none of your concern. Let me know when you’re here and I’ll decide whether I want to see you. But it will be at a time and place of my choosing.”

He sighed into the phone. “I did love you, Claire,” he said quietly. “This distance between us – it became too much.”
“It was too much for you, Frank. It was never too much for me.” She sighed. “Good-bye.”

She hung up before she could hear whether he returned the good-bye. Silently she sank to the bed, knee pressing against Jamie’s.

She sighed deeply, eyes fascinated at just how large his thumb was as it traced the bones of her hand over and over.

Jamie was so patient – he was giving her space. Again. He knew more about her, and gave her more room to be herself, than Frank had in all their years together.

“Do ye want to talk about it?” he asked quietly.

She shook her head. “Did you get all the boxes upstairs?”

“Aye. Murtagh nearly ruptured himself hauling those heavy books of yours. All the boxes are in the living room. We can keep them there or move them in here – whatever ye prefer.”

Claire rose. “I’ll bring some of them in here – I don’t want to take up all the space in – ”

Jamie gently tugged on her hand so that she landed in his lap. He settled his arms around her shoulders and drew his forehead against hers. They closed their eyes, breathing each other in.

“Ye’re so brave.”

She exhaled. “I don’t feel it.”

“Ye are. Braver than I am.”

“Not possible.”

A long moment.

“I dinna deserve you, mo nighean donn.”

“What does that mean?”

He smiled. “It’s the Gaidhlig. It means ‘my brown-haired lass.’ I’ve been longing to say that to ye.”

She butted her nose against his, pleased. “Did you grow up speaking Gaelic?”

“Aye. My parents made sure of it. I – I have no English sometimes, when I am upset or deeply emotional. So.”

Eyes still closed, Jamie trailed tiny kisses along her cheek to her earlobe.

“What did you say to me on the plane yesterday?” Was her voice really that breathless?

He hummed against her jaw. “Silly words. Ye’d laugh at me.”

“I promise I won’t. Tell me.”

She felt him swallow. “I told ye that if ye were mine, ye’d know every single second of every single day how much I love and cherish and respect ye,” he whispered, breath hot in her ear. “And I promised to protect ye, and give ye a home filled wi’ love. And give ye the space I know ye
need.”

He inhaled shakily. “I’m in love wi’ ye, Claire. I want ye to know that I’ll never change a thing about ye. I couldn’t.”

Claire pulled back. Jamie saw her eyes shining with tears. His heart sank.

He licked his lips. “Is it too much, Claire? Too soon? Am I – am I being too forward?”

She had no words. All she could do was smile at him and gently, gently bring her lips to his for the first time.

Fire.

Safety.

Love.

Home.

“I love you,” she whispered against his lips, breathless.

He stole another kiss, tears mingling with hers.
This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire and Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here for easier reading and in case there's anyone on AO3 who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check the blog out, though, and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: I know there was just a a part 4 in modern glasgow au of Jamie & Claire getting to know each other on the plane. Will there be more to fill in the gaps, maybe from there wedding or first date? This is a great new perspective. Thanks.

They had no plan – just to be outside, in the balmy weather, with each other.

Truth be told, Jamie wanted to walk down the largest streets in Glasgow, holding Claire’s hand so the whole world could see that this wonderful, strange woman was his.

But more immediate needs came first.

“I canna believe ye’re no’ feeling any ill effects from last night,” he said, chewing a piece of toast. They’d stepped into a local café for a hearty breakfast, taking a table that allowed them to sit side by side.

“Black coffee and protein cure almost everything,” she said between bites of omelet, nudging her knee against his. “I should know. I’m a nurse.”

He smiled into his teacup. “Aye, weel. I dinna wish to argue wi’ ye in any medical matters. Or ever, to be honest.”

Her eyes fell to her plate. “But you know it’s bound to happen, sooner or later. We can’t always be happy, Jamie. We’ll disagree.”

“You know it’s bound to happen. I asked ye to promise me honesty, Claire. And I’ll pledge the same to you.” He lay a big hand on the smooth, bare skin of her thigh, right below the hem of her dress. “I’ll never lie to ye, Claire. I’ll always let ye know what’s on my mind. I dinna make false vows.”

She set down her fork and cupped his cheek. “I know, Jamie. You can’t know how precious that is to me.”

“I’ll never play ye false, Claire. I truly will forsake all others. Gladly.” He swallowed. “I’ll never hurt you like he did.”

Not caring one bit of the other diners, she brought his mouth to hers. It was a slow, wet kiss and it lasted for a long while.

Finally she pulled back, eyes shining. He held her chin between a thumb and forefinger.
“How come every silly conversation between us becomes so serious, so quickly?” she asked softly.

He ran his thumb along her lower lip. “Because we dinna waste time wi’ empty words and flowery promises. And we have honesty and respect.”

“And love,” she smiled.

He sighed, heart full. “Oh, lass. So much love.”

By early afternoon it dawned on her that although she’d lived in Glasgow for almost three years, she’d never really gotten to know the city.

Jamie led her up small, winding side streets and large leafy avenues, bustling with people at midday. They stopped at a few boutiques where Claire lovingly touched a few gorgeous dresses and Jamie whispered silly dreams in her ear, smiling. She insisted they duck into every art gallery. He showed her the doors leading to underground clubs where he’d spent a few ill-advised evenings during his time in the city three years before. They drank pints and ate meat pies at a nondescript pub.

And the whole time her hand was tightly clasped in his. She had no idea where they were or where they were going – but it didn’t matter. They were together. It was truly that simple.

She said as much to him as she leaned against a shade tree in a large public park, his head in her lap.

“My Da told me that most folk make things too complicated for their own good,” he replied after a while. “And if I ever wanted happiness in my life, it had to be based on something simple.” He ran a hand up and down her bare leg, marveling. “He and my Mam had such a deep love between them. But it was also a simple love. They – they marrit after knowing each other for only a few weeks.”

She ran a hand through his hair. “Like father, like son?”

He smiled. “Weel. When we Fraser men see something we want – we grab it wi’ both hands, aye?”

“Hmm.” Her eyes followed his fingers as they gently traced the shape of her ankle. “Has there ever been a lucky woman in Murtagh’s life?”

“Murtagh? Women?” Jamie snorted. “That man is a confirmed bachelor. I think he’s terrified of women, as a rule.”

“Really? No woman has ever wormed her way into his heart?”

Jamie closed his eyes. “I know he was in love, once.”

Claire traced the ridges of his eyebrows. “Who was she?”

He sighed. “My Mam.”

“What?”

“Aye – it was my Mam. He knew her, growing up. Never told her, as far as I know. And once she met Da, weel. That was that.”
“And Murtagh is your father’s cousin?”

“He’s…I suppose. Something like that.”

Claire’s heart clenched. “Whose idea was it for him to be your godfather?”

Jamie’s eyes opened and met hers. “Mam’s. Da kent weel that Murtagh still loved her. And they both knew that he’d likely never settle down on his own. So – Jenny and I became his children.”

“That’s so…tragic. And romantic.”

He raised one brow. “Romantic? I dinna understand women sometimes.”

She traced his smile. “Don’t worry, lad. You’ll have all the time in the world to get to know how we think.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: I know y'all are probably finished with the Glasgow AU, but I can't help but imagine their wedding. Imagine Claire and Jamie spontaneously getting married!

Mod Gotham responds: Definitely not done, anon - not by a long shot! Hope you'll settle for the spontaneous marriage proposal...

Claire perched on the straight-backed chair in Murtagh’s kitchen, sipping a strong cup of tea. The late afternoon sun streamed through the high-paned windows, leaving pools of brightness on the dark-stained wood floors.

What a whirlwind. In three days she’d been to New York and back, said her goodbyes to Frank, packed up her things, and met Jamie.

Dear God, Jamie.

It was quick and intense with him. But so sincere. She knew that he meant every word he had said to her – that he would always keep his promises, that he would always put her first. That he would always love her, never change her, and do his best to make her happy.

Such simple things, really – but so rare. The depth of his feelings stirred echoes within her. How could she not be as devoted to him as he clearly was to her?

Was she jumping too quickly into a new relationship? She hadn’t spent any extended period of time with Frank in three months – and even then it had been a strained three days. Truth be told, they’d been drifting apart long before he’d taken the sabbatical. They’d been engaged for two years already, and had never set a date. It hadn’t really seemed to be that important to them.

Was it fair to compare Frank to Jamie? Two men who could not have been more different from each other. Frank had always put his work before anything else. Jamie’s intentions were clear: a life with her in it. He had such a disarming way of making everything so simple.

She sighed and sifted through the pile of mail she’d collected from the kitchen table in Frank’s flat. Bills, catalogs. And – oh Christ, the invitation. The hospital held a fundraising gala every year – a black-tie affair at a ritzy hotel. Her position entitled her to two free tickets. She hadn’t had anyone to escort her when she received the invitation three weeks prior. But now –

“There ye are.” She looked up as Jamie stepped into the kitchen and settled in the chair across from her. Automatically their hands sought each other on top of the table, fingers twining together. Strength.
“I didn’t realize you were looking for me,” she smiled.

He shrugged. “We got all the boxes where ye wanted them. Murtagh is bellyaching about how we younger folk are wearing out an auld man. He’s hungry for his supper.”

Jamie paused, thoughtful. “How old are ye, Claire? I never thought to ask.”

“I’m twenty-eight.” She pushed away her empty mug and rested her other hand atop his.

“Ah.” He smiled. “I don’t suppose ye mind robbing the cradle then?”

She quirked one brow. “Don’t tell me you’re eighteen, lad.”

He grinned. “No, but three and twenty may still be a wee bit young for the tastes of an auld woman like you.” He twisted his hand in between hers, fingers lacing and unlacing.

“You like it. Admit it.”

“I do,” he said huskily.

Then he didn’t speak for a long time, lost in thought, fascinated by their joined hands.

“Claire – is it usual? What it is between us – when I touch you? Kiss you? Is it – is it always so?”

Her heart stuttered. “Jamie – ” she rasped, throat thick. “Jamie, love – no. This isn’t usual. This is different.”

He nodded, thoughtfully. “I – Claire. I want everything with you. Do you – are ye willing to open yer heart to me? Fully? Because I understand if ye are not ready – ”

“Shh.” Her thumbs gently stroked the back of his hand. “Yes. I’m ready. I’ve been thinking – Frank hasn’t truly been in my life for a long time. We’ve been so far apart from each other for so long. Jamie – I look at you, and I feel – linked. Joined.”

He nodded. “I – I feel it too.” His eyes were so wide, the pupils dilated – his iris was almost entirely black.

His thumb traced the base of her ring finger. “If I give ye a ring, Claire – will ye wear it? Will ye have me?”

Her heart raced. Oh God, this was so fast. Oh God, this was so right.

“Yes,” she breathed. “Yes, I’ll have you.”

He raised her left hand to his lips and kissed her ring finger gently. Then he bit down on the knuckle.

Heat pooled in her belly. She met his gaze, eyes so dark.

And held it as he knelt before her, fingers still gripping her left hand.

He broke her gaze only to fish in his pocket. Quickly he produced a thin, worn silver band and held it, considering.

Tears slipped down Claire’s cheeks.
“This was my Mam’s wedding ring. Da gave it to Murtagh after she died. It’s Murtagh’s responsibility to stand up for me at my wedding and make sure I give it to a worthy lass, ken.” He swallowed. “I asked him for it this morning, Claire. You are that worthy lass. So.”

His eyes met hers. “Will ye marry me?”

She nodded furiously.

He smiled, breathless. “Say the words, Claire. Please. I need – I need to hear ye say them.”

She inhaled deeply. “Yes, Jamie. Yes.”

His fingers trembled as he drew the ring over her knuckle. It fit snugly – perfectly.

She launched into Jamie’s arms and they crashed to the floor, laughing.

“I love you.” He kissed away her tears.

“I love you.” She dug her nose into the hollow of his throat.

They held each other for a long time, just sharing the same space. Sharing breath.

Until Murtagh’s shuffling steps came right up beside them. Jamie looked up over Claire’s curls to see his godfather scowling.

“Have ye no decency, Jamie? Ye canna even lie wi’ her on the couch?”

Jamie grinned stupidly up at his godfather. “We’re getting marrit, Murtagh.”

The older man sighed. “God bless the puir lass.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Imagine Claire and Jamies first date or the wedding itself in the Modern Glasgow AU

Jamie paced on the rug in front of the window, hands clasped behind his back.

What was taking her so long? Murtagh had assured him all was well – lasses did take a bit more time to get ready, after all. But never had he had to wait for something like this –

The door to their bedroom creaked open. Jamie turned, and his heart stopped.

Claire smiled widely at him from the doorway, glowing in a beautiful grey dress. The neckline scooped to show off her beautiful collarbones and just the tops of her bonny breasts. Her hair floated gently around her face. God, he wanted to bury his fingers in it and swallow her mouth -

He blinked, watching helplessly as she slowly walked toward him. Quickly he grabbed her hands and twined their fingers together.

“Claire –” he choked. “My lady. Claire – you’re –”

She squeezed his hands. “I could say the same to you, lad. I didn’t know you owned a kilt.”

Jamie blinked, looked down at his tartan, and then back at Claire. God, her eyes were so beautiful.

“Aye – Fraser colors. I want – I want to honor ye. To wed ye in the same clothing my father did, and his father before that, and on and on and on back.”

Her eyes darted to his feet. “My, what bonny knees you have,” she teased.

And with that, the tension between them broke – to be quickly replaced with excitement.

“He’s really doing this, Jamie.”

He nodded. “Aye, Claire, we are.” He dropped her hands and fished in a small pouch at his waist.

“These were my mother’s,” he said softly as he drew a lovely string of pearls around her neck and closed the clasp gently at her nape. His fingers lingered for just a moment before pulling back.

Claire’s fingers ran along the pearls. “They’re lovely, Jamie.” Her eyes locked with his, and she licked her lips.

“Aye, weel.” Jamie flushed. “They’re only Scotch pearls – and antique ones at that. They always
looked so bonny on her – ye’ve got a long graceful neck, just like she did. So.”

Overcome with emotion, Claire tilted up her chin for a kiss.

“Oh no you don’t!” Murtagh quickly stepped between them. “It’s bad enough ye’re seeing each other before the wedding – I willna break wi’ every tradition today.”

Jamie glared at his godfather, and Claire smiled. “Any other disruptions ye’d like to make, then?”

“Aye, lad. Yer rings – give them to me. Elsewise I’d have nothing to do during the ceremony.”

Quickly they removed their rings. Murtagh deposited them with a soft clink in his sporran and picked up his phone from the side table.

“Another man in a kilt! Maybe he’ll catch some lucky lassie’s eye today,” Claire teased, winding her arm around Jamie.

“Enough wi’ ye,” Murtagh glowered, holding up his phone. “Give us a good pose, aye? Ye’ll want yer bairns to see what lovestruck idiots their Mam and Da were on their wedding day.”

Jamie, glowing with joy, settled one hand possessively in the curve of Claire’s waist. She turned her body so it was flush against his side, her head settling into his shoulder.

Murtagh cursed gently as he tried and failed to get the camera to focus. It finally cooperated and he snapped one photo. Claire lifted her head and Jamie turned his to nuzzle her hair. Murtagh snapped another photo, shaking his head slightly. He cleared his throat.

“Well then. Let’s get to the Morris. Canna be late to yer own wedding.”

—

It didn’t take too long to get to the registry office. Murtagh dropped them off in front. Jamie scrambled out of the back seat to open the passenger door for Claire and take her hand. Her wide smile at his gallantry warmed him straight through.

A few steps inside the door and a short trip up a flight of stairs were all that separated them from their future. Claire paused on the landing. Jamie stopped, inquisitive. “What is it?”

She shook her head. “Aren’t you afraid that people down below will see your - parts?”

He grinned. “And here I thought ye’d changed yer mind. No, I’m not worrit. It’s no’ like most people have never seen a pair of ballocks before.”

She smiled and suddenly darted up the remaining steps, holding her skirts in one hand. Jamie, laughing, chased behind. They made it to the top, panting and giggling, to meet the disapproving frown of a middle-aged matron slumped behind a battered desk.


The woman scowled. “Aye – that’s all we do on this floor. Weddings.” She made a note in her ledger. “Do ye have yer own witness?”

“Yes – he’ll be along presently.” As if on cue, the elevator chimed and Murtagh stepped through.

The clerk listlessly waved toward a battered bench on the other side of the landing. “Take a seat, then. Yer name will be called when it’s yer turn.”
Jamie thanked her and tugged Claire’s hand, leading them toward the bench. She watched him gingerly sit down, carefully keeping his legs as close to the bench as possible.

“I thought you said you didn’t care whether people saw your ballocks,” she whispered.

He smiled conspiratorially and brought his lips to her ear. “Aye, but I certainly dinna want that old bag to see them.” Claire noticed that one of his knees was quickly bouncing up and down. “She’s probably never seen a pair in her life – the shock of seeing mine would kill her.”

Murtagh gently pushed Jamie’s shoulder and they exchanged clearly rude remarks in the *Gaidhlig*. Claire sat up a bit straighter and drew in a deep breath.

“There ye all right?” Jamie tilted her chin to meet his eyes, full of worry.

She touched his cheek. “I’m not leaving. Just – we’re here. It’s happening. Truly happening.”

He nodded. “I know. I – I canna wait for it, Claire.”

She touched his cheek, moved. “Just a bit longer, lad.”

He turned his head to kiss her palm, eyes locked on hers.

And he would have kissed her, right there, had the door not opened at that moment.

“Bowchamp and Fraser?”

Claire rose. “It’s pronounced Bee-cham, not – ”

“It doesna matter, Claire,” Jamie interrupted, setting a big hand at the small of her back and drawing her closer to the door. “Not for much longer, anyway.”

And together they stepped toward their future, Murtagh close behind them, grinning ear to ear like an idiot.

—

To Jamie, the ceremony was over almost as quickly as it began. Claire never let go of his hands. She was so captivating – her gorgeous face, her beautiful eyes. The bonny way her chest rose up and down with short breaths. How *right* his Mam’s pearls looked around her neck.

He said his vows. He was hers.

She said her vows. She was his.

Then Murtagh touched his elbow and handed him his Mam’s ring. The shock of cool metal after the warmth of Claire’s hands grounded him as he slipped the ring over her knuckle.

Then her small fingers slipped his ring onto the base of his finger. They smiled, giddily. And with the confirmation it was over, Jamie framed his wife’s face between his hands and kissed her properly.

He drew back only after Murtagh cleared his throat. Tears spilled from Claire’s beautiful eyes, and it would have bothered him had he not been blinking back his own tears.

No words could convey the gravity and euphoria and absolute joy of the moment.
Murtagh stepped between them and laid a hand on each of their shoulders. “Welcome to the family, Claire,” he said softly.

She gripped Murtagh’s hand and he gently raised it to his lips for a kiss.

Jamie thumped him on the arm. “She’s my wife, man. Dinna try to steal her from me now.”

Murtagh quirked one bushy eyebrow. “Dinna fash yerself, lad. She’ll never let herself be stolen. Now are ye ready for a wee bite?”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Love to read a Modern Glasgow AU wedding/engagement. Thank you this one it's a favorite of mine

Murtagh insisted they go to the pub around the corner to celebrate their engagement. He’d expected them to continue their lovestruck behavior in public, and that he’d be very much the third wheel.

But he hadn’t expected Claire Beauchamp to just about drink him under the table.

She slammed down the empty shot glass, grinning like an idiot. “That’s ten, Mr. FitzGibbons,” she crowed, voice only slightly slurred. “To your seven. Better give up now – I don’t think you’ll survive another three.”

Blinking back tears, Murtagh slid another shot of whisky down his throat. Jamie thumped him on the back in encouragement. Bloody fool had withdrawn himself after the third shot, grinning the whole time.

This lass was full of surprises – a Sassenach, older, a nurse. Mouth like a sailor. Rescued like a damn damsel in one of the fairy stories he’d read to Jamie when he was a bairn. And she drank like a fish.

He couldn’t have picked a better match for wee Jamie if he’d tried.

“Eight, mistress,” he gulped. “I dare ye to stand up. It’s no’ winning if ye havena got yer legs about ye.”

Flushed with alcohol and excitement, she rose. Wobbled a bit, to be sure, but steadily held her ground. Jamie instantly rose beside her and offered a steadying hand.

“No! Not allowed!” Murtagh bellowed – though he could barely be heard above the din in the pub. He pushed his chair back and rose, feet planted firmly on the ground.

And dropped like a stone.

“Come on, man,” Jamie nudged Murtagh, who had crumpled against his side as they waited for the crossing light to change. “Dinna embarrass yerself in front of my wife.”

“She’s no’ yer wife yet, laddie,” Murtagh mumbled slowly, deliberately. “That’s – why – we –
were – celebratin’.”

Jamie slung Murtagh’s arm around his shoulder. A rather unladylike snort came from Claire, somehow still walking under her own power. “I don’t know how we would have ever gotten you home, Jamie.”

The light turned green, and Jamie practically dragged Murtagh into the crosswalk. “Weel, Murtagh’s done it for me a time or two before, when I was a young and foolish lad.”

“Yer still a young and foolish lad,” Murtagh croaked. He could move his legs, to be sure – but gripped Jamie’s shoulder for all he was worth.

“I’d smack ye if we weren’t in the middle of the street,” Jamie hissed. As they reached the other side and turned onto the sidewalk, he glared at Claire. “And you – you encouraged him. He hasna had this much to drink in a long time.”

She giggled. “He’s a grown man – not my fault he didn’t want to be beaten by a woman.”

They arrived at Murtagh’s door. Jamie fumbled in his pockets for the key.

“Yer no’ a woman. Ye must be – a witch. No woman could drink that much.”

Claire eased Murtagh’s other arm over her shoulder, helping Jamie guide him up the stairs. “I’ll let you try to best me again, then – but next time, let’s do it at home? I have a feeling Jamie would have preferred leaving you to fend for yourself at the pub.”

Murtagh broke into a beatific smile as they eased him through the door and onto the couch. “Maybe – maybe I’d ha’ met a beautiful lass like yerself, then. Like Jamie did.”

Jamie snorted as he unlaced Murtagh’s shoes. “Hush, a bhailach. Go back to yer dreams. Claire will tend ye in the morning.”

She draped a blanket over him as his eyes closed. Jamie stepped into the kitchen. Suddenly Murtagh’s hand darted from under the blankets and gripped her wrist, tightly.

“Dinna break his heart, lass. He wouldna survive it.”

Gently she pried his fingers from her arm. “I won’t. I couldn’t.”

He sighed, and within seconds began to snore.

Jamie returned and set a glass of water and some aspirin on the bedside table. “Puirt bugger. He’ll have a sore heid in the morning.”

Claire stepped beside him and grasped his hand. He turned to face her fully. His other hand tilted up her chin for a soft kiss.

“Christ, ye taste like the bottom of a bottle,” he breathed against her lips.

She laughed softly. “Let’s go to bed, Jamie.”

He stilled. She felt the pulse in wrist race.

“To bed or – to sleep?” he whispered, breathlessly.

She smiled and kissed him for a long moment.
“Just hold me?”

He kissed her forehead. “Aye. I can do that. I wouldn’t want to take advantage of a woman half gone wi’ drink, anyway.”

She playfully pushed against his shoulder. “Wait until I try to drink you under the table.”

He laughed softly. “God help me if I’m fool enough to try.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Imagine Jamie reassuring Claire as she becomes insecure about her body whilst pregnant.

Before (three days after meeting)

“Hush,” he said softly. Gently he ground his pelvis into hers. She gasped against his lips, holding him tight, wanting to give him everything.

“Will you still want me when I’m fat and pregnant?” she whispered into his ear.

He groaned. “Ye canna say those things to me,” he whispered. “I think I’ll want ye even more, when I see ye all swollen wi’ my child.”

He drew back and butted his nose against hers. “So I’ll want to keep ye pregnant as much as I can, aye?”

She stole a kiss and bit his lower lip. “We’re going to have so much fun together, Jamie.”

He rolled off her but kept his arms locked around her side, their legs tangled together, cupping her belly. “I canna wait to feel a bairn move inside ye.”

——

During (three years after meeting)

Jamie quietly shut the door, slipped off his boots, hung his coat on a peg, and padded across the living room to the open kitchen - mindful of Claire, head bent, four textbooks and three notebooks haphazardly strewn across the dining table. Her feet were propped up on the other chair, clad in the soft tartan socks Jenny had sent for Christmas. Her hands rested on the swell of her belly, flipping through the flashcards he’d made last week.

He pulled the carton of orange juice from the refrigerator, stepped over to kiss Claire’s head, and eased into the chair across from her, gently placing her feet in his lap, caressing the tender arches. “Have ye memorized the names and places of all those tendons and bones yet?”

She lay down the pack of flash cards and sighed in bliss. “The metacarpal is connected to the metatarsal, which -”
“Ach, so ye’ve got it then.” He grinned as her toes curled against his steady hands, seeking more. “And how’s the wee bannock?”

Claire set the flash cards on the table and caressed her sweatshirt-covered bump. The flash of his Mam’s wedding ring caught his eye as he watched how Claire’s hands - spread wide - could no longer cup the entire swell.

“We’re good. A bit active today. And very hungry. I swear I’ve eaten half a loaf of bread and an entire block of cheese.”

“That’s normal, aye?”

She sighed again - not in pleasure this time, but resignation. “Yes. I just hate how much weight I’m gaining. Not to mention all the water I’m retaining. Can’t you feel that?”

Jamie met her gaze squarely. “It’s all for the bairn - so ye shouldna mind. I don’t, one bit. You are so beautiful to me, Claire.”

She shook her head, and shifted her foot in his lap, brushing against his groin, and - oh.

Warmth - emotional and physical - flushed through her body. “Oh,” she remarked with feigned casualness, one eyebrow arched.

Jamie grinned wolfishly and resumed his ministrations. “I did promise ye honesty, aye?”

____

After (five years after meeting)

“She willna eat?”

“Poor thing can’t seem to make up her mind,” Claire sighed, wearily swaying back and forth before the window, a fussy Brianna tucked against her shoulder.

Jamie rose and settled behind Claire, kissing Brianna’s brow. Her small eyes were finally starting to drowse. He paused, deliberating, and slowly sank his face into the curve of Claire’s neck, hands settling at her hips. He stepped closer, pressing his back to her front, lightly sucking her shoulder.

She melted against him. “Jamie-”

“Do ye know – it’s the longest we’ve gone wi’out lying together since we wed?” He kissed her shoulder languidly, thoughtfully. “I ken well that yer body is still not quite yer own again – but I mind what ye said to me last night, about being someone’s mother now.” Careful of Brianna on Claire’s shoulder, Jamie moved one hand to cup her breast, thumb teasing the tender nipple.

He smiled, feeling Claire’s breath hitch. “I find ye even more beautiful, even more desirable, now that ye’re someone’s mother. You created and bore life, mo nighean donn. Ye did so, and endured such a terrible ordeal, for me. How could I not love you, and desire you, even more?”

He rocked his hips slightly into the small of her back, seeking friction. Her face reflected in the window – eyes closed, mouth open, deep breaths - was the picture of desire.

But as much as he wanted her – and he wanted her badly – he wanted, needed her to give the final yea or nay. “Is it too soon, Claire?” he whispered, nose buried in her hair. “Are you tender inside, still?”
She turned to face him – cheeks flushed, lips parted, hair all curling around her face. Slowly she smiled, took his hand, and led him to the bed, pausing only to quietly lay Brianna in her bassinet.

Her skin glowed in the firelight. He cupped her breasts and gently kissed her forehead, clearly wanting to go slow. Greedily she pulled his mouth to hers, finding and sucking on his lower lip.

Gasping, she pulled back after a moment. His eyes were fire – as were hers.

“I can’t wait any longer, Jamie. I can’t. I want you. Just please, please be careful. I don’t know – ”

He swallowed her words, smiling, and eased her back onto the bed.
Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Imagine Claire pregnant for the third time

“How could this have happened?”

Jamie arched a bushy red eyebrow at his wife, hunched across the kitchen table, face buried in her hands. “I’d think after the two girls we’d ken our way about it by now.”

Claire sighed, suddenly feeling so drained. “We tried for three years - and nothing. Now three babies in a little over three years. You damn Scot with your bloody powerful sperm.”

“My sperms have nothing to do wi’ it! I canna help -”

“Nothing to do with it, my arse!”

Jamie rose, propping his hands on the table, leaning closer to Claire. “Aye, it’s your arse that got us into this situation to begin with! I canna help that every time ye move past me in the kitchen or the bathroom or in the nursery I just want to pin ye to the ground and -”

Claire straightened up in her chair and narrowed her eyes. “Shh! They’ll be up any second now and I won’t have a moment’s less peace than I can get! God knows I’ll never get any sleep again, between the babies and my residency and needing to roger you every time we have five minutes alone -”

Jamie rounded the table and knelt beside Claire, gently taking her hands in his. His thumbs caressed the backs of her hands - the veins more prominent now than before she’d borne the bairns, but no less attractive to him. She was even more beautiful than the first time he’d seen her, thumbing through a medical journal on that fateful plane ride.

“Claire. Do you not want this bairn?”

She moved to snatch her hands away - but he gripped them tight.

“How can you say that? Of course I want the baby. I don’t -”

He twined their fingers together. “And were we no’ terrified when we had to juggle wee Faith and yer classes? And then wee Faith and wee Brianna and yer clinical time?”

She huffed. “Yes, but -”

He edged closer, eyes locked on hers. “And did ye no’ graduate near top of yer class and land a
spot in the best surgery program?”

A small smile. “I did. But Jamie - you had to sacrifice, and we had to lean on Murtagh so much -”

He kissed her wedding ring. “Ye ken fine that he doesna mind one bit - it’s no’ like he has much to do anyway. The girls are his life. And they’re also used to being wi’ me at the printshop - you know that Rupert and Angus and Willie all love them something fierce. We’ll make do. Like we have already.”

A full smile now. “Aye,” said softly.

“So. I’m terrified too, Claire - but we’ve faced such challenges before. We’ll face them again.”

“And always come out stronger.”

His smile matched hers. “Yes.”

“Yes.” She bent for a kiss.

“Jamie?”

“Hmm?”

“Maybe no more after this one? Just to give ourselves a break?”

He kissed the lovely, sweet curve of her neck. She shivered. He smiled.
This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

**Original prompt:** What happens when Claire and Jamie leave the plane, and decides to move into his/Murtagh’s flat?

This was crazy. She was crazy, pouring her heart out to a stranger and soliciting his help to move her things from Frank’s flat. He’d convinced her to wait until the morning, when he and his godfather could both help. And she didn’t want him exerting himself too much, and give the burn enough time to heal.

Right. Keep telling yourself that, Beauchamp. Convince yourself he’s a patient, when he’s something else entirely.

She glanced at Jamie, beside her in the back seat of a cab. The dark, rain-slickened streets of Glasgow glided by. Her hand hadn’t left his since the airplane, not even in customs or immigration, when they’d gone through together. As a couple.

Jamie’s thumb gently traced the backs of her fingers. Her left hand felt naked, but free. Liberated. But at the same time she felt the invisible weight of another band – the one Jamie could give her. He was an amazing, selfless man – but still very boyish in some ways.

Idly Claire wondered just how old he really was. Not that it mattered – but she was curious. Frank was ten years older than her, and Jamie was clearly younger.

“It’s just a wee bit up the street,” the cab driver said over the roar of the rain.

“I feel terrible intruding on you and your godfather – you haven’t seen each other in ages,” she said softly.

Jamie squeezed her fingers. “Dinna fash yourself. He’ll be delighted to meet you.”

Claire wasn’t so sure. She’d taken such a big risk with Jamie – but he’d proven to her in their short acquaintance that he could hold her heart – and her feelings – with such gentleness and thoughtfulness. And respect.

The cab eased to a stop. “Here we are.”

Jamie reluctantly released Claire’s hand. “Here are your bags – wait for me just under that alcove.”

She opened the door and darted through the raindrops to a small covered entryway. Beside the glass door were six doorbells, glowing in the dark.
The door slammed, and Jamie hurried to the alcove, pressing tightly against her. Her heart surged.

He pressed one button and settled an arm around her shoulders as they waited.

“Come on…” he said under his breath.

“Aye?” A deep voice scratched over the intercom.

“It’s me,” Jamie yelled over the din of the rain. “Fer the love of God, man, let us up!”

The door buzzed, and Jamie turned the doorknob. Claire gathered their bags and followed him into the hallway and up a flight of stairs.

The door at the end of the landing was already open, a bearded man in a navy dressing gown waiting in the doorway. She hung back as Jamie rushed to greet his godfather.

They embraced, and the older man held Jamie for a long time. They spoke Gaelic in excited tones. Jamie’s voice saying those strange words…she wondered again just what exactly he had murmured to her on the airplane.

Murtagh looked up over Jamie’s shoulder and noticed Claire. “Jamie?” he asked, switching to English. “What’s this? Have ye something to tell me?”

Jamie turned and extended an arm to Claire. She stepped forward and gripped his hand tightly.

“This is Claire. She sat next to me on the plane ride home. She’s in need of a place to stay tonight.”

Murtagh looked her up and down in frank appraisal. “Ah. Weel. And here I thought – weel.” Belatedly Claire realized that Murtagh was a bit flustered.

Seeking to break the tension, Claire stepped forward, hand extended. “Claire Beauchamp,” she said softly. “Jamie told me quite a bit about you.”

Murtagh stared at her hand before gripping it and giving two hard pumps. “Mmphm,” he said warily. “She’s English, Jamie?”

“Aye. So?”

Murtagh shook his head. “Of course. Anyway. I suppose I’ll be making up the extra bed for ye, lad. No way this lass will sleep on the couch.”

—–

“Really, I’m fine – I’m quite comfortable. Thank you.”

“Truly? I know it’s no’ much, but…” Jamie glanced around the small bedroom, lit only with the glow of a single bedside lamp. There had been no question that she’d get the bed and he would make do with the pull-out mattress of Murtagh’s battered living room couch. Though truth be told, he’d prefer to slide in next to her and just hold her through the night…He shook his head to clear it of those thoughts. Better save them for later – not with her standing right in front of him, so bonny in the dim light.

She gently rested a hand on his chest. Only now when they stood, face to face, did she realize just how bloody tall he was.
He closed his eyes. Dimly she realized that his heart was racing under her palm.

So he was as affected as she was.

“Thank you, Jamie. You’ve been so kind – offering me help, a place to stay.”

He swallowed. “It’s nothing. I hope you know I’d do anything for you, Claire.”

His voice was so eager – open, and honest. And the way he said her name – so gently, and with that burr – warmed her insides. Her breath quickened.

“I’ll take you to the pharmacy in the morning to get more of that aloe cream. You don’t want that burn worsening.”

He nodded, and opened his eyes. His blue gaze burned into hers.

Heady. Intense. What was this between them?

His hand gently rested on top of hers. He licked his lips and kissed her knuckles, so gently.

“Good night,” he said, voice husky. He stepped quietly toward the door.

She smiled widely. “Good night.”

He nodded and shut the door. She rested against it and let out a deep sigh.
Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Can you please write about Jamie and Claire's first encounter on the plane in your modern AU?

Jamie Fraser settled back into his lumpy economy class chair, idly watching the passengers slowly make their way up the airplane’s central aisle. He was finally going home. Colum and Dougal had worked him to the bone these last few weeks, knowing that his time was almost up – and wanting to take advantage of his labor as much as they could. Much more than was proper, to be sure – but Jamie was willing to do just about anything to turn the page on this time in his life.

He hadn’t minded that his uncles didn’t even spring for a business class ticket. As long as he was going back to Scotland, he didn’t care exactly how – Murtagh’s snide comments on the cheapness of the MacKenzie’s notwithstanding. Still, he wouldn’t feel entirely at ease until that door closed shut and the plane gently pushed back from the gate.

The stream of passengers had dwindled to a few stragglers now. Jamie stretched, hoping that the window seat beside him would remain empty for the flight. His legs always had no place to go in these cramped seats. Even sitting at an awkward angle was better than losing circulation from the knees down.

Jamie sifted through the magazines and catalogs in the seatback pocket. No good movies to be shown on this flight, and he wasn’t in the right frame of mind to focus on a book or crossword puzzle. There was always sleep, but he was still so keyed up from his whirlwind final day in New York…

“Excuse me?”

Jamie looked up, and his heart nearly stopped.

She smiled back hesitantly, curly hair askew and cheeks slightly flushed. Clearly she’d run all the way to the gate.

Jamie blinked, then remembered his manners.

“Of course,” he breathed, quickly jumping up and stepping into the aisle. “Do ye need a hand wi’ those bags?”

She tilted her head and gently eased a satchel into his waiting hands. “Sure – if you don’t mind?”
Jamie shook his head and heaved the small – but heavy – satchel into the overhead bin. “What do ye have in here? Rocks?”

She raised one eyebrow and squarely met his teasing gaze. “Textbooks,” she said deliberately.

He nodded, then awkwardly extended a hand indicating her to sit. She settled into the window seat and Jamie eased in beside her. He buckled his seatbelt and stared at his hands, watching out of the corner of his eye as she unpacked a magazine from her purse. His mind grasped at something, anything to hear her voice again.

“What kind of textbooks?”

She smoothed her right hand over the cover of the magazine – *The Lancet*. “Medical. I’m a nurse.”

That got his attention. “Oh, aye?” he replied, a bit surprised. “What kind o’ nurse, if ye dinna mind me asking?”

“Well, I don’t have a specialty, really. I’m an emergency room supervisor at a hospital.”

Jamie’s eyebrows shot up. “Ye live in Glasgow, then?”

“Yes, going on three years now.”

“But ye’re clearly no’ from there originally – unless yer parents sent ye to school in England when ye were a wee bairn?”

She smiled, and his heart raced. “No – Oxfordshire, originally. I moved to Glasgow with my – my fiancé, when he accepted a teaching job at the university.”

Fiancé. Of course. Jamie glanced down at her hands, neatly spread side-by-side on the magazine. How could he have missed that diamond ring? He swallowed, limbs numb from the adrenaline. What was this woman doing to him?

“What about you?”

Jamie’s eyes snapped up to hers. “What?”

She raised one eyebrow, teasing. “You’re clearly not from Oxfordshire.”

“Aye – weel. I was born at home, near the wee village of Broch Mordha, in the Highlands up near Inverness.”

“You were born at home?” Her voice was incredulous.

“It was my Mam’s choice.” He shrugged. “My family lives in our ancestral home, and all the heirs have been born there – in the same bedroom, even - since the eighteenth century.”

She shook her head. “You Scots and your traditions.”

He arched one eyebrow. “You English have a fair bit of tradition as well. The Queen and all that, aye?”

She smiled. “So, do you live in Glasgow now?”

“Yes and no. I’ve been in New York for the past two years, working with my uncles in the printing business. My time here is done, so it’s back to Scotland. My godfather lives in Glasgow, and I’ll be
living wi’ him for a while.” He sighed. “I’ve got a job at a printshop waiting for me. I dinna want to do that kind of work for the rest of my life, but it’s a place to start, ken?”

She nodded. “How come –”

“Excuse me.” Jamie reluctantly turned to face the grizzled flight attendant. “Will you need a card for UK Customs?”

“No, thank you,” he said slowly, glaring at her. The flight attendant moved on to the next row without asking the woman next to him whether she needed a card – clearly assuming that they were traveling together.

Jamie swallowed and turned to face his seatmate. “How many miles do you think that one has on her?” he asked quietly.

She grinned and shook her head. “You’re terrible.”

He smiled back, absolutely entranced. “What were you doing in New York, then?”

Her demeanor changed immediately. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat and looked down at her hands – almost nervous. She twisted the diamond ring around her finger. “I was visiting Frank – my fiancé. He’s on a sabbatical at Columbia – he’s an expert in Scottish history, actually. The ’45 and all that. Columbia has some wonderful resources, and he’s trying to write a book.”

He longed so desperately to take one of her small, trembling hands into his. To comfort her, ask what was troubling her, and put her mind at ease. But he couldn’t. He shouldn’t. Another man had already laid claim to her – and what a lucky man he was.

So Jamie did the only thing he could do – find a bit of humor.

“Bonnie Prince Charlie. What a daftie that one was.”

She snorted softly, the tension broken. “Scots, as a rule, have very long memories.”

He nodded, meeting her gaze as she raised her eyes to his. “My family’s estate was never taken over by the English, not even after Culloden” he said, with not a small bit of pride. “My six-times great-grandfather was able to hold on to it. And today we run one of the largest and most prosperous working farms in the county.”

“That’s no small accomplishment,” she remarked softly. “Why did you come to New York, then? Why leave the farm?”

He opened and closed his mouth. How much to tell her, this beautiful, smart, absolutely captivating stranger?

An announcement from the flight deck, shortly followed by the terribly-produced safety video, filled in the silence between them. Their connection was broken.

She leafed through her magazine, he stared dumbly at the backs of his hands. He longed to answer her question – tell her the truth about why he had left Lallybroch and come to work for his uncles. He felt he could trust her – could open up to her – and that she would really, truly listen. Some part of him believed that by opening himself up to her, she’d want to know more about him – and come to see that he was worthy of her. More worthy than the university professor ever could be.

*Enough. She’s not yours, lad. Let it go.*
He turned to peer out the window at the runway, slowly tracing her profile with his eyes. Dear God she was beautiful. Funny and charming, with a solid iron core. Strong. Capable.

He swallowed and lay his head back on the headrest, closing his eyes. It was going to be a long flight.

—

Twenty minutes until landing now. She had settled back into her seat, but her hand hadn’t left his grip – their fingers were still tightly laced together.

And she’d removed her ring, with little ceremony, and tucked it into her purse.

“I’ll be moving out of the flat,” she said softly, gazing down at their hands. His thumb hadn’t stopped stroking her knuckles. “It’s in Frank’s name – university housing. I don’t want to spend even another night there.”

Jamie’s other hand settled against her palm, fingers idly tracing the sensitive skin of her wrist. “I’ll help ye,” he said quietly. “Ye can live wi’ me and Murtagh until ye land on yer feet.”

She shook her head. “I can’t believe this. Six hours ago, I didn’t even know who you were. And now I’m planning a new life – and you’re in it.”

He swallowed and met her eyes. “Only if ye want me to be.”

She nodded. “Yes. I do want you to be in it.” Her gaze softened. “Though I have one condition.”

He bit back panic. “Oh, aye? What is it, then?”

She smiled. “Tell me your name.”

He let out a sigh and grinned widely. “Ah. It’s Jamie. Well, James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser, if ye want to be formal about it.”

She ran the tips of her fingers up and down the inside of his palm. He swallowed. “Well then – fair’s fair. What’s yer name?”

She smiled. “Claire. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp.” Her left hand, naked, traced his brow gently. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jamie.”

Holy God, the way she said his name…

He raised her hand to his lips for a gentle kiss. “The pleasure is all mine, Claire.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Can you write about Claire and Jamie running into Frank during the modern Glasgow time?

Claire settled into the stiff wooden chair and rested her elbows on the sticky cafe table, curving her cold fingers around the glorious warmth of her teacup.

It was always disconcerting, how early the darkness came in Glasgow as the calendar inched toward the winter solstice. Even though she’d left the hospital early - the emergency room had been almost deserted, as the city had emptied out a fair bit now that Christmas was just a few days away. Jamie was working on a deadline at the printshop - an order for a book of fairy tales, of all things - and likely wouldn’t be home for dinner.

Which gave her a window of time to do something that had formed a dark, hard knot in her stomach from the moment she’d received the text two weeks ago: I’ll be coming back to Glasgow for Christmas. Please let me see you. I can’t stand the way we left things in New York.

Jamie had been changing the wallpaper on her phone when the text arrived. He’d silently handed it back to her and perched on the kitchen counter, letting her process it, giving her space. She knew it would be the right thing to do - to officially close that chapter in her life - but just seeing his name brought back all the loneliness and hurt and confusion that had characterized the disintegration of their relationship six months prior.

So she’d agreed to it - at a time and place of her choosing - and now he was uncharacteristically five minutes late.

Claire sipped her oolong as the screen of her phone illuminated - showing the picture Murtagh had taken of her and Jamie on their wedding day at the registry office, together with a text from Jamie. I’m across the street. Take all the time you need. I love you, mnd.

Her jittery heart soared - knowing he’d had to have moved heaven and earth to leave work early - and she smiled despite that heavy knot. Only two days until they finally -

“Claire?”

Slowly she clenched her teeth and looked up, across the table - as Frank removed his scarf and gloves, scraped a chair across the tile floor, and slipped his briefcase off his shoulder. She’d given him that briefcase two years ago - it was embossed with his initials. Initials she’d hoped to share,
She didn’t rise to greet him. "Hello Frank."

He settled into the chair, his own hands clutching a to-go cup of what Claire knew had to be English Breakfast tea. “This is a nice place. I don’t remember seeing it when I visited the hospital before.”

“It opened up just this summer - my colleagues and I come here once a week or so.”

“Ah.” He sipped his tea, eyes intent on hers. “Did you just come from work?”

“I did.”

“You always used to change out of your scrubs before coming home. Not today?”

“Not today. Not ever now, actually.”

Frank leaned closer to her, elbows perched on the edge of his side of the table. “Any particular reason?”

Well this conversation was not going in the direction she’d expected. He was trying to take the lead, to take control. And she’d have none of it.

“No - just that my husband doesn’t want me going to the effort at the end of the day, when me staying in my dirty scrubs means five more minutes we can have together.”

He smiled a rueful half-smile. “So it’s true, then. You’re married.”

Claire bent her left thumb so that it traced the inside of her wedding ring. “I am. Six months on Christmas.”

That took him aback. “Six months? You married him only a few weeks after we broke it off?”

“As I recall - you were the one whose actions led to the breakup.” It was so difficult to keep her voice calm, but she wouldn’t rise to his bait. Not if he wanted to hurt her.

“Is that right, Claire? Did you know him before, then? It’s impossible that you’d marry someone you’d just met. We were engaged for God knows how long and didn’t even set a date!”

She wanted nothing more than to throttle him - but took a long sip of tea instead.

“I didn’t know him before - and I can’t believe you’d insinuate such a thing. I was faithful to you, Frank - even when we lived apart. I wanted to marry you, you know.”

“I know. Believe me, Claire - if I could take it back, I could. She meant nothing to me.”

Claire crossed her legs under the table and pushed her now-empty teacup to the side. She licked her lips and lay her hands flat, palm down. Grounding herself. “She? Just ‘she,’ Frank?”

He sighed. “I deserve that. Them. I - Claire - it was too much. The separation from you was too much.”

“Was it, really? It wasn’t too much for me. Did it start before you left Glasgow? When we were still living together?”
His dark eyes said everything that she needed to hear. She nodded sadly.

“I hope you find someone to make you happy, Frank. Someone who can be the person you want them to be.”

“That could have been you, Claire.” He drained the last of his to-go cup and crumpled it into a haphazard, folded mass.

“No - it couldn’t have been. I know that now. I’m applying to medical school, you know. I want to be a thoracic surgeon.”

“And what does your husband think of all that?”

Claire couldn’t help but smile at the memory of coming home to Murtagh’s flat one evening, exhausted, to find a pile of neatly printed medical school applications on the kitchen table. “He’s very supportive. He wants me to follow my dreams, and I want him to follow his.”

For a long moment, Frank Randall just looked at the woman who would have been his wife. She looked tired, to be sure - she always did, when she was finished with a shift. But it was only a physical exhaustion - as her eyes sparkled, and she sat up straighter than he’d ever seen before. And she touched that plain, battered ring almost every other minute. She was the Claire he knew - and she was a stranger.

Claire sighed, and the moment broke. Whatever it was that may have remained between them - it was gone. She’d moved on, and he would never, ever have even a chance of getting her back.

“Are you here just for the holidays, then?”

He blinked, surprised at the change in subject - but happy to have just something, anything to talk about. “Yes. It’s just a quick trip - wanted to visit my office here while the students are away, cross-reference some things I learned in New York. Then back to America after the first of the year.”

He paused, wanting to extend an olive branch - anything to bridge the awkwardness that bloomed between them. “And you? Will you and your - husband be here for Christmas?”

A small smile. “No - we’ll be up at the family farm, with his sister and brother-in-law and their family. Will be nice to get out of the city for a while.”

He couldn’t think of a reply - but then didn’t need to, as the screen of her phone flashed with a notification. Before she picked it up from the table, he caught a brief glimpse of the background photo - Claire, with a tall, redheaded man, their arms tightly around each other, laughing.

She looked like a stranger in that photo - because, he mused, he’d never made her that happy.

She smiled widely at the phone before standing up and shrugging into her coat. “I need to leave - I’m wanted back at the hospital after all. I hope you don’t mind -”

He smiled ruefully. “No, no - I won’t keep you. I’m glad to see that you’re as busy as ever.”

At one time, such a flattering remark would have earned him a blush from her alabaster cheeks. Now - nothing.

She wound a tartan scarf - dark green, with a thin red stripe running through it - around her neck. “Of course. I wish you luck, Frank.”
Suddenly he grabbed her hands - still so small in his - and squeezed them tight. Her brow furrowed in shock. “Frank -”

“I’m sorry, Claire. Sorry that it didn’t work out between us. But I’m glad you’ve found him - this husband of yours. He seems to make you happy, more than I ever could.”

One side of her lovely mouth lifted in a half-smile, and she withdrew her hands from his. “Thank you, Frank. Happy Christmas.”

“Happy Christmas, Claire.”

She nodded a goodbye. He watched her exit the cafe - and cross the street - and lose herself in the arms of the tall, redheaded man standing by a light post, waiting patiently in the cold.
Chapter 16

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: di-elle asked for a Modern Glasgow take on International Kiss A Ginger Day - and here’s what Mod Gotham came up with…

Dr. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp Fraser was a lot of things - thoracic surgeon, former emergency room nurse, mother to three active children, adoptive mother to a French orphan, typesetter’s wife, amateur horticulturalist.

But she wasn’t an idiot. And she smelled a rat almost as soon as Murtagh opened the door and welcomed her into his flat - the same flat she and Jamie had lived in during the first months of their marriage.

Murtagh hung her trenchcoat on a peg and leaned her umbrella against the wall, settled amid a haphazard pile of boots and shoes belonging to various wee Frasers. “And how was your day then?”

Claire paused before answering, brows furrowed. “Why is it so quiet?”

“Ah.” Absently he ruffled his beard, clearly casting in his mind for the right words. “I may have had to separate them when I picked them up from school.”

Claire slung her briefcase off her shoulder and rolled her stiff back, lips pursed. “I see. And why was that?”

He shifted in his stocking feet. “Mmphmm. Weel. It has to do with Brianna. There was a stramash in the schoolyard today.”

“What? What do you mean? Is she all right?” Claire stepped forward, clearly intending to seek out her younger daughter - only to be stopped by Murtagh’s gentle hand on her shoulder.

He sighed. “It was that wee boy again - Roger Wakefield. He kissed her on the cheek, during recess. Faith was there, and she said that Brianna didna like it one bit. So she went and found Fergus in the upper school, and Fergus came round to the lower school and-”

“But Roger is only a year or two older than Bree! Surely-“

Murtagh lowered his hand. “Dinna fash, Claire. He’d never hit an eight-year-old lad - just gave him a stern warning, is all. Fergus loves his sisters something fierce, ken?”
Claire sighed, both exasperated and warmed by just how closely Fergus was keeping his promise to Jamie to keep his adoptive brother and sisters safe. “Do I need to speak with him? Or did you do that already?”

“I took care of it - but perhaps ye’d wish to tell Jamie, aye?”

She nodded and rubbed her eyes with her hands, suddenly tired. “That’s the third time Roger has acted out on Brianna. I’m afraid next time either Fergus or Faith will hit him to keep him away.”

“Weel - Brianna said he told her some nonsense that today was International Kiss A Ginger Day, and since she’s as redheided as they come, he could kiss her.”

*That* brought a smile to Claire’s face. “Oh my. Wait till I tell Jamie.”

She looked up at the sound of small footsteps padding into the hallway - and then a small, dark-haired blur sped down the carpet and launched itself at her knees. “Mama!”

Claire finally laughed as she crouched to be eye level with her four-year-old son. “Well hello, love - did you have fun with Murtagh today?”

William nodded solemnly, blue eyes wide with excitement. “Aye! We went to the play park and had soup for lunch and then watched a show about aeroplanes and -”

He shrieked in joy as she suddenly hoisted him up onto her hip. “Oof! Sounds like a wonderful day. Want to help me get your sisters ready to go home?”

——

“International what?” Jamie set down his toothbrush and stared incredulously at Claire in the mirror. She patiently ran a brush through the tangles of her hair - something she’d found was a soothing way to ease into bedtime.

“International Kiss A Ginger Day - if you can believe it. Seems that Brianna has an admirer in wee Roger.”

Jamie huffed and rinsed his toothbrush before standing it in the coffee mug painted by Faith, Brianna, and William for their most recent wedding anniversary. “She’s five. I dinna understand it.”

Claire smiled. “I think it’s cute - and amazing to see Faith and Fergus rally around her. William, bless his heart, would have done the same thing, had he been there.”

He shook his head. “Maybe the lad’s acting out because he’s got no real parents - he’s an orphan, ken?”

Claire turned to face him, stricken. “I had no idea! And how do you know, may I ask?”

Jamie leaned back against the counter and gently turned Claire away from him. She handed him the hairbrush and he slowly, gently untangled a particularly harsh snarl. “His guardian is a Presbyterian minister who comes into the printshop from time to time - he publishes pamphlets and prayer books and that sort of thing. Apparently the lad’s parents died in a plane crash a few years back, and the Reverend is the only family he’s got left.”

He felt her shoulders rise and fall in a gentle sigh. “That’s so sad,” she said softly.
Jamie set to work on another tangle. “It is. Ye ken something about that, don’t you, *mo nighean donn*?”

She didn’t need to nod for him to know that she did. Silently, slowly he loosened the tangle - then gently kissed a soft spot on the nape of her neck, relishing in her shiver.

Claire turned around and lazily slung her arms around his shoulders, bringing their foreheads together, closing their eyes. For a long moment they stood, breathing each other in, his toes tickling hers on the bathmat.

“And where’s my kiss, then?” His voice was low, husky - full of promise.

She eased her chin closer to his - until their mouths almost touched.

“Come and take it,” she teased.
Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompts: I absolutely adore Modern/Glasgow Gotham! They're perfect, please can you write one of the bairns births, love daddy Jamie. Or a moment when Claire has to support Jamie, emotionally? Their Wee family give me all the feels. // Imagine Jamie was around when Claire was giving birth to Faith // Imagine Jamie being there with Claire at the birth of his first daughter and holding her for the first time. Please? :)

Jamie rolled the stiffness out of his shoulders as he gazed at the play park across the street, swings and seesaws still and silent in the moonlight.

“Ssshhh,” Claire’s voice whispered gently beside him. “There’s a good girl. Let’s see what Da is up to.”

He turned toward his wife, who cradled their impossibly small daughter snug against her neck, the baby’s downy brown head mirroring her mother’s. Quietly he folded Claire – and Faith – into his arms, so afraid that even his breathing would harm her.

“Did she eat?” he murmured, lips against Claire’s forehead.

She nodded. “I had to hold her, Jamie. I couldn’t – ”

“Hush. I know.” They were only supposed to take Faith out of her incubator to be changed – as she still received most of her milk through the feeding tube she’d had since her birth five weeks prior. But he – and Claire, most of all – could tell she was unsettled when she went for a long time without touch. And so now, in the quiet hours of the deep night, when the nurses were dozing at their stations and the emergency light in the ceiling of the NICU ward made Faith’s transparent skin seem to glow a dull blue – they held her, bottle-fed her, cherished her, whispered to her how much she was loved. How much she was wanted – how she was the fulfillment of years of hopes and dreams.

Faith Janet Hildegard Fraser had been born almost three months early. Claire’s pregnancy had started out normal enough – as normal as it could be, after almost three years of trying, worries, tears, and false alarms. Jamie’s ecstatic grin at the news he was to be a father was the most beautiful thing Claire had ever seen – that is, until the first time she saw her daughter, covered with blood and muck and so tiny she fit neatly into Dr. Abernathy’s palms.

The last month of the pregnancy had seen one scare after another – from the paralyzing moments when the nurse couldn’t find the baby’s heartbeat during the five-month checkup, to the spotting
Claire had discovered in between classes, to the heartburn and joint pain and the rash she’d developed after Jamie had cut up some strawberries for her breakfast. She’d been ordered on strict bed rest – supervised by both Jamie and Murtagh – and gradually folded in on herself, convinced that she would lose the baby, that she would never be a mother, that the baby would be ill when it was born.

Throughout it all, Jamie had held her – and loved her – and cared for her through his own terror and heartbreak and unbelievable anguish. Just shy of Claire’s six-month mark – and against her objections - he’d brought Joe to their flat for a private visit. And Joe Abernathy had taken one look at Claire – wasting away from fatigue and stress – and told her in no uncertain terms that he was taking her himself for an emergency caesarian.

And so Faith had entered the world – as Jamie held Claire’s hand and calmly told her what Joe and his team were doing. She’d immediately been whisked to the NICU for further tests, as Claire’s half-numb body shuddered with confused, restrained sobs. Jamie had just held her close, focusing on her, distracting himself from how his own heart was shattering.

But all had been forgotten when, three hours later, Joe had walked him to the incubator where his one-kilo daughter slept. Jamie glided Claire’s wheelchair to the incubator – so that she was at eye level with their daughter – and against all hospital protocols, Joe had opened the incubator and placed the sleeping baby in her mother’s arms. Jamie had knelt, holding his girls so close, inhaling deep breaths as Claire’s warm tears trickled into his ears.

They hadn’t named her Faith until a few days later. Claire had insisted on not finding out the baby’s sex until birth – and they had planned to have more time to settle on a name. But the name suited her – a timeless, graceful, captivating, ethereal creature – whose birth had healed the doubt and despair in Claire’s heart.

Claire hadn’t left Faith’s side since she was born. Her classmates and teachers all regularly dropped by to visit and provide her strength, and while Jamie left during the day to see to things at the printshop, Murtagh was always there with her. Keeping her and the bairn safe, silently letting her know that she wasn’t alone in her ordeal.

Jamie spent every night with Claire at the hospital – relishing the quiet, peaceful time he had with his family. Faith was growing stronger by the day, but she was still so small. She still had a long way to go. But she had given Claire faith in herself – and had given Jamie faith in himself – and given them both the confidence and surety to know that it really was going to be all right.

“She’s fidgeting,” Jamie breathed into the clouds of Claire’s hair.

Claire drew back and held Faith away from her shoulders, watching her struggle against the tightly-wrapped blanket swaddling her tiny limbs.

“Here, love – let me make you a bit more comfortable, hmm?” Gently she unwound the blanket from Faith’s impossibly tiny shoulders so that her arms – snug in a plaid-patterned onesie – jerked randomly in the dark.

Jamie held out both hands and Claire eased the baby into his waiting palms. Quickly Jamie drew Faith into the top of his shirt, unbuttoned to the breastbone, cradling her against his bare skin. He felt her tiny lungs shakily inhale, then exhale, and then melt against him. Claire snuggled against his shoulder, one hand snug in the back pocket of Jamie’s jeans, the other laying gently on Faith’s back, warm below the softness of Jamie’s shirt.

His heart sped impossibly fast, full of love for his wee miracle. And his wife. And thrumming with
anticipation for the many wonderful years they’d all have together – God willing.

“Mary, Michael, and Bride, bless my daughter with strength. Bless my wife with patience. And bless me with grace to be strong enough for them both,” he whispered in the dark.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Heya! So what if - in the Modern Glasgow AU - Jamie's picking Claire up from work one day, and Claire sees Laoghaire make a pass at him.

Jamie slid the gray toque off his head as the automatic doors at the emergency room entrance quietly glided closed behind him. Carefully he dodged out of the way of two hospital attendants pushing elderly women in creaky wheelchairs, a young couple carefully juggling a brand-new baby (and he ignored the small twinge in his heart at the sight) and an armful of flowers and balloons, and a gaggle of doctors headed out for an early dinner. One more turn around the corner and – ah.

“Jamie!” Glenna FitzGibbon’s voice boomed from behind the counter, where she supervised the nurses and orderlies rushing to and fro across the ward.

He smiled and leaned over the counter to give the kind woman – Claire’s mentor and confidant – a lingering hug. “So lovely to see you, Mrs. Fitz. I should have known it was you on duty – I didn’t see anyone idling in the corridors.”

She shook her head as she neatly signed a clipboard full of requisition forms and handed it to a waiting nurse. “Flatterer. Now I know why that wife of yours is so sweet on you.”

“Is she here? I had to see a customer nearby and thought I’d surprise her.”

“Weel she gets off at five - it’s about twenty minutes until she’s done wi’ her shift – I dinna suppose ye mind waiting?”

“No at all – where I can I stay out of the way?”

She waved toward a set of hard plastic chairs wedged tightly against one wall, beside something that used to be a plant and a pile of battered magazines. “That’s as good of a place as any. Shall I tell her ye’re here?”

He helped himself to a tissue and blew his suddenly-runny nose. “No need – I dinna want to intrude. I can amuse myself.”

She quirked one eyebrow and shook her head. “I daresay. Off wi’ ye, then, afore this entire hospital grinds to a halt.”

Jamie smiled and quickly crossed the room, folding himself into what was possibly the most uncomfortable seat he’d ever had the displeasure of sitting in. He unzipped his coat, rolled his shoulders, and slipped off his right glove, fishing around in his jacket pocket for his phone. For a few minutes he scrolled through his messages – another order for that book on the history of
shinty, a proposal for a coffee table book on different Scottish whiskys, an invoice for the reams of paper they’d had to special order from a shop in Edinburgh. But work could always wait – and he certainly wouldn’t bring it home with him tonight.

He thumbed through his applications until he found the folder labeled, simply, MND. It had over 50 pictures now – just four months after meeting Claire, and three months after marrying her. Pictures of Claire laughing over a fried Mars bar they’d shared at a pub; Claire admiring the vast sweep of hill and heather from his very favorite spot at Lallybroch; Claire wearing one of his shirts, mincing onions as she prepared his favorite omelet; Claire peacefully dreaming, propped against the window on a train ride to London.

And Claire’s beautiful, flushed face – eyes closed, lips parted in an ecstatic grin, hair wild on the pillow – the moment right after he’d given her paradise. That one always made his mouth dry -

“Can I help you?”

Jamie blinked harshly – jolting back into awareness – and looked up to see a young, blonde, perky woman clad in pink scrubs. “Sorry?”

She smiled sweetly - too sweetly. “Do you need help wi’ anything? Are ye looking for someone, perhaps? I dinna suppose ye’re in need of doctoring, though I could certainly tend to ye if need be.”

He locked his phone screen and slid it back into his pocket. “No, I’m in no need of doctoring. I’m waiting for someone, is all.”

She shifted the clipboard to her side - proudly showing him how she’d chosen to wear v-neck scrubs that day – and flipped her long hair over one shoulder. “Well then. Ye’re no’ waiting for a doctor, surely? I can page one for ye.”

Jamie noticed she was stepping ever so closer to him – trying to lock gazes. Christ, she was blinking very fast – was something stuck in her eye?

“No,” he replied politely. “No, I’m no’ waiting for a doctor. And Mrs. Fitz knows me – she asked me to wait right here. So I am.”

She tilted her head, appraising him. She was pretty, he had to admit – but in a girlish kind of way. This was no woman – a stronger, more confident woman would subtly emphasize her natural beauty with a hint of makeup, not use dark, garish eyeliner.

“Do ye mind if I sit here wi’ ye, then? Just to make sure the person ye’re waiting for actually arrives?”

He scratched the back of his head. “I suppose not. But – ”

Quickly she plopped beside him and swung one leg over the other, so that her tiny foot almost touched his knee. “Oh good. I’m so glad we can get to know each other a bit better while ye wait.” She paused, then extended one hand – nails covered in chipped red polish. “I’m Nurse Laoghaire MacKenzie.”

Jamie twisted his lips and quickly grasped her hand in his. “Jamie,” he said simply.

“Are ye from Glasgow, Jamie?” Was that – was that her thigh pushing up against his? A Dhia, would Claire not just hurry up already?
Claire wearily slung her purse over her shoulder and mindlessly pushed open the door of the locker room. She rounded the corner to the waiting room and briefly rested her elbows on the countertop of the nurse’s station while Mrs. Fitz hung up the phone.

“I’m off, Mrs. Fitz. Do let me know how everything turns out for that burn patient?”

Mrs. Fitz smirked. “Aye, I will. Though I doubt ye truly wish to hear from me again tonight – turn round.”

Puzzled, Claire turned to see Jamie folded uncomfortably into one of the hard plastic chairs, trying valiantly to fend off the attentions of young Nurse MacKenzie. He had edged as far away as possible from her crossed legs. Absently he twined and tugged at his fingers.

She sighed. No, no, that wouldn’t do. It didn’t matter that they’d pledged themselves to each other, time and time again – he was hers. As she was his. And someone clearly had not picked up on that truth.

As if sensing her, Jamie turned and locked gazes with Claire. His face split into a smile and he removed his left glove, the wide silver band on his ring finger glinting in the harsh fluorescent light.

Claire mirrored his smile and quickly stepped forward, taking his hand with hers. He bent to touch his lips to her forehead, but she pulled him down for a deep, proper kiss. It went on a for a long while, and he settled his wide hands on her hips, tugging her closer as she kissed his smile.

Finally he pulled away. “Ready to go home, Claire?”

She nodded against him and turned to the younger woman. Really, a gaping mouth did not become her.

“Good night, Nurse MacKenzie.”

“Good night, Nurse Fraser,” the girl croaked.

Jamie settled his hand on the small of Claire’s back and pushed her toward the exit. “Thank ye for rescuing me from that – ”

He huffed in surprise as she pushed him into a small, dark examination room off the main hallway. She bolted the door and turned to face him, eyes shining, chest still heaving. His teeth flashed in the dim light, and she heard the rustling of paper as he settled onto the examination table.

“At seven o’clock, Murtagh flipped to a Channel Four documentary on Bonnie Prince Charlie and cracked open another can of beer. Be home at six, the lad had said. We want to look at some flats tonight, the lass had said, so would you mind if we all ate beforehand? He didna mind cooking – though he also knew that they were newlyweds. So he’d had the foresight to order take-away curry – to be delivered at half past seven. Murtagh sighed, shook his head, and settled back into his easy chair.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I’m posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there’s anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Hey guys, how about Christmas in the Modern Glasgow Au? I’d love to read about J&C having a modest- for lack of funds- yet very special Christmas in the true sense of the season. Thank you in advance, I so love your blog, it's my daily pleasure to check for new prompts. Merry Christmas to all of you!

Claire scrunched her nose as her mind drifted into half-consciousness. One hand eased over to the other side of the bed and slid across cold, empty sheets.

Where was he? They were supposed to have an easy morning, free of unpacking and re-arranging, before leaving around mid-day for the drive up to Lallybroch. Between her seeing Frank two days before, and Jamie finally moving the last of their boxes into the new flat last night, and both of them making sure to bring gifts for Jenny and Ian and all their children as well as the Lallybroch staff – it had been an exhausting couple of days. And it would continue to be busy during their week-long Christmas stay at the estate – what with cooking and merriment and the whirlwind of activity that always came with a gaggle of small children.

So this morning was supposed to be their time – to reconnect, reflect, and savor the stillness. But she couldn’t do any of that without her husband.

Claire sighed and sat up against her and Jamie’s pillow, immediately shivering in the cold, damp air of their bedroom. She groped by the side of the bed for Jamie’s undershirt and slid it over her bare shoulders, rubbing her arms against the sudden warmth and deeply inhaling his scent.

Perhaps that’s where he was – they hadn’t been exactly thrilled to discover that the heating in their flat was spotty at best. But then again, it was to be expected, given the age of the building and the lack of extra zeroes on their rent cheque each month. It was what the agent had called a “starter flat” – a small, but homely kitchen which opened onto a cozy living area, along with their good-sized bedroom and tiny bathroom. All they needed, really – and if it was cramped, at least it was theirs. She loved Murtagh, she really did – but living in his spare bedroom for the past six months, together with a six-foot Scotsman, with whom she shared many mutual appetites – they desperately needed their own space.

Jamie had so wanted them to live in a more updated flat – the idiot had felt he wasn’t providing adequately for her – but when she walked him through the finances of his income and her income, together with her expected costs for medical school – he’d reluctantly agreed. She loved him, so deeply – but he was just so old fashioned sometimes…
“Ah, you’re up!” Claire’s eyes darted to the open doorway, watching Jamie weave through the pile of boxes between the hallway and their bed, balancing a tray of coffee (for her) and tea (for him) and the ginger scones she’d picked up yesterday from the bakery on the corner. Gently he set the tray on a box labeled “BOOKS – JAMMF” – within arm’s length of the bed – and knelt to be almost eye level with his wife.

He cupped her face in one hand and smoothed back errant curls with his right, mouth smiling so wide it almost split his face. “Good morning,” he breathed against her lips.

She kissed him long and slow and sweet. “Mmm. I thought we were supposed to be relaxing this morning.”

He kissed the tip of her nose. “Weel I wanted ye to be warm – since I knew I’d have ye laying atop the covers of the bed anyway. And I need ye to be at least half-awake to appreciate the things I want to do wi’ ye – so that’s why I made the coffee.”

She settled both hands on the small of his back – nails digging into the tender flesh – and bit his chin. “Come here to me, Jamie.”

But he pulled back, still smiling. “No’ quite yet. I had a wee idea.”

She frowned, reaching down below the waistband of his boxers. “I have a bigger one…”

He swatted her hand away, laughing. “Please, mo nighean donn. It’ll be over wi’ soon enough, and then you can have yer wicked way wi’ me.”

She snorted, watching as he stood and began rummaging through a pile of bags clumped in the corner. “So, what’s the idea?”

He pulled a small, rectangular package from one of the bags. “I was thinking – it will be crazy once we get up to Lallybroch, between Jenny and Ian and the bairns. And we’ll do the proper Christmas on the actual day, wi’ all the family – but I so want to have our own Christmas first. Would that be all right?”

She sighed, so happy. “Of course, you idiot. Of course that’s more than all right. But what is it that you want to give me in private? Unless you printed some of those pictures you took the other night – ”

She enjoyed watching him flush from navel to hairline. “Dinna say such things, Claire – I’d never send those away to be printed. They’re safe on my phone and only you and I will ever see them.”

Slowly she sipped the coffee he’d made for her – black, just how she liked it. “Well in that case, can you get my purse from the doorknob? There are two things in there that I have for you.”

He grinned and quickly crossed the room, gathered her purse by its long shoulder strap, and settled beside her on the bed. She fished inside for the small box and envelope stashed beneath her wallet, and set the items in the space between her and Jamie’s knees.

“The envelope is from Murtagh – he gave it to me when I dropped by the flat the other day – and the box is from me.”

Gently he kissed her forehead. “Do you want to go first?” He slid the long package onto her lap and she slowly, carefully unwrapped the small parcel.

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “Airline tickets? Framed? We can’t use them if they’re
framed…”

She heard the smile in his voice. “Look at the dates, ye wee daftie.”

She did – and her heart almost stopped.

“How – how did you get these?” Her throat choked with sudden emotion.

Gently his thumb traced the inside of her knee. “I had mine in my pocket, and I found yours in the flat a few days later. I’ve been keeping them, waiting for a good time to give them to ye.”

Her fingers trailed over the glass – protecting the fragile boarding passes from that fateful flight from New York to Glasgow, where everything had changed for them.

“Did ye realize that today it’s six months from the day I met ye, Claire?”

Tears shone in her eyes. She had no words. “Jamie, I – ”

“Hush. I understand.” He set the frame aside and gathered her onto his lap, settling her head in the curve of his shoulder, holding her so close as emotion welled between them.

She breathed deeply, and he delighted in the feel of her chest expanding against his. “I love you so much,” she whispered. “I still can’t believe we have forever together – we came so close to never meeting each other…”

He held her tighter. “Dinna think on such things, it will give ye the nightmare,” he soothed. “I love ye more than any man has ever loved any woman, Claire. I’m no’ going anywhere. I’ll never leave ye.”

She sighed, so happy.

After a long while, she pulled back and pressed the small box into his waiting fingers. “This isn’t nearly as amazing of a gift, Jamie, but – ”

He silenced her with a kiss. “Hush. It’s from you – how could it be anything other than amazing?”

She smiled despite herself and watched him carefully open the box. He pursed his lips and swallowed before raising his eyes to meet hers. “Claire – I – ”

Her grin widened. “I spoke with Murtagh – it’s your clan motto, am I right? He said you never had a proper brooch, but now that you’re married and settled, I thought it was time.”

Jamie traced the fine metalwork – snug in its box – before lifting it out and pinching it between his thumb and forefinger. “It’s bonny, Claire – where did you find it?”

Gently she traced the bumps of his collarbones. “Mrs. Fitz – she recently got a new brooch for her husband. Apparently he’s deeply involved in re-enactments, and he needed something authentic for the 18th century. So I visited the shop and…well. Here it is.”

He nodded, eyes suddenly far away.

“You’re back home now, Jamie. Back in Scotland, with me. You’ve reconciled with your sister, you’ll be spending more time at Lallybroch. You’re a man, in every sense of the word. You need the last link in that chain to convince yourself that that’s the truth – and here it is.”

“Je suis prest,” he said softly. Slowly his eyes met hers. “You’ve helped make me ready for all of
it, Claire. I’m nothing – no one – wi’ out ye.”

Then she kissed him, and loved him, and her body told him all the words her mouth couldn’t say.

And a few hours later when, sated, they’d finally made the bed – Murtagh’s envelope drifted out from beneath the quilt.

“Oh! We forgot about this one!” Claire exclaimed.

Jamie crawled over the bed to sit beside his wife. “It’s no’ like him to write us a letter – or give us a bill or anything…”

Claire slit open the envelope. Two items dropped out – a cheque, and a small piece of paper. Her eyes bulged at the figure on the cheque as Jamie read aloud the short note in Murtagh’s staggering hand.

“So ye can make it through till springtime. Happy Christmas.”

“It’s three months of rent,” she said softly. “Oh, the dear man. How thoughtful.”

Jamie shook his head. “He’s just happy to have his flat back to himself again,” he teased.

Fresh tears sprung from Claire’s eyes. “I need to make him a nice dinner.”

Jamie kissed the tear from her cheek. “That would be lovely – but do you know what he’d like even more than that?”

She shook her head. His eyes, heady, locked on hers.

“A grandbairn or two. So – want to get in some more practice afore we drive?”
This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Happy Valentine’s Day! By special request for iwanttodriveyouthroughthenight - a wee romantic Modern Glasgow ficlet to help you celebrate today.  
This one starts on the afternoon after Jamie and Claire marry...

Chapter 20

Claire nuzzled into Jamie’s neck and burrowed closer into his chest under their shared blanket.

“Cold, are ye?” he asked gently, stroking her back.

She shook her head. “Just hold me?”

He sighed, so happy. “Aye, I can do that.”

Jamie settled deeper into the kitchen chair, just enjoying the feeling of Claire against him. He’d surprised her with a quick but hearty breakfast – late lunch, really – which she had eaten, perched in his lap, not willing to stop touching him. Not the most comfortable position – but he wouldn’t have traded it for anything.

“Do you want to check in on Murtagh?” she asked after a long while.

His thumb traced the bumps of her spine. “Why? He’s a grown man, Claire – I dinna need to mind him. I’m sure he’s having a grand time watching football in a fluffy bathrobe in his hotel room.”

She wrinkled her nose against him. “I did not need that mental image, thank you very much. Seeing him without his shirt that one time was quite enough.”

He smiled against her forehead. “Weel, if it would make you feel better – we can send him a picture of us when we’re all dressed up tonight?”

She nodded against his neck, then sighed. “What time is it? I suppose we need to start getting ready.”

He craned his neck to see the microwave. “Ten to five. Do ye truly want to go, Claire? I dinna care one way or the other.”

She raised her head and met his eyes. Her left hand cradled his cheek. He turned his head to kiss her wedding ring.
“Let’s make an appearance. If you wear your kilt again, I’ll let you help me into my dress.” She pulled him down for a long kiss. He hummed against her lips and stroked her calf as one leg wound tightly around his middle.

“I’m coming home with you no matter what, James Fraser,” she whispered after a long while. He kissed the tip of her nose. “I’m verra glad ye are, Claire Fraser.”

Claire kicked Jamie’s bare shin under the table, but it didn’t dislodge his hand from the top of her thigh.

The idiot didn’t bat an eyelash and continued his apparently riveting conversation with the sports medicine physician to his left.

She kicked again, this time aiming with her pointy heel rather than her shoe’s rounded toe. Jamie quickly removed his hand to rub gingerly over his lower leg, and he turned to Claire, eyes narrow.

Not that she didn’t want to feel his touch, of course – but she was surrounded by her colleagues, for God’s sake!

“Soon,” she mouthed. “We’ll go home soon.”

His lips quirked into a smile, and he bent to kiss her cheek.

“I love you, Claire.”

She blushed despite herself. “Hush, you,” she whispered, and reached for his hand under the table. She settled their twined fingers on his thigh, enjoying the scratchy wool against her palm.

Claire had expected to be ravenous at the dinner, given that she and Jamie had barely eaten anything all day. But his touch at the small of her back as she introduced him to her colleagues as her husband – the feel of his arm around the back of her chair as they listened to the hospital president thank the donors for sponsoring the evening – the feel of his thumb on her thigh during the main course – all caused the food to lose much of its flavor. And all she could think of now was getting him home, feeling his skin all along hers, and -

“I canna believe ye’re here tonight, Claire.” Mrs. Fitz, seated at her right, nudged her elbow as she ate another bite of fruit tart. “I’m surprised the lad let ye out of the flat.”

Claire bit back a smile as she sipped her glass of white wine. “I think we both needed some separation,” she replied softly. Jamie was still engrossed in his conversation, thumb tracing the back of her hand – but Claire certainly didn’t want him overhearing this. “Mrs. Fitz, with him it’s so – ” She licked her lips, hesitating. “Intense. And – and we’re both surprised by that.”

Mrs. Fitz finished her dessert and laid a kind hand on Claire’s forearm, chewing thoughtfully. “Dinna fash yerself, Claire,” she said gently, helping herself to her husband’s untouched slice of pie. “Speak about it wi’ him, if ye like. I guarantee ye he feels the same way.”

Claire shook her head. “No. Never. And – it scares me a bit.” She turned as Jamie raised their joined hands above the table and kissed her fingers, still engrossed in his conversation with the doctor. Claire turned back to Mrs. Fitz and saw the older woman’s eyes crease in a smile. “Dinna fash yerself, Claire,” she said gently, helping herself to her husband’s untouched slice of pie. “Speak about it wi’ him, if ye like. I guarantee ye he feels the same way.”
As if on cue, Jamie slid his chair right up to Claire’s and tugged her closer to his side. “Is she saying mean things about me, Mrs. Fitz?” he teased, resting his chin on Claire’s shoulder.

“Only that she thinks ye’ve gotten more attention in yer skirt tonight than she has, laddie.” Mrs. Fitz pointed her spoon at Jamie. “Ye’re a brave lad to wear a kilt here – most of the donors have verra deep pockets, and they were all of the same mind when the vote happened last year.”

“Ach.” Jamie kissed Claire’s neck, delighting in her shiver. “It’s different up where I’m from – in the Highlands. We’ve got longer memories there. In the house where I grew up, there’s a section of wall in the parlor where ye can still see the saber marks left by the redcoats after the ’45. My family has always kept it to remind us of where we’ve come from, and how hard we had to work to get what we have.”

“So how has the family reacted to ye marrying an Englishwoman, then?”

Jamie shrugged. “It’s just my sister and me now, and my godfather, who we’re living with. She hasn’a met my sister yet, though we’ll go up in a few weeks time. And to quote my godfather, ‘She’ll do.’”

Mrs. Fitz laughed – a deep, well-felt laugh. “A compliment, then?”

Claire blushed. Jamie held her closer and kissed her cheek.

“Aye, Mrs. Fitz – the highest possible compliment.”

—

Jamie’s hands were all over her in the back seat of the taxi on the way back to the flat. It took almost every ounce of Claire’s willpower to push him away until they could get some time alone. But once they had arrived and bounded up the steps to the landing, the mood between them changed.

Jamie quietly unlocked the door and held it open for Claire. She immediately stepped out of her shoes and crossed the threshold, setting down her purse on the side table. Her back remained facing Jamie, and she expected him to pick her up and throw her over his shoulder.

But he didn’t. After a long moment she turned to see him leaning against the door, completely still.

“What?”

He blinked, startled. “Hmm?”

“What are you doing all the way over there?”

He smiled slowly, widely. “Watching you, mo nighean donn.”

She tilted her head. “Watching me do what?”

“Just - you. The way you rummage through your purse, check your phone, stretch your shoulders. Flex your toes. God, I canna understand why women wear shoes like that.”

Claire softly crossed the floor to stand right in front of him. “Because that way I’m at least a little taller, and don’t look so small compared to you.”

He grabbed her left hand and held it to his chest. “But I like seeing how small ye are, Claire. Because you fit, right here, against me.” He gathered her close and tucked her head under his chin.
She sighed happily.

For a long moment they just stood there, holding each other, breathing each other in.

“Claire?” he finally said, thumb tracing a hipbone through her dress.

“Hmm?” She butted her nose against the pulse in his neck, delighting in feeling him swallow.

“Does it ever stop? The wanting you?”

She kissed his pulse. “I don’t know, Jamie,” she said softly. “Do you want me right now?”

“Aye,” he whispered. “I want – I want to take ye, hard. And make ye cry out.” He swallowed. “But at the same time, I want to go verra, verra slowly, and hold ye close to me, and watch yer face.” He pulled back and cupped her face. “Do ye – do ye feel the same?”

She nodded. “Fast is good – but Jamie, I need slow right now. Can you – can we do that?”

Without warning he effortlessly picked her up and slowly stepped toward their bedroom. He gently set her down and turned her around, zipping her out of her dress.

“The pearls look bonny on ye,” he rasped, holding out one arm so she could brace herself as she stepped out of the dress.

She turned to face him. He shrugged out of his shirt and unbuckled his kilt, naked before her. She smiled, undid her bra, and slid out of her panties.

Clad only in the pearls, Claire reclined on the bed and extended a long arm to her husband. Jamie quickly shut the door and lit the remaining candle on the bedside table, admiring how his wife’s skin glowed in the soft light. He settled atop her and kissed her for a very long time.

Gasping, he pulled back. “Claire, I – it’s almost too much.”

She bit his lower lip. “I know, Jamie.”

He reached down to guide himself into her. They gasped at the sensation, overcome.

“I love you so much,” she whispered, tears pricking her eyes.

He kissed each tear away and then pecked her lips. She tasted salt.

“I love you, Claire. So much that I canna breathe unless I’m inside of ye.”

He pushed home, swallowing her gasp.
This was a prompt sent in to on tumblr. I'm posting my Imagine prompts here on AO3 for easier reading and in case there's anyone here who might not be on tumblr. Do feel free to check out the blog and send in prompts if you have more ideas for our favorite pair!

Original prompt: Really enjoying the Modern Glasgow AU's! Could we maybe get one where Claire’s trying to make an elaborately romantic dinner for Jamie?

Jamie jerked the vestibule door closed and quietly shivered in the dim hallway. So much for spring - it seemed like the cold, driving rain hadn’t stopped for weeks now. Which reminded him - he needed to check that water leak in the front room to make sure it hadn’t gotten too big since this last round of storms had started…

He sighed, flicked the lingering raindrops from his umbrella, and slowly mounted the first of six flights of stairs up to the flat. With every step he added more items to his mental to-do list – make sure to check that Rupert had correctly put in the order for new parts, purchase a gift for wee Maggie’s second birthday, ask Mrs. Fitz if her husband could recommend a place to stay near Doune Castle…

On the second to last landing, he was hit with the unmistakable smells of a burning dinner. Perhaps it was old Grannie Neary again – she was hard of hearing and often couldn’t tell when her oven timer went off…

Then he stepped in front of their flat – and heard Claire through the door, using unbelievably foul language to curse what must have been left of their dinner.

He grinned despite himself as he unlocked the door and gently shut it behind him. Poor lass, she’d warned him she was no housekeeper – and he’d delighted in that very fact. She was imperfect – perfectly imperfect. No matter how many times he told her that, she still didn’t quite seem to believe it. Quietly he rounded the corner into the open kitchen…

“..bloody bastard, I did everything Murtagh told me to! And you’re still overdone!” she screamed at a charred lump, hunched innocently in one of the white baking dishes Murtagh had given them as a housewarming gift.

“Claire?”

She whirled around – and he fell in love with her all over again. Her hair was all mussed, the tip of a ballpoint pen peeking over one ear. She was still clad in her blue scrubs, random notes scribbled in ink on the back of one hand – her front spattered with food stains. Her right thumb was covered in an enormous bandage.
“Bloody fucking hell,” she seethed. “You’re home early.”

He leaned against the doorframe, watching her. “I’m a manager now. I can keep my own hours.”

She rubbed her tired eyes with the backs of her hands – just like she must have when she was a tiny, stubborn girl. He watched her heave a tremendous sigh.

“I’m sorry, Jamie. I wanted to make you a nice dinner – to celebrate your promotion. I went to the market today and then spoke with Murtagh and even wrote down his step-by-step instructions to make sure it would all work. And now – ”

Quickly he crossed the room and folded her into his arms. He kissed the crown of her head, inhaling her hair – which smelled strongly of burnt…something.

“Dinna fash. I canna tell ye how it warms me to my toes to know that ye went to such great lengths for me.”

She twisted her fingers into the belt loops above his back pockets, drawing his hips closer to hers. “I don’t understand – I can stitch people, measure out medications, take a patient’s vital signs – but I can’t follow a stupid recipe.”

He shifted his face to kiss her ear – and then her jaw – and then suck slowly on the side of her neck, tasting her sweat. She shivered.

“Ye have so many other wonderful talents. I love you for them. I love you for doing this for me. But next time, Claire – maybe ye can have Murtagh do the cooking?”

She playfully shoved him away, and they laughed, and then kissed for a long time.

“Let’s get some curry,” he whispered against her lips after a while. “The place around the corner. And then we’ll come home, and you’ll shower, and I’ll do the dishes, and then I’ll take my time to thank you properly for this and everything ye do for me. What do ye say?”

She shoved the congealing remains of the ruined dinner into the sink, grabbed her lovely blue coat, and dragged Jamie out the door.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

This was a prompt sent in to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: Love this blog so much. You all are amazing. Would it be possible to have Frank randomly run into Jamie and either a pregnant Claire or Claire with baby Faith somehow in Modern Glasgow AU?

“And it seems that the fairy tale series has been selling well, so we expect the author to order another print run – ”

“Jamie?”

Jamie twisted over his shoulder to find Rupert sticking his head through the crack between the wall and the glass door.

“Apologies – but Alec’s meeting is running over and he’d like you to keep one of the authors company while he waits?”

Jamie turned back to the small group gathered around the conference room table – Willie, Angus, a few interns they’d picked up for the fall term. He slid the weekly agenda over to Willie and pushed back his chair. “If you’ll excuse me?”

“Sure, Jamie. I’ll run through the numbers.”

Jamie clapped Willie on the back as he stepped out of the room, following Rupert as the older man barreled down the narrow hallway.

“I’ll have him come to yer office, then? He’s a prospect – got a book about the ’45 and the Bonnie Prince that he’s been shopping around to all the publishing houses. Alec’s slated to give him the sell, but it can’t hurt for him to hear from you as well.”

“Aye – I’ll do my best.”

Rupert stopped in front of Jamie’s office and clapped him on the back. “Good lad. I’ll send him in.”

Jamie nodded and padded across the tiny office, settling his long legs in the chair behind his desk, shifting around invoices and galleys to open up some space.

Footsteps in the doorway. “Jamie?”

He looked up – to see Rupert accompanied by a dark-haired man dressed in a suit and dark green sweater vest, the perfect curl of a red tie edging over the knit v.
Jamie rose and extended his hand in welcome. “Jamie Fraser. And you are –”

“This is Professor Frank Randall, of the University of Glasgow.”

Jamie gripped the man’s hand, heart leaping to his mouth. *A Dhia.*

“So lovely to meet you,” the older man said in his proper English voice.

Jamie blinked – then remembered his manners, gesturing to the chair at the other end of his desk. “Please.”

Rupert grinned and waddled out of the office, closing the door with a definitive shut.

Jamie wanted to be anywhere but with this man – who he knew all too well, but who likely knew not a thing about him.

Well then.

“I understand ye’re looking to publish a book about the Jacobites?”

Frank’s face lit up. Jamie observed that despite his youth, harsh lines cut beside his mouth. “Yes – I’ve been researching it for the past few years – even did a sabbatical in New York for six months. I’m especially interested in exploring the various parties that financed the Jacobites – English lords, the French and Spanish kings, and so on. It’s not something that’s been explored at length – usually people are fixated on the Bonnie Prince and Culloden and all that.”

Jamie pursed his lips, the man who had voted *Yes!* screaming within at the man who needed to put up a neutral face for the sake of his company. “I see. And who is the target audience?”

Frank settled back in the chair. Jamie noticed the glint of a gold wedding band on the man’s left hand. Interesting. “Well, academics and historians, of course. But I’m hoping it will attract a more mass audience as well – popular history. Perhaps the BBC or Channel Four can make a documentary out of it – that’s why I want to publish in Scotland, rather than down in London.”

Jamie clenched his fist at the thought that this man – or any Englishman – would host a television special on events that had directly led to suffering for his ancestors. “That sounds ambitious. Have ye any experience in that sort of thing? Television, I mean?”

Frank smiled – but Jamie noticed that it didn’t reach his eyes. “My wife tells me that my head is in the clouds far too often. The perils of being an academic, I suppose. But to answer your question – I don’t, but with the recent Culloden anniversary, and the vote a few years past, it’s definitely a topic on people’s minds.”

Jamie nodded, focused on the framed photograph facing him – Claire nuzzling Faith’s wee cheeks – drawing strength just from the image of them. His girls. His life.

“Yer wife sounds like a wise woman. Have ye been married long?”

Frank tilted his head at Jamie – curious. “She *is* wise beyond her years. We married last spring – she helped me with the research for the book. We met while I was in New York.” Absently he twisted his wedding ring around his finger, his eyes settling on Jamie’s hands, lying flat on the table, and his own wide silver wedding band. “I assume you’re married as well?”

Jamie smiled slowly. “I am. Oddly enough, we met on a flight from New York to Glasgow.”
“Did you? That’s fascinating. Is she American?”

Jamie sat up a bit straighter. “No – she’s English. From Oxfordshire, actually. But she’d been living here in Glasgow – she was working as a nurse at the time.”

Frank’s dark brows furrowed – torn between confusion and disbelief.

“And she was in New York because she had been visiting you.”

Frank blinked. His face went blank in shock.

“My God – it’s you.” His voice was cold. So cold.

Jamie held Frank’s gaze and tilted his chin in challenge. “Aye. We wed four weeks later. Our first daughter was born last year.”

No emotion flitted across Frank’s face – not anger, not rage, not surprise. He was perfectly still. And it chilled Jamie to the core.

“First daughter?” Frank’s voice was emotionless – but Jamie could tell when rage was being held in check.

Jamie swung around the picture so that Frank saw it. “Aye. Our second daughter is in Claire’s belly.”

A long, silent beat. Tension crackled. Whatever Frank had been expecting – it certainly wasn’t this.

And then the door creaked open to reveal Rupert, boisterous and oblivious. “Professor Randall? Alec will see ye now.”

Frank nodded, rose, shot an icy glare at Jamie, and stormed through the doorway. Rupert glanced a question at Jamie. “What did ye – ”

“Dinna fash – I didna do anything. He’s an ambitious man, but I don’t think it’ll amount to anything.”

Rupert scratched his whiskers, thinking. “I’ll pass that on to Alec, then. Will ye be going back to the meeting?”

Jamie shook his head. “Willie is more than capable of finishing it up. I think I’ll call my wife and then head home.”

Rupert shrugged. “Whatever suits ye. I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

Jamie unlocked the screen of his phone – smiling at the picture of an ecstatic, toothless Faith clad in the tartan onesie Murtagh had given her for Christmas. “Aye. I’ll see ye.”

As the door clicked shut, Jamie dialed Claire’s number, sighing in relief when she picked up.

“Jamie? What is it?”

“Mo nighean donn,” he breathed.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Originally posted at imagine Claire and Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: I always thought that we didn’t get enough of Fergus in the books. Can we please get a scene of a young Fergus with Jamie and Claire? Complete fluff or humor welcome!

Claire settled William tighter in the crook of her arm as she unbuttoned her blouse. She gently caressed the tender curve of his wee cheek, and he rewarded her with a gummy grin.

“He’s smiling again!” she exclaimed as the baby lay a chubby hand on the curve of her breast and began to suck greedily, impossibly tiny fingers kneading gently.

“That’s because he knows ye’re feeding him.” Jamie shifted on his knees, crouching beside the bathtub, constantly checking the temperature of the water streaming from the faucet as Brianna and Faith happily splashed their toys in the shallow water. “He’s no’ an idiot.”

Perched on the closed lid of the toilet beside the bathtub, Claire tucked back the brown wisps of William’s fine baby hair, his piercing blue eyes – Jamie’s eyes – boring into hers. “He’s like his da that way,” she teased. “He loves my breasts. And especially my milk.”

Jamie whirled to face her, eyes narrow, face flushed. “Dinna say such things in front of the girls,” he warned through his teeth. “That talk is no’ suitable for –”

“Milk?” two-year-old Faith asked hopefully, looking up from her plastic horses. “Can we have milk before bed?”

“Milk,” one-year-old Brianna nodded, her wet red curls nearly black against her fair skin, smacking the water around her wee hips.

“Well, we’ve had such a long day – I suppose we can find some milk in Jared’s refrigerator.”

Jamie shook his head and closed the tap, reaching across the bathtub to the bottle of baby shampoo. It had been a long, tiring day – the train trip from Glasgow to London, and then a second leg from London to Paris, had worked out logistically but had been a very taxing experience. With three small children, plus suitcases, it had been very ambitious. And she’d been so glad when Jared met them at the train station and helped with the kids and luggage, driving them the short distance to his flat in the heart of the old city.

Jared Fraser – Brian Fraser’s elder brother – had moved to France as a young man, setting up a wine exporting business catering to Scottish clients at a time when most Scots had zero interest in foreign alcohol – let alone French wine. But time and patience had paid off – and Fraser Exporters was now one of the most prosperous companies in the industry. Jamie had visited his uncle periodically over the years – but hadn’t seen him in some time. And now that wee William, aged
two months, was old enough to travel – he’d finally taken Jared up on the offer to come to Paris.

So they would be visiting for about a week. Claire was still on maternity leave, and Jamie was able to take some time off from the printshop. Faith and Brianna had been on trains before, but never for so long. They were well-behaved, but active, and inquisitive. Brianna had slept for most of the way – as had William, thankfully – but Faith had taken in every single moment with her bright, questioning eyes. Asked questions the whole time, watching the English countryside glide by.

By all rights, the girls should have been exhausted – but they were still full of energy and excitement at the novelty of being in a new place.

And with new people. Jared had taken immediately to his great-nieces and –nephew. Having never married or had children of his own, he’d been immediately charmed by the three wee Frasers. And of course he’d showered them with ridiculous gifts – to the delight of the girls, and the bewilderment of William, who had promptly tried to stuff part of his new plush Highland Coo into his mouth.

And then for dinner, there had been a special guest – the nine-year-old boy Jared had been sponsoring for the past few years. Fraser Exporters participated in a program with a local charity, where employees could mentor, spend time with, and provide financial sponsorship for a child living in a home operated by one of several social organizations. This boy had had a rough start in life – father unknown, mother a drug addict – and he’d been rescued from a filthy apartment, aged two, the victim of severe neglect. He’d grown stronger with the love and attention provided by the home – and by Jared, who had come to regard him almost as a son.

So Fergus had come for dinner – excited at the prospect of spending time with the small children. He was polite, charming, and a bit reserved – but had utterly blossomed in the company of Brianna and Faith. And William, whom he’d held so gently, crooning soft things in French.

Seeing him with the kids had touched something deep inside Claire. Had brought back all her memories of living as an orphan, with dear Uncle Lamb her only family in the world. Of the bone-deep longing for parents – for a true mother and father – and for siblings. And for a home, full of love and laughter.

It had given her an idea.

“Jamie?”

He shielded Faith’s eyes as he rinsed the shampoo from her long dark hair. “Hmm?”

She gently slid William’s wee lips from her nipple with a soft ‘pop’ and moved him to her other breast. “What do you think about Fergus?”

“What about him? Here, Brianna – take one of Faith’s horses.”

She bit her lip, considering, watching William’s tiny eyelids starting to drowse. “He needs a home.”

Jamie sat back on his knees and just looked at her – so serene, nourishing their precious wee lad. He badly wanted to give her another child to love – but they’d already discussed that William would be their last. Three bairns in three years had taken a toll on her body – and it wasn’t fair to her training as a surgeon, either.

But perhaps there was another way – a way which also provided a family for a loving child who so desperately needed a Mam and Da.
“He does. Ye see yerself in him, don’t you?”

She nodded, not surprised at how perceptive he was. How attuned he was – always was – to her, and her feelings, and her desires.

William’s lips slid from Claire’s nipple – fast asleep. Gently Claire hoisted him over her shoulder, rubbing his small, solid back.

“Do ye want to talk to Jared about it?”

She met his eyes – and in that one moment, their decision was made.

“Yes. We’ll make it work. We have to. He’s a sweet lad, and he loves the kids already.”

Jamie nodded and turned back to the girls. “Tomorrow, then. Let’s make it happen. And quick.”

She nestled William’s dark head closer against her shoulder, her heart already blooming with love for this slight, French orphan who, God willing, would be coming back to Glasgow with them.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Originally posted to Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: Modern Glasgow is by far one of my favorite series of all time. So imagine one of (or all of) the bairns bringing home a stray, muddy, flee infested animal (of your choice) then Jamie and Claire's reaction.

“Have you seen Julia?”

Jamie looked up from the desk in his study. William’s head remained bent, sitting beside his Da, concentrating on his math homework.

“No – last I heard she and Murtagh were off on one of their treasure hunts. Have ye asked Mrs. Crook?”

Claire pursed her lips. “Because she always gives her some sweets before she leaves? No, I haven’t – that’s a good idea.”

“Dinna fash, Claire – ye ken well that Murtagh will always bring her home safe.”

She sighed, drawing the plaid shawl tighter around her shoulders. “I know. Only, she’s not used to being out in the countryside yet, and she’s not as familiar with the landscape as the other kids, and –”

Jamie pushed back his chair, gently ruffled William’s mop of dark curls, and stepped around the desk, crossing the room to grasp his wife’s hands. “She’ll be fine. It’s a warm day, the sun is shining, and ye ken that she just loves exploring.”

Claire rewarded him with a tiny smile. “She is adventurous, I’ll give you that.”

Julia Helen Diana Beauchamp Fraser – their blond, four-year-old surprise – had been inquisitive since the day she was born, upstairs in the laird’s bedroom at Lallybroch. Even before she could walk, she adored being read to by her parents or doting older siblings. And her favorite stories were those of finding buried treasure – whether that of Vikings, or pirates, or trolls, or dragons. And ever since they took her to the archaeological museum in London during their visit last year, she’d been fascinated by the prospect of digging around to find her own buried treasure.

Now that they were living at Lallybroch full time – having left their cramped flat in Glasgow for the spacious rooms and rolling hills of the ancestral Fraser estate – Julia relished the thousands of hiding places that the streams and fields and ponds provided. And Murtagh – the loving, doting godfather/grandfather that he was – loved accompanying her as she explored the land where he had grown up. And surprised her with burying “wee treasures” now and again – special rocks, or aluminum cans full of marbles, or glass jars filled with rolled-up papers – and helping her carefully “eksavate” the item before she gleefully carried it home.

It appeared that the two of them were off on another expedition today – but they’d left right after
breakfast, and it was now past lunch –

“Mama!”

Jamie smiled as Claire visibly relaxed at the sound of her youngest daughter’s voice. He bent to kiss her cheek and returned to William – who was ruffling his hair in frustration over his arithmetic – and she turned into the hallway, quickly stepping toward the kitchen, hoping to avert Mrs. Crook’s habit of feeding fresh warm cookies to Julia every time she returned from one of her “twips.”

She rounded a corner and entered the ancient, cavernous kitchen – to see Julia facing away from her, wisps of hair escaping from her small blond braids, clutching something tight. Murtagh was hanging up their coats by the door.

“I’m here, love,” she said gently. Julia quickly turned – and what Claire thought was another grimy jar of old coins started to squirm in her daughter’s tiny grasp.

“Is that –”

Julia rushed across the room to show off her prize. “Itsa kitten, Mama! We found him by the millpond – he doesna have a collar, Mwtagh says he must be a stway. Can we keep him?”

Claire exchanged glances with the filthy, irritated cat – no bigger than a kitten – which promptly tried to claw its way out of Julia’s tender grasp.

Claire knelt and swiftly gathered the cat against her thick shawl. “Well, we’ve got the dogs in the house, but no cat. Will you take care of it?”

Julia rocked back and forth in her tiny boots, vibrating with excitement, nodding furiously. “Aye, Mama! I’ll take vewwa good care of him!”

Claire glanced up at Murtagh, chewing through his third fresh cookie. He gave her a look that said, What, can ye expect me to say no to her? before brushing some imaginary dirt from the sleeve of his sweater.

She was outnumbered. Jamie and the other kids would love a cat. There was no reason not to.

“All right. Let’s get him all cleaned up, then. Have you thought of a name?”

“Aye! Mwtagh had an idea! It was –” she frowned, struggling to remember.

“Adso,” he chimed in, speaking around a mouthful of chocolate.

“Adso?” Claire was surprised – in all her years as an honorary Scot, living in a culture full of unusual names, that was one she’d never encountered before.

“Aye. Adso. That was a cat we had here at Lallybroch, when I was a lad. He was – he was Ellen’s cheetie.”

Something shifted in Murtagh’s eyes – as it always did, at the thought of Jamie’s mother – and Claire tactfully decided to let the matter drop.

She turned back to the kitten, which had embedded its claws in the thick wool of her shawl. “Julia, love – get me that stool, will you? The first thing you need to learn about a cat is that they absolutely hate taking a bath.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Originally posted at Imagine Claire and Jamie on tumblr

We know that in the Modern Glasgow AU, like in canon, Jamie and Claire don’t consummate their relationship until their wedding night. They started sharing a bed - to sleep - on the night they become engaged, which is the day after they meet on the plane. This story takes place the morning after that - when they wake up to each other for the first time.

Remember, they agreed on no “to bed” rather than “to sleep” until they marry. But that doesn’t mean that either of them aren’t up for a wee bit of fun…

Daylight knifed into Jamie’s eyes through the closed blinds. He blinked, instantly awake

Claire.

Dear God, her lovely arse was wedged tight into his hips and one of his hands had wormed inside the neck of her shirt, fingers cupped around one lovely breast.

He swallowed. Would it be like this every morning for the rest of his life? Holding her, breathing in the scent of her hair? He hoped fervently that it would be the case.

Mortified at his state of arousal, he tried to ease away without waking her. But she was already so attuned to him that he felt her breathing change as she woke. Quietly, sleepily she turned to face him. Wordlessly his thumb continued caressing her nipple, not too ashamed to boldly show her what he wanted.

Her eyes, puffy, met his. She licked her lips and gently drew down the neck of her shirt even further.

“It’s all right, Jamie,” she whispered.

He groaned into their kiss. “Claire –”

“Shhh.” Gently she pushed his fingers away and he watched, amazed, as her nipple pebbled in the cool morning air.

He swallowed. Suddenly feeling so brave, he eased her onto her back and rested his chin on her sternum. Blue met blue. She smiled in a way he hadn’t seen before – happiness, yes, but want. So much want.

Eyes locked on hers, he inched up his chin until he kissed the underside of her breast. She moaned, mouth open. He continued until he gently licked her nipple, feeling her belly shudder under his hands. Then he took her nipple into his mouth, sucking softly, eyes firm on hers.
Claire’s eyes narrowed in pleasure, mouth open, gasping quietly. She dug her fingers into his hair, pressing him closer.

So this was intimacy. And in that moment he wanted nothing more than to hear those sounds and see that look whenever possible. For the rest of his life.

Gently he bit the soft tip, withdrew, kissed it, and returned. Again. And again.

Claire’s back arched beautifully. “Jamie – ” she choked. “Jamie – ”

And then, suddenly, she let out the most beautiful noise he’d ever heard. Her body went completely slack, her chest still heaving. “Jamie – ” she whispered, rasping.

He kissed her nipple a final time and eased up on his elbows so that they were face to face. He gently kissed her eyelids, then her mouth.

“Good morning,” he smiled against her lips.
Jamie absently swirled the half-melted ice in his empty whisky tumbler, watching a strange man talk to his wife.

Well to be fair – they were *all* strange men – most of them the doctors with whom she worked at the hospital. And it was a big deal to be invited to their Christmas party – their high esteem for Claire was apparent in the glowing, enthusiastic reception she’d received when they had arrived.

Jamie was clearly out of his element – surrounded by so many skillful, accomplished men with medical degrees. He hadn’t even finished uni, after his father had so suddenly died and he’d fled to New York to escape from it all. And only Mrs. Fitz and Claire had been invited from the nursing staff – that, combined with the fact that most of the doctors were men, meant that there were very few male spouses with whom he could idly chatter.

But he’d done it – and would do it again, in an instant – because he loved his wife. Because he knew and understood just how important this event was to her – how important her colleagues were for her both personally and professionally. Especially when it came to her medical school applications, which he’d so enthusiastically been helping her assemble…

His vision blurred – and settled on Claire, watching her walk with one of the doctors to another room of the swanky townhouse. The host clearly knew how to throw a flashy party – snacks with names he didn’t care to pronounce, top-shelf liquor, eclectic indie Scottish music softly playing through the entertaining and dining areas. As nice as it was, he far preferred the quiet, cluttered solitude of the flat he and Claire were in the process of moving into. The flat where he just wanted to take her and make her forget about everything but him…

“Jamie?”

He startled at his wife, who had suddenly appeared at his elbow. “Ready to go?”

He quickly set down his glass and bent to kiss her cheek – flush with alcohol and excitement. His belly tightened at the prospect of getting her home, when she was a bit gone with drink…

Quickly she gripped his arm and steered him toward the door, away from the buzzing crowd. He wanted nothing more than to be alone with her – but something wasn’t quite right in the way she gripped his hand.

“Claire?” he asked softly as they padded toward the coat closet, where he silently retrieved her lovely blue coat, helped her into it, and then wrapped his own coat around his broad shoulders.
No response – she swiftly did up her buttons and gripped his hand again.

“Claire?” This time he was more insistent – gently stepping in front of her, blocking her, as they strolled down the sidewalk.

She sighed and met his gaze, suddenly so tired.

“What is it? I’m cold.”

He gripped her other hand in his, warming her between her palms. “What’s wrong? Ye were having such a good time and now ye wanted to leave all of a sudden.” His fair brows creased with worry, thumb stroking her knuckles.

She twisted her lips, considering. “I was talking with someone and didn’t want to talk with him anymore.”

Jamie stiffened. His eyes narrowed. “Tell me.”

She met his gaze. “He was – was being a bit forward, is all.”

A long, tense beat.

“He didna touch ye, now?” Jamie’s voice was as cold as the mist that surrounded them, glowing a dim halo around the streetlight.

“No – but he wanted to.” He had, fool man – one too many gin and tonics having fortified him, Claire thought he’d seen his chance to act out something he had apparently wanted for a long time. She respected his skills as a doctor – but clearly he also had remarkably bad judgment.

Jamie’s nostrils flared. She felt his arms tense – watched the cords of his neck flex – clearly readying himself to run back into that party and beat the poor bastard to a pulp.

She had to stop him.

“No, Jamie,” she said softly. Pleading. “No. He’s not worth it.”

“No’ *worth* it?” he growled. “Aye, he isn’t. But *you* are.”

Gently she settled her arms on his shoulders, drawing him nearer. “Shh. He didn’t hurt me.”

He pulled back a bit. The raw pain and revenge in his eyes floored her. “Maybe so and maybe no – but he hurt *me,* Claire. He tried to take you from me. How could I not respond?”

She stepped closer, bumping her nose with his. “It’s nothing. *He’s* nothing. Please stay here with me, Jamie. Don’t go back. Don’t you ever doubt that I want you. Only you.”

He inhaled deeply – then exhaled – then buried his face in her hair. Breathing her in. Grounding himself.

Beneath her patient hands, Claire felt every muscle in his body quivering from the pure adrenaline. From the primal instinct to protect and defend and avenge that which is the most important to him.

It frightened her, to feel the warrior within him. And it sparked a heady feeling, deep within her, that she’d never felt before. The need to claim and be claimed. To protect and be protected. To fight and be fought over.
And there was only one way she knew to get him to respond.

So she stepped onto his shoes, grabbed him by the lapels of his coat, and kissed him long and hard and deep.

“I’m yours,” she breathed against his lips.

“Mine,” he gasped. “Mine.”

She bit his chin. “And you’re mine, too.”

He groaned, and kissed her again, gasping. Blindly she fumbled in his back pocket for his phone, and pulled away from his lips only for long enough to find an Uber to take them home.

When the poor driver arrived three minutes later, finding a desperate man and woman kissing desperately under the streetlamp, the only way he could get their attention was by rolling down the window and shouting:

“Kiss her lad, but dinna swallow her! Would be sad to have none of her left by the time ye get home!”
Chapter 27

Original prompt: Imagine Claire and Jamie's reaction to being told they were pregnant/what gender they were having in the Modern Glasgow world // Could you please write one in the modern Glasgow AU about Jamie and Claire having a baby? Thank you! // Could you do one where she finds out she is pregnant and surprises Jamie or both surprise Murtagh with the good news?

The documentary had reached its pinnacle – the Allied landing at Normandy, the storming of the beaches, the brave soldiers spilling out of the boats. And the brave piper – part of the Master of Lovat’s regiment, no less – who landed along with the soldiers, armed only with his sgian dhu and bagpipes.

“William? This is the best part!” Murtagh exclaimed to the seven-year-old sitting beside him.

Silence.

“William?” He turned – to see the lad sound asleep, curled against the tartan blanket draped over the back of the sofa.

Well – it was late. Jamie had called, saying that he and Claire would be picking up the bairns a bit later than normal. Not that it mattered – Murtagh was always happy to spend time with the wee Frasers, especially if it gave him an opportunity to cook them a proper dinner. But this was out of the ordinary. Something was up.

He sighed, watching the boy sleep. Fergus could mind himself, now that he would be attending university next year. And Faith and Brianna kept to themselves, after they came home from school – so close in age, they had a lot in common despite their startlingly different looks.

William, though – William was his wee shadow. The girls were all fine and good, but to have the keeping of a wee lad again – it made Murtagh’s heart soar. And reminded him so strongly of tending to Jamie at that age. The lad had his Da’s inquisitiveness, for all he was much quieter than Jamie had been. No wonder – between two boisterous sisters and his parents, William had to struggle sometimes to get a word in edgewise. But whenever he did speak, it was very thoughtful. He was a brilliant wee lad. Murtagh couldn’t have been prouder.

He clicked the mute button on the remote control and rose, settling the blanket around William’s shoulders and slowly stepping towards the kitchen. Whisky or tea while he waited for Jamie and Claire? He had just a bit left in that whisky bottle, but then again Faith had given him that nice tea selection for Father’s Day a few weeks back –

“Oh! I didn’t hear ye come in.”

Jamie and Claire sat at the battered kitchen table – where the three of them had spent so much time
in the early days of their marriage. They were holding hands and grinning like idiots.

“I heard the television in the other room and didn’t want to disturb you,” Claire replied. “I know how William so loves learning his history, so –”

Murtagh shrugged as he sank into one of the empty chairs. “Ah. The lad fell asleep. I’m trying to teach him his World War II history, and how the Frasers have played a major role in every single war in the past hundred years.”

“The piper? That man was incredible.” Jamie ran his thumb along Claire’s knuckles, and she leaned even closer against him.

What was going on with the two of them? Not that they were never affectionate – it was something Murtagh truly admired about their relationship – but this was a bit more than normal. It was no business of his to ask where they’d been – for all he knew, they’d enjoyed an early dinner, or a film, or something where they got away from the bairns for a while. But it was a Tuesday, and their anniversary was last month, and there wasn’t any kind of special occasion coming up –

Then he noticed the envelope on the table.

“What’s this?” he quirked a bushy eyebrow.

Jamie’s smile widened further – if that was even possible. “It’s why we were late. Open it.”

Murtagh unfastened the flap of the envelope and shook it. A small picture dropped out.

A sonogram.

His heart jumped to his throat. He carefully pinched the small picture between his thumb and forefinger, mesmerized by the round blip.

“Holy God,” he said softly. Then he looked up at Jamie and Claire – and realized he had never, ever seen them happier.

“That’s about what Jamie said,” Claire laughed. “It’s true, though. I’m about five weeks along.”


“Apparently, God decided to bless us wi’ another one,” Jamie beamed. “Can ye believe it?”

Murtagh shook his head. “So ye’re the father of five bairns, then, Jamie?”

“I am – God willing.”

That sobered Murtagh. He gently set down the picture and reached across the table to lightly touch the back of Claire’s hand. “Claire – is – I ken ye’re a bit – well, older than the last time –”

She smiled and patted his hand gently. “Thank you, Murtagh – but I’m quite all right. Really. I’ve promised Jamie to take extra care of myself this time.”

He squeezed her fingers. “Please, Claire. Ye – ye need to care for yerself. Especially being around all those sick people in the hospital –”

Her eyes softened with love for this man – this caring, quiet, generous, loving man, who cared for her children as if they were his own, who guided them and showed them the ways of the world. Whom she trusted with anything.
“Then I promise to you to take care, as well.”

He pursed his lips and nodded. Then blinked, and cleared his throat. And the moment passed.

Murtagh stood, pushing back the chair and stepping around the table to clap Jamie on the back and squeeze Claire’s shoulder in congratulations.

“Whisky?”

“Of course,” Jamie laughed, so happy.

Murtagh reached for the high cupboard – where he kept the good stuff – fetched two glasses, and set them on the table. Then he fished a can of warm ginger ale from under the sink and plonked it in front of Claire.

“This will ha’ to do, lass,” he said gently, unscrewing the whisky bottle. “No’ even the smell of whisky for ye.”

She opened the can, watching Murtagh fill the small glasses, and raised the can to join the men in their toast.

“To the Frasers,” she said softly.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: Imagine Jamie's deep disappointment- in the Modern Glasgow AU- when he worked so hard to save a bit of money to treat Claire to a few days out of town, only to have his plan sunk by an unforeseeable expense. Perhaps there's even a little substitute to save the situation??

Jamie’s feet were heavy as he climbed the stairs, one by one, 60 in all to the third floor where he and Claire called a few simple rooms home.

Tomorrow was their first wedding anniversary - and this past weekend, he’d put the finishing touches on a long-awaited and much-needed four-day trip to the wilds of Scotland. Their plans were simple - a rented car, a new map, a handful of ancient, half-ruined castles and battlefields to explore. He so wanted to take Claire to two places he’d visited as a lad - Doune Castle and Culloden Moor, both of historical importance, both beautiful and haunting in their own way.

It was to be four days without work, or class, or people. Three nights in a cozy B&B where they knew nobody. Lovely, aimless days where they could roger each other senseless, then share a hearty breakfast, then gorge on history and culture during the day (with a restorative picnic, which could turn into an hour of sun-drenched loving under a tree) and maybe a film or two in the evening before losing themselves in each other all over again…

But no. It was not to be. A perfect storm of rush orders, colleagues out sick, and Rupert booking meetings with nervous new authors meant that Jamie couldn’t take the two days off after all. He’d called Claire this morning to let her know - she had the rest of the week off anyway, as she was still in the odd time between when her nursing job at the hospital had ended and her first semester of medical school began.

She understood, of course. She *always* understood. She said she’d take care of the arrangements and that she couldn’t wait to see him tonight.

He loved her even more today than he had yesterday. Loved her for being so understanding, so caring. So loving.

Jamie rounded the second-to-last landing, heart pounding from the exertion at climbing so many stairs - and the prospect of seeing his wife. In the blissful year they had been married, his love for her - and his want for her - had grown at an impossible rate. Where did it all come from? Where did he store it all?

What did it matter?

He flexed the fingers of his left hand, heart lurching at the “C” tattooed at the base of his thumb. It
had been Claire’s idea - to get each other’s initials permanently inked. A tangible, visible reminder of their bone-deep bond. The letter was small, and simple - but he now touched her every single minute of every single day. As did she, with his initial etched at the base of her right thumb. So that every time they held hands now, her right hand in his left, their initials touched. Pulsed. It was incredibly erotic.

He bounded up the final steps - and saw she was waiting for him in the doorway, lips curved in a lovely, secret smile.

He scrambled up the final steps - heedless of his screaming muscles - and almost tackled her, seizing her hips and roughly pushing her against the doorframe, mouth fused with hers, swallowing her moans.

At last they parted, panting.

“I’m sorry,” he rasped. “I so wanted to spend our first - ”

“Shhh.” She pressed a soft kiss to his upper lip, winding one leg tighter around his hip. “It’s all right, love. Besides - I’ve got a plan.”

He bit the lovely secret spot on the side of her neck that always made her shiver. “Mmm? Does it involve our bed and the camera?”

She playfully swatted his shoulder. “No, idiot. Though it can. I was thinking…you so love your history…”

He stole her breath with a long, deep, hungry kiss. It took every ounce of willpower she had to push him away - and then meet his confused eyes.

“Not yet. Soon. Not just now. Let me go, please?”

Reluctantly he stepped away, but still gripped her hand in his - pressing his C to her J - watching her hungrily.

She smiled that secret smile again, slowly leading him through the door and into the small - but cozy - living room. The door slowly clicked shut behind them as Jamie took in the cushion and blanket fort she’d constructed - the picnic blanket she’d draped in the corner - the pile of documentary DVDs heaped on top of the TV. The “French Insults” scene of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* was paused on the screen.

His heart filled with love - and he turned to his wife, so beautifully flushed with want - and with joy.

“I thought I could bring the trip to you, if we couldn’t get out to the countryside ourselves,” she said softly, voice full of pride. “With snacks and DVD tours of the castles and a comfortable place to hold each other.”

He swallowed, throat full of so much emotion. So much excitement. So much love. Slowly he stepped closer to her, anchoring his hands on her hips.

She held so still, enjoying how he slowly, slowly stepped closer. Then he kissed her forehead, the arches of her eyebrows, the bridge of her nose, her closed eyelids, the apples of her cheeks, the tip of her nose, the spot right above her upper lip, the curve of her jaw, her earlobe, her chin.

She whimpered with want.
“I dinna deserve ye,” he whispered, digging his fingers into the back pockets of her jeans, drawing her hips flush with his.

“We can still have our holiday,” she breathed, her breath hot against his parted lips. “As long as we’re together, every day is a holiday.”

Finally he brought his lips to hers. She gently eased him to his knees, then to his back amid the pile of cushions and blankets on the floor. Their world shrunk to be a mess of limbs, and clothing, and the desire to become one flesh.

And just as she peeled off his jeans and took hold of him, rising to her knees above him, blowing him a kiss, planning to sink home -

“Your mother was a hamster, and your father smelt of elderberries!”

The TV came to life. Startled, she dropped him and elbowed him in the stomach. They gasped - her in surprise, him in pain.

And as the movie resumed behind them, they collapsed in a heap of uncontrollable giggles.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Note: this takes place from where the previous chapter left off

When Claire woke, disoriented, she’d worried that things wouldn’t be the same with Jamie in the harsh light of day. That they’d discover that their connection – amazing as it was – had been fleeting. A mistake.

Quickly she pinned back her hair and shrugged into jeans and a cardigan before peeking outside the door. Gingerly she tiptoed past Jamie - snoring on the couch in the middle of Murtagh’s sitting room. She couldn’t help but look at him – sleeping flat on his back, legs dangling comically over the side of the sofa. His face was so relaxed in sleep – almost boyish.

Claire turned back to the kitchen and gently opened the refrigerator door – but not before seeing it was covered in postcards from New York, Boston, Washington, Miami. She turned a postcard over – clearly Jamie’s handwriting, as it matched the small, square letters he’d used to fill out their customs form. She smiled, pleased at his thoughtfulness. Murtagh was a gruff man, but he clearly adored Jamie.

Eggs, cheese, bread, and a bit of bacon. Coffee and tea and orange juice. The perfect breakfast – and a small way to thank her hosts. She was no cook, but this she could do. Would happily do.

It wasn’t long before Jamie padded into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes. He yawned and leaned against the doorframe, smiling at her sleepily.

“Good morning.” Claire handed him a steaming cup of tea. “I promise I won’t spill it on you.”

His face split into a grin. “Thank you. I’m verra glad you’re still here, Claire.”

She tilted her head and grazed the back of her knuckles against his cheek. Her body prickled in pleasure at the rasp of his stubble. “Why wouldn’t I be here?”

Blue eyes locked with hers. “I was afraid it was all a dream.”

His honesty was absolutely disarming. And completely endearing. “I was afraid of the same thing,” she said softly.

He sighed. “But ye’re here, and I’m here. And we’re starting this bonny day together. I couldna ask for more – could you?”

She shook her head and turned back to the eggs sizzling in the saucepan. “I hope you like omelets. I tend to burn almost anything else.”
Quickly he strode to stand beside her, helping himself to a piece of bacon cooling on a dinner plate. “Ye dinna need to do this for me,” he said gently. “I can make my own breakfast.”

“It’s the least I can do – you’ve given me so much already.”

He sighed behind her. “Look at me, Claire. Please.”

He patiently waited for her to slide the omelet off the pan, turn off the gas, and raise her eyes to meet his.

“I dinna ken what this is between us, but ye feel it too. Ye must.”

She nodded.

“Weel.” He grabbed her hands and ran his thumbs over her knuckles. “I willna lie to ye. It scares me, the depth of it. Not because I fear it – but because I – I dinna want to make a mistake. Yesterday I didna have anything, and now I have everything, in you.”

She released a shaky breath, but kept her eyes locked on his.

“I want – I want us to try. I ken weel that ye’re coming off a long relationship wi’ a man who has hurt ye badly. I want to give ye the space you need to find yerself again – but Claire, I canna – I canna leave ye alone. I promise ye I will never, ever hurt ye. I will never do to ye what he did.”

It was too much. Her eyes closed and she sighed. “Jamie – ”

He framed her face between his hands. “Look at me, Claire. I mean it. Wi’ everything I am.” She took a shaky breath. Her beautiful eyes, open to his, swam with tears.

“I will never, ever hurt you. I will never, ever give ye cause to doubt me, or the depth of my feelings for you. I would do anything for you, Claire. Do you understand me?”

She nodded weakly.

“Do you? Truly?” His voice cracked.

She found her voice. “Yes. I understand. Jamie – I’m sorry, this is just so much. Not that I don’t want this – not that I don’t want you, but – this is so fast. I’ve barely had time to catch my breath.”

He gathered her to him, and she sank her head into his shoulder, inhaling his scent deeply. Grounding herself.

He held her for a long time, swaying gently in the soft light of dawn. Holding this amazing, wonderful, brave, strong woman.

At last she took a deep breath and raised her face toward his. “I think your breakfast is cold.”

He smiled softly. “That’s why God invented microwaves. Make something for yerself – I’d love to eat wi’ ye.”

She grabbed his mug of tea, abandoned on the countertop, and drained it. She met his eyes as she deliberately drank from the exact spot where his lips had rested.

He gulped, eyes wide. She smiled.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

This ficlet takes place the day after Jamie and Claire get engaged - which is three days after they meet on the airplane.

“I meant to ask ye earlier – and please dinna take this the wrong way – but do ye plan to keep yer name after we marry?”

It was much later, and Claire lounged on their bed, reading the rest of her Lancet magazine. Jamie sat on the chair in the corner, feet propped up, watching her.

She looked up. “Would you prefer I change it?”

“It doesna matter what I think – what matters is what ye want to do, Claire,” he said softly.

She pursed her lips. “I’d never planned to change it when my surname was going to be Randall. Frank didn’t want me to – and I don’t think it sounded right anyway.”

Jamie wanted to test it for himself, but couldn’t bear to combine her name with that surname.

He swallowed. “And now?”

She put down the magazine and extended her left hand. Jamie quickly crossed the room and took it, settling against her under the covers. He nuzzled her neck, and she shivered. He smiled into her skin.

“And now, Jamie – I want my name to be Fraser. When I get to the hospital in the morning I’ll start the paperwork. That way it will have gone through by the time we marry.”

He sucked on the side of her neck. “Claire Fraser. I love the sound of that.”

She arched into him. “A new name for a new phase in my life.” She reached around her side to find his left hand. Gently she traced the base of his ring finger.

“If I change my name – I want you to wear a wedding ring.”

He hummed against her. “Yes. I’ll find one that matches yours. And I’ll start wearing it as soon as I can. I dinna want to wait.”

She sighed and closed her eyes. Their left hands, joined, settled on her hip as Jamie continued to suck.

“You’ll leave bruises,” she said somewhat breathlessly. “It’s summer. I can’t wear a scarf to hide them.”

He bit her gently. “I dinna care. I want the whole world to know you’re mine, mo nighean donn.”
That only I am allowed to hold ye like this, to love ye like this. To kiss ye like this.”

To prove his point he nudged his nose against hers and captured her lips in a deep kiss. After a while she pulled away, gasping, only to sink her teeth into the side of his neck.

He moaned in pleasure. It was one of the most beautiful sounds Claire had ever heard.

He threw his head back and licked suddenly-dry lips. Suddenly she hitched her legs around his to straddle his lap. He opened his eyes to find them eye-level with the tops of her lovely breasts. He swallowed and wisely looked up to lock eyes with her.

“Claire –” Jamie’s voice was pained. “What are ye doing?”

She eased back a bit. “Good lad, eyes up here.”

He swallowed. “I said I didna –”

Her hand cupped his cheek. “I know, and I’ll respect that. But that doesn’t mean we can’t have a little fun.”

She crossed her arms and rolled her loose shirt up over her head. His eyes bugged.

“Holy God,” he croaked.

——

Jamie nudged the bathroom door open, a coffee mug in each hand.

Claire met his eyes in the mirror as she applied her mascara. “Thank you,” she breathed. “I really need it this morning.”

Gently he set one mug next to the sink and held the other between his hands, leaning back against the wall, watching her. “Ye dinna need to wear that,” he said softly, voice still thick with sleep.

“Hmm?” She was distracted as the hem of his shirt rode up to expose the skin of his belly, dusted with red-gold hairs.

He swallowed a large gulp of tea. “Ye dinna need to wear any makeup. Ye are so beautiful to me, Claire.”

She flushed and turned to face him. “Flatterer. Your eyes aren’t awake yet.”

He tilted his head, appraising. Even in bright green scrubs she was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen.

“Are those comfortable to wear?”

She sat on the closed lid of the toilet. “These? They’re easy to work in. And once I’m really focused on something – I don’t care very much about anything else.”

“Do ye normally work during the day, then? Or do ye work nights as well?”

She sipped her coffee thoughtfully. “I get day shifts mostly – right after I arrived in Glasgow I was working at night all the time. But now I’ve worked my way up to the point where I can choose my shifts, rather than have someone choose them for me.”
“That’s good. I ken you’re perfectly capable, but I would worry so, knowing you had to work all night.”

She shrugged. “Medicine is my calling, Jamie. It’s what I’m meant to do. I’m so fortunate I’ve been able to figure that out about myself.”

He sighed and dropped his gaze to his tea. “I dinna ken whether printing is my calling – but it’ll do for now.” He paused. “Ye dinna mind being a lowly printer’s wife, then?”

She nudged her bare foot against his. “I dinna mind one bit. I’m marrying you, not your job. Besides,” she smiled, “Didn’t you tell me I’d be a doctor one day? I don’t see why you can’t open your own shop and command a dozen lads.”

He smiled. “Ye have such faith and I havena even started the job yet.”

“I’m your wife. It’s what I’m supposed to do.”

Hearing her say the words warmed him through to the backbone. “I dinna understand why some men think that marriage is the end of something. For you and me it’s the start of something – something so exciting and precious. And a wee bit terrifying, no?”

She set down her coffee mug and stood to embrace him tightly.

“You’ll do fine today. I can’t wait to hear all about it.”

He kissed her.

“I’ve never liked coffee – but I love the way it tastes on your lips, mo nighean donn.”

She swatted his shoulder. “Get dressed, lad. Let’s leave for work together.”
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**Original prompt:** Really loving Modern Glasgow!!! Imagine Claire's called into the ER to help with a mass casualty - only to find Jamie's one of the (seriously) wounded having done something heroic? And maybe gets a proper chewing out from Claire? // Imagine Claire experiencing the shock of her life when Jamie winds up as a patient in her emergency room after an accident/mishap in the Modern Glasgow AU. Nothing too serious of course for poor Jamie ;) Thank you ladies, you are awesome, I’m enjoying your blog immensely!

---

For the tenth time, Claire reviewed her plan as she methodically scrubbed her hands under the scalding water, back and forth, under the fingernails, counting to five before she flipped her hands beneath the punishing spray.

It was to be a complicated surgery - a middle-aged father, with a family history of heart disease, who already had one heart surgery under his belt. This second surgery was meant to improve the flow of blood to his overtaxed heart, and would extend his life - if he only took the time to eat a proper diet…

She was so focused on her task - rehearsing how she would step into the operating room, examine her instruments, ensure the patient was properly prepared for surgery - that she didn’t hear the nurse rush in through the swinging doors.

“Dr. Fraser?”

Startled, she looked up - still scrubbing her hands. “Yes? Nurse Hawkins, this is a sterile area - ”

“Yer husband is downstairs.”

Claire furrowed her brow. “I’m not expecting him - is he in my office?”

Mary twisted her lips. “No - he’s in the emergency room.”

Panic and adrenaline surged. “What - ”

“He was in a car accident - the ambulance brought him in just now. Dr. Christie says it’s bad - ”

Claire’s world tilted - and stopped. When she thought back on it later, she had no recollection of turning off the tap, undoing her apron, and pushing past poor Nurse Hawkins on the way to the stairwell. She *did* remember clutching at the wall, trying to stay upright as she went down the stairs two at a time, heedless of the surgical mask covering her face and the hairnet taming her wild curls.

Her mind - her heart - her eyes were full of Jamie.
Jamie.

No. This had to be a mistake. He couldn’t have been in an accident - he wasn’t scheduled to do anything out of the ordinary today, just get the children ready for school and wait for Murtagh to pick up William before heading off to the printshop.

Drunkenly she rounded a landing and continued down the stairs, elbows crashing into the walls, completely numb to the pain.

Jamie. His eyes - now crinkling at the edges whenever he laughed. His hair - as wild and red as it had been that day they met on the airplane, when her heart had been so broken and his heart had been so open. His strong, capable hands holding her close, cradling each of their newborn children, working unspeakable magic on the secret places of her body. His mouth, wide and sweet and full of so much humor - especially how it had smiled against hers just this morning, swallowing her gasps after he asked how she’d enjoyed her “English breakfast”…

No.

Jamie -

And somehow she was at the nurse’s station, and dear Mrs. Fitz stopped directing traffic to take her arm and gently guide her to the room where her colleagues were trying to piece Jamie back together.

She heard only snatches of what Glenna told her - it still made no sense -

“-Making a delivery…front seat…stoplight…didn’t see it coming…wasn’t wearing a seat belt…thrown through the windshield…”

Glenna held her hand as she saw Jamie - or what Glenna insisted was Jamie, because there was no way that the poor man with the mangled, bloody back - from which three doctors were diligently plucking bits of glass and asphalt and assorted grime - was her Jamie, the Jamie who had bit her lip as she’d kissed him goodbye this morning, the Jamie who had come to bed late last night after telling Faith yet another fairy story, the Jamie who told her that she made him happier than any woman had ever made any man -

But the man on the table had Jamie’s hair - was wearing Jamie’s jeans - and was screaming in Jamie’s voice, hoarse from the pain.

Her soul called out to him. Her heart overruled everything her brain told her was right - everything she had learned and honed in years and years of medical training.

“Jamie!”

And she pulled from Glenna’s grasp and pushed through the throng of doctors, circling the table and crouching to be at eye level with her husband, her mate, her blood.

His eyes were squeezed shut against the pain. Gently she framed his face with her hands.

“Claire?” he rasped. “Mo Sorcha, mo chridhe. Is it you?”

“I’m here, Jamie. I’m right here.”

“Dr. Fraser - ye canna - ”
“Hush, Dr. MacGillivray. Let her be.” And then Mrs. Fitz was there, beside Claire, challenging her colleagues. Giving Claire and Jamie the space they needed - craved.

“What did you put him on?” Claire turned to the flushed face of young Dr. Robin MacGillivray, in just the first year of his residency.

“A hydromorphone drip,” he replied, eyebrows raised high over his surgical mask. Dr. Claire Fraser was known to be no-nonsense, by the book, and strictly focused on the patient - seeing her like this had clearly rattled him.

“Opioids? But - ”

“He’s covered in terrible scrapes over his entire back and one of his arms. The fingers of his right hand are broken,” the doctor replied - his voice a bit hesitant, but confident. “Ye ken as well as I that that’s one o’ the most painful parts o’ the body to have wounded. And he wouldna keep still.”

Her heart - which had sunk to somewhere in the bottom of her chest - surged with love. She turned back to Jamie, his face flushed with confusion and pain, eyes squeezed tightly shut.

“I’m here, love. I’m right here. I won’t leave you.”

Then his eyes flashed open - bright blue and unfocused, pupils dilated wide. “I’m so, so sorry, a graidh. So sorry.”

“Sshh.” She caressed the bridge of his nose, dripping with sweat. “There’s nothing to be sorry about. You’re here, with me. Nothing else matters.”

“Am I dying? You are so beautiful, my own. The books dinna matter.”

Tears pricked her eyes. His brain was trying to process so much - and the drugs weren’t helping. “It’s all right,” she soothed. “I’m right here. You’re going to be all right.”

“William tied his shoes on his own this morning. Rupert said I didna have to make the delivery, but I wanted to, because I had some other business in the area. Can ye believe the flowers are already out, mo Sorcha? They’re beautiful just like you.”

Now the tears flowed freely as she let her husband babble, holding him close, breathing him in, loving and cherishing him and letting him know that he wasn’t - and would never be - alone.

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She didn’t realize she’d fallen asleep until Fergus gently shook her shoulder.

“Maman? We are here.”

She blinked harshly, instantly awake. Fergus looked down on her with a worried smile, Faith and Brianna each holding one of his hands. Claire sat up a bit straighter and opened her arms. The girls quickly scrambled onto their Mama’s lap. She held them close as Murtagh rounded the corner into the waiting area, William on his shoulders. At the sight of Claire, he relaxed.

“How is he?”

“It’s bad - his back is all torn up, and his right arm and hand are completely crushed. Last I knew he was going for an x-ray to make sure that no other bones were broken.” She swallowed, cuddling Brianna against her chest, holding her girls tight.
Murtagh eased into the hard plastic chair beside her and rested a supportive hand on her knee - his other hand holding William’s legs steady as Fergus took his wee brother into his arms. “I hope ye dinna mind I took Fergus and the girls out of school - I came as soon as Mrs. Fitz called - ”

She smiled - shakily, but calmly - at the man who had been more of a father to her than anyone else in her life. “No, no, it’s all right. I feel so much better now that you’re all here.” She paused. “I was with him the whole time - when they took everything from his back, set his hand, sewed him up. I shouldn’t have been in the room, but nobody asked me to leave.”

“Because they know better,” Fergus said quietly, gently rocking a suddenly sleepy William. “They know you and Da cannot be apart.”

“Or more like, they ken weel ye’d raise bloody hell if they tried to separate ye,” Murtagh added, watching the elevator doors glide open and a gurney being pushed out.

“That’s Jamie.”

And it was - lying on his front, back bandaged from neck to rear, right hand in a cast propped awkwardly to one side. But that red head was recognizable anywhere.

“Da!” Four small Fraser voices chorused.

The gurney wheeled past them on the way to the private room Mrs. Fitz had somehow secured. Jamie’s eyes were glazed in a haze of drugs and pain - but he was awake.

“Hallo, kids,” he smiled. “Aren’t you supposed to be in school?”

Claire stood - one girl on each hip, clinging to her filthy scrubs - and Murtagh and Fergus followed her into the room behind the gurney. “Murtagh decided to take them out of school today so that they could see you,” she said quietly, watching the nurses push the gurney into place and gently lift him to the bed.

Jamie winced, but said nothing - whether because he truly felt no pain, or for fear of scaring the children, Claire couldn’t tell.

But one thing she could tell was his absolute joy at seeing his family. Faith and Brianna wriggled in her grasp. She gently set them down, and they scampered to their beloved Da’s side. Fergus followed, careful not to wake William.

“What happened to ye, Da?” Faith placed her chin at eye level with Jamie on the bed. Brianna’s red curls barely skimmed the top of the mattress.

“Ach, I was in a wee accident.” His voice was tired, but stronger by the minute, now that his bairns and wife were with him. Claire crossed the room and gently lay a hand at the nape of his neck, directly above the bandages. Soothing him.

“What happened?”

“I’m no’ sure, Bree. But the police arrested the man who hit the car, so - ”

“Damn fool could have killed ye,” Murtagh seethed. “And what exactly were ye doing no’ wearing a seat belt, ye daffie? Could ye no’ think for one second about yer wife? Yer family? Ye’re lucky ye only have the - ”

Claire turned to face Murtagh, her eyes silently pleading with him. She was furious at Jamie for the
same reasons, of course, but now was neither the time nor the place -

“It was one of those old seat belts, that just had the shoulder strap.” Jamie’s spoke with excruciating patience, clearly wanting to argue with his godfather - but mindful of the bairns. “I slid right out from under it, when that idiot hit the car. And - ”

“Let’s just let him rest for the time being,” Claire suggested, gently caressing the tender skin at the base of Jamie’s skull, digging her fingers into his rich hair. “He’ll have to stay for a few days, and there will be a long recovery - but he’ll be just fine.”

“Does that mean we get to doctor him when he gets home?” Faith asked hopefully.

“Aye, it does. But only if ye want to.”

And there was his humor - and his deep love for his family - despite the pain, and the medication, and the stress and terror of the day.


And Claire anchored her fingers in Jamie’s hair, letting him know she was there, with him, every step of the way. They were all right. They were going to be all right - she would see to it.

And only then would she bloody throttle him.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: I love love love Glasgow AU and that last prompt (of J and C discussing adopting Fergus) got me thinking of how Fergus reacts to this thought by our Frasers. They deserve all the bairns! And Fergus deserves all the ❤️ thanks ladies! You all are amazing! // Could you please do a sequel to today’s prompt- Fergus going back to Glasgow with the Frasers and how he settles in?

Jamie quietly closed the door to his bedroom and leaned back against the door, watching Claire nurse their wee son.

William was nearly a year old, and he’d long ago graduated to solid foods – but he still nursed right before bed. Claire had weaned the girls by their six-month birthday, but she’d wanted to stay closer to William for a bit longer. Perhaps it was because they’d decided there would be no more children – perhaps it was because she hadn’t done so with the girls – or perhaps it was because she just loved the peace and calm it brought to her, now that she was knee-deep in her challenging new job as a surgeon.

But whatever the reason, Jamie didn’t mind. It soothed both his wife and the lad, and also meant he could still have a wee taste of his own every now and again –

“Are they asleep?”

Claire didn’t look up, mesmerized by William’s tiny features – the perfect mix of the two of them, with her dark curls and his piercing blue eyes.

“They’re bathed and dressed for bed. Fergus asked to read to them again – it’s good for his English, and the girls certainly dinna mind.”

Jamie settled his thumbs in the belt loops of his jeans, reflecting. Five months since the papers had been finalized and Fergus had become a Fraser, arriving via train in the company of Jared, wide-eyed with nervousness and excitement. At the end of that first trip to Paris when William had been so small, they’d spoken to Fergus about joining their family. The lad had been so overwhelmed that he’d sat there, stunned, on the lumpy couch in Jared’s sitting room, with the girls singing to their stuffed toys in the other room.

Jamie was worried his French had not been up to par – that perhaps the puir lad had misunderstood him – but then Fergus had wiped his nose on his sleeve, nodded, and said in a strong voice, “I would be honored.” Then he’d hesitantly looked at Jamie and Claire – seated on either side of him – and very slowly sank into Claire’s arms.
It had taken some work after that – Jamie had made some trips down to Paris to sign all the necessary documents – but he was here now. Still struggling to learn English, but blossoming with the love showered on him by his parents – and his adoring siblings – and Murtagh.

Truth be told, Jamie feared Murtagh would disagree with their decision. When they returned from Paris and announced that not only would they be adopting another bairn, but that it was a ten-year-old boy, with no English - the older man had had to sit down to process the news. But he’d clapped Jamie on the back, congratulated him, and praised him for being so selfless – for opening his heart to a child in need. For showing compassion, when he had no obligation to do so.

And Murtagh had been the most diligent of Fergus’ teachers since he’d arrived in Glasgow – showing him around the city, each pushing a pram with one or two of the three wee Frasers he cared for during the day. Introducing him to different foods. Showing him the parks where he could push one of his sisters on the swings or hold his brother while Murtagh followed Faith and Brianna around on the playground. And helping him with his English, despite the fact that Murtagh had zero command of the French language.

Fergus had made astonishing progress – his speech was still halting, and he struggled with the Scottish accents, but he was a remarkably bright and resilient lad. He could speak basic English now, and put in as much practice as he could every day, speaking with Murtagh or reading picture books to his loving sisters.

“He’s so good with them, Jamie. More patience than I have sometimes.”

Claire shifted William to her other breast and smiled down at him. Jamie softly crossed the room to sit beside her on the bed, reaching an arm around her back and resting his chin on her bare shoulder, watching his son gently knead Claire’s breast with his tiny fist.

“Mmm.” He kissed her shoulder. “We Fraser men are patient wi’ our women. Even this one, greedy wee thing he is.”

He felt her smile. “I know it’s been so overwhelming for him, but he’s so lucky to have so many lovely people supporting him.”

Jamie snorted. “About that. I have something to tell ye.”

Claire shifted William in the crook of her elbow. “Oh? A good something or a bad something?”

“Weel – a good something, I suppose. Fergus asked me a question tonight, and I didna have a good answer for it.”

“Did he?” Claire turned her head, craning her neck to look at him – and he took the opportunity to kiss her cheek. “Now I’m intrigued.” She angled her head to kiss him on the mouth – and it went on for a while.

He pulled back, grinning. “Oh God, Claire. If it’s what I think it is – you and I are in for a good laugh.”

She quirked an eyebrow. He shook his head.

“Fergus asked me if Suzette was Murtagh’s…woman.”

Claire’s mouth opened in shock. “No!”

Jamie’s grin went all the way to the creases of his eyes. “Yes! Can ye believe it?”
“But how? When?”

“Ever since ye introduced them, what – a month or so ago? She’s been stopping by Murtagh’s flat almost every day.”

“I had no idea! She didn’t tell me – and she hasn’t missed any of her shifts at the hospital, so -”

“She’s been such a good friend to Fergus – helping him understand how he can stay French but also be Scottish, ken? And Fergus told me that she and Murtagh have been taking lunch together almost every day, after he puts the bairns down for their nap and lets Fergus watch his learning English programs on the computer.”

Claire’s face-splitting grin matched Jamie’s. “Oh, that’s so wonderful! I never thought anyone would crack that hard shell.”

Jamie’s thumb ruffled William’s dark curls, cupping his tiny head within his palm. “He hasna said anything to me about it, though now that I think on it, he’s been quieter than usual.”

“Jamie, that man barely speaks as it is – I don’t see how he could get any quieter!”

He shrugged and kissed the tip of her nose. “So I told Fergus that ‘woman’ wasna the proper term – there are words such as ‘girlfriend,’ for example. And then it was difficult to explain why we use the world ‘girlfriend’ even if it’s no’ a girl, but a woman.”

William released. She handed him to Jamie, who expertly threw a blanket over his shoulder and began burping his wee lad as Claire buttoned her blouse.

“And what did he say to that?”

“He didna say much of anything, except that Murtagh looks at her the way I look at *you* sometimes.”

Tears suddenly sprung to Claire’s eyes – whether as a release from the nursing, or with joy for the dear man who loved her and her family deeply, she couldn’t say. But she gripped Jamie’s elbow – and as soon as William was finished and safely laid in a nest of pillows on the other side of the bed, she crawled into Jamie’s lap and wound her arms around his strong shoulders, forehead touching his.

“Was *I* ever your girlfriend?” she teased, winding her legs around his hips.

He kissed her closed eyelids. “No – ye went from being a stranger to my fiancée to my wife. And ye’re certainly no’ a girl, Claire.”

She hummed in pleasure against him. “You know what this means, right?”

He shook his head, gently grinding his hips against hers.

“Remember all those mornings he gave us looks over breakfast, right after we married? Or that time he came home early and found us on the kitchen counter? Or –”

“Aye, that time when I left my phone charging on the table and he saw one of the pictures. I canna forget that one.”

She butted her nose against his. “So – now we get to give it all back to him. In spades.”

He swallowed her laugh, thrilled.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Original prompt: Imagine Claire takes Jamie to a public pool

It was his first day off since taking the job at the printshop - his first weekday since coming back to Glasgow where he didn’t have to listen to Ned drone on about financials, or fend off Rupert’s insistence that he spend more time with prospective authors, or tune out Angus’ off-color jokes in the break room.

His first day off since marrying Claire, six weeks ago.

He was long overdue for more time with his wife.

Jamie would have loved to spend the day in the park, or at a museum, or at a pub - or, to be honest, in bed.

Claire had other ideas.

Which was why he was sitting on Murtagh’s couch, thumbing through his phone - pointedly ignoring his work-related emails - bouncing his knee up and down, itching in his new swim trunks.

Claire had always loved to swim - loved the peace and solitude and quiet that came with immersing herself in water and pushing her long, graceful limbs almost to the point of exhaustion. When she was with Frank, she had swam almost daily in the university’s pool. But since meeting - and marrying - Jamie, she had fallen out of her routine.

But no more - she’d found an outdoor pool, close by. And fortunately the weather today was warm, sunny - a perfect late summer day.
Perfect swimming weather.

She’d shooed him out of their bedroom after he changed into his pale blue swim trunks, insisting that she wanted her swimsuit to be a surprise. Jamie had shook his head, kissed her soundly, and strolled down the hallway to the sitting room, absently rooting through the refrigerator and then settling on the couch to pass the time.

What was taking her so long? She only had to change into whatever she’d bought -

Soft, purposeful footsteps echoed on the worn floorboards of the hallway.

Jamie looked up - and his jaw dropped.

For Claire was wearing one of the most…*revealing*…deep red, two-piece swimsuits he had ever seen. Her bonny white skin glowed in the soft afternoon light as she stood, hands proudly on her hips, her chest rising and falling with excitement - anticipation -

“Are you…*mad*…woman?”

Did those words really just come out of his mouth?

Claire frowned at her husband. “What? What did you just say?”

Jamie continued, as if hypnotized. “I can see every inch of you - right down to yer third rib!”

She sashayed closer to him. “And how exactly do you know where the third rib is, hmm? I thought *I* was the physician here.”

He swallowed, throat full of awe - lust - possessiveness.

She stood right before him, and his hands automatically settled on her hips, thumbs hooking under
the flimsy ties holding the sides of the bottom piece together.

“Christ - surely ye dinna mean to go out in public like this?”

Her fingers twined in his messy curls, and she stepped between his parted legs. Jamie pressed his forehead to the bare, quivering skin of her belly, settling his nose into the wee hollow of her navel.

“I was - I just want to take a quick dip and then lounge in the sunshine, next to you.”

He inhaled deeply, and kissed the top hem of her…swimsuit. Glorified underthings, really.

His fingers spread on her hips, taking handfuls of her bonny arse - and he shuddered when he only felt bare skin.

“Claire,” he choked, desperately trying to maintain control. “Claire - I never want to tell ye what to do, but - for the love of God, woman, I canna have ye wear this…this thing…in public. Call me jealous, or a caveman, but I dinna want other men looking at ye.”

He pulled back and looked up at her, licking his lips. “Am I so selfish that I only want it to be *me* who sees ye like this?”

She smiled, reaching for his left hand and guiding it upward to rest on the string around her neck. She bent over, lay her hand on his shoulders, and kissed him. Hard.

“No,” she breathed against his hungry lips. “Because I want *you* to be the only man who sees me like this.”

Jamie deftly untied the string, and the obscene swimsuit top fluttered away. He swiftly rose, picked up Claire, and kissed her all the way to their bedroom.

—–

Murtagh pushed open the door, quietly rested the grocery bags on the floor, and surveyed the odd
scene in his kitchen.

A tube of sunscreen rested on the table - next to two of his fluffy blue bathtowels. A tote bag from Jamie’s printshop. Claire’s sunglasses, which he joked were so large that only a movie star could wear them without looking ridiculous.

And the top of a very…minimal…red bikini, resting innocently in the doorway between the kitchen and sitting room.

And then a loud crash from Jamie and Claire’s bedroom, down the hall.

He shook his head, organized the groceries in the cupboard, gingerly toed the swimsuit top out of his path, and settled in for another night of “Strictly Come Dancing” re-runs - at very high volume.
Claire’s hand curled around Jamie’s jeans-clad knee, wordlessly soothing his anxiety as the car coasted down yet another hill.

“You know, I haven’t spent very much time in the countryside since I came to Scotland.”

Jamie’s eyes focused directly on the road ahead.

Silence.

She knew he was nervous to be returning home after close to three years away. He was not only ignoring her, but forgoing the chance to discuss the lochs and trees and mountains and broad expanse of *green* that was almost blinding in its wild, untamed beauty.

And that concerned her more than anything.

“I was hoping you could perhaps show me around the area? You talk about it so fondly - you have so many memories of this place.”

His fingers gripped the steering wheel tighter, lips pursed, tendons straining in his neck.

She narrowed her eyes.

“I had the map of Scotland tattooed on my bum.”

Silence.

This wouldn’t do.

She lay a gentle hand on his. “Pull over, please.”

She watched him blink, as if coming out of a trance. His fingers flexed, and he shifted in the drivers’ seat.

“Claire?”

Her fingers tangled with his. “Yes. Just me. Pull over, will you?”

He quickly looked over his shoulder to check for oncoming traffic, eased onto the shoulder, turned on his hazard lights, and put the car in park.
Still his hands gripped the wheel. Claire watched the pulse racing on the side of his neck.

“You know I’ll be right with you, every step of the way.”

He swallowed. “Aye. It’s just - so much. So much happened, so much has happened - ”

“Shh.” She unbuckled her seatbelt and leaned over the center console, resting her head on his shoulder. She felt him relax against her.

“I feel like such a fool. I made such selfish decisions - and I am a coward for not coming home to face them sooner. For running away to New York, leaving Jenny and Ian to see to everything. And - “ He buried his face in Claire’s curls, inhaling her, grounding himself. “And for letting my father down. No’ keeping my promise to him, to always see to the running of the estate. For taking care of it for him.”

Claire sighed, holding him.

Almost four years since everything had happened, all in a rush. Jamie and his childhood friend turned brother-in-law Ian Murray had attended a pro-independence rally in the town of Broch Mordha, just a few miles from the estate of Broch Tuarach - Lallybroch, the Fraser ancestral estate since the 1700s. Things had gotten a bit out of hand - or, as Jamie put it, *enthusiastic* - and he had exchanged words with some counter-protesters, which had quickly escalated into fists.

Which is how Jamie had ended up in the custody of one Captain Jonathan Randall at the police station in Inverness - as the small Broch Mordha police force had been overwhelmed with the crowd control. A cruel man - English - and clearly not supportive of Scottish independence. He’d let Ian off with a warning, but had personally driven Jamie back to Inverness. Stopped the car a few times along the way to quietly punch him in the soft parts, under the cover of night. Spewing all kinds of filthy words, trying to get Jamie to fight back.

But he hadn’t. And when he’d arrived at the police station with an eye swollen shut, a split lip, and limping from a sizable cut on his thigh - and been booked for disorderly conduct - and shoved into a holding cell - nobody had thought it was anything more than it appeared to be.

Captain Randall checked on him every hour - offering no food, or water, or comfort. Not even a telephone call.

Which is why Jamie had been surprised to hear his father’s voice, sometime in the early hours of the night. Brian had been frantic, searching the police station, not quite sure what his beloved son had been charged with, rightly or wrongly.

Words had been exchanged between Brian and Captain Randall - what exactly, Jamie couldn’t hear and would never find out.

For Brian had taken one look at his son, curled in a bloody mess on the floor of the filthy holding cell - and dropped like a stone.

Jamie had no memory of what had happened next - only what Ian had told him afterward. How a young lieutenant had chosen just that moment to deliver some papers to Captain Randall - and raised the alarm. How one of the officers had tried to perform CPR on Brian Fraser, but to no avail. How Captain Randall had just sat in a corner of the room, watching.

And how Jamie Fraser had hurled himself against the bars of his cage and screamed and screamed and screamed - for his father, for his country, for the injustice.
Ian had bailed him out - taken him to Murtagh, in Glasgow. Murtagh had patched him up and called in a favor to Colum and Dougal MacKenzie in New York. Jamie had gone, gladly - eager to leave the horror behind.

But he had not seen Jenny since she had kissed him on the cheek, softly asking him to take care of himself at the rally. Hadn’t even spoken to her until last year.

She didn’t even know he was married.

“You’re here now, Jamie. You’re taking that big step. You’re the one trying to make amends.”

He sighed deeply, desperately trying to hold himself together.

“I couldn’t be here, right now, five miles from Lallybroch, wi’out ye, Claire. Ye give me the kick in the arse when I need it.”

She kissed his neck. “I love you. I support you. You need to do this - to move on. To heal a bit more.”

All he could do was nod against her.

“You can’t feel so much guilt. So many things about that night were beyond your control.”

“Aye, I ken that now. Ye’ve helped me see that.”

They held each other for a few wordless moments, listening to each other breathe.

“Do you know what I realized this morning, when you were signing for the car?”

He shook his head.

“If you never had gone to that rally - if you had never gone to New York - you never would have been on that airplane.”

All the breath rushed from his chest. He wrapped his arms tightly around her, squeezing her so close.

“Claire,” he choked. “*Claire*.”

“So don’t you see, Jamie? From something so terrible - it set us on the path to find each other.”

She pulled away a bit - and saw the tears shining in his eyes.

Then he reached for the lever to push the seat back. Claire unbuckled his seatbelt, and climbed over the center console to straddle his hips.

He framed her face between his hands and kissed her for a long time.

She smiled into the kiss as she unbuttoned the top buttons of her blouse and pulled up her skirt. He pulled away to push his jeans down to his knees, then settled his hands on her bonny arse.

She sank home - eyes locked with his - and they watched each other. Smiled at each other. Healed each other.
Jamie parked the car just outside what he called the dooryard of the old house. He opened Claire’s door and took her hand, lacing their fingers tightly together, and led her slowly, slowly to the front entrance.

“Shall we knock?” She turned to him, watched him swallow down his fear.

He grinned - from ear to ear. Finally.

“It’s my home. I’ll let myself in.”

He turned the doorknob, and the heavy door swung slightly ajar. Jamie gestured for Claire to enter first - and she did.

The house was large - formal - but clearly lived-in. Well lived-in.

As evidenced by the small boy who chose that moment to toddle into the entryway, just as the door clicked shut.

He watched Claire with dark, expressive eyes above his Bob the Builder t-shirt.

“Jamie?”

A woman’s voice - how did she know?

And then Janet Fraser Murray rounded the corner, clearly chasing after her son - and stopped dead in her tracks.

She stood in the doorway, hands on her hips, shaking her head.

“So ye’re back, then?”

Claire felt Jamie straighten beside her. She dug her thumbnail into the back of his hand - solidarity.

“I am.”

“To stay?”

“To mend things. Start over.”

Jenny cocked her head at her brother - Claire was surprised to see that she would barely make it past Jamie’s shoulder.

“I suppose.”

Silence.

Clearly a family trait.

For the second time that day, Claire did her best to pull a Fraser - now two Frasers - back to reality.

“We’ll be here a few days - if it’s not too much trouble.”

Jenny’s bright eyes narrowed at Claire. “And who are *you*, then? Telling my brother what to do, inviting yourself to stay in my home?”

“She’s my wife,” Jamie hissed. “And ye’ll treat her wi’ respect.”
Jenny’s dark, gull-wing brows rose, incredulous. “Yer wife, ye say? Is she breeding, Jamie? Is that why ye marrit so fast?”

Outraged, Jamie’s mouth soundlessly opened and shut. Claire squeezed his fingers.

“No - not for lack of trying, anyway. It was literally love at first sight, if you can believe it.”

“Oh, aye. With Jamie I can believe just about anything.”

Now it was Jamie’s turn to squeeze Claire’s hand.

It was going to be an interesting visit.
When Jamie heard Claire’s key in the door, he pushed back his chair from the kitchen table, stood, crossed his arms, and waited.

She breezed through the door, still clad in her rumpled scrubs, face beaming with delight.

“I had the most amazing day!” she exclaimed, dropping her satchel and hanging her tartan scarf on the peg in the hallway.

“Did ye, then?” Jamie’s voice was low, even.

“Yes! I got to volunteer in the emergency room today - they only let the top students do that, you know? I was able to assist the doctors and sew up some wounds and put dislocated shoulders back into joint!” Her hands absently caressed the small swell of their baby as she looked up at him. And frowned.

“Jamie? What’s the matter?”

“Ye were supposed to be home two hours ago.”

“Was I? I was having so much fun - I must have lost track of the time.” She approached him and gently lay a hand on his forearm.

He always would have taken her hand and threaded his fingers through hers. But he didn’t.

“I’m no’ mad, Claire. I ken weel ye’ve worked so hard in yer studies, ye truly enjoy being around sick people. But I - weel. I’m worrit about ye.”

Her brow creased. Jamie counted ten curls that had popped loose from the chignon he’d helped her with that morning. They framed her face in such a beautiful way.

“But why? I wasn’t in contact with anyone who was contagious - only physical injuries. You know I’d never put myself, or the baby, in harm’s way.”

He swallowed and rested a big hand on her belly, cradling and sheltering their bairn.

Three years they’d tried. Doctor’s visits, menstrual charts, hormone shots for Claire. Tears every twenty-eight days when she bled again. The crushing fear that they’d never be able to share their life with a child of their own blood.
They had almost given up - and yet. In her third year of medical school, Claire finally became pregnant.

To say that he - that *they* - had been ecstatic was the understatement of his life.

“I ken that,” he said softly. “Just - I dinna want *anything* to happen to ye. Or to the bairn. Ye - ye both - are so very precious to me.” He swallowed back the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat. “It doesna matter that the patients dinna have something catching - what if there’s a crazy man on drugs, who is lashing out, and he kicks ye in the belly? Or what if ye cut yerself, and the patient has some kind of disease, and bleeds all over ye?”

“Jamie - I wear gloves and an apron, there’s no way - ”

“Or what if they make ye stand on yer feet for ten hours and ye start getting those pains again? Christ, Claire - ye were bleeding last week, and even though Dr. Abernathy said ye were fine, I’m still so scared for ye.”

His eyes searched hers - pleading.

“Jamie - ” she stroked his cheek, surprised to feel wetness. “Jamie - I promise you, I’m not overexerting myself. The doctors and nurses all know I’m pregnant. They won’t push me.”

“I ken they won’t push ye - I’m worrit that ye’ll push yerself, Claire.”

She sighed, and wrapped both arms around his shoulders. He settled bonelessly against her, relishing the small, hard swell of the baby between them.

“You know me too well, James Fraser.”

He kissed the side of her neck. “Of course I do. That’s my job - to take care of ye, and make sure ye take care of yerself.”

She sighed, so happy to feel so much love from this incredible man.

“I’ll be more deliberate in what I do. I promise.”

“God, Claire - if anything were to happen to ye, I dinna ken what I’d do. I - there’s - I canna even think - ”

“Hush. You won’t have to. I promise.”

He turned his face for a kiss. Her lips met his, sealing her promise.

Sometime later, he pulled back, pushing the wisps of hair from her eyes.

“I canna help but feel jealous of all those strangers who ye laid yer beautiful hands on today, *mo nighean donn.* I was wondering - ”

She arched one brow, intrigued. “Yes?”

He smirked. She melted.

“I was wondering - if ye could maybe - doctor *me*, for a bit. If it’s no’ too much trouble, that is.”

She narrowed her eyes, hooked her thumbs into the belt loops of his jeans, and pulled him toward their bedroom.
She’d just finished a particularly challenging series of examinations in the first weeks of her first semester of medical school. It had been so difficult to get back into the mindset of being in school again - to suddenly have to devote most of your waking hours to attending class, debriefing from class, completing homework, and preparing for the next class.

Jamie had been her rock, of course - making sure she ate breakfast every morning, packing her a lunch and snacks for when she was at the university, helping her make flashcards and quizzing her before each exam.

Still, she *missed* him. Missed the leisurely mornings of making love, whispering secrets to each other, without worrying about catching the bus or whether she’d completed all the reading in time for the next lecture.

She craved his love for her - and above all, his *touch* on her - like the drug that it was.

So she had brought it up one night, as she washed and Jamie dried the dinner dishes.

“A tattoo?” he had asked, clearly surprised. “Of what?”

“Something small.” She had focused on scrubbing away a particularly oily patch of curry, pursing her lips. “Something that only you and I would know about.”

He held out his hand for the plate, and she gently passed it to him - but he gripped her hand instead, and leaned over to shut off the water.

“Such as?”

She turned to face him. “You know how I’ve told you that I feel - calmer, more grounded, when you touch me?”

His brows furrowed. “Aye. Ye said that it soothes yer heart.”

“It does. So - I can’t keep getting anxious with every new thing that happens. I can’t afford to feel that way - not when I have so much to do, so much still to learn.”

“And what does this have to do wi’ a tattoo?”

She twined her right hand with his left, and turned their joined hands so that their wrists faced
“I was thinking - of getting a J, right here, at the base of my thumb.”

He swallowed, eyes instantly dark.

“That’s - that’s a bonny idea. But are ye sure, Claire?”

“And I was thinking - you could get a C, right here, at the base of your thumb.”

“Yes,” he replied instantly. “Yes. I want that.”

“Your touch on me, always,” she breathed. “And mine on you.”

He had set down his dishtowel, pushed her to the table, and they had claimed each other, right there, next to the cooling take-away.

So here they were - at Sweaty Nettie’s Tattoo Parlor, which had come highly recommended by Rupert.

“He kens this place because they’ve done work on him before,” Jamie had explained as they walked over one afternoon when Claire did not have classes. “I’ve seen them before - horrid things, mermaids and such.”

“And what does his wife think about his…artwork?”

“Well, considering that he told me the mermaid has her face…”

Claire shook her head, feeling a sudden rush of excitement.

Before they knew it, they were seated in chairs beside each other, waiting for a young man named Rabbie to start his work.

“Are ye sure about this?” Jamie asked for the sixth time. “I’ll do it, but ye canna go back.”

“Why would I even think of going back? This is it. You are it.”

He nodded - and then Rabbie walked over, snapping on black latex gloves. His arms were covered in dozens of tattoos - most of which had some kind of Celtic influence.

“Right, then. Just the one letter each, and in black script, aye? Who first?”

“Me.” Claire lay out her right hand.

Rabbie bent to his work - and Jamie wordlessly rose, holding Claire’s free hand.

It only took a few minutes - and then it was Jamie’s turn.

And then Rabbie was bandaging them, and they walked out of the shop, holding each other’s unbandaged hands, giddy with adrenaline and pain and love.
Chapter 37

original prompt: For Modern Glasgow AU, please! Jamie and Claire shopping together... Baby things, groceries, normal clothing! Just a domestic thing! // How about a Modern Glasgow AU where Jamie and Claire take the kids on a day of running errands including a trip to the grocery store where chaos ensues!!! Please and thank you!

Jamie glided the battered Range Rover to the last free space in the car park, put on the brake, and shut off the engine. The Corries were cut off in mid-song, and silence echoed in the car. Jamie turned back in his seat to address his children - eight-year-old William sitting beside ten-month-old Julia in her car seat in the middle row, nine-year-old Brianna and ten-year-old Faith lounging in the back row.

“All right, Frasers. We have exactly thirty minutes until we need to be back in the car. Yer Mam needs us all to get home on time so that she can help Mrs. Crook make the special welcome dinner for Fergus.”

“What time does he get home?” Brianna twirled one long red lock around a finger.

“Uncle Ian is picking him up from the train station at four o'clock. It’s noon now. Mam wants it to be all special for him, because he hasn’t been home since he went away to university all those weeks ago.”

“It feels like forever,” William huffed, wriggling under his seatbelt.

“Aye, weel. We’ll all see him soon enough. But I need everybody to help me get all the things on the shopping list, all right?”

“All right, Da,” Faith sighed, clearly annoyed at being made to do boring chores on a Saturday.

“Good. Girls - get yerselves out. William, can ye help wi’ Julia?”

“Aye, Da.” William turned to unbuckle Julia from her car seat and gently lift her into his arms. Jamie and the girls slid out, and Brianna held the door open for William as he slid off the seat and into the car park. Julia instantly reached for her Da, and he locked the doors before settling her on one hip.

“All right. Stay close to me, aye? I dinna want to take one of ye to Mam’s clinic because ye weren’t careful crossing the road.

William’s hand slipped into Jamie’s, and Jamie made the girls walk in front of him as they neared the entrance.
“I’ll get the cart!” Brianna dashed toward the entrance and pulled a shopping cart from the long row.

“Can I push the cart, Da?”

Jamie settled Julia into the basket at the front of the cart, carefully pulling her stubby legs through through the gaps at the front. “It’s still a bit to tall for ye, lad - but do ye want to hold the list?”

William beamed, and Jamie fished the crumpled list - written in Claire’s neat script - from his pocket. He bent to kiss the blond curls at the top of Julia’s head - and she giggled - and he smiled as he pushed the cart through the entrance.

Produce first.

“All right, William - are there any fruits or vegetables on Mam’s list?”

William frowned, trailing a grubby finger down the handwritten rows. “Mama wants potatoes, and leeks, and strawberries.”

“I’ll get the strawberries, Da!”

Faith turned on her heel, but Jamie quickly reached to grab her shoulder.

“Hold on - stay wi’ Brianna, now. Can the two of ye get the leeks and strawberries? William and I will find the potatoes.”

Brianna nodded and the sisters darted off.

“The potatoes are over here, Da,” William pointed to the other side of the store. Jamie pushed the cart down the aisle to the potatoes, and bent to toss a five-kilo bag into the cart.

“All right, lad. What else?”

And so it continued - William read each item off the list, and Jamie divided the items between his children, making sure that Julia didn’t try to stick anything within reach into her mouth.

The market was safe for the bairns - they had been here many times before - but he never let them out of his sight. They were all so precious to him - all such a vital part of him - and he wanted them to be safe, as much as he also wanted them to be independent and self-sufficient.

All went well - until they reached the snack aisle.

“No,” he said for the fourth time as Brianna casually tossed a large bag of crisps into the cart. “Ye ken how yer Mam feels about those things.”

“But they’re so *good*, Da. And Rabbie’s mam lets him have them, so why can’t our Mam?”

“Please take it out of the cart, Faith, and find the walnuts. Ye ken that Fergus likes Mrs. Crook’s cookies to have the walnuts in them.”

“Yes, Da.” She sighed theatrically, removed the item from the cart, and pulled Brianna down the aisle.

Jamie turned to his son. He had stuck out his lip and - were those tears in his eyes?

“Come now, William. Dinna do that. Ye ken I willa let ye buy them - and I dinna give a fig for
what Mrs. MacNab serves her bairns. She’s no’ yer Mam, the last I checked.”

Julia rocked back and forth in the cart. Jamie lay a gentle hand on her back to steady her.

“But Da - not even the one bag? Fergus likes them.”

Jamie’s eyes narrowed at his son - who gazed back at him with his own eyes.

He sighed. “Just the one bag, then. We’re running out of time.”

Jamie pushed the cart down the aisle to meet up with his daughters. Faith clutched the bag of walnuts - and Brianna held a bag of frosted biscuits.

“Bree -”

“These are Fergus’ favorite, Da,” she insisted. “He loves the different animal shapes, ken?”

William ran up from behind and tossed two bags of crisps into the cart. Faith’s eyes went wide, but she wisely said nothing.

Jamie shook his head. “I canna argue wi’ anyone today, it seems. Come now. Put it in. Anything left on the list, William?”

William patted his pocket - but in the excitement over Da allowing them to buy snacks, he had somehow lost it.

Jamie ruffled his son’s hair and peered in the cart. “I suppose this will do. Brianna - can ye help me steer the front?”

Checking out and bagging the goods went fairly smoothly - after all, he had three very enthusiastic assistants, and Julia absolutely charmed the cashier.

Faith had conveniently kept the bag of frosted biscuits separate from the bagged groceries, and opened the bag to share with her siblings before they even left the store. They wiped sticky fingers on their trouser legs as they helped Da load the groceries and buckle in Julia before pulling out of the car park and singing “Flower of Scotland” at the tops of their lungs on the way back to Lallybroch.

Once they arrived home, they tore out of the Range Rover and ran into the house like fiends. Jamie shook his head and looked back at Julia, who was gumming the side of her carseat.

“I’m going to be in so much trouble, *mo nighean òir*. I canna say no to any of them - and God help me, I’ll have no hope with you, either.”

She snorted happily, reaching for him.

Two minutes later he was carrying three bags of groceries in one hand and balancing Julia with his other. Claire appeared at the door, and he bent to kiss her.

She pulled back.

Oh no.

“What did you feed them? They’re full of sugar. I can’t afford to have their supper ruined, not when Mrs. Crook has been working so hard -”
He dropped the grocery bags with a loud clunk on the paving stones, wound an arm around her hips, pulled her close, and kissed her hard.

She tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let her.

Finally Julia squealed - having patted her Mama’s shoulder, to no avail - and Jamie released her.

“I couldna help myself, Claire. I wanted to get back in time, and I didna feel like getting into an argument there in the middle of the market - ”

She pulled Julia onto her hip and held her close as the little girl rubbed her face in her Mama’s shoulder.

Claire sighed, resigned. “If we had more time, I’d give you a talking-to.”

Jamie’s eyes darkened - and then narrowed. “If we had more time, *mo nighean donn*,” he whispered, voice low, hand still tight on her hip, “I’d take ye around the corner to the barn, push up that skirt, and give ye a proper talking-to of another kind.”

She blushed prettily, and he smiled, and she shook her head.
Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Alright Gotham, tell me your secrets! I would love to know how Willie, Angus and Rupert fit into the Modern Glasgow AU that you've made.

Claire didn’t realize she’d fallen asleep until Jamie staggered into their bedroom. She blinked awake in the soft light of the bedside lamp and turned to squint at the alarm clock.

“Jamie?” Her voice was thick with sleep.

“Aye?” He was bent double at the foot of the bed, untying his shoes.

She rubbed the swell of her belly. “How come it’s two AM and you’ve only just come home?”

He kicked off his shoes and rose, groaning as his back cracked.

“Rupert’s idea of showing puir Willie a good time.”

Now that her eyes were coming awake as well, she saw the lines of weariness creasing his features. And the stains on his shirt.

“Where exactly did you go?” She crept to the edge of the mattress to sit right before him, helping him unbuckle his belt.

But surprisingly, he snapped his hands back.

“Dinna touch me,” he hissed. “I need to shower.”

Hurt, she lay her left hand on her belly, propping herself up with her right hand. “Jamie? What’s going on?”

He dropped his belt to the floor and moved to unbutton his shirt.

“I was at a strip club,” he said baldly.

Claire focused on a stain on the coverlet, and counted to ten.

“And why were you at a strip club, Jamie?” Her voice was cold, unfeeling.

It terrified him.

“Willie’s bachelor party. The puir lad had no idea that’s what Rupert meant by ‘showing him a good time.’”

Willie Coulter was a junior editor at the publishing house where Jamie oversaw day-to-day operations. Rupert supervised the relationships with writers, while Angus was in charge of the men
who actually ran the printing presses. Willie had been engaged to Mary Hawkins, a young nurse who used to work with Claire before she’d started medical school.

Claire had introduced them, about two years before - two of the most sweet, shy, bashful people she’d ever known. It turned out that they were absolutely perfect for each other - and somehow Willie had found the courage to ask her to marry him. They were planning to attend the wedding in a few weeks - Claire having finally found a decent maternity dress that didn’t make her look like a whale.

“I see. And I suppose you *did* know that’s where the evening was going?”

“Look at me, Claire.”

He knelt before her, unbuttoned shirt hanging loosely from his shoulders. She bravely tilted up her chin, her eyes narrow.

“I promise you, I had no idea that’s what we would do. Ye ken I wasna even planning to *go* until Angus convinced me this afternoon.”

Claire nodded, tired mind racing in a million unpleasant directions.

So in tune with her, he answered her unspoken question.

“Ye have to believe me, Claire - nothing happened. I didna touch any of those women - though God knows Angus paid for three of them to crawl all over Willie. I thought the lad’s eyes would drop from their sockets.”

“So I have to believe that you only - watched, then?”

He sighed, pressing his lips together. “I let Rupert and Angus have their fun - I sat off to the side the whole time, feeling so uncomfortable, looking at pictures of ye and the girls on my phone.”

Jamie touched her chin with the tip of one finger. “I didna find those women at all beautiful, *mo nighean donn*. I didna desire them one bit. Because they’re no’ you.”

She held his eyes for a long time.

“Did you take Willie home?”

He nodded. “He was stinking drunk. Angus ordered five or six rounds of whisky shots, I canna remember anymore. And I hope Willie doesna remember anything in the morning.”

“You’re a good sport. A good friend.” She reached out her left hand and cupped his jaw, relishing the rough stubble.

“I’m his best man - it’s my job to look out for him.”

“He owes you.”

“No - more like, Rupert and Angus owe me. They said we were going to a football match. That’s much more Willie’s speed. Though to be honest - I just wanted to come home, to you and the wee girls.”

“Flatterer.”

He smiled, and kissed her forehead.
She smelled stale smoke, and sweat, and coughed.

He immediately withdrew. “Ach - I’m sorry. I’ll get in the shower now.”

She rose and followed him into the tiny bathroom. He kicked away Faith and Brianna’s wee plastic bath toys, and let Claire draw the water for him.

“How’s our lad doing today?”

She sat on the closed toilet lid. “Active. He was awake when I was trying to sleep.”

Naked, Jamie bent to kiss her belly. “Ye canna keep doing that, *a bhailach* - yer Mam needs rest.”

She smiled up at him and watched him step into the shower and draw the curtain closed.

“I’m glad that at least you won’t have to work tomorrow.” She raised her voice so that he could hear her over the spray. “I’d think you’d need the separation from your crazy colleagues.”

“Would ye believe it if I told ye Angus said that he’s gone there on weeknights before?”

“Well, considering he’s never been able to find a real girlfriend…”

“And Rupert said that he and his wife go together sometimes.”

Claire rolled her eyes. “Don’t you get any ideas.”

He laughed. It warmed her heart.

And then he turned off the water and stepped out of the tub, and she handed him a towel, watching him dry himself.

“Are ye checking me for bites?” he asked, voice muffled as he dried his face.

“I only see the one I gave you this morning. We’re all set.”

She rose to stand in front of him. He wrapped the towel around his hips and drew her to his damp chest.

“Come here,” he whispered. “Bite me some more.”
Claire locked the door behind her, hung up her blue coat, emptied the pockets of her scrubs, and listened.

Normally at least one child would be in the hallway waiting for her – and the television would be blaring some history program – and the girls would be bickering – and William would be loudly playing with his trucks – and Fergus would be practicing his flute – and Jamie would be trying to organize all of them to get ready for dinner.

But today – silence.

All four Fraser children had, one by one, come down with a particularly nasty bout of the flu. There was much debate over whether Faith or William had caught it first – but at this point, it didn’t truly matter anymore.

Even fourteen-year-old Fergus, who had lived for most of his young life in a string of orphanages and group homes and thus been exposed to every ailment imaginable, had woken this morning feeling ill.

Claire had wanted nothing more than to stay home and tend to her family – “doctoring” them, as five-year-old Brianna called it. But she was scheduled today to assist in a heart transplant for a young woman who had been on the donor list for almost five years. She’d grown to know and care for young Amy McCallum, and had promised her that she – and her new heart – would be in good hands.

So Jamie had called Rupert, explained the situation, and taken the rest of the week off to care for his bairns, shooing Claire out the door with a to-go cup of coffee and a kiss.

That had been this morning – forever ago, but Amy finally had a new, strong heart. And Dr. Claire Fraser was *tired*.

Quietly she padded to the living room – finding it spotless and empty.

Then to the kitchen – equally clean, with a few empty soup cans on the counter and a dirty saucepan on the stove. Jamie had tried to make them lunch, then – no telling whether they’d all been able to hold it down.

Then quickly by William and Fergus’ room – their bunkbeds were empty, sheets rumpled and unmade. Then next door to Faith and Brianna’s room – equally empty.
Finally, her and Jamie’s room. The door was closed but slightly ajar. She nudged it open – and her heart stuttered.

Jamie was sitting up against the headboard, reading a manuscript. Two small forms were burrowed against either side – Brianna’s red curls and William’s dark ones were barely visible above the thick quilt. Right next to her sister, on Claire’s side of the bed, slept six-year-old Faith. And beside his brother, guarding him even in illness, snored Fergus.

An empty bottle of children’s cold medicine lay overturned on the bedside table. Used tissues littered the bed like popcorn.

She met Jamie’s eyes – red-rimmed with fatigue. His shirt was rumpled, stained, and likely smelled of sweat – not all of it his own.

Yet he smiled at her through the exhaustion – and she watched all the tension leave his body.

“Long day?”

“You could say that.”

Claire slipped out of her shoes and slid under the covers behind Faith. She eased closer to Jamie, pressing Faith tightly against her chest and resting her other hand on Brianna’s tiny back. Jamie crawled to the end of the bed, lay down his manuscript, and gently woke Fergus, encouraging the lad to move closer to the middle of the bed. Fergus mumbled something in French and pressed himself and William closer to their sisters as Jamie eased in the bed behind him.

Bookending their children – boys on one end, girls on the other, nestled so close between them – Jamie rested a hand atop Claire’s on Brianna’s back and twined their fingers together, smiling at her across the bed.

“I’m glad you’re home,” he whispered.

“Me too. There’s no place I’d rather be.”

He smiled, so tired, but so happy just to have them all together.

“We’ll be next, aye? Wi’ the sickness?”

“And if we are – I’ll doctor you, and you’ll doctor me.”

His eyes creased with promise. “I’ll hold ye to that, *mo nighean donn.*”
Chapter 40

A wee Modern Glasgow missing moment. This takes place two days after Jamie and Claire get engaged - three days after they meet on the flight from New York to Glasgow.

“Are you serious, Claire?”

Glenna FitzGibbons’ voice couldn’t be heard by their neighbors – the low buzz of conversation in the break room generally prevented eavesdropping. Claire was grateful for that – more now than ever before.

Claire set down her half-eaten sandwich. “I am. It’s – it’s almost like something out of a fairytale, I know. But I also know that it’s right – so right. And I’ve learned that when I see an opportunity for something great, I should take it.”

Mrs. Fitz chewed her potato chips thoughtfully. “Not that I don’t understand his attraction to you, Claire – he has exquisite taste. But are you sure? Are you sure you’re not rushing into this?”

Claire studied her hands, twisting Jamie’s ring around her finger. “I’m positive. The more I think about it, the more I realize that Frank and I had really been over for some time. But we were comfortable with each other, and we never had the heart to admit it. That’s why we never set a date.” She sighed. “With Jamie, though – he gives me space to be myself. He is open and honest with me about everything.”

“That must be some change.”

She nodded. “It’s refreshing and endearing and absolutely terrifying.”

Mrs. Fitz smiled. “You’re in love with him. Damn, I can’t wait to go home and tell Graham. He won’t believe it.”

Claire met her kind gaze. She’d always considered Mrs. Fitz – the head of nurses and her boss, really – as a mentor. Claire wasn’t one to socialize with the nurses, truth be told. Mrs. Fitz, on the other hand, had taken a chance on her in the beginning. She was very well-respected – and had even suggested a few times that Claire should consider medical school.

Frank had listened to Claire’s thoughts about medical school, of course. He’d said all the right things – education was a good idea, a solid investment, something worthwhile – but hadn’t really encouraged or discouraged her. Jamie, she knew, would not only encourage her – he’d print out the applications and make her flashcards to study for the prerequisite exams.

That was the key distinction in how these two very different men understood her. And now she realized that with Jamie, she truly could do anything.
“I can’t wait to introduce you. He’s different. Almost old-fashioned.”

Mrs. Fitz laughed heartily. “And since when was that a bad thing, Claire?”

Claire glanced at the big clock on the wall and finished the last few bites of her sandwich. “I didn’t used to understand that – but now I do. So – shall we?” She stood and crumpled her garbage with her left hand.

Mrs. Fitz caught her by the wrist and touched Jamie’s ring with her other hand. “You traded a platinum ring with a big diamond for a second-hand silver band?” she asked softly.

“It was his mother’s,” Claire retorted. “And I don’t need a diamond. I’d rather he spend the money on something else. And besides, a diamond just gets in the way when I put on gloves.”

Mrs. Fitz patted her hand and stood. “I was joking, Claire. No need to be so defensive about it. But if he’s giving you his Mam’s jewelry, well. He’s a keeper.”

She smiled broadly. “He is. He certainly is.”
Chapter 41

kalendraashtar asked Gotham about the conversation where Modern Glasgow!Jamie and Claire decide to wait until their wedding night. So this story takes place on the night they get engaged - which is on the day after they meet on the flight from New York to Glasgow…and they share a bed for the first time...

Jamie sat up straight against the headboard, listening to Claire brush her teeth.

What in hell was he supposed to do now? He’d never shared a bed with anyone – well, sleeping with his parents or his sister when he was a bairn didn’t count. What did a man wear to bed with a woman he was going to marry? Was it too forward of him to just be wearing his sleep pants? She’d seen his chest and back before, but that was different…

Was she expecting anything? She’d shared a man’s bed before – what if he didn’t match up? Christ, was she already comparing him to Frank?

All thoughts left his head as she turned off the tap and strode into the bedroom.

Her pyjamas were conservative – a scoop-necked top that showed off her bonny collarbones, and loose knee-length pants. Her lovely hair was down, curling madly around her face. She smiled at him as she eased beneath the covers and leaned into his side. Automatically his arm rose to settle around her shoulders. She leaned into him, sighing. Jamie’s eyes saw right down the front of her shirt, eyes tracing the milky white contours of her breasts. He swallowed.

“This is nice,” she purred.

“Aye.” He kissed her forehead and closed his eyes. So grateful to be here, in this moment, with her.

“I’ll give ye a proper flat,” he said softly into the clouds of her hair. “I dinna ken how much I’ll be making at the printshop, but I promise ye I’ll provide a home of our own.”

She sighed. “I make a decent salary at the hospital. Frank’s flat was provided by the university – so I’ve been able to save up a good deal. I can support us until you land on your feet.”

He held her tighter. “It’s my duty as yer husband to provide for ye,” he said softly.

She lifted her head to meet his eyes. “And it’s my duty as your wife to support you in whatever way I can,” she said just as softly. “Do you think I’ll need you any less, just because I can pay my own bills?”

He swallowed and shook his head slowly. “No. I don’t. I – Claire.”

She traced his cheek, so softly. “You said you’d provide me space to be myself. Let me provide you space to be yourself. It doesn’t make you any less of a man.”
He nodded, eyes captivated by hers. “We can stay here a while longer – but we should start looking for a place to live. A home of our own.”

She ran her thumb along his lips. “Yes. Though you should know I’m not much of a cook. Or a housekeeper.”

“Dinna fash yerself. We’ll make do.”

She sighed happily. “I so want to make a home with you, Jamie. It would be our –” she blushed.

He kissed her forehead. “Our what, mo nighean donn?”

She smiled. “Our – sanctuary. Away from the world. Just us. We could drink whisky, watch television, not make the bed.” She paused, thoughtful. “And – make love wherever and whenever we wanted.”

He swallowed, the long column of his throat bobbing up and down. “Aye,” he rasped. “Claire – I – I want to tell ye something.”

She nodded, encouraging.

“I – I dinna wish to lie wi’ ye until we’re wed.”

She traced his lips. “Are you scared of it?”

“No – no I’m not. Only – I want to do everything properly wi’ ye. I want to marry ye in a church, before a priest. I want ye to wear a bonny dress. I want to give ye a proper home. Because it’s what the men in my family do, Claire. We take care of our women, and care for them. And love them wi’ all we have.”

Touched, she rested her forehead against his. “You’re so traditional,” she breathed.

He laughed. “Aye, weel. It’s worked for Frasers for hundreds of years, ken? Why stop now?”

Thoughtfully he traced one big hand down her front to rest on her belly. Bravely his fingers pushed up the fabric to feel her sensitive skin there. His thumb settled in her navel, fingers cupping the small swell of flesh.

“Claire – I must ask ye. Do ye – do ye want children?”

Her eyes met his. This conversation had gotten very serious very quickly. But they needed to talk on these things – needed to discuss this.

“Honesty, right?” she asked softly. He nodded.

“Yes. But I never really considered it – it was never an immediate possibility. Frank, he – didn’t want children right away. So we – took precautions.” Her cheeks flamed.

“Like what?” Jamie’s voice was quiet.

She sighed, flustered. “Do you really want to know about my sex life with Frank?” she said tiredly.

His free hand cupped her cheek. “I willna ask ye about anything ye dinna wish to tell me. I only ask there be complete honesty between us, Claire.”

She nodded. “I – well. I’m on a pill. And Frank he – he used condoms. So.” She blushed scarlet.
Jamie kissed her forehead. “Ye’ve nothing to be ashamed of. I’m no’ embarrassed by it. I ask because I want to know what ye like – what ye don’t like.”

She sighed. “He didn’t want to – to finish inside me. He didn’t like how it felt.”

His heart raced. “When – when I lie wi’ ye, Claire – do ye want me to do that? Would that – would that please ye?”

She nodded furiously. Her eyes met his, so open and honest. It was probably the most honest conversation she’d ever had – and he was so patient and understanding. Dear God, he only wanted to understand her and please her.

His fingers traced her stomach, so brave, trembling. “I’ll give ye that gift, then. For as long as ye wish, Claire. And – ” he stopped, hesitating.

“Don’t you stop talking now,” she said quickly. “Don’t you start making me uncomfortable.”

He drew in a shaky breath. “Claire – I want children. As many as possible. As soon as possible. Is that – is that something ye’re willing to do?”

Would she give Jamie that gift? The gift of her love, the gift of her body?

“Yes,” she breathed. How she wanted everything with this man.

He swallowed. “So – the pills. Ye’ll stop taking them?”

She nodded.

“How long until it washes out of yer body?”

She considered. “About two weeks.”

He nodded. “So that’s when we’ll marry. Even if it’s just in the registry office – we can have our church wedding later.” He paused. “Now do ye understand why I want to wait to lie wi’ ye until we wed?”

Overcome with emotion, he eased her back into the pillows and climbed on top of her. He braced his hands on either side of her shoulders, looking straight down at her. His pelvis rested in the cradle of her hips. He closed his eyes, lost in feeling. Then opened them. His eyes shined into hers.

“Just think on it, Claire – the first time I lie wi’ ye, finish inside ye – we could make a bairn. Because ye want to, and because I trust ye. And the bairn would always know – it was made during a moment of such love and honesty and commitment.”

She burst into tears and wrapped her legs around him. “Jamie – ” she rasped. “Jamie – I –”

He kissed her tears away. “Hush,” he said softly. Gently he ground his pelvis into hers. She gasped against his lips. “I know, mo nighean donn. Ye feel the same way, don’t ye?”

She nodded, holding him tight. She wanted to give this man everything.

“Well will you still want me when I’m fat and pregnant?” she whispered into his ear.

He groaned. “Ye canna say those things to me,” he whispered. “I think I’ll want ye even more, when I see ye all swollen wi’ my child.”
He drew back and butted his nose against hers. “So I’ll want to keep ye pregnant as much as I can, aye?”

She stole a kiss and bit his lower lip. “We’re going to have so much fun together, Jamie.”

He rolled off her but kept his arms locked around her side, their legs tangled together. “Do ye truly want the bairns, then? Not just because I want them?”

“I do, Jamie. I – I never thought I’d meet a man who would want the same thing.”

He cupped her belly once more. “I canna wait to feel a bairn move inside ye.”

“Not so fast, laddybuck,” she smiled. “I canna wait to feel ye move inside me first.”

He groaned. “Is two weeks too long?”

She sighed happily. “I need to get a dress. That should take a good week at least.”

He kissed her nose. “Murtagh thinks we’re mad.”

She kissed his chin. “Murtagh also thought he could best me at the pub.”

He laughed and rested their foreheads together. “What do ye want to do tomorrow?”

Her hand rested in the hollow of his chest. His heart beat strongly under her palm. “Hmm. Do you need to do anything before you start at the printshop? I don’t want to keep you from getting ready.”

He nuzzled her nose. “No, I dinna need to do anything. Just a wee phone call. I want to spend every moment I can wi’ ye, before ye go back to the hospital and I start my job.”

She nodded. “Let’s talk about it in the morning, then?”

He rose to switch off the bedside lamp and returned, gathering her to him. She nudged even closer so that they shared a pillow.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you, Jamie.”
Chapter 42

Claire rested the back of her arm over her eyes and groaned.

“I’m sorry.”

Naked beside her, Jamie laughed.

“Why are ye apologizing? Ye’ll have noticed that I didna exactly want to fight ye off.”

She arched her back, stretching, feeling soreness tug at suddenly-tired muscles between her legs.

“It’s the middle of the day. And I’m a respectable doctor who has a list of chores a mile long that I need to do on my day off.”

Jamie rolled to face her, delicately tracing a line across her belly with the tip of one rough finger. He cupped the swell of flesh that had sheltered their bairns - cherishing the skin criss-crossed with a web of silvery marks. Hard-earned proof of his love for her - and their love for each other.

“Claire. Ye’re entitled to a bit of a lie-in. Fergus is at uni. Faith and Bree and William are at school. Murtagh and wee Julia are up to God knows what out on the estate. Jenny and Ian are dealing with the electricians at the barn, and all their bairns are away. Mrs. Crook doesna care. And ye haven’t taken a holiday in two months.”

She moved her elbow from her eyes and smiled at him.

Christ, how did she still take his breath away, after fifteen years of marriage?

“It’s just - when I saw you wearing those boots, I don’t know what came over me.”

Was she blushing?

His hand dipped to cup her. Her breath hitched, and his eyes narrowed.

“It’s just the new rubber boots, Claire. How else am I supposed to see to my estate if I’m up to my ankles in mud and horse manure everywhere I go? And I’ve had boots before - ”

“But never like that. Never ones that go up to your knee…”

*A Dhia* - he could feel her under his hand. She truly *did* find it erotic.
“Is that so?” he purred, bending to kiss the side of her jaw.

She swallowed. “Yes,” she hissed. His fingers gently kneaded the tender flesh between her legs.

“How?”

She moaned, seeking friction. He did not yield.

“Tell me, Claire.”

She turned her face toward his, hungry for his lips - and he pulled back.

“Tell me.”

She licked her lips. “Just - you. Covered in sweat and dirt. I - it’s so different from when we lived in Glasgow.”

“How?”

She squirmed. “You’re - closer to the earth here. You’re the laird. This is your true place.”

“Aye. It is.” Fascinated, he watched her belly quiver. “But my true place is wi’ ye, Claire - wherever ye are.”

Her eyes - hooded - locked with his.

“Seeing you like that, Jamie - it makes me forget everything else. Makes me want to -”

And then she blushed.

“Honesty, Claire. Ye ken ye can tell me anything, aye?”

She nodded.

“Makes ye want to what?”

Lord, what his fingers could do…

“Makes me want to claim you,” she finally whispered. “And for you to claim me.”

In three seconds he had growled, shifted, and then sheathed himself within her.

“I’m yours,” he panted, almost overcome with emotion. “Only yours. Ye must ken that, Claire.”

She lifted a trembling hand to cup his cheek.

How her heart soared to see his smile.
Chapter 43

I love Modern Glasgow, thank you for it! Imagine the Frasers having an eventful night with hungry babies, sleepless children, small emergencies etc.

Murtagh jolted awake as his mobile phone shrieked on his bedside. Fumbling in the half-light of dawn - and knocking over his book (“Scotland: A Very Peculiar History”) in the process - he finally grabbed his phone and flipped it open.

“Aye?”

“Do ye mind coming over to the flat today?” Jamie’s hoarse voice shouted over what sounded like two screaming bairns in the background.

“No - that’s fine. Is everything all right?”

“Just that Bree is teething and William has colic and Faith decided to stay up all night, too. And today is Claire’s early day, for that surgery rotation -”

Murtagh rubbed his hand over his face, tugging at his beard. Jamie and Claire sure had their hands full with three bairns under age four - he’d had his doubts, but they had more than risen to the challenge. They loved those lassies and the lad more than life itself - and the bairns were well-behaved, for the most part.

But then again there were times when all three Fraser adults just wanted to throttle the wee bastards.

“Dinna fash yerself, laddie. I’ll get dressed and head over. Just have the coffee ready, aye?”

“Claire just made our third pot of coffee since midnight. We’ll be ready.”

“Good. I’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

And he was - knocking on the battered door, a bag full of scones in his other hand. Jamie pulled open the door - hair matted to his forehead, an alert wee William strapped in to his carrier on Jamie’s chest, a sleepy Faith on Jamie’s hip.

“Thank ye,” his godson rasped. “It’s never been this bad.”

“These things happen - I remember a few times when you and Jenny gave yer parents quite the hard time.” He stepped into the apartment, hung up his ratty coat, and followed Jamie into the kitchen. “Ye probably dinna remember, but those loud noises carry far in that old house.”

Claire sat at the kitchen table, eyes blank as she sipped from the huge coffee mug he’d given her for Christmas - it read “Trust me - I’m a doctor!” with a small Dallek.
“Morning, Claire.”

She looked up at him, blinking slowly. “You’re a lifesaver. I just got Bree down - ”

Murtagh set the bag down on the table and extended his arms to Faith, who willingly came to his side for a snuggle.

“Ye get yerself ready, then - I’ll mind these three. Ye need a bit of time to yerself.”

Claire nodded slowly and rose, slipping past the Fraser men toward the master bedroom - but not before leaving kisses on William and Faith’s foreheads, Jamie’s mouth, and Murtagh’s cheek.

Jamie and Murtagh stood for a long, quiet moment in the kitchen, watching the two bairns finally fall asleep.

“Times like this I’m glad that Claire talked me out of more bairns,” Jamie said quietly. “Fergus is on his way - but he’s older. At least he won’t keep us up all night.”

“That’s what *you* think, laddie.” Murtagh shifted Faith closer to his side and sat on the edge of the table, reaching for a scone with his free hand and chewing it thoughtfully. “And the sleepless nights never end - if it’s no’ the colic, or the teething, it’s waiting up for them when they go out with other lads and lassies.”

Jamie caressed William’s wee legs over his tartan onesie, considering. “Oh God. I canna even *think* about that right now.”

Murtagh gently pushed Jamie to an empty chair. “Then sit, and eat, and give me the wee lad so ye can take yer rest. Rupert willna mind if ye are a few hours late, aye?”

Jamie sank to his seat and held his head in his hands. “Since when did ye get so wise, then?”

Murtagh pulled out another scone and placed it in front of Jamie on the table. “Since I was entrusted the care of ye, and yer passel of bairns. Now - time for breakfast, aye?”
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt:** Imagine for Modern Glasgow: the first time Claire realizes/confirms she is pregnant. Last year you answered a meme prompt where Claire came home early from the hospital to surprise Jamie with a “tiny pair of tartan socks on his placement” (I was re-reading your prompts and that one stuck out to me // Imagine Claire and Jamie in Modern Glasgow AU when Claire tells Jamie that she’s pregnant for the very first time :)

Jamie rubbed tired eyes with the back of his wrist, blinking harshly to stay awake in the rear of the taxi as the driver fiddled with the volume on the radio up front.

“Eyes on the road, man,” he said softly, trying so hard to mask the irritation in his voice. “I’d like to get back to my wife in one piece, aye?”

The driver hmphed and returned his left hand to the wheel - leaving the dial on BBC Alba. Jamie unconsciously relaxed at the sound of the language from his childhood - remembering bedtime stories from his Mam, and hours spent out walking the fields with his Da, and late nights in the pub with Murtagh.

And Claire’s flushed skin, prickled with gooseflesh, as he kissed every inch of her body and taught her the corresponding Gaidhlig word.

Jamie shifted in his seat, eyes dropping to the C tattooed at the base of his left thumb. Almost three weeks they’d been separated - the longest time they’d been apart since meeting and marrying, more than two years before. Rupert’s wife had gone into labor early and delivered a healthy son - and the man was understandably reluctant to leave his wife and bairn for an extended business trip. So Jamie had volunteered at the last moment to take Rupert’s place as the publisher’s representative for a small book tour through England, Wales, and Scotland - promoting a book of short stories written by Ned Gowan, a charming older gentleman who had had a first career as a successful barrister and was enjoying his retirement by writing a well-received series of spy novels.

It was a good opportunity for Jamie to step in and provide the necessary support for Rupert - as well as make some connections in Cardiff and London. Accumulate hotel and rail points so that he and Claire could finally take a vacation. And get to know Ned Gowan - an eccentric but thoughtful man - a bit better.

But truth be told, he missed Claire deeply. It didn’t matter that they’d texted constantly, spoke over Skype every night - and watched their private videos together. He craved her - heart, body, soul. He needed her more than food, more than air.

And now the taxi was turning onto the street where they lived, and Jamie couldn’t wait to begin executing his plan. First, just look at Claire as she opened the door - admiring her, drinking her in.
Then dinner - to fill his starving belly, and fortify him for a long, sweet night of slow lovemaking to forge their bond even stronger. But not before he led Claire to their bedroom, sat on the bed, asked her to take off her blouse…

“Scuse me? You said 10 Carfax Close, am I right?”

Jamie swallowed, turning to focus on the cab driver.

“Yes - it’s this building just up the road a bit.”

And before he knew it, Jamie had paid the driver, collected his bag from the boot, and somehow unlocked the vestibule door with his trembling fingers.

Up six flights of stairs to the third floor. Then he dropped his bag and knocked five times on the door.

And Claire - hair rumpled, cheeks flushed, scrubs sweaty - unlocked the door.

Her smile was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“Mo chridhe,” he croaked, overcome. “Mo graidh. I am home.”

“So you are,” she teased. “I got Greek - your favorite. I know you’ll need a big dinner, if your plans are anything like mine for tonight.”

Was she - was she flirting with him?

He swallowed, tracing his eyes over her features - still not touching her.

“I do love when we have the same thought, Claire Fraser.”

Finally, finally she reached to touch him, hooking her thumb in his belt loop.

Completely under her power - and ecstatic to be there - he let her draw him closer. His lips hovered over hers -

“Come on! The food’s getting cold.”

Then she was gone - and he picked up his bag, kicked the door shut, locked it, and dropped his bag and coat in the hallway.

Quickly he rounded the corner to their tiny kitchen - and his heart soared. For Claire had set three take-away dishes on the table between their two chairs, two candles glowing in the holders Jenny had given them for their first anniversary.

She was already sitting in her chair, serving him his favorite kebab. He crossed the room, bent to kiss the crown of her head, and helped himself to pita bread.

“How was the train trip back?” Her head was bent, focusing on her baba ghanoush.

He slid the meat off the skewer with his fork. “Long. Ned is a lovely man, so full of ideas - but he’d forgotten that he’d already shared with me his wee outline for the next novel - ”

Jamie dropped his fork. Claire cautiously looked up, heart racing.

To see Jamie’s finger softly tracing the outline of the wee pair of tartan socks - baby’s socks -
she’d left next to his spoon.

“What’s this, Claire?” His voice trembled, so full of caution, yet so heartbreakingly full of hope -

“Something we’ll need in a few months.” Her hand slid across the table, fingers lacing through his.

His brow furrowed - and his eyes lifted to meet hers.

“Truly, Claire?”

She nodded, heart so full.

“Ye must tell me the words. I must hear them, Claire.”

Tears blurred her vision. “I’m pregnant, Jamie. We’re to be parents.”

He cried out - was it a sob or a laugh? - and squeezed her hand so hard she thought her fingers
would break. His mouth opened and closed - dumbstruck. Wordless.

“I missed my period. Forty-six days.”

Suddenly he pushed back the chair, dropped to his knees, and crawled to her side of the table, burying his face in her belly.

She threaded her fingers through his hair. “Finally.”

He could only nod. And after a long moment he pulled back, eyes shining, nose running. Not believing that this dream - their dream - had finally come true.

“Are ye sure?”

She nodded. “I took four tests.”

“I’m so sorry I wasna here to help ye.”

“Nonsense. Isn’t this better?”

He wiped his nose on his shirtsleeve. “Yes. Yes it is.”

One large hand reached to caress her still-flat belly. Full of wonder.

“It’s a miracle. Ye have made a miracle, Claire.”

“We have a made a miracle, Jamie. You were there.”

“Aye, I was, wasn’t I?”

Suddenly he rose and hoisted Claire into his arms - one arm behind her knees, the other behind her back.

She giggled in surprise, throwing her arms around his neck.

“So you’re happy, then?”

He staggered down the hallway to their bedroom. “I’m verra happy indeed, Claire. This calls for a celebration, does it not?”
And before he could gently set her on the soft, soft pillows, she brought his head to hers for a long, slow, searing kiss.

“I’m not going to class tomorrow,” she whispered against his lips. “And I charged the camera battery.”

He kissed her smile. “I love you.”

She kissed the cleft in his chin. “I love you more.”

He kissed her eyelids. “Not possible.”

“Yes, possible. There are two hearts within me, now. Double the love for you.”

His grip tightened - and his smile widened - and he thanked every saint and deity and turn of circumstance in his life that had led him to this woman, this moment, this happiness.
Claire hadn’t even bothered going inside this time - choosing to wait in the warmth of the car as Jamie rushed through the rain to inquire if the inn had any vacancies.

They were on the second day of a week-long driving trip, celebrating their second anniversary. Having cancelled their driving vacation the previous year - when Jamie had unexpectedly had to work on their first anniversary - they’d both worked hard to take the time off for the current trip. Seven glorious days without work - or emails from Rupert - or studying for the practical lab courses that had taken up most of Claire’s summer.

They’d left Glasgow first thing the previous morning, spent the afternoon - and a lovely evening - at a funky hotel in Edinburgh, and were now on the first day of what promised to be a meandering journey north. One of their stops - likely their next - was to visit Jamie’s estranged Fraser great-grandfather.

Simon Fraser still believed he was the true Lord Lovat, though the title had passed to another branch of the family hundreds of years back. He lived in a big old house - surrounded by servants - near the site of the old Beauly castle, moldering away in the bitterness of old age.

Claire vividly remembered the night she had learned more about the Fraser side of the family - the second day of their first trip back to Lallybroch, a few months after their wedding. It was late, and much whisky had been drunk by Jamie and Claire and Ian and Jenny, and Jenny had asked the simple question of whether Jamie had recently heard from the Old Fox.

Matters had become a bit confused, due to the lateness of the hour and the quantity of whisky that had been consumed - but by the end of the conversation, Jenny had revealed that her beloved father Brian - a kind, true, honorable man if there ever was one - had not spoken to his grandfather in years. And Brian’s children - who bore the man’s name - had not seen their great-grandfather since he had made a brief appearance at Lallybroch for Ellen’s funeral fifteen years before.

So in the spirit of new beginnings, Claire had calmly suggested that Jamie extend the proverbial olive branch - to make amends with that part of the family. Nobody could remember why the two generations of Frasers had lost touch.

Having grown up with no family - and married a husband with an abundance of it - and now actively trying to start her own family, Claire couldn’t fathom any kind of familial estrangement.
Which was why Jamie - hair dripping moisture, shivering in the air conditioning of Murtagh’s battered Morris that he had so kindly lent for their trip - had just slid into the car, muttering Gaelic curses under his breath.

“The old bag has got a room - but with two twin beds. Are ye fine wi’ that?”

“Either I sleep on top of you or you sleep on top of me. I’m fine with either outcome.”

Jamie wiped the rain from his eyelids and tried - and failed - to wink at his wife.

“Sounds good to me. I’ll fetch the suitcase.”

Now it was Claire’s turn to run through the rain and wait, dripping, in the vestibule of the ancient inn as she finalized the arrangements with the receptionist and waited for her damp husband to join her.

And when he did - hair plastered to his forehead, raindrops clinging to his shoulders, teeth flashing amid his ruddy cheeks - she wondered if they’d even make it to one of the twin beds.

They didn’t - thank God for sturdy doors in old inns - but she didn’t mind.

And afterwards, when they had pushed the twin mattresses together and figured out a way to both lie flat without falling into the crack between the beds - and Jamie had traced the slope of her bare belly and hips so gently and reverently she wondered if it had been a raindrop instead - he finally shared what had been eating at him since they’d decided to visit old Simon.

“The Old Fox - he never approved of my parents’ marriage.”

Claire shifted closer to face him, pushing the damp strands of his hair behind his ears.

“Of the marriage - or of your mother?”

Jamie closed his eyes, considering. “I suppose of her. She - she was a lady. But she didna come from a landed family - no’ one wi’ a title, or one that had had a title. And she was definitely no’ the woman my great-grandsire wanted his grandson to marry.”

She threw her arm around his shoulders. “What would he have preferred?”

Jamie kissed her forehead, lips lingering. Tasting.

“I can’t even think about it, Claire. He - he called her all sorts of vile names, right to my father’s face. Even after she died, and he had the gall to show up for the funeral. I was only eight, ken - but even *I* remember how crazy he was.”

His eyes closed tightly at the memory. She caressed his furrowed brow - then kissed it.

“I’ve only ever heard the most lovely things about your mother. He must be a real bastard, your great-grandfather.”

Jamie sighed. “He is.”

Then she felt the tension completely leave his body - and his eyes opened, mouth smiling wide.

“I canna wait to see what he thinks of *you,* Claire. And I canna wait to see ye put him in his place - to do what my Mam never had the chance to.”
She smiled back - conspiratorially.

“I’ll be happy to. And honored - to serve her. And you, my laird.”

He growled, seized her lips in a fierce kiss, and rolled on top of her.

They slid right between the beds and landed - hard - on the old floorboards.

Oblivious, Jamie sheathed himself again and rode his wife properly.

One floor below, the receptionist plugged her ears.
original prompt: Imagine Claire and Jamie stopping for a night at some inn when they were on their way to see Jamie's grandfather. Seeing them riding together in Scotland reminded me when they were collecting the rents and Jamie slept outside her door <3

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She smiled back - conspiratorially.

“I’ll be happy to. And honored - to serve her. And you, my laird.”

He growled, seized her lips in a fierce kiss, and rolled on top of her.

They slid right between the beds and landed - hard - on the old floorboards.

Oblivious, Jamie sheathed himself again and rode his wife properly.

One floor below, the receptionist plugged her ears.
“What time is he supposed to get here?”

Faith looked up from her biology textbook, squinting at Brianna – who stood in the window, eyes closed against the warmth of the setting sun.

“In time for supper – Mrs. Crook said that she was going to make a big pot pie. Do ye remember that’s one o’ his favorites?”

“Of *course* I remember – even though he hasna lived here for a few years, it doesna mean I’ve forgotten such things!”

Brianna turned to face her sister, arms crossed. At fifteen she was already over six feet tall – and would likely stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Da one day. Sixteen-year-old Faith, on the other hand, was the spitting image of her Mama – and had inherited her height and knack for healing as well. She was already in the accelerated science courses and volunteering in Mama’s clinic on weekends – medical school was the most logical option as she started thinking about uni.

Faith sighed. “Ah, weel – it’ll be good to see him again, no? Do ye think he’ll bring Marsali this time?”

Marsali MacKimmie was just a few years older than the elder Fraser girls – a second-year student at the same uni where Fergus was studying for his master’s. They had met last year in a History of Journalism class – Fergus was the teaching assistant, Marsali was in the first semester of her undergraduate studies. They had been utterly inseparable almost since that day.

Mama and Da liked her – she was beautiful but so quiet, and had hinted that she’d come from a troubled home. The first time Fergus had brought her to Lallybroch, she had been almost overwhelmed by the tidal wave of Frasers (and Murrays) and their almost boundless love for one another. Wee seven-year-old Julia had taken Marsali by the hand and led her through the gardens, naming every plant and flower and showing her the special treasures she’d unearthed on the estate during her expeditions with Murtagh. And slowly Marsali had smiled, and asked questions, and grown to love Julia – and William and Brianna and Faith and Murtagh and all the Murrays and even the staff.

“I hope he does – I do like her so much.” Brianna paused, absently twirling a red lock around her finger. “Do ye think it’s serious between them?”

Faith sat back in her chair, considering. “Aye. I do. Have ye seen how gentle he is wi’ her? And
how kind and patient he is? And not to mention how she looks at him? It minds me of –”

“Aye,” Brianna interrupted. “It minds ye of Mama and Da, doesn’t it?”

Faith nodded. “He’s so much older than her, though –”

Brianna snorted. “Mama is five years older than Da, and it seems to work for them just fine!”

The sisters giggled – remembering a night not so long ago when they’d tiptoed downstairs for a midnight snack, only to halt in the hallway when they heard some – sounds – coming from the direction of Da’s study…

“Anyway, she’s still in school. I canna imagine anything serious will happen afore she graduates.”

“Yes – but remember, Mama and Da marrit after kenning each other for only a month. Anything is possible in this family.”

Gravel crunched in the driveway. Brianna turned back to the window, squinting, and cheered.

“Fergus is home!”

—–

Julia’s ecstatic voice echoed through the house as the girls scampered downstairs.

“Marsali!!”

Then they were in the entryway – watching Julia hug Marsali’s middle, William – who was never too old for a hug from his big brother – wrapping his arms tightly around Fergus, and Mama and Da standing off to the side, his arm draped over her shoulders, grinning like idiots.

“Mes soeurs!!”

Fergus smiled from behind his dark, bushy beard – which he’d had (to Mama’s annoyance) since his third year of uni – and stepped away from William to embrace both of his sisters at once.

Then William snuck in between his sisters, and Julia crept up between all of them.

For a long moment, all five Fraser children closed their eyes, breathing, holding each other. It was something they’d started as bairns – but which they could do less and less frequently as the years went on.

And then Mama and Da were there, too – encircling all of them.

“Marsali! Come on!” Julia’s voice was muffled, but clear.

Da stepped back from the circle, and then Marsali was there, tucked into Fergus’ side.

And all was well.

—–

“And what is the occasion for this visit, wee frog?”

Murtagh helped himself to more whisky from the decanter in the middle of the long dining table. Claire and Jenny had insisted they use the more formal dining room tonight, rather than the two
parallel tables they usually sat at in the kitchen. It wasn’t every day that the eldest Fraser was home, after all.

Nobody had come out and asked Fergus the reason for his impromptu homecoming – it wasn’t near any birthday or holiday, and school was still in session. But everyone had been too excited – it had been almost two months since Fergus had last been home – and also unwilling to bring up what could be a touchy topic.

Faith knew Da would get to it, eventually. But when they were alone, sipping whisky in Da’s study after supper. Not out in the open, with all the family.

But Murtagh – Murtagh wasn’t like that. He didna like secrets of any kind – and was of the firm belief that the more families kent about each other, and the more they communicated – the stronger they were.

And the room of more than twenty Frasers and Murrays went silent – eyes all focusing on Fergus – sitting at Da’s right, in the place of honor – and Marsali, sitting quietly, yet serenely, beside Fergus.

Fergus swallowed, and took Marsali’s hand.

“We have the most wonderful news to share with all of you. It couldn’t wait any longer.”

Marsali beamed at Fergus – so radiant.

“Marsali and I – ” Fergus hesitated, almost as if he couldn’t believe that the words he was about to say were real.

“Are ye breeding?”

All heads swiveled toward Julia – propped up in her booster seat between Murtagh and Young Ian.

“Julia!” Mama hissed from across the table. “Where did you ever hear that word?”

“It’s the word Da uses to describe the coos, Mama! And it’s wha’ Uncle Ian says when Auntie Jenny has babies in her tummy!”

“It’s no’ proper for a wee lassie to say such a thing now,” Murtagh said gently, meeting her blue eyes and holding them. “Fergus and Marsali aren’t even marrit yet, so it’s impossible – ”

“That’s our news, Murtagh.” Fergus pierced the silence with his deep, steady voice – beside Marsali, who had flushed beet red with surprise. “You see – Marsali and I are married. She is a Fraser now, just like us.”

Even Julia had nothing to say.

Faith counted ten ticks of the clock on the fireplace mantel.

“Truly, Fergus? Are ye truly marrit?”

Now Da was smiling so wide – gripping Fergus’ shoulder.

“Aye, Da – we surprised even ourselves. It was a very…quick decision.”

“We didna want to wait another moment,” Marsali finally spoke. Her voice was quiet, breathy as always – but strong. Firm. “I want him. Always. It was that simple.”
Then she and Fergus looked at each other – and Faith felt time stop.

Before the entire room burst into cheers and applause, all the Frasers and Murrays rising to their feet, silverware and plates and glasses crashing to the table and staining the dark wood.

But nobody cared – for tonight would be a celebration like none other that Lallybroch had seen for a long time.
Jamie shifted on his back, blinking in the darkness of their bedroom, sleepily reaching for Claire.

Cool, empty sheets.

He rolled closer to her side of the bed, extending his arm further.

Pillowcase a bit damp – but no Claire.

The digital clock on Claire’s bedside table cast a dim blue glow over the dog-eared pregnancy book she had dropped to the floor before bed.

2:43 AM.

Gooseflesh prickled his bare skin, now that his body was coming awake.

He stood, shivering, groping for his bathrobe at the foot of the bed and tying the soft terrycloth around his waist.

He and Claire had a matching set – a souvenir of the hotel where they spent their third anniversary. Jamie squinted at the hook by the door – her robe was gone.

Now almost fully awake, he padded out of the bedroom and down the hall to the kitchen, bare feet whispering against the worn hardwood floors.

Only the light over the stove was on – and the nose of the kettle still steamed.

Claire looked up as he came in, one hand caressing the modest but growing bulge of their bairn, the other methodically dunking her teabag in the mug Murtagh had given her for her last birthday – reading “THIS IS WHISKY.” She so delighted in absolutely every aspect of her pregnancy, except having to give up her two favorite drinks – coffee and whisky.

“Can’t sleep?”

Claire pursed her lips and shook her head, returning her gaze to her mug.

Tension crackled in the room.

This wouldn’t do.
“Claire?” Jamie quickly pulled back the chair beside her and sank into it, reaching out a big hand to join hers atop her belly. “Is it the wee bannock, then? Giving you the gas?”

She twined her fingers through his, and lay her other hand flat on the table. The silver of her wedding ring – Ellen’s wedding ring – glinted in the soft light.

“No – not that. Not this time, anyway.”

Her voice was soft – far away. Gently he took her chin between the thumb and forefinger of his free hand, and tilted her eyes to meet his.

“Tell me?”

Bravely she held his gaze, but swallowed.

He waited – would give her all the time in the world, if need be.

A long moment passed before she spoke.

“I had a dream.”

Jamie released the breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding. “Did ye now? Do ye want to talk about it?”

She licked her lips. “It must have been because we were watching that programme before bed – the one about the ’45 and Bonnie Prince Charlie.”

“Aye? So?”

Claire shifted a bit in the high-back wooden chair – they’d been lucky to have found a matching set in a church’s rummage sale when they were furnishing the apartment two years before. She’d decorated the hodge-podge of chairs at their dining table with colorful, comfortable cushions – but her lower back was aching more and more as the bairn grew within her.

She was hesitating.

“Claire? Ye ken ye can tell me anything, aye? I’m here.”

He leaned over and pressed his forehead to hers – feeling hers clammy with sweat.

*A Dhia*, what had frightened her so?

“Breathe in wi’ me, all right? Just relax.”

He inhaled – and felt her do the same.

He counted to ten – and then exhaled. As did she.

Four more rounds – and finally she almost collapsed against him, throwing her hands around his shoulders.

“Sshh,” he soothed, rubbing gentle circles on the soft terrycloth covering her back. “Hush. I have ye. I’m here.”

She buried her face in his neck, hot tears slipping down to his torso.
“I dreamed you sent me away,” she murmured.

His grip on her tightened, anchoring her to him.

“Why would I ever do that, Claire? It was only a dream. Ye ken weel I’d never do that to ye. I canna survive ten minutes wi’ out ye.”

Shakily she inhaled against him. “I dreamed you were a soldier, fighting for Prince Charles. I was accompanying you – serving as a nurse for your men. Following you to all the different battles.”

He kissed her forehead.

“And then – then I dreamed we were at the Battle of Culloden. Only – you refused to let me stay, because of the baby. You ordered me to go – to go to safety. To protect me.”

“I will always protect you, *mo nighean donn*,” he whispered.

“I argued with you,” she continued, not hearing him. “I told you no, my place is with you. My home is with you. But – you would hear none of it. You sent me away, and I was so afraid because I was all alone, and I knew you were going to die. And I felt my heart die within my chest.”

Wordlessly, Jamie hooked one arm under Claire’s legs – bare, freezing – and plopped her onto his lap, untying the belt of his robe and enveloping it around her. He undid the tie of her robe and pressed her bare skin to his.

Reassurance. Grounding her in the here and now.

“Sshh. I’ll never leave ye alone, Claire – ye must know that.”

Then he kissed every inch of her face – so lightly she thought she must have been dreaming.

“I love you,” he whispered. “So, so much. And I’m here wi’ ye, now. In this time – in Glasgow. In our wee kitchen, which ye turn into a study room half the time.”

She butted her nose against his, seeking. He captured her smiling lips in a long, slow kiss.

“Do ye remember how we passed the time on this table two days ago?” His voice was deep – breathy. Teasing.

“You let me taste you,” she purred against his neck. “Savor you. Hold you at my mercy.”

“Mmm. My place is wi’ you, Claire. My body – it’s yours. My heart – you own it, and keep it safe. My soul – it lives within you. I canna live wi’ out ye – I will never, *ever* send ye away.”

She turned in his lap to straddle him, bracing her arms on his shoulders. Pressing her bare chest to his – sheltering the bulge of their baby between them.

“I know. It’s just – it was so *real*, Jamie. I could smell the damp earth of the moor – hear the cannon fire. See the light catch in your hair.”

One of his hands reached down to caress the sensitive, stretching skin of her belly. How he marveled at this miracle, every moment of every day.

“I’m sorry – ye’re right, it must ha’ been that programme we watched before bed.”

“Before sleeping, you mean.”
He kissed her cheeky grin. “Aye – if ye want to be precise about it. But I’m sorry if it upset ye – I ken I like to talk about how my ancestors fought for that daftie of a Prince –”

“It’s all right, Jamie. Just – it was so *real*. Like it had truly happened to me. I’ve never had such a life-like dream before.”

“Mmm. Perhaps it’s the bairn? Yer wee book says that ye may have verra vivid dreams, now and again –”

Now she kissed his chin. “I so love that you’ve been reading that book. I’m afraid I’ve read it so many times now that I can’t absorb anything anymore.”

“Why wouldn’t I read it? The bairn is as much mine as yours. I *was* present when we made it, after all.”

She laughed – small, but deep-throated. Slowly she ground her center against his belly.

Well then.

“Is the bairn still awake, then? Perhaps I can read some more fairy stories to help it sleep.”

“*She* is still awake – not as much as before, but definitely moving around. The chamomile tea soothes her.” And to prove her point, Claire took a long draught of her cooling tea.

Jamie’s brows furrowed. “*She*, is it? The bairn was male last week. We canna confuse the poor thing afore it’s born, Claire.”

“Mmm. She – or he – is still quite small. We could still do the test, you know – to find out whether it’s a lad or lass.”

“Ye ken weel that I want it to be a surprise – so much else is planned out, aye?”

Claire finished the last of her tea and set down her mug, drawing Jamie’s hands away from her arse and toward her belly.

“Tell us a story, Da. And then you and Mama can play for a bit, hmm?”

Jamie licked his lips, thumbs caressing Claire’s luminous skin, eyes boring into hers.

“Well then. Have I told ye the one about the woman who climbed the fairy hill, walked within a circle of stones, and was transported to a magical, faraway land?”
original prompt: Can we have a third encounter of Frank with the Frasers in Modern Glasgow? Maybe one with the wee bairns so he’ll see what a happy family they all are!

Claire set down the hairbrush and clipped the shiny barrette into Faith’s dark curls.

“There! All done.”

Ten-year-old Faith Fraser turned her head in the mirror, admiring her Mama’s handiwork. And smiled.

“It’s beautiful! Do you think any of the other girls there will have one, too?”

Claire smoothed the shoulders of Faith’s sundress, picking off a few pieces of lint. “Certainly not one like this - Suzette bought it at a special shop in France, remember?”

Faith nodded enthusiastically. “Aye - I ken that. Only…”

Claire sat on the bench in front of her vanity, watching her daughter’s face in the mirror. Patient - as she was with all of her children. From birth she had instilled in all of them the simple fact that Mama and Da would *always* be there, would *always* listen, and *always* love them deeply, no matter what. Simple - and yet, she knew that so many other parents never even hinted as much with their own children.

“Only what, love?”

Faith pursed her lips. “Only - ye ken I dinna much like it when I have to play wi’ children I don’t know, aye?”

Claire smiled and opened her arms. Faith sank into them gladly, settling her face against her Mama’s shoulder.

“I know - and I also know you’re old enough now to understand that sometimes we must do things that make us uncomfortable. Because it’s important to somebody else.”

She sighed, holding her eldest daughter close, relishing their time alone.

“Can I tell you a secret, Faith?”

Faith stood up, straightening her shoulders - proud that Mama was telling her such grown-up things.

“Do you think *I* really want to go to this picnic today? It’s for Da’s job, and I don’t much feel
like talking with other ladies that I don’t know. So - you and I are in the same boat, aye?”

Faith nodded, smiling. Good.

“Aye. I understand. I’ll mind Bree and William and Julia, Mama - I dinna want ye to worry.”

Claire’s heart swelled with love for Faith - her miracle child, who had had a rough start in life but who had grown to prove that her heart was more loving and compassionate - and responsible - than any other girl she’d ever known.

“I’ll take care of Julia - but if you could keep an eye on Bree and William, Da and I would be very grateful.” Softly she thumbed her daughter’s cheek, pushing one of Faith’s curls - so much like her own - behind her ear.

“Now - can you help me get everyone else ready?”

—–

Jamie settled a sleepy Julia - clad in a bright blue baby dress - against his shoulder, adjusted her hat to protect her from the afternoon sun, and took a draught from his tumbler of whisky with his other hand, clearly absorbed in conversation with one of his favorite clients.

“And what’s this newest story about then, Ned?”

The elderly man squinted in the sunshine as he looked up at Jamie, cheeks flushed with champagne.

“Ah! Well - you know how my last novel was about an Englishwoman who was captured by Scotland Yard on suspicion of being a spy, even though she said she wasn’t - but she was actually a double agent for the Americans? Well - ”

Claire squeezed Jamie’s shoulder and stepped away, letting the men talk. Jamie and Ned had developed such a lovely relationship over the years - Jamie had always been patient and kind with the brilliant yet scatterbrained retired lawyer turned writer, and in turn Ned had been very loyal to Jamie, insisting he accompany him on his small book tours throughout the UK. Even as Jamie had advanced up the ranks at the publishing company - he was now third in command, and Rupert’s right-hand man - and no longer interacted as much with the authors, there were a few he still insisted on seeing to personally.

The publishing house hosted this summer garden party every year - inviting the employees and their families to attend a lovely afternoon of food, drink, and games for the children. All the authors and their families were also invited to informally mingle with the staff - keeping it casual, but also forging new business relationships.

It was fun to see some of the other spouses - Rupert’s wife Scarlett and their tribe of wee MacKenzies, Willie and Mary - who had scaled back her hours at the hospital once she gave birth to their son Jack - Angus and his latest girlfriend (or at least Claire hoped she was a girlfriend, and not one of those escorts he’d brought to the event last year).

But as it was even at her own work events, it was tiring to make nice and socialize all afternoon, knowing she couldn’t speak as freely as she wanted - mindful of her position as Jamie’s wife, and the need for him to maintain his rock-solid reputation at the company. Which is why she insisted her wee Frasers be on their best behavior - she didn’t want them making a scene, as wee Hamish MacKenzie had last year when he’d pulled down the skirt of one of the author’s wives...
Her eyes scanned the crowd - ah, there was Brianna’s red head, swaying back and forth on the swingset beside Faith and Morag MacKenzie, one of Rupert’s daughters. William was nearby, deep in conversation with one of Morag’s brothers, Jerry.

And to think that Scarlett was pregnant again…quickly she counted up in her head the number of small MacKenzies she’d seen running around this afternoon. Five? Six?

She turned back to the refreshments table - ah. Sangria - perfect.

Claire helped herself and then scanned the table for a napkin -

“Claire?”

She almost dropped her glass. That voice - she hadn’t heard it in years, but recognized it instantly.

She swallowed, and turned.

“Hello Frank.”

Her right hand clutched the glass - her left dropped to her side, thumb furiously tracing her wedding ring.

He was dressed informally - a button-down shirt open at the neck, jeans, sunglasses hanging from his shirt pocket. Posh. Polished. Smart.

Memory flashed - Frank had always neatly pressed his shirts before folding them and stacking them in his bureau, usually while dictating ideas into a tape recorder.

And then another flash - Jamie desperately rummaging through his closet this afternoon for a suitable shirt after Julia had spit up all over the one he’d picked out.

“I - I didn’t expect to see you here. I know your - husband - is still employed by the publishing house, but as I don’t have any direct dealings with him…”

She pasted on a thin-lipped smile. “We’re here every year - Jamie co-runs the operations side of the business now, with Rupert MacKenzie. Though he still has a small group of writers he’s worked with for a very long time.”

Frank glanced down at his glass of wine - white, his favorite - and shuffled his feet.

Silence bloomed - and Claire groped around in her mind for something to say.

“I understand you’ve become quite the accomplished author yourself - written a series about the ‘45 and such. Jamie tells me it’s been a popular hit.”

Frank nodded absently. “Yes, well. I’ve even been on a few television programmes.”

Claire sipped her sangria. “Yes, I know. My son enjoys watching them - he loves his history. Especially Scottish history.”

Frank blinked. “So you’ve a son, then? I knew you had a daughter or two - ”

Claire straightened. “Two sons, actually - the history buff is eight, and we adopted another boy from France. He’s at uni - studying journalism.”
She watched him nod, taking in the news. “Did you ever see yourself with so many children, Claire? It was never something you brought up when we were together.”

“I never really thought about it - but once I met Jamie, I realized that it’s what I want. A family. A big family.”

“Even with your work? Are you still at that hospital?”

She shifted in her sandals, feeling the tops of her feet burning in the bright summer sun. “I am - but I’m not in the ER anymore. I’m a thoracic surgeon.”

Frank sipped his wine. “Impressive.”

Claire smiled, digging in her purse for her sunglasses. “Indeed. Especially since I have four small children at home.”

“Ah! Darling - there you are.”

Claire turned - and watched a slight blonde woman in a long, flowy dress approach Frank and kiss him on the cheek.

Frank backed away from her a bit and gestured toward Claire. “Cara - this is -”

“Dr. Claire Fraser. Pleasure.” She extended her hand. Cara took it - limply.

“Ah! Are you a professor as well?” Cara slung an arm over Frank’s shoulders.

“No, darling - she’s a medical doctor. A surgeon.”

Cara squinted at Claire in the sunshine. “Oh, how interesting! I’m working on my PhD, actually - French history. Frank’s been such a great help over the past few years.”

“I’m sure,” Claire replied drily - biting her tongue.

“Mama!”

Two small forms seized her knees. Her heart immediately lifted.

“There you are!” she exclaimed, hiking up her dress so she could crouch down to be at eye level with Faith and William. “Have you been having fun?”

Faith rolled her eyes - but William nodded enthusiastically.

Claire rested a gentle hand on their shoulders and stood. “Frank - Cara - these are two of my children, Faith and William Fraser.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Faith said softly, wondering who these strange people were - and why Mama’s hand was so tense on her shoulder.

Frank nodded - suddenly stiff. It dawned on Claire that he hadn’t mentioned any children of his own.

“The two of you look just like your mother,” he said, voice tight.

“No’ all of us do!” William exclaimed. “My brother Fergus - well he’s French, so he doesna look like Mama or Da, but -”
“Bree!”

Faith called to her sister, who was eyeing the dessert table. She glanced up, and happily scampered over to her mother and siblings.

“And this is my daughter Brianna.” Claire lifted her hand from William to draw Bree close - watching her remove her hat and lift her damp red hair, brilliant in the sunshine, from the nape of her neck.

“Hello,” Brianna said politely. “Who are you?”

“This is Professor Randall and - ”

“My friend Cara,” Frank interrupted. “I write history books.”

William gasped. “I’ve seen you on the TV! Murtagh and I watch all of yer programs!”

Frank smiled politely. “Yes - I’ve done a few programs over the years.”

“I loved the one where ye visited Fort William! My da took me and my brother there last year - I kent all about the history already!”

“Indeed. It’s an interesting place.”

He spoke to William as he would to an adult - rather than to an eight-year-old. And then it became quite clear to Claire that Frank never had - and likely never would - spend much time around children.

“Claire’s husband is an - executive - at Leoch Publishing,” Frank belatedly explained to Cara. “And a bit of a history buff, if I understand correctly.”

And then all the tension in Claire’s body slackened with one touch to her side.

“I am. It’s good to see you again, Professor Randall.”

Jamie extended his left hand to shake Frank’s, as Julia was dead asleep against his right shoulder. The wide silver band of his wedding ring glinted in the bright afternoon sunshine.

Frank took the proffered hand and shook it gracefully. “This is Cara - she’s one of my PhD students.”

Jamie nodded politely, then settled his free hand possessively around Claire’s waist. Her right hand snaked around his back, sinking her fingers into the back pocket of his jeans.

Frank’s gaze turned to the sleeping baby. “And this is - ”

“Ah - Julia. Our youngest, just six months old this week.”

Jamie kissed his tiny daughter’s wee forehead. Claire curled her fingers into his pocket - digging into his arse. Faith, Bree, and William stood - bored, yet patient - before them.

Frank coughed.

“Well then. I won’t take up any more of your time - I’m sure you still have a lot of business to attend to.”
Jamie nodded, politely.

“So nice to meet you and your family,” Cara said softly, eyes already scanning the crowd for the next conversation partner.

“Good to see you, Frank.” Claire smiled, drawing strength from her wee ragtag family.

“And you, Claire. You look happy. It becomes you.”

And with that, he nodded and led Cara away.

Claire waited for twenty seconds - then curled into Jamie’s chest, eyes closed, breathing deeply. Her mind desperately rooted for something - anything - to anchor her.

Jamie’s solidity. Julia’s softness. Jamie’s scent - and the small patch of hair at the open neck of his shirt.

And his eyes this morning - smiling, half-asleep, and intent on hers as he buried his face between her legs.

“I’m here,” he whispered in her ear. “It’s done now. Do ye want to go home?”

The older children wordlessly hugged their Mama’s middle and knees - not understanding, but knowing that she needed support.

She breathed deep, and shook her head. “No. I’m quite alright, actually.” Then she looked up at him, squinting down at her in the sunshine.

“Because I have you. All of you. I’ll always be alright.”

His smile flashed - and then his mouth met hers. Not caring that they were surrounded by so many people.

The wee Frasers, accustomed to the sight, groaned in unison.
Chapter 50

original prompt: Dear Modern Glasgow AU...how about a time Claire finds an old shoe box full of love letters from Jamie's old girlfriend, Annalise.... and doesn't take it so well.... Thank you. I await your brilliance.

Cold, dry, stale air. And mothballs.

Claire scrunched her nose and squinted into the darkness beyond the battered door.

“This is it, eh?”

Jenny nodded. “Aye - all of Jamie’s boxes should be labeled. Some have been in there since he was a lad, and Ian and I packed up some of his loose things when he…went to America.”

When he went to America after getting beaten up by that sadistic police captain and Brian Fraser had died. But no need to bring that up here, today - not when Claire could hear Jamie pretending to be a Highland Coo downstairs and his Murray niece and nephew squealing with delight at their silly uncle.

Claire coughed.

“Well then - I’ll see what I can find. Now that we’ve got our own flat, we’ve certainly got more room for Jamie’s things.”

Jenny pulled a long chain from the ceiling, and light flooded from a bare bulb to illuminate stacks and stacks of boxes, the odd chair covered in protective plastic, and a number of framed pictures stacked up against the far wall.

“Weel there are things that have been up there since our grandparents lived in the house - anything that strikes yer fancy, it’s yours.”

Impulsively Claire gave her sister-in-law a quick hug - and Jenny returned it.

“Thank you, Jenny. I’ll keep myself busy - I know you must have so much more to do to get the house ready.”

“I do - and trust me Claire, ye’re doing me a favor. I canna ever find the time to go through all this rubbish!”

And with that, Jenny turned on her heel to help Mrs. Crook with the final preparations for the biggest Christmas Eve dinner that Lallybroch had seen in a long while.
Claire gingerly stepped through the doorway and began tracing her fingers down the long columns of boxes. Many were labeled with marker in tall, neat letters - not Jamie’s handwriting, or Jenny’s. Her heart clenched at the realization that it must have been Brian’s handwriting.

**JENNY FRASER - PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**LAND SURVEYS, 1750 - 1900**

**JAMIE FRASER - RUGBY TROPHIES**

**BRIAN AND ELLEN - BACK TAXES**

**BROCH TUARACH LEDGERS, 1920-90**

One by one she read the labels, opened the boxes at the top of each stack, carefully sifting through Jamie’s history - the Fraser history - *her* history now.

What little she knew of history - of being a historian - she’d learned from Frank. But his interests lay in what he always called the “big picture” - trying to understand the causes and effects of the big historical trends. What kings and queens and prime ministers and generals thought about the events of the day.

Not what ordinary, hard-working people thought about those events. Never the effect of laws and regime changes and wars and economic crises on the majority of people - such as the Frasers who had owned and lovingly farmed this land for more than two hundred years.

Lallybroch wasn’t just a quaint holdover from a different time - it was a working farm. Would *always* be a working farm, if Jenny, Ian, and Jamie had their way. And events in Westminster and Brussels and New York and so many other places would continue to affect the Frasers here, just as they always had. And life would continue to move on.

A crash downstairs - probably Wee Jamie turning over a chair in the kitchen again - startled Claire back to the present. It was always overwhelming to visit Lallybroch, to be surrounded by so many Frasers and their history. But their history wasn’t something dead on a page - it was living, breathing. Part of day-to-day life. For by living as they did, the Frasers honored all of their ancestors who had come before them - who had poured their blood and sweat into the stones of the house - and kept alive that which many others had lost.

It was why Jenny and Ian were teaching Wee Jamie and his newborn sister Maggie to speak Gaelic as well as English. It was why they insisted on traditional foods for holidays, and High Mass on Sundays, and had been such passionate Yes voters a few years back.

Claire turned to examine another stack, thinking. This was how she wanted her children to be raised - with a strong sense of self, and a strong appreciation for tradition.

**JAMIE - SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Now that box should be interesting.

Claire hoisted the box from the top of the stack and brought it to the other end of the room, where she’d cleared off a stool. Carefully she removed the lid and began sifting through the tidy stack of folders.

**REPORT CARDS…SCIENCE FAIR PHOTOGRAPHERS…**
That folder contained a snapshot of an absolutely adorable Jamie, aged perhaps sixteen, hair all messy, grinning in front of a large posterboard at a science fair.

A handsome lad, to be sure. She knew he’d had girlfriends, of course - he’d told her as much, and been honest as to his previous romantic experiences (or his “BC” - “Before Claire” years, as he referred to them). Brian - and Ellen, though she’d died when Jamie was eight - had instilled in him a deep respect for women, and a sense of responsibility. For to be intimate with a woman was to risk disease and pregnancy - which (combined with his total inability to feel attracted to *any* woman as he grieved for several years after Brian’s death) had significantly contributed to him remaining a virgin until their marriage.

And then a small bundle of letters caught her eye.

Not true letters - the envelopes bore Jamie’s name, but no addresses. They must have been delivered by hand.

And written in what was clearly a woman’s handwriting.

Carefully, Claire unwound the string holding together the bundle, opened the top envelope, and began to read.

—–

“Have ye seen Claire?”

Ian looked up from his seat behind Lallybroch’s ancient desk. Jamie stood in the doorway, his namesake hoisted high on his shoulders, wee eyes drooping.

“Jenny sent her to the attic - said she wanted to find some things to furnish yer new flat with. Here, bring the lad to me.”

Jamie strode across the room and gently shifted Wee Jamie into his arms, handing him to his father across the desk. The little boy settled against his Da’s shoulder and suddenly went boneless.

“There’s a good lad - ye’re all tired out, playing wi’ yer daft uncle all day.”

Jamie theatrically rolled his eyes. “I’ll leave ye two to it, then. He can help ye wi’ the ledgers if ye dinna want me to.”

And turned on his heel to find Claire, Ian’s soft laughter trailing behind him.

Up three flights of stairs - ah, the door was open at the end of the hall. He hadn’t been in the attic in years - had no need to, truly - and felt a sudden pang of regret that Claire felt she needed to retreat from the family for a bit. This was only her second visit to Lallybroch, and she still felt so overwhelmed by the house and the history, let alone his family -

She was sitting on a stool at the back of the room, a box open around her, squinting at a wee piece of paper.

“Claire?”

She flinched and looked up at him - eyes cold.

His heart stopped.

“Claire? Are ye - are ye all right?”
He watched her take a deep breath. “Tell me - who is Annalise de Marillac?”

Now *that* was a name he hadn’t heard in a long time -

“…and why did you keep all of her love letters?”

Heat flushed through him - and he flailed a bit, grabbing on to the doorframe to stay upright.

“Mon bête rouge, I could not sleep again last night as thoughts of you filled my mind. Even eight hours after the time we spent holding each other and kissing in the trees, my heart was racing so fast I thought my chest would burst.”

Her voice was thick - unemotional. She sounded like she was holding back tears.

“You are full of more passion than any other man I have ever known. You kiss me with more dedication than I ever knew possible. Your hands on my waist scorch me through my clothes. Your beautiful blue eyes smiling at me warms me to my very center.”

“Claire - ”

“I so love when you whisper in my ear, tell me how beautiful I am, tell me how you love to kiss my neck and hold my hands so tight you are always afraid you will break my fingers. How you like to show me off to the other boys at school. How you love my taste and always want it on your lips.”

Jamie had watched Claire unknowingly curl her back, shrinking into herself.

No - no - no. This wouldn’t do.

Quickly he weaved through the piles of boxes and other bric-a-brac and knelt before her.

“Claire - look at me. I will tell you *everything* about this. Just look at me.”

She did - eyes so narrow and brimming with tears.

“Why did you never tell me of her? It sounds very - deep.”

“I never told you because I didna think it mattered. And because it lasted for all of four weeks.”

“You fell in love with me in a second. And married me after a month.”

“Aye - I did. But will ye let me explain to ye how what I felt for her is absolutely nothing compared to what I feel for you, Claire? For you, my wife?”

She swallowed, but didn’t move to touch him.

“She was a French exchange student at the school in Broch Mordha.” He sat down on the dusty floor, legs crossed, keeping one hand on her ankle, rubbing it just above her boot. Keeping them connected.

“I was sixteen. She was seventeen - French - experienced. And at the time I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the entire world.”

“Mon bête rouge?”

Jamie looked up at her, lips pressed tightly together. “She loved my hair - said it was exotic to her.
I was already a head above all the other lads at school, and she was such a tiny wee thing - even shorter than you. She barely came up to my elbow. And she - she brought out something in me I didna ken I had.”

Claire set down the letter and turned to face Jamie, hands resting on the dusty knees of her jeans. “And what was that?”

She watched him lick his lips - remembering? “She - kissing her was the first time I felt my entire body tremble. My breath would go short, and I would go - go a bit mad, I suppose. And she liked being kissed on her neck and ear - no’ like the other girls I’d kissed, who only wanted it on the lips.”

Claire nodded, flexing her fingers. “How far did you go with her?”

He glided his left hand up her shin to twine his fingers with her right hand, grounding her. “I have never lied to ye, Claire. You are the *only* women I’ve made love to - the *only* woman who knows me in the way that a wife knows a husband. And my heart and soul belong to you, *mo nighean donn*. Surely ye must know that.”

She arched an eyebrow, waiting.

He swallowed. “If ye must know - she showed me her bubbies, and I just about came in my pants. I was a lad of sixteen for God’s sake. And I touched them. But that’s it.”

His thumb traced the back of her knuckles.

“And she wrote you letters.”

He sighed. “Aye - she did. But I didna ask her to - she’d just leave them in my locker at school, and the things she’d write…I couldna risk throwing them away at home, for fear my Da would find them, so I bundled them up and hid them in a box.”

“So what happened?”

Now he laughed. “In typical Jamie Fraser fashion, I noticed another boy - two years ahead of me at school - who was eyeing Annalise at school. I challenged him to a fight - and knocked him out.”

She barely cracked a smile. “You did?”

“Aye - I did. And Annalise was so upset wi’ me for doing that to the other lad that she dumped me and took up wi’ him, just like that! The puir bastard even followed her back to France at the end of the term.”

Now he got onto his knees before her - looking up at her. Pleading.

“I never told ye because she didna mean anything to me. She showed me what passion is - but I ken weel I didna love her. No’ then, and certainly no’ now. It was - weel, to be honest it was lust between us. And I felt proud for getting her to go out wi’ me - but then after she took up wi’ the other lad, I felt foolish for the rest of the school year.”

Claire gently rested a hand on one of his shoulders. From this angle, he was eye level with her chest - and as much as he wanted to enjoy the view above the scoop neck of her loose sweater, his eyes remained fixed on hers.

“So you didn’t keep the letters because you wanted to remember her?”
“No, Claire - I kept the letters because I forgot to throw them away. And I’ll gladly burn them all in the fire downstairs, right now, if ye like.”

She nodded, and pulled her other hand away from his so that it could rest on his other shoulder. Slowly she drew their heads together, and sighed as his nose bumped hers.

“You’ve never once questioned me about my life with Frank, or asked about the more - intimate - details of our life together. And I feel terrible that I’m doing so now, with this Annalise girl.”

“I will tell you *everything* you ever want to know about me, Claire.” He pulled back a bit to kiss the tip of her nose. “Every action, every thought. Everything.”

“I know - and I cherish that. I cherish *you*.” She sighed. “I don’t know why I feel so upset - ”

“Is it because you fear that she had me in a way that you don’t? Or in a way that you do, and ye dinna like sharing that?”

Her brow furrowed. “How - how did you -”

“It’s how I feel about your years wi’ the Englishman, Claire. Every time I learn something new about you - or when I kiss ye on that mole, my favorite mole - I think to myself, did he know about this? How many times did he see her like this?”

She slipped off the stool and onto his lap, winding her legs around his waist. He staggered back a bit, but held on to her tight.

“Nonsense. He never *knew* me, Jamie. He never made me a fraction of as happy I feel when I’m with you.”

She kissed him then, but he pulled back.

“So it’s the same for me, Claire - that wee French girl may have had my mouth and mind for a bit, but that’s it. And I thought I wanted her - or my body wanted her - but now that I have you, I understand that I didna truly understand what *want* was. And certainly didna understand what love was, or what true *commitment* was - but now I do. In you.”

They kissed, and kissed, and kissed.

“I love you,” she murmured. “Can you please close the door? I need you, now.”

Heart racing, he grinned into their kiss. “Next door,” he breathed. “There’s a lovely bedroom wi’ a soft bed - I canna wait to see how bonny ye look on the blue quilt, when ye’re naked.”

She shot up, and gripped his hand, and they raced out of the attic in a flurry of papers and dust.

And when she woke, some time later - alone and naked under the lovely blue quilt Jamie had said his grandmother MacKenzie had made - there was a small, half-folded sheet of paper on Jamie’s pillow.

Curious, she opened it.

Gaelic - in Jamie’s hand. And then -

*You are blood of my blood, and bone of my bone. I give you my body, that we two may be one. I give you my spirit, till our life shall be done.*
I am yours, eternally.

J
Chapter 51

original prompt: Imagine Claire's reaction when Jamie keeps bringing home strays.

Claire shrugged out of her blue overcoat, hung it beside Jamie’s mac (raindrops still clinging to it from the earlier cloudburst), straightened a pair of William’s muddy boots and Julia’s battered clogs (tsking to herself that she had to remind them yet again to neatly line up their shoes in the cubby when they came back inside), and set her Mini’s keys in the dish on the sideboard. The metal clanked cheerily with Jamie’s own Range Rover keys.

She signed, rolled her shoulders in a vain attempt to shrug off the stiffness from a long day standing in the clinic’s walk-in ward, and smelled something delightful wafting from the Lallybroch kitchen.

Ah, Mrs. Crook was up to something tonight. She’d cooked a veritable feast the night before, and there had been plenty of leftovers. So why was she baking…lasagna?

Claire frowned. Something was up.

Just what that something was became immediately apparent as she padded down the hall and rounded the corner into the kitchen.

Small muddy pawprints dotted the cream-colored tile between the doorway and the space beside the oven, where her husband and five children stood in a circle, crouching over something.

“…doesna have a collar so I suppose we can keep him then?”

“He’s so small - I canna believe someone would just let him go like that!”

“Aye - if he hadna chased Adso up that tree I’d never ha’ seen him! He was hiding under the bushes -”

Claire cleared her throat. “What are you all doing?”

Six heads swiveled toward the doorway. Jamie’s face split into a smile, eyes creasing.

Oh no. She knew that look…

“Mama! Mama! Itsa wee dog! Da found him today!” Brianna exclaimed.

“Aye Da says we can keep him, as long as we take him to the vet and make sure he’s go’ his shots!” William practically vibrated from excitement.

Fergus hoisted Julia up on his hip as Faith stepped back.
To reveal a small, lean, bushy gray dog, blissfully destroying a cooked chicken.

Jamie crossed the room to gently kiss Claire’s brow in welcome. “He’s small, but his paws are big. So he’ll grow to become a proper guard dog, aye? We’re in need of one around here - the bairns all sorely miss Bran, and it’s been a while since Lallybroch has had a dog…”

Claire surveyed her small family from left to right - blue and brown eyes pleading silently.

She shook her head in amazement. “I can’t argue with any of you, it seems. What shall we call him?”

William cleared his throat. “I was thinking…Rollo.”

Julia craned her neck over Fergus’ shoulder to look at her big brother. “Wollo?”

William raised his chin a bit. “Aye - Murtagh and I were watching a documentary about Vikings the other day. Rollo was a mighty Viking king. A good dog should have a strong name, aye?”

“Yeah - Rollo!” Faith cheered. “And if we’re not too careful, he’ll get big enough from Mrs. Crook’s cooking that we’ll need to roll him out of the kitchen!”

Rollo Fraser chose that moment to look up at his new family, lick his chops, and urinate on the tile.
original prompt: MODERN GLASGOW AU PLEASE!!! Jamie and Claire take the kids to an amusement park for the day with all the bairns going in 15 different directions and Jamie trying to fit his big self on a roller coaster with the boys. // This one for Gotham and her modern AU- The Frasers, and Murtagh, having the scare of their lives when one of the bairns gets lost on a public place, and their relief when they find her/him.

Claire pecked Jamie on the lips. “Meet back here in two hours?”

“Aye - if you and the girls aren’t in line for that long to get on just that one blasted rollercoaster,” he huffed, stealing another kiss. “The boys and I will have fun on the carousel, thank you very much.”

Brianna impatiently tugged Claire’s hand. “Come *on,* Mama!”

Claire shook her head. “All right, you two - let’s go. Say goodbye to your father.”

Faith and Brianna murmured a quick goodbye as they pulled Claire away, eagerly discussing which fast-paced ride they’d get in line for first.

Jamie shook his head and turned to Murtagh, who was sipping Coke from one of those super-sized cups, a “FREE SCOTLAND” cap on his head. Standing beside him, face buried in a map of the amusement park, was fifteen-year-old Fergus.

“Perhaps the dinosaur carousel, Papa? I think William would like it.”

Five-year-old William nodded enthusiastically. “Aye, Da - dinosaws!”

“But what about the flying dinos - the ones where ye ride in a wee car, and the arms lift ye up and down?”

William actually squealed with delight. Murtagh crumpled his cup and extended a hand to the wee boy.

“Come on, lad - let’s go then.”

—–

It wasn’t the most comfortable ride at the amusement park - Jamie sat with his knees pinned up almost against his chin, one arm protectively around William (even though there was a safety belt that the attendant had checked and then Jamie had checked himself) as the boy chattered with sheer delight.
Murtagh and Fergus were in the car directly in front of them - turning to wave at William every few seconds. The cars swung up and down, side to side - and only his focus on William’s safety (“No, laddie, dinna stick yer wee arms outside the car”) kept the nausea at bay.

But it was over soon enough - and once he had somehow extricated himself from the impossibly cramped car and staggered out to the waiting area, he collapsed on a bench, leaning forward, putting his head between his legs.

Jamie heard Murtagh clucking at him like a mother hen. “I knew it - yer stomach hasna improved since ye were William’s age. Did ye bring the aspirin, then? Or maybe ye need something to settle yer stomach?”

“Stand back, ye old bag,” Jamie hissed, temples pounding, vision spinning. “Dinna even mention food to me. I’ll be fine, just a wee bit dizzy.”

Movement beside him - then a cool hand at the back of his neck. Fergus, good lad.

“Here, Papa - the ice pack from Maman’s bag.”

“Thank ye, Fergus. I just - just need a moment.”

He closed his eyes, inhaling, exhaling. Counted to ten.

Then realized something was very, very wrong.

“Where’s William?”

Silence.

Blinking back the pain, Jamie sat up, unfocused eyes darting from Fergus to Murtagh.

“William?”

But the little boy was nowhere to be found.

Icy tendrils of terror wrapped around his heart.

He tried to stand - but Murtagh pushed him back down.

“You stay put, now. Ye’re in no shape to go capering about. Let Fergus and I handle this - the lad can’t have gone far.”

Jamie swallowed - mouth suddenly parched. No. No, he *had* to act. *Had* to find his son - *had* to make sure he was safe.

But he watched Murtagh weave through the crowd and start walking around the waiting area, searching for the wee boy wearing his favorite Godzilla t-shirt and matching green shorts. Surely that would make him easier to find -

A gentle hand on his knee. “Breathe, Papa. You must breathe.”

Jamie looked down at his hands - shaking violently - and breathed in and out. In and out.

“*Très bien.* Now - I will go find someone who works at the park, and inform them that William is missing. You will stay here, all right?”
Jamie nodded - heart swelling with pride at his older son, so calm and collected while his father became such a mess.

“All right,” he croaked. “I’ll stay here, in case he comes back.”

And then Fergus darted off, and Jamie was alone. With a million thoughts running through his head.

Could he have wandered off? Was he in line for another ride? Did he get back on the ride? Had - oh, Christ - some terrible, terrible man taken him?

*Stop. You’re no’ helping anyone - ye must think, man. If you were a five-year-old boy, at this park, where would *you* go?*

So Jamie sat, scanning the crowd, stomach rolling, praying as hard as he could that all would be well -

“Excuse me?”

Jamie turned to face a young woman, dressed in the employee uniform he’d see in the park - holding William by the hand.

Jamie made an incoherent sound and seized William, hugging him so close that the lad squawked in protest.

“You must be Jamie Fraser - this is your son William.”

“I ken that,” he said softly, kissing the soft curls at the crown of William’s head. “Thank you, miss. Thank you so much.”

She smiled kindly. “I should be thanking *you* - you’ve got a well-prepared little boy here. He walked right up to me, told me he was lost, and said his da was a redheid named Jamie and he couldn’t find ye.”

Jamie pulled away from William and settled the lad on the bench beside him - heart swelling with pride.

“Did ye do that, William?”

The boy nodded. “Aye, Da. Murtagh and Mama always tell me to find an adult if I need help - and I needed help.”

“Ye did right, lad. Ye did right.” He turned back to the woman. “Thank you so much - I swear I only lost sight of him for an instand - ”

She raised a hand. “No need, Mr. Fraser - happens here all the time. I assume everything is sorted?”

He nodded, suddenly not feeling any bit of nausea anymore. “It is - thank you. Thank you.”

She nodded, smiled, and quickly walked back across the waiting area.

Jamie turned to his son, who was idly kicking his wee legs against the overhang of the bench.

“Ye did right, William. But dinna do that to me *ever* again, laddie. All right?”
William nodded. “Aye, Da. Can we go on the carousel now?”

“Mama! Mama!”

Claire laughed as William clutched her knees in one of his patented hugs, ruffling his sweaty curls.

“And how was *your* afternoon, my little lad?”

He grinned widely, lips still stained blue from the cotton candy that Murtagh had gotten him. “It was so much fun! We went on the car ride and on the carousel and I got lost for a wee bit - ”

“Lost?” She quirked one eyebrow at her husband, who had given Brianna and Faith two small plushie kittens he and Fergus had won at one of the shooting galleries.

Jamie shrugged. “Wee William had a bit of an adventure. Scared his da and brother and Murtagh a bit - but he’s fine.”

Claire gave Jamie a Look - clearly, she’d want to hear more later, and clearly, he’d tell her. But for now, they were safe, and happy - and full of sugar.

And the next time they all went to any kind of public place - he’d make each bairn wear a bright yellow t-shirt so that he’d never, ever have to go through that kind of terror again.
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Could you write something about the night before their wedding and their thoughts, etc for the modern Glasgow au?

“Are ye nervous, then?”

Jamie idly spun his empty glass on the battered tabletop. The pub was surprisingly lively for a Thursday night – he could barely hear Murtagh’s burr over the chatter.

“About getting marrit? No – I canna wait to tie myself to her.”

Murtagh sipped his pint. “Crazy fools the both of ye – ye’ve been wearing the damn wedding rings since the day ye proposed. Dinna forget to take it off in the morning – got to give yer bride something to do during the ceremony.”

Jamie nodded, tracing his finger in the rings of condensation on the table.

“I am a wee bit nervous, though.”

“About what? She’ll show up, laddie – no need for ye to fear that.”

“Not that. It’s – weel.” Jamie sat up straighter and dropped his eyes to the table. “She’s been wi’ a man before, aye? And I havena ever lain wi’ a woman.” He swallowed. “I – I want to please her. I dinna want to make a fool of myself.”

Murtagh eased back in his chair. Could Jamie not see that Claire wouldn’t give a damn about that?

“Do ye love her, lad?”

Jamie raised his head, brows furrowed. “Of course I do. How could ye possibly ask me that?”

“Then there’s nothing to worry about. She loves you something fierce. She will open her arms to ye no matter what. Dinna fash yerself.”

Jamie pursed his lips and nodded, absently. Clearly he still had something else on his mind.

“Out wi’ it, laddie. I can hear ye thinking from over here.” Murtagh refilled Jamie’s tumbler from the half-full bottle of whisky between them on the table.

“Easy, easy. Dinna get yerself drunk, ye ken I canna drag ye home. Claire would skelp me if I left
ye here.”

Jamie swallowed, eyes downcast. “We – we want to try for bairns. Right away.”

Murtagh nodded, encouraging.

“I’m terrified of becoming a father. I dinna want to see Claire in pain. I canna stand that she’ll be in
pain because of me.” He lifted his gaze, tears shining in his eyes. “I dinna have a true future at the
printshop – I dinna ken how I’m ever going to support her. I want to go home to Lallybroch and
take my rightful place as my father’s heir, but she canna get a good job up there. I – ”

Murtagh shoved Jamie’s shoulder, heedless of the whisky that sloshed onto the table. “Stop, Jamie.
Stop it.”

Jamie licked his lips. He raised the tumbler to drink the rest of the whisky, but Murtagh’s arm
stopped him.

“It’s all right to be worrit. Ye’re a man, wi’ a man’s responsibilities. That’s natural. But Claire’s
choosing this – she’s choosing you. She kens everything ye just said, and she doesna care.”

He smacked the table for emphasis. “She doesna care, lad. Get that through yer thick skull.”

Chastened, Jamie nodded. Then buried his face in his hands.

“I love her so much.”

Murtagh sighed. The lad was more than halfway gone wi’ drink – better make a quick exit before it
got any worse.

“Aye lad, ye do. Let’s get home so ye can tell her yerself, aye?”

“Are you sure there’s nothing I can help you with?”

Claire clutched her dressing gown a little tighter around her shoulders as she accepted the plate of
toast and fruit from Murtagh.

“Aye – ye just focus on getting ready for yer wedding, lass. I’ll mind Jamie.”

They had stumbled in close to midnight – Jamie more than a little buzzed, Murtagh more than a
little miffed. Jamie had greeted her at the door with a sloppy kiss, reeking of whisky. Murtagh had
had to pry him out of Claire’s arms, admonishing them that it was bad luck to see each other on the
morning of their wedding and shooing Claire back into the spare bedroom.

It was close to ten now – their appointment was at three. Plenty of time for Claire to get ready. But
Jamie?

“I can hear him snoring, Murtagh. Are you sure I can’t help you get him up?”

Murtagh sighed. “I promised the damn fool I’d stand up for him – and that includes making sure
that he even gets there. Dinna fash, lass.”

She nodded and gently shut the door, setting the plate down on the end table. Truth be told, her
stomach was roiling with nerves. Not fear or doubt – she would never regret marrying Jamie. No,
she was nervous about what would happen after they returned from the dinner Murtagh promised
he’d treat them to. When they would return to the flat, just the two of them.
Consummation – such an old-fashioned term. Jamie had brought it up to her the other day, saying that traditionally, a Scottish marriage wasn’t considered valid until it had been consummated. Preferably with witnesses – who would be in the building, if not in the room itself.

Murtagh’s face flashed into her mind, and she shuddered. Thankfully they were no longer in the eighteenth century.

She was secretly glad that Jamie had insisted they wait – it made the anticipation of this day even sweeter. And of course she knew that, now that she’d stopped taking her birth control, there was a chance they could create a new life between them in the next few days.

Claire licked her lips and slipped out of her dressing gown and pyjamas. Quietly she stood in front of the full-length mirror in the bathroom and took a frank inventory of her body.

Gently she rested one palm on her belly, right below her navel. To think that even tonight a child could start there – it thrilled her straight through to the bone. It was a risk, yes. Foolish, perhaps. But Jamie made her brave. Jamie brought out all her deepest dreams and desires. And she couldn’t wait to start the journey with him.

Quickly she showered and dried her hair, nibbling at her breakfast as she read a medical journals to pass the time. Two hours to go now. She rested her ear against the door and heard Jamie and Murtagh speaking in Gaelic.

Another thing – she wanted to learn their language. Wanted their children to grow up speaking the language.

She sighed and rose, padding over to the closet. She pulled out the simple but elegant gray dress she’d selected for her wedding. No use wearing white – and the gray really did contrast nicely with her pale skin and dark hair. The neckline was generous but not overly so, and the bodice did fit her torso quite nicely.

Claire slipped into the dress and perched on the toilet, applying a touch of mascara. Jamie preferred her to go without – lovestruck fool that he was – but she wanted to look pretty today. Wanted to look beautiful for him.

A spritz of perfume, and done. Now if she could only tame her hair –

“Claire?” Murtagh’s voice was muffled by the door. “Are ye decent, lass?”

She padded out of the bathroom and opened the door slowly, allowing Murtagh to slip inside. His brows shot up higher than she’d ever seen, and his mouth gaped, cheeks flushed.

“Holy God, Claire – ye look – ”

She smiled. “Thank you, Murtagh. How is my groom doing?”

Murtagh shook his head slightly. “He’s ready. I was thinking I could take some pictures of the two of ye? Before we leave?”

She smiled warmly. “Of course. I’ll be ready in two minutes.”

He smiled back. “Hurry, lass. He really wants to see ye.”
original prompt: For Gotham's modern au: Jamie and Murtagh having to prepare one of the girls for something like a ballet performance because Claire is late, and being the only men there surrounded by mothers.

Murdina MacKenzie’s eyebrows shot up when she turned to watch her best friend, Faith Fraser, scamper through the door and take her position at the barre.

“Why is yer hair all sideways?” she hissed. “And yer tights – they’re ripped!”

“Hush!” Faith turned to make sure that their teacher hadn’t heard. “Mama had to stay late at the hospital, and Auntie Suzette was still working at her shop, so Da and Murtagh had to help me get ready.”

“But how come ye couldn’t have come over to our house, then? Dads canna do our hair properly!”

Murdina bent to stretch her wee legs, scanning the cluster of parents on the other side of the room. Mam and Da were there – along with…four? Or perhaps five of her siblings.

Faith shrugged, stepping into first position, balancing in front of the mirror. “I *tried* to tell Da what to do, but he and Murtagh ended up arguing, so I let him do whatever he wanted.”

Murdina watched Faith’s da and…grandda? Uncle? (She didna ken who exactly Murtagh was – only that he loved Faith and her brothers and sister something fierce) enter the room and stand next to her parents. She recognized Fergus Fraser’s dark head, William Fraser right behind him like a wee shadow. And then Brianna Fraser’s bright red curls, focused on her book as she followed the Fraser men.

“But what about Bree?”

Faith stepped into third position and only wobbled just a tiny bit. “She doesna want *anything* to do wi’ ballet, remember? She’s outside building things all the time.”

Murdina tried for third position, and gripped the barre tightly. “Moira told me that she has a boyfriend.”

Faith pshed. “Ye mean Roger? He’s her best friend. It’s OK for girls and boys to be friends – that’s what Mama says.”

“But I dinna –”

“All right!” Mrs. MacNab – the mother of Faith’s auntie Mary (who was married to her uncle
Willie, who worked with Da at the printshop), and the headmistress of the ballet school – clapped her hands. “Positions, everyone!”

Faith swallowed against the sudden rush of nerves, but bravely faced the knot of parents and took her position beside Murdina.

She smiled nervously at her family – sad that Mama wasn’t there, but understanding. She knew that they’d probably have another of their special teas, like they often did when Mama just wanted time with her.

Da flashed two thumbs-up, and William waved.

Fergus beamed, and Bree smiled back.

And right as the recorded music began, Murtagh smiled so widely that Faith could see all of his teeth – before his face disappeared behind the viewfinder of his ancient video camera.
Chapter 55

A Visit to Forget-Me-Not Farm

This story is lovingly dedicated to the absolutely delightful @mywoolmitten, who so generously provided many of the plot points and even let me move some bits of her Michigan farm to the Scottish Highlands, so that our Modern Glasgow Frasers could have some fun. Love you, Mitts!

“Are we there yet?”

Claire turned back from the passenger seat in the Range Rover. In the middle seat, Rollo’s head on her lap, pouted eleven-year-old Julia. Eighteen-year-old William squirmed in his seat beside her, not best pleased to have been dragged out of bed early on a Saturday morning.

“It’s verra close, *a nighean.* Just a few more minutes, aye?”

Jamie glanced over his shoulder to check for oncoming traffic before turning off the highway onto the side road, following the signs to Forget-Me-Not Farm. He slowed to make sure that the wee caravan – Fergus and Marsali in their battered Mini, and Faith, Brianna, and Roger in Faith’s Volkswagen – had also made the turn.

“I dinna understand why we’re going to a sheep farm, of all places,” William huffed. “I dinna like Auntie Jenny’s merinos, they always want to bite my fingers off.”

“Well this is an actual sheep farm – thousands of sheep – and they sell all kinds of yarn and woolen products.” Claire sipped from her to-go cup of coffee, holding it carefully as Jamie guided the car around a particularly large pothole. “They also produce some of the wool that is used to make your kilt – remember, the one you were so excited to get for your last birthday?”

William sighed theatrically.

“It’s part of yer culture, laddie!” Jamie exclaimed. “And ye have to humor yer sisters every once in a while, aye?”

“Sometimes I feel that’s *all* I do,” he muttered.

Claire whirled to face her son, eyes narrow.

He sighed, shook his head, and turned to watch the moors roll by the window.

—

One final bend in the road – and then a field dotted with gray and black and white fuzzy bodies for
as far as the eye could see.

As soon as Jamie had parked the car, Julia almost flew out the door, running to the fence to get eye-to-eye with her favorite animals.

“They’re Shetlands, mama!” she exclaimed, vibrating with excitement. “Look how beautiful they are!”

Faith and Brianna quickly came to their wee sister’s side, Roger standing back with Fergus, Marsali, and William. Fergus gently rubbed the small of Marsali’s back as she caressed the swell of her belly.

“I’ve never met someone who can be so excited about *everything,*” Roger mused, watching Julia reach through the fence to lovingly pat a Scottish Blackface on the nose.

“She has always been like that,” Fergus murmured, kissing his wife’s temple. “She has brought so much joy to our family – she is a literal ray of light. For all of us.”

The men startled as Jamie soundlessly crept up behind them and clapped a solid hand on their shoulders. “Well then – let’s let the wee ones have their fun. Yer Mam tells me there’s a good shop to explore – and they even make their own whisky!”

–

It took William a while to get the hang of it, but soon he had spun more yarn than his sisters.

“Are ye sure ye’ve never done this before, lad?” The kind shopkeeper, clad in homespun woolen mittens, squinted at the pile of soft blue yarn beneath William’s spindle.

“I haven’t, I swear! It’s just – weel, I had thought that only *girls* would like doing this.” His voice was shy, but strong. “I like it. I think.”

“It’s no’ fair – my fingers are smaller than yours!” Julia frowned at her much smaller pile of yellow yarn.

“Now, now – it’s no’ a race. Quality is *always* more important than quantity.”

Julia huffed softly, but bent to her work.

From her vantage point across the room, Claire smiled – so happy to see her son actually enjoying himself.

“What do ye think, Mother Claire?” Marsali, beaming in her sixth month of pregnancy, appeared at Claire’s elbow, holding a wee woolen sweater.

Claire smiled – still getting used to the idea that she would soon be somebody’s grandmother.

“I think it’s beautiful,” she replied, giving her daughter-in-law a quick, impulsive hug. “And I’m sure Faith would love to make you something, too – ”

“Oh, aye – we’ve already talked about it. She said that Brianna is making her her own spinning wheel, and it should be ready in time for when the bairn comes.”

“That sounds just like the two of them.” Nineteen-year-old Brianna and twenty-year-old Faith studied at the same uni – and lived in dorms right next door to each other. She and Jamie had thought it would perhaps be good for the girls to get a bit of separation, but the girls had refused –
and instead had become even closer since moving away from home.

“And it looks like she may be able to use some of William and Julia’s yarn – or William’s anyway.”

“Are ye the mother of those two young spinners?”

Claire turned to face the shopkeeper, whose arms now overflowed with knitting patterns.

“Yes – thank you for being so patient with them!”

“Oh, it’s nae bother! So nice to see boys so interested in learning the craft, so to speak.”

Marsali quietly stepped away as the two older women began discussing the different plants and herbs that were used to create the natural dyes which were used to color the yarn produced by Forget-Me-Not Farm. Mother Claire always had an interest in such things – and she smiled at the thought that Fergus could probably write an interesting article or two about it.

Speaking of Fergus – her eyes scanned the shop, but didn’t find her husband. Not even in the section with the homemade snacks and drinks.

Hmm.

–

“No you like sheep, Roger?”

Roger slung an arm around Brianna’s shoulder as Fergus stretched his legs on the other end of the bench.

“Never really been around sheep, to be honest – I grew up in Glasgow, wi’ my uncle. The closest I ever got to a sheep was Mrs. Graham’s mutton pie.”

Brianna snorted.

Faith and Jamie rounded the corner, heads bent in deep conversation.

“…see that round house behind the shop?”

“Aye – the sign said that they use it now to bake pastries and such.”

Jamie looked up and frowned at his daughter, son, and putative son-in-law lounging in the sun.

“Up off yer arses! Breathe in the fresh country air!”

Roger rolled his eyes at the Great Scot’s insistence on physical activity so early in the morning – but he *was* Brianna’s father, after all.

So together they walked down the winding path, past the barn and beside yet another paddock full of blissful sheep to the octagonal-shaped red building.

“Oh Lord – is that cinnamon bread?” Roger groaned.

Fergus glanced over at his wee brother. “Race you to it?”

And then Roger took off like a shot, Fergus close behind, Faith and Brianna and Jamie watching,
laughing, and just happy to be alive.

–

“Thank you so much again, Mrs. – ”

“Everyone calls me Mitts – you may also.” The shopkeeper pushed her spectacles back up her nose, smiling at Claire, Marsali, William, and Julia – who was still pouting, but very proud of the small skein she had spun.

“And now let’s go find your Da – I hope he hasn’t wandered off somewhere…”

“He’s probably up at the roundhouse – there’s a great big cistern at the bottom that was used in the old days to pipe water directly into the main farmhouse. And that’s where our ovens are, for the farm kitchen.”

“That sounds like something Bree would love,” William remarked, still fingering his skein. “And Da always loves to eat, so – ”

“It’s just past the shop – turn left and follow the path.”

Claire took the bags and nodded in thanks to the kindly woman.

“Thank you, Mitts!” Marsali exclaimed. “I will be back in the springtime with the bairn – so many lovely things for you to choose from!”

The woman beamed with praise, and then the Frasers were stepping along the path to the roundhouse.

William was right – Brianna was deeply engaged in a conversation with someone who looked like a farm employee, gesturing toward the corner where the cistern had to be. Fergus was perusing the tray of freshly-baked scones cooling on the butcher-block counter. And Jamie, William, and Roger –

“James Fraser. Is that whisky?”

From his perch on an old barrel, Jamie raised a glass to his wife.

“It is, my love. Matches the color of your eyes. Have a wee nip wi’ me?”
Full of scones and honey and apples, William and Julia Fraser staggered out of the red roundhouse, ten paces behind the rest of their family. Julia carefully balanced her and William’s yarn while William squinted at the gravel path.

“I could have sworn I saw something strange on the way here, but Mama was rushing us so quickly –”

“There!” Julia pointed at a small blue lump with the toe of her foot. Carefully she handed the yarn to William and knelt to survey the artifact. Well - the blue plastic dinosaur lodged in the footpath.

“It’s half covered in sand,” she observed. “Do ye have a tissue? I can wipe it off as I excavate it.”

William rolled his eyes. “It’s no’ worth excavating – it’s no’ like one of yer archaeology digs. It’s just a toy!”

Julia narrowed her eyes, glaring up at her older brother. “We need to be careful, William.” Her voice was slow with exaggerated patience. “We dinna ken how big it is under the surface - I dinna want to break it when I excavate it.”

William sighed theatrically and dug around in his jacket pocket. Producing a used tissue, he handed the wad to his sister. Gently she dipped the tissue in a nearby puddle and slowly, carefully dabbed at the sand and gravel covering the small toy.

And a few moments later the wee dinosaur was resting in Julia’s muddy palm. She twisted her lips, thinking. “Ankylosaurus?” she suggested.

“I think so - it’s hard to tell, he’s a bit worn out.”

“There you are!”

William and Julia looked up at their…well, at Roger. He and Brianna had been friends for so long that Roger was like another cousin (even if he *was* Presbyterian). Only, he was Brianna’s boyfriend now, so probably not a cousin anymore…

“Yer Da says to get a move on!” Roger huffed, a bit out of breath from the jog uphill. “Marsali isna feeling so well right now, and yer Mam wants her to rest.”

Intrigued at the blue dot in Julia’s hand, Roger bent to examine it. “What a bonnie wee thing. Did ye find it here in the road?”

Julia nodded. “It’s an ankylosaurus. I excavated him!”
“Did ye now? Ye can tell me about it in the car - yer Mam says ye can ride with me and Bree, if ye like.”

She grinned ear to ear and shot up the path toward the carpark.

William trudged up the path beside Roger.

“Brianna’s the same way,” Roger observed. “She’ll get excited over the smallest thing.”

“I can’t believe Julia left me with the yarn and her other wee things,” William huffed. “I’m no’ a pack animal. She can carry her own stuff.”

Roger looked over at the lad. “Ye have a hell of a lot more to learn about women, wee William,” he smiled, shaking his head.
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Modern Glasgow gives me life! After this angsty (but amazing) chapter on Jamie’s accident… How is the recovery process? Does Claire throttle him? How does that conversation go?

Claire had already sat bolt upright, suppressing a scream, by the time her eyes opened in the dim bedroom.

“It’s just me, *a nighean.*” Jamie’s voice was quiet somewhere in the dark beside her, hand gently resting on her thigh. “I - I need the toilet.”

Claire squeezed his hand - the one not bandaged - and reached to her bedside table. Soft lamplight flooded their bedroom, illuminating Jamie’s haggard face - grimacing as he swung his legs over the side of the bed.

“Hold still – let me help you up.” She crawled to Jamie’s side of the bed, stood on the soft carpet, and bent so that he could brace his arms on her shoulders. Together they stood, Jamie hissing in pain as the wounds on his back flexed.

“Easy,” Claire coaxed, slowly leading Jamie in the ten short steps to their bathroom. “Go slowly. There’s no rush.”

Step. Step. Step. Toes curling against the cold wood.


Claire tsked, but chose to not say anything, helping Jamie sit on the toilet and tactfully turning her back to give him privacy.

“It’s all right, Claire,” he said softly. “I’ve seen ye in all sorts of conditions – watched our bairns come from yer body. The least I can do is say I dinna mind ye watching me use the toilet.”

“That was different – and you know it,” she teased, quietly thrilled that he was strong enough to do more of these daily tasks on his own.

One month since the accident that had nearly killed him – something she hadn’t learned from her husband, of course, but rather from Rupert, when he visited the hospital in those hazy first days. The police officer investigating the accident had cleared Jamie of any fault – not that Claire needed the confirmation – and Rupert had come to re-emphasize that Jamie could take off as much time as he needed.
Not like Claire would ever dream of letting him out of her sight until – well. Until some later date – or until her two-month leave from the hospital was over, anyway. He’d been home for two weeks, and in that time Claire had come to understand just exactly why the word “patient” was used to describe a person receiving medical treatment.

For Jamie had no patience lying in bed all day while his body healed – and Claire had no patience for a stubborn husband who refused to rest.

It helped that there was always a child or two about – William had taken to napping with his Da every afternoon, and Brianna and Faith enjoyed the silly stories he told them when they returned home from Murtagh’s every evening. And Jamie insisted on getting a full report from Fergus every day about what he was learning in school – and even helped him sometimes with his homework.

And while the children were away most days – Claire had insisted they stick to their normal schedule, even though both Mama and Da were home, so that Da could focus on getting better – the Frasers took advantage of the strange (but not unwelcome) quiet of an empty flat to talk. And talk. And talk.

His fear of not regaining full use of his crushed right hand.

Her fear when she had first seen him, a bloody mess on the OR table.

His concern that Fergus was not making friends as quickly as a lad of twelve should.

Her concern that William was not yet toilet trained.

His hope that the publishing house would stay independent and not get bought up like so many of his competitors.

Her hope that the horrifically sexist resident she’d been forced to work with would not place into her hospital full-time.

And their wish for Murtagh and Suzette to have a child of their own.

Shuffling behind her – she turned to face Jamie, smiling through the pain, standing right behind her, gripping the side of the sink.

“Ye look verra beautiful, Claire.” His voice was quiet, deep. “I – I canna tell you just how beautiful you are. And how grateful I am to have you.”

Claire smiled – so tired, so happy. How she would do anything for this man.

“You’re lucky I don’t make you use a bedpan,” she smirked, watching him carefully wash his hands.

“Ye ken weel those damn nurses wanted me to, in the hospital. But I was afraid that they’d be overcome wi’ lust once they saw…well. Wee Jamie.”

“Not so wee, if I may say so myself.” Heat bloomed in Claire’s tired limbs – but ah. She wouldn’t pressure him – not when she was not yet sure whether he was physically ready for intimacy. They hadn’t made love since the morning of the accident – and had been preoccupied with other concerns since then…

Jamie methodically dried his hands and turned to face his wife, eyes creased with joy. And mischief.
With his good hand he pushed his boxers to the ground.

Claire swallowed, then shrugged out of her (Jamie’s, really) nightshirt.

“Definitely not wee,” she confirmed, heart racing.

Then she took his hand, led him back to bed, eased back against the soft pillows, and let him finally care for her in the best way he knew how.
Chapter 58

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt**: Meme prompt or a short drabble about Father’s Day in the MGAU? I realize that the date in Europe is different but Jamie with the tiny bairns, please?!

Father’s Day. The one day in the year when Jamie didn’t get out of bed first to make coffee for Claire - she said it was a good trade-off, her bringing him his tea in bed.

And from the ruckus in the corridor, she wasn’t alone -

The door swung open and a stream of wee Frasers darted through.

“Da! Da!”

Someone jumped on his legs. Someone else reached over the side of the bed to hug him. And someone settled right beside him in bed - ah, wee Julia, five months old, solid and sleepy and warm in the crook of his arm.

“Happy Father’s Day!”

He sat up a bit against the headboard. Claire and Fergus stood in the doorway, carrying trays of tea and hot chocolate and fruit and bannocks. William was still hugging his middle, and Bree and Faith were bouncing on his legs.

“Ach - what a surprise! I wouldna expect ye all to be up so early - ”

“It’s no’ early, Da!” William exclaimed, scratching his tummy over his Godzilla pyjamas. “And don’t ye want to enjoy as much of the day as ye can?”

“I do, lad. I do.” Jamie sat up a bit more and patted the space next to him. Quickly William hoisted himself up on the mattress, snuggling against his Da’s side.

“We made yer special tea, Da!” Faith looked over her shoulder at Fergus, who was walking with careful steps toward Jamie’s bedside table. Softly he lay down his tray, complete with the chipped blue teapot that had been at Lallybroch since Jamie was a lad.

“I added the milk just before I came,” Fergus explained as he poured steaming tea into the Highland Coo mug Faith had given Jamie for his last birthday. “It should be perfect for drinking right now.”

“*Tu est prêt, mon fils.*” Jamie smiled up at his older son as he snaked an arm around William - careful of Julia in his other arm - to reach for the mug.
Fergus sat at Jamie’s feet, resting an arm around Brianna’s shoulders.

Faith crawled over the mattress to take Julia from her Da, allowing him to sip his tea in peace, enjoying the sight of his eldest daughter settle his youngest so carefully against her shoulder.

“Now that Da is taken care of - who wants hot chocolate?”

Claire set her own tray at the foot of the bed, handing colorful checkered napkins to each child before passing around a basket of scones and bannocks that were still warm from the oven.

“Mind yerselves - I dinna want to be sleeping wi’ crumbs!”

The bairns laughed around their treats, sipping hot chocolate that Claire poured for them.

“And ye’ll make some room for yer Mam - she hasna eaten anything yet.”

Brianna and Fergus shifted closer to Da, allowing Claire to perch at the foot of the bed, nibbling on her own bannock, eyes sparkling at Jamie’s.

So much happiness.

“Happy Father’s Day, Da!” William mumbled around a mouthful of bannock. “Do ye have a wish?”

“Wishes are only on yer birthday, ye daftie!” Faith chided, running a soothing hand up and down Julia’s wee back.

“Dinna speak to yer wee brother that way.” Jamie raised his eyebrows at Faith, who huffed in annoyance.

“Yeah, Da! Can ye make a wish?” Brianna nodded, wiping sticky hands on her nightdress.

Jamie surveyed the scene - two daughters on his left, one daughter on his legs, beautiful wife beside his feet, the son of his heart at his right, the son of his blood tucked against his chest.

“I dinna want to wish for anything,” he said finally, swallowing against the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat. “For I have so much more than I ever dreamed of.”
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt**: Hey so I love your modern Glasgow story! You have one where Claire is working and gets the call that Jamie’s been in a car accident... Imagine if Jamie gets the call that Claire has been hurt in this universe

“...Which is why despite the continued softness in the Continental market, we expect that launching the new e-book platform will lead to a commensurate doubling of sales…”

Jamie discreetly checked his watch under the conference room table, hoping that Lawrence Stern (a friendly but decidedly dull accountant whose personal collection of over 10,000 beetles had been published in a handsome coffee table book last year) wouldn’t notice. He was happy to attend these management meetings - securing an invitation meant that Rupert considered him to be one of the key decision-makers at the company. But he should have left this meeting half an hour ago, so that he could be at the hospital in time for Faith’s feeding…

Wee Faith. Born two months ago at only 30 weeks gestation - she was a bonny fighter. Getting stronger every day, and even able to feed herself once a day now. How Claire cherished the ability to breastfeed their daughter after so many weeks of watching Faith take her nourishment from a feeding tube. And how Jamie treasured being with Claire during that feeding - holding his girls close.

“...took the liberty to mock up some projections, using different assumptions of pound and Euro interest rates…”

Jamie sighed and pulled his phone from his pocket. Better text Claire at the hospital, sharing the news that he wouldn’t be able to make it tonight. She’d be sad, but of course she’d understand. He’d be there in time to take her home - to support her as, yet again, they had to leave their baby girl in the NICU ward until she was strong enough to sleep without constant supervision. Only a few more weeks now - though it seemed like forever.

His lock screen was a picture one of the nurses had taken just the day before - Faith wide awake, clad in a fuzzy blue cap Murtagh had bought for her, boneless against Claire’s shoulder as her Mama gently burped her.

Two missed calls. Three text messages.

Thumb trembling, he unlocked the screen.

From Murtagh: Come to hospital.

Another from Murtagh: Why arent u at hospital?
And one from Dr. Joe Abernathy: You’re needed at the hospital.

Jamie swallowed, stood, and rudely walked out of the room. Then raced to the street, flagged down a taxi, and prayed.

And kept praying as he flew down the corridor, up to the NICU ward on the third floor, and grabbed the first nurse he could find.

“Faith Fraser,” he gasped. “Is she all right?”

“Faith?” the nurse gaped, shrugging Jamie’s huge hands off her shoulders. “Why yes, she’s perfectly fine - just checked in on her myself. You must be Jamie - yer wife was asking whether ye were here.”

“Clare?” he said stupidly, heart still somewhere in his throat. “She’s fine? Faith is all right?”

The nurse - her nametag read MAISRI - narrowed her eyes, but kindly took Jamie’s elbow and led him down the hall. “Aye - she’s bonny. I’ll take ye to them?”

Wordlessly, Jamie nodded and followed the wee nurse down the corridor, past the long glass wall of the nursery full of healthy newborns sleeping in their incubators, and down to a door reading “CONFERENCE ROOM.”

“What’s this?” his voice was raspy, confused.

Maisri gently eased him toward the door and turned the handle. Jamie pushed it in, heart pounding -

“SURPRISE!”

Seated at one end of a long conference table were Murtagh, Mrs. Fitz., Dr. Abernathy, and Claire’s friend and former colleague Mary Hawkins. On the other side of the table, Claire held an alert and wriggling Faith close to her shoulder, beaming. A pile of presents was stacked neatly on the table, along with a plate of biscuits and a pot of tea.

Jamie’s knees gave way and he collapsed into an empty chair.

“What’s all this?” he croaked.

“It’s a baby shower,” Claire explained patiently, using her best Nurse Fraser voice. “We never did finish buying Faith everything she’ll need when she comes home.”

“The two of ye have been so worrit about the wee lass that ye never took the time to think about what comes next!” Mrs. Fitz murmured around a mouthful of scone, shaking her head at Claire. “Claire told me ye didna even have a car seat yet! So I mentioned to Dr. Abernathy that perhaps we could organize something, and - ”

“I knew nothing. I swear.” Claire shifted Faith to her other shoulder and sipped hot water from a paper cup. “I arrived here with Joe just a few minutes ago - Mary was kind enough to wrap the gifts.”

Jamie sank his face into his hands, resting his elbows on the edge of the table, breathing deeply. “Murtagh and Joe scared me half to death wi’ their text messages. I ran out of Rupert’s meeting thinking ye and the lass gravely ill, Claire.”
Murtagh tsked while Claire gently stood and moved around the table to sit beside Jamie. Instantly he took her and Faith into his arms, kissing the baby’s forehead and inhaling the scent of Claire’s hair.

Safe. They were safe. Silently he willed his heart to stop racing.

After a long moment, Murtagh pushed a long, wrapped box down toward the Frasers. “Open it,” he said softly. “I brought the car so I can help ye cart all the wee boxes home. And I’ll help ye get the lassie’s room set up good and proper for when she comes home.”

Jamie sat up straight, re-filled Claire’s empty cup, and slid his finger under the wrapping paper.

“Is it all right for Faith to be here? I dinna want - ”

“Relax,” Joe smiled. “You’ve got one doctor, one medical student, and two nurses in the room. Faith will be just fine.”

Jamie sat up a bit straighter, feeling Claire roll her her eyes at him, and ripped off the wrapping paper.

An hour - and ten onesies, four bibs, one carseat, one breast pump, two stuffed Highland Coos, four bottles, three baby dresses, a pile of childrens’ books, and a lovely Fraser tartan quilt (“It was nothing, lad - I truly enjoy the quilting,” Mrs. Fitz had said as Jamie and Claire thanked her profusely) later - only one envelope remained.

Faith dozed against Jamie’s shoulder, so Claire carefully opened the envelope.

A lovely card - and pictures of a pram, pile of diapers, crib, and changing table fell out.

“It’s all over at my flat - I’ll bring it by afore the lassie comes home,” Murtagh explained. “And I’ll also get a crib for my flat, in case ye are ever over and she wants to take a wee nap -”

Jamie swallowed a sudden lump in his throat - so deliriously happy to have this strong, quiet, loving man in his life. In Claire’s life. And now, in Faith’s life.

“Thank you,” he said, voice thick. Claire nodded in agreement, heart full. “Thank you - all of you. This means a lot to us. We - we -”

“We are overwhelmed. This is so incredibly kind.” Claire eased an arm around Jamie’s shoulders, smiling at her adoptive family. Ragtag, and random - but hers. Hers and Jamie’s.

Faith sneezed against Jamie’s neck, suddenly awake. He cradled her head in one big hand, Claire peering over his shoulder to make sure the baby was all right.

The photograph Murtagh snapped at that exact moment would remain on his refrigerator until they moved to Lallybroch nine years later - and then would rest, framed, on his bedside table until he was an old, old man.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt:** I'm not sure if you've already done this, but in the Modern!Glasgow AU I was wondering if you might possibly consider writing about Claire and Jaime's first major fight? // Modern Glasgow Au: Imagine Jamie and Claire first *major* fight like not just a little bickering. The first time they realize it might not always be smooth peaceful romantic sailing.

Claire swirled her ankle, absently watching the water fold and bend on the far side of the bathtub, desperately trying to feel numb.

How *could* he? How did it come to this?

“Claire?” Murtagh’s worried voice filtered through the thick door.


“Ye’ve been in there for two hours, lass. Can I get ye anything?”

*Just a sensible husband.*

“No – I’m fine. Perfectly fine.”

She didn’t feel it.

Damn him.

“As ye say. I’ll put the kettle on just in case.”

Rudely, she said nothing. Not caring, for once in her life.

Murtagh’s steps shuffled away from the door – and she was alone again.

Claire sat up, water cascading down her shoulders. Past the love bite Jamie had left on the side of her right breast. Last night? Forever ago.

It had been a long day. And it would be an even longer night.

The second day of medical school orientation had seemed to be longer than the first. The introductions had been made, the campus tour had been provided, the courses had been selected. And today, in between lunch with the dean and a trip to the bookstore and a meeting with Geillis Duncan, the second-year student who would be her “buddy” – she had received her first tuition bill.

She knew roughly how much it would be, of course – but seeing all the zeroes with her own eyes
had been a bit…overwhelming.

So she’d brought the statement home, and laid it on the table, intending to discuss it with Jamie during dinner.

And they had – just not in the way she’d expected.

“We willna be touching any of yer money, Claire,” he had insisted. “My salary can cover it –”

“What do you mean?” she’d interrupted, speaking around a mouthful of curry. “You *know* your salary can’t. We’ve talked about this, Jamie – I have more than enough money to pay for this year at least. What else is the money for, after all?”

“What’s it *for*?” he’d hissed, gently pushing aside his plate and resting his elbows on the table. “It’s for our future – that’s what. For the bairns we’ll have, God willing. For a better flat.”

“So I just sit on it, then? Even though spending it means we’ll live a little better?”

“Ye’ll keep it in the bank, because it’s my job to provide for ye, Claire.”

She pursed her lips and took a deep breath. “Jamie – not that I don’t appreciate it –”

He sighed. “I can hear a ‘but’ coming…”

“…But we both know it’s foolish to not dip into that money. It means a lot to me that you *want* to cover the expenses – but it’s just too much, and you know that.”

“I dinna *want* to cover it, Claire – I *need* to cover it. I’m your *husband,* damn it. It’s my job to provide for ye.”

Claire sat up a bit straighter, eyes narrow. “Oh – so I can’t provide for myself, then? All that work I did at the hospital, all the saving I did – it’s not as good as *your* money?”

He leaned across the table, ruddy brows furrowed. “I didna say that, Claire. I ken weel ye can provide –”

“Can I? Isn’t my money as good as yours? Or better, even, since I was making a lot more than you until I quit?”

That stung. Jamie blinked in shock. His mouth wordlessly opened and closed, struggling to find the words.

“Ye dinna need to remind me how poorly I’m paid, for all the hours I put into that job,” he hissed, voice deadly calm. “Ye dinna need to remind me how I came into this marriage with barely any money. I ken ye’re no’ used to living this way, wi’ a man who can barely afford the clothes he wears to work every day –”

“We are so *not* talking about Frank right now!”

“We aren’t? Ye dinna think the thought never crosses my mind that the only reason why ye have that money in the first place is because ye were living wi’ him? Because ye were sharing his bed?”

Claire reeled. “This is all about you, isn’t it, and your bloody pride! You *hate* the fact that I had those years with him, don’t you? You *hate* that he was my lover! You *hate* that there are pieces of me that you’ll never have!”
Jamie sprung to his feet, and his chair crashed to the floor. “Aye! I do, damn me! And damn *you,* Claire Fraser, for making me feel that way!”

Now Claire rose, hands shaking with shock and rage. “You make *yourself* feel that way, you bloody jealous bastard. It’s *my* money. I worked for it. I can spend it however I damn well please – there’s no use in saving it for children that may never come.”

“What the hell does *that* mean, Claire? Is that a threat?”

His chest was heaving with adrenaline – his pupils dilated – his face flushed – his hair messy.

God, she wanted to ravish him right there on the table.

God, she wanted to smack him.

“It’s not a threat, you fool. It’s a reality – we fuck twice a day, never use protection, and I haven’t gotten pregnant. At this rate I probably never will.”

When had the tears started falling down her cheeks?

“So I don’t care about saving the money – I’m probably barren, and if I don’t have a family at least I can have a career to fall back on.”

And just like that, Jamie fell back into his chair, deflated. Wordless.

Except for the one word that mattered to him above all else.

“Claire…”

She couldn’t bear it.

In slow motion, she walked across the kitchen, gathered her blue coat from the peg and her keys and phone from the cut glass bowl that Murtagh had given them for a six-month anniversary present, and slipped out the door.

Where else to go on a damp Glasgow evening but Murtagh’s flat.

He’d answered her knock, seen her tear-streaked face, and shook his head.

“What ye want me to kill him?”

Claire could only sigh. “I need – space.”

Murtagh had taken her coat. “Whatever ye need, lass. Yer old bedroom is empty if ye need a wee rest.”

“Thank you, but I think I’ll take a bath first.”

Anything to cleanse the poison from her mind, body, and tongue.

It hadn’t quite worked – but at least it had calmed her down.

Clad in the fluffy spare pyjamas she kept in a drawer in the bedroom where she and Jamie had lived for the first six months of their marriage – the bedroom where they’d spent their wedding night, and dozens of hours of lovemaking and sharing promises and secrets in the dark – she finally slept.
And nearly screamed when someone opened her door, deep in the night.

“Claire?” Murtagh’s sleepy voice rasped.

“Hmm?” She reached out to Jamie’s side of the bed by reflex – and remembered it all in a flood.

“He’s outside.”

“Who?”

A sigh. “Yer husband. He’s banging on the door and probably waking up all the neighbors.”

Now she sighed, flicking on the tablesde lamp.

Murtagh rested in the doorway, wearing a faded University of Glasgow t-shirt and sweatpants.

Then she heard it – three loud bangs on the door.

And rose, slipping past Murtagh in the doorway and silently padding toward the door.

“Claire.”

Jamie’s voice was hoarse – rasping. Broken.

“Let me inside. I’m sorry, Claire. I’m sorry.”

Something in his voice shattered her heart. It was the sound of a man who feared he had lost everything.

“I’ll beg ye on my knees if I have to, Claire. I’m sorry. So, so sorry.”

“Do ye want me to kick him out?”

Murtagh was at her elbow, ready to protect her.

She lifted her chin. “No. No – I’ll let him in.”

And so she unlocked the door – and saw Jamie, damp hair plastered to his forehead, wearing only his undershirt, teeth chattering in the cold.

His face contorted in physical pain as he felt his heart die in his chest.

His eyes red and puffy. And fixed on her.

He dropped to his knees before her in the doorway.

“*Mo nighean donn. Mo chridhe.* I am sorry. I ask your pardon, for what I said. I said more than I meant. Will ye forgive me?”

He would wait for her, cold and uncomfortable, for as long as it took.

And she knew it.

So there was no question.

“Forgiven,” she breathed. “Always.”
So she extended her hand – her left hand, the one that so proudly wore his ring – and helped him to his feet.

And then in the doorway he crushed her to him, and held her and held her and held her. While Murtagh kept the door open.

And then they slowly, automatically made their way down the hall to the room where it had all began. Claire shut the door, helped Jamie out of his damp clothes and into the soft, worn pyjamas that lived beside hers in the drawer of the spare bedroom. And then they lay down in the dark together, her head tucked under his chin.

“I ken there’s so much we need to say to each other, Claire – but let me speak first.”

She hummed against his neck, holding him – her anchor – so tight.

“I want ye to use the money in whatever way ye want. I only want to make sure we have enough to spare us, in case something goes wrong. Enough put aside to plan for our future – because I want the best future with you, Claire. And the family we will have. And the house we will have, God willing.”

He swallowed. She kissed his Adam’s apple.

“I had thought it would be a certain way, now that ye’re no’ working. I had thought that it was time for me to take care of you, like a husband ought to care for his wife. Because that’s what I thought would be expected of me. But now I see, for you and me it has to go a different way.”

He kissed her forehead.

“And that’s no’ such a bad thing, is it?”

“Mmm. It’s not.”

“Mmm.”

A long beat. Jamie’s thumbs traced the curves of her shoulderblades.

“I’m sorry too,” she whispered in the dark. “What I said was completely unfair and uncalled for. Forgive me?”

“Ach, nay bother. Truth is, I’d forgiven ye already - for this, and anything ye could ever do. Because I thought I’d lost ye, Claire. And wi’out ye, my life is nothing.”


“Thank God.”

*Thank God,* she echoed over and over in her mind, feeling him fall into sleep, still holding her tight.

She tangled her legs with his, so happy that this traditional, stubborn man was hers. All hers.

Thank God.
It was in the deep, quiet night – the sounds of the old house settling around them, one of the dogs barking outside, the whoosh-whoosh of the fan in the windowsill – when Claire awoke, a damp patch spreading between her legs.

Calm. Above all – remain calm.

All in all, this pregnancy – her fourth – had been quite easy. Then again, she’d been on bed rest for much of the past three months, due to her “advanced maternal age” (though, at almost 41, she was far younger than some first-time mothers she’d met at the hospital), her history of complicated pregnancies (especially Faith’s early delivery, nine years before), and Jamie’s insistence that she take it easy.

More like, his forcing her to stay in bed each day under pain of serious bodily injury if she refused to comply.

Poor man was so worried. She couldn’t blame him – after all, they had never expected to have another child. William was seven now, and after his birth – the third baby in just over three years – she and Jamie had decided on no more. Fergus coming into their lives was an unexpected blessing, and for the past seven years they had had a nice, neat family – two boys and two girls whom their two parents loved more than any parent had ever loved a child.

And now this surprise baby – this tiebreaking baby – would change everything.

Like how, during her months of bedrest, she and Jamie had decided to temporarily relocate from Glasgow to Lallybroch. Coincidentally, it was the summertime – and the children had had so much fun running around the grounds, playing with their army of Murray cousins every day and enjoying having much more space than they were used to in their spacious but sometimes cramped flat.

They hadn’t told the children yet, but Jamie and Claire had decided that, after this one was born, they would relocate to Lallybroch permanently. With another small child to care for, Claire had no desire to retain her position as a surgeon at the hospital – not when a head doctor position at the clinic in Broch Mordha had opened up. Perhaps it wasn’t as prestigious, and the cases certainly wouldn’t be as challenging as she was accustomed to – but it was a real chance to have a significant impact on the community. And the hours would be *much* more flexible.

Jenny, Ian, Murtagh, and Suzette knew. Fergus had suspected something was up. But they were waiting until the newest Fraser made an appearance before telling the rest of the children.
And at this rate, the baby would be coming sooner rather than later.

They had chosen to not find out whether it was a boy or a girl – wanting to keep it as a surprise. William was rooting for a wee brother, Faith and Brianna were hoping for a wee sister, and Fergus insisted he would be happy with either outcome. And he meant it, sweet lad.

Well – judging by the amount of fluid she had already lost, as well as the sharp contractions coming more and more frequently – they would know very soon indeed.

“Jamie?”

She hoped her voice sounded strong.

Instantly he bolted awake. “Claire? Are ye all right?”

“I need you to turn the lamp on.”

Quickly he rose to his elbow and did. Then turned back to her.

“Christ! Claire! What – ”

“My water broke.”

He swallowed, blinking harshly. “Are ye sure?”

She rolled her eyes. “I *have* done this three times before, you – ”

Then she winced as a massive contraction ripped through her body – and she doubled over on herself.

Jamie let out a strangled sound and slid over to her side of the bed, holding her tight.

“I can go fetch the car – ”

“No,” she insisted through gritted teeth. “No. There’s no time. This baby is coming, Jamie.”

Gently he lay her back against the headboard, peeling away the soaked covers. Claire sat up a bit, propping herself up on her elbows.

“I need you to get some towels. From the bathroom. Quickly.”

He kissed her forehead, damp with sweat. “Are ye sure? I won’t leave ye.”

How she wanted to throttle him – but kiss him, for his thoughtfulness.

“I can assure you – I’m a bloody surgeon. I know what I’m doing. And you’re going to have to follow my instructions. I need you to. Can you do that?”


She closed her eyes, jaw clenched, as she was hit with another contraction. Jamie held her, braced her, whispered reassuring words to her.

“Water,” she gasped. “Make sure some towels are damp. Go now.”

Through the haze of pain – for now she felt wave after wave of pain – she felt the mattress lift as he dashed off to the bedroom.
Her contractions were ninety seconds apart now. The baby would be here soon. Too soon.

Where was Jamie?

“Here, Claire.” A cool washcloth against her forehead – heavenly.

Tears streamed down her face at his thoughtfulness.

“Do ye want me to help ye remove yer pyjamas?”

She felt him lay some towels underneath her bent knees. Weakly she lifted her hips, and he eased her out of her ruined panties and sleep pants.

Then he crouched at the foot of the bed, propped her legs up, and peered up at her face around her ankles.

“Tell me what to do, Claire.” His voice was sleepy, yet calm – collected. Confident.

They would survive this together.

“Do you – have – the baby’s blanket ready?” It had been a gift from Murtagh and Suzette – something Suzette had brought back from her most recent trip to France, and had been patiently waiting, folded on the top of their bureau.

“It’s right here. I’ve got the towel to wipe her up and then the blanket – ”

“Her? Are you so sure?” He brought such a smile to her face amid the pain.

“Of course. I’ve never been wrong, have I?”

She bit back her reply as a fresh pain – more intense than any other – rippled through her stomach. Her head rolled to the side as she bit back a scream.

“*A Dhia,*” Jamie gasped, pushing her legs apart and dabbing at her center with a towel. “Christ almighty, that’s a lot of blood.”


“Is this usual, Claire? For a – natural birth, after the surgeries?”

She took a deep breath as another pain coursed through her. “No, it’s not fucking usual. But this is a Fraser baby, so it breaks all the damn fucking rules.”

He threw the soiled towel to the floor and gasped. “Claire! The – the – ”

Somehow she got up on her elbows, sweat pouring down her face, her sleep shirt sticking to her chest. “It’s got to be the head,” she wheezed. “I have to push.”

Jamie met her eyes – wide with worry, and yet so excited. “Are ye sure, Claire? Don’t ye have to just let – ”

“I’m pushing, damn it! Who the hell are you, telling me what to do?”

So he rested one hand on each of her inner thighs, watched her belly twist and writhe – and then locked his eyes with hers.
Her face was bright red with effort. Veins were popping out on her forehead and neck. Her hair was a tangled mess. She was sweaty and bloody and swearing more than he’d ever seen her.

Christ, how he loved this woman.

“Keep going!” he encouraged her. “That’s it! Push!”

She grunted – he’d tell her later that she sounded like that damned white sow that ran feral on the lands of the estate.

And pushed, and pushed, and pushed.

And delivered Julia Diana Helen Beauchamp Fraser into her father’s waiting arms.

—

“She’s so tiny!”

William touched a gentle fingertip to Julia’s cheek. The baby, swaddled in her new blanket, slept soundly in Claire’s arms, sunlight streaming through the windows of Lallybroch’s sitting room as Jenny, Suzette, and Mrs. Crook worked to strip all the bedding in the Laird’s room upstairs.

Claire had ruined the sheets and quilt – and likely the mattress. But nobody seemed to care.

“You were even tinier than this, at one time.” Claire smiled – exhausted, yet serene – and kissed her son’s forehead. “But she’s not fragile. She’s strong. She’s just tired out from being born.”

“I’d think it would be easy to be born – you just wait for your Mama to push you out,” Faith mused from her spot right above William’s head, peering into her new sister’s face.

“You know well enough that *yer* birth was verra difficult for yer Mam,” Jamie reminded her, arm tightly slung around Claire, mesmerized by the miracle of their new daughter. “And Bree’s was quicker, but even more difficult. And then wee Bree slept so much the first few days that the doctors thought she was sick!”

“I remember,” Claire mused, heart clenching as Julia’s tiny fingers curled around her index finger. Ten fingers – ten toes.

She was so perfect.

“Julia – a fine name,” Murtagh remarked from the opposite corner. He and Fergus had just returned from picking Claire and Julia two bunches of wildflowers from the meadows and gardens – and Brianna was finishing up arranging them into two gorgeous vases.

“We’ve named most of you after Da’s family – we thought it was time one of you get a name from *my* side of the family.”

Brianna brought over one vase to the end table next to Claire. Claire smiled, and Bree beamed.

“There’s one thing we’d like to show ye all,” Jamie said quietly, after a moment. “If ye’d all gather around?”

Instantly Murtagh, Faith, Brianna, Fergus, and William huddled around Mama and Da and Julia, waiting.
Gently Claire pushed back the blanket covering Julia’s wee head.

To reveal blond fuzz.

Faith’s brows knit in confusion. “But – but – she’s no’ redheaded! Or brown-haired!”

“She’s not,” Jamie smiled. “She’s our wee surprise.”

“She’s beautiful.” Fergus trailed one big finger across the baby’s forehead. “She looks like you, Maman.”

“Thank God – I can’t have *all* of you looking like your poor Da.”

Jamie kissed her cheek.

Julia awoke – bright blue eyes flashing.

And blessed them all with a smile.
Jamie paused at the top of the hill, digging his hands deeper into his pockets and shrugging against the cold, waiting for his son to catch up.

“Make sure ye put his cap on a wee bit tighter.”

Twelve-year-old Julia Fraser looked up at her father, then down at her infant nephew Germaine, sleeping snugly against her chest, wisps of blond hair peeking out from beneath the blue knit cap Faith had made him when he was born.

“He’s fine, Da. He sleeps like Fergus – nothing will wake him.” Still, she tucked the plaid shawl tighter around his shoulders and pushed the cap down over his ears.

“I’ve got it!”

Jamie and Julia whirled to watch William race up the slope, Murtagh close behind.

“Got what?”

Nineteen-year-old William paused between his father and sister, bent over as he tried to catch his breath.

“The plan – for when the zombies come,” he gasped.

“Oh, aye?” Murtagh shielded his eyes from the glare of the sun, squinting down on his grandson. “That television program’s been getting to yer heid, laddie. There’s no zombies coming to Scotland – it’s too cold.”

“That doesna *matter,* Murtagh.” William stood up a bit straighter, chin tilted defiantly. “When was the last time we put together a proper emergency plan for Lallybroch? It doesna hurt to be prepared against the worst – and full zombie preparedness would make us ready for a flood or snowstorm or power outage or –”

“The lad’s got a point.” Jamie fished his sunglasses out of his pocket, enjoying the absolutely gorgeous panorama of the big house, the broch, the pond, and the valley – even more beautiful in the crisp autumn air. “Dinna tell me ye’ve spent all that time watching that program wi’ him and havena thought about how *you* would react in that situation.”
“Farms are good – they’re rural, and can grow their own food,” Julia chimed in. “And even though there aren’t too many people in Scotland, once the cities empty out then there will be a lot of people on the road. Which means we have to make sure the fences are good and sound – right, Da?”

“Aye,” he smiled down at his youngest daughter, so proud. “And even if we dinna expect hundreds of thousands of refugees to just appear in the Highlands – we *do* need to make sure that the fence is good and strong. We canna have yer auntie Jenny’s sheep out on the road again.”

Gingerly he stepped down the far side of the hill, one arm on Julia’s shoulder to help her and his grandson – his grandson! – descend steadily. William raced ahead to check that the fenceposts at the bottom of the hill were strong and showed no sign of rot.

“Truth is, I canna remember the last time so many people wanted to walk the fence with me,” Jamie muttered to Murtagh, watching William inspect every inch of fence. “Ye’d think that something their Da does once a week wouldna be something that the wee ones would find so interesting.”

“Mmphmm. Ye ken wee William and his friends at uni have a Walking Dead watch party every weekend? Seems he’s become quite the connoisseur of planning for emergencies.” Murtagh squinted into the sun, watching a small, dark-haired form make its way from the big house and across the open field to where they stood.

“I’m surprised he hasna gotten ye into the comics yet.” Germaine was awake – eyes darting back and forth – and Julia settled him closer against her chest. “Da let me read them, but Mama doesna ken. She thinks I’m no’ old enough to read them – it doesna matter that I’ve been watching wi’ William and Bree since I was eight.”

“Ye ken that Suzette doesna like having such things laying about – she canna understand why a grown man would want to spend his time reading – ”

“Uncle Jamie!”

The dark-haired blur had come into focus – the homely features of seventeen-year-old Ian Murray the Younger, William Fraser’s best friend and a diehard Walking Dead watcher with Murtagh every weekend.

“I’ve found something!”

“Found what?” Jamie stepped closer to his nephew and past William, who was now apparently trying to size up the gap between fence posts and determine whether it was sufficient to withstand some kind of external attack.

“There’s a few fence posts down behind the barn – it looks like dry rot, but can ye come check?”

“Aye – you and William go fetch me some things to mend it with, aye? I’ll show you lads how to make the repair.”

The boys darted off. Murtagh, Jamie, and Julia slowly made their way to the barn, inspecting every fence post along the way.

“At least you and Mama would still have useful occupations when the zombies come,” Julia said after a while. “I mean – you’re a farmer, and Mama is a doctor. You can still do those jobs even without electricity – they’ve been around since even before we’ve had proper civilization. So that means we’d be OK, if something bad happened.”
Jamie stopped and turned to face Julia directly, resting one hand against Germaine’s tiny back.

“I hope you know – yer Mam and I will *always* care for ye, *mo nighean òir.* You, and your brothers and sisters, and your cousins, and especially this wee one. No matter what kind of life we lead – no matter if it’s here or somewhere else, zombies or no.”

He bent to kiss her forehead, and she smiled.

They resumed their walk.

“What about me, then?” Murtagh asked after a long moment. “Would I have a useful occupation when the zombies come?”

Julia thought for a while before responding – waiting until they had almost reached the section of fallen fence, Ian and William patiently waiting with a pile of new timbers for the repair.

“Of course you will,” she smiled at him. “You’ll love us Frasers, and take care of us. Isna that the most important job in the world?”
Chapter 63

Claire snapped awake, reaching by reflex to the pillow next to her.

Empty.

“Whatever we deny or embrace // For worse or for better // We belong, we belong, we belong together…”

Jamie’s ringtone.

Quickly she fumbled in the dark on her bedside table. Her phone screen read 2:26 AM.

A picture of Jamie – taken just the week before – flashed up on the screen.

Fingers trembling, she swiped to accept the call.

“Jamie?”

“Claire.”

Instantly she was alert.

“Jamie? What’s wrong?”

“Claire. *Mo nighean donn,* I need to see you. Please. Please.”

Swallowing down panic, she quickly started a video call.

As she waited for his face to appear, she soothed him – using the same voice as she would with one of the children.

“Hush, Jamie. Just a second, and then I’ll see you. Hush.”

And then his tear-streaked face flooded her screen – and she disconnected the audio call.

At the sight of her, he visibly relaxed. But his eyes were still unfocused, his hair all messy from undoubtedly running it through his hands over and over.

Gaelic words flooded from his lips, his voice hoarse.
“Jamie,” she whispered, shifting to turn on the bedside lamp. “Tell me. Please. Are you in your hotel room?”

He nodded, swallowing. Clearly breathing hard.

Mentally she calculated how long it would take for her to drive from Glasgow to Sheffield at this hour of the night.

“Jamie, love. Tell me. Please.”

Never had she seen him so upset. And how her heart just ached that she couldn’t be there with him.

He swallowed, nostrils flared, struggling to find the words.

So she did what always worked best when Faith or Brianna or William or Fergus was upset – helped them visualize something warm, comfortable. Something happy, and safe.

She had learned the technique back in medical school, during her pediatric rotation – and had never, ever thought she’d need to use it on her husband – the most level-headed person she knew.

“Breathe, Jamie. Please breathe for me. Come back to me. Picture me there, holding you.”

She watched him pull off his tie, and then the long column of his throat swallowed.

He breathed in, and out. In, and out.

“Do you remember the night before you left, Jamie? When I cradled you so close to my heart?”

He nodded, eyes wide, wordless.

“And then you fell asleep inside of me, remember? And when we woke up – I told you that you are my forever.”

“Aye,” he croaked, blinking harshly. “Aye. I am. And ye are, for me. My soul is yours.”

She smiled – heartbeat beginning to slow. “Yes. And I love you, you proud Scot. How I love you so.”

He shut his eyes, pursed his lips, and inhaled hard.

Twenty seconds later he released his breath – opened his eyes – and cleared his throat.

“*Mo nighean donn,*” he rasped. “That I could lay my head on yer lap, lass, and have ye care for me. As I would care for you.”

She settled against the pillows, allowing the deep neck of her sleep shirt - his shirt, really – to fall over one shoulder.

“Tell me, Jamie. Please. You’re scaring me, love. Tell me what’s upset you so.”

Her image of him shifted – his face disappeared, and all she saw was the ceiling of his small but well-apportioned hotel room.

“One sec,” his muffled voice implored. “Hold on.”
And then he was back – his button-down gone, his sweat-soaked undershirt clinging to his chest.

“I wish I could kiss you,” she soothed. “Right there – right under your neck.”

He pushed down of his undershirt to show a fading bruise on his collarbone. “This is yours,” he breathed, voice soft, reverent.

She tilted her phone down and pushed back the neck of her own sleep shirt – exposing a dark spot blooming on the side of her breast. “And this is yours, Jamie. *I’m* yours.”

“Ye ken I’m always true to ye, Claire? That I’d rather die than play ye false?”

She peered closer into his pixelated blue eyes.

“I do, Jamie. I know you’re mine – every inch of you is mine. And every bit of me is yours.”

He nodded, considering. Turning the words over and over in his mind.

“Did something happen tonight?” she gently prompted. “Did a woman approach you?”

It certainly wouldn’t have been the first time. He’d been on the road for ten days, traveling with Lord John Grey – war hero, member of the House of Lords, handsome scion of a wealthy and powerful family, a very eligible bachelor, and more recently an accomplished author. Jamie had overseen publication of Lord Grey’s three previous books, all focusing on different aspects of life in World War II-era Britain. This new book told the stories of families who had sheltered in Tube stations during the Blitz – and it was already a runaway bestseller.

Which required Jamie to accompany Lord Grey on a six-city book tour in England. He spoke to a mix of veterans’ groups, literary agents, and historians, and always followed up with a book signing. Jamie was there to make sure that everything went smoothly – including the cocktail receptions that the publishing house hosted in each city.

Claire rarely travelled with him – the demands of her own job at the hospital, together with the need to care for their small army of Frasers, meant that Jamie was always on his own. Without fail, in almost every city a beautiful young woman would approach him toward the end of the evening and offer to provide him some entertainment for the rest of the night.

His retort was always the same – that he had to make an important phone call to his wife. And then he would - and they’d laugh about it.

But tonight, something was different. “No, Claire. Nothing like that.”

She yawned. “What, then?”

He licked his lips. “Tonight’s event was huge – a big reception done by the local historical society. John had to make a big speech – I could tell all day that he was nervous, because Rupert told me that the BBC would be sending someone to observe him. We’ve been approached to adapt his books into a television series.”


He sighed. “It went well – John was his usual charming self. And afterward, he invited me to meet him for a drink at the hotel bar.”

He paused. “I was so tired, Claire – but I could tell that he needed someone to talk to. And I should
have said no – I should have just gone up to bed. But it’s my job to support him. So.”

Another pause. Jamie’s eyes darted back and forth, struggling to find the right words.

“So?” Claire asked after a while. “What happened?”

Jamie shrugged his shoulders. “I got to the bar – he was already tipsy after his speech, but now he was almost full-on drunk. And we chatted for a bit – I kept to my one whisky, but the man was throwing back gin and tonics like they were going out of style. And then – ”

He licked his lips. “Well. He lay his hand on top of mine, right there on the table – and asked me to spend the night wi’ him.”


“Hush, Claire – ye dinna want to wake the bairns.”

“Who the fuck does he think he is?” she raged. “You’re the most married man on the face of the earth. Christ, Jamie, he’s been here to dinner and has met all the children!”

“I know, Claire. I know.”

“Well, what did you tell him, then?”

“I asked him - verra politely - to take his hand off me. Then I said no, I’m verra happily marrit. Then I paid for my drink, came upstairs, and called you straight away.”

“But I don’t understand, Jamie – why were you so upset? I’m sure he just had too much to drink – ”

“Ach – I’ve kent he’s gay for a long time. He doesna want it to be verra public, but I ken he broke up wi’ his partner right before the tour started, and he’s still reeling from that. Percy has been threatening to take it to the tabloids.”

“That’s terrible. But you still haven’t answered my question.”

He looked away.

“By the time I made it upstairs, I was shaking so badly. And I couldna understand why, at first - I mean, it was surprising for John to do that, but it’s happened to me wi’ those women before.” He paused - still not willing to meet her eyes.

“But now I understand why my mind just - just shut down, and couldna do anything except find a way to talk to ye, *mo chridhe*. Because it wasna *what* he said, so much as *how* he said it.”

“Which was?”

“He said – well. He said, ‘Were I to take you to my bed, Jamie – I could make you scream.’”

Claire squirmed underneath her duvet. “Well *that’s* a bit awkward.”

Jamie swallowed – eyes and voice so far away.

“Do ye remember what I told ye about the night my father died?”

Her brows furrowed, startled. “Yes – he died when he saw you in jail, after you were arrested at
that independence rally.”

Jamie nodded. She could see his chest rapidly rising and falling.

“I was arrested by that sadistic bastard police captain. Captain Jonathan Randall. He beat me up – broke my nose. Held me captive.”

“Oh, love. Yes. I remember. But I don’t understand – ”

“He locked me in a cell, all by myself. Visited me every hour that night to kick me, and beat me some more. I was hungry, and cold, and alone, and in so much pain.”

“Jamie – please – you don’t need to tell me this,” she implored. “It’s all in the past, love. I don’t-”

“And one time when he came by – he said to me that it would all be over if I would make free of my body to him.”

Claire’s heart stopped. Ice flooded her veins.

“He said – he said nobody else would know, or care. And that he would make me scream.”

Tears sprung to Claire’s eyes.

Jamie’s voice was cold – he spoke in a monotone. Devoid of feeling.

Why hadn’t he ever told her?

It didn’t matter, not now. Tonight she needed to bring him back to her – to the present.

“Jamie.”

Still she only saw the side of his face, the vein in the side of his neck throbbing in terror.

“Jamie. I love you. Look at me.”

He looked back into the camera, fresh tears streaming down his face.

“I’m so sorry that happened to you. And I’m so, so sorry that bloody drunk writer brought it all back to you tonight. But you can’t – you can’t let it destroy you like this. He certainly didn’t mean it the same way that that bastard captain did.”

“I want you here with me,” he whispered, voice choked. “I want to feel ye close. I want to be inside you. To forget.”

“Hush, love. Hush. I’m there with you, right now. Look down at your hand, Jamie. Your left hand. Tell me – what’s there?”

He drew in deep breaths through his mouth.

“You ring.”

“That’s right. My ring. The one I put on your finger when we married. Do you remember?”

He nodded.

“And tell me, Jamie – what’s there, right by your thumb?”
“C. Your C. *You* are there, Claire,” he whispered.

“That’s right. Jamie, my love. I am with you always. And you are with me. See?”

She held up her right hand – watching him find the blurry J tattooed at the base of her own thumb.

He swallowed, choking back a sob.

“I love you so much.”

“Oh, I love *you* so much,” she whispered. “Focus on that. Focus on how much I love you. How beautiful our love is. How strong it makes us.”

He nodded.

“And how it will help you overcome anything. Even this.”

And then for a long while they just looked at each other – watched each other breathe. Wishing desperately that they were separated only by inches, rather than hundreds of miles.

Slowly, slowly Jamie relaxed. Grew more confident. Returned to himself.

“Do you want me to drive there? Give this Lord John a piece of my mind?”

He smiled. It was so, so beautiful to see.

“Nay bother. He probably won’t even remember it in the morning – God knows I certainly won’t remind him. *And* I’ll have to deal wi’ his hangover on the drive to Manchester tomorrow.”

“Mmphmm.”

His smile widened. “Ye’re finally making the proper Scottish noises, Claire. It’s taken ye long enough.”

She smiled back – heart so full of such strong love.

“Do you want me to stay on with you? I need to be up in a few hours, but you can watch me sleep. Almost like if I was next to you.”

“Aye - I’d like that. But it’s definitely no’ the same. Because if I was there - ye ken weel we wouldna be sleeping.”

She smiled - heart slowing - and blew him a kiss. Then she dimmed the light, tugged the pillow down, and settled on her side, bringing her phone along with her.

“Tell me how you’d hold me, if you were here right now.”

She drifted off to sleep at the soothing sound of his voice - rich with love, strong with promises. The stuff of her - their - dreams.

As dawn approached, one by one the wee Frasers crawled into bed with their Mama - first two-year-old Brianna, then three-year-old Faith, then eleven-year-old Fergus carrying one-year-old William. They waved a sleepy hello to their beloved Da - who smiled back his own quiet hello - and settled in with Mama and each other for a bit more rest.

Jamie watched the beautiful, peaceful faces of his family. Each face was his heart, in its own
special way. Each one he loved more than his own life. And each one loved him more than he deserved.

And only then did Jamie finally, finally close his eyes.
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompts: I love the MODERN AU series so much! I’m re-reading the series in order from the master post you put chronologically. Could you do more from the early days of their marriage? Maybe a chapter where Jamie has to get creative with a romantic/cute present for Claire because they are broke during her first year in medical school? // Is it too early, too weird or too bold to ask about the possibility of a Modern Glasgow Christmas Special?

When the humming clock on the wall hit five thirty, Claire Fraser sighed, closed her notebook, neatly stacked her papers, and stood to push it all into her satchel.

It was long since dark outside, and from this vantage point she could see the seemingly endless line of study cubicles huddled against the library windows, each one with a head bent over a pile of books and binders and other study materials.

Exams weren’t until next week – but it was never too early to start studying. It was a lesson Claire had learned early on this semester – more than six years after graduating college, it had been a massive adjustment to attend class and do assignments again. Her marks on the first few assignments hadn’t been as high as she would have liked – but now that she’d settled into a routine, it was all going much more smoothly. And Jamie, bless him, had been such a rock throughout – helping her make flashcards, tucking a sandwich or bag of crisps into her bag each day, texting her with random emojis to make her smile.

The satchel had been his gift to her on her first day – it was meant to be a replica of what field medics had used during World War II, constructed of solid olive green drab with a red cross painted on the top flap. It was perfect, and thoughtful, just like him.

Claire hurried to button up her blue coat and wind her scarf – Fraser tartan – around her neck.

The best part about coming home was that Jamie would be there, waiting for her. They’d even spruced up the flat with a few Christmas decorations this year – just a few hand-me-downs from Jenny, really, together with some small items she’d purchased at a charity sale in January. Money was still tight, now that she’d stopped working and was a student full-time – but it would work out. It had always worked out.

It was only twenty minutes on the bus to their street – and Claire texted Jamie on her way out of the library, waving a quiet hello to several classmates as she passed by their study cubicles.

*Leaving now. What’s for dinner?*

Claire slipped her phone under her arm as she pulled on her grey knit cap and fished in her pockets for the warm gloves Mrs. Fitz had knit her. When she turned back to her phone, she swallowed – so
glad that nobody was waiting behind her for the elevator.

For Jamie hadn’t replied with words – just a picture of his hand (his left hand – proudly displaying his wedding ring), fingers splayed on his belly, right beneath his bare navel.

So he wanted to play tonight.

Claire’s heart thrummed with excitement.

*Set up the camera,* she replied. *I love you, you cheeky bastard.*

The elevator arrived, and Claire stepped in just as Jamie replied with a kissy face emoji.

She swallowed, throat suddenly dry. God, she couldn’t wait to be home.

–

“I’m ravenous,” she declared, sometime later.

Jamie, wrapped around her like a limpet, paused from sucking her neck and dragged his nose up to her ear.

“So am I,” he purred, biting her earlobe and drawing one big hand down to caress where they were still joined.

Claire drew from a well of willpower she didn’t know she had, reaching down to take his hand, twine their fingers together, and gently drew their joined hands over and across her hip.

He settled his head against her shoulder in mock defeat, sighing theatrically. “Ach. Ye mean food.”

“Mm-hmm.” She couldn’t help but kiss the messy curls at the crown of his head.

Jamie pushed himself up on one elbow. “Well then – I’ll go to the kitchen, find something for us to eat.” He pulled away from – and out of – her, wincing. Then bent to kiss her properly, stood up, crossed the room to the tripod, clicked stop, and threw the camera to Claire.

“Find the best ones – I’ll want to look at them wi’ ye when I’m back.”

And he left their bedroom, naked, padding down the hall in search of sustenance.

Claire leaned over the bed, found her tartan scarf in the tangled pile of hers and Jamie’s clothes – God, they had just ripped everything off of each other – and settled the scarf around her bare shoulders as she leaned against the headboard. The low screech of a siren sounded in the distance as she turned on the camera and viewed the gallery.

This camera had only one use – for intimate photographs of the two of them. Jamie had found the perfect angle – directly beside the bed, the frame trained on Claire’s pillow. Every thirty seconds it captured an image of the two of them from the shoulders up. For these photographs were not meant to titillate with gratuitous nude shots – rather, they captured smiles, and kisses, and nose bumps, and the soul-deep joy that their lovemaking always elicited.

And, of course, absolutely gorgeous shots of Jamie and Claire losing – and finding – themselves in each other.

The gallery held over a thousand images. They didn’t turn on the camera every time they made love – but when they did, it added an extra dimension to the entire experience.
Just scrolling through today’s images formed a small knot of desire in Claire’s belly. How she craved him.

“Ye are so beautiful.”

She looked up to see her husband in the doorway, holding a plate with two sandwiches – and a small book tucked under his arm.

She smiled, so wide, heart so full.

“To see ye wi’ my tartan, Claire – ” he swallowed, at a loss for words.

“Come here, Jamie,” she whispered, extending her left hand.

Quickly he crossed to her, settling the plate on their bedside table and gently placing the book – face down – on his side of the bed. She shifted over for him to settle beside her in bed, and then he helped her settle on his lap. She drew his forehead to hers as their heartbeats quickened. He was half-hard already and it took just a few quick movements of her wrist before he breathed, “Come home, lass,” and she took him inside her.

They gasped – then settled into silence. Intoxicated in the magic of each other. Not moving.

“How?” was the only word her brain could process – so overcome by so many emotions.

Both his hands had a solid grip of her arse as he slowly, gently ground into her.

“Ye are so beautiful.”

She seized his mouth and kissed him long and hard and deep.

But he pulled away to gently set the camera aside, reach for the small book, and hand it to her.

“This is my early Christmas gift to you, my wife, my soul. For I dinna want anyone else knowing this book exists, except for you and me.”

Gingerly she opened the cover – stamped with no name or date – and realized each page was a different image of them.

All of which were incredibly intimate. All from the camera set up in their bedroom.

She felt Jamie’s hands rub circles at the small of her back as she thumbed through the images.


“I worked late the other night. I waited for the lads to leave – then printed the book myself. Special edition – one of one. A memento of our first full year together, aye?”

She thumbed to the very last page in the book, trying desperately to ignore the flames of desire
flickering through her body. It was a photograph she’d never seen before – Jamie holding the camera at arm’s length, Claire nestled against his side, asleep.

“Jamie,” she breathed. “Jamie, this – this is – it’s beyond words.”

Gently he took the book from her, set it beside them, settled her hands on his shoulders, and returned his hands to her bonny round arse.

“There’s only so much I can say to ye, Claire, but the same poor words, again and again. But these photographs – they say everything I canna find the words to express.”

Now he pulled her to him, and she gasped.

“Because ‘I love ye’ is never quite enough,” he continued. “How can I express everything I feel for ye in those three puir words?”

She struggled to breathe, so great was her desire for him. And yet somehow, she managed to hold him at bay. For he would always, always be at her mercy.

“I know, Jamie. Don’t you think it’s the same for me? I know, my love, my heart. For I am only complete now, in this moment, with you inside me.”

He reached up to kiss her, smiling so wide.

“Happy Christmas,” he breathed, heart so full with love he worried it would burst from his chest.

“Happy Christmas,” she whispered. And then helped him lose all sense of space and time.
Chapter 65

Claire set down the medical journal in her lap as Jamie grumbled his way through their bedroom door, closed it behind him, and sighed.

“How come I canna say no to them, Claire?”

She rolled her eyes, shaking her head. “You have to remember they’re not in charge, Jamie. Even if there are four of them. *You’re* the parent. *You* make the decisions.”

He rubbed his face with his hands, suddenly feeling so deflated. “I canna understand how you and Murtagh do it. If they want something, I want to give it to them. If they don’t want something, I dinna want to give it to them.”

She set the journal on her bedside table, next to the framed picture of their family that Murtagh had given her for Mother’s Day. “Come here, love.”

Jamie slipped out of his shoes and quickly crossed the room, planting himself face down on the mattress right beside Claire. Gently she wove her fingers through the hair at the back of his head, kneading the tense muscles of his neck and shoulders.

“Dinna stop,” his muffled voice vibrated against her side. “Feels sae good.”

She continued, thinking. He reached one big hand to settle possessively across her hips, fingertips gently caressing the strip of bare flesh above the waistband of her sleep pants.

“It’s completely all right to put them in a time-out if they’re misbehaving,” she said after a while. “They need to learn their boundaries. They *must* understand that adults are in charge, and that they need to listen to us. Even if they don’t want to. Even if one or more of their siblings also isn’t listening.”

“Aye, I ken that,” he sighed, and turned a bit on his side to look up at his wife. “I mind weel how my own Mam and Da did that to Jenny and me – and God knows we deserved it.”

He traced one fingertip underneath her waistband. Gently but firmly she grabbed hold of his wrist and settled his hand safely on her thigh instead.

“But when it comes to my own bairns – I dinna ken why it’s hard for me to do the same.”

“It’s a bit different when you’re on the other side, isn’t it?” She twined her fingers through his, and
pushed stray locks away from his forehead with her other hand.

“It is. And I suppose it’s difficult for me because I hated it as a lad. And I dinna want – ” he suddenly swallowed. “I dinna want the bairns to…weel. To hate me.”

“Idiot,” she shook her head. “Don’t be ridiculous. I’d never believe you hated your father – maybe how he disciplined you, but you never hated *him,* did you?”

He pushed his face into her side, inhaling deeply.

“Ye’re right, *mo nighean donn.* It feels silly to even say it. I didna like it – but I understood it. And now, now that I’m a da – I understand it even more.”

“So we need to make sure *they* understand it as well.”

He nudged his nose against a patch of bare flesh on her side, and exhaled, and delighted in feeling her shiver.

“Ye are so very wise,” he whispered. “I hope ye ken I couldna do anything wi’out ye.”

She scooted down so that they were eye to eye. She hooked one leg over his hip, pulling their centers close together.

“That’s rubbish – but for what it’s worth, I couldn’t do anything without *you,* either, you –”

“Bloody Scot,” he grinned, and reached over for a kiss.

“We are a pair, aren’t we?” he murmured against her lips, sometime later.

“Mmphmm,” she replied, snaking one hand below the covers to skillfully undo his fly. “We are.”

“Do ye ken how much I love ye, Claire?” he breathed, eyes piercing hers as he felt her push down his pants and boxers, inch by delightful inch.

Then she kicked out of her own sleep pants, and edged closer, and gasped as he cupped her.

“I do. I do.”

Then he rolled underneath her, held steady to her hips above him, and came home.
Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt:** Can we have a moment about Jamie and Julia's bonding in Modern Glasgow AU? A wee moment when Julia having a nightmare and Jamie soothing her or a museum trip together?

Julia tugged on Jamie’s hand, the heels of her wee boots squeaking against the polished marble floor of the gallery.

“Come *on,* Da!” she exclaimed, breathless with excitement. “We have so much to see!”

Jamie gently brought Julia to a halt as he squinted at the museum map clutched in his free hand. “Wait a bit, *mo nighean oír,*” he mumbled, stepping toward a case displaying some rather uninspiring Roman stone carvings that had been found in the River Ness. “Ye’re not the only person who has things to see today.”

As if on cue, twelve-year-old William coughed and shoved his own museum map up toward his father’s face. “When will we see the dinosaurs, Da? Ye ken I dinna care much for this archaeology stuff.”

“Weel, it’s verra important to yer wee sister, ken? So we’ll tour the archaeology galleries first and then we can make our way toward the natural history galleries.” Julia sighed theatrically at his hip, and he tore his eyes away from the map to glare down at his youngest – whose lip was thrust out in an exaggerated frown.

“Ye’ll have to be patient, Julia. All right?”

She heaved a tiny huff, but nodded. “Aye. Can we go now, please? We still need to see the chessmen and the golden treasures and –”

“Do ye ken how to get there, then? Can ye lead the way?”

Julia beamed – irritation at her father and brother forgotten. She strode purposefully forward, tugging once more on Jamie’s hand, twin blonde braids bobbing on her wee shoulders. “Come on! This way!”

Jamie shook his head but let his daughter lead – making sure that his scowling son also followed.

The Frasers had jumped at the opportunity to visit Edinburgh while Claire presented at a medical conference. It was a rare treat to spend a few days in a big city, especially since they hadn’t spent much time in any city since moving permanently to Lallybroch when Julia was a baby. Claire had presented on the Thursday and Friday, and the six Frasers (missing Fergus, who was away at university, but kept in constant contact through text and video chat) had a lot of fun touring the
city sights.

They had left the National Museum of Scotland for Saturday – and knowing that they’d likely spend most of a day there, Jamie had taken William and Julia to the archaeology and natural history wings while Claire had taken Faith and Brianna to the World Cultures galleries.

Brianna had been helping Julia research the museum, and the youngest Fraser had had a hard time getting to bed the previous night. Her excited babble about Roman hoards and Pictish ruins had elicited many groans of irritation from her older siblings – but prideful smiles from her parents.

Jamie, Julia, and William turned a corner and stepped into a small, dimly lit gallery. Quickly the children stepped toward the display case, Jamie hoisting Julia up on his hip so that she could get a better look.

“Is that – ” William swallowed – half eager, half terrified.

“Aye, it’s a bog body.” Jamie squinted at the tag beside the case. “Gunnister Man. Found in the Shetlands.”

Julia clutched to her father’s side, trembling a bit. “Is that a real person, Da?”

“Aye, *a nighean.* It is.”

“Then why is he in the museum?”

“Weel – it’s like the ancient Egyptian mummies, ken? He was found by a farmer in the 1950s, and they decided to put him here in the museum. The scientists were able to study his body and his clothes and then learn all about the people of his time.”

“But his skin looks so dark! How did it get to be like that?” William pressed one awed hand against the glass.

“It’s because he was buried in a peat bog. The chemicals in the bog affected his skin.”

“And it also made sure that he was preserved,” Julia murmured, still half-frightened, from safe in Jamie’s arms. “Murtagh and I read about it once.”

William stepped back a bit to stand right next to his Da and sister. “Do ye think he ever imagined he’d end up in a museum, Da?”

“I’d imagine not,” Jamie sighed, Julia turned her face into his neck – clearly she was ready to move on.

“Come on, you wee fiends,” he smiled at his two youngest children, quickly stepping into the next, brighter gallery full of half-decayed baskets and textiles dating back about fifteen centuries. “Let’s find the funny chessmen, aye? And then we can find William’s T-Rex!”

Jamie reached over Claire to turn off the bedside lamp, and couldn’t resist kissing her forehead as he did so.

As the room plunged into darkness she scooted closer to him on their shared pillow, hooked one leg around his hip, and drew closer for a proper kiss.

It went on for a long while. Christ, he had *missed* her today – even though they’d very quietly
shared each other in the dark predawn while their bairns were still abed. Seventeen years married—and she still made him feel like he was twenty-two.

“Do you think John will mind us making love in his bed?” she murmured in between kisses. Lord John Grey – Jamie’s former client from his publishing days, and now a close family friend – had graciously let them use his spacious Edinburgh flat during their visit. Through his family, the man had a house or flat in practically all major UK cities. They hadn’t seen him on this visit, as he was on vacation somewhere in Africa with his partner Hector – but they had arrived to a nice bottle of wine waiting on the kitchen countertop, and a new plush toy for each child waiting on their beds. Even fourteen-year-old Faith had smiled, clearly not yet too old for a new lovie.

Jamie kissed his wife’s smile. “It’s a bit too late for that – ye should have asked me last night. Or this morning.” He seized her mouth then, and gently wormed his hand down the front of her sleep pants.

“What have we here, Dr. Fraser?” he murmured in surprise, a few moments later. “It’s a bit smoother than I remember this morning – ”

Claire’s reply was cut off with the sound of tiny feet pounding down the carpeted hallway before the bedroom door flung open.

Jamie and Claire sat bolt upright – Jamie automatically reaching across Claire’s body to shield her.

Then a small blonde blur, clutching her stuffed Scottie dog, landed on their knees, sniffing loudly.

“Julia?” Jamie croaked, heart pounding as adrenaline flooded through his limbs. “What’s wrong?”

She scooted up his legs and crashed into his warm chest, clutching to his sides like a small monkey, burying her face in his sleep shirt. Safe.

Claire lay a gentle hand on her daughter’s heaving back. “Tell Mama and Da, love. What’s wrong?”

Julia gulped. “I had – a nightmare, Da.”

Jamie gently wrapped his arms around his youngest, precious daughter. “It’s all right. It was just a dream, *a nighean.*”

Still she shook with terror in his arms. He felt Claire look at him, gently prompting him to ask her more.

“Can ye tell me about it?”

Julia drew in a deep breath. “I dreamed the bog man took me away from you and Mama.”

Claire sighed – she’d known as soon as Jamie told her what he had taken Julia and William to see at the museum that the bog body would have had a deep effect on them. But definitely not this much.

“And ye ken that it’s only a dream, aye? Because ye ken that I’ll never, *ever,* let anything take ye away from us?”

Jamie hoisted up Julia so that her head curled into his neck. He ran one big hand up and down her back, soothing her. Feeling her breath even out.
“Aye,” she said softly. “I kent it was a dream – but it was so real!”

“That’s what happens sometimes,” Claire said softly, kissing Julia’s warm brow. “But when we have bad dreams, we also know that we’re dreaming. So it makes it easier for us to wake up.”

Julia nodded against Jamie’s shoulder. “Aye, Mama. But then I woke up and I didna remember where I was, so I wanted to sleep with ye and Da.”

Jamie gently lay Julia between himself and Claire, bringing the sheets up to Julia’s chin. “Rest now, *mo chridhe.* No one will harm ye. I’m here. Yer Mam’s here.”

Julia clutched her wee dog closer to her chest and settled onto her side. “I love you,” she whispered.

Claire settled on her side, one arm draped over Julia’s chest – and her fingers tangling with Jamie’s.

“Oh, Julia. You have no idea how much we love you.”
original prompt: In Modern Glasgow, Jamie stays home with all the sick kiddos and he and Claire joke about how they are next. Could we see them both getting sick and spending time in bed talking and canoodling to take their minds off it?

Claire coughed, throwing an arm across her eyes, settling deeper into the pillow, gasping for breath.

The bedroom echoed with another of Jamie’s thunderous sneezes.

“Oh, Christ!” he groaned, then murmured some very foul words in Gaelic.

With her free hand, Claire sought and found Jamie’s back, weakly rubbing circles into the base of his spine.

“What time is it? I think we’re due for another dose.”

Her fingertips vibrated as Jamie loudly blew his nose. “Two more hours until the next dose, Claire. If I survive until then.”

Just as Jamie had predicted, the terrible cold that had completely immobilized their four bairns the previous week had finally made its way to Mama and Da. For two days now Jamie and Claire had taken sick days from work, so that they could be together in their misery. Murtagh and Suzette, bless them, had graciously agreed to let the children sleep over at their flat until their parents were better.

At this point, neither Jamie nor Claire cared if their children were getting proper nutrition, staying up too late, or completing their homework. All they cared about was trying to breathe.

Jamie gingerly lay down beside Claire, lacing his fingers with hers and resting their joined hands on his chest. She snuggled closer and rested her head in the crook of his shoulder – desperate for comfort.

“I dinna think I’ve ever had a cold this bad, Claire.”

He reached to brace her as her body wracked with deep coughs.

“You survived a bloody terrible car crash, and yet you’re immobilized by a rhinovirus? You’re such a baby,” she wheezed.

“I love you too,” he murmured. “Here, you need to loosen up what’s in your throat. Let me help you drink…whatever god-awful concoction this is.”
He helped her sit up, and held the plastic cup full of...whatever...as she drank from it.

After a few minutes they nestled together under their thick down comforter, carefully breathing through their mouths.

“You smell,” she laughed into his chest. “When was the last time you changed your clothes?”

Briefly he glanced down at his faded Leoch Publishing t-shirt, then kissed the greasy curls at the crown of Claire’s head. “I could ask ye the same. Yer hair smells something awful.”

She couldn’t help but laugh – and then groaned as it launched a fresh coughing fit.

“We *are* a pair, aren’t we? If we’re like this now – can you imagine what we’ll be like when we’re old and gray?”

His chest rumbled with laughter under her ear – and then he sniffed loudly. “Aye, weel – I’d imagine we’d still be in bed, laughing at ourselves. No’ a bad prospect, aye?”

“Mmphmm. I suppose not.”

She hummed against his neck.

“Do you think that when you’re ninety-six, and I’m a hundred and one, we’ll still want each other as much?”

Jamie very slowly turned on his side to face Claire squarely on the pillow.

“Look at me?”

Her beautiful eyes – red-rimmed, and puffy, and yet still so beautiful his heart stuttered – fluttered open to meet his.

He smiled at her – and suddenly her congestion and nausea and aches didn’t matter.

“I will *always* want ye. *Always* love ye. Even when I’m auld and decrepit and will need ye to help me serve ye.”

She tangled her free hand in his sweat-dampened curls, and edged closer to him on the pillow. Touched her fevered forehead to his. Bumped her nose against his.

Brought her parched lips to meet his.

Savored him.

And then they held each other close as he sneezed and she coughed.

“In sickness and in health, hmm?”

Jamie laughed, and kissed her chin, and drew the covers up over their heads.
Chapter 68

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Hi! I have a Modern Glasgow prompt if it's agreeable! We all know Jamie loves Claire pregnant. Could we get an intimate scene with them from his POV? Honestly, pregnant women go through a horny stage so Claire might even jump HIM lol.

Claire rolled her eyes, trying so hard not to get exasperated at her adorably persistent husband.

“I *promise* I’m all lined up, just like I always am. I’m getting cold!”

From his position kneeling on the floor, Jamie carefully held his phone at eye level, squinting at the screen and focusing the camera. “As ye say. Now hold still – oh come on, Claire. Ye can smile a bit, no?”

Claire rolled her bare shoulders and hugged her arms tighter across her breasts, warming herself with thoughts of the incredibly soft wool blanket which Jamie loved to wrap around their shoulders at night. Giving Jamie the smile he craved – for there was so much to smile about.

Five months pregnant now with their first child. Their beautiful miracle. What they had hoped and prayed for. What they had endured so many uncomfortable tests and treatments for.

And every day, Jamie took a picture of Claire’s bare belly. From this angle, her bare toes lined up against a floorboard in their kitchen, flush against the light blue wall that had been one of their projects right after moving in, they watched the baby grow. Not so much day by day – but very noticeable when compared to a few weeks ago.

It had been Jamie’s idea – shared with Claire on their way home from Dr. Abernathy’s office, on that momentous day when he’d confirmed what the six home pregnancy tests had already told the already ecstatic parents-to-be.

It was a bright spring day – barely a cloud in the sky. Such a rarity for Glasgow that they felt the whole world was celebrating with them. After stopping by the nearest church for a quick, heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving, Jamie and Claire were almost skipping down the street. Two lovesick idiots – impossibly in love with the world, and each other, and the tiny bairn nestled in Claire’s belly.

“I’ve an idea,” Jamie had said at length. Claire’s smile widened at the sunshine in his voice.

“And what’s that?” Her eyes followed a mother holding her toddler son’s hand, helping him toddle across the cobblestones at the crosswalk.

“I ken ye like when we take the pictures. So I was thinking – what if I take a picture of yer belly,
What are you planning for every day? So we can have a memory of this time, and maybe share it with the bairn, once she’s grown?”

Claire stopped, tugging Jamie’s hand so he moved closer. His grin was dazzling. She stepped up on the top of his shoes and pulled him into a long kiss – breaking away only when a lorry driver whistled at them as he rumbled by.

“Let’s go home, then?”

“Perfect!”

She blinked, and then held her smile as Jamie stood, groaned at the effort, picked up her shawl, and settled it around her naked back. He swiped awake his phone screen, and there she was – her skin and smile so radiant.

“I look huge!” she mused. “How did that happen?”

He wrapped his free arm around her shoulders and kissed her cheek. “And you a medical student! Well, ye know, when a man and a woman love each other…”

Playfully she nudged her hip against his, and he pulled back just a bit – keeping her safe in the circle of his arm.

“And what’s next for us, tonight?”

Jamie’s eyes creased into conspiratorial blue triangles. “I don’t know. What ideas do you have?”

She dropped the shawl. Stood proudly naked before him.

Enjoyed watching him swallow.

Tilted her head.

“Perhaps you could turn on the *other* camera?”

“Aye,” he croaked, stricken. Overcome with love and adoration and want and pure *need* for this woman. His wife – the air in his lungs. The blood in his veins. The backbone of his very existence.

She licked her lips. Knowing exactly what she was doing.

And turned, and softly padded down the hall toward their bedroom.

And Jamie – ever so bright – was powerless to follow her.
Chapter 69

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt:** Would love a Modern AU with Jamie and Claire having to send flirty texts to each since family members/kids/friends are around and they have to be on good behavior. :)

“Thanks, Claire – I’ll be only a minute!”

Geillis Duncan set down her coat on the chair next to Claire’s and darted up the theater’s center aisle, red galoshes squeaking on the linoleum.

Dr. Claire Fraser sighed and pulled out her phone. Geillis had been trying to drag her out for a girl’s night for what seemed like forever – or at least since she had joined the surgery team late last year. They were the only two female surgeons at the hospital – Claire was a young yet well-regarded thoracic surgeon, while Geillis specialized in orthopedics. The magic that woman could perform on broken bones was nothing short of miraculous.

Her taste in movies, however –

“Did ye read the novels?” The middle-aged woman at her right had turned to face her, smiling kindly.

“I haven’t – I work, and I have four children at home to keep me busy,” Claire confessed, absently twisting her fingers in her lap. “My friend and I went to dinner and this was all her idea.”

“Well then – ye’ll be in for a surprise to be sure! Half the things he does to her have to be seen to be believed!”

Suppressing the urge to make any number of unkind remarks – that it was all just a fantasy, that based on what she understood about the storyline this Grey would be a posterchild for emotional manipulation and abuse, that there was no way for *anyone* to have the lifestyle that seemed to be so easy on film – she merely smiled and unlocked her screen.

Five messages – four from Fergus, and one from Jamie.

Nothing major – just a group shot of Faith and Brianna and William and Jamie enjoying their dinner on the couch, and three selfies of Fergus pulling funny faces. Jamie had shared an adorable photo of two-year-old William with what appeared to be half of his dinner smashed all over his face.

Her heart soared with love for her crazy wee family – who were all missing her tonight, but certainly didn’t begrudge her a night to herself.

Even if she had to endure what undoubtedly would be the most excruciating movie experience of
her life.

Just as the lights began to dim, Geillis returned to her seat. “Did ye see – they’ve got wine and beer here! Never seen that before. Now – do you want me to give you a recap of the first movie, or – ”

“I think I’ll be able to figure it out,” Claire sighed, thumbing one quick text to her husband as the previews began.

*Wish I was with you.*

Then she glanced at her watch, settled into her seat, and sighed. Geillis and her neighbor sat literally at the edge of their seats, riveted. Waiting.

—

Thirty excruciating minutes later, she glanced over to Geillis – who was absolutely enraptured with the fantasy unfolding on the screen – and discreetly slipped her phone from her pocket.

Two messages from Jamie – one a picture of all four children snuggled on the couch watching classic Bugs Bunny cartoons, the other just five simple words.

*how is it? miss u*

Claire dimmed the brightness of the phone screen and quickly typed a reply.

*It’s so far removed from reality. He has more money than God and still she plays hard to get.*

Immediately the screen flashed that he was typing a response.

*and here i thought money wasn't everything :p*

*It’s not, but they jumped right into bed again anyway*

Feeling absurdly self-conscious, Claire pocketed the phone and returned her eyes to the screen. But after feeling five vibrations over the following ten minutes, curiosity got the better of her.

*im glad we always talk things out, mnd*

*well not like we dont ever go to bed to help us find a way to talk, but the talking is so impt*

*i could talk to you all day and all night and id still find something new about u to love*

*whats happening now? u know rupert and scarlett really like the books, hes told me waaay too much about the story*

*picking up any new ideas?*

Seven years married, and her heart still skipped when she read his beautiful words.

*They’re at a masked ball. He’s still trying to control her – tells her what to wear, what to do with her money*

*a masked ball? fancy. would u ever want to go to one?*

*Only if we could do what they did and sneak away for some private time…* *ye ken that from the moment we arrive, id be plotting how to do that*
How he made her smile.

Then nothing from him for a while. She glanced at her watch – Murtagh’s present for her medical school graduation – ah. It was bedtime for the four wee Frasers.

One more message, and then she’d put the phone away.

*I do like how she’s not shy to tell him what she wants – even if her voice gets a bit quieter when she tells him. And even though he’s damaged, he always takes care of her*

The final 45 minutes of the movie weren’t much different than what had already transpired – but Claire wasn’t really paying attention. For she knew that while most of the women in the theater – and it *was* a majority of women – would be going home to empty beds, or to men who perhaps would not meet their needs in all the ways they desired, she could not wait to get back to Jamie. Not just because she knew they would probably make love before falling asleep – and that it would be full of so much soul-deep love and tenderness and passion that it would bring tears to their eyes.

No – it was because she knew that above all else, she and Jamie had intimacy. True intimacy – emotional as well as physical. The ability to laugh, and to share hopes and dreams and fears, and to face the joys and challenges of each day as an unshakable team.

This kind of intimacy was rare, and sacred – and certainly not what was portrayed in the movie.

When it finally ended – and she chatted with Geillis as they both slipped on their coats and made their way out of the theater – all she could think of was Jamie – her husband, her heart, her soul. His eyes, and his hands, and his heart.

She waved goodbye to Geillis, and pulled out her phone to get an Uber.

One new text from Jamie –

*look up*

She did – and there he was, standing in front of their battered car, parked across the road. Smiling.

She ran to him, and he caught her, and his kiss was everything.
Chapter 70

Chapter Notes

originally posted on tumblr

Written in response to diverse mediums on tumblr - asking for "A Love Bite" as part of the "Sweet Affectionate Moments" meme prompts!

“Bree - why are you wearing a scarf?”

Claire sipped her coffee, squinting across the breakfast table at her middle daughter. Eight-year-old Julia turned the corner from the kitchen, set the platter of piping hot bannocks on the table, and slid into her seat beside fifteen-year-old William - whose face was buried in a book about the Roman conquest of Britain.

“Why not, Mama?” Brianna licked her lips, clearly trying to dismiss the question. “I’ve got this new blouse and -”

“But it’ll be so bright and sunny today,” seventeen-year-old Faith insisted, pushing her scrambled eggs around on her plate. “Ye should bring the sunscreen instead. Canna have ye looking like a lobster again.”

“Dinna tell yer wee sister what to do,” Jamie admonished gently from his seat beside Claire, glancing down at the scribbles on the ledger beside his plate. “She already has a mother.”

“Wee?” Julia laughed. “Da, dinna be daft - ye ken Bree has been taller than Faith since I was small!”

“Ye still *are* small, *mo nighean oir*,” Jamie smiled, ruffling Julia’s blonde curls. “And ye didna answer yer Mama’s question, Bree - why are ye wearing the scarf?”

Brianna huffed, but said nothing.

“Does it have to do wi’ Roger MacKenzie?” William asked around a mouthful of bannock, still engrossed in his book. “I saw the two of ye after school yesterday, and I was surprised when he wasna staying here at the house. We’ve got plenty of rooms.”

“Roger is here? Why didn’t you tell us?” Claire’s brows raised in surprise. Brianna and Roger had known each other since primary school - and had been the best of friends since then. She and Jamie had always hoped that it would eventually blossom to more between them -

“He just drove up for the day,” Brianna sighed. “He had to be back in Glasgow last night because he has an exam this morning. That’s why he didn’t tell you he was coming -”

“But what does that have to do wi’ yer scarf?” Julia interrupted.
Jamie and Claire exchanged a long glance while Brianna’s face flushed bright red.

Faith and William wisely kept their mouths shut.

“I suppose she just felt like it,” Jamie said carefully, smiling indulgently at his youngest. Wanting to keep her that much more innocent for as long as he could.

Claire turned back to her breakfast with a small smile. “You may want to wear it a bit higher next time, Bree. Wouldn’t want people to get the wrong idea.”
Chapter 71

Chapter Notes

originally posted on tumblr

"A Sorry Kiss" as part of the "Sweet Affectionate Moments" meme prompts!

Claire stretched under the soft duvet, eyes shut tight against the sun streaming through the curtains.

“Quiet!” Jamie’s theatrical whispers echoed in the hallway. “The whole *point* of surprising yer mam wi’ breakfast is keeping it a surprise! And ye canna be making so much noise because that way she’ll ken we’re here!”

“Ooh!” two-year-old William’s soft voice exclaimed.

“Sshh!” his brother and sisters admonished.

Jamie cleared his throat. “Fergus - will ye open the door, man?”

Claire heard the door creak open, and the patter of eight small Fraser feet scampering toward the bed.

“Wait -” Jamie admonished -

“Supwise, Mama!” Three-year-old Brianna jumped on the bed, shoving against her four-year-old sister Faith.

In the same instant, Claire let out a surprised “oof” and Faith crashed to the floor, knocking Fergus’ tall legs and upsetting the tray of fruit, eggs, and coffee.

Fortunately the crockery - Claire’s inheritance from her parents, which the Frasers only used on special occasions - fell harmlessly on the big bed. But the coffee pot crashed to the ground, sending a scalding hot tide across the rag rug Jenny had given them for their anniversary two years back.

What followed was the typical chaos and mayhem of any morning in the Fraser household - Fergus yanking Faith away from the coffeepot; Jamie throwing William airborne and out of harm’s way so that he crashed, giggling, on the mattress beside Brianna; Claire still muzzy from sleep and trying to decipher exactly what was happening.

It didn’t take long to organize the wee Frasers into clean-up duty, and then send them with Fergus back to their rooms to change into fresh clothes. For they would go out for breakfast today.

And then Jamie crashed on the mattress beside Claire, exhausted.

She snuggled closer, careful of the stray strawberries that rolled out from under the pillow.

“I’m sor-” he began.
But she interrupted him with a smiling, forgiving kiss.
original prompt: In Modern Glasgow, Jamie and Claire go see Joe about their troubles conceiving a child. Could we see a few moments that led up to that decision and how they supported each other since they both want children so badly?

“Claire! There you are!”

Claire Fraser looked up from her medical journal, perched at one corner of the crusty table in the ER’s dimly lit break room. “Dr. Abernathy?”

The kindly American doctor allowed the door to creakily swing shut, wiping his sweaty forehead on the back of his scrubs sleeve. “It’s a madhouse out there. I know you’re on a break, but would you mind pitching in?”

But Claire had already risen. “Of course – lead the way.”

It was spring – the first truly nice evening since the previous autumn – and, seemingly, an occasion for people to do whatever they did that landed them in the emergency room. Claire was just finishing up her second year of medical school, and had been lucky to land an internship in the emergency room at one of Glasgow’s leading hospitals. Learning the art of triage.

Dr. Joe Abernathy was on a long-term exchange from Boston – his specialty being OB/GYN – but on a night like tonight, everyone and anyone with advanced medical training seemed to be needed.

“What have you done tonight? I thought it was your anniversary?”

Joe quietly laughed and shook his head as they walked down the hall together – quickly darting around the nurses andorderlies. “Well it was – still is, I guess. But I somehow had a gut feeling that things would be crazy around here tonight – it’s the first full moon of the spring, after all. And it’s fun to be doing sutures and setting broken bones – God knows I haven’t done that for a while!”

By now they’d reached the nexus of the ER – overflowing with half-drunk men bleeding from various places on their bodies, mothers clutching wailing children, and a smattering of elderly people.

Nurse Murdina Bug – who reminded her so much of Mrs. Fitz – appeared at her elbow, clutching a stack of clipboards. Deftly she handed one to Claire and nudged her and Joe toward a small area to the side of the waiting room, where patients waited amid partitions separated by thin curtains.

“Here ye are – I thought this woman would be perfect for ye, Claire. She’s seven months pregnant – complaining of cramps and bleeding. Dr. Abernathy – ye can lead, but I’d like Claire to observe?”
“Of course,” he smiled at the red-cheeked nurse who always had a kind word and smile. “Lead on.”

Claire glanced down at the chart, and Murdina pulled back the curtain, and then she and Joe met Amy Higgins.

“Good evening, Mrs. Higgins – Mr. Higgins.” Joe greeted the nervous-looking couple. Amy sat up straight against the headboard of the bed, tracing the large curve of her belly – her husband stood right next to her, face ashen with worry.

“Hello,” they said softly.

“I’m Dr. Abernathy and this is Claire – she’s a second year medical student and one of the finest I’ve ever seen, if I may say so. You’ll be in good hands with us. Now tell me – what seems to be the problem?”

Claire thanked God yet another time that she had found an internship so close to her and Jamie’s flat – just a fifteen minute walk and she could be home. And after pulling a double shift, full of blood and broken bones and screaming children and just a little bit of heartbreak – she wanted to enjoy the late afternoon sunshine, drink a restorative cup of tea, shower, and go to bed with Jamie – in that order.

*Be home soon,* she texted him as she turned onto the main avenue about five minutes from home.

*Waiting for u mnd,* he replied immediately, followed by ten heart emojis.

How he always brought a smile to her face. A smile which he kissed with such sweetness when she finally strode through their front door, and he swept her into his arms, and time stood still.

“Have you been drinking?” she whispered against his lips a bit later, after he had set her down on the edge of their kitchen table.

“Aye,” he breathed, kissing the tip of her nose. “We got word a bit after noon – Scarlett went into labor this morning. The bairn came around two – so Rupert’s got three now, in less than three years. Can ye believe it?”

And then a most profound feeling of fear and regret – and shame – surged through her heart.

Of course Jamie felt the change in her. He reached down to take her clammy, trembling hands in his.

Her pulse picked up – rapid breaths in and out. Vision blurring.

“Claire?” he whispered. “*Mo graidh* - ye’re scaring me. Did something happen today?”

“I’m having a panic attack,” she observed – voice absolutely detached. She closed her eyes as the room began to spin.

Her senses sharpened – and she heard Jamie swallow.

“Claire? Claire – what can I do?”

Slowly she looked down at their joint hands – distractedly admiring how the J tattooed just inside
her right thumb perfectly lined up with the C tattooed just inside his left thumb.

“It’s what *I* can do – or, rather, *can’t* do,” she said, so quiet. Lost.

Jamie gently cupped her flushed cheek with one of his hands, tilting her chin so that his eyes met hers. Waiting.

“How come I can’t get pregnant, Jamie?”

He physically reeled back. Shocked.


“We’ve been married almost two years. We’ve *never* used protection. And I’m still not pregnant.”

Now he stepped a bit closer – eyes still locked on hers. “Aye. So?”

Tears welled.

Where was this fear and pain and sorrow coming from?

“We’ve made love a thousand times, Jamie – but never conceived. Statistically that’s – that’s terrible. Beyond terrible.”

He pursed his lips, and swallowed. “What are ye saying?”

“I’m saying that I don’t think I can get pregnant. If I haven’t already – I’m not going to.”

Now his eyes narrowed – and color flared on his own cheeks.

“How *dare* ye say that?” His voice rose – not in anger, but in emphasis. “Are ye giving up, then? Giving up on our dream of a family – of a house full of children?”

“I’m surrounded by women who get pregnant as easily as sneezing – I treated a woman today who has been married for three years and is pregnant for the second time. Rupert and Scarlett met not too long before we did, and she’s been pregnant non-stop since they married.” She closed her eyes, chest heaving with feeling. “Why can’t that be me? How come I can’t do that?”

Jamie leaned and wrapped his arms around her so tight. She buried her face in his shoulder, and all of a sudden let out a sob that shuddered through her entire body.


And she clung to him, mourning the life she didn’t have – and feared she would never have with him, this incredible man who deserved so much more than she felt she could give him.

Sometime later he carried her to their bedroom and helped her shed her sweaty scrubs. They burrowed under their plaid quilt, naked, but not wanting to make love – just craving skin-on-skin intimacy. Oneness.

“I want so, so badly to give you children,” she whispered after a while. “And I’m so afraid that I won’t be able to.”

“We can always adopt,” he replied softly, thumb tracing the contour of her hip, dipping into the hollow of her navel. “There are so many needy children in this world – we could give one a proper
home."

“Yes,” she breathed. “Of course. But – but it is selfish to say that I want a child that’s part you and part me? That I want our lovemaking to create a product of our love? That I want to grow and shelter a child inside me? That – that I want to make love when I’m pregnant? And – and that I want to feed you, so close to my heart?”

His thumb skinned up her side to swirl around one areola, watching in fascination as her nipple puckered.

“Those arena selfish things,” he said after a while. “Lord knows I want to see you pregnant – show it to the world. Have a daughter that looks like ye, or a son that looks like me.”

He shifted his hips a bit closer toward hers, tracing his hand down her side and then cupping her lovely round arse, anchoring her to him.

“Are ye telling me ye’ve given up on that dream?”

She jerked her hips against his, seeking friction.

“I want you inside me,” she pleaded.

He stilled her against him. “No, *mo nighean donn* - no. Not now. We need to talk about this.”

She closed her eyes. He watched her – would keep watching her for as long as it took.

“No – no. I haven’t given up. But I don’t think we can do it on our own.”

He pressed his thumbnail into the sensitive flesh of her lower back. “All right – so what do we do?”

“I’ll ask Joe. We should both meet with him – he’d give us an honest answer. And then we’ll know.”

He leaned in for a long kiss. Full of strength, and promise.

“I love you,” he breathed against her lips. “I will love you until the day I die. No matter if we have no bairns or adopt fifteen or you carry a few of our own. I have *you,* Claire. That’s the most important.

“I so, so want a family with you,” she whispered. “I want what I didn’t have.”

“So we shall make one together.” Gently he eased onto his back, letting her straddle him. “Full of so much love that we won’t know what to do with it all.”

She leaned over to kiss him. “I love you, Jamie. I – it just keeps growing. I can’t believe how much I love you. How lucky I am to have you.”

He nudged up a bit. “God blessed me with you – and God will bless us with children. He may just need a bit of help from your friend.”

She reached down between them, stroked her thumb back and forth to prepare him, and took him inside. They both gasped. Yet she held still.

“You astound me,” she whispered. “In everything. Always.”
“It’s because I love you. How could it not be so?”

Impatient, he rolled his hips. Helped her take power in that moment – so that she could take power in the days and weeks to come.

And prayed that their firstborn would have her eyes.
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Imagine Faith is asked to a school dance and Jamie has to meet her date. Nor is he pleased with her dress when she comes down the stairs to meet her date // Modern Glasgow AU: Does Faith have a significant other or any romantic endeavors (or maybe she is waiting?) We know Fergus has Marsali, and Brianna has Roger, but what about Faith in the middle? :)

“I canna believe ye convinced me to go tonight,” Faith huffed as Brianna helpfully zipped the back of her dress. “Ye ken I dinna like to dance – ”

“Nonsense,” Brianna smiled, tucking a wayward curl back into her sister’s chignon. “Ye *never* go to these things, and since ye’ll be graduating in just a few weeks ye might as well go this time.”

Gently she spun Faith around so that they faced each other. Brianna, at seventeen, was three inches taller than her sister. She had inherited their Da’s height and coloring, while Faith was the spitting image of their Mama. For years now she’d been taller than her older sister – and perhaps that’s why she always felt so much more protective of her.

For while Brianna had had Roger MacKenzie in her life since they were bairns in Glasgow – first as playground mates, then as friends, and now in a romantic relationship – Faith had never had that. Her curly brown head was always face down in a book, teaching herself as much as she could about science and medicine and technology. She was well-prepared for her first year of uni – and she had made their parents so proud when she proclaimed her interest in becoming a doctor. But she was always so *serious* - and so bloody smart – that the boys had never come calling.

The fact that they had the most intimidating father on the face of the earth likely didn’t help very much, either.

“Faith? Listen to me.” Brianna’s blue eyes met those of her sister – the only physical trait they shared. Faith narrowed her brows, and sighed, but pursed her lips. Waiting.

Brianna smiled. “Can ye relax, just this one night? Ye’ve met him before – ye ken he’s no’ a bad man. He’ll care for ye – he willa do anything ye dinna wish to. I bet he’s just as nervous as ye are.”

Faith rolled her eyes. “I feel like such a fraud – all dressed up. What if he wants to dance and I dinna want to?”

“Then I hope he respects yer wishes – and if he doesna, well then he’s no’ worth yer time.”


Brianna turned to look at herself in the bathroom mirror. “Ye’ll find a man one day who loves ye just as much as Roger does me. I ken ye will.” She leaned over the sink to apply another layer of
mascara.

Faith took a deep breath, and sighed, and reminded herself to bring a crossword puzzle and pen in addition to her book.

—

“And how do ye ken wee Roger again?”

Jamie Fraser took another sip from his tumbler of whisky, watching the two young men squirm a bit.

“We’ve been roommates for a while now – I enrolled at uni last fall. Trying to get my life back on track.” Rob Higgins paused, just for a moment, to see how Jamie Fraser – Red Jamie, Roger had described him – would react. But the man’s face was frustratingly impassive.

“I joined the Royal Marines when I left school. I served in Afghanistan for two years. After the attack I was able to get a discharge. That’s how I got the scars on my face.”

“Why Glasgow, then? It’s far from Dorset. My wife – Faith and Bree’s mother – she was born in Oxfordshire.”

Rob shrugged. “I needed a fresh start, away from – well. I served with a lot of Scotsmen and they always told me so much about home. So – why not?”

“He’s a bonnie wee swordsman, too – captain of the fencing team,” Roger piped up, shifting uncomfortably in his suit.

“Are ye now?” Ice clinked in Jamie’s glass as he took another sip.

“Bree!”

The three men turned their heads at nine-year-old Julia Fraser’s exclamation. Julia’s blond head darted past them – followed closely behind by the dark braids of her friend Sinem, a Turkish girl whose parents had recently immigrated to Scotland and who shared Julia’s deep passion for archaeology. Sinem was sleeping over tonight, and already the girls had spread out survey maps of Lallybroch to plot out their expeditions for the next day.

Jamie, Roger, and Rob carefully rose from their seats in the parlor and watched Brianna and Faith Fraser descend the stairs.

Brianna – resplendent in dark green – beamed at Roger and darted down the steps and into his arms.

Faith – shy in a gorgeous shade of electric blue – shared a tentative smile with Rob, who carefully approached her.

“Your tie matches my dress,” she breathed, surprised.

Rob swallowed. “We have Bree and Roger to thank for that,” he replied softly, bending to gently kiss her cheek.

“You look beautiful,” he whispered, and felt her flush against his earlobe.

He pulled back to present her with a simple, yet beautiful corsage.
“Gardenias? Wherever did you get those?”

He bent to pin it to her shoulder. “I brought it all the way from Glasgow. I – I wanted you to have something nice.”

She gave him the most beautiful smile – and immediately he knew he’d done the right thing.

Suddenly aware of the silence, Rob turned to stand beside Faith – and saw that they had had an audience. Bree and Roger, their arms around each other, grinning ear to ear; Jamie and his wife Claire, him scowling, her smiling encouragingly at her eldest daughter; Julia and Sinem with hearts in their eyes.

“I’ll go get the car,” he heard Roger say before dragging Bree out of the parlor – undoubtedly wanting some time alone.

“Mrs. Fraser,” Rob nodded in greeting. “So nice to meet you.”

Claire Fraser – who must have been in her forties, but was so beautiful that Rob’s heart actually skipped – extended a hand in greeting. “I’m glad to know I’m not the only Sassenach in this house now. Welcome.”

Rob’s brows furrowed. “Sassenach? What’s that?”

“It means ‘foreigner’ – or ‘outlander,’” Julia piped up, still star-struck. “Because ye’re English.”

He swallowed. “I hope that’s not a bad thing?”

And then his heart almost stopped when he felt Faith’s hand settle around his back. “It never has been in this house. Shall we?”
Chapter 74

Chapter Notes

originally posted on Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: what if Jamie and Claire need a holiday, away from their frantic lives for a bit. We know they love their kids, but sometimes a break is needed. Maybe a nice wee date or a weekend getaway?

“Will ye look at that? The postman is here!”

Faith Fraser – aged almost two – let out a wee cheer and scampered from the couch to the front door of the flat. Her sister Brianna – aged almost one, and at that stage where she mimed almost everything her beloved older sister did – let out her own confused wee cheer, and speed-crawled across the carpet, keeping up the best she could.

Murtagh knelt to help Faith into her bright blue sweater, then lifted Brianna to his hip, wrapping a worn Fraser plaid arisaid around her wee shoulders – knowing that Claire would have his head if she heard that her daughters had so much as stuck their wee noses outside without proper covering.

“Ready?”

Faith enthusiastically nodded, and Murtagh carefully opened the door, let Faith run out to the landing, and then turned to lock the door behind him, balancing a suddenly squirmy Brianna.

“*Seas, a ruaidh,*” he hushed her. “Ye’ll be chasing after yer sister soon enough. Faith! Dinna go down the stairs until I’m there!”

Faith theatrically froze at the top step – one small leg poised to take the first step down – waiting for her godfather.

And then Murtagh was there, taking her hand, guiding her down the three flights to the ground floor and unlocking the entry door.

Chilly, damp air – unusual for July – blasted through the open door – and Brianna suddenly snuggled against his neck, seeking warmth.

“Sshh,” he soothed. “I ken it’s almost yer naptime.”

Swiftly he unlocked the mailbox, and allowed the cards, letters, and magazines to spill out.

“Muwta!” Faith admonished. “Ye haf to clean up the mess!”

“Weel – can ye help me, Ms. Faith? I have my hands full wi’ yer wee sister here.”

Gleefully she bent to stuff her arms full of mail – and one particular piece caught her eye.
“Issa coo!” she exclaimed, holding the postcard out to Murtagh for his inspection. “Just like Bwee’s toy!”

“Aye – it’s a bonny coo,” Murtagh agreed, smiling at the blasé picture. “And look – it’s from the Isle of Skye! Who could possibly have sent it?”

“Mama and Da!” Faith exclaimed.

“Mama?” Bree briefly perked up, craning her neck to see if her beloved parents had suddenly returned.

“No, *a leannan* - they’re no’ back yet,” Murtagh soothed, running a gentle hand up and down Bree’s wee back. “They should be back tomorrow – come then, Faith. Help me wi’ the post and then we can go back upstairs, make some tea, and read their postcard – all right?”

“All right!” Suddenly engrossed in her task, Faith scooped up all the pieces of mail and darted back up the stairs – stray letters fluttering behind her.

“Mama?” Bree asked again, voice filled with sleep.”

“Hush now – lay yer heid. Mama and Da love ye so much.”

Bree settled back against him – and blessed his neck with a small, wet sneeze.

“And Murtagh loves ye and Faith more than he can ever find the words to say,” he continued, turning back to the stairs. “Though God kens it’s trying sometimes.”

—

“Dear Faith and Bree – we saw so many coos today! And sheep and goats too. The weather is bonny and we wish ye were here with us. Mama says we can come back once the baby comes, and take a proper holiday. Hope you aren’t giving Murtagh too much trouble. Lots of love, Mama and Da.”

Jamie looked up from the desk at the corner of their hotel room. “What do ye think?”

Claire stretched, naked, amid the soft duvet, rubbing the five-month swell of their bairn. “I think we’ll need to get a nice bottle of whisky, for Murtagh. And of course a coo for Faith, since she’ll be jealous that Bree has one and she doesn’t.”

“I’m glad she won’t take it for herself, then – God kens it’s what I would do,” Jamie smiled, finishing the last of his tea.

“Well - *I* like to raise my children to have manners,” she teased, rolling over to one side, watching him. “This one, too.”

Jamie rose, crossed the room, and slid over her on the bed, pushing her to her back, holding himself up on his arms above her. Feeling their bairn dance under his belly.

“God bless women like you for bringing more Frasers into this world,” he breathed, rolling them to rest on their sides, still skin on skin.

“It means I’m going straight to heaven,” she teased. “For putting up with you.”

“I hope you’re willing to do a wee bit more than just put up wi’ me,” he whispered against her lips. She closed the gap in a long, heated kiss.
“Happy anniversary, Jamie.” She rolled on top of him. His fingers skimmed all over her beautiful, glowing skin.

“Six years,” he breathed, swallowing with want and emotion. “Holy God, Claire – we have forever together. Do ye ken that?”

She smiled – and took him, gasping, inside – and he kent it weel.
Chapter 75

Claire watched her eldest daughter twist her fingers on her lap, head bent, thinking.

Not yet meeting her Mama’s eyes.

Pursing her lips, dark brows furrowed.

Down the hall, William called for Fergus – who replied that the youngest Fraser’s beloved stuffed Nessie had been safely located behind the living room sofa.

Faith swung her legs over the edge of the bed, careful to not kick her Mama. And picked at a spot of breakfast crusted on the hem of her shirt.

“Does it happen every time?”

“Does what, darling?”

“Does a baby happen every time people – I mean, you and Da – ”

“No. No, it doesn’t. Once is enough, but it can take years.”

“Like with me?”

Now Faith finally looked up – blue eyes still wide, but voice steady and strong. So wise beyond her nine years.

“Exactly. Your Da and I – we wanted you, very much. And we tried for more than two years before you arrived.”

Faith nodded absent. Processing.

“Did you try every day?”

Claire held back a smile.

“Yes.”
Faith’s eyes bugged a wee bit.

“It must not take very long, then. Otherwise I’d think you’d be tired all the time.”

Claire smiled – just a bit.

“It can be quick – or it can take quite a while. But it’s so, so much better when it’s with someone you love, Faith – and with someone who really, truly loves you. Do you understand?”

Faith nodded, dark curls bobbing.

“I couldna think doing something like – like *that* – with someone I didna really love. It – weel. It sounds a bit gross.”

Claire leaned down to envelop Faith in one of her patented Mama hugs. Faith sank against her, grateful just to be held.

“I told you this because I know you are smart enough to understand it. I wanted you to hear it from me first. Because you can always, *always* talk about it with me. All right?”

Faith nodded against Claire’s neck.

A long, lovely moment –

Interrupted by a knock.

“Faith? Are ye in here?”

The knob turned – and there was Jamie, still in his bathrobe, three manuscripts under one arm. His eyes met Claire’s over Faith’s head.

“Ach – I’ll come back – ”

Faith pulled away a bit. “No – no, it’s OK. Tell Bree I’m coming.”

Then she squeezed Claire’s hand and padded across her bedroom – but not before stopping in the doorway, looking up at her Da, and quietly yet sincerely saying:

“Thank ye for doing sex with Mama to make me.”

Faith ran down the hall.

Jamie gaped at his daughter – then at his wife.

Claire settled back on the bed, giggling, hands gently caressing the tiny swell where Bairn Five rested.

“Here, love – let me help you pick up all those pages. Can’t have you getting those authors confused.”
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt**: Modern Glasgow AU Jamie and Claire having to deal with their teenage daughters, maybe some boy trouble... // For Gotham’s Modern Glasgow AU- few years in the future, someone catches teenage Bree & Roger on a “compromised” situation and Jamie goes full Highland Warrior father with them // For the Modern Glasgow au. Someone surprising teenage Brianna and Roger together and Jamie giving them a serious talk

Jamie Fraser eased his elbow out the open car window, humming tunelessly along with his favorite live recording of The Corries’ “Wild Mountain Thyme.”

It was a beautiful spring day. The sheep were lambing well – he’d had a good chat with Jenny about that this morning. The fields were just about ready to till – Ian was going to check on the tractors this afternoon. Claire had had an unusually quiet spell at the clinic in the village. Fergus and Marsali would be back at Lallybroch for a visit in a few weeks. Faith, Bree, William, and Julia were off school this week – he’d spent a good part of the previous night helping Julia select the next quadrant of the estate for her and Sinem to excavate over the next few days (so far they’d turned up a startling array of artifacts, from broken pipes to corroded ploughs to all sorts of animal bones to a beautiful string of what had to be, oddly enough, beads from the Mediterranean).

Now that the winter damp was finally dissipating, it was as good of a time as any to check the outbuildings on the estate – an array of guesthouses, storage sheds, and cottages where Murtagh, Suzette, the household staff, and various long-term visitors lived. Some had been winterized – might as well make a visit, open the windows, and air them out while the weather remained fair.

So, armed with a basket full of Mrs. Crook’s cock-a-leekie pie for lunch, Jamie found himself turning off the main road to look in on the stone crofter’s cottage that dated at least from the 1740s but which his father had lovingly restored into a guesthouse at least thirty years ago.

And frowning at the ancient red Morris Minor innocently parked near the front door.

Jamie cut the Land Rover’s engine and gingerly followed the fresh tire tracks to the car, which sported a cheery University of Glasgow bumper sticker.

His eyes narrowed.

Swiftly he approached the house and quietly pushed in the heavy wooden door – which he knew had to be unlocked.

Brianna’s coat lay crumpled in the entryway.

Then he turned to the left – to the room where he knew a large, comfortable couch sat before the old hearth that he, Murtagh, and William had repaired the previous summer.
All he saw was a tangle of red and dark curls, and a blur of pale flesh.

“Roger MacKenzie,” James Fraser growled. “I’ll thank ye to take yer hands off my daughter.”

Dr. Claire Fraser pulled her Volvo in between her husband’s Land Rover and Faith’s battered, yet dependable Volkswagen Jetta. She stretched as she stepped out of the car, and smiled as she spotted Julia’s blonde braids darting through the dooryard.

“What?” she called.

Eight-year-old Julia whirled backwards and ran to her beloved Mama, tackling her midsection with a tremendous hug.

“And hello to you too, darling. How has your day been?”

“We’ve got it all marked out and have started digging,” she replied, fishing in the pockets of her coveralls. “Found this so far. What do ye think it is?”

A small, corroded metal lump lay in the palm of Julia’s dusty hand. Claire gingerly picked it up, squinting.

“It looks like an old bullet,” she mused. “Wherever did you find it?”

“Oh, over in that plot behind the old coo barn. Da said his grandda told him that in olden times there was a smithy back there.”

Sinem emerged from the main house and padded over to them.

“Hi, Dr. Fraser.” Her voice was shy, her English still a bit hesitant – but clearly improving.

Julia turned to her best friend. “Are they still talking?”

“Yes – they’re still in the study room. But Mr. Murtagh was listening from the outside.”

“What?” Claire crouched down to be at eye level with the girls. “Who’s in the study?”

“Da and Bree and Roger,” Julia explained patiently.

“Roger? He’s here?”

“Oh, aye – Da found the two of them out in one of the cottages. Been holding them hostage until ye came home.” Julia paused, then produced a compass from one of her pockets. “Can we go now? The sun will set in two hours and we have a *lot* of work to do.”

Claire nodded, distracted, and walked as quick as she could toward the house.

She found Murtagh right outside Jamie’s study – just like Julia had said.

“What’s going on?” she hissed.

The older man’s busy eyebrows – long gone grey with age – rose in amusement. “He’s been tearing wee Roger a new one for acting improperly wi’ Brianna.”

“What?” Indignant – and wanting to defend her daughter – Claire raised her hand to open the door.
But was stopped by Murtagh resting a work-worn hand gently on hers.

“No need. They’re almost done. Jamie’s just about worn himself out wi’ warning the puir lad. And Brianna, brave lass – she’s been in wi’ him the whole time.”

Claire’s eyes bugged. “She *what*? Just what exactly were they doing out there, anyway?”

“Just fooling around – kid stuff. Roger swears up and down that nothing serious happened.”

Now Claire rolled her eyes. “A likely story.”


“…no’ fair to punish me, Da. I’m grown –”

“Seventeen is *no’* grown, Bree. No’ as long as ye live in my house. It hurts me to think that ye couldn’t have Roger here, to be open about it.”

“Because I wanted to avoid *this,* Da.” Claire could just picture the look of exasperation on Brianna’s face.

“Ye ken weel that I dinna want to hide anything about my love for Bree,” Roger added quietly. “I love her and she loves me and we’re proud of that. Only – weel. Only there are so many people in this house, Mr. Fraser. We just wanted some time alone to ourselves.”

“Ye could have just asked, lad.” Claire knew that tone of voice – and knew that Jamie was probably ruffling his hand through his hair as he spoke. “I ken ye love and respect my daughter. Ye just gave me the hell of a shock today.”

“I’m sorry –”

“And for God’s sake I hope ye’re still a maiden, Bree. Because I swear if ye’ve lain together outside of marriage –”

Knowing this was her cue, Claire innocently breezed through the door.

Jamie stood behind his desk, face flushed, hair all a mess, arms folded across his chest.

Brianna and Roger, seated in the high-backed chairs in front of the desk, turned to face Claire. Roger looked tired. Brianna looked annoyed – then relieved.

“Mama!” she exclaimed.

“Hello Roger!” Claire replied in her best cheery doctor tone of voice. “What a lovely surprise! I hope I’m not interrupting –”

Roger rose to greet Claire with a kiss on the cheek. “Actually, Dr. Fraser, we were just finishing – I need to go soon, to get back to Glasgow. Just a quick trip.”

Bree quickly rose to take his hand.

“I’ll just go see Roger to his car,” she explained, dragging him out of the study and past her hysterically laughing godfather, lurking in the hallway.

Claire met her husband’s eyes, hands on her hips.
Waiting.

His eyes narrowed, seeming more blue than she had ever seen.

“If I find them again – ”

“And you’re telling me you *never*, not once, snuck off to a haystack with some girl, James Fraser?”

He pursed his lips. Swallowed. Sank weakly into his chair, burying his head in his hands.

Claire quietly walked around the desk, opened his bottom drawer, and pulled out the bottle of Laphroaig.

Jamie sighed, leaned his head back against the chair, and unscrewed the top.
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: This one is for the Modern Glasgow world. We’ve seen a few of Jamie’s incidences from the books in this story and how Claire helped him through it. Could we see one of Claire’s and how Jamie reacts and helps her? // Hi! Love Modern Glasgow! We’ve seen some of Jamie’s misadventures from the book get translated into this story. Could we see one of Claire’s? How does Jamie and the family react?

“And ye’re sure ye dinna need some extra help? There’s no shame in asking – the drought this year has made it hard for everyone.”

“I ken that – but I’ll manage.” Joe Fraser extended his work-roughened hand to grip Jamie’s. “And I thank ye for yer offer. But Rosie and me – weel, we always plan for this. The coos will have a bit of a lean year, but nobody will starve.”

Jamie nodded and opened the driver door of his battered Land Rover. “We’re settled at the Big House now – I’m just a phone call away.”

“Oh, that’s right! Ye and the missus and how many bairns, now? Three?”

“Five,” Jamie laughed. “Can ye believe it?”

Joe slid his hands into his pockets, shaking his head. “Mary, Michael, and Bride! Yer poor wife.”

“She had more of a say in it than I did, Joe. She kent weel what she was I for when she took up wi’ me. And she’s the head doctor at the clinic in Broch Mordha now – but I’m sure ye’ve heard already. Broken bones, cuts, you name it and she can fix it.” He slammed the door shut and turned on the ignition, leaning out through the open window to wave goodbye.

“I’ll be back in a week or so – and let me know how the animals are getting on, aye? We always plan for this as weel.”

Joe waved a final hearty goodbye and trudged back to his barn, the setting sun striking the dust brought up by his boots.

Jamie sighed, ran his hands through his hair, and reached for the glove box, fishing around for his phone. Thumbing it to life, he couldn’t help but smile at the lock screen – a selfie Fergus had taken of him and his four siblings. They all had massive grins on their faces, even ten-month-old Julia, proudly showing her five teeth.

It hadn’t been easy adjusting to life in the Scottish Highlands when living in their cramped Glasgow flat – or in Paris, in Fergus’ case – had been the only life his children had ever known. But he and Claire knew they had made the right decision – right for their family, and right for the
two of them. Selling his stake in the printing business had netted quite the tidy sum, and she was more than willing to give up her high-pressure surgery job for a quieter pace at the rural clinic. That they both spent much more time with the children – watching them grow, guiding them, showing them how to live – made every single sacrifice worth it.

But now Jamie frowned – ten missed calls, just in the hour or so he’d spent with Joe.

Four from the Big House’s number. Two from Fergus. Two from Jenny. One each from Ian and Murtagh.

Christ.

He swallowed and quickly called Murtagh.

“Thank God,” his godfather’s voice crackled through the line. “Ye need to come home.”

Jamie’s heart stopped. “What is it? The bairns?”

“No, lad. No. They’re fine. It’s Claire.”

With shaking hands, Jamie activated the Range Rover’s BlueTooth and tore out of poor Joe’s driveway.

“Tell me everything!” he desperately shouted into the speakerphone, swerving around the potholes in the dirt road connecting Joe’s farm to the motorway.

“She got a call, around midday. An old woman having heart trouble – perhaps a stroke. She left the number here and drove out to make a house call.”

Jamie roared down the motorway, limbs shaking.

“When she didna come back an hour ago, we started calling her mobile. No answer. And then Jenny called the woman’s house – her son said she was fine, and that Claire had left two hours before that, and said she was coming straight home. So nobody has seen or heard from her for three hours.”

“We need to go find her!” Jamie screamed, passing two sedans full of tourists and simply not caring that he was at double the speed limit.

“Aye, lad. We do. Calm down. I’ve got Ian and Jenny and Suzette here, waiting for ye. We can each drive out and search. Fergus wants to go – “

“No. Put him on the phone. Please. I’ll be there in five minutes.”

Muffled sounds – then Fergus’ surprisingly deep voice. Jamie blinked, remembering that his eldest son was now eighteen. A man grown.

“Papa?”

“Listen to me, Fergus. Do yer brother and sisters ken what’s going on?”

“No – they’ve been playing with their cousins. I want to help you search - ”

“No, Fergus. You must stay behind. They canna know what’s going on. Do you understand?”

“But –”
“Damn it, Fergus. You need to protect them. They need an adult to watch over them – to keep them safe. And that adult – that *man* - that’s you, *mon fils*.” Do ye understand me?"

Silence. Then – “Yes. I understand.”

“Good lad. I’m just turning off the road. Can ye ask them to meet me outside?”

Thirty seconds later, he pulled up to the main house and jumped out of the Land Rover, leaving the engine running. It was full dark now, but he recognized the silhouettes waiting in the driveway.

No time to feel, now. Just to think – and to act. And to find Claire.

Five agonizing minutes to plan – four separate cars, driven by Jamie, Ian, Jenny, and Murtagh. Suzette would ride with her husband and continue calling all the places where Claire could have gone – including Mrs. Crook in the main house, just in case Claire appeared at home.

Ian handed each driver their own walkie-talkie – the best way to communicate, given the patchy mobile service.

Then their caravan crunched down the gravel driveway and back to the main road, tracing Claire’s movements.

So many memories flashed in front of Jamie’s eyes – Claire burning dinner in their first apartment; Claire bravely introducing her family to her ex-fiancee, just a few months before; Claire’s ecstatic smile as she showed him William for the first time; Claire’s beautiful face, just this morning, as he gave her what they had come to call a Full English Breakfast…

If she was gone –

No.

For the bairns’ sake, he would push on. But not for his own.

So he prayed, fervently, in every language he knew. For God had brought them together – why would He dare to pull them apart?

Up and down the small country lanes, high beams bobbing in the pitch dark.

A light drizzle had started.

Was she cold? Was she shivering?

He kept dialing her mobile. Over and over. And every time it went straight to voicemail.

“You’ve reached Dr. Claire Fraser. I’m not available at the moment – ”

“You’ve reached Dr. Claire Fraser – ”

There was no life without her.

“You’ve reached – ”

And then he turned a corner – and she was there.

Face glowing with the soft light emanating from the boot of her Volvo, rummaging around for something.
It took everything Jamie had to not run off the road as he slammed on the brake and fell out of the car, running toward his wife like a man possessed.

“Jamie?”

Then he caught her up in a tremendous bear hug, and didn’t let her go.

“Are ye all right? For God’s sake, Claire, are ye all right?”

“No,” she gasped. “Jamie – you’re crushing me.”

So he did let go – and her face swam with his tears.

“Hush,” she whispered, framing his face with cold hands. “Hush. It’s all right now. I’ve just got two flat tires and no mobile service. I’m fine.”

“Are ye all right? Truly?”

“Yes,” she said softly, patiently. “I’m cold and I’m starving. You didn’t happen to bring any food, did you? I could murder some neeps and tatties right about now.”

He let out a strangled laugh, and kissed her long and hard.

“Ye gave me quite the fright,” he whispered against her temple. “I did think ye were maybe dead.”

“Why are you so dramatic?” she teased, digging her hands in the back pockets of his jeans. “You know I can fend for myself.”


“Hush, love. I know.”

Ten seconds – he counted and cherished every one of her heartbeats.

“I need to be inside ye now, Claire. I – I need to feel whole.”

She kissed him gently. “Tonight. Let’s get home. I want you to take care of me. Can you do that?”

“Aye,” he pledged. “Aye, I can do that.”

She nodded. “Good. Now can you please tell whoever is on the walkie that I’m all right, and I need a tow? I just want to go home, and kiss the children, and then be one with you.”

He inhaled the curls at the top of her head – damp with the rain – and trotted back to the Land Rover. Murmured a few words into the walkie – and Claire couldn’t help but smile when four cheers crackled back.

“And don’t think I won’t scold ye when we get home,” Jamie admonished. “I’m just too happy to have ye here wi’ me to say anything else. But don’t think ye’re getting off easy for scaring me half to death.”

She sauntered over and wrapped her arms around his neck. “I look forward to it,” she whispered, grinding her hips against his.

He playfully smacked her bum, then wrapped her legs around his hips and hoisted her up against him, leaning against the Land Rover, devouring her mouth.
Not even the beeps and high beams and cheers of Ian, Jenny, Murtagh, and Suzette broke them apart.

“Shall we leave the two of ye out here alone, then?” Murtagh jibed – silently sagging with relief against Suzette.

Claire pulled away, grinning. “If I knew it took me disappearing for him to get all riled up like this – I’d do it more often!”

“No’ bloody likely,” Jamie growled, pulling his wife back for more.
Chapter 78

original prompt: Imagine Jamie and Claire while she’s in medical school. She's exhausted, he's working his good looking bum off but still being an awesome supportive hubs. Claire may need to slow down and relax a bit eh? Thanks!

Claire distractedly stirred the saucepan of oatmeal on the stove, glancing between the solidifying lumps and the dog-eared, color-coded study guide she had spent the better part of the past week memorizing.

It was Friday morning, 6:30 AM. Her final exam was at eight o’clock on the following Monday, and she had been at the library until two AM studying with her classmates. By the time she’d arrived home at half-past two, she hadn’t even bothered going into the bedroom lest she wake Jamie – just texted him that she’d arrived home safe, and literally crashed on the sofa.

He’d been working almost around the clock these past few weeks – personally supervising the printing of a three-volume special commemorative edition of Robert Burns’ poetry, complete with new illustrations by some up-and-coming contemporary artist based in Edinburgh. What with his hours at the printshop – checking the spacing, combing over each line in the galleys, adjusting the ink ratios so that the artist’s work would be that much more vibrant – and her extra hours of lab time and studying in the cramped, windowless library, they had barely spoken in almost two weeks.

Two weeks of passing by each other in their flat, like roommates sharing a space. No shared meals. No shared sleeping space. No sharing of hearts – of minds – of bodies.

Christ, she missed him. It was the longest they’d gone without making love since they married, almost two years before.

Christ, she wanted him.

But now – the oatmeal hissed, and she flicked off the burner and set down the study guide on the counter – amid piles of dirty dishes. She pivoted to the coffeemaker, poured herself a large cup, and turned to lean against the sink –

- to see her husband, barefoot, hair tousled, sleepily smiling at her from the doorway.

“I didna hear ye come in last night,” he said, voice thick with sleep.

“It was this morning, to be exact – and I didn’t want to wake you.”

He scratched his belly, lifting up his sleep shirt to do so.
“It’s only three more days, Jamie – then I’ll be all done. Then *we* can – ”

“I canna wait for that, Claire,” he uncharacteristically interrupted. “I’m tired of no’ sleeping wi’ ye by my side. I’m tired of seeing those dark circles under yer beautiful eyes. I’m tired of no’ even knowing what’s on yer mind, since we havena talked much these few weeks.”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “It’s only – ”

“I just said, I canna wait for three days.” He stepped closer to her, and closer, and finally stood right in front of her, anchoring his hands on her hips.

The heat of him – once so familiar – shocked her.

Her heart called out to his – its twin.

Her body instinctively began preparing itself for him.

His eyes bore into hers – not speaking. Their lips mutually parted in a soft gasp. Her breath quickened.

“Stay home today, Claire,” he whispered. “Wi’ me.”

“Jamie,” she swallowed the sudden lump in her throat.

Christ, had his eyes always been so blue?

“Jamie,” she said again, “it’s only – ”

“I want to make love to ye, Claire. All day. Starting now. Are ye really telling me no?”

Her mouth opened – and closed – and none of her feeble excuses seemed to matter.

She watched him watch her – his pupils dilated, his chest rapidly rising and falling.

“All day, hmm?”

Then he smiled, and she realized that this moment – this man – was all that mattered.

“I’ll gladly take ye up on that challenge,” he murmured, bending to capture her lips in a long, long, long kiss.

—

Sometime later he peeled away from her, slipped out of their bedroom, and returned a few minutes later with a tray full of half-eaten jars and take-away containers.

“This is all I could find in the refrigerator that didn’t look dodgy,” he winced, setting the tray down on the bed beside her.

Claire evaluated the meager spread – a half-eaten jar of roasted red peppers, a carton of rice from the Chinese food she’d ordered on Monday night, a tin of Jenny’s strawberry jam from Lallybroch, and a roll of shortbread biscuits.

“This is ridiculous,” she mused. “I can’t believe I’ve let so many things slide.”
He kissed her forehead. “It’s no’ just yer fault – it’s the two of us. Dinna fash – let’s finish up, and then we can nip down to the grocers.”

She sat up a bit and quirked an eyebrow. “I thought you promised to make love to me all day,” she teased.

He flushed – Claire watched it spread from the crown of his head all the way down to his belly. “Weel – the wee man may need a bit of rest, is all.”

“The ‘wee man’?” Claire exclaimed. “Not so wee, last I could tell – and I’d be in a position to tell, wouldn’t you agree?”

Jaime carefully lifted the tray and set it on the soft carpet, before tackling his wife to the mattress, both giggling like idiots.

“Better – have another round of – of evaluation, don’t ye say?” he wheezed.

She hooked her legs around his hips – stilling him. Gradually the smiles drained from their faces, and she looked up at him.

“I’m sorry, Jamie. For neglecting you. Nothing is more important than you.”

He swallowed – closing his eyes, full of so much feeling.

“I know, Claire. I know.”

He kissed her forehead, then her eyebrows, then the tip of her nose.

Her arms twined around his shoulders, bringing them so, so close.

“Right now is the only time I feel whole,” she whispered shyly. “School is important – but you’re my life.”

“Hush, *mo nighean donn,*” he breathed into her ear. “I know. As you are mine. I know.”

Her phone buzzed on the bedside table – and before she could reach it, he snatched it away from her hand.

“Look at this – 12 messages from Geillis.”

“Shes my study group partner, you know that – ”

“Aye.” Quickly he tapped a reply and threw the phone onto the carpet – attacking her neck with kisses.

“Jamie!” she squirmed. “What did you tell her?”

He nipped playfully at her collarbone. “I’m busy in bed with my husband.”

She sighed, happy, and not caring.

He smiled, ecstatic, and blew a raspberry on her tummy.

Her full laugh was the most beautiful sound in the world.
Claire woke like clockwork at six on Monday morning. She blinked in the dim light of the bedroom, sweating. Jamie’s arm was solid around her middle, holding her against his chest, her legs curved up against his.

Even in sleep he needed to feel her skin against his. He’d held her close before they’d married, of course – but now it was different. Everything was different between them.

His hunger for her was something she hadn’t anticipated. He was a healthy young male – naturally his desire for her would be difficult to quench. But her own deep desire for him seemed to only feed his need for her – and drove them to near madness during the precious, amazing times that their bodies joined.

She hadn’t wanted to leave their bedroom at all yesterday, preferring to spend the hours languidly exploring Jamie’s body, tangled in the sheets that smelled sharply of their desire. But he’d insisted that they not only get up – but that they go to church.

“It’s no’ as if ye haven’t gone wi’ me before, Claire,” he’d said softly, thumb tracing the bumps of her spine as he held her close. Daylight glowed faintly through the closed drapes. “I want – I want to give thanks for ye coming into my life. And as much as I want to lie wi’ ye here all day - I want things to feel…fresh between us.”

“Fresh? Because you think we’d grow tired of each other?” she’d teased.

Slowly he’d kissed her eyebrows, then the tip of her nose. “No – only, it’s like when I was a bairn and I ate half a jar of honey wi’ my breakfast once. I learned that ye can have too much of a good thing.”

“Are you comparing me to a jar of honey, then?”

He kissed her lips, long and slow, smiling. “God knows ye taste just as sweet, Claire.”

She laughed throatily. “Perhaps we can get breakfast after Mass?”

He buried his nose in her curls, inhaling deeply. “Aye. Ye ken that the whole time we’re out, all I’ll be able to think of is getting ye back here.”

She sighed. “You love the anticipation, don’t you?”

He kissed her forehead. “I hope I never stop wanting ye like this, Claire.”
She burrowed tighter against him. “I don’t think I ever will, Jamie.”

She certainly hadn’t since last night – or this morning – or whenever it was that they had soundlessly turned to each other, and loved for a long, long time in the dark.

The long day they had spent strolling Glasgow together – first attending Mass (where they both lighted a candle for their parents), then to a cozy café where Jamie ordered a full English breakfast (Claire had enjoyed how brightly he had blushed when she asked whether he hadn’t gotten his fill of proper English breakfasts that morning) and Claire ordered French toast. Then a delirious day full of laughter and stolen kisses and coffee and ice cream and feeling like they lived on a cloud.

They went to bed when the sun was still up – and loved and loved until the moon rose.

Now they had one more day together – a paltry Monday – before heading back to work on Tuesday.

Claire Fraser was determined to make the most of it.

Gently she untangled Jamie’s arm from around her middle – and pushed back the sheets.

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Monday noon – surely the lovebirds would be up and about by now. Or so Murtagh Fraser mused to himself as he slid his key into the front door of the flat.

The poncy hotel Claire had tried to pay for – but he insisted on covering himself, as his wedding gift to them – had insisted he check out at eleven. So he had made the most of his morning, ordering room service (coffee, toast, eggs, beans, bacon) and watching the morning shows, wondering how much it would cost to buy a bathrobe that was just as soft as this one.

Yes, noon was late enough.

The kitchen and living room were tidy – no surprise there, he mentally snickered. Those two likely hadn’t left their bedroom since returning from that fancy party on Saturday evening.

He padded toward his bedroom – across from the spare room where Jamie and Claire lived.

Someone had taped their namecards from the party – names printed in a bold calligraphy – on the door.

James Fraser.

Claire Beauchamp Fraser.

Those two have it bad, he realized. But in a good way – like Brian had for Ellen. Like –

Then Claire’s voice – low, breathy – cried out Jamie’s name behind the door.

Murtagh flushed, pushed into his bedroom, and quietly locked the door behind him.
Chapter 80

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: Modern AU: Perhaps Jamie gets laid off/ fired from his job and the family has to cope with his unemployment

“…dinna care one bit – he canna go about beating up lads in the schoolyard anymore. It doesna matter what his brothers did at his age –”

“Ach – I can come back.”

Rupert MacKenzie, publisher of Leoch Editions, looked up to find his star editor crouching in the low doorway of his office.

“Scarlett, love – I’ll have to call ye back. Jamie is here…” Rupert waved at one of the two chairs on the other side of his desk, watching Jamie close the door and carefully hoist the large stack of manuscripts to the floor.

“No, ye have to tell Moira that she’s still grounded. And ask Senga to tell me all about her test when I get home tonight. All right?…I love ye, my dove. See you tonight.”

Rupert hung up the phone and rubbed his face with his hands. “I swear to God, Jamie – I love all the bairns, I really do – but they’re just so difficult to manage sometimes.”

“I’ve only got the four to deal with,” Jamie smiled tightly. “I canna imagine how you and Scarlett deal with twice that number.”

“I dinna think we do, to be honest – being at home is like having the inmates run the asylum.” Rupert cracked his back and narrowed his eyes at Jamie. Curious.

Jamie looked right back, with that damn blank stare that had won over so many skeptical writers and book distributors – but which never ceased annoying the hell out of him.

“What can I do for ye, Mr. Fraser?”

Jamie sat up a bit straighter. “Weel – speaking of bairns. Claire – *we* are expecting again.”

Rupert stood bolt upright and reached over his desk to clap Jamie on the back. “Congratulations, lad! What wonderful news!”

Jamie flushed – clearly pleased. “We werena expecting it – it’s been almost seven years since William, and we had promised no more, but –”

“Ah, I ken fine what ye mean. After every bairn Scarlett swears she’ll cut off my ballocks, but then
she’s always pregnant again within a year, so…”

Jamie coughed. “*Anyway*, this time the doctors have asked her to take extra care, on account of her age and her troubles with Faith.”

“Aye – I mind that. A bit scary, as I recall – though you’d never know it now, to look at her.”

“So Claire and I were thinking – with a fifth bairn coming, we’ll be spending a lot more time up at Lallybroch. I want her to be up there and rest. And I want to be up there with her. To give the kids fresh air.”

Rupert thought for ten seconds.

“So are ye quitting, then?”

Jamie licked his lips. “No – I’m just asking for a smaller job.”

Rupert skeptically raised his shaggy brows. “*That*’s no’ something I hear all the time. Especially from someone like you – ye ken that ye’re the top editor I have. What you were able to do with Ned Gowan’s latest mess of a book, and how you were able to finally land Tom Christie –”

“I hear ye, and yes it’s important. But it’s not the most important thing to me anymore. Claire is – my family is. Fergus will be going to uni in less than two years. Jenny’s kids are growing up. I canna miss that.”

Rupert briefly turned away to rummage through the pile of papers on his desk – quickly finding the single page he was looking for.

The list of Jamie’s current projects – from those that were just barely ideas, to those ready for publication, to those currently on book tour.

“I want to do right by ye, man – ye ken I do. I havena given so much of my life to this company, to just throw it all away.”

Rupert nodded, chewing his lip, studying the list. “So what do ye propose?”

“I keep the big names – Ned, Tom Christie, John Grey, Neil Forbes. I manage them as I do now – only from a mix of Glasgow and Lallybroch. None of them are local, anyway. Well, Ned is – but he willna care.”

“And if they’re not happy with the level of service?”

“Trust me – they’ll be happy. Have I ever let ye down?”

Rupert thought about it – and realized he had nothing to counter.

“And what about the other authors? The other tasks?”

“Give it to Willie – ye ken he’s chomping at the bit to prove himself. Or Manfred. Or anyone – I dinna care who. Ye’ll do it the right way.”

Rupert doodled on the list.

“And ye can cut my pay to reflect it.”

Startled, Rupert met Jamie’s eyes – so damn blue.
“Nonsense. Ye’re dealing with the most important names we have – I canna do that to ye. No’ wi’ a new bairn on the way.”

Jamie curled his hands into gentle fists. “Whatever suits ye, then. Dinna say I dinna offer.”

Then he rose and extended one big hand.

“Ye willna regret this, Rupert.”

Still dazed, Rupert had no choice but to shake the proffered hand.

“I dinna think I will, Jamie.”

And with that, Jamie Fraser nodded and quickly, quietly padded out of the office.

Rupert looked back down on the list – now covered with doodles – and shook his head.

Jamie paused on the landing at the end of the hallway to text Claire:

*we’re on, mnd. I’ll be yours now all day, every day*

Her immediate reply led him to pack up his things and cancel his afternoon meetings:

*youve always been mine. all mine. come home and show me*
Chapter 81

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

original prompt: For Modern Glasgow AU, imagine possessive Claire at a hospital celebration for her after taking her oath. Possibly Leghair is involved again... And we know what that does to Dr. Fraser // Would love to find out what happens on the day that Claire graduates from medical school (with Jamie, Murtagh and the children in tow!). Thank you!

Soon-to-be-Dr. Claire Fraser squinted at the line of classmates lined up in the auditorium hallway, chattering idly as they killed the thirty minutes before the ceremony began.

Almost all the way to the front of the line – no longer at the very font, now that she was a Fraser rather than a Beauchamp. Right in front of an exit stairway the line sank – two young women perched in twin hard plastic chairs, engrossed in conversation.

“Excuse me?”

Both heads swiveled upwards, irritated.

“What letter is this? I’m Claire Fraser. I know I don’t have to go all the way to the front – ”

“I’m Malva Christie,” the brunette replied. “And this is Geneva Dunsany. You’re probably behind us.”

“Nice to meet you both.” Claire smiled tightly, suddenly feeling very tired and not in the least bit sociable.

“Pleasure,” Geneva replied automatically. “Are you a nurse like us?”

“No – I’m graduating from the medical program. I’m planning to be a surgeon.”

“Hmm.” Malva tilted her head, turning away – idly scanning the crowd.

Claire mentally counted to five.

“I don’t mean to be rude, Malva, Geneva – but would one of you mind letting me take a seat? It’s not exactly easy for me to stand for long periods these days.”

“Oh – um, sure.” Geneva shrugged and rose, moving to stand on Malva’s other side. Claire unceremoniously plopped down, stretching her legs and resting her hands on the eight-month swell of her second daughter.

“Thank you,” Claire smiled at the younger woman. “If I may say so – you don’t sound like you’re from Glasgow. I’m originally from Oxfordshire myself.”

Geneva shrugged. “I’m from the Lake District – followed a loser boyfriend to Glasgow.”
“She’s being modest,” Malva chimed in. “She has a *thing* for gingers, and that man was no exception.”

“A *thing*?”

“Oh, aye,” Malva continued, as Geneva blushed. “She loses all sense when she sees one. Strangest thing.”


Now Malva squirmed in her seat, and Claire politely turned away. Silently she watched fellow graduates mill around in the hallway, trying to find their place, laughing and joking, slapping each other on the back.

She had made her own joyful farewell not too long before, kissing Faith’s tiny brow and then Jamie’s cheek before he and Murtagh stole away to their seats.

Pulling out her phone, she checked the time – fifteen minutes to go.

Then five text messages – selfies with different combinations of Jamie, Faith, and Murtagh. And one from Jamie, full of hearts.

How she loved her family.

How she couldn’t believe she had finally made this day! What with all the sacrifices she and Jamie had made, both personally and financially – and then somehow figuring out how to balance caring for an infant and finishing her coursework – it was truly a miracle that she was able to graduate with her class.

“…see that ginger stunner when we arrived, though? I ken ye’ve sworn off them – ”

“Of *course* I did, Mal. I’ve eyes in my head.”

“Only, I was thinking – maybe you could approach him, afterwards? He seemed to be alone…”

Claire bit the inside of her lip, absently rubbing her belly. Graduation gowns weren’t exactly designed for pregnant women – she counted four separate beads of sweat running down her chest and back.

Bairn Two was especially active…

“Oh my God! He’s here!!” Malva squeaked.

“Shut up! Oh my God,” Geneva fidgeted with her hair – a useless exercise when wearing a mortarboard. “Can you talk to him? Get him to stop?”

“Don’t worry – I’ll take care of that.” Claire waited confidently, and then –


“I’m fine – we both are.” Claire reached out a hand. Jamie took it, kissed it. Vibrating with joy.

So happy to be sharing this moment.
“All right!” A uniformed usher materialized, waving at random. “Graduates! Places please!”

Jamie rose and bent to kiss her forehead.

He extended one arm, and she gripped it, and let him help her stand.

She tilted her chin – and he gave her a good and proper kiss.

“I’ll see you soon – Dr. Fraser.”

And he darted away.

Claire turned to face forward – and a gaping Malva and Geneva.

And smiled.
Chapter 82

original posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

**original prompt**: Jamie ruminating on the similarities between Ellen and Brianna (not just the superficial things) or a conversation between Jenny and Jamie about their mother and Brianna

Jamie sipped his latte and smiled at his wife. Voices of children and their adults echoed in the main hall, carrying all the way up to the vaulted ceiling and bouncing off the skylights. Cool air breezed through the open door.

“When was the last time we had a proper date?” he teased, taking a bite of raspberry crumble.

Claire rolled her eyes, taking a long draught of her favorite Assam tea. “Some date – an outing with the bairns to their favorite museum in the whole world, where we turn them loose for two hours and don’t even have to pay to get in.”

Jamie pushed the half-eaten slab of crumble across the table. “Yes – but when was the last time you and I were alone in Glasgow together?”

Claire picked up the crumble and took a bite, thinking. Just about eight years since they had permanently relocated to Lallybroch, when she was expecting Julia. Eight years since they had moved out of this exact neighborhood – abutting the majestic Kelvingrove Museum – trading the leafy streets of Glasgow’s newly-resurgent West End for the fields and rolling hills of the Fraser ancestral estate.

She never regretted it – never had second thoughts about giving up her surgery job for a slower-paced, yet undeniably more rewarding job as head physician at the clinic in Broch Mordha. Just as she know that Jamie never regretted leaving Leoch Publishing – the job he had fought so hard to win – in favor of running Lallybroch, while still managing the careers of a few top-name authors.

“Too long,” she whispered. Her foot found his beneath the table, and his eyes darkened as they watched her.

Surrounded by throngs of tourists and schoolchildren – yet they were the only two people in the room.

And then a baby in a pram shrieked, breaking the spell.

Jamie coughed.

“Weel – as predicted, wee Julia went straight for the fossils – Fergus is a good lad to go wi’ her, even though he’s been so many times already.”

Claire reached her right hand, palm up, across the table. Proudly displaying the “J” tattooed at the base of her thumb.
“And William went upstairs to the history rooms. He told me there’s a lovely exhibit about Charles Mackintosh and all the buildings and furniture he designed.”

Jamie reached across with his left hand – where the tattooed “C”, dark against his fair skin, caught her eye. Then he twined his fingers in hers.

“Faith told me she was going for the fine art this time – the Dali, especially. It’s so haunting.”

Jamie squeezed Claire’s hand. So relaxed. So happy to be here, in this moment, with her.

“And Brianna is torn between the animals and the machines – I know she so loves the hall where the hippo dangles from the ceiling. Is that the same one with the Spitfire airplane?”

“No – that’s in the other hall. But it’s magical, is it no’? To see the plane almost in flight?”

Still gripping Jamie’s hand, Claire took another sip of tea. “It is. And she’s always liked the machines – understanding them, how they work. The same way with the big animals, I suppose.”

“Aye.” And all at once he paled, and swallowed, and had to look away.

“Jamie?” Alarmed, Claire set down her tea and reached across the table to turn his chin to face her. “Are you all right?”

He licked suddenly parched lips. “I am. It’s only…”

Deep inhale – then exhale. Calming himself. Claire ran her thumb over the back of his knuckles, soothing.

She waited. And waited. And waited. Until –

“Ye ken today is my Mam’s birthday?”

So that was it – his mind was full of thoughts of his mother, and here he was on an outing with his own family –

“Of course I do. Is that why – ”

“I dinna ken why, today of all days – but all morning, Brianna has minded me of my Mam. No’ just in how she looks – ye ken fine she’s the spit of her. But in her speech, and in her interests. How she brought her wee bag wi’ her sketchpad and pencils and her wee stool so that she could sit in the gallery and draw.”

He closed his eyes – lashes shining with unshed tears.

“I’m sad she never met our bairns. Never shared a day wi’ them like today. That she and my Da never lived to see their grandchildren.”

Claire raised their joined hands to her lips. “Jamie – ”

“And I’m no’ an idiot – I ken one of the reasons why Bree leapt at the chance to come wi’ us to the museum is because Roger Wakefield studies just a few hundred yards away at the University. And I’m convinced that if Bree is anything like her Grannie, then she’ll run away wi’ her own dark-haired man and leave her family behind.”

“Stop it. She’d never do that. Roger would never let her do it.”
Now his eyes opened, brows lifted. “When was the last time our Brianna Ellen *ever* let anyone tell her what to do?”

Claire pursed her lips, and sighed.

“She loves him, Jamie. And he loves her. She’s a year away from graduating – nothing can stop her.”

He rested his other hand atop hers. “Aye. She’s a stubborn Fraser, through and through.”

Claire tilted her head, barely holding back a smile.

“But who are we to judge? You proposed to me the day after we met, after all.”

*That* was unexpected – his mouth opened and closed in surprise.

And then, adorably, he blushed.

“Well then. I suppose if he loves her only a fraction of how much I love you, *mo nighean donn*... it would be hard, but I could live wi’ that.”

She squeezed his hand – and looked at the man whose shy, yet confident proposal she had accepted more than twenty years before – and realized that she loved him more at that moment than she ever had.
“Dr. Fraser – ”

“I said* I’m fine, Constable. Perfectly fine.”

“Beg pardon, ma’am – I’m no’ doctor, but yer hands are shaking.”

Claire swallowed, lay her – trembling – hands flat on the table in the break room, and breathed deeply.

Turning inward, is what she always called it – taking stock from head to toe, checking for soul-deep wounds and bruises when physical trauma had (praise God) not occurred.

Heart racing – breath shallow. Both normal symptoms post-trauma, considering she had been *right there* when the crazed man had stormed into the A&E, wielding a meat cleaver.

Palms cold and clammy – not bad, considering the circumstances.

Scrubs sticky with blood, from where she had knelt to apply pressure on the wounds.

But most importantly – the baby slept within her. Just over five months gone, she was just barely showing – and she (and Jamie) were attuned to every movement of this little one.

Christ, Jamie. He had to know by now –

“I’ll be fine.” Infusing her voice with bravery she didn’t believe – just wanting to get out of here, out of this room, out of these clothes. “It’s just shock – I’m going into shock. I should know.”

The Constable raised one dark, skeptical eyebrow.

“Ye were right there when Mr. Hodgepile allegedly came into the waiting room – ”

“Allegedly, my arse. I saw him right before my eyes come in, raving about God knows what, demanding the prescription medications we keep at the nurse’s station.”

He shifted a bit in his seat. “And I understand ye were standing right beside the victims.”

Claire closed her eyes. Her left hand drifted to settle on her belly, thumb tracing her wedding ring. Craving Jamie.

“I was asking Nurse Ellesmere to adjust the dosage of pain medication for an elderly patient. The –
the man just started hacking at her when she refused to hand it over.”

She swallowed – seeing so much blood.

“Ye ken she’ll be all right –”

“Of *course* she will – I cared for her, after all.”

“Indeed.”

Her eyes still closed, Claire enjoyed the simple peace of the small room. The scrape of the constable’s pencil in his notepad. The scent of that disgusting industrial-grade cleanser used to sanitize the floors. The murmur – like bees in a hive – of voices and footsteps and distant ringing of telephones down the hallway.

Familiar, comforting sounds. But not the sounds of home – the shrieks of her two girls, the deep rumble of Jamie’s laughter, the gentle hum of the ancient refrigerator in their kitchen.

“Dr. Fraser?”

Claire opened her eyes – focusing on the young, eager man on the other side of the table.

“I think I’ve got all I’ll need for now – though I may ring you up later, once we’ve completed more of our investigation.”

“I know you have a job to do, but trust me – he’s guilty as sin. And stupid as fuck, since he picked a hospital to attack. The poor bastard is probably getting better medical care right now than at any other point of his life.”

The Constable rose and extended a hand. Claire took it, shook it firmly, and stepped out into the hallway.

The chaos had died down, to be sure – but uniformed police officers still stood at the nurse’s station, photographing the pools of blood and discarded cloths Claire had used to stanch the bleeding.

Clearly her colleagues had already gone home – she recognized nobody in the waiting area, save for a few hospital administrators. And then looked up beyond the cordon –

The most beautiful sight she had seen all day.

Jamie’s hair was all mussed. Even from here she could see the tendons straining on his neck – feel his soul calling out to hers.

Somehow she ducked under the cordon and within two heartbeats was crushed to Jamie’s chest.

His throat rumbled with the *Gaidhlig* - first sweet, sweet words of endearment. Then –

She pulled back, brows creased. “What?”

His blue eyes darkened. “I *said,* what in hell were ye thinking? How dare ye do something harebrained like try to fight off a knife-wielding bandit? And you with child, too! Have ye no sense at all?”

“Let go!” she hissed, fighting against him. “What do you mean, how dare *I* do something harebrained? I took an oath to do not harm, to heal others – and what right do *you* have to tell me
what to do?”

Still he held her close, refusing to release her arms. “What right do *I* have, ye ask? I lay claim to the child in yer belly – and to our other two wee bairns, unless ye’ve forgotten? They need a mother, and I need a wife, much more than this world needs you as a hero!”

His grip was iron on her arms and shoulders. “Let go of me! I have a fucking MD degree! I’m not an idiot, I assessed the situation and acted rationally – ”

“I dinna doubt ye did,” he hissed. “But ye canna blame me for panicking when I’m giving the girls their wee bath and I get an emergency text on my phone, so I roll them up in a towel and race over to Murtagh and throw them through his door and then race over here, not knowing what in hell is going on and worrying ye are alive or deid, and then waiting behind the cordon and hearing the doctors say ye had saved the lives of three people and – ”

Suddenly exhausted, he slumped against the wall in the corridor. Eyes closed.

His hold on her relaxed – but now it was her turn to hold him. Cradle him to her, like she had with their daughters – like she would with this new baby. His hands skimmed up her sides – one resting on the baby, the other on her shoulder.

“It’s all right. It’s done. All is well. *We* are well.”

“I love ye, Claire,” he rasped against her cheek. “I’m glad ye’re no’ harmed. But dinna do that again, aye?”

She pulled his forehead to rest against hers. Now both his hands spanned her belly – sheltering, cradling their bairn.

“He is all right?”

Finally, finally she smiled. “You’re still so certain it’s a boy?”

“I am. After two girls, why not?”

He nuzzled against her cheek. “I hope he grows to be a braw laddie. As stubborn and smart and brave as his Mam.”

She dipped closer for a quick kiss. “Flatterer.”

Now it was his turn to smile. “Let’s go home? I’ll call Murtagh, ask him to keep the girls till the morning.”

She sighed against him, so happy. “Yes – as much as I love them, I *need* you.”

He kissed her forehead, and took her hand, and they walked out toward the car park, blinking at the flash of police lights, happy to be alive.
**original prompt**: How about one for the Modern Glasgow AU? Claire and Jamie decorating Faith's baby room before she's born. Thank you!

“First ye chastise me for no’ being ready, and now here ye are making us late!”

Jamie shook his head at his wife, laying a gentle hand on her shoulder, turning her to face him.

“Let’s stop by the hardware store on the way home? I think yellow will be our color.”

Light poured into the small room behind her, and he couldn’t help but kiss her smile. Then bend and kiss her belly.

“Aye, if ye insist. A bit of sunshine for our bairn, no?”

Claire nodded, joy singing in her eyes.

“She’ll love it.”

“Ye mean *he* will love it. Our braw wee lad.”

She curled her arms around his broad, broad shoulders. “What makes you so sure it won’t be a braw wee lassie?”

He tilted his head. “A father kens his bairn.”

“And a mother knows hers. Let’s go.”

—

Jamie warily eyed the room full of pregnant women and new mothers.

“How come there are hardly any men here?” he whispered.

Claire looked up from the clipboard. “It’s the middle of the day.”

“So? What is more important for a man than to be wi’ his wife when they check the health of their bairn?”

He leaned over to watch her fill out yet another form. Claire’s dark, bold letters spelled her name, date of birth, and profession – MEDICAL STUDENT.

“Why does it ask if ye’re on birth control? Ye’re wi’ child, that doesna make sense.”

“Looks like it’s one of those one-size-fits-all forms. Ah, here – read this to keep yourself busy. Joe
shouldn’t be much longer.”

Jamie looked down at the three sheets of paper, neatly folded into thirds.

NATURAL CHILDBIRTH – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

BREAST IS BEST – YOUR BREASTFEEDING PLAN

INFANT IMMUNIZATIONS – FACTS AND MYTHS

Gently, quietly he folded the papers into small rectangles.

“Since when did having a bairn get to be so complicated?” he whispered, watching a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman eyeing him from across the room. He slid one arm around the back of Claire’s chair, nuzzling her shoulder.

He felt her smile against his cheek. She had never said as much, but he *knew* she enjoyed when he claimed her in public. Just as much as she knew *he* enjoyed when she did the same.

“Only since we allowed it to get complicated,” she said softly, watching Jamie play with her fingers. “I’m terrified, I am – but with you, I know I can do anything.”

He kissed the side of her neck. She shivered.

“Claire Fraser!”

Startled, they both stood and crossed the room.

“Hi, Kal – how is everything today?”

The kindly nurse – a recent immigrant from Portugal, and Dr. Joe Abernathy’s new right hand – smiled at the Frasers, leading them through the maze of corridors to the examination room.

“Ah, busy. Joe has been running late all day – complicated appointment this morning.”

Jamie let Claire go first, his hand warm at the small of her back. And shared her smile at Joe’s boisterous greeting.

—

“Claire, *mo chridhe*?”

No sound from the mound of blankets huddled on her side of the bed.

“I ken ye’re awake.”

The hum of a diesel engine cruised past their window, masking Jamie’s sock-clad footsteps on the wood floor.

The mattress dipped as he shifted closer to her, gently lay one arm around her side – resting his hand atop hers, caressing the bairn, wrapping his body around her back.

The only way he could protect them.

Had it been only today that Claire had lay back on Joe’s exam table, pushed up her dress so that Joe could run the ultrasound for their five-month check-up?
When their jokes had abruptly ceased, and Joe had quickly turned to Kal, a thousand questions in his eyes?

When Claire, mind lightning-fast, had cleared her throat – “Joe, why don’t I hear a heartbeat?”

When Jamie had flown to her side, gaze darting between Kal adjusting the machine and Joe moving the wand around Claire’s belly and Claire’s wide and terrified eyes?

Then –

Then the whoosh-whoosh of their baby’s heart – so impossibly fast.

A choked cry of relief – from him or her, he would never know.

But Joe’s frown of concentration – and Kal’s whispers to her boss – let the Frasers know that not all was right with the bairn.

The baby they had longed for – had tried for – for three long years, including a year of hormone treatments and disappointment after disappointment after heart-crushing disappointment.

“No – no – no…”

“Claire – Claire, *listen to me*,” Joe’s voice was strong, firm – but scared. “I’m trying to get a good read on the baby. Hold on.”

Claire’s hands flew – and Jamie caught her, squeezing her hands tight, heart stuck in his throat.

“There,” Kal pointed to the ultrasound screen. “Just about…eight inches?”

“Eight?!?” Claire screamed. “Should be closer to twelve!”

Joe nodded. “Your baby has barely grown in the past month, Claire.”

“What – what…” Jamie swallowed. “What does this mean?”

“I’m not sure – could be any number of things.” Joe nodded at Kal, who took several screen prints from the ultrasound. “Heartbeat is there, but a bit lethargic. Growth is slow. Development looks fine – there’s the head, and the hands.”

Jamie craned his neck – and there he or she was, floating in Claire’s belly, blissfully unaware of the stramash outside.

“What do we do, Joe?” Claire’s voice was devoid of emotion – seeking facts. Closing off her heart.

“I don’t know, Claire.” He turned to face her head-on. “Speaking from colleague to colleague. I need to make some phone calls.”

“Do you want to know if it’s a girl or boy?” Kal asked quietly. “I can tell you –”

“No,” both Frasers insisted in unison. Then a ghost of a smile – just for a few seconds – on Jamie’s lips.

“No,” he repeated. “We’ll find out when the child is born.”

Claire opened her mouth to protest –
“No, Claire,” Jamie interrupted. “No. Dinna even speak on that. No.”

She shifted her head on the table, fighting back tears.

But she didn’t hold back now – and all he could do was hold her, her body wracked with heaving, silent sobs.

“What can I do, Claire?” he whispered.

Slowly, slowly Claire turned over to face him. Tangled her legs with his. Pushed the swell of their baby – so small, yet so active right now – against his belly. Quietly he pulled up the front of her shirt – then his – so that they were skin to skin. Feeling. Sharing.

“What can you pray for us, Jamie?”

She drew up the blankets to cover them – shield them – protect them.

“O Glorious Prince of the heavenly host,” Jamie whispered, voice cracked, hands tangled in Claire’s curls, feeling their bairn dance against his belly. “St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in the battle and in the terrible warfare that we are waging against the rulers of this world of darkness…”
“Stop – you can’t be serious!”

Jamie, smiling, sipped from his tumbler of whiskey. “Aye, it’s true – we met on an airplane. Economy class. I was in seat 23A – the aisle. She was in seat B – the window.”

Jerry shook his head in amazement. “And how long until you got together?”

“He took me home from the airport, to his godfather’s flat, where he was living at the time. And that was it.” Claire dipped her bread in the seasoned olive oil at the center of the table. “We got married a month later. It’ll be two years in June.”

Across from her, Millie sighed theatrically. “That’s so romantic! Jerry and I – well. It was a bit more conventional.”

“Well, to be fair, we were both…seeing other people at the time.” Jerry winked at his wife. “She just caught my eye, you could say. But it took a while for it to all work out.”

“And how long ago was that, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Four years in May, Claire. But Jerry and I have lived in six apartments – including our new place. We just can’t seem to find an apartment that suits us.”

“Honey, they’re called *flats* when you’re here, across the pond.”

“Oh, hush. Jamie and Claire understand perfectly what I mean – don’t you?”

Jamie’s boot brushed the back of Claire’s heel. She curled her ankle around his.

“Aye – we do. Sassenachs, the lot of ye,” Jamie growled in his best Scots burr.

“Let’s drink to that,” Jerry exclaimed. “To Sassenachs!”

–

“Jamie, that was so kind of you to pay for the taxi – you really didn’t have to.”

Jerry pulled open the front door to their building – Jamie and Claire lived five flights up, while Jerry and Millie were lucky to only deal with two.

“Ach, it’s nae bother. Ye’ll get used to how quickly it can get cold in Glasgow, once the sun goes down. And besides, I canna leave my bride to get all cold – what kind of husband would I be?”

They had climbed the stairwell together and stopped in front of Jerry and Millie’s door. Claire – a bit drunk, a bit tired, and wanting nothing more than to wrap herself around Jamie, preferably naked Jamie – watched her new friend quickly exchange knowing glances with her husband.
Jerry cleared his throat. “Well – I’d sure hope you’d be a generous husband.”

And the atmosphere changed. Claire could almost taste it – Jerry’s eyes burning earnestly, full of secrets, focused on her. Millie’s face gone all soft around the edges – lips puckered – head tilted coquettishly at Jamie.

Beside her, Jamie bristled.

“I dinna catch yer meaning.” Voice slow, measured. Deliberate.

“You’re a smart lad, Jamie.” Jerry settled an arm easily around Millie’s shoulders. “I think you know just fine what I mean.”

“Come on – it’ll be fun.” Millie’s voice raised in pitch. Inviting. “I’m sure you’d like to share, Claire.”

Perhaps it was the English manners Uncle Lamb had drilled into her – or her time around professors and their refined behavior, when she was with Frank – or it was a lesson she’d learned from some long-forgotten teacher, to always take the upper hand. The only words that came to Claire’s mind were perfect, polite, refined, restrained:

“No – no, thank you. Jamie and I share everything – but not with other people.”

She nodded a goodnight, took Jamie’s hand, and led her gaping husband up the steps to their flat.

He unlocked their door with shaking hands, yanked it closed, turned all the locks – even the ones left over from the previous occupants, which they had never used before – and seized her.

They shook with shock – with passion – with laughter.

“Christ,” he whispered. “What the fuck was *that*?”

She dug her fingers into the curls at the back of his skull, inhaling the musk of his neck. “I think we just turned down an invitation for an orgy.”

“I – I’m no’ even *attracted* to Millie. I suppose she’s pretty – but she’s no’ you, Claire.”

“Flatterer.” She pulled back a bit, framing his face with her hands. “They’re looking to – to fill a gap. Something they can’t, or won’t, find in each other.”

“I’ll *always* find what I need in you, Claire,” Jamie whispered, eyes dark.

“And I you, Jamie. Always.”

She sealed her vow with a kiss. And then –

“Will ye – will ye come to bed wi’ me then, *mo nighean donn*? That is, if ye dinna think it immoral…”

Joy – giddy, colorful, healing – bloomed in her eyes.
original prompt: Those scenes with Millie and Jerry made me wish Claire had a close female friend when she was married to Frank. Can you do a one-shot where she has a friend like that? Maybe someone she could at least partly confide in (even if she didn’t tell them the whole story)?

Claire set down the bruised apple, frowning, and searched over the pile for one in better shape. She found two – with a small smile – and added to her basket.

Just a few quick things from the Co-op on her way home – she’d seen a tasty yet simple recipe for shepherd’s pie (Jamie’s favorite) in the Sunday newspaper, and had been planning to make it all week. A string of unexpected late nights at school meant she hadn’t had the time to make them a proper dinner.

But it was Friday now – and while most of her classmates had been chattering all day about which club or party they’d be visiting that night, all Claire could think of was a quiet evening with her husband of seventeen months, cozy in their kitchen with a homemade dinner and bottle of wine and Fleetwood Mac on the stereo.

And then dessert, and bed – but maybe not in that particular order…

“Claire?”

Startled, Claire almost dropped a bag of carrots, and whirled to her right.

“It *is* you!”

The woman’s face – kind, blue-eyed, dark-haired – came into focus.

“It’s me – Vi. Don’t you remember, we used to live down the hall from each other…”

Claire blinked, then came back to herself. “Yes – yes of course. Hello. How are you?”

Viola Baird shifted her own shopping basket over her elbow. “I’m doing well – but how are *you*? I haven’t seen you since you moved out.”

Claire paused, careful. “You mean – since I left Frank.”

Vi tilted her head, just a bit. “Aye – I suppose. I didna want to come out just like that, but I do remember, ye have always spoke yer mind!”
Claire nodded absently. “Well – I’m doing quite well, thank you. I’m in my first semester of medical school, actually. Been a busy week – just picking up some groceries on the way home.”

“Medical school? Well that’s grand! Are ye rushing home, or do ye have time to chat over a cup of tea?”

Truth be told, it was the last thing Claire wanted – but Vi had always been kind to her. A few years older than Claire, she had always said hello in the hallway, and had had her and Frank over for dinner a few times. Her husband was a professor of biology, and she had made her own career in the city’s tourism office, of all things – she personally took credit for the People Make Glasgow slogan plastered all over the city.

“Of course – I’ll be finished in just a few minutes, and then I’m all yours.”

–

Claire removed her mittens and wrapped icy hands around the steaming mug.

“Smells delicious,” she remarked, watching Vi stir three sugars into her tea.

“Aye – I don’t come over to this neighborhood very often, but when I do I always stop here. All the coffee is roasted right in the back of the shop, and the tea is mixed here, too.”

Claire sipped her coffee. Just as she set down the mug, the screen of her phone flashed.

The text from Jamie was short – *take ur time mnd, ily* – and, not wanting to be rude, she turned the phone face down on the table.

Vi chatted for a while – updates on her, and her husband, and their three dogs whose barking had always driven Frank mad.

Claire nodded, polite – her mind far away, wondering what Jamie was doing.

“What happened between you and Frank, Claire?”

Claire startled – and met Vi’s kind eyes. She wasn’t prying – just honestly curious.

“It’s…where do you want me to start?”

“Weel, the two of you always seemed to be so close, and you were engaged to be married, is that right?”

“Yes – though to be honest, we never set a date.”

“But Claire – I come home one day and your name is off the mailbox in the lobby. With no word. And when Frank is home, he refuses to even say hello.”

Claire sighed. “Do you remember how he took that sabbatical, in New York?”

Vi sipped from her tea. “Aye – verra prestigious, if I recall.”

“Yes. Well, I went to visit him – as a surprise. I got to his flat just in time to see him kissing one of his students goodbye.” Absently she swirled the half-empty coffee cup, watching the grounds cling to the white porcelain sides. “So I flew back to Glasgow, and I moved out. Left his diamond ring on the kitchen table.”
It all seemed so far away now – but just speaking about it brought back incredible pangs of shame, and anger, and disappointment.

Vi reached across the table. “I’m so sorry, Claire. What a cad.”

Claire shrugged. “That’s a polite way to put it, I suppose. I – I felt like such an idiot, that I didn’t see it coming. Things hadn’t been perfect between us, but I had no idea…”

Vi didn’t let go of Claire’s hand – and reached down to touch her wedding ring.

“You’re married now?”

Claire nodded, taking another sip of coffee. “Yes. He works in publishing. He – well. He’s everything that Frank is not.”

Vi withdrew her hand. “And what is that?”

Warmth flooded Claire’s body, mind, heart. “Selfless. Generous. Doesn’t take himself too seriously. Loving, and kind, and thoughtful. Loyal. And committed to me, and to us, without question.”

She pursed her lips and turned her head, watching the pedestrians and cars and bicycles flood by on Argyle Street.

Jamie would like this café – the coziness of it, the countless varieties of tea, the spiced scones. The nook in the corner where they could curl up and share an afternoon of books and snacks and conversation.

“So I guess that’s why you’re in medical school now? Because he encouraged it?”

Claire smiled. “Encouraged it? He printed out all my applications, proofread my essays, helped me study for the entrance exams. Yes, you could say he encouraged it.”

“Frank never would have done that?”

Claire turned to face Vi. “No. I don’t want to sound unkind – but no. He was happy with me being the way I was – he himself was happy with the way he was.”

*You’ve got a perfectly fine career as a nurse, and the expense from schooling would set us back. I support your decision, of course, but we’d have to think carefully about what that would mean for us both. Would you even be able to get a surgery job in Glasgow?”

*We’ll make it work, Claire. Ye follow yer dreams, and we’ll make them happen.”

“And you weren’t happy with the way things were?”

Claire thought for a very long time before answering.

“No. My ambition was never his ambition. It wasn’t until I left – until I married Jamie – that I realized what…true partnership is. How love is generous. And selfless.”

Vi swirled a biscotti in her tea. “You love him very much – your husband?”

“Yes. With everything I am.” She didn’t even have to think how to answer.

“Then I’m so very happy for you, Claire. And I don’t want to keep you from him any longer – what
are your plans for tonight, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Homemade shepherd’s pie – his favorite. Then an apple crisp, if I have the time. Wine. And music.”

“I don’t remember you cooking very much when we were neighbors.”

Claire finished her coffee. “Because, Vi – I didn’t particularly care. But with Jamie, I want to try. And God bless him, he’s patient with me.”

She stood, and gave the older woman a quick embrace. “I’d like you to meet him, if you’d be open to that?”

“Of course. It would be my pleasure.”

Vi pulled back, smiling. “I’m so happy for you, Claire. You are just radiant.”

Claire sighed, and smiled, and buttoned up her coat, and pushed through the door.

Fifteen minutes later when she turned her key in their front door, Jamie was there to pull it open, darting in for a quick kiss.

“I got to cutting up the beef and defrosted the crust – all we need is the vegetables and we’ll be set.”

She set down the grocery bag, and kissed him properly, and silently thanked Frank Bloody Fucking Randall for his carelessness.
Claire tiredly sank her head against her husband’s shoulder, allowing him to gently sway them in their own corner of the dance floor.

Murtagh and Suzette had wanted a quiet wedding – and the Frasers of Glasgow and Lallybroch had delivered. A short, but beautiful ceremony in the church at Broch Morda – between the beaming bride and bashful groom, there hadn’t been a dry eye in the congregation. That two people past their young years could find so much joy in each other…what a miracle.

Even more miraculous was that all four wee Frasers had behaved themselves, including ten-month-old William.

But their littlest Fraser had finally tired himself out sometime during dinner – and was already safely tucked away in his crib in the nursery at Lallybroch, together with his older sisters. Only Fergus – age eleven – was still awake, albeit a bit unsteady on his feet, clumsily dancing with his nine-year-old cousin Maggie Murray.

Jamie curled his hand tighter around Claire’s back. Holding her close as the DJ cleared his throat.

“This is the last dance, everyone – special request from the groom himself. A classic tune for a classy couple.”

Claire sighed against Jamie.

_Strangers in the night_
Exchanging glances
Wondering in the night
What were the chances
We’d be sharing love
Before the night was through?

She’d heard the song before, of course – Uncle Lamb had played the record incessantly one summer.

But she had never really listened to the lyrics. And maybe it was her exhaustion, or the emotions of the day, reminding her of her own wedding, or Jamie’s intoxicating proximity.

_Something in your eyes_
Was so inviting
Something in your smile
Was so exciting
Something in my heart told me I must have you…

Jamie swallowed against her forehead.
He felt it, too. Of course.

“Claire?”

Her grip tightened around his shoulder as she raised her head to meet his burning eyes.

*Strangers in the night, two lonely people*
We were strangers in the night
Up to the moment when we said our first hello
Little did we know
Love was just a glance away, a warm embracing dance away

Slowly, gently, her hand raised to cup his cheek.

“I know,” she whispered.

He looked at her as if she were the only woman in the world.

*And ever since that night*
We’ve been together
Lovers at first sight
In love forever
It turned out so right
For strangers in the night

*Love was just a glance away, a warm embracing dance away*

They stopped dancing. Mesmerized by each other.

“It’s turned out so right – hasn’t it, Jamie?”

“Ye’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” he breathed. Twining their fingers together.

“You’re the biggest gamble I’ve ever taken,” she whispered.

He bridged the gap between them, leaning his forehead against hers.

“From the first I saw you – I knew. I had to have ye.”

She rubbed the tip of her nose against his.

“My heart has always known yours.”

Their kiss said everything their hearts could contain.

And from his seat at the head table, Murtagh FitzGibbons Fraser sighed at his godson’s happiness, and wrapped his arm tighter around Suzette’s shoulders, and kissed her cheek.

–

*Frank Sinatra - Strangers in the Night*
Chapter 88

original prompt: I was just re-reading Modern Glasgow AU for the 400th time and came across this lovely comment of Murtaugh's while getting Jamie and Claire together for a photo: "Ye’ll want yer bairns to see what lovestruck idiots their Mam and Da were on their wedding day." Can we see Jamie and Claire showing and telling their children of their wedding day?

“All right, wee Frasers! Who is ready for some hot cocoa and shortbread biscuits?”

Four pyjama-clad feet raced into the room, giggling. “Me! Me!”

Murtagh FitzGibbons Fraser heaved a theatrical sigh. “Good thing you ladies got here in time – before your brothers beat ye to it!”

Faith and Brianna – aged seven and six, respectively – almost bounced with energy. “Can ye please add the milk this time? It always tastes a wee bit better wi’ the milk.”

“Of course – he never forgets these small details.” Suzette Fraser smiled down at her energetic nieces. “And if you’re *extra* quiet when Murtagh tells his story tonight, I can perhaps share one of the special French licorice candies…”

“Quoi?” Fifteen-year-old Fergus Fraser rounded the corner into the kitchen, five-year-old William hoisted on his shoulders, snug in his footed Godzilla pyjamas.

“Cocoa for ye as well, Fergus?”

“No, thank you – tea, please.”

William squirmed, and Fergus knelt to gently help him slide to the floor.

“Are you all settled in the extra room?”

“Aye,” he nodded, watching Murtagh carefully mix the hot water and cocoa mix on the counter.

“The bunk beds are fun!” Faith exclaimed. “Me and Bree share a room at home, but we have our own beds.”

Murtagh placed the last mug on a large tray – a wedding gift he and Suzette had received from Jamie and Claire – and carefully walked over to the living room. The four young Frasers scampered behind him, jumping up onto the couch, smashing their sides against each other, eager for their sweet treat.
“Did ye know – yer Mam and Da lived in that room, the first six months they were married?”

Suzette handed a Highland Coo mug to Brianna, who nodded sagely. “Aye. I mind that. But…”

“But what?” Fergus asked, munching a mouthful of shortbread. “It was very generous of Murtagh to give them a place to stay.”

Brianna pursed her lips. Beside her, William succeeded in dropping hundreds of crumbs on his lap.

“Weel… the room is so small! It’s fun for the four of us to stay in, when we visit – but I canna imagine living in there.”

“Well, for your Mama and Papa it was just a place to sleep. They were working very hard to save for a flat of their own.” Gently Suzette brushed the crumbs from William’s lap into her hand.

Murtagh snorted – but thankfully the wee ones didn’t notice. “Ye ken their story, aye? How they met on the airplane?”

Faith sipped carefully from her Doune Castle mug. “Nobody ever believes me when I tell them – most of my friends at school, their parents met on the Internet, or at church.”

“Or through friends and family – like you and Tante Suzette,” Fergus smiled.

Murtagh set down his own mug – a drawing of the Duke of Wellington statue, complete with an orange traffic cone on its head – and padded across the living room. When he returned, smiling, he held a familiar photo in a heavy black frame.

“Do ye ken what this picture is, kids?”

“Aye! Mama and Da’s wedding day,” William smiled.

“Clever lad. And do ye ken who took the picture?”

Four wee brows furrowed.

“Was it you?” Suzette asked quietly.

“Of course it was! Did you know, I was the only relative at the wedding.”

“Yes, because Mama’s parents died when she was small, and Da had only just come back from New York.”

“Right, Fergus. Jamie – well, he wasna on speaking terms wi’ yer Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian for a few years, if ye can believe that. So it was me who stood up for him at the wedding.”

Bree gently set down her mug on the coffee table. “Can I see the photo?”

Murtagh watched her, then – frowning a bit, studying the picture.

“That’s this room they’re standing in – there’s the fireplace, and there’s the window.”

Faith nodded beside her. William reached a sticky finger to touch the glass, and Fergus gently pulled his brother’s hand back.

“They look very happy,” he remarked.
“Da always says it was the best day of his life. Apart from when we were born, and when Fergus came to live wi’ us,” Faith replied.

Suzette slipped an arm around her husband’s shoulders, watching the three dark heads and one red head studying the photograph so carefully.

“I wish I could have been at their wedding,” Bree said softly. “It’s sad that they didna have many people there. When my friend Campbell’s auntie got married last year, she said there were over 200 people!”

“They would never have wanted it to be that way,” Murtagh said softly. The four children looked up at him, surprised.

“They only need each other to be happy.” He looked at Suzette then – the creases around her eyes, the tortoise shell barrette clipping back her bangs, her smiling mouth – and his heart stuttered just as much as when he had first seen her, speaking French to a ten-year-old Fergus in the supermarket. “That’s a good lesson for all of us.”

—

“Has it *really* been ten years?”

Jamie swirled his tumbler of after-dinner whisky, sitting back in his chair, admiring his wife.

Murtagh and Suzette had the bairns tonight – and Claire was wearing a slinky new black dress – and they had managed to land a reservation at the cute restaurant just three blocks from home that served an inventive young chef’s modern take on traditional Scottish cuisine.

Claire lay her left hand on the table, sipping her wineglass with her right. Jamie’s right hand snaked across the smooth, polished wood and beside the flickering candle to twine his fingers through hers, his thumb tracing her wedding ring.

“When I see you, Claire – I always remember what you looked like, the day we wed.”

“Do you?” she smiled. “You were quite hung over, if memory serves.”

“Aye, I was. Murtagh wouldn’a let ye tend to me – he had to help me into my kilt, my hands were shaking.” He swallowed, face flushing. “I was so nervous, Claire.”

“Nervous? Whatever for? Surely you didn’t think I didn’t want to marry you.”

The corner of his mouth lifted in the small half-smile that went straight to her core, every single time. “Ach – no, it wasna that. I…weel. I was nervous about the wedding night.”

“Idiot,” she teased, running her thumbnail along the tendons on the soft underside of his wrist. “You were a quick learner.”

Jamie leaned across the table, shamelessly stole a look down the front of Claire’s dress, then raised his eyes to meet hers, full of fire and humor and mischief. “I’m lucky I had a good teacher.”

Claire leaned forward and gave her husband a long, slow kiss – not caring that they were packed almost elbow-to-elbow with other diners in the tiny restaurant.

When Jamie finally pulled back, and saw the gorgeous flush running from Claire’s collarbones up to her brow – he couldn’t believe his fortune in her.
“I remember every moment that day, Claire – every second.”

She smiled, so beautiful.

“I’ll never forget when you came out of our bedroom and I saw you for the first time.”

She had worn a gray dress – tasteful, inexpensive – and his mother’s pearls. She still had the dress, hanging up in her closet at home. And the pearls were Faith and Brianna’s favorite – how they loved the story behind them, and how they loved when she wore them.

Love soared through Jamie’s heart at the sight of this woman – his lover, his partner, the mother of his children. His life. His light.

“It was as if I had stepped outside on a cloudy day – and suddenly the sun came out.”

He watched a single tear well in her eye, then fall soundlessly down her cheek – crystal in the candlelight.

“When we wed,” she said huskily, fingers clutching his, “When you stood there next to me, so handsome in your kilt – I couldn’t wait until I could have you alone, naked, next to me.”

His eyes locked with hers.

“Do you want me now?”

All the breath left her in a rush. “Oh God, yes,” she breathed.

Without breaking eye contact, Jamie pulled out his wallet, set down more than enough cash to cover their bill, stood, took his wife’s hand, and led her out of the restaurant.

Then he picked her up, and carried her the two blocks home to their flat. Her face burrowed into his neck, peppering the tender skin with kisses.

He set her down only when they finally reached their dark bedroom – where, just as on their wedding night, he lit a single scented candle, undressed his wife –

And for the ten thousandth time, they lost themselves in each other.
original prompt: What if Jamie did actually give Claire the shot in the turtle soup scene? Then, he feels guilty about causing her pain, so at various points afterward he keeps checking to make sure she is OK.

Louise snorted with laughter. Jeanne doubled over, giggling, and Malva thoughtfully poured more champagne to top up Claire’s glass.

It was a girl’s night – the four medical students celebrating Louise’s engagement to her long-term boyfriend, Charlie Stuart (no relation to *that* historical idiot, he always liked to say). Charlie was a dreamer, to be sure – living off his family inheritance, he owned stakes in art galleries and thoroughbred horses and a few menswear companies; he had met Louise at an art show when she was freshly arrived from France, just starting a one-year medical school preparatory program and keen to meet new people. They had been inseparable since that night – to her delight, and to the utter consternation of his upper-crust family.

“To the happy couple!” Malva hoisted her glass, sloshing a bit out – and her three tablemates enthusiastically clanked glasses.

“Here, here!” Claire cheered, taking a measured sip. She knew Jeanne better than Louise – Jeanne had been her lab partner in first-year anatomy, and Louise had roomed with Jeanne until officially moving in with Charlie about six months before. Malva was a first-year medical student from Edinburgh who had taken Louise’s room – and the three had quickly become partners in crime, now dating two of Charlie’s closest friends.

Claire knew all three of them, of course – but didn’t go out with them frequently. Most of their Friday and Saturday nights were spent at high-end clubs, wearing slinky dresses and partying with their moneyed boyfriends. She and Jamie lived on a tight budget – his job at the printshop paid well, but between rent and textbooks and living expenses there wasn’t much left over each month. And truth be told, most nights she fell asleep on the couch reading her lessons, or in bed, skin-on-skin with Jamie.

“Now, Louise – you must tell us. What is Charlie’s secret?” Jeanne quickly darted her eyes to the other tables in the bar. “His…aubergine. It satisfies you, no?”

“You are so lucky he knows what to do with it, to satisfy you properly.” Malva sighed, spearing another forkful of salad. “Stefan…he is enthusiastic, and God knows he has a nice body. But a man can only do so much with a Vienna sausage.”
“Well I certainly never hear *you* complaining, when he stays over!” Jeanne smiled, finishing her champagne.

Malva rolled her eyes. “I can’t tell him, of course. Would wound his bloody big ego to know that. So I just make the noises I know he wants to hear.”

“Charlie is the same, when he’s been drinking.” Louise looked down at her half-eaten broiled fish. “Single-minded, he is. And then he never remembers in the morning, so he gets angry if I tell him I’m irritated.”

Claire dropped her eyes, focusing intently on her lamb stew. A jumble of images flashing through her mind –

The dark glint of Jamie’s eyes, two nights before, when he removed the camera from the tripod to hold it in his hand, capturing her face as she fell apart around him…

The bashfulness in Jamie’s voice, in the first weeks of their marriage, when he asked her to teach him about a woman’s period and how it brought changes to her body…

The joy flashing through her heart when he surprised her with a boat ride on the River Clyde, to celebrate her acceptance into medical school…

The soothing comfort of his lips – and the apology in his hands – as he helped inject the latest hormone shot the night before, the sixth in their attempt to get pregnant…

“Claire?”

Startled, Claire’s eyes darted across the table to Louise. “Yes?”

“I said – you are the only married woman here. Two years, yes?”

“Two years and one month,” she responded, not even needing to think. “Why?”

“I was only wondering…your husband…he is a handsome man. Do you ever worry?”

Claire sat up a bit straighter. “How do you mean?”

“I think she means – Charlie spent the night with another woman, about six months ago.” Jeanne lay a gentle hand on Louise’s shoulder. “He was stupid, he knows he messed up, he apologized. But she still worries.”

“No. I never worry.”

“But why?” Malva sopped up her leftover tomato sauce with the last piece of olive bread. “Women must look at him.”

“Because I know that he never looks back.” Claire dropped her hands on her lap, furiously rubbing the J tattooed at the base of her right thumb.

“Because if he did, you’d have his ballocks?”

Claire sighed – her heart breaking a bit for her friends. “No. Because he promised.”

Louise’s brows furrowed skeptically. “As simple as that?”

“Yes. As simple as that. And I made the same promise to him.”
Malva swirled the remaining champagne in her glass. Jeanne finished her steak. Louise set down her fork, head in her hands.

“It’s not as simple as that for everyone, Claire.”

Claire reached across the table, laying a hand on top of Louise’s – and her two-carat diamond. “It can be. When a man wants nothing else than to commit himself to you. And if you have doubts – even the tiniest doubt – you must speak with him about it. He must know.”

“And what if he decides to leave me? What if he doesn’t want to talk about it?”

“Then don’t marry him. I don’t care how good he is in bed. Or how much money he has. Because those mean nothing, if he won’t be honest with you.”

Louise kept her gaze trained on the table.

“Look – none of you know this, but I was engaged to another man when I met Jamie.”

Claire pulled back – to see the dumbfounded looks on her friends’ faces.


“He wasn’t honest with me, so I left him. Jamie knows what happened with him – which is why we are *always* honest with each other. In everything.”

Louise heaved a deep sigh. “I know what you’re saying, Claire. It’s just…just so bloody hard to talk about.”

“Wouldn’t you rather talk about it, to at least know where he stands? Because if you don’t talk about it…”

“I know, I know.”

Louise reached for the champagne bottle and poured out the dregs into her empty glass.

“Your Jamie – is he honest in bed?”

Claire pursed her lips. “What happens between us is private, Louise. We don’t talk about it with other people.”

“Oh, come on, Claire – you *know* we all want a man like him.” Jeanne rested her chin on one hand, eyes locked on Claire. “We tell you so much about our men…the least you can do is tell us one thing about yours.”

“Yes!” Malva chirped. “Come on, Claire – be nice. Tell us at least one thing. I promise we won’t ask you about it again.”

“He has such big thumbs,” Louise smirked. “Tell us – is he that proportionate everywhere?”

“I bet you do it at least once a day,” Jeanne interrupted.

“Is he quiet or talkative, during?” Malva added. “Stefan can’t shut up sometimes.”

Claire sighed, and thought, and shrugged.

“He wants me always in charge.”
And smiled at the shock on their faces.
“Are ye sure ye don’t mind? Because – ”

“Don’t worry, my friend!” Stefan heartily slapped Jamie on the back. “I’ve got it all taken care of. It’s my gift to Charlie – you’re just along for the ride!”

Jamie nodded, still uneasy as he watched the bar hostess – clad in a very slinky black dress – prettily bat her eyelashes as Stefan signed for the bar tab with a flourish.

“Come on, Jamie!” Charlie Stuart grinned, pouring his guest another glass of champagne. “Lighten up a bit! You’re on your own tonight – no wife to nag at you!”

Jamie swallowed, sat up a bit straighter, plastered on his best fake grin – furiously, secretly rubbing the C tattooed at the base of his left thumb.

Stefan had picked the place – a very trendy bar/club that had recently been written up in all the newspapers and magazines. The perfect spot for a gentleman of means to celebrate his engagement. Charlie and Claire’s friend Louise were perfectly matched – starry-eyed dreamers, the both of them, and she enjoyed spending his family’s money as much as he enjoyed spending it on her. Stefan was Charlie’s childhood friend – they had gone to the same fancy boarding school in England – and himself came from a wealthy German family. His relationship with Claire and Louise’s friend Malva was more recent, but judging from the way he spoke about her, very adventurous.

Jamie Fraser wasn’t one for bars or clubs – or dressing up – or spending more money on a bottle of champagne than he and Claire spent on groceries for an entire week. But Stefan and Charlie had insisted tonight – and as much as he didn’t want to feel like a charity case, Claire had encouraged him to do something different. To get out of his comfort zone – to see what he was missing out on (she teased), since he was married.

His only response to that was to make hard, fast love to her right there, on the kitchen counter, proving to her just how much he *wasn’t* missing out on in being married to her.

Now he sat back, carefully sipping his champagne, listening to Charlie and Stefan ogle the hostesses.

“…*that* one would be pure heaven. Those curls – ”

“Are you sure you haven’t enjoyed her company already? She seemed to know you when we walked in…”

“Well even if I had, I certainly don’t remember it. Though I wouldn’t mind getting re-acquainted!”

The two shared a laugh. Disgust rose from somewhere deep within Jamie – aghast that they could speak so casually about other women when they had a girlfriend and fiancée waiting at home.
“Did I tell you about the time when Malva tied me up and used a blindfold? She got the wax *everywhere* on the sheets!”

Under the table, Jamie pulled out his phone, found his MND folder, and scrolled to a picture he had taken the day before. Claire all rumpled and messy from sleep, smiling at him around a piece of the toast he had brought her in bed.

“Jamie!”

Startled, Jamie locked his phone and looked across the table to Charlie.

“Is Claire checking up on you already? You can tell her there’s nothing for her to worry about.”

“She’s fine.” His voice was short, clipped, closing the door on the matter. “And of course she has nothing to worry about.”

The hostess returned, setting a tray of meats and cheeses on the table, practically falling out of her dress.

“I wouldn’t think she’d keep you on such a short leash,” Charlie teased. “She doesn’t strike me as the jealous type.”

“Like I said – she has nothing to worry about. She knows I’ll come home to her.”

Charlie narrowed his eyes. “How long have you been married again?”

“Two years and one month,” he replied, not even needing to think.

“And how old are you now?”

“Twenty-five.”

Stefan’s brows rose nearly to his hairline. “You were twenty-three when you got married? My God – why did you do that?”

“Because I fell in love and knew it was for forever,” Jamie bristled.

“As simple as that?”

“Yes. As simple as that.”

Charlie chewed on an olive, thinking. “But surely – a man like yourself – there must have been other women you were interested in.”

“There weren’t. And I wasn’t.”

Stefan turned to his friend. “Do you know about his tattoo, Charlie?”

“What tattoo?”

Jamie’s fist clenched beneath the table.

“Do you mind showing him, Jamie? I know because Malva told me Claire had one – she thinks we should get them as well. I told her no.”

Jamie held out his left hand, palm up – his wide silver wedding ring bright in the dimly-lit room.
Charlie squinted – then looked up at Jamie in surprise.

“A C?”

“For Claire. She has a J, for Jamie,” Stefan explained.

“Why did you agree to that?”

“Because I wanted to. Because she asked.”

“As simple as that?”

Jamie pulled his hand away and drained the last of his champagne. “Yes. As simple as that.”

“What is it that keeps you together, Jamie?” Charlie, suddenly sobered, looked straight across the table at this man who was not quite a friend – who travelled in such a different social circle – who was so unafraid to be different. “How do you know that it’s for forever? How do you know that you’ll keep interested – and that she’ll keep interested?”

Jamie thought for a very long time before answering. He thought about his parents’ marriage, and his sister’s marriage, and how badly Claire had been hurt by Frank’s infidelity and disinterest in commitment. He thought about the joy he had in Claire, the pride he had in the life they had built together, the love for her that was something bigger and deeper than anything he had ever imagined possible. He thought about how she smiled when he made her tea while she studied, how her breath hitched so deliciously when they made love, how she cried when she shared her deepest fear of never conceiving a child.

He thought about how the men across the table from him would likely never understand any of that. So he explained in the simplest way he could.

“Because we share everything. And because I promised it to her – and she promised it to me.”

Charlie and Stefan didn’t say anything for a very long time.

“I don’t know if I could honor that kind of promise,” Charlie reflected.

Jamie shrugged, and sighed, and stood, ready to go home and lose himself in Claire. He lay a comforting hand on Charlie’s slumped shoulder.

“You can. And you will – if you want to. You need to want to.”

Charlie looked up at Jamie – seeing him almost as for the first time – and nodded.

Jamie nodded politely, bade a quiet goodbye to Stefan, and headed for the door, already dialing Claire’s number.
“This box goes upstairs?”

Claire stood up straight, one hand on her hip, the other cradling her six-month-pregnant belly. “What’s in it?”

Sixteen-year-old Fergus Fraser squinted. “It just says Books. Papa’s handwriting.”

Claire thought for a minute. “I suppose you could put it in our bedroom for now. And the one next to it as well. Your Da can go through it all later once he’s back in the house.”

Fergus nodded, hoisted the box on his shoulder, pecked his Maman on the cheek, and carefully climbed the stairs, careful of the tables and paintings and bric-a-brac in the hallways of the old house.

His parents had insisted that they were just staying at Lallybroch for the summer, until Maman delivered his newest sibling sometime in the autumn. But something told him that this move would be more permanent – that after the baby came, all the Frasers would be re-locating to the estate full time. Not that he minded – he had always loved spending time here, from the first visit just after his arrival from Paris. To be enveloped so enthusiastically, by so much family…he was truly blessed.

Faith and Bree and William – ages eight, seven, and six – had barely spent a moment inside since they arrived, gleefully carousing the grounds with their Murray cousins. Too old to spend all his time with them – and too young to spend all his time with the adults – Fergus had taken to spending most of his days helping Maman get on. Helping her unpack, cook, whatever she needed – he was her shadow, when Papa could not be with her. He had never seen her pregnant before – and it sparked something deep within him. To protect her – to keep her and the baby safe, always.

Not that Papa wouldn’t do the same, he snorted, rounding the corner and softly pushing open the door to Maman and Papa’s bedroom. If he thought Papa loved Maman something fierce before she had gotten pregnant, it paled in comparison to the love and utter devotion he showered on Claire now.

He was also worried, Fergus could tell; from what he had learned about Faith’s birth, and what he had been able to piece together about why it had taken two healthy young people so long to conceive her in the first place, no wonder that Papa restlessly wandered the hallway at night. Worried that this baby would not survive – worried that Maman would somehow harm the baby due to her stressful job and long working hours.

But all that was now in the past – Glasgow was a long way away. Fergus set down the box in the corner of the bedroom – amid a nest of bedding and plastic bins of clothing and various other
things that they had crammed in the caravan, while Papa had locked up the flat and Murtagh and Suzette had hugged them all goodbye.

It was so much quieter here, out in the countryside. For a moment he watched the fields and hills outside, watched the flock of geese soar over the trees, watched his cousin Jamie Murray tackle William to the muddy ground, giggling.

Wherever his family went – there he would go. They had given him a new life, here in Scotland – it was a debt he feared he could never repay. It didn’t matter that he was far more at home in the city, where his accent never led to awkward questions, where he could quickly and quietly slip away for a walk in the park, or a snack at the corner shop. Living here would be different – but he would adapt.

Turning away from the window, he tripped over the box of books, sending a dozen volumes spilling over the top of the open carton. Quickly he crouched to return them to the box – and frowned at a small, thin book. White cover. No letters.

He glanced over his shoulder – nothing but the quick bootsteps of his aunt and cousins downstairs. Opened the front cover.

Blank – except for an inscription in Papa’s handwriting:

Jamie loves Claire.

He turned the page – and nearly dropped the book.


Page after page after page. Kisses, and faces frozen in silent screams, and smiles.

Papa holding the camera at arm’s length, Maman sleeping nude against his shoulder.

Papa standing nude at the kitchen counter of a flat he didn’t recognize, grinning at Maman, holding two coffee mugs.

Maman’s legs wrapped around Papa’s hips, his bare back – before the scars – turned to the camera.

Maman’s head angled on a pillow as Papa suckled her.

His head spun.

And then the last picture almost brought tears to his eyes – Papa’s left hand twined with Maman’s right hand, palms apart just enough to see the J tattooed at the base of her thumb, and the C tattooed at the base of his.

Then an inscription on the last page, in Maman’s handwriting:

Claire loves Jamie.

Heart pounding, Fergus silently slid the book in between the dozens of other volumes in the box. Piled the remaining books on top of it. Burying it. Protecting it.

Everyone knew the story of how Maman and Papa had met on the airplane and married a month later. Everyone knew that they shared an uncommon love – a love broader and deeper than anyone else’s. He had seen for himself just how much they joyed in each other – and worshipped each
other – and would do anything for each other.

He had wondered whether they had grown into this kind of love – whether their love had first been physical, but then matured into the beautiful jewel it was today.

And now – now with these pictures, he understood that it had all been the same from the very first day. The want – the need – the worship – and above all, the love.

Fergus smoothed his shaking, dusty hands on the knees of his jeans, stood, and slowly made his way back downstairs.

As he entered the hallway, he saw his parents. Leaning against the wall, Papa’s hand curled protectively on Maman’s belly, Maman’s hands in his hair and around his shoulders. Lost in a long, slow kiss.

Tiptoeing around them, he shouldered another box of books and quietly went back upstairs, heart aflame.
Dr. Claire Fraser huffed, gazing in utter frustration at the cast on her wrist.

“This is unbelievable.”

Her husband raised his eyebrows skeptically. “Aye? What did ye think would happen, when ye slip on the pavement and try to support yerself wi’ just yer hand?” He fluffed the pillows supporting her back, and tucked the blanket closer around her legs. “Ye’re lucky ye didna break yer arm, or even yer other wrist!”

“I *know* better than what I did, Jamie - I knew the moment I hit the ground.”

“And what do ye expect? That ye can master yer body to act against its natural instinct to cushion yer own fall?” He settled onto the mattress beside her - careful to not crumple the half-dozen “GET WELL SOON, MAMA!” cards the children had lovingly piled at Claire’s side.

She sighed. “You’re right. Only - what am I going to do now, that I won’t be able to work until I’m healed? I feel all cooped up in this flat already, and I won’t know what to do with myself all day.”

Gently, carefully he stroked the back of her hand, careful of the still-drying scribbles the children had gleefully drawn all over the cast. “How about read? Or cook? Or finish those wee books ye started making for each of the bairns, all their baby things?”

That got a half-smile. “Yes - yes, that would be good. I know they will appreciate it when they’re older - all those memories.”

He laced his fingers through hers. “Just - slow down. Use this time as an excuse to do different things. To be quiet.”

“I just -”

A loud crash echoed somewhere in the flat, followed by the raised voices of four-year-old William and five-year-old Brianna.

Their eyes met for a long moment - and then Jamie stood and kissed her forehead. “I’ll take care of it. And then I’ll come back, and we’ll continue talking, aye?”

She tilted up her chin for a kiss - which he happily provided - and then settled back against the pillows, watching him stride down the hall, wincing at the pain shooting up her arm.

Jamie was right, of course - she *did* need to slow down. The past two months had been particularly grueling - a long, unbroken chain of complicated surgeries requiring her to sleep at the hospital more than a handful of times. How she disliked that aspect of her job - for it meant going for several days without seeing the children - not tucking them into bed, not making their dinner, not mediating their arguments, not helping them dress - and Jamie - not holding him, not being held
by him, not falling asleep with his heartbeat under her ear.

It had been too much - and she had felt powerless to do anything about it. Now her broken wrist - the result of not watching where she was going, and taking an extra step in the hospital staircase, and tumbling down one flight to land in a crumpled heap - just seemed to compound that feeling.

*But maybe this is how you take power back,* she mused, watching the dust motes swirl in the stray sunbeam that warmed her feet. *You’ve been thinking about what it would be like to cut back your hours, to be home with the children more. To be more present for them. Why not see this as that opportunity?*

“Problem solved,” Jamie smiled, breezing back into the room.

“Do I want to know?” she teased.

He settled back at her side, one warm hand anchoring on her hip. “No. But what *I* want to know is how ye feel about being home wi’ them more than ye ever have.”

“It’ll be good for me, Jamie. I *know* it will - even though I’ll be like a bird with a broken wing.” She paused, swallowing. “But I can’t help but think - what will it be like for you, to have me here all day? For…for me to be all domestic?”

Jamie’s thumb stroked the sliver of bare flesh between the bottom of her shirt and the top of her sleep pants.

“I was reading an article the other day.” His eyes focused on his thumb, voice low and thoughtful. “Did ye know that there are some storks that migrate every year from Croatia to South Africa? That’s over 13,000 kilometers. Twice a year, every year.”

“I didn’t know that.” She smiled, reaching out her uninjured hand to run her fingers through his thick hair.

“Mmm. Weel, there’s a story about one pair of storks. They mate for life, ken? And this one couple - they’re a wee bit different than most. Because she was injured, more than ten years ago - and canna fly any longer. So she has no choice but to stay home at the nest in Croatia, when he flies south every winter.”

“That’s very sad,” Claire whispered.

Now Jamie raised his eyes - and tilted her chin, so that she could look at him. “And every spring, for more than ten years, he’s returned to her after the long, cold winter. He is faithful to her, always. He always finds his way home.”

He licked his lips. “Don’t ye see, Claire - *you* are my home. It doesna matter who ye are - mother, surgeon, working all the time, or home all the time. I will *always* love ye, and *always* come home to ye.”

Heart full, she brought him close for a long, long, sweet kiss.

“You know - with your long limbs, you *do* remind me somewhat of a stork.”

He laughed then, and kissed the tip of her nose.

“Broken wing or no’ - this stork loves you.”
She shook her head, and kissed him again, and kept kissing him even when all four children thundered down the hallway and jumped on the bed, ready to play.

Klepetan and Malena are indeed real! Click here to read all about this amazing true-life love story. And here is a beautiful photo of the happy couple:
“Fern was happy, for she felt that Charlotte’s trick was working and that Wilbur’s life would be saved. But she found that the barn was not nearly as pleasant—too many people. She liked it better when she could be all alone with her friends the animals.”

Jamie snapped the book shut with a flourish. “And tomorrow we start Chapter Twelve.”

“But Da!” his daughters chorused. “Ye canna leave it there!”

“I can, wee ones, and I will.”

Five-year-old Brianna huffed, but obediently slid across the top bunk and carefully climbed the ladder down to the bottom bunk. Jamie unfolded his very long limbs and followed Bree down, turning to tuck the duvet around Faith’s small shoulders and gently kiss her forehead.

“Maybe ye want to read us the chapter tomorrow night, *mo chiusle*?”

Sleepily, eagerly she nodded, yawning. “Yes please.”

He kissed the crown of her head – her curls so much like Claire’s. “Sleep well. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

Not to be left out, Brianna tugged Jamie’s jeans right below the knee. He shook his head and crouched to bid her a goodnight as well, pulling back her messy red curls and kissing her once on each cheek, then on the tip of her nose – the way he had since she was a tiny bairn. She giggled, and he smiled.

“Night Da.”

“Goodnight wee Bree. I love you.”

He set the battered book on the dresser, switched on the nightlight (a soft blue glow, casting star shapes on the ceiling), and switched off the main lamp.

“Love you too. Love you both. See you in the morning.”

Quietly he shut their door half way, then padded across the hall to the boys’ room.

“…Goodnight…cl..clocks and goodnight socks.” Four-year-old William sat cheek-by-jowl with fourteen-year-old Fergus on the older boy’s bed, brow furrowed as he sounded out the letters. “Goodnight…lit…little house and goodnight…mouse.”

“Well done!”

William immediately looked up. “I’m reading all by myself, Da!”
Jamie couldn’t help the smile that split his face, bursting with pride. “You are!”

“It is slow but he is doing well,” Fergus added. “He is very quick, is he not?”

“Of course he is.” Jamie knelt by the bed and opened his arms; William quickly abandoned the book and leapt into his Da’s embrace.

“Oof!” Jamie laughed. “You’ll be reading Fergus’ books in no time!”

“Not yet, silly.” William shook his head as he hugged Jamie tightly. “That’s big kid books. I’m still a bairn.”

“You are, that’s true. But you’ll be a big kid before you know it.”

Gently he lay William on his own bed, tucked the Godzilla comforter up around his neck, and kissed his wee brow.

“Love you.”

“Love you Da. Can I read to ye tomorrow night?”

“Of course – if Fergus doesna mind.”

“I don’t.” Across the room, Fergus had settled into his own bed, neatly placing William’s book on the bedside table they shared. “I need to read my own books tomorrow.”

Jamie made sure William was settled with his favorite toy bunny, then crossed the room to sit at the foot of his eldest son’s bed.

“Thank you for reading with him,” he said sincerely.

“You know I am happy to. It is good for me, too.”

Jamie leaned over to kiss Fergus’ forehead. “*Bonsoir, mon fils.*”

“*Bonsoir, Papa. Bisous à Maman.*”

“I’ll gladly give them to her. Do ye want the light?”


With two flicks – one to turn on William’s favorite dinosaur nightlight, the other to turn off the main light – Jamie settled his two sons to sleep.

“Love you,” he said softly.

“Love you,” they replied.

He left the door open – as they preferred – and walked to the end of the hall, softly opening and then closing the door.

Claire – hair disheveled, still wearing her surgery scrubs – briefly glanced up before returning her gaze to her work laptop, tap-tapping away a report on her day’s work.

“Everything all right?”

“Aye – they all went down without a fight.” Jamie kicked off his slippers and sprawled in the
center of their bed, yawning.

“Murtagh said he took them to the play park this afternoon – the weather was so nice. And Suzette did the girls’ nails, did you see?”

“I did.”

He didn’t say anything for a long while – just listened to her furiously pound they keyboard, in that way she was wont to do when re-living every detailed step of the surgeries she had performed. She had had a particularly grueling day, and hadn’t been able to write up her post-surgery reports for several days, leading to the infrequent but always regrettable decision to come home and finish the work, rather than stay late at the hospital. This way, she could at least spend dinner with the children before retreating to the bedroom while Jamie oversaw the bedtime activities. They understood, of course – they all did, including Jamie. But that didn’t mean that Claire enjoyed it.

“Have I ever told you about Gavin Hayes, Claire?”

She stopped typing, and stretched her arms. “Wasn’t he one of the people you apprenticed with, when you worked for your uncles in New York?”

He smiled, just a bit. “Aye, that’s the one. Anyway – he’s in Glasgow this week. Called me up a few days ago, and we went to lunch today.”

Claire saved her work and closed the laptop, yawning. “How did that go?”

Jamie paused, thinking hard, trying to find the right words. But couldn’t – so he just shared the honest words.

“His wife is divorcing him.”

Claire turned off the desk lamp and slid onto the bed, resting on her right side. She reached out her left hand, and like always his hand automatically found hers.

“That’s terrible. I didn’t know he was married.”

“I knew, somehow – it just happened a few years back. They have a two-year-old son.”

He lay on his back, facing the ceiling; she admired his profile in the half-light seeping from the open bathroom door.

“That’s even worse.”

He sighed, then squeezed her fingers. “I will use his exact words to describe the situation. He has not been faithful to his wife, for a long time, and she only recently found out about it. The latest girl was someone he works with.”

“Oh my God, that’s awful!”

“It gets worse. He didna apologize for it, but felt sorry that she found out. As if that’s not bad enough.”

Then he turned on his side to face Claire.

“And then he said that he had had trouble bonding wi’ his son, and that fatherhood was too hard, anyway.”
“Just like that?”

“Aye, just like that! Being unfaithful to his wife is one thing – but claiming that being a father was like...like a chore, and then on top of that saying that it didna matter because he couldn’t bond with his son?!”

Claire scooted closer on the bed, molding herself around him. Being there.

“I knew I hadna seen him for a few years – but he seemed like a completely different person than the lad I knew in New York.” He sighed, stroking Claire’s back, working one hand up beneath her scrub top to trace the bumps of her spine.

“People change. You know that.”

“Aye – but no’ *that* much. It was almost like – like he woke up one morning, and realized he had responsibilities, and wanted to run from them. And in the process, make foolish decisions.”

“Yes. It’s so sad.”

“It’s no’ just him, mind – there’s the wife, and the puir boy who will be shuttled between them for his whole life. It isna fair.”

“It’s not.”

He kissed her forehead. “Claire – I know that the bairns drive me beyond crazy some days. But I canna – I canna even fathom what would make it OK to just throw my hands up in the air and feel like...like I couldna even care enough to try.”

She nuzzled against his neck. “You’re the best father to them. You always have been.”

“I’m *proud* to be their Da. Christ knows, Claire – we prayed so hard for them.”

Memory flashed – the hormone injections, the visits to Joe Abernathy, the months and months of tears and disappointment. “We did. They love you, you know.”

“I know. I – *we’ve* – been bonded wi’ them, all of them, since the day we found out ye carried them. And Fergus – since the day we met him. From that first moment.”

She tangled her legs with his. “It’s a bullshit reason to walk away from your marriage, your family – to say that you’re struggling to bond with your children. So what? He’s just going to give up?”

Jamie sighed. “I guess so.”

“What did you say to him, after all this?”

“Would ye hate me if I told ye that I stood up and left the restaurant?”

“You know I won’t – but that’s a bold move.”

His thumbnail gently pressed into the soft, soft flesh of her side. “It was the only logical response I could think of.”

He pulled back a bit – eyes fierce and bright in the dark.

“Claire – my love. You know there’s only you, right?”
From nowhere, tears welled. “Jamie –”

“And nothing comes before you, and our family. Right? You know that, right?”

“Of course.” He thumbed away her tears. “You don’t ever need to tell me. You prove it to me – to the children – to our friends and family. Every day.”

He let out a long breath.

“You know there’s only you, Jamie? Right?”

He swallowed. “Of course. Always.”

“Good. Because if you ever fear that you could even go down Gavin’s path – you’re wrong. That’s not you – it could never be you.”

“I didna say –”

“You didna need to. I *know* you.”

“Aye.” Now he smiled – just a bit. But it was real and so very heartfelt.

“And I thank God every day that ye do, *mo nighean donn.*”

He leaned in for a kiss, and knew that all would be well.
“Oh no you don’t!”

Marsali darted to catch one-year-old Germaine as he raced across Lallybroch’s main sitting room.

“Don’t worry, cherie,” Fergus crooned from the other side of the room, arms outstretched for their squealing son. “He is just fine.”

“Wait for him to find something to stick in his wee mouth – oof!” All at once father, mother, and son collided in a giggling heap.

“What’s all this?” Jamie ducked his head around the corner, spectacles (which Claire insisted made him look distinguished rather than like an auld man) pushed up to the top of his head.

“Just – a bit of – fun,” Fergus panted, arms wrapped tightly around his much-beloved wife and son.

“I see,” Jamie smiled. “It’s good to have bairns in this house again.”

Marsali grabbed a firm hold of Germaine and sat up straight. “Speaking of bairns – where’s Julia this morning?”

“She and Murtagh and Sinem were up at the crack of dawn to resume their dig.” Jamie shifted an armful of papers – ledgers, bills, and the like. “She’s convinced they’re on the verge of something big.”

Faintly they heard the back door slam – it could have been Claire, back from her quick trip to the clinic, or it could have been Mrs. Crook, back from the market, or –

“Da!”

Now Jamie had to be wary of his own blonde tornado, as twelve-year-old Julia Fraser raced down the corridor, her best friend Sinem not too far behind.

“Careful!” Quickly he lifted the papers above her head as she sped past. “I dinna want ye tripping on the carpet again, do ye hear? Yer Mam wouldna be too happy about that.”

But Julia had ground to a halt in the sitting room, scampering over to Marsali and opening her arms to Germaine and his gummy grin.

Sinem shyly stood in the hallway next to Jamie.

“Did you find anything?” Fergus asked politely.

Sinem nodded excitedly, her dark brown braids – she and Julia had shared the same hairstyle since the day they had met – bobbing in the afternoon sunlight.
“What did ye find, then?” Jamie asked gently. “The big something ye had hoped for?”


“Aye!” Julia piped up from the middle of the room, bouncing Germaine on her lap. “A whole horde!”

Jamie turned to Sinem. “Would ye like us all to come out, then?”

She smiled, so happy to share this joy with the family she had come to love so much since they had welcomed her with open arms several years before.

“Sounds like a good plan. Fergus, can ye help me sort these papers?”

“Told ye long enough!” Murtagh grumbled as he lifted his large, floppy hat to wipe his sweaty brow.

“I had to get everyone, Murtagh! Ye ken how long that can take sometimes.” Julia huffed as she handed him an ice cold Irn-Bru, which he gratefully accepted with a mmphm noise.

“Did you dig this all by yourselves?” Fergus asked, voice full of wonder, clutching Germaine tight to his shoulder. “It must be at least three meters square!”

“Five,” Julia corrected. “We make a grid, and then mark out smaller squares within the grid.”

“We also make detailed drawings of what we find in each layer,” Sinem explained, showing Fergus the notebook she so diligently filled out with every excavation.

“That’s incredible!” Fergus exclaimed, peering intently at the dozens of drawings. “Do you also take photographs?”

“But what did you find?” Suzette had crossed the side of the pit to stand beside her sweaty husband, gently rubbing his back.

“Look!” Gently Julia hoisted her excavator – essentially, a round piece of iron mesh surrounded by wood – on which rested half a dozen round metal fragments.

Fergus, Marsali, and Jamie craned their necks, peering intently at the objects. “They look like bullets,” Marsali observed.
“That’s what we thought,” Julia agreed. “Grape shot, to be exact. Da – ye said that this part of the estate had had a small shed around the time of the ’45, aye?”

“Aye, I had.” He vividly remembered the day he and Julia and William had spent hours sifting through crumbling boxes and old leather-bound volumes in the attic, searching for the land surveys completed by his six-times great-grandfather on the eve of Culloden. That forethought had ensured the estate remained safely in Fraser hands during the terrible years that followed the Rising – and would remain so, as long as Jamie had a say.

“So – Sinem has been doing some research, too. We think that the shed was used to store military supplies, for the Lallybroch Frasers.”

“But the Lallybroch Frasers didna fight at Culloden,” Murtagh countered.

“Yes, but the research showed that it was a last-minute decision to not fight,” Sinem quietly replied. “We believe that they prepared for the battle for some time.”

“Ye’ve been reading the ledgers, then?” Jamie asked, bursting with pride at his youngest daughter’s hard work.

“Aye! It all makes sense, Da. When else would there have been so much ammunition here at Lallybroch? We all ken what happened after the Rising…”

“Aye,” Murtagh interjected glumly. “We do.”

Fergus held back Germaine’s tiny hands, but nodded his chin at another hunk of rusted metal. “What’s that?”

Gently Sinem lifted the bit of metal from the screen, holding it in the palm of her hand. Julia dabbed at it with a damp cloth, removing the dirt chunk by chunk.

After a minute or so, the group gasped.
“It’s a wee cross,” Marsali breathed. “How beautiful.”

Suzette peered at the mysterious object. “Do you think it came from a rosary, perhaps?”

“Aye, that’s certainly possible,” Jamie mused. “God knows, if I was preparing to fight the English wi’ nothing but a sword, I’d be praying the Rosary every second of every day.”

“You refer to the Battle of Culloden, right?” Sinem gently placed the cross back on the screen, and wiped her dirty hands on her even dirtier jeans.

“Yes.” Jamie sighed, still dumbstruck at the sheer futility and overwhelming loss of that fateful day in 1746. “The Highlanders charged the English army – the most technologically advanced in the world – wi’ nothing but their swords and dirks and targes.”

“Aye. For the damn fool prince,” Murtagh added, now standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the group. Germaine extended his arms, and Murtagh took him without hesitation, holding the wee one close.

Each was lost in their own thoughts for a while – punctuated by the whoosh of summer wind in the trees, and the crows cawing over by the barn, and the crunch of gravel on the long driveway…

“What’s all this?”

Julia whirled to see Claire, still clad in her scrubs, car keys in hand.

And raced to her Mama, beaming with pride and joy, eager to share the fruits of her labors.
Claire yawned, then sipped from the dregs of her now-cold tea, thumbing through the dog-eared anatomy textbook. Three weeks until medical school started; she had decided to quit her nursing job about five weeks before the term began, so that she could transition and prepare.

And prepare she had – Jamie gradually stockpiled notebooks, pens, sticky notes, and plastic folders from the printshop (“Every penny counts,” he had argued); Claire carefully reviewed the syllabus for each class, ordered all her textbooks, and scoured the Internet for deals; together they agreed on a tighter budget for groceries and clothes and household supplies, now that only Jamie’s income (and Claire’s thankfully deep savings) supported them.

He had been so disappointed that they had had to cancel their first anniversary trip the week before, due to an unexpected convergence of circumstances at the printshop; secretly she had been glad to just have him to herself, here at home, for a blissful four days. Four days full of fried eggs and Monty Python and cuddles on the couch and afternoon walks in Kelvingrove Park and lots and lots of lovemaking…

She started at the blare of a car horn in the street, then glanced over to the clock on the microwave.

Eleven-thirty PM. Jamie had left for the printshop at seven AM. Here in the depths of August, with the management team either on holiday or touring with the more prominent authors elsewhere in the country, Jamie had been left to run the day-to-day operations of the publishing house. It was a
fantastic opportunity to demonstrate how capable he was – but it was exhausting, to say the least. Every day this week he had worked at least eighteen hours; on Tuesday he hadn’t even come home, the bone-deep exhaustion crinkling his eyes and making his voice husky during the eleven PM video chat when he had told her he would sleep on the couch in Rupert’s office.

Today was Friday; six months ago they would have celebrated with drinks at the pub, or perhaps a movie. But tonight – tonight, all Jamie and Claire Fraser wanted was to quietly hold each other.

Claire rubbed her eyes tiredly, debating whether to turn in –

Her phone screen flashed. “Finally done. See u soon. Ily mnd.”

Her tired heart soared. Quickly she set the mug in the sink and padded off to their bedroom, thumbing a quick reply:

“So happy. Love u more.”

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When Jamie finally staggered into their bedroom some twenty minutes later, at first she thought he was drunk.

“Are you all right?” She rose from the bed, brow furrowed with concern –

“Holy God.” Jamie blinked in the soft lamplight, not sure whether he was asleep or awake.

“What?” she smiled, coming to stand before him, cupping his stubbled jaw.

He swallowed; she traced the bob of his Adam’s apple with her fingernail. “What is *that*?”

Briefly she glanced down. “This? It’s called a negligee. Would you believe I had it at the back of the closet? I was looking for some socks this afternoon – ”

Softly his hands – shaking a bit with fatigue – settled on her bare shoulders, traced down her sides, cupped her arse. Just as softly, she untied his tie, unbuttoned his shirt, pulled the shirt tails from his pants, undid his belt…

“Is there an occasion? I’m sorry if I forgot…”

“Just that you’re home. Finally home.” Now she pushed the shirt from his shoulders and kissed the underside of his jaw. “And I have you to myself all weekend…”

He angled his face to kiss her – his lips landing first on her cheek, and then finally his mouth collided with hers.

Hungry.

Jamie squeezed his hands on her arse, then pulled back to whip off his shirt. Claire helped him step out of his shoes, and pants, then his undershirt.

Now it was her turn to seize his mouth; easily he picked her up, walked around the bed and gently, carefully lay her on the mattress.

She opened her legs; he settled between them and wriggled out of his boxers, then dove in to nip at her neck, clavicle, the tops of her breasts. One hand kept him balanced over her, the other reached down…
“Ifrinn!” he exclaimed, breath hot against her neck.

“Jamie?” Claire set up a bit on her elbows, concern etched on her face. “Are you all right?”

Even in the dim light she could see that his face was beet red with effort and embarrassment. His chest rapidly rose and fell. She glanced down to his pelvis…

…to where he furiously tugged on a decidedly non-erect part of his anatomy.

“GÓRACH PÍOS DE CAC!” he spat. “What the hell is wrong wi’ me?”

“Jamie!” Now she sat up fully and, taking both of Jamie’s hands in hers, drew him into her embrace. He snuffed against her, brow so hot and sweaty, shaking with frustration and shame.

“Sshh. It’s all right, love. Sshh. Just be still.”

He crossed his legs and hoisted her onto his lap, one arm locked around her shoulders, the other anchored on one side of her arse. Face buried in her neck. Carefully she soothed him, running gentle hands up and down his tense, heaving back.

“Sshh,” she repeated, feeling his heart thunder against hers. “Just be with me.”

His tears were as hot as his forehead. “I’m sorry,” he murmured. “So sorry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for, my love.” She kissed his forehead, then the damp curls at his hairline. “You’re so stressed and exhausted. Your body is shutting down. That’s why you need me to take care of you.”

In this position, his still-limp cock was flush with her, warm and wet and ready. She shifted a bit, and he gasped.

“I wanted to just be one with ye tonight,” he choked, voice hoarse. “It’s all I’ve thought about all week…and then…”

“Sshh. It’s all right. We have forever together. Don’t we?”

“Yes,” he breathed immediately. “Yes. But – but am I greedy for wanting ye now? Tonight?”

“No, you’re not.” She licked the shell of his ear, bit his earlobe. He dug his nails into her shoulderblade. “Watch?”

He pulled back just enough to kiss the tip of her nose – then obeyed, looking down to their hips. Softly she slid back on his thighs, taking hold of him with unspeakable care and reverence. Cherishing the trust he had in her, in this most intimate of acts.

She watched the muscles in his belly quiver.

Then the world shifted as she touched the tip of him to the softest part of her.

He let out a strangled shout.

“You know I love you, Jamie?”

Throat parched, he could only nod, mesmerized.

“And that there’s nothing you could do that would make me love you less?”
“Claire,” he choked, watching her swirl their flesh together. “Claire –”

“I can’t wait to give you children. To grow old with you. To have every day with you.”

“I love you,” he sobbed. “So…so much…Oh, God!”

Sweat beaded between her breasts; the negligee stuck to her like a second skin; he had never loved her, or wanted her, more than at this moment.

Then all he saw and felt was light – pure, healing, blinding light – and surrendered to her safekeeping.

—–

“If you say ‘thank you’ one more time…”

His laugh was a deep rumble in his chest, still heaving. “You’re a sorceress, Claire.” His mind was still somewhere else in the room; his voice sounded so light. “I don’t know how ye did that.”

Her laugh was free and happy against his sweaty side. “Simple biology. When you rub two very sensitive organs against each other…”

He playfully swatted her arse. “No’ like that, and ye ken that weel.” Suddenly serious, he drew back a bit. “You…you found me, amid my fear and frustration. You found my heart – you reached into my very soul.”

She kissed his chin. “Even if your body won’t respond – I know your mind will. Your heart will.”

“Aye.” Lazily he traced the edges of the negligee. “Ye wanted me, and I couldna…I couldna meet yer needs. I felt like less than a man. I panicked.”

“I know. I wanted to stop it.”

“Should I be surprised that it hasna happened before?”

She shrugged. “We’ve only been married a year.”

“Yes, but how many times do ye think we’ve made love? At least half a thousand…”

“At the very least,” she grinned. “But never have you been so drained before. It’s natural for this to happen when you’re tired, and hungry, and stressed. It will pass.”

“I hope so,” he sighed. “I felt like a very auld man, and I didna like it one bit.”

She kissed his nose. “Which is why you need to let me take care of you this weekend. No work. No Saturday work. Just sleep, and food, and me.”

He pecked her cheek. “I want to serve ye properly, Claire. To make up for this.”

“Hush.” She snuggled closer. “You don’t need to make up for anything. I really liked what we did.”

“I did too.”

“I want to do it again.”
He grinned stupidly – so unspeakably happy to be married to her. “I do too.” A beat. “Can we, right now? But wi’ the camera?”

She seized his face and kissed him long and hard and deep.

“I love you,” she murmured against his lips.

“I love you,” he replied. “Is the battery charged?”
Dr. Claire Fraser ducked her head around the doorway to find her husband glowering at main window of Lallybroch’s sitting room, eyes trained on the dooryard.

“There you are,” she said a tad too cheerfully. “Joanie and Félicité were asking after you. They want Grandda to tell them a bedtime story.”

“Fergus can do it,” Jamie replied curtly, not even turning to look at her. “I want to be here when she comes home. The lad’s still got three minutes.”

Claire sighed and crossed the room to stand beside him, slipping an arm around his surprisingly tense shoulders. Watching, with Jamie, as the sun dipped below the horizon.

“I ken Julia can mind herself,” he said softly, answering his wife’s unspoken question. “And I know he’s a good lad. And it’s no’ like I havena been here before, waiting for my girls to come home. Only – ”

“Only – with Bree, it was Roger, who we’ve known since she was in preschool. And with Faith, it was Rob – who was a soldier and is the only boy she ever chose. This time it’s a different. I understand.”

Jamie nodded absently. “Julia’s our wee bairn, Claire. Our miracle. I – I ken she’s sixteen now, and that we have our three grandchildren upstairs, but I’ve never felt like an auld man until tonight.”

“Hush.” She leaned against his shoulder, sliding her palm into the back pocket of his soft, faded jeans. “You’ll be sixty next year. If anyone’s auld, it’s me.”

That finally got him to crack a smile. “Aye. ‘Tis true. Though I must say, even though ye’re half-way to seventy, ye dinna look a day over fifty.”

She snorted. “How charitable of you. And I’m not quite half-way to seventy…”

He tensed, then – and she looked up to see a set of headlights curving around the driveway.

Jamie glanced down at his watch – a gift from Claire and the children for his fiftieth birthday. “Seven fifty-nine. Well done.”

Claire stood on her tiptoes to kiss his stubbled cheek. “Come on. Let’s go upstairs.”

“No,” Jamie insisted. “I’m staying here. I want to see how the lad sees her home.”

“How would you have behaved with me, had I been in Julia’s situation?” she asked, watching the young man step around the front of the car to open Julia’s door and help her stand.
Jamie huffed. “I was honorable wi’ ye, and ye ken that weel.”

Claire sighed, watching the young couple slowly step through the dooryard and across the paving stones to the front door.

“She deserves privacy,” Claire whispered.

“You may know the lad, Claire, but I don’t.” And with that he slid away from her and walked quickly over to the front door, pulling it open with a flourish.

The young couple blinked up at him.

“Da?” Julia’s voice was strong but surprised. “Were ye waiting by the door?”

“Thank you for bringing my daughter home on time.” Jamie extended one big hand.

The young man, suddenly sweating in the cool autumn evening, looked him in the eye and shook his hand firmly. “It was what ye asked, Mr. Fraser.”

“It was. But still, I appreciate it.”

“Elias!” Claire materialized at Jamie’s side. “Won’t you come inside?”

The creases between the young man’s brows noticeably softened. “Hi, Dr. Fraser. I’d love to, but I need to get home. Early shift tomorrow at the clinic.”

“Oh! You know you could have asked me to move it around for you, it wouldn’t have been any trouble – ”

“It’s all right,” he smiled, tucking his hands into the pockets of his corduroy trousers. “But thank ye for asking. I’ll be assisting Dr. Rawlings with a surgery, first thing. I’ll need to be well-rested.”

Claire returned his smile. “Well – next time, then.”

Jamie bristled beside her. “Weel, ye heard the lad, Claire. Good night, Elias.”

Elias nodded to both of them. “Good night, Mr. Fraser, Dr. Fraser. And good night, Julia.” He turned to face her, face a bit flushed. “Thanks for a lovely evening.”

He gave her a quick, shy smile, squeezed her hand, then turned to go.

For years afterward, Claire remembered how loud the chirping crickets had sounded when Julia reached out a gentle hand to catch Elias’ shoulder, bring him closer, and kiss him full on the mouth, right there in the dooryard in front of both her parents.

“Good night,” she smiled sweetly. “See you soon.”

Elias could manage only a bewildered nod before dashing back to his car.

“I’m going to find some dessert,” Julia mused, watching Elias’ car pull out of the driveway. “We would have had some at the restaurant, but for some reason I needed to be home at eight.” She flashed a brief smile at Claire before slipping between her parents and disappearing into the house.

Claire turned to look at Jamie – still standing open-mouthed at the now-empty driveway – and burst out laughing.
“Come on, lad.” Gently Murtagh shook four-year-old William Fraser’s tiny shoulder, trying to rouse the lad from his nap. “Time to get up. I already let you sleep a bit more than usual.”

William mumbled and curled into a ball under his favorite soft blanket – one that Murtagh had borrowed from Lallybroch years before, and never got around to returning. Knitted by William’s grandmother Ellen, from wool that William’s grandfather Brian had sheared from the Lallybroch flock.

Murtagh sighed, gently rubbing William’s small back, watching a car quietly parallel park on the street three storeys below.

“Did I tell ye that Suzette just made a batch of the rolls ye like so much wi’ yer tea?”

That got William’s attention – he shifted on the pillow and squinted up at Murtagh, his small face still creased with sleep. “Ye mean, the ones wi’ the raisins?”

“Aye. They’re still warm – if ye’re not careful, yer sisters will eat them all before ye can even have one.”

William sighed, then sat up, scrubbing the back of his head with a tired hand. It was such a Jamie gesture that Murtagh nearly started.

“Suzette wouldna let them,” William insisted, yawning away his sleepiness. “Or Fergus.”

“Ye may be right,” Murtagh nodded, standing and then bending down to pick up his godson/grandson and lift him to his shoulder. William gratefully curled around his middle, and Murtagh softly stepped through the door and down the hallway to the kitchen. “But ye dinna want to risk it, aye?”

“William?” Fergus appeared in the hallway as he heard Murtagh’s heavy steps approaching the kitchen. “Are you all right?”

“Aye,” he yawned. “Are there any rolls left?”

“Of course.” Fergus pulled out a chair at the kitchen table, and Murtagh gently set William onto his booster seat. “Suzette? Plus de pain pour le petit?”

“Bien sûr,” she replied, carefully setting a plate with two piping hot brioche rolls and a mug of hot chocolate in front of William’s place.

“Merci,” he smiled, then allowed Fergus to help him break up the rolls into several pieces.
“Ye didna help me wi’ *my* roll!” Five-year-old Brianna piped up from the other end of the table, where her plate only had crumbs.

“Sshh,” whispered six-year-old Faith. “Remember, we’re too old to nap now. William takes *forever* to wake up. Like Mama.”

Suzette smiled as she set down Murtagh’s helping – two rolls, butter, strawberry jam, and a steaming mug of Darjeeling tea – and kissed her husband’s brow. He slipped an arm around her waist, holding her close. “What are ye drawing there, Faith?”

Faith only briefly glanced up at Murtagh before returning to the piece of paper crowded with dozens of people and animals and flowers. “My art teacher, Miss Fiona – she’s getting marrit next week! So I want to give her something before we all leave for holiday.”

“That’s verra nice of ye.” Murtagh chewed around a bite of brioche roll – one of his very favorite things, apart from his wife and these bairns, of course. “I’m sure she’ll appreciate yer wee wedding gift.”

“I’ve never been to a wedding,” Brianna sighed, eyeing the half-eaten roll on Faith’s plate.

“Yes you have,” Fergus insisted, pushing William’s chair a bit closer to the table. “We attended Murtagh and Tante Suzette’s wedding. But you were very small at the time. I remember you and William both slept through it!”

“You did.” Now Suzette sank into the empty chair beside Murtagh, wrapping an arm around his shoulders, sipping from his mug of tea. “Fergus danced with me at the reception! That was very fun.”

Brianna frowned. “It’s no’ fair. I canna remember it.”

“Do ye ken which wedding I can remember?”

Four wee Fraser heads swiveled to the head of the table, waiting.

Murtagh swallowed his bite of roll. “Yer mam and da’s wedding, of course. I was the only one there, aside from the two of them.”

“What was it like?”

“Was Mama really as pretty as in the picture?”

“Was Papa nervous?”

“What did ye eat for tea afterwards?”

For a long moment Murtagh just enjoyed the looks of surprise on their dear, dear faces – his mind returning to that fateful day more than nine years before.

“Ye ken yer mam and da met just a month before they marrit, aye?”

“They met on an airplane!” Bree squealed. “Da got hurt, and Mama fixed him.”

“Aye, that’s true. He asked her to marry him right here, in this kitchen – did ye ken that?”

Four gasps of surprise.
“No!” William exclaimed, wee hearts in his eyes. “Right here?”

“Aye,” Murtagh smiled. “Ye ken they lived here wi’ me, for a while, before they found their own flat?”

“I remember them telling me that, when we moved into our current flat,” Fergus nodded. “That was right after I came to Glasgow.”

“What was their wedding day like?” Faith asked politely, tidying up her stack of crayons and colored pencils. “I ken ye’ve told us about the wedding. But what happened the rest of the day?”

“Weel…yer da had a particular case of…mal à la tête…that morning.” Murtagh grinned as Suzette and Fergus shook their heads. “He was verra nervous as I helped him get ready – he thought that yer mam wouldna want to marry him.

“But why?” Brianna’s red brows furrowed. “She loves him so much.”

“Aye, weel – I felt the same way the morning I marrit Suzette. It’s normal.”

“He told me he was afraid I would not be there at the church,” Suzette smiled. “But of course you know that there was no place I would rather be, on that day.”

“Well.” Murtagh cleared his throat. “I helped him get into his kilt, and make sure it was all proper. Ye’ll mind that yer da was in New York for a few years before he returned to Glasgow? No’ many opportunities to wear a kilt there.”

“Da says that when I’m big, he’ll teach me to wear a kilt too,” William smiled. “He already showed Fergus.”

Fergus tsked. “It is very…very strange, at first. But I like it now. Even though I prefer trousers.”

“And Mama wore her grey dress, aye?” Faith asked. “I’ve seen it in the photo. And she still has it in her closet at home! She let me touch it once.”

“Yes, she wore a very beautiful grey dress. And yer Da gave her yer grannie Ellen’s pearls – ye’ll have seen those, too?”

Bree nodded. “They’re verra beautiful. But Faith and I cannot wear them yet. We need to be older.”

“That’s verra sensible. But yer Mam – she’s always been verra sensible, no?”

“Papa told me once that’s one of the reasons he loves her so much – she helps keep him grounded.” Fergus helped William wipe his hands with a soft linen napkin. “What did he think, when he first saw Maman on their wedding day?”

“He couldnna speak.”

*He blinked, watching helplessly as she slowly walked toward him. Quickly he grabbed her hands and twined their fingers together.*


“And he was verra chivalrous. Made sure she was all right. Helped her out of my car, when they
got to the registry office. They both dressed up, even though it was just a civil ceremony, because they knew how important of a day it was for them.”

Quietly Fergus disappeared into the living room – to return moments later, holding the framed portrait of Jamie and Claire that Murtagh had taken on that morning. Gently, reverently, he set it in the middle of the table.

“Enough wi’ ye,” Murtagh glowered, holding up his phone. “Give us a good pose, aye? Ye’ll want yer bairns to see what lovesick idiots their Mam and Da were on their wedding day.”

Jamie, glowing with joy, settled one hand possessively in the curve of Claire’s waist. She turned her body so it was flush against his side, her head settling into his shoulder.

Murtagh cursed gently as he tried and failed to get the camera to focus. It finally cooperated and he snapped one photo. Claire lifted her head and Jamie turned his to nuzzle her hair. Murtagh snapped another photo, shaking his head slightly. He cleared his throat.

“They still stand like that, for photos,” Fergus reflected. “It is an uncommon love, no?”

“Very uncommon,” Suzette agreed. “They knew, right from the beginning, yes?”

“Yes,” Murtagh nodded. “They love each other – and all four of ye – more than ye’ll ever be able to understand.”

Brianna sighed dreamily.

Faith added a few more pink hearts to her drawing.

William slurped the last bits of his hot chocolate.

Fergus turned to Murtagh. “You took this on your phone, yes? Not bad.”

Murtagh huffed in mock indignation, and Suzette squeezed his shoulder.

Just then, twin knocks sounded at the door.

Four wee Frasers scampered to see who it was – William high on Fergus’ shoulders – and collided with joy into their parents’ unsuspecting legs and arms.
Dr. Claire Fraser was accustomed to the middle-of-the-night phone calls. As the chief physician of the clinic in Broch Mordha, there was always the odd traffic accident or birth that required her immediate attendance. As she was a heavy sleeper, every night she set her mobile phone to the loudest, most obnoxious ringtone. Because if it didn’t wake her from the dead – then Jamie would shake her awake, begging her to turn the damn thing off.

But tonight, it was the house phone – the old rotary phone that had been in the Laird’s bedroom since Brian and Ellen Fraser had had residence – that jolted them awake.

Jamie flailed in bed – hit his wife of nineteen years squarely in the stomach – apologized at her foul Gaelic expletive, and fumbled for the phone on the bedside table.

“Hullo?”

With his free hand, Jamie clicked on the bedside lamp – one of the few items they’d retained from the Glasgow flat.

Claire rubbed her eyes, squinted at her phone screen – 2:34 AM – and sat up against the headboard.

“Slow down, Marsali. Is it Fergus?”

Now much more awake, Claire scooted closer to Jamie on the mattress, bringing her ear to the other side of the receiver.

Their daughter-in-law’s voice was half frenetic, half resigned. “…knew those lads werena a good influence on him. I told Fergus – he’s too young to be around them. I dinna care that they said they’d look out for him. He doesna ken them at all.”

“Marsali, love,” Jamie sighed. “It’s no’ that I want to be rude. But ye never call me at the house, at two in the morning no less – what’s wrong?”

“Yer son has gone and gotten himself arrested.”

“What?” Claire gasped.

“What?” Claire gasped.

“He left the flat around ten – said he’d be back afore midnight. But he was wi’ those lads. I *knew* they’d be up to no good. The first stop was the pub. God only knows where they went after that.”

“Mama? Da?” Nine-year-old Julia appeared in the doorway, clutching her favorite toy bunny, Rollo at her heels.

“Marsali – where did they go? I dinna follow ye.”
Claire sat up and pat the bed beside her. “Get in, lovey. Nothing to worry about.”

Julia padded into the bedroom and snuggled up against her Mama. Rollo lay on the knotted rug beside the bed, guarding his mistress.

With Julia curled up against her side, Claire couldn’t hear Marsali’s words – just the overly patient cadence of her voice.

Jamie ran a hand up and down his tired face. For a long time he just let Marsali talk. After a while he moved closer to Claire so that she could hear better.

“...of all the pig-headed things to do. I dinna care that it’s a tradition, or what have you – it’s still illegal. So he shouldna have been surprised when he climbed down the statue and came face-to-face with a police constable, who didna see the humor in a traffic cone painted wi’ a poop emoji on the Duke of Wellington’s heid.”

“What about the other lads?”

Marsali snorted into the receiver. “Of course they disappeared as soon as they saw the police car coming down the street! He was just so damn focused on his damn stupid mission that he didna see anything. Idiot took a selfie wi’ once he climbed onto the statue. So much for a moment of glory.”

“When was this?”

“Oh, just before midnight. Fergus didna call me from the police station until half past one.”

“That seems like a long time for them to wait to give him his phone call.”

Marsali paused. “What do ye mean, give him his phone call?”

Jamie sighed. Exhausted. “It’s his right under the law – to get a phone call when he’s been arrested.”

“But he wasna arrested, Da.”

Claire lay her forehead on Jamie’s shoulder.

“What? Marsali, I ken it’s late, but I dinna understand – ”

“It’s yer other son that was arrested! Ye have two, remember? Wee William!”

Jamie dropped the phone.

Claire picked it up. “Marsali – it’s Claire. Where is he?”

“He’s on his way back to the flat now, thank God. He used his phone call – ye can tell Da I’m no’ daft, I ken fine what our rights are under the law – to call us here. Fergus went out straight away. I just put the kettle on for them. Should be back here soon.”

Jamie lay motionless on the bed beside her.

“Thank you for letting us know, Marsali. Does he need to go back to the police station?”

“I dinna think so. Fergus paid the fine. Five hundred quid, if ye can believe it.”
“I’ll wire you the money first thing.”

“Thank ye, Mother Claire. He’ll be all right. Just shaken up a bit, from what Fergus said.”

“No need for me to speak to him tonight. He’s in more than capable hands. Though I do want him to come home on the first train tomorrow morning. I’m sure Jamie will want to pick him up. Talk things over.”

“I will. I’m sorry to disrupt yer night – just thought – ”

Claire’s heart swelled with love for her still relatively new daughter-in-law. She was feisty where Fergus was quiet; outgoing where he was a bit more reserved. And she loved her man – and his siblings – fiercely. Yes, she was a fine woman to have in the family. The best Fraser-by-marriage she could ask for.

“You did absolutely the right thing. Now take care of my sons. Tell them I’ll want to speak to both of them tomorrow.”

“I will. Good night, Mother Claire. Send my love to the girls.”

“I will.”

Claire reached over Jamie’s prone form to hang up the phone. The ancient bell deep within the console clanged softly as she set down the receiver.

She turned off the lamp and lay between her husband and youngest daughter – the former rigid, the latter softly snoring.

“He’ll be all right, Jamie.”

“What a damn fool,” he whispered. “What in the hell was he thinking?”

“He’s sixteen. He’s going to make mistakes.”

“Five hundred quid. That’s a very expensive mistake.”

“It’s better than prison. And aren’t you glad that he had Fergus and Marsali to turn to?”

He reached for her hand – twined his fingers through hers, below the bedclothes.

“Aye. It warms my heart. Fergus has always been his protector. But why do my instincts tell me that we wouldna have known, had Marsali no’ told us?”

“She wants what’s best for them. And she knows how we feel about honesty in this family.”

“Mmphmm.”

Claire closed her eyes, willing sleep.

Jamie chuckled. “All for a damn selfie. I canna wait to see it.”

“An eventful night out in the big city. He’ll be a hero at school in the village.”

“I wonder where he gets that flair for the dramatic. Surely not from *my* side of the family.”

Before remembering that Julia was in bed with them, Claire tackled her husband. Their youngest
daughter rolled off the bed, onto the dog – and their barks and shocked screams woke the entire household.

Click here to read more about one of Glasgow’s more eclectic traditions. And here is a picture I took myself during my visit to Glasgow last summer!
“Go Bree go!!”

Jamie lay a gentle hand on six-year-old William’s wee knees, holding his lower legs in place. “Dinna kick me, *a bhailach*, aye?”

William huffed a bit, but didn’t tear his eyes from the sight of his seven-year-old sister, bright red ponytail streaming from under her helmet as she chased the loose ball.

Claire grimaced at Jamie’s side, watching the girls crash into each other as they all dove with their sticks.

“I didn’t realize shinty would be so – so violent,” she remarked. “Faith, darling – you brought my first aid kit from the car, right?”

“Aye,” eight-year-old Faith nodded, taking a sip from her water bottle and handing it back to sixteen-year-old Fergus. “It’s in my bag, along wi’ a towel and snacks for Bree. She told me that she gets verra hungry when playing a game.”

“There’s a lot of running wi’ shinty – certainly helps work up an appetite.” Jamie shifted William a bit, keeping him steady. “I remember when I was a wee lad, playing wi’ the tenant’s children at Lallybroch – my Mam and Missus Crook would always make a big proper dinner after our games.”

“Maman – look!” Fergus exclaimed, pointing wildly at the field. They all squinted at the tangle of seven-year-olds, before one – clearly Bree – broke free from the pack, pushing the ball down the field toward the goal, running with all her might, a girl on the opposite team hot on her heels.

“Go, Bree!” Claire shouted. “Go! Go!”

It all happened so quickly – one second Bree was just meters away from the goal, the next she was sprawled flat on the grass, stick flying through the air, with the other girl running the ball back across the field.

“Oi!” Jamie screamed. “That’s no’ fair! She was tripped!”

“Aye!” one of the parents beside Jamie chimed in. “I saw it wi’ my own eyes! That girl canna play dirty!”

Claire’s heart stopped as she watched Brianna on the ground, not moving.

Although the game had made its way to the other side of the field, the referee blew his whistle to halt play, and quickly ran back to investigate.

“Mama?” Faith’s hand gently touched her elbow. “Mama – here is the bag.”
Gratefully Claire took it, mind going into her finest Doctor mode, already running through the list of possibilities in her head, calculating how long it would take an ambulance to arrive –

Then Jamie rested a warm, reassuring hand on her shoulder. “Claire – look.”

And her heart somehow began to beat again, for slowly Bree pushed herself upright, adjusted her helmet, and searched the field for her stick. Soft applause echoed along the sideline, and she waved at her family – silently letting them know she was all right.

And all five Frasers knew she was – for as soon as she trotted to the other side of the field, and the referee blew his whistle once more to signal that the game could resume, Brianna used her stick to hit the girl who had knocked her down, straight in the knees.

Years later when Faith told the story at Brianna’s hen party, she told how William had scrambled to the ground and run across the field to defend her – that Fergus had taken off right after him – that Mama had groaned – and that Da had cheered and laughed. With the punchline being that Brianna would do whatever it took to defend herself – and that Roger had better watch his ballocks.
Claire blearily watched the machine dispense stale, industrial-grade coffee, not even bothering to hide her yawn.

Twenty-six hours she had been on her feet. Two other nurses were out, caring for sick children. A freak unexpected snowstorm had snarled Glasgow’s traffic and brought a seemingly unending stream of casualties through the hospital doors. And this year’s flu season had been unexpectedly bad – meaning she had been sneezed at, vomited on, and coughed on more times today than she cared to admit.

She didn’t mind the extra work – especially now that she was actively pulling together applications for medical school, with Jamie’s unwavering help and support. There would come a time in the near future where they’d be grateful to have the extra money.

In the abstract, that made sense. But now, in the moment – she just wanted to fast-forward through the next ten or so hours.

“Claire?”

Gratefully she sipped the coffee, holding her breath so that she couldn’t taste it.

“Claire?”

She turned to see Glenna FitzGibons – head nurse at the hospital, and her dear friend and mentor – frowning in the doorway of the break room.

“Och, lass – ye have to stay away from that stuff. It’ll wear a hole in yer stomach.”

“It’s better than nothing.” Claire felt the room sway a bit. “I’ve got to keep going.”

“Mmphmm.” Glenna shook her head. “Can ye come wi’ me? Bring the coffee if ye like.”

Claire sighed, then approached Glenna, who gently waved her into the hallway before falling into step beside her.

“Where are we going?”

“Here – just down the hall.”

Immediately Claire’s mind raced, mentally preparing for whatever may be ahead. “Has something else happened? Another car accident?”
“No – no, everything is quite all right.” Glenna stopped outside Exam Room 3. “Just go inside. And take yer time – I’ll cover for ye.”

Claire’s brow furrowed. “I don’t understand –”

Gently Glenna touched her arm. “Just go inside, Claire. Trust me. You’ll see.”

So Claire turned the knob and stepped inside to see –

“Jamie?”

Quickly he sprung to his feet and closed the door – locked it – and kissed Claire’s cheek, beaming. “Hi.”


“Glenna called me.” Already his hands had found hers, fingers twining together. “She’s worried about you. You’re working too much.”

“I’m perfectly fine. Just got my third wind. I just need –”

“You *need* to sit down and rest. Even for just a few minutes.” He squeezed her hands. “I had to see you.”

Her tired heart soared – and she knew it was from more than the caffeine. “I’m happy to see you, Jamie – don’t think that I’m not. But I’ve worked long shifts before, you know. I don’t understand why you felt so compelled to be here today.”

He smiled at her, a bid sadly. “Not so much as today, Claire – but what we both missed yesterday.”

Claire blankly blinked. “Yesterday? Yesterday was Tuesday – what’s so special about Tuesdays?”

“Yesterday was February the fourteenth,” he said softly.


“No need to apologize, *mo nighean donn*. We’ll have dozens more, aye? Only since this is the first, so…”

She dropped his hands and reached up to cradle his dear, dear face, kissing him sweetly.

He made a face when they parted. “You taste awful. Like something industrial.”

She kissed his chin. “It’s the coffee. Or what passes for coffee, anyway.”

He gestured to the examination table in the small room. For the first time she saw that he had pulled down a fresh sheet of paper, and set the table with two paper plates, two Costa Coffee cups, and three sweet pastries on top of a folded paper bag.

She kissed him again, and whispered, “Thank you.”

He grinned and led her to the table, where he pulled out a chair and helped her take a seat. “It’s no’ much, but –”

“It’s perfect.” Now he sat across from her, and she took his left hand across the table, thumbing his wedding ring. “Black?”
“Of course. Wi’ a dash of cinnamon, the way ye’ve liked it recently.”

She sipped her coffee with her free hand, savoring the flavors on her tongue. Watching her husband. Heaven.

“What time is it, anyway?”

Jamie looked down at his watch. “About three p.m.”

Claire shrugged, squeezed his hand, and released it – to take a huge bite out of a ginger scone.

“This is amazing,” she murmured around a mouthful, dropping crumbs everywhere.

He sipped his cup of Earl Grey tea, watching his exhausted wife – make-up crusting at the corners of her tired eyes, dried snot or vomit on the sleeve of her scrubs, stuffing her face with a pastry he’d bought for less than one pound – and fell even more hopelessly in love.
Carefully Jamie set down the piping hot kettle and slowly crossed the kitchen, balancing the tray with sure, steady hands.

Claire thanked him for the tea and biscuits with a tired smile, absently rubbing the ever-growing swell of their second bairn. He kissed her forehead and sat across from her at the table with mismatched chairs that was all they could afford as newlyweds almost four years before.

“Better today?” he asked quietly, pushing the mug of chamomile closer to her waiting hands.

“Not quite,” she sighed. “Faith is cutting another tooth, poor thing. Screamed like a banshee most of the afternoon, when I was trying to study.”

Jamie rubbed her feet, propped up on the chair beside him. “I’m sorry I wasna here to care for her.”

Claire wrapped her hands around the mug. “There was nothing you could have done – nothing even I could have done. It just needs to happen. Thank God we have the teething rings in the freezer – but that only does so much.”

“Aye. And then she’s so upset that there’s no soothing her, aye?”

She nodded. “And now with this one – we’ll be going through it again before we know it.”

Gently Jamie squeezed Claire’s ankles, meeting her gaze across the table. “We’ll make do when wee Brian arrives. We always have.”

Her tired eyes narrowed above her tea. “And who exactly is Brian?”

Jamie’s own brows furrowed in confusion. “Our bairn, aye? The one in yer belly.”

Claire sat down her mug and crossed her arms. “I wasn’t aware we had settled on a name. Or that it was a boy.”

Jamie shrugged. “I think it would be appropriate to name him after my father.”

“Assuming that first of all, the baby is a boy and that second of all, I agree,” she huffed.

“And why would ye no’ agree, Claire? Ye ken well how important my Da is to me. Was. Even though ye never met him.”

Crossly she slid her feet off the chair beside Jamie’s, abruptly standing straight up, arms still crossed, glowering down at her idiot husband. “I know that, Jamie. I’m not stupid.”

Incredulously he shook his head. “I dinna recall saying ye were stupid, Claire. I’d never say that about ye. But I thought ye’d understand why I want to name him Brian, for my father.”
“And did it ever occur to you,” she hissed, “that perhaps I’d want to name the baby after my own father, if it was a boy?”

From the look of surprise that crossed his tired features, Claire realized that no, it hadn’t.

She sighed, suddenly tired of everything.

“Or is Henry a too English name for a Scottish Fraser, hmm? You’d marry an English wife and have half-English children, but insist on stamping your cultural heritage on them?”

Slowly Jamie rose, hands slightly outstretched. “Come on, Claire – get those foolish ideas out of your head. You ken that’s no’ true – Faith is an English name, for God’s sake!”

“It’s a religious name, which transcends nationality,” she sniffed, eyes suddenly full of tears. “And that’s different.”

Now he slowly stepped around the table, edging closer. “I hadna considered Henry as a name, Claire. Not because I don’t like it – just because I’m an idiot who hadna considered it. The same with girls’ names…” He shrugged. “I suppose after already having a girl, I was thinking that this time we’d have a boy.”

Claire wiped her nose on the sleeve of her bathrobe. “Are you saying you want a boy more than a girl?”

And then he was there before her, gently settling his strong hands on her trembling shoulders, rubbing her back soothingly.

“What nonsense is that, Claire? I want a healthy bairn. That’s all. Don’t you?”

His thumb swiped the tears from her beautiful eyes.

“Am I being an idiot?”

His smile was hesitant. “A bit.”

She sighed, shaking her head. “I don’t know why I’ve been so emotional – I wasn’t ever this way with Faith.”

One red brow quirked in question. “Dinna take this the right way, but ye were exactly this way wi’ Faith. Only – only we were worrit about her a lot more, aye?”

Claire swallowed. She stepped closer within the safe circle of Jamie’s arms, resting her forehead against his neck. He held her tight, and pulled up the hem of her tank top and the hem of his undershirt to feel the bairn skin-on-skin against his belly.

“Are ye worrit it will happen again wi’ this new bairn?”

She nodded. He rested a confident hand on her belly.

“All will be well,” he whispered into her hair. “I’m sure of it. Joe was too, remember? He said ye’re carrying this one differently than ye did Faith.”

“I think Brian is a lovely name,” she said softly.

“We can talk about it later.” He kissed her forehead. “We’ve about three months left until this one comes, aye?”
She tilted her chin up for a kiss.

“I was thinking,” she whispered when he pulled back, “that if it’s a girl, we can name her Ellen.”

Now it was her turn to thumb the tears away from his own cheeks.
“Here we are!” Claire swung her backpack down into the window seat. Jamie took her coat and set it next to his in the overhead bin, before folding his long legs into his aisle seat.

Claire plopped into her own seat, rummaging through her backpack. “I swear that these budget carriers don’t even know what legroom is.”

“It’s all right.” Jamie winced as a boisterous little boy careened down the aisle and crashed into his knee. “It’s a short flight. I’d rather this than the train – it means we can enjoy our time there even more.”

Setting a thick textbook on her lap, Claire pushed her backpack beneath the seat in front of her, then squeezed her husband’s hand. “I know it’s really just a long weekend, Jamie, but – ”

“But it’s our second anniversary, and I’m just thankful to have the time wi’ ye.” He raised her hand to his lips for a soft kiss. “I canna believe ye’ve never been to Cardiff.”

“And when would I have gone?” She leaned a bit closer across the ridiculously skinny armrest.

He shrugged, twisting his broad shoulders toward her – and away from the people streaming down the aisle. “Did ye ken that the Welsh language is verra similar to the Gaidhlig? I canna understand it, mind – but it’s all related.”

“Bloody Celts, the lot of you,” she teased. “Though from what I recall, there never has truly been a proper independence movement, at least in modern times. Unlike their cousins to the northeast.”

“I’m sure they have their reasons. And I canna wait to learn all about them.” He leaned closer, kissed her sweetly.

She pulled back after a while, smiling. “Do you remember the last time we were on an aeroplane together?”

He kissed the tip of her nose. “Of course I do. I ended up sitting next to this absolutely gorgeous English lass. She ordered black coffee, and I was gravely injured by it when the numpty of a stewardess poured it all down my back.”

“Hmm.” She squeezed his hands. “Sounds like an eventful flight.”

He nuzzled the underside of her chin. “Ye could say that. I took her home wi’ me. And she never left. Even after I introduced her to my grump of a godfather.”

Her pulse raced. He bit it. Her hands dug into his wrists. He pulled back just enough to find her lips. Give her a proper kiss.

“I fell in love wi’ her before we landed,” he breathed against her lips, smiling as her hot breath
came short and fast.

“You must have swept her off her feet.” God, she wanted to be alone with him.

He pulled back a bit more – meeting her eyes. Lord, she was so beautiful. “I like to think that we were what each other was looking for – but thought we would never find.”

Her eyes filled with happy tears. Her right hand cupped his cheek. He turned to kiss her palm – to kiss the J tattooed at the base of her thumb.

“That’s why I insisted on these cramped two seats. I didna want to risk the three-seater – I wanted no chance of her sitting next to someone else.”

She could only shake her head, and draw him close, and kiss him with all her might, heedless of the judgmental businessmen and tired mothers and gaping children all around.
Claire cooed at her three-month-old grandson. He replied with a gummy grin.

“He is all smiles for you, Mother Claire,” Marsali sighed, rubbing her tired eyes. “He has been so fussy today, ever since last night.”

“Have you spoken to his pediatrician?” Gently Claire bounded Germaine up and down on her knee, her arm locked securely around his pudgy middle.

“Yes – she said it was nothing to worry about.” Fergus wrapped a lanky arm around his wife’s shoulder. “And he’s been like this before.”

“Bairns at that age are both joy and trouble,” Jamie remarked, sipping the tea Marsali had prepared when he and Claire had arrived at their flat.

“I wouldn’t trade it for the world.” Marsali snuggled against Fergus’ shoulder. “Only – it’s so much more difficult than I thought it would be. None of our friends are married – let alone have children. We’ve just got each other. And I’m not complaining, but – ”

“Marsali, I completely understand. It’s overwhelming to be mother to a small child, cooped up in a flat all day, all on your own in Glasgow.”

Marsali smiled slightly. “Ye’d ken that, wouldn’t ye?”

Claire returned the smile. “I would. You’re both welcome to come to Lallybroch whenever you want. Julia adores Germaine, you know that – she’d love to take him off your hands for a while.”

Fergus nodded. “Having him here with us has made us think about a lot of things. About our future.”

“Children have the tendency to do that.” Germaine squirmed on Claire’s knee; she deftly picked him up and held him against her shoulder, gently rubbing his wee back. “I remember when Faith was born, and then Brianna so close after that – it changed everything for us.”

Jamie shifted on the couch. “Are ye saying ye’re thinking of moving, Fergus?”

Fergus exchanged glances with Marsali, then turned back to face his parents. “The magazine is doing very well, thank God. I have been getting bigger and bigger assignments. I am speaking to my boss next week – I will ask him whether I can work remotely, and come in to the office just once a week.”

“We’d like to move to Lallybroch, if that’s all right with you – ”

“All right?” Jamie clapped Fergus on the shoulder. “It’s more than all right! There’s plenty of space for the three of ye, ye ken that.”
“Oh we’d be so thrilled to have you!” Claire exclaimed. “But Marsali, what about your work?”

Marsali’s hand found Fergus’, squeezing tight. “I’ve been on leave from the agency since Germaine was born. And I’ve been thinking, Claire – I don’t want to go back to a life where Fergus or I would take turns dropping him off at the care center so early in the morning, and then working an exhausting day, and then picking him up late in the evening. Not really spending any time with him.” She swallowed back tears. “That’s how it was with me, growing up. That’s why I struggle with my Mam – she was never there for me, really.”

Fergus kissed her crown. “We do not want that kind of life for Germaine. We want him surrounded by family, out in nature where he can get dirty and climb trees and play with the animals.” He met Jamie’s gaze. “Like how you raised me.”

Germaine babbled.

“I’ve been calling around the offices at Broch Mordha.” Marsali sat up a bit straighter. “The solicitor’s office in the village – they need a part-time researcher.”

“Oh, lovie, that’s perfect!” Claire exclaimed.

“I know!” Marsali beamed. “Three to four hours every morning, in the office – and I can take work home, if I like. It means I can spend as much time with Germaine as I want!”

“I’m proud of ye – the both of ye.” Jamie’s heart felt like it would burst through his chest. “Ye’ve done the right thing – forging yer own careers, keeping each other and yer bairn first.” He swallowed, throat suddenly thick. “I couldna ask for a better son. Or daughter, for that matter.”

Fergus’ eyes filled with tears.

“Do you want to tell them, love?”

Fergus turned to Marsali, looked at her for a long moment, then turned back to his parents.

“When Marsali was carrying Germaine, it got me thinking about my own parents. My birth parents.”

Jamie’s hand slowly found Claire’s; he pressed his C to her J.

“I thought, I am now a father myself. I love my wife. I love my child more than I ever thought possible. How…” He sighed. “How could I not want my child?”

“You have the papers we got from Jared, correct?”

Fergus nodded. “There wasn’t a lot of information. The police report from when I was found in the apartment; it said I wasn’t able to speak, even though I was almost three. There was a copy of my birth certificate. It listed my mother’s name, but the father’s name was blank.” He swallowed.

“She was only seventeen when she had you.” Germaine sagged a bit against Claire’s shoulder, clearly starting to fall asleep.

Fergus nodded. “The report said I was filthy. That I had been fending for myself for some time, since she was too…too high or drunk to care for me.” He sighed. “I can’t imagine doing that to Germaine.”

Marsali squeezed his hand. “Keep going,” she encouraged.
Fergus cleared his throat. “So. I called the orphanage, and then the police, to confirm some of the
details. After I was taken from the apartment, my mother was in and out of prison. She overdosed
when I was five.”

“I’m so sorry, lad.”

“But that’s not the end of the story.” Here his face clearly brightened. “One of my colleagues at
work – he recently did one of those DNA ancestry tests. There are some services where the
company will search for relatives.”

“And?” Jamie’s brow raised.

Fergus’ face split into a wide grin. “I am eighty-five percent French, and fifteen percent Iberian.
And I have a brother, in Paris.”

Claire’s hand flew to her mouth.

“Praise God!” Jamie exclaimed. “That’s fantastic!”

“His name is Raymond. He was born three years after me, when our mother was in prison. He
doesn’t know his father, either – and he didn’t know I existed.” Fergus shook his head. “After he
was weaned, he was sent to live with our mother’s family, outside of Paris. I have a grandmother!
And an aunt and uncle and four cousins!”

Tears streamed down Jamie’s cheeks. So happy for his son.

“And I have spoken with all of them on FaceTime. I look like them! And I want all of us to go to
Paris to meet them – both of you, Papa and Maman, and Faith and Bree and William and Julia, and
Marsali and Germaine of course. Do you think we could convince Murtagh and Suzette to come,
too?”

Claire slid Germaine, fast asleep, into Jamie’s arms before crossing over to Fergus and hugging
him with all her might.

“Oh, my heart – I am so, so happy for you. So happy.”

He held her so tight. “I don’t want you to think I’m not happy with you, or how I was raised –”

“Nonsense. You deserve to know where you came from.” She pulled back, grinning, gently
brushing dark locks from his forehead. “This is a miracle.”

“Raymond was searching, too – that’s why he put his DNA in the database.”

“Then it’s meant to be, isn’t it?”

Jamie stood – then Marsali did, too – and they all held each other for a long, long while.

“I couldn’t be more proud of the man ye’ve become, Fergus.” Jamie kissed his son’s brow. “And I
can’t be more grateful that yer Mam and I took that trip to Paris, so many years ago.”

“To think I was all alone back then – and now I have more family than I know what to do with!”

“I could say the same,” Marsali added quietly.

Germaine stirred; Jamie carefully returned him to Marsali.
“Aye,” he observed. “So can we.”
Chapter 104

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Jamie rubbed his tired eyes with the back of one hand, while the other traced the big, bright, bold words on the front of the card.

I LOVE YOU!

Claire had been having an especially rough go of it lately. This first semester of medical school was truly a killer – of her free time, of her energy, of her self-confidence. Often she dragged herself home, utterly exhausted both physically and emotionally.

Physically – sore legs from standing in a lab all day, or a sore shoulder from carrying too many books in the satchel Jamie had bought her as a good-luck gift.

Emotionally – from self-consciousness at being several years older than most students, to cursing how easily she was distracted while trying to memorize the names of bones and ligaments and tendons, to shaking her head at how so many classmates dealt with the stress by bingeing on drugs and alcohol.

He knew – she knew – that soon enough, she'd find her rhythm. Would make true friends – not just acquaintances who attended the same classes. Would decide her area of specialty, and where to apply for internships, and find the mentors crucial to her future success.

Today, however – today, he needed her to know how loved and cherished she was.

The card he'd found for 50 pence at the Co-Op was simple – and the bright flowers on the front likely meant it was intended for very old people or very young children. But the message was simple.

He opened the card. BECAUSE YOU’RE YOU!

Truer words had never been written.

Was there anything he didn’t love about her?

On the bus home today, he’d overheard two lads speaking about their girlfriends.

“I ken she’s hot, Craig – but she’s always telling me what to do.”

Jamie swallowed, remembering the night before when Claire, in her best Nurse Fraser voice, had told him to take her against the kitchen wall.

“Aye, Mark – there’s no’ telling what’s on their minds. My girl just wants us to settle down, but she kens I’m no’ ready for that kind of commitment.”
Being committed to Claire – building a life with her, knowing that they had forever together – was the joy of Jamie’s life. His marriage was the first day of something bright and terrifying and new – the most positive experience he could ever imagine. She had given his life structure, and a purpose, and a motivation to be the best man he could be for her. For them.

He loved every inch of her. Inside and out. It tore at his guts how she sometimes couldn’t see that about herself – couldn’t see the beauty of her heart and mind that so intoxicated him.

How to tell her all of this, in emotions almost impossible to express with words?

He knew he’d chosen the right ones when, later that night, sipping from the tea he’d made for her and nibbling a shortbread biscuit, he watched her exhausted eyes light up as she read:

_I love you, a nighean donn. I have loved you from the moment I saw you. I will love you until time itself is done. And so long as you are by my side, I am well pleased with the world._

She set down her biscuit, and leaned over to kiss him, and whispered her own words of soul-deep love against his eager lips.
“I’ve got it!”

William Fraser scampered to the heavy front door of the old manor house and swung it open.

The postman shifted both parcels to his left side and extended a damp piece of paper.

“Two packages for James Fraser - can ye sign?”

William shrugged, scrawled his signature, and carefully took both packages - large, but surprisingly light.

“Have a good day!” he called as the postman returned to his truck, before stepping back into the hallway and gently closing the door.

“Who was that?” Da emerged from his study, hair slightly mussed.

“Just the post. Looks like ye’ve got some packages?”

Jamie stepped toward his son, frowning. “I havena ordered anything recently - nothing this big, anyway. And nobody’s birthday is coming up, so - ”

“Who was that?” Mama rounded the corner from her office.

“I’ve got two parcels in the post - but I didna order anything.” Jamie furrowed his brow, gently shaking one of the packages to guess what was inside.

Claire colored a bit, and cleared her throat. “I ordered you some new shirts.”

“New shirts? What’s wrong wi’ the ones I’ve got?”

William watched Julia and Sinem quietly poke their heads through the slats of the staircase, curious.

“Nothing, love - just, I saw these in a catalogue and thought they’d look nice on you.”

Da squinted at the return address label. “Barbour? Oh, that’s lovely - I’ve always liked their things.”

Mama pursed her lips and turned to her son. “William, darling - Da and I will be in his study for a few minutes. Can you please answer the phone if anyone rings?”

And with no further warning, Mama took the other package and Da followed her into his study.

Just as Julia and Sinem crept down the steps to stand with William, they heard the door lock.
“I dinna understand what’s going on,” Julia mused. “All of Da’s shirts are upstairs.”

William shook his head. “It’s all right, J - come now. Let’s see what Mrs. Crook is cooking up for supper.”
Chapter 106

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Claire blew another raspberry on Faith’s tiny tummy.

How her heart soared to hear her baby laugh. It came from deep within the little girl – who had brought so much joy and light to her parents’ lives, even after her scary and unexpected entrance into the world.

“All done, lovie!” Gently Claire lifted Faith – clad only in a fresh diaper – up against her shoulder.

“How’s it going?”

Faith cuddled against her Mama’s shoulder, the impossibly tiny bones of her body molding effortlessly to Claire’s. For a long moment Claire just held her daughter so close, relishing her fast, tiny heartbeat and her impossibly soft hair – brown, just like hers, much to Jamie’s delight.

Claire carefully stroked Faith’s tiny back. “I love you so much,” she whispered. “So, so much.”

Tonight she and Jamie were celebrating Faith’s first half-year. Six months ago today, Jamie had held her hand while Faith was delivered via emergency caesarian – the most unsettling and scary experience of their lives. She had been so impossibly tiny, at just over six months gestation – but from the very first day, she had been a fighter.

Now, at six months, Faith had met all her milestones at or just slightly behind schedule. She was still a bit small for her age – but then again, Claire knew that Faith’s body was truly that of a three-month-old, had she been carried to term. She had her full life to catch up.

A full life. Thank God.

Faith cooed against her shoulder.

“How’s it going?”

—

Faith shrieked in pure delight as Jamie strode through the door, bouncing up and down in her high chair.

“There’s my wee lassie!” he exclaimed, quickly dropping his coat and a small sack of groceries before crossing the room to cover Faith’s face in hundreds of tiny kisses.

“How’s it going?”

He stood then, to give his wife a proper hello kiss.

“I can’t, actually. Sometimes it feels like years ago – and other times it feels like –”

“Like yesterday, aye?” He kissed her cheek. “I was just thinking that today.” Gently he leaned his
forehead against hers. “I was so afraid that day, Claire – that I’d lose ye both.”

“Sshh.” Softly she wound her arms around his shoulders, holding him so reassuringly close. “It didn’t happen.”

He sighed, deeply. “I thank God every day for you – and for her. I dinna want to imagine a life wi’out ye in it.”

Claire kissed him quickly. “You won’t have to, thanks to modern medicine. Now.” She pulled back a bit. “I hope you’re all right with cock-a-leekie soup for dinner? It’s been simmering all day.”

Jamie raised a skeptical eyebrow. “Did ye make it yerself?”

Theatrically Claire rolled her eyes. “I’ll have you know that I did. Maybe I’ve gotten Murtagh’s advice over the phone a few times, but still…”

“Hush, I was only teasing ye. I did pick up a bottle of wine for us on the way home – and also some tampons for ye.”

She furrowed her eyebrows. “That’s so thoughtful, Jamie – but why the tampons?”

“Because ye should have started yer period yesterday, no? I left so early this morning I didn’t bother asking.”

Forever she would remember this moment – the soft scent of chicken broth over the stove; the way the evening light poured through the window; the soft thwack as Faith slapped her chubby hands against the tray of her high chair.

“I didn’t,” she rasped. Eyes wide, locked on Jamie’s face.

“What?” he choked.

“I didn’t,” she repeated.

He grabbed her hand. Squeezed it tight.

“Holy God,” he breathed.

Heart in her mouth, Claire’s hands started to shake.

“I have an old test in the bathroom.” How did her voice sound so calm?

“Take it. I’ll watch Faith.”

He squeezed her hands again – this time, reassuring.

“No – pick her up and wait for me in the bedroom? I need you near.”

Already he was unbuckling their daughter from her high chair. “Let’s go.”

“I can’t believe this.”

Jamie bounced Faith on one knee, squinting down at the positive pregnancy test lying on the bed between him and Claire.
“Dinna tell me ye forgot how this can happen, Claire.”

She huffed, ignoring him. “We tried so hard last time, for so long – the shots, and the temperature checks…”

“So we didna have to this time.” He shrugged. “Promise me ye’ll go see Joe in the morning?”

“I will,” she replied. “Only – Jamie, another baby so soon? Faith isn’t even walking yet, and I’ve only just gone back to school…”

With his free hand, Jamie tilted Claire’s chin so that they could look at each other. Gently, softly, carefully he caressed the wrinkles forming at the corners of her eyes.

“We’ll learn how. Together,” he vowed. “I have never seen ye bested by a challenge yet, Claire. This is no different.”

Suddenly her eyes welled with tears. “Oh, Jamie – another baby! My God…”

His tears matched hers. He leaned in to kiss her, Faith squashed between them.

“God has answered our prayers again, mo nighean donn. How rich we are in each other.”

They held Faith, and each other, and this new baby – safe, and warm, and protecting each other from the world. Wordless with joy.
Chapter 107

Chapter Notes

originally posted at Imagine Claire & Jamie on tumblr

Anonymous asked: we know Claire usually just becomes more determined if someone tells her she isn’t good enough to do something, but what if someone finally tells her something she’s truly affected by? How do she and Jamie react / deal with it?

Jamie turned off the screaming kettle and carefully poured hot water over a fresh teabag. Turning an idea over and over in his mind – how to pitch Lord John Grey’s three-book proposal to Rupert MacKenzie, his boss at Leoch Editions.

John was a nice enough guy. His family had more money than God, and rather than be yet another bored member of the aristocracy, he’d decided to become something of an amateur historian, focusing on daily life in Britain during the Second World War. Three books he wanted to write – one about the children sent into the countryside for their safety, one about women on the home front while their men fought in Italy and North Africa and the Pacific, and the last about day-to-day life and survival in the midst of the Blitz.

The man had fantastic ideas, to be sure – but his resume was terribly slim, just a few articles in cigar and hunting magazines. Jamie was convinced that John had what it took to focus and become a big-name writer. He just needed to convince Rupert.

Which was why he had stayed home today – needing the peace and quiet of the flat to just mull it over and concentrate. He had one shot to pitch John – to help the eager man gain a foothold in his future. And he had to do it right.

And with almost-two-year-old Faith and seven-month-old Bree dropped off at Murtagh’s flat for the day, Jamie and Claire’s flat was suspiciously quiet.

Jamie sat back down at the kitchen table, steaming mug of tea in hand –

- to watch his distraught wife crash through the front door, tears streaming down her face.

Within a breath he was beside her. Catching her as she collapsed into him.

“Claire! Are ye well? The bairn –”

Protectively his hand cupped the small two-month swell of their third baby.

She shook her head against his neck, gripping him for dear life in the doorway.

Not the bairn, then. But what? She’d left extra early this morning…

“Did ye lose the patient, Claire?”
She stiffened and pulled back a bit, red-rimmed eyes – still so beautiful – meeting his.

“I made such a stupid mistake. Thank God I caught it myself – but everyone in the operating theater knew.”

Gently he stroked her cheek. Thumbed away her tears. “Well, that’s all right, then – isn’t it? It’s no’ like ye havena made mistakes before.”

She sniffed. “No – but not when Dr. Fentiman was in the room with me.”

Jamie bristled. Dr. Fentiman had the best reputation at the hospital – perhaps even in all of Glasgow – for his experience and skill with open-heart surgery. He had healed everyone, from common people all the way up to celebrities and members of the nobility. He was one of the reasons why Claire had elected to stay in her position at that hospital, after her medical training concluded.

The fact that he was almost unbearably misogynistic was the dirty secret that too many people seemed to happily sweep under the carpet.

Claire had taken it upon herself to begin a secret diary, writing down specific dates and times when she had personally heard – or other female doctors and nurses and staff had heard – the doctor say incredibly demeaning things about his female patients, his female colleagues – anybody female in general.

She cleared her throat. “I made an obvious but easily fixable mistake. I identified it right away, and announced it to the room. Along with my recommended course of action.”

Jamie waited. Squeezed her hands.

“He was coldly professional. And after I announced my recommendation, he just shrugged, and looked at me across the patient, and said, ‘Well, that must be what happens when “mommy brain” gets the best of you.’”

Fire rose within Jamie’s heart and limbs.

“How dare he?” he hissed.

Claire swallowed. “I was so flabbergasted – but the other people in the operating theater, they just carried on like nothing had happened. I had to work so hard to control myself to focus, to not be distracted for the sake of the patient.” She closed her eyes. “How does he always know what to say, to cut someone right to the quick?”

“Are ye bringing up this nonsense again, Claire, about how ye fear ye canna be a good mother and work at the same time?” Jamie’s voice rose with passion. “Because if ye are telling me that that… ape of a man has brought all this crap back up again…”

“I can’t help that I think of the girls, and this new baby, all the time. They and you are what’s most important to me.” Her voice sounded so far away, eyes still shut tight against the world. “You know I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, with this new baby on the way. How to balance it all. Whether I should be spending so much time helping other people rather than being with my own children.”

Jamie set his jaw, wanting so badly to stop it – but patiently, silently, he let her speak.

“And you know how I feel I’ve become more absent-minded since Faith was born. Christ, Jamie,
we both can’t sleep at night just worrying about all of them sometimes. And now with this one, we need to move, and how will we be able to afford everything, and what if the birth doesn’t go well this time, and – ”

“Are ye done beating yerself, Claire?”

She sighed deeply. Almost resigned.

“Will ye please look at me, mo nighean donn?”

She did.

He cupped her cheeks in his hands. Eyes boring into her.

“I understand why ye feel the way ye do. We wanted our bairns for so long, didn’t we?”

She hiccupped, and nodded.

“They are well. They are more than well. They have so much love and support from the two of us, and Murtagh, and Jenny and Ian and everyone else. We have so many people who want to help us be successful, Claire.”

“I know,” she sighed.

“And please don’t get on about being lacking as a mother. Those girls love you more than anything.” He pushed up her shirt and lay his hand on the bare skin of her belly. “And this bairn too – think of all the precautions you’ve already taken to make sure the bairn is safe.”

She swallowed. Eyes still bright with tears.

“Do not let that bastard ever make you doubt yourself or your abilities. Can ye just stop for one second and reflect on everything you’ve been able to accomplish?”

“I know. I know, Jamie. It’s hard to not get tunnel vision sometimes.”

“Oh, love, I know.” He gathered her close to him, hand still on her belly. “Never doubt yourself. It kills me to see you doubt yourself.”

“I love you,” she whispered against his skin.

“Christ, Claire, how I love you.” He squeezed her so tight. “May I take ye to bed now? Just to show you? And to help you just let it all out?”

She wrapped her legs around his middle.

He bolted the front door and carried her to their bedroom.

Sometime later they lay naked on their bed.

Claire had thrown her left arm over her eyes, wanting to shut out the world and just feel the aftershocks of the mad, passionate, affirming love they’d made.

Jamie had done yeoman’s work to help her let out all the anger and frustration and tension. Now he turned his head a bit and rested it on her hip, catching his breath, watching her body deliciously quiver and shake.
“Are ye sure you’re only nine weeks along? Your belly was a bit smaller at this point, the last two times.”

Feebly Claire groped with her other hand for an anchor on the bed – and she dug her fingers into Jamie’s hair, pushing him back. She felt his chuckle against her.

And finally, finally he – she – needed a wee rest. Jamie scooted up the mattress, kissed her belly, and rested his head beside hers on the pillow, watching her sleepily smile at him.

“Better?” he whispered.

She sighed, so happy. “I’m going to take my notebook to Personnel. Get his ass fired.”

Jamie grinned. “Good. You should.”

She rubbed her nose against his. “You make me feel so powerful.”

He shifted his body closer. Pressing his chest to hers. Darting a hand back between her legs as she threw one leg over his hips.

“It’s because you are powerful, Claire. You have so much power within you.” He kissed her long and deep.

“The power to heal.” Kiss.

“The power to forgive.” Kiss.

“The power to create life.” Kiss.

“The power to love.”

She laughed, and rolled him onto his back, and rose above him, and rejoiced.
Dr. Claire Fraser wearily smiled at her eldest son, picking at the egg sandwiches Murtagh and Suzette had so thoughtfully dropped off earlier.

“Thank you, Fergus. I know your Da and I have been relying on you too much these past few days.”

Twelve-year-old Fergus shrugged as he set down the freshly laundered towels. “You know I am happy to help with les petits. It is my duty as their brother.”

Just then Jamie breezed into the room, holding a pile of crumpled linens at arm’s length.

“Claire – William was just sick again. I cleaned him up and switched out the sheets, but – ”

Fergus took the soiled sheets from Jamie’s arms. “Let me start a fresh load. Maman, go tend them.”

Claire kissed his cheek, already halfway down the hall toward the childrens’ bedrooms, Jamie at her side.

Four days they’d been tending two-year-old William, three-year-old Brianna, and four-year-old Faith – all struck with the chickenpox. Fergus had had it years ago (backed up by the health record his orphanage in Paris had provided when he was adopted), and Jamie and Claire had both had it as children. It was hard to tell whether Faith or Brianna had had it first – but since all three wee Frasers had contracted the illness seemingly within a matter of hours, these semantics didn’t matter.

Right outside the bedroom William and Fergus shared, Jamie gently grabbed Claire’s arm. Met her tired eyes with his own.

“Breathe wi’ me. Just for a moment.”

Her fingers laced through his. He brought his forehead to hers. She followed his lead – breathing in and out. Long, slow breaths.

“Ye’re taking such good care of them, Claire. There’s naught more ye can do.”

“I’m a doctor – a fucking surgeon!” Her whisper was hot against his lips. “Why can’t I make them better?”

“Aye, ye’re a doctor. But ye ken weel that ye canna protect them from everything, Claire. It’s no’ like we’re living in the eighteenth century – they will be well. They’ll survive – just be sick for a few days.”

She sighed. “I just don’t like to see them like this.”
“And ye think I do?”

Claire pulled back a bit. “That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Then stop thinking it. They got sick. It happens. They’ll never get this sickness again, aye? Thank God for that. And thank God we’re all here to care for them.”

She smiled then, just a bit. “I can’t imagine what it must have been like, to live in a time before medicines and vaccines.”

Jamie kissed her forehead. “Fortunately we dinna have to.”

“Mama?” William’s tired voice called.

Claire squeezed Jamie’s hand, and she opened the door to William’s room, Jamie right behind her.

She knelt at her son’s bedside, bringing the sheet higher around his fever-warm body, pockmarked with the blotches and scabs characteristic of chickenpox. Soothing him as best she could.

“Mama’s here, lovie. Mama’s right here.”

William scooted to the edge of his bed and snuggled against his Mama, clutching his beloved stuffed dinosaur.

“I’ll go check on the girls,” Jamie whispered, squeezing Claire’s shoulder before darting next door to the room shared by Faith and Brianna.

Claire’s hands deftly flew over her son’s tiny body, checking his breathing, his pulse, his temperature.

“Thank you, Fergus,” Jamie’s voice rumbled from the hallway. “Do we have more Pedialyte for the girls?”

Claire rubbed William’s back, hoping to help him ease into sleep. Four days he had been sick – a lifetime for a two-year-old – but his vitals were good. All would be well in a few more days.

“Do you want Mama to sing you to sleep, lovie?”

He nodded sleepily. “Sea,” he whispered, voice rough.

She kissed his sweaty brow. Pushed back a few wisps of his dark hair. Holding back tears.

“Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside…”
Chapter 109

Claire briefly looked up as Jamie – two-year-old William in his arms – entered the kitchen, then re-focused her attention on her daughters.

“More cocoa, Bree?”

Three-year-old Brianna nodded vigorously, face smeared with jam and crumbs. Across the table, four-year-old Faith carefully sipped her cocoa, a perfectly half-eaten jammie dodger resting on her plastic plate.

“Mama! The post!” William exclaimed.

Carefully Jamie sat beside Claire, placing William – clutching the day’s letters in his tiny hands – onto his lap.

“Great job!” Claire smiled, and bent to kiss her son’s rosy cheek. “I’m sure Da appreciated your help!”

With one hand holding William steady, Jamie gently took the letters from William and spread them out on the table. “Let’s see…council tax bill…water bill…something from the hospital…”

Claire squinted at the half-dozen envelopes. “That one there – no return address. And the stamps look foreign.”

Jamie held up the letter in question. “Canada. Do you know anyone in Canada, Claire?”

“Murdina MacKenzie said her Mam’s auntie is in Canada,” Faith helpfully interjected, nibbling on the rest of her biscuit.

“Thanks, lovie.” Jamie handed William over to Claire and carefully slit the letter open. A single sheet of lined paper fell out – both sides covered in spidery script.

Jamie frowned, and turned over the letter to read the signature.

“Aunt Jocasta,” he gaped.

“Who’s that, Da?”

Jamie blinked and turned to face his younger daughter. “She’s one of my aunties – Grannie Ellen’s younger sister.”

“I thought you’d lost touch with her years ago.” Claire shifted William on her lap.

“I did. She and Uncle Hector moved to Canada when I was a bairn – and from what I can remember, he estranged her from the rest of the family. Colum and Dougal never speak of her – and they’re just a few hours south in New York. Last I heard of her was a card she sent to
Lallybroch when Da died.”

Quickly he scanned the letter. “Seems that Uncle Hector passed away a few months ago. Aunt Jocasta wants to make amends.”

Claire raised her brows skeptically. “What does that mean?”

“Dinna fault her for reaching out, Claire. I canna imagine what it must have been like for her husband to move her so far away from the rest of her family. It may take years for her to recover.”

Claire wiped Bree’s mouth with her napkin. “Well then. I wonder what Murtagh would have to say.”

Jamie set down the letter, grinning. “Da always said that Murtagh carried a torch for Auntie Jocasta.”

Claire snorted. And then the house phone rang.

“I’ve got it!” Faith bounded off her chair and reached up to take the cordless phone off the counter. “Fraser residence.” A pause. “Hi, Murtagh.” Another pause. “No, today I dinna have school, remember? Something for the teachers.” She started walking back to the table. “Yes, he’s right here. He just got a funny letter. Love you too.” Faith handed over the phone, and Jamie had barely picked it up before he exclaimed,

“You too?”

–

“Are we all ready?”

Jamie turned to check the sea of smiling Fraser faces huddled around him on the couch – Claire, with Bree on her lap; Fergus, with William on his lap; and in between them, Murtagh and Suzette, with Faith on her godfather’s lap.

“Aye!” they chorused.

Jamie carefully dialed the long-distance number and put the phone on speaker.

Three rings, and then –

“Hello?”

Murtagh closed his eyes.

“Auntie?” Jamie’s voice asked.

“Is that Jamie? Oh, Jamie – it’s so wonderful to hear your voice!”

“She sounds like Ellen,” Murtagh murmured to his wife, who squeezed his hand in silent reply.

“And yours, Auntie. Am I calling at a good time?”

“Och, tis always a good time to speak to family!”

“That’s good – because I’ve got my whole family wi’ me here. There are so many new people for you to meet.”
“Truly?”
“Aye – first is my wife, Claire. She’s a surgeon, Auntie – and a good one, too!”
“Pleased to meet you,” Claire smiled into the phone.
“A sassenach! Jamie!”
“He’s not the only one,” Murtagh piped up. “Hello, Jo.”
Never had Jamie heard such a loud gasp. “Murtagh FitzGibbons Fraser. My God.”
“I’m here wi’ my wife, Suzette – she’s French from France.”
“Allô,” Suzette added softly. “Lovely to speak with you, Jocasta.”
“My head is spinning!” Jocasta exclaimed.
“Hold onto yer hat, then,” Murtagh smiled, “for Jamie has yet to introduce ye to his four bairns!”
“Four?”
“I still canna believe it myself sometimes, Aunt. First we have Fergus – he’s twelve, and he joined our family just two years ago, from Paris.”
“Hello Auntie,” Fergus chimed in. “Hello to Canada. They speak French there, yes?”
“Oh hello Fergus! They certainly do! *Je parle un peu français*.”
Fergus beamed. “*Très bien!*”
“And next we have our daughter Faith, who’s just turned four.”
“Hi, Auntie,” Faith shyly spoke into the phone.
“Hello, dear! Do you have beautiful red hair like your Da?”
“I do!”
Jamie smiled. “That’s our younger daughter, Brianna. She’s three – and yes, Auntie, she definitely inherited my hair.”
Jocasta chuckled. “You may remember my hair was like that. But none was like your Mam’s.”
“And last but not least – we have wee William. He’s two. Can you say hello?”
“Hi.”
“Hi, sweetie. It’s so lovely to speak wi’ all of you.” She sighed. “I havena been home in so long, Jamie. I’m overdue.”
“Ye always have a home wi’ us in Glasgow – or wi’ Jenny and Ian at Lallybroch. Ye ken that.”
“I just might, Jamie. I just might.”
Chapter 110

Claire tilted her head, squinting at the row of columns cresting the hill.

“Isn’t this the monument that was never finished?”

Jamie slipped an arm around her lower back, drawing her tighter against his side. “Aye. Construction started in the 1820s to commemorate Scotsmen who died fighting Napoleon. The builders ran out of money three years later – and it’s been here like this, ever since.”

Claire shook her head, incredulous. “I’ll hold myself back from making a bad joke about how the Scots don’t finish things.”

Jamie laughed. “Ye wouldn’t be the first one. My uncle Dougal calls this the monument to the pride and poverty of Scotland – and all the English ever took from us.”

In front of the monument, a family sat down, ready for a picnic.

“And that’s the Nelson Monument over there, of course.” Claire swiveled a bit, still safe within the circle of Jamie’s arm, shielding her eyes against the bright sun.
“Ah yes.” Jamie squinted, following Claire’s gaze. “Of course the English picked the tallest natural point on Calton Hill to construct a memorial to one of their greatest military leaders.”

“Do I sense a tone of indignation in your voice?”

Jamie huffed, turning Claire away from the sun. “I’m no’ saying it’s beautiful. Only – ye ken that the Bonnie Prince occupied Edinburgh for a time, during the ’45. And now perhaps in consequence, the city is full of memorials to dead Englishmen.”

He resumed his walk toward the National Monument, his hand slipping from Claire’s side and sliding into the back pocket of her jeans.

“I can’t believe I’ve never been up here,” she remarked as they approached the columns.

“We should come here more often. Bring the bairns,” Jamie suggested. “It’s no’ that far from Glasgow. And as much as I may jokingly complain about this city full of monuments to Englishmen – it is the capital of their country, after all. So many things to see and do here.”

Claire sat on a bench, thankfully shaded by the leafy trees, and Jamie sat beside her, automatically taking her hand in his. For awhile they just watched the people come and go – families with children, young people out for a run with their dogs, tourists busily posing for photos – and watched the Firth of Forth over the buildings, and just enjoyed the bright, sunny day.
Claire felt Jamie straighten beside her, then clear his throat. He turned to face her, eyes intent on hers – both of his hands holding her own.

“Jamie, are you –”

“Eight years ago today, I married ye, Claire.” He swallowed. “I hope I willna ever give ye cause to regret it.”

She blinked back sudden tears, and squeezed his hands. “Oh, Jamie. Not for a single day.”

Blindly she reached for him in a long, restorative kiss.

After a while she pulled away, holding his dear, dear face between her hands.

“This Englishwoman couldn’t be more thrilled to spend this one day with her Scotsman, learning more and more about the country she’s adopted.”

He smiled. Her thumb traced the corners of it.

“I feel bad I couldna take off more than the one day to be wi’ ye. If I had my way we’d be off in the Highlands for a full week – no’ squeezing in a day trip wi’ three hours roundtrip on the train.”

Now she returned his smile. “Jamie – the fact that we were even able to find this one day together, and that none of our four children were sick or had a school function, is a miracle in and of itself.”

He swallowed. “I never want ye to think that I’ll ever be one of those husbands who forgets his own wedding anniversary, or schedules a trip and ‘accidentally’ misses it. I ken too many men like that. Some of them say their wives dinna remember, either, or that they dinna mind – but I canna believe that to be true. For today – today, mo nighean donn, is the anniversary of when our lives truly begun.”

Now the tears freely flowed down her wind-chapped cheeks – and he thumbed them away.

“We’ve always made this day special, Jamie – and I promise you,” she sniffed, “I always will.”

“As do I, Claire.” He leaned in for another kiss. Claire crawled onto his lap, holding him close, not
caring where they were.

“Ye’ll give that busload of Japanese tourists an eyeful, if ye’re no’ careful,” Jamie murmured against her neck.

“Let them watch,” she rasped. “They’ll see one Scotsman who knows very well how to finish things.”

**photos are mine, from my trip to Edinburgh in summer 2017!**
She must have jerked a bit as she awoke – for his hand was there, always there, warm fingers soothing her bare shoulders.

“Sshh.”

Claire sighed, burying her face into his side, throwing an arm around his middle.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” she murmured.

Jamie sat a bit straighter against the headboard. “Too much on my mind.”

He knew that she knew that he didn’t need an invitation to share more. Understood implicitly, like so many things.

His hand stroked her hair. “Sometimes I regret not finishing university. Not having an education like you have, like the managers at the printshop have.”

She shifted away and propped her head on one hand, elbow digging into the mattress.

“I know it’s daft. But sometimes I see a book we’re printing, and I wish I knew more about the author.”

“You have the whole rest of your life to catch up.” Gently her hand cupped the inside of his knee. “A university degree doesn’t teach you everything.”

He shrugged, holding up a thin volume with his free hand. “I’d never heard of Carl Sandburg until Tuesday.”

“He was an American poet, if I remember correctly.” Softly her thumbnail traced the bones and tendons of his knee. “Died quite a long time ago.”

“You do remember correctly. It’s so nice to be marrit to such a smart woman.”

She rolled her eyes. “Is that a book of his poems?”

“Aye.” He swallowed. “They’re quite short. But so different, each of them. Like paintings in a museum.”

Her hand skimmed the fuzzy angles of his thigh. “Share?”

His brow furrowed in the lamplight. “This one is called ‘Mascot.’ Though I cannae understand why.”
“Does it have to do with sports?” she teased.

“No. Only – here. Let me read it to ye:

*I will keep you and bring hands to hold you against a great hunger.*

*I will run a spear in you for a great gladness to die with.*

*I will stab you between the ribs of the left side with a great love worth remembering.*”

Claire sat up now, one hand cupping the ribs of her husband’s left side, the other turning his face to meet hers in a kiss.

“A great hunger,” she whispered against his lips.

He nodded. “What we feel for each other.” Kissed her again.

“Our love.” She sucked on his upper lip. “Great, huge, eternal love.”

He bit her lower lip. “I could die of the happiness you give me.”

His fingers dug into her hips. Shifted her onto his lap, where he cradled her, holding her so close.

“I hope not,” she smiled. Fingers splayed over his heart. “We have so many years yet to remember.”

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