Faith Restored

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Summary

A canon divergent alternate universe where Faith lived and how I envision her life affecting the way events in the series would unfold. Picks up during Dragonfly in Amber and goes from there.

Originally posted to Tumblr in shorter installments.
Part One - In the Garden

Chapter Summary

Claire is walking in the garden at Fontainebleau when someone unexpected appears.

Chapter Notes

BEGINNING OF PART ONE

Faith had gone down for her nap and Claire desperately needed to stretch her legs. She went for a turn in the garden hoping to keep her mind clear of the usual worries and failing miserably. Guilt - that was always the first to strike. For Louis; for having been angry with Jamie given what Fergus had finally gotten around to telling her about that fateful day; for getting angry with Jamie for leaving her alone with Faith during that horrible time of uncertainty - knowing each moment might be their daughter’s last and Jamie still hadn’t seen her. The guilt she could live with most of the time. One look at Faith wriggling as she continued to grow stronger and the guilt subsided to manageable levels.

Fear was the second. Fear of the unknown. She couldn’t stay at Fontainebleau indefinitely. Louise’s good will would run out eventually. But Claire couldn’t think of going anywhere else without word from Jamie first. She supposed she could return to Jared’s house in Paris - he would hardly turn her away with Fergus and Faith in tow - but she didn’t like the thought of what an overpopulated area like Paris might mean for Faith’s health - so many contagious diseases… She doubted her daughter’s immune system could withstand the assaults Paris would put it through, even if she remained strictly indoors. No, Faith needed fresh air and a calm, reassuring atmosphere.

Anger. She should have heard from Jamie by now - if the king had been true to his word and Jamie’s promised release carried out accordingly. At the very least, Murtagh should have returned from their planned intervention with the Comte St. Germain’s shipment - the now deceased and no longer a problem, Comte St. Germain. Of course, it had undoubtedly gotten out that she’d gone to make an appeal to the king for Jamie’s release and if Mother Hildegarde - who’d arranged the audience - knew the terms of such arrangements, word had likely made its way to Jamie himself. And if he blamed her for doing what she’d done - what his actions had forced her to do - well… he only had himself to blame if he didn’t like it - she certainly hadn’t enjoyed a moment of it.

Loneliness. That was last and that was the one that led her to duck into an alcove nestled in the hedge of the garden. She dropped onto the bench and leaned against the stone back - she wished she could remove her corset and slump properly. It was impossible to mope the way she needed to if she couldn’t slump. She was tired of forcing herself to her feet each day, of keeping herself upright when she desperately wanted to curl up in bed and stay there where she need see no one - no one except Faith. It was true she wasn’t completely alone; she had Faith… and Fergus. But they depended on her; they didn’t mind if she couldn’t hold it together all of the time, but they couldn’t share her burden in the way she needed - and she would never ask it of them if they could.
She kept her gaze focused on the clouds skirting across the sky. If she rose and headed back to the house, Faith would still be sleeping when she got there. She could take a nap herself - her strength had come back but Faith still woke three times each night to nurse. Just thinking about it caused Claire’s breasts to ache.

She sighed and pushed herself to her feet only to turn the corner of the hedge and walk straight into someone, slamming her forehead into the wall that was this person’s chest. Hands caught her by the shoulders to steady her.

“Claire? The man at the door said I’d find ye here,” Jamie said, finding his words before she could locate hers.

“You came,” Claire said in a flat voice that caused Jamie to pause and pull back, letting his hands drop from her shoulders.

“Aye… I… I knew ye likely wouldna want to see me - not after… but I had to see ye for myself,” he stammered before spotting the alcove she’d just been leaving and ushering her back into it.

Claire was grateful for the opportunity to sit once more.

“I didn’t think you would want to see me,” she said. “Not after you heard about… well, you must see I had no choice - it was the only way to secure your release. I would have done sooner-”

The color rose in Jamie’s face as she did her best to explain. He interrupted her before she could speak aloud the exact details of her appeal. “Yes, I know what ye did for me - I went to Mother Hildegarde as soon as I returned from my…” his face took on a slightly sickly pallor at the memory of his time aboard ship. “From the task at hand.”

“You were successful then?” Claire prompted, hoping to divert Jamie’s attention from the more painful subject.

“It was more convincing for Murtagh and I to switch places.” As they spoke, both of them began to relax despite the fear and tension each carried within. “I dinna think I need to go into just why. Of course, it wasna long after we docked we had word of the Comte’s demise. I dinna suppose he’ll be stirring further trouble for anyone now.”

“What exactly did you hear regarding the details of his demise?” Claire inquired.

Jamie examined her expression and saw something more than just curiosity.

“There wasna much anyone knew to tell,” he said with eyebrows furrowed. “Have ye heard more then?”

Claire took a deep breath. “Actually, I was there.”

That surprised Jamie and it was Claire’s turn to relate some of what she had been up to since that fateful day nearly three months earlier.

“And that was when ye…?” Jamie awkwardly asked when she’d finished her tale. “When ye…”

“Made my appeal for your release? Yes,” she admitted, forcing herself to hold her head high. She was ashamed but she also knew she wouldn’t do anything differently. Just having Jamie sitting on the bench beside her - even if there were several inches between them - left her better able to breathe than she had since… well since she found his note in their room at Jared’s house.

“I’m so sorry,” she started to apologize but Jamie cut her off once more.
“Dinna say that,” he begged. “Not after what I did to ye. Ye wouldna have had to do what ye did to get me out of the Bastille if it werena for me landing myself there in the first place. I’ll no have ye apologizing to me for it any more. It’s me should apologize to you but… there arena words enough…”

The anguish in Jamie’s voice was too much for Claire. She reached across the bench to rest a hand on his arm but he pulled it out of her grasp and turned away from her - in shame? It didn’t matter what - she needed to touch him, to comfort him.

“Jamie - Fergus told me everything,” she said, her hand going to his thigh instead of the arm. “I don’t blame you for killing Randall.”

“I didna kill the man.” Jamie straightened himself on the bench so that he wasn’t facing away from her anymore though he wasn’t looking at her. “But he willna be fathering your Frank’s great-great-however-many-grandsire - nor anyone else either. I didna recall the reasons for the promise I made to ye in the moment, ye see - only their letter.”

“Ah,” Claire sat up, pulling her hand away as she processed what Jamie meant. She felt for Frank’s gold ring on her finger - it was still there. Would it still be there if what Jamie said was true - if Frank would never be born? Perhaps Jamie was mistaken in the severity of whatever wound he had inflicted on Randall…

It was Jamie’s turn to bridge the gap between them, reaching and taking Claire’s hand in his own. It was her right hand and he ran the pad of his thumb over her silver ring.

“It… it wasna Randall’s injury I meant when I said it was I should apologize to you,” he started, only able to glance up and meet her eyes briefly before looking away again. “I was referring to the bairn - I’m so sorry, Claire. I should ha’ known better than to do something so damned foolish with ye in the condition ye were in - if I had, I would ha’ seen that ye’d lose the child and… I didna think of anything else all the days I sat in that cell - it was weeks before I even heard ye were alive. I wanted to die there, thinking I’d lost ye both. And there’s nothing I can do to make up for what I’ve done to us. When I heard the guard say, ‘it was a miracle she survived,’ I wept with relief that I hadn’a killed ye both with my foolishness.”

There were silent tears coursing down Jamie’s face as he clutched Claire’s hand while she gazed at him with mild confusion before understanding dawned. A relieved smile crossed her face then and she reached for his face with her left hand, cupping his cheek, and wiping his tears away. When he was able to look at her and hold her gaze she responded.

“I did take fever for a short time following delivery, but I’m not the ‘she’ the guards were referring to.”

“Ye aren’t?”

“No. They were talking about our daughter - Faith.”

“Daughter? The child was a lass?”

“Is,” Claire clarified. “And yes, she’s a lass all right. It was touch and go a bit at the beginning - her lungs were underdeveloped and affected her breathing a great deal. Mother Hildegarde baptized her convinced she wouldn’t last long - but your daughter has inherited your Fraser stubbornness along with your eyes.”

Jamie’s tears of relief flowed freely as Claire shifted closer on the bench and they leaned into each other more firmly.
“She’s alive,” Jamie repeated to himself.

“I’m surprised Mother Hildegarde didn’t tell you when you went to her,” Claire wondered aloud.

“I didna give her much chance, I suppose,” Jamie admitted, wiping his running nose on the sleeve of his coat. “I simply demanded to know who’d secured my release and then where ye were staying. She clearly blamed me for the fact ye had to go to Louis in the first place - and rightly so. Faith ye said, she’s been baptized?”

“Yes. We can have a more official ceremony and change it, if you like, but I’m rather fond of the name - it suits her.” There was an undeniable note of pride in Claire’s voice.

“What’s she like, Sassenach? Ye said she has my eyes - what of you is there in her?”

Claire laughed and moved to rise from the bench, arching her back as much as her corset would allow. Her breasts were swollen with milk and the confines of her dress were becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Faith was overdue for a feeding.

“Come along and meet her for yourself,” Claire told Jamie, reaching her hand towards him. “She should be up from her nap by now and looking for her supper.”
La Petite Miraculée

Chapter Summary

Jamie meets his daughter as he and Claire decide how to move forward.

Claire could feel the tension in Jamie as she led him inside and through to the rooms Louise had offered for her use.

They encountered a frazzled Louise on their way. She looked immediately relieved.

“Claire - there you are at last,” she exclaimed breathlessly before adopting a more restrained air as she recognized Jamie. “And you have found your husband. My lord Broch Tuarach. Claire did not tell me you would be arriving today.” She glanced to Claire, uncertain whether Jamie’s appearance was a good sign or not.

“I have only just returned from a business matter that was of some urgency… I must thank ye for the kindness ye have shown to my family in my absence,” Jamie began but he hadn’t quite recovered from the revelation in the garden and his usual eloquence was nowhere to be found.

Claire mercifully intervened. “From your relief I take it you were searching for me?” she prompted her friend.

“Yes. The boy - Fergus - he asked that I send for you to return to your rooms as soon as you could be found but he dared not look for you himself as he wanted to be sure your Faith was properly looked after.” There was a note of amusement in Louise’s voice as she rested a hand on her own swollen belly. “It seems la petite miraculée already has a devoted protecteur.”

“Thank you, Louise. And I hope you don’t mind but would it be too much trouble to have our supper sent to our rooms later?” Claire requested.

Louise smiled. “It will not be a problem.”

Claire thought Jamie breathed a little easier after Louise had left them.

The door to her rooms was open when they turned the corner and they could hear the soft tones of Fergus talking to Faith in her bassinet. They paused for a moment, looking to each other before smiling as they were able to make out what he was saying.

“Is the lad really telling her about his favorite foods?” Jamie asked with amusement.

“Apparently he can sympathize with her complaints,” Claire responded, reaching to loosen the laces on her dress. “She must be hungry but if he’s able to keep her from crying, I don’t care what he chooses to tell her.” She started to push into the room but paused a moment just inside the door. “There’s a basin over there,” she nodded. “You need to wash your hands thoroughly. She’s gotten much stronger than when she was first born but I don’t want to take any chances.”

“The germs,” Jamie said with a nod as he moved toward the basin, but his attention was turned towards Fergus perched on a short stool leaning over the edge of the bassinet.
Fergus looked up and spotted them, starting at the unexpected sight of Jamie. “Milord,” he blurted, jumping to his feet. Faith emitted a whimper in response and Fergus immediately resumed his former position, apologizing to the babe for frightening her and making it clear, to Claire at least, where Fergus’ priorities now lay.

Claire approached the bassinet with Jamie behind her, hesitating with each step now that the reality of his daughter was actually before him.

Faith was watching Fergus intently, her tiny hand wrapped around one of his fingers. She had kicked off her blanket and her pale pink feet stuck out from the bottom of her baby gown.

“Are you hungry, Faith?” Claire crooned as she reached in to tug the hem down and tickle Faith’s toes.

The baby’s attention shifted rapidly away from Fergus to Claire as soon as she heard her mother’s familiar voice. She let go of Fergus’ finger and began waving her arms and kicking her legs while she grunted. Her lips moved like a fish gaping.

Claire laughed and lifted her daughter from the bassinet, cradling her in the crook of her elbow and bringing her closer for Jamie to see. Faith began rooting at the front of Claire’s dress, intent on getting her supper.

“She’s a hungry lass,” Jamie said with awe, raising a finger to stroke the child’s cheek.

Faith turned towards Jamie’s finger, calming in Claire’s arms as Jamie captured her attention. He beamed at her as he continued stroking her cheek, his eyes wet with tears of amazement.

“Faith,” he said quietly as she took hold of his finger and began investigating it. “Aye, it suits her. A Dhia, she is so like you, Sassenach.”

“Like me?” Claire asked in disbelief, shifting Faith’s weight in her arms so Jamie could take her himself.

“Aye. Ye can watch her mind at work.” He lifted Faith gently from Claire’s arms to rest her in his own. “She’s so small,” he remarked as he noticed he could wrap his hand around her bare feet while her head rested comfortably at his elbow. He gently ran his fingers over the sparse fuzz on her crown. “She’ll have your curls.” He turned to Claire, beaming.

Claire was mesmerized watching him as he processed the details of Faith’s features and began to get a feel for her developing personality.

The novelty of Jamie started to wear off for Faith and she turned her face into his shirt, rooting for her supper again.

“Sorry to disappoint ye, m’ annsachd, but ye’ll no be getting that from me;” he chuckled. “Ye’ll be needing yer mam for that.” He handed her over to Claire who moved to a stiff-backed chair that she found comfortable for nursing. Sighing with relief as Faith latched and began to suckle, Claire noticed that Fergus had slipped out to give them their privacy - though she knew he wouldn’t be far off, intent on intervening should anyone approach to disturb them.

Jamie watched until they had settled before he approached and dragged a chair over for himself, stationing it a little behind Claire’s so he could rest an arm across the back of her chair, rubbing her shoulder.

“As you see, she’s inherited your appetite as well,” Claire remarked, leaning her head back and
turning towards Jamie. His hand moved from her shoulder to the curls at the nape of her neck. “Ye’ve done…” he started but was too choked up to finish the thought immediately.

Claire reached up with her free hand to cup his cheek as he leaned in and pressed his forehead to hers. “We’ve done,” she emphasized. “She’s ours.”

“Aye. Ours.” He pressed a lingering kiss to her lips and then a second briefer one to her forehead before turning his gaze back on Faith.

The infant’s eyes had closed, one hand clutching the loose fabric of Claire’s shift. She suckled intermittently as - appetite appeased - she succumbed to sleep.

Movement from the bassinet beside the bed woke Claire from her sleep.

“Wha-?” she started, listening for Faith’s cries but all she heard was the baby’s breathing, deep and even - a sound she’d memorized quickly listening to it so intently in those early days when it had been a thick wheezing that twisted her heart.

It didn’t take long for her to make out Jamie’s form in the dim glow of the moonlight. He was seated beside the bassinet watching Faith sleep.

Claire was both touched and annoyed. “If you wake her, I’ll throttle you. Come back to bed.”

“In a minute, Sassenach,” he answered, reaching in and adjusting Faith’s blanket.

Claire shifted onto her back with a sigh, turning her head back to watch as Jamie reluctantly gave up his seat to circle the bed and crawl under the covers beside her. He propped himself up on his elbow looking past her body to where he could just make out the edge of the bassinet - he was too far to be able to look into it and see Faith herself. He frowned and Claire chuckled quietly.

“What’s so funny?” Jamie asked.

“It’s not funny, really,” Claire admitted as she curled into Jamie’s side. “Just… sweet. She will be fine until her feeding - I promise. Her breathing has improved tremendously and it might be difficult to believe looking at her but she’s put on a good bit of weight,” Claire assured him.

“Ye shouldna have had to do so much alone, Sassenach,” Jamie began apologizing again but Claire cut him off by putting a finger to his lips.

“Enough,” she told him. “I will not listen to any more of you feeling guilty about what happened. I’ve forgiven you for it now please forgive yourself so we can figure out what we’re going to do next.”

Jamie sighed before playfully nipping at Claire’s finger. She laughed but kept it quiet, glancing over her shoulder to the bassinet. Jamie sank back against the pillows, his arm coming up around Claire, pulling her closer to him.

“Next, eh? Ye’ll know something of the conditions of my release, no?”

“That we must leave France? Yes, I’d heard that part. The question is where do we go from here?
Do you… do you think we’ve done enough? About the Rising, I mean.”

“Oh, aye, I think we’ve done enough. Whether we’ve succeeded or no, I dinna ken but I’ve had enough of it all either way.” The frustration was clear in Jamie’s voice. “We’ve Faith to think of now - what’s best for her to consider.”

“You want to go home to Scotland - to Lallybroch,” Claire stated. It was the obvious choice.

“My pardon has gone through,” he pointed out. “We can take her home and hope and pray we’ve done enough to change things.”

“And if we haven’t - if the Rising does happen… we protect ourselves,” Claire said with forced resolve. “We keep out of it and prepare for the worst. We can protect the estate and the tenants - build up the stores against the famine and raiding that will follow.”

“Aye,” Jamie agreed grudgingly.

She knew it would be difficult for Jamie to sit by and watch as his fellow countrymen headed off to their deaths - possible deaths - if it happened at all. There was still a chance that their interference would have some impact though it might feel futile at the moment.

“So in the morning we begin making the necessary arrangements,” she continued, hoping to distract him from the grim possibilities. “There are some things you’ll need to arrange with Jared in Paris, I’m sure - I don’t suppose there’s much we can do about the channel journey but if we can limit her exposure-”

“I’ll go ahead and take care of the arrangements,” Jamie interrupted. “I need to tell Murtagh everything - he doesna know much of how ye faired other than that ye lived and knows nothing of wee Faith here.” Pride returned to Jamie’s voice as he strained once more to get a glimpse of her sleeping form.

He turned back to Claire, the smile fading into solemnity. “I ken ye asked me no to dwell - and I’m not - but I will promise ye this - ye willna be alone like that next time.”

Claire raised a hand to Jamie’s cheek, brushing several strands of hair back from his brow - the low light glinted off the fiery locks giving them the appearance of smoldering embers.

“Next time?” she said with a suggestive smile in her voice, lightening the mood.

Jamie grinned and bent to kiss her, his hand slipping beneath the covers to tug up the hem of her shift until he came into contact with the bare skin of her thigh, moving up to cup and squeeze her buttock. Claire’s hand began explorations of its own causing Jamie to groan loudly.

Claire tensed reflexively, her ears straining.

Sure enough, there was a stirring from the bassinet followed by a weak whimper that strengthened into a full cry on the second breath.

Claire pushed herself up, giving Jamie a quick peck on the cheek. “I’m afraid we’re going to need to get used to being interrupted.”

“I’ll get her,” Jamie said, eagerly pushing back the blankets and climbing out of bed.

“Let’s see how eager you are after a few nights of interrupted sleep,” Claire remarked, yawning and sitting up in case Faith decided she was hungry again.
“Lay back, Sassenach,” he said, lifting the squirming infant from the bassinet. “She just needs a change is all.”

With Claire to instruct him as to where things were, Jamie set about changing Faith’s soiled diaper, calming her cries with soothing tones.

“Ye need to go back to sleep a leannan for I must leave for Paris in the morning and I mean to lie wi’ yer mam at least twice before I go.”

“Jamie!” Claire exclaimed.

“Then we’re goin’ te take ye home to Lallybroch,” he continued, ignoring Claire’s outburst. “Ye’re goin’ te meet yer Auntie Jenny and yer Uncle Ian. Ye’ve two cousins ye’ll play wi’ - if Fergus lets them near ye that is.”

Claire laughed quietly, leaning back against the pillows as Jamie walked and rocked Faith back to sleep. It didn’t take long but he looked reluctant to lay the child down again - though he hurried back to bed eagerly enough when she was safely tucked in.

“Ye’ll need to be quiet, Sassenach,” he warned as his hands once more found their way under the covers to the hem of her shift.

“Me?” Claire hissed. “I wasn’t the one who-”

He stopped her objections with a kiss.
Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire make their way from France to Scotland and Lallybroch with Faith, Fergus, and Murtagh in tow.

The carriage lurched and Claire’s grip on Faith tightened reflexively. Faith cooed and continued to gum the silver rattle Louise had given as a gift as Claire’s things were strapped in place and Fergus debated the merits of sitting inside the carriage with Claire and Faith or riding beside the driver - he settled for sitting with the driver as it felt more official or, as he told Claire, sitting inside the carriage would put him at a disadvantage should anything arise.

“Milord entrusted the care of his family to me and I must be ready at a moment’s notice to serve you and defend you.”

After the carriage door had shut, Claire rolled her eyes and chattered to a rapt Faith about the silliness of men and their sense of honor. She’d responded with a yawn showing that she was tired of such silliness too.

Claire realized she must have dozed off as the terrain beneath the carriage was different. Packed earth had been exchanged for cobblestones, their pace had slowed, and the peaceful quiet had grown to a noisy din.

Faith’s legs kicked and she dropped the rattle, her body straining towards the spectacle of passing buildings, pedestrians, and other carriages.

Claire adjusted her grip on the baby to try and reach for the rattle but her stays wouldn’t allow her to bend that way.

“We’ll just have to grab that later and be sure it’s properly disinfected before you play with it again, how does that sound?” she asked Faith. Claire wiped a trail of drool from Faith’s chin as the girl began to chew on her balled up fist. “I suppose that tastes as good as the rattle.”

A quick glance out the window showed a familiar street - they were nearly there. Claire prayed that Jamie had been able to secure passage across the channel for sometime in the next few days. Already the windows of the carriage were beginning to display the dirt and grime that came from passing through a crowded metropolis. Faith sneezed as though to validate Claire’s thoughts. She pulled a handkerchief out and wiped at Faith’s nose, a difficult task as Faith twisted and shifted her head out of the way and the carriage rocked uncomfortably.

Faith began to fuss just as they were pulling up to Jared’s house. They hadn’t yet come to a full stop when Claire caught sight of Jamie bursting through the front doors, heedless of the footmen whose job it was to do such things. There was another small jolt as Fergus jumped down from his perch and dashed to the back to oversee the unloading of Claire’s things.

Jamie pulled open the door and reached for Faith. She began to squeal loudly as he kissed her cheek before settling her more solidly in his arms and holding out a hand to help Claire in her descent. She paused first to retrieve the rattle and tucked it away in her pocket.
“Did ye have a calm journey or was this wee lass as loud along the way as she seems to be now?” He winced as Faith’s pitch rose to a painful level. “Hush a nighean, ye’ll cause my ears to bleed and then yer mam will have to tend me.”

“I think she’s trying to tell you about all the things she saw from the carriage window,” Claire decided with a smile. Jamie’s free arm came up and pulled her in so he could kiss her temple. “She can’t wait to see all the sights a ship has to offer.”

“I’ve been looking for you for the past hour,” he remarked as he led them into the house. Fergus was giving the footmen firm instructions for handling the trunk and boxes behind them.

“We were late getting off,” Claire explained. “Louise had a little gift for Faith but had misplaced it and insisted we stay till it was found.” She pulled the rattle out to show Jamie. “It needs to be cleaned before she can play with it again - I’m afraid she’s beginning to teethe so we’ll need to be extremely careful of what she puts in… her… mouth.” Claire reached over and tugged the end of Jamie’s cravat from Faith’s mouth.

He peered at the soggy fabric briefly before tucking it back in and tapping Faith lightly on the nose with his finger. She grabbed hold of that instead. He bent it so she could gnaw on his knuckle.

“Our passage is booked for tomorrow. Before the week is out, we’ll be back in Scotland,” Jamie informed Claire, as they seated themselves in Jared’s library. Though she knew he dreaded the channel crossing, the eagerness in his voice was tangible and contagious. “Arranging for horses shouldna take long once we land and then it’ll be a few days on the road before we reach Lallybroch.”

Fergus cleared his throat at the door. “Milady’s things have been sent upstairs to your room, Milord. She said there was room for more if you were not finished packing yourself.” Claire nodded to confirm Fergus had done as she wished. “Is there anything else, Milord?”

“Have food sent from the kitchen and fetch yerself a bite while ye’re in there,” Jamie told him. “Oh, and if ye see Murtagh, let him ken they’re here and there’s someone eager to see him.”

“I was wondering where he’d got to,” Claire remarked. “I would have expected him to be right behind you as we drove up.”

“He’s some inquiries he needed to make before we leave France,” Jamie said with a frown. “Something to do with his oath to ye, after what happened wi’ Mary Hawkins.”

Claire shuddered. “He doesn’t mean to stay behind and continue his investigations, does he?”

“I think the thought had crossed his mind. But I told him we preferred him by us, at least till we reached Lallybroch safe. Once there, he’ll no want to be looking back anymore. If we can convince him St. Germain was behind it all, it’ll be at an end.” Jamie was seated in one of the stiff-backed chairs as he lifted Faith under her arms so that her feet skimmed his thighs. She kicked with excitement but so far her knees refused to lock and support her weight. He turned her around and sat her down.

“Do you think that will be enough?”

Jamie sighed. “I dinna ken but… I fear he’ll no be settled till he has proof… And the vow he swore to ye included vengeance for the wrong done to ye. If it was the Comte, that willna set well with him. He’ll feel there’s a debt still owing to ye.”

They’d been speaking in quiet tones while Faith had settled on Jamie’s lap, a fistful of his kilt in her
hand. She tugged on it but he had it firmly tucked beneath and between his thighs. A knock at the door startled the three of them and Faith whimpered until Jamie bounced her a bit to settle her. Murtagh took a few tentative steps into the room.

“The lad said ye’d arrived and were settlin’ in,” he explained, his attention drifting between Claire and the babe in Jamie’s lap.

Jamie rose, an arm protectively clutching Faith across her chest while his other arm was under her bum, keeping her in a sitting position herself. “There’s a new Fraser for ye to meet,” he said as he brought Faith closer to a dubious Murtagh.

There had been many times since she’d come through the stones when Claire had wished for modern conveniences, but since Faith’s birth the desire for a camera to capture and preserve hundreds of small moments had been at the top of her list - and never more so than while witnessing the moment before her as she realized Murtagh was the closest thing to a grandparent Faith was likely to know.

“Do ye want to hold her?” Jamie asked, clearly amused by the terrified expression that flitted across Murtagh’s face.

“I have held bairns afore,” he felt the need to remind Jamie. “You for one.”

As Jamie held Faith out for Murtagh to take - Murtagh pausing to wipe his hands on his kilt before raising them to take the babe - her face puckered and she tucked her legs up, a whimper escaping her quivering lip. Jamie and Murtagh both froze with Faith suspended between them, Faith working up to a wail.

“I think it’s your beard,” Claire explained rising and interceding. She took Faith from Jamie and let her daughter’s head rest against her shoulder while she took a few steps closer to Murtagh. With her free hand, Claire reached up and pointed to Murtagh’s beard then touched it gently. “See. It’s all right. It’s soft,” she cooed. Murtagh remained still as a statue.

Claire shifted Faith in her arms and took hold of the little hand. Faith quickly wrapped her fingers around Claire’s. She guided the little fingers out until they could just brush against Murtagh’s bushy beard, using the back of Faith’s hand to pet it slowly. Claire felt Faith relax against her as the fear faded.

Murtagh relaxed too as he got a good look at Faith in Claire’s arms. “Faith, ye said her name is?”

“Aye,” Jamie spoke up behind Claire. “One o’ the nuns baptized her.”

“And ye’re keeping it for her?”

“The name, yes. We’ve talked a bit about doing something more formal at Lallybroch,” Claire explained, “when Jenny and Ian can be there. You too,” she added.

“We were hoping ye’d stand as godfather to her,” Jamie stated, moving to rest a hand on Murtagh’s shoulder. “I know Ian would be willing if-”

“Aye,” Murtagh said softly, cutting Jamie off. “I’ll do it.” He raised an eyebrow as he turned to Jamie. “I wager she’ll be a tenth o’ the trouble ye are and I’ve survived ye well enough. What say ye, lass?” He reached up cautiously and gave Faith a little tap under her chin. The corner of her mouth ticked up into a half-smile as she began to warm to the bush-faced man.
Whatever reservations Faith had concerning Murtagh vanished on the journey across the channel. Jamie required Claire’s attentions as the ship pitched and lurched beneath them and Fergus - though willing - simply wasn’t as sturdy as Murtagh. Faith clung to him while he murmured to her in the Gàidhlig, calming her enough to keep her quiet though she was still too discomforted to sleep through the voyage.

Everyone was relieved to set foot on Scottish soil once more. Fergus was excited and nervous about the prospect of seeing Lallybroch. Faith was increasingly restless and fussy because of all the traveling. Jamie began to worry over her in the face of Claire’s exhausted reassurances that everything would be fine when they reached Lallybroch and could settle her into a routine again.

“How long till she sleeps through the night, Sassenach?” Jamie inquired as Claire rubbed circles into Faith’s back. Her whimpering had subsided with the feeding but she was still fidgety in her sleep.

“She was doing better before the crossing. I wonder if her distemper stems from a source similar to your own,” Claire remarked.

“Distemper? Ye don’t mean ye think the wee lass has been seasick?”

“No - well, yes, a little but that’s not what I meant. Faith and sleeping through the night. It’s tied to food and having enough to tide them over until morning,” she explained with a yawn. Jamie handed her a bit of bread and cheese from one of the bags of provisions. “Thank you.”

“Tomorrow we’ll have a proper meal and will sleep in our own bed again,” he promised, shifting so her head rested on his shoulder. “We’re no far and Jenny and Ian ken we’re coming.”

“Did you tell them about Faith when you wrote?”

Jamie sighed and lifted his hand to brush a wisp of hair from Faith’s forehead. The fuzz was longer now and the curl he’d predicted was starting to appear. Her hair was a few shades lighter than Claire’s, the curl softer, but he could see the resemblance growing stronger with each passing day.

“They know she’ll be with us but I couldna tell them much about her - I dinna have the words to say it all,” he remarked.

He could feel Claire’s head nod in agreement as she began to drift off having finished the bread and cheese.

“Aye, I kent ye’d understand,” he muttered to her sleeping form as he ran a finger along Faith’s chubby cheek where it pressed against Claire’s chest.
There would still be miles to go the next day before they reached Lallybroch but he could feel the contentment of home washing over him already. Tomorrow night the three of them would be lying together just as they were now but in a proper bed under a proper roof.
Chapter Summary

Jamie, Claire, and company arrive at back at Lallybroch but with so many little ones, some adjustments will need to be made.

Young Jamie had spotted them as they were slowly making their way down the last stretch to the main house and ran to alert the house so when they walked into the yard, Jenny and Ian were waiting for them with the Mrs. Crook and a few farm hands ready to help them with their things.

Jenny had a tight hold of young Jamie in one hand while the other arm was keeping Maggie perched on her hip.

“Ah!” Jamie exclaimed, rushing over to Ian and giving him a clap on the back. “Now this is a homecoming to be proud of.”

“Ye’ve cleared yer name then,” Jenny confirmed, leaning into Jamie’s hug. “Once and for all?”

“Aye,” Jamie assured her, ruffling his namesake’s hair and dropping a quick kiss to the top of Maggie’s head. The lass didn’t care for it and raised a chubby hand to the top of her head, covering it against further assaults. “We’re home for good,” he told Jenny. “And a good thing too for this wee lass here has had enough of bein’ on the road, isn’t that right Faith?” Jamie turned to Claire who held Faith against her hip in a fashion similar to Jenny - Fergus hung back by the horses with Murtagh, unsure what to make of the Murrays.

“This is her?” Jenny cooed, releasing young Jamie’s hand and stepping forward to greet Claire properly. Their hug was understandably awkward with the girls in their arms but they managed. Ian came over and gave Claire a kiss on the cheek while he took a peek at Faith.

“She’s a beauty,” he remarked to no one in particular though Claire caught sight of Jamie beaming with pride.

“Look how big you’ve grown, Maggie,” Claire greeted her niece. “It won’t be long before you two will be proper playmates.” She looked to Faith who was unusually quiet as she blinked at Jenny and Maggie. Maggie was less shy and more vocal, wriggling in Jenny’s arms to try and grab at Faith, squealing in Jenny’s ear as her mother intercepted the finger headed for Faith’s eye.

“Now if the next one’ll be another laddie for wee Jamie here to play with, maybe I won’t have him getting underfoot so often,” Jenny remarked with a nod to her son and sliding her free hand over her abdomen where the swell of her third child was beginning to show.

“Yer not,” Jamie stared in disbelief at his sister. “Wee Maggie here isna even a year yet.” He turned to Ian who looked towards Murtagh and the horses before taking a step in their direction.

“We should get the horses fed and watered, no?” he remarked with a nod to the farm hands to begin unloading the weary beasts.

“And as for playmates,” Claire said with a look to Fergus. “Perhaps young Jamie here could show Fergus around a bit while we get things settled inside.”
Young Jamie grinned at being given the important task of showing a newcomer around but Fergus didn’t look pleased.

“I will help with milord and milady’s belongings,” he asserted, moving to take Claire’s small kit with her medicines from her horse, handling it with particular care.

“And who is that?” Jenny asked after Fergus had disappeared into the house behind the man carrying a trunk from the wagon they’d bought in Inverness.

“Jamie found him in Paris,” Claire explained. “Fergus has… special talents that proved invaluable. He has no family of his own so we brought him back with us.”

“Ah - a stray then. No the first stray that’s found refuge at Lallybroch and he’ll no be the last, I’m sure,” Jenny stated carrying Maggie back to the house. “Ye’ll be needin’ rest and refreshment after yer journey. Ye can tell us of Paris and more of how ye managed after we saw ye last over some supper.”

It didn’t take long for everything to be brought into the house and deposited for unpacking at a more convenient time - or as items were needed - when they weren’t all saddle sore and exhausted.

Supper was boisterous as Jamie told tales of the French court, steering clear of the details of his and Claire’s efforts to undermine the Jacobite cause. As the meal was ending, they heard a raucous in the kitchen where the children were under the watchful eye of Mrs. Crook.

Claire and Jamie were the first through the door to investigate with Jenny just a few steps behind and Ian bringing up the rear. Murtagh slipped away with a mumbled remark about checking the horses - he wasn’t about to subject himself to being around that many distraught bairns.

Faith had been crying but was beginning to calm in Fergus’ arms while young Jamie was red-faced and blubbery at the table, his arms crossed in front of his chest and a bowl of something that had been mashed was splattered down his front. Some of it appeared to be on Maggie and Mrs. Crook too thought the latter was busily wiping it from Maggie’s wide-eyed face.

“What happened?” Jamie asked Fergus while Claire stepped forward to take Faith from him.

Fergus relinquished Faith who looked relieved and over tired. Fergus adjusted the hem of Faith’s baby gown to keep it from riding up. Faith burrowed her face in Claire’s neck and promptly fell asleep. Jamie kept his eyes on Fergus as his hand reached up to cup the back of Faith’s head, stroking the wispy brown curls.

“She was only startled, milord,” Fergus explained. “I’m afraid…” He gestured at young Jamie who was in the process of being wiped down by Jenny, having taken over the task from Mrs. Crook.

“What did ye do a bhailach?” Jenny asked, caution in her voice - she wasn’t sure yet how angry she should be.

“I was feedin’ Maggie - mashed milk and bannocks,” Mrs. Crook explained, turning the rag on herself. “The lad wanted te help which he’s done afore only this time-”

“He put the spoon to Faith,” Fergus finished.

“I made te grab it from him,” Mrs. Crook continued. “But Maggie knocked the bowl and scared the wee thing and the food-”

“Aye,” Jamie halted the explanation. “We can guess the rest.”
“Dinna do that again, aye?” Jenny scolded her son. “No wi’out askin’ first. Yer cousin’s a wee little thing. Her belly isna ready like Maggie’s.”

Young Jamie looked dejected. Claire turned to Jamie and raised her brows.

He took the hint and crouched beside his namesake who had stopped crying, the redness in his cheeks shifting from being a result of his distress to being the reluctant center of attention.

“Ye’re all right, lad,” Jamie reassured the boy. “Ye meant well and there’s no harm done.” He glanced to Faith and Claire who smiled at young Jamie to further assure him that he wasn’t in too much trouble. “It’s no the first mess in this kitchen and it’ll no be the last. Now, yer da was tellin’ me ye’ve started lessons wi’ yer letters.”

Young Jamie’s face broke into a smile as he nodded with pride.

“Well, go fetch something so ye can show me what ye’ve learnt.” The boy hopped down from his perch and dashed off before Jamie had risen from his crouch.

Jenny shook her head but was smiling as she took Maggie back from Mrs. Crook. Ian chuckled first and soon they were all laughing to varying degrees as they removed themselves from the kitchen to restore peace to Mrs. Crook.

Young Jamie reappeared with a primer to show his uncle.

“Ye’ve been teaching him then, Ian?” Jamie asked as he took the primer from young Jamie to examine it. Jamie began to lead the way towards his study.

“A bit when I’ve the time, aye.”

“D’ye think ye could have a go wi’ Fergus here?” Jamie asked, catching the older boy off guard.

“Milord?”

“Ye’ll be needing a bit of proper education. I think Ian and myself can manage until a tutor can be found for ye te share wi’ young Jamie here in a year or two,” Jamie explained to a visibly grateful and overwhelmed Fergus.

Claire and Jenny carried the girls into the parlor where they could sit and chat by the fire. Maggie squirmed until Jenny set her down on the floor and gave her one of Ian’s shirts from her mending basket to play with.

“If it isna one crisis,” Jenny remarked, stretching her back and resting a hand on her stomach, “it’s another.”

“And you’re going to add another to the mix,” Claire pointed out as she shifted Faith into a more comfortable position on her lap.

“Aye well,” Jenny shrugged. “She’s a quiet one, isn’t she,” indicating Faith.

“When she’s sleeping, yes,” Claire smiled. “She has her moods though and can be wary when it comes to meeting new people. Here,” Claire said, handing Faith over to Jenny, “now’s a good time to hold her. She won’t sleep for long - she needs a feeding soon - and she should get used to her godmother.”

Jenny’s lips pressed together in a satisfied smile as she readjusted Faith’s limp body in her arms.
“I told ye ye’d have one of yer own soon enough,” Jenny said quietly. “She favors ye, ye ken.”

“That’s what Jamie says,” Claire agreed. “But she’s got the Fraser eyes.”

“More of yer temperament from what I can tell.”

As Claire predicted, Faith began to rouse, groaning and stretching before opening her eyes and straining her neck to find Claire, smiling and reaching for her mother when she succeeded. Both women laughed quietly which caught Maggie’s attention.

She looked up from the shirt she’d been crumpling, tugging, and pulling over her head to see Faith in Jenny’s lap where she was reaching up to grab at Jenny’s nose. Maggie grumbled as she rolled onto her knees - the shirt hanging loosely off her head like a veil thrown back. She crawled to Jenny and took firm hold of Jenny’s skirt to pull herself up. Her grumbles rose in pitch until they became squeals - she waved her chubby arm at Faith disapprovingly, looking up to Jenny and babbling angrily, “ma” being the only distinct and repeated syllable.

“I think someone’s jealous,” Claire remarked, reaching to take a now whimpering Faith back so Jenny could heave Maggie up and onto her lap.

“Well, she’ll need te get over it in the next few months.” Jenny put a hand back on the gentle swell of her belly and Maggie put one of her hands beside it possessively, still babbling.
Potatoes and a Christening

Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire settle into life at Lallybroch with Faith.

It didn't take long for life at Lallybroch to fall into a routine again. The first of the potatoes were to be harvested a few short weeks after their return and preparations were underway for storing them with Jamie overseeing them. There were plenty of tenants in need of physicking from Claire but not many who could easily make their way to her. She tried leaving Faith behind with Jenny at first, determined to keep Faith from being exposed to illnesses unnecessarily, but her patients' demands on her time and Faith's dietary demands of her body quickly forced her to abandon that habit.

With Jenny's and Mrs. Crook's help, a carrying sling was constructed to make it easier for Claire to ride or carry Faith about the estate with her - visiting the tenants, gathering herbs, Faith spent her days close at hand. Compared to her cousins, Faith was a quiet and calm child, taken with observing the people and world around her. She would pass Faith off to whomever was on hand in a house where she was needed, though concerned relatives rarely strayed far from a loved one's sickbed. Faith was good with being handled by strangers and generally sat in a lap with as much of her attention on Claire and her ministrations as the person who held her.

"I wonder will she have yer healer's touch," Jamie pondered aloud one night after Faith had fallen asleep on him, her cheek pressed to his sternum.

Claire was returning the bottle of whiskey to the sideboard - Faith had started teething but rubbing a drop of whiskey on her gums calmed her enough to put her to sleep and luckily, once she was asleep, she generally stayed asleep.

"It does sometimes feel like she understands what she's watching," Claire admitted. "Obviously it's just that she's tracking me and my movements... but she'll be old enough to learn before you know it."

"Aye," Jamie ran his hand over her hair - it was just getting long enough to be brushed but would still be a while before it could be plaited or tied off to keep it out of her face. "Soon she'll be walking after wee Maggie, tryin' to keep up with her."

Claire most enjoyed the days when she took Faith out to the garden, spread a blanket, and set her down to roll about and play while she gathered the necessary plants for her medical stores. She was thriving at Lallybroch - they all were. The only time Claire felt shadows pass was when they received letters from France - reminders of what they'd been there to do and what might still be heading for Scotland. It was in those moments that the importance of the potatoes, the repairs and improvements to the house, outbuildings, and fields, loomed large over her.

Faith squealed on the blanket. She'd been sitting up when Claire set her down but had flopped onto her back. An insect was humming nearby and she arched her back, reaching with her arms to try and catch it. Claire moved closer to wave it away but it had already dodged Faith's grasp. Determined, Faith rolled onto her belly and pushed up onto her hands and knees, rocking back and forth screeching for the dragonfly to wait for her to catch up with it. She hadn't quite mastered the coordination necessary to crawl consistently but was getting close - Jamie sat on the floor
encouraging her most evenings while Claire worked at the mending, the efforts leaving Faith exhausted so that she frequently lay on her belly on the floor and went to sleep right there.

"And what are you going to do with that when you catch it?" Claire asked Faith with a laugh.

The girl turned towards her mother and moved an arm but lost her balance and rolled to her instead, ending on her back, startled, but looking up at an amused Claire. Faith smiled triumphantly which made Claire laugh more.

"And just what might you two lasses be up to?" Jamie asked, brushing dust and dirt from his arms and shirt as he strode over. There was more dust stuck to the sweat on his brow and in his hair.

"A nature lesson I guess you could call it," Claire explained as she scooted over so Jamie could join them on the ground. "How's the root cellar coming along?"

"It's a large hole in the ground," Jamie said, reaching for a mint leaf from Claire's basket of fresh plucked herbs. He stuck it in his mouth and chewed for a minute before leaning away from them and spitting into the grass. "I dinna think I'll stop tasting the dirt of digging for a week. But, the cellar will be ready when the potatoes are," he confirmed.

"We'll have to set some aside for planting next season and store the rest for winter. Hopefully there will be a decent crop."

"Hopefully we won't ruin too many in the process of harvesting them," Jamie voiced his fear. "It's a new crop and we're no familiar wi' it. Ian has his book on growing potatoes but there's still more than enough room for error on our part. And then there's the small matter of getting the folk round here to eat them."

"Ah but I thought we had a plan for that." Claire reached over and plucked Faith from her back, setting her upright again. Faith smiled up at Jamie but she had to look up at such a sharp angle she nearly toppled over backwards again. Jamie reached into his sporan and pulled out a whittled animal Murtagh had made for Faith - it was difficult to tell whether the creature was supposed to be a dog or a cat but it certainly had four legs, a tail, and a lean body. She grabbed it and began shaking it about.

"Murtagh will be bringing the priest when he comes next week," Jamie confirmed. "I dinna expect it will take more than a day or two to harvest the potatoes."

"And you're sure you're all right with doing this now? You don't want to wait until after Jenny's baby's born in February and have them baptized together?" Claire asked him again.

"She should have a proper Christening," Jamie insisted, "here at Lallybroch with her family present and we should celebrate wi' the tenants as well."

The harvest hadn't taken long - once they'd decided for sure that the potatoes were ready for harvesting. There had been more than a few questions about how they were meant to be cooked and eaten before Jamie and Claire explained they would be served several ways after Faith's Christening and that all the tenants were invited. An air of anticipation descended as Murtagh arrived with a priest from a village just over the border into the MacKenzie lands - it had been some time since the priest at Broch Mordha had passed away having suffered from symptoms Claire believed indicated he had suffered from a form of stomach cancer. A new priest had yet to be assigned to the church there but word had reached them of Father Drummond traveling through the area on his way further north and he'd agreed to come and Christen Faith properly in exchange for room and board.

"Hildegarde?" Jenny had asked with raised brows as Faith slept in her arms following the brief
ceremony. "Why on earth would ye settle a name like that on the poor child?" She wasn't alone in wondering at the choice to include Hildegard after Faith and Janet and before Fraser in the child's string of names.

"Mother Hildegard was the nun who helped deliver her," Claire explained.

"She's the one who baptized her Faith in the first place," Jamie added, reaching out to take his daughter from her godmother. "She's been a good friend to Claire."

"Is she the one what sends ye the bits and bones of dead creatures?" Jenny's brow furrowed as she settled into a chair to rest before the time to assist Mrs. Crook in the kitchen arrived.

"No." Claire turned away to conceal the slight flush of self-consciousness. "That's Master Raymond - or at least, I believe it is. Mother Hildegard is the one who sent the baby gown she's wearing now." In Claire's first letter to Mother Hildegard informing her of their safe arrival at Lallybroch, she had mentioned their intent to have Faith Christened properly when a priest could be found as well as their decision to include the nun among Faith's given names when they did so. Along with an touchingly appreciative reply, Mother Hildegard had sent the lovely but simple baby gown for Faith. Claire liked the idea of dressing Faith in it for the Christening - similar to the Christening gowns prevalent in her own time, which were still some years away from becoming common practice in her present time.

Jenny's expression shifted to one of relief as she nodded her understanding. Faith began to stir in Jamie's arms, her fussing indicative of needing a fresh clout.

"I'll take her," Claire volunteered. "I should change her into something more suitable for tonight anyway."

"What's wrong with what she's wearing?" Jamie inquired.

"If she's going to have a taste of potatoes tonight, I'd rather she wear something that isn't so new," Claire explained as Jamie passed Faith to her. "We'll be back in time to help in the kitchen."

"Ye better," Jenny snorted. "Ye're the one knows best what we should be doing to them and whether they'll have turned out right."

Claire swept up the stairs with Faith, the mention of Master Raymond still weighing on her mind. The parcels he sent to her were unmarked though he was the only person she could think of who would send her little bones from snakes, bears, and wolves as well as small stones worn smooth but for small carvings etched into the surface. Jenny found them unsettling and Claire knew Jamie found them odd gifts but Claire found them fascinating. She kept them tucked safely away so that Faith wouldn't accidentally come across them and investigate them the way she investigated so many new things, by sticking them into her mouth. But the last parcel that had arrived from Master Raymond had included a scrap of paper with a note scrawled on it - *For madonna and child.*

Instead of the smooth stones or bones, the package had included two bits of raw amethyst mounted and strung to be worn as necklaces. One of the stones was larger and on a longer chain while the second was more petite, though it would still be some years before Claire would allow Faith to wear it if she ever had occasion to. There was something about the amethyst that put Claire in mind of the crystal Master Raymond had given her with the intent that it would help protect her from poisons and the fact he'd sent one for Faith unnerved her. She hadn't mentioned the indication that he'd sent anything for Faith to Jamie yet - they were still sitting in the small box where she stored the other things he'd sent.
Laying Faith on the bed while she changed her, Claire's eyes kept drifting to the corner where the box and note sat. Faith began babbling to Claire as she squirmed onto her stomach while Claire was busy folding and putting Mother Hildegarde's gift out of harm's way. She noticed Faith seemed to sense Claire's preoccupation with the box in the corner, turning her own head back and forth between it and her mother as she continued to emit strings of meaningless syllables.

"I'm being silly, I know," Claire told her. "Now let's head down to help get ready for your party."

There was a spot in the corner of the kitchen where blankets had been piled and obstacles erected to keep Faith and Maggie from getting underfoot while their mothers were working at the table—though Maggie was beginning to grow proficient at climbing over the unorthodox walls. Claire deposited Faith there with the silver rattle Louise had given her upon departing Fontainebleau. It promptly entered Faith’s mouth and she began gnawing on it. Maggie crawled over to watch what Faith was doing with it at which point Faith removed it from her mouth and waved it around, splattering her older cousin with droplets of drool—Maggie lost interest and moved back to the small rag doll she’d abandoned.

Claire joined Jenny and Mrs. Crook dicing up potatoes and other root vegetables for the stew. Fergus came in at one point with a leg of mutton for them to use as they saw fit—the rest of the sheep with two of its brethren and two pigs would be roasted in the yard. Claire went through the pile of potatoes and set aside the biggest ones to be buried and cooked in the coals directly after the meat had finished. After that, Claire pulled aside a number of greens and raw vegetables to put into what she could of a salad—Jenny and Mrs. Crook watching her with raised eyebrows the whole time. She was determined to encourage as many of the tenants to eat greens as could be managed—the last thing she wanted come winter was to be called from the house to treat scurvy.

Grannie MacNab and her daughter-in-law soon slipped into the kitchen after having assisted in the necessary outdoor preparations. With the extra hands, Claire and Jenny were able to slip away to change before gathering the children and going out to greet the guests as they began arriving. Claire located Jamie standing with Ian and Murtagh not far from where the mutton and pork were roasting over the fire. She crossed to them with Faith grinning at the sight of Jamie—and Jamie breaking into a proud smile of his own when he spotted them coming.

“There ye are lass,” he said, reaching to take her from Claire. “Don’t you look bonny. Are ye eager to try those tatties yer mam has had us growing? Goin’ to put that wee tooth of yers to good use.”

“I think there’s a second just coming through there,” Claire said, pointing to a pale spot along Faith’s lower gums. Faith twisted her head to avoid being prodded, spotted Murtagh, and reached for him to save her. He obliged with a faint smile largely hidden beneath his bushy beard. “Muh, muh,” Faith babbled as she twisted her fingers into it and pulled.

Claire stood watching Murtagh and his two godchildren with satisfaction. Ian glanced her way with his own grin of appreciation. She didn’t know what—if anything—Jamie had told Jenny and Ian of his time in Wentworth and what Jack Randall had done to him but it hadn’t gone unremarked that whatever it was had left its mark on Jamie. Claire and Murtagh were the only ones who could appreciate just how far he’d come back to his old self—and having Faith to think about and watch grow had been a large part of that return.

As the tenants and their families began to arrive, they stopped to make their congratulations to the Laird and his family, to admire Faith before enjoying the food, drink, and company of the larger party. Claire took Faith back when the meat and stew were ready to be served. With so much going on, Faith watched everything with a keen interest and enthusiasm. Fergus, Rabbie, and young Jamie excitedly set about the task of laying the potatoes in the bed of glowing charcoal before Murtagh
raked the rest of the embers on top of them to bake.

Faith was growing heavy as her exhaustion took over—it had been a long day with more activity than her small body could handle without a nap. Claire drifted to the edge of the crowd and found a place on a bench where she could lean against the side of the house while Faith slept in her arms.

The meat and ale had taken care of much of the tenants’ wariness over some of the food options they were unfamiliar with. She watched two children playing with leaves of watercress before their mother could scold them. The potatoes were proving a bit more popular than the leafy greens. The scent of them smeared with butter wafted over to her and made her stomach rumble—she had been busy with Faith and chatting with their guests and hadn’t had enough to eat.

The smell roused Faith as well. She stirred in Claire’s arms, her back arching as she stretched and blinked her eyes.

“Did you have a good nap?” Claire inquired, smiling at her daughter.

Faith smiled back and reached up to grab one of Claire’s stray curls. Claire bent her forehead to Faith’s inspiring a string of giggles.

The smell of food was closer now and Claire realized someone had come up while she was preoccupied. Jamie stood with two of the baked potatoes in his hands, the blackened skins sliced open with buttery steam rising from them. She moved to sit Faith up in her lap but Jamie remained still, a soft smile on his face.

“Are those both for you?” she asked, nodding to the potatoes.

“No,” he answered, blinking and taking the seat beside her. “Sorry I just… didna want to disturb the two of ye like that. Wi’ yer heads together that way… I couldn’a tell where yer hair ended and hers began—framed yer faces and made yer smiles shine brighter.” He balanced one of the potatoes on his leg and reached out to smooth a curl back from each of their faces. “I’ll ne’er tire of seeing the two of ye like that, Sassenach.” He trailed his finger down Claire’s cheek and along her jaw before raising her chin for a kiss.

Faith was apparently just as hungry as Claire. She reached out for the potato but Claire deftly caught her wrist before Faith could burn herself.

“Slow down there,” she laughed.

“Mamamama,” Faith babbled, looking up at Claire and reaching for the potato.

“Can she have it?” Jamie asked, loosening a small bit and blowing on it to cool it for her.

“Yes. Let’s see how she likes it.”

Faith pushed the small, butter-soaked bite around in her mouth with her tongue, the unfamiliar movement causing her to scrunch up her face. She swallowed it eventually and began kicking her legs in approval and reaching for more. “Dadadada mmm,” she jabbered, opening her mouth in anticipation.

“Aye, that’s right, *m’annsachd,*” Jamie beamed. “Da. That’s me. Here ye are. I suppose ye’re hankering for a change from what yer mam can give ye of her milk—though I’ve yet to tire of yer mam myself.”

Claire snorted quietly. “People can hear you,” she reminded her husband.
“And ye think I’m ashamed of wanting ye?”

“No,” Claire admitted. “But I can think of a better time and place—”

“Ye know ye need only name a time and place, Sassenach,” Jamie grinned. “I’m familiar wi’ yer appetites.”

“If I’ve an appetite at the moment, it isn’t for that,” she informed him as her stomach grumbled again. “Take the baby and give me that potato.”
Future Considerations

Chapter Summary

The weeks pass and Faith grows at Lallybroch.

Having settled into life at Lallybroch once more, Jamie and Claire began to realize that time passed differently when there was a growing child involved. The seasons still formed a backdrop by which to measure its passage, but more and more often things began to fall into categories of before or after Faith was able to do something new.

Jenny and Ian would smile indulgently at their pride and amazement over Faith’s every accomplishment, no matter how small—perhaps remembering their own pride over wee Jamie as he began crawling and talking and taking his first steps. They’d been more subdued with Maggie and with Jenny weeks away from delivering a third child, they were sure to be too busy herding their bairns and keeping them from trouble to take proper pride in any milestones beyond those that meant less work for themselves—sleeping through the night, weaning, and using the privy.

“You know, this is our first real Christmas together,” Claire remarked as December advanced.

Jamie shuddered. He’d spent much of the previous December imprisoned at Wentworth facing the very real possibility that he wouldn’t live to see another year. “I much prefer this one to the last myself,” he agreed.

Faith crawled across the floor in front of the fireplace to where he sat in his chair with a book open in his lap. She reached up and grabbed the edge of his boot to pull herself up onto her wobbly legs.

“How would ye mark the day in your time?” he inquired, closing his book and setting it aside in order to reach down for Faith to take hold of his fingers with her chubby fists. Helping to carry her weight, he rose from the chair and walked her over to Claire where she sat brushing her hair.

“We would bring an evergreen into the house to decorate,” she said mischievously, watching for the skeptically cocked eyebrow—he didn’t disappoint. “It won’t come into fashion for more than a hundred years yet,” she informed him. “We would sing Christmas carols, feast, put up stockings by the fire for Saint Nick to fill with little gifts and treats… Mostly it was a time to spend with family and friends, drinking, exchanging presents, and enjoying one another’s company.”

She reached down to raise Faith and turn her around, swapping her hands for Jamie’s while he backed up to give Faith a new target.

“Would ye want to do anything like that with Faith?” Jamie asked. “I dinna want ye to miss those kinds of things and if ye—”

“It’s fine, Jamie,” Claire insisted, pausing to look up at her husband. “Faith won’t miss what she’s never known.”

Jamie frowned for a moment before his face broke into an expression of shock. Faith had let go of Claire’s fingers and took two steps unassisted before pitching forward, Jamie catching her deftly before her face could collide with the floor. Having startled herself, Faith began to cry, tucking her
face into Jamie’s chest as he held her close. It took a few minutes for her parents’ excitement to calm her down but she still refused to leave Jamie’s arms instead succumbing to his warmth and drifting off to sleep.

As he laid her down for the night, Claire assumed the Christmas conversation had been laid to rest as well. But a few days later she retired with an overtired Faith to their room for the night and found that Jamie had placed a single bough from a Scots pine in the vase she usually kept on the mantel—it had been empty for some time and placed far out of Faith’s reach.

“I didna think it would do to bring an entire tree indoors but that little bit…” Jamie said from behind her.

Claire turned and was quickly engulfed in Jamie’s arms with Faith babbling her approval between the two of them.

“Thank you,” Claire whispered to Jamie, rising onto her toes to kiss him.

“Aye, well… Faith may no miss what she’s never known, but I thought you might,” he explained.

Claire moved to the meager branch to allow Faith to investigate it until she began trying to eat the needles, pulling a disgusted face that sent Claire and Jamie into a fit of laughter. Jamie took Faith from Claire while she spent a few minutes rummaging around for small things they could use for decoration.

Twisting a scrap of silky red ribbon into a bow, Claire dabbed a bit of the branch’s sap onto the back and stuck it to Faith’s forehead, the ends of the ribbon dangling in Faith’s face. She reached up to try to grasp the ends but the obstruction was wreaking havoc with her depth perception and she repeatedly closed her fist several inches into the open air. While Faith was preoccupied, Claire draped and tied a few other scraps of ribbon and lace over the branch, tilting her head in contemplation before nodding at the task’s having been completed.

Faith finally succeeded in removing the bow from her head and began playing with it properly, fascinated by the spot of stickiness that had secured it in place. Claire retrieved a bit of peppermint oil to help rub the bit of sap from Faith’s forehead and fingers, laughing to herself as the scent of peppermint mingled with the slight tang of pine to evoke memories of Christmas by the tree with candy canes.

The pair of unassisted steps Faith managed before Christmas remained an anomaly until after Hogmanay. As the new year dawned, she began loosening her grip on their fingers to take tentative steps alone though she preferred to keep a hand on something to steady her as she began making her way in the world on her own. She would use a chair to pull herself up and hold onto it as she located the leg of a table, only letting go at the last moment with her arm already stretched out toward her goal in order to catch herself when her balance failed her.

“She’s walking early,” Jenny noted as she struggled to get comfortable in the last stages of her pregnancy. “Wee Jamie didna take his first steps afore he was a year and Maggie was two months shy of that herself. But the pair of them were both managing clear words at this point.”

“She seems to have ‘mam’ and ‘da’ pretty well in hand,” Claire pointed out as she and Jenny watched Faith doing her best to chase after Maggie. She was still too hesitant in her steps and opted to get back on her hands and knees to continue her pursuit. Maggie squealed whenever Faith got close enough to reach out to touch her and would scurry away, forcing her younger cousin to look for her again and change course.
“It’ll come,” Jenny assured Claire with a dismissive tone. “Wi’ how early ye said she came, she’s doing fine.”

“Maggie seems to be doing better with her. She’ll be a fine big sister in a few weeks.”

“Aye, though it helps that Faith can do more herself now.”

“They’re becoming quite the playmates,” Claire agreed.

“Gee! Gee!” Faith screeched in frustration as Maggie eluded her once more.

“Looks like she’s got Maggie down as well,” Jenny laughed then winced as the baby kicked her hard. She rubbed the side of her belly. “When are you and my brother goin’ to be givin’ Faith a wee brother or sister?” Jenny hinted, grinning when Claire blushed.

“I haven’t even begun weaning Faith yet,” Claire protested, reaching out and catching Faith as she made her way past. She lifted her up and settled the child on her lap.

“Mamamama, Gee,” Faith said, pointing to her cousin and fidgeting to get down again. Claire shifted her around a bit until she captured Faith’s attention.

“What do you say, Miss Faith? Are you ready to wean and start on parritch?”

Faith’s pucker of disgust was probably directed at her mother for refusing to let her down to play but her timing had both Claire and Jenny laughing. Realizing she was at the center of attention, Faith settled enough for Claire to begin playing with her hair, wrapping one of Faith’s curls around her finger.

“I’ve never seen a lass with such hair at her age,” Jenny remarked looking to Maggie’s dark locks, straighter than Faith’s curls but only about half the length when Faith’s were stretched straight.

“I never had anyone who could tell me what I was like at this age,” Claire confessed. “My uncle wasn’t around much before my parents died so the only stories I have of me at a young age begin when I was five.”

“Well, some of the faces she pulls are pure Jamie,” Jenny told her. “He had that knack for making the rest of us laugh like that. But there’s a lot of you in her as well—that’s plain as day. Ye may no ken from others’ stories, but my best guess is ye’re looking at yerself as a wean.”

Claire smiled at Faith and was rewarded with a toothy grin from the child in her lap as well—she was up to three teeth and had started eating more solid foods though the potatoes remained a steady favorite along with any vegetable Claire could boil until it was soft enough to mash. Maybe it was time to start actively weaning her?

It was two weeks later that Jenny gave birth to a second daughter—Katherine Mary.

“That was the easiest birth this family has seen in two years,” Claire remarked as she cradled her new niece in her arms, bringing the infant over to Jamie and Ian who each had a tight hold of one of the older girls.

“More Murray than Fraser in her is my guess,” Jenny quipped from the bed despite her exhaustion. Young Jamie was perched on the bed beside her, disappointed that there was yet another girl in the house. Fergus and Murtagh had declined to tramp upstairs to see the latest addition.

“No need to overwhelm the wee lass so soon,” Murtagh had said with a shrug. “From what Claire
says, the lass is healthy and no going anywhere. We can become acquainted in our own sweet time.”

Fergus had adopted Murtagh’s view and avoided the excitement. He wasn’t as fond of playing with young Jamie or Maggie as Faith was—though it was to be expected at Faith’s age. He looked forward to the warmer weather of spring when Claire would need his assistance in her herb garden again and he could help her keep an eye on Faith there—he missed the days in France when he’d had her undivided attention.

“Ba,” Faith told Jamie as she pointed to her new cousin. “Ba!”

“Aye, Faith. Tha’s the new bairn. No,” he informed her, intercepting her hand before she poked the slumbering Kitty in the eye. “No ye canna grab her. Ye must be gentle, a nighean.”

“Ba,” Faith whispered at the baby, then turned to Maggie to make sure she had seen her new sister. “Gee, ba.”

Maggie peered at Kitty and squinted at her. She turned to her father—unimpressed—and requested, “Down, Da. Mam down,” gesturing to the bed.

Ian rolled his eyes and moved to bring Maggie to the bed for some time with Jenny. “Fate come,” Maggie called to Faith who was ignoring her. “Fate!” she squealed, loud enough to wake Kitty, who began squirming against the blanket that swaddled her, fussing at the constraint and noise.

“Sssss,” Faith hissed at Maggie, wagging a scolding finger. She turned back to Kitty and started crooning a string of ‘ba’ at her again.

Jamie and Claire smiled at each other over their daughter’s and niece’s heads.

Claire began actively working to wean Faith after that—though Faith was suddenly reluctant, fascinated as she was with Kitty. She would approach Claire looking to nurse whenever Jenny sat down to feed Kitty.

Rather than risk Faith throwing a tantrum and disturbing Jenny and Kitty, Claire rose and lifted Faith into her arms, taking her for a bit of a walk around the room before heading for the kitchen to see if she could get Faith to drink some goat’s milk.

Faith was fascinated with the baby and it had led Claire to reflect on how she would react to becoming a big sister herself. Faith would be turning one in about two months’ time and was already quite an active toddler. Given how long it had taken for Claire to become pregnant with Faith, it could still be some time before she got pregnant again—her courses had only begun again as Faith started trying solid foods and nursed less often though she wasn’t having them regularly again yet. Once Faith was weaned completely, Claire knew that the chances of her becoming pregnant with their second child would increase.

Though the children could be tiring, watching them all playing and growing together… she was ready for more. And though she hadn’t brought the subject up with Jamie yet, she was sure he would be enthusiastic at the idea of having more children—having had such a strong relationship with his father, she knew he longed for a son of his own.

Though she’d turned her nose up at the goat’s milk the last few times Claire had encouraged her to drink it, this time Faith took it, swallowing it with resignation if not active enthusiasm.

A few minutes later, Jenny came in carrying Kitty in one arm and a parcel and some letters from the postman in the other.
“It’s mostly from France,” Jenny declared setting it down before sitting herself.

Jamie and Ian appeared at the back door covered in dirt and withered vegetation from the fields having spent the morning examining them and planning the year’s planting.

“It looks like Jared sent some new reading material along with his letter,” Claire informed Jamie as she poked through the mail they’d received. “And it looks like you have another lamentation from Charles as well.” She held the letter out for Jamie to take before Faith reclaimed her attention by coughing on the mouthful of milk she was working to swallow.

“Not so fast, lamb,” Claire cautioned. When she decided once-and-for-all to wean Faith, Claire had spent some time fashioning a bottle that was more like those she knew from the twentieth century, not very satisfied with the eighteenth century equivalent—she wanted one that could be easily cleaned and sterilized. After a few failed prototypes and disappointing messes, she’d succeeded rather nicely. She set the precious bottle aside so she could pat Faith’s back and help her catch her breath before the child’s coughing caused her to spit up the milk.

Faith’s coughing subsided but her breathing was ragged for a few minutes as she trembled in Claire’s arms, blinking back tears and refusing to fuss. Claire stood Faith in her lap so Faith could rest against her shoulder and bury her face in her mother’s neck, the wetness on her face seeping into the fabric along Claire’s collarbone.

With Faith calmed down, Claire looked to Jamie who had been uncharacteristically quiet through the minor ordeal—he would usually at least come over to check Faith and see for himself that she was all right.

Jamie was pale and clutching a piece of paper in either hand, his gaze darting frantically from one to the other with increasing disbelief.

“Jamie? What is it?” Claire rose and walked over to peer at the pages he held.

One was the letter from Jared applauding Jamie for the bold move he’d made; the other was a broadside declaring James Stuart the rightful king of Scotland, England, and Ireland along with listing the names of declared Jacobite supporters.

Jamie’s name was at the bottom of those declaring his support. Claire snatched the page from Jamie’s hand to see it for herself. Jamie turned to the letter Charles had sent muttering in Gaelic under his breath, words and phrases that caught Faith’s attention so that she picked her head up from Claire’s shoulder to see what her parents were concerned with. She reached for the broadside but Claire held it out of her reach, still trying to grasp at how Jamie’s name could be there, knowing that Charles was the only one with the gall to make such a presumptive move.

“Tha bastard had the nerve to apologize for no letting me sign it myself,” Jamie sneered, looking like he was ready to tear the letter in two. His eyes fell to Faith who scowled at the papers in their hands, her brows knitting in imitation of the confusion, fear, and frustration her parents were feeling. At the sight of her, the air leeched from Jamie’s building fury. He set the papers down on the table and reached for Faith who went to him gladly, her face brightening as her fingers lodged in Jamie’s hair.

“Christ, Sassenach. What’re we going to do?”
Lasting Impressions

Chapter Summary

Jamie and Claire have some difficult decisions to make concerning Faith.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Faith was finally asleep but they couldn’t bear to put her into her cradle. Instead, they placed her in the pocket of space between them in their bed and watched as her chest rose and fell steadily, her fists twitching periodically.

There was only one thing they had decided so far—Faith would stay at Lallybroch. It was the only place they could be sure she would be safe.

“You should stay here with her, Sassenach,” Jamie whispered, reaching out and tucking one of Faith’s sweaty curls behind her ear—she gave off a great deal of heat whenever she slept, a trait, Claire had been quick to point out, she shared with her father.

“But you’ll need me,” Claire objected. “If there’s any chance that we can change the way this all turns out, you’ll need what I know about what’s coming and it isn’t the kind of information that can be passed along by letter. It’s too slow and if it fell into the wrong hands—”

“If it fell into the wrong hands, those hands would know as little about what to do with it as we might,” Jamie argued, struggling to keep his voice low. Faith scowled in her sleep and Claire reached down to smooth the furrow in her brow. “We dinna know that what ye remember will be of any use and ye’ve said before that ye dinna remember many of the details.”

“I remember enough that it might make a difference,” Claire protested. “And what’s more, my medical knowledge could prove invaluable to those who wind up wounded.”

“And what of Faith, hmm? D’ye think she willna need her mother?”

“As much as she’ll need her father,” Claire countered, her voice breaking with the force of her emotion. Their wet eyes met over their slumbering daughter. Jamie reached up and tucked one of Claire’s curls behind her ear—it was a stubborn one that tended to fall against her cheekbone in the same area Faith’s often did.

When Jamie spoke again, his voice was quiet and controlled, betraying to Claire the emotion he was fighting hard to keep in check. “Charles signed my name. I canna escape the consequences of that. I can fight and hope it will be enough to change the tide ye’ve said is coming…” He took a deep breath. “But if I canna do that…I’d have you and Faith safe here at Lallybroch. I’ll find a way to keep the English from taking it from ye if things dinna go right.”

“I’m not letting you face this alone,” Claire pressed.

“So ye’d leave Faith here on her own?” Jamie scoffed.

“She… she won’t be alone,” Claire insisted though wasn’t sure whether she was making her
argument for Jamie’s benefit or to reinforce her own resolve. “She has Jenny and Ian here. And young Jamie, Maggie, and Kitty.”

“Jenny and Ian have their own bairns to look after and they’ve had the keeping of Lallybroch alone for so long as it is. I canna ask them to do this too.”

Claire reached over to take hold of Jamie’s chin, to force him to look up from Faith and at her.

“You can and you will. They’ll understand and it’ll only be for a little while, right? We’re going to be back for her,” Claire promised, though they both knew it wasn’t something they could truly control.

“She’ll no grow up wi’out us,” he agreed with determination, holding Claire’s gaze.

“It’s not the worst thing,” Claire said as tears rolled down her cheeks and her eyes dropped to Faith. “Not for her, anyway. Not at this age. She’s… so young still. She knows us but… It’ll be harder for us… leaving her.” Claire ran a finger along Faith’s round cheek and smiled when the corner of the child’s mouth ticked up—like her father.

“All right,” Jamie finally consented. “It’ll be some time to gather the men and provisions we’ll need. We’ve… some time wi’ her yet. Not enough.” He slipped his arm under Faith and lifted her, sliding closer to Claire and resting Faith on his chest. With her cheek pressed into the shirt above his sternum, Faith’s toes reached just to his navel—a far cry from when she stretched barely the length of his forearm only eight months earlier.

“There’ll never be enough time,” Claire agreed, curling against Jamie and resting her hand on Faith’s back. "She grows too fast as it is. Changing every day.” Jamie reached down and pulled the blanket up so that it covered all three of them. The three of them fell asleep together.

The morning they knew they would be leaving, Claire stood in their bedroom with Faith sitting propped against their pillows. Faith—now fully weaned out of necessity—had a bottle of goats milk and was content to simply sit, sip, and watch Claire double and triple-check everything in the room to be sure nothing was being left behind—nothing but her daughter who unknowingly held her heart in her chubby little fists.

Finally, Claire sat on the edge of the bed and simply watched Faith. She and Jamie had both been doing it—memorizing every detail of her face and personality only to start all over again the next day when they noticed that she had grown a bit more, that her hair was finally long enough to tie back and out of her face, that she was steadier in her steps, that she could say more words. Jenny and Ian had been quick to agree to Jamie and Claire’s request that they take Faith into their charge until they should return. Jenny in particular had gone out of her way to give Jamie and Claire time to themselves with Faith—insisting Claire leave preparations in the kitchen to herself and Mrs. Crook, pushing for Fergus and Rabbie MacNab to be trusted with tasks Jamie would normally undertake himself, volunteering Ian left and right. She was generally more aware of where her own children were and showed remarkable patience and tolerance with them—at least until it was clear young Jamie was taking advantage of his mother’s excessive sentimentality.

Claire had insisted that they mark Faith’s first birthday in some way, explaining the various ways children’s birthdays would be celebrated in the twentieth century. She didn’t want another large and showy gathering like they’d had for her Christening but she couldn’t let the day pass like any other; she wanted to leave Faith with something while they were gone, though if they succeeded, she knew —hoped, prayed—Faith would never even remember the separation.
Jamie made an effort to set aside the demands of gathering and supplying his men to spend the day with his family. A small picnic was arranged with help from Jenny and Mrs. Crook. Claire carried the larger basket while Fergus was enlisted to carry a blanket and smaller basket. Faith rode atop Jamie’s shoulders, her fingers gripping his hair as tight as he could stand. He’d taken her on a horse once or twice, holding her tightly in front of him on the saddle—trying to keep the horse calm as she emitted high pitched squeals of excitement was a chore (more easily accomplished when he had Fergus sit with her on one of the steadier draft horses that didn’t go very fast while he kept tight hold of the horse’s bridle). Every so often when she squealed he made a point of bouncing her, savoring the sound of her delighted laughter and cries of “See, see.”

They could see the whole of the house and yard from their eventual perch. Faith puckered her way through some softened mutton before gorging herself on strawberries from a patch Claire had coaxed into existence in the corner of the garden—they grew wild in scattered patches about the grounds but had resisted Jenny and Mrs. Crook’s attempts at transplantation in years past. The red juice of the berries stained Faith’s mouth. A few quips between Jamie and Fergus in French inspired a game of chase that had Faith lurching around and growling while Fergus fled in mock terror.

Faith slept in Jamie’s arms on the walk back, her red-stained lips and fingers leaving marks on Jamie’s shirt.

When she woke from her nap, Claire and Jamie had brought her to his study. Inspired by the stains left by Faith’s small fingers, Jamie had found some paint that had been used on one of the outbuildings. Careful not to make too much of a mess, he and Claire painted each of Faith’s hands and pressed them to the center of a piece of paper. Claire was able to dry Faith’s hands with a handkerchief to keep her from making more of a mess while Claire painted Jamie’s left hand for him to press to the left side of Faith’s small handprints. She then did the same to herself but with her right hand and on the right side, leaving Faith’s small hands bookended with one from each of her parents’.

While Faith pressed her stained hand against her mother’s stained palm, Jamie took up his quill and—careful not to smudge their drying hand prints—jotted down the date and the occasion.

“With any luck, we’ll be home in time to do this again with you next year for your second birthday,” Claire whispered to Faith as she applied an oil that was more effective in removing the pigment from their hands.

The paper was folded down the middle once it had dried and Jamie had been keeping it in their room.

Claire retrieved it from between two books and brought it over to the bed. As she’d done numerous times in the weeks since making it, she settled Faith in her lap and unfolded the paper. Faith did what she always did and immediately pressed her palms to the marks she’d made then looked up at Claire. “Mama,” she said before pointing to the space where Claire’s handprint rested.

Claire removed her hand from where she’d been rubbing Faith’s leg and spread it out over its imprint.

“Da?” Faith asked, pointing to Jamie’s handprint.

“Yes, lamb. That’s where Da’s hand goes.”

Faith looked up, searching for Jamie. Claire was startled to see he was standing in the doorway. His face was dour and she knew it meant that everything was ready for them to set out. They had only to say their goodbyes.
“Da!” Faith called, reaching for him. Jamie came over and settled himself on the bed beside them, placing his hand in its spot beside theirs. He slid his arm up Claire’s back and turned to bury his face in her hair as she cried silently.

Faith continued babbling in her lap. She lifted her hands from the page to tap each of theirs, “Da… Mama… Fae,” she ended, slapping her hands back onto her handprints. She was pleased with herself but also tired after having finished her bottle of goat’s milk. She yawned and slumped back against Claire while Jamie slid the page from under their palms and carefully folded it.

Claire began humming and rocking Faith gently. Their packing had gone according to plan and it was just about time for Faith’s morning nap. It was a lullaby out of time so Claire only ever used it when they were alone—it was also foolproof. Faith drifted off quickly. Jamie’s hand rubbed circles into Claire’s back for a few moments before he rose from the bed and helped adjust Faith in Claire’s arms so she carried her with the child’s curly head tucked into the crook of her neck.

Mrs. Crook was watching Maggie and Kitty (who was also fast asleep) so it was just Jenny, Ian, and young Jamie waiting in the yard for them.

Fergus jumped down from the wagon he’d been sitting upon to bid Faith goodbye. He lifted her limp hand and pressed a kiss to her dimpled knuckles. “Au revoir, la petite miraculée.”

Murtagh stepped forward and dropped a hand to cover Faith’s head, his large hand light as it drifted along her curls. “Sleep well, lass, and mind yer aunt and uncle, eh? I’ll be sure to keep yer mam and da in line,” he whispered. He lightly tapped the tip of her nose with his finger and chuckled quietly when her nose scrunched in response.

Jamie turned to Ian and handed over the folded piece of paper. “Will ye hold this for Faith? Make sure she’s gentle wi’ it.”

Ian nodded and replied, “Aye,” then took the paper and tucked it carefully into his vest.

Jamie could do no more than nod his thanks as he turned to Claire and Faith and wrapped his wife in his arms so that their daughter was caught between them. “M’annsachd,” he whispered as he pressed a kiss to Faith’s brow before sliding a hand from where he held Claire to run his fingers gently over Faith’s features one more time.

Finally releasing the pair of them from his grasp, Claire stepped towards Jenny, still clutching Faith desperately.

“Ye needna fear for her,” Jenny said gently, stepping forward and placing a hand on Claire’s arm. “I promise, I willna let her come to harm.”

“I know.” Claire’s voice was faint as she spoke around the lump in her throat. Pressing her head to Faith’s, she breathed in deeply, determined to capture the smell of her and memorize it along with everything else. “Mama loves you, lamb,” she whispered and then kissed Faith’s temple before surrendering her to Jenny.

She had to move quickly as her tears fell. Jamie’s hand steadied her as she forced her feet to move to her horse and then he gave her a leg up as they mounted. Keeping close together, they rode through the gate, trying and failing not to look back. The dust of their departure was still settling as Jenny carried Faith back inside.

They rode for only a mile or two before Jamie ordered a rest to water the horses and stretch their legs. No one argued though it was quite unnecessary. Claire slipped eagerly from her saddle
followed quickly by Jamie. Fergus looked to Murtagh for reassurance and saw the older man’s pain and sympathy written on the line of his brow. In the privacy of the woods and with a swift burn to drown out any noise they might make, Jamie held Claire tight as she sobbed into the front of his shirt, his own tears running in silent streaks down his cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

END OF PART ONE
Faith is almost two years old when the Rising fails and her father's men begin arriving back at Lallybroch.

BEGINNING OF PART TWO

April 21, 1746

Jenny and Mrs. Crook kept an eye on the girls as they washed the laundry. Young Jamie—uninterested in either helping his mother or playing with his sisters and cousin—had tagged along after his father as he headed for the barn to supervise the shearing of the sheep and gathering of the wool, now that the weather had warmed enough for the sheep not to need their thick winter coats. Maggie took her task—sorting through the piles of dirty clothes to see which would need mending—very seriously. Kitty—who was deftly toddling around—kept crawling through Maggie’s piles, much to her older sister’s dismay.

Faith had wandered off to the edge of the clearing and was picking things up from the ground, collecting them in her skirt to carry over to the stone step near where her Auntie Jenny and Mrs. Crook were busy scrubbing and wringing the clothes. Faith dumped her little pile of sticks, leaves, and stones onto the step where she proceeded to sort them out for presentation to her aunt.

It was a favorite game of Faith’s that Jenny had dubbed ‘playing apothecary.’ She often had the girls trailing behind her—or propped on her hip, in Kitty’s case—as she’d gathered the herbs she and Mrs. Crook needed from the garden nearest the house. The previous autumn, she noticed the meticulous way that Faith had started plucking at the leaves and things, ready to scold should she try to put something in her mouth that she shouldn’t. But Faith never put the plants she picked into her mouth; she only ever put them into her basket or the folds of her dress to be sorted later and offered for Jenny’s inspection. There was something in Faith’s manner as she examined the plants and selected the ones that she wanted that brought Claire to mind—more so even than her looks, which increasingly favored her mother, bar her distinctly Fraser eyes.

Having laid out her haul on the step, Faith walked over to tug on her aunt’s skirt.

“Auntie Jenny,” she said in her light, musical voice. “Come see.”

“In a moment, dearie,” Jenny delayed, wringing one of Ian’s shirts tight, then sliding her wrist deftly so she could pull it still tighter—the water ran down her wrist to her elbow and soaked into her skirts.

“Uncle Ian!” Faith called, suddenly spotting him and young Jamie as they hurried into the yard. Faith forgot about her wilting plants on the step and broke into a run. Maggie and Kitty heard her exclamation and, not wanting to be left out, took off after her. Maggie soon caught up to Faith but...
poor Kitty tripped over her own two feet and sprawled in the dust, crying over the resultant mouthful of dirt and scraped palms.

Jenny dropped the still tightly wound shirt over the edge of the wash tub so that the ends reached neither the dirty water nor the bare ground on the other side, then hurried over to Kitty to pick her up, dust her off, and soothe her.

“Ye ken to go slower than that,” she said gently as she wiped Kitty’s round cheeks with the wet fabric of her skirt. While Kitty’s lower lip still pouted, her tears had ebbed. Jenny shifted the toddler securely onto her hip and scurried to meet her husband.

“There’s folk coming up the road,” Ian informed her. “More’n a few based on the dust they’re kickin’ up too. I sent Rabbie ahead to meet them and see what they want but they’ll likely be needin’ water as they appear to be afoot.”

Jenny nodded and urged the girls back towards the house. They didn’t understand what was happening—and to be fair, neither Ian nor Jenny was sure either—but the shift in the air was almost tangible as they set about clearing up the half-finished washing and preparing a bit to eat to tide over whomever it was coming up the road toward Lallybroch.

Rabbie appeared running a short time later out of breath.

“They’re Laird Broch Tuarach’s men,” he panted before dropping into a chair and taking a sip of water.

“Is his lairdship with them?” Jenny asked eagerly, looking to Ian.

Rabbie shook his head. “The man as was leading them didna say so. From what he said…” Rabbie dropped off, looking to his feet.

Rumors of the Rising’s shifting tides had moved fast so Jenny and Ian were not entirely unprepared, but without word from Jamie himself, they were inclined to worry. What would become of Lallybroch should the Bonnie Prince and his men fail? They knew that Jamie would take steps to protect his family, the estate, and his tenants but what form that protection would take…

When the first of the men arrived in the yard at Lallybroch, a few more pieces of the puzzle fell into place. The armies had gathered and it was plain from the state of the Lallybroch men that the Bonnie Prince’s army had been in difficult circumstances for some time. Jenny set Mrs. Crook to find a bit more food for the men as many looked ready to drop should they halt their forward momentum.

“Ever’one kent it would be the end,” the man said, holding Ian’s gaze. “There were too many of those bloody English bastards. We would ha’ fought did his lairdship order us to. But he sent us away—had Murtagh send us in smaller groups though there was none as wouldna ha’ done the same were they in a way to.”

“But his lairdship stayed? And Murtagh?” Ian questioned.

“Aye. His lairdship disappeared wi’ his lady. Word was he wanted to see her safe.”

Ian and Jenny looked to one another, mildly confused. What would Jamie have done with Claire other than send her home with the men if he wanted her safe?

“And Murtagh?”

The man shrugged. “I dinna ken. I’d ha’ thought he would have caught up to the rest of us on the
road—joined the last group as they left, ye ken. But…”

“He’d have stayed wi’ Jamie,” Jenny said firmly with a knowing look to Ian.

Some of the men had eaten hastily and continued on before they could succumb to the temptation of longer rest. Most of them were close enough to home now that the promise of their own hearths and beds lifted them to their feet once more. Others had passed out in the stew Mrs. Crook produced. Those who couldn’t make it another step were allowed to lay down in the hall and sleep a bit before being bustled out the next day when a few stragglers continued to appear.

Among the stragglers was Fergus. He’d been sent by Jamie the day before the battle (and his men) but the horse he’d been riding had thrown him before he’d made it halfway to Lallybroch and he’d been forced to make the rest of his way on foot.

“Fergus!” Jenny exclaimed, hauling the dirt-streaked boy inside before the lad could say a word.

She brought him to Jamie’s study where Ian was looking over the books and accounting for the stores the returning men had consumed.

“Monsieur Murray.” Fergus said, attempting a weak bow before doing the same towards Jenny. “Madame Murray. Milord entrusted me with this.” He pulled a folded document from inside his shirt. It was in a better state than his clothes. “I have not seen Milord since he gave it me—nor Milady. I should have been here sooner but I had hoped…”

Ian took it as Jenny pulled out a handkerchief and began wiping ineffectively at the boy’s face.

“Ye’re going to have a right bath and some food. Ye’re skin and bones—all of the men are.”

She stopped abruptly when she saw the look on Ian’s face.

“What is it?”

“Fergus,” Ian turned to the boy. “Go to the kitchen and fetch something to eat from Mrs. Crook. She’s watching the bairns and there’s a few of them as’ll be glad to see ye again.”

A smile passed across the boy’s face, quickly replaced with something more solemn and finally determined.

“I thank ye, Monsier… Madame.” He bowed to each of them before scurrying off to find

When the lad had safely gone, Ian held the page out to Jenny. “It’s a Deed of Sasine,” he told her. “Jamie’s signed Lallybroch over to our son to be held in trust by the pair of us.”

“What? To wee Jamie? But…” she examined the document for herself. “The date… He couldn’a ha’ done this afore they left… and why to wee Jamie? What about Faith?”

Ian shook his head—he didn’t have any answers. “Perhaps… If he’s captured… If he’s tried and convicted of treason, the English would seize it all. If he left it to Faith… I dinna ken that they could take it in that case but he must ha’ felt it safer to put it out of Fraser hands entirely?”

“More like he didna want it passing into the hands of her husband when she weds,” Jenny remarked, not entirely pleased with what she proposed for her brother’s way of thinking. “She’s a wee thing and he’d be sure to trust her wi’ Lallybroch, but he likely canna bring himself to trust the man as would take his daughter from him—especially as he doesna ken who that’ll be yet.”
“But he’ll trust young Jamie wi’ it?” Ian remarked, the weight of the responsibility heavy in his tone. They’d had the care and keeping of Lallybroch for many years now but to suddenly be caring for it to pass it on to their own son was something they’d not thought to prepare themselves for.

“He trusts us,” Jenny emphasized. “He trusts us to guide our Jamie through it and be sure he treats the place the way it should be treated. He kens we’ll do right by Lallybroch as he kens we care as much about it as he does.”

“It still doesna sit right, does it?” Ian pondered, taking the paper back from Jenny and folding it carefully. “To take all this from Faith and give it o’er to Jamie.” He locked the deed in one of the drawers of the desk and slid the chair back from the desk—the accounts would have to wait to be reconciled until a time when he could look at them without his mind wandering. As he crossed to Jenny, he paused to consider a new and unwelcome thought. “Perhaps… D’ye think he means it as a payment of sorts? In exchange for the keeping of Faith?”

Jenny scoffed but the idea weighed heavily in her chest, making it difficult to speak with her usual cynicism. “Jamie and Claire would ken better’n that. Faith’s our flesh and blood; we’d no turn her out nor hand her over to strangers for raising. And they’d ken we would keep her gladly, no expect payment or such nonsense.” She opened the door and marched out, heading for the kitchen to check on Mrs. Crook and the children and to make sure Fergus didn’t escape having a bath.

Fergus stood in the doorway of the kitchen watching Faith playing quietly in the corner with Maggie and Kitty. She’d grown in the months since he’d last seen her. She was closer to two now than one and was taller and sturdier even as her hair was longer and curlier. He knew it was unlikely that she would remember him but watching her he felt that familiar instinct to protect her rising. He had promised that he would bring the document to Jenny and Ian quickly as he could but he couldn’t help dawdling a little, hoping that Milady or Milord would catch up with him, that he would know they were safe. But he’d had to pick up his pace eventually and how he too was left waiting and wondering, his hopes of seeing them return to Lallybroch safely fading with each passing hour.

Someone had to look out for Faith. He knew that her aunt and uncle would provide for her, but they had their own children to worry about as well. He, on the other hand, had no one else who meant as much to him as Faith did; he would protect her and care for her where Milord and Milady could not.

“Dinna block up the door,” Mrs. Crook scolded, ushering him inside and placing a bowl of stew on the table for him. “Dinna get too close to the rest of the food now,” she warned. “No unless ye care to have yer dinner seasoned wi’ dirt.”

He scrunched up his nose before taking his bowl and scurrying to a chair further from the table but closer to the children whose attention he caught. Maggie was the first to investigate, coming up to his knee and frowning at him.

“Who’re ye?”

“Fergus,” he informed her, the little girl starting at his accent. Faith was a few steps behind Maggie, peering at him around her older cousin. Fergus smiled when he saw her. She blushed and smiled back at him. “Faith is my petite soeur,” he explained, nodding to her.

At the invocation of her name, she crept closer to him, eying his bowl of stew.

“I have some?” she requested bashfully. She didn’t understand what he’d said, but it was clear from
the way he’d said it that she was special and hoped it entitled her to special treats.

Fergus dipped his spoon into the stew so that he came up with only broth—he needed the chunks of beef and potato too much himself but wouldn’t disappoint her entirely; she might well be as much an orphan as himself now. He held the bowl beneath her chin to catch anything she might dribble as he brought the spoon to her lips and let her sip the broth.

“Fergus, dinna be sharin’ that with the bairns. They’ll be havin’ their own suppers soon,” Mrs. Crook scolded, “And I’d as soon as no have ye spoilin’ their appetites.”

“Let him be,” Jenny instructed gently from the doorway where she stood watching. “He’s the one as’ll go hungry if he starts letting them at his food. But if ye wind up wi’ a nest of gaping mouths crying for ye to feed them like baby birds, ye’ve only yerself to blame. We’ll be drawin’ yer bath so it’ll be ready for ye as soon as yer belly’s full—or theirs are. I’ll fetch ye some clean clothes and then to bed with ye till ye’ve rested up.”

Maggie and Faith were shooed away as Fergus’ empty bowl was taken and he was ushered to the waiting bath. Before long he was in a new nightshirt and put to bed despite the early hour. He was grateful for the soft, warm bed and full belly having gone many weeks without either. But there was an underlying hollowness that he hadn’t felt since his days in the brothel—since the days before Milord had found him and brought him home.

He dozed but failed to reach deeper levels of sleep, starting at every creak of the floorboards and whistle of the wind past the windows. He listened to the footsteps of Jenny as she brought the girls up to the nursery across the hall from Fergus’ and tucked them into their beds, their whispered prayers indecipherable from one another. Then Jenny slipped away to do battle with young Jamie who refused to be put to bed at the same time as his little sisters and cousin—he insisted he was old enough to stay up at least as late as Rabbie.

A few minutes after Jenny’s footsteps had faded, Fergus slipped from his bed and peeked out into the hall, checking that the coast was clear before slipping into the nursery and finding Faith curled up on her cot in the corner—Maggie and Kitty shared a bed in the opposite corner with Kitty on the side closest the wall, her older sister’s body a barrier to keep her from falling out. The Murray girls were asleep but as he moved to watch Faith sleep, he noted that she was still awake and watching him. She smiled and yawned as he slipped onto the cot next to her, taking the side of the bed so that it was his back that braced against the cool stone of the wall, keeping her warm.

Jenny found the pair of them asleep when she carried an unconscious young Jamie to bed less than an hour later, having first peeked in to check on Fergus and finding his bed empty. For that night, she left him and prayed that they would soon have some more definite word of what had happened to Jamie and Claire.
A wounded Jamie arrives at Lallybroch

The last of Lallybroch’s stragglers had left the day before the wagon rumbled up the road and through the gate. Ian was out in the fields with the boys so Jenny left Mrs. Crook with the girls in order to see what the driver might want. They weren’t expecting anyone or anything but the man might have further word of the battle—that it had been lost was common knowledge now, but how bad it had been was still a matter of fervent speculation.

“I’m looking for the mistress of Broch Tuarach,” the man said as he peered down at Jenny skeptically.

“I’ll do for that. What d’ye need of us here at Lallybroch?”

“A Red Coat major wanted me to deliver the feller in the back to ye,” he remarked as he climbed down and moved around. “Wasna in a good way when they gave him me and didna seem to think he’d survive but for some reason they wanted him returned to his family. Dinna ken what makes him special enough for them to have gone to the trouble.”

Jenny’s breathing hitched as the man talked and she scrambled around to the back of the wagon, knowing who she would find even as she wished it might not be so—Jamie. The ruddy sheen of his hair was duller thanks to a thick coating of dust and dirt and blood—the last hopefully not entirely his; he was pale and still beneath the filth, his clothes caked with mud and blood. The concentration of blood along one thigh suggested that he had been wounded there and badly though there was bruising across the bridge of his nose and it had clearly been broken at some point recently.

“ Jamie,” she gasped at the sight, then quickly climbed up into the back so she could perform a closer inspection. He was hot to the touch, which first shot her through with relief—heat meant he was still alive—but as soon as she was able to discern that much, the amount of heat became the cause for new fears—heat meant fever and at first glance it was clear his was dangerously high.

“Mrs. Crook!” she hollered, bringing the woman to the door with Kitty in her arms and Faith and Maggie trailing at her heels. Jenny waved the housekeeper over. “Send a maid to the fields to fetch Ian and the others down as quick as they can—even with a few of us I doubt we’ll be able to shift him without more help. We’ll need water boiled and cloths, linens… a cot by the fire…” She was running her hands over Jamie to assess his injuries but there was simply too thick a layer of grime coating him to be able to tell where the worst of the damage lay. He groaned audibly when she lightly pressed his leg. The kilt was torn and the fabric stiff at the outer edges of the stains remained lightly damp towards the middle.

Mrs. Crook set Kitty down and scurried back into the house, the three girls coming round the back of the wagon to peer up at their mother. They were, thankfully, too short to see Jamie or the state he was in.

“Who is it, Mam?” Maggie asked rising onto her toes to try and see.
“Go inside, girls,” Jenny ordered, her distress giving the words a harsh edge so that the girls didn’t argue but scampered back inside warily.

Mrs. Crook was soon back out in the yard with a flask of whisky and a sturdy blanket.

“D’ye think we could manage him if we got him on this first?” she suggested.

“Aye,” Jenny said with relief. “If the driver can take the corners at his head, we can each take on by his feet.”

They unfolded the blanket and managed to roll Jamie onto it—after dribbling several sips of whisky down his throat—then very slowly they eased him out of the back of the wagon and onto the ground before taking a break. More whisky was administered in the hopes it would ease his pain though it was debatable whether it had dulled the pain or worsened it by rousing him to a state of semi-consciousness in which he could feel it more keenly.

Ian and the men from the field arrived as they managed to get Jamie halfway across the yard. Under Ian’s direction, he was lifted carefully, brought into the house, and laid on the prepared cot in the main hall. The girls had taken up positions along the stairs, high enough so they could see what was going on and arranged in such a way that they managed to avoid being trampled by the maids running about fetching the materials Jenny had requested.

“Everyone out except Mrs. Crook!” Jenny ordered loudly as the room became uncomfortably crowded with folk eager to help.

Ian ushered the men out and urged them to return to the fields; the maids were sent back to their work and one was pressed into wrangling the children and keeping them occupied. Fergus was torn between wanting to stay at Jamie’s side and keeping Faith from seeing him, finally deciding Milord would want him to stay with Faith.

“We need to clean him up and dress the wound while we do what we can to bring his fever down,” Jenny told Mrs. Crook. “Wash his face—careful about his nose—and then get the coldest water ye can find and keep cloths soaked in it on his head. I’ll take the leg.”

She soaked the fabric that was caked to the wound on his leg to loosen it so it wouldn’t pull when she peeled it away. Still, dried blood that had been helping to keep the wound closed came away with it and it started to ooze. The skin at the edges was red and swollen and she could tell it was starting to fester—puss seeped out in several places. Jamie’s leg twitched reflexively from time to time as she gingerly washed way the filth from the wound.

Jenny had seen Claire stitch deep cuts and wounds on a few occasions but Jenny wasn’t certain she should do that with it festering—wouldn’t that just trap the foulness inside and make it worse? What would Claire do?

“The whisky,” Jenny said reaching for the flask still in Mrs. Crook’s possession. “Ian,” she said looking up. “Can ye hold him down?”

It took a moment for Ian to get into a position where he could brace Jamie across the chest. When he was ready he looked up and nodded to Jenny. She said a silent prayer and an apology and then poured the whisky into the wound on Jamie’s leg.

He screamed, still not entirely conscious, and what little strength he had in his body jerked against Ian and Jenny, who held his shin down.

“I’m sorry, brother,” she whispered as she poured more in after cleaning the first bit where it dribbled
out of the wound and down his thigh. There was a little left in the flask so she raised it to her own lips and drank it down, then handed the flask to Mrs. Crook with instructions to refill it.

Jamie calmed after a few minutes and seemed to slip back into some sort of sleep. Ian released his hold of Jamie and looked to Jenny.

“I think… We need to get him out of these clothes and washed down more. And I’m going to let that be,” she nodded to his leg. “See if a few more whisky washes help the swelling before I try to bandage it—or do ye think I should try stitching it the way Claire would have?”

Ian frowned at the wound. “Did she no have herbs as would draw the foulness out first?”

“Probably but… I dinna ken which.”

“She took most of her medical things wi’ her when they went but perhaps she left some up in their room.”

Jenny pushed herself to her feet and reached over to help Ian up as well. “I doubt she left instructions to go with them if she did.”

“Ye can ask Fergus,” Ian suggested with a bit more enthusiasm. “He must have seen her work by the battlefields. He might remember something she said or did for similar cases.”

Jenny nodded. “Aye. I’ll see what he kens after we’ve got Jamie settled a bit more.”

With Mrs. Crook fastidiously swapping out the cool cloths on Jamie’s head, Jenny gingerly undressed and washed her brother down calling Ian in twice more to hold Jamie down while she rinsed the wound on his leg with whisky. The pus was slowly seeping out but prodding the wound gently, she could tell there was more beneath the surface that would need to come out.

Finally Jamie was clean and covered with a blanket aside from his wounded leg.

“Mrs. Crook, can ye keep an eye out for flies? Dinna want them botherin’ him while he sleeps,” Jenny requested, looking between the stairs and the kitchen where the maids had the children sequestered.

“Fergus, first,” Ian advised, coming up alongside her.

The lad was sitting at the table with Faith in his lap and the piece of paper Claire and Jamie had made with Faith on the table in front of her. She had pressed her hands to the prints she’d made almost a year earlier—after a year’s growth her palms and fingers had expanded beyond the edges of her own but were still dwarfed by her parents’ on either side. She moved her left hand to rest in the print left by Jamie and turned to Fergus.

He nodded. “Aye. When your Auntie says Milord is ready, then you will see your da,” he promised her.

Ian looked at Jenny whose brow tightened. Of course Faith would have to see Jamie—whatever happened, whatever condition he was in, they both would need that. But it was also likely to inspire questions that they themselves weren’t prepared for—and that they were by no means certain Jamie would ever be in a condition to answer for them—*What had happened to Claire?*

“Fergus,” Jenny called quietly.

The lad’s head shot up to see her at the door.
“Leave Faith there a moment. We need to speak with ye,” Ian said over her shoulder.

Fergus slid Faith from his lap to the bench, her brow furrowed as she watched him cross to her aunt and uncle.

“Oui, madame?”

“Did ye ever watch Claire as she worked at her healing?” They kept their voices low. “Do ye ken whether she would ha’ stitched up a festering wound like what Jamie has?”

Fergus shook his head. “I do not think she would, but I did not have much stomach for watching the wounded. I was son pigeon. I… carried messages and supplies when she was needing them.”

“And did ye carry her herbs for her at all?” Jenny pressed.

“I only know the bottles she used to keep them, not what was inside them,” he shook his head sadly. “Is… is Milord…”

“He’ll be fine,” Jenny insisted with more determination than true belief behind her words.

“May I bring Faith in to see him?” Fergus requested.

Jenny heard reluctance in Ian’s sigh but nodded before he could say anything.

“Aye, lad. Be sure she’s gentle wi’ him, though. Dinna be disturbin’ his rest,” she instructed.

Fergus smiled and turned back to fetch Faith, leading her out of the kitchen and into the main hall. Jenny and Ian followed and watched, Jenny motioning to Mrs. Crook that it was all right for her to go and let Faith and Fergus have a moment with Jamie alone.

Fergus bent and whispered to Faith who turned to Jamie and quietly called, “Da?”

Jamie’s eyes twitched as she repeated herself and when his eyes opened, they refused to focus on her but he tried to move his arm beneath the blanket Jenny had draped over him.

Jenny moved forward to crouch by her brother’s head.

“Aye, Jamie. It’s yer wee Faith come to see ye,” she crooned softly and brushed the damp strands of hair out of his eyes. She took away the cloth and felt the clammy skin of his forehead—still hot. “Faith,” she turned to her niece. “Come give yer Da a quick kiss.”

Faith stepped forward and put her small hand to Jamie’s cheek. “Da hungry?” she asked.

Jamie smiled weakly and tried to mumble something but it was too low to hear.

“I will fetch Milord some stew,” Fergus decided and set off for the kitchen once more.

Jenny looked to Ian who was turning to stop the boy but she waved him off. “It willna hurt if we can get some of the broth into ‘im,” she remarked. She wrung out the cloth that had been on Jamie’s head and dipped it into the cool water again.

Faith had started picking at Jamie’s blanket, muttering quietly to herself as she tucked him in the same way she did when she, Maggie, and Kitty played with their dolls and put them to bed. She stopped at Jamie’s leg and Jenny moved to rise and pull her away but Faith only peered at the wound and wrinkled her nose.
“Da, yer leg is ucky,” she proclaimed and shook her head as she toddled back towards his head. He smiled weakly and Jenny relaxed.

Fergus returned with a bowl of stew.

“Ian, will ye take the stew for a moment. Fergus, help me prop him up,” Jenny instructed, shifting behind Jamie to lift him so that he wouldn’t choke on the broth. It was an awkward position for them to hold but Ian managed to get Jamie to swallow a few spoonsful before Jamie began to grimace and shy away from it.

“Right, let him back down,” Ian suggested, placing the bowl on a small table nearby.

“Dinna fash,” Faith said, moving to pat Jamie’s forehead. “Da need sleeps.”

Jenny and Ian looked dubiously at one another over the children’s heads.

“Can we stay with him?” Fergus asked as Jenny and Ian rose and seemed about to usher them back to the kitchen. “He should have someone to stay at all times, should he not?”


Fergus nodded vigorously and pulled a few cushions into a pile to sit at the head of Jamie’s cot and monitor the condition of the cold cloths on his forehead.

Faith moved over to the bowl of stew and carefully lifted it down, only spilling a few drops as she carried it over to Jamie’s cot.

“I help ye eat it, Da,” she told him, intent on spoon-feeding him more of the broth.

Fergus shook his head and glanced to the door as though expecting Jenny and Ian to come back in. “No, Faith. You cannot do that now. He needs to be as sleeping. Why do you not eat the stew yourself?” he suggested.

Faith nodded and turned to Jamie, whose eyes were in fact closed. “I eat it for ye, Da,” she told him then sat on the floor and proceeded to pick her way through the stew as best she could. There was more than she could eat and she made a few noises as she sampled the less familiar vegetables she encountered.

Fergus was wrapped up in the rhythm of mopping Jamie’s brow and gauging to see if the fever had dropped at all to notice much of what Faith did—he wasn’t used to her moving so quietly. She soon came forward with the mostly empty stew bowl and held it out for him.

“All gone,” she proclaimed.

“Are you wanting more?” he asked.

She shook her head. “All done.”

“Go bring it in to Mrs. Crook in the kitchen then,” he suggested.

She obliged and when she came back Jenny was only a few steps behind her and anxious to check on Jamie’s condition.

“The fever… well, it doesna seem to be worse,” was the best she could say as she pressed her hand to Jamie’s head. She moved along to check the wound on his leg, still unsure what should be done
about it. She and Ian had been discussing the options and whom they would call to help should the leg need to come off, though both knew Jamie would be none to happy if he survived such an operation.

Jenny started at the sight of Jamie’s leg. “What… Fergus, wha’s this on his leg then?” She pulled up some of the slippery gunk and sniffed at it. “Ye put mashed onions to the wound?”

Fergus looked startled and shook his head vehemently. “No, madame. It was not me. I have only ministered to Milord’s head.” Before Jenny had quite looked away, Fergus’ gaze shot to Faith, not in accusation but realization and the fear that inspired his brotherly protection. “Come, Faith. We shall leave your aunt Murray to tend your father.” He moved to usher her back out of the room but Jenny stopped their retreat.

“Faith,” she called and Fergus let his hold on her shoulders loosen so she could turn an innocent expression to her aunt. “Did you put this on yer Da’s leg?”

Faith stepped forward to see and wrinkled her nose at the macerated onion and nodded. “It’s ucky like Da’s leg.” She pointed.

Jenny sighed and rolled her eyes as she began to clean the onion mush from Jamie’s leg wound. “Go on, Fergus. Take her to—” She realized as she cleaned that the already soggy and mashed up onion was made more foul by the pus from Jamie’s wound that had mixed with it—more pus than she would have expected to have seep out on its own. Wiping it clean, the skin around the wound was still red and inflamed but it wasn’t as swollen to the same taut degree it had been before. “Faith, go to Mrs. Crook and have her give ye some cooked onions—cooked, mind,” Jenny enunciated as she cleaned Jamie’s wound with as much speed and care as she could. “Fergus, you go to Mistress Claire’s still room and see if there’s a mortar and pestle left—there should be at least one she left behind as she didna need two and they’re weighty. Take care and dinna drop it. Bring it in here.”

Fergus took Faith’s hand and pulled her away, knowing how lucky they were not to be in trouble.

Jenny disappeared briefly to fetch some cheesecloth, nearly colliding with Ian as she passed through the hallway.

“What are ye about then?” he asked, following her. Fergus and Faith were a few steps behind as Jenny laid some cheesecloth over Jamie’s wound then took the onions from Faith and slid them into the mortar.

“I canna believe I didna think of it sooner,” Jenny lamented. “D’ye recall when the blacksmith from Broch Mordha sent for Claire—he’d sliced himself with a sword while grinding the blade and it had festered—she packed onions in her kit along wi’ her other tools. She must have used them in a poultice.” Having ground the limp onions into further submission, Jenny scooped them out of the mortar and lay the mush atop the layer of cheesecloth all along the length of Jamie’s wound. She then used a second piece of the cheesecloth to cover them and lightly pressed them down, hoping and praying it would work. “Likely she used more’n just the onions, but this’ll have to do for now… At any rate, I dinna think it can hurt.”

“I dinna see how,” Ian agreed, crossing to Jenny and pressing a kiss to her temple. “Ye’ve done what ye can and now we must wait.”
The mysterious and miraculous circumstances of Jamie's recovery at Lallybroch

There was pain—in his head, in his leg, in his chest. He preferred the physical pain. It came in waves that distracted him from the other more pressing pain; the pain of loss, the weight in his chest that was Claire’s absence, that was the guilt he bore for convincing her to go. It was supposed to have ended by now; it should have been over on that bloody battlefield when that bayonet caught him in the leg but there had been more blood in his body than he realized—how many pints did Claire say the human body contained?—and his had not run out fast enough; it should have been over when the English caught up to him while they were executing his fellow survivors—he’d heard the steady rate of the gunshots until they pounded along with his pulse—but chance in the form of Lord Melton, the elder brother of that foolhardy lad who’d attacked Jamie before Prestonpans, had given him an unwanted reprieve.

So now, instead of dying on the field of battle as he’d sworn to Claire he would do, their daughter would have to watch him linger as long as it took the fever to take him, the blood poisoning spreading from his mangled leg towards his heart, the weight of simple existence to crush the hollow shell he was without Claire there to ground him. He didn’t want Faith to see him like this, afraid it would scare her—if she even knew who he was to her. He almost hoped she wouldn’t know him; he could be just another broken man from Culloden who simply couldn’t be put back together, one of the many casualties of the misguided Rising.

But Jenny wouldn’t let go of him; not without a fight.

He was only vaguely aware of her as she poked and prodded at his wounds with Mrs. Crook’s assistance. The water they used to wash him with felt icy on his skin—soothing at first but after a time he began to shiver at the cool cloth pressed to his forehead and the shivering made the pulsing of his leg worse. He existed in a familiar fever haze. Last time he’d suffered from such a fever, Claire had been there to pull him out of it and there were moments when he thought he saw her now only to slip back into unconsciousness where he could do little more than relive their final moments together.

“How? How can you ask this of me? I can’t leave you like this and I won’t leave Faith,” she’d argued as they came in sight of Craigh na Dun. She was torn between coming at him physically to vent her fear and frustrations on him and running so that he couldn’t get a hold of her and carry her the rest of the way so that she had no choice. “You promised me—we promised her—we said we’d be back for her, that she wouldn’t grow up without us,” Claire sobbed.

“I ken that, Claire, and I ken how hard this is for ye—do ye not think it’s breaking my heart too?” he’d cried. “If there were a way for ye to—”

“I can go to Lallybroch,” Claire objected.

“Jamie shook his head. “Ye’d never make it—the English would stop ye on the road first and if they didn’t ken who ye were and take ye for a traitor there and then, ye’d be taken somewhere else and questioned till they did ken ye as the Stuart Witch. And if ye did make it Lallybroch, what of the bairn in yer belly? Will ye risk yer life and his by staying here? Ye ken how close ye came to dying when ye
bore Faith. I... I canna let ye stand that risk again. It'll be safer for the both of ye in yer own time.”

“I have to go back,” Claire begged, though he could see what he said was sinking in and with the dawning realization her desperation grew. “I can’t just leave her alone like that. I can bring her back with me. Please...” Tears were streaming down her face and she was beginning to sway on her feet.

He stepped forward and caught her in his arms, holding her tightly to his chest and absorbing her sobs as his own tears fell silently.

“We dinna ken that she can pass through the stones to yer time,” he reminded her. “She was born here. Maybe… maybe it only works in one direction or… maybe she doesna have what it is that allows ye safe passage.”

Claire drew a sharp breath in and started shaking her head with the anguish of acceptance.

“She’s no alone,” Jamie reassured her. “She has Jenny and Ian to care for her. She has young Jamie and wee Maggie and Kitty for company... and Fergus. He’ll watch over her. They’ll tell her about us and she’ll ken us through them.”

“She won’t know the truth,” Claire lamented. “I... I can’t just... abandon her... She’s my... I’m her...”

Jamie squeezed Claire tighter no longer sure whether it was her shaking that had him trembling or if he was the one affecting her.

“I know, mo nighean donn, I know,” he murmured into her hair.

How long had they stood there next to the horse at the base of the hill? It felt like an eternity.

A pale round face framed by dark curls hovered before him. He was still there. It wasn’t too late. He could call her back and ask her to wait with him until it was over, until he had passed—he didn’t want to be alone in those final moments before Purgatory would claim him and he would be forced to wait, to endure until he could find her again—find Claire.

Blue. There was a blue light reflected on Claire’s face. It was definitely Claire’s face though he couldn’t remember going after her or calling out for her... he must have though because there she was. But something was happening. It was like she was absorbing the blue light... it was seeping into her eyes. They weren’t that warm, whisky colored brown anymore; they were blue like his own. He closed his eyes and turned his head. He knew it was almost over because the pain was beginning to recede—wasn’t that what was supposed to happen when you died? The pain fades and you grow cold?

Though the pain and his mind quieted as the deep sleep that must precede death reached out to him, he was very much aware of the lingering weight pressing on his chest—the aching for Claire, for the life and family they would never have.

As the sun faded and the pus continued to drain from Jamie’s leg wound, Jenny paced the room resisting the impulse to peel bag the poultice and examine it every few minutes. It had to stay undisturbed to do its job—there was no question about that—but the waiting was proving excruciating.

“Now ye ken what it is to wait while a woman is in labor,” Ian commented to Jenny in an effort to lighten her spirits. “To ken there’s naught more ye can do and leave things to unfold.”
“Aye, and ye think there’s no waiting and helplessness involved on my end of things when it comes
to birthing the bairns?” Jenny snapped back before closing her eyes and shaking her head. “I… I’m
sorry,” she apologized before slipping under Ian’s outstretched arm and pressing her cheek to his
chest. It was nearly dark and she should be putting the children to bed but couldn’t bring herself to
leave Jamie; Mrs. Crook and one of the maids had undertaken the unenviable task in her stead and
the raucous above stairs was doing little to calm her nerves.

“Ye’re worrit and ye’ve a right to be,” Ian said gently, resting his chin atop her head while she took a
few deep breaths.

“What d’ye think happened to Claire?” Jenny whispered. “She’d never let him out of her sight if she
kent he was like this.”

“When he comes round…” Ian sighed, “we’ll have to ask him—though… I suppose we can guess.
She must be… gone,” he admitted reluctantly.

Jenny gave a short nod and drew an unsteady breath. “Murtagh too. They’d neither of them leave
him had they any choice in the matter.” She reached up to brush silent tears from her cheek. “Were it
no for Faith…” Jenny trailed.


“Madame Murray,” Fergus called from the stairs startling the couple who had their backs turned to
him. “Faith would like to say goodnight to Milord,” he explained. Faith peeked around from behind
him, the cuff of her nightdress in her mouth.

“Come here then lass… and get that out of yer mouth,” Jenny scolded. “It will need to last ye some
months yet and ought to serve Kitty when ye’re through—though ye’re sprouting like a weed and
like to need a new one sooner.”

“Da sleeping?” Faith inquired as Jenny set her near Jamie’s cot. Faith shuffled closer before laying a
hand on Jamie’s chest and feeling it rise and fall. The touch didn’t disturb his sleep so she laid her
head next to her hand so that she was looking up at his face. “Stay,” Faith said quietly before
reaching to pull herself up on top of Jamie.

Jenny intervened. “Ah—dinna go clambering all o’er him, Faith. He needs to sleep as do you. To
bed with ye now.”

But Faith fought back against Jenny’s attempts to lift the squirming child. Jenny relented in an
attempt to keep Faith from waking Jamie.

“Ian, have someone fetch some blankets and cushions for Faith,” she instructed with an exasperated
sigh. “She can sleep next to him.” Faith plopped herself onto the ground next to Jamie’s cot and had
her head leaning against his arm, her eyelids already drooping.

“I shoulna allow it.” Jenny remarked to Ian as they made their way upstairs having seen Faith
wrapped into a cocoon of blankets on the floor of the main hall. Ian had been careful to put the
screen in front of the banked fire so that Faith couldn’t wander in if she waked in the night and was
confused by her surroundings. One of the maids had been tasked with staying in the room and
keeping watch over Jamie and Faith until Jenny relieved her in the early morning hours—Ian had
insisted Jenny try to get some sleep in their bed, arguing that in her exhausted state, she needed it.
“Maggie and Kitty will be looking to crawl into our beds of a night when they ken what Faith’s
done.”
“Ye canna take this from Jamie or the lass and ye ken that well,” Ian remarked, rubbing Jenny’s back once she’d removed her stays.

“And if he passes in the night?” Jenny whispered. “If he passes and we’re no there wi’ him?”

“He’ll no pass in the night,” Ian insisted with sad resignation. “That fever… If it is to take him it will be another day or two yet before it does. Better let him have this time with the lass when there’s a chance he’s aware of her.”

It wasn’t much comfort but it was all that could be said so they went to bed. Jenny slept restlessly waiting for the time she would need to rise and relieve the maid of watching. She found the girl dozing in her chair. Faith had crept out of her bundle of blankets and climbed onto Jamie, draping herself across his chest and pressing her cheek to his sternum. It didn’t seem to have an adverse affect on Jamie though—his breathing was no more ragged than it had been, was perhaps more even than earlier—so Jenny just tapped the girl on the shoulder and encouraged her to head off to bed before crouching next to the cot and brushing aside a loose curl on Jamie’s forehead. He seemed calmer but she was afraid of what that might mean as she settled into the abandoned chair and leaned back to rest. Soon the rhythm of Faith and Jamie’s deep breathing lulled Jenny to sleep.

The weight on Jamie’s chest began to shift in unexpected ways, rousing him from sleep. He opened his eyes to see Faith looking up at him. Her arms were crossed on his chest and her chin was resting on the backs of her hands.

“Da ye’re awake,” she whispered.

He blinked and cleared his throat—it was dry and rough and he wasn’t sure how he would sound but didn’t want to frighten her. Still, he tried to whisper. “Aye and so are you my wee miracle.”

“Auntie Jenny’s still asleep,” Faith warned him before her gaze darted to where Jenny was sound asleep in the chair.

There wasn’t much light in the room but the rest of the house was beginning to stir as dawn approached and the business of the day demanded attention. So far no one had ventured into the hall to even check the state of the fire.

“Are ye feeling better, Da?” Faith asked reaching out and touching her hand to his cheek. “Yer leg was ucky.”

“Aye,” he said, offering a small smile. “I feel much better now ye’re here.” He couldn’t raise himself enough to sit up—not with her weight on his chest—but he was able to raise his hand to rest it on her back. She was so much bigger than when he’d seen her last and yet still so fragile. He ran his hand up her back, feeling the small bumps of her spine, wincing when one caught the tender spot at the base of his thumb where Claire had marked him.

“Are ye all right, Da?” Faith inquired at the noise he’d made.

He nearly laughed as her concern put a small furrow in her brow that looked just like Claire.

“Aye, lamb. I’m fine,” he assured her.

Her features relaxed and amusement replaced her worry. “Auntie Jenny says tha’s Mama’s name for me,” Faith informed Jamie.

Tears rose in his eyes as he nodded. “Tha’s right. But ye dinna mind if I call ye that myself now, do
Faith smiled and she shook her head. “No, ye can call me lamb too.”

“Ye’re awake,” Jenny said with a start as she woke to the sounds of their quiet conversation and it registered that Jamie was not just conscious but talking. She scrambled from her position on the chair to take up a crouching position at Jamie’s side, inspecting his condition with disbelief. “Yer fever’s broken and yer leg…” She moved to check the poultice but came up short at the sight of it. “I’ll be back.” She disappeared for the kitchen grabbing her shawl and throwing it about her shoulders and using it to cover herself more thoroughly than her worn shift allowed.

Faith turned to Jamie and shook her head at Jenny’s frantic exit before dropping her head back to his chest and letting her arms flop out on either side of him as though she were trying to reach completely around him. He cupped the back of her curly head with his hand and drew a ragged breath.

“Da… where’s Mama?”

His face fell though on some level he’d known the question would come. Still, the parting was so fresh in his memory and the hollow ache of losing her joined now with the guilt he knew he’d carry for the rest of his days—guilt for having talked Claire into going, for putting Faith in the position of growing up without her, for neither of them having one final moment to say a proper farewell. And there was something else undercutting all the pain—something he hadn’t expected. Joy. Relief. If he’d been spared on the battlefield and in the chaotic aftermath—if he had to face the prospect of a life without Claire—at least he had Faith. He could live for her if not for himself; he could make sure she knew about Claire and the truth about all the things Claire had feared their daughter would never know—that she was loved, that they hadn’t wanted to leave her, that they had done everything they could to make a better future for her.

“Yer mother… she’s gone to a safer place,” he finally whispered. “She didna belong in this time and it was too dangerous for her to stay… so I brought her back to the fairy hill and bade her go where she would be safe. She… she wanted to come back for ye, but there wasna time.” His voice wobbled. “She loves ye, lamb, and she always will.”

“Will she come back again?” Faith asked quietly. Her lip was quivering as she absorbed Jamie’s sorrow.

“I dinna ken,” he admitted.

“Right then,” Jenny said as she bustled into the room with a hot kettle and a stack of fresh cloth. “I’m going to do what I can to loosen this up wi’out pullin’ it too hard but I’m sure it’ll hurt a bit either way.” She set one of the cloths beneath the kettle to protect the floor and dipped another into the open top with care to avoid scalding herself with the steam or hot water.

Jamie held tightly to Faith who was quiet and cuddled against his chest as Jenny eased the stiff poultice off the wound on his leg and cleaned the edges. The inflammation was gone and the redness had faded significantly. There were no signs of blood poisoning either.

“That… shouldn’a have worked so well so fast,” Jenny muttered with quiet disbelief. “How does it feel?” she asked louder.

“It… it itches a bit,” Jamie said, “and the leg feels like a large bruise.” Jenny prodded gingerly at the edges of the gash and his leg twitched. “Dinna do that. It stings.”
“Well… ye’ll no lose the leg. I think it’s safe to bandage it properly now—there doesna seem to be any foulness left to trap that could cause it to fester again though, I’ll be sure to check it regular. That yer fever’s faded seems to be a good sign.”

She left the soiled cloths and the remnants of the poultice aside and sat back on her heels seeking Jamie’s eyes. He was running one hand through Faith’s dark curls, brushing them out of her face as she lay with her cheek pressed to his chest and her thumb in her mouth. With a distracted look in her eye, she looked like she might fall asleep again.

“Ye were lucky, brother,” Jenny told him with a nod to the leg. “I dinna ken how ye managed to come round so fast though ye’ve a ways yet to go. Rest for now and I’ll be back with something for ye to eat when Mrs. Crook has something ready. I’ll finish with yer leg then as well but first I need to dress and let Ian know how ye fare.”

Gathering everything together once more, she glanced back from the doorway to see that Faith and Jamie both had fallen asleep once more.
What Happened and What Will Happen

Chapter Summary

With his fever gone and his leg healing, Jamie must confront Jenny and Ian's questions as well as figure out what to do next.

Faith sat carefully balanced on Jamie’s left leg while he kept his right leg stretched straight on the bench. It was healing quickly but the weight of a two-year-old was still a bit too much for it to handle—that he’d managed to hobble from the main hall to the kitchen for a proper meal had already pushed him to his limits for the day.

“Are ye ready to tell us about it?” Jenny asked, too impatient to beat around the bush. “We’ve heard the gist of how it turned out… but…” Her eyes darted to Faith whose attention was on the bowl of parritch in front of her.

Jamie blinked and swallowed hard, tears pricking his eyes. He lifted Faith to the ground and urged her to run off to the corner to play with her cousins. She took a deep breath as though she were going to argue—a flash of Claire that made Jamie’s breath catch—but she saw something in his expression that resigned her to her fate. She reached up to grab her unfinished breakfast and carried it carefully in two hands. Fergus cast a few glances about before jumping up and hurrying to Faith’s side, taking the bowl from her and leading her to the corner where the other children were seated with their breakfasts. Jamie noted that Fergus deliberately sat so that he was closest to the adults’ conversation and that his head was tilted at an evident angle.

“I… There’s no much…” Jamie struggled to start. “Claire…”

“She’s gone,” Jenny said with gentle and sad finality.

Jamie couldn’t speak so he simply nodded. She was gone and though it wasn’t in the manner Jenny meant, it was just as final. There was a part of him that looked at Faith and half-hoped, half-feared that he was wrong, that she wouldn’t be able to keep from looking back, that she would find them again. But the image of her with her skirts soaked in blood at the edge of the woods as he dueled that bastard Randall sent a cold shiver up his spine. There had been extenuating circumstances in France that might have precipitated Claire’s early labor but he’d come dangerously close to losing both Claire and Faith—he’d lived with the belief that they had both been lost, or at least that Faith had been lost, for weeks. With what Claire said of what was still to come—Redcoats raiding the Highlands, doing everything they could to terrorize the Scots, destroying everything that meant something to them—he was terrified to imagine what that might mean for Claire as she carried another child. He told himself that she would be safer in the future—she and the child both—and that he could and would protect Faith for them both.

“What about Murtagh?” Ian asked, snapping Jamie’s attention back.

“I lost track of him on the battlefield,” Jamie admitted quietly. “I dinna ken how he fared. Last I saw… he was alive and didna appear to be wounded… But we were separated. I was wounded and when I woke… when I woke I thought I must be dead. Then I was dragged to a barn where I kent I must die but was…” He trailed off shaking his head. “I dinna ken whether he was struck down, escaped the field, or was carted off with innumerable others as prisoners and I dinna ken what they...
mean to do with the prisoners they did take.”

His eyes met and held Ian’s and then Jenny’s, none of them doubting that the English were capable of executing any and all prisoners in their custody. From what Claire recalled, Jamie was fairly certain that while many were hanged for their treasonous support of the Stuarts, there were more who’d simply been imprisoned or transported for their crimes. Could Murtagh be among them?

“If he escaped altogether, I suspect he’ll find his way back here,” Ian spoke up, forcing a note of optimism into his voice. “If only to exchange what information he has for what we might know or what supplies we might be able to spare.”

“Perhaps,” Jamie agreed with a nod.

“He might try to get away to France,” Jenny suggested with far less enthusiasm or conviction. “He was there with ye before.”

Jamie cast his eyes to the table. Murtagh wouldn’t leave Scotland again willingly and he doubted his godfather would risk bringing the Redcoats down on Lallybroch by returning and making his presence known. He might never discover what had happened to Murtagh.

He felt a tightness in his chest. Claire gone; Murtagh gone. He was a wanted traitor and if the English found him…

“What am I goin’ to do?” he muttered quietly rubbing a hand down his face.

Jenny left the room and fetched a glass of whisky for him while Ian pressed his mouth into an uncertain line.

“I canna stay,” Jamie said sadly, his eyes drifting to Faith in the corner. “I canna put the lot of ye in danger like that—one look at me and any Englishman worth his salt would ken me for Red Jamie… But how am I supposed to… She’s all I have left. Claire… we promised…”

“Ye’ve time yet to decide what to do, brother,” Jenny insisted. “Ye’re no going anywhere until yer leg has healed properly. And whatever ye do, ye can be sure that Faith will be safe here at Lallybroch.”

“Aye, that she will,” Ian agreed. “And I dinna see that ye have to go at all. So long as ye’re somewhere the Redcoats canna find ye. There must be somewhere on the grounds that ye can be safely hid—what of the old cave yer father used when ye hunted stag?”

“Is it far enough from the house?” Jamie’s heart leapt at the thought of being able to stay close enough to feel he was protecting Faith, close enough not to miss everything, to keep the promise he and Claire had made that Faith wouldn’t lose them both.

“It doesna matter how far it is from the house,” Jenny said sternly, “ye’re no going anywhere. Father had that priest’s hole built into the house and it’s about time it had some use.”

“I’ll agree to it for the time being,” Jamie said after a few moments to think it over.

“The time being?” Jenny’s eyes narrowed. “What do ye mean my that?”

“While my leg heals, I’ll stay in the priest’s hole,” he explained, holding up a hand to prevent her from speaking before he could finish. “It willna be long before the Redcoats are about the countryside searching for Jacobites that’re unaccounted for. There’re broadsides tellin’ of me and they’ll ken where I’m from. Lallybroch is the first place they’ll come looking and it’ll be safer for
everyone if I’m out of sight when they do.”

“D’ye think ye’ll be able to get into the hole on yer leg as it is?” Ian asked skeptically.

“In, aye,” Jamie nodded shifting his leg on the bench and clenching his teeth as the movement sent a sharp twinge through to the bone. “Out again at some point… That I couldna say.”

“I go too,” Faith said forcefully as she appeared suddenly at Jamie’s elbow with her empty bowl of parritch in her hands. It looked like Fergus had tried to wipe her face clean but there was a streak across one cheek that he’d missed. “Where we goin’ Da? We goin’ to meet Mama at the fairy hill?”

“No, lamb. We’re no going anywhere,” he told her, lifting her onto his lap again and using his thumb to rub away at the food left on her face. She shrugged his hand away and rubbed at it with her fist before offering her cheek for further inspection. “We’re staying put but... ye’ll no be seeing me about the house much. I’ll be watching ye but ye’ll no see me.”

“Are ye gonna watch to make sure I mind Auntie Jenny?” Her eyes drifted to the side where Jenny set her teeth, caught between horror and amusement.

“I’m no that bad, am I?” she asked Ian but he carefully looked away, a smile creeping onto his face as she gave him a light smack and set her hands on her hips.

Jamie felt his own lips twitch towards a smile but kept his attention focused on Faith.

“I’ll be watching ye to protect ye,” he assured her.

Faith nodded and leaned into Jamie. He pressed a kiss to the crown of her curly head. With Faith right there, they couldn’t discuss the subject further and Jamie was relieved. He didn’t want to think about what would happen when his leg was completely healed but the prospect of spending all of his days in the priest’s hole was a bleak one. He’d be at the house but not a part of it and being so close to Faith without being able to spend time with her would be a whole new brand of torture. He preferred Ian’s suggestion of the cave for both the illusion of freedom it offered as well as the relative safety as far as Jenny and Ian having credible deniability concerning his presence on the property.

“Tomorrow,” he told Jenny and Ian as he lowered his leg from the bench to the floor, careful to keep it stretched straight. “Ye’ll start readying it for me tomorrow and I’ll start working to get back on my feet enough to use it,” he said, referring to the priest’s hole.
A Different Set of Standing Stones

Chapter Summary

Claire is back in the twentieth century and must deal with the grief and guilt of having passed through the stones again.

“Thank you for doing this,” Claire thanked Mrs. Graham as the countryside passed in a blur through the window.

“Aye, well, with all the attention ye were getting—even at the manse—I thought it might help ye to catch yer breath if ye could get away for a bit. Yer husband is doing what he can to keep prying eyes away but given… everything… I suppose it might feel like he’s a bit too close sometimes,” Mrs. Graham said politely.

“That’s not exactly how I would put it but I do believe he’s trying his best,” Claire agreed. Actually, ‘smothering’ was the word she would have used. Frank had been hovering about her like an insect ready to pounce on anything she said or did that might allude to where she’d been since her disappearance. She had agreed to tell him her story once without interruption and he could believe her or not as he saw fit. She hadn’t told him everything though—there were some things she couldn’t bear the thought of sharing with him or anyone else. Because of her pregnancy, she had to tell him about Jamie.

But Faith was hers to cherish—her greatest source of both comfort and guilt. Her daughter would be safe, would be surrounded by family, and with any luck would never know that Claire had left her behind. That it had broken her heart and that she hadn’t wanted to do it didn’t matter on this side of the stones. She had broken the promise she made to her daughter and doubted she’d ever be able to forgive herself for it—not without Faith’s forgiveness first.

Maybe that was what had inspired the idea. She closed her eyes, put her hands to her abdomen, and concentrated on the life she knew was growing within her—she knew it consciously but she couldn’t really feel it yet, had no sense of it. She remembered what it had been like when she first realized she was carrying Faith but didn’t feel the same instantaneous attachment to this second child. Perhaps it was because she was so torn—torn with the grief of losing Jamie, torn with the guilt at leaving Faith behind. She was afraid that she wouldn’t be able to feel connected to this new child until she was able to reach some kind of peace with the memory of Faith.

She’d told Mrs. Graham a little more than she’d told Frank, encouraged by the older woman’s willingness to believe her. Speaking about Jamie she found a truly sympathetic ear—Mrs. Graham had lost her husband during the war and understood her grief all too well. But she kept Faith from her as well.

“How is this it, up ahead?” Mrs. Graham asked, slowing the car and pulling over to the side of the road.

Claire blinked as she saw the familiar shape of Lallybroch in the distance. It looked so much older than she remembered but then it had been two hundred years since she’d ridden through the gate.

“Yes,” she swallowed hard. “If you pull through to the main yard, I can see if there’s anyone living there and if they’ll let me walk around a bit.”
“It doesna look like anyone lives here now,” Mrs. Graham commented as she found a place to park and climbed out of the car.

Taking a deep breath, Claire opened her door and stepped out to look at the familiar house and yard. Tears pricked at her eyes as she took in the worn exterior of Lallybroch. It was still standing and it didn’t look like much had changed in its external structure. She didn’t want to bother walking around inside—the thought of seeing a gas stove or electric lights inside would be too much for her at that moment. Instead, she turned around a few times to orient herself and then set off in the direction she was looking for.

“Dinna move so fast, Mrs. Randall,” Mrs. Graham called to her as she hurried to catch up. “Ye dinna want to overexert yerself and we’ve plenty of time before we need to return to the manse.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Graham, but I need to see what’s there,” she said instinctively reaching down to lift her skirts out of the way only to realize that she didn’t need to—she was wearing trousers. The land tilted upward and she spotted the gap in the wall at the top. Someone had put a more formal gate on it at some point but the iron was old and beginning to rust. She stopped before she reached the gate and searched the ground at her feet, gathering a handful of small rocks in anticipation and dread.

“I hope ye’ll be able to find a bit of peace,” Mrs. Graham remarked, resting a hand on Claire’s arm and giving her a sympathetic squeeze. “Moving forward is easier when ye can lay the past to rest.”

“I don’t know what I want to find in there,” Claire confessed, “but I hope it’ll help whatever it is.”

She offered Mrs. Graham a forced smile before steeling herself and crossing through the gate to the family cemetery.

At first all she could see was how overgrown everything had become. Weeds ran rampant and climbed over stones that were worn smooth with time. The crisp edges she remembered were rounded with age. It was clear that most of them had names and phrases cut into their faces but discerning their meaning would take a bit of time. There were also more stones than she remembered and the sight caused her breathing to hitch even as she closed her eyes and counted to ten, reminding herself that she was here because she knew there would be more stones than before—that it was the new stones she was there to see.

In order to keep herself from bolting, she moved to the oldest corner of the cemetery first, slipping the handful of stones she’d picked up from the path into her pocket. Jamie had taken her to see the family plot during their first visit to Lallybroch but they’d made it a point to take Faith at least once a month after their return from France. Had Jenny and Ian continued to do that with her? Would they when they learned…

She started with the stones for Brian, Ellen and Robert, and William. Kneeling, she pulled the weeds away, tearing at the tall grasses that hid the headstones from sight. She felt the grasses cut at her palms but kept working, clearing the space and scraping the lichen from the stones themselves until she could read the names there once more. Mrs. Graham had stood watching but said nothing letting her do what she needed.

When the area was clear, she reached into her pocket and pulled three small rocks from her supply placing one at the base of each. The small cairns that she, Jamie, and Faith had added to when they visited were long gone, scattered by time and nature. She prayed quietly to Jamie’s parents, apologizing that it had been so long since she visited and asking that they might keep him company and help to watch over Faith in her absence.

Reluctantly, she rose and turned to the rest of the stones in the plot. Presumably as she moved further
and further away from those oldest stones, she would be moving through time closer to her present. She picked one and knelt to clear it and read the name. It was familiar to her but a knot of tension relaxed when she realized it was one of the older groomsmen on the estate—he’d been in poor health when they left and likely hadn’t survived the winter before Culloden.

The first stone that made it hard to breath was for an infant—Caitlin Maisri Murray with the single date of December 3, 1749. The girl must have been Jenny and Ian’s. She cleared the small plot and left a stone and a prayer for her niece even as she felt a small relief that it wasn’t Faith’s. She continued searching through the plots and clearing the stones, reading the names and dates. There were a few more she recognized but increasingly more that she didn’t. She didn’t see any for Jamie; she knew that even if she did, he would almost certainly have been buried in one of the mass graves at Culloden but had thought Jenny might erect a stone for him at Lallybroch anyway. And there were no stones for anyone named Faith either—by Fraser or any other last name. She chose to believe her daughter had lived and thrived—tried to picture her married and leaving to live with her husband’s kin, raising a family of her own…

Mrs. Graham had followed along, looking at the stones as Claire moved about tidying the yard. After a while the older woman had begun to gather the piles of weeds from where Claire left them, carrying them out of the cemetery and leaving them in a mound by the gate. Returning from one such trip she found that Claire remained kneeling at the stone she’d been clearing when Mrs. Graham had left with a fresh pile.

“Is it him, lass?” she asked gently, resting a hand on Claire’s shoulder.

Claire shook her head. “No. It’s my brother-in-law. 1778. So… thirty-three years after I saw him last… though for me it’s been less than a year.” She started to cry at the thought of Ian being gone but tried to check herself. He had survived the years after Culloden, the English raids on the Highlands—he and most of the people at Lallybroch seemed to have fared well enough—including Faith. Had she stood here to watch her uncle buried—the uncle who would have acted as a father to her and maybe told her stories about her parents? “He was a good man,” she told Mrs. Graham. “Incredibly kind and gentle—patience beyond measure. The only way to last surrounded by stubborn Frasers.”

She wiped her nose on her sleeve and pulled one of the larger rocks from her pocket to place at the base of Ian’s headstone before looking around expecting to find Jenny’s nearby. But she didn’t. There were other stones with the Murray last name—more so than any other name in the cemetery—but aside from a James Murray that might have been her nephew, she didn’t recognize any more of them.

“Are ye ready to go back then?” Mrs. Graham asked when Claire stood and dusted off the knees of her trousers. “Have ye laid yer ghosts to rest?”

“I don’t know that they’ll ever leave me alone, exactly,” Claire confessed, “but I don’t think they’ll haunt me—not all of them anyway. I don’t have much choice but to press forward though, do I?”

“I suppose not. Come, let’s return to the manse and to supper.”

It was only after her visit to Lallybroch with Mrs. Graham that Claire really began to listen and pay attention to Frank and what he had to say.

“I think we can make this work but we need a fresh start,” he told her after they’d gone up to their rooms for the evening.
She wasn’t sure whose idea it had been for them to be given separate bedrooms but she was grateful to have a place she could go and shut herself away when the modern world became too loud and overbearing. There was a small room joining her bedroom to the one Frank was using though whether it was meant to be a sitting room or a storage area was unclear. At the moment there were some boxes in it but they appeared to be boxes of fliers and materials that were left over from the search when she’d first gone missing. Her suitcase had been waiting on her bed for her when they’d first arrived from the hospital.

“A fresh start,” she repeated in an effort to show she was listening.

“Yes. There are too many people at Oxford that… that know what happened, that will wonder at your return and that will… will plague us with their curiosity and… if we go back there together then this… incident… we’ll never be able to put it behind us,” he argued.

She reached down and tightened the belt of her dressing gown looking at the way that the fabric bulged a little beneath where it was cinched, where her belly would soon be growing increasingly prominent. She refrained from making any comments about the fact that with the child she would inevitably be carrying her past forward into their future, that it was impossible to think of the coming child without thinking about its father or sister.

“So what do you propose?”

“Boston,” he said with a self-satisfied smile. “I’ve been offered a position at Harvard that will start with the fall term. We’ll have weeks—months—to settle in before… Well. It’s a fresh start. People will ask questions but without the presumption of already having made up their minds about our situation—we can tell them whatever we want about our situation. As far as anyone there will be concerned, the time was simply right for making this kind of move—it’s not something one can do as easily once children are involved.”

Claire looked away from him and crossed her arms over her chest. She remembered the journey from France to Lallybroch and the difficulties of keeping Faith occupied for those hours in the carriage, at sea, on a horse; she remembered being greeted in the yard by Jenny and Ian and the excitement of coming home at last. Nothing would ever match the joy of that day; of gathering round the table for one of Mrs. Crook’s finest meals and trading stories of all that had happened in the months their family had been separated; of laying Faith down in the cradle at the foot of their bed before climbing under the sheets to make love.

“Claire?” Frank asked, pulling her attention back to him.

“Hmm?”

“Do you think you can do that? Do you think you can come to Boston and we can be a family?”

No. It was on the tip of her tongue. She knew the way that family was supposed to feel and that she wouldn’t be able to feel that way again—not with him, not without Jamie or Faith—but she couldn’t say it. She couldn’t refuse to try for her unborn child’s sake. Even as she clung to the memory of Faith, she forced herself to confront what she knew to be true—she had two children now. It was why she allowed herself to be convinced into traveling back through the stones. Jamie had already felt the painful tearing of having to consider what was best for more than one child, being forced to consider the welfare of two where before there’d been only one—and that sometimes the best interests of each would pull in opposite directions and a difficult decision had to be made. Faith was safe and cared for and now Claire had to do what was best for their other child—to provide that child with as much as she could. Even if this new child would never know what she and Jamie had shared with Faith in those too-brief months at Lallybroch, this child deserved a chance at some kind of
family.

She nodded, unwilling to trust her voice in that moment of resignation. Frank gave her a small and encouraging smile.

“I’ll make the necessary arrangements. I believe I can have things sorted within a week or two and then we’ll be able to get out of Reggie’s hair and properly away from all the unwanted attention here,” he said. She knew he was referring to the newspapermen who hadn’t entirely given up on calling for interviews though they had curbed their efforts in the last few days. There was a flash of uncertainty in Frank’s face before he lightly put his hand on her shoulder, leaned down, and pressed a kiss to the top of her head, smoothing her hair down first.

Claire rose and drifted to her bedroom, muttering something about needing her rest before closing the door on Frank.

“I was wondering if there was something more you might be willing to help me with?” Claire approached Mrs. Graham in the kitchen the next afternoon.

“Of course, my dear,” the kindly older woman agreed with a smile, her eyes narrowing as she saw the solemnity in Claire’s face. “What is it?”

“I… I didn’t tell you quite everything about what happened and who I left behind,” Claire confessed before explaining about Faith.

“I’m so sorry,” Mrs. Graham sympathized, slipping an arm around Claire’s shoulder as she allowed a few tears to slip free down her cheeks. “I canna begin to imagine… What is it ye need my help with?”

“I… I want to see if I can find out what happened to her.”

“It wasna just yer man’s stone that ye were lookin’ for then,” Mrs. Graham noted quietly.

Claire shook her head. “It wasn’t there which… if anything will have happened to her in the years following the Rising, that’s where I would expect her to… be… But she’s not so she must be all right through all that. And if she’s not there then… she must have gone somewhere.”

“Ye sound like ye’ve a notion of something.”

“The surest place I can think of to find any trace of her or how to find her would be the family Bible,” Claire explained, watching Mrs. Graham’s face relax with understanding and agreement. “I watched my husband note her birth in it as well as our marriage. If she married, I can’t imagine that wouldn’t have been in there too.”

“And once ye have her married name…” Mrs. Graham said, continuing along Claire’s train of thought.

“I’ll have something to work with. But first I have to find that Bible.”

“And ye ken where it was when ye left but no who might have ended up wi’ it down the line.” Mrs. Graham nodded again.

“Idealley, the house would have stayed among the Murrays for generations and the Bible along with it.”
“So to start I can look into the property for ye—see who it is that owns it now and how they came by it,” Mrs. Graham asserted. “A quick look at the map should be able to tell which records office would have the deeds ye’re looking for. We can probably make a day of it at the beginning of next week. Now, let me make ye a cup of tea to help settle yer nerves and yer stomach. I ken that look well enough.”

“It’s not that,” Claire asserted though there was a rising wave of nausea as the task she felt compelled to undertake rose impossibly high before her. She breathed deeply in through her mouth and out through her nose before explaining further. “Frank—my husband—and I will be leaving in a short while.”

“Well… that will make it difficult for ye I’m sure but I can do my best on my own and once Mr. Randall has ye settled again in Oxfordshire ye’ll be able to come away when I find something promising,” Mrs. Graham attempted to reassure her but Claire shook her head and wiped at her eyes.

“We’re not going back to Oxfordshire; Frank has taken a new teaching post at Harvard University. We’ll be living in Boston.”

Mrs. Graham blinked at the additional news before she moved to finish filling the kettle and putting the water on to heat.

“No matter. I ken it’ll be more work for me—but then it willna be long before ye’ll have yer hands full on yer end as well and the search would be fallin’ more on me anyhow.” She sat and reached for Claire’s hand to give it a squeeze. “I’ll help ye find what happened to yer lass. Ye can’t be able to let her go—nor should ye—but it might ease yer mind to have some answers all the same so I’ll do what I can. I promise no to tell the Reverend about yer Faith, but I may need to his assistance down the road—he can be verra useful and persuasive when it comes to tracing matters of historical record.”

“As long as he says nothing to Frank,” Claire asserted.

“No. The truth of the lass will stay between us.”

They slipped into a heavy silence for a few moments before the kettle began to boil and Mrs. Graham finished with their tea setting out a plate of gingersnap biscuits for Claire as well. The food and drink helped to relax her physically but her mind continued to whirl.

“Does it make me a bad mother to have left her like that?” she whispered to the older woman as she turned one of the biscuits over in her fingers. Crumbs fell to the tabletop beneath as her fingernail inadvertently gouged one edge of the dry biscuit.

“Ye were put in an impossible situation,” Mrs. Graham reminded her. “There is nae right or wrong about it. Ye can only do what feels right at the time and pray it turns out well.”

“I miss him—Jamie—so much but I… I’m angry with him too,” Claire confessed. “I want to yell at him for making me choose, for pushing me to leave him and to leave her… but I know it’s my own fault for listening and…” she let the biscuit drop to the table as she felt the barrier that had been holding everything back slip—only a little at first but then a little more before it was washed away completely.

Mrs. Graham shifted her chair so that she was beside Claire and could reach over to pull her down and let her cry on her shoulder as Claire finally let all she had lost overwhelm her.

“Ye’d have faced the decision whether yer man voiced it to ye or no. Dinna let that taint yer memory of him,” Mrs. Graham advised as she rubbed Claire’s arm and back. “Take what comfort ye can in
what ye shared and what ye have left. It may not be all that ye had, but it’s no nothing.”

Claire nodded into Mrs. Graham’s shoulder but continued to cry until her tears were spent and her tea was cold.
Rumors of Old Acquaintances

Chapter Summary

Lallybroch has a number of unexpected visitors, some more welcome than others.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains NSFW material.

Jamie could feel the bare expanse of Claire’s warm back against his chest, the firm roundness of her arse wedged against his hips and groin. A thin blanket covered them as they lay next to each other both in that hazy state between sleeping and waking—some parts of them more awake than others.

He sighed as he trailed his fingers down her bare arm to where a hand rested against the large swell of their unborn child. Claire was already larger than she had been when she carried Faith, nearly two months beyond when she’d delivered Faith early. Claire stirred beneath his feather-light touch and arched her back—no doubt sore from the weight of the bairn—and in so doing, created a delicious bit of friction that did more to rouse him. He kissed her shoulder as she reached for his hand and brought it to her swollen breast. With his fingers he kneaded the sore tissue for her and was rewarded with a groan of appreciation and additional grinding of her backside against his cock.

Her nipple rose in invitation against his palm but he resisted the urge to bend his head and take it in his mouth—she was too close to her time and he didn’t want her milk to come early, to take was rightfully belonged to their son—or perhaps it was another daughter...

Claire inhaled sharply and curled in on herself unexpectedly but before he could ask what was wrong, she rubbed at a spot on her belly and chuckled, then relaxed against him once more.

He let his hand drift down to the spot she had been rubbing moments before and stretched his hand over her strained skin. Faith hadn’t been as active as this lad was—but then, Faith hadn’t been as large to be occupying such confined quarters for so long. There was a slow shifting beneath his hand and another inhalation from Claire as the child asserted its will within her, not yet independent but itching to be free. As Claire had done moments before, Jamie rubbed his hand in small circles over the place where the bairn fidgeted. It seemed to calm the child whose movements quieted so that Claire sighed with relief.

She put her hand over his again and interlaced their fingers before guiding his hand down the curve of her belly. He took her meaning and loosened her grip on his fingers to slide his hand down the length of her thigh in order to hook her knee and hitch her leg up over his.

Claire quickly took advantage of the additional space between her legs, reaching through to take a firm hold of him. He bit his lip as she stroked him eagerly and brought him into her, leaning and arching around her protruding belly until he responded and sank himself into the intoxicating warmth of her. Her fingernails continued to tease him with each thrust as he sought to establish a gentle pace appropriate for her condition. It was proving difficult with the unexpected agony those fingernails
were putting him through.

He decided to pay her back in kind, applying his practiced and nimble fingers to her own roused and sensitive folds of skin so close to where they were joined. Her hand quickly shifted to guide and redirect his ministrations. He chuckled but the laughter soon became a series of gasps and grunts to match Claire’s quietly pitched moans.

She shuddered and clasped her thighs together, trapping his hand as she sought to contain the sensation of her release and triggered his own. They lay still, limbs entwined, their hands clasped in the damp heat between Claire’s legs where their mutual satisfaction seeped from where they were still loosely joined.

Jamie was afraid to move, to try and speak. He clung to whatever it was that had her in his arms once more. His heart pounded in a loud, slow, steady rhythm.

Other noises began to intrude and he blinked—Claire began to fade, the coolness of the priest’s hole taking the dream of her from him faster.

He sighed as he came to full consciousness, his hand clasped between his own thighs, the wetness of his completion cooling on his skin. He used the hem of his shirt to wipe up the mess as he bent his ear to the task of discerning what time it might be.

So many things were lost to him in the darkness of the priest’s hole beyond what he had already lost with the failure at Culloden—time, companionship—but the worst was the sense of being productive, useful. There was nothing he could do to help with anything at Lallybroch, his very presence on the grounds a threat to them all. Yet he couldn’t leave. He couldn’t leave Faith when she was all he had left—her and the few occasions when his dreams brought Claire back to him.

He stopped suddenly as his ear caught the sound of raised voices above. What worried him was that he could make out what was being said which meant the hatch to the root cellar must be open. He remained perfectly still as his eyes darted to the shared wall between the root cellar and the priest’s hole. It was unlikely that anyone in there who didn’t know about the priest’s hole would discover it—so long as he didn’t make his presence known.

“Are ye really so cruel as to take stores that are meant to feed all these bairns through the winter?” he heard Jenny question with an obvious challenge in her voice.

Redcoats.

Sure enough, an English voice responded.

“Madam, we are taking what is needed for provisions for his Majesty’s army. If it were not for the rebelliousness of your people here in the Highlands, our presence wouldn’t be necessary and we would not require provisioning.”

The clean, clipped speech had to belong to an officer. Jamie could only imagine what Jenny’s expression must look like—he was increasingly aware of the way his fingernails were cutting into his palms as he clenched his hands into fists, a ribbon of pain streaming from the stiff fingers of his right hand, anchoring him in place.

There was nothing he could do. He had to simply sit in the priest’s hole and wait it out while the Redcoats raided Lallybroch. To do anything else was to put his family—to put Faith—at risk.

They hadn’t had much warning of the Redcoats’ approach. Fergus and Rabbie spotted the cloud of
dust the soldiers were kicking up in the distance and rushed to alert Jenny and Mrs. Crook. Jenny dispatched Rabbie to fetch Ian and the other men from where they were harvesting in the field—the soldiers were less likely to cause trouble if there was a visible presence of menfolk about the yard, even if they were only armed with farm tools and presumably going about their business. There wasn’t time to get into the priest’s hole to wake and warn Jamie so Jenny had to settle for a few firmly placed stomps on the floor above where he was hidden.

Fergus disappeared into the nursery where one of the housemaids had the younger children gathered. He set himself up between Faith and the doorway smiling and asking if she would mind if he joined her in playing with her pile of sticks—it was a simple game he had taught her.

She gathered them into a neat handful, then raised them and dropped them so that they fell into a loose pile on the floor, the ends of the twigs sticking out as they overlapped and rested on one another.

Faith moved first, opting for the obvious stick at the top of the pile. Her tongue stuck out the side of her mouth as she carefully lifted it off the pile without disturbing its fellows. Fergus looked to the side of the pile and found an oddly twisted twig. He made a show of examining its position before moving quickly to dislodge the twig—none of the others in the pile even twitched at the removal. Faith clapped excitedly even as Fergus peeked over his shoulder at the door in time to see Jenny stride purposefully by with Mrs. Crook a few steps behind.

There were two Redcoat officers on horseback and at least another half-dozen on foot. The youngest soldier had been given the task of leading a small workhorse hitched up to an empty wagon. Jenny swallowed as she eyed the sturdy beast and the size of the wagon it hauled. She doubted it would be able to pull the contraption efficiently when it was full and from the way the soldiers’ greedy eyes darted around the Lallybroch yard they didn’t mean to be leaving with it empty—if she could find a way to get them to take one of the weaker horses…

“Madam,” the officer in charge addressed her as he dismounted. Jenny crossed her arms over her chest and drew herself up as high as she could. “In the name of his Majesty we are here to acquire provisions to support his Majesty’s soldiers. If you would kindly direct my men to your stores we shall make quick work of it and be out of your hair.” He smiled politely but if he hoped to be reassuring, charming, or authoritative, he failed miserably on all three counts.

“And just which of his Majesty’s officers might I be addressing,” Jenny countered keeping her body solidly between the yard and the door into the house itself.

“I am Major Albert Peterson and may I presume you are the lady of the house,” he hinted heavily.

“I am the acting lady of the house for now,” she informed him.

“You are not Mrs. Fraser?” Major Peterson inquired, still leaning on civility.

“Fraser was my maiden name,” she told him though she was fairly confident he already knew as much.

“Well, if you are the acting lady of the house, may I presume your husband is acting as steward?”

“Ye may presume what ye like. I’m in no position to stop ye doin’ that. As for taking provisions, I’ll have one of the lads show yer men up to the fields. We’ve no finished with the harvest and if ye want it so bad ye can pick it yerself,” Jenny offered with a hollow but polite grin of her own.

“I’m afraid we won’t have time for that ma’am. If you won’t show us to your stores yourself, then
I’ll need you to step aside so my men can search for themselves.” He cocked his eyebrow in challenge.

Jenny heard the commotion in the house behind her as Ian and the other men returned from the fields through the kitchen. She gave Major Peterson a shrug and led the way inside.

“Our cellar’s through here,” she told him over her shoulder. “Mind the stairs. Wouldn’t want any of your lot to tumble and break something.” She shot a look to Major Peterson who was still eyeing her warily. “There’s jars of preserves just at the bottom that travel well so long as ye’re no so careless as to break them,” she added though she knew the implied threat of the moment before had landed precisely the way she intended it to.

Major Peterson nodded for two of his men to descend into the cellar and take what they would while two more continued on into the kitchen to examine what was already at hand.

The children above stairs had heard the Redcoats in the house and slipped from the nursery—against the wishes of the housemaid who was supposed to be in charge of them—and stood at the railing watching the soldiers move through the house. Fergus had a tight hold of Faith’s skirts so she couldn’t go wandering off without his noticing.

Jenny saw the officer note the children’s appearance and the slight alteration that crossed his face at the sight.

“Are ye really so cruel as to take stores that are meant to feed all these bairns through the winter?” she asked him in a quieter voice.

Major Peterson’s face hardened again. “Madam, we are taking what is needed for provisions for his Majesty’s army. If it were not for the rebelliousness of your people here in the Highlands, our presence wouldn’t be necessary and we would not require provisioning.”

Jenny heard the echo of Ian’s wooden leg on the floor as he came up behind her having hastily washed up from working in the field. His face was still red from the exertion of rushing back to the house.

“We’re complying readily, Officer,” Ian pointed out. “This isna the first time his Majesty’s soldiers have paid us a visit, ye ken. My wife doesna appreciate disruptions to the routine of things. But me, I’ll take the excuse to rest my leg. Would you or yer men care for a wee dram?”

“And you are?”

“Ian Murray.”

“And you are the steward of this estate?”

Ian grinned. “I suppose ye could call me that. I dinna own it but I run it for him that does.”

“And that would be James Fraser, correct?” Major Peterson grinned like a cat that had its mouse cornered. “The former Lord Broch Tuarach and traitor to the crown? As a traitor I’m sure you’re aware—”

“This land is owned by James Murray, if ye’ll pardon the interruption,” Ian said with a polite firmness. “The former Laird Broch Tuarach,” Ian explained taking care to properly enunciate Jamie’s old title, “James Fraser transferred the estate to my lad some few years back now.” He turned to Jenny. “Two or was it three years ago?”
“It was after the sadness wi’ his wife—God rest her,” Jenny said, playing along.

“He had no children of his own to leave it to?” Major Peterson noted, skeptically. “And he transferred it effective immediately?”

“Aye,” Ian said, waving an arm to invite the Major in towards the kitchen. “He had a daughter but the birth didna go well. The lass arrived too soon and his wife… The wee lass was a sickly thing and wasna likely she’d survive. He was distraught over it all and said he couldna stay to watch her pass too.”

“Couldna bear the burden of the estate when those he’d hoped to share it with were gone,” Jenny added. “So he passed it to our son—his namesake—and he left. We’ve no seen him since. Heard tell of his antics,” Jenny rolled her eyes, “who hasna heard the tales, though?”

“From your tone I take it the daughter is still alive?” Major Peterson noted.

“Aye. Stronger now she’s a bit older. Dinna ken the how or why of it but she’s right ‘tween our own two girls.”

Fergus came striding purposefully into the room with a self-satisfied look on his face.

“Monsieur, Madame,” he nodded to Ian and Jenny, ignoring the officer. “Monsieur Gowan has arrived to see you. Shall I show him in?”

“Of course,” Jenny said with her first genuine smile since the Redcoats had appeared. “Show him through and tell Mrs. Crook. He’ll be half-starved puir man. I dinna ken what he’s about traveling so far on his business at his age but I’ll no turn him away at that.” She rose and slid past the officer to greet Ned Gowan at the door of the kitchen. Major Peterson’s attention had remained on Fergus as he strolled out of the room to fetch the aging lawyer.

“Oh, Mrs. Murray, Mr. Murray,” Ned greeted Jenny with a small bow and nodded towards Ian. “If I had known ye were to have company I’d no have been so hasty in leaving the MacKenzies. I do not wish to put additional strain on yer hospitality.”

“Nonsense,” Ian insisted, moving to introduce Major Peterson. “Ye’ve been looking forward to yer visit for some time now. I’m sure our unexpected visitors willna mind at all.”

“On the contrary,” Major Peterson asserted, “we’ll soon be finished here… for today.”

“I couldn’t help but make note of your men loading that wagon of yers out in the yard,” Ned observed to the officer. “Ye look to be taking enough to feed an army,” Ned said in a joking manner. “I do hope ye’ll leave enough for these people to feed their family—especially the wee ones.”

“The property of traitors is forfeit to the crown,” Major Peterson took pleasure in reminding Ned. “They’ll be happy with what we leave them.”

“The Murrays are no traitors, sir,” Ned asserted as he took his packet of papers from where he’d had them tucked beneath his arm. “They took no part in the rebellion against his Majesty and at any rate, the property is not theirs but their son’s in trust; he being a child could have nothing to do with either side and therefore cannot be charged a traitor, therefore cannot have his property confiscated in such a manner. You and yer men are entitled to a measure of provisions but if ye abuse that privilege, I’ll be only too happy to file a complaint on behalf of the Murrays. It may no get too far, but it isna something ye’d want to have on yer record, is it Major?”

“They claim their son—” Major Peterson began but Ned waved him away as he pulled a series of
pages from his packet with a small flourish.

“The witnessed Deed of Sasine that initiated the transfer has already been registered with the proper authorities, Major,” Ned informed him. “This is one of several notarized copies I requested be drawn up when I filed it on behalf of the Murrays. Finally finding an opportunity to deliver it to them personally is why I have come so far—though I’ve had word of other families in the area that might be in need of my services,” he glanced to Jenny and Ian who nodded with a solemn smile.

“Aye, too many in need of yer services and more, I’m afraid,” Ian remarked as he took the pages from Ned and unfolded them to glance over the copy. “I thank ye for filing it for us as we couldna go ourselves so easily.”

At the appearance of an official document, Major Peterson’s eyes narrowed but he refused to ask to see it personally and clearly didn’t know enough of the specific legalities to press further—he had his career to think about and did not wish to have anything mar his record. They’d all heard of the Scots lawyer, Ned Gowan, and his remarkable success in petitioning on behalf of the families of those traitors to the crown who’d had their property seized. Though he was rarely able to have all restored, he managed to get enough of it back to build his reputation among both the British troops and the people they were there to keep in line.

When Major Peterson and his soldiers left, they had taken a significant portion of the root cellar’s contents as well as five chickens, a goat, and a horse—not the one Jenny had wanted them to take but neither of their best horses either. They watched the Redcoats disappear up the road from the yard of Lallybroch, only breathing easy again when they were completely out of sight.

“Thank ye, Ned,” Ian remarked as they made their way back inside. He glanced back over his shoulder at the setting sun in the distance. “Ye’ll stay the night I hope,” he encouraged Ned. “Dinna want ye out on yer own in the dark with Redcoats about.”

“I’m most grateful,” Ned accepted, bringing a handkerchief to his brow with a hand that shook with age. “It was a hard ride and I’m a bit drained at the moment. I wouldna mind postponing my departure till tomorrow but I must be off in the morning. Duty’s call has been persistent and boisterous of late, I’m afraid. The English have been making bigger pushes to claim the property of traitors for the crown the last few weeks. If they strike hard and quick enough to get possession, the process to recover it can be stalled and drawn out and the longer it lasts the less likely it is for the property to be recovered at all. Resources drain quickly. Not everyone was prepared for a possible loss. It was fortuitous that yer brother passed the property to yer son before becoming entangled with Prince Charles and his plans.” Ned’s eyebrows rose significantly as he alluded to the Deed of Sasine.

“Yer timing was most convenient,” Jenny noted, skirting the subject and leading Ned back to the kitchen. With the Redcoats gone, the children and skittish maidservants crept out of hiding.

“I heard word of Redcoats headed this way when I was a few villages away conferring with a uh…” Ned paused as his chest tightened and made breathing difficult. “A uh, a blacksmith’s wife who… her husband was arrested—suspected of having… supplied weapons.” He coughed, reaching for his pipe and a pouch in his pocket. “No proof, of course.” He packed the pipe with dried herbs and turned about, spotting the fire. “Be a good lad,” he said, turning to Fergus. “Fetch me a light.”

Fergus lit a rush at the hearth and carried it to Ned who lit his pipe and breathed deeply, relaxing with each puff.

“Hello there,” he said, leaning forward to greet Faith who was watching him with wide blue eyes. “If ye’re not the spit of yer mother.”
“Aye,” Jenny said as she brought some food to the table for the children’s supper. “That she is and a comfort to the lot of us having her here. Claire… She’s missed.” Ian nodded, remaining quiet too while Ned puffed on his pipe.

Jenny settled the younger children at the table in the corner before sending Fergus out to the yard. “Make sure everything is clear, then go fetch him. He’ll want to see and speak wi’ Ned.”

Fergus nodded and scampered off while Ian settled at the table with Ned and Jenny instructed a maidservant to begin shutting the house up for the evening. The men who had come down from the fields with Ian had drifted home without returning to the fields, eager to see their families and provide reassurances all around.

“I ken ye’re no at Leoch as much with yer work takin’ ye here and there so much more,” Jenny said, “but my aunt Letitia and wee Hamish… Do ye ken how they fare?”

“They’re managing well enough with Mistress Fitzgibbons’ assistance,” he nodded as they heard Fergus return through the house and heading for the priest’s hole. “Yer aunt is a strong woman and willna let anything close to suspicion fall on her son. She insists Colum wasna intending to pledge his men to the cause and that it was all to Dougal’s doing and that Leoch passed to Hamish at Colum’s death—the crown’ll likely have Beannachd but I should be able to help protect Leoch. Hamish’s age works in his favor so it’s unlikely more will come of it than already has. Contending with the womenfolk whose husbands were captured and imprisoned… That’s where most of her efforts lie now.”

Fergus’ footsteps echoed as he raced back to the kitchen but Jamie moved silently.

“Da!” Faith cried as she ran into his arms.

“Aye lamb. Let me wash up so I dinna get ye dusty,” he said, setting her down in his place to cross to a basin Mrs. Crook had set out for him to rinse his hands and splash his face.

Once the dust and grime of the priest’s hole and been washed away, it became clear how pale he was, the ruddiness of his short beard dull like his hair. He hadn’t been out in the sunlight for the better part of four months, only risking leaving the priest’s hole after dark and often remaining down there for days at a time—until his buckets needed to be changed and he couldn’t bear to keep away from Faith any longer. If it weren’t for the brief snatches of time he spent with the family, Jamie might have mistaken the confines of the priest’s hole for the dungeons of Wentworth Prison.

Clean enough, he lifted Faith from his seat and held her out at arm’s length in a ritual that already had her smiling. He gauged her weight and then standing still he tried to hold her straight out and steady as he could—she obliged by letting her feet dangle.

“Ye must be getting near two stone,” he told her, “and yer legs are running like weeds. Yer toes’ll be touching the floor ‘fore ye know it.” She squinted at him as he pulled her close and settled between Ned and Jenny with Faith in his lap. She was growing—heavier and taller—but he was growing weaker too, unable to adequately exercise his limbs in the confined space of the priest’s hole. Faith was still giggling as Jamie settled in for a more serious conversation.

He turned first to Jenny.

“How bad was it?”

“They took near half the root cellar,” Jenny admitted. “But we finished digging the other cellar out beyond the barn three days ago and had a fair amount of our stores moved there already. What was
in the root cellar was mostly for show.”

“With what we have yet to harvest we should be able to scrape by,” Ian added with a firm nod but the furrows in his brow suggested it would be tighter than that.

Jamie was decided. “I’ll go to the cave—just for a week or two,” he amended seeing Jenny was already setting her jaw for a fight. “And not until the Redcoats are further afield. Ian, you and the other men are too weary from the harvest and now cobbling together what ye can to make up for what they took… Ye dinna have the kind of time I do. I can hide during the day and hunt by night. I’ll bring the game here for ye to butcher and salt or smoke as ye need to replenish the stores. Two weeks and winter will be coming on enough that I’ll have no choice but to return to the priest’s hole.”

Jenny and Ian looked to each other but said nothing, knowing there was nothing they’d be able to do to stop him going on his own and to do so would put him at greater risk.

“What’re ye smoking?” Faith spoke up from Jamie’s lap and addressed Ned Gowan, taking advantage of the lull in the conversation.

“It’s a herb yer mother recommended,” the old lawyer told her with a smile before indulging in a puff. “Thornapple she called it. When my lungs seize—as they’re wont to do at my age,” he added with a wink that delighted Faith, “it helps to relax them so I can breathe agin. Yer mam was a rare woman and a fine healer.”

As he frequently did when Claire was mentioned, Jamie steeled himself against the wave of emptiness. He used his right hand, clenching it into a fist. Faith noticed and began to play with his hand, tracing the lines of the scars on his fingers and through the back of his palm, fingering the bones beneath the skin. Something about the way her tiny fingers moved proved soothing rather than painful.

Jamie turned his attention back to Ned.

“Did I hear right? The deed has been properly filed?”

“Aye. I had authorized copies drawn up as well,” Ned explained, sorting through the documents he had with him and producing several official looking pages, passing them around for inspection. “I’ll keep a copy for my records—and yer protection—and then the rest are for you. I dinna put it past some of the more reckless Redcoat officers and soldiers to destroy what they may think is the only copy of a document such as this so it may prove useful to have more than one concealed in various places about the house,” he advised with a nod.

“Thank ye, Ned,” Jamie said with a deep sincerity. “Ye’ve been a help to many.”

“Well… I must admit that bringing these copies to ye was only one of the reasons I came,” Ned said carefully.

“And what was the other?” Jenny asked, leaning back in her seat and raising an eyebrow in inquiry.

“I’ve heard rumors about a number of… old acquaintances. Many, as ye’ll know, didna survive the fighting; a good many managed to escape to France and the Americas; and more still are incarcerated by the English awaiting trial and either the hangman’s noose or simply a transfer to more permanent imprisonment.”

“Murtagh Fraser,” Ned said quietly.

“Alive?” Ian asked.

“Aye. Captured as best I know and awaiting trial. I dinna ken where but I’ll look into it if ye like and keep ye abreast of any developments,” Ned promised. “There’s no much I can do for him and inserting myself on his behalf… it may affect—”

Jamie waved a dismissive hand. “There’s naught he’d want ye to do for him. He’d no want ye risking yerself or yer ability to fight the English confiscating lands and estates left and right,” Jamie said with certainty. “Hearing how he fares will be enough.”

“If I find him and can speak to him is there a message ye want me to relay?”

Jamie looked down at Faith. “What do ye want Ned to tell Murtagh should he find him?” Jamie asked her.

“Mama?”

“Murtagh,” he repeated with a slight catch in his throat.

“I miss them,” Faith said with a sigh, nuzzling against Jamie.

“Aye, lass,” Jenny remarked, “I do too.”

“Tell him that,” Jamie turned to Ned. “Tell him… his godchildren miss him. All of us miss him.”

“I’ll pass the message along when I locate him,” Ned promised. “Now… I’m a bit worn down from all the excitement. Would ye all please excuse me that I might retire for the evening and—”

“Not till ye’ve had a bite to eat,” Jenny insisted, rising and moving to clear the children from the kitchen that the adults might eat and continue to converse in greater peace.
Claire came awake as she felt fingers trailing down her arm, an unexpected warmth at her back. There was a moment of hesitation before the hand caressed the swell of her enormously pregnant belly—it was a familiar touch, the one she longed for rather than the one she shied from. Jamie. She arched into him, luxuriating in the feel of his body against hers—both of them naked beneath the light blanket apparently. His lips brushed her shoulder and sent a shiver down her spine that made her aware of the various aches and yearnings of her shared body. The ache in her hips had usually dissipated after a night sleeping on her side but perhaps it was the deep-seated wanting of him that had her writhing against him trying to find a more comfortable position.

Everything about her body felt heavy—her legs, her belly, her breasts. But Jamie’s touch was light, soft, tender. It made her fight against the lethargy of pregnancy—the hindered movements and general exhaustion. She found his hand and brought it to her breast, pressing his palm hard against it. They were sore and needed to be suckled for real relief. Jamie’s strong fingers massaged it, which proved distracting and was almost as effective as what she really needed.

She could feel Jamie’s cock stirring against her—there was something else that she wanted—needed—that could prove to be a more effective distraction and it seemed it might give Jamie some relief too.

A sharp pain radiated outward from inside her and she bent instinctively around her belly. The source of the pain was almost certainly a kick—to one of her kidneys most likely; the lingering pain settled in her lower back where so much of the aches accumulated. She didn’t remember being so uncomfortable when she carried Faith—though of course, she hadn’t carried Faith so long.

Faith.

She rubbed absently at the side of her belly, feeling the large mass of the child inside and remembered how much calmer her first had been.

If Jamie was beside her, Faith must be nearby. No. She was too old to still be sleeping in the cradle at the foot of their bed—she’d have a cot of her own by now, probably in the nursery with Maggie and Kitty. Besides, her cradle would soon have a new occupant. She chuckled quietly at the brief window before they would share their room with another child—it hadn’t even arrived yet and already they had to be careful not to disturb it too much with their attempts at lovemaking.
Jamie had brought his hand back down from her breast and rubbed circles into her belly. The child shifted gently within her as it drifted back to sleep.

She knew there wasn’t much time but the depth of her desperation and need surprised her as she guided his hand down to the warm dampness between her legs. His desire was strong too but he was taking his time about it, letting her feel every goose pimple his fingertips raised as they trailed down her silky thigh before hooking her knee and pulling her legs open as he drew it up and over his own.

She reached down to where the length of his cock pulsed against the length of the crease between her legs. He was more than ready as she guided him inside and he began to thrust, thoroughly stroking and stoking her from the inside out. She kept her fingers right where they were joined, feeling him slip through them as he pushed deeper and deeper into her.

His breathing was ragged as he moved within her, releasing slow building waves of tension that were collecting low in her belly beneath the growing child they had created—in a part of her that wasn’t shared, that still belonged entirely to her. She gasped at the tremor that rippled through her thighs when Jamie’s fingers began to massage the bundle of nerves that was centimeters from where her own fingers had been busily teasing him. He’d lost the spot and she quickly took control of helping him to locate it again.

The tension broke free and rippled out through her and into Jamie until she felt his thighs shudder against hers, his climax reaching into her and drawing hers out longer. But there was something more underlying her release, creeping up beneath the euphoria of the moment. She struggled against it, drawing her legs together to trap that fleeting bliss.

She came awake suddenly, her hand wet between her legs. It wasn’t right but it wouldn’t be the first time the baby had kicked her bladder a little too hard while she was sleeping. She kept her hand pressed between her legs as she struggled to rise from the tangled—and damp—bedclothes, her mind and muscles trying to contain the contents of her bladder until she could make it to the toilet.

She tried to tug the door closed with her foot and in her haste pulled it too hard causing it to slam. As she rucked up her nightgown and sat on the toilet, she prayed it hadn’t been loud enough to wake Frank. He had taken to sleeping in the guest room the last few weeks. As her pregnancy advanced, she found it increasingly difficult to find any position that was comfortable for sleeping for long periods of time—flat on her back put too much pressure on her hips and lower back; if she piled up the pillows and reclined, the baby grew too active; if she slept on her side, the baby quieted but that too began to hurt her hips after a while, even if she placed a pillow between her knees—and the maneuverings necessary for her to achieve any kind of rest were much easier if she had the bed to herself.

“Claire?” she heard Frank ask from the other side of the door. “Are you all right?”

“Yes, Frank,” she called, trying not to sound exasperated. “I just needed the toilet again.”

“Oh,” he replied though it was slightly distorted by a yawn.

Claire sighed and reached for the toilet paper but noticed that there was a reddish tinge to her hand and it immediately caused her to gasp with panic—blood. She couldn’t see around her belly to the toilet water below to see how bad the bleeding was so she used the toilet paper instead, praying it had already stopped—she would call the doctor as soon as she was out of the bathroom and schedule an appointment. But though the toilet paper came away heavily damp, it wasn’t the shocking crimson she feared—only faintly tinged pink. She tried holding and releasing her bladder to be sure it was empty but was aware of a disconcerting trickling that persisted.
And then a wave of discomfort grabbed her behind her kidneys and wrapped itself around her belly, pulling her breath in through her teeth in a gasping whistle.

“Claire?” Frank called again, a little more fervently than before. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

She nodded though she knew he couldn’t see her but speech was not something she could manage at the moment. Counting, she should probably start counting… like you do with thunder and lightning… how long between the flash and the boom. It lasted somewhere between twenty and thirty seconds, the flash of pain and the booming release of its hold on her.

She grabbed the cleanest towel at hand and clamped it between her legs when she rose from the toilet. She was either leaking amniotic fluid or her water had broken. In her experience the handful of times she’d acted as a midwife’s assistant, the waters usually broke in a rush rather than a trickle, but she was pretty sure the pain was a contraction.

“Frank,” she called as she did her best to waddle around the bathroom flushing the toilet and rinsing her hands, “I need you to pull my bag out and bring the car around while I call the hospital to let them know we’re coming.”

“You said you were fine,” he exclaimed, not with exasperation but with fear.

“I am fine,” she insisted. “I’m just in labor.” She pulled the damp towel from between her legs to check it again—wet but no signs of blood. “It will be some time yet but I don’t want to push things too long before we go to the hospital.”

“No,” he muttered on the other side of the door. “Wouldn’t want that,” she could hear him continue to mutter as he moved about the bedroom when she emerged. “…giving birth in a cab…” Then he was out of the room and she crossed to call her doctor and the hospital to let them know she was coming.

They asked her some basic questions about her pains but she couldn’t tell them when exactly they had started. “I was trying to stay late in bed and rest and my husband doesn’t teach on Mondays,” she explained.

“Well we’ll see you soon, Mrs. Randall,” the nurse on the other end said with a smile in her calming voice before hanging up.

Claire wished she felt calmer but her hands shook as she hung up the phone. She still had the towel clenched between her thighs and kept checking it though she was pretty sure the trickle of fluid had stopped.

She tried telling herself that she had done this all before—that if she could survive the birthing ordeal that had given her Faith, she could survive it again. But it didn’t help. She hadn’t been through it all before, not really. And though she was doing better about holding on to the hope that Mrs. Graham’s searching would help her find the marks of her first child in history, the quiet terror of her situation only made her miss her family more—Faith, who should be waiting impatiently to meet her younger sibling; Jenny, who should be there talking and walking her through it all just as she had done for her sister-in-law twice before; Jamie…

She tried to conjure the remembered warmth of him at her back, the solid feel of his body against hers. They’d been there minutes earlier in her dreaming but evaded her now. It had all been an illusion, a figment of her dreaming imagination—possibly impacted by the shifting in her body and of the child as it prepared for birth. Hadn’t Jenny described something like that once? The movements of a child late in pregnancy, near to delivery…
She was distracted as Frank showed up at the door of the bedroom.

“The car is out front,” he told her with mild panic. “Are you coming down now or…”

She nodded and stood asking him, “Could you grab me a coat?” before pulling the towel from between her legs and examining her nightgown—it wasn’t too damp from the ordeal and glancing over at the bed sheets, they didn’t appear to have suffered much either; she had made it to the toilet in time to escape making too big a mess. She shuffled to the bathroom again and tossed the towel into the bathtub then slipped her feet into a pair of clogs—the only thing she could wear despite their unsuitability for the approaching winter.

She breathed steadily as she moved through the house and to the car hoping it would help to calm her nerves or at least help keep Frank calm until they got to the hospital.

Another contraction struck while they were on the road and she fought to keep from yelling at Frank when he made moves to pull the car over. “If you pull off here we’ll be stuck on a one-way street and will have to go further around to get back on the road we need to get to the hospital,” she told him through clenched teeth as she clutched her belly with one arm and dug her finger nails into the car door handle with the other.

The pains were shocking when they first struck because they were unexpected but as she counted her way through it she came closer to reaching a point where it was bearable—but she also knew that she was only in the very early stages of labor and that they would undoubtedly grow worse as things advanced.

When they arrived at the front desk Claire was ushered into a wheelchair and taken upstairs.

“I’m afraid Dr. Russell has three other patients in labor at the moment so he’ll be relying on his colleague Dr. Fuller to assist him,” the nurse said as she helped Claire out of her nightgown and into a hospital gown. “But you should have nothing to worry about—Dr. Fuller is wonderful. He’ll be in to check you shortly and then I’ll be helping him with administering your ether and monitoring you through delivery and recovery.”

“No,” Claire said shaking her head adamantly. “I don’t want the ether.”

“Claire,” Frank began to object but the nurse recognized Claire’s determination and didn’t argue; instead she stepped in and offered to show Frank down to the waiting area where the other expectant fathers were kept.

Alone in the hospital room for the moment, Claire let out a breath.

She fought through her memories to the day Faith was born. She remembered the adrenaline that carried her to the woods that day and the tearing pain in her abdomen that, looking back, had probably been her placenta tearing loose. The sharp scent of her blood and sweat had filled her nostrils as she fell and grew cold.

She didn’t remember being carried away from the woods or being carried into l’hopital. There had been pain during the labor and delivery but it was detached from her in a way that still scared her more than two years later. She didn’t want to feel like that again—floating and observing rather than within her body, commanding it directly.

Two of the nuns had assisted Mother Hildegarde, holding Claire down and her legs apart, pushing on her abdomen, helping her body to birth Faith while Mother Hildegarde and guided her out as gently as possible. Claire knew that was what must have happened though she didn’t remember the
process itself… just the nuns’ faces staring down at her, their lips moving with… instructions? words of encouragement? The first thing she remembered hearing was the ringing in her ears that became Faith’s ragged, strained breathing after Mother Hildegarde brought the cleaned and wrapped infant to her and placed her on Claire’s chest. Comprehension of everything that had happened came later—after Master Raymond had paid his visit to her during the fever, after she’d seen the healing blue light.

What came back to Claire now was the fear, the sense of helplessness she’d felt as she stood in those woods watching Jamie and Black Jack Randall—powerless to stop them from killing one another, powerless to keep her child from coming early… and she’d been powerless in the face of time and history, losing both her husband and child since then too.

“Hello Mrs. Randall,” a young man in a long white laboratory coat said cheerfully as he came into the room. “I’m Dr. Fuller. I’ll be assisting Dr. Russell with your delivery today. Now, Nurse Russell tells me you don’t want to use ether during your labor and delivery and I’m going to advise you to reconsider,” he said, preparing to launch into what promised to be a practiced lecture regarding the relative comfort offered by the ether.

Claire stopped him before he could start.

“How many infants have you delivered, Dr. Fuller?”

“Oh, uh… at least a dozen, Mrs. Randall—you needn’t have any worries on that account,” he said with an immodest smile.

“How many of those were to anesthetized mothers?”

Redness crept up his neck and into his cheeks. “It is common practice these days—”

“Well then this’ll be a first for you,” Claire asserted as she felt another contraction beginning. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed and started pacing and breathing heavily.

“Uh…” Dr. Fuller glanced at her chart and tried to pick up with part of his sales pitch. “Where you’re a first-time mother, you may not be completely prepared for the pain that—”

“I know what I’m getting myself into so you can stop right there,” she told him as she passed by the door to the room. She stopped herself short of explaining that in fact, she was not a “first-time” mother, the words catching in her throat and only making their way out as a groan.

Nurse Gerard spotted her from the nurses’ station only a few yards away and jumped to her feet hastening over to see if the good doctor required her assistance.

“Mrs. Randall,” Dr. Fuller tried to continue.

“Dr. Fuller,” Claire rounded on him. She focused her energy on her words and addressing him forcefully in order to distract herself from the contraction. “I have assisted in delivering half a dozen infants myself and in none of those cases was ether or any other anesthetic used,” she informed him, remembering Jenny and the tenants at Lallybroch and the babes themselves—Maggie, Kitty, Craig, Lileas, Rhona, and Glen.

“Dr. Fuller,” Nurse Gerard spoke up. “Dr. Russell’s been called into an emergency situation. He’ll need you to monitor the sedation of his other laboring mothers and perhaps to oversee some of the births yourself. I can help Mrs. Randall here through her labor if you’re not up to it personally.” Her words were heavy with judgment and challenge but Dr. Fuller appeared to be too inexperienced to recognize them.
“Wonderful. The contraction appears to have passed,” he said with relief. “Let’s help Mrs. Randall over to the bed so I can see how she’s progressing and then as things move along, Nurse Gerard here will keep me apprised of the situation.”

Claire reached for Nurse Gerard’s arm, leaning on her as she waddled back to the bed. “Don’t worry, Mrs. Randall—I’ve got you,” she said with quiet reassurance.

Claire breathed a little easier having found an ally.

When Dr. Fuller came into Claire’s hospital room in the late afternoon to check her progress again, he was clearly aghast to see her still pacing about, leaning against the wall as she took deep breaths and let out low moans to get through her contractions.

“You really ought to be in bed where you can rest during the time between,” he advised her.

“If I lie in bed then gravity can’t help move things along,” Claire pointed out to the skeptical doctor.

Still, despite her efforts to speed her labor along, Claire was only about halfway to where she needed to be.

“Nurse Gerard, why don’t you pop down to the waiting room and give Mrs. Randall’s husband an update on her progress in a few minutes—he may want to come back here for a brief visit with his wife to help bolster her spirits,” Dr. Fuller said, pulling the nurse aside to outline what it was he wanted her to tell Mr. Randall about his wife’s condition.

Claire couldn’t hear what it was the doctor was saying but she knew how to read a nurse’s body language. Nurse Gerard gave a quick reassurance to the doctor who was out of the room again before she could finish rolling her eyes behind his back. Claire snorted which made Nurse Gerard smile.

“I remember a few doctors like him from the war,” Claire confessed as Nurse Gerard helped her back out of bed to resume her laps of the hospital room. “More experienced than anyone of a lower rank, whatever the reality may be.”

“You’re a nurse?”

“I was—a battlefield nurse.”

“Well if you survived combat, you can certainly survive this,” Nurse Gerard said with a wink.

Claire felt her face freeze into formality and looked down at the ground to be sure there were no obstacles in her way. “I hope so,” she responded quietly. Still inundated with memories of her ordeal at l’hôpital during Faith’s birth, it occurred to her how unreliable her sense of time still was. It must have been hours between her collapse in the woods and when she finally had Faith wrapped and placed on her chest—longer still before the fever had left her body and true lucidity returned.

Here she could watch the minutes ticking away, counting down to an unknown time. It had been such a close call last time, the panic was creeping up in her with each passing hour. The sun setting outside her window and the darkness invading the hospital room weren’t helping. Nurse Gerard crossed to turn on the lights in the room but it wouldn’t be as bright as the sunlight—they couldn’t keep as many of Claire’s doubts and fears at bay.

Nurse Gerard looked askance at Claire. “You’ve seen more than just soldiers die haven’t you,” she prodded. “You’ve been there when a birthing’s gone sideways.”
Claire nodded. “My… well… my former sister-in-law had a close call with her second,” Claire said, stopping and starting as she moved away from discussing Faith. “Her girl was breach and gave her a hell of a time of it.”

Nurse Gerard’s eyes narrowed and she shook her head. “No, that’s not what’s got you scared. It’s something deeper—something more personal. You don’t have to say if you don’t want to but you don’t have to worry about me flapping my jaw to anyone. To be honest, I miss talking the nervous mamas through labor. Nowadays they all come in and get put under. Makes this floor a creepy place sometimes,” she shuddered glancing over her shoulder to the hallway beyond the door.

Claire couldn’t help the half-smile that flitted across her face.

“My… my first pregnancy,” she said slowly. “The placenta detached and I was only about seven months.”

It was enough for Nurse Gerard to press her lips together and nod sympathetically. “You delivered early.”

Claire nodded.

“Was… was that child by your first husband?”

Claire must have looked startled for Nurse Gerard reached out and rubbed her arm reassuringly.

“You mentioned your former sister-in-law and your husband… well, he’s clearly a first-timer. If he had been through… well, I think he’d be more persistent in checking up on you. Did you lose your first husband in the war then?”

“Yes,” Claire said flatly, letting Nurse Gerard think what she would. It was as close to the full truth as Claire could tell her and more than she really wanted to share—the tightness in her chest at the thought of Jamie and Faith, of the life she’d lost to a different war… She’d lived through a world war and she’d lived through a war that destroyed her world, they just weren’t the same war.

“If there’s anything you need, just let me know, okay Mrs. Randall?”

“Claire. Please… I’d rather you call me Claire.”

“Then I want you to go ahead and call me Ruth,” Nurse Gerard insisted. “Do… do you have a name picked for this one? If you don’t want to tell me—if you want to wait—”

“Brian,” Claire said quickly—having someone who would know, who could make sure the child was properly named should anything happen, calmed her. “Brian James if it’s a boy. And if it’s a girl, Brianna Ellen.”

Nurse Gerard smiled and nodded. “Good strong choices—both of them. Hopefully it won’t be too much longer till you know which it is. Now I need to go tell your husband how you’re doing but I’ll be back soon.”

Nurse Gerard held Claire’s hand—and helped keep a very nervous Dr. Fuller calm—when it was time for her to push.

Day had faded and with it much of Claire’s optimism. The harsh artificial light of the hospital and the stinging scent of the antiseptics was making her head pound. Nurse Gerard urged her to have more water and ice chips but there wasn’t enough time left—Claire was ready for it all to be over one way
“You need to bear down harder, Mrs. Randall,” Dr. Fuller urged her from his position between the cold metal stirrups. “The baby’s crowning.”

It felt like she was being pulled inside out but Claire obeyed her body and put every ounce of herself that she could muster into pushing the child from her womb.

“Nurse,” Dr. Fuller said in a nervous voice to one of Nurse Gerard’s colleagues who was assisting him since Nurse Gerard was occupied with Claire, “Would you have Dr. Russell summoned here as soon as he’s able?”

His voice was low but it was enough for Claire to start to panic—something was wrong; she must have started bleeding and Dr. Fuller didn’t know how to stop it or there was something wrong with the baby. Claire grunted as she continued to push.

Nurse Gerard looked to see what had Dr. Fuller so uncertain and nearly laughed.

“You’re doing great, Claire,” she said as she shifted down, leaving Claire to grip the bed rail. “There’s nothing wrong,” she reassured, eyeing Dr. Fuller with disapproval—the other nurse hovered by the door, caught between Nurse Gerard’s certainty and Dr. Fuller’s obvious nervousness. “Your little one just has a caul is all. Take a deep breath and give one more good push and your little one will be here.”

The child’s shoulder slid free with the rest of its body following. Claire gasped and lay back on the pillows, a hollow, alone feeling already beginning to creep into her bones. She closed her eyes and let the tears slip silently down past her temples and tickle her ears. A moment later there was a hearty cry and her eyes flew open again.

Faith hadn’t done that when she was born—her lungs had been too weak for a proper cry. Claire didn’t know how long it was between Faith’s birth and the moment Mother Hildegarde had roused her to lay Faith on her chest.

“You have a Brianna,” Nurse Gerard told her with an obvious smile. She had taken the baby from Dr. Fuller who set about delivering the afterbirth—a far more comfortable task for him. Nurse Gerard had the baby at a nearby examination table to clean and wrap her. “And a lucky little lady she’ll be, I’m sure,” Nurse Gerard insisted as she brought the wailing infant over to Claire. “There, now. Here’s your mother.” She placed the child in Claire’s arms then reached back to help Claire sit up as she plumped the pillows behind her head.

"Thank you, Ruth," Claire said quietly, glancing up at the nurse. Nurse Gerard dropped her hand to Claire’s shoulder and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"My pleasure, Claire."

The baby stopped crying but her face remained red from the effort, her face scrunched and dissatisfied with the world as she’d entered it.

“Congratulations, Mrs. Randall,” Dr. Fuller said with a bit more life in his voice than had been there a few moments earlier.

“You did well, doctor,” Nurse Gerard complimented him. “Now you’ve done a real delivery. Why don’t you go see to the woman’s husband while she and the baby settle and get a bit of rest,” she suggested, ushering him toward the door. “I’ll take care of the certificate paperwork and will have it ready at the desk for you and the father to sign when you get back.”
Claire didn’t hear any of the exchange. Her full attention was on the infant in her arms, a warm, solid weight—tangible in a way that had eluded her through so much of her pregnancy.

She ran her thumb lightly along the baby’s brow eliciting a twitch in the corner of her eye as she tried working those muscles for the first time and blinked. They were Jamie’s eyes… Faith’s eyes… Claire remembered holding Faith—she’d been so much smaller—and the way she too had struggled to open her eyes that first time. Faith had been so pale, so delicate; Brianna was ruddy and robust. Though the reddish color of the sparse hair Brianna had could be due to some of the blood of birth, Claire suspected it was another of the many things she had inherited from Jamie. He seemed to be stamped all over the child, more so than Faith had been.

“Brianna,” Claire murmured quietly. She was redder than Faith had been, as well as bigger; stronger but just as helpless, just as reliant on her mother as her sister had been.

The hollow feeling in her gut began to fade leaving her just plain sore. She ached for the rest of her family but in some vague way knew that Jamie must be watching them now and perhaps Faith was too—she would find out what happened to her first daughter. They should have all been together—Brianna in her arms while Jamie carried Faith in and sat her on the bed where she could coo over her baby sister. The biggest lump in her throat was tied to Faith; in conjuring an image of her daughter, Claire knew it must be wrong. She could picture Faith as she’d been asleep in Jenny’s arms, always that small toddler. But she wouldn’t be anymore; it had been a year and a half since then and Faith would be turning three at her next birthday.

But Claire swallowed the lump as best she could and focused on the baby in her arms. She was no longer as alone as she had been; she had the most vulnerable of her family with her and she would stop at nothing to protect her little Brianna.

“There’s two of us now,” she whispered running her finger down the line of Brianna’s nose, over her pursed lips, and along her chin and jaw. Brianna sighed and went to sleep, her mouth twitching into a faint smile as she succumbed, her breathing deep, steady, and sure.
Faith turns three at Lallybroch.

At a slight movement nearby, Faith’s eyes flew open. “Da?” she asked eagerly.

“Pardon ma soeur,” Fergus’ low whisper answered as his hand brushed her cheek. “I did not mean to wake you. He will be up to see you soon, I am sure.”

Faith fought to sit up, and Fergus protested.

“Non, you must return to sleep.”

But Faith had already slipped out of bed and darted past Fergus to the door. He cursed quietly in French, glancing to be sure that Faith’s Murray cousins hadn’t been roused by the noise.

Faith was down the hall and had her face pressed to the dowels of the railing, peering down at the hall below. A fire was low in the hearth and two of the dogs were curled on the floor in front of it. One of them lifted his head, ears pricking at the sound of Fergus coming up behind her again, urging her to return to her bed to wait for Jamie to come to her. When the canine head settled once more on the back of its companion, Faith crept further along and started down the stairs leaving Fergus rolling his eyes and turning to go back to his own bed.

There were voices coming from the kitchen—Uncle Ian, Auntie Jenny, and Da.

She scampered to the kitchen, hoping to take them by surprise. Their voices rose as she approached.

“I dinna ken that ye’ll be able to wake her,” Auntie Jenny was saying from her chair. Uncle Ian sat close enough for Auntie Jenny to have one of her feet in his lap and the other in his hands. She sighed as his he ground his fingers into the arch of her foot. “She gets verra tired at night now she’s grown too old to nap during the day.”

Faith pressed her back to the outside wall of the kitchen, just in the shadows of the dim light that spilled through the door and onto the floor from the candles handful of candles and the low hearth fire.

“Ah,” Jamie scoffed, rising from his seat. “I’ll go surprise her. She’ll no sleep through a birthday surprise from her Da.”

Faith covered her mouth with both hands to keep from laughing as Da walked right past her without seeing her. She listened for his footsteps on the stairs before letting a little giggle slip out. Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian were still in the kitchen so she couldn’t hide in there—she would have to wait for Da to come rushing back downstairs looking for her before popping out at him and surprising him.

“Ye all right?” Uncle Ian asked Auntie Jenny. Faith could hear the concern in his voice and dared a quick peek around the doorframe. Auntie Jenny’s feet were on the floor again and she was pulling herself up from the chair to walk around a bit and rub her swelling belly.
“Aye,” she said through grit teeth. “They’re fightin’ is all. Lord, what are we goin’ to do wi’ two more mouths.”

Faith had known first that there were two babies in Auntie Jenny’s belly though no one believed her until they quickened and Auntie Jenny began to distinguish the movements of one from the other.

They’d been alone in the garden one afternoon when Jenny quietly asked, “Faith, how d’ye ken I’m carrying two bairns?”

Faith had frowned at her aunt and blinked before shrugging. “They’re different colors.”

Uncertain what to make of it, Jenny hadn’t asked anything further but she did make a point of more closely watching Faith. The lass was too young for all her healing skills to be put down to natural talent or instinct but none were willing to voice anything else in reference to Jamie Fraser’s daughter. Better to just watch from a safe distance.

More troubling than Faith’s having correctly guessed her aunt was carrying twins were the prospects of the difficult birth that lay ahead and the additional mouths to feed and backs to clothe. Jamie had begun hinting at leaving the relative safety but definite constrictions of the priest hole for the relative safety but more open possibilities of the cave.

“The hunting helps wi’ the matter of feeding everyone,” he would mention when someone inevitably mentioned the difficulties of making supplies stretch. “I could head up to the cave more often to contribute… Of course… to go back and forth so often tempts trouble to cross my path… Perhaps it would be best to stay away a few days at a time—it would allow me to catch more than a rabbit or two and a slew of squirrels. If I were to take down a stag or the like, I would need to return wi’ it sooner for proper butchering…”

“And what of Faith?” Jenny always asked as a counter argument.

“I’m no doing her much good trapped down there in that hole,” he finally started pointing out to her. “You and Ian do more for her than I’ve a right to ask and I’m grateful for it. I would that I could do something to repay ye and to help care for the lot of ye instead of constantly putting ye in danger. I can do that better from the cave—much as it tears my heart to think of being parted from her… if she’ll be safer for it, then I’ll do it.”

As yet, however, he had refrained from setting out a timeline for when he would take up a more permanent residence in the cave. Jenny suspected he was waiting to see how the twins’ birth unfolded and was quietly grateful to him for waiting though there wouldn’t be much he could do in any case.

But on this particular occasion Jamie and Jenny had refrained from discussing the controversial subject in favor of Jamie’s determination to do something special for Faith for her birthday.

“I missed her birth and thus far I’ve been present to mark the day with her but no in any meaningful way—save her first birthday with… with Claire… but that was on the heels of Charles’ letter and overshadowed by the prospect of our leaving,” Jamie explained. “And last year I was still recovering.”

“Ye’ve something in mind?”

“I want to have her up in our old room for a night—I want to give her something of her mother’s… I just… dinna ken what yet.”

“Everything’s still up there,” Jenny said with an understanding nod. “I’ll find a way to keep her out
of the way while ye're looking.”

“I'll just wait to wake her till I'm through,” Jamie asserted.

Jenny laughed. “I've yet to see the day a child naturally does what’s most convenient for his parents.”

Faith yawned in her place against the outer wall of the kitchen. She slid to sit on the floor to wait for Da to return searching for her—she wished he would hurry up because waiting was boring.

Auntie Jenny was bent forward leaning against the table while Uncle Ian rubbed her back and shoulders. It sounded like the bairns had calmed a bit but Auntie Jenny was still uncomfortable.

“Ye belong in bed,” Uncle Ian chided her.

“Being abed doesna mean I'll be able to sleep.”

“No, but ye’ll be restin’ all the same. Doesna do to o'er work yerself—especially in a state like yers. Ye dinna want Jamie to…”

“Shhh,” Jenny hissed, her voice dropping considerably. “Keep yer voice down, will ye—beag cluasan.”

“Aye. Did Jamie tell ye what it was he had in mind for wee Faith?” Ian said, his warm voice rising. “He’s been at work on it for some time.”

“Fragile thing, as I understand it,” Jenny replied. “I dinna think it will stand being dropped or the like. I do hope Jamie has a steady hand and doesna lose his hold of it—would be terrible if someone were to give him a fright.”

Faith’s tired eyes popped open again and she gasped, covering her mouth with both hands.

“Ye havena heard anything from upstairs, have ye? I’d ha’ thought Jamie would have managed to wake her by now.”

“Well, he had to fetch her surprise,” Jenny pointed out. “Might be it was well hid.”

Faith shot to her feet and quietly darted back toward the stairs, eager to get back into bed before Da could find her missing.

She came up behind him in the hallway and froze, uncertain what to do to keep from startling him.

“Da,” she finally whispered. “Da.”

He turned and spotted her. “Faith? What in the good Lord’s name are ye doing out of bed? I was just goin’ to fetch ye.”

Faith’s face flamed as she threw herself at his leg.

“I’m sorry da,” she said, close to tears.

“What’s this now?”

“I wanted to surprise ye,” she said. “I got out of bed and went to hide so ye wouldna find me.”

Jamie bent and got a grip of Faith up under her arms, then hoisted her from her feet.
“Ye meant for me to find yer bed empty? But then I should ha’ worried about ye.” His tone was gentle as she trembled in his arms with shame.

“I kent it but I thought ye’d be glad again when I jumped out,” Faith explained.

“Aye, I would ha’ been but I’d as soon do without the fright to start.”

Faith buried her face in his neck and he could feel the heat of her embarrassment. “I only wanted to surprise ye, Da.”

He began walking slowly down the hall towards the room he’d shared with Claire.

“I ken ye didna mean any harm. But ye’re getting older now, my wee uan. Ye need to start thinking about how others might view yer actions. You wanted to surprise me but ye didna think of how scared I’d be to find yer bed empty,” he continued explaining. There was no harshness in his tone, only his usual smooth, soothing rhythm. “See there’s good surprises and bad surprises. Finding ye missing would ha’ been a bad surprise—the last thing I want in the world is to lose ye.” He paused, having arrived at the door. “Why did ye change yer mind, a nighean? Why’d ye no stay hid as ye intended?”

Faith lifted her head to peer up at him. “Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian said the present ye had fer me might break.”

“What?”

“If ye were surprised and dropped it they said it would break. I heard them but they didna know I was there.” She looked down and around, suddenly remembering more than just her embarrassment. “Where is it? Ye dinna have hold of anything but me. Did ye no say ye were gonna surprise me wi’ a present? I heard ye before ye left the kitchen.”

Jamie chuckled and rolled his eyes before kissing his daughter’s frowning brow.

“Ye ken how we were talking of surprises a moment ago? Well, ye’re birthday present is one of the good kind,” he told her turning the handle on the bedroom door. “Ye’re no likely to remember this room much, but this was our room before it all—yer mother’s and mine, but yers too. Ye were a wee thing in yer cradle at the foot of the bed there.” He gave a nod to the space where the cradle still sat unused, waiting; he’d hastily wiped away a layer of dust when he’d been up earlier.

There was a low fire in the grate lighting the room while Jamie had opened the windows to air the space out. When he’d first come in earlier, he’d lain on the bed for at least ten minutes breathing deeply. The air had an earthenness to its scent that was a combination of the staleness of having been closed for so long and traces of Claire and her herbs.

He set Faith on the ground and crossed to check the fire again raking the embers into a neater pile and adding another log. When he turned back, Faith was frowning and turning her head about like she heard something but couldn’t figure out from which direction the noise originated.

“Ah, yer good surprise,” Jamie said as he pushed himself back up and crossed to the bed, scooping Faith up into his arms once more and delighting in her giggle. “I couldna decide what would be best present for ye so I thought I’d let ye choose for yerself.” He plopped her down at the edge of the bed.

Scattered across the coverlet was an assortment of trinkets and tokens he decided she was old enough to have. Most of them had belonged to Claire with a few of his own items sprinkled in as well. Faith poked through the collection, raising objects one at a time for Jamie to explain.
“That’s Sawny,” he said of a small wooden snake. “Yer Uncle Willie carved him for me when I was a wee lad—no much older than you.”

“I don’t have and Uncle Willie,” Faith protested.

“Ye would have had he lived but he died just a few years after he gave me Sawny.” Jamie reached out to take the snake and rubbed his thumb over its head briefly. Faith had already moved on to something else.

“Now if ye choose that, ye’ll no be able to wear it but for special occasions and only when yer Aunt Jenny says so,” Jamie cautioned as Faith picked up a bracelet of pearls and slipped it over her wrist; too big, it slid down to the crook of her elbow.

“It’s nice,” Faith said, running her small fingers over the irregular pearls.

“Aye. It was yer mother’s. Matched a necklace she had once.” Watching Faith begin to roll the strand of pearls up and down her forearm, Jamie reached out and helped her take it off. “Perhaps, ye wait on this one for it to fit ye better, aye? Here—what about these instead.” He offered her two bracelets that appeared to be made of horn but had silver at their tips. “Ye’ll no remember Murtagh verra well either, but he had these made up for yer Grannie Ellen. Aunt Jenny gave them to Mama the first I brought her here to Lallybroch. I think Murtagh would want ye to have them now—he’s yer godfather, ye ken.”

These bracelets were also too big for Faith’s small wrists but they proved less delicate than the pearl bracelet—they wouldn’t need to be hidden as carefully either should Redcoats appear again in search of additional provisions and whatever else of value they could get away with confiscating.

Leaving the bracelets on her arms, Faith continued exploring the treasures on the bed. She picked up the skull of a small animal—some sort of rodent, most likely.

“I dinna ken where yer mother got some of these bits and pieces,” Jamie remarked plucking the small skull from Faith’s palm. “Jenny says some of them came in the packages from France. Dinna think yer mam used them for her physicking though. But if there was someone at l’hopital who believed in such charms, perhaps it was them as sent them to her.”

Faith’s face had gone a bit pale and her hand had stopped in the air above what she’d been reaching for—a pair of rough amethyst crystals mounted and strung on chains.

“What’s those?” she asked, drawing her hand back and keeping her eyes on the stones.

Jamie frowned as he watched Faith. He took hold of the purple stones—they looked small in his large palm.

“More trinkets from Paris. This one’s about yer size and the other was yer mam’s, I suppose.”

Faith was still staring transfixed at the necklaces. He began to gather the other objects from the bed and put them away in a nearby box.

“It’s late and ye need to get to bed,” Jamie said with a sad smile. Faith’s gaze had followed the necklaces into the box and she continued to watch the container as though she could see through the wooden sides to the objects inside.

He set the box aside again and reached out to tilt Faith’s chin up so she would look at him.

“Mo uan,” he whispered finally getting her to blink. “Yer mam would be so verra proud of ye.”
His tone had grown serious and somber and Faith picked up on it, pushing herself up onto her knees and reaching her arms out to wrap around his neck. He clutched her to him and let himself feel both his losses and his blessings. He and Faith had each other just as Claire had the wee bairn—Christ, the child would be about six months old now; had it been a lad or a lass? How difficult had the birth been on Claire?

Lifting her, he turned and carried her to the other side of the bed—he would always think of it as Claire’s side—and pulled the covers back before laying Faith down and tucking her in. The boar tusk bracelets rested in the crooks of her elbows as she turned toward Jamie’s side of the bed and tucked her hands beneath her cheek. He slipped back around and into bed beside her, reaching over to brush a curl out of her eyes.

Faith fidgeted for a few minutes trying to get comfortable before she reached out to take Jamie’s hand in both of hers so she could play with his fingers as she fell asleep. It was something she had done frequently as an infant; picking at the fine hairs on his knuckles, running her fingers over various scars and scabs acquired in the course of field work, flexing and folding the stiff fingers on his right hand.

But there was something specific on his left hand that was a constant source of interest for her. She rarely saw it in the light, relying instead on her own sensitive fingertips to find it at the base of his thumb. The curve was sharper than the others on his hand, an unfinished circle. She was starting to learn her letters and would have recognized the “C” if she’d been able to get a proper look at it.

“How did ye get this, Da?” she whispered, pressing it with the pad of her thumb as though she might be able to absorb the mark into her own thumbprint.

“Yer Mama did that before I sent her through the fairy stones—so everyone would ken I belonged to her,” Jamie explained. He brought his hand with hers still clinging to it up to his lips to press a kiss to the faint “C” and then to shower over-exaggerated kisses on Faith’s knuckles and the backs of her hands as she giggled.

Finally she let go his hand and covered her face with her hands to shield herself. When she decided it was safe to peak again, Da appeared to have fallen asleep but she spotted one eyelid that twitched a bit in order to steal a look at her. She smiled then rubbed a finger across her own palm.

“Tainna have one,” she remarked sadly, turning her palm to show him.

“Of course not, mo uan,” he told her. “Ye tainna need one—everyone kens ye belong to Mama and to me just by lookin’ at ye. She didna need to mark ye here,” he said, touching her palm and brushing her hand aside. “Ye bear her marks here,”—he brushed a hand over her dark curls—“and here,”—he traced his finger from her brow down the bridge of her nose with a last tap—“and here,” he finished by holding her hands up before her face again. “Ye have her healing touch and her gentleness… her heart and her light.”

“Did ye give her anything to take wi’ her through the fairy stones?” Faith asked with a yawn.

“A mark like the one she gave me.”

And a second child to comfort her as Faith’s presence comforted him—comforted even as guilt and sorrow threatened his peace of mind. Who did the new child favor—him or Claire? Which would Claire find a greater solace?

“And a second child to comfort her as Faith’s presence comforted him—comforted even as guilt and sorrow threatened his peace of mind. Who did the new child favor—him or Claire? Which would Claire find a greater solace?

“Do ye think…” Faith started but hesitated, her brow furrowing as she struggled to put her thoughts into the right words. “If ye took me to the fairy stones, do ye think they’d let me through to see her?
Just for a little while and then I could come home again,” she promised.

Jamie’s blood ran cold for a moment before he remembered to breathe and smile.

“I dinna ken, but she wouldn’a want ye taking such a risk—no when ye’re still so young and there’s so much as can go wrong.”

“But Mama went…and I’m three now,” Faith pointed out.

“Someday maybe, but I dinna want ye to go just yet.” He stroked her cheek with his thumb and watched her eyelids begin to droop before they flew open and she blinked furiously to fight off sleep. “It would make me verra sad.”

“You could come to, Da.”

“No, I canna. The fairies dinna let me through—I tried once before ye were born. They’d have taken Mama but no me. And she… she didna want to go wi’out me so she stayed.”

“And wouldn’a have gone again but for the fighting,” Faith picked up the more familiar story with another yawn. “How many old do I have to be before ye can take me to see the fairy stones—I promise I willna ask them to let me through.”

Jamie took a moment to push aside the idea of Faith willingly leaving him to go to Claire in the future. It would break his heart but it would be Faith’s right to choose for herself and the thought of how happy it would make Claire… “No for some years yet.” His voice was barely audible for the lump in his throat and the tightness in his chest. He feared he might choke on the words.

But Faith’s eyes had drifted closed and remained closed.

He watched her sleep for a while, praying silently that Claire and the other bairn might be as safe and well as he and Faith were in that moment.
A Trip to the Mailbox

Chapter Summary

Faith's birthday begins roughly for Claire but some unexpected news leaves her in a more hopeful place.

Claire lay motionless in bed staring at the drawn window shade. It was going to be a lovely day outside but Claire would have preferred rain to match her mood.

She vaguely heard Frank's footsteps as he readied himself for work. Brianna would need to be fed soon—the heaviness in her breasts was only just beginning to grow uncomfortable. But until she knew the baby was awake, she lacked the will to confront the day.

“Dammit Claire!” Frank exclaimed upon re-entering the room. “When will you get past these… these…” He stalled in his search for words as his attention became consumed with tying his tie.

Claire sighed as she pushed back the sheets and slipped out of bed. She crossed to Frank and stated blankly at him as she took the ends of his tie to finish the knot for him. He swallowed noticeably against the knot and loosened it as he cleared his throat.

“I apologize,” he said quietly. “I just want you to be… to feel… Sometimes you seem to be… recovered and then you have these inexplicable relapses. I just wish you could… get past them— this—whatever it is that's holding you back.”

“You'll be late,” Claire told him, ignoring his lamentations. She brushed past him to escape the room and headed for Brianna’s nursery.

She peered down into the crib where Brianna was beginning to wriggle and rub her eyes with her pudgy fists. She blinked and looked up at Claire then broke into a toothless grin. Screwing her mouth into an “O,” Bree cooed and opened and closed her fists as she kicked her legs.

Claire smiled even as tears filled her eyes. She scooped Brianna up into her arms while sprinkling kisses on the infant’s face and neck. Screwing her mouth into an “O,” Bree cooed and opened and closed her fists as she kicked her legs.

Claire smiled even as tears filled her eyes. She scooped Brianna up into her arms while sprinkling kisses on the infant’s face and neck. Brianna giggled and Claire cupped the back of her head to her chest, felt her younger daughter’s drool soak into the fabric of her nightgown as she carried her to the rocking chair by the window.

Brianna took hold of Claire’s finger as she began to nurse, squeezing it and picking at Claire’s cuticle while they rocked in the gentle morning light.

Frank popped in on his way by, briefly pulling Claire’s gaze away from Brianna’s striking blue eyes.

“Feeling better?” he asked, tentative.

Claire looked back at Brianna and nodded—she still didn’t feel whole but holding Brianna was as close as she’d found yet.

“Good,” Frank said with a measure of relaxed relief. “That’s the way I like my girls.” He stepped into the room and crossed to run a finger along Brianna’s chubby cheek. “Her hair seems to be darkening, don’t you think? Getting long enough to start to curl, too,” he remarked, playing with the
loose wisps that tickled Brianna’s ear. She brushed away his distracting hand before settling hers against Claire’s chest again—she was busy eating and didn’t appreciate being disturbed.

Frank chuckled before pressing two fingers to his lips and the pressing the fingers to Brianna’s forehead.

“I’ll see you two ladies later. Be a good girl for Mama, eh Bree,” he said before moving to give Claire a cool kiss on the forehead. She tilted her face down so that his kiss was lost in the haphazard mess of her curls, causing him to stiffen. She didn’t look up again until he had left and she’d heard the front door close behind him.

Claire sighed and a moment later Brianna did too, her suckling slowing as she became full but was reluctant to indicate she was finished. Claire let her snuggle rubbing Brianna’s back in slow circles and smiling as Brianna’s eyelids grew heavy once more.

When Brianna had fallen to sleep again, Claire straightened her nightgown and rose with Brianna carrying the baby back to bed with her and arranging a line of pillows on Frank’s side before laying her down and crawling back into bed beside her.

She knew it was indulgent to wallow in her grief like this but even Brianna’s smiles only twisted the knife on days that held significance to her alone. Frank had come home from work on April 16th to find her still in bed, Brianna asleep on her chest. She had done the same on May 1st but managed to drag herself downstairs when she heard his car pull into the driveway but she knew he had guessed the truth, though he’d said nothing—she hadn’t made anything for dinner and the mail was still in the mailbox.

She hardly blamed him for growing upset with her for showing her reluctance to do anything but wallow. It was Faith’s third birthday—halfway between Jamie’s birthday and their anniversary. She’d had the excuse of being pregnant and recuperating from her “ordeal” the year before but with the exception of Christmas and Hogmanay with a newborn Brianna, her birth had appeared to mark the change in Claire’s disposition that Frank had been expecting.

Brianna soon woke again and began playing with her feet. Claire reached over to pull her toes out of her mouth so she could pretend to gobble them up herself. Brianna giggled and wriggled until she rolled over onto her stomach. She pushed herself up onto her hands and knees and rocked back and forth before flopping onto her belly again with a squeal.

Faith would have loved playing with her.

What were Jenny and Ian doing with her for her birthday? Did Faith still have the paper with their handprints marked on it?

Brianna turned to look at Claire and squealed again. She was growing bored with the confines of the bed and a sniff told Claire that if Brianna wasn’t changed soon she would grow decidedly less happy.

Claire carried Brianna into the nursery to the changing table before realizing she hadn’t put the freshly laundered diapers away the night before.

“Looks like we’re venturing downstairs after all,” she told Brianna who was scrunching up her nose and squirming uncomfortably.

By the time they were downstairs Brianna had begun fussing wholeheartedly. Rather than prolong the screaming, Claire changed Brianna’s diaper on the bathroom floor.
“Well, now Frank won’t be able to deny that we’ve been downstairs at least some of the day,” Claire crooned to Brianna. “He’ll be able to smell it as soon as he walks into the house.”

Brianna smiled now that she was comfortable again. She rolled over on the floor and resumed her attempts to crawl. Claire swept her up off the hard tile floor before she could faceplant as she had on the bed.

“Save that for when you’ve got something softer to land on,” Claire advised tapping Brianna’s nose.

Brianna grabbed Claire’s finger and tried to put it in her mouth and when Claire pulled it away, Brianna reached for her mother’s nose instead.

It never failed to amaze Claire how distinctly different Brianna was from Faith. The physical differences were the easiest to see and to accept. Brianna so strongly resembled Jamie in everything from the fiery wisps of her hair—which despite what Frank seemed to think was *not* darkening but rather growing more vibrant with every quarter-inch—to her stubborn temper. The weight of her in Claire’s arms was reassuring after all the worrying over Faith’s slow early growth but it also led Claire to wonder at how Faith might be growing in her absence—how tall was she, how long had her curls grown, what could she say now that she couldn’t before?

Did Faith remember her at all?

Where Faith had been a quiet and endlessly observant baby, Brianna was boisterous and brash, demanding attention loudly and squealing with delight when she received it. Claire frequently found herself pondering what the sisters would have made of one another—would they have fought or gotten along?

But thinking of the fact that her girls were forever separated made her cling to Brianna more tightly—enough for her to begin fussing and squirming in Claire’s arms. She wanted to play.

Claire carried Brianna to the window to watch the cars and people passing on the street outside, her legs kicking wildly against Claire’s stomach when an older woman walked by with a cocker spaniel. The woman met the postman as he was headed in the opposite direction and Claire and Brianna watched the dog attacking some sort of bug on the sidewalk while the postman and the woman chatted briefly.

“I suppose we can walk out to the mailbox too,” Claire remarked as Brianna began to whimper over the departing dog. “But you can’t tell Daddy that we didn’t bother getting properly dressed first,” she informed Brianna.

Brianna stared up at her as they moved towards the front door, Claire shifting Brianna to her hip and tightening the belt on her dressing gown.

Brianna squealed with delight as Claire opened the door, causing the dog to bark excitedly.

“Hello, Mrs. Randall,” the postman said with a nod. “The little one seems to be doing good.”

“Yes, she is, thank you. Getting into teething now, I’m afraid but she spotted your dog and cheered right up,” Claire explained to the elderly woman who crouched to pick up her little dog so Claire could help Brianna pet it.

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“Yes, she is, thank you. Getting into teething now, I’m afraid but she spotted your dog and cheered right up,” Claire explained to the elderly woman who crouched to pick up her little dog so Claire could help Brianna pet it.

The dog licked Brianna’s hand and set her giggling.

“Whiskey,” the older woman advised, “on her gums. Or a bit of brandy. Should numb things right up for her and if it doesn’t help with the pain, apply enough and she’ll fall right to sleep.”
They all chuckled politely before going their separate ways. Brianna babbled over Claire’s shoulder and waved at the departing woman and her dog while Claire reached into the mailbox to retrieve the stack of letters and catalogues. She tucked the stack under her arm so she could get a better hold of Brianna who was doing her best to climb up and over Claire in her attempts to pursue the dog.

“Did you like that puppy?” Claire cooed as she carried Brianna back to the house. “We’ll have to tell Frank about it when he gets home tonight—you can tell him all about how much you loved that dog.”

She let out a deep breath when she was safely inside once more. She was shaking as she settled Brianna down into her playpen and dropped onto the sofa.

The dogs at Lallybroch had been bigger but it hadn’t stopped Faith from chasing after them as soon as she could walk. Claire and Jamie had joked about Faith being tri-lingual—English, Gadhlig, and Barkanese. Brianna’s babbling was beginning to sound a bit like barking as she lay on her back in the playpen and worked to pull off her socks.

One of Frank’s history journals, two letters from past colleagues of his in Oxford…

She dropped the last letter and covered her mouth with her hands, gasping.

Brianna stopped fidgeting in her playpen and when Claire looked over at her she had rolled onto her belly and had one of her socks in her mouth like a dog bone.

“We’re actually going to go upstairs and get dressed,” Claire announced in a shaky voice.

Brianna opened her mouth and let the sock drop.

Claire rose and was surprised to find that her legs were so steady given the situation. She crossed to pick up Brianna and walked towards the stairs with her, leaving the envelope with the Inverness postmark where she’d dropped it on the floor.

Brianna had fallen asleep in the car on the drive to the church. She was heavy and warm in Claire’s arms as she shifted Brianna to her other side, ignoring the wet patch left behind by her daughter’s drool. It felt like the unopened envelope in the pocket of her coat was burning a hole through the lining and branding itself into her side.

She used the side door that opened near the sacristy and crossed to leave a donation and take a candle. The statue of the Madonna was on the other side of the wall just inside the main sanctuary. Mary gazed down on several dozen lit candles flickering at various heights.

It was awkward striking the match to light her own candle while Brianna was a dead weight against her shoulder but she managed to do so and set her candle with the others. She crossed herself and knelt to pray. Beginning with the Our Father and Hail Mary was familiar and reassuring. She repeated them quietly until she was comfortable moving on to what lay in her heart.

Please, let Jamie be at peace. Let him watch over Faith, since I can’t be there with her. And let her grow and be happy and healthy. Let her be safe; let her know how much I love her and miss her. Lord, may she forgive me for leaving. And please, please, please let me find her. Please let this letter be good news.

She rose with Brianna and walked to the nave to bow her head before the altar. Finally, she slipped
into one of the pews a few rows from the front—still in sight of the Madonna statue—and sat, moving Brianna from her shoulder and into her lap.

In her sleep Brianna stretched, arching her back and raising her arms but then she settled down again. A quiet snore emanated from her half-open mouth. It sounded louder in the emptiness of the deserted church.

Claire’s gaze drifted to the tabernacle and nights in an abbey in France. She’d prayed for Jamie then too; it was also where she’d first become aware of Faith’s existence. The peace and determination she’d felt then failed to come now; all she had was dueling hope and fear. She reached into her pocket and felt the envelope. The writer’s pen had pressed hard enough to leave indentations as she wrote. Though Claire couldn’t actually tell which depressions corresponded to which letters, she knew the direction and return address by heart.

What had Mrs. Graham managed to find? It had been weeks since she’d heard from the Reverend’s housekeeper and the last few letters had all be accounts of dead ends. Had she succeeded or had the leads dried up entirely?

“Mrs. Randall,” Father Carmichael addressed her as he emerged from the sacristy and entered the church. “Care for some company?”

“I have all the company I need, Father,” she said with a polite smile and a nod to the statue of Mary.

“Oh, one mother seeking council from another,” he remarked. “If you need anything, I’ll be in the back office paying bills.” He nodded to the far end of the church before wordlessly blessing her and making his way down the side aisle.

When she had heard his office door open and close, Claire finally pulled the envelope from her pocket and slid her finger beneath the sealed flap to open it.

There were two pages enclosed—a letter from Mrs. Graham and a hand copied list of names, family events, and dates.

Claire,

I have finally managed to trace the correct Murray line to the Bible in question and have seen the page you inquired after. I have copied everything from that page faithfully and enclose it here. I am afraid I do not see any further evidence of where your lass might have found herself but perhaps you will. She is not listed as married, nor is she listed as deceased. I choose to see this as evidence she left the Murrays at Broch Tuarach alive and well, perhaps in pursuit of something other than marriage or in order to make a match they did not approve of at the time—and thus chose not to include it in the family Bible list.

If you have further ideas for me to pursue, send them and I shall. Until I hear from you, I shall continue searching on my own for references to any Faith Fraser I can find in records of the time in the surrounding area.

We will find her. Do not lose hope.

Moira Graham

Tears filled Claire’s eyes as she set the letter on the bench beside her and hugged Brianna’s warm, slumbering body to her.

Where had Faith gone? When had she left Lallybroch? And why?
Brianna began to stir and fuss in her arms. Claire turned the infant around and stood her up in her lap, smiling through the tears until Brianna’s pout was transformed into a toothless smile. Sitting Brianna back down on her knees, Claire bounced her a bit.

Jamie had done the same with Faith when she was small. It occurred to Claire that her daughters shared their father’s laugh.

Brianna got hold of the letter with one hand and began waving it around until Claire took it back and resettled Brianna in her lap with a rattle from her purse to gnaw on. She took up the enclosed list copied from the Fraser/Murray family Bible.

*James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser m. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp June 16, 1743*

All of the names were in Mrs. Graham’s neat handwriting but Claire could recall the careful and cramped style in which Jamie had written the record of their marriage on the page.

*Margaret Ellen Murray b. November 27, 1743*

That would have been entered by Jenny just before Jamie had been taken.

*Faith Janet Hildegarde Fraser b. May 18, 1744*

Claire ran her fingers over the name. She had written Faith’s entry in that Bible herself shortly after their return to Lallybroch from France.

*Katherine Mary Murray b. February 25, 1745*

Claire’s eyes narrowed as she took in the next name on the list:

*Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp Fraser d. April 16, 1746*

So they had assumed she was dead, then; killed at Culloden alongside Jamie.

Tears flooded her eyes so that Brianna turned awkwardly in her lap to peer up at her and raised her hand to point at them coming dangerously close to poking her in the process.

Claire caught Brianna’s hand and kissed her knuckles. The baby babbled and reached for the letter again, squirming in her lap.

She sniffed and wiped her eyes so she could see the list again.

Below her own name appeared to be several more of Jenny and Ian’s children—Faith’s cousins and playmates.

*Janet Ellen Murray b. October 19, 1747*

*Michael Brian Murray b. October 19, 1747*

Claire’s heart lurched and a fresh twinge of regret and longing pulled tight in her chest. The thought of Jenny pregnant with twins during those difficult years after the failed Rising… She should have been there to help Jenny through what must have been a difficult and dangerous birth. The only relief she felt was that Jenny and the twins appeared to have made it through alive.

*Caitlin Maisri Murray b. December 3, 1749 d. December 3, 1749*

Her relief vanished and her heart broke for Jenny and Ian. She had guessed as much when she’d
come across wee Caitlin’s gravestone in the yard at Lallybroch but seeing the long worn stone was a far cry from the gentle handwritten confirmation before—what must that entry look like in person? Had Jenny written her lost daughter’s name on the page or had it been Ian?

How close had she come herself to losing Faith like that? How long had little Caitlin lived after her birth? A few minutes? A few hours? It took no time at all to fall in love with one’s child—they would have loved her before she’d even been born. To lose that so suddenly and unexpectedly…

She heard the door to her right—the same door she had entered—open and close and familiar footsteps entering the church. Quickly, she folded up the pages and stuck them back into her pocket. She would look at them again later—as many times as it took to find another clue in her search for Faith.

Brianna squealed in Claire’s lap when she spotted Frank near the array of candles at the Madonna’s feet.

“I thought I might find you here,” Frank said quietly as he slipped into the pew beside her. Brianna kicked and reached for him until Claire yielded her into Frank’s ready arms. He smiled at Brianna as she reached up and grabbed his nose, wincing as her tiny fingernails dug into the skin and cartilage. “I suppose I shouldn’t complain. I was afraid I’d find you still in bed.”

Claire rolled her eyes and looked forward toward the altar but refrained from snapping back at him.

“I wish you would tell me what it is that sends you into these moods,” he whispered. “If I knew more—if you would let me in again—perhaps I would be able to help you.”

“Frank…” she sighed. “You don’t want to hear what I have to say.”

Brianna’s quiet babbling as she pulled at Frank’s face was all any of them said for several minutes. Frank resettled Brianna in his lap where she grabbed at his tie, sucking on the end of it.

“You know… when the hospital first called to tell me you’d… reappeared…” Frank began quietly, “before they let me in to see you they told me… they said that you had been muttering about having lost your faith, that whatever you’d been through… Well… It seems to me you’ve found it,” he nodded to the quiet church.

Claire wanted to laugh and cry. Part of her was tempted to tell him about Faith and her search. Part of her wanted to believe that he might understand and help her. Part of her was afraid he would judge her. So instead she gave him a tearful smile.

“I did… lose… my Faith,” she told him. “I’m still searching… but I’m not about to give up.”

Though she’d felt disheartened before, saying it aloud—and to Frank—strengthened her resolve. It hadn’t been as easy as she’d hoped but if anyone was worth the trouble, Faith was. No more wallowing. She wouldn’t miss out on the time she had with Brianna just because she longed for Faith; Brianna was already growing too fast for her liking.

Frank reached over and took hold of her hand in her lap, catching her off guard. He gave it a light squeeze.

“I hope you find it again.” She couldn’t bring herself to squeeze his hand back but did respond with an appreciative nod before gently pulling her hand out of his once more. After clearing his throat he added, “You’ve picked a wonderful place to look. Would you like me to take Bree home so you can have some time here to yourself?”
Claire shook her head and began to rise, adjusting her clothes and reaching for Brianna.

“I’m ready to go home and I think Bree is too.”

Brianna’s babbling had picked up in volume and was beginning to echo off the ceiling and walls of the church.

“Are you ready to go home then, my beauty?” Frank asked as he adjusted the collar of Brianna’s baby dress and tickled her behind her ear.

Claire exited the pew, Frank a few steps behind her. “Bree got to meet the postman today and she befriended the dog of a kind woman who I believe lives down the street. She had some suggestions for treating Bree’s teething.”
Chapter Summary

Red Coats descend on Lallybroch bringing fear and tragedy in their wake.

Faith rolled over in bed unable to sleep. Even the warmth of Fergus lying beside her wasn’t helping. It was so late it had become early and still she hadn’t heard Da return to the kitchen so Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian could take whatever he’d caught on his latest hunting trip while he returned to the safety of his priest’s hole.

“Are ye awake Fergus?” she whispered. Maggie and Kitty were curled up on their bed in another corner with wee Janet while Jamie was forced to share his cot with wee Michael. There had been talk of moving some of the children into the room across the hallway—one room for the lads, another for the lasses to give them all a bit more privacy—but with the winter settling in it would save on wood for the fires if the lot of them continued to sleep in the same room.

In the three years since Culloden, Lallybroch was scraping by, which was more than could be said for most of the estates, farms, and crofts in the Highlands. Potatoes might be bland and there were only so many ways to cook them, but they kept a belly full and with fresh local game when it could be had, they were constantly able to keep several days ahead of going hungry.

But the regiments of soldiers patrolling the Highlands continued to harass and confiscate as they saw fit, to laud and intimidate.

“Oui ,” Fergus said with a yawn. “I am awake too, ma soeur .”

“Ye havena heard Da, have ye?” She didn’t like it when he was gone and staying in the cave. He always came back but the time away from him left her unsettled.

Fergus sighed and turned toward her to give her a sympathetic kiss on the forehead. “Non . Were he to have come home he would come to see you—even for just some minutes. And I would have heard him even if you did not.”

“Ye dinna think he came to trouble, do ye?”

Fergus shook his head with put-upon confidence. “He is taking so long because he has much game to carry. It takes time and he is but one man. He will be home before the sun rises and we will have a feast in the morning,” Fergus comforted Faith. She rolled onto her stomach so that he could rub her back. “Just wait and see. You will fall asleep again now and when you wake again, it will be to the aroma of goose or rabbit roasting in the fire. There will be stew and pies… The potatoes will be mashed and the fat dribbled over la totalité .”

Faith sighed with deep exhaustion and Fergus felt the muscles in her back relaxing as she reached up and brushed her wild curls away from her nose. A moment later she yawned and he knew she was safely asleep again. He turned and lay on his back, his head turned toward her so he could watch her sleep in the dim moonlight.

Dawn wasn’t very far off and if Milord hadn’t returned by then he would have to remain in hiding.
Faith slept while Fergus lay awake until both started at the sound of someone crying out as they entered the yard. The day had dawned as the adults crept from their beds and began moving about the house ahead of the children’s rising. It must be Rabbie, the stable boy, who was making a fuss outside—he was tasked with making sure the horses were fed and watered while his own breakfast warmed over the kitchen hearth under Mrs. Crook’s watchful eye.

The racket woke Maggie and Kitty too. Maggie groaned loudly while Kitty whimpered with fright and disrupted sleep.

Fergus put a hand on Faith’s arm, urging her to stay put.

Gooseflesh broke out on his legs as the cold air that lay on the other side of the blankets hit him. He crept quietly to the window, skirting the edge of Jamie and Michael’s pallet.

Peering down into the yard, Fergus had to rub his eyes to make out who was there and what the subject of his hollering might be. Having ignored his silent plea, Fergus soon felt Faith brush against him as she strained up onto her toes to look out the window at the angle necessary to see what was going on below.

“It’s no Da, is it? He wouldna use the front door,” she reasoned.


“Fergus,” Faith scolded, knowing he wasn’t supposed to use that word.

He turned to her pale, his eyes wide with fear.

“Get back into the bed,” he ordered ushering her ahead of him as he made his way to the bedroom door to fasten it. “All of you,” he said in a slightly louder voice, “stay in bed and keep quiet.”

He placed himself at one side of the trunk where the girls’ clothes were stored and planted his feet firmly against the worn floorboards. Praying he would have the strength necessary and straining with all his might, Fergus was able to slide the heavy trunk in place to block the door to the room.

“Fergus?” Jamie asked, the noise of the trunk scraping against the floor having woken him. “What’re ye doing wi’ that?”

“Red Coats,” Fergus said with a calm detachment that concealed the depths of his fear. It was up to him to protect Faith and the other children just now. He would make certain they couldn’t get into the room.
Crook for use in the Lallybroch kitchen.

But in the night as he was making a final circuit of his traps and snares he had come across fresh tracks and droppings, too large to belong to anything other than a stag or his doe. It had been some time since they’d had venison for a meal and a single side of meat could be stretched to feed quite a few mouths, let alone if he could take down and bring home a whole beast.

Tracking had taken the better part of the night and the young stag had fought valiantly against his fate, tiring Jamie. He resolved to butcher and leave behind what he could in the hopes he could make it back to the cave with the carcass to hide out until it was safely dark again and he could return to Lallybroch later than planned but with a haul well worth the wait.

The prospect of attracting wolves to his cave made true rest difficult but at least the early December air, cold as it was for him, would help keep the meat from going off too fast. Claire had told him about ice boxes and methods that would one day be used to keep food from spoiling—something about… fudge … no, it had been fridge … refrigeration, that’s what she’d called it.

What weighed heaviest on his mind as he tried to sleep in the chill of the cave next to the stag’s cooling carcass, was that he had disappointed Faith. She had been expecting him home the night before and he didn’t like the thought of how she—like her once-more-pregnant aunt—would worry about him all day. The stag would have to serve as his amends and he would need to find another way to make it up to Faith… perhaps he could sneak out of the priest’s hole early so he could properly tuck her into bed for the night, give her a proper story…

Jamie dozed lightly, fearful of falling too deep into sleep as the temperature didn’t appear inclined to rise with the sun.

“Master Jamie!” a voice hissed somewhere outside.

He woke and peered to the front of the cave, reaching for his knife and moving as quickly and silently as his stiff joints would allow.

“Master Jamie!” the voice came again.

This time Jamie recognized it as belonging to Rabbie MacNab. He moved more purposefully toward the mouth of the cave, ready to rebuke the lad for his noise and carelessness around what was supposed to be a safely secret place.

One glance at the lad’s pale face and fearful eyes set Jamie on edge.

“What’s happened?” Jamie asked forcefully. “It’s not Faith, is it?”

Rabbie shook his head. “Mistress Murray sent me to tell ye te keep well hid. There’s Red Coats about.”

“She din’a think ye might lead them straight to me,” Jamie snapped, itching to run home and remove every one of them from his property by force.

“They were busy in the house, sir,” Rabbie assured him. “I was able to get away while they were at work in the kitchen.”

Jamie frowned. It was too late to do anything now. He hated feeling so bloody useless. Even in venturing out to hunt and provide for his family, he proved to be a liability.

“Everyone at the house is all right?” he asked, desperate for reassurance.
“I’d expect so, sir,” Rabbie nodded, relaxing now that his message was safely delivered. “The soldiers did come near to first light, sir, so many folk were still abed. Dinna ken what they’re hoping to find; there’s no much in the stores that’s good for taking on their horses and they dinna have a wagon.”

“Not yet,” Jamie muttered, reasonably sure that if the Red Coats decided a wagon was necessary they’d find means of procuring one. He shuffled into the cave. “Dinna stand there for anyone to see ye,” he scolded. “Come along. It willna do for ye to go back without something to account for yer whereabouts.” From his game bag he pulled out a pair of hares and held them out for Rabbie to take.

The lad stared at them hungrily before his eyes adjusted to the dim light enough to make out the shape of the stag behind Jamie. Then his mouth dropped open and his eyes went wide with yearning. Jamie shook the rabbits a bit to draw the lad’s attention back to the matter at hand.

“Take these with ye. If the Red Coats ask ye where ye ran off to—and I’m sure they will—ye tell them ye went to check yer line of traps. D’ye ken where I place them? Tell them if they demand to see ‘em.” Jamie sighed. “It’s likely they’ll take these but when they’re safe away, ye can have Ian or one of the others about come to fetch me and help me wi’ this bit o’ meat, aye?”

Rabbie nodded and took the rabbits dashing out of the cave quickly, eager to complete his new assignment.

Jamie was left behind to wait and wonder what was happening at Lallybroch and how his family fared.

“Lord… keep them safe,” he prayed.

Sometime in the night a light appeared at the mouth of the cave, startling Jamie awake.

“It is me, milord,” Fergus whispered, shifting the light he held so that Jamie might make out his face.

“Fergus,” Jamie breathed a sigh of relief. “I take it the Red Coats have gone then.”

“Oui,” Fergus replied but Jamie was quick to pick up the note of concern in the lad’s voice.

“The house…” he began cautiously, “everyone… they’re all right?”

“Milady Jenny has taken to bed. She is afraid the child is coming. Monsieur Ian, he sent me to inform you. She does not want to have you in danger but he… he is afraid, milord.”

Jamie felt a mixture of rage and fear course through him. It was because of the soldiers—the stress of having them appear that morning—that was causing this. He turned to look back at the stag, lifeless in the cave where he’d managed to drag it earlier. It was too cold for flies to have found it but it was unlikely he’d be able to get it to the house with only Fergus’ assistance. Still, any meat he could manage to bring to the family there was better than none.

“Do ye have a sack or anything ye can use for carrying?” Jamie asked, reaching for his knife.

“For carrying, milord?”

“Aye. We’re bringing as much of this with us as we can manage,” he told the boy, moving as quickly as he could about his work.
Faith and her cousins had been told to go to bed but there had been too much excitement during the course of the day and they had spent too much of it in the nursery as it was. The twins were fussy and Maggie and Kitty and Faith were too cross themselves to be patient with them so that all of them were bickering with one another and tears were becoming contagious.

“The lot of ye need to calm yerselves and get to sleep, now,” Mrs. Crook scolded them harshly after Kitty had shoved Michael who in turn fell onto the floor and bumped his head, screaming as though he’d fallen into the hearth.

“Is Mam unwell?” Maggie asked, sidling up to Mrs. Crook. “We can hear her and she… she sounds unwell,” the six-year-old pressed.

“Yer mam will feel better if she kens ye’re all safe in bed,” Mrs. Crook insisted. It was the sudden gentleness of her tone that finally accomplished that goal, young Jamie lifting his brother off the floor and setting him onto the pallet beside Janet then turning his attention to Kitty. Maggie had beaten him to her, hauling her sister to her feet and nudging her to the other corner where their own pallet lay.

Faith hesitated where she stood. She had heard her uncle send one of the kitchen maids to fetch the midwife from Broch Mordha earlier in the afternoon but hadn’t noticed if she had returned or not; everyone else was too busy setting the house to rights again after the soldiers had left.

Auntie Jenny herself had appeared at the door urging Fergus to unbar it and let her in. After making sure that they were unharmed, she had wanted them to stay put, to play together quietly until the mess downstairs could be put right. They had managed to keep out of the way for half an hour, but the sounds they heard were just as intriguing and far less terrifying than those of the earlier hours they’d spent cooped up in the room. Fergus, as the oldest and not having the hindrance of being ultimately answerable to Jenny, had ventured out first, the others following in short order behind him.

The furniture was battered and toppled; glass and pottery had been shattered and was largely swept into piles out of the way; there were scorch marks on the floor and rugs in front of the hearth; chunks of the wooden lintel and supportive beams had been hacked away by the soldiers’ swords.

Things were worse in the kitchen where pots, pans, and even Mrs. Crook’s large cauldron for making stew had been bashed and dented, some never to be used again. The remnants of a sack of flour coated most of the surfaces except where footprints could be seen on the floor.

Auntie Jenny scowled when she found the children had made their way downstairs.

“Now ye see what a true mess looks like,” she lectured. “When I tell ye to be polite and mind what ye’re up to, it’s so ye dinna put people out havin’ to tidy a mess like this.” She set a chair back on its feet and then cried out, doubling over and wincing as she did so.

“Are ye all right, Mam?” Kitty had asked.

Auntie Jenny had nodded and offered a pained smile even though she’d gone pale. Faith could tell something was wrong but Auntie Jenny went back to tidying up and the children had dispersed to help where they could. A few minutes later Auntie Jenny quietly slipped away from the room and Mrs. Crook had taken over directing their efforts.

By nightfall it was clear that Auntie Jenny’s bairn was coming and the tense atmosphere from earlier in the day shifted once more, still refusing to settle.

Faith crept to the window and looked out. Fergus hadn’t come to bed with the rest of them. Uncle Ian had something in particular he needed Fergus’ help with that now left Faith without her greatest
source of comfort and calm.

She saw movement in the yard outside and glanced over her shoulder at her cousins. They were preoccupied with one another and didn’t notice as she slipped out of the room and padded down the hall to the stairs. It was probably just the kitchen maid returned with the midwife but Faith knew there had to be something she could do to help; nothing could be worse than sitting around waiting for things to happen.

She was in the great hall when she heard them in the kitchen and recognized their voices.

“Da!” she cried as she took off running. Bursting through the kitchen door, she launched herself at her father, careless of the stag’s blood and mud that spattered his shirt and was smeared across his face.

Jamie caught her in his arms and held her tight, hoping he wasn’t hurting her but fearful that she might feel the tremor of worry in his limbs. He and Fergus had deposited what venison they could carry and now that he knew Faith was safe, he needed to know his sister was all right.

Carrying Faith with him, he sought out Ian.
Faith keeps vigil with Jenny and Caitlin doing everything she can to keep her premature cousin alive.

It was just before dawn that the midwife emerged and went to retrieve Ian. He was sitting in the great hall, eyes red and bleary from the combination of a lack of sleep and worry; he had removed his wooden leg and periodically massaged the stump, an action somewhere between distraction and compulsion. Jamie sat in another chair opposite him with Faith curled up asleep against his chest.

Ian hadn’t spoken when Jamie appeared with Faith in his arms. There wasn’t anything he could bring himself to say just then; his entire being was taken up with worry for Jenny and the bairn.

The midwife was somber as she approached the men, Ian quickly grabbing his leg from beside the chair and slipping on the brace.

“Jenny?” Jamie murmured, his body tensing with fear.

“Mistress Murray is fine,” she assured them quietly. “She’ll live… but the bairn… I dinna think the wee lass will last for long. Yer wife wants ye, man,” she turned to Ian, her hands twitching with the impulse to help him stand but he already had his crutch in hand and was pushing himself up from the chair.

Jamie rose and moved to follow them upstairs. Faith sighed and her grip on his shirt tightened reflexively at the movement. He shifted her in his arms, getting a better grip on her. Standing with her bare feet dangling from beneath her night shirt, she was now as long as his torso, the tips of her toes falling below his hips. He thrilled in and dreaded every inch. She was his little weed, growing and thriving even when everything worked against her, even at birth. He prayed that the wee lass upstairs would prove to be as stubborn as her older cousin, for Jenny and Ian’s sakes.

“Da?” Faith began to rouse as he reached the landing. He watched Ian disappear through the door and heard a muffled cry of grief from Jenny--would that he could spare his sister such grief.

“Aye, my lamb,” he whispered. “Go back to sleep now.”

“Is Auntie Jenny all right?” she asked with a yawn.

“I’m goin’ to find out now. Rest mo nighean donn. All will come right in the end,” he assured her, his hand rubbing warm circles into her back as her curly head settled once more on his shoulder.

Ian had left the door open enough for Jamie to ease it open a little more and peek in at the sorrowful couple. Jenny was sitting up and leaning forward, her body shielding that of her struggling daughter. Ian had settled beside her and had his arms around her, his head pressed to hers.

Jamie hesitated in the doorway, not wanting to disturb them but unable to look away either. Faith raised her head again, sensing something was wrong. She peered at the wheezing and quietly fussing bundle in her aunt’s arms and came fully awake with rigid alertness that startled Jamie.
“She’s fadin’, Da,” Faith whispered in his ear, concern heavy in her voice.

She was loud enough to attract Jenny and Ian’s attention. Jenny looked desperately at her brother, as though he might be able to do something she could not, but a moment later she used her free hand to brush at her tears.

“Ye shouldna be here,” she muttered in a voice hoarse from the exertions of a fraught labor. “It’s no safe for ye… it’s no safe for anyone,” she added looking down at the baby in her arms.

“Can I hold her?” Faith asked quietly.

Jamie squeezed her. “A nighean … I dinna think…”

“Aye,” Jenny interrupted. “She can—she canna do any harm.” Jenny’s voice broke on the last word.

“Shall I fetch the other weans?” Ian asked his wife, torn between whether it would be better for them to see their their wee sister like this or if it would be easier for them if it was all over before they were told.

“Check on them, aye, but dinna wake them,” she told him.

“I can do it if ye dinna want to go,” Jamie volunteered as he eased Faith down onto the bed, careful to avoid Jenny’s legs.

“No,” Ian said with a thick voice, rising stiffly and easing toward the door. Jamie could see in his brother-in-law’s eyes how difficult it was for him, how close he was to losing his control and how desperate he was for Jenny not to see him like that. “I’ll go.”

Faith crouched over the impossibly small infant in her aunt’s arms before tentatively reaching out and stroking the baby’s cheek with her finger.

When Faith touched her, the baby calmed her weak squirming. Jenny inhaled sharply, fearing the worst but then relaxed and smiled weakly, a half sob causing her shoulders to tremble. Jamie put an arm across her back, lending her his strength.

“Wha’s her name?” Faith asked, settling a hand on the baby’s chest. Her breathing became less ragged and she emitted a sound that might be considered a true cry.

“Caitlin,” Jenny told Faith. “Sit up here and put this pillow in yer lap.”

Faith concentrated on the baby as Auntie Jenny placed her gently on the pillow in Faith’s lap. She kept hold of the small foot, unable to completely let go.

Faith’s hand was drawn to Caitlin’s chest. She could sense it was where the problem was but it was something wrong inside, something she wasn’t familiar with and couldn’t see. She tried lightly rubbing the baby’s chest and wee Caitlin began to get a bit more color in her face. She stretched her arms out and arched her back, startling Auntie Jenny and Da but Faith kept her attention on Caitlin. She could see a bluish tinge growing in her hand and it was going numb.

Jenny turned to Jamie with hope. “She sounds better,” she reasoned. “Do ye think…” She took the baby back from Faith and held her close to her chest. She thought about trying to get Caitlin to nurse but even as she fiddled with her shift she knew it wouldn’t work—her milk hadn’t come in yet and Caitlin was already beginning to shake with the effort to breathe.

Faith scrambled to her knees and leaned on her aunt, reaching out to rub Caitlin’s back. The
newborn calmed again as Faith cooed to her before yawning. She rested her head on Auntie Jenny’s shoulder but kept her hand on Caitlin.

Jamie brushed hair from his sister’s forehead and pressed a kiss to her head while he fought to keep back his tears.

“I’ll go fetch Ian back, then,” he told her quietly before lightly cupping Caitlin’s tiny dark head and then reaching over to caress Faith’s.

Faith looked like she might fall asleep again any minute though she was fighting it desperately. Her gaze remained intent on the form of her cousin. Just when her eyes began to lose focus and her eyelids threatened to close, she would start and begin rubbing her circles in Caitlin’s back again with renewed purpose. But she was slowly losing her battle against sleep and before long it claimed her and her hand slipped from wee Caitlin’s back and onto the coverlet. She curled instinctively into Auntie Jenny’s side.

Jenny didn’t want to wake Faith and urged Jamie to leave her where she was. In truth, Jenny didn’t want to be alone but at the same time, couldn’t really bear anyone’s company—least of all her other children. She felt horrible for even thinking it but having them near would draw her to their wants and needs and distract her from Caitlin in a way she wasn’t ready for just yet; the pain of Caitlin was too raw and it was all she would have left of her.

But for some reason it wasn’t like that to have Faith with her. The lass wasn’t one of her children, so that was part of it; she loved her niece but with a different sense of duty attached to her. And there was something about her that calmed and soothed… it reminded Jenny of Claire.

Faith might only be a wee lass of five, but she had lost a mother just as Jenny had now lost a child; Faith might not have much memory of Claire but the absence was one she could see Faith felt.

She still had Jamie but Jenny wondered how long that would last. Her muscles tensed painfully at the recollection of the Red Coats stomping through the house, kicking and overturning the furniture, knocking crockery and glass to the floor to shatter, taking food they could transport easily and damaging what they couldn’t. But most importantly, the Red Coats had discovered the priest hole. As far as she was concerned, it was a miracle Jamie hadn’t come home when he was supposed to. If the English had found him… It was a matter they would have to discuss with Jamie soon, after… after they had taken care of Caitlin.

Jamie had volunteered to take care of what was necessary at the family plot while Mrs. Crook was busy with Caitlin. Ian and the other children would manage with a little help but Jenny wouldn’t be able to attend—she would make a journey of her own in due course.

Faith stirred against Jenny’s leg, her hand reached blindly and rubbing circles into her aunt’s thigh. Jenny’s breath caught briefly before she put her hand to her niece’s head and began running her fingers through the lass’ curls. Blinking slowly at first, Faith came fully awake with a sudden jolt, her head popping up and her eyes scanning her aunt and the bed frantically.

Gingerly, Jenny cupped Faith’s cheek until the bold, blue eyes met her own.

“Where…” Faith started to ask but then Jenny watched the pieces fall into place. Tears welled in Faith’s eyes as her chin quivered. “I’m sorry, Auntie Jenny,” she whimpered, lowering her gaze but letting her tears slip from her eyes unhindered. “I… I couldna… I was too tired… I fell asleep and
now… she’s…”

Jenny gathered Faith’s small, warm form to her own and let the girl’s sobs shake her as well. It shook her own tears free though she kept enough of a handle on her grief to keep it from running completely wild and alarming Faith—she would have a lifetime to grieve for Caitlin and she well knew it wouldn’t always be within her power to control it.

Faith continued to apologize for falling asleep.

“It wasna yer fault, my wee one,” Jenny shushed her.

“But I fell asleep,” Faith insisted, pulling away and wiping her eyes.

“There’s none could ha’ done more than what ye did for her,” Jenny told her brushing at the wet streaks on Faith’s round cheeks. “Ye comforted her and soothed her,” Jenny’s voice broke, “and ye helped her ken she wasna alone. Ye made her passing easier and that…” Jenny took a deep steadying breath, “tha’s no nothing. Ye’ve a bit of yer mother’s touch.” Faith swallowed and sniffled loudly but she seemed to be calming down.

“Mama’s touch,” Faith murmured looking down at her hands. They weren’t blue anymore and didn’t feel as cold to the touch.

Jenny reached out and took Faith’s small hands in her own rougher ones and rubbed her thumbs over Faith’s knuckles.

“Yes. Ye have yer mother’s touch—a healer’s touch—gentle and soothing. And I ken… I ken yer mam’s got my wee Caitlin wi’ her now… She trusted me wi’ her bairn… and I trust her wi’ mine,” Jenny said with conviction.

Faith’s brow furrowed. “Caitlin’s wi’ the fairies?” she asked.

“No with the fairies,” Jenny shook her head. “They’re all gone to heaven together… And they’ve yer grannie and grandda Fraser wi’ them too, and yer Uncle Willie…”

While Faith appeared comforted by the idea of her mother taking care of Caitlin, she didn’t seem to be convinced about where they were.

“Da says Mama went to the fairy hill,” Faith told her aunt. “He said he made her go to the stones at the top so she’d be safe.”

Jenny pressed her lips together, trying to figure her way through the conversation.

“A nighean, ye’re old enough now to ken the truth. Yer da… ye were just a bairn when yer da came back—no the near grown lass ye are now—and yer da didna want to upset ye. He told ye a tale ye’d understand better and he’s kept to it longer than perhaps he should. Now, would ye rather yer mam was wi’ the fairies… or wi’ the angels in Heaven?”

Faith didn’t say anything more, just leaned down to rest her head on her aunt’s shoulder once more and the two of them lay there on the bed quietly with their sorrow and guilt.

Until Jenny had recovered enough to get out of bed again, Jamie was resolved to stay in the house. Since he had been staying in the cave when the Red Coats discovered the priest hole, it had not just been empty but cleaned and aired as well—something Jenny insisted on seeing done whenever he was away for more than a single night. There was a good chance it would be safe for him at the
house for at least a few days, but then he was determined to remove himself to the cave on a more permanent basis.

Faith was a heavy but reassuring weight on his chest. He had thought she would be too afraid of the impenetrable darkness when she first asked to join him in the priest hole but he couldn’t resist her pleas when he too wanted to spend as much time with her as he could. She hadn’t fussed or whined at all, though—perhaps she’d been too exhausted from the vigil she had kept with Jenny and Caitlin.

Jamie wasn’t able to sleep. What Jenny and Ian were going through, losing Caitlin, brought back the memories of his time in the Bastille when he’d believed Claire and Faith had been lost to him forever. The shock of learning first that Claire had survived and then that Faith lived too… no such reversal awaited Jenny and Ian. No, they only had the unending sense of loss he now felt over Claire and the child she had carried when she went back. The weight of Faith helped keep the ache in his chest at bay. Lord, that Claire and the child might be safe… That Claire might find the same comfort in that child that he found with Faith.

As though his thoughts had called out to her, Faith began to stir, her breathing sped up and he knew she’d woken.

“Shush, shush,” he whispered as he kissed the crown of her curly head and rubbed her back. “I’m here.”

“Da… Auntie Jenny said Mama is in heaven,” Faith said a few moment later following a drawn out yawn. She started to roll over on top of Jamie, her bony elbows digging into his ribs and driving his breath away. “You said she went to stay wi’ the fairies.”

“No, a leannan, I said she went to a fairy hill,” he tried to clarify. “But this fairy hill doesna take ye to the fairies—it takes ye to another time altogether.” How to tell Faith the truth about Claire was something Jamie dreaded. It was easier when she was younger and simply took comfort from his delivery but she was reaching an age when such explanations weren’t enough. “She… the fairy stones brought her here from another time—brought her here so she and I could be together, so you would be born.”

He knew she was frowning from the way she asked, “Why did she go back?”

“She didna want to leave ye, but it wasna safe for her to stay, nor for her to try fetchin’ ye and bringing ye with her,” Jamie said.

“But… that means she’s alone there—in… the place that’s no heaven.” Faith’s voice had shifted drastically and she sounded on the verge of tears.

“No, uan, she’s no alone,” he hastily reassured her resettling her more firmly in his arms so he could rest a cheek on her head, tucking her closer into himself. Her body remained tense and concerned. “She couldna bring you wi’ her because ye were safe here at Lallybroch wi’ Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian. But ye were to have a wee brother or sister of yer own. That bairn was still in yer mam’s belly and went through wi’ her.”

“A bairn?” Faith’s head popped up in her surprise.

“Aye.”

Jamie had to pause, the ache in his chest coming loose and creeping up his throat for a moment at the image of Faith holding wee Caitlin; she would have been a wonderful older sister. But perhaps… someday, since Faith would know the truth and if she wanted to… she might be able to go where he
couldn’t; she might be able to see Claire again, to tell her that he’d kept their promise to Faith after all. She might yet meet her brother—or sister.

“I hope it’s a girl,” Faith said with an excitement that clawed at Jamie. “Then I can have a sister. I already have a brother; I dinna need two.”

Jamie chuckled. “I had one brother and one sister too and I agree—one of each is a fine thing.”

“Uncle Ian and Auntie Jenny?” Faith sought to confirm.

Jamie smiled. “Aye… now.”

Faith seemed to settle down but then gasped and pushed herself up on Jamie’s chest again.

“But if Mama’s no in heaven, who’s goin’ to take care of Caitlin for Auntie Jenny? She thinks Mama’s there.”

“We’ve still plenty of kin in heaven; Caitlin’s no alone,” he reassured her. “Yer gran and grandda will keep Caitlin safe wi’ them.” Jamie thought too of Willie and wee Robert—lost in a similar manner to Caitlin but not going alone. There were still times he felt all four of them watching over him—over Lallybroch and Faith; hopefully over Claire and the other bairn too.

“Good,” Faith said with relief. “It doesna matter Auntie Jenny made a mistake about Mama then. So long as Caitlin’s no by herself; she’s just a wee bairn.” Faith yawned and lowered her cheek back to Jamie’s chest.

“We’re none of us alone,” he whispered knowing she had already fallen asleep again as he held her tight to his chest—his last but most important link to Claire.
When Brianna's latest throat infection sends Claire and Frank to the emergency room, Claire's experiences at the hospital leave her with some ideas.

Claire's senses were overwhelmed, her nerves prickling with the impulse to jump to her feet and take action. Then Brianna coughed and whimpered in her lap and the noisy emergency room faded into the background.

“How are you feeling sweetheart?” she asked, brushing Brianna's sweat-dampened hair from her forehead.

Brianna pouted, raised her head enough for her to shrug, then settled her head back on Claire's thigh.

“How do you think she feels?” Frank snapped as he rubbed a reassuring hand along Brianna's back. “I don't understand why those fools haven't done something about it before now. And why couldn't we take her to the pediatrician--”

“Because her physician is out of town,” Claire responded for what felt like the twelfth time. “The on-call physician at the office would take two hours to get into the office at a time like this and with her fever so high there's a pretty good chance he'd refer us to the hospital anyway. There's a phone down the hall and quarters in my purse; I can give you the man's number if you want to call him and have him tell you what I just did,” she challenged. She grit her teeth as Frank looked like he just might take her up on the offer.

“I don't like having her here like this,” Frank continued to complain. He lowered his voice, “It's not the sort of… environment she ought to be in.”

“There are worse things than being around sick and injured people.”

Frank's gaze lock on someone coming into the waiting room, the blood draining from his face as he reached for Brianna and lifted her out of Claire's lap and onto his own. When he carefully turned Brianna so she could rest her head on his shoulder, gaze directed away from the entrance, Claire finally looked to see what had Frank so concerned.

“Help,” a man begged, trying not to cry out too loudly, possibly to keep the blood-stained friend he was helping to keep upright from getting worked up.

She heard Frank hiss her name but she was already on her feet and halfway across the space.

“What's happened?” she asked reaching for a bloody rag the injured man was clutching to his chest with every ounce of strength he possessed.

“Accident with the saw,” his friend answered. “You've never seen so much blood in your life.”

Claire doubted that was true but instead settled for telling the men, “I was a nurse in the war. Raise the injured limb if you can. I'll go see if I can find one of the doctors to see you immediately.”
She dashed up to the reception area pushing past several people in line who grumbled loudly as she cut her way to the front.

“I'm sorry but the man back there can't wait,” she explained. “He's severed several arteries and tendons in his hand at the least—he'll need a full amputation if you make him wait not to mention more blood transfusions.”

The nurse behind the desk was young but recognized the sound of experience in Claire's voice. She scurried off to fetch someone with a higher rank and Claire turned to run back to the injured man and his worried friend.

“Claire!” Frank called as she passed him. She stopped, backed up enough to grab her coat from the seat, then continued on her way.

“The nurse went to fetch the doctor,” she told the men in as reassuring a voice as she could muster. “Now bring his arm down a bit—not all the way; I just want to see if the damage…”

Claire took firm but gentle hold of the injured man's arm. As she eased it gently away from his body, she could tell from the way its weight rested in her hands that there would be no saving the appendage; there wasn't enough left joining it to the arm and if it had been the work of a saw as his friend had mentioned, the flesh was probably torn to shreds too.

“We'll just keep applying pressure and elevating it,” she said helping to hold the lump of flesh steady.

The doctor appeared a moment later with an orderly and a gurney. Claire helped the man's friend to let him go. The doctor spewed information at the stunned man before turning instead to Claire who gave the doctor a knowing nod then left.

“Wait, where're they taking him?” the friend asked with growing fear and agitation.

Claire took him by the arm and guided him back towards where Frank remained seated with Brianna.

“They're taking him back to prep for surgery,” she explained in a calm voice as she pushed him down into her chair and settled her coat over his front to help cover the blood. “Can you tell me your name?”

“Karl.” His eyes were fixed on the doors the doctor and orderly had whisked his friend through.

“Karl, my name is Claire. You're suffering from a bit of shock. I want you to sit here while I go get you something to drink. This is my husband Frank and my daughter Bree. They're going to stay with you till I get back.”

There was one final exasperated hiss from Frank, “Claire!” before she had wandered off again with a renewed sense of purpose.

It didn't take long for her to locate a spare coffee cup and a water fountain. As she made her way back to the waiting room she found the nurse from behind the reception desk in her path.

“I just wanted to let you know that your friend has been taken into surgery,” she informed Claire, “It probably won't be a long one—it doesn't look like there’s much they can do for the hand—but they’ll be sure to clean it up properly and be sure it doesn’t get infected.”

“Oh, sorry,” Claire apologized. “He isn’t my friend—don’t even know his name, I’m afraid. He
came in with a man called Karl who’s currently suffering from a mild case of shock. I came in with my husband and daughter; she has a throat infection—her fifth in as many months—and likely needs to have her tonsils removed. But thank you; I’ll find a way to break the news to Karl.”

“How long have you been waiting?” the nurse inquired glancing back over her shoulder to the group of people gathered at the reception desk where another nurse was busily sorting intake forms, attaching them to clip boards, and passing them to the patients to fill out.

“An hour or two but Bree—my daughter—she’s tired more than fussy just now. If there are other, more serious cases—”

“Nonsense,” the nurse insisted. “Most of the folks in there need more than a pediatrician. I’ll make a call upstairs. It might take a while for the doctor on call to get down here anyway. Thank you for taking care of Karl. You should think about becoming a nurse.”

Claire smiled. “I am—or was. In France during the war.”

“Well, we can always use more help around here—as you can see,” the woman said with an eager smile. “Kitty Thorne.” She offered a hand to Claire.

“Claire Randall,” she responded, taking the woman’s hand gladly. “I have a niece named Kitty,” she said without thinking. Had, she corrected herself silently.

They parted ways and Claire returned to find Frank sitting rather stiffly with Brianna turned toward Karl. She looked a bit dazed but also vaguely interested in the strange man sitting beside them; it was a distraction for her, at least. Karl didn’t seem to be doing quite as well as Brianna. He started at the sound of an ambulance’s siren pulling out of its parking space and heading out on a call.

“Karl,” Claire called to him gently as she came up to him. “I want you to drink this—it’s just water but when you’re feeling up to it, I’m sure someone can help you find the cafeteria and perhaps a cup of coffee or tea.”

He took the cup and drained it without stopping then held it out for her to take.

She sat in the seat on his other side and his eyes followed her, finally focused on something.

“Karl, I spoke with the nurse about your friend…”

“Bobby? Is he okay? Where is he?”

“They’ve taken him into surgery and the doctors are taking care of him. He… His hand is in pretty rough shape.”

Karl groaned and leaned forward, Claire’s coat slipping so that some of his bloody shirt showed. She reached over and pulled it up for him taking care to tuck it in.

“I should have asked about finding you something clean to change into,” she mused. “The important thing is that Bobby should live; you got him here in time—you saved his life.”

“He shouldn’t even have been doing it,” Karl muttered. “It was my job and I… I shouldn’t have let him…”

“Karl,” Claire interrupted, “you need to look at me,” she waited for him to meet her eye, “and breathe. Whatever happened, Bobby will be all right. You helped to get him here and you’ll help him with whatever comes next.” Karl nodded. “Good. Now can you stand? Let’s find someone who can
help you with some fresh clothes and then you can help then get Bobby’s information straight so his family can be properly notified.”

By the time Claire returned—her coat folded neatly over on itself to conceal some blood stains—Brianna had fallen asleep in Frank’s lap.

“How’s her fever?” Claire asked even as she reached out and felt Brianna’s forehead.

“I wish you wouldn’t do things like that,” Frank muttered under his breath, his eyes darting around to be sure no one was staring at them. “It’s not your place; he wasn’t your patient.”

“But he could have been,” Claire said quietly as she brushed Brianna’s hair behind her ear; it was still very fine and had a tendency to escape from the barretts they used to keep it out of her eyes. “I’m not sorry,” Claire told Frank in a louder voice, “and I won’t apologize for it; those men needed help and I was able to help them.”

“Randall? Brianna Randall?” the nurse at the desk called, interrupting the brewing argument.

“You’ve done very well, Miss Randall,” the physician told Brianna as he helped to lift her down from the exam table. “Do you think you could go for a little walk with Nurse Thorne, here while I talk things over with your parent? She might be able to scare up a special treat for you.”

Brianna ducked her head shyly as Nurse Thorne took her by the hand and led her out of the room. When the door shut behind them both Frank and Claire turned to Dr. Boyer who had Brianna’s chart open and was making notations.

“Well, from what you’ve noted here it looks like your pediatrician’s assessment is right—she ought to have her tonsils removed. It should keep her from getting these infections and she’s at an age where it should be easy for her to recover,” Dr. Boyer told them without looking up from the paperwork. His pen kept going back and forth between two lines, holding his place for reference as he checked the information over a second and then third time. “I uh… I’ll put things in motion, if you don’t mind waiting a little longer in the waiting room. Should be able to free up a bed upstairs. Have to check the OR schedule but I think there’s one open later tonight—tomorrow morning at the latest. In… the mean… time… I’m sorry but do you happen to have physical copies of your daughter’s medical records? I think you might’ve made a mistake on her intake forms regarding her bloodwork,” Boyer told them. “But don’t worry—it happens all the time; you’re worried about your kid and you write the wrong thing down or put it in the wrong place… We just need to clear this up before the surgery since we’ll need to have extra blood on hand in case of an emergency.’”

“No, all that information is accurate,” Frank insisted adamantly. “As you know, she’s been in to see her pediatrician regularly the last few months; you can appreciate how often I’ve had to fill out forms just like those. And Bree’s pediatrician told us the procedure would be minimally invasive; what sort of emergency are you anticipating?”

“Frank,” Claire said quietly, “you know there are always risks with any surgery.”

“I can go over the details of exactly how the operation will go if you like,” Dr. Boyer offered, to which Claire nodded while Frank shook his head. “But first we really do need to get the details of your daughter’s blood work in order.”

“Let me see it.” Claire reached out her hand for the folder with Brianna’s intake forms and chart. The doctor handed them over with a wary glance at Claire.
She had looked through hundreds if not thousands of medical charts while nursing during the war; it had been more than ten years but little had changed in their formatting and as she scanned the technical terms and the doctors’ and nurses’ various scrawled notations, her knowledge of what she was looking at came back.

Hers and Frank’s personal histories comparative to Brianna’s. She hadn’t had much reason to notice it before but Dr. Boyer had clearly seen the discrepancies in their three blood types.

“I see,” Claire said as she handed the forms back to the doctor. “No, there’s nothing wrong with the information on those forms, I assure you.”

Boyer’s eyes darted instinctively to Frank seeking confirmation of his knowledge or ignorance before turning back to Claire’s unflinching gaze.

“If everything’s in order then, why don’t the two of you go wait by the nurse’s station. Nurse Thorne will be back with Brianna shortly and I’ll have one of the other nurses arrange a room for her in the mean time,” Dr. Boyer suggested.

“I want to know about the procedure,” Claire insisted. “Every cut, every suture. I would like for you to take me through it.”

“Mrs. Randall,” Dr. Boyer began in a patronizing tone as he crossed his arms over his chest. “I understand your concern but—”

“I’m fairly certain I can follow whatever—”

“Let’s go, Claire,” Frank said, guiding Claire to the door. “We need to let them begin processing things so we can get Bree settled sooner rather than later—I don’t want her waiting any more; I want this procedure accomplished quickly so we can get her home as soon as possible.”

Claire sighed as they followed Dr. Boyer to the nurse’s station and he took the woman behind the desk aside to give her his instructions. When she nodded and left to arrange Brianna’s room, he picked up the phone and began making the necessary calls to check the surgery schedule.

“What was that all about with Brianna’s information?” Frank asked Claire under his breath, his eyes on Dr. Boyer.

“Brianna’s blood type. It doesn’t match mine or yours,” Claire whispered back. “Because of that he… he knows that you’re not her biological father.”

“I see.” There was something in Frank’s tone that Claire didn’t recognize but she didn’t have time to puzzle it out before Nurse Thorne was coming down the hallway with Brianna at her side.

Brianna was still subdued but was smiling again with what looked like some sort of homemade lollipop in her fist.

“One of the other nurses here makes them,” Nurse Thorne told Claire after Frank bent down to scoop Brianna up. “They’re basically a cough drop on a stick. By the way, I spoke with Dr. Bishop—he’s handling the construction worker you helped when he first came in. I thought you should know that he’s out of surgery and in recovery and we tracked Karl down so he could sit with him a while.”

Dr. Boyer had hung up the phone and come to join them, his eyes widening as Nurse Thorne spoke with Claire.
“You were the one from the waiting room who helped with the hand guy?” Dr. Boyer asked skeptically.

“Mrs. Randall was a nurse in the war,” Nurse Thorne informed him. “Handled plenty of trauma cases, I’d wager from the way she dealt with him and his friend.”

Claire watched Dr. Boyer’s face flush a little and wondered if he would reconsider going over the steps of Brianna’s operation with her after all. But as he nodded understanding and turned back to Brianna’s file Claire could see he had too much pride to say anything. She would try again later or inquire of one of the nurses; if Nurse Thorne could put her in touch with one of the surgical nurses, they would know the steps of the procedure too and would probably be able to tell her more about the skills of the doctor performing the operation than the doctor himself could be relied upon to divulge.

The nurse who’d gone to set up a room for Brianna returned to show them up.

“I’ll take them,” Nurse Thorne volunteered. “Do you want to ride in the elevator?” she asked Brianna getting down to the young girl’s level.

Brianna nodded vigorously, her hair shining even in the poor fluorescent lighting of the hallway. Dr. Boyer pressed his lips together and watched Claire then Frank under from the corners of his eyes, not realizing Frank noticed.

Claire took Brianna by the hand and followed Nurse Thorne, Frank falling into step behind for a moment before tapping Claire’s shoulder and telling her to go ahead without him, he would be along shortly.

As they got into the elevator and turned to see whether or not it was worth holding the doors for Frank, Claire and Nurse Thorne saw him speaking with Dr. Boyer and as Claire reached over to press the button to hold the doors they heard Frank raise his voice to the physician.

“Perhaps you should rethink your approach to such subjects. Your insinuations certainly don’t make it easier to discuss difficult subjects like my wife’s late husband—none of which changes the fact that I am Brianna’s father…”

“Bree, honey, do you want to push the button?” Claire said quickly to keep the child from hearing or asking questions. She felt Nurse Thorne’s eyes on her as she lifted Brianna into her arms and the elevator doors closed a second later.

“Is Daddy mad at the doctor?” the girl asked, unsurprised.

“It would appear so. But Daddy just wants to make sure you’re being taken care of and he doesn’t know Dr. Boyer the way he does Dr. Reynolds,” Claire tried to explain.

Brianna just sighed, rested her head against Claire’s shoulder, and resumed sucking on her special lollipop.

The doors opened and Nurse Thorne guided Claire and Brianna to the ready room in the pediatric wing. When Claire had settled Brianna on the bed with a nearby storybook, she motioned for a word with Nurse Thorne.

“Would you be able to find the surgeon who’ll be performing the operation or a surgical nurse or someone who could go over it all with me?” she asked. “I’d like to know as much as possible about the procedure.”
Nurse Thorne smiled as she nodded. “I think I can arrange that. There’re plenty of people around here who’d be interested in chatting with you after hearing about how you handled that pair in the ER.” She hesitated for a moment before asking, “Have you ever thought about medical school?”

Claire blinked, surprised. “Uh… no. I’ve always had more patience for… well, for patients than for their physicians.”

Nurse Thorne chuckled. “And I’m sure there are plenty of nurses who would very much appreciate a physician who understood that sentiment. Let me go fetch your husband before he gets himself lost.”

With Nurse Thorne gone from the room, Claire sat on the bed and resettled Brianna in her lap.

She mused on what the full extent of Frank’s conversation with Dr. Boyer might have been; perhaps she would ask Frank later when Brianna had fallen asleep and if she was lucky, he might actually tell her. She suspected he had been scolding the physician for his attitude, defending his own position as Brianna’s father.

The smile that had begun to form at the thought of Frank protecting Brianna faded as her thoughts wandered. Yes, Frank was quite protective of Brianna and an affectionate father towards her. But how much of that was because he had been there throughout her pregnancy? Brianna looked like Jamie but it had to be easier for Frank to pretend she was his because he’d seen her carried and born.

If she had had her way and had been able to retrieve Faith from Lallybroch and bring her through the stones with her, would Frank have been as willing to be a father to her as he was towards Brianna? If it had been Faith who was ill, would he have scolded the doctor so strongly?

Claire doubted it and the thought depressed her. Mrs. Graham had been pressing for her to consult her husband regarding the task of finding Faith—not necessarily explicitly, but through hypotheticals and questions about his methods. Claire had wondered whether she might bring herself to do more than just pick Frank’s brain, whether she might be able to share a little more of her past with him.

“There’s my girl,” Frank said as Nurse Thorne showed him to the door.

“Daddy!” Brianna cried from the bed holding her book aloft to show him.

Nurse Thorne nodded to Claire from the doorway before leaving them to their own devices.

Claire turned her thoughts away from the painful memory of her daughter and towards the seed of an idea planted by Nurse Thorne.
Chapter Summary

Nine-year-old Faith has been missing Jamie while he's been hiding in the cave and wants to go with Fergus to deliver supplies.

“I want to go with ye,” Faith whined as she trailed after Fergus.

He headed for the kitchen where Jenny was sitting and nursing baby Ian while Mrs. Crook stood at the table wrapping several fresh loaves of bread in cloth and adding them to the top of a very full pack of supplies that he would be delivering to Jamie in his cave along with a small barrel of ale. It would take him all morning to reach the cave weighed down as he would be but after a midday meal with Jamie, he would be home in the early afternoon.

“Ye canna go,” Jenny said flatly. “It’s too dangerous and there’s naught ye can do but take a share of what’s meant for yer father.”

“Why couldn’t he come to fetch them himself this time?” Faith asked with a frown that by no means signaled resignation.

“Ye ken there were reports of Red Coats as near as Broch Mordha just last week. It’s safer for Fergus to be roamin’ about the property than for yer da to be caught here or anywhere near. The cave is the best place for him just now and here at the house is the best place for you.” Jenny detached Ian from her breast and sat him up to burp him before switching him to her other breast.

Faith grit her teeth and followed Fergus out of the kitchen and back to the barn where Rabbie had set the small ale barrel he was to take with him.

“I can carry the pack,” Faith volunteered. “Then it willna take so long and we can get back to the house without needin’ to rest long with Da and eatin’ his food.”

“The walk alone will tire you petite soeur,” Fergus told her. “I do not wish to carry you home again.”

At that, Faith groaned and stomped her foot in the dust, turning her back to Fergus so he wouldn’t see the tears of frustration and longing in her eyes. It had been near to a month since she had seen her father in person. He had only stayed for one night and she hadn’t known he was coming to stay up and see him. He’d picked her up out of bed, sat down in it himself, and let her sleep there in his arms for a few hours; she’d only woken up as he was moving her again so that he could take his leave.

“Let me tell you what I will do for you,” Fergus interrupted her disappointment. “I will not go yet if you would like to write a message that I can take to him. But you must be fast about it for I ought to be already on my way.”

Faith didn’t bother taking the time to thank him; she dashed to the house and straight to the study where Ian was behind the desk with the ledger preparing for quarter day.

“I need paper and a quill,” she panted to him.
Ian smiled at her and leaned back in the chair.

“And just what would ye be needing that for?”

“Fergus said he’ll bring it to Da for me.”

Ian nodded and flipped to tear a page from the back of the ledger. He closed the book and rose leaving the page on the desk for Faith while he put the ledger away on the shelf for later.

Faith had to kneel on the chair in order to reach properly and she pressed her lips together as she tilted her head and lifted the quill he’d set down.

“What do ye propose to tell him?”

She sat with the tip of the quill poised over the paper, hesitating. “Uh… I’ll write him something in French!” she exclaimed. “Fergus has been teachin’ me and says I’m improvin’ and Da would be proud.”

“Whatever ye write ye’d best put it to paper fast or Fergus will have to leave wi’ out it,” Ian remarked as Faith began meticulously forming her letters.

Her head shot up. “Make him wait! I’ll no take long, I promise.”

Ian nodded and stepped out of the room so she could compose her brief not in private.

“Should ye no be on the other side of the door?” Jenny remarked as she came through with the baby pressed to her shoulder. She peeked around the doorframe to see Faith blowing on the ink to make it dry faster.

“Jamie,” Ian answered her unasked question. “Fergus’ idea.”

Jenny nodded. “She was sayin’ she wanted to go wi’ him.”

Ian raised his hand to caress the back of his youngest son’s head as he slumbered. “I dinna envy Jamie his position.” Though Ian spent most of his days at Lallybroch with his family, there had been a handful of occasions when he’d been kept away for extended periods of time. The latest had nearly landed him in an English prison and kept him away for the birth of this youngest son.

“Were ye in the habit of envying him before?” Jenny inquired, her eyes reflexively dropping to her husband’s false leg and crutch.

Ian frowned. “When I did it wasna on that account… not usually, at least. Ye never did see him in France when we were fightin’ and thinkin’ ourselves true men. He has a way about him that draws ye to him and a way of makin’ ye feel ye can manage anything… He was a Laird and suited to it. But now… Christ, what more can a man lose and keep goin’?”

“He’s someone at least to keep goin’ for,” Jenny whispered as Faith scampered forward.

“Can ye help me to seal all proper like?” she asked looking up at her aunt and uncle hopefully. “And can ye tuck in a wee bit of pencil so he can write somethin’ back?”

“Ye ken well he’ll no be back for some hours yet,” Maggie said as she counted the stitches she had on her knitting needles for a sixth time (she had three more stitches than when she started but was
supposed to have been decreasing at either end for five rows).

Faith rolled her eyes at her reflection in the dirty window pane. “I ken. Doesna mean I canna look to see do I think those clouds hold rain or will they break,” she responded with annoyance.

Maggie groaned with frustration and pulled the knitting off her needle to pull out several rows and start again. Faith looked over her shoulder and watched, hoping it would keep Maggie distracted enough to leave her alone for a while. She should be working on her lessons but didn’t have the mind for it just then.

If she had thought to ask, her aunt would have gladly let her go upstairs and explore her parents’ room—something she’d been pressing to do increasingly of late. She had already heard all the stories about her mother that everyone in the house was able to recall but there was always something lacking in their versions of her mother; it was only Da’s stories that felt complete but he wasn’t around to tell them to her and when he could and did, she could see the pain behind his eyes and felt guilty—as though she had summoned it with her requests. It was a theory of hers that somewhere in the room among her mother’s things she would be able to find some of what she felt was missing—preferably a journal or something other evidence confirming what her father said about her mother coming through the fairy stones from another time. But her aunt and uncle were reluctant to let anyone or anything disturb what they still saw as Jamie’s.

“What?”

Faith and Maggie both started. The exclamation had come from the kitchen. With only a brief glance at each other they rose and darted from the hall to see what was causing the ruckus.

Rabbie and young Jamie were both red-faced from running and taking it in turns to explain what was wrong.

“Red Coats.”

“Broch Mordha.”

“But coming.”

“This way.”

“Again?” Jenny exclaimed bouncing a fussy infant in an effort to calm him (it wasn’t working). “But they were just hereabouts…” She looked at the fussing baby in her arms, entirely too aware of how long it had been since the last time the Red Coats had descended on Lallybroch and what had happened on one of their other ‘visits’ not more than three years before.

“Fergus,” her husband muttered.

Faith watched her aunt’s face pale.

“If they catch the lad… But he can talk himself out of it,” she said trying to instill a certainty she didn’t feel into the words. “He can talk himself out of anything and if not he’s quick on his feet and like to get away. Besides… he’s just a lad.”

“He’s near enough a man for the Red Coats,” Ian shook his head. “And his accent isna goin’ to do him any favors.”

Then Faith saw an even more terrifying look cross her uncle’s face.
“Christ,” he muttered. “He’s got Faith’s wee note for Jamie. If they find him and search him…”

“Can someone go to warn him?” Jenny asked though the glance she cast at Rabbie and young Jamie was full of hesitation and fear. “Can they fetch him back?”

“I dinna… I think what we must do is pray the English come here to the house,” he asserted. “If they do we must keep them busy to buy the lad time. He’ll come back empty-handed at any rate; tha’s no a crime, even in their eyes.”

Maggie turned to see what Faith thought of the whole exchange but her cousin was gone.

Faith hadn’t been to the cave herself—Jamie refused to let her take that risk and everyone else agreed—but she had heard Fergus, Rabbie, and her uncle talk about it and the various ways to reach it enough times to have a vague idea of which direction to head in while searching for Fergus. He had been gone a while so he ought to be drawing close to it meaning that if the Red Coats did happen his way they would be dangerously close to finding Jamie and the cave.

She ran as fast as she could and began calling Fergus when she had enough breath to allow it.

“Faith?” she heard him at last. “What in heaven’s name—you should not be here,” he scolded as he stopped and set the small barrel of ale down while he waited for her to catch up. “Your father—”

“Red Coats,” she gasped, bending over and pressing a hand to the stitch in her side. “There’re Red Coats at Broch Mordha… and they’re coming toward Lallybroch.”

“Mon Dieu,” he muttered, shifting the pack slung over his shoulder so it would be more comfortable then glancing around at the thinly wooded area around them. The coast seemed to be clear. “Right. You will go back home and tell the others that I will bring this to Milord and stay with him until Rabbie comes to fetch me because word has come the English have gone.”

Faith shook her head. “Ye canna know they’re no watching and ye might lead them to Da. Ye’d best come back wi’ me to the house,” she insisted, her fear for her father giving her words an unexpected weight.

“But we are already so close. To go and need to come again with the supplies would be more risk,” Fergus tried to reason with her. “He will not have food and will leave the safety of the cave to hunt.”

“Then I’m comin’ wi’ ye.”

“Non.” Fergus’ response was louder and firmer than he intended.

“Hello there!” They heard an unfamiliar voice call to them and turning to investigate its source, they saw a trio of English soldiers on horseback riding toward them. Fergus pulled Faith behind him, knowing there was no time to run.

“What might the two of you be doing so far out in the wilderness?” the soldier in the lead asked looking down his nose at Fergus and then eyeing the barrel of ale and pack of provisions.

“It is not wilderness,” Fergus informed the officer. “These lands belong to the estate of Broch Tuarach.”

“Interesting accent you’ve got there.”
“Here—what do you have all that for?” one of the other soldiers asked nodding to the food and drink. He shifted in the saddle preparing to climb down.

Faith took a step out from behind Fergus to protect the provisions. “They’re for the estate and her tenants,” she declared loudly and with a ferocity and glare that defied her youth and stature.

“And what are they doing so far from the house and those tenants?” the lead soldier challenged her. His companion had succeeded in dismounting and his smile as he approached Faith was one of amusement more than intimidation.

“It is no business of yours where we store additional provisions,” Fergus took another step forward to get Faith behind him once more. “You and your soldiers have been through already and taken more than your share.”

“Not if you’ve been holding out on us.”

The third man was down from his horse in a flash and had knocked Fergus to the ground so that the second man was able to grab the bag of provisions. As he fell Fergus was able to knock Faith out of the way but she screamed in the process.

“Leave my little sister alone!” Fergus shouted, kicking the legs out from under the man with the bag of provisions. He fell hard and landed on the bag, screaming in pain as one of the jars of preserves smashed and the broken glass cut him.

“Attacking a soldier in His Majesty’s army,” the one who’d knocked Fergus to the ground tutted as he unsheathed his sword. “Now, that’s something you’ll be brought to answer for—though I suspect there’s something larger that’ll have you swinging ‘fore too long.”

“I find it hard to believe that you have any sort of food store so far from the house, even if your intent is to conceal it from His Majesty’s men,” the leader remarked—still seated calmly on his horse. “It’s far more likely that you’re bringing it to someone—you would rather remain undiscovered and whose presence poses a threat.”

Faith roared as she ran at the soldier with the sword. She was small but he was unprepared for the way she launched herself at his side. The impact threw him off balance so that they both tumbled to the ground. The man who had fallen on the bag of provisions kicked the ruined mass out of his way as he laughed.

“Faith!” Fergus hollered when the soldier she’d knocked down got back to his feet. He did not find her efforts as entertaining and turned on her raising his sword to threaten and scare her. Faith screamed and kicked at his shins before Fergus tackled him. The two rolled around on the ground, Fergus doing his best to punch the larger man while the soldier slashed with his sword as best he could in such close quarters.

“That’s enough!” his commander ordered as the other soldier struggled to remount while carrying the small barrel of ale. “Let him go! I thought I heard something…”

All of them paused and listened; even Faith quieted though her face was streaked with tears.

They heard a gunshot in the distance.

“Let’s go!” the lead officer instructed turning his horse around in circles while waiting for his subordinates to get themselves together.

“But sir,” the one who held Fergus by his collar objected. “This one’s old enough to be worth
“Forget your pride and get on your horse,” the order came down. “We’ve bigger fish to catch than some imported brat. Drop it, Reynolds,” he added, frowning at the other soldier who had regained his seat in the saddle but struggled to keep hold of the ale barrel while guiding his horse.

“Yes, sir,” he replied reluctantly before letting the barrel fall. It didn’t smash on impact but rather rolled away down the slight slope, leaving a trail of its leaking contents behind.

It was another minute or two before Faith and Fergus recovered themselves enough to stand up and assess the damage. Faith began to cry as she prodded the bag of provisions with her foot and heard the tinkle of broken glass in response.

“There, there, petite soeur,” Fergus comforted her even as he winced and got to his feet. “We will go back to the house and return another day. Milord will be all right until then.”

“Ye’re hurt,” she noted going pale at the sight of his blood-soaked sleeve. “Let me see.”

It was a deep gash across his lower arm and it was bleeding a lot. She pulled off her apron and wrapped it around his wrist.

“We need to get back to the house and get ye mended,” she instructed, her earlier fear and nerves gone. “And we’ll have to tell Aunt Jenny and Uncle Ian about the Red Coats. They’ll ken what to do about Da.”
Jamie watches as Red Coats intercept Fergus and Faith while they’re bringing him provisions.

Jamie was restless. It had been one of his longer stretches on his own in the cave and his provisions were running low. He knew there was a good chance Fergus would show up to replenish them within the next few days and that he should stay put. But Fergus would be able to tell him how Faith was doing and it had been so long since Jamie had been out in proper daylight.

If Fergus were on his way, there was a spot at the top of a bluff that was fairly well protected where Jamie would be able to see the lad from a ways off. It wouldn’t take long to check and then, if he did see Fergus, he could slip down and along the path to meet the lad—though he was close to seventeen now and should rightly be called a man. The two of them carrying the provisions would move more efficiently and it would mean less risk for Fergus.

Jamie slipped to the back of the cave where his brown knitted cap lay with his bedding. He tucked the hat under his arm for a moment then picked up the pistol he kept in the cave for emergencies though they weren’t good for much more than providing him an alternative to being taken alive by any Red Coats that might find him. Pausing at the mouth of the cave, Jamie made sure to tuck every lock of his hair beneath the cap’s dark wool then slowly crept out of the cave and into the chill morning air.

The rocks and ground were slick with a dampness that hung in the air, drifting down from the peaks and settling in the natural pockets of the lower elevations. It might be difficult to spot Fergus but that meant it was also safer for Jamie outside the cave than it normally would have been; he’d be just as difficult to spot.

Finally reaching the desired outcropping, Jamie dropped to lay prone on the ground near the rocky edge and peered down the incline towards the fields and the house. He could just make out the top of one of the chimneys and took heart from the trail of smoke rising from it. The kitchens; Mrs. Crook would be hard at work on the midday meal with some help from Jenny and the girls. He redirected his gaze to the blur of dull, slumbering landscape that lay between the edge of the hill that blocked his view of Lallybroch and the footpath Fergus would take to reach the base of hill that lead to his cave.

Movement caught his eye and he involuntarily smiled. The shape of a young man began to stand out against the lighter blur of the ground. Fergus’ progress was slow and burdened but his figure advanced in the usual direction.

Jamie tugged at the brim of his bonnet in preparation for rising and sneaking away to meet Fergus but more movement caught his eye. A second, smaller figure started taking shape chasing after Fergus from the house. His heart leapt to his throat; he’d recognize that dark head and the cloud of curls bouncing anywhere.

Faith.
More pressing was the other movement he had spotted. From the corner of his eye advancing quickly and from a different direction had been the warning flash of scarlet that meant a Red Coat patrol was moving through.

He wanted to run forward and intercept the Red Coats; he wanted to scream to Faith and Fergus to run. However, to do so would only get himself killed and implicate them in the process.

But maybe there was another way…

He fumbled with the pistol at his belt as he watched the Red Coats come upon Faith and Fergus.

“Good lad,” he muttered to himself as he saw Fergus step in front of Faith. He took his eyes away from the scene to check that the pistol was properly loaded and primed. He only had enough powder and shot for two additional rounds.

Faith’s terrified scream was a faint echo on the breeze and his heart seized. He looked frantically down to see Fergus tousling with one of the Red Coat soldiers; Faith was on the ground but apparently unharmed. And it was going to stay that way.

There was no chance he could make a shot from so far away but the sound would carry easily. He stayed pressed to the ground, safely out of sight, raised the pistol and fired into the sky. The hot barrel burned the tips of his fingers as he set about preparing it for another round.

He didn’t look down to see whether the Red Coats had noticed the first shot, he simply raised the pistol again and fired. Then he was up and running through the brush. There wasn’t much time to get a sufficient head start but the soldiers were on horses and he knew a path through the dense brush that would be difficult for them to manage with beasts of that size. He needed a safely concealed spot to reload and fire to keep them on his tail and lead them away without getting himself caught. When he was out of shot and powder, he would find other ways to lead the Red Coats on a merry chase safely away from Lallybroch.

Only when he was absolutely sure it was safe would he dare to return but even as he ran he knew that it would be a brief stay; he needed to be sure Faith was all right and he had to find a way to say goodbye. He couldn’t stay so close to home anymore; they were in greater danger because of him and he would never forgive himself if anything happened to Faith.

“There ye are,” Jenny scowled. She looked ready to reach out and smack Faith upside the head but her hands were full with the baby fussing in her arms. “If ye had half the sense God gave…” Jenny went pale as she saw the blood soaked apron Faith held tightly around Fergus’ arm. “Take him to the still room,” she said quickly turning to Mrs. Crook and handing the baby over.

Faith helped Fergus to sit and rest his arm on the table while keeping pressure on his wound. He was beginning to be pale and clammy when Jenny entered with Ian a few steps behind.

“Drink,” Jenny instructed, holding a flask to Fergus’ mouth.

“What happened?” Ian asked. “Did ye meet the Red Coats comin’ or goin’?”

“I had not reached the cave when Faith appeared,” Fergus informed Ian. “The Red Coats were not far behind her. Ah!”

Jenny had poured some of the whisky on the wrapped wound to help loosen the parts where the
blood had dried.

“They got the supplies then? Did they search ye as well? Do they have the message ye carried for Jamie?” Ian spoke with a rapidity born of desperation and fear.

Fergus reached into his shirt and pulled out the sealed letter. Handing it to Ian he left behind three faint smudges from his bloodstained fingers. Ian sighed with visible relief.

“No, they did not have time to search me. Faith caught them by surprise and things became… messy.”

Jenny paused in her removal of the improvised bandages to gape at her niece. “Ye fought back?”

Faith pressed her lips together and turned her attention to Fergus’ arm.

“First she told them that the provisions were from another stash and we were fetching them to the house,” Fergus tried to equivocate. “But they did not believe her and then…”

“Well if I ever needed proof ye were Jamie’s lass…” Jenny muttered with awe and disapproval. “Here, thread the needle while I clean this,” she instructed, handing a small case of instruments over to Faith.

Faith picked up the curved needle in question and examined it with a frown before disappearing briefly to the kitchen for a candle.

“What’re ye do—Faith… where’d ye learn to do that?” Jenny asked with a faint note of foreboding and a glance to Ian.

Faith was being careful not to burn her fingers as she passed the needle through the flame.

“It was something Da said Mama used to do,” she informed them, too distracted by her task to notice their silent looks. “I like it when he talks about her,” she added wistfully. “I think he likes it too.”

“Aye, she did. She had quite a few odd ways about her,” Ian responded, the bloodstained letter tucked under his arm. “But she was a rare healer.”

Faith deftly threaded the needle and handed it over to Jenny, accepting the blood and whisky soaked apron in exchange.

“Ian, come hold the lad’s arm steady,” Jenny requested. “Faith, ye ken the herbs for wrapping this when I’m through, no?”

Faith nodded and quickly began rummaging through the stores. She dropped the dried leaves into the mortar and added a few drops of oil before taking the pestle in hand and beginning her task, ignoring Fergus’ grunts and groans as he fought against the impulse to cry out in pain.

“So ye fought with the Red Coats,” Jenny mused in hopes of distracting Fergus. “I dinna think for a moment that ye killed them so how’d ye get away?”

“They heard something,” Fergus said through gritted teeth. “A gunshot—perhaps it was two. They dropped what they had and went in search of the shooter.”

“They really did,” Faith insisted enthusiastically. “One of ‘em had been tryin’ to get on his horse with the barrel of ale and he just dropped it to the ground and let it roll away. They wanted to take the provisions too, but ruined them in the fight. What?” She finally noticed the concerned looks on
her aunt and uncle’s faces.

Jenny nodded to Ian who hurried out of the room and was soon calling for Rabbie to fetch the smith, Ross, who happened to be shoeing horses in the stable.

“What is it?” Faith pressed.

“It’s nothing for you to concern yerself with,” Jenny told her as she finished tying the last suture into Fergus’ arm and cut the silk thread. “You need to finish dressing this for Fergus so it doesna cause him to take a fever.” She gathered her things and hastily left the room, closing the door behind her.

“Fergus? What is it? What’s goin’ on?”

“The gunshots,” he said quietly. “Can you think from where they might have come? Who could have fired the shots and led the soldiers away from us?”

The pestle made a dull thud as it hit the table.

“Da,” she breathed but the breath was ragged and shallow; her hands trembled.

“He will be all right,” Fergus assured her reaching out with his good arm and pulling her closer. “He knew what he was doing. He knows this land better than they do and he will outrun them.”

“But they’ll no stop chasing him, will they,” Faith countered. “They’ll watch us closer and he willna be able to come home so often.”

Fergus rubbed her arm with his hand but said nothing; he didn’t want to lie to her if he could help it.

“Just focus on repairing my arm,” he suggested, nodding to the injury.

Faith brought the mortar closer and began to scoop the oily mixture out of the bottom to spread over the wound. Fergus relaxed at the soothing sensation that settled into the tender flesh as she gently massaged the mixture into the skin.

There was no news for over a week. No Red Coats came to Lallybroch, which everyone took as a good sign and there was no news that the Red Coat patrol that had been passing through from Broch Mordha had captured anyone. But they hadn’t gone far from the area either.

Ian had Rabbie and Ross help him to bring additional stores to Jamie’s cave—only what could reasonably be spared should Red Coats find and confiscate it. They also cleared away any lingering signs of Jamie’s presence there but were too afraid to visit the cave to see whether their efforts had been either discovered by the Red Coats or disturbed by Jamie returning to his hiding place for rest or provisions.

Faith had trouble sleeping and grew quiet and withdrawn; Jenny and Ian, too, exhibited shorter tempers and deep circles under their eyes. Fergus continued to use his wounded arm as a means of distracting Faith. It became her task to change the bandages and apply salve to the deep cut. Jenny insisted he keep it as still as possible if only so she wouldn’t be required to put new stitches in should movement tear loose the ones in place. It was only a matter of days before the wound had healed enough for Faith to cut the stitches.

“Gently,” Fergus scolded as she tugged at the loose ends of the threads to remove them.
Faith rolled her eyes and continued down the line until only a series of pin pricks remained on either side of the pink scar.

“Slowly, try touching the tips of yer fingers to yer thumb,” she suggested.

Fergus winced as he made the attempts.

“Ye’ve healed on the outside,” Faith remarked taking his forearm in her hands and lightly tracing the scar, “but ye’ve a ways to go ‘fore the inside’s fully healed.” She took up a small pot of a new salve and began massaging it into Fergus’ arm before wrapping it once more.

“Gi’ him a wee ball o’ rags to squeeze,” Jamie said from the kitchen’s back doorway into the yard. “Tha’s what yer mam gave me when my hand was a mangled mess.”

“Da!” Faith squealed, running to him and jumping into his arms.

“Hush, mo uan ,” he said with a relieved smile in his voice. “Ye dinna want to bring the Red Coats down on us, now.”

“Da… ye smell terrible,” Faith murmured into his neck causing him to shake with silent laughter.

He pulled her back to look at her and nodded as she wrinkled her nose. “Aye well, I had to give the Red Coats some way to track me when I ran out of shot for the pistol.”

“Then we’re all done for,” Jenny muttered from the doorway that led to the parlor. “Could smell ye from upstairs,” she assured him shifting the baby to her other shoulder, “and I was changing a soiled clout. Come. Let’s get ye to the priest hole and I’ll have Mrs. Crook warm ye some water to bathe with till it’s dark and safe for ye to come out. I suspect ye’ll have quite a bit to talk over wi’ Ian when he’s back from the fields tonight.”
Echoes of Claire

Chapter Summary

Jamie must say goodbye to Faith.

Jamie explained his plan and reasons to Jenny and Ian while Mrs. Crook was getting the children ready for bed. There wasn’t much time before Faith came hurrying back into the kitchen and crawling into his lap to cuddle against him so there had been little opportunity for either Jenny or Ian to object and try to reason with him. They could also see from the way he held his daughter that he had to have thought it through a million times trying to find another way forward.

“Why don’t the two of ye take yer old room, brother?” Jenny suggested quietly as Faith’s eyes glassed over with her exhaustion. “Ye ought to sleep in a proper bed while ye can.”

“Aye,” Jamie agreed, shifting to keep Faith undisturbed in his arms while he stood to carry her upstairs. “I’ll tell her in the morning.”

He laid Faith down on Claire’s side of the bed and tucked her in before going about lighting a fire in the hearth. It was cold in the room but some of the chills he experienced had nothing to do with the temperature.

He had rarely been in that room since he and Claire had ridden out with his men to join Charles eight years before. Nowhere in Lallybroch did he feel Claire’s essence more strongly than their bedroom—not even in her stillroom which certainly smelled the most like Claire. The air was more stale in the bedroom though the growing fire in the hearth was helping to change that. But there were echoes of Claire in the way the furniture remained arranged—the two chairs by the hearth drawn closer together rather than facing each other because when he read in the evenings, she liked to glance over at the page from time to time; the way the bottles and jars of scent and ointment were arranged on her dressing table over in the corner that caught the light best in the morning; the trunk she had put along the exposed side of Faith’s cot so she wouldn’t roll out of bed and fall on the floor.

There was a box in the corner where Claire had kept the things she didn’t think it worth trying to bring on their campaign, things that Jenny had promised to keep aside for when Faith was older. Jamie retrieved the box and brought it over to the fireside, sitting on the floor. The piece of parchment unfolded reluctantly and crinkled stiffly but ultimately revealed the sets of handprints he remembered. He traced the lines of Faith’s short, plump fingers in the center of the page before drifting and spreading his right hand out to cover the mark left by Claire’s hand; his hand completely engulfed hers.

What would she make of his decision? He had promised her that Faith wouldn’t be left to grow up without them shortly after they had made this for Faith’s birthday. The day he’d sent Claire back through the stones, he thought he was breaking that promise only to come out of the haze of his fever to find Faith asleep in his arms. If he left now, if he took this risk… Faith would certainly be safer and maybe—just maybe—he would survive and be able to return to her again. If what Claire had remembered about the sentences for captured Jacobites was true, there was a good chance he would see Faith again.

But how to make Faith understand? And how to make himself go through with it?
She had grown so much already… and was so like Claire. She was the only thing that made the hiding and solitude bearable… that made the not having Claire survivable.

He closed his eyes and saw again Fergus standing in front of Faith as the Red Coats sat high on their horses, their shadows falling on the both of them. Yes, he could and he would do it to keep anything like that from happening again. The only reason either of them had been so far from safety was him. And painful as it would be to live so far away from her, horrible as whatever the English might do to him as a prisoner, he promised himself he would endure it and he would survive it for her sake.

He poked through the rest of the things in the box: tokens Claire had received from some of the tenants when she’d provided her healing services, the few bits of jewelry she had brought back from their time in France, some rough stones and bones that must have come from those strange parcells she believed Master Raymond sent her, and lining the bottom was her small diary of ailments and remedies. He pulled it out and skimmed through it to see the delicate working of her handwriting, tighter and more forceful when she rushed to get something down in her excitement, occasionally recopied with greater care and legibility.

His heart yearned to choose something from the box for himself so that he could take a bit of Claire with him where he was going but he knew it would be unceremoniously stripped from him as soon as he was handed over. Better to entrust the lot to Jenny and eventually Faith for safekeeping. He put the items back in the box and reset the lid, hugging it to his chest for an extra moment before returning it to its corner.

The room had warmed significantly and the disquiet he’d felt before had settled. He set another large log on the fire before turning to crawl into bed beside Faith. She sighed as he pulled the blankets up around them and before he had completely lost consciousness, he was aware of her hand wrapping around his arm and her face nuzzling against him.

“Ye’re goin’ away?” Faith asked, her voice still sleepy. “Back to the cave? Or are ye goin’ to a different one?”

“Further than that, I’m afraid, mo uan, ” Jamie said sorrowfully, brushing back her hair. She reached up a fist and rubbed at her eyes. “Ye remember how I told ye about sending yer mam through the stones to keep her safe?”

“Are ye goin’ to go join her? Can I come with ye?”

“No, mo uan … I cannae go through the stones. And ye cannae come wi’ me where I must go. It’s no a place for lasses, even grown lasses like yerself. But I must go for the same reason yer mam and the bairn had to go through the stones—I must keep ye safe. I cannae send you somewhere safer than ye already are… so I must be the one to go.”

He fought to keep the tears from his voice—he had shed quite a few silent tears as the dawn broke and he watched her still sleeping with her rosy cheeks creased from the pillow. Now he watched the watery blue of her eyes—one of the few bits she’d inherited from him—spill over as her light frame began to shake with sobs.

“Hush, now, m’annsachd ,” he murmured, pulling her into the tight circle of his arms.

“I don’t… want ye to go,” Faith managed to gasp between sobs.

“I dinna want to go either,” he assured her, fresh tears spilling from his own eyes. “I want to hold ye
like this for always; to keep ye where I can see ye and protect ye wi’ my own two hands the way I did when ye were just a wee bairn, smaller even than yer cousin, Ian… But I can’t…” He loosened his hold on her so he could put his hands between them where she could see. “Yer mam helped fix this one here,” he reminded her, tracing the scars on his right hand with the fingers of his left. “I can do a lot wi’ them, but I canna keep the Red Coats from harmin’ ye when they come here lookin’ for me… not unless I go wi’ them.”

Faith’s sobs had subsided but silent tears still trickled down her cheeks.

“Will ye ever come back?” she asked quietly.

More than anything Jamie wanted to reassure her that he would see her again because that was what he wanted for himself; holding her in his arms it was impossible not to notice how grown she already was. She would be nine in just a few months; already well on her way to being a grown woman. He’d spent so much of her childhood at a short distance, it broke his heart to think he might well miss the rest of it—that, however small it might be, there was a chance he would never see the woman she became…

But he pushed that fear that was twisting his stomach in knots aside.

“I promise ye that I will do everything in my power to come back to ye as soon as I can,” he told her and meant it. “If there’s a way to get word to ye—to let ye know how I fare—I’ll use it… And so long as ye keep me in yer thoughts, I’ll be with ye, just as ye’ll be with me… Ye’ll be my first thought in the morning and my last at night.”

Faith nodded against Jamie’s chest and reached up to wipe her eyes. “And ye’ll by mine, Da. Promise.”

Jamie pressed his nose to the crown of her head and breathed deeply, her hair tickling his nose.

“I’ve something I want ye to have,” he said after a few moments. He reached under his pillow to where he’d stashed it before she woke. “Yer Uncle Willie made this for me when I was a wee lad.” He handed her the carved wooden snake that had long lived in his sporran. “I dinna want anything to happen to it so I want ye to keep him safe for me, aye?”

“Saw-ny?” Faith sounded out, running her fingertips along the worn letters carved into the snake’s belly.

“It’s what he called me,” Jamie informed her.

Faith managed a weak smile. “If I have him for ye, then ye have to come home to get him back from me.”

Jamie smiled and kissed her warm forehead. “I suppose ye’re right, mo uan. I suppose ye’re right.”

“When… when will ye go?”

“No for another day or two. Yer aunt and uncle have some arrangin’ to do to make ready for my leaving but waitin’ too long might just bring the Red Coats back to the house proper and that’s precisely what we want to avoid,” he warned her.

“Can I stay here wi’ ye till ye have to go?”

Jamie pulled her tighter to him till he could feel the edges of Sawny pressing into his chest too.
“I wouldna have it any other way.”
Claire's Patient

Chapter Summary

A patient's plight hits Claire close to home.

It was the rotation Claire had most been dreading though it was also the one—aside from emergency and trauma—where she had the most prior experience. Maternity and postnatal care. Because she was aiming to specialize in surgery, the cases she shadowed and contributed to were difficult Cesareans and premature births—cases that kept her three words away from crying at any given moment. None of her fellow students or instructors knew how close to home it all hit and she was determined it would stay that way. She was already judged for being the only woman in her program and a married mother at that. The push for her drop from surgery into obstetrics had started when she filed her declarative paperwork and was about to increase exponentially. If she showed too much sensitivity, showed that it was getting to her that push might try to go past obstetrics and out of the program entirely.

Looking over the notes for her first patient of the day and listening to the surgeon on the case explain the procedure that had been performed as well as those that would likely be necessary, Claire’s pulse began to beat louder in her ears. Detached placenta resulting in a premature birth of a female child; the infant had survived the early delivery but was having difficulty breathing with its underdeveloped lungs and was reacting poorly to its formula making it likely the child’s already low birth weight would continue to drop. They were trying to ensure the infant would be comfortable but had focused most of their attentions on the mother who was suffering a fever, the likely result of retained placental tissue. Claire was scheduled to observe the procedure that would remove any lingering tissue that might be causing a dangerous infection.

Claire was sent in to do the preliminary examination on the patient.

Mrs. Knight thought Claire was the nurse when she first came into the room. She was a younger woman, probably in her early to mid twenties. The fever was evident in the sweat-soaked bedclothes and hospital gown; her light brown hair was plastered to her forehead.

“Is… is my husband…” the woman mumbled. She was having difficulty speaking around her tongue, heavy and dry in her mouth. Claire got her a cup of water and helped her sit up enough to take a sip. “Is he… with the baby? Where is she? I want to see her.”

Claire remembered her own desperation, the restlessness that couldn’t be soothed until Faith had been brought to her and placed on her chest, until she could feel the weight of that tiny body pressed to her heart.

“Mrs. Knight,” Claire began calmly, “My name is Dr. Randall. I’m going to be taking care of you today. You need to have a procedure this morning that will help you fight this fever you have.”

“My baby… is she… Where is she?”

“I promise I will find out where she is and how she’s doing but I need to take care of you first, is that all right Mrs. Knight?”
There were tears gathering at the corners of Mrs. Knight’s eyes. She was shaking as Claire checked the dilation of her eyes, took her pulse, and quietly gathered the information the woman’s body could provide.

Claire could feel the fear wafting off of the young mother, that extra layer of anxiety that was helping sustain her through the fever but couldn’t last forever. Claire worried what the crash might bring; if it came before the woman knew her daughter’s fate it could be catastrophic…but the daughter’s fate—if not good news—could just as easily trigger that crash sooner.

“Please…” Mrs. Knight said, gripping Claire’s wrist with surprising strength as she paused to make a notation in the woman’s chart. “Please… find my baby. I… I need my baby.”

Claire covered the woman’s hand with her own and then sat gingerly beside her on the bed.

“Mrs. Knight… I’m going to make sure you’re taken care of and then I promise you, I will find your baby and see she’s brought to you.”

The tears dribbled from the corners of the young mother’s eyes as she struggled not to sob.

“Thank you,” she managed after a few moments. “It won’t take long, will it? The… my… procedure?”

Claire shook her head. “No, but you will be sedated through it. With any luck, I’ll be able to bring your daughter to you by the time you wake up. Now let me go fetch the lead surgeon for you and we’ll work on getting you down to the operating room as soon as possible, Mrs. Knight.” Claire gave the woman’s fevered hand a squeeze before moving the leave.

“Doris,” the woman’s voice called faintly after her.

Claire walked back. “Is that your daughter’s name?” Her own voice was quieter than she anticipated.

“No, I’m Doris. My baby… she… she doesn’t have a name yet,” Doris lamented. “She can’t… I have to give her a name before… But I can’t do that without seeing her—please, I have to see my baby.”

“I’ll find her for you,” Claire reassured her with more conviction. “I’ll start looking for her just as soon as I speak with my supervisor. I promise.”

Claire stood at the outer edge of the surgical team trying hard not to bounce in her anxiety for the procedure to be through, for Mrs. Knight to be safely on her way to recovery so she could make her way to the nursery and discuss the unnamed baby girl’s treatment options with the nurses and doctors in the pediatric unit. She would find a way to bring mother and child together.

“Dr. Randall?” her supervisor’s voice cut through Claire’s attempts to mentally calculate how long it would be before she could get away. “I was going to ask if you wanted to come closer and explain each step of the procedure as I make my way through it but I’m afraid your mind is elsewhere. Perhaps I should ask another resident to—”

“No, sir,” she interrupted, slipping from between two of the taller residents in her program. “I know the steps.”

“Very well, then,” he said, watching her with narrowed eyes from above his surgical mask. “Explain to your peers what I’ve already done and why,” he instructed.
Claire narrated her way through the procedure, her eyes drifting periodically to Mrs. Knight’s face, the anesthesiologist’s mask obscuring the lower half of her face.

“Thank you, Dr. Randall. Would you care to accompany Mrs. Knight up to recovery? I want you to monitor her case and come to me if she shows any signs of deterioration.”

“Yes, sir,” Claire agreed even as she silently cursed the time she would lose. She was sure that what would help her patient most was reuniting her with her baby.

Luckily, the recovery area was close to the nursery. Settling Mrs. Knight in her new place and adjusting her pillows and taking her stats, Claire leaned down to whisper in her patient’s ear, “I’m going to get you your baby.”

It was impossible to know whether Mrs. Knight had heard her or not; Claire remembered her own delirious state at the hospital and how, even years later, she still couldn’t tell what snippets of conversation had been real and which imagined.

Reaching the nursery, Claire let herself in and began examining the names and charts for all the infants swaddled and lying in their bassinets.

“What are you doing here?” one of the nurses asked sharply as she lay a slumbering infant down and took up its chart to make a notation.

“I’m looking for the Knight baby? It was an early delivery so she was having some breathing issues,” Claire explained, trying to force more authority into her voice. Despite wearing a white lab coat, most of the older nurses were dismissive of her where they were more likely to heed her male fellows.

The nurse’s face softened at the description of the child, however.

“She’s in the back corner,” she said, leading Claire. “She needs more attention and it can be upsetting to folks visiting when there’s a sick one like this too close to the window.”

“Has her father been to see her?”

“The paperwork from admissions couldn’t seem to find him and the mother wasn’t in a state to explain much when she came in,” the nurse lamented. “Bleeding too heavily and already a bit delirious.”

“She was still a bit scattered when I saw her before her procedure this morning,” Claire conceded.

Claire looked down at the small body struggling to breath in her bassinet. Her skin had a slightly blue tinge to it—she needed more oxygen than her delicate lungs could supply. A light pink blanket rested over her but she wasn’t swaddled the way the other babies were; too fragile and the staff needed to have easier access to her for her to require repeated wrapping and unwrapping.

“I want to take the baby to see her mother,” Claire stated abruptly. “I think it might do them both some good.”

“Absolutely not,” the nurse said without hesitation.

“Mrs. Knight hasn’t even had a chance to see or name her daughter yet,” Claire persisted.

“You’re supposed to be a doctor, right?” the nurse said harshly. “Any doctor would see that this baby is barely holding on right now. Here in the nursery she’s close to oxygen, we’ve got plenty of
staff on hand if something goes wrong… If she goes all the way to one of the rooms and something happens then valuable seconds—minutes maybe—could be lost and she can’t afford that.”

Claire tried not to get offended by the woman’s comments reminding herself that as the baby’s nurse, she was only doing her job. But so was Claire and she wasn’t about to give up so easily—nor was she going to give the woman a reason to call over her supervisor or get any of Claire’s supervisors involved.

“I’ll be back,” Claire warned and then turned before she could see the nurse’s reaction.

She hadn’t been gone long but when she arrived back at Mrs. Knight’s room, the woman was beginning to stir and rouse from her anesthesia. The orderlies looked oddly at Claire as she directed a wheelchair into the room and she called for two of them to help move Mrs. Knight into it from her bed.

“What… what’s going on?” Mrs. Knight murmured, her eyes having difficulty focusing. Finally she found Claire through the clearing fog. “You… you said you’d find my baby.”

“And I did,” Claire told her, “but I couldn’t bring her to you so I’m bringing you to her.”

Claire pushed the chair slowly through the halls. Mrs. Knight winced at sudden movements though it was impossible for Claire to tell whether it was from physical pain or lingering disorientation from the anesthesia. She had to stop just outside the nursery in order to open the door and maneuver the wheelchair through. Before she did she bent in front of Mrs. Knight to see how she was doing.

“Doris?” she asked quietly. “How are you feeling? Do you remember who I am?”

The woman’s eyes fought to focus but in a moment they centered themselves on Claire’s face and she nodded clearly.

“You’re the woman who said you’d bring me to my baby,” she murmured.

Claire nodded encouragingly. “Yes, I’m Dr. Randall. I’ve brought you to the nursery to see your daughter but I don’t want you to be alarmed so I’m going to tell you a bit about what you’ll see. You know your little girl was born early so she’s smaller than most of the other babies in there. She’s being kept on her own so that she can be given special attention. She’s been having some trouble with her breathing so she’s going to look a bit blue but if anything happens everything they’ll need to help her is on hand.”

Mrs. Knight still seemed dazed and Claire wasn’t sure how much of what she said was penetrating the woman’s nerves.

Claire pulled open the door and held it with her foot while she eased the wheelchair through the space. Mrs. Knight’s eyes darted around as she tried to identify which of the crying and cooing babies was hers.

The nurse Claire had spoken with before spotted them and her eyes widened with surprise and fear. Claire shot her a smile that was meant to be reassuring but she feared might have come off as smug.

Mrs. Knight gasped, a hand to her mouth and tears in her eyes as Claire pulled her wheelchair alongside the special bassinet with the weak but persevering baby in it.

“Is she… Can I?” Mrs. Knight fumbled, reaching a tentative hand out towards the infant.

“Go head,” Claire encouraged. The nurse was slowly making her way over to them, pointedly
checking on the other slumbering infants along the way so as not to spook the fraught new mother. “You can touch her. And you should talk to her. She might know your voice.”

Mrs. Knight slipped her finger into her daughter’s tiny hand and emitted a small, strangled laugh as the miniscule fingers closed around it. The baby’s head was already turned towards her mother but her eyes remained closed. “Hello there,” Mrs. Knight crooned quietly, her thumb gently stroking the delicate knuckles and fingernails. “Hello baby girl.”

“Nurse,” Claire turned to the other woman whom she knew was standing at her side by then. She spoke low so Mrs. Knight wouldn’t hear but the woman was too enthralled in the miracle of her child to pay them any attention. “You said the baby’s having trouble with the formula? Do you think you could assist Mrs. Knight in trying to nurse her? The contact should help keep the baby’s temperature up and maybe the breast milk will be easier for her to digest.”

The nurse stood watching mother and daughter bond; Mrs. Knight with both fear and tears in her eyes but a blazing smile on her face while the nameless infant began to rouse from sleep, her eyelids peeking open to her mother’s delight.

“The baby’s breathing is the biggest concern at the moment but she needs to keep her energy up to keep fighting to do that,” the nurse mused quietly to Claire. “It’s worth trying, I suppose.”

“Thank you,” Claire murmured before they both moved to Mrs. Knight. “Nurse…”

“Miller. It’s time for the little one here to have a little something to eat,” she said with gentle kindness, reaching into the bassinet and gently lifting the child, wrapping the blanket around her loosely. “Now, because the doctors have been keeping you busy, we’ve been feeding her with the bottle but since you’re here, do you think you’d be up for trying to nurse her yourself?”

Mrs. Knight looked startled but her eyes drifted to her baby. “Well, my husband and I were going to… Yes, please give her to me.”

Claire helped guide Mrs. Knight through what to do, reassuring her as the small bundle in her arms whimpered and flailed weakly for a few minutes before successfully latching and calming in her mother’s arms.

Claire and Nurse Miller continued to watch the pair, eyes scanning for any sign of distress in either.

“You’ve seen this work before, have you?” Nurse Miller asked.

Claire swallowed and blinked back the tears in her eyes. She nodded. “My… my oldest daughter. She was born early too. We were lucky—both of us. It was close. It was a while before she was well but when I held her like that… It was the closest I felt to knowing everything would be all right.”

“You lost her then?” Nurse Miller asked, confused.

“No, then,” Claire explained as best she could. “She was… she was two. I lost her and my first husband both… An accident,” she lied. “I… I was already pregnant with my younger daughter. My husband now… he uh… he adopted her. She doesn’t know anyone but him.”

“What was her name?” Mrs. Knight asked. Claire felt Nurse Miller start beside her. Neither of them had realized she was listening.

“Faith,” Claire breathed then swallowed hard. She turned her head and cleared her throat, wiping at her eyes. “Her name was Faith. Nuns ran the hospital and I was… The one taking care of us didn’t have time to ask me her name so she baptized her Faith just to be safe. When everything… when we
were both safe and well again, my husband and I decided to keep it for her.”

“Bold nun,” Nurse Miller muttered under her breath and the memory of Mother Hildegarde with Faith’s small, slumbering form in her arms caused Claire to laugh unexpectedly.

“She was. But as long as I held Faith in my arms… I didn’t lose it—my faith.”

“Faith…” Mrs. Knight pondered with a furrowed brow as her attention shifted back from Claire to the daughter in her arms.

Claire tensed at the expression that she saw forming on her patient’s face but when Mrs. Knight looked back up at her there was still something incredibly pitiable in it.

“I never had much faith to begin with,” she whispered, forlorn. Her finger moved to the thin cheek of the infant at her breast. The child’s palm was spread flat against her mother’s warm, soft flesh, rising with the sob that threatened to escape Mrs. Knight’s chest.

Claire bent before the terrified woman and put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. “What about hope?” she suggested.

Mrs. Knight looked up and Claire watched a tear slide from her eye. “Hope?”

“It can be as powerful as faith. Certainly worth holding on to.”

“Hope…” Mrs. Knight turned the word over with her tongue then looked down at the baby and repeated, “Hope.”

The child pushed away from Mrs. Knight’s breast with a deep shuddering breath that caused all three adults to inhale sharply… then sneezed and began rooting around in search of the rest of her meal. Mrs. Knight laughed, gently shifting the baby in her arms from one side to the other and guided the eager mouth to what it sought. “You’re a hungry girl, aren’t you… Hope?”
Making Her Daughter Proud

Chapter Summary

A recent patient reinvigorates Claire's search for Faith.

Claire was late getting home but she knew that Brianna would forgive her. The porch light was on and she could see the duller glow through the front windows that suggested Brianna and Frank were having supper in the kitchen rather than the dining room.

She made sure to close the front door loudly and was rewarded with an excited squeal from Brianna followed by the pounding of her feet on the floor as she bounded out of the kitchen and hurled herself at Claire.

“Mama!” she exclaimed, her arms clinging tightly to Claire’s neck.

She noisily grunted while lifting a laughing Brianna off the floor and into a hug.

“Bree!” Frank called from the kitchen with a scolding edge to his voice. “Let your mother get her things off and whatever you do don’t wipe your face on her.”

Giggles flooded Claire’s right ear as Brianna pulled back suddenly forcing Claire to rapidly accommodate the shifting weight with a genuine groan rather than one that was purely for the child’s amusement.

“Don’t worry, Mama. I didn’t get any of it on you. I made sure to turn my head like this,” Brianna explained demonstrating and showing Claire precisely why there was a smeared red stain along the rolled up sleeve of her shirt.

“Daddy made you spaghetti… again,” Claire remarked with amusement and poorly concealed judgment. If Frank had been able to hear from the kitchen he would have rolled his eyes and frowned passing judgments of his own but Brianna was too excited.

“It’s my favorite,” she informed her mother who was well aware of the fact.

“Have you left any for me or did you already gobble it all up?”

“There’s some for you in the sink but you’ll have to use hot water to get it unstucked. But you have to tell me what happened? Did the lady and the baby go home like they were ‘sposed to?”

Claire nodded. “Yes, Mrs. Knight and baby Hope got to go home today. I had my appendectomy in the afternoon but she stayed long enough for me to get out of surgery and get to say goodbye to them both.”

“And will you see ‘em again?”

“Ideally, no. If I see them again it would mean one of them got sick and I don’t want that.”

Brianna sighed. “No, I guess not. But it stinks that you only get to see sick people at work.”
“But I get to make them not sick and I like doing that very much. Now how about you help me unstick my spaghetti,” Claire suggested.

Brianna hurried back to the kitchen to fill Frank in on Claire’s news.

“It sounds like you’re justifiably proud,” Frank remarked.

Claire wasn’t quite sure what to make of the remark so she chose to treat it like a compliment.

“I am.”

“I find it hard to imagine what it must be like for you when you see your most difficult patients recovered and leave,” Frank continued to muse. “Most of the time you don’t treat them long enough to get too attached but with some—like this Mrs. Knight—you do seem to… bond with your patients.”

“Depending on what’s ailing them, it can be easier not to,” Claire tried to explain. “I’m sure you’re closer with some of your students than others.”

There was a deepening of the lines around Frank’s mouth and he looked away. Claire turned to the sink and wet the spaghetti in its colander, giving them both a moment to recover as she served herself and Brianna rambled with a story for Claire about what she’d been doing in school that day.

Frank rose and put his dishes in the sink as Claire sat to eat her meal. Brianna stayed at the table with her while she ate, Frank switching out Brianna’s empty plate of spaghetti for a small dish of ice cream before leaving the pair of them alone.

“What do you think, Mama?” Brianna asked. “Will you be able to fix your work so you can come? There aren’t a lot of moms who’ll be there; it’s mostly the other kids’ dads.”

“You want me to go to your career day and not Daddy?” Claire blinked against the tears of pride forming in her eyes; it would be difficult to explain them to Brianna should she notice.

“Of course,” Brianna said as though she hadn’t even considered asking Frank.

“If you want me to, I’ll arrange things so I can make it,” she promised. There were several of her fellow students who owed her favors and a few others who would probably help her without coercion. “Now, I think you should have a bath before bed tonight. I’m pretty sure you’ve got spaghetti and sauce in your hair; just look at how red it is.”

Brianna giggled. “That’s not sauce, Mama. It’s just my hair.”

“Well there’s only one way for me to be certain and that’s for you to have a bath and wash it,” Claire said with a smile and a shrug.

“Okay,” Brianna said resigned as she trotted out of the kitchen and up the stairs to the bathroom. “You’ll tuck me in when I’m done, right Mama?”

“And read you a story.” Claire cleared the rest of the dinner dishes into the sink, filling it with water and leaving them to soak before heading for the stairs herself to check on Brianna’s progress.

The light was on in Frank’s study but the door was closed. She felt a small pang of guilt for having run so late from the hospital and cutting into his correcting and research time. As was her habit, she promised herself she would find a way to make it up to him only to recall the awkward moment during dinner and wondered if she ought to feel guilty at all; perhaps it wasn’t her tardiness causing
him to fall behind at work or perhaps it wasn’t his time spent researching that he lamented losing.

Brianna was rambunctious with the news of Claire’s success and her promise to attend career day. It took fifteen minutes for Claire to get her to sit still long enough to have her hair brushed but she finally succeeded in getting Brianna to practice reading aloud to her while she tackled the girl’s dark, wet mane. She was halfway through plaiting it, smiling with the memory of how many times she’d performed a similar task for another red mane, when Brianna cried out for her to stop—she wanted two braids, not one. With a chuckle, Claire pulled it apart to start again.

After reading with Brianna for twenty minutes, she tucked Brianna into bed, kissing her forehead before turning out the light.

The surge of energy of Claire’s own excitement and triumph from the day were beginning to wan. She had taken the lead on her surgery that afternoon completing it successfully and without assistance; she had then seen two patients that meant a lot to her go home happy and healthy after close to a month in the hospital; and her daughter was not just proud of her but wanted to show her off at school for career day.

*One* of her daughters was proud of her. The other…

It had been impossible not to think of Faith every time she went to check on Mrs. Knight and Hope. While it was painful at times, seeing that little girl pushing through everything, seeing her survive and thrive had brought back the memory of her own joy. Knowing she wouldn’t be able to visit Hope in the nursery the next day had picked at the edges of the wound of her loss; perpetually scabbed over and oozing as it had been, now the scab had been pulled clean off and blood was rising to the surface.

Would Faith be proud of her? Faith thought she was dead, that she’d died… Well, Claire would likely never know how Jenny and Ian thought she had died. But would that matter to Faith or would she only blame Claire for leaving her in the first place, for having followed Jamie and his men to war…

Claire thought to her own parents, dead so long now; she couldn’t really picture their faces from actual memories, only from her memory of the few photographs Uncle Lamb had of them. She didn’t blame them for dying, for leaving her behind though she knew there were times growing up when she had resented their absence, but only for brief moments before hollow grief took its place. Was she *proud* of Henry and Julia Beauchamp?

Claire didn’t know. She doubted Faith would be proud of her if she knew the whole truth.

It didn’t take long for Claire to find the box in her closet, even in the dark. The letters from Mrs. Graham had come more and more infrequently as the few leads she’d had withered and led to dead ends. Claire hadn’t given up her search, exactly, but as the prospect of failure began to loom large, she had put it off. She distracted herself with medical school and made excuses that the information would still be there waiting for her wherever it was when she had the time to look again; maybe something would find her on its own the way that the stones had found her in the first place and brought her and Jamie together. She clung to the idea that fate was somehow at play and that Faith would find her if she could just be patient and hold out hope.

Well, her hope was stronger than it had been in a while but so was the need to *do* something about it. She opened the box and sorted through the assorted mementos it contained: the pearls Jamie had given her when they wed; a scrap from the arisaid she’d worn where, though faded, the Fraser colors and tartan could still be seen; the worn woolen warmers that had been knit by Mrs. Crook at Lallybroch to protect Claire’s healing hands and wrists. The items sat atop the folder where Claire
kept Mrs. Graham’s letters along with her own notes and ideas for where to search, most of the notations scratched out upon receiving the next bit of bad news from Mrs. Graham.

Retrieving the folder, Claire put the box back on the shelf and retreated to the warmth of her bed to go through it all again. It would be some time yet before Frank finished for the night down in his study.

She went over it all again searching not for Faith in the pages and accounts, but for the gaps she missed before; the parish left unchecked, the obvious possibility overlooked, the revelation that would finally yield results.

Despite the fact that his mind kept wandering, Frank stayed barricaded in his study. He could hear Brianna laughing upstairs as Claire got her ready for bed and hated the wave of jealousy that swept through him at the sound; the quiet wish that Brianna would show a little resentment for the fact that she’d been kept waiting an extra hour and a half for Claire to come home because saying farewell to a patient was more important to her than being home in time to check Brianna’s homework or have dinner with the two of them.

It had all been his idea, of course; Brianna joining him at the university after school rather than coming home to a sitter or housekeeper whose concern for her happiness and welfare switched off at six o’clock sharp. He actually enjoyed having Brianna to himself after classes. She was a bright and enthusiastic child, a charmer who won everyone over to her in five minutes or less… In that way, she reminded him of Claire… before. To be honest, Claire still had that power over a room and reveled in it when faculty parties and dinners couldn’t be avoided. It ate at him that it must have been like that for her and… him; the poor bloke wouldn’t have stood a chance with her but… he would have thought she at least had a little more…

He sighed and set the exam he was supposed to be correcting aside. It didn’t matter anymore. It didn’t matter that the fellow was dead, it didn’t matter that Claire was physically faithful to him now, it didn’t matter that they had moved across a bloody ocean to make a fresh start. There was no escaping what that man had done to them, to their marriage.

What mattered was Brianna who liked to make faces at him over dinner to make him laugh, who asked questions about his work that showed a great deal more insight than half of his colleagues and all of his students, who came running to him with her fears and her worries because she believed he had all the answers. And he could tell Brianna was happier with things the way they were now. He wanted Brianna’s happiness to be enough to make him happy but he missed the way things had been with Claire and found himself seeking her in the old ways even when he knew it would leave him feeling disappointed, inadequate. He couldn’t stop himself from wanting her even if she only accepted him because her desired alternative was unavailable.

He glanced at his watch. Brianna would be asleep by now and it wasn’t too late; Claire wouldn’t be asleep yet and she’d been in such a good mood after the day she’d had. Perhaps she’d be willing…

No, she wouldn’t; not after the insinuations over dinner. Claire could only be referring to Mildred when she made that remark about being close to his students. Of course, Mildred wasn’t his student anymore and at any rate, nothing had happened… yet. He knew it was just a matter of time before it did. She was working as a secretary and research assistant in the department now that she was no longer a student and she wasn’t particularly shy about showing her desire for him. It had happened before with other women; one had told him it was something about his accent that she found irresistible. He didn’t really want her but knew that she would win him over with her wanting; it had
been too long since he’d felt that wanting from Claire. It would likely start some afternoon when Brianna had been invited over a friend’s house after school, when he had his office to himself; it would inevitably end when she too felt the need to be wanted and realized he couldn’t give it to her.

Frank sighed and stood up from his desk. He wasn’t making any progress on his work and it wouldn’t help anything with Claire if she thought he was avoiding her—which he was but could only justify if he actually accomplished something. He could stand to smooth things over with her even if nothing more came of it. He turned off the light and headed up to bed.

There was a light on in the bedroom but it wasn’t the main light. He eased the door open expecting Claire to remark on the time yet met only silence. The lamp on the bedside table beside her and she was propped up in bed but her head rested back against the headboard and there was a folder and papers spread across her lap. She was asleep.

Assuming it was some patient file, Frank began gathering the pages together to return to the folder for Claire. As he stacked them he realized they weren’t patient records but letters and in a hand that wasn’t entirely unfamiliar to him. They were letters from Reg’s housekeeper Mrs. Graham.

Claire hadn’t stirred so he set about examining the dates of the letters to put them in some sort of order, or at least that’s what he told himself he was doing. The dates went back all the way to their move to Boston back in ‘48 but with several passages clearly copied from historic records and documents, Frank soon found himself dragged into the subject of the correspondence.

He stared at one of the earlier letters copied from an old family bible.

James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser m. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp June 16, 1743

That was the name she had told him and it looked like Mrs. Graham either believed it or was humoring Claire. The rest of the page seemed to fit Claire’s explanation as well; birth and death records for the Murray family.

Faith Janet Hildegarde Fraser b. May 18, 1744

The name caught Frank’s attention. This was the person Mrs. Graham seemed to be helping Claire search for. Born less than a year after they had married. And apparently left behind.

Frank felt numb, perhaps because the thoughts flying through his head carried too many contradictory emotions with them. There was disbelief and the reluctance to believe any of it; he was inclined to believe the chances of there being another Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp living two hundred years ago were greater than the chances of time travel being real, and yet he didn’t doubt that Claire was ultimately honest. There was confusion over why Claire had left Faith out of the story in telling her tale after her return. There was disgust and shock that Claire—Claire who had nearly walked away from medical school to keep their daughter from getting stuck with irresponsible and unreliable sitters—that Claire could abandon her child like that, whatever the other circumstances might be. There was jealousy because she and this Jamie had managed to conceive not once but twice in their short marriage while he and Claire had tried and failed repeatedly, even in the midst of a bloody world war. There was sorrow for Brianna whom he was sure would have loved to have a sister. And surprisingly there was pity for Claire because she had clearly been searching for years and didn’t seem to be any closer to finding answers about what had happened to this other daughter.

The Murrays who were sprinkled throughout the family register must have wound up with custody of the young Faith in the wake of Jamie’s death and Claire’s disappearance.

Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp Fraser d. April 16, 1746
Frank’s brow furrowed at the copied list. He glanced through it twice then read through the rest of the letter that accompanied it. There was a chance it had been a mistake in Mrs. Graham’s copying; it wouldn’t be the first time an oversight from a transcriptionist had cause confusion or misinterpretation in historical research. But the thought wouldn’t go away; damn Jamie Fraser.

Frank put the pile of letters back into Claire’s lap and scurried out of the room before she could wake up and accuse him of something. He retreated back to his study, closing the door before pacing and mulling over his options.

He could write to Reg or Mrs. Graham to see about getting a verification on the source she’d copied from; if it was just a simple transcription mistake that would be the end of it. But if it wasn’t... If that omission was really there on the original register... Then perhaps Jamie Fraser hadn’t died at Culloden after all. Why else would Claire’s name be written there but not Jamie’s?

And if Jamie hadn’t died... It might be easier to trace the daughter through him, assuming there were records of him to be found. There was just as much chance that Fraser had fled Scotland to evade the English troops scouring the Highlands for escaped and hiding Jacobites. Or he might have died while in hiding and left no record at all.

It was a curious problem and there was an itch to pursue it simply because he was afraid of letting it eat at him if he did nothing, but what would he do with the information—if any—that he found? Would he give it to Claire? Would that really be best for her? He didn’t think for a moment that she would turn around and leave Brianna behind just to go back and confirm what might have happened to her other daughter... He was slightly less certain the same would be true if Fraser had definitively survived any length of time. The possibility that Claire would go and bring Brianna with her gave him a cold, hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach.

If he found something, then he would decide what to do with the information. There was always the chance that Brianna would figure out the truth at some point; did he really want to be the one who had suspected some larger truth and failed to act? Did she have a right to know? She was too young now, of course, but someday when she was grown she might be able to handle the truth—he might be prepared for her to know the truth.

He snorted as he sat down to begin making notes and jotting down ideas of where to look in his own research. He knew Claire avoided reading his books and tuned out whenever the subject of his research crept up. It wasn’t a thought that made him proud but he couldn’t deny the amusement he found when he was struck by the possibility of turning whatever he discovered into another book for his collected works on Jacobite history. He could put the answers right under her nose and she wouldn’t even think to look.

By the time the clock struck midnight, Frank had sketched out a research plan for this new side project and had composed three letters to post for colleagues in Scotland and England. When he went back upstairs to bed the folder had vanished, the lamp was out, and Claire had rolled over in bed so that her back was towards his side of the bed.
Faith struggles to feel connected to her parents in their absence.

Faith lay on her stomach in the sparse dirt and grass along the far edge of the herb garden behind the house. A wheelbarrow blocked the view of her corner of the garden from where Auntie Jenny and Mrs. Crook would watch from the kitchen. They would see her basket already full of enough herbs for the hearty green stems and a few leaves to poke out and appease them all while her chin rested on the heel of one hand, damp earth seeping into her sleeve at the elbow, and her mother’s medicine book spread open on a handkerchief to protect it from getting wet.

Auntie Jenny didn’t know she had taken it from her parents’ room—though if she had, Jenny would have shrugged it off figuring that Faith, at ten, was too young to understand most of what the more scandalous passages meant while the more mundane sections would prove useful knowledge for someone with Faith’s obvious healing skills to acquaint herself with. But while Jenny underestimated Faith’s ability to comprehend what Claire’s notes meant, ten did prove young enough for Faith not to care about those passages.

Faith had started at the beginning of the slim volume her mother had started keeping upon their return from Paris when she had taken over the medical care for Lallybroch’s residents and tenants. Faith hadn’t realized what the book was when she’d crept into her parents’ room and taken it from the trunk in the corner where Auntie Jenny had carefully packed the remnants Jamie and Claire Fraser had left behind. Allowed to look through a handful of items Auntie Jenny had selected for her each year on her birthday with the promise of choosing one to keep, Faith had seen the book in the box before but Auntie Jenny had yet to include it in the pre-approved mix of mementoes.

A glimpse at her mother’s handwriting was all Faith had been after when she stole the little book. There were still some jars and packets in the still room with labels Claire had penned and of course Faith’s birth entry in the family register but Fergus insisted those were poor samples.

“Your mother’s hand was lovely,” he insisted when she had turned over a page of her French translation for him to check. “Yours puts my mind to hers though yours is closer than hers—in that way it is like your father’s. He writes with the right hand but it is wrong for him and so the words cannot always breathe.”

As she had looked over the first pages of her mother’s medical book, Faith decided Fergus was right. Her mother had written in an elegant hand though the effect was sometimes marred by the fact that she often let the quill run too dry; a line would gradually fade into near invisibility before returning with a thick and dramatically dark line of text. Faith was several paragraphs into the book—mesmerized by the shapes of her mother’s letters, enchanted by the idea that her mother had held those same pages just ten years earlier—when she recognized a name and the words themselves began to have meaning again. She skipped back to the first line and started over at last understanding that the book contained more of her mother than just her handwriting.

*Herein will be recorded for reference only the ailments, illnesses, injuries, and complaints of the residents of Broch Tuarach (Lallybroch) and her tenants. Treatments, recipes, and remedies will be included and cross referenced (to the best of my abilities) with their success or failure in the hope*
that these efforts will result in the improved health and wellness of all.

Below that first passage she had signed her name Claire Beauchamp Fraser August 1744.

The first ailment recorded had been her father’s seasickness—with the notation Though I inquired after possible remedies from MR, Jamie arrived at the docks too thoroughly intoxicated to try any of them properly; as he is unlikely to seek transport on a boat anytime soon we may never know whether these suggestions work followed by a recipe for ginger tincture and instructions for a pressure point massage. The second entry had been in reference to a diaper rash she had suffered.

Every opportunity that arose, Faith pulled the easily concealed medical book from her pocket to pore over the entries absorbing the medical knowledge contained therein but also savoring the crumbs of her mother nestled between the pages.

“Faith?” Auntie Jenny called from the kitchen doorway, shattering her concentration (she had been reading about the day that Ross—the smith—had knocked a hammer from his work bench onto his foot and broken three toes).

Faith scrambled onto her knees so she could slip the book into her pocket then grabbed at a fistful of peppermint and walked calmly to her basket to deposit it as Auntie Jenny spotted her and started to cross to her.

“There’s a letter come for ye,” Auntie Jenny informed her, nodding her veracity as Faith looked at her skeptically. “It’s no a hand we recognize so ye’re to come inside and we’ll open it together. Hurry along now.”

Confused, Faith slipped her basket over her arm and followed Auntie Jenny to the house, the weight of her mother’s medical book thumping against her thigh from inside her pocket.

Uncle Ian was waiting for them in the kitchen along with Fergus, the younger Murrays having been successfully banished to chores and lessons.

“It’s addressed to me?” Faith remarked skeptically as she set her basket down and took the letter from Uncle Ian. “But I dinna ken anyone who couldna stop at Lallybroch in person to talk wi’ me.” She turned the folded pages over to examine the intact molded wax holding it together but she couldn’t make out what it was supposed to be, the seal having been misapplied once before a distorting second attempt proved successful in sealing the letter.

“From what I can make of it, it’s no one I’m familiar wi’ either,” Uncle Ian confessed. “But as it is addressed to you it didna seem right no to let ye open it yerself.”

With their eyes on her, Faith took a deep breath and broke the seal.

The letter in the unrecognized handwriting turned out to be shorter than they all anticipated and was wrapped around what appeared to be a second letter, but Faith’s heart began to pound as she looked at the signature on the first. It was from a Major John Grey, the governor of Ardsmuir Prison where Ned Gowan had let them know Jamie had been sent following the completion of his trial a few months before.

The rest of the words of the note blurred with fear; there were only so many reasons Faith could think the man in charge of a prison would write to a prisoner’s family and none of them were good. She handed the first letter to her uncle while she started pulling open the folded pages of the second letter which bore her father’s hand.

“The governor of the prison?” Jenny gasped, reading as best she could over Ian’s shoulder. “He’s no
writing to say that Jamie…” But she couldn’t bring herself to finish the thought, her hand rising to
the kerchief around her neck, loosening it though it wasn’t what was causing her to feel short of
breath.

Ian’s eyes scanned the page several times before he let out his breath in a sigh of relief. “Jamie’s
fine,” he announced. “The man now in charge has agreed to allow Jamie letters but as it’s no a
privilege the men are generally allowed, they must go through him.”

Jenny scoffed. “Likely hopes Jamie will trip himself up on something along the way—or that one of
us will—and being in a position to read all Jamie’s letters goin’ both ways, he aims to make
something of it when he does catch something.”

Ian shook his head. “Jamie will be careful and so will we,” he said with determination.

*My dearest Daughter,* the letter began and Faith couldn’t help comparing it to the pages she’d read
earlier in her mother’s hand. The words were carefully formed—a necessity born of being naturally
inclined to left-handedness but forced to write with a right hand comprised of stiff fingers—but at the
ends of his sentences it was possible to see the strain and discomfort break through, the spacing
between letters and words shrinking, neatness sacrificed for expediency.

*My dearest Daughter,*

It brings great Relief to my Mind knowing I can at last inform you that I am alive, though as you will
know by now, imprisoned by the Crown. Though it has been some Time since I have seen you, I
pray that you remember me and think of me as often as I do of you. I trust my Sister and her
Husband have cared for you well in my Absence, being wiser than I in their choice of Friends.

The lord Governor here has granted me Permission to write you when Circumstance permits and
has graciously offered to receive Letters from you on my behalf, should you also wish that we might
know each other better.

*For now I shall simply close with my Love; it is and always will be yours, mo uan*

*Your Father, James Fraser*

*Postscriptum: For your Reference, the lord Governor has added that any Correspondence will only
be passed along if it is written entirely in English. He has placed his Trust in me and so I must place
Trust in him.*

“What does he say?” Jenny asked clasping her hands tightly together in what appeared to be an effort
not to snatch the letter from Faith’s hands.

“He doesna say much,” Faith told her aunt with a shrug before handing the letter over.

“No, he wouldna be able to with the governor reading his every word,” Jenny nodded skimming it
herself and then handing it to Ian. “But there’ll be bits to read between the lines. He must be in good
standing wi’ the governor to be allowed the privilege of writing to ye. It sounds as though”

“Or he’s something the governor wants,” Ian muttered with a brief glance to Jenny.

“Ye’ll need to be careful in yer reply,” Jenny warned. “I’m afraid we’ll be needin’ to look anything
ye write over before ye can send it back to this Major Grey to give to yer father.”

Faith nodded, her mind already wandering to what she would write, stumbling over what she would
have to leave out with Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian reading it all. The medicine book weighed heavy
in her pocket. Her questions about her mother weren’t ones she’d want them to read, let alone complete strangers like the man in charge of the prison. She would think of something though; she hadn’t expected to hear anything from her father for years, so she would gladly take whatever scraps of himself he could squeeze into his letters to her—take them and cherish them until he could come back to her.

Ian handed the letter from Jamie back to her but kept the governor’s note for his own records. “When ye’ve something to send back, come to me with it, aye?” he reiterated, satisfied when she nodded and hurried back out to the yard with her basket of herbs.

She retreated to the same concealed corner as before and pulled the medicine book from her pocket. Carefully flattening her father’s letter, she inserted it between the pages of her mother’s medicine book and closed it tightly. She would keep her parents’ words together and safe; she would keep them hers.
New Prisoners

Chapter Summary

Jamie gets a response from Faith and there's a group of new prisoners arriving at Ardsmuir.

“Where might yer mind be?” Jamie asked Major John Grey as he moved his rook and took Grey’s knight. “Or is it prison business and none of mine?”

Grey blinked out of his reverie then sat up straighter taking in the lay of the board.

“I apologize. It is prison business but of a nature that also makes it yours. There’s a new band of prisoners being brought up from one of the prisons further south,” he explained as he reached first towards his queen but hesitated and frowned before withdrawing his hand and reconsidering. “They were originally supposed to arrive tomorrow but they were delayed in leaving by the weather. They’ll be here by the end of the week and I still haven’t figured out where I’m going to put them.”

“Aye, we’re crowded as it is,” Jamie agreed sipping the whisky Grey had poured for them. “And unless they’re coming with a fresh food store, I’d wager food’ll be tight till ye’re able to requisition next quarter’s rations.”

Grey looked up and met Jamie’s penetrating gaze. “I have hopes that I’ll be able to supplement what we already have but they’re not particularly high hopes. You and your men might need to rely on your foraging a bit more than usual.”

“At least the season’s right for it,” Jamie remarked with resignation as Grey finally made his move—he moved a bishop so that it helped block his king, a defensive move that would only further delay the inevitable; Jamie had already won the game.

“Can I trust that your men won’t do anything to make trouble with these new arrivals?”

Jamie didn’t need to do anything more to convey the level of insult he felt then look at Grey as he moved his own bishop to take Grey’s queen. Grey closed his eyes, frustrated with himself for having overlooked such a devastating move. Then he shrugged to himself and knocked over his king in forfeit.

“I know,” he murmured. “I know. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

The two men rose and Jamie nodded, accepting the half-apology then downed the rest of his whisky.

“Do ye wish me to give the others warning that new men are on their way or would ye prefer to do so yerself?” Jamie asked, rising and leaning towards the door. The guards on the other side would lead him back to the dank and overcrowded cell.

“Do as you see fit,” Grey instructed. He too rose and went back to his desk to go over the message that had been sent ahead. He wondered if the update would arrive in the night or if the courier would stop to rest and wait for light; the moors made for difficult passage under the best of conditions but without daylight to tell where solid ground suddenly became marshy… “I’m sure there have been rumors about it already. If you think it would be better to confirm them and address any concerns
they have before the men arrive—Oh,” he interrupted himself as his fingers found a letter he’d set aside days before and forgotten in the logistical mess of the coming prisoners. “This arrived the other day. I don’t know that it would be a good idea to take it back to the cell with you but I can find a place to store your correspondence here in my office until we think of something more suitable.”

Jamie took the letter from Grey with a polite nod and an expression devoid of emotion even as his pulse began to race with excitement and relief… and frustration. He’d known when Grey proposed the arrangement that his letters would be read both coming and going but seeing Ian’s deliberate direction on the outside with Faith’s carefully practiced still too-large handwriting on the page and knowing how many people in between would have seen it before him made his blood warm.

He turned his back as though using the fire to assist him in reading Faith’s letter; Grey might have already read it but he wouldn’t get to see Jamie’s reaction to it.

Dearest Father,

It is a great relief to at last know that you are alive and safe. I am still in the care of my aunt and uncle, though my many cousins keep them both quite busy. Fergus is as good a brother as one would expect of blood.

I hope it pleases you to know that I am learning my lessons and he helps me with my languages but even my Aunt Jenny must admit that my talents lie most with healing, as did my mother’s before me. I do what I can to help my cousin’s tenants through their illnesses and injuries from the main house but as soon as I am old enough—and so long as my aunt and uncle permit—Fergus has agreed to accompany me in making the rounds as my mother did when she was Lady Broch Tuarach.

Know that you and Mama are always in my thoughts and prayers and I am eager to know you better.

With love from your daughter,

Faith Fraser

Jamie closed his eyes to see how well he could read the carefully executed script of his daughter’s letter on the backs of his eyelids. When the words eluded him, he read through the letter again until he had it thoroughly memorized. Taking a deep breath and carefully folding it back in on itself, Jamie turned and held it for Grey to reclaim.

“I would be much obliged if ye would store this somewhere safe for me,” he said, accepting Grey’s offer though it felt like a piece of his heart had been torn and wrapped in the pages.

“I’ll have writing materials prepared for you at our next dinner,” Grey responded putting the letter into a drawer. “That ought to give you time to compose a response.”

Jamie nodded, stepped to the door, and knocked lightly before opening it to find the guards ready to lead him back to the cell.

Starting the following day while he and the other prisoners were out cutting peats, Jamie stole moments with a select few to begin spreading the word about the expected new prisoners. Contrary to Grey’s belief, there hadn’t been much in the way of rumors but it was better to spread the word gradually, to ease the men into the knowledge a few at a time so that those with concerns could be reasoned with rather than find strength and greater fear in larger numbers.

Once the news had begun to spread, Jamie shifted back into the mindless rhythms of physical labor and let his mind wander from the task at hand to Faith’s letter.
It was clear that Grey hadn’t been the first to read her response; he could see the traces of Jenny and Ian shaping Faith’s words to be vague and formal where necessary. Though Jamie was sure Grey had his suspicions about where he’d been hiding during the seven years between Culloden and being turned over to a British patrol, there was little anyone could do about it at this point; but Jamie had no desire to tempt fate by committing the answer to paper and Jenny and Ian would be sure Faith didn’t slip up either.

Still, more in the letter than just the handwriting belonged to Faith. Fergus was watching out for her as he had promised Jamie he would. Jenny and Ian would do what they could but they had responsibilities beyond Faith to contend with; Fergus had only her and was her protecteur.

And Faith, it would seem, had found a calling in healing.

He smiled as he paused in his work, leaning against the handle of his shovel while he wiped the sweat from his brow.

Claire would be so proud of Faith, of her skills, of her interest. The smile faded and he took up the shovel, driving the blade into the ground with more force than was necessary. It nearly snapped the handle off when he leaned to break the mass away from the rest. It was something Claire and Faith should have been able to share, to do together. And now Faith didn’t even have him there to guide her or answer her questions, to tell her about all the incredible things Claire was—is—and the possibilities Faith had within her.

But he would certainly try to convey as much of it to her as he could in his letters; they were better than nothing.

He sat propped up against the cell wall that night, sleep proving elusive. He would write to Faith about what it had been like to meet Claire… that from the first she had made it her mission to heal him and he’d tell her about how Claire wouldn’t let anyone stand between her and someone she might be able to help, whether it was wise or not.

He changed his mind as they worked in the rain the next day—not cutting peats this time but clearing and cleaning about the prison yard so the new construction and conversion to military barracks wouldn’t fall behind when the weather cleared again. Jamie thought it might be better to tell Faith his memories of how Claire had been with her, the way she used to sing to Faith while she nursed—he remembered some of the words even if he had no ear for the tunes—or the way Claire would drape a cloth over Faith’s face and pretend she couldn’t find her then ripped it away and laugh until nothing could be heard except Faith’s giggles…

Jamie wavered back and forth as the days went on finally figuring the words would come only when he had a quill in his hand and Major Grey watching him.

In the meantime, the new prisoners had arrived and been distributed amongst the already crowded cells. The absorption seemed to occur smoothly with the men in Jamie’s cell deferring to him and the men in the other cells following his lead pretty closely. It would be some time before the work schedules allowed him to meet and know all the new men but time was something all of them had in abundance.

“Mac Dubh,” Innes broke Jamie’s concentration and the hunk of peat on the end of his shovel slipped. “Sorry Mac Dubh. There’s one of the new men wants to be havin’ a word wi’ ye. He’s been assigned to Christie’s cell and the two of ’em are na seein’ eye to eye.”

“Christie hasna said anything to me,” Jamie remarked only to have Innes raise his brows and quirk his lip. “Aye, aye,” Jamie nodded as he retrieved the lost block of peat and flung it back up onto the
pile in the wheelbarrow Innes had been sent to retrieve, the new empty one waiting to be filled waited beside it. “Who’s the man wants a word?”

“ Seems to be a Fraser.”

Jamie’s grip on his shovel loosened for a moment before he drove the blade down into the damp peat. “He’s under one of the other guards, eh? Pass word along to have him volunteer for the foraging group at the end of the day. I’ll speak wi’ him then.”

“Aye,” Innes promised before departing with the loaded wheelbarrow and continuing along his way.

The last few hours of the day Jamie did his best not to get his hopes up but he couldn’t help the anticipation spreading through his chest and driving his arms to stab the shovel into the peat with greater and greater force. There were so many Frasers who had fought in the Rising and been captured in the wake of Culloden, not to mention all the men who’d been taken from their homes and arrested on trumped up suspicions in the years since.

Still, when the prisoners were allowed to stop for the day and those who volunteered to scavenge for greens stayed behind with their empty bags and a fraction of the guards, Jamie wasn’t surprised when he recognized the man who had wanted to speak with him.

“Murtagh.” Jamie barely managed to say the name aloud but his godfather heard him.

“Jamie, lad. Didna think I’d see ye again in this world and though I’m glad to have the chance, I never wanted to meet ye in a place like this.”

“Nor I,” Jamie confessed, all too conscious of the other men around them and the fact they’d have their eyes on Mac Dubh. He wanted nothing more than to pull his godfather in for a hug and to pour his heart out about all that had happened. “Come,” he said nodding his head towards the others who had already set out on their foraging. “Claire wouldna forgive me did she ken I wasna making sure ye ate as properly as circumstances allowed.” They stayed close together as they began scanning the ground for edible vegetation.

“Be sure ye have a few bites as ye go,” Jamie advised. “There’s no guarantee ye’ll get yer due back in the cells—though there’re some as dinna care for the stuff anyhow.”

“Yer man Christie bein’ one of ‘em, eh?” Murtagh inquired. Jamie watched the pain flash across Murtagh’s face as he stooped and bent to gather up and inspect a spot of green. He tossed it aside after squinting at it and realizing it wasn’t what he thought.

“Christie is his own man and tellin’ him otherwise is a sure way to get yerself on his bad side. Here,” Jamie handed over the first bit of watercress he found.

“This does seem the sort of thing Claire would’ve had a difficult time convincing me to eat,” Murtagh said with a judgmental sniff. “But I’m none so picky now.” He stuffed it in his mouth and settled the mass in his cheek where he could suck on it and chew for a good long while. “I feel like a coo wi’ a cud.”

“Ye look it too,” Jamie laughed feeling lighter than he had in a long time.

Murtagh grinned and Jamie could see bits of the mashed plant matter stuck to his teeth sending both of them laughing again until Murtagh finally swallowed the mass.

The other prisoners watched the pair of them covertly. There would be questions and Jamie knew he would need to decide how much of the truth of his and Murtagh’s relationship they should know.
Innes had understood their Fraser connection and maybe the truth up to the point of Murtagh being his godfather would be sufficient.

“Oof,” Murtagh groaned suddenly, straightening up and working at a kink in his back.

“Are ye well?” Jamie asked.

“I’m no such an old man yet,” Murtagh huffed but ducked his head as he went back to foraging.

“There’s younger men didna last so long as me these past years… and older likely to last longer’n me too. Glad to see I didna outlast you though.” His voice dropped and his hands stopped their searching; he couldn’t look at Jamie. “… tried to get to ye, lad. I saw the blow to yer leg and then when ye went down I lost ye in the muddle of the battle. I thought I saw… I saw that bastard Randall and I went after him—got a few good slashes in but then there was another man behind me and hit me o’er the head. I went down and thought that would be it but came to myself a moment later and had lost where I was. My head… I thought it was a fight we’d already fought or…” He shook his head. “I was taken prisoner and tha’s all that matters. Didna want to risk tryin’ to send word to Ian and Jenny lest it draw attention to that deed of yers and throw suspicion on them.”

“Ye didna need to explain,” Jamie said when Murtagh had finished. “Ye held to yer oath and I couldna ask for more than that.”

Murtagh was still shaking his head, reluctant to accept Jamie’s assertion that he didn’t need to be forgiven.

“If I had, ye wouldna be here,” Murtagh reasoned.

“I’m no here because of anything you did, a bhailach,” Jamie told him in a whisper. “I was wounded but I made it home to Lallybroch; Jenny mended me and I was able to stay close—to be with Faith and watch her grow… for a time.”

“Ye were caught?”

“It was too dangerous. We came too close too many times. If the English had found me there that way…” Even so far after the fact he could see the way Fergus had pushed Faith behind him to shield her and he shuddered to think of what might have happened. “I arranged to be taken—one of the tenants we could trust did it—so the reward could help Lallybroch.”

Murtagh’s head was moving again but this time in a knowing nod. “Yer father would be proud,” he told his godson. “It’s right they call ye Mac Dubh.” Murtagh reached over and rested his hand on Jamie’s forearm, giving him a familiar and comforting squeeze. Jamie laid his hand over Murtagh’s, trapping the warmth of the rough and aged hand, not caring if any of the other men saw or learned the truth. It only lasted a moment and then they let each other go and resumed their foraging.

“Ye’ll tell me how my goddaughter fares, aye?” Murtagh asked quietly. “It’s no a rush, but tell me, does she favor Claire as much as she did when she was just a wean?”

Jamie smiled broadly. The words to pass along the news about Murtagh were already taking shape. “She’s the spit of Claire.”
Chapter Summary

Faith is acting as healer for Lallybroch and its tenants and must travel to Balriggan to attend the ailing Mr. MacKimmie, clashing with his wife in the process.

Auntie Jenny went with Faith and Fergus on the first few calls to tenants’ crofts to be sure the arrangement would work but with wee Ian being a mischievous toddler she couldn’t afford to spend so much time away from the estate—it was part of why Faith acting in such a role had been suggested in the first place.

The first few injuries had been relatively minor—burns from spilled boiling water, a nasty cut requiring stitching, children with a variety of rashes, a rheumatic fever. Auntie Jenny wasn’t the only one satisfied with Faith’s healing. Several of the older tenants who remembered the days when Claire acted as healer smiled and nodded knowingly and whispered about how she shared her mother’s gift.

But despite the reassurance of having served the tenants well during Auntie Jenny’s trial period, the first time Faith went out with only Fergus as an escort and assistant she feared she might be sick to her stomach with nerves.

“You should wear something of your maman’s,” he suggested. “It will keep her with you and she will guide your hands to do what needs to be done.”

Faith flushed and quickly moved so Fergus wouldn’t catch it. Across the room there was a small box where she kept the mementos of her parents that Auntie Jenny let her add to each year. The boar tusk bracelets were a favorite but would be too cumbersome for healing work and the pearl bracelet wasn’t much better.

Her fingers tingled as she hesitated over the rough amethyst on the gold chain. There had been two of the necklaces in her mother’s things, the larger stone hanging from a longer chain. Auntie Jenny didn’t know anything about how Claire had come to have them but suggested from the sizes that one of them might have been intended for Faith all along. Faith had chosen the larger of the two necklaces and ignored Auntie Jenny’s knowing smirk.

She’d chosen it but hadn’t gone back to it since putting it into the box with the others. Whenever she missed her father or wondered about her mother, she would take the box out and pull out the growing collection of trinkets to hold them and feel that spark of connection. But she shied from the amethyst; she didn’t have to touch it to feel more than just a spark of connection and not to her mother but rather something else, something she didn’t understand.

Whatever had made her hesitate regarding the necklace before seemed to be urging her to take it up now. She let it sit for a moment nestled between the lines of her palm. It had naturally flat edges along one side though the flat surface was hardly smooth except compared to the rest of the stone which appeared cracked and rough, like it had been forcefully broken from a larger piece. Faith wondered whether the smaller piece of amethyst on the necklace that was supposed to have been hers might fit along one of those breaks. She would have to wait until her next birthday to claim it and see.
She fiddled with the clasp, the gold latch slipping through her fingers and tangling in her curls the first two tries.

“Let me help you,” Fergus offered, taking the necklace from her. The fingers of his left hand didn’t always move as precisely as they used to but he succeeded in getting the clasp to catch while Faith held her curls aside and bared her neck. “There. *Laisse moi voir* .”

Faith let her hair drop down around her shoulders as she turned to face him. The amethyst was heavy and the gold chain warmed against the skin of her neck. The chain was long and the stone hung low, just a few inches above her navel.

Fergus cocked his head and narrowed his eyes.

“What?”

“It makes you look…” Fergus fumbled.

“It makes me look like what?”

“Like… *une sorcière*,” he finished quietly. “Like *la dame blanche* .”

“Ye think I look like *la dame blanche* ?”

“It is what some called your *maman* when we lived in Paris,” Fergus confessed.

Faith’s mouth dropped open. She’d heard the stories about what happened to her mother at Cranesmuir and even after a decade there were still vague rumors about the exact nature of her mother’s healing skills.

Faith’s hand drifted to the stone and she felt it pulsing in her fingers. Everyone said that she had her mother’s healing hands but what exactly did they mean by it? She dropped the stone against the front of her dress again and looked at her hands—looked at them in that special way she had that no one else seemed to see or understand, the way that made her skin look faintly blue. She didn’t know what it meant or why she could do what she did, but she could just sense what was physically wrong with people and sometimes she could use more than poultices and tonics to heal them.

She slipped the amethyst charm down the front of her dress between her shift and her bodice. It felt strange to have it nestled there against her body but the subtle throb of it in time with her pulse was vaguely reassuring in its rhythm. She ran a hand over the front of her dress and lightly pressed it into the softer tissues at the base of her sternum.

She noticed Fergus watching her with narrowed eyes and rolled her own in response. “Should we no be goin’ now?”

Fergus nodded and moved to take up her small medical box from where she’d set it on her bed.

“Where is it we’ve been called?” she asked as she followed Fergus out of the room, pausing briefly to grab a kerchief and wrap it around her neck, concealing the gold of her necklace chain.

“Mr. MacKimmie has been complaining of pains in his chest again and has not risen from his bed in three days,” Fergus reported. “He has no sons to tend his fields while his wife and daughters have been left to tend to him. He wishes for someone who knows what they are doing to see him.”

“Are ye drivin’ the wagon to Balriggan or are we to walk?” Faith asked with a frown. She was pretty sure she had met Mr. MacKimmie once or twice when she’d come to Lallybroch to speak with
Uncle Ian but she didn’t think she’d ever met his wife or daughters though their farm wasn’t too far.

“We will be taking the wagon today.”

The ride to Balriggan wore away Faith’s nerves. It was approaching midday as Fergus reined the horse in and helped Faith down from the wagon’s hard bench. She balanced her medical box in the crook of her elbow while she used her free hand to rub at the numbness of her backside.

Fergus strode to the door and knocked. “Mr. MacKimmie, I am Fergus Fraser from Lallybroch and I have brought my sister, Faith, the healer to see to you,” he called.

The door swung open and a woman with a shawl draped over her head and wrapped so that one end was thrown over one shoulder, concealing most of her face. Her eyes were narrowed and wary of the visitors and she barred the entrance with her body.

“Will ye quit yer hollerin’,” she scolded. “My husband’s abed and finally restin’ comfortably. Or is it yer aim to heal him by disturbin’ his rest?”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. MacKimmie,” Faith apologized for Fergus and stepped forward with her hand extended in greeting. “I’m Faith Fraser, the healer over Lallybroch way.”

The blood drained from Mrs. MacKimmie’s face before her eyes hardened. “We dinna need a healer,” she insisted. “My daughters and I are carin’ for my husband.”

“Let them in woman!” a voice ordered harshly from inside and Mrs. MacKimmie flinched. A stream of coughing followed and Faith pressed forward brushing past Mrs. MacKimmie and into the house.

The coughing came from a room just off the entryway. Faith nodded briefly to the two younger girls who stood with their backs pressed against the wall by the door staring at their father struggling to sit up in the middle of the bed.

Faith set her box on the floor and helped him by shifting the pillows.

“I dinna want her here,” Mrs. MacKimmie stated feebly as she and then Fergus crowded into the room. “Marsali, Joanie—go check the chickens for eggs,” she instructed hustling them out and glaring at Fergus. Though it was obvious she wanted him out of the room as well, he merely leaned against the doorframe and crossed his arms over his chest.

Mrs. MacKimmie approached her husband from the other side of the bed, eyes twitching to Faith and back as she stopped just out of her husband’s reach. Mr. MacKimmie gave Faith an apologetic smile and rolled his eyes. She returned the smile and politely turned away to resettle her medical box on a nearby chair and begin searching through it for something to soothe the raspy soreness of his throat after his coughing fit.

“Simon,” Mrs. MacKimmie plead quietly. “Ye ken what they say about her mother.”

“Ye mean what you say about her mother,” Mr. MacKimmie countered. “Whether Claire Fraser were a witch or no, I dinna care a lick. She kent how to heal a body and tha’s what I’m after. Anything’ll be better’n yer useless fussing o’er me.” He paused as a fresh bout of coughing struck. He leaned forward and reached a hand out to brace himself. Faith caught him and looked to Fergus to step in. While Fergus took firm hold of Mr. MacKimmie, Faith finished mixing up a draught and rubbed his back until the spasms calmed enough for him to drink the vial’s contents. The choking coughs abated and Fergus eased Mr. MacKimmie back against the pillows, his energy visibly spent.
Mrs. MacKimmie had backed further away during the incident and was adjusting her shawl.

“Out, Laoghaire,” Mr. MacKimmie ordered with a weak attempt at a snarl. “Out.”

Mrs. MacKimmie blinked at her husband, glared at Faith and Fergus, but then left slamming the bedroom door behind her.

Mr. MacKimmie’s breath wheezed out in a loud gush that nearly triggered another coughing fit.

“Dinna speak just now, Mr. MacKimmie,” Faith requested. “I need ye to relax so I can examine ye.”

Mr. MacKimmie nodded feebly and Fergus helped to remove one of the pillows so the patient could be laid flat.

Faith started her examination by lightly running her hands over Mr. MacKimmie’s limbs and chest, lightly tapping him here and there as though sounding a wall for hollow spaces. She could feel it beneath her fingers—his body’s inner workings. She didn’t know the names or functions for all the organs or even what their exact shapes might be. But she could tell when they were in good working order and when there was something wrong.

She didn’t even need her special abilities to feel the lumps in Mr. MacKimmie’s chest. They felt like growths on the bones of his ribs. She pressed on one lightly and Mr. MacKimmie yelped causing Fergus to start.

“Sorry,” Faith said quietly, moving her hands a bit lower. There wasn’t much flesh on Mr. MacKimmie’s body but there was plenty of loose skin telling her that he had once carried a bit more weight through his middle. “How have ye been eating lately?” she asked conversationally. “Have yer meals been agreeing wi’ ye or setting odd in yer belly?”

“If ye’d had my wife’s cookin’ ye’d understand why I’ve no been eatin’ much of it,” Mr. MacKimmie joked, wincing as Faith’s fingers sank into the little bit of flesh over his abdomen. “What little I manage doesna set well but it never did.”

Faith could sense more of the lumps peppering his gut.

“I’m goin’ to need ye to sit up and lean forward so I can listen to yer breathing,” she explained, nodding to Fergus to help him while she fetched a listening contraption from her medical box—another of the tools her mother had left behind. What she heard only further confirmed her suspicions but she smiled as Fergus put the pillows back behind Mr. MacKimmie so he could recline.

“It’s no good, is it?” he asked with resignation.

“I’m afraid not,” Faith apologized. “I can make you comfortable and think to see if there’s something I can do that will slow whatever it is ye’ve got hampering yer lungs…but I canna cure it.”

“Ye might as well bring my wife back in and I can tell her once and fer all ye’re no a witch,” MacKimmie suggested. Fergus opened the door and beckoned for Mrs. MacKimmie to enter, which she did with a glare that would cow most men but held no power over Fergus (spending his formative years in a brothel had inured Fergus to a wide range of feminine ire including the brand favored by Mrs. MacKimmie). “If ye were a witch,” Mr. MacKimmie continued, ignoring his wife, “I’d ha’ been more’n happy to sell my soul to yer master to get rid o’ this weight in my chest.”

Mrs. MacKimmie’s face went red with anger but she remained standing near the door. “Ye ought not be saying such things or ol’ Nick might hear ye and take ye up on it wi’out someone vouching for ye first,” she warned keeping her voice low.
“What’s she on about?” Mr. MacKimmie asked turning to Faith for clarification.

“She’s sorry ye’re still feeling poorly and was asking if there’s anything I can do to be easin’ yer pain,” Faith lied. “Ye need to lie here and rest while I speak with yer wife about treatin’ ye.”

Mr. MacKimmie rolled his eyes. “I daresay I couldna afford it but I’ve a mind I’d ask you to stay and be nurse to me for what time I have left,” he murmured just loud enough for his wife to hear. “I wager ye’d be gentler wi’ me and I’d as soon have ye here just for the way it’d rub her, ungrateful—”

“Here ye are, Mr. MacKimmie,” Faith interrupted him by shoving a small spoonful of medicine into his open mouth. “That’ll ease yer pain and help ye to sleep.”

Mr. MacKimmie’s tongue grew thick so that the rest of the vitriol he had for his wife died on his lips. His eyelids drifted shut and he relaxed against the bedclothes.

Mrs. MacKimmie looked torn between gratitude and the impulse to hurl obscenities at Faith and Fergus. Instead, she turned on her heel and stomped out of the bedroom.

“I’ll thank ye to get out of my house now ye’ve seen to my husband,” she said loudly finding her confidence along with her words knowing Mr. MacKimmie couldn’t reprimand her while unconscious.

“Let me see yer injuries first,” Faith insisted stepping forward and reaching for the shawl that still hung in a way that shielded most of Mrs. MacKimmie’s face and neck from sight.

Mrs. MacKimmie clung to her wrappings and looked ready to spit in Faith’s face. “I have no injuries I’d be wanting you to tend.

Faith raised her hands in deference to Mrs. MacKimmie’s wishes before reaching to fix the leather thong keeping her hair pulled back as she had to do periodically throughout the day. Her curls refused to stay bound and seemed to break free most often when she was tending a patient and could least afford to be bothered by it.

“Judging by the state of yer husband I doubt he’s had the strength to do ye serious harm for some time,” Faith conceded as she ruffled her curls and pulled them back into a semblance of order. “But I ken he’s hit ye and he must have been fond of doin’ so for ye to flinch at him the way ye do.”

“What happens between me and my husband is no business of yourm,” Mrs. MacKimmie hissed.

“As ye say,” Faith shrugged. “Still, it might interest ye to know he’ll no be doin’ such again. He’ll no have the strength. There’s a deep sickness in his chest that I might be able to slow but cannae stop and if slowin’ it down means he’d have strength enough to hit ye more, I’m more inclined to let the Lord take him as he sees fit.”

Mrs. MacKimmie’s scowl softened a fraction, her eyes darted and blinked as she absorbed Faith’s diagnosis. Faith knew she could try to wield the blue healing light in her hands, that she could shrink the tumors buried in the tissues of his lungs and some of his other soft organs… but she could never make them vanish or even make them small enough to do more than buy him a few more weeks.

Mrs. MacKimmie was back to glaring at Faith. “So ye’re sayin’ I’m saddled wi’ a mouth to feed what cannae feed himself nor those it’s his duty to care for… that I’m soon to be a widow wi’ two lasses and no one to tend the fields or the livestock?”

“I’ll talk to my aunt and uncle,” Faith promised. “They’ll help ye to hire a lad can work yer farm for
room and board. And as for tendin’ yer husband…” She reached into her pocket where she’d stashed the bottle of laudanum from her supplies. “He can have a bit of this in the mornin’ and at night to ease his pain. Just a few drops will keep him comfortable and have him sleepin’ a great deal.” She handed the bottle to Mrs. MacKimmie. “Ye must be careful no to give him too much at a time or it might do him in right then. There should be enough to last ye a fortnight. I’ll send away for more in the meantime and have it ready should ye run out.”

Faith met and held Mrs. MacKimmie’s eye for what felt like minutes but could only have been a few seconds.

“You’re verra like her, ye know,” Mrs. MacKimmie said in a strange tone. “Yer mother… in looks at least. But I can see now, ye’ve got some of yer father in ye too. He always had a kind heart—too kind, in some cases. If ye’re careful and follow yer father’s example, ye may yet come to a better end than yer mam.”

Faith clenched her teeth, longing to lash out at Mrs. MacKimmie, to defend her mother—maybe even take back the bottle of laudanum or go back in to Mr. MacKimmie and try her hand at healing the deep-rooted sickness in his chest, then wish Mrs. MacKimmie the best of luck with her husband.

But that wouldn’t help anyone and there was already so little she could do. So she smiled at Mrs. MacKimmie and said, “Thank ye. I’ll send word when the new laudanum comes in,” and walked past the older woman to get out of the house. Something in Faith’s smile gave Mrs. MacKimmie pause, a chill running up her spine and setting her hair on end.

Word reached Lallybroch just three days later that Mr. MacKimmie had succumbed to his illness. Mrs. MacKimmie never returned the leftover laudanum.
As the renovations at Ardsmuir finish, Jamie and Murtagh wonder what will become of the prisoners there.

Jamie and Murtagh made sure not to volunteer for harvesting greens together every time the opportunity arose. Though Jamie’s position with Major Grey might give him a little leeway with the guards, it was more important to keep the men from finding anything to take issue with, and while many were indifferent or pleased with Murtagh, there remained enough holdouts with trouble in mind for godfather and godson to take precautions.

As such, it had been a solid two weeks since Jamie and Murtagh had been able to speak to one another with any degree of privacy. Jamie had a few tidbits from another of Faith’s letters to share—Rabbie McNab had gone to make his fortunes in London following the death of his grandmother—but there was a cloud of worry on Murtagh’s brow that led Jamie to inquire, “What’s amiss?”

“Naught but rumors for now,” Murtagh said with a frown. He ripped the green vegetation from the ground with surprising vigor. Though Ardsmuir was near as crowded as any of the prisons he’d been in over the years, it wasn’t in a city just as crowded and the physical labor, though demanding, was at least outdoors in the wide, clear open. The improvements to their diets that Jamie had arranged with Major Grey still left them wanting more than they liked but it was at least enough to sustain them.

“Rumors of what? More prisoners?” Jamie asked as he picked a few insect bitten leaves from the handful ready for his sack. “I’ve no heard anything from Major Grey about any more coming. Mostly just his usual grumblings about provisions and manpower.”

“Not more prisoners arriving,” Murtagh explained shaking his head. “All of us leaving. Goin’ somewhere else. The work’s near done and they’ll move us when it is.”

“I’ll see what Major Grey has to say,” Jamie promised. “They’ll likely split us up but… I may be able to suggest who would do better being separated from each other to prevent conflict at whatever prisons we’re sent to next… And might be granted a request to be sent wherever you go.”

One side of Murtagh’s mouth ticked up. “When have we ever been that lucky?” But the skepticism in Murtagh’s voice was tempered with a quiet hope.

“Faith writes she’s been goin’ round with Fergus to treat the ailing tenants. She says the crops were better this year and people are doing well considering everything,” Jamie launched into his report knowing it was exactly what was needed to fan the embers of that small bit of hope into a kindling flame. “Wee Jamie’s apparently courting a lass though it seems Jenny and Ian think he’s too young to think about marrying her for several years yet.”

“They’re all too young to be marrying,” Murtagh scoffed. “You were too young though ye were right to wed Claire when ye did. Damn lucky, both of ye in that. Probably all the luck ye had gone in one shot.” He softened with vague regret as he watched the familiar grief ripple beneath Jamie’s surface, the aftermath of the pebble he’d carelessly tossed.
“Perhaps,” Jamie agreed with a pained smile. “But worth every minute we had.”

“Better your luck than mine,” Murtagh offered by way of an apology. “I think maybe I was born wi’ better luck than yer father but I squandered it where he used it wisely. What little I had left by the time yer father got yer mother I used in becomin’ yer godfather.”

“I do recall many instances where ye cursed the luck that gave ye that post,” Jamie teased.

Murtagh chuckled. “Aye, mostly when I thought ye were about squanderin’ as I had. But no… ye were either born wi’ more’n I ever had or ye learned what yer father taught ye about keepin’ it for something worthwhile than I gave ye credit for… Dinna be squandering it now on my account,” he added quietly after a brief pause to settle another handful of greens in his sack.

Jamie leaned back on his heels to look at Murtagh.

“If ye’ve any luck left—or whatever it is ye consider this friendship wi’ the governor—dinna spend it hangin’ on to an auld sack of bones like me…” Murtagh requested. “See if there’s a way ye can use it to bring ye back to yer wee lass.”

“Maybe they’ll no let ye go, but ye might get placed somewhere closer to Lallybroch. Ye might find yer way somewhere the lass can come visit ye.”

Jamie shook his head, resistant. “I’m no just any Jacobite,” he reminded the older man. “I’m a convicted traitor—Red Jamie. They’re no about to let me go if I ask politely.”

“Whatever ye choose to do, I ken ye’ll choose wisely,” he assured Jamie, then turned to start back towards the guards, shifting the sack of green roughage he’d collected to make the weight easier to bear.

Grey sat with his glass of whisky warming in the palm of his hand, his eyes fixed on Jamie’s king. He’d have him in three moves but that was only if Jamie didn’t notice the path that had just presented itself to Grey.

Jamie’s eyes roamed the board, lingering and retracing possible routes to a victory of his own. Gray had fallen into the habit of watching how Jamie’s eyes worked and had started noticing the patterns between what his eyes did and how his pieces moved. Grey’s last two moves had been made in reaction to what he thought were Jamie’s plans to mount his own offensive attack. Now, it looked like he might have successfully blocked that assault and slipped a rook into position to flank the pieces Jamie had protecting his king. He didn’t want his own eyes to betray his plan so he had fixed it on the crown of the king piece; there was a small gouge in one side that looked like the carver’s blade had slipped.

Jamie finally made his move. “Checkmate,” he said with no satisfaction or enthusiasm.
Grey reached over and flicked his king hard enough to topple it. He would have to re-evaluate his theory about following the movements of Jamie’s eyes.

Throwing back the rest of his whisky, Grey inquired, “Shall we play one more?”

Jamie wasn’t even looking at the board but rather was frowning at the fire in the grate and running his fingers up and down his jaw and around his mouth, tracing the edges of his thick ruddy beard. He’d declined Grey’s offer to let him shave before dinner as he declined every time Grey offered.

“What is it?” Grey asked, sitting back and leaving the pieces where they lay. “Are there rumors that have you worried?”

Jamie started and Grey laughed.

“Some of my men have come to me hoping to clear up rumors,” Grey explained. “The prisoners aren’t the only ones concerned with what will happen when the work is finished. I’m afraid I don’t know anything for certain about where the prisoners will go, only that the prison will cease its current function. I’m sure I’ll be notified when the decisions have been made.”

“But it’s no likely the men will stay together wherever we’re sent,” Jamie guessed. “Some will go here, others marched there, scattering us to the wind.”

Grey nodded. “I would expect so… But there aren’t enough prisons in England and Scotland combined for each prisoner to be separated from all the others,” Grey added in a sympathetic tone. “You’ll be able to stay with some of your men.”

Jamie met Grey’s eye with suspicion and wariness. Grey stifled a smile.

“You share the name of Fraser,” Grey pointed out. “It doesn’t take much to realize he’s some kinsman of yours. An uncle, perhaps?”

There was a long beat before Jamie admitted, “My godfather.”

Grey nodded then leaned forward to begin righting the chess pieces and returning them to their starting spaces.

“I cannot go against whatever orders come down when the final decisions have been made,” Grey told him. “There’s as much chance I’ll receive orders with each prisoner’s specific reassignment listed as there is I’ll receive orders with only instructions to send a certain number of men here and another number there.” With the pieces aligned in their proper starting arrangement, Grey rotated the board so that he and Jamie had switched colors—an attempt to reissue his earlier invitation to another game. “If there’s anything I can do—”

“I dinna want ye doin’ anything if it means ye’ll be wantin’ somethin’ from me in return,” Jamie interrupted. “Ye’ve been in my debt once before and ye paid me back in full. I’m already in yer debt more’n I like wi’ you sending and receiving letters for me.”

Grey looked mildly hurt but his face quickly resettled into neutrality.

“I know you held similar meetings under my predecessor and I know you were dubious of my motives when I finally began arranging them myself,” Grey stated quietly. “But they have allowed me to know you better and you are now someone whose friendship I should like to have for its own sake. I do not make such an offer in order to put you in my debt but in an attempt to express the admiration I feel for the decorum and honor you’ve shown given your position.”
Jamie watched Grey unblinking during the younger man’s brief speech.

“Given my position,” Jamie repeated in his own quiet and steady tone. “Given my position, do ye really feel ye can ‘know me better’ as ye put it? That I could ever consider ye a friend while ye’re my jailor?”

Grey frowned. “I know what you did for me when I was foolish enough to get myself captured,” he reminded Jamie. “I suspect you being caught and turned over for trial three years ago wasn’t entirely down to bad luck on your part. And I know what you do for your countrymen here—how you manage to both keep them compliant and keep their spirits up.”

Jamie kept his expression stoic as Grey’s frown became a satisfied smile.

“No, I’m quite confident in my evaluation of your character, James Fraser, and I’m equally confident I should like to have you as a friend. I intend to do what I can regardless of whether you feel indebted in turn; I certainly do not consider you so.”

“I should like to go back to my cell now,” Jamie announced, rising to his feet.

“As you wish,” Grey muttered, rising to follow him to the door.

Jamie didn’t look back as the guards took their places on either side, following rather than leading him back through the corridors of the prison.

Grey must have received word of something a few days later but what the order was, no one—not even the guards—seemed to know. Grey opened the notice and promptly ordered his horse be readied. He had ridden away before the men returned from their day out on the moor.

“That doesna bode well,” Murtagh remarked as they wandered back to the walls of the prison.

“I dinna think so, no,” Jamie agreed.

“They’ll… they’ll no be… hangin’ us do ye think?” one of the younger prisoners asked, swallowing loudly and paling at the notion.

One of the older men, notorious for his bleak disposition, scoffed. “Sounds just like somethin’ the English would do—the bloody basterds. Work us to our bones rebuildin’ the prison and then when the job is done and they want if for other uses, hang us inside its very walls so we’ll none of us ever leave alive.”

Jamie rolled his eyes. “They wouldna bother disposin’ of such a productive workforce wi’ so many other structures in similar disrepair. Be glad of what rest we manage now for we’ll be marchin’ to another prison soon enough.” He lowered his voice as the other men spoke up with their own reasons why there was no reason to worry for their necks. “I dinna ken which I’d prefer, a new prison where there’s as much or more work than here, or a prison where we’re no let out to move and work at all.”

“The last is better an’ ken it well,” Murtagh grumbled. “And ye ken it’s no out of the question that the English might decide to hang the lot of us rather than deal wi’ findin’ a new place to put us or more food to feed us. We dinna ken what’s gone on outside these walls these last years—not enough to know for certain we’re safe from a noose. All it’d take is a handful of fools with a terrible plan to try something and none of the Jacobites in prison would be safe from retribution did the crown want to make a point.”
Jamie shook his head even as a slight chill passed through his blood. “The major would ha’ told me were there somethin’ causin’ that sort of storm to brew. What’s more, the guards would be talkin’ of it and they’re no so close-lipped as the major.”

“Then why do ye think the major left in such a hurry?” Murtagh asked but Jamie had no answer.

“I dinna ken but… I canna help… trusting the major… to a point,” Jamie added as Murtagh’s eyebrows leap away from his surprised eyes. “He’s an honorable man and he intends to do his job well.”

“What was that bit of poetry Claire would say about scheming mice and men?” Murtagh pressed. “The major’s intentions dinna mean a thing when he’s the one receivin’ orders ‘stead of givin’ ‘em.”

When the orders came less than a week later, they arrived before Grey did. The prisoners were roused from their cells and made to line up in the yard to be counted and sorted according to a list Grey’s second in command held.

The men’s names were called one at a time and the guards assigned them a new line in which to stand.

The names were read off in alphabetical order so Jamie was prepared as they finished with Domnall Finlay but instead of hearing ‘James Fraser’ ring through the yard, the soldier in charge called for ‘Murtagh Fraser’ to step forward.

Jamie watched with his jaw clenched as his godfather stepped forward so the guards could confer with the list, look him over, and shuffle him off to another growing group of men. Murtagh’s eyes never left Jamie as the rest of the men in the yard were sorted.

Finally, only Jamie and two others remained and the guards led each group of sorted men out of the yard one at a time with no hint as to where they’d been taken.

“You three are to follow me,” Grey’s second in command informed them. There were six more soldiers who followed as well.

They were led back inside and to a separate wing of the renovated prison. It was one all three of them recognized immediately—the solitary cells.

Each was locked up on his own in a smaller cell than the ones where they’d been kept with the rest of the Jacobite prisoners. Jamie’s mind strained to Murtagh and where he and the others were being taken rather than wonder why he had been kept behind.

The others were no doubt starting the journey to their new prison homes but perhaps he and the other two were going to be hanged after all. He didn’t know much about his two fellows; they weren’t Jacobites so far as he recognized. But Jamie himself was a convicted traitor, not just a crofter turned footsoldier; if an example was to be made, surely he would be near the top of the list…

It was three days more before Jamie was retrieved from his cell. The guards led him past the other two men who watched him eagerly, desperate for any bit of light Jamie’s situation might shed on their own.

To his surprise and partial relief, Jamie was taken to Major Grey’s rooms.

When Grey looked up to see Jamie, he couldn’t hide the flash of shame that flickered across his face. Jamie braced himself for the worst, hoping that Grey would at least allow him to write a letter to
Faith before they took him to the yard for his execution.

“Mr. Fraser… I’m terribly sorry I wasn’t able to do more for you and your kinsman. I was unable to alter his sentence. I had hoped to arrive back in time to oversee the prisoners’ removal myself so I could arrange for you to have a few moments with him to say a proper farewell.”

Jamie felt himself go cold all over. Perhaps it was Murtagh and the men of his group who had been taken forth for execution. There had been lottery executions in those first weeks and months after Culloden, rather than attempt to execute every Jacobite prisoner the English had taken. Perhaps something had happened—another small rebellion if not a full uprising.

“What… what—if I may ask,” Jamie choked out quietly, “what’s happened to him?”

“He—like most of the prisoners here at Ardsmuir—is being transported to the colonies,” Grey explained.

Jamie wanted to sigh with relief for Murtagh but fear for himself crept into that first fear’s place.

“And those of us… remaining …”

“As a convicted traitor you are not eligible for transportation,” Grey said quietly, the shame returning more obviously to his face. “You are to be paroled to England. You’ll be put under the supervision of Lord Dunsany at his estate, Helwater. You will work for him in whatever capacity he requires and I will make quarterly visits to see that the arrangement continues to function as intended.”

“How long?” Jamie croaked.

“That will be up to His Majesty,” Grey responded. “I… I was able to place you with Lord Dunsany—the Dunsanys have long been friends of my family so I know that they will treat you well. I will be escorting you personally to your new place there at the end of the week.”
Frank is working on his research into what became of Jamie when Brianna returns with a surprise after a day out with Claire.

Frank’s progress was slow—mostly because he had to wait for his colleagues and friends overseas to locate, copy, and mail him the documents he needed—but it was steady and intriguing. He made a point of having everything sent to his office at work so there was no chance Claire would stumble across it in the post. Bringing it home in his brief case and leaving it in his study was another matter; he was confident he could leave the papers and his notes strewn about and she would never take notice of what they contained.

Still, he kept his research orderly. There was a pile for all the materials he had received that remained unread and several piles of pages with his notations, sorted by relevance and the likelihood they would lead to additional resources.

With only his belief of Fraser’s survival based on the Bible ledger, Frank decided to learn what he could about the role James Fraser had played in the Bonnie Prince’s army prior to Culloden. It had been easy to find Captain James Fraser listed among the men sent by the Old Fox himself. Frank was also confident that Claire’s Jamie was the same who appeared in the broadsides circulated by the British Army desiring the arrest of a man they called Red Jamie.

Frank’s blood had gone cold when the pages slid from the large envelope onto his desk at work and a copy of a woodcut with a still recognizably familiar face stared up at him. The jaw on the broadside was probably a lot sharper and squarer but with the blur softening it Frank saw Bree frowning up at him the way she did when she didn’t get her way. There was something else familiar about the face—something that made the hairs stand up at the base of his neck—but he couldn’t put his finger on it. He’d taken the broadside copy and shoved it to the bottom of one of his desk drawers, resisting the strong urge to tear it up and throw it out. It was most certainly Claire’s Jamie so it might prove relevant in the end.

The first round of documentation from the British Army’s archives regarding the Jacobite officers taken prisoner following Culloden had arrived at the same time as the information concerning the Old Fox’s men. It was tedious skimming through the lists of names in search for one of what was likely to be many James Frasers. When he first looked through the report, Frank had set it aside into a pile for what he dubbed mid-level leads. Halfway through the next list of prisoners the gears clicked into place and his hand shot out to reclaim the report from the top of its pile.

A list of executed men—Jacobites found wounded and hiding in a nearby barn. James Fraser wasn’t on the list so Frank hadn’t read the rest but there had been a brief glimpse of a word that might have been ‘Fraser.’ Reading through it with greater care, it was ‘Fraser,’ an officer from Fraser’s regiment. Cross referencing between the documents he had, Frank almost grinned as he concluded that the escaped officer had to be James Fraser. But where had he escaped to?

The report had been filed by a Major Harold Grey and so Frank had written to another acquaintance looking for everything he could find of Major Grey’s time in the army during Culloden and its immediate aftermath.
A reply had finally arrived in the form of a thick envelope—hopefully a good sign—and Frank found himself especially thankful for Claire’s day off from the hospital in order to take Brianna shopping for her First Communion. It left him with at least three uninterrupted hours to sort through and evaluate the new material.

Grey clearly came from a prominent family and some of the documents referred to him as ‘Melton’—Frank would have to look into why that was; he’d served with distinction at a few of the smaller battles earlier in the fighting… though it seemed he was part of a unit that didn’t quite make it to Prestonpans in time for that fight. He was one of Cumberland’s men tasked with restoring order following the Rising and that started with the captured and wounded Jacobites on Culloden Moor. The official reports were detached and to the point, as was to be expected. It reminded Frank chillingly of his own time in the service though he’d been on a different end when it came to captured, wounded, and deceased soldiers; he was the one looking at that least and dealing with the families left behind, though in some cases, he’d been as responsible putting the names on the list as Major Grey appeared to be.

A few pages of Grey’s personal diary for the time of his life that included Culloden had been tucked into the envelope as well with a note suggesting Frank consider taking a break from his books chronicling the Jacobites to consider delving into the realm of biography.

Harold Grey later became Duke of Pardloe, the note informed him. I know you were interested in the life and history of the Duke of Sandringham at one time. I agree that the Duke of Sandringham is fascinating to speculate about but I’m convinced the majority of his appeal lies in the decided lack of information about him (in all likelihood, his life was just as void of genuine intrigue as many aristocrats of his day). The Duke of Pardloe, however, seems to hold more promise as a possible subject. He kept regular diaries throughout his life, though I only secured and copied the relevant sections at this time, so at the very least you ought to have an easier start of uncovering additional resources to explore.

As Frank read through the diary pages, he too began to see the appeal of the one-time Duke of Pardloe as an academic subject. He was clearly a young man with something he wished to prove—perhaps tied to the sense of honor that became thick and undeniable in the pages dated April 1746; something about the horror and grief in his younger brother’s eyes as he enlisted the boy’s assistance dealing with the wounded and dying prisoners on the field but then…

He’d found him. Frank had found James Fraser. He hadn’t escaped at all. The future Duke of Pardloe had packed a severely wounded James Fraser into a cart with instructions he be brought home, presumably to die… in fulfillment of a debt of honor.

Frank blinked. So James Fraser had been sent home. That fact only convinced him more that Fraser had indeed survived and for some time. But that still didn’t tell him what had happened to Fraser after he arrived home. Frank shook his head. It wasn’t a dead end yet. He needed to know more about this Harold Grey; perhaps he had kept tabs on Fraser beyond simply sending him home half-alive. And Frank was annoyingly curious about the debt of honor that had been more important to young Major Grey than following orders.

“Daddy!” Brianna’s voice called from the front hall as he heard the door slam.

Frank shuffled the papers on his desk but kept the diary out on top, leaning back in his chair and looking up just in time for Brianna to burst into his study without knocking.

Brianna grinned at him as she crossed to stand opposite his desk.

“What’re you working on?” she asked, reaching up to brush her hair behind her ears.
“I’m reading through some research,” Frank answered, his eyes immediately drawn exactly where Brianna was hoping to attract them. “What’ve you got there?” It was obvious from the way her face flushed that his judgmental inflection had taken her by surprise.

“Mama said I could get my ears pierced,” Brianna answered with a touch of hesitation. “A bunch of the other girls are getting theirs pierced for First Communion too.”

“Mmmhmm,” Frank hummed. He was pressing his lips together tightly while he fought to get a hold on just what he was feeling and what he should be feeling. There were certainly girls in Brianna’s classes who already had pierced ears and having it coincide with her First Communion gave it a certain Rite of Passage feel that he could understand and appreciate.

But Claire hadn’t consulted him first. It wasn’t that he would have said ‘no’—though he certainly would have laid out quite a few reasons against it—but to not even be consulted…

None of that was Brianna’s fault, though. It was only natural for her to want to have what her friends had. She would have known immediately to approach Claire with such a request but he couldn’t fault Brianna there either; she’d only taken advantage of an opportunity presented to her.

“You don’t like them,” Brianna remarked, deflated.

“They look lovely,” Frank responded, finding the smile and approval Brianna needed to see. “I’m just… I can’t believe how grown up they make you look.” He rose from his chair and crossed to examine them closer. “Did you pick them out?”

“Sort of,” Brianna said, wincing slightly as Frank ran his thumb over the odd surface of the pearl stud. “I asked Mama if I could wear Grandma’s necklace cause Elaine’s mom is letting her borrow her pearls to wear, but Mama said no, it was too much for something like this and when I asked if I could get my ears pierced instead—like Linda and Karen and Evie—she said yes and said pearl earrings would be a nice touch and then I’d have them for when I do get to wear Grandma’s necklace.” She huffed at the end like she’d been running a race. Frank was leaning back against his desk, his hands in his pockets. Brianna reached up to poke and prod at the fresh piercings and feel the shape of the pearls again for herself. “I wanted regular round pearls but Mama said to match Grandma’s necklace they would have to be these kind instead.”

Frank nodded. “I agree that wearing a pearl necklace is a bit much for girls your age, even if it is for First Communion.” He frowned. “I was going to save this for afterwards but since your mother gave you something early so you could wear it for the ceremony, perhaps…”

He walked back around his desk and pulled open one of the lower drawers. He hadn’t decided whether he wanted to wrap the box or simply put a bow on it so it was still in the small bag from the store. Brianna’s eyes went wide at the sight of it and she hesitated to take it from him when he held it out to her.

She gasped when she got the box open. “Is it…?”

“18 karat,” Frank informed her. She gaped though he knew that all she knew about karats and gold was that more was better than less. It was a thin chain with a simple crucifix pendant.

“Thank you, Daddy,” Brianna exclaimed, running over to throw herself into his arms.

She was too big for him to easily lift her from the ground the way he had when she was younger—and more importantly, she would have considered herself too grown or it in any case—but the impulse was still there. Nothing was more thrilling than being the reason she was excited, being the
focus of her affection; feeling those arms tight around his neck and the weight of her resting against him.

All too soon she’d broken away from his embrace and was back to looking at the necklace in her hands, running her finger along the delicate chain.

“You take good care of it,” he instructed. “It’s not to be left about or taken for granted. I want it tucked safely away when you’re not wearing it and it’s only to be worn for special occasions and to church on Sundays. I don’t want you losing it at school.”

She nodded. “I promise, Daddy.”

“And you’ll take care of your ears and those earrings as well,” he added. “It was very kind of your mother to buy them for you. It wouldn’t do for her to have gone to all that trouble only for you to let them get infected or lose them.”

“I have to leave them in for six weeks,” Brianna recited, letting the authority of someone else’s lecture seep through. “Otherwise the holes could close up again. And Mama already made sure I know how to clean them properly. She even made the woman who was doing it let her watch to be sure she sterilized everything before she let them start,” Brianna added with a roll of her eyes.

Frank chuckled both at Brianna’s exasperation and Claire’s thoroughness. When it came to matters of health and cleanliness, that was one area where Claire never faltered.

“It sounds like you have it well in hand,” Frank admitted before turning back to his desk and the work he’d laid down when she came in.

“What’re you researching?” Brianna asked, her attention following him.

“Well… I was looking to see if I could find out what happened to a specific soldier who fought for the Jacobites at Culloden,” Frank said honestly. “But in the process… I’ve stumbled upon a rather intriguing tangent.” He motioned to her to come around the desk and look.

He scooted over on the seat leaving a sliver just large enough for her to perch on too. She leaned forward and rested her arm against the edge of the desk using the other hand to brush her hair behind her ears and fiddle with the earring, not to show off or catch his attention this time, but purely because she was still adjusting to the feel of it there weighing on her earlobe.

“I’m fairly certain this soldier I was looking for survived and made it home to his family—there’s no record in their bible of his death but there is of another who perished at Culloden,” he continued, bending the truth and leaving out names. It tickled him that Brianna was always so interested in his work. It gave them more time together and because she thought of it as their special area of interest, he was confident Brianna would say nothing to Claire—nothing specific enough to catch Claire’s attention, at least.

“How did he get away? Didn’t Cumberland go looking for them all?”

“If they hid well enough or managed to sneak away, there were plenty who escaped Cumberland’s men. This one though…” he flipped a few pages back in the copy of the diary, “appears to have had some assistance from one of Cumberland’s officers.”

Brianna’s jaw dropped. “A traitor?”

“Not really,” Frank cautioned. “It seems this particular Jacobite had spared the officer’s younger brother earlier in the war and that brother had sworn an oath to repay the debt. The Jacobite was also
gravely wounded and the officer didn’t think he would even make it all the way home alive so…”

“But he did?”

“It would appear so, yes,” Frank said with a nod. “Now I just need to find his trail again after he made it home… a task that’s proving next to impossible.”

“So you’re looking at the officer instead,” Brianna guessed. “Do you think he checked in on the Jacobite?”

“I doubt it,” Frank confessed, “though that would certainly make things easier.”

Brianna frowned down at the pages of Major Harold Grey’s diaries, staring at the scratched observations and musings as though they were integers and variables in an equation she was solving.

“You know the Jacobite escaped Culloden and made it home… but do you know that Cumberland’s men never found him? You said they went after the Highlanders for years afterward and that kilt act thing wasn’t passed right away… Could they have caught him later after he was recovered?”

She looked at him eager to see what he thought of her observation. A flash of prescient panic shot through him. Claire had promised she wouldn’t tell Brianna the truth but there were a thousand ways the girl might learn a version of the truth regardless. Someday when she understood the birds and the bees she’d look at their family photos and would recognize that something didn’t add up correctly. Someday—however unlikely—she might stumble across a story concerning her mother’s disappearance or return and she’d realize that part of the truth.

If she did… would she blame him for keeping it from her? She wouldn’t believe the story of Jamie Fraser easily, if at all, but… she might still want to learn about him for herself someday and Frank didn’t want to be the one who kept it from her, no matter how much it hurt to think about it now. He never wanted to be the one she looked at with disgust or a sense of having been betrayed, only with that expression of gratitude and joy she’d worn earlier when she’d opened her gift. Someday if she believed the whole truth, he wanted to be able to show her that he had found Jamie Fraser and that she’d helped him to do it.

“That’s something I’ll look into next,” he told her. “One thing the British Army did rather thoroughly in those days was keep records. It will take a while, first to procure copies of the records and then to go through them, but we can see if that Jacobite soldier appears on any of the lists of captured and tried men.”

“If they did find him and capture him… would he have died in prison?” Hesitation and the quiet fear of a youth teetering on the edge between naive optimism and a mature practicality, Brianna waited for Frank to push her over or pull her back.

She looked so grown up with those earrings.

“It would depend on when he was captured. Lots of Jacobite prisoners were executed, but not all, and in the later years they were more likely to find themselves imprisoned for life or transported to the colonies.”

A ghost of a smile played on her lips before darting into her eyes.

“So he might have ended up here,” she observed.

“It’s a possibility.”
Claire was busy at her dressing table making notes on the cases of several patients she wanted to check the next day. As much as she loved having days off to spend with Brianna, it always seemed to be the case that she wound up thinking about her patients half the time and that her greatest insights into how best to treat them struck during that time with her daughter.

Working on her patient cases and thinking about work also helped with the when the past pushed too close to the surface and threatened to overwhelm her. Like it had that afternoon with Brianna.

Frank made little effort to muffle the sound of his approach or the closing of their door as he sought to ready himself for bed. She knew exactly what was on his mind and only had to wait for him to find the way to confront her. It was something that she’d been anticipating all day, a storm gathering on the horizon. She’d seen it coming before it even had a chance to start brewing. She also knew and was willing to acknowledge the role she’d had in stirring up the circumstances so that this conclusion was inevitable. She wasn’t proud of it, but she knew what she’d done, and she didn’t care. As much as she’d put off letting everything overwhelm her earlier, she needed some sort of release for the pressure of guilt that built up in her with time and this was the only way she found so far to achieve it.

“‘The earrings suit her,’” he started, innocently enough.

“I thought so too. They’ll go well with her dress.” Claire crossed one final ‘T’ and set the pen down. “I know what you’re going to say,” she sought to cut him off before he could get properly worked up. “But she’s not too young and she is responsible enough to take care of them.”

“I agree on the latter though I think the first is debatable,” Frank said civilly enough as his shirt slipped down his arms leaving him in his undershirt. He sat on the bed to remove his shoes. “I would have appreciated being consulted on the matter, for you to at least pretend like my opinion counts for something.”

“You weren’t exactly there to consult,” she retorted. “It wasn’t important enough to put off. We were at the salon to have Bree’s nails done for Sunday and one of the women there was piercing another girl’s ears in the back. Bree got excited and it made sense so we went to the store for the earrings and then right back for Bree to have her ears done too.”

Frank shrugged into his pajama top, his back turned to her. She watched him button the top in her mirror’s reflection.

“Interesting choice, freshwater pearls.”

Claire went still. “They were cheaper than the others.”

“Bree said it was so they would match her grandmother’s necklace.”

Claire swallowed awkwardly. “They do.”

“I didn’t know you had a necklace with freshwater pearls.”

“Didn’t you?” Claire turned. Her voice was coy but she knew her expression gave her away.

“You’ve been hiding them. Why?”

Claire turned away and reached for her handcream. “Because I knew you wouldn’t want me telling Bree about them. For the record, I didn’t; she found them one day poking through my jewelry looking for trouble.” Her volume remained conversational and calm. “She thinks they were my mother’s, that Uncle Lamb gave them to me when you and I married.”
“You hid them because you didn’t want me to know about them because they’re from him.” Frank didn’t raise his voice either. Neither wanted Brianna to overhear them and eavesdrop, either intentionally or unintentionally.

“They were his mother’s. He gave them to me when we wed. I had them with me when I came back and he would want Bree to have them when she’s old enough.”

She remembered realizing they were still sewn into the lining of her bodice as they undressed her at the hospital. She’d thrown a fit to be sure she kept her clothes with her until she was left alone long enough to pull the stitching out with her teeth and retrieve them. She remembered clutching them in her fist and crying because the necklace was something that should have stayed behind at Lallybroch where Faith could have them when she got older. At the time, Claire had been sure she carried Jamie’s son in her womb and had only been able to stem the tears when she thought about how the pearls could be a gift for the boy to give his wife on their wedding day, just as his father had. She remembered hiding them further away when Brianna was a toddler who liked to climb onto her chair and push everything from her dressing table onto the carpeted floor. It was then that Claire recalled the pearl bracelet, a companion piece sent to her from MacRannoch and how it had been left behind among her things at Lallybroch. She knew then that Faith would inherit the bracelet while Brianna would have the necklace. It still brought tears to her eyes, even as she smiled at the thought of her daughters being connected across the centuries in such a way.

Frank snorted behind her as he crawled into bed and let the matter drop for the time being. He turned out the light overhead leaving only the smaller light on the table next to Claire’s side of the bed to illuminate the space for her as she stacked her notes and finished tidying her dressing table, going about it slowly so Frank had time to fall asleep—or at least time to support the pretense that he had—before she slipped into the bed beside him.

She reached for her jewelry box, carelessly shoved to the back of the table where it abutted the wall and wasn’t in danger of being knocked off. The pearls were in a small silk pouch at the bottom of the box. She didn’t risk opening it for fear Frank would hear though he likely knew precisely what she was doing. Instead, she felt the uneven shapes through the silk, nearly as smooth as the pearls themselves. She closed her eyes and briefly felt Jamie’s fingers on her neck as he fastened the necklace in place on their wedding day.
The ride from Ardsmuir to Helwater was a long one. Major Grey attempted many times in the first few days to apologize to Jamie—for not being able to keep Murtagh from being transported, for not being able to discover where he was being transported to, for the fact that Jamie was being sent into England for his parole. On the fourth day Jamie interrupted another awkward attempt on Grey’s behalf with a simple but firm, “Stop.” The rest of the journey was accomplished in silence.

The combined loss and banishment had brought Jamie lower even than when he allowed himself to be captured by the English. He hadn’t known what would happen then and he didn’t think anything could be worse than leaving Faith behind. Going even further away and losing his ability to exchange letters with her was worse. Being in Ardsmuir he’d been under the authority of English soldiers like Grey but he hadn’t been alone; the other prisoners and the way they looked to him helped him get through those days. Now he faced the prospect of being the only Scot under a wealthy Englishman’s authority. Grey had informed him that he wouldn’t even be able to go by his proper name because the man who would be his master was afraid of the notoriety—of the power—that name held. The world had been stripping him away piece by piece since Culloden but the pace of that stripping felt like it had increased and the chill of exposure was leaving him numb.

Following the other grooms out to learn the lay of the land and the way Lord Dunsany liked things done, Jamie ached for the hills and glens of Scotland even as he luxuriated in the feel of the sun on his face, the warmth of the meal in his stomach, and the smell of a farm in his nostrils. It wasn’t home and he wasn’t free but there would be moments when he might be able to pretend—or forget; there might be moments of peace.

Within the first six months, Jamie was consumed by a possibility he would have laughed at just a year earlier.

Major Grey had been sent on assignment to the continent so he had missed the promised quarterly check ins to date but Jamie had found ways around the requirement that Lord Dunsany read and approve all of Jamie’s in and outgoing letters. Faith and Jenny knew he was alive and where he was paroled, that he was being treated well but had no knowledge of how long his parole would ultimately last.

Waking from a dream in which he’d been thrown by one of the horses and Faith had appeared to tend to him, Jamie became consumed with the idea of sending for Faith to join him at Helwater.

He doubted it would be allowed. The government must be compensating Lord Dunsany for the cost of Jamie’s upkeep but they would never provide additional funds for Faith if she joined him and Lord Dunsany wasn’t likely to welcome an extra mouth to feed unless the money for it came from someone else’s pocket.

Then there was the question of whether it would be good for Faith. At Lallybroch she was surrounded by family and whatever was left of the estate and its tenants. She might be better fed at
Helwater—which would in turn leave more for Jenny and her family at Lallybroch—and physically safe from any raids the Red Coats might still make, but Faith’s Scottish blood would be held against her. They could assure everyone they came in contact with that her mother had been English but her accent and status as the traitorous Scot’s daughter would outweigh that fact every time.

It had become an argument he had with himself every day, first convincing himself that there was nothing to be lost by inquiring with Major Grey when he did eventually arrive for one of his promised check ins. Then he would deride himself for the selfishness of even considering the idea; Faith couldn’t be ripped from Lallybroch like that simply because he was tired of missing her grow up. Finally, his thoughts would drift to Claire and what she might make of his conundrum and of the job of raising Faith he’d managed so far.

Walking behind the plow in one of the far fields, Jamie was only halfway through the cycle of his mental argument when he noticed a horse and rider approaching. He stopped the horse and plow to take his shirt from the stone wall, wipe the sweat from his face and chest with it, then quickly slip it on and roll up the sleeves before Lady Geneva reined in and brought her horse alongside the wall.

“MacKenzie,” she said as she turned and dismounted unassisted. “Just the man I was looking for.”

“Is there something I can help ye with?” Jamie asked dubiously.

Geneva refrained from answering while her eyes roved over Jamie in an evaluating manner. The look in her eye brought an unsettling chill to his wame and the nod she made to herself before continuing sent a shiver up his spine.

“I’m sure the maids have been talking with the rest of the servants about my upcoming marriage and though you’re only a groom I’d be surprised if the talk hadn’t made it’s way to you,” she said.

“Aye, I have heard. Please allow me to offer my congratulations.”

“Congratulate my father. It’s his doing and he’s the one who’ll truly benefit from the match. If I had my way, it wouldn’t be happening.”

“And ye’re looking for help stopping it happening?” Jamie asked tentatively.

“Of course not,” Geneva said with resignation. “Going against my father’s wishes in this matter—especially in any public way—will do me more harm than good. No, I am going to marry the man my father chose and for my father’s sake I’ll smile while doing it.”

“Then I dinna ken what it is ye’re—”

“I said I’ll marry the man,” Geneva interrupted, the rest of her words coming in a rush that belayed a nervous streak. “What I didn’t agree to was giving my soon-to-be husband my maidenhead.”

Jamie uncomfortably swallowed the anxious laugh that bubbled up in his chest and caught in his throat.

“There’re several lads in the stables and house foolish enough to help ye with that,” he informed her then turned back to the plow.

“I’ve decided it will be you,” Geneva announced, undeterred. “I believe I’ve heard tell you’ve been married before?”

“I lost my wife more’n ten years ago now. And I’ve a daughter near yer age. Yer first time ought to be with a man ye love—and preferably one nearer yer own age, not… not a man old enough to be
“Whether it ought to be that way or not doesn’t really matter. My only option is for it to be with a man I choose, regardless of how either of us actually feels. And my fiancé is old enough to be my grandfather so your age is not the obstacle you think.”

He sought to listen for the hurt and disappointment that he was convinced hid beneath the cold practicality of her tone. She was too proud to let it seep through though.

“I’m sorry ye’ve kent so little of love and seem so willing to set aside the hope ye’ll find it yerself,” Jamie said with a sad nod.

“I don’t have time for hope or fancy and Isobel’s always been more disposed to them anyway. I’m a lady of decision and action.”

“And ye’ve set yer mind to what ye want, I suppose… Well, if ye’re sayin’ it’s me ye’re choosing, I’ll tell ye I’m flattered but ye’re going to need to choose another.” Jamie took up the horse’s reins but before he could flick them and call to the beast to start again he caught a glimpse of Geneva moving on her horse, drawing something from her riding jacket.

“You see, I thought of that too. The daughter you mentioned, is she the Jenny that writes to you?” There was a vengeful edge to her tone as she unfolded the letter and pretended to read it. “Oh, no… I see. This Jenny calls you Jamie. A daughter wouldn’t call her father by his name like that. A lover then, perhaps?”

Jamie clenched his jaw, felt the heat of his fury rise in his limbs and carry him across to the wall where Geneva lingered so quickly she started and had to scramble to steady her horse.

“Give me that,” he demanded.

“I don’t think so. That is, not until you agree to my proposition. I’d hate to think what would happen to your family if this should find its way into my father’s possession.”

Jamie let every bit of his disgust settle into his features. Geneva blinked and swallowed but it was enough for him to find some hope he’d be able to talk her out of it. “So yer answer for bein’ forced to wed and bed a man ye dinna fancy is to force another man to bed ye against his wishes?”

“Why does it matter to you? It isn’t as though you’ve never done it before.”

The spark of hope in Jamie had landed on a fleeting thought and was beginning to smoke.

“How much do ye even ken of what it is that happens when a man beds a lass?” he challenged.

She cast her eyes at the letter as though appreciating its value. “I know enough,” she asserted. The blush rising in her cheeks betrayed her but a moment later she was able to raise her gaze to meet his, her eyes defiant.

“And given yer education, I’m sure ye ken what a eunuch is?” At the widening in her eyes, he hurried on, the flame of home traveling quickly from the edge of his fleeting idea inward to the heart that would sustain the brilliant blaze. “If ye don’t, there’s no way ye’ve lived yer life on a farm as breeds horses without hearing and learning about gelding.”

There was more blinking from Geneva and the next time she glanced down at the letter from Jenny it was with confusion.
“You were married,” she reminded him. “You said… Your wife bore you a daughter…”

“Aye,” Jamie nodded. “That was all before I was wounded in battle.”

Geneva’s eyes bugged with disbelief and drifted slowly down to Jamie’s crotch before jumping back up to his face. “You’re saying you don’t…”

He laughed, surprised by how easy it was to slip into the performance that was taking one a more solid shape with each word and gesture on his part.

“I’m saying I’ve no lain wi’ a woman since I lost my wife, which was shortly before I was wounded.” He turned away from Geneva and dropped his hands to the flies of his breeks. Thank the lord his shirt tails were long.

“You don’t need to show me…” Geneva began to protest.

“Dinna fash lass,” Jamie told her sliding his breeks down to his knees and cupping a hand protectively over himself. The tail of his shirt fell to mid-thigh. “I’m no going to offend yer modesty—though, given what ye’re demandin’ of me… ye do ken ye’ll have to get a might closer to a man’s cock if ye’re looking to surrender yer maidenhead, don’t ye?”

Perhaps it was cruel to tease her that way but he wanted to make her uncomfortable. He hoped she might abandon her endeavor altogether though he was fairly certain she was too stubborn for that.

He turned back around and watched as she took in the sight of the twisted scar tissue snaking its way up his thigh and disappearing under the hem of his shirt. She couldn’t tell that the scar ended about two inches further up. Let her imagination run wild with what the dirty linen of his shirt and his cupped hand might conceal.

“Bayonet,” he said as she looked away, her cheeks flaming. “It festered for a time and nearly killed me. There were times missin’ my wife that I didna think I’d mind if it did carry me away.” He turned away again and pulled his breeks back up, tucking his shirt into them and buttoning up before turning back around. “But I’ve my daughter still and she… well, as a bairn at least, she looked just like her mother.”

“You’ll… you won’t say anything to anyone of what we discussed today?” Geneva requested.

“If ye give me that letter, I’ll forget we ever had this conversation,” he promised with a nod to Jenny’s letter still clutched in her hands.

She scowled. For a moment he feared she would simply take it to her father out of spite. But instead she handed it over—it was only useful if he had something she wanted from him and she wouldn’t be staying at Helwater long enough to find such an opportunity. Spoiled and vindictive as she could be, he wasn’t worth the effort.

Tucking the letter into his shirt, Jamie paused before turning back to the plow. Geneva was adjusting herself on the saddle and he could see she was deciding who her new target should be.

“I ken there’s nothin’ I can say that will change yer mind about what yer father means in making this match for ye,” Jamie spoke up. “But I ken he’ll only be doin’ it because he thinks it’s best for ye. Ye may be right that it’ll no change his mind after whatever fuss ye’ve made so far… but will it do ye harm to try talkin’ with him about it again? Or yer mother? Perhaps ye’ll find she’ll speak wi’ him on yer behalf.”

“You have your letter now drop it and never address me on the subject again or I will tell my father
what you just did—taking your clothes off and making me watch,” Geneva threatened. “He’ll flay you alive.”

She kicked her horse and trotted off leaving Jamie alone again in the upper field, waiting for the wave that had carried him through the encounter to recede.

His hands trembled releasing the tension of his combined fear and anger. He had a strong urge to laugh, surprised and relieved that his farce had worked.

With Geneva well out of sight, he took the letter from his shirt, sat on the stone wall and read through the letter from Jenny. It was nothing special. The potato crop yield from the previous harvest (their stores had been better than expected and they’d set more aside for planting the next year); Jenny’s eldest son was courting a lass from a nearby croft and matters were already settled between her and Ian and the lass’ parents so all that was left was to wait for the two young people to reach an understanding; and Faith had taken it upon herself to overhaul Claire’s old herb garden to make it easier for young Janet and wee Ian to help keep the storeroom stocked while she tended to the tenants.

Tears pricked Jamie’s eyes. He couldn’t ask her to leave Lallybroch. The tenants needed her and if she was anything like Claire, she needed them and their ailments in order to feel truly herself.

Having read the letter through enough times to memorize it, he began tearing the page into small pieces. Later he would burn the others that were stashed in the ticking of his bed roll. He wouldn’t risk it with Geneva around and he would need to be more careful in sending his letters too. He refused to put them in danger.

Letting the breeze carry the miniscule scraps of paper away, Jamie used the back of his hand to dab at his eyes then pushed himself back to his feet and headed back to the plow.

As much as Geneva was spoiled and selfish, he bristled at the thought of what her father was asking of her. No, he wasn’t asking; he was ordering. But Jamie couldn’t quite feel the sympathy he logically knew her position deserved—Faith would object just as much to being told whom to wed. Geneva Dunsany had threatened Faith and that was something Jamie could not find a way to move past. She didn’t deserve to be sold in marriage but neither did she deserve his understanding.

Just as he had done countless times at Ardsmuir, Jamie lost himself in the physical labor before him while his mind chipped away at what he would say in his next letter to Faith.
Faith’s cousin Jamie gets married and she has to confront the social awkwardness and uncertainty of being fifteen.

The ceremony itself was small and confined to the chapel but since Lallybroch would technically be Jamie’s once he fully came of age, all the tenants were invited to celebrate at the main house afterward. Everyone had been cooking, cleaning, and readying the yard for a week straight in preparation and now the air of anticipation had broken with a swelling of music and laughter as the happy couple greeted well-wishers and encouraged them to eat and enjoy themselves. After years of near-starvation and fear, a few good harvests and the extended absence of English soldiers meant this was the first true celebration since the failed rising.

The tenants all greeted Faith warmly with thanks for injuries healed and the occasional question about preventatives and palliatives. Soon her cousins had pulled her away from the older generations and into the dancing and merriment that were the domain of the younger folk.

Fergus handed her a glass of wine while they hung back at the edge of the designated dancing area. Kitty was fidgeting in time to the music and sighing every time Maggie swirled passed on the arm of Paul Lyle. Everyone knew it was only a matter of time before the two of them announced their intentions to wed—many speculated they had only been waiting out of respect for Jamie and his bride.

“You must hurry and find yerself a suitor, Faith,” Kitty stated at Faith’s shoulder. “It’ll be yer turn after Maggie and then finally mine.”

Fergus laughed. “I do not think it is something that must be taken in turns in such a way,” he told her. “Otherwise do you not think I should have wed by now?”

“Ye’re a man,” Kitty said with a roll of her eyes as though that were all the explanation necessary.

“I dinna think I’m old enough to think of marriage,” Faith shook her head. She was only just fifteen and the thought of any of her cousins marrying was strange to her though she had just witnessed Jamie standing before a priest with Joan. She suspected the real reason Maggie and Paul hadn’t become engaged was that Jenny and Ian were making Maggie wait at least until she turned sixteen in the fall.

“Ye’re never too young to think of marriage.” Kitty spoke with an air of authority that she’d picked up from her mother but without the level of care or sense behind it.

“Even if that were true, I’d need to have a young man payin’ me mind first and the only young men pay me any mind are them as find themselves hurt or ill. Not somethin’ likely to put thoughts of marriage in their heids,” Faith pointed out.

Kitty laughed before wandering a short ways to a table where food had been laid out.

“How often do you think young men find themselves injured and unwell, generally speaking?”
Fergus asked her with a hint of mischief in his voice.

Faith looked to him sharply. “What do ye mean?”

“Do I not often hear you making complaints that they are never so badly off as their reports would suggest? And what of your Murray cousins? Do they find themselves so often in need of your medicinal assistance?”

Faith rolled her eyes even as her cheeks began to flush. “Ye’ve a mind far more devious than most, Fergus Fraser,” she teased him. “I think ye’re giving the lads round here more credit than they’re due.”

“Perhaps… but I also think I know more of what passes through the minds of young men than a young girl—even one observant as you ma petite soeur. You have your mother’s beauty as well as… le aveuglement. You pay your attention to the wound but the young man attends only that you are une fille jolie and is allowed to lay her hands on him.”

Faith gave Fergus a smack on the arm as she felt all the heat in her body rushing to her face. He laughed and rubbed his arm. Kitty returned with the crumbs of some shortbread still clinging to her fingers and lips.

“Did I miss something?” she asked, her eyes darting to the dancers who were slowing and catching their breath now the song had come to an end.

“Just Fergus being his usual self and causing trouble,” Faith informed her with a sly grin towards her adoptive brother.

“I think ye may be right,” Kitty nodded, her eyes on someone across the clearing. “I’ve a feeling he’s the one keeping ye from finding a suitor.”

“What?” the other two said in unison, startling themselves and Kitty.

“I’m only sayin’ that if Fergus wasna here standing guard of ye, then perhaps Keir Gilchrist would feel safe to come over and ask ye to dance. He’s been trying not to stare at ye all afternoon and every time there’s a break between songs he looks at ye all anxious like he might wet himself.”

Fergus choked on his wine and required Faith to clap him on the back as Kitty laughed.

“Look what ye’ve done,” Kitty scolded with amusement. “Ye’ve got yer drink all down yer shirt. Ye ought to go inside and change though Mam will no be pleased when she sees it in the laundry. I might be able to help ye get some of it out if we go about it quick.”

“I can—”

“No,” Kitty insisted, cutting off Faith with a smirk. “I’ll help Fergus as it was something I said caused him to make the mess. You stay yerself there… and if I’m wrong as ye say, then ye’ll still be there when we make our way back.”

As Kitty led Fergus toward the house, he offered Faith an apologetic shrug.

Faith kept watching them until they had disappeared inside before she turned her attention back to the crowd of her peers who were beginning to pair off for the next dance, swallowing nervously.

When Keir Gilchrist appeared at her side a few moments later, Faith could have sworn she heard Kitty laughing from inside the house.
“Mistress Faith,” Keir greeted her with an awkward nod that looked like it started with the intention of being a more formal bow.

“Keir Gilchrist,” she said with a smile before turning her attention back to the gathering dancers taking their positions. She hoped he hadn’t noticed the flush in her cheeks but knew he must have when he took another step closer. “Please don’t tell me ye came to ask me to dance…” She intended her remark to be playful and vaguely teasing but she feared it must have sounded rude or dismissive. Despite having watched both Maggie and Kitty flirt with local lads on countless occasions, Faith couldn’t manage to say anything to young men in such social circumstances without sounding ridiculous and feeling foolish. But she had yet to find any men outside her family circle who responded positively to feminine directness.

“I uh… well, that is… I thought ye might be interested in a walk,” Keir stammered but recovered, grinning as he found his feet again. “It’s crowded just here and wi’ the heat of everything,” he glanced up to where the summer sun was still hovering high in the clear afternoon sky, “steppin’ away for a turn in the shade where we might find a breeze and ye can hear what each other’s sayin’.”

Faith smiled, glad he seemed to be taking the color in her cheeks for being overheated—or at least that he was kind enough to suggest that must be the case.

“I should like that, thank ye… Would ye care to see my garden?” she suggested, her smile broadening at her stroke of genius. “I’m near finished moving everything about but everyone kens to keep away till I’m through—and even after I’m through,” she added with a laugh. “It’ll be cooler there.”

Keir couldn’t conceal how pleased her suggestion made him. “Lead the way,” he said, stepping aside so she could move along the outer edge of the crowd gathered in the yard.

She tried to ignore the way that her heart pounded with each step she took leaving the familiarity and safety of the crowd behind. The sweat from her palms soaked into her skirt as she lifted her hem to step over one of the dogs sprawled in the shade of the archway that led into her herb garden.

If the crowd of her cousins and neighbors had been reassuring in that she wasn’t entirely alone with Keir, her garden was comforting in more tangible ways. She knew who she was within its bounds better than she knew herself anywhere else. It relaxed her to be there and the fact that she was more comfortable seemed to help Keir’s nerves too.

“I have the beds arranged by the ailments they treat,” she explained, leading Keir down the central aisle. “Those that I see most often—lavender, chamomile, and lemongrass—are near the front so I dinna have to go far for them. My da cannae stand the lavender so it’s on the far end there by the wall.”

“But he’s not seen yer garden,” Keir said quickly before stuttering an apology. “I mean… I ken ye’ve no seen him since he… I’m sure when he does see it—”

“I’ve told him about it,” Faith explained, smoothing over Keir’s awkwardness. “He’s been paroled, ye ken. There’s no knowing how long till he’s released for good…” or if he ever would be, she refused to acknowledge aloud for fear it would come to pass, “but we’ve been able to write back and forth for some time now. It’s no the same as havin’ him close as it was when he was in the cave…” But at least she knew where he was.

“I’m sorry. I didna mean to put ye in mind of… I ken ye must miss him.”

Faith nodded. “Aye.”
They walked a little further in silence, Faith glancing at her herbs in their neat beds. Feverfew, peppermint, purple coneflower…

“Perhaps I should have asked ye to dance after all,” Keir muttered after a few moments. “Ye might have said ‘no’ but I’d no have gotten off on the wrong foot by stickin’ it in my mouth.”

Faith laughed and the awkward tension between them was broken. “And ye started so well suggestin’ a walk after I warned ye off a dance.”

“I’m better on my feet and my hands than wi’ words,” he told her then suddenly looked up, flustered again. “Not that I’d be… with my hands… not like that, it’s just—I’ve been training as a cooper and it’s all with the hands and no much to be said in a day—”

But Faith was laughing again and when Keir realized she hadn’t taken offense, he relaxed and laughed too.

“I know what ye mean, by the way,” Faith said leading them to turn at the end of the central aisle so they passed along the back end of the garden and under one of the windows of the house. “Why do ye think I suggested we walk here? Put me in front of someone wounded or ill and I ken what to do, but dancing… I’d be the one gettin’ us off on the wrong foot, probably by steppin’ on one of yers.”

“I promise I wouldna yelp did ye trod on my toes,” Keir promised with a hopeful grin.

“Maybe later when the others have had more time wi’ the whisky and wine. I’d rather folk put it down to my having had a wee dram too many than realize I’m that bad at dancin’.” The smile she shone at Keir had more to do with self-satisfaction at the realization she was successfully flirting than it did with the idea of actually dancing with him.

“I willnae tell a soul the truth,” he readily offered further promises. “If anyone asks, I’ll swear to the fact I’ve seen ye swallow more fingers of whisky than can be counted on one hand.”

True to her word, she danced with him a short time later and trod on his toes till they were black and blue but both of them laughed about it as he exaggerated a limp when he went to rejoin his departing parents late in the evening.

She had danced with Fergus and her cousins as well as Keir. After their walk in the garden, he hadn’t been as hesitant about approaching her when she was standing and talking with the others much to Kitty’s satisfaction and Fergus’ discomfort.

“Look at what it is you have started, Kitty,” Fergus scolded her as they helped to carry in the leftover detritus of the celebration. The guests had trickled away soon after the newlyweds, neither of which had happened till the moon had replaced the sun in the sky.

“I didna start anything. Keir’s had eyes for Faith for months now,” Kitty insisted. “All I did was say it aloud.”

“You did nothing? And who was it dragged me into the house leaving Faith to herself so she could not politely refuse?” Fergus bit back, his color rising.

“It’s all right,” Faith told Fergus bumping her elbow against his arm. “Ye ken well as I do that I’ve no trouble bein’ im polite when I feel there’s a need. I didna do anything I didna want. Keir is a sweet lad who’ll have sore toes for his troubles and a lesson learned.”

Fergus rolled his eyes. “He has learned I am sure. He has learned how he can get close to you
“Ye say that as if it were a bad thing,” Kitty interrupted, completely content to be offended on her cousin’s behalf. “Why should Faith no have a suitor? And what’s wrong wi’ Keir? He has done nothing and ye’re just jealous and over-protective.”

Fergus’ mouth fell open with shock. He looked to Faith who shrugged.

“I’m not… There’s nothing… Keir is… he is not good enough for Faith, that is all,” Fergus stammered. “And I do not think Milord would approve.”

“Well, Uncle Jamie isn’t here to approve or not and Faith shouldn’a have to wait God knows how long for him to come home before enjoying a young man’s attentions,” Kitty huffed heading for the stairs.

Faith felt her exhaustion overwhelm her and sat down with a sigh.

“I am sorry,” Fergus said, sinking onto the seat beside her. “She did not mean… You know how she can be, speaking before thinking.”

“But she’s right too. We dinna ken when he’ll be free from his parole.”

“And he would not want you to be unhappy while he is away,” Fergus agreed. “But do you think that Keir Gilchrist will make you happy that way?”

“Ye mean because he’s only goin’ to be a cooper? Ye ken Da’s no the only one whose titles and lands have been lost since the Rising. It’s no likely I’ll be makin’ the sort of match he and Mama would have had in mind did the Rising never happen. The clans as they were…”

But Fergus was shaking his head. “Milord and Milady would never force you to such a match,” he assured her. “And that is not what I mean. The boy being only a cooper is not why he is not good enough.”

“Then why?”

Fergus drew a deep breath but hesitated to speak. Faith rolled her eyes and stood.

“I’m goin’ to bed,” she said, turning.

“You were too small to see and to remember,” he said quietly. She stopped. “Milord and Milady… If you could remember you would be able to see.”

“I ken what it was Da felt for Mama,” Faith whispered. “And I have seen what is between Uncle Ian and Aunt Jenny… and Jamie and Joanie, and Maggie and Paul.”

“But you do not see how it is between you and Keir. You cannot because you are in it.”

Faith felt her face heat with indignation. “I never said it was anything. Ye may not see anything because there’s nothing to see and it may be because there’s nothing to see yet. All I ken is that I liked dancin’ with him and walkin’ with him. He’s sweet and kind and he’s none of yer concern. I’m no likely to see him for some time again so it’s as like as naught that nothing will come of it. But ye dinna need to get at Kitty that way and I dinna care to hear ye talkin’ like ye’re some grand authority and takin’ all the joy out of the day.”

Fergus went red in the face from his well-deserved scolding as Faith stomped off.
She caught her bedroom door before it could slam shut then sat herself in front of her dressing table mirror. She began pulling down her hair to brush it, taking her frustrations out on her unruly curls and replaying each moment she’d spent with Keir that day.

He had made her laugh, both with his awkwardness and his thoughtfulness. More than just finding it endearing, it made her feel like she wasn’t alone in not knowing what to do when it came to courting or whatever Kitty wanted to call it. Fergus wasn’t giving her enough credit for being sensible; he spoke as though dancing and walking with Keir meant she was considering eloping with him.

She snorted. They’d all grown up with the stories of how Grandda Brian and Grannie Ellen had done just that—met and eloped before a full day had passed. She frowned. She also remembered Da’s stories about how he knew about Mama right when he met her, though marrying her took some time and a lot of luck. But he’d also told her about how Mama hadn’t felt the same at the start, that she’d actually been married once before and only grew to love him with time.

How much time had it taken her?

Faith set the brush down and reached for the drawer where she kept her mother’s medical book. Usually when Faith had questions she longed to ask Mama, she could search through the pages of that book and cobble together some sort of answer that might be close, but she knew what she sought now couldn’t be found there. But the sense of her mother’s presence could and that was calming in and of itself. She took out the book and shifted in her chair, propping her feet on the dressing table and angling the page so the light from her candle illuminated the page.

*Measles have struck Broch Mordha and I have had to stay overnight in the village treating more than a dozen scattered in various homes. I hope in the morning to convince those that claim to have survived in the past to move all the afflicted into one place that I might treat them all more easily. That should also reduce the risk of exposure for those who have never contracted the disease before...*
Sounds Like Love

Chapter Summary

Jamie gets some surprising news at Helwater. Faith deals with teasing and encouragement about her developing relationship.

Jamie stood at the back of the chapel with the other servants. Those who worked in the house stood closer but there was still a large gap between them and Geneva’s immediate family and friends at the front of the quaint space. It wasn’t enough distance to keep Jamie from hearing Lady Dunsany’s quiet sobs. The chapel was warmer and cosier than it should be for a funeral, especially one marking such a tragic end to a had been a short life.

Jamie bent his head as the minister spoke but didn’t listen to the words. He was busy saying his own prayers for the poor lass’ soul, forgiving her in death where he couldn’t while she’d been alive. She had been a reckless and selfish fool, unable to think or maybe even care about the consequences of her actions, even those to herself… and it had killed her in the end. Her husband, too, in effect. It was his fury over her deceit that had caused him to be a threat to the child Geneva had borne and it was in defense of that innocent child that Jamie had interceded, killing the man and saving the bairn. He regretted the necessity of the action, but not having done it.

The rescued baby in question woke and began to cry, his nursemaid hurrying him out a side door and back to the main house for a change and a feeding. A wave of sentimental murmuring rippled through those gathered. Only a few knew the whole truth of the death of Lord and Lady Ellesmere and Jamie was one of them.

Another who Jamie suspected knew—Major John Grey—glanced over his shoulder searching for Jamie at the back. Jamie kept his head bowed but the hair on his neck stood stiff the way it always did when he was being watched.

When the service was finished, Jamie quietly went back to his work in the stables while the attendants gathered somberly in the house to eat and console Geneva’s family. It was just over an hour before he was summoned to assist with retrieving the horses for the carriages of those leaving. It kept him busy though again he felt the eyes of those who knew the truth watching him.

Lady Dunsany had the baby in her arms as she bid a cousin farewell. Jamie heard her call to him as the carriage pulled away. He went to her and bowed his head.

“May I offer ye my condolences, ma’am,” he said with quiet formality and a note of sincerity that didn’t go unobserved.

“Thank you, MacKenzie. And I must thank you for… stepping in. Our loss might have been so much greater were it not for your interference.” She readjusted the weight of her grandson in her arms, holding him tighter, closer.

Before she could turn away, he found himself confessing, “I ken what it is to lose a child.” She froze, her face a mask with her emotions rippling just below the surface, threatening to melt the facade. “My wife… she was with child when I lost her. Our second. The first… My lass is no much older’n Miss Isobel.” And not much younger than the child ye buried this morning , he left hanging in the
air. “I’ve no seen my daughter since… since she was a bairn. She’s all I have left of my wife and even bein’ parted from her… knowin’ that she’s there… it’s a comfort. What I suppose I’m sayin’ is… I’m glad to have saved the lad for his own sake, but I’m especially glad for the sake of you and yer husband, that ye have this piece of Lady Geneva with ye still.”

He could feel the heat lingering in his face having rambled on for so long but he found an unexpected and more pleasant warmth through his chest and limbs. It wasn’t whatever comfort his words might have given Lady Dunsany—he pitied them and was truly sorry for their loss, but they meant nothing to him personally. No the comfort came from talking about Faith, from feeling closer to her simply from telling more people of her existence. With the comfort came the familiar, underlying ache of yearning and wondering. Was she happy at Lallybroch? Would he ever see her again?

“Thank you, MacKenzie,” Lady Dunsany repeated with a nod before finally taking the baby back into the house.

Major Grey found Jamie at the stables later in the evening. As such a close family friend, he was one of a handful making an extended stay at the house.

“You’ve made quite an impression on Lord Dunsany and his wife,” Grey remarked as he watched Jamie go back and forth carrying a flake of hay to each of the horses in their stalls for the evening. “They want to express their gratitude to you.”

“Lady Dunsany thanked me enough earlier,” Jamie insisted, his attention focused on his task.

“They want to sponsor a petition for you to be pardoned.”

Jamie froze with the hay in his hands. The impatient mare reached over the stall door and began to pull a mouthful from where he held it aloft. After a beat, Jamie tossed it over and onto the ground in the corner of the stall. The horse snorted her appreciation.

“They have their influence, I’m sure,” Jamie said carefully, “but I dinna think it would be enough for the Crown in my case.”

“I think not. And they are aware, as well. That’s why they’ve asked me to speak with my brother to see if he’ll join them in it. A few more influential names and accounts of your good deeds might do the trick,” Grey mused. “I’m inclined to talk the matter over with Hal, though I make no promises. Even were he to agree, it would be some time before anything could happen.”

Jamie blinked. “I’d… be most grateful, sir. I should like to see my family again.”

Grey nodded and turned to walk out. “As I say, I can make no promises, but I think I’ll spend this evening composing a letter to my brother and tomorrow taking a statement from Lord Dunsany.”

Jamie suspected the Dunsanys’ statement would be embellished, some of the details amended to fit the Earl’s on-record cause of death. If they needed other accounts of his ‘good deeds,’ there’d likely be more fabrication involved than just that pertaining to the exact manner of the Earl’s death.

But Jamie didn’t care. Soon, he might be free to return to Scotland again, free to see and be with Faith again at last.

“It’ll be yer turn next,” Joan told Faith as she took the baby from Maggie and left the room to change him and put him to bed for a nap.
Maggie, Kitty, and Jenny all turned to see Faith blush.

“Has Keir said anything?” Maggie asked eagerly. It was only two weeks since she’d left Lallybroch following her own wedding but everyone was acting as though it had been much longer.

“I havena seen him but once since you wed,” Faith protested. “And if he had I expect ye’d have heard of it about as soon as I had,” she said looking at Kitty while Jenny and Maggie laughed.

“It’s only a matter of time till he does speak to ye,” Kitty insisted. “Even Paul didna come to see Maggie so often as Keir’s been to see you since he started courtin’ ye.”

Faith shook her head as she reached into her basket of tattered and worn shirts to keep from needing to look any of them in the eye.

“Dinna tease yer cousin,” Jenny scolded half-heartedly and watched Faith carefully from the corner of her eye. “If it’s an easy decision to come to when ye’re so young as you lassies are, then ye’re either a fool—”

“Mam!” Maggie objected loudly.

“OR … ye’re lucky and ken well what ye want. Yer grandfather always said he kent right away about yer grandmother and that was that. She must have felt the same about him to have run off as she did. When it’s right, ye’ll know and have no doubt.” She smiled at her newlywed daughter.

Maggie blushed and grinned as she bent her head back to her sewing. She had brought some of Paul’s mending with her.

Jenny turned back to Faith who was still pointedly assessing the severely damaged shirts to decide if they’d reached the end of their patching days and might be torn into bandages instead.

“Now if ye dinna ken right away,” Jenny went on, “it doesna mean ye’re no right for each other. I wager I kent before Ian did but it wasna an easy notion to find.”

“But that’s different,” Kitty challenged. “You kent Da when ye were bairns. No one kens when they’re bairns.”

“I’d argue that the lot of you are still bairns,” Jenny teased her middle daughter. “For all ye’d like to act the lady, ye do a fair impression of a spoiled lassie when ye dinna get yer way.”

Maggie laughed while Kitty rolled her eyes and Faith prayed silently that they would move on to other topics soon.

The truth was Keir had hinted at the subject of marriage but had refrained from saying anything more direct because she had hinted right back that it was too soon. She knew he thought she meant too soon after Maggie’s wedding. She and Paul had spoken to Jenny and Ian shortly after Hogmanay but only wed a few weeks after Jamie and Joanie’s first anniversary. Faith was confident her hinting had bought her a few weeks before Keir would start alluding to the future again.

It worried her that the thought of even having the conversation made her so anxious. In the days before her wedding, Maggie had grown reflective and adopted a more affectionate and advisory attitude toward Faith whom she was closest to in age.

“I ken what everyone said about Paul and I but we never did talk about it before he asked if he could speak to Da. I hoped and I thought it was what he wanted, but the waiting and no bein’ sure he felt the same… It gave me terrible stomach ache many times,” Maggie had confessed.
Faith hoped what was tying her stomach in knots was something similar. She didn’t want to think about marrying until her father could come home and be there, until he could meet Keir. But at the same time, she didn’t want to wait too long and lose Keir’s interest. She should want to wed and yet the thought of it all terrified her more than she was comfortable saying aloud.

She didn’t know anything but Lallybroch and the rhythms of life in a crowded house. What might it be like in a smaller cottage with no help and no one but Keir to talk with most days? Would she have time to visit the tenants and tend their ailments? Would they even bother to continue to seek her help or would they assume she was too busy? And what about children? She’d helped deliver babies but had never done much in the way of caring for them or helping to raise them. She didn’t know the first thing about being a mother. She’d seen it with her aunt and cousins but barely remembered her own mother. It was mostly just a feeling that washed over her when she went through her mother’s things or listened to stories about her… the warmth and longing in her father’s voice when he spoke about her…

“Go on then, Maggie,” Kitty said with quiet insistence as she moved to take the empty space on Maggie’s other side.

Faith looked up to see that her aunt had left the room—gone to help Mrs. Crook in the kitchens or perhaps the baby was giving Joanie trouble again.

“Tell us what it’s like,” Kitty begged.

“What what’s like?” Maggie asked with a smirk that underscored the playfulness of her tone.

“What’s it like to lie with a man?” Kitty pressed shamelessly.

“Kitty!” Faith hissed glancing back to where Aunt Jenny might reappear at any moment.

“Don’t ye want to ken what ye’re in for wi’ Keir,” Kitty teased. Both she and Maggie giggled as Faith felt her cheeks go red.

“It’s no something to worry over,” Maggie reassured her after a moment. “Though I ken ye will anyhow—I did. But it wasna so bad, even the first time, though it hurt a bit and I was sore after. But it’s better now we ken better what we’re about.” A faint pink tinged Maggie’s cheeks as well and she was resolutely staring at the mending in her hands.

“Do ye like it?” Kitty asked in a whisper.

“Sometimes it feels verra good,” Maggie confessed. “It makes yer heart pound and ye canna catch yer breath and ye never want it to stop…but when it does and ye see yer man lookin’ at ye like… like ye’re his whole world…and he smiles and ye ken ye must be lookin’ at him the same way… Aye, it’s verra good then.”

“That just sounds like love,” Kitty murmured.

Maggie laughed again. “Well… aye. That’s part of it. I couldna think of lyin’ wi’ another man. There’s only Paul I could bear to see me so, to… do that with.”

Faith let Kitty continue to press Maggie for details and advice, listening intently and trying to imagine it for herself. She hadn’t let Keir do more than kiss her a few times in the garden when she was sure no one from the house could see them. It had been nice, his chest warm to lean against even if his hold of her was stiff and formal. They had both been too conscious of how easily it would be for someone from the house to stumble upon them so the moments had been brief but all the sweeter for their stolen nature.
Still, he’d never so much as gestured at taking any kinds of liberties with her. She could only imagine what it would be like to feel his hands on her without restraint. What it would be like to run her hands over him.

“And do ye lie together often?” Kitty continued questioning her sister, her sewing lying idle in her lap.

“Well… we would like a bairn,” Maggie hinted. “It’s too soon to tell anything for certain, but the only sure way to get a bairn is to try for one.”

Faith glanced at her cousin sideways. Just as it had been strange to think of any of them getting married a little over a year ago, the idea that they were starting to have children of their own was difficult to wrap her mind around and yet wee Matthew was already beginning to smile and laugh.

While Maggie and Kitty were focused on each other, Faith took a deep breath and closed her eyes for a moment, relaxing them. When she opened them again she could see them, the little faint hues that bathed the people around her. Maggie and Kitty were similar shades of yellow, Kitty a little paler while Maggie was slightly darker, more gold. Faith focused on Maggie more intently but couldn’t perceive any alterations in what she saw. It was too early for her to tell by sight alone and if Maggie were to carry a child with coloring similar to her own, it would take longer to discover by such means. Of course, Faith could probably discern the truth by other means—it wouldn’t even take a thorough examination, only a cursory one would would be a necessary to lay her hands over her cousin’s womb and feel for the truth of her condition. But while such skills came in handy when searching for a diagnosis and treatment, Faith had long ago figured out when such methods were appropriate and when they would only upset people.

“Are ye all right, Faith?” Maggie asked, her brow furrowed with concern.

Faith blinked and laughed. “Sorry, I—”

“Oh, we ken what ye were thinking,” Kitty said suggestively, laughing quietly again. “Or should I say, who ye were thinkin’ of.”

Faith looked down at her lap so the others wouldn’t see her roll her eyes. She was beyond tired of the teasing and the hints about her and Keir. It sometimes made her dread his arrival though that sense of unease usually faded soon after they were alone. What she felt when she was with him was… she wasn’t sure. She enjoyed his company and liked him well enough but remained confused about what she wanted. What she wanted was to be sure—to be sure she wanted a husband, to be sure she wanted children… to be sure it was something like what her parents had found with each other…

Aunt Jenny came back into the room and Kitty took hold of Maggie’s mending examining it closely and nodding. Then she took her own sewing and moved back to the seat she’d occupied before closer to her mother.

“Ye should talk to him,” Maggie whispered. “If ye have yer concerns, it’s best to talk them through. Ye dinna want a husband ye canna share yer heart with and that means sharing the fears as well as the hopes.”

“Sounds like something yer da would say,” Faith said giving Maggie a small nudge with her elbow.

“He did, though he only gave me that advice the morning we wed,” Maggie conceded. “Something to keep in mind.”
Faith sighed. “Ye really had no doubts about Paul?”

“I’m sure I have at times, but if I have they’ve no been loud enough for me to pay any mind.”

Maggie smiled brightly, still very much the beaming bride of two weeks past. Faith smiled in return and both turned their attention back to the work in their hands. But Faith found her stomach had far more knots in it than before.
Faith has a request to make of Keir.

Faith’s heart pounded as she looked over her shoulder back along the path to Lallybroch. She could only see the roof of the house and no one in any of the windows so she hoped no one was watching her. She left the path and began to cut through the trees, circling back to where she’d asked Keir to meet her. Several days had passed since she’d slipped him the note with her vague request and her nerves had yet to quiet.

She was relieved when she spotted him already at the designated copse of trees. Waiting and wondering would have been agony.

“There ye are,” he smiled, straightening from where he’d been leaning against the tree. “Are ye goin’ to tell me what this is about?”

Faith swallowed and clung to the basket she carried to steady her hands. “I told them I was goin’ to visit Widow MacDermid. She cannae tell one day from another so if anyone were to ask she’d be sure to say I was there,” Faith explained, avoiding his question. “Come wi’ me.” She took his hand and led him deeper into the woods until the terrain became rocky and uneven.

“Are ye takin’ me where I think ye are?” he asked, confused and awed.

She smiled at him over her shoulder. “The Dunbonnet’s cave, aye.”

“Are ye no supposed to cover my eyes so I cannae find it again were I to try?”

“Only if ye wish to fall and break yer neck,” she chuckled.

At last she pushed aside some vegetation and led Keir into the cave. He stooped his head at the entrance then laughed to see how much space lay inside and its semi-furnished state. The cave had been cleared following Jamie’s arrest but within a year it had been re-established as a shelter by the young men of Lallybroch for their hunting excursions and such. They had only recently returned from such a trip so Faith was confident they would have plenty of privacy.

While Keir was still looking around and exploring the cave, Faith gathered her courage and blurted what she had been on her mind for the better part of a week.

“I want to lie with ye.” Heat flooded her cheeks as she watched him go stiff, his back still facing her like she’d caught him in a trap. Panicking, her mouth began to ramble. “I ken ye want to wed but I cannae say I’ll do that unless I’m sure and I dinna think I can be sure unless I know what it’ll be like—all of it, not just the bedding part—but the rest of it I do think I ken so it’s just the bedding. And Maggie says there’s naught to worry over but…” She sighed. “I want to be sure and I know that I can trust ye to be… kind about it.”

Keir had turned to her as she spoke, his face a mask of shock and confusion. She watched him swallow hard several times as he struggled to find words.
“But… ye… I… Ye ken I’ve no… lain with a lass before,” he stammered at last.

“Then we can figure it out together,” Faith suggested, her nervousness dissipating now that Keir appeared to share it.

“And… ye’re sure?”

Her unrestrained giggle startled her. “About marriage? I’m no sure. But about wantin’ to give ye my maidenhead? Aye, of that I’m sure. I’ve been puzzling over the matter for a time so dinna think I’ve no spent thought on it.”

It was too dim to tell definitively whether Keir was as red-faced as she thought but he blinked and fidgeted for a moment, running his hand back and forth over his head until his hair stood at unruly angles.

“I do wish to wed ye,” he confessed quietly. “And I’ve wanted to bed ye for some time.”

“But… not like this?” she asked, disappointment and embarrassment suffusing her voice.

“I didna think this would be an option,” he joked but then took a few steps closer to her so that she could feel the warmth of his breath on her forehead. “But if this is what ye want… I want to have ye note that I would wait for us to be wed properly or I’d be handfast to ye here and now to show ye that I mean to be honorable by ye.”

“Ye’re supposed to have witnesses for a handfasting,” Faith whispered, deflecting. “And I ken well enough ye’re honorable. It’s one of the reasons I trust ye and want it to be you.” She tilted her head up toward his and rose on her toes to brush her lips against his.

Keir’s lips pressed back, gently at first but a moment later his tongue flicked out to caress her lower lip and his fingertips slipped across her cheek to disappear into her hair.

“We’ll find our way together,” he echoed breathlessly before kissing her again, slowly.

They’d kissed before but never had let it be like this. They’d been too afraid of being interrupted and too uncertain of what the other might think. This time Faith let her arms twine around Keir’s neck and he let his hands slip past her waist to the small of her back, pulling her against him. Faith’s tongue tasted Keir’s lips and he groaned with a low rumble that sent a shiver up her spine.

After a few moments, she pulled away and reached up to begin pulling the pins and ties that were keeping her curls out of her face. Keir watched as she then removed her shoes and finally turned her attention to her skirts, fumbling with the ties at her lower back. Realizing what she was doing, he flushed and began to undress himself too pulling off his boots and shedding his jacket and waistcoat.

They disrobed in silence, each stealing occasional glances at the other but turning away again when they got caught looking. With fewer layers and laces to deal with, Keir was done first. Faith had removed her bodice so she remained standing in just her shift, stays, and stockings when she noted Keir’s awkward stance with his hands shielding himself from view.

She straightened and met his eye offering him a smile of encouragement.

“Will ye let me see ye?” she asked quietly so her voice wouldn’t betray her nerves.

“Ye’re a healer, no? Ye’ll have seen naked men before,” Keir remarked, though she couldn’t tell whether he was speaking to reassure her or himself.
She stepped closer and ran a hand lightly down his arm. “Aye, but those men were injured or ill.” Keir looked away from her as he moved his hands to let her see him in his roused state.

There were several beats of silence before Faith whispered, “Can I touch ye?”

Keir finally met her eye and after another hesitant beat, nodded.

She took a surreptitious deep breath then took a finger and gently pressed it to his cock starting at the heat of it before slowly dragging that finger along the length of him. Keir inhaled sharply and his cock perceptibly twitched under her light touch but Faith grew bolder and added two more fingers for her second pass. She was struck by the contradiction of it being simultaneously hard and soft. Relaxing further, she felt for the familiar tendrils of blood vessels beneath the skin. There were more than she would have expected and his pulse was pounding. His breathing was increasingly ragged too.

As he throbbed against her hand, Faith felt an answering beat start in her head and then traveled through her chest and limbs before settling between her legs. Her thumb traced a prominent vein while her other fingers closed more firmly around him. He was larger than she had imagined, not realizing that the male member underwent such a transformation before it was put up inside a woman.

A strangled noise from Keir was followed by a strange shudder that startled Faith. She let go of him and stepped back watching as Keir lost himself, his seed dripping to the dirty floor of the cave.

A finger of panic twisted low in Faith’s belly. She tried to calm it by envisioning the oil-soaked scrap of sponge that she had carefully inserted before leaving to meet Keir. It was the only practical preventative she’d been able to find reference to in her mother’s medical book. There were references to the fact that certain herbs might work but alongside an admission that she had no knowledge of what those plants were. Faith was determined to take every precaution available.

“I’m sorry,” Keir murmured as he became aware of what had happened and that his cock had started to soften again. “I… I dinna ken it would feel so good just to have ye touch me like that.” He grabbed his shirt and turned away to clean himself up but Faith could still make out the redness creeping up his neck.

“That’s… ye will be able to make it… like… it… was again though, will ye not?” Faith haltingly asked.

“Aye but… I canna… that is… It takes some time before I can get it… that way again,” Keir responded, his back still turned to Faith.

She closed the distance between them once more taking extra care to avoid the damp spot on the ground. He flinched when her hands came into contact with his bare back but she rubbed up and down in slow circles hoping to reassure and calm him.

“Will ye help me wi’ my laces?” she whispered.

He didn’t turn but nodded.

She stepped back and waited. When he at last moved to face her, she smiled. “I should remove my stockings first.” Lifting the hem of her shift until her pale thigh could be seen, she tugged the ties of her garters until they fell to the ground and then eased the stocking down while Keir watched and swallowed loudly. She did the same to the other, setting the stockings atop the established pile of her clothes.
The stony floor of the cave was cold as she stepped closer to Keir, reaching for the knot at the top of her stays and loosening it. His fingers quickly covered hers and then brushed them away.

Before continuing with the knot, Keir traced his finger along the top edge of her stays where the edge of her shift protruded. He then trailed it down the front seam, the tip of his finger twanging on the tautly pulled laces. Faith felt hot all over. She could feel the pressure of the boning acutely, as though it was constricting and pushing the air from her lungs, preventing her from taking anything but shallow, gasping breaths.

Her breath refused to even out as Keir finally untied the knot and pulled the lacings free of the eyelets. It would take forever to lace them again, but perhaps he would help her with that too… *later.*

Down to just her shift, Faith stepped back, closed her eyes, and held her arms up. Keir obliged, pulling the fabric up and over her head. It caught on her hair for a moment and caused her curls to fluff out around her head in a cloud. If only it were longer and straighter, she might be able to pull it over her shoulders and give herself the comfort of feeling covered even if it was largely ineffectual.

Keir lifted a finger and, for a moment, Faith thought he was going to retrace the lines of her stays—she knew the impressions of them remained pressed into her flesh in several places. She shivered at the ghostly imagined touch grazing the tops of her breasts and then trailing down between them all the way to her navel.

But he didn’t touch her where she expected. His finger went to her chin lifting it so he might kiss her. Those were the only places their bodies touched—their lips and his finger on her chin—but she could feel the heat of him across the several inches that remained between them. It was a teasing warmth that made her yearn for more.

She took his hand and broke the kiss, keeping hold of him as she took the few steps to the pallet along the cave wall and eased herself onto it. He perched beside her, his body angled facing her.

“Touch me,” she whispered, bringing his hand and holding it over her heart, her thumb brushing back and forth over his knuckles.

Her grip loosened as his hand opened and he let the fingers wander, tracing the curve of her breast before caressing it against his palm. Gooseflesh broke out over her chest and arms as she leaned into his touch, her head falling back as he increased the pressure of his fondling and used his thumb to tease her nipple.

Faith soon lay back while Keir leaned over her and continued to draw shapes on the skin of her breasts and abdomen, grinning each time she shivered and sighed. Each time his fingers traveled down to her navel, she stretched, willing him to continue that journey down but it was the point at which he unfailingly retreated.

His tongue replaced his fingers and Faith’s eagerness for him grew agonizing. Her nerves were quickly melting away in the heat of her desire. She lightly pulled his hair, guiding him upwards until she caught his mouth with hers. When he pulled back and reached for her breast again, she caught his hand in hers and guided it where she needed it to go.

“If ye touch me here…” she said, opening her legs and pressing his fingers against her, showing them where to go and how to move. Faith drew a shuddering breath. His hip was pressed to hers so he could hardly escape noticing the way she trembled and rocked her hips against his fingers. “…Ye’ll make my breath come short,” she panted.

With a little more pressure, she guided his touch further, using his fingers to part her slick and
swollen flesh until they reached the place where it yielded and his finger began to disappear inside her. Keir swallowed loudly.

“That’s where yer cock goes,” she whispered, releasing her hold on him and draping her arm over her head to clutch the rough fabric of the pallet.

Keir pushed his finger only a inch or so into her before drawing it out and rubbing it against his thumb.

“Is it supposed to be so…”

“What?” Faith propped herself up on her elbows to look at him leaning against her drawn-up knee with his hand only just visible between her legs. “Of course it’s supposed to be like that. How else do ye expect to fit something the size of yer cock into a space like that?”

“Well… I’d thought it was… bigger,” Keir responded. “Bairns fit—”

“Have ye never heard a woman scream in labor?” Faith interrupted with a laugh. “Did ye think they do it to scare or shame their men? And I’d no be mentioning bairns if ye’re wanting to bed a lass as doesna want to get one,” she teased.

Keir flushed. “Ye ken that… Even if ye did… Ye ken I want to wed ye do we do this now or not.”

“I know,” she smiled at him.

Reassured, Keir’s brow furrowed. “Is it always like that? Wet, I mean.” He touched her again, pressing the heel of his hand against her pubic bone while his fingers played with her.

“No,” she gasped. “It’s… when I’m… roused.”

He chuckled. “So… I’m rousin’ to ye? Good, as ye’re rousin’ to me too.”

Faith glanced at him to see that he was indeed aroused as before. She spread her legs wider. “I’m ready,” she told him.

Keir shifted to a crouch between her legs moving carefully as he lowered himself to where she’d showed him and began to push into her. He moved slowly and groaned loudly. Faith bit her lip at the brief flash of pain that preceded his final sheathing thrust.

“Christ,” Keir breathed loudly in her ear. His lips brushed her cheek as she adjusted to the pressure of having him inside her, the weight of him on top of her. “I kent it would feel good to have my cock inside ye… but I didna imagine it would feel this good.” He kissed her cheek, her jaw, and finally her lips as she tightened her hold of him. “I… I canna… I must…”

Keir began to instinctively move his hips in unpracticed and jarring thrusts. Faith winced through the first few but then a more pleasant and welcome sensation started pushing back the pain and rocking her hips to meet his thrusts.

She smiled with relief and put her hands on his lower back, urging him on.

Keir’s groans became strained grunts and the rhythm he was beginning to find was a fast-paced one.

“Get it out,” Faith ordered suddenly, adrenaline flooding her bloodstream and competing with every instinct that told her to take hold of his buttocks, pull him in deep, and hold him there.

“But… I’m nearly…” Keir panted.
“I know,” she snapped. “That’s why—get it out.”

His cock slipped free of her but Keir was still chasing his release. He ground against her, bearing down as his hard flesh rubbed against the bundle of nerves she’d led him to earlier. A shudder passed through Faith and she gasped. Keir’s arms trembled under his weight as his cock, trapped between Faith’s abdomen and his own, twitched and pulsed. Warmth spread across Faith’s stomach, trickling down and pooling in her navel.

Again, she smiled with relief. Keir’s forehead rested against her shoulder as he fought to catch his breath. She turned her head and kissed his cheek. Better to have his seed on her belly than trying to take root inside it.
Chapter Summary

Faith’s tryst with Keir doesn’t end well.

Keir rolled onto his back breathing heavily. Faith trembled as she struggled to wrap her mind around what they’d just done and how she felt.

Her mind went to the physical first. She was a little sore but had expected that. The pain overall hadn’t been bad at all and what had followed… She let her hand slide down her hip and reach between her legs to gingerly touch herself, her flesh still sensitive to even the lightest brush from her fingers. She whimpered.

“I’m sorry,” Keir apologized beside her, his voice low and hoarse. He pushed himself up onto his forearm. “I was tryin’ to be gentle with ye but I…I couldna help myself.”

Faith reached up to touch his cheek, shaking her head. “You didn’t hurt me,” she assured him. “It was… uncomfortable at first but I’m not hurt.”

His eyes narrowed on her face and then trailed down to her belly to her still-parted legs as he clenched his teeth.

She looked down at herself. His spilled seed was trickling downward over a faint smear of blood on her lower abdomen and there was more of it trailing through the hair that led further down between her legs. She looked at the fingers she’d just touched herself with and saw they came away wet and red.

Pushing herself to her feet she crossed to the basket she’d carried and crouched beside it. Her legs felt strange and her steps were awkward. She could feel the damp trickle of blood on her thighs and flushed with embarrassment, put in mind of the time she sneezed and feared she’d pissed herself only to discover her monthly had arrived was soaking her petticoats.

“It’s no unusual for a lass to bleed the first time,” she told him while retrieving a cloth and the flask of boiled water. She wet the cloth and wiped carefully between her legs first. It was tender and pressing to be sure she cleaned all the blood made her wince. Then she folded over the cloth and checked again. “It’s already stopped.” She wet the cloth a second time and wiped at the mess he’d left on her stomach, taking great care to keep it from her hands and folded the cloth in on itself before discarding it and turning back to the pallet where Keir was watching her.

Something in his gaze made her look away and turn her back while she returned to the basket for a second cloth and wet that one as well. It was ridiculous. He was as naked as she was. His body had been pressed to hers—had been inside her—and yet it was as he watched her now that she felt most exposed, self-conscious, uncertain.

She carried the second cloth over to him. He sat up and hunched so she couldn’t see as he cleaned himself up and then tossed the cloth aside. Perhaps he was feeling the same. Not ashamed but… unsure what to make of what they’d just done. They’d done it correctly—she was sure of that—but had it changed things between them at all? Shouldn’t she feel something more than just relief that she
hadn’t hated it and a small pinch of anxiety over whether she’d taken enough precautions to prevent pregnancy?

She sat on the pallet beside him and moved to lie down once more. He shifted his position and slipped an arm around her so that she was tucked into his side, an arm draped over his torso and her head nestled in the space between his shoulder and neck. Touching him helped. Feeling his body under hers spread an intoxicating warmth through her that relaxed her muscles and calmed her nerves. It pooled in her belly and between her legs, renewing her awareness of the ache that was part soreness and part longing.

“Ye’re sure I didn’t hurt ye?” he whispered, doubt still heavy in his voice.

“I’m sure.”

“Then… did ye like it?”

She chuckled. “Well I know you did,” she murmured.

He let out a brief, breathy laugh. “Aye but that’s no what I asked.”

“I think I did, yes,” Faith confessed. She hadn’t wanted it to stop so that meant she liked it, right? But something remained tight in her belly, untouched… unfinished. It was disappointing and frustrating not to be able to put her finger on what had been missing.

“What does that mean? Did ye or no?”

“It means it didna feel bad or unpleasant but I’m not sure what to call how it felt.” She wondered if he could feel the heat flooding her cheek where it rested against his chest. “I’d have to do it again to see was it the same.”

“Again?” Keir asked somewhere between excited and doubtful. “I ken I told ye it took time between… but that’s…”

Faith pressed her lips to his neck and let her fingers trail over his chest. There weren’t many hairs there but they were coarse and curled. She traced them one at a time with the tip of her finger.

“I’m not in a rush,” she said, watching the path of her finger instead of looking up at him. “You got to take your time with me… It’s my turn to touch you now.”

Faith drew her finger up his breastbone and out along his collarbone to the shoulder joint and then back, up his neck and along his jaw. He closed his eyes and relaxed, fighting to keep still though when her fingers moved along his ribs and across the lean planes of his abdomen, the corner of his mouth ticked up and he pressed his lips together to keep a giggle from escaping.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath to relax them before looking at him again. It wasn’t as easy to see in the shadows of the cave but Keir had a vibrant green air about him. Her own blue hand skimmed over the gentle rises of his muscles like water rippling over water weeds or the sky subtly darkening with the day as it passed over rolling hills.

His body thrummed with life beneath her touch. She could feel the pathways of his blood coursing under his skin, growing stronger and more prominent where the narrower tendrils came together to form larger courses. They weren’t something she could see along the surface of his body, but she could trace their paths easily enough and did just that, resting her hand for several beats in the crease where leg joined torso. He had such a strong and tangible life force, she couldn’t help but pause—in awe, in appreciation, in desire—and smiled to herself. Keir’s body would recover and rouse again in
its own time well enough, but she wanted to feel him moving with her and within her now.

Keir inhaled sharply as Faith reached between his legs.

“Are you sore too?” she teased, stroking him gingerly.

He chuckled but made no comment as she continued with a deliberate and hypnotic rhythm.

Tapping into that tiny blue flame deep inside her, Faith reached out to Keir’s flesh, willing it to respond. It was slow at first but she felt him start to harden in her hand as his body responded to the restorative force she wielded. He groaned and began to rock his hips, grinding against her palm.

She let go her hold of him long enough to sit up and throw a leg over him, sitting her weight on his thighs and resuming her rhythmic stroking in a way that was gratifying to herself as well. Soon he was bucking beneath her, eager for her to put an end to his torment and let him in.

But she wasn’t listening to his body anymore; she let the yearning of her own flesh drive her. The heat of him against her, sliding, parting, pressing, was lighting her on fire and melting away the pain of the strain in her joints as she pushed herself further, rode him harder. At last she reached between them and guided him in, shuddering as Keir thrust hard upwards with relief.

“Please,” he panted as the weight of her on his legs worked against the pace he craved. “Please, Faith… let me stay inside ye to the last.”

She couldn’t speak yet, her breath trembling in her chest, but she shook her head no.

He groaned with frustration and need. “I’ll go to the priest tomorrow,” he vowed. “I’ll arrange the bans and… we’ll be wed before ye ken one way or another… are ye with child.”

She shook her head again and leaned forward onto him, her weight shifting from his legs to her knees on either side of him. He moved faster, his hands finding her hips and gripping hard to keep her steady as her legs slowly turned to jelly.

“Please,” he begged again.

She weakly started to push off of him, knowing he was close. His hands vanished from her hips and instead clasped her face, his pace slowing to a torturously tender rocking while his thumbs traced her cheeks and she opened her eyes to look down at him.

“I love you, Faith,” he told her quietly.

She couldn’t swallow. Her body went rigid as tears flooded her eyes.

In that moment she knew.

She panicked and broke from his grasp, rolling off of him and onto the ground in a move that was mildly painful to both. She’d landed on her tailbone and this time when Keir moaned it was with a whimper.

“Are ye all right?” he asked from his side, looking down at her. “Were ye feeling light in yer head?” There was a pleading and fear underlying his questions that turned the liquid warmth in her belly to a cold mass.

“I’m fine,” she managed to croak, rolling onto her hands and knees and steadying herself before she reached for her clothes to begin pulling them back on. Guilt flooded her with shame on its heels—not
for what she’d done but for what she was about to do.

“What… where are ye going?”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, barely able to get the words out as tears pushed their way up her throat and threatened to choke her. “I canna… I must go.” She only donned what would be most notable if absent and shoved the rest of her clothes into the basket. She just needed to get out and away as quickly as possible.

“Faith?” The hurt and confusion twisted in her gut like a knife.

“I’m sorry,” she repeated. “I canna marry you.”

“What? Faith!” He started scrambling off the pallet after her but she grabbed her shoes and basket and slipped to the mouth of the cave before he had his hands on his breeks.

She knew this part of the woods better than he did and quickly wound her way through the trees, leaving the path she’d used to take him to the cave, the only path he knew back to Lallybroch. Finding a shelter of trees with low branches, she paused to catch her breath and dress more thoroughly. It was a challenge to keep from sobbing loudly as she let her own disappointment wash through her.

When he’d looked in her eyes and told her he loved her she knew she didn’t love him back—not the way he loved her. She was fond of him and she certainly enjoyed lying with him. He made her feel beautiful and safe and wanted…and it wasn’t enough. There was something missing and she still wasn’t sure what to call it except… love.
Chapter Summary

Faith is avoiding Keir after the way she left things then receives some much-needed advice on facing Keir once more.

Faith worried Keir would show up at his usual time on his usual day and try to talk to her privately. She wasn’t sure what more she could say to him that would make him understand without hurting him deeply.

Thankfully he sent word that something had come up at home and he wouldn’t be able to come. Her relief when she heard the news didn’t go unnoticed by Jenny or Kitty but neither said anything while she was around. The next week when Keir’s usual visiting day arrived, Faith made a point to go out on her rounds as usual but she dawdled at each croft and cottage, taking an extra cup of tea when it was offered and gladly letting the minutes of the day slip away. She was confident that if she wasn’t at home when he arrived he would understand why and wouldn’t stay long waiting for her; she could outlast him and say she’d been caught up with the tenants.

But how long could they continue avoiding each other—or rather, could she avoid him—before someone caught on and confronted her? Would she be able to keep secret what she and Keir had done? While she didn’t regret having lain with him, she wasn’t naive enough not to realize the consequences should anyone find out. Her courses had come only days after and relieved her mind of that fear, though she’d been confident of the fact after removing and burning the bit of sponge alongside the bloody cloths.

The only way anyone would learn the truth was if either she or Keir told them. She knew she could refrain from saying anything but whether she could keep from giving herself away if anyone came close to guessing if they questioned her… And would Keir say something in the hopes that rumors or pressure from her family would push her to marry him? She flushed with shame at having thought Keir capable of such a thing, no matter how fleeting.

It was near dark by the time Faith walked into the yard at Lallybroch again hoping that Keir had gone if he’d decided to come at all.

The dogs were barking boisterously inside the house and a few moments later her cousin Ian appeared at the door trying to lure them outside with scraps from the kitchen. The puppy, Bran, nearly knocked him down the steps trying to jump for the meat speckled bone. Ian threw it halfway across the dooryard before he noticed Faith standing there and grinned.

“Faith! Ye must come inside at once! There’s a special visitor here to see ye!”

The sly grin on his face made her stomach lurch and her mouth go dry. Keir had waited longer than she’d thought. And what must he have been telling them to put that smile on Ian’s face? Had he declared his intentions to her family in the hopes that she would say yes to please them?

Why was she suddenly so suspicious of Keir? He hadn’t done anything or changed at all. He was still the same young man he’d been the whole time they were courting. The fact she had realized she didn’t love him or want to marry him didn’t mean he would suddenly change. But somehow
knowing her own mind at last made her see his actions and motivations differently—like she was trying to find more acceptable and reassuring reasons for not loving him after all.

She slowly followed Ian inside. She was being a coward. Just because she hadn’t been able to give Keir answers that day at the cave didn’t mean he didn’t deserve them—and the way she’d run out on him and hid in the woods… That was where her shame in the whole situation lay.

Ian ran ahead of her and she heard a hush fall in the hall as they waited for her.

Pausing one final moment to prepare herself, she turned the corner and gasped.

Her father had risen from the chair near the fire next to Jenny and was sniffing back tears as he looked at her. His clothes were worn with travel and he looked tired but relieved as she met his eye.

“Faith…” he murmured, taking in her height, her hair, her eyes and figure. His mouth trembled along with the rest of him as he smiled.

“Da,” she whispered before running across the room and launching herself into his arms. “Ye’re home.” She pressed her face into his neck and breathing in the scent of grass, dust, sweat, and horse that clung to him.

“Aye, home at last and home for good with any luck,” he answered quietly, holding her close and resting his cheek on her head. “I’ve missed ye, mo uan.”

“I’ve missed ye too, Da.” She pulled back enough to give him a kiss on the cheek and then tugged him to the sofa to sit beside her. “How’d ye get out of yer parole and why’d ye no send word ye were coming?” she asked, leaning into his arm and resting her head on his shoulder. All her earlier worries and fears quieted for the first time in two weeks as his warmth engulfed her, making her feel like a child again, where any problems she had were too scared of her father to get to her.

He lifted his arm to wrap it around her and pull her closer. “There was an incident with the Lord’s wee grandson when he was born. I… performed a service that likely saved the lad’s life and as repayment of his thanks, the Lord petitioned for my pardon. I didna want to write and get yer hopes up. Then when it came through, I was free to leave right away and didna want to take the time to write ye word. I wanted to be on my way and home again fast as possible. Hoped ye wouldna mind the surprise.”

She laughed and wiped at her eyes, which were still wet. “You bein’ home is the best surprise I could have prayed for—and I have, every night since ye were taken by the soldiers.”

“Is there more reason than just surprise that we’ve no heard from ye in near a year?” Jenny asked her brother with a piercing look. Her joy in his return softened the words themselves.

Jamie’s face flushed. “I learned our correspondence was compromised. I wouldna risk yer letters fallin’ into the wrong hands and landing you and all at Lallybroch in trouble.”

Jenny watched him for a moment then nodded and turned her attention back to the mending in her lap.

“And you are truly a free man, milord?” Fergus asked from his place next to the hearth.

“I’ve been granted a full pardon, yes,” Jamie explained. “So long as I keep from trouble—”

Jenny snorted then pressed her lips together.
“So long as I keep from trouble, I should be free of prisons and Red Coats and the like.”

“Then let’s hope trouble doesna come knocking,” Ian raised a glass of whisky and the others in the room with drinks raised theirs as well. “And what do ye think ye’ll do first wi’ yer newfound freedom?”

“Well, first was to see and embrace my daughter,” Jamie said, his grip tightening on Faith beside him. “But now… now I should like to sleep in a bed. It’s been quite some time since I’ve had leave to do that.”

“The room should be ready for ye now,” Jenny told him. “Wee Ian brought yer things up when ye arrived. Faith, he’s in the room at the end of the hall on the left. Make sure he gets settled, aye?”

Faith slipped from under Jamie’s arm to rise then took his hand and pulled him to his feet. “Come along, Da. Let’s get yer auld bones up the stairs and into a warm bed before ye fall off yer feet wi’ weariness,” she teased.

“But doesn’t he ken the way?” they heard Young Ian ask his mother too loudly before receiving a fervent shush. “I dinna understand why he needs Faith to show him the way,” the lad pressed in a quieter voice.

Jamie and Faith made it to the room before chuckling quietly.

Jamie groaned as he first sat and then flopped back on the bed. Faith jumped on and sprawled out beside him.

“The last time I lay on a proper bed, you were still small enough to curl up and lay yer head on my chest… And now,” he sighed and looked over at her. “Now ye’re a woman grown… and so like yer mother. Seeing ye walk into the hall… for a moment my heart stopped and I thought ye were her.” He reached over and gently touched her cheek. “Jenny said ye were off tendin’ to the tenants and their ills. She’d be proud of ye—seeing how ye’ve taken to healing—but not just for that.”

Faith flushed and looked at her hands where she was poking at the quilt on the bed.

“I use her medicine book often,” she told him. “Auntie Jenny let me have it a few years back when I started going out to the crofts. I wish I remembered her better but… it helps. And I remember your stories of her… and have Fergus’ and Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian’s as well.”

“It’s not the same as having her here though,” Jamie acknowledged sadly. “There are times I wish she’d been able to fetch ye and take ye with her when she went—that ye’d been with her and the bairn in that time, safe and sound and together… But most of the time when I pray for their safety and yers, I also thank God that ye weren’a taken from me too, that I still have you here to live for.”

“Da…” Faith choked out as tears welled.

“There’s nothing I wouldn’a do for ye, Faith… whatever happens, whatever ye might need, wherever ye might go.”

There was an odd note in his voice that distracted Faith from the lump in her throat.

“Wherever I might go?”

“Yer wee cousin Ian hasna quite learned when to speak and when to hold his tongue,” Jamie explained with a wry smile. “He mentioned it was a night when yer young man usually came to see ye before Jenny managed to get her hand over his mouth.”
“And what else have they told ye?” Her cheeks were hot with embarrassment and nerves.

“Only what they suspect about his intentions… and that he’d no been to see ye in a fortnight and ye were usually back from yer rounds earlier in the evening when he was expected… Is there something ye need to talk about uan?”

She sighed. “Keir Gilchrist. He’s been courtin’ me since Jamie wed Joan more’n a year ago… He wants to marry me…”

“He’s asked ye then?”

She nodded.

“And have ye given him an answer?” Her father’s voice was gentle, bittersweet.

“I’d not made up my mind.” She spoke quietly, speaking barely above a whisper. “I thought I could and was able to imagine it…”

“But ye’ve told him ‘no,’ and not said to anyone else…” Jamie guessed. “Did he do anything to ye—or try—”

Faith shook her head fervently. “No, he didn’t… He only… told me he loved me.” The tears that had surfaced and retreated earlier found themselves called upon again and finally spilled down her cheeks. “I knew when he said it that I dinna love him. I’m fond of him and I wouldna be unhappy wi’ him… but I dinna love him and I dinna want to wed without it.”

Jamie sat up and pulled Faith up and into his arms, letting her cry against his chest as he rubbed her back and murmured into her hair. She allowed herself to sink into the freedom and safety of his embrace, the warm reassurance of her most precious childhood memories and let the sobs run loose.

“Ye needna be ashamed, lass. Ye’re no goin’ to be forced to anything and if Keir doesna like yer answer, ye can tell him to speak to me about it,” Jamie said.

Faith coughed and fought to control her breathing so she could speak again. “It’s not… He wouldna… I dinna ken how I can face him again…” she confessed. “When he said it… I only said I couldna wed him and then… I ran. I didna tell him why and he had every reason to think that I’d… I hate to think what folk will say, but that doesna concern me so much as what Keir will think of me… I-I never meant to hurt him and yet I canna see how anything I have to say will do anything else. I never thought I could be such a coward.”

“Hush now, lass. Ye’ve time to do right by the lad and tell him the truth of the matter. He may not thank ye for it now, but when he does meet the lass he’s to wed, he’ll think better of ye,” Jamie reassured her.

“Then I hope he meets her soon because I dinna think tellin’ him the truth is goin’ to make meeting him in passing any easier after it’s done,” Faith muttered as she pulled back and wiped her eyes.

Jamie smiled and brush stray curls behind her ears. “Not likely, no. We’ve decisions to make in the coming weeks and no mistake. Listening to yer Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian talk of the estate and its running… I dinna think they need me to help the way they once did and… I wonder now was it right for me to deed it to yer cousin the way I did. It should be yers by rights, though it’s likely the crown would ha’ tried harder to take it from ye did I pass it to you just then.”

Faith shook her head. “I dinna want it,” she said but when Jamie stiffened next to her, she began babbling. “That is—Lallybroch is home and it always will be. The fields and woods—I ken them
like my own two hands—and goin’ about to visit the tenants and treat their ills fills my days in a way I enjoy a great deal…”

“But…?”

“I’ve… never been… anywhere else—never seen anywhere else. I ken I was born in France but since you and Mam brought me here… I’ve no left. And I ken it’s been safer for me here than most other places would ha’ been… Fergus remembers Paris well and tells me of it sometimes. And he’s been wi’ Uncle Ian to Edinburgh to help wi’ fetching seed and tools from time to time. He’s talked of going to the city to earn a proper wage and save for a home should he ever take a wife.”

“Is there a lass Fergus fancies then?”

Faith snorted. “Fergus fancies all lasses,” she laughed, “but none so far that’s made him want to settle down and marry. At least, none as he’s told me of yet.”

“It appears I’ve a talk to have wi’ Fergus as well, then. For now, think of what ye’ve said to me and what it is about it that ye fear will hurt the lad ye’ve been avoiding. Letting him know ye’ve worried about how he feels is a good place to start as ye decide what to say,” Jamie suggested, taking Faith’s chin and lifting it so she’d meet his eye. “Then, find him and say it. It’ll be a weight off yer shoulders to have it out there between ye, whatever else happens.” He kissed her forehead and watched her nod.

It was some time before Faith figured out what she would say to Keir. He continued to avoid visiting Lallybroch in those weeks after Jamie’s return. Everyone who had teased her before about Keir’s visits and their regularity began to joke about how it must be the terrifying prospect of her father keeping him away.

Eventually, Faith couldn’t put off speaking with Keir any longer. She sought him out at his master’s workshop and sighed with relief when she noticed that Keir was alone.

He didn’t hear her as he worked the round strip of metal around the fresh wooden slats of the half-finished barrel. Once he’d hammered the ring into place, he reached up to wipe his brow with the back of his hand and started as he noticed her standing in the doorway.

“Faith… I… didna think ye wanted to…” he stammered then looked to the ground as he cleared his throat.

“I came to apologize… for running away like that,” she said taking a step into the workshop. “It shames me to think of what I said and how I left ye—wondering what ye’d done and why I’d ask ye to… if I didna feel…”

“I take it ye’re no here to tell me ye’ve changed yer mind…” he murmured.

She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I thought I felt the way that you did—or that I could with time…but when ye said it… I didna want to hurt ye and I ken this probably isna helping… but I wanted ye to know that it’s nothing ye said or did… and… it wasn’t… what we did that day—I,” she felt the flush rising up her neck and into her cheeks. “I enjoyed that a great deal and I want ye to know that I dinna regret that you were the first man for me.”

“How are ye so certain that ye willna love me with more time?” Keir croaked as he asked. “I’ll wait, ye ken… as long as ye need.”

“My da says when ye find the right one, ye know it in yer very bones. I… didna feel that—not in
that way. I thought I did until, suddenly, I kent in my bones that it wasna right for me. I wish I could tell ye something more than just that—something that would make ye feel better… I didna change my mind… I simply didna know my mind…”

“I suppose I’ll just have to learn to live with whatever that means,” Keir muttered. “I hope yer family… that they dinna think me rude or…”

“Ye needna concern yerself with what they think,” Faith assured him. “I’ll make sure to explain enough to them before… before I leave.”

Keir finally brought himself to truly look at her. “Where’re ye going?”

“Since my da returned… we’ve talked of starting fresh away from Lallybroch. Fergus talked of goin’ to Edinburgh and… we’ve decided we’ll all go—the three of us. Da no longer needs to hide and Fergus is old enough now to find work and they’ll need someone to keep them from living in filth and disorder.” She tried to laugh about it and downplay her own growing excitement and nerves at the prospect of not just relocating but moving to such a prominent city.

Keir nodded. “Luck to ye then, Faith. I hope ye learn what it is ye’re looking for so ye dinna have to rely on learning what it’s not and narrowing down the possibilities.”

There was a bitter note in his farewell that stung, but Faith swallowed her dismay and returned his nod.

“I hope ye find a lass who appreciates ye better than I can,” she told him quietly. “Ye certainly deserve it and I want ye to be happy, Keir… truly.”

As she walked away, Faith felt the tightness in her chest begin to loosen, the weight of guilt over Keir began to lighten in her stomach and the fluttering of nervous butterflies started to take its place. They were leaving in a week for Edinburgh and excitement and fear were battling for dominance.
Chapter Summary

Brianna's excitement over a breakthrough in Frank's research opens up a can of worms.

Claire sat at the table, her cup of tea growing cold as she sat contemplating the letter from Mrs. Graham. The handwriting was shakier than it used to be and the contents brief, to the point. Mrs. Graham’s health wasn’t good and there was much she had been forced to give up—her position working for Reverend Wakefield, her most arduous hobbies… the search for Faith.

*I am so sorry, Claire. I believe I have exhausted every possibility along with myself in this search and regret it does not appear to have been enough. All that I am able to do for you now is pray that somehow you will find your way to her again, or she to you.*

Claire’s heart hurt both for her friend and for her eldest daughter. As happened every year as Faith’s birthday approached and passed, the combined yearning for meaningful progress and subsequent lack of it was making her anxious and irritable. Faith would be seventeen, a young lady grown and ready to strike out in the world… Or would she be looking to settle down to life as a wife and mother? If she was anything like Brianna, Faith would be captivating, eager to please but frequently stubborn and willful where her own desires were concerned.

“Daddy?” Brianna called as she entered the house and slammed the door in her excitement. Claire heard a thud as Brianna dropped her book bag on the floor.

“He’s still at work, darling,” Claire responded, her voice raised but not harsh. She refolded the letter from Mrs. Graham and tucked it into the envelope. “Is it something I can help you with?”

Brianna came into the kitchen and blinked at her mother sitting with her half-empty cup of cold tea. “It’s nothing,” she said dismissively before plopping into the seat opposite Claire. “Just something I found that’ll help him with his research. It can wait till he gets home.”

“You’ve been helping him a lot lately, haven’t you?” Claire observed. She had been busy at the hospital lately—there was a position opening up since the head of the general surgery department was retiring so she’d been putting in a lot of extra hours to support her application. Luckily, Brianna and Frank had been busy too. Frank was developing a new book in a different vein from what he’d written before—a piece that was more biography than general history, though from what little Claire had paid attention to, the subject was tangentially involved on the English side of Jacobite Rising of ’45.

“Mmmhmm,” Brianna said unfolding some photocopied pages from her pocket and laying them flat on the table. “Daddy doesn’t have time to go through all the letters that his friend sent him so I’ve been reading them to see if there’s anything interesting he might want to use.”

“Do you think… That is… If you wanted to find someone from a long time ago—see if you could discover what happened to them—but you ran out of ideas for how to track them down… what would you do to pick up their trail again?” Claire asked. She reached out to her teacup and ran her finger along the lines of the handle. There was a cloud of residue hovering near the bottom of the cup, waiting for her to drain the last bits of liquid so they could cling to the porcelain and tell her
fortune. She wondered if Mrs. Graham still read tea leaves and what she would make of her cup.

“Well…it would depend on the leads you had to start with and where and how they dried up,” Brianna explained. “Looking to the people around them usually helps. That’s how Daddy wound up working on this Duke of Pardloe book. He started out interested in a Jacobite soldier but after Culloden the best records to work with were military records. When he found the man’s name in a report, he started looking into who had written it—the Duke of Pardloe.”

It was no longer just the tea that was cold. Claire was sure her brow was clammy and didn’t trust her hands to lift the cup without dropping it again.

“The people around them…” she murmured, her mouth suddenly dry.

“Yes. See, the Duke of Pardloe’s personal papers had more to say about that Jacobite soldier. The official military record said he’d escaped but it wasn’t true—the Duke let him go to repay a debt of honor. The Jacobite had spared his brother’s life before an earlier battle. Daddy figured that was probably all there was in the Duke’s papers about the Jacobite and basically gave up learning more—he’d been badly wounded and the Duke didn’t expect him to survive the journey home,” Brianna continued, leaning forward as her spark of enthusiasm caught and sought to consume others in its blaze. “But, what Daddy had read of the Duke was interesting on its own so he read more and thought about gathering enough for a biography. In the letters between the Duke of Pardloe and his younger brother, a John Grey, the Jacobite turned up again years later as a prisoner. Once we knew John Grey was in charge of him, we looked for his letters and papers too and now…” she pushed the copied paper toward Claire whose heart was pounding. “Now I think I’ve found him again—the Jacobite soldier.”

Claire couldn’t bring herself to reach out and take the page. She didn’t need to. She recognized the careful and strained handwriting, even at a distance. Her eyes saw the shapes of the words but didn’t register their meaning beyond the evidence of life in the hand that wrote them.

“James Fraser,” she murmured breathlessly as her gaze finally reached the bottom.

“The British called him—”

“Red Jamie,” Claire interrupted, startling Brianna.

“How’d you know that?” she asked with a puzzled expression.

The blood pounded in Claire’s ears as the cold, clammy feeling began to seize her and made it hard to think. *He survived*. “He’s my husband,” she murmured almost too low for Brianna to hear. Claire’s eyes were still on the page, areas of the handwriting too faint to read in the copy but not the signature. “He’s your father.”

Brianna snorted and it broke the spell of Claire’s fixation. “Yeah, okay, Mama. Did you even listen? James Fraser fought in the battle of Culloden… more than two hundred years ago…” She blinked at Claire expectantly but Claire said nothing, her attention entirely on Brianna. “Just look at the date on the letter—1761,” Brianna pointed. Part of the date had blurred when it was copied but *ember 13, 1761* was faintly visible at the top of the letter.

Claire blinked as she struggled with the math in her head. She’d written the date—September 10, 1963—for at least a dozen reports and charts earlier in the day. The letter proved Jamie was still alive.

When Claire abruptly stood she grew aware of her clothes sticking to her back and arms; a cold sweat to go with anxious, adrenaline-driven trembling. She began to pace to burn off the nervous
energy and distract her body so her mind could think.

“Does it mention where he’s living or anything about a daughter?” Claire asked desperately.

Brianna rolled her eyes and turned to refold the letter, muttering under her breath about how she should have waited until her father had been home and just not said anything. “This letter from Red Jamie to Lord John Grey was sent from Edinburgh. It sounds like he was running a print shop there with his son.”

Claire’s steps stopped but Brianna didn’t notice.

“It’s an appeal for Lord John’s help figuring out where an uncle or someone was transported when their prison closed. As governor at that time, he thought Lord John might remember or would at least be able to tell him where to look. Red Jamie ends with his wife’s and daughter’s best wishes. I’m pretty sure there are other letters from him in the packet Reverend Wakefield sent but that’s the only one I’ve read through so far.” Brianna sighed as she reached the end of the improvised recitation. “I wanted to tell Daddy right away.”

Wife. The word churned in Claire’s stomach. Son. Even if the daughter referenced was Faith, it was clear that Jamie had remarried and moved on, that he hadn’t just built a new life in her absence but a new family as well. She reached out and grabbed the back of her chair to steady herself.

“Mama… are you all right?” Brianna asked standing up herself and crossing to help brace her mother.

“He’s… married,” she stammered.

Brianna scoffed, growing frustrated with her mother. She let her hands drop to her side and took a few steps away from her mother before turning on her heel and attacking. “Why do you care? It was two hundred years ago.”

“He’s my husband,” Claire responded with greater force behind the words than she meant to use. “And he has some other woman raising my daughter—your sister—so yes, as a matter of fact, I do care.”

Brianna was looking at her like she’d gone mad.

“Knock, knock,” Frank’s voice called from the front hall as he loudly closed the door. “Bree? Claire?”

Mother and daughter remained rooted at opposite ends of the table watching each other as Frank made his way down through to the kitchen and froze at the sight.

“Please tell me the two of you aren’t arguing about—”

“Bree found something helping you with your research,” Claire interrupted, turning her gaze and the growing anger behind it on Frank.

He frowned back at her for a few beats before turning to Brianna. She was already holding out the copy of the letter with an exasperated expression. Claire could see Jamie’s self-assuredness in the way Brianna relaxed and crossed her arms over her chest now that Frank had arrived, presumably ready to back her up in her assertions of Claire’s absurdity.

But as Frank’s eyes roamed the letter, the color drained from his face. When he finished, he looked to Claire.
“How long, Frank? How long have you been looking for him and why, for Heaven’s sake, didn’t you tell me?”

He was dumbstruck glancing over the letter again as though the answer was hidden somewhere between the lines of the page. Brianna watched him and waited for the echo of her disbelief but it didn’t come.

“How long have you been looking for him?” he responded quietly. “I… found some of your papers from Mrs. Graham…”

“Daddy, why… Mama’s talking like she knows these people, why are you acting like you know what she’s talking about?”

Frank turned on Claire. “You told her? We had an agreement!”

“Why were you looking for him?”

“Will the two of you just stop and tell me what the hell is going on?!” Brianna exclaimed.

“I told you,” Claire said, her attention still defiantly on Frank. “James Fraser was my husband and he’s your father.”

“A man who lived and died two hundred years ago can’t be my father!” Brianna cried. “It’s a physical impossibility. Besides, you were married to Daddy for years before I was born. He couldn’t have been your husband.”

“Bree,” Frank interjected gently, “I love you and have done since the day you were born and the nurse first put you into my arms. I am your father in every way that matters…”

Brianna turned on him with eyes that begged him not to continue.

“But your mother… isn’t lying. Biologically speaking… your father is James Fraser.” Resignation and resentment twined in Frank’s concession.

“Two hundred years!” Brianna emphasized again, clinging to the logistical impossibility, as though convincing them would be enough to negate what they were telling her on every level. She couldn’t have another father. She would have known, would have guessed, would have sensed it.

“It shouldn’t be possible,” Claire agreed, “but I know what I’ve lived through and I assure you it was all real. Jamie and what he and I shared was real. The life I left behind to save you and protect you…” Her voice caught as tears choked her. “Your sister…”

“I don’t believe you,” Brianna shook her head.

“Come here,” Frank said, still gently as he beckoned for her to follow. He walked toward his study and after a moment, Brianna did so rather than remain behind awkwardly watching her mother try to regain control of her emotions.

She found Frank sifting through papers in a folder on his desk. It looked like the rest of his research but it was a pile she hadn’t seen before. He located the page he was looking for and held it out to her.

“Mrs. Graham had sent a handwritten copy to your mother years ago. When I realized who she was looking for and why and I started looking myself, tracking down and having a proper copy made was one of my first priorities,” Frank explained as Brianna looked over the page. It was a register copied from the front of an old family bible. The names at the top belonged to Frasers, documenting
the marriage of Brian Fraser to Ellen Mackenzie. The births of their children followed and then unfortunately the deaths of some of them along with first Ellen and then Brian about a decade later. More marriages and births, these with the surname Murray attached.

Then she stopped.

*James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser m. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp June 16, 1743*

“Your mother told me when she first returned and I didn’t want to believe her,” Frank continued. “But then none of the alternatives were exactly palatable either and it became easier to pretend along with her. Or at least, I called it pretending. With her back and him so long dead, it was easy to call ‘ignoring’ pretending and not-believing.”

Brianna looked up at him, still trembling with disbelief—and the reluctance to believe. He looked old and worn but also… free. She’d long known her parents’ marriage wasn’t perfect but they tried to keep its rough edges from catching on her and largely succeeded. They made it easy for her to ignore it and pretend they were happy, which made her feel safer. Now the curtain had been pulled back and she couldn’t unsee the strain that such pretending had put on him—on both of her parents.

*Faith Janet Hildegarde Fraser b. May 18, 1744*

“This is Mama’s handwriting,” Brianna muttered as she fixated on the name two lines below the marriage entry. It was the same handwriting that graced the back of numerous photos of herself, each marked with her full name and the date it was taken or sometimes just her age at the time. The first picture of her taken by a nurse who’d helped to deliver her was marked in exactly the same way as the bible register, *Brianna Ellen Randall b. November 23, 1948*.

“I know,” Frank confirmed with a hint of lingering regret. “I’ve come across it several times now, if you need to see other examples.”

She hadn’t asked to be lied to. They’d taken that upon themselves. But why and perhaps more importantly, “How?” Brianna gasped. “She was… there but then how did she get there? And how did she get back again? Why did she come back again if she loved him as much as she says she did?”

“I would like, very much, to tell you,” Claire said from the doorway.

Neither of them had heard her follow them to the study and maybe she’d only just reached the door.

“About all of it,” Claire continued, staying put rather than imposing by entering the room—Frank’s space. “About the stones. About Jamie and how we met. About your sister. Why I had to leave… Why I… why I think I have to go back again.”
“I have a sister?” Brianna was sitting in the overstuffed chair in the den. Claire was a few feet away on the couch, leaning forward and angled toward Brianna but keeping just enough distance between them to keep from being overwhelming. Frank paced at the far end of the room, unable to decide whether it was better to keep his arms crossed over his chest or to put his hands in his pockets.

“Faith. She’s older than you by about two years,” Claire told her.

“Think it’s a bit more than that,” Frank muttered with his eyes still focused on the floorboards that creaked and shifted under his weight.

Claire ignored the remark. “It’s because of what happened with her—in part—that Jamie pushed me to return here when we learned I was carrying you. It broke my heart to leave them but Faith was born several weeks early and it nearly killed us both. She was named by a nun at the hospital where she was born, baptized immediately against the chance she wouldn’t make it. It was weeks we were there and I’ll never forget how scared and alone I felt then watching her struggle. I couldn’t take the risk of that happening again… not then, not… not with what we already knew would happen in the highlands after the Rising failed.”

“How could you leave her?” Brianna asked with every drop of accusation Claire had imagined Faith injecting into the same question every time she thought of her oldest daughter in the last fifteen years.

“If there had been a way for me to go back to Lallybroch for her, believe me, I would have,” Claire responded with broken vehemence. “There was no way to know if she could pass through the stones too. And there was no way to explain to Jenny and Ian if I did arrive at Lallybroch why I was suddenly taking Faith and leaving, where I was going. And if I’d decided to stay anyway, you and I almost certainly would have died at Lallybroch. We’ve only ever told you a little about how dangerous carrying you was, even in this century. If I’d been there with you—without the knowledge and skills of modern medicine and without things like reliable food or water—I probably would have gone into early labor with you too only this time, I wouldn’t have been anywhere near a hospital like the one where Faith was born and I wouldn’t have had the level of care that saved us that first time. I was the one who served as physician to the people of Lallybroch and the neighboring tenants.”

“So you’ve just spent the last fifteen years pretending she never existed,” Brianna continued, unsatisfied with Claire’s answers, “lying to me about who I am and ignoring the fact that she probably spent her whole life wondering where the hell you went.”

“I’ve spent every day since I left Lallybroch thinking about her,” Claire snapped. “I’ve been trying to discover what happened to her from the beginning. Whether she made it through those famine years, whether she married, did she have children, did she ever leave Lallybroch. Mrs. Graham has helped me but everything I tried—every possibility that occurred to me—yielded nothing. And I had you to think about, too. You may think I’m heartless but what good would I have been to you if I hadn’t been able to let her go just enough to pay attention to you too. I’ve done what I could for your sake,
Bree, because you were the child I had in front of me and you needed me too—to feed you and clothe you and kiss your cuts and bruises better, to tuck in at night and drag out of bed in the morning so you wouldn’t run late for school. Someday, you’ll be a mother and maybe then, you’ll understand.”

Brianna swam before her eyes, her ruddy hair blurring with the pallor of her horrified face. Claire reached up and wiped the tears from her eyes and cheeks.

“I never stopped looking for her, but I couldn’t let not finding her stop me from looking after you. You needed me too.”

“And you never thought to look for him,” Brianna said flatly, her earlier anger had faded but she hadn’t yet reached a place of sympathy or understanding, only numb shock and reluctant belief.

Claire coughed. “He meant to die on the battlefield… I had no reason to believe he wouldn’t and confirming it… That would have been more than I could bear then. I’d still like to know how you figured it out,” Claire said over her shoulder at Frank.

He stopped his pacing and looked up from the floor. Brianna’s ire was still mostly directed at Claire but it was clear from the hollow way she looked at him that she wasn’t about to let him off the hook for his role in the deceit either.

“It was right in front of your nose for I don’t even know how long,” Frank informed Claire. “When did Mrs. Graham send you the family register from that bible?” He nodded to the pile of research that had been placed on the coffee table when they’d all moved from the study to the den.

Claire’s brow folded in confusion but she reached for the pages until she found the photocopy of the bible page with all the entries in their original hands. Her fingers lingered over where Jamie had written his name next to hers and then again where her own had marked Faith’s entrance into their lives. Below Katherine’s was Claire’s name again with the date of her supposed death written in Jenny’s hand, April 16, 1746. Her eyes traveled down the page again in search of Jamie’s linked to another woman’s but the entries only went to the late 1750s with the marriage of young Jamie to a woman named Joan.

Claire gasped and scanned the page again before looking up at Frank who nodded and sighed.

“He’s not on here. That’s how you knew he’d survived,” she said at him, rising to her feet. “If he’d died, his name would have been there with mine.”

“I knew you’d see it someday,” Frank said with resignation. “I looked for him… maybe so I’d be ready when you did.”

“You found all this and were just going to sit on it?” Claire turned on him.

Frank sighed. “I’m not sure what I was going to do with it. We agreed we would never tell Brianna,” he winced a bit under the look of betrayal she threw his way, “but if she ever did uncover the truth, I wanted to be able to tell her whatever she might like to know.”

Silence fell as Claire and Frank both turned to Brianna for her reaction. She held Frank’s gaze, unblinking, as her eyes shone with gathering tears.

At last she turned back to Claire.

“You want to go back…”
Claire nodded. “I don’t want to leave you, but I need to see Faith. I need to apologize for leaving her like that and… I want to tell her about you, to see if she wants to come back here with me.”

Brianna, usually so controlled in her expressions, wore her confusion and doubt plainly as Claire struggled to explain.

“I don’t know what it is that allows me to pass through but since you and I were both fine when I came through while pregnant, I think there’s a good chance you and your sister will have the same ability. And if she does, there’s so much that this time can offer her—an education, the right to choose a future for herself… I owe it to her to make sure she has the opportunity and a place and support if that’s what she wants,” Claire insisted. “I’m her mother.”

“And what about Fraser?” Frank lifted his chin. There was something in his eyes—shielded but still visible to Claire who knew where to look—that clawed at Claire’s heart drawing forth pity and a raw, sympathetic pain.

“He should know about Brianna… but he’s remarried… Faith is the only thing there for me and if I can explain and convince her to return with me…” Claire wasn’t sure how to finish the thought. Though Jamie wasn’t dead, he was just as lost to her as before. Nothing had changed and yet everything was different. He had succeeded in moving on where she had failed before. Perhaps knowing that would change things for her as well… if she could bring herself to let it.

She wouldn’t think about that until she returned—if she returned.

“I don’t know for certain that I’ll be able to come back at all,” Claire added. “Each time is worse and… there are people who never make it through, people who get… stuck.”

“If it’s that dangerous—” Frank began.

“Go,” Brianna interrupted. “You’re right and you should go. It’s not fair for Faith to have to stay there not knowing she can come here. It’s what I would want if I was stuck there.”

“I won’t go right away. I want to take some time to plan and prepare, neither of which I’ve had the luxury of when I traveled before. There’s no way to know how long it might take, so I would feel better going if I take certain precautions ahead of time.” She moved closer to Brianna, fidgeting with the need to hug her younger daughter but not wanting to impose on top of everything else. “I… I would like to spend time with you first. I want to tell you about your… about Jamie—what he would want you to know, what you want to know—as much as I can remember.”

Brianna looked dazed and uncertain but she nodded and said, “Of course. I’d like that.”

Claire rose as soon as she saw Brianna begin to do so but still she waited and kept her distance hoping Brianna would come to her.

But though Brianna first took a step in Claire’s direction, she followed it with two backward steps and an abrupt, “Good night,” before quickly leaving the room.

Her footsteps on the stairs echoed through the still house as she retreated to the safety of her room to further consider everything she’d learned that night. A moment after Brianna’s door closed upstairs, Claire heard the clink of glass behind her as Frank migrated to the drinks cart and sifted through the bottles for the brandy he sought.

“There are some things we should discuss about your—”

“Not tonight, Frank,” Claire cut him off. “I just… can’t do any more of this tonight. I’m going to
bed.” She walked away without looking back at him.

He downed his drink and let it burn through his chest and into his belly, wishing it would smother the hope that had begun to bloom when Claire had mentioned Jamie Fraser remarrying in her absence. Through the irony of Claire being set aside for another during her absence, Frank could see that learning the truth had changed something in Claire, and not in the way he had expected. Sure, she’d immediately decided to return to that time, much as he’d guessed she would, but her attitude about it made him believe that it would not be anything more than the errand she proposed.

And when she returned to the twentieth century this time maybe she’d truly come back.
Chapter Summary

Claire prepares for her journey back through the stones, which means leaving Brianna behind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first Claire didn’t notice and then when she did notice, she tried to think it was just because Brianna needed time and space to process everything she’d learned. But as Claire’s preparations for a new journey through the stones progressed and the day of their departure for Scotland drew closer, she began to chafe under Brianna’s distance and silence.

They would leave for Scotland in less than two weeks and Claire couldn’t bear the feeling that, once again, she was failing one of her daughters, leaving when she knew Brianna needed her as she navigated the rough teenage waters toward adulthood. Telling herself it would only be temporary—that she’d be back in a few weeks or months at most, and hopefully with Faith at her side—didn’t help; she’d rationalized leaving Faith at Lallybroch in a similar fashion fifteen years earlier.

It also stung that Brianna hadn’t shown more interest or curiosity in where she really came from—in Jamie, in Faith, in what Claire’s experiences had been. She didn’t want to force Brianna to confront something she wasn’t ready for but she also didn’t want her younger daughter to regret not asking questions when she had a chance.

It was fear of her own regrets that ultimately pushed Claire to seek out Brianna. After waking up to the remembered screams of travelers who’d become trapped in the timeless space between the stones, Claire dug through the trunk in the back of her closet where she’d put aside so much of her past and pulled out what she needed to share with Brianna.

Frank had gone into his office to correct exams and prepare assignments for his students to complete in his absence. Brianna was similarly closed in her room upstairs working to get ahead on her schoolwork based on the plans her teachers had provided. Claire had already notified the hospital administration that she would be taking a leave of absence to deal with family matters back in England. She had been given the full weekend at home, ostensibly to write up notes on open patient files for the colleagues who would be taking over until she returned. Those files remained untouched on the dining room table.

Brianna’s bedroom door was open and Claire could hear her muttering quietly to herself as she worked to solve a difficult equation. Taking a deep breath, Claire knocked lightly on the doorframe and smiled when Brianna looked up from where she was sprawled on her stomach on the bed.

“Do you have a few minutes?” she asked. “I was going through some of my things and came across something I want you to have.”

Brianna’s brow furrowed but she set her pencil into the gulley of her open textbook and pushed herself up into a sitting position, crossing her legs so there would be enough room for Claire. She brushed aside the curtain of her hair as Claire sat beside her, though from the pink in her cheeks,
Claire wondered if she wouldn’t have been more comfortable leaving it as a barrier between them.

“These,” Claire explained as she pulled the strand of pearls from the small velvet bag in her hand, “belonged to your grandmother—Ellen MacKenzie Fraser.”

Brianna’s eyes went wide and she mechanically held out her hand to receive them when her mother offered.

“They were a wedding gift for her from one of her many admirers,” Claire continued, watching Brianna as she ran a thumb over the pearls, mesmerized. “I got to meet the man who gave them to her, only a few months after Jamie gave them to me on our wedding day. A few weeks later, he sent me a matching bracelet. When we left Lallybroch to join Charles Stuart, I left the bracelet behind and… I like to think that Faith has it now.”

Brianna looked up at her then, the spark of curiosity finally alight in her eyes, and Claire felt lighter.

“You look like your grandmother, you know.”

“What was she like?” Brianna asked in a whisper.

“I never met her—or your grandfather. She died in childbirth when your father was young and Brian died after a stroke. But I can tell you that your grandmother was a painter. There was a self-portrait of her in the hall at Lallybroch…and she was wearing those pearls in it,” Claire said with a nod.

“They eloped—caused a tremendous scandal. They had only met that day and yet, they knew. Ran away under the noses of the entire MacKenzie clan.”

“A day?” Brianna’s brows shot up and Claire smiled.

“Your father loves telling the story—or any story, really. When Faith was fussy or stubborn and wouldn’t go down for the night, Jamie would bring her into bed with us and sit with his legs up so she rested against them, and he would tell her stories until she finally fell asleep,” Claire rambled, seeing it again in her mind’s eye. There had been many nights when the sound of Jamie’s voice had lulled her to sleep first, the deep and soothing rhythm all she needed to feel safe and secure enough to let go.

“He told her that story? About our grandparents?”

Claire nodded. “But his favorite to tell her was about how we met, about how the fairies brought me all the way through the stones just for him… so we could be a family,” she murmured as tears clogged her throat.

Brianna looked at the necklace in her hands again.

“How old was she when you left?”

Claire cleared her throat before answering. “She turned one just a month or two before. She was getting better at walking and talking… she could say ‘mama’ and ‘da.’ I used to carry her around with me when I worked in my garden or went to treat the injuries of Lallybroch’s tenants—nothing contagious, just physical injuries. She was quiet and was always watching.” Claire nudged Brianna gently with her elbow. “You were like that too—the watching more than being quiet. You were always vocal about your opinions.”

Brianna blushed but also smiled; small but irrepressibly genuine.

“She resembled me, while you resemble Jamie…but you have the same eyes, you and your sister.
You got them from Jamie—the color and the way they slant a little. The Fraser eyes.”

Brianna looked at her then, with those piercing eyes, and it made Claire’s heart skip. In that moment she felt the gazes of all three aching for something that was missing.

“Do… do you have anything else from… then?” Brianna asked. Her hold on the pearls had tightened.

“Come with me and I’ll show you.” Claire slid off the edge of the bed and made her way slowly to the door, listening for the creak of the mattress and the sound of Brianna’s bare feet as they padded across the floor after her. She picked up her pace when she heard it.

The box she’d dragged out of the closet earlier was on the floor beside the foot of the bed. Claire settled herself next to it, leaving room for Brianna who followed suit, peering in but not reaching out to touch anything or asking questions. Perhaps she thought doing so would make her seem too eager.

“These were the clothes I wore when I came back through,” Claire explained, pulling the garments out and laying them on the floor. They smelled stale but Claire had taken care of them over the years, always finding a little time here and there when Frank and Brianna weren’t around to pull them out and check them for damage from moths. There were still bits of grass clinging to the hem of the skirt. The laces on the stays had started to disintegrate. But the embroidery on the stomacher remained bright, even after more than fifteen years.

Brianna ran her fingers over the floral decorations with the awe of an experienced historian who recognized both the quality and the rarity of such artifacts.

“Are you going to wear them when you go back?” she asked when she handed them back.

“I don’t even know if they would still fit,” Claire remarked vaguely, setting them aside.

“So try them on,” Brianna pressed playfully.

“In a minute. Whether they fit or not, I won’t be able to take this.”

Claire pulled a length of soft, worn plaid out of the box and unfolded it so that it draped across her lap, crossed the space between them, and covered Brianna’s lap as well.

Brianna just sat and stared at it, her eyes tracing the tartan pattern for a while before looking up at her mother who simply nodded. Only then did Brianna let her fingers follow the path her eyes had taken. The colors of the arisaid had lost some of their vibrance because of the ways Claire had worn it before her return but the pattern they created remained distinct.

Claire remembered when she’d first arrived at Castle Leoch and she’d seen the various patterns of the men’s kilts. It had taken weeks to tell them apart and longer than that to begin associating the patterns with the main clans and numerous family variations. She was sure she’d forgotten most but the Fraser pattern could never be erased from her memory.

“And… these are all you have left of him—of the time you spent there?” Brianna looked into the empty box.

“And you, of course.”

It was said gently but when Brianna finally met her mother’s eye, she quickly looked away, redness rushing up her neck and into her face.
“I’m sorry you never had the chance to meet him,” Claire apologized. “And that I didn’t tell you about him sooner—and Faith. There is… so much I would do differently if I had it all to do again.”

“Would you have gone back then if you’d found out sooner? If you had a chance to go before he met whoever the woman is he’s married to now?” Claire couldn’t help but hear the unspoken, And would you have brought me with you, or left me behind? as well.

“I don’t know… For Faith, I probably would have gone. I missed him and it broke my heart to leave… but I’ll never be able to make up for leaving her behind like that—for not trying to go back for her.” Claire brushed away tears. “What can I even say to her?”

Brianna bit her lip but then slipped out from under the Fraser plaid and scurried back to her room.

Claire reverently folded the length of cloth and set it on the end of her bed then turned to the clothes laid out on the floor. She picked them up and carried them to the chair of her dressing table, resting them across its seat. She held the skirt up though she knew of all the articles, that was the one she needed to worry about the least. The stays could be loosened or tightened as needed and the bodice was structured to accommodate a changing figure as well. She almost laughed at how much more practical the clothing of the past could be.

But should she really make her reappearance in the clothes she’d worn the last time she’d seen Jamie? Shouldn’t she put a little more effort in? She tossed the stays down onto the seat, defeated.

What did it matter? She wasn’t going to try and win him back. He’d moved on. All she needed from him was where and how to find Faith. She didn’t need—or want—to know anything else.

Claire peered at herself in the mirror, trying to gauge just how much she had changed in the intervening years but she noticed Brianna waiting in the doorway.

“Here,” Brianna said, holding an envelope out for Claire to take.

It was long and thin and Brianna had scrawled Faith’s name on it.

“If she won’t listen to what you have to say… maybe she’ll listen to me.”

Claire took the letter and pulled Brianna into her arms.

“Thank you, sweetheart,” she murmured into Brianna’s hair.

“You don’t even know what I said,” Brianna tried to joke but her grip on her mother tightened. Claire chuckled. “It doesn’t matter. I’m sure Faith will appreciate it.” She pulled back and looked over to where the Fraser plaid sat folded. Brianna’s gaze followed her mother’s and the redness returned to her cheeks. “You don’t have to take it, if you don’t want it,” she promised. “I just thought you might like to see it.”

“I do want it… I just… don’t know where I’ll put it yet,” Brianna explained with a forced shrug.

Claire pressed her lips together and nodded. How would Frank take seeing Brianna with these few tokens of the father she’d never known? Would he understand? Claire was hopeful that he would—he had searched for Jamie for Brianna’s sake, after all. But understanding didn’t mean he wouldn’t feel hurt, that the relationship between them hadn’t already changed forever. Claire could see how careful and calculated Brianna’s interest in Jamie was; how delicately balanced so that she wouldn’t what she had in the pursuit of someone she would never know.
Claire hated to think of leaving Brianna to navigate those choppy, uncharted waters on her own but then Brianna had gotten good at finding her way through the swells and doldrums of Claire and Frank’s marriage.

And how would things between her and Frank look when she returned? Now that the truth was out there for Brianna, it must necessarily change her relationship to Frank as well. What would they do if Faith \textit{did} choose to come back with her? How would \textit{Faith} treat Frank?

Claire blinked. She wouldn’t think about that until she had gotten to know Faith better, until she saw the young woman her sweet baby had become. Because if Faith \textit{didn’t} want to come back with her…

“I have no way of knowing how long I’ll be,” Claire said quietly. “If… if your sister doesn’t want to come back—or can’t…”

“I understand,” Brianna nodded, forcing a smile. “I’ve had you to myself for fifteen years. Sisters are supposed to share, right? She can have you for a while.” Her voice broke on the last word.

There was also the possibility that the stones wouldn’t let Claire return again—in either direction. Her last time through had been worse than the first, and she had no reason to suppose this time would show an improvement. What if there were some unknown limit to the number of times a person with her abilities was able to make the journey? Would she even know before it was too late?

But she wouldn’t speak those fears aloud.

“I can work on packing more later,” Claire said suddenly, setting the note from Brianna to Faith on the folded plaid. “Do you need help studying or would you like to do something together? We could go shopping for you,” she suggested. “You could do with some warmer clothes for Scotland.”

Brianna smiled and nodded. “I’d like that.”

They stayed with Reverend Wakefield when they made their journey to Inverness. They told him that Claire was going to be heading on to a medical conference in Edinburgh and that Frank and Brianna were going to meet her there in a few days before heading back to Boston.

The drive to Craigh na Dun was a quiet one. Frank and Brianna waited outside the car while Claire finished changing in the backseat.

Leaning against the hood, Brianna stared up the hill at the light playing between the trees and stones. It blinked as the wind bent the branches, whipping around the hill and forcing them toward the center, toward the stones.

“I suppose this is it then,” Claire said, breaking into Brianna’s reverie and making her blink.

“I want to go up there with you,” Brianna said, her eyes drifting back to the stones. “I want to see you go.”

Claire had gone pale. “No, sweetheart,” she pled. “This is close enough. It’s too dangerous for you.”

Brianna looked over at Frank and felt heat rise in her cheeks. If she couldn’t go to the top with her mother, it would have to be now.

“You have everything for Faith?” she asked, reaching into the pocket of her coat for a folded envelope.
Claire’s brow furrowed as Brianna handed it to her. It was thicker than the note she’d written for Faith. There had been a few times since giving the first note to her mother that Brianna had considered writing something more deliberate, something longer, but for her sister she decided to leave it short and hope that what she’d left out could instead be said in person someday.

For Jamie, however… Her mother had made it clear there was no way for him to come through the stones, no matter how much any of them might wish it. And it didn’t seem right to let what he’d done for her go unremarked.

Claire noticed the name and simply nodded, pushing it deep into the pocket of her skirt.

“I love you, Bree,” Claire squeaked, embracing her daughter tightly and letting the tears fall.

“I love you, too, Mama,” Brianna murmured, similarly giving in to the tears. “I will see you again,” she vowed.

“I’m certainly going to do my best,” was all the promise her mother could give, though Brianna saw what it cost her to say even that much. Brianna wanted to tell her mother that she didn’t want a promise in return. She was the one making a promise this time, and it would be up to her to keep it.

Brianna watched as Claire straightened, exchanged a nod with Frank, and then turned to go up the hill. She paused at the top to look back one last time. Brianna wasn’t sure if she could see it but she nodded to her mother nonetheless. Claire walked between the stones at the edge of the circle and disappeared from sight.

Brianna waited at the bottom of the hill, unsure what to expect after that. There was no flash of light, no shout, no noise, nothing to indicate that Claire was gone.

After a few minutes, Frank came up behind her and rested a hand on her shoulder.

“I have to be sure,” Brianna said, pushing forward to go up the hill. She only made it a few steps before Frank’s hand was on her arm again, pulling her gently back.

“I’ll look,” he told her, silently begging her to stay put.

She yielded. Her head was beginning to ache. She could hear the blood ringing in her ears as it pounded more rapidly than she’d realized. When Frank moved past her she sat down on the side of the hill and pushed her fingers into the grass, taking hold of it by its roots and steadying herself. As the pounding faded, she let go with one hand and found the silver chain around her neck. It bore a small pendant with two entwined flowers on it. One had a small opal at its heart and the other a small topaz. She wasn’t sure why her mother had insisted, Bone of My Bone be engraved on the back but she held it tight between her fingers feeling the metal warm with her touch.

“She’s gone,” Frank said as he came back down the hill a few minutes later. He eased himself down beside her and waited, silent. After another beat, Brianna turned into his arms and buried her face in his chest while she cried.

Chapter End Notes

END OF PART TWO
Part Three - Of Lost Daughters

Chapter Summary

Claire arrives in Edinburgh to mixed reactions.

Chapter Notes

BEGINNING OF PART THREE

The directions the coachman gave her were simple. She found the shop in just a matter of minutes. Claire had expected—and hoped—that it would take her longer, that she would have more time to prepare herself for the prospect of facing Jamie.

So she didn’t go in. She walked past the shop and further up the street, wringing her hands and running through what she ought to say to him. Faith. She needed to make it clear that she was only interested in seeing Faith again, that she had no designs to walk in and upset the life he’d built for himself in her absence.

She turned around and walked down the street toward the printshop again but passed by it once more without making the turn to go inside.

Brianna. She also needed to tell him about Brianna and pass along the letter entrusted to her care. That was the stickier point. He would want to ask all manner of questions about the daughter he would never know. That would take time and being around Jamie that long… But she had no choice. She would find a way to bear it. She’d borne worse for far longer, after all.

“Milady?”

Claire looked around but there was no one else the tall, dark-haired stranger could possibly mean. She frowned and moved to get past the young man. “Excuse me,” she stammered, wishing that she hadn’t loitered and had simply gone into the printshop. Causing a scene outside as she resisted an attacker or con artist and having Jamie wander out was not how she wanted their first encounter in nearly sixteen years to begin.

“Milady, it is me,” the young man insisted, smiling and holding his hands up to show he intended no harm. “Do not tell me you have forgotten Fergus,” he implored with the happiness in his face beginning to slide toward sorrow.

Then she saw it. The youthful roundness was gone from his cheeks but the eyes remained full of mischief, his hair was as unruly as ever, and his smile was just as cocky as it had been when Jamie pulled him into their home from the streets of Paris.

“Fergus? But you’re…” Her gaze fell to the height he’d been the last time she’d seen him before darting back to meet his eye. “You’ve grown so much.”
“It has been sixteen years, milady. I am not the one who has changed the most,” he reminded her with a sad smile that cut through her. “And you may be the one who has changed the least. You look précisément the way you always do. Perhaps you are a fairy after all. That is what Faith liked to believe when she was young.”

“She thought what?” The hairs on Claire’s neck stood. Had Jamie told Faith the truth or had it only been a Faith told herself so she wouldn’t feel so alone? And how long had she believed it?

“It was easier to let her believe that when she was still young. When milord was brought to Lallybroch and you were not with him… we thought the worst.”

“I…” she stammered, shoving away visions of Jamie wounded, feverish, and alone on the battlefield after Culloden. “I couldn’t find him. When it was over and I looked for him… He wasn’t there. And what they did to the survivors… I was able to get away—my accent—but not back to Lallybroch. I was terrified that I might bring them down…”

“And you did not even write? Did not send word to Mistress Murray? To Faith?”

Claire had known it would be difficult coming back, difficult facing those she’d left behind. The drive to see Faith again, to hold her baby in her arms once more in her lifetime, had been stronger than the fear of judgment and resentment and it still was. But it didn’t help the ache or the sting.

“There’s nothing I can say,” she admitted. Nothing she thought he would believe, at least. “I didn’t want to leave… but the longer I was away, the more difficult it became to try to come back. I don’t expect you to forgive me…”

Fergus shrugged. “I have been left before.” He started toward the printshop, not waiting to see whether Claire followed. “I was at least left with more than in the past.”

Claire was only a few steps behind him when he pushed into the shop. He strode with purpose to the counter and lifted the partition that separated the main shop from its innerworkings. There was a hunched form on the other side of the wood and metal press.

“Ye didna have trouble wi’ yer deliveries?” Jamie asked, taking a moment to peer up from a jammed mechanism to see that Fergus was slipping a long, leather apron on to assist.

“No trouble. But there is someone here,” Fergus said, glancing over his shoulder at Claire.

Claire watched as Jamie’s eyes found her. He rose from his crouch and stepped around the press, handing the tools he’d been using to Fergus who took his place fixing the troublesome piece of machinery.

“Claire?” Jamie murmured, his eyes wide with surprise.

She swallowed. “Hello Jamie.”

“Claire,” he breathed her name again, then glanced self-consciously over to Fergus.

“I didn’t come to disrupt anything,” Claire explained, fighting to keep her voice steady and even. “I only need to know where she is so I can see her. If you’ll just… point me in the right direction…”

Jamie blinked, looking dazed. But he nodded. “I’ll take ye to her, if ye dinna object. Fergus, ye can mind the shop on yer own?”

Fergus shrugged. “Of course.” He continued to watch Claire as Jamie removed his apron and went
to the basin in the corner to quickly straighten up.

Claire couldn’t hold his gaze for long. Instead she took a long turn about the shop, examining the samples on display at the counter then reading through the titles for sale a small shelf—there were three copies of Robinson Crusoe, which was apparently still a favorite of Jamie’s. On one wall was a board with various notices tacked to it, including one advertising an apothecary who also offered on-site healing services.

“She has yer talent for it,” Jamie said quietly behind her shoulder, shrugging into his coat and reaching past her for his hat hanging on a hook beside the notice board.

Claire found it impossible to respond except by blinking at the tears pooling in her eyes. Jamie bent in a short, tight bow and then offered her his arm. She took it and let him lead her out of the shop, lamenting how stiff and awkward it felt between them. Her body screamed to step closer to him, to lean into his arm but that would be too familiar now. Touching him, even formally, had brought the memory of those fading sensations they’d shared and that she had clung to for sixteen years roaring back with shocking vibrancy.

“Ye’re really goin’ to make me ask, Claire?” Jamie kept his face forward but she could hear the ragged, pained edge in his voice. “I’ve prayed for yer safety every day since ye left—for you and the bairn. Ye’re… here. But ye havena said… Is the bairn…”

Claire squeezed his arm to slow him down and make him look at her.

“She’s fine,” Claire assured him then let go of his arm to reach into her pocket for a carefully wrapped packet. “These are for you—I wanted to show them to Faith… but they’re yours.”

Jamie blinked and started to fumble with the strange wrapping.

“Wait,” Claire stopped his hand and nudged him toward the edge of the street. There was a small open space between two buildings, not quite wide enough or clear enough to count as an alley. When they were angled so no one passing could see, Claire helped him with the plastic protecting the precious photos.

He gasped at the image of her with newborn Brianna in her arms. “The nurse who helped me through labor took that. Her name is Brianna. She’ll be fifteen in just a few weeks.” She shuffled to the next photo in the stack—Brianna with frosting smeared on her grinning face and a piece of birthday cake successfully squashed all over the high chair tray in front of her. “She’s so much like you. Sometimes she reminded me of Faith but… mostly it’s been you.”

“Brianna,” Jamie whispered as he took firmer control of the photos and slowed the pace of shuffling them so he could take in every detail of her. “She has Faith’s smile—yer smile,” he remarked.

“Your hair,” Claire said just before he came upon a color photo. “They both have your eyes.”

“I’ve seen ye in Faith. Every time I look at her, it’s been you staring back at me,” he murmured, eyes glazed as he looked at a photo of Brianna and Claire from Claire’s graduation from medical school. “Lookin’ at her…”

“She looks like you,” Claire said again but he was shaking his head.

“She looks like her grandmother.” He looked up. “Thank ye, Claire. Have ye… that is… does she know about me?”

She nodded. “She does. I didn’t tell her for a long time. There… was no easy way to do so with
Frank. But it was actually the two of them who found you, who learned you’d survived and then traced you here. She didn’t know who you were really, but she does now. She even gave me this for you.” Claire placed the folded envelope on top of the photos.

Jamie clutched the letter and the photos in his hand, his breathing shallow and ragged as he fought for control. Claire waited.

“What did you tell Faith? About why I left?” Her voice wavered with fear and shame.

Jamie frowned at her. “I told her the truth. That ye had to go back to yer time for the sake of the bairn—that I made ye go.”

Claire’s chest tightened. She fought the urge to break down and lean into Jamie’s chest while she cried. But she couldn’t put him in that position. He hadn’t done it for her; he’d done it for Faith. She should have found a way to do the same thing for Brianna. Another failure to add to the list.

“Thank you,” she croaked, not looking at him.

There was a rustling as Jamie wrapped the pictures and folded the envelope around them before tucking them into his coat. “Come. Ye need to see her and she’ll be beside herself to see you,” he assured Claire. His hand was gentle on her shoulder as he guided her back into the street.

Faith loved the smell of the back room where she worked. Most of the time. There were times when patients’ injuries, illnesses, and ailments left behind odors that overpowered the drying herbs overhead, but even in those cases it only took a few minutes of grinding at the mortar to freshen the space.

No one had come in ill yet but if the pattern from the previous few days held, there would soon be a steady trickle of folk looking for relief from coughs, runny noses, and fevers. Ramsay Haugh—who had hired her to help his wife in the back before he’d learned she had a knack for applying and dosing with the herbs as well as preparing them for sale—was running low of a few things in the shopfront. Faith put Louisa Haugh to work grating cinnamon and then lemon rinds while she put honey in water to warm over the fire and then settled to work on the ginger root, setting most aside to dry and the rest to steep in the heating honeywater.

“I’ve half a mind to tell Ramsay we ought to sell this by the pint like ye would at an alehouse,” Louisa told Faith as she sliced what remained of the last lemon and dropped them into the pot. She gave it a stir and then leaned over to take a deep breath of the rising steam.

“Put a pinch of the cinnamon in too,” Faith reminded her.

“And a bit of whisky.” Louisa retrieved the bottle and measured a small amount to pour into the pot while Faith laughed.

There was a knock on the door and Ramsay leaned into the room.

“Faith, yer father’s here askin’ to see ye.” He paused and looked back over his shoulder then dropped his voice to add, “And he’s brought a lady with him.”

Faith frowned but set aside the knife and ginger root, wiping her hands on her apron. She heard Louisa hiss something at her husband and Ramsay remained with her in the back room, closing the door on Faith, her father, and the lady in the main shop.

Glancing around quickly, Faith spotted her father hovering by the entrance, watching the woman
who stood with her hand braced against the counter. She had been examining the labels on the various shelved bottles but turned at Faith’s entrance.

“Da what’re ye…” Faith stopped as the woman took a step closer and Faith saw her more clearly.

It was like looking in a mirror. The older woman’s brown curls were fighting against the restraints imposed upon them. There were tears in her eyes making them shimmer like whiskey in a glass—the main feature where their faces differed.

“Mam,” Faith breathed with awe and disbelief. She looked to her father who nodded in confirmation. Everyone had said that she resembled her mother but seeing it for herself made the hairs on her arms stand on end.

“Faith,” the woman choked out, closing most of the distance between them but hesitating at the last with doubt in her face and two feet still separating them.

“I always hoped ye’d come back,” Faith said, stepping forward and leaning into her mother’s tearful embrace. She closed her eyes and rested her head against her mother’s shoulder. A hand gently stroked her hair while a voice Faith told herself she couldn’t possibly remember murmured, “my baby.”

The shop door closed quietly but it was enough noise to break the calm that had settled on them. They both turned to see her father had exited the shop. He paused on the other side of the door and gave them a brief nod through the window before disappearing back down the street.

Faith felt her mother stiffen but before she could express her self-consciousness aloud, Faith spoke up explaining, “He’ll be headin’ back to the print shop. Fergus’ll no thank him if he’s left to do the day’s work on his own.”

The older woman’s smile was a sad one as she wiped at the wetness in her eyes. “I’m afraid Fergus might’ve been a little put out by my presence earlier. And I’ve taken you away from your work as well, haven’t I.”

“Aye, but it’s no unwelcome,” Faith assured her. “Not for my part. And Fergus willna be put out long. He’s often disagreeable in the mornings.”

Her mother nodded but didn’t appear convinced.

“Ever’one says I get my healer’s hands from you,” Faith remarked trying to keep her voice steady. What might her mother be able to tell her concerning the blue light that she could conjure and use to heal wounds unseen? No one else seemed to see it but it must have come from somewhere and if her mother had the knack…

She received genuine smile at last. “I used to take you with me when I tended the tenants at Lallybroch. It always felt like you were watching and learning.”

The answer helped to loosen some of the tension in her shoulders but it wasn’t what Faith had been hoping to hear. She would have to approach the subject more directly. Hopefully there would be time to broach it with her mother delicately.

“We could use another pair of hands in the back room just now. There’s something catching hereabouts that’s leaving us spread thin the last few days. We’ve a tonic brewing now that—”

But her mother grinned and cut her off. “Lead the way.”
Having healing in common gives Claire and Faith a starting point for reconnecting.

Louisa and Ramsay jumped apart when Faith opened the door to the back room.

“Mam, this is Mr. Haugh and his wife,” Faith said briefly, ignoring Louisa’s pointed look.

“Your father ran this shop before you,” Claire remarked, tilting her head and narrowing her eyes at him.

“Aye, madam, that he did. He passed on a few years back. I dinna ken the herbs so well as he did but Miss Fraser is tremendous help.”

Claire turned a prideful smile on Faith who flushed a vibrant red and shuffled deeper into the room to distract from her embarrassment.

“It’s my mother I have to thank for my skills,” Faith demurred. “She’s goin’ to help back here a bit, if tha’s all right wi’ you.”

“Tha’s perfect,” Louisa chimed, her posture popping with the arrival of an idea. “I was just tellin’ my husband that we need to restock a few things and that he ought to head down to the docks to see what’s come in off the latest ships. But he said he couldn’a spare the time just now. If ye’re goin’ to help back here, Mrs. Fraser, I can watch the counter in front while Ramsay’s gone.” Louisa began nudging her blinking and confused husband toward the door before anyone could question the plan.

“It’s a pleasure to meet ye, Mrs. Fraser,” Ramsay Haugh said with a polite nod as he was forced from the room.

“I’ll be just the other side of the wall here if ye need me,” Louisa grinned, before closing the door and leaving Faith and Claire to themselves.

“Your friend appears to be quite thoughtful,” Claire remarked, slowly walking around the table and examining the contents and tools upon it.

“Aye, but no verra subtle,” Faith agreed. Both chuckled quietly. “There’s an apron over there,” Faith pointed, settling back into her usual spot between the table and the fire where the large pot was simmering.

Claire donned the apron and stood across the work table from Faith. She reached up to the hanging herbs and gently touched them, setting them swaying on their strings.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve been in a room like this,” she murmured. “Since I used tools like these.” She reached out and ran a finger around the rim of the mortar.

“Are ye no a healer still?” Faith asked.

“I am. But I do most of my healing with blades. I’m a surgeon,” she explained. “I went to medical
school and became a special kind of physician.”

Faith hummed in awe but didn’t know what to say.

“I had to wait a few years for your sister to be old enough,” Claire continued, bracing herself so she was ready when Faith’s head popped up.

“Sister? The bairn ye carried when Da sent ye back was a lass then?”

“Yes. She’s called Brianna and I’m sorry you didn’t have the chance to know each other growing up. She always wanted an older sister.” Claire’s voice caught and she reached for the cinnamon stick and grater Louisa had abandoned, seeking something to do with her hands and an excuse to look away from Faith.

“I had Fergus,” Faith said with a nonchalance that tore at Claire’s heart.

“You should have had me, too.” Claire’s voice was full of tears. “I should have found a way to retrieve you before I left, to bring you with me. You would have been safer there.”

“Mam, I dinna mean… I was safe enough here. I had Da. And Fergus when he couldna be there, to say nothing of Uncle Ian and Auntie Jenny…” Faith stopped and looked down at her hands for a moment, then lifted one to the place on her chest where the amethyst necklace was nestled between her bodice and her shift. “Ye said in yer time, ye heal with blades… Do ye heal with anything else?”

Claire blinked rapidly and breathed deeply, fighting to keep her control. “Uh… medicines and… there are machines, depending on the patient’s needs… There’s so much to learn there and though there were quite a few obstacles for women when I was a student, it’s improving for young women who wish to become doctors now.”

Faith shook her head. “Tha’s no what I—They say I got my healer’s touch from you—”

There was a sharp rap on the door and then Louisa appeared.

“We’ve a young lad here needs assistance,” she blurted holding the door for a man carrying a young boy in his arms. The boy was pale and dead weight, his shin bloody where it had broken and pierced through the skin.

“He got underfoot of a passing cart and gave the horse a start, puir creature,” the man informed them as he followed Faith’s direction and laid the boy down on a bench. Claire hurried over, briefly wondering if the man’s final comment referred to the boy or the horse.

“Do you know this boy, sir?” Claire asked, kneeling beside the bench and gingerly examining the leg. Faith stood to the side with a clean cloth in one hand and a bottle of laudanum in the other, stunned by the way her mother had swept in with a cool surety that she admired and almost resented.

“I ken the other lads he goes about with and they’ll ken him for sure.”

“Go to them and send one of them for his mother or a sibling if they can. She’ll want to know he’s safe and someone will need to fetch him home when he’s through,” Claire ordered.

“As ye say.” The man disappeared with a nod.

“Faith I’ll need the—”

“Laudanum?” she finished, offering her mother the bottle.
Claire blinked and then nodded. “Yes. And something to clean the field.”

Faith frowned but held out the cloth as well. “Will this do?”

“Thank you. I’ll need water, some straight boards for a splint, bandages, and a needle and thread,” Claire listed as she pulled the cork from the bottle of laudanum with her teeth so she didn’t have to set the clean bandages down.

Faith moved to lift the boy enough so some of the laudanum could be poured into his mouth then took the bottle from her mother and recorked it, setting it aside.

“Thank you, Faith. About the water—it needs to be—”


Claire paused and watched Faith as she carried away the bottle of laudanum and then went to move the bubbling pot off the heat and replaced it with a fresh one containing just water.

“You’ve read my medical book?” Claire asked when Faith turned back to face her.

“Of course I have,” Faith told her. “It’s one of the few things of yers that I have.”

Claire swallowed against the tears repooling and turned to her patient. The break to the bone wasn’t as clean as she’d like but it could have been much worse. It hadn’t splintered which was a blessing and there didn’t appear to be any bone fragments in the surrounding tissue. Pulling the bone into position would take some delicate force. Thank heaven the child was already asleep. The laudanum should keep him under until the worst was over. She was also thankful the mother hadn’t arrived yet.

“Can you hold him steady?” she asked Faith.

Faith nodded, bringing bandages and a kit with needle and thread.

“Those are already boiled,” Faith informed her mother as Claire set the kit within easy reach.

Faith put her weight where Claire indicated and held the thigh steady while Claire pulled on the boy’s lower leg, just above the ankle. Claire moved slowly, wishing she had an x-ray to work from but finally closing her eyes and feeling along the edges of the bone, palpating the muscle to sense nothing got pinched as she realigned and set the bone.

“There,” she muttered when she’d finished, opening her eyes and shooting Faith a triumphant smile. It froze on her lips when she saw Faith watching her intently and wearing a knowing look of her own.

Claire blinked and cleared her throat as she settled in on the rest of the work to be done. They worked in silence with an ease both found strange but comforting. Soon, the torn skin where the bone had pierced the flesh was stitched back together and the leg was effectively splinted. The boy remained unconscious but when Claire eased his eyelids up, his pupils responded as she hoped. There was still a chance he’d suffered a concussion in the crash that broke his leg, but it was more likely the pain and shock that had knocked him out before she administered the laudanum to ensure he stayed under.

Faith was applying a salve to the line of stitches Claire had made and was gingerly pressing loose bandages to the area to protect it from external agents that might trigger an infection.
Claire watched as Faith first used two fingers to trace the edges of the wound and then the line of the realigned shin bone beneath skin that had blossomed into bruises. Claire frowned. The bruises looked bluer than she would have expected. She was about to remark to Faith to be gentler as it appeared her touch might be causing the bruising but then she realized it wasn’t the boy’s skin or the bruises that were blue, it was a faint glow from Faith’s hand.

She made several slow passes, up and down the boy’s leg and then over the bandaged stitches before pulling her hand back and glancing up at her mother.

Claire looked back and forth between Faith and the boy’s leg.

“You… could see it then?” Faith asked quietly.

“How did you do that?” Claire asked back. “What did you do?”

Faith looked nervous. “I dinna ken how I do it, exactly—or why. It’s something I’ve done as long as I can remember. I just… I can feel where a body’s gone wrong and sometimes I can… I can tell it how to right itself and nudge it down that path. It’s… not something you can do… is it?”

Claire shook her head gently and when she looked up, she saw whispers of disappointment in Faith’s face.

Claire crossed to Faith and raised her hands to cup the girl’s face, kicking herself for not thinking to wash her hands first. When Faith looked at her, Claire hoped her daughter could see the wonder and pride she felt.

“It’s not something I can do, but I have seen it done once before. It’s a rare gift and you can do a lot of good and help a lot of people with it.”

Faith smiled with relief. “It doesna scare ye? Most folk canna see the blue light and if they’re hurtin’, they’re no carin’ about much more than that and dinna notice. But I ken there are some as wouldna be too grateful did they know.”

“Did your father ever tell you that people used to call me La Dame Blanche?” Claire asked with a satisfied grin.

Faith nodded. “I kent that. Wasna Da told me though. It was Fergus. He said ye were called that when ye lived in Paris about the time I was born.” She frowned suddenly. “Ye said ye’d seen it done before… Who was it that ye saw that could heal folk that way, and… do ye think they could teach me?”

Claire let go of Faith’s face and blinked, hesitant. Taking one of the spare cloths and the unused water, she began to wash the boy’s blood from her hands and then reached up to wipe the few marks she’d left on Faith’s cheeks.

“What stories have you heard about when you were born?” Claire finally asked.

“I ken I was born early.” Faith looked away from Claire and began to go red in the face as she explained, “Da… he always said there was something he’d done… there was a reason he couldna be there and that… he thought for a time that you and I had both died, then that it was just me that had died. And finally what it was he felt when he learnt the truth and held me in his arms and knew it to be true.”

Claire was nodding when Faith finally met her eye again. “You came several weeks too soon and it was a very difficult birth. We both very nearly died. Your name was given to you by one of the nuns...
who stayed with me. She baptised you quickly because she was so afraid you wouldn’t survive. But
a friend of mine, Master Raymond, came when I lay in fever with you struggling to breathe beside
me. I remember the blue light and that he used it to heal us.”

Faith’s eyes went wide and her hand drifted to her chest as though her lungs remembered that
struggle.

“I’m afraid I wasn’t well enough to understand what he was doing or how it worked. I never saw
him again to ask him. But my fever broke and your breathing grew stronger. You were finally able to
nurse properly and put on the weight you should. We left l’hopital a few weeks later and my friend,
Louise, let us stay with her in the country to convalesce… and while matters with your father were
worked out.”

“So… ye dinna ken where this Master Raymond is.”

Claire shook her head. “I’m afraid he was banished by the king shortly after he helped me. I don’t
know where he went. He sent me things from time to time—at least, I believe it was him. But there
was never a way for me to find him.”

Faith frowned as she started to put away the materials they’d been using on their still-unconscious
patient. “What would he send ye?”

“He was a strange man with unusual tastes,” Claire explained as she helped Faith to clean up the
back room. “He sent me some animal bones, stones with markings on them… a pair of necklaces
once. I think he intended one for you.”

Faith reached for a chain hidden beneath the kerchief tucked into the neck of her bodice and drew
out the rough amethyst fastened to it.

“Yes, that’s the one,” Claire said, reaching out to gently touch the stone. It was warm from being so
close to Faith’s body. “Actually…” wiping her hands properly, Claire reached into one of her
pockets and retrieved a small velvet-covered box. She glanced to the door leading to the main shop.
The boy’s mother could arrive at any moment. “I brought this for you. Bree helped choose it. She
has one just like it.”

Faith opened the box and gazed at the small silver pendant inside. A pair of entwined flowers were
etched on the front and when she turned it over Blood of My Blood was engraved on the back.

“It’s beautiful,” Faith said as she removed the chain to put it around her neck.

Claire started when saw it resting against Faith’s kerchief and reached out as though to grab it back.
“They’re gone. There were two stones in it but it appears they’ve come loose and fallen out.”

“Stones?”

“An emerald and an opal, your birth stone and mine,” Claire explained with a sigh. “I’ll get them
replaced for you before… before long.”

“Ye dinna need to do that,” Faith said, tucking the pendant out of sight. “There’s better things to be
putting money toward.”

“But it’s supposed to match Bree’s,” Claire pressed. “I want you both… It hasn’t been fair to you…”
Claire grew increasingly flustered as she struggled to hold back the wave of guilt and longing that
threatened to topple her. “It wasn’t fair to you that I… left you here like that… That you haven’t had
the same opportunities that your sister has. And I want to make up for it.”
Faith blinked in confusion. “And the necklace is... meant to do that?”

Claire swayed on unsteady legs. It was clear from Faith’s baffled expression that she hadn’t intended the statement as an attack but Claire couldn’t help the self disgust that followed. Was she trying to buy Faith’s forgiveness in some way?

“The necklace is... No. But I do want you to know you can take the chance and pursue those opportunities if you want them—that I’ll help you,” Claire said, reaching and taking Faith’s hands in her own. “I don’t know anyone who can help you learn about healing with that blue light... but you could learn to heal the way I have—by going to school for it and becoming a doctor.”

Faith shook her head. “But they dinna take women as students for medical training,” she objected.

“Not here they don’t,” Claire agreed. “Not now... But they will and... I think you could make that journey, that the stones will let you through too.”

“You... you mean to return through the stones?” Faith’s face fell and then her eyes went wide as she realized what Claire was suggesting. “You want me to go with ye? To leave Da and Fergus and... everyone.”

“You’ll be able to go to school for proper training, you’ll get to meet your sister,” Claire told her, the quiet joy of possibility beginning to light her face. “You’ll have a place to stay and we’ll help you to adjust—”

“What? No,” Faith objected, her horrified expression stopping Claire short. “I cannae leave Da like that. And there are too many people here who need a healer’s help.”

“I understand,” Claire said flatly, unconvincingly. She hadn’t realized how much she’d been hoping Faith would return with her, how attached she’d become to the idea of seeing her daughters together. “Come. We should work to rouse the boy for when his mother arrives to collect him.”

“Ye’re not... staying, then,” Faith said as Claire turned back to their patient. “Ye’re going back through the stones.”

Claire forced a smile. “I’m not going anywhere for a while. I want to spend time with you and learn more about the woman you’ve become.”

There was a commotion in the front of the shop. The boy’s mother had arrived and it sounded like there were several others with her. Louisa raised her voice to calm the chaos in the poor woman’s wake.

“We’ll discuss it more later,” Claire said, glancing over her shoulder at the door waiting for it to burst open.

A Distracted State

Chapter Summary

Claire's reappearance and the word she brought of Brianna leave Jamie reeling as he returns to the print shop and Fergus' questions.

Jamie’s head was spinning as he meandered through the streets back to the print shop taking several wrong turns in his distracted state.

Claire. She had returned. And they had another lass—Brianna. He pressed his hand to the pocket where the pictures Claire had given him were safely tucked away. Relief and a yearning stronger than he thought possible after more than fifteen years had him itching to duck into a deserted alley so he could go through those pictures in peace. He wanted to memorize her face as he had done over the years with Faith. He wanted to scrutinize them for bits of her personality that Claire wouldn’t know or think to mention. He wanted to sob for the bairn he would never hold and comfort in his arms, never spin yarns for as she lay under the covers fighting off sleep, never scold for mischief while hiding his amusement and awe at her spirit or ingenuity.

Never see playing or arguing or whispering with her sister.

The way Faith’s expression had transformed as she’d seen and worked through who Claire was would stay with Jamie for the rest of his life. The confusion turned to joy and then that stab of fear that made him want to pull her close and reassure her as he had when she was small… He wished he could have looked at both their faces in that moment, seen the look in Claire’s eyes as she saw the babe they’d left in Jenny’s care at Lallybroch grown to a young woman.

He’d thought it was Faith when he first glanced Claire in the shop. How could he not? She looked almost exactly the same as the day they’d parted at Craigh na Dun. While he…

He looked at his hands and saw there as though looking into a mirror all the changes he’d undergone that he felt through to his very bones. The years in the cave and then Ardsmuir, the work at Helwater and now with the press, it all left him stiff in the mornings and achy at night. One of the first things he remembered Faith remarking on when he returned to Lallybroch was that he had so many grey hairs. What must Claire think of the old man he’d become?

Reaching up, he ran his hand along his jaw. He could at least shave and clean himself up before she and Faith returned for the evening. He would do better around her now that he had some time to prepare—wouldn’t be so tongue tied and awkward. He laughed to himself. While his body felt old, there was a nervousness in his wame that was just the same as in those early days when they’d first arrived at Leoch, when he believed he hadn’t a chance in hell of winning Claire’s affections. It wasn’t many men who had the chance to be blindsided twice by the woman they loved walking into their life like that.

The nervous fluttering in his stomach turned sour. She’d said nothing of her plans or why she’d come back. Only that she needed to see Faith. True, she had reason enough to want to see their daughter again but… there had to be a reason why it was now after all this time… She must know something… presumably about Faith. It could only be to help, to save Faith from… something or someone that would do her harm. The thought alone was enough to have Jamie touching the places
on his belt where he used to carry a sword and dirk.

But what could Claire mean to do about any such threat? And why wouldn’t she have said something while they were walking to the apothecary’s shop?

*I didn’t come to disrupt anything.*

It was too late for that. He could already feel it. Once more, everything would change, though perhaps this time it would be toward having more solid ground beneath his feet. After so many years it had been firming up again with the move to Edinburgh. Faith had settled in quick and flourished beyond his expectations, finding that position with the Haughs. Fergus had helped to find the printing trade for the pair of them to pursue after managing to acquire the press through a series of exchanges Jamie still couldn’t quite trace. Their days had found a predictable rhythm that was reassuring.

Maybe it was all the years of living with uncertainty and knowing that it was just a matter of time before something pulled the rug out from under him, but he hadn’t been able to get completely comfortable in Edinburgh. He’d spent too many years looking for the next thing that would take away what little he had left. Or perhaps it was that something was missing altogether. He’d gotten used to the ache of missing Claire, or he thought he had. But maybe the more sure his situation became, the more the threats receded from his daily life… the more that absence became its own thing. Not the active ache of grief and loss but a hollowness that was always there but only recognizable when confronting it straight on.

Jamie sighed as he drew closer to the print shop. He would need to talk with Claire about what her return meant. He vowed he wouldn’t let himself hope too far, nor would he cut down the hope that had reflexively blossomed in his chest at the sight of her.

Fergus interrupted his work at the press as Jamie shut the door behind him and began removing his hat and coat. He shielded the coat as he checked the pocket to be sure the photographs of Brianna were tucked away safe and deep. When he turned, Fergus was leaning against the door jamb with his arms crossed over his chest.

“What did Milady have to say? Did she tell you where she has been all these years or why she has only returned now? Why she sent no word?”

Jamie rolled his sleeves up to the elbow and reached for his ink-stained apron.

“She didna need to say a thing, Fergus,” Jamie said with an edge to his voice that warned his adopted son not to push too hard. “I kent where she was as I was the one who pushed her to go before Culloden. It wasna possible for her to find her way back safe till now and that’s an end of it.”

“But Milord,” Fergus protested, “if you had known where she was, why did you not go to her? And why would you not say anything to me or to Mistress Murray? No,” he shook his head, “I do not believe you had the knowledge. I know that you love her still, Milord, but you must not let it cloud your judgment and forego answers. Do we not deserve the truth, Faith and I?”

“I said, that’s an end of it, lad,” Jamie asserted with only enough force to put an end to Fergus’ questions. He refused to show the fear and anger that were beginning to bubble just below the surface, to let them have control over him.

Fergus waited until his back was turned to roll his eyes, but Jamie could tell he was doing it from the way he held his shoulders. He said nothing, preferring to try and put all thoughts of Claire out of his mind for the moment, to remember how his life had been just that morning and recapture a fragment
of the peace that had been.

They worked together in silence for just a few minutes before Fergus spoke up again. “Setting aside where Milady has been, what has she returned for now? Is she planning to stay or will she leave again when it suits her?”

“Fergus…” Jamie groaned, putting his frustration and weight into the bar.

“I am thinking of you, Milord, and of Faith. When you sent me to Lallybroch with that deed, I promised to watch over Faith and when you returned without Milady… I promised myself I would watch over you as well. It has not been easy, Milord. Faith was small enough but you took the loss deep.” Jamie released his hold on the bar and braced himself anew to pull it in the opposite direction and relieve the pressure on the page. Fergus was watching him from across the plank. “I do not wish to see you fall back to that place again.”

“She means to see and know her daughter,” Jamie said frankly. “Beyond that, I dinna ken.” Nor was he sure he wanted to know the answer. Not knowing was preferable to knowing he would have to say goodbye again soon. “Now are ye goin’ to help me wi’ this or are ye going to continue questioning me till ye drive me mad?”

Fergus reached for the bar and pushed while Jamie pulled. There was a slight groan as the platen rose. Fergus pulled the coffin down the plank and opened the frisket, then peeled the page free taking care not to drag it across the still-inky type. He handed it to Jamie who inspected it by holding it up to the light streaming through the window.

Jamie nodded, satisfied, and carried the sheet over to a rack, gently laying the page to dry.

Fergus had already prepared the machine for the next page. “How many copies did you say we were to make of this one?”

“The order was for fifty.”

“And how many pages have we done?”

Jamie looked to the stacks of pages already printed and specifically organized according to the bookbinder’s preferences.

“We’ve forty-three copies of that page done and at least thirty more sets of pages to print. They’re to be ready by the end of the month,” Jamie said, glancing around and making a few quick tallies. “The plates for the next five are ready. We should have time to print the whole fifty of the next page today as well.”

Fergus nodded wiped at a dribble of sweat that was snaking its way down his cheek.

Jamie pushed the bar again and the platen descended once more.

“Whatever her reason for coming now,” Fergus said quietly, waiting for Jamie to pause and begin pulling the bar back. “You wish for her to stay.”

It wasn’t a question and Jamie paused before responding.

“Aye,” he whispered. “I dinna want to lose her again.”

Fergus reached for the bar, placing his hands on either side of Jamie’s.
“Then we will need to find our way to convincing her to stay,” Fergus said with determination.
Faith bid Louisa and Ramsay farewell for the evening while Claire smiled politely and waited by the door after everything at the apothecary shop had been set to rights following the eventful afternoon.

“I should… walk you home,” Claire told Faith.

“As ye say,” Faith responded awkwardly.

They walked all the way to the first turn in silence. “Do you live near the print shop?” Claire asked, glancing around and recognizing the route as that which Jamie had taken her by earlier in the day.

“Aye. We’ve a small house across the street and up a ways. Ye likely would ha’ passed it when ye were looking for the print shop,” Faith explained.

Claire kept her pace even but let the crowd in the street force her a few steps behind Faith so her daughter wouldn’t see the red humiliation creep into her cheeks.

Had Jamie’s new wife been sitting at home watching her—unknowingly, surely—the whole time? Claire could just envision this woman (who in Claire’s mind, for some reason resembled Laoghaire Mackenzie) sitting at the window with Jamie’s mending in her lap, watching the people passing in the street. She could see herself, standing there in the street, staring at the print shop as she worked up the will to walk through the door, could see Fergus approach her and essentially reprimand her (which, she knew she deserved) before showing her inside. She couldn’t remember for certain, but Jamie must have glanced down the way toward home as they emerged from the shop on their way to see Faith. Had he been looking to see her waiting there and watching for him?

“Were ye able to bring anything with ye when ye came through?” Faith asked.

“Came through? Oh… you mean the stones. Only what I could carry with me,” Claire answered.

“Then ye dinna have a trunk we’ll need to move for ye,” Faith said with an approving nod.

“Move? Even if I had one why would you need to move it?”

“Well, where would ye have left it? Ye wouldn’a want to drag it around Edinburgh with ye, I dinna think. Ye’d need it fetched from the tavern or stables where ye left it after the coach dropped ye here.”

“Oh, Faith… Are you saying you want me to… stay with you? I can’t do that,” Claire objected. “I already made inquiries and secured myself a room—I couldn’t possibly impose like that—”

“I thought ye said ye wanted to spend time together?” Faith reminded her.

“I do! But… I want it to be time… just the two of us… with no… distractions,” she stammered.
“You mean ye dinna want Da there,” Faith said flatly.

“Well… I think it would be easier if he and I don’t have to… That is… it would be best—”

“You dinna want to see him,” Faith again responded with a frankness that she could only have absorbed from Jenny Murray.

“It would be easier—” Claire tried to reiterate.

“Easier for you, ye mean,” Faith muttered.

“You’re right,” Claire admitted. “It would be easier for me if I didn’t have to be around your father. I came to be with and know you, Faith… You’re my daughter. I know that when I carried you, if I ate something too hot, it would startle you and you’d kick me, usually in the liver or the bladder. When you were teething, the only thing I could do to calm you when you fussed at night was sing you songs from my time, because those were the only ones I could remember when I was that tired. What I know about you runs out shortly after you turned one. I have spent enough time focused on people who are not you.”

Faith stopped and turned to face her mother. There were tears in both their eyes but Faith blinked them away and then looked forward.

“If that’s what ye want,” she said with casual resignation. “But ye’ll come inside for a few minutes, will ye no? I’ve some things I’d like to show ye.”

Claire nodded. “I can do that. I would like to see where you live.” She hoped that she could maintain her composure and a viable air of disinterest when the time came to meet the woman who had replaced her in what was once her family.

“Well, it’s right here,” Faith indicated with a small jerk of her head.

Claire felt momentarily frozen. Faith had cut down a different street than the one she’d come up with Jamie. The change brought them down and around the back of the street with the print shop so that they approached the street from a new angle. They were already there.

When Faith opened the door, the blonde woman Claire had imagined was not waiting on the other side but there was certainly a female touch about the space.

Faith removed her cloak and offered to take and hang Claire’s along the wall near the hearth where it would stay warm rather than near the door and the chill that swept in every time it was opened.

“It’s no a large space,” Faith said, apologetically. “But then, we’re none of us here so long for it to feel too small. There’s a pantry and kitchen space back through there.” Faith nodded to a doorway next to the foot of the stairway. “Most days we eat here in the parlor as it has better light in the evening—ye’re welcome to join us unless ye’d rather take yer meals in yer rented rooms.”

There was a bite in Faith’s words that stung but Claire said nothing rather than provoke something that would only hurt them both more.

“Is that a still room you have back there?” Claire asked, glancing to the partially open door just off the kitchen. She took a few curious steps toward it.

“No, we dinna have enough rooms for that. I sleep upstairs and that’s where Da sleeps wi’—”

“Faith, Milady,” Fergus remarked as he and Jamie burst into the house with a blast of chilly air. “I
saw you returning and said we must close early to meet you and take you somewhere special for
supper to celebrate your return.”

Jamie’s face had gone a little red standing behind Fergus and shutting the door. Something calculated
lurked in Fergus’ eyes and his smile, though broad, still lacked its old familiar warmth.

Claire glanced around at the faces of them all watching her. It was too much—too much expectation,
too much doubt, wariness, hurt and she wasn’t even sure what else.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea,” she objected, fighting the urge to grab her cloak and push her way
out of the space. Even as she felt trapped, her feet were moving her slowly toward that cloak.

Faith and Fergus looked to one another, each uncertain and looking to the other for reassurance but
finding none.

Jamie’s eyes were locked on Claire, recognizing something the others didn’t.

“Fergus, Faith,” he said with quiet calm, “Why don’t the two of ye take a walk and see where we
might want to eat later. Or ye can see what’s left at the market so we can make supper here.”

“Jamie…” Claire said his name so that is sounded like she was whimpering or begging him for
something.

“Ye’re staying here wi’ us tonight,” he insisted, still holding Claire’s gaze, “and ye’ll take yer meal
wi’ us as well. Please Claire… Will ye no even talk wi’ me a while?”

There were a few beats of silence while Claire wavered and Faith and Fergus waited to see what she
would do.

Claire’s shoulders sank as she sighed with resignation. There was no point in trying to avoid it. She
wanted to stay a while and spend time with Faith so it was inevitable that she would need to be
around Jamie and discuss the intervening years beyond their daughters and their transformations into
young women. And to postpone that talk would only make it more painful.

“We passed the butcher’s stall on our way back,” Faith remarked. “I saw there were some fine cuts
of mutton. There’s a chance he’ll still have one if we head that way now.”

“And we will need more potatoes,” Fergus added, “whether you plan to stew or roast it. We should
not be gone for long if your stomachs can wait.”

“That sounds grand, Fergus,” Jamie addressed them without looking to them. “We’ll build the fire so
it’s ready when ye return.”

They moved in silent synchronization as they grabbed what they needed and headed out the door,
oisily pulling it shut tight behind them.

The tension in the room eased a fraction.

“What have I done, Claire? Why are can ye no stand to be in the same room as me?” Jamie asked.
His voice was low and pained rather than accusatory. “For more’n fifteen years now, I’ve dreamt of
little more than you finding me again, of having ye near enough to touch…” He leaned toward her
but stopped himself from taking a step closer. “But ye… ye dinna seem to feel the same way.”

Claire scoffed. “Please, Jamie. Don’t put this on me like that. How do you think I knew where to
find you?”
Jamie stiffened. “Ye said it was… Frank, helped ye learn the truth. It’s him then, is it? Ye went back to him and ye’re… faithful to him again now, are ye?”

“Faithful? Jamie, they found your letters to Lord Melton’s brother,” Claire said, her voice close to a sob. “Letters where you tell him about how your wife fares.”

“Lord Melton’s brother?” Jamie repeated, visibly baffled. “Ye mean, John Grey? Claire, I’ve written to John perhaps twice since my parole at Helwater ended. I let him know I was makin’ arrangements to live in Edinburgh rather than at Lallybroch and then again when we’d settled here. He was in charge of my keeping at Helwater and though I was granted formal pardon, as a convicted Jacobite traitor, I need to keep him apprised of my residence,” Jamie explained, his ears going red and his tone shifting with his embarrassment as he finished.

But Claire was insistent. “I saw a copy of the letter Jamie. You asked him for help locating someone who had been transported from Ardsmuir and you closed by letting him know that your wife and daughter were in good health.”

“The only wife I’ve ever had or plan to have, is you,” he said evenly, his eyes never leaving hers. She faltered. “But… the letter…”

“Will ye stop goin’ on about a letter I havena written and may yet never write,” he blurted, taking a step closer to her. His hands twitched as though he might take her by the arms and give her a shake to loosen her sense of reason, which was clearly stuck. “Are ye sayin’ that ye thought I wed another? Is that why ye’ve been…”

“Yet… You haven’t written that letter… yet…” Claire murmured, the gears beginning to turn. “And the room you share… with Fergus.” She lifted her hands and buried her face in them. “Christ,” she breathed as she began to shake, “I feel such a fool.”

Jamie did reach out to touch her then, resting a hand on her shoulder and stepping closer so that she was nearly pressed to his chest.

“Fool or no, Claire, I need to know… is there anything left of the love ye once bore me? Or has yer time wi’ Frank changed yer heart? I swear to ye, I dinna blame ye if it has—ye said ye didna know I lived for more’n fifteen years, and I believe ye…” He reached for her hands and gently pulled them away from her face, capturing and holding her gaze when she finally looked at him. “My own heart is as much yers as it ever was, Sassenach.”

Claire blinked and shook her head in disbelief, twisting her wrists in his loose grip so their hands pressed palm to palm. “Is there anything left? Jamie, you don’t know how many times since we parted that it’s felt like the love I bear you is all I have left, that I wouldn’t know myself without it.”

Jamie closed his eyes and sighed, leaning forward until his forehead met Claire’s. “I’ve missed you,” he whispered. “So many times I’ve dreamt of ye coming back to me like this… of bein’ able to touch ye again…” His nose bumped hers lightly, the tip of it trailing down the length of hers. “To kiss ye again…”

She took a nervous, shuddering breath just before his lips brushed hers. The soft pressure of them, the warmth of him standing so close. The memory of his scent mocked her as she breathed him in. It was still there but beneath the unfamiliar traces of ink, of paper, of a life she didn’t recognize.

He pulled back and she leaned into him to prolong the kiss a moment longer.

“Ye’ll stay then?” he asked, breathless. “Ye’ll be my wife once more?”
“I…” Claire stammered, her head swimming. There was something—some one —she was forgetting. Someone important. But Jamie was there beneath her hands, solid and warm, wanting her. “I want to stay with you,” she answered honestly and Jamie’s smile flashed before she lost herself in his tight and desperate embrace.

It was intoxicating, being able to touch and kiss and breathe and hear and taste each other again after so long deprived. Each gesture that had once been taken for granted now bore a greater potency as their bodies sought a path to joining anew.

Jamie’s hands traveled up her back and into her hair, the pins coming loose and falling to the ground as he cradled her head, tilting it for another, deeper kiss. Grounding herself by gripping his shirt, Claire soon began to tug the garment up so that it came free of his breeks. Her hands found the hot bare skin of his torso as his grip found its way to her hips and he began guiding her back into the kitchen and toward the adjoining bedroom.

“I havna done this in a long time,” Jamie murmured against her throat as they came to a stop at the edge of the bed.

“Are you trying to tell me you don’t remember how it’s done?” Claire teased nervously, reaching for the mattress and lowering herself, while Jamie tugged her skirts out of the way.

“I remember,” he assured her, pressing his hand against her and smiling. “I remember how wet ye get when ye want me…” He began to knead and stroke. Claire opened herself wider and rocked her hips so she matched his rhythm. She looked up at him, biting her lip and reached for the pillow next to her head, taking a fistful and squeezing.

His free hand fumbled with the buttons of his fly. Claire nodded she was ready and then cried out as Jamie entered her, closing her eyes and locking her legs around him while she adjusted to the pressure of him filling her. When she opened her eyes again, he was watching her, waiting. She ground against him and urged him on.

He hitched a hand under her knee, pulling her leg up and plunging deeper so that she moaned and threw her head back, arching off the bed. Jamie made a satisfied noise and shifted himself, getting further onto the bed, more of his weight pressing her into the mattress—into her—with each thrust.

There was a quiet and still moment at the last, just when they’d each reached the highest peak but before they went over. They looked to one another and nodded, agreeing wordlessly to go together, and so they did.
Knitting Two Lives Back Together

Chapter Summary

Having overcome a major hurdle of misunderstanding, Jamie and Claire find there are still several hurdles in their path.

Jamie and Claire laughed awkwardly as they straightened their clothes and struggled to find their way back to conversation.

Claire pulled up her stocking which had lost its garter and puddled around her ankle while Jamie turned to tuck his shirt back into his breeks.

With a sigh he settled onto the edge of the bed beside her and reached to tuck one of her loose curls behind her ear. She needed to retrieve the pins from the floor if she was going to have any hope of getting her hair back into a semblance of respectability before Faith and Fergus returned from their trip to the butcher’s stall for their dinner. Instead she remained staring at the pins as the flush of heat and euphoria from their encounter slipped away and a new aching hollow began to open in her chest.

“Claire?” Jamie asked, nervous and confused. “What’s wrong? Did I… was it something I did? Do ye no like it anymore when I—”

She shook her head and smiled weakly assuring him, “No, it’s nothing you’ve done. That was…” Color rose in her cheeks and her smile grew as she fidgeted. She wished there would have been time for them to laze about, undressing each other and relearning all the ways their bodies fit together…but it would need to wait until the children had gone to bed—until they’d set Fergus up in the parlor for as long as it took them to decide on more permanent arrangements.

It would be the first time Claire had seen Faith off to bed since she was small enough to fit in her lap and fall asleep in her arms. In that moment it washed over her that she would never tell Brianna goodnight again… The last time… she hadn’t known it would be the last time. She hadn’t prepared herself—or Brianna—for any of those lasts to be their last.

“What is it then?” Jamie pressed quietly.

“Brianna,” Claire murmured. “I… I thought I would be returning to her. Not right away… but eventually. She… she’ll be expecting me back.” Shame seeped from her voice and burned under her skin. She drew her legs up, leaning her heels on the frame of the bed so she could wrap her arms around her knees and bury her face in her skirts. “What kind of mother am I that I’m considering abandoning my child again?”

Jamie’s hand found her back and began rubbing circles into it as he moved closer to her.

“Ye’ve been and are a fine mother,” he told her. “There’s none could do better than you have with what ye were given. Ye said yerself the lass has wanted for nothing and… you were there for her… through it all. Didna miss any of it stuck in a cave or in prison…” Claire lifted her head and looked at Jamie to see shadows of the same doubts she carried weighing his shoulders down.

“You had little choice,” Claire reminded him. “You did what needed to be done. That you survived
it all and made it back to her… And it isn’t as though you left her completely on her own.”

“And neither have you with Brianna,” Jamie pointed out. “Ye said she’s with him, with Frank. And ye didna leave Faith entirely alone before her either.” His hand drifted from her back to her waist and pulled her close again. “I’m just glad both our lasses ken ye… and… if ye cannae see to stay… if ye feel Brianna needs ye… then I understand. Ye ken best what she needs and if yer instincts say to go to her…” He took a deep shuddering breath and took her hand in his free one, pressing his head to hers and whispering, “then go to her. I’ll take whatever time with ye I’m given and be thankful for it, for I ken it’s more than I deserve.”

Claire turned and rested her head on his shoulder, pulling herself closer to him. “That’s just it. I can’t stand the thought of breaking my promise to her… but leaving you again, now that I know you still… I don’t think I can stand it a second time.”

She could feel the relief that rippled through him as he held her tighter and felt her own body begin to relax in response. He needed her too and if she was selfish to want to stay, at least she wasn’t alone in it.

“Whether she ever met you or not, I tried to make sure Brianna knew you,” Claire said. “And I promise I’ll try to do the same for you and for Faith. I’ll tell you everything of her I can remember.”

Jamie’s grip on her loosened and Claire pulled away. He motioned for her to stay put while he left the room briefly and returned with his jacket, pulling the packet of photos and Brianna’s letter from the pocket.

“I havena had the courage yet to read it,” he confessed, resuming his place beside her and cradling the tokens of Brianna in his hands. “But I think, if ye tell me about these,” he pulled the photos out and rested them on top, “I might find some by the time ye’re through.”

His eyes were already shining, primed for tears when Claire looked up at him and nodded, then took the photos and shuffled through them to put them back in chronological order.

“She was born in late November, early in the morning…”

The last picture was one taken shortly before everything had come to light.

“Bree’s summer break was ending and over the years we had developed a sort of ritual to mark the occasion. It wasn’t anything extravagant, but packing up a picnic and taking it to the Common to eat in the sun out on the grass… no work, not much talking really… just being outside together and watching everyone around us living their lives too…” Claire mused as Jamie examined the photograph of Brianna and Claire leaning against one another and smiling as they sat on a red and white checked blanket with a picnic basket on the ground in front of them. They were both squinting as they smiled at the camera, the sun in their eyes. “When we’d done, we would walk over to the public garden and go for a ride in the swan boats there, pretend to be tourists. When she was really small, Bree liked to imitate Frank’s and my accents because she thought if everyone thought we were from so far away, they’d let us have the best seats near the front. Then there was the year she made us sit near the back where the operator pedaled, so she could ask him questions about what she needed to do to be able to have his job when she was older,” Claire chuckled, her smile broad and bright with the memory.

“She’s…” Jamie murmured, mesmerized by the vivacious portrait Claire painted of Brianna. “She sounds like she’s a handful.”
“She can be,” Claire agreed. “But in the best way.” She took the photo back from Jamie and returned it to the bottom of the stack so that Brianna’s newborn face stared up at them again.

Jamie turned back to the letter in his hands. Claire watched as he examined the envelope, tracing the lines where it was folded and sealed without wax before gently pulling at the paper, afraid to tear it as he opened it. He peered at the intact flap, frowning to discover there was nothing written inside before pulling out folded pieces of thinner paper with pale lines running across them, supporting Brianna’s words.

He looked to Claire briefly, then opened and flattened the page against his leg.

With a final deep breath and his free hand held tightly between Claire’s two, Jamie began to read.

James Fraser,

Before Mama told me the truth about you and who you were to her, I already knew a lot about you. I didn’t know why my dad was looking for you but he’s always doing research for work and I’ve always wanted to help him. So I helped him look for you and where you went after the Battle of Culloden. There were a few times we thought we lost you for good but you always showed up again connected to the Duke of Pardloe or his brother. I know you were in Ardsmuir Prison and that you were paroled while most of the others were transported. I know you were formally pardoned by the Crown. And I know you ended up in Edinburgh as a printer. That’s where you’re probably reading this.

Now I know about your life before Culloden as well. At least, I know what Mama has told me. I feel foolish for not having been curious about your life before Culloden until I learned the whole truth of who you were to me. Until now, the people I’ve helped Daddy research have always been puzzles we got to solve together, stories we discovered piece by piece. But you’re real and so are they, even if I don’t get to meet you or them in person. I have more papers to look through that are about you and what happened will happen to you but I can’t bring myself to read them now that Mama’s decided she’s going to go find you and my sister. I’m afraid to learn what happens next.

I didn’t know there was anything wrong with Mama until I showed her that letter you wrote. When she talks about you and about my sister, she’s different. And I can see it now, how sad she was even when I thought she was happy. She says she’s been happy here with us and that she doesn’t regret it and I don’t know if I can believe her or not. I don’t know what to think about any of it. The happiest I’ve seen her is when she’s telling stories about you and the things you did when you were together. She misses you and still loves you and it’s different than the way she loves me. She says she’s just going for Faith to see if she wants to come back here and live with us for a while to see what it’s like here. If I was her, I don’t think I would be able to leave like that. And I think Mama knows that too. I think she’s going because she needs to see you too.

It’s because of me that she had to leave you and Faith behind. She said you couldn’t get through the stones with her and Faith was too far away to go back for her. I don’t want to be the reason she leaves you both again and have to watch her be sad and miserable about it knowing it’s my fault. So as much as I know I’m going to miss her and wish she would come back, I hope she stays with you. I hope you still love her too and that seeing her again makes you happy. I hope it doesn’t cause problems with your wife, if you’ve even got another one. The way Mama talked about you, it doesn’t make sense to me that you would, but maybe that’s just because I want Mama to be happy with you and so I don’t want you to be married to someone else.

I suppose I’m always going to wonder what it would have been like to grow up with you and my sister. I don’t know how I feel about it all now because I have Daddy and can’t imagine what life would be like without him. Mama said you were glad she and I would have Daddy when she got
back here. So I have you to thank for bringing Daddy and me together. Twice over I guess, since you not only sent me and Mama to him when you asked her to go, but I got to spend so much time with Daddy when we were looking for you.

Take care of Mama for me and make sure she doesn’t come back unless it’s what she really wants. I’ll be able to manage without her even though I’ll miss her all the time. She’s missed you long enough and it’s my turn now.

Thank you for everything.

Brianna

Claire watched Jamie’s reactions as he read the letter to himself. She squeezed his hand every time he drew in a sharp breath and found herself smiling every time his lips perked up at the corners. And when he’d reached the end and his sigh became a sob, she had tears in her eyes and held him as he leaned into her shoulder and cried.

“It’s a good letter then?” she asked, quietly, afraid to disturb Jamie as he grieved the daughter lost to him in more ways than she could bear to contemplate.

He sniffled loudly and lifted his head, his eyes and face red but nonetheless wearing a smile. “Read for yerself, Sassenach,” he told her, offering the pages to her. “She’s a wise one, our lass. And kind hearted. Ye’ve raised her well.”

Claire gripped Jamie’s hand while he wiped his eyes with the other and she read Brianna’s letter.

“Oh, Bree,” she murmured when she’d finished. Then she turned into Jamie and it was his turn to hold her as she wept, grieving Brianna even as she was relieved to know that her youngest daughter wouldn’t blame her for staying, had wanted it for her, in fact. Sitting up and letting Jamie wipe the tears from her cheeks, Claire tried to lighten the mood but didn’t quite succeed. “I suppose that settles it once and for all on the matter of my staying.”


“I think Faith will be happy but Fergus… I don’t think he’s forgiven me for leaving—nor do I blame him on that front,” Claire muttered, carefully folding the letter and giving it to Jamie for safe keeping.

He nestled the pile of photos in the folded letter and wrapped them in the plastic bag she’d kept them in for the journey.

“Fergus will come around,” Jamie assured her. “He wants ye to stay he’s just… hurt because he doesna know why ye left.”

“Do you think he would even believe the truth?” Claire asked.

Jamie shrugged and rose to secret the few bits of Brianna away in a drawer. “He did have the stories of the fairies and such but no so young as those born in the Highlands. And all he went through in Paris… He’s no predisposed to belief in such things but that doesna mean he wouldn’t if ye truly want to tell him.” Jamie turned back to face Claire, leaning against the low chest where he’d stowed the mementos. “But, when I asked what to do next, I was referring to our arrangements here in Edinburgh.”

“What do you mean?”

“This space is fine for three but gets smaller when ye try to fit four. And I willna be sharing a bed wi’
“You want to find something bigger here in Edinburgh? Can you afford it?”

Another shrug.

“Well, what about that letter? The one you haven’t written yet but obviously will or I wouldn’t be here now.”

“What about it?” Jamie crossed his arms over his chest.

“I believe it’s a letter asking for information about where someone was transported after the prison where you were kept was closed,” Claire hinted as delicately as possible.

“Murtagh,” Jamie said quietly. “The only one I’d care to know about enough to write John Grey is Murtagh. Ye dinna happen to ken what the answer was?”

Claire shook her head. “I didn’t see any other letters. As soon as I knew it was you… But what if he does know? Wouldn’t you want to bring Murtagh back here to live with us too?”

Jamie paced. “Without knowing where he is or if he’s even alive… I should have searched for him sooner.”

“You were afraid of what you’d find,” Claire guessed.

“And that there’s naught I can do to change things should I find him alive somewhere. I ken they were to be transported to the American colonies but there’s nothing to say what happened to him once he was there. I dinna think the British army would ha’ kept records beyond their intended port and perhaps who survived the journey.”

“It would be a place to start,” Claire said, pushing herself to her feet and intercepting Jamie in his pacing, standing in front of him and resting her hands on his arms. “And whatever it takes to find him, whatever news you might receive… you won’t go through it alone,” she promised.

“I owe it to Murtagh to try,” Jamie nodded. “It’ll be easier to write that letter than find the words to tell Jenny and Ian ye’ve come back to me.”

“Christ, I hadn’t thought about what to tell them or what they might think.” Claire slipped her arms around Jamie’s waist and sighed as his came up around her, pulling her against him. “I hadn’t let myself think about what it would take to knit our lives back together.”

“It appears the first steps will involve writing more than a few letters,” Jamie remarked.

Noises came from the main door as Fergus and Faith returned from their errands with the components necessary for constructing their evening meal.

“Supper first,” Claire said. “Perhaps by the end of the meal I’ll have figured out what to say to Fergus.”
Fergus and Faith discuss Claire's return while they visit the market then return home to see how Claire and Jamie's talk is going.

Fergus and Faith were silent as they walked away from the house leaving Jamie and Claire alone. They walked in the direction of the butcher’s stall but Fergus’ pace was deliberately slow and Faith found herself stopping frequently to wait for him to catch up.

At last she confronted him. “Are ye tryin’ to drive me mad wi’ draggin’ yer feet? I’d think one as quick to kick up dust over supper bein’ late would move a bit faster when there’s still so much to do ‘fore it’ll be ready.”

“I’m not of a mind to return too quickly,” Fergus told her. “There are matters Milady and Milord need to discuss between themselves and it would be best if we do not interrupt them. Do not forget, I speak from experience. Milady does not appear so changed that it would be wise interfere.”

Faith scoffed. “I dinna see that there’s much to discuss. Not from what she said to me this afternoon.”

Fergus stopped and frowned. “What has she told you she intends to do?”

Faith flushed and chose her words carefully. “She will stay for a time but… she asked me if I would… return with her when she went away again. And said, no,” she was quick to clarify. “We’ve settled here and I’m happy in my work. I wouldn’a leave you and Da like that,” she assured him and then let out a breathy huff that was meant to be a laugh. “The two of ye wouldn’a last long on yer own.”

Fergus gave her a half-hearted smile to acknowledge her attempted joke, but it faded quickly. “You do not think she can be swayed to stay?” he asked, eyes narrowed and a sorrowful note in his voice.

Faith turned and took a step forward, waiting for him to follow her again before she answered. “She… has reasons to go back. Reasons that… I suppose I understand. Theoretically. But I hope Da can convince her to stay… though saying it aloud and knowing why she would go back… I canna help but feel a little guilty about it.”

“You have nothing to feel guilty for,” Fergus said quickly and with a forceful edge. “I still cannot understand where she went and why she did not come for you. If she had returned for you, she would have seen that Milord survived and we would have decided what to do. She could have helped to get Milord away to France and we could all have—”

“Ye dinna understand,” Faith interrupted. “There’s more to it than that.”

He stopped again. “If there is more, then I would have someone tell me what it is. How am I to judge when I do not have all the facts of the case?”
Faith took a step closer to him with her jaw clenched but then let out a sigh, her shoulders drooping as the need to take out her own frustrations ebbed.

“I didna think any of us has the right to judge… in this case, or any other,” she said quietly.

Fergus closed the distance between them and wrapped his arms around Faith, giving her a quick squeeze and then stepping back again, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“You are right, ma sage petite soeur;” he whispered. “You sound like Milord.”

Faith choked on a laugh and nudged Fergus hard in the arm. “Let’s get what we need for our supper and go home. If Mam is goin’ to go back, I dinna want to be wasting time away from her.”

They continued on, their conversation fading into companionable silence again.

Faith negotiated with the butcher over the cut of meat she wanted while Fergus haggled for the potatoes. They came away with everything they’d set out to fetch and then some.

“I still think we should give them more time to themselves,” Fergus said as they started back.

“What was Da goin’ to say to her, do ye ken?” It was Faith’s steps that slowed though she made a show of adjusting her hold on the parcel of mutton.

“When I asked him earlier if he wanted her to stay, he said that he did. So I told him he must find a way to convince her.”

“Do you want her to stay?” Faith asked, cautiously. “She gave the impression earlier that ye were somewhat less than welcoming when ye saw her.”

A cloud of shame passed over Fergus’ face. “That would be accurate. I was so happy when I first saw her and understood she was not dead… but then I could not think about anything but how could she have gone and left us with no word for so long. I do not understand it and it makes me angry… I… am not sure… if my anger is with her. Not entirely or I would not want her to stay… but I do.”

Faith bumped into Fergus, jostling him from the shadow he’d fallen under. “We all want her to stay and… there’s a part of her that wants it too. It might just be enough.”

“You say there is more to the story of her leaving,” he murmured. “You know what this is?”

“Aye… but I dinna think ye’ll believe me. And I dinna ken that it’s mine to tell. Ye might try asking her yerself, if ye have a chance.”

“And you think she will tell me? Do you think it will make a difference?” he wondered.

“I dinna ken. On either count. No. That’s no true,” she amended. “I do think it will make a difference did ye know. I just dinna ken which way… But I also know the only way to learn is to ask.”

She gave him a frank look from the corner of her eye as she pressed her lips together. It was a look she’d learned from Jenny and Fergus had rolled his eyes at it enough when they’d lived at Lallybroch, but he didn’t roll them now. He looked ahead to the door of their home just a few buildings away and paused along with Faith. Exchanging small nods, they braced themselves for whatever they might find on the other side of the door.

Faith rolled her eyes as Fergus pushed loudly into the house and proceeded to continue making more noise than was necessary as he carried their parcels through to the kitchen.
A moment later, her parents emerged from the bedroom her father shared with Fergus and Faith blushed when she noticed their state. Their clothes were neat but hung looser on them than before and her mother’s hair looked like it had been combed back with her fingers and re-affixed in an untidy bun. They were both still tense, but in a different way than earlier. Their movements flowed together rather than against and around each other. When they came near, they didn’t shy away or halt, paralyzed, but brushed and guided, supported and lingered.

Fergus set their packages on the table throwing a raised eyebrow Faith’s way, the quirk of his mouth and set of his eyes telling her he’d been right.

“Faith,” Claire said, turning and smiling at her daughter. “You’ll let me help you fix supper, I hope?”

“Uh… of course,” Faith replied, vaguely unsettled by the change in the air that was tangible but also fragile. She smiled back and brushed into the kitchen to begin untying the wrapped mutton.

“Fergus,” Jamie said, summoning the young man away from mother and daughter at the table and towards the door. He spoke discreetly. “I’m goin’ to need ye to help me move some things around here so ye can sleep in the parlor while we settle on new arrangements.”

“You have decided to stay, Milady?” Fergus addressed Claire, ignoring Jamie’s tone and the implied request to let things rest while the way forward was thoughtfully and carefully negotiated. “I assume it will be for some time as it seems you will share with Milord rather than Faith.”

Claire’s face flushed and her eyes darted first to Jamie and then to Faith before settling again on Fergus.

“I have decided to stay, yes,” she told him, clearly keeping an eye on Faith’s reaction across the table from her as well. “For as long as you all will have me.”

Fergus crossed back to plant himself next to Faith and leaning on the table. “You will not leave again? Go back to wherever it is you have been all these years?”

Tears filled Claire’s eyes as she continued to look at him. Faith stepped on his foot beneath the table but Fergus refused to break his stare.

“Fergus…” Jamie spoke low, coming up behind Fergus and resting a firm hand on his adoptive son’s shoulder.

Claire’s eyes slid to Jamie and she shook her head. He removed his hand.

“I know there is more than I have been told,” Fergus told Claire. “Faith said I should ask if I wish to know. If I ask, will you tell me the truth?”

Claire sighed, but it wasn’t a sigh of resignation. She stood straighter. “I promise you it will be the truth, but you must promise me an open mind in return. Can you?”

At that, Fergus turned to look at Faith. She tilted her head in question as her hands continued to move over the food on the table, organizing and preparing to take up the task of making their dinner.

“I will not say anything until you are through,” he promised, looking back to Claire.

She nodded and looked down at the food on the table, reaching for the potatoes and piling them next to a basin. Pouring in some water from a nearby pail, she took up a rough cloth and began scrubbing the dirt from them.
“I didn’t lie to you before,” she assured him. “When I said I didn’t want to leave. Jamie asked me to go where we both knew I would be safe. I carried a child when I left.”

Fergus turned, wide-eyed to Jamie who nodded and looked to Claire, Fergus following suit.

“The safest place for me to go… the safest thing for me to do… was to return to where I’d come from before I’d ever met Jamie,” she continued, awkwardly.

Fergus’ brow furrowed with confusion.

“I’m… not from here, and I don’t just mean Scotland,” she clarified. “I’m from… another time.”

Confusion melted into annoyed disbelief on his face and Claire felt a familiar frustration taking over. She tried to focus on the fact that he was keeping quiet, not challenging her outright but in the way he bit down and clenched his teeth, she thought she saw his mind closing.

She put down the potato and the cloth with more force than she intended and dried her hands on her skirt as she hurried to the bedroom.

Jamie glared at Fergus who raised his shoulders into a shrug. Faith batted him upside the head.

Fergus rubbed at the spot, confusion returning as he digested their disapproval.

Claire returned with something in her hands and Jamie briefly stopped her, a hand on her arm and mild panic on his face. She took another step forward and he let her go, his arms crossing over his chest and his fingers tightly clutching his sleeves.

She was on Fergus’ side of the table instead of across from him and held something in front of him, inviting him to take it.

It felt like a thick scrap of paper but one side was slick and shiny. As he examined it in his hands he froze, taking in a crisp image of Claire in a strange cream-colored dress standing with her hand on the shoulder of a young girl with flaming red hair and an odd dress of her own, precisely the right shade of blue to emphasize her own familiar eyes.

“That’s Brianna,” Claire said. “She’s your youngest sister.”

Jamie took over helping Faith with preparing the food while Claire went back to the beginning of her story and told Fergus everything—three times. When supper was safely stewing away next to the fire, the potatoes carefully sliced and stuffed with butter resting next to the hot ashes, the table was carefully washed and dried so Claire could lay out the photographs of Brianna in roughly chronological order.

“Did she help you with your healing?” Fergus asked, returning to the image of Brianna standing with Claire the day she graduated from medical school.

“No,” Claire said with a sigh. “She’s a bit squeamish about blood. And she’s a terrible patient when she’s sick. No patience, whatsoever.”

“Like Da then,” Faith said with a sly smile at Jamie. He tried to look offended but glancing at the photos of Brianna, he couldn’t help smiling over such details.

“And can she travel through these stones as well?” Fergus continued, his brow furrowing at an image of Brianna and Claire sitting at opposite ends of a sofa, Brianna’s long legs draped over her mother’s and both of them laughing.
“I… I don’t know,” Claire confessed. “I don’t know what it is that allows me to pass through them, or if it’s something that might have been passed to the girls.”

“I touched the stone that once and nothing happened, so it isna something many can do,” Jamie added. “I dinna want to think of either of you lasses testing the theory.” He visibly shuddered and Faith sidled closer to him.

“I used to wonder what it would be like to try to find the fairies and ask them to bring me to Mam,” she said, quietly. “But hearing it now… No, I dinna think I could stand to try and I dinna ken how ye made yerself do it three times.”

“Well, I only made myself do it twice. The first time was a complete accident.”

“It was fate,” Fergus said decidedly, his attention still fixed on the photos. “Just as it was fate that I should cross paths with Milord in Paris.”

Claire and Jamie exchanged a brief smile before Faith picked up one of the photos and brought it to Claire.

“What’s this?” she pointed.

“That’s the first time Brianna rode a bicycle. It’s a machine used for transportation. You push those pedals with your feet and it turns the wheels and you move,” Claire explained.

“Why would ye no use a horse?” Jamie asked, taking the photo and squinting at it with confusion.

“The bicycle is good for exercise and is cheaper than keeping a horse. It can sit in a shed over winter and you never need to feed it,” Claire teased.

“And what’s this?” Faith asked, a new photograph in her hand as she pointed to the large box on the floor behind Brianna.

“The television set. You can see images of people broadcast on the screen there. They can tell you the news or tell stories… All sorts of things, really.”

Faith went on asking fewer questions about Brianna and more about the time and trappings of her upbringing. She paused while they put the photos away and ate their supper, the conversation beginning to shift away from Brianna and a far distant future in order to focus on their more immediate one.

They managed to agree to sleeping arrangements for the next few nights while they figured the rest out. While Fergus and Jamie carried the extra bed from the bedroom to the parlor for Fergus, Faith helped Claire clean up from supper and her questions resumed.

“What would ye have done differently wi’ that lad today were ye at yer hospital?”

“Well, we would have started with a machine that produces what are called x-rays. It can take a picture of the bones inside the body so we can see precisely where and how the bones are broken,” Claire began, smiling over Faith’s fresh enthusiasm. She hoped the change in Faith was due to the news she’d decided to stay, that Faith’s earlier reservation and apparent detachment was only to guard against the disappointment of Claire’s anticipated leaving.

“And how long did ye say ye needed to study before ye became a surgeon?”

“I meant what I said earlier, you know, about you going and studying such things yourself,” Claire
told her. “Even if I stay here with your father… you could try to go and see it all for yourself. I’m sure Brianna would like to meet you and… If you didn’t want to stay with her and with Frank, I completely understand… but I have other friends who I’m sure would welcome you and help you with a place to stay while you adjusted and got settled. My friend from medical school, Joe Abernathy—”

“I am curious about my sister,” Faith interrupted, “and what it’s like in her time—in yer time… especially the medicine… but I dinna want to go. I… I ken Da would have you and Fergus… but I… I’m afraid I’d be… disappointed… did I see it for myself. I spent so long when I was a wean, dreamin’ of the fairies that brought ye here and back. There isna any way it can be as incredible as I dreamt it was when I was wee. And you wouldn’a be there, and Da wouldn’a be there, and…” She sighed and flushed. “It scares me to wonder what Brianna would think of me. I kent ye had a bairn with ye—Da had told me—and I’ve had this idea of her too. And what ye’ve said of her…” she glanced over her shoulder at the photos on the table, neatly stacked and packaged in the protective plastic wrapping Claire had brought with them. “She’s… no how I thought of her… she’s… real. And she didna ken about me and what if she blames me for taking ye from her?”

Claire embraced her daughter, resting a hand against her head where it rested against her shoulder. She said nothing but noted that Faith must be at least three inches shorter than Brianna.

“She knows you aren’t taking me from her,” Claire assured her. “No more than she took me from you all those years ago. If I could split myself in two and be with you both, I would do it. I feel I have done it in some way, both of you holding your own piece of my heart. And for what it’s worth, I’m sure she would love you if she met you—that she already does now that she knows about you.”

Faith nodded and let the rest of her questions go for the evening. It had been a long day for all of them and they soon drifted to their beds for the night.

As she sat on the edge of her bed in her shift, Faith held the note from Brianna in her hands, the candle next to her casting shadows over the paper as she unfolded and read it.

\textit{Faith,}

\textit{I’ve never had a sister before but I know sisters are supposed to share. Take good care of Mama for me—she’s the only one I’ve got and she’s a great one. Make sure she knows it.}

\textit{Bree}

\textit{P.S. I always wanted a sister.}
A scratching noise tugged Claire to consciousness. She thought it must be a mouse scurrying beneath the bed or munching on crumbs dropped from their supper. Reaching across the bed for Jamie, she found the space beside her empty and squinted in the dark to confirm he wasn’t there.

The scratching continued but as her eyes adjusted, she noted the faint shadows playing on the walls—not just a candle’s flame but something passing back and forth in front of it.

She sat up with a sigh, keeping the bedclothes up over her shoulders blocking the chill.

Jamie sat at the desk they’d moved from the parlor to help accommodate the new sleeping arrangements, Fergus having collided with the desk on several occasions. It was the quill Jamie was playing with that kept throwing shadows. He sat back in the chair, twirling the feather in his fingers, apparently at a loss for words.

As Claire swung her legs out from under the blankets and wrapped her shawl around her shoulders, Jamie apologized. “I didna mean to wake ye.”

“You couldn’t sleep?” she asked crossing to stand behind him and squint at the page. “What’re you writing?”

“That letter to Lord John that ye found,” he explained with a smile in his voice. “Or tryin’ to, at least.”

She bent over him and draped her arms about his shoulders, resting her head against his. “Do you want me to tell you what it will say?” she asked, pressing a teasing kiss to his temple. “Or do you want to figure it out on your own?”

He chuckled and turned to kiss her cheek. “I think I’ll manage. I just keep wondering if we’ll find him and if we do… how to apologize to him for no searchin’ for him sooner.”

Claire hesitated, holding him tighter before quietly asking, “Why haven’t you searched for him before now?”

Jamie sighed. “I suppose… I didna want to think of what it would feel like to have my worst fears confirmed. I’d thought… if he lived, he would ha’ sent word to Jenny and Ian at Lallybroch. So when I arrived there and they’d had no word…”

“What’s changed now? Aside from the fact that without this letter, I might not have found my way back to you.”

“Well, it is that. I never dreamed I’d see ye again, Sassenach.” He set the quill down beside the page that only had the date and the greeting scrawled across the top. With a warm hand he reached back and pulled her around to sit across his lap. She wrapped her shawl about them both as he pressed his
forehead into her shoulder. “To have ye with me again… to hold ye in my arms… There is more possible in this world than I have felt for some time, so… perhaps there is a chance that Murtagh lives. And that we might find him and bring him home.”

“We will find him,” Claire assured Jamie.

“I do hope John kens where he was sent or can discover it quickly.” Jamie glanced at the paper and sighed. “It’s my own fault it’s been so long but I dinna want to wait any longer for answers.”

“And is that the only letter you’ve been working on?”

Jamie frowned. “What other letter do ye have in mind?”

“Have you sent word to Lallybroch about me yet?”

A wave of tension passed through Jamie’s hold on her.

“No. I dinna ken where to start. It isna something I feel should be shared in a letter… but I dinna ken as I want to be going all the way there just now we’re resettling into life here,” Jamie told her.

“Those excuses won’t hold up forever,” she said gently. “And I’ve missed Jenny and Ian. I should like to see them… and thank them… for all they’ve done, looking after Faith the way they did—and Fergus. Part of me… part of me want to tell them everything, as we did with Fergus. Do you think they would believe it?”

Jamie shrugged and then rocked to help get some momentum to rise from the chair, Claire still held tight in his arms. He turned and managed to flip the lid closed on the inkwell without upsetting it, blew out the candle without igniting Claire’s shift.

He carried her back to bed.

“I cannae think on any of it more tonight,” he told her, laying gently down and settling in beside her. “Once I find the words for John, I’ll write to Jenny and Ian and let them know I’ve a surprise for them. We’ll be invited to Lallybroch for Hogmanay. Ye’d make a decent first foot, though seeing ye again might give them too great a shock.”

Claire tucked herself into his side and pressed her cold toes against his calf, causing him to jolt.

“Whether we tell them about the stones or not, I want to tell them about Brianna.”

Jamie smiled as his eyes drifted shut. “I should like to tell them of her as well.”

As they waited for word from Lord John and their eventual return to Lallybroch for Hogmanay, the Frasers fell into a comfortable routine. They all knew it could only be temporary and yet none wanted to call attention to the fact.

Parting with Jamie and Fergus at the print shop every morning, Claire and Faith headed to the Haughs’ apothecary. Claire was helping Ramsay to catalogue and reorganize the herbs and medicinals in the main shop—Faith’s knowledge only extended so far. The first few times patients came into the shop, it took all Claire’s control to let Faith see and evaluate the cases first, to wait for her advice to be sought rather than imposing it.

Discovering how much Faith already knew filled her with both pride and a regretful ache. She wished she could have been the one to show Faith what needed to be done and how best to do it.
After watching Faith cleanse and suture a deep cut on a dock worker’s arm, Claire asked her daughter, “Who taught you how to do that?”

Faith laughed. “I told ye before. I’ve read yer medical book. Fergus says he’s sure I have it memorized by now.”

Claire frowned. “I didn’t describe the things I did in that much detail… did I?”

Faith finished washing her hands in the basin and went to dump the water out the back door.

“Not exactly. Ye didna lay it out step by step… but ye did write a great deal about what other healing folk did wrong, and that could be just as good.”

Claire rolled her eyes as heat flooded her cheeks. “That does sound right.”

“There were times I asked Auntie Jenny. She’d seen ye do enough healing to let me know was I on the right path or no.”

“But you haven’t had anyone to help you learn about the other bit of healing you do,” Claire said in a low voice that only Faith would hear. Faith had used the blue light again when she was bandaging the dock worker’s wound.

It was Faith’s turn to flush. “No. I’ve discovered the ways of that mostly by instinct.”

“Do you think you could try to teach me?” Claire asked, surprising both of them with the request.

“I… I dinna ken,” Faith frowned. “Ye can see it when I use it… but have ye ever seen it about yer own hands when ye were healing someone?”

“I don’t think so… but I’m not sure I would have because we always kept ourselves so covered. There… have been times when I seemed to just… know what was wrong with a patient,” Claire confessed. “Joe called me the most uncanny diagnostician he knew.”

“Aye, sensing what’s amiss is where it starts,” Faith explained, lifting her hands to look at them and then move them over an imaginary patient on the table. There were drops of blood from the injured dock worker drying on the surface. “It’s as though… my hands are drawn to the part what needs healing most and once they find it… I dinna just sense it, I actually feel it in my own to hands. But I ken I’m not touching it truly… It’s more that my mind seems to be touchin’ it and my hands just… focus it all.”

Claire nodded and looked down at her hands. They were a little red and chapped from the combination of colder weather and readjusting to harsh, eighteenth century soap. She should see what Faith had learned about lotions and other concoctions with less medicinal purpose and more personal luxury at the root.

“When you come across a patient you think would be a good trial for me, I’d love for you to let me know and walk me through it,” Claire requested.


“You’ve read the medical book I left behind. Jenny gave it to you then?”

Faith nodded and came around the table to take up the seat beside Claire. “She and Uncle Ian left the room you and Da shared as ye left it and for my birthday she would let me in to take something of yers and make it mine. It had to be somethin’ Auntie Jenny approved—she wouldna let me take yer
medical book till I was thirteen. Most often it was a bit of jewelry. Grannie Ellen’s boar tusk bracelets, my amethyst charm,” she pulled it up from where she habitually tucked it between her bodice and her shift. It was entwined with the necklace Claire had given her that first day she’d appeared in Edinburgh. “When we left Lallybroch to make our home here, Auntie Jenny told me I could take all that was left in yer trunk if I liked. Didn’t feel right though. Like I was cheating, taking something that wasn’t truly mine. So I left it and told her I’d write her which to send me for my birthday each year… I ken everything in that box like I know my own hands.”

Claire couldn’t speak for the lump of tears caught in her throat. She remembered going through her parents’ belongings with Uncle Lamb on a few occasions when she was growing up—usually when he was between digs and they had taken new lodgings until another project presented itself. They would go through all the boxes normally kept in storage to see if they’d changed their minds on what could be done without and what had become useful again. There hadn’t been much left for her by her parents to start, but her mother’s jewelry and her father’s books… Uncle Lamb had encouraged her to take items of each for herself whenever they went through that box. When she and Frank were married, she’d worn a necklace with a small sapphire that had been her mother’s.

“If there’s anything ye want back…” Faith said, embarrassment infusing her tone and drawing Claire’s attention back to the present.

“Nonsense,” Claire replied warmly. “I’m glad Jenny gave everything to you. I would have given much of it to you by now anyway. We can go through what’s left together when we go to Lallybroch.”

Faith looked away. “I… dinna ken as I want to go when you and Da do. There’s many folk take ill or injure themselves at Hogmanay and need a healer. I wouldn’t feel right leavin’ them waiting for goodness only knows how long.”

Claire blinked, watching Faith who continued to tidy her workspace.

“It’s not an easy journey back and forth, to be sure,” Claire conceded. “But it would be the first time all of us have been back there together since your father and I left to join Charles Stuart. I’m sure it would mean a lot to your uncle and aunt…”

Faith stayed silent and turned her back to Claire while she set several blood-stained cloths into a tub for washing and replaced the sterile bandages in their place on her shelf of supplies.

Claire leaned back against the table and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Why did you all come to Edinburgh when your father returned from his parole?” she asked. “The way he talks about Lallybroch, I know he misses it, and I can’t think why he would leave again so quickly after being away for so long.”

Faith shrugged and then chattered, still not meeting her mother’s eye. “We all wanted a fresh start. The last he’d been at Lallybroch before that was when he was a wanted man in hiding. I’d been a bairn then and Fergus… He’s a grown man now and… and Lallybroch belongs to cousin Jamie now, though Uncle Ian and Auntie Jenny still do much of the runnin’ of it.”

Claire nodded slowly, understanding both the point Faith was making about Jamie and seeing in Faith’s face that there was more to the decision than Jamie’s feelings alone. It would have been difficult for Jamie to be free at Lallybroch again, to know it no longer belonged to him. To see Faith near grown and know it might’ve been hers. But Jamie also would have believed that Faith would one day marry and leave Lallybroch to live with her husband’s family—though, it had been Jenny who had stayed put in the Murray marriage.
No, the more Claire saw the color rising in Faith’s cheeks, the more convinced she was that something else had happened to make a move to Edinburgh appealing.

“Your cousin Jamie is married? How lovely. And what about Maggie and Kitty?”

“Maggie’s wed this past year and Kitty’s expecting to marry her man in the spring as well.”

“It would’ve been difficult staying there when everyone else is marrying and leaving,” Claire remarked, a stab in the dark.

Faith looked up at her, hesitant. “It might be easier if they did go,” she said quietly, “but they all live near enough to be visiting wi’ Auntie Jenny and spending time at Lallybroch often. Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian help Jamie and his wife wi’ their bairns and I dinna doubt Maggie will too, soon as her bairn’s born this winter.”

“Then I suppose you didn’t leave in order to find somewhere quieter than Lallybroch,” Claire mused. “The city is hardly less crowded.”

Faith sighed and turned away again, moving to a pot set near the hearth to boil. The fire had died down too low and the pot’s contents were congealing. She reached for the small stack of wood and started building the fire back up.

“Did something happen?” Claire asked, fighting the urge to go kneel beside her daughter and take her into her arms like a child. She wasn’t an infant or a toddler to be coaxed and coddled. She was a young woman who might resent feeling forced into talking about… The possibilities refused to coalesce in Claire’s mind. She didn’t want to think about what might’ve happened to drive Faith away from Lallybroch. Fear was twisting in her stomach. “Does your father know about it, whatever it is?”

“Why?” Faith responded too quickly. “So you can ask him instead?”

At that, Claire did approach Faith, kneeling at the other side of the hearth so Faith could see her and the respectful distance she maintained.

“If anything happened, I just want to make sure that you had someone you were comfortable talking to about it,” she explained, fighting to keep her voice calm and even. “I know how difficult it can be when you’re not able to discuss what’s causing you pain… whether it’s grief or… embarrassment or shame…”

Faith stared into the fire for a moment before closing her eyes and taking a deep breath.

“There’s a lad back home who was courtin’ me before Da returned. He wanted to marry and… I thought I fancied him and thought I would marry him…” She rocked back on her heels and took up a spoon to stir the pot’s contents as they loosened and liquefied once more. “I made him no promises,” she asserted firmly, “but everyone thought it was a matter of time before we wed, that he needed only to ask for Auntie Jenny and Uncle Ian’s blessing. And… I realized the truth of my heart one day. It wasna love I felt for him but only a strong fondness and friendship. I told him I couldna marry him and…” She shook her head, her cheeks glowing with the heat of the fire enough to hide her shame. “Everyone will ask what happened between us and why did I refuse him, just as they’ve done since they kent we’d stopped courtin’. If he’s started courtin’ another lass, they’ll never let me hear the end of it.”

Claire gasped with the beginning of a laugh but stifled it when Faith glanced up.

“Darling… If you’re worried about everyone at Lallybroch bothered you with questions about this
young man… then coming back with your father and I for Hogmanay is the best time for you to return and face them,” Claire tried to explain with a sympathetic smile. “Everyone will be taken up with my return and wanting to know where I’ve been, why I’ve waited so long to come back. They’ll be asking you what it’s been like to have me around given you were so young when I left.”

Faith laughed and put her hands to her face in a gesture Claire recognized as one of her own, hiding from her own foolishness even as relief washed over her. Claire scooted over to Faith and cautiously put a hand on her back to comfort and reassure. Faith leaned into her, removing her hands and resting her head on Claire’s shoulder.

“I should be ashamed that hearing ye say that makes me feel better,” Faith said quietly. “I dinna take pleasure in the prospect of ye facing gossip and ridicule.”

“It’s a natural reaction to feel relief that you’ll not be the one facing it,” Claire replied, the prospect of being the subject of that attention losing some of its sting now that she knew Faith’s fears. She’d gladly bear the brunt of it to spare Faith the awkwardness. “You needn’t feel guilty on my account. I’ve borne a great deal of judgement before—both here and in my own time. It hasn’t broken me yet.”
Chapter Summary

Returning to Lallybroch means facing Jenny, forcing Jamie and Claire to decide how much of the truth should be shared.

A response arrived from Lord John the day before the Frasers were set to leave for Lallybroch. Jamie read it quickly before passing it off to Claire, his fingers tapping his thigh as he paced the parlor where most of their things for the journey were already packed.

“The prisoners from Ardsmuir… one of three port cities…” Claire murmured as she scanned the letter. “Charleston, Baltimore, or Savannah.” She set the letter down on the table.

“There’s no way we’ll be allowed to check the ledgers ourselves,” Jamie said, shaking his head.

“He says he’ll write to his brother for the list,” Claire pointed out, rising and moving to stand behind Jamie, slipping her arms around his waist and forcing him to be still. “It shouldn’t be too much longer… And he seems confident the list will provide more information than just which port he was brought to.”

“Aye,” Jamie sneered. “He believes he’ll discover who it was bought Murtagh’s indenture. As though the men were no better’n draft animals to be sold and worked till they die in the harness.”

“According to your friend, Murtagh’s term would only have been about seven years,” Claire said, trying to soothe Jamie’s understandable disgust. “By the time we locate him, it could very well be entirely through. We can bring him home.”

“So long as it was seven years and no fourteen,” Jamie objected, stepping away from Claire’s calming touch. He wasn’t ready to cede his anger. “And what if the work has broken him? Or killed him outright?”

“It’s a lucky thing I specialize in broken bodies,” she continued, crossing her arms over her chest and refusing to be dragged into Jamie’s pessimism.

Jamie sighed. “This was part of why I didna look sooner,” he said quietly, control and weariness beginning to replace the fiery anger. “Every step closer brings the possibilities into clearer focus and there are more painful ones than good.”

Claire stepped up to him again and settled her hand on his cheek until he met her eye. “I’m well aware of the emotional toll this sort of search entails,” she reminded him. “It will be some time yet before we have further word from your friend. That will be plenty of time to discuss the possibilities and what we wish to do in each case. But for now, let’s focus on getting to Lallybroch and how we’re going to explain everything to Jenny and Ian.”

The younger Ian Murray—eager to be out of the house as his mother and sisters were preparing it for the festivities—had slipped outdoors and was watching the road, waiting for the party of Frasers to arrive. Fergus spotted the lad as they began their final approach to the house. It gave them time to
prepare for the prospect of a larger gathering in the yard as they made their way through the arch.

“Mary, Michael, and Bride,” Jenny muttered, her gaze fixed on Claire as Jamie helped her dismount from her horse. “Young Ian said ye’d another woman with ye… I never did think it’d be you marchin’ through the door.”

There were a few streaks of gray running through Jenny’s dark hair. Fergus insisted there was a streak for each of the Murray children—“Two for the younger Ian, and him still a small child,” Fergus embellished. Her skin was still clear and rosy through her cheeks, though there was a softness to the flesh that was absent from the hard, wary, Fraser eyes. She looked tired, but healthy and well; a woman in command of more than just herself and used to the burden of such responsibility, even as she thrived on it.

“I never thought I’d find my way back here either, but I’m glad I was wrong,” Claire confessed. She swept forward to throw her arms around Jenny before she lost the nerve and before Jenny had a chance to react and step out of the way.

“Thank you,” Claire said near a whisper, so Jenny might be the only one to hear. “Thank you for watching over them when I couldn’t.”

Jenny gave Claire a faint squeeze back before pulling out of Claire’s grasp.

“Couldn’t… or wouldn’t?” she asked with quiet judgement.

“Couldn’t,” Claire insisted, meeting Jenny’s eye again and holding her stare. She could see presumption shifting into curiosity.

Then a baby cried and Claire’s attention was drawn to the larger group in the yard. Faith had wandered over to embrace and talk with her cousins—was that wee Maggie standing with a baby in her arms? Fergus, Jamie, and Ian were standing in silence watching Claire and Jenny, their bodies angled to look like they were engaged in a private conversation of their own.

“There’s much to tell… and I promise, I will. It’s just… not something that needs a large audience,” Claire hinted.

It was clear from the way Jenny exhaled that she was fighting her impatience.

“Let me introduce ye to yer nieces and nephews,” Jenny said, turning Claire to the start of the waiting group. “Jamie, lad, do you remember yer Auntie Claire?”

It took a while for everything and everyone to settle into Lallybroch for the day. As they brought their things through the house to the rooms where they’d be staying, Claire felt Jenny’s eyes watching her closely.

“What and how ye tell her is up to you, Sassenach,” Jamie reminded her as they cleaned up from their time on the road and prepared themselves for dinner. “She’ll stay treatin’ ye the way she is until ye tell her something though.”

“I’ll tell her,” Claire insisted as she sat in front of a mirror fixing her hair. “Everything. I just… need to find the right way to do it. And the right time.”

“Aye. It’s no something everyone needs to know.” Jamie was using a damp cloth to wipe the back of his neck and clean behind his ears. Dust and grime seemed to have seeped into every pore.
“Ian should know too,” Claire said, watching Jamie’s reflection in the mirror. “Jenny will likely tell him, either way.”

“Ye ken he’ll soften her reaction, whatever it may be.”

Claire nodded then exhaled loudly as she met her own eyes in the mirror. With a quick pinch to her cheeks to raise the color in them, she rose and turned to Jamie.

“After dinner then. When everyone else has gone up. Best to just… get it over with.” He kissed her forehead then held his arm out for her to take and led them down to the dining room.

Of course, before they could get Jenny and Ian alone, there was the curiosity of their nieces and nephews to appease. Claire decided to stick to as much of the truth as possible.

“I was with child when Culloden arrived and the outcome was… obvious,” she said, looking to Jamie for support. His hand was tight on his knife, the frustration and sorrow a memory but a vivid one. “As was the likely aftermath. Either for me or for anyone here.”

“I asked her to go somewhere safer. For the child’s sake,” Jamie contributed.

Claire could feel Jenny watching her closely and swallowing awkwardly, lifted her gaze to meet her sister-in-law’s.

“And the child?” Ian asked.

“Brianna. Her name is Brianna. She was born in Boston and she’s still living there now with… friends,” Claire answered. Jenny blinked first and Claire turned her attention to Ian, smiling. “She looks just like Jamie and is a Fraser, through and through.”

“Why did ye no come back with her?” Jenny interjected, unwilling to be distracted. “Why did ye no write to tell us ye were safe and about the bairn?”

“I know… I should have… But I thought Jamie was dead and…” But the excuse sounded weak, even to her own ears. “I wanted to be here, to be with all of you and it gutted me to have left Faith behind… It was… misguided, perhaps, and a result of my grief and fear… But I thought you all would be better off without me—certainly safer.”

“And how did ye come to be back in Scotland after all this time, then?” Ian spoke up before Jenny could push again.

“I heard through the grapevine that Jamie was alive.”

“Ye heard it where?” the younger Jamie asked, baffled.

“That is, through gossip,” Claire explained, her face going red. “Boston is like any port city—people pass through from all over and some of them stay. Word that Red Jamie had been found, imprisoned and later pardoned rather than executed… I had to see if it was true. The thought that it might be… It was like waking up from a nightmare.”

“And have ye let yer lass know that ye found him? Are ye plannin’ to bring her over or are you goin’ to put Jamie on a ship and take the chance he survives a sea voyage?” There was a challenge in Jenny’s voice that cut Claire but also provoked Jamie.

“We havena decided much of anything yet,” he said with a dare of his own for Jenny. “Actually… wi’ Claire’s return… I’ve started to see if we might track down what became of Murtagh.”
It was a deft change of subject and Claire reached below the table to gently squeeze Jamie’s leg in thanks. His hand slipped down to meet it and rub the back of her palm comfortably.

After speculating about what Murtagh was likely to have gotten up to in the intervening years, there was a more thorough rundown from Jenny and Ian concerning their children, young and grown with each submitting to a few polite questions from Claire.

Faith and Fergus spurred the exodus of the younger generation from the dinner table, Fergus taking the young men outside to finish locking up for the night while Faith agreed to help with putting the younger children to bed and checking on the bairns that had gone done before their parents’ dinner.

The four of them sat in silence for a moment after the door had closed, Claire rummaging through her pocket.

“The tale ye told was a fine one but it isna everything, is it?” Jenny said.

Claire ignored Jenny’s jab and instead placed a few of the photos from the collection she’d brought for Jamie on the table.

Jenny glared at them, hesitant and dubious to what Claire was doing. Ian reached for them and angled them toward the glow cast by the nearby candle. His eyes went wide with the first wave of understanding.

“Is this…”

Jamie nodded. “That’s Brianna.”

Ian’s attention turned to Claire, his eyes widening, urging her to explain further.

With another glance at Jenny and the stubborn set of her jaw, Claire focused on telling her tale to Ian instead.

Despite having had practice sharing her secret with Fergus, the knot in Claire’s stomach remained tight as she took Ian and Jenny through it. Every few minutes Ian would look away from Claire and shift to another photograph in the pile—Brianna in her Christening gown, lying asleep on a bed with the skirt fanned out; Brianna with her leg up trying to climb onto the back of the dog; Brianna with Claire at the party to celebrate Claire receiving her medical degree. A few times he looked back and forth quickly between a photo and Claire, still trying to wrap his mind around the contradictory images.

But there was no denying the resemblance Brianna bore to Jamie, especially as she grew up before his eyes.

When Claire finished at last, Ian gently set the photos in the middle of the table again and ran a hand over his face. Jamie watched Jenny intently, his hand drifting to Claire’s thigh beneath the table to give her a reassuring squeeze.

“It’s… an incredible tale, to be sure,” Ian spoke at last. “And it couldna have been easy for ye to share it.”

“Thank you, Ian,” Claire replied reaching to take the photos back. “I didn’t want to lie to you anymore. Either of you.”

Jenny’s hand shot out and landed atop Claire’s covering the photos of Brianna.
“Why did ye no tell us of it sooner?” she demanded, hurt and anger warring in her tone. “Did ye no think we’d believe ye?”

Claire blinked, momentarily speechless. “You’re saying… you would have believed me?” She frowned at Jenny, pulling her hand back but leaving the photos of Brianna beneath Jenny’s hand.

Jenny spotted Ian and Jamie watching her with skepticism as well and she looked down at the table and the photos of her niece. “I dinna ken as I would,” she confessed. “But if I’d been in yer place, I dinna think I wouldna have bothered to try.”

“All that’s in the past now,” Ian asserted, stopping the conversation from devolving any further into what might have been. “We ken the truth now and are relieved to find ye’ve returned, Claire. We’ve missed ye and often wondered did we do right by ye with Faith.”

“I cannot thank you enough for what you’ve done for her,” Claire assured them. “And for Fergus and Jamie too.” She turned to Jamie as he leaned into her and pressed a kiss to her temple. “I’m so sorry for what we put you through.”

“So it was down to this that ye told me to plant the potatoes?” Jenny asked, the hurt and anger replaced by something lighter. She had taken the photographs and slid them closer to herself but she hadn’t looked at them yet.

“Yes. I only remembered a little about what would happen but I knew many would go hungry and potatoes saved many of those who might otherwise have starved,” Claire said, apologetically.

“They did,” Ian confirmed. “We wouldn’a have survived wi’out them. As it was, there were a few tenants lost to illness and the redcoats.”

Claire felt a shiver run up her spine and fought to push aside the image of a gravestone in the family plot. 1778. It was still almost twenty years away. She hadn’t told Jamie about it sitting there with Jenny and Ian, she didn’t think she could.

“She’s beautiful, Claire,” Jenny said quietly, examining the photos of Brianna at last. “As ruddy as her father was when he was tha’ size—and aye, brother, I remember it well.” She paused over a picture of Brianna and some friends in their pajamas, laying sleeping bags on the floor for a sleepover. “It’s a shame she’ll never ken the rest of her family.”

“I’ve told her about you all. At least… what I knew from before,” Claire explained.

“Ye didna go looking for what happened to us?” Jenny asked, carefully restacking the photos and tapping them on the table to make the edges flush.

“I searched for Faith… but I didn’t have much luck. And I… I was afraid of what I might find regarding the rest of you,” she evaded. “I couldn’t bear to think of you any way but how you’d been when I left.”

Jenny nodded and handed the photos back to Claire. “Thank ye, Claire. For telling us.”

Claire smiled weakly back as she tucked the photos safely away again. Something was still off about Jenny. She was taking it all too well.

“I think I’m goin’ to head up to bed,” Jenny said, pushing her chair back. “My head’s spinnin’ a bit from all of this.” She bent to give Ian a quick kiss and then nodded her good nights to Claire and Jamie.
“I’m going to head up too,” Claire said a moment after Jenny had gone. “It’s been a long day and the two of you still have some catching up to do.”

“I’ll no be too long,” Jamie promised before turning back to Ian and releasing a long sigh of relief.

Claire wasn’t surprised when she reached the top of the stairs and found Jenny waiting for her at the door to her room. She didn’t say anything as Claire pushed her way in and held the door for Jenny to follow.

“There’s still more, isn’t there. Ye did search for us, didn’t ye? Or maybe ye just found something when ye were looking for Faith but ye know something that’s goin’ to happen to us,” Jenny accused.

“Even if I knew something, I couldn’t tell you,” Claire hedged, bracing for Jenny’s reaction.

“Ye’d leave me to wonder and wait for it to happen? To know somethin’s coming and no be in a position to stop it?”

“That’s just it, Jenny. It didn’t matter if you knew something was coming or not. There’s no stopping it. Jamie and I lost so much because we tried to change what we knew was coming. And it couldn’t be stopped. We only made it worse for ourselves—for Faith. This is the sort of thing that made me hesitate to tell you at all,” she threw back at Jenny, fighting to keep her voice from rising. “I can tell you so much about the future, but I can’t tell you what part any of us will play in shaping it or how what happens next in history will affect us.”

Jenny still seemed unconvincing but was tucking away what Claire had said for further examination. “If ye canna tell me what—”

“I honestly don’t know,” Claire interrupted.

“Can ye at least tell me when?” Jenny sounded close to begging.

It took a long moment for Claire to decide but at last she said, “1778.”

Jenny didn’t thank her or say good night. She simply turned and slipped out of the room leaving Claire to prepare for bed and wonder if she’d done the right thing.
History Will March On

Chapter Summary

Jamie receives further word in the search for Murtagh and Claire does what she can to help Jenny cope with the truth of her time traveling.

The tension that had existed before Claire confessed the truth to Jenny and Ian shifted form but was still there between her and Jenny as preparations for the Hogmanay celebrations hit their peak. Jenny didn’t speak to Claire about anything except the chores she needed help with and minimal pleasantries. Though Jenny must have known Claire was watching her, Jenny rarely looked Claire’s way.

It impacted her relationship with Ian as well but in far subtler ways. She caught him staring at her every so often with a look of wonder and curiosity in his gaze. He would smile warmly at her when he noticed her awareness of him and she would smile back, even as she contemplated the wisdom of the handing over the nugget of information she’d given to Jenny.

Every time she saw Faith interacting with her cousins and the Lallybroch tenants—many of whom indeed remembered Claire and were astonished by the less fantastical version of events she shared—Claire was relieved to see how comfortable and relaxed her daughter appeared to be. She had been right in assuaging Faith’s fears about questions people would have about her apparently-jilted suitor. There was also an ache for the daughter who was missing and had never known the warmth of having so many people around to care for and support her. The bond between Faith, Maggie, and Kitty was what she’d always yearned for Brianna to have, even as she knew it was an impossibility.

Another distraction arrived just a few days after the Frasers—a second letter from John Grey to Jamie concerning his inquiries into the transport lists from Ardsmuir. It had been forwarded along having reached Edinburgh two days after they had left for Lallybroch.

“He sent along copies of the lists?” Claire asked, though she could clearly see that’s what they were as she read them over Jamie’s shoulder.

“That’s what they appear to be,” he nodded, shuffling through the pages and handing one to Claire to read through as they both searched for where Murtagh’s name might appear.

“I had no idea there were so many of you at that prison,” Claire murmured. She used her finger to keep her place on the page of names.

“That’s what they appear to be,” he nodded, shuffling through the pages and handing one to Claire to read through as they both searched for where Murtagh’s name might appear.

“I had no idea there were so many of you at that prison,” Claire murmured. She used her finger to keep her place on the page of names.

“Some days it felt like more,” Jamie muttered in reply, setting one page down and taking up another. “Others, less.”

“Charleston,” Claire whispered, one hand darts to Jamie’s shoulder as she continued to stare at the careful script on the page. “He was brought to Charleston and his indenture…” she traced the line across the page from Murtagh’s name through the port of arrival and to the final record the British army had of him. “His indenture appears to have been taken up by a family called Pembroke. They have an indigo plantation a ways from Charleston—it doesn’t specify which direction but speaking to anyone familiar with the area or the family, should be simple enough.” She held the page out for Jamie to see.
“I suppose I’ll have to settle for ‘should’ just now. And ye’ll propose we go to the colonies then to find him?”

“Unless you would prefer to wait several months for a letter to Charleston to confirm matters on our behalf.”

Jamie sighed. “Fergus can go with ye,” he said at last. “He’ll be able to help ye manage finding this plantation and if there’s healing to be done for Murtagh, it’s you who’ll be doin’ it.”

“Fergus and I alone? All the way to the colonies while… while you stay here?”

“I cannae be at sea more’n a few minutes wi’out losing the last week’s worth of food from my belly,” Jamie reminded her. “I’ll die of starvation or thirst before we were halfway through the crossing.”

Claire was shaking her head, defiant. “No. After all we’ve been through, I refuse to believe the only way is for you to stay behind—to separate.”

“It’s no just the sickness. What of the business? Should I just abandon it? Put Bonnie in storage, close up shop, and leave for Lord knows how long…”

“We have time,” Claire interrupted. “We don’t need to make any final decisions just yet. I’ll find something to cure your sea sickness. You have orders that need to be filled when we return to Edinburgh, so it would take time to wrap up our affairs before we left. And Murtagh may not be allowed to return to Scotland for some time yet, anyhow.”

Jamie nodded, though just how reassured he truly felt, she wasn’t sure. “I’ll speak wi’ Ian about it. And Fergus.”

“And Faith. It’s not just a matter of being separated from you. We’ll all go.”

“If we can plan it well…” he at last conceded. It was enough positivity for Claire not to push the question further—not when there was Jenny to tell.

“You’ll let me tell Jenny?” she asked.

Jamie’s brow scrunched. “I dinna see why not,” he responded, baffled.

“I want to see what she thinks. And I want to see how she’s taking the news about my… about what really happened.”

Jamie folded the page with Murtagh’s information on it and handed it to Claire.

“Good luck to ye, then. Especially if ye must pull Jenny away from the kitchen at this vital hour,” he teased.

Claire rolled her eyes before taking the page and kissing his cheek.

Jenny wasn’t in the kitchen. Claire found her in the hall directing her taller sons in decorating places she and her daughters couldn’t reach.

She looked exhausted. Lines from stress stood out across her forehead and at the corners of her eyes. Her color was low and her eyes dull and glassy. The girls were watching her carefully, Maggie rocking her baby to sleep and nudging Kitty.

“Mam, why don’ ye put the baby down and have a rest yerself,” Maggie suggested. “Ye’re running
yerself ragged and the tenants willna mind if the hall’s no perfect.”

“Aye,” Kitty agreed. “Ye could purposely hang these crooked and they’ll look straight to half the party as they’ll be too drunk to stand upright themselves.”

Jenny turned to argue with her daughters but noted Claire standing to the back with the letter in hand.

“Fine,” Jenny conceded, reaching for the baby. “As ye say, they’re no comin’ for the decorations. They’ll be comin’ for the food and the drink and the company. And I’ll no be better on any of those fronts if I run myself off my feet ‘fore folk even arrive.”

There was a murmur of surprise as Jenny carried her grandson up the stairs, yielding her place in charge without argument. At the landing, Jenny looked for Claire again, holding her gaze long enough for Claire to understand.

As the decorating resumed—with more controversy as Maggie and Kitty offered differing instructions on what ought to be done—Claire slipped away after Jenny, climbing the stairs and creeping down the hall listening at various doors, uncertain which was being used as the nursery.

Jenny was standing, watching at the window with the baby asleep in her arms. She didn’t look away from the yard as Claire quietly closed the door behind her and leaned against it.

“I wish ye’d never told me,” Jenny said. “Not about where ye’re from or what ye are. But about 1778 and whatever it is that’s goin’ to happen. I’m sorry I pressed ye for it. Ye warned me and I didna listen and now… now I must live with it.”

“In 1775, the American Colonies will begin a war with Britain,” Claire told her, crossing the room slowly. “They’ll formally declare independence in 1776 and they will win a few years later. In the 1790s, the French people will start a revolution of their own against their monarchy. They’ll kill their king in 1793 but there will still be a great deal of fighting and death before the end.”

“Why’re ye telling me this?” Jenny frowned.

“Because the world goes on. I can look further than most, but it doesn’t stop tomorrow from coming. For so long, almost all that I cared about was unreachable, that it was behind me. But it was just in a future I couldn’t envision for myself then. Something or someone will always be missing,” she faltered, thinking about Brianna and trying not to imagine her younger daughter waiting for her to come home again, Faith in tow. “But you keep going.”

Claire had reached Jenny’s side and lifted a hand to gently slide the blanket away from the baby’s face. He was asleep, his fist pressed against his chubby cheek.

“Aye,” Jenny murmured, looking down at her grandson before clearing her throat. “I ken that’s no why ye came seekin’ me. What is it ye’ll have to say for yerself?”

“Jamie’s had word about Murtagh. It seems he was transported to Charleston and was serving his indenture under a family called Pembroke,” Claire explained. “There are still a number of details to work out before much more can be done…”

“But ye’re thinkin’ ye’ll be going to Charleston to find what’s become of him,” Jenny finished. “You and Jamie…”

“And Faith and Fergus—if I can find a way to keep Jamie from vomiting his guts up the whole way there.”
“And what will ye do when ye find him? IF ye find him?” Jenny asked, moving to settle the baby before her growing agitation could rouse him. “Will ye be comin’ back with him to Scotland?”

Claire shrugged. “There’s no way to know. It will depend on his condition when we find him. He may not legally be able to return.”

“And Jamie willna leave him there on his own having found him at last,” Jenny said with conviction and exasperation. “Does Murtagh know? About…”

“Yes. We told him in France. He had to know given our attempts to stop the Rising. He… he promised me he would stay and watch over Jamie… and Faith.”

Jenny paced the room, her steps slowing as thinking through the situation helped calm her mind.

“So ye’ll go to the colonies and stay indefinitely knowing that war will come in little more than ten years’ time?”

Claire shrugged again. “History will march on, with or without us. I pray it won’t trample us but I’m also determined not to be left behind by it either.”

“How do ye no go mad with it? The knowing,” Jenny asked, stopping in her tracks and looking helplessly to Claire.

“Jamie,” she answered simply. “Being able to talk with him about it. With time… I’ve realized it’s like most things in marriage—more easily borne together.”

Claire tapped the letter against the palm of her hand before quietly slipping out and leaving Jenny to her thoughts.
As Faith prepared for the Hogmanay celebrations that evening, she found herself unexpectedly calm and relaxed. So far, her mother’s predictions about people focusing on her own return rather than the abrupt severing of whatever courtship she’d had with Keir Gilchrist had been correct. Even Maggie and Kitty had been more interested in their mysterious aunt’s return than what Faith would do if Keir showed up at the evening’s festivities.

“Did ye remember her at all when ye first saw her?” Maggie had asked, hopeful as she held tight to her nursing newborn son.

“What did she have to say for herself and why she’d been away from ye for so long?” Kitty added before Faith had been able to answer Maggie.

She’d kept to the story her parents had told over dinner that first night—an easier half-truth to carry on with than she had expected it to be—and turned the conversation back to her cousins’ lives as often as she could, pushing to hear about Maggie’s new baby and how Kitty was progressing in the preparations for her own wedding, which would happen in the spring or early summer.

Coming down the stairs to see the hall fully decorated and guests arriving, milling about, Faith had to admit that part of why she was so calm was the news her parents had shared with her and Fergus the afternoon before—they’d had further word about Murtagh.

“We don’t want to make any decisions without consulting you,” Claire had explained.

“But yer mother and dinna want to be parted from one another just now, nor from the two of you,” Jamie continued. “So if we’re to find Murtagh in the colonies…”

“We will all need to be going, no?” Fergus guessed.

Claire nodded, her attention on Faith who found herself speechless.

“It wouldna be right away—we’ve matters in Edinburgh to take care of before we leave, should ye both agree with the plan to go.” Jamie looked to Faith with the question in his eyes.

Fergus too looked to her to see what her thoughts on the matter were. Glancing at each of them in turn, Faith’s cheeks began to heat with the attention.

She didn’t remember her godfather personally, but she’d heard plenty of tales of him from both Fergus and her father. She still had letters saved from Jamie’s time at Ardsmuir—letters that carried Murtagh’s inquiries and well wishes alongside Jamie’s. And though he kept his features carefully controlled, Faith could see in her father’s eyes how excited and relieved he was to be that much closer to finding his kinsman.

“I dinna think we have much choice but to go and try,” she finally spoke up. “It seems this is the best—and perhaps the only—one chance we’ll have. We cannæ just leave him.”
“Oui,” Fergus agreed, taking the attention off of Faith. “Monsieur Murtagh will be needing his family to care for him in his age. We cannot depend on those who imprisoned and forced him into service to see to his needs the way that we can. If Milord is willing to go to sea, then I am willing also.”

Though the details remained to be settled, the decision had been made.

“A fresh start. For all of us,” Claire had said, standing next to Faith as Jamie and Fergus discussed what to do about the print shop and the press—where they should put it into storage or should they sell it outright.

Faith nodded but said nothing.

Edinburgh was supposed to be her fresh start. And it had been, but perhaps it was still a little too close to Lallybroch. What else could explain the weight that had lifted from her shoulders? She enjoyed Edinburgh, mostly because of her work at the apothecary shop, but it hadn’t felt like home to her. Of course, Lallybroch didn’t feel that way either. Not anymore.

She glanced around the room before reaching the bottom on the staircase but saw no sign of Keir among the early arrivals. The hall was warm and lovely with the decorations carefully secured and innumerable candles supplementing the light from the hearth. Her parents were surrounded by a small crowd, eagerly asking questions. Though Jamie had returned some time before from his parole at Helwater, the difference Claire’s presence made to his disposition was causing as much stir as Claire herself.

Uncle Ian and Auntie Jenny were further off, greeting their guests and seeing to their needs but doing little to take attention away from the former laird and his lady. Uncle Ian was grinning like a fool and doing what he could to tease a response out of Auntie Jenny, who didn’t appear to appreciate his efforts. Faith moved closer, keen to take advantage of the position near them where she would be able to survey everyone arriving without drawing too much attention to herself in the process.

“I dinna understand how ye can be so calm about it all,” Jenny muttered.

“And I dinna understand how ye can let it tie ye up so,” Ian countered. “We’ve more’n ten more of these to enjoy before whatever happens is goin’ to happen. That’s more than I we kent for sure we’d have before.”

“But… to ken it’ll all end…”

“It isna meant to last forever,” he reminded her, the teasing dropping from his voice. “Ye can let some future doom cast a shadow backwards over these days… but I see it as bein’ off in the distance and the sun shinin’ overhead between now and then.”

Jenny stared back at him, unconvinced but less dour than before. Then Ian nudged her to draw her attention to a few newly arrived guests.

Faith swallowed hard and willed herself not to be noticed.

Keir and his family had arrived.

Keeping out of the way, Faith couldn’t help but watch as Keir, his younger brothers and sisters, and their parents were greeted first by her aunt and uncle (warmly, familiarly, more attention paid to the parents than the younger brood who were clearly itching to get to the rest of the party) and then by her own parents.
Keir stared at her mother, the color creeping slowly up his neck when she addressed him directly. Mrs. Gilchrist had to reach up to put an affectionate hand on his head.

Much as she longed to know what was being said, she thought it would be better if she made herself scarce. She pushed aside the shame she felt over even contemplating hiding or escaping early. It was her family’s estate and she had every right to be there. She had nothing to be ashamed of. And yet, her stomach twisted at the very thought of finding herself alone with Keir—and a big part of that had to do with the fact that, seeing him again, she was reminded of how much she’d enjoyed being with him. Not just the easy conversation and friendship, but feeling his body moving with hers, the way her heart had pounded and the warmth that was pooling low in her belly again just thinking about that night…

She clung to another feeling from that night. More potent than the agonizing strain in her legs as she rode him closer and closer to the edge of pleasure had been the cutting realization that what they were doing, how they saw their relationship and its future, meant very different things to both of them. While she would take her pleasure from him, he would have her take his heart as well. And that she would not do when she could not offer him the same.

Maggie’s baby was crying. Faith moved instinctively toward the sound.

“There now, lad,” Maggie crooned in a corner, trying to calm him. “What’s wrong wi’ ye? Ye’ve only just finished a nap and it’s too soon for ye to be hungry…” She lifted him under the arms and turned him round to sniff and sigh.

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“She clung to another feeling from that night. More potent than the agonizing strain in her legs as she rode him closer and closer to the edge of pleasure had been the cutting realization that what they were doing, how they saw their relationship and its future, meant very different things to both of them. While she would take her pleasure from him, he would have her take his heart as well. And that she would not do when she could not offer him the same.

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“Do ye need help with him?” Faith asked.

Maggie shook her head. “Nah. He just needs a fresh clout. Willna take more’n a few minutes.”

“I’ll do it for ye,” Faith insisted, reaching for the baby. “Ye’ve been looking forward to the celebrations so much and ye’ve put a deal of work into the preparations. It’s only right ye ought to enjoy them.”

“Ye’re sure ye dinna mind?” Maggie asked, skeptical but eagerly yielding her fussing son to Faith’s care.

“I’ve no had so much time wi’ him as I would like,” Faith smiled, moving toward the stairs to make her escape, rocking her excuse in her arms.

She took her time with the baby, cleaning him and calming him, hoping he might drift off to sleep and she could use that to justify her prolonged absence from the party. But he had other ideas. Having voided bladder and bowels, he had spaces inside that he decided needed filling and Faith could not stand as a substitute for his mother where an empty belly was concerned.

Assuring herself it was at least closer to the end of the party than when she’d come upstairs, Faith headed back down to find Maggie and return the baby to his mother’s care.

Maggie spotted her first and waved her over to her spot near the hearth. A space had cleared in the middle of the hall floor and dancing had begun, leaving the crowd around the edge dense and difficult to wade through with the hungry baby squirming in her arms. Faith had noticed Maggie but she hadn’t noticed who she was standing with.

“There ye are, Faith,” Maggie said, reaching to take her baby back. “I hope he didna give ye any trouble.”

“None at all, though his efforts have left him hungry again.”
“Well, to thank ye for the favor, I’ve done one for you in turn,” Maggie informed her with a sly smile. “I’ve found ye a partner for yer first dance of the evening.”

Keir looked like he wanted to melt into his shoes when Maggie turned to him.

“Ye dinna have to if ye dinna want to,” Keir told her, pointedly not looking at Maggie.

They both knew that she couldn’t, not with Maggie watching.

“Thank ye,” Faith said, also refusing to look at Maggie. She knew her cousin meant well but in that moment she had the strong urge to strangle Maggie and tell her to mind her own affairs.

Instead she followed Keir to where others had paired up for dancing.

“I didna ask her to do that,” Keir informed Faith as he took her hand and led her into the fray. “I just want ye to know that.”

“I have no trouble believing the interference is all Maggie’s,” she assured him, letting herself get whisked along.

“But I am glad we’ve a chance to talk again,” he said, meekly. “I’ve… I’ve missed ye, Faith.”

“I’ve missed our friendship, too,” she told him carefully… sincerely.

Though they used to find plenty to talk about, neither of them had anything else they wanted to say—not in front of other people, not easily said with the music rising and falling, the other dancers sweeping by and occasionally bumping into them.

So for a few minutes, Faith let herself enjoy the feel of Keir’s arms around her, the familiar warmth of having him close. She gave in to the memory of his hands on her back, on her waist, when there were no layers of fabric between them, just skin against skin. From the way he held her, she was sure he remembered the feeling too. A reckless and selfish part of her wanted nothing more than to pull him away from the other guests to some quiet and private spot where they could spend some time letting their bodies hash out what—if anything—remained between them.

But that wouldn’t be fair to him because she already knew that nothing had changed.

When the song was over and the musicians were deciding what to play next, Faith took Keir’s hand and pulled him through the crowd and toward the kitchens.

“Faith?”

“There’s something I need to tell ye and I dinna want to be doin’ it where I cannae even hear myself think,” she explained.

The cold shocked her as they headed outside, but Faith didn’t stop walking until they’d reached the kitchen garden, the plants shriveled and dormant waiting for spring. But they were finally far enough away from the house for Faith to feel like she could think and speak without looking over her shoulder to be sure no one was watching.

“From the look on yer face when Maggie called ye over, I’m guessing ye’ve not changed yer mind,” Keir said, resigned.

Faith sighed and shook her head slowly. “I cannae love ye the way ye deserve,” she told him.

“And I’ll still gladly take whatever ye’re willing to give me, whether ye think it’s what I deserve or
Faith was glad for the cold then. It helped her combat the heat that was rising through her core as she remembered all the times she and Keir had slipped away to that very garden while he’d been courting her, stealing kisses just out of sight of the house.

“I was worried about what bein’ here tonight would do to ye,” she confessed. “I dinna want it to be harder for ye… And… I was afraid of what it would do to me. I ken ye wouldn’a say anything to anyone about… about why I turned ye down or… what we did that night… But I didna want to think of ye lookin’ at me and resentin’ me—”

“Faith,” he objected but she continued to talk over him.

“And thinkin’ of ye not resentin’ me only made me feel worse. I didna mean to hurt ye and I dinna want to be doin’ it now…” She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

That wasn’t what she’d meant to—it wasn’t about her. She wanted to make sure he knew she was thinking about him and what would be best for him.

“I kent ye’d be here, Faith,” he chuckled. “And… I did wonder if it might be better did I stay behind. But my parents… They kent that I had been courtin’ ye but they didna ken was I ready for marryin’ ye or no… I couldn’a have stayed behind did I no tell them something of what happened. And… I already said I’ve missed ye and that’s the simple truth of it.”

“It’ll be easier when we’ve gone,” she said, quietly, glancing briefly in his direction. The length of an entire bed of thyme was between them. As she’d instinctively shuffled further into the garden, he hadn’t closed the gap.

“Ye’ve been in Edinburgh near a year, and I dinna ken as I’d say it’s been easier knowin’ ye were no here at Lallybroch.”

“Not Edinburgh. That is… we will be goin’ back to Edinburgh first. But then we’re goin’ to the colonies—Ma, Da, Fergus and I.” She finally met his eye again, shame flooding her cheeks with heat.

It felt like she was running away. In so many ways the decision to go had little to do with her and yet, she’d leapt at it when her parents presented it. She wasn’t ashamed because it felt like running away; she was ashamed because deep down she knew that was exactly what she was doing. No matter how much she told herself she shouldn’t feel guilty for turning him down—that it was better to realize it before they found themselves stuck in a marriage they couldn’t escape—she still felt terrible about how it had unfolded. She both wished she’d realized it before they’d lain together and clung to that experience knowing she’d never regret that he was the first man she’d lain with.

“My da’s been searching for his kinsman—my godfather. They were in Ardsmuir together but Murtagh was transported when my da was paroled. We’re goin’ to find him,” she babbled, turning away and continuing down the path. She needed to move. The cold was suddenly paralyzing.

“And ye’re no comin’ back when ye find him.”

It was the first hint of bitterness Faith could remember hearing in Keir’s voice. It startled her and she spun to face him again.

There wasn’t just hurt in his eyes anymore; there was resentment. And it cut as deeply as she’d been afraid it would.
“I… I dinna ken when or if we’ll be comin’ back,” she admitted. “We dinna ken if he’ll be able to return yet—the conditions of transportation—”

“Dinna do that, Faith,” Keir shook his head. “Ye dinna need to explain yerself to me. I dinna have a right to that… or anything concerning what ye choose to do, where ye choose to go.”

“I didna want ye to hear it from anyone else,” she offered apologetically. “I’m no sure if they’re sharin’ our plans wi’ anyone in there tonight.”

“Ye didna want me to hear from someone else? Was it because ye wanted to spare me? Or because ye wanted to watch what the hearin’ did?” The barb had faded from his voice and she could see a tic in the muscle near his left eye.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, fighting the urge to turn and flee through the gate at the back of the garden. She wouldn’t run again. She would give him the chance to walk away from her this time.

“Good. Maybe if ye feel sorry enough, I’ll stop feelin’ it too,” he muttered. “Thank ye for tellin’ me. I wish ye a safe voyage and may ye find yer kinsman.” He turned and left the garden.

Faith couldn’t see but she hoped he went back to the house. She waited in the frozen garden until her she could no longer feel her hands and feet. Then she rose on stiff legs and awkwardly made her way back to the kitchen, slipping inside and standing near the hearth long enough to thaw before taking the back stairs up to her room.
The Frasers' desire to sail to the colonies hits a snag when it comes to treating Jamie's sea sickness.

The Frasers left for Edinburgh a week later and by the end of February most of their preparations for sailing to the colonies had been completed.

Jamie and Fergus had finished their most arduous printing jobs and were only taking on those that could be wrapped up in a matter of days if necessary. Jamie had let word get around that they were thinking to sail in the spring and that he would be open to selling or renting the shop and equipment if the right offer came about. Before six days had passed as many parties had let their interest be known.

Faith and Claire had informed the Haughs of their loose plans and set about helping the young couple to get their shop stocked and organized as well as husband and wife both trained in some basic first aid and remedies. They spent their evenings recording instructions and recommendations for various scenarios and treatments based upon their combined knowledge of medicine, the usual patients, and their complaints.

At last, the main thing preventing them going was the poor weather. They could find neither ship nor captain that was willing to take them on for such a journey at least until the end of March though most refused to sail for the colonies until April. Eager as they were to be off, the extra weeks gave Claire and Faith more time to devise a solution to Jamie’s seasickness problem.

Fergus had friends down by the docks who loaned them a skiff when they needed to test the various remedies they concocted. Focusing on the horizon failed. Sucking on various fruits failed as did various pickled vegetables and other pickled food items. Even the ginger tea failed.

Leaving Jamie at home to recover from the last attempt, Claire and Faith took a walk along the docks hoping to ask any and all sailors willing to speak with them for even the most outlandish seasickness cures they’d come across.

Claire was also pleased for the opportunity to speak with Faith about what had happened at Lallybroch. Though everyone realized that Faith had disappeared only a fraction of the way through the celebrations, none of them had dared broach the subject with her yet. Returning to Edinburgh and delving into the preparations for their journey seemed to help at first, but Claire quickly saw that Faith was simply keeping herself busy to avoid thinking about whatever was behind the somber mood that still hung over her.

“I rather wish we would have another chance to visit Lallybroch before we go,” Claire said, gauging Faith’s reaction from the corner of her eye as they walked along the wharf. “It was a relief to see the place again… and I’m glad Jenny and Ian know everything now—I always hated keeping it from them before.”

“Mmmhmm,” Faith nodded, her eyes focused ahead.
“And it was nice seeing everyone else, too. So many of the tenants I treated have since passed, but quite a few of the ones I helped to deliver are grown with children of their own now,” Claire remarked. “Maggie, to start—you know, she was the first baby I helped to deliver? Well, the first breech baby and the first where I did more than just watch. She seems happy with her husband and son. She did appear to think she’d done you some sort of wrong…”

“She didna do anything,” Faith insisted quickly.

Claire shrugged. “It must just be her exhaustion I was seeing, then. From what Jenny said, she had a long labor and though he’s healthy and she’s recovered well, he’s a fussy baby, and that takes a toll.”

“I ken I was born early, but did I fuss?” Faith asked, clearly trying to change the subject.

“You were a rather docile baby. You had your breathing issues for a while there and I was a bit of a wreck about that … but once you were out of the woods you began to thrive. You were always too curious about the world around you to fuss,” Claire told her, smiling at the memories.

“And how many babies did you deliver while ye lived at Lallybroch?”

“Near a dozen I believe,” Claire said with a sigh. “Let’s see… Maggie and Kitty—obviously… Then there was Mrs. Crook’s third grandson—Ronald? And then Mary MacNab’s sister had a daughter, Iona. I was there for Mrs. Gilchrist’s second boy—”

Faith started but kept walking, calculating quickly and realizing that she couldn’t mean Keir but rather his brother, Tamas. She kept walking and acted like nothing had happened but her mother had noted the way she flinched.

To break the awkwardness that had crept in, Faith hurried to speak with the next young man she saw carrying a crate down the nearest gangplank. For the next half hour, they didn’t speak to each other, only to the people bustling about the docks and tending to the needs of the ships.

“I dinna think any of the untried pickled cures will work if the others made Da so miserable,” Faith muttered as they leaned against a pillar to catch their breath. “Covering an eye and pluggin’ an ear was a new one to me.”

Claire was watching a growing commotion on one of the ships, straining her neck to spot the source.

“Mam?” Faith looked in the same direction. “Dear lord,” she gasped. Her mother had already started in the direction of the small crowd so Faith was forced to run to catch up.

A new crowd had gathered near the customs house and as they drew closer, they began following a trail of blood to the door and pushed their way closer.

“We’re healers,” Claire told the men trying to bar the way to the curious lookers on. “Whatever’s happened, we can help.”

“It’s no a sight for ladies’ eyes,” one of the men insisted, his eyes wide and his face tinged slightly green.

Claire rolled her eyes and with a quick glance and nod to Faith they pushed forward with a synchronization and force that surprised and toppled the men blocking the way.

They were greeted with a wall of groans and cries of pain as other sailors and dockworkers scurried frantically about with uncertainty and desperation.
Claire and Faith both began reinforcing the pins and ties in their hair before rolling up their sleeves and taking in the sight of at least a dozen men lying in agony in lines on the floor of the warehouse.

“What happened? How were these men injured?” Claire asked, kneeling beside the first man she came to and making a quick assessment of his wounds.

“Yard arm snapped,” one man who had blood soaking the sleeve of his shirt but was well enough to still be standing explained. “It was damaged in a storm and while we were workin’ to secure it so it could be replaced, it snapped and broke free of the riggin.’ Fell least twenty feet and smashed in’o the main deck.” He pulled aside the torn fabric of his sleeve to show a shard of wood several inches long impaled through his lower arm.

“Don’t try to remove that!” Claire exclaimed and the man scoffed.

“I’m no so inexperienced as some, ma’am,” he assured her. “I’ve seen many a man bleed out from doin’ such. There’s few down that way,” he nodded to several forms draped with filthy and blood-splattered sailcloth, “as did just that ‘fore ye arrived. I’m waitin’ my turn wi’ the Chinaman.”

Claire and Faith glanced around and spotted a man bent over one of the injured down the other end of the line. The two men before them, however, were in rough shape so meeting the other healer would need to wait.

The men on the floor suffered predominantly from crushing injuries. Having been busy below deck unloading cargo and reloading supplies when the yard arm fell, they had been unable to get out of the way when the main deck collapsed over their heads.

Claire kept muttering about not having the proper tools to relieve the pressure from internal bleeding and wishing there was a blood bank to call while Faith focused on setting broken bones as quickly as she could manage, wrapping bandages around makeshift splints and trying to get fluids into her patients. A few required suturing but without their prepared kits on hand, they were forced to resort to the larger needles and thread intended for repairing sails. Taking it in turns to hold the men steady and complete the sutures, mother and daughter worked together with a practiced efficiency that the injured men appreciated more than they were capable of acknowledging in the midst of their pain.

“No’ you,” a man whose arm had been shredded by the flying splinters of yard arm and deck. “The Chinaman can take away the pain.”

“If you don’t let us remove the splinters and clean, suture, and dress these wounds, you’ll develop a dangerous blood infection and the only way to save your life will be to remove the arm entirely,” Claire lectured with an exasperated certainty that had evolved from years of dealing with skeptical and stubborn patients. “Do you want to keep your arm?”

Faith offered the man a bottle of whisky which he frowned before taking and swigging for several moments.

“Ye cannae finish it,” Faith ordered, apologetically as she reclaimed the bottle and passed it to Claire. Her mother poured some over the knife she’d been using as a scalpel and over the tweezers that served as her forceps, waiting for Faith to get most of her weight distributed across the man’s shoulders before dribbling the last over the shredded flesh of his arm.

Faith and Claire both winced as the man screamed but the flash of pain seemed to have been shock enough to cause him to pass out. Faith reasserted her grip and Claire quickly got to work removing shards of wood, dabbing the field to check for deeper vascular damage and suturing where she could.
She was half done when the Chinese man appeared near them, hovering to watch their progress.

“Excuse me, madam,” he said quietly, capturing Claire’s attention just as she cut the thread from a trail of seven stitches. “May I offer assistance to you?”

“I’m not sure there’s room enough for both of us to—” Claire began, indicating the short stretch of forearm she had left to clear of shrapnel and stitch.

“No, I keep him calm,” the man explained, kneeling beside Faith and pulling out a small kit of needles. “Two of you work his arm.” With deft hands, the man inserted several long, thin needles into precise points along the patient’s upper arm and shoulder.

Even though the patient’s state of unconsciousness did not appear to alter, there was a definite relaxing in his body. Claire and Faith exchanged a look and as the Chinese man moved to take over holding the patient’s body still.

Faith took over removing the splinters and dabbing the wounds clean so Claire could quickly suture them. It was only a few more minutes before the arm was finished and bandaged and the Chinese man smiled and nodded his approval while he removed the needles.

“Acupuncture,” Claire whispered to Faith as they watched. “I remember reading an article or two about it in the surgeon’s lounge.”

“How does it work?” Faith asked, keeping her voice low.

“Let’s find out. Thank you, sir,” Claire said, approaching the Chinese man and holding out her hand in greeting. “I’m Claire Fraser and this is my daughter, Faith.”

“I am Yi Tien Cho,” he said, tucking the case of needles away before taking and shaking her hand. “You and your daughter have skills with healing.”

“As do you, it seems. I’ve heard about these needle treatments but never from someone who actually practices them,” Claire pressed as the three of them walked up and down the rows of wounded sailors.

Everyone had been tended and all that could be done now was to wait and monitor them as long as they were allowed to stay where they were. Soon the men would begin attempting to leave, their families and friends would collect them or they would be removed so the warehouse could be put back to its intended purpose.

“You are interested in how the needles work?” Yi Tien Cho asked, surprised but clearly pleased.

Claire nodded. “I have heard they can cure a range of the most difficult ailments. I’m afraid it’s made me rather curious. Would they work on seasickness, by any chance?”

“Acupuncture?” Jamie repeated, warily. “I dinna like the sound of that. Not if the puncture means wha’ I think it does.”

“As long as it’s done properly, you’ll not feel any real pain,” Claire tried to reassure him as she and Faith lead the way through the crowds along the docks and toward the spot they’d arranged to meet Yi Tien Cho to test the remedy. “And with any luck, you won’t feel sick to your stomach either.”

“The needles rest just beneath the surface of the skin,” Faith excitedly explained. She’d been mesmerized as she watched Yi Tien Cho at work, first as he inserted various needles describing the
reasoning behind the placement of each one, and then later when he’d just as carefully set about removing them and returning them to his case.

“Doesna sound like a remedy for anything,” Jamie muttered as they stopped before a door and Claire knocked. “Sounds like a human pin cushion. Or one of those devil’s dolls meant to bring evil upon yer enemies.”

“You’ll look more like a porcupine and you’ll feel as happy and content as one too,” Claire said before sighing at the blank expressions on the others’ faces. “It’s an animal covered in… Never mind. If we ever make it to the colonies, I’m sure you’ll see a few when we get there.”

The door opened and Yi Tien Cho smiled as he greeted his guests and ushered them into a warehouse space similar to the one where they’d treated the wounded days before.

“You are Mister Jamie?” Yi Tien Cho asked, bowing slightly when Jamie nodded. “Missus Claire is asking for my help for your seasickness.”

“Aye, so she told me,” Jamie smiled with forced joviality.

“Come lie down,” Yi Tien Cho invited him to a long table, broad and sturdy enough for Jamie’s large form. “Missus Claire and Missus Faith will need closely to watch.”

“Fergus, ye should go find a dinghy for when I’m through wi’ this,” Jamie suggested. “We’ll no want to be wastin’ time once the wee things are in.”

Fergus nodded and left with one last lingering look of sympathy for Jamie as he lay down and Yi Tien Cho began bustling about the table, positioning Jamie’s limbs as he needed them.

“Close your eyes,” Claire suggested as Yi Tien Cho opened his case of needles. “And whatever you do, stay still.”

Faith slipped her hand into her father’s and gave it a reassuring squeeze as Claire hovered by Yi Tien Cho’s side, watching as the needles were tapped into place. After the first few, Jamie was able to relax a little. They didn’t hurt as much as he’d feared and with little confidence the needles would work—how could needles in his face and hands possibly have a positive impact on his stomach?—the sooner the whole experiment was over, the sooner he could put it behind him.

He kept his eyes closed even when Claire and then Faith took turns inserting needles under Yi Tien Cho’s guidance.

“That’s it,” Claire said when the last needles had been inserted. “Let me help you,” she said, taking his elbow and guiding him stiffly to a seated position. “How do you feel?”

He opened his eyes and looked at the needles protruding from his wrists and was immediately glad he couldn’t see his face.

“I feel the way I suppose the corpses up at the medical college would,” he said, only half in jest.

Faith rolled her eyes. “Get yerself standing and I’ll go find where Fergus has got to,” she urged, turned to her errand.

Jamie followed slowly with Claire at his side. He was suddenly very aware of the space around him, wondering what would happen if he inadvertently bumped something. The needles didn’t hurt—though they were far from comfortable—but he didn’t doubt there would be a great deal of pain involved should something force them deeper into the tissue.
“Would you relax?” Claire whispered as they entered the street and started in the direction Faith was waving them to follow.

“I dinna ken what these will do for my stomach on the water, Sassenach, but having them here now isna helping much,” he complained. Every person that lurched in their direction made his stomach knot with nerves.

At last they made it to the dinghy Fergus borrowed and Jamie was seated on the central bench while Fergus pushed off from their mooring, Claire and Faith huddled next to the dock watching and waiting.

There was awkward jostling in the dinghy as Fergus rowed them further and further out into the port. It was impossible to tell what they were saying to one another as the boat rose and fell in the gentle swell of the incoming tide. One of the larger ships was pulling in its gangplank and dropping its sails to catch the wind.

“He doesn’t appear to be bent over the side,” Claire remarked hopefully as the boat drifted and spun in the water.

“Aye,” Faith agreed, looking to her mother and both of them smiling broadly with the hope of their tentative success.

“We’ll need Yi Tien Cho to draw a diagram we can reference, though hopefully we’ll be able to practice a bit more before we sail,” Claire began planning.

“And ye cannae take Yi Tien Cho’s set of needles,” Faith reminded her mother. “We’ll need to find someone as can make us a set of our own.”
The Frasers finally board a ship to leave for the colonies, but there are some familiar (and not entirely welcome) faces along for the journey.

It was three weeks more before they were able to sail for the colonies. Three weeks to have two sets of needles fashioned after Yi Tien Cho’s kit—one each for Claire and Faith—and for them to practice so that either of them could administer the treatment for Jamie. Three weeks for Jamie and Fergus to finish their arrangements for the print shop and their equipment—leased to one another local printer who was looking to expand with the funds to go to a bank account that Ian and Young Jamie could access should Lallybroch ever need it. Three weeks to find a ship with Charleston as its destination port and room for paying passengers. Three weeks for Jamie to compose the letter informing John Grey of his intentions to sail for the colonies and search for his godfather, even if all they succeeded in accomplishing was bringing his bones home to Scotland.

The first week of April 1762, the Frasers shuffled aboard a large merchant vessel, following a crewman to their cramped quarters. There were six cabins designated for paying passengers when the merchant companies’ men didn’t require accommodation. Though the cargo hold was filled with goods that had piled up during the rougher winter months, the company only required the berths in two of the cabins allowing the captain to take on additional passengers—and charge well for the quality of the accommodations; most families seeking to begin again in the colonies could only afford transport that packed them into a single deck with no privacy and fewer cots and hammocks than were sufficient for basic comfort.

“There isnae enough room for two of any of us to share a berth,” Jamie pointed out when they reached their side-by-side cabins. “Fergus and I will share one and Faith, you and yer mother can share the other. No need for the two of ye to be kept awake by the two of us strugglin’ to stuff ourselves in spaces too small.”

“You want to sleep in separate rooms?” Claire asked him under her breath. “For close to three months?”

“I dinnae want to, Sassenach, but I dinna see as there’s much choice,” he responded as they stood crowded in the door watching Fergus fold himself into the upper bunk with a skill retained from his days in the streets and brothels of Paris where fitting into small spaces meant safety and protection. “Even could we share, there wouldn’a be room anything more than simply lyin’ still. And that insae something I could stand. Better to have temptation removed altogether than lie beside ye and no be able to lie wi’ ye.”

“Well… three months is a long time and there’s only so much ship to explore,” Claire remarked. “I’m sure we’ll figure something out before we reach Charleston. Are you comfortable just now or would you like me to get my kit and set you up for when we get under way?”

Jamie settled a hand on his stomach and scanned the room to find the bucket set aside for waste. “I think I’ll last long enough for the two of ye to settle yerselves next door. I’ll see if I can find a way to lie comfortably, though I suppose either my feet or my heid will be hanging over the edge,” he said, eyeing the short and shallow berth.
“Good luck with that,” Claire smirked and kissed his cheek.

Faith had already gone to explore their own quarters, claiming the top berth and arranging the pillow and blankets, adding her cloak and some rolled clothes to the space for extra cushioning against the ship’s lurching.

“A far cry from how ye travel such distances in yer time,” Faith remarked as her mother set about pulling out her medical kit and placing it somewhere easily accessible—Jamie’s seasickness might prove the worst, but it was unlikely to be the only case in the first few days at sea and she meant to be prepared, to say nothing of the crew’s inevitable injuries.

“Far,” Claire agreed. “It only takes a few days to cross the Atlantic by sea, but I’ve really only crossed in a plane before—a long flight but less than a day from Boston to London.”

“No wonder ye’ve seen so many places,” Faith sighed with wonder. “To go from one to another so easily… Ye could see the whole world.”

“It won’t be long before it’ll be possible to travel all the way around the world in about eighty days,” Claire said with a smile, remembering Brianna’s brief obsession with Jules Verne. She’d asked all about Uncle Lamb’s work and what it had been like for Claire to travel with him.

“And how long does it take in yer time?”

“Closer to eight days, but that wouldn’t allow much time to actually see anything. Not the sorts of things that matter, anyhow.”

“Ye saw quite a bit of it,” Faith noted. “Do ye have favorite places ye’ve been?”

Claire sighed. “France, I suppose. The best and worst days were spent there—in both times. It’s where I served in the war and those were… I saw some of the most horrible things I’ve ever seen in my life in those hospitals near the front. But I learned more about medicine and myself than I ever expected—more, in some ways, than I learned in medical school. And living there with your father was an adventure. It’s where I was pregnant with you and where you were born…” She watched Faith flush with that familiar teenage self-consciousness.

There was a groan from the other side of the wall and a hasty shuffling before the familiar sound of retching.

“I think I’d best see to your father,” Claire said, rising and taking the small case with her new acupuncture needles. “But after I have him settled, I can tell you a bit about my uncle Lamb. I haven’t told you much about him before.”

Faith shook her head. “Ye haven’t, no. He raised ye though?”

Claire nodded. “After my parents died.”

“Was he at all like Uncle Ian?” Faith asked with a smile.

“More like Ian than Jenny,” Claire admitted as she closed the door behind her.

Faith took over arranging their quarters and checking over the medical supplies they’d been able to pack, lamenting all they’d been forced to leave behind.

She perched on a stool and opened a box in her lap—Fergus had had it made for her back before they’d moved to Edinburgh from Lallybroch. The cover was shallow while the box itself was deep.
Thin slats of wood created square crevices that housed two dozen small bottles, each wrapped in a handkerchief to keep them from jostling around. Faith and her mother had spent the better part of two weeks distilling as many herbal extracts as they could to prepare for the voyage. A scrap of paper provided a key for which extracts were in each slot. A quick assessment showed that nothing had broken, none of the stoppers had loosened, everything was intact. She tucked the box safely away where it was out of sight—the contents were clearly valuable and the fewer people who knew they were there, the safer they would be.

There was a bustling in the tight corridor and it sounded like someone might be knocking on the door.

Faith rose and upon hearing a frightened, feminine screech, she hastily opened the door.

An older woman and two younger girls were clustered against the opposite wall, their bundles of belongings clutched in front of them—a barrier against whatever had frightened them.

Faith poked her head out to discover the door to her father and Fergus’ room was open and her mother was nearly finished inserting the needles for Jamie’s treatment.

“Witchcraft?!” came the cry from the older woman, spurring Faith to act. She dashed to the other door and pulled it closed, turning to face the others as she did.

“I’m sorry ye had to see that,” she said quickly, “but I promise ye, it’s no witchcraft. It’s a cure for seasickness and ye must believe that we’ve tried every other remedy as well. I’m afraid this is the only one what works for my da’s puir stomach.”

“It’s you isn’t it?” the woman muttered, pulling her daughters closer to her. “Fraser,” she hissed.

Faith blinked, startled, then looked more closely at the woman. It was her daughters that finally sparked the flame of recognition.

“Mistress MacKimmie? What… why’re ye so far from Balriggan?”

“You stay away from me—from us,” Laoghaire MacKimmie glared. “Ye’re the reason my lasses and I are being sent away.”

“Sent away?”

“None will have me.” Laoghaire started pushing her daughters further down the hall to the cramped cabin the three of them would share. “That tonic ye gave killed my husband and folk are sayin’ it was me what done it—sayin’ I’m cursed or a murderess. Cannae keep Balriggan wi’out a man’s aid and none will have me wi’ the rumors that follow thanks to you and yer help.”

“I told you the proper dosage for that tonic and it was never meant to cure him,” Faith shot back, vehemently. “Yer husband was no long for the world and there was naught to be done but ease his pain.”

“All I ken is ye came to treat him and within the week he was dead and tha’s all anyone else kens and cares about too, ‘cept they blame me fer it, no you and it’s you as should be blamed.” The girls had located their cabin and were waiting for their mother, the younger, red-headed girl curled into her taller sister who strongly resembled the mother—Marsali was the older one, Faith remembered, and Joanie the younger. “I tried to tell my brother and his wife the truth of it—it’s no as though anyone would say such to me directly—but they said none would believe me cause ye’re a Fraser wi’ all the weight of the Murrays and Lallybroch behind ye. There’s too many dinna dare to question ye or dinna want to stain yer mother and father’s legacy. Well, if they willna see what’s right in front
of their eyes, then they’ll be punished for it some day. Yer mother was a witch, convicted and should ha’ burnt at Cranesmuir and I told my brother’s sister to remind folk o’ that.”

Faith nearly fell when the door behind her opened. She felt her mother’s hands steady her and watched as the blood drained from Laoghaire’s face in front of her (it was decidedly satisfying though she tried not to smile too broadly).

“Hello, Laoghaire,” Claire’s voice cut sharp and clear.

“Ye’re dead,” Laoghaire gasped, her eyes roaming over both Faith and Claire as though Faith might have somehow conjured an apparition.

“Far from it,” Claire assured her. After a beat of silence, she shifted her tone to a more amiable one and raised her voice, ensuring that not just Laoghaire but her daughters would hear what more she had to say. “It isn’t too bad now, but once we’re under way it’ll likely take some time for those of us unused to the motion to acclimatize to it. If you or your girls feel ill at all, I can make some ginger tea. That usually works in all but the most extreme cases of seasickness,” she explained with a glance over her shoulder to Jamie.

He was hidden from Laoghaire’s sight, having moved from the stool where Claire had tended him to the lower berth, lying as best he could without disturbing the needles in his face. His feet stuck out and one was braced on the floor while he used an arm to brace himself against the bottom of the top berth. But his breathing was steadier and he seemed more comfortable than before, if a little cramped.

“It’ll be a desperate day indeed the day I seek anything from you,” Laoghaire snapped, finally moving down the corridor to meet her daughters and disappear inside their cabin.

After ensuring the door to their own cabin was secure, Faith followed her mother into the cabin where Jamie was resting. Fergus had disappeared, presumably to explore the ship and to ingratiate himself with the crew where possible.

“I dinna understand why ye bothered offerin’ to help Mistress MacKimmie,” Faith muttered, plopping down onto the empty stool. Claire was crouched beside Jamie’s bunk, checking to be sure each needle was still in its proper place. “She’s been callin’ ye a witch among the village folk for years now.”

“And did any of them believe it? Did any of them think less of you for the things she said?” Claire asked.

“Who?” Jamie inquired, confused.

“Laoghaire,” Claire explained. “She’s aboard with two girls who look to be her daughters.”

“Laoghaire MacKenzie?” Jamie made to sit up. “The one what tried to have ye burnt for a witch?”

“Tried and failed,” Claire reminded him, pushing him to sit back down. “From what she was saying in the corridor, it sounds like she’s been on the receiving end of her just desserts. And whatever the mother has done, I refuse to punish her poor girls. I am determined to be the bigger person.”

Jamie snorted and Claire gave him a light, playful smack.

“It’s going to be a long few months at sea,” Claire said. “Would it be easier if Laoghaire weren’t one of our fellow passengers? Absolutely. But since we’re stuck here with her, I’m going to try my best not to be the source of conflict with her.”
“From all I’ve heard of Mistress MacKimmie,” Faith muttered, “that’s never stopped her before.”

Claire sighed with exasperation and defeat. “One would’ve hoped she’d have matured a bit in the past fifteen years.”

“I cannae recall was it Murtagh or Old Alec at Leoch scolded me for smilin’ and bein’ kind to her once,” Jamie recalled. “But they warned me she was the kind of lass to take too much meanin’ from a lad’s actions. Said she’d be a lass till she was—”

“Fifty,” Claire finished. “I believe it was Alec. He told me the same once. As she’s younger than both of us and neither of us has hit fifty yet, I suppose there’s a ways left to go before she’ll be tolerable. If there’s a silver lining to the current situation, it’s that we will only need to put up with her until we dock in the colonies. Then we can go our separate ways and we’re unlikely to ever see her again.”

Claire rose and gave a determined nod to both her husband and daughter before slipping out of the cabin and back into the one she would share with Faith.

“We’ve a mighty streak of luck in our family, and no mistake,” Jamie said, lying back in the berth and closing his eyes. “But if there’s one area that streak doesna seem to touch, it’s Laoghaire MacKenzie.”

“I’m inclined to agree wi’ ye.”

Fergus gave a brief knock before letting himself into the cabin and was visibly relieved to find Jamie and Faith within.

“I have been on deck and speaking with the captain. Everyone and everything is aboard and we will be underway very soon in order to be catching the tide,” he informed them with a grin. “Are you feeling better, Milord?”

“In stomach, aye,” Jamie confirmed. “But in nerves and spirits…”

Fergus nodded with understanding and looked to Faith. “I believe I know what ails your mind, Milord. I had a brief encounter with one of the mademoiselles MacKimmie just now.”

“She didna give ye any trouble…?” Jamie asked, frowning before wincing as it moved the needles into an uncomfortable position. He took a deep breath and released it, relaxing the muscles in his face to the best of his ability.

“No,” Fergus shook his head and looked to Faith again. “She seemed to be checking the way was clear. Pulled her head back in when she saw me, like a turtle into a shell.”

“I suppose that is the best we may hope for,” Jamie confessed.

“Will you wish to go up to see them set the sails?” Fergus asked Faith. “It will be the last glimpse we may have of Scotland for some time.”

Faith looked to her father who had his eyes closed and was breathing carefully.

“Go,” he told her. “If I need anythin’ I’ll groan a bit and yer mother will appear to fret over me faster’n I could manage to get myself out of this berth.”

Faith rolled her eyes but grinned as she followed Fergus into the corridor and up the steep stairs to the main deck.
His hand was at her back, guiding her out of the way of the scurrying crew as they made final preparations to get underway. Finding a space along the railing, Faith and Fergus looked to the left and right, between the crowded docks and the rising buildings of Edinburgh on the one hand and the open sea beckoning them on the other.

“What’s it like?” Faith whispered to Fergus. “Leaving behind a place ye’ve kent as home for so long?”

He frowned at her.

“Ye left France to come to Scotland,” she reminded him and he scoffed.

“France did not feel like home to me until your maman and Milord took me in. To leave with them… it did not feel like leaving home,” he said with a shrug.

“And what about now? Do you feel the same way this time?”

Fergus frowned again, this time in contemplation. “There are more people in Scotland that I do not wish to be away from—as I am sure is the case for you as well— Monsieur et Madame Murray to begin.”

“I cannae tell if the feeling in my stomach is seasickness, excitement, or fear,” Faith confessed.

“Can it not be all three?” Fergus teased.

As the commotion increased and it became obvious the ship was moving away from the dock and out to sea, Mistress MacKimmie and her two daughters appeared on deck to watch the spectacle as well, though Laoghaire made a show of standing as far as possible from where Fergus and Faith watched the receding shoreline.

When the impact of the larger swells began to make itself known, Faith heard a pitiful retching and scrambling from the MacKimmie party and surreptitiously peeked to see which was the suffering member. It appeared to be the younger of the girls, her older sister kneeling beside her and rubbing her back as she leaned over the side. The mother couldn’t hide her frustration as she ushered the girls away from the rail and back toward the passage that would lead back to their cabin.

After returning to her own cabin for the night and tossing for a while in the berth, Faith slipped down and rummaged quietly through the vials and pouches of herbs and spices, careful not to disturb her mother.

It only took a few minutes to gather a small packet of ingredients for ginger tea and scrawl a brief note. Once she’d left the packet outside the MacKimmies’ cabin door and knocked before scrambling out of sight, Faith was able to sleep more comfortably.
Claire treated Jamie's seasickness (and more) while Faith and Fergus encountered the MacKimmie sisters on deck.

Jamie sighed as Claire bustled around the small cabin straightening her things and leaving him to sit still with the acupuncture needles still embedded in his skin.

“How long do ye think ye’ll need to do this? I’ve no been ill in near a week,” he complained.

“You haven’t been ill because we’ve been doing this every day,” Claire insisted.

“But how will we know that for sure unless we try going without for a day or so?”

Claire crossed her arms and stared at him, contemplating.

“I don’t know about skipping a day altogether,” she began. “But … perhaps we don’t need to leave them in for quite so long.”

Jamie nodded, knowing better than to push. “Faith and Fergus willna bother to come back down for a while yet,” he pointed out to her as she stepped forward and began to remove the needles. “They always leave us be while ye’re administerin’ my treatment.”

Claire laughed as she watched Jamie suggestively wiggle his eyebrows, several needles still embedded under the skin jiggling with the movement.

“Is that what we’re calling it now?” she teased, easing a few more needles out, sterilizing them quickly, and replacing them in their case.

“Ye can call it whatever ye want, so long as we get a few minutes to ourselves that dinna revolve around turnin’ me into a pincushion.”

With the last few needles put away, Claire closed the case and set it aside. Turning back to Jamie, she braced her arms on either side of the edge of the top bunk.

“Is it a bit of revenge you’re interested in? Got something you’re looking to stick me with?”

Jamie laughed and slipped his hands around her waist, searching for the warm rounds of her buttocks beneath her skirt and kneading the flesh when he found it.

“Much as I want to take my time with ye,” he murmured, using his foot to push her feet apart. He slipped under Claire’s arm, his hands sliding back around to her bodice and traveling up to the curves of her breasts. “We dinna have much of it to work with.”

Faith closed her eyes and breathed in deeply as the strong wind combed through her hair, pulling free several of her dark curls and sending them dancing across her eyelids.
“Look!” Fergus exclaimed next to her.

She opened her eyes again to find them pointing at something moving through the water along the side of the ship—several somethings in fact.

“Porpoises!”

“They’re so fast,” Faith remarked, watching mesmerized as the creatures wove in and around each other as if to some secret choreography. “And graceful.”

“Do you think your parents would care to see? Or… do you think we should be giving them some extra time together? Alone…” he added, his meaning heavy.

Faith rolled her eyes. “I’m sure we’ll grow tired of seeing such as porpoises before we reach the colonies. No need to disturb them o’er it. ‘Sides, by the time we get there and back it’s like the beasts will ha’ gone their own way again.”

She glanced over at Fergus to find him looking, not at the water, but back over his shoulder toward the passage leading below deck.

“Hmm… We may want to consider going down again sooner rather than later,” he said quietly.

Joanie held tight to her sister’s side as they shuffled across the deck toward the rail and ultimately reaching it a few yards further down from where Faith and Fergus leaned into it.

“D’ye see where their mam is?” Faith asked, looking away to avoid detection and divert suspicion.

Fergus strained his neck around as though attempting to crack it.

“No sign. I am surprised she let them loose on their own,” he said. “Thought she meant to keep all three to their room until we arrived.”

“Even she wouldna be so cruel as to force them to endure months at sea wi’out stretchin’ their legs… I dinna think.”

A throat cleared nearby and when Faith and Fergus looked to their right, they both jumped. Marsali stood behind Joanie, her hands protectively and reassuringly on the younger girl’s shoulders.

“I wanted to thank ye for the tea ye left,” Joanie addressed Faith. Redness stained her cheeks but it might have been from the cool, sharp breeze rather than self-consciousness. “It’s helped wi’ settlin’ my belly and I’m grateful for it.”

Faith smiled and nodded. “I’m glad it’s worked for ye. And ken ye only need say the word and I can give ye more. It doesna work for my da but my mam and I made sure to have plenty for them as it does work for. Wi’ time, we’ll no need it except should the sea grow unruly. Assumin’ yer mam doesna object, of course,” Faith added, instinctively glancing around for sign of Mrs. MacKimmie should she realize what her daughters were about and storm over.

“She doesna like it but I dinna think she’ll say more to you about it,” Marsali responded apologetically. “I…” she hesitated while she glanced at Joanie but then seemed to shrug internally and continued, “I hid it from her at the first but when it helped Joanie and she was made miserable herself, I told her what had made the difference and where it came from. She finally took some for herself last night and is still restin’ in the cabin. We needed to get out o’ the stale air… and I wanted to be sure we thanked ye for yer help.”
“And apologize for your mother’s rude behavior,” Fergus pushed with a challenge that made Joanie curl further back into her sister.

“Fergus…” Faith chastised quietly but Marsali, her color rising, defiantly stared Fergus down (though she stood close to a foot shorter than him).

“My mother can apologize for her own behavior,” Marsali declared. “It’s no like to happen, but neither Joanie nor myself are to blame for it, so it’s no for us to be apologizin’ for it. We’re none of us to blame for the actions of our parents… Or would you care to be judged for the actions of them that bore ye?”

Fergus went red in the face and took a step back. Faith had little doubt Mrs. MacKimmie was aware of the rumors about Fergus’ parentage, though in this instance, rumors were true—his mother a nameless whore in a brothel, his father unknown. And if Mrs. MacKimmie had heard the rumors, she’d likely shared them with her older daughter, if not the younger just yet.

“I suppose not,” Fergus responded, his voice strained. “But even so, we cannot deny the shame we feel for some of those actions, no?”

“Aye. There’re many times I dinna agree wi’ my mam’s words and deeds. I try to make a point to say as much when tha’s the case,” Marsali agreed, her expression softening only a little.

“And ye’ve done so,” Faith said, inserting herself back into the conversation. “I think it’s a fine sentiment and I should be glad of yer friendship, whether yer mother approves or no. Mine are like to be wary should I mention it to them…” She leaned closer and addressed the last to Joanie with a smile, seeking to ease the tension. “Which is why I think we ought to keep it between us. Do ye think we can be secret friends?”

Joanie grinned and nodded. “What do secret friends do?” she asked, her nervous shyness beginning to fall away into excitement.

“We’ll need to devise some signals,” Faith decided. “A way to leave each other messages that willna be found by those that we canna have know. Can ye think of anything like that?”

“I think so,” Joanie nodded. “I’ll try.”

“Good. And now, Fergus and I should head back down below. My mam will need help seein’ to the crew and any injuries they’ve had this morning. But we’ll be up again tomorrow mornin’ about the same time, as that’s when my mam treats my da for the seasickness.” She winked at Joanie whose brow wrinkled with uncertainty.

“She means for us to come back up at the same time tomorrow to hear yer ideas,” Marsali explained to her sister with a tinge of exasperation, though clearly not with Joanie. “I suppose we could arrange that—if we’ve any ideas. I dinnae like keepin’ such things from Mam, but I dinnae think it wise to be at odds wi’ the ship’s healers neither. Good day to ye.”

The four continued along the cramped deck moving in opposite directions, Fergus glancing over his shoulder at Marsali as they approached the ladders that would return them to the deck with their rooms.

“The older one has more than a bit of her mother in her,” Fergus remarked as they moved through the corridor.

“Her stubborness and outspokenness, I agree. But she isna so harsh nor distrusting in her views of others,” Faith pointed out, watching Fergus to see if there might be lingering damage from Marsali’s
implications about his unknown parents.

“Time will tell,” he said skeptically.

Faith hoped Fergus would warm to the idea of being friendly with Marsali and Joanie. But though she was the one with Fraser blood in her veins, Fergus had absorbed some of the Fraser stubbornness from his adopted family.
Joanie is concerned for Marsali and asks Faith to help assess her sister's help—without their mother knowing.

Faith yawned as she stood in line for her breakfast. There were no separate dining accommodations for the passengers and the crew, by virtue of the labor they were expected to perform each day, had first priority when meals were served. Her father had informed her that they were lucky they weren’t being forced to pay more for their meals or have been expected to fully provision themselves for the duration of the voyage.

As she shuffled closer to where the cook’s crew were passing out allotments of parritch and rations of fresh water, there was a light bump against Faith’s back. When instead of hearing a mumbled apology she was bumped a second time, Faith turned to see who it was behind her.

Joanie glanced up at her briefly, murmured an apology with her attention darting to where her mother sat stern faced at their table, and then looked down at the floor again.

Faith turned to face forward once more before asking surreptitiously, “What’s amiss? Where’s Marsali?”

“Tha’s what I need to ask ye about,” Joanie whispered back. “I ken Mam says… that is, she doesna like because… Are you or yer mam a witch?”

Faith started at the question and nearly turned around again but caught movement from Mistress MacKimmie out of the corner of her eye. The older woman was watching her closely, mistrust obvious in her expression.

“No,” Faith responded, louder than she intended. “I’ve told ye before, we’re neither of us a witch.”

Joanie sighed with what Faith could have sworn was disappointment.

“What does that have to do wi’ Marsali anyhow?” Faith asked, stepping forward. There were only three men between her and the crew serving.

“Marsali isna well and Mam says it’s cause she’s cursed. I ken even if ye were… that ye would never do such a thing to Marsali. But if yer were a witch, ye might be able to remove whatever curse it is plagiun’ her. She roils about clutchin’ her belly and cannae find comfort even to sleep.”

Faith was silent as she thought over what to do. Would Mistress MacKimmie block her and her mother from examining Marsali even if the lass were as ill as Joanie feared? Though, if the situation were as bad as that, would Mistress MacKimmie have left her alone for so long and would she look so… well, she looked sour and disgruntled, but that was how she appeared most of the time. There didn’t appear to be any grave concern weighing on her.

Still, it would reassure Joanie and help Faith with her own peace of mind if she had a few minutes to speak with Marsali for herself.
“If there’s anything I can do for Marsali,” Faith whispered, moving closer to the servers, “I’ll need ye to get yer mother to walk about on deck for a while.”

“She’ll no go above for more’n a few minutes,” Joanie explained. “She doesna like to be about the crew on her own like that and doesna like for Marsali and I to walk about so much as we do. It unsettles her, she says, bein’ a woman wi’ two lasses on a ship wi’ no man for protectin’ us.”

“Let me take care of that then,” Faith said, reaching out and taking up a bowl for herself and passing another along to Joanie. “I promise I’ll find a way to see how yer sister does and if there’s naught my mam and I might do to help her.”

“Ye want me to what now?” Jamie asked, flabbergasted and with his arms crossed over his chest.

“I want ye to offer to take Mistress MacKimmie and Joanie for a turn about the decks,” Faith reiterated.

She could feel her mother’s stern and skeptical gaze on her but kept her own attention on her father.

“Ye’ve both said as how Mistress MacKimmie fancied ye when ye were younger and livin’ at Leoch. She’s no fond of Mam and I but she might stand to walk about if ye’re there to protect her from the crew. I’d ask Fergus but she’s less fond of him than either of us.”

“And you need Laoghaire distracted why?” Claire asked, still uncertain as to the purpose behind Faith’s odd request.

“Joanie is worried about Marsali. The lass thinks her sister’s cursed. If Marsali’s ill, she needs to be treated properly, by you or I and no left to suffer for her mam’s grudge.”

Claire’s expression softened and she nodded her consent to the plan.

Jamie blinked and pressed his lips together before nodding too.

“Fine. How long do ye think ye’ll need to have her away?”

“No longer’n a half hour to see wha’s wrong wi’ her,” Faith speculated. “Cannae know about treating her before tha’.”

Claire sighed. “The longer you can keep her away, the better,” she admitted reluctantly, crossing to her husband and slipping under his arm.

“Aye well, the longer I’m wi’ her listenin’ to her blather, the sicker I expect I’ll feel.”

“Hmmm…” Claire slid her hand up his chest and around his neck. “You might require an extra round of treatment, is that what you’re saying?”

“I’d no turn ye down if ye’re offering,” Jamie replied, leaning in to kiss the bridge of her nose.

Faith cleared her throat, her cheeks flush with embarrassment as she wished they would wait long enough for her to leave.

“Are ye goin’ to make yer offer this morning or do ye wish to wait for this afternoon?” she prompted.

Jamie took a deep breath as he stood in the passageway outside the room Laoghaire MacKimmie
shared with her daughters. There was a queasy feeling in his stomach that no number of needles in his face would help cure.

But Faith had asked it of him because she was both concerned for the lass and wanted to reassure the younger one. And neither of them should suffer for their mother’s stubbornness and animosity. He’d seen Claire suffer at Laoghaire’s hands and he’d no intention to standby and watch it happen to her own daughters.

He knocked on the door and waited for Laoghaire to open it, forcing himself to smile rather than scowl.

“Oh,” Laoghaire exclaimed, flushing and putting the door more securely between her and Jamie. “Is there somethin’ I can be helpin’ ye wi’, Jamie?”

It surprised him, the way she looked at him and how a few of the years seemed to melt off her face when she blinked at him and offered a small smile. Or maybe he was imagining it, seeing the memory of what she’d looked like all those years ago at Leoch. Either way, he could feel his pride rising, pushing him to stand straighter. He felt the echo of the cockiness he’d outgrown long ago—the cockiness that had surged in those first months after marrying Claire when he felt confident it was just a matter of time before he would have everything he ever wanted, the cockiness of the young and naïve.

“I was wonderin’ if ye’d like to go for a turn about up on deck,” he suggested. “Ye cannae be comfortable in there wi’ three of ye to the space.”

“It is cramped,” Laoghaire admitted, “but I wouldna like to think what the crew would make of it, you walkin’ wi’ a woman no yer wife…”

“Well, I dinna like to think how the crew might behave if ye tried to go walkin’ up there on yer own,” he countered, leaning toward her confidentially. “A lovely lass attractin’ their attention and them too crude to hold their tongues or ken ye’re a respectable sort as doesna deserve to hear such things. They’ll no be speakin’ to ye in any but the politest manners if I’m wi’ ye.”

“Can I come, Mam?” Joanie jumped up, throwing a knowing look to Jamie before her mother turned to face her. “Marsali’s no well enough to take me up and I wish to see if there’s naught in the water swimmin’ aside us.”

“I suppose… If ye dinna mind and yer wife…” Laoghaire hesitated, rising on her toes in an attempt to look past his shoulder, though Jamie wondered which she would prefer to see, an empty hallway or Claire standing behind him, jealous.

“Claire’s busy tendin’ to the crew as have met wi’ mishaps,” he explained, willing the exasperation he felt with her to peek through and suggest it was Claire currently frustrating him. “She’ll no even know I made ye such an offer. I doubt she’ll even be through before I bring ye back here.”

The light that sparked in her eyes made him want to vomit.

“Well then I thank ye, Jamie Fraser, and my Joanie does too,” Laoghaire said with a flattered bob of the head. She reached for her shawl and adjusted the cap covering her hair.

“I do, sir,” Joanie spoke up, smiling at Jamie with relief. “I thank ye.”

The sick feeling faded as he looked at her and glanced over to Marsali where she was curled up in the lower berth, her back to the rest of them.
“My pleasure,” he assured her.

Joanie scurried to Marsali’s side and reached for her own cap, hooked on the corner of the chair beside her sister. “I’m sure ye’ll be feelin’ better by the time we’re back,” Joanie told Marsali quietly. “We’ll take our time and give ye plenty of quiet and rest.”

Jamie held the door for Laoghaire and Joanie to exit the stale cabin and looked to Marsali’s miserable form. She turned to look over her shoulder as they left, her eyes meeting Jamie’s. He nodded to her slowly and closed the door behind him, hoping she noticed that he hadn’t pulled it completely shut and that Joanie had let Marsali know about the plan she and Faith had concocted.

“This way, ladies,” he said as he ushered them toward the ladder that would take them up. He glanced back over his shoulder as first Laoghaire and then Joanie climbed and emerged onto the main deck. “Watch yer step.”

The door to the room Claire and Faith shared opened enough for Faith to poke her head out and check to see the coast was clear.

He motioned to her that it was and then turned to climb the ladder himself. He would have to wait until later to hear from them how they made out with Marsali.

As soon as her father disappeared up the ladder and onto the deck, Faith slipped out of her room and crossed to knock lightly on the door to the Mackimmies’ cabin before easing the door open.

“Marsali?” she whispered, peering into the cramped space.

Marsali rolled over awkwardly in her berth so that she remained on her side but faced Faith in the door.

“What are ye doin’ here?” Marsali hissed.

Faith slipped in, leaving the door open for her mother to stand near watching to be sure the way remained clear. Taking one of the two chairs in the room, Faith sat beside the berth, her eyes roaming over and evaluating Marsali. She looked tired and in pain but wasn’t flushed and didn’t appear clammy.

“Joanie was worried for ye and asked if I might find a way to check on ye,” Faith explained. “Well… actually she said that yer mam thought ye’d been cursed and she asked me if I might ken how to lift it.”

“Oh, I’m cursed right enough,” Marsali muttered, clutching her gut. “Mam calls it the curse of Eve and says it means I’m a woman now.”

Faith relaxed and she heard her mother chuckle from the doorway.

“I’ll go fix some willow bark tea,” Claire said. “It won’t take long.”

“There’s little more can be done for ye I’m afraid. If ye can get heat on yer belly, it should ease some but aside from that ye’ll have to wait till it passes,” Faith told her apologetically.

“Until my courses come again… and again and again,” Marsali whimpered with increasing despair.

“The only respite being if ye get wi’ child…” Faith commiserated while Marsali groaned, “or by the grace of God and auld age.”
“How do ye bear it?” Marsali asked, looking up at Faith with a pitiful expression.

“How’ willow bark tea and hot compresses when I can manage. Extra sleep if it’s possible and pushin’ through when it’s not.”

Claire appeared with a steaming kettle and Faith reached for a nearby cup, glancing briefly to be sure it was clean. Marsali forced herself to sit up and accept a cup of the tea. She made a face when she tasted it but drank it nonetheless.

Claire retrieved the other chair and pulled it up alongside Faith’s.

“Marsali… has your mother spoken with you about your courses at all? About what it means and how to take care of yourself?”

“She showed me how to pin the cloths, aye,” Marsali said quietly into her cup of tea, her cheeks flushing.

“And about what it means as far as bearing children?” Claire pressed.

“I ken it means I can marry and give my husband bairns. She said… she said that there’s no much to enjoy in the getting of bairns, but the bairns themselves are worth it. They give ye a break from yer man’s attentions while ye carry and the love they give ye as they grow can make ye forget the trouble they cause ye most of the time. And they’re a true blessing when they’re old enough to lend ye a hand in yer work,” Marsali added with a prideful smile.

“Well… she’s not wrong about bairns being worth all the trouble of carrying them,” Claire said with a smile of her own and a glance to Faith from the corner of her eye. “But making them can be pleasurable, for the woman as well as the man. Do you know what happens when men and women lie together? Did she tell you how it works?”

Marsali’s face darkened and she looked down at the drained cup in her lap. She shook her head.

“She didna say but I ken she didna like it… That it hurt her when she and my da…”

Faith eased the cup from her hands and poured her more.

“If it’s done gently and with care, it doesn’t hurt. At least… It can be a bit painful the first time—not always; everyone is different—but usually after that, you don’t just get used to it. It can be… ‘pleasant’ doesn’t really do it justice. Not when it’s someone you love and trust who wants you to enjoy it and takes pains to ensure you do.”

Faith felt the heat rise in her cheeks. “Mam…” she whined, not wanting to think about her parents that way.

“How… how does it work?” Marsali asked. “It’s somethin’ to do wi’ a man’s cock, no?”

Claire nodded and tried to school her face so she didn’t look too amused by Marsali’s naïveté. “It does indeed.”

While Claire began explaining the mechanics of sex to Marsali, Faith rose from her seat, took the kettle and carried it back to their room. She hoped Marsali wouldn’t mind and someone needed to keep an eye out in case Laoghaire decided to return to her cabin.

Once the kettle and tea things were safely put away, Faith lingered near the door, listening with one ear while she regularly glanced up and down the corridor.
“But is there no way to keep from gettin’ a bairn if ye dinna want one?” Marsali asked, clearly disappointed the answer was likely to be ‘no.’

“There are certain concoctions that make it less likely to conceive,” Claire said in a carefully measured tone, “but they are usually incredibly dangerous and don’t work a hundred percent of the time.”

“Ye can make the man—that is, ye can ask him—no to… finish when he’s inside ye,” Faith chimed in, her cheeks going red as her mother and Marsali turned to stare at her. “Tha’s what Maggie told me and Kitty after she wed.” Faith fibbed. “If he doesna spill his seed inside ye, it’ll no take hold and grow a bairn.”

“This would be the same cousin Maggie who had a new baby with her when we visited at Hogmanay?” Claire challenged lightly with a smile.

“That was a bairn she did want,” Faith reminded her mother as she turned to look back into the corridor—a pretense for looking away.

“Well, whether she was actively practicing that method of contraception or not, the results are often the same,” Claire warned, her attention shifting back to Marsali. “It can be very difficult when in the midst of things for either of you to remember the need to… disengage before it’s too late. There are… devices that can help, usually worn by the man while he’s inside you that catch his seed but they aren’t entirely effective either—they can break if you’re not careful, and once they’ve been used, they’re difficult to clean properly which can lead to a whole different host of problems beyond pregnancy.”

“It’s no wonder we’re supposed to wait till we’re wed to lie together,” Marsali declared with a resigned sigh.

Faith watched her mother bristle under the statement but she when she spoke again, it was with warmth and gentleness.

“If you find and marry the right man—a man you truly love and who loves you in kind—that makes all of it better. It can make lying together more enjoyable, it can make the prospect of children more desirable… it can make talking about both easier and deciding what you want—learning what you like—a shared adventure. So take care you don’t fall in love with a fool, or if you do, that he’s a fool for you and you alone,” Claire advised.

Marsali smiled at both of them. “Thank ye for this. I’ll find a way to talk wi’ Joanie and ease her concern. And… when she’s of an age to worry about this, I’ll tell her what ye’ve told me.”

“If you ever have any questions, I’m only too happy to help,” Claire assured her before rising to leave.

Marsali lay back again and curled onto her side, but it was clear the tea was having its desired effect. Her pain had lessened and her natural exhaustion taking over in its absence. Faith closed the door to the cabin and followed her mother back to their shared space with a final glance to the ladder. She felt a twinge of guilt that there was no way to signal her father that they were through and it was safe for Laoghaire to return.

“That was… not what I was expecting,” Claire said with a chuckle when Faith had closed the door to their own cabin as well. “A relief that she isn’t actually ill but also…” She shook her head a little.

“Are things different then, in yer own time? When it comes to men and women and… lyin’
“Yes and no. There are more ways to prevent pregnancy—more reliable ways… But there are probably as many people who engage in sex outside of marriage—both before and during—and it’s still worse for women if anything is found out about it,” Claire mused, staring past Faith and seeing through two hundred years to the world she’d left behind. “But it seemed that things were beginning to change more quickly. I hope they continued that way, at least.”

“Ye were married before Da… to Frank,” Faith stated, heat rising in her cheeks again as she struggled to find the words she needed. She couldn’t lift her eyes from her shoes.

Luckily, her mother seemed to understand exactly what she was trying to say.

“Frank and I didn’t wait until we were married to be together like that,” she confessed gently. “And… he wasn’t my first lover either.”

Faith’s eyes darted to her mother.

“And Frank didna mind that ye’d been with another man?”

“No, and neither did your father.”

“And ye’ve never regretted that ye didna save yerself…?”

“I’m not ashamed of the men I’ve loved,” Claire said, her tone still gentle. “Nor of showing them how I love them. I’ve always found it easier to express my feelings that way. I don’t have a way with words the way your father does.”

“Then… ye loved them all?”

“In different ways. You can love someone and not want to marry them. Or you can love someone and find someone else you love in a different way that you need more.”

“Like what happened when ye met Da,” Faith nodded, a calm feeling slowly working its way through her limbs.

“Sometimes, sex teaches us about ourselves… it helps us understand what we don’t necessarily have words to explain otherwise.”

“I cared about Keir, and… I liked how it felt, lying with him,” Faith confessed in a whisper, “but kent as soon as he said he loved me when we were… I kent then that I didna love him that way and couldna marry him.”

“I know your father likes to talk about how your grandfather assured him he would know as soon as he met the right woman—and there are some times when that’s happened for me. Healing, for instance. I knew right away that I was a healer. But with love and men? I’ve found I’m more likely to suddenly realize when something is wrong, than when it’s right. It took me weeks to understand how deeply I felt for your father.”

“Ye’ll no tell Da that I’m no a maid, will ye?” Faith asked, a twinge of fear piercing the calm that had made its way from her limbs in toward her core. “He… I dinna think he would understand.”

“This conversation stays between the two of us,” Claire promised.

“Aye. Between the two of us,” Faith smiled. The impulse overwhelmed her and she lunged forward,
capturing her mother in an appreciative hug—a hug her mother gladly returned.
A few weeks into the voyage, illness strikes the ship leaving Claire and Faith to share the duties of caring for the sick.

Three weeks into the journey that the first two crewmen fell ill. Word didn’t reach Claire and Faith until the third day when a fourth crewman began vomiting. One of the first men appeared to be on the mend while the second had died.

As soon as she heard, Claire began issuing orders and most of those around her were so startled, they actually followed them. Faith was right behind her as she descended to the crew’s area of the ship where the sick men had been sequestered near the back to keep the filth they produced from disturbing the others.

“It’s not a proper quarantine,” Claire muttered as she tied a handkerchief below her eyes to block her nose and mouth. Faith paused to do the same. “We’ll need to ask the captain about any spare storage space that can be used to keep them separate from the others.”

“Do ye have any idea what it may be?” Faith asked.

“I need to examine them before I can begin to guess, though the vomiting and fact that it’s spreading don’t bode well for the list of possibilities. If we’re lucky, it’s just a bit of food poisoning.”

“And if we’re unlucky?” Faith countered, her voice dropping.

“Then I’m sending you back to our cabin for a thorough wash and then I want you to be sure your father, Fergus, and the MacKimmies keep to your rooms and have as little contact with the crew as possible,” Claire said with cold and firm clarity.

Faith nodded and followed her mother, watching Claire make her examinations in the usual methodical manner.

“No rashes,” Claire observed. “And you’re not itchy?” The exhausted man shook his head ‘no’ and then cringed at the movement, reaching for his head. “Can you tell me what you’ve eaten the last few days?”

Faith listened, trying to find a common pattern beyond the symptoms of fever, vomiting, and dehydration (probably from the vomiting). They had eaten many of the same things but there wasn’t much variety to be found on the ship. Similarly, they’d found themselves in many of the same areas and so had been exposed to the same ‘environmental factors.’

“I don’t think it’s typhus,” Claire mused, crossing her arms as she stared at the ill men. “I wish I had a microscope. I’d feel more comfortable if I could take samples and examine them. Then I might be able to tell if it was something viral or bacterial.”

“What’s the difference?”

Claire looked at her daughter and opened her mouth to explain, but then closed her eyes and sighed
in exasperation.

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t have antibiotics or any of the medications I’d usually prescribe. I’m… flying blind. I need more information and there’s no way for me to get it.”

“What do ye think it is? Ye must have eliminated a few more possibilities,” Faith encouraged.

“My gut is telling me it’s a strain of influenza,” Claire hedged.

“Assuming it is, what can we do?”

“Treat the symptoms. Try to contain it and keep others from getting sick. Wait for it to run its course. And hope we don’t lose too many,” Claire resolved, her confidence seeming to grow with each objective stated.

“I’ll speak with Da and have him approach the captain about where these men should go,” Faith offered, already moving.

“Send Fergus down, will you? He can stand guard here while I speak with the cook and then prepare the quarantined space.”

Jamie negotiated and cajoled until the captain finally capitulated and gave over his own quarters to serve as the sick bay.

“It’s the only space large enough that willna require shifting significant cargo,” the captain conceded.

The captain’s personal effects were removed and placed in the cabin of the only passenger traveling alone—much to the man’s chagrin. Claire and Faith quickly began preparing the space for the sick men, even laying blankets and cushioning on the desk to serve as a makeshift bunk.

“We’ll need to restrain whoever lies here to be sure they don’t roll off,” Claire remarked, “but it’ll be easier than putting him on the floor.”

“And it leaves the floor open if we should need it,” Faith added. “Though I pray we’ll no have the need.”

“I’m going to tell your father we’re ready and they can start bringing the men up. If you can pass along what’s happening to Marsali…” Claire suggested.

“Aye. I’ll let them know.”

Claire nodded and left to find Jamie. Faith finished washing up and then left to find Marsali.

Faith found Marsali and Joanie on deck with their mother. Since Laoghaire’s turn above deck with Jamie, she’d been less harsh about her daughters interacting with Faith and less cautious about the pair of them going up on deck to stretch their legs and get some air. After Marsali was feeling better, she’d made a point of thanking Faith for all that she and her mother had done and for initiating that single walk.

“It put Mam at ease in a way I dinna ken was possible,” Marsali confessed. “I dinna know as it’ll last long, but while it does, we’ve ye and yer family to thank.”

It had only been a few days, but the amenability of Laoghaire MacKimmie appeared to be holding
steady. Joanie spotted Faith approaching them and tugged at her mother’s skirts. When Laoghaire noticed who it was, there was a slight bracing of her posture but a careful politeness found its expression where before there had only been disdain and disgust.

“Mistress MacKimmie,” Faith greeted her with a slight curtsey. “I hope ye’re well this morning.”

“Aye, thank ye. The weather’s fine though we’re no goin’ to stay above long. Word’s spread that there’s sickness among the crew. As yer mother’s a frequent tender of their ailments, I suppose ye’ve already had word,” Laoghaire hinted, keeping several feet of distance between Faith and herself and her daughters.

“I was steppin’ out here in hopes of findin’ ye or yer daughters as I might give ye warning,” Faith informed them. “There’s several crewmen as will be residin’ in the captain’s quarters till the sickness runs its course. They’re movin’ the men now and the captain will be stayin’ wi’ Mr. MacPherson in the meantime.”

Laoghaire took a step back and pulled Joanie closer to her.

“Is it serious, then?”

“We’re still no sure what it is but it’s best to take precautions.”

Before Faith could explain further what precautions those should be, Laoghaire had muttered a quick thanks and was pulling Joanie along back toward the ladder leading to the passenger cabins. Marsali shrugged at Faith as she made to follow and Faith mouthed an apology back. In truth, she was relieved that they were likely to be sequestered and—hopefully—out of harm’s way.

She stood at the railing letting the sea breeze brush against her face and neck, letting it play with her hair. It hadn’t been more than a few hours and already the strain of dealing with the illness among the crew was draining her of her energy. The sooner they could be certain of what was wrong and cure it in the crew, the better.

It was getting cold on deck and Faith rubbed her hands to warm them up. Perhaps she would be able to use her special gift to glean additional insight into what precisely was internally wrong with the sick men… It probably wouldn’t take much for her mother to figure it out with that kind of information. It had been a while since she’d used that particular gift, her mother’s extensive diagnostic knowledge precluding the need for it.

A rank scent of rotting fish drifted to her on the breeze and she shuddered against the sudden revolt in her stomach. Best to get on with it sooner rather than later if she was going to try her hand at it.

Faith returned to the captain’s quarters as her father and Fergus were settling the last of the sick crewmen on the makeshift bunks. There were six crewmen occupying spaces, an increase that caused Faith’s pulse to pound and nervous sweat to break out on her brow. She took a steadying breath and began by washing her hands in the water and alcohol mixture her mother had secured.

Approaching the first crewman, she spoke softly to him as she began her examination. He was on the captain’s bunk, which allowed her to keep her back to the others and guard against prying eyes. Her parents were conversing in the doorway, her mother warning her father to keep clear of the sick bay himself while he was busy warning others away.

The man before her was unconscious but restless as she closed her eyes and began to slowly run her hands over him. She started with his chest. She could feel his heart straining, his lungs sluggish and tired but clear of fluid and other obstructions. Her hands shifted lower to the man’s stomach. It
quivered and roiled and there was excessive movement through his guts but from his drawn and limp state, it was clear there was little left inside for him to evacuate. So far, nothing beyond the expected inflammation and disquiet of his symptoms struck her as being off.

She rested her hand on his forehead and felt the blaze within. It bothered her, that she couldn’t pinpoint what was causing the illness. It wasn’t like most of the times she’d used her special gift before—finding the places to knit bones back together or shrinking unseen lumps in deep tissue was simple enough. With a sigh, she settled for using her healer’s touch to do what she could and treat the symptoms, starting with the man’s fever.

There were several points on the body that she’d learned years before from her mother’s medical diary were key points for applying cooling cloths to bring down a fever. Faith lay a hand briefly at several of them and summoned a cool feeling from deep within herself, channeling it to her hands and willing it into the body of the sick man.

Faith heard her mother’s footsteps approach with an effort at remaining quiet. After a few minutes, Claire touched her arm and roused her from her state of concentration.

“I cannae break it altogether,” Faith explained with frustration.

“You don’t need to,” Claire assured her in a whisper. “You’ve brought the fever down considerably and he’s resting more comfortably. When he wakes, I want you to give him some of the broth I have keeping warm over there—only a little at first to be sure he’ll keep it down.” A large pot was nestled down in a metal-lined box with coals tucked around the base.

Faith used the back of her hand to wipe away the sweat that was starting to bead on her forehead and looked at the other ill men, two of whom were groaning and writhing and in danger of falling out of their beds.

“Can you show me how to do it?” Claire asked under her breath. “Is it something you can explain and try to walk me through?”

Faith blinked, her eyes going wide. “Ye said it wasna something ye could do,” Faith reminded her in a whisper.

“Well… I don’t actually know. I’ve never tried. But I do think there’s a possibility it’s linked to what allows me to… travel,” Claire speculated then sighed heavily. “And I can’t stand feeling so… helpless. If I had the proper equipment, the proper medicines, the proper… but I don’t. I don’t want to treat the symptoms. I want to help heal these men.”

Faith looked down at the man she’d been treating. He appeared to be resting more comfortably at least. But the effort had left her feeling drained and clammy. She was confident it was the unfamiliar and tricky nature of the illness rather than sheer exertion on her part. More than before, she understood her mother’s frustrations. When she worked to heal a broken bone, she could envision the injury beneath the skin, could feel it and tell her patient’s body what to do, how to knit itself back together. But with these men, she was stuck searching for a source she didn’t know and struggled to understand.

“I can try to talk ye through it,” Faith whispered. “But I dinna ken as it’ll be much help—my tellin’ ye, that is. It’s… a feelin’ more’n anything.” She moved with her mother to the other man who had been laid on at table, the others more securely tucked into bunks. “I close my eyes,” she explained, taking up a comfortable stance and doing as she described. “And then I sort of… look inside—first myself, to catch hold of a thread of… I dinna ken what, but it’s… cool and… stretches? And it reaches up through the center of me and then… runs down through my arms and leaves my hands
and fingers tinglin’ like I’ve pricked ‘em all over wi’ needles.”

Claire watched Faith carefully as a visible calm descended. She had found and taken hold of whatever that thread was. Her daughter’s hands skimmed over the patient’s body, alighting momentarily in a few places—over his heart, then his lungs, down his torso to his stomach—and then she sighed and settled for laying her hands over places where the blood ran close to the surface. Resting one hand on his forehead, the other hovered for a few beats and then moved on to the next until she was satisfied his temperature had dropped to a less dangerous level.

Faith leaned against the table for a moment afterwards, collecting herself once more.

“Shall you try the next?” Faith asked.

“After you’ve taken a seat and had a few sips of something,” Claire insisted, guiding Faith to a chair. “It’s plain to see that whatever it is you’re doing, it takes more out of you than you realize. I don’t want you to push yourself too hard.”

Faith nodded faintly and reached behind her toward a pot that was still warm and the tea, though stronger than she liked it, would provide just the restorative boost she needed.

When Claire was satisfied that Faith wouldn’t fall over from exhaustion, she straightened up and moved to examine another of the men who was restless with his fever. She muttered under her breath as she turned her back to Faith and focused on her patient.

Faith watched as her mother rolled her shoulders and exhaled forcefully, then reached her hands out over the man’s body, a solid two inches between her palms and the blanket that covered him loosely. She ran her hands over the same parts of his body that Faith had with the man before, only she did so at a much slower rate and retraced her path several times before sighing quietly and moving to check his fever.

Draining the last of her tea, Faith set the cup down and pushed herself back to her feet.

“I thought I felt a little something for a moment,” Claire confessed, sheepishly. “But I might’ve just been imagining it—feeling it because I wanted to. What specifically do you try to do when you’re… treating their fever?”

“I think about what I want to happen.” Faith reached for the familiar point along the man’s neck and let her eyelids slowly droop shut. “I must cool his fever… so I think about the way the cold seeps into my hands when there’s been a frost… how it starts slow so ye barely notice. Dinna want to think my hands numb—that’d be too much—but I want to share that cool feelin’ wi’ him, convince his body no to work so hard it boils over.”

Something warm brushed Faith’s hand and startled her, but it was just Claire’s hand settling over hers in an attempt to better understand.

“They’re actually cold to the touch,” Claire breathed.

“That… doesna usually happen. But I dinna usually treat fever in such a way. Usually, I can find a source for the fever—a wound that didna heal properly or an organ that doesna want to do its share. This…”

“If it’s influenza, as I expect, then it’s a virus. It changes and evolves quickly so that even the doctors of my time struggle against it. A step behind, always,” Claire lamented. “I hope we’ve managed to contain it and that these men will have recovered in a few days’ time… I hope it isn’t like the Spanish flu.”
“Spanish?”

“After the Great War that ended when I was just a few weeks old, there was an influenza epidemic that killed so many of the young men who had only just returned from the fighting. Salt in the wound. But this strain doesn’t seem to be quite that severe, though it’s still dangerous.”

“Shall we go to see if there’re any others as have come down wi’ it?” Faith asked. “These lot are resting easier.”

“I’ll go while you try to get some of that broth into them,” Claire instructed. “And then you go and get some sleep. Whatever it is you’ve been doing to lower their fevers, you’re clearly exhausted. I’ll stay with them for a first watch and then come wake you when I need some sleep myself.”

Faith agreed and moved to stir the pot of broth as Claire carefully washed up in the basin by the door, then slipped out of the room to check with Jamie and the crew to be sure all the sick men had been brought to the captain’s quarters as instructed.

It took a while, but Faith was able to gently rouse each of the ill men and coax them into drinking at least a few sips of broth. One man drank a full teacup’s worth but rolled over and vomited it up after she’d moved on to the next. She cleaned up the mess and continued with the work so that she was still there when her mother returned with Jamie and the captain helping another ill crewman between them.

Claire scolded her and told her to go to bed. Faith was too tired to argue and let Jamie guide her from the room when the new patient had been settled on a pallet on the floor. He kissed her head and pulled the door closed, murmuring about making sure she wasn’t disturbed.

It was more than Faith had in her to bother stripping to her shift. Instead, she slipped into the lower berth and pulled the blanket over her, letting the rocking of the ship soothe lull her to sleep.

Hours later when Claire returned to their shared cabin, she smiled at the hunched shape of her oldest daughter curled up in bed, her feet sticking out from under the blanket with her shoes still on. She didn’t want to wake her, but there was no one she trusted more than Faith to keep an eye on the men and make sure they were comfortable while she managed a few hours sleep herself.

In her years at the hospital Claire had perfected a gentle way of waking her colleagues and the nurses on call when they were needed. As she crouched beside the bed to see if it would work on Faith, the smile dropped from her face, the knowledge that something was wrong overwhelming her even before she reached to roll Faith toward her.

Faith was trembling, her teeth chattering even as Claire pressed a hand to her forehead to discover she was hot and clammy with fever.
Digging Deep

Chapter Summary

Claire works to treat an ill Faith.

Everything ached. Every joint, every twitch of her muscles, every blink from her eyelids hurt. Faith wanted to sleep but her fevered dreams left her restless and unsettled.

“You need fluids,” Claire whispered, holding a cup with hot tea to Faith’s lips. The steam helped rouse her but the scent made her stomach roil. But Claire recognized the expression and deftly set the tea aside and grabbed the nearby bucket in time for Faith to empty her stomach into it. “Let’s try some water instead.” Claire rose taking the cup of tea and the bucket with her.

Jamie was waiting for her on the other side of the door.

“How bad is she, Sassenach?” he asked before the scent of vomit struck him and he paled before Claire’s eyes.

“I shouldn’t have brought her tea,” Claire said, trying to calm him. “It was too much to hope for given how much she was exposed to while we were working with the sick men and how much she’d worn herself out. I was hoping it was more exhaustion than illness.”

“But it’s not, is it,” Jamie guessed, his voice low and rough. “She has what they do. Which means she… might…”

“No,” Claire said, firmly, pushing the bucket of sick into his hands. “She’s going to be fine because even the sick men are beginning to pull through and she was healthier than most of them before they became ill. So do what you need to do to keep those kinds of thoughts from your head. Help me take care of all of them and start by taking care of this.”

Jamie looked down at the bucket again and winced at the smell. “Aye,” he nodded. “I’ll fetch Fergus to help wi’ it all too, no?”

“If that’s what he wants to do. But the fewer people exposed to those sick men, the fewer who might come down ill too.”

“And the fewer ye have to tend means ye’ll have more time to tend Faith. Aye. Stay wi’ her now and I’ll check in on the others. Make sure there’s naught they need of ye while ye sit wi’ her and rest yerself,” Jamie said with grim determination. He glanced down at the bucket and turned a little green before lowering it to dispose of the contents and rinse it clean.

Claire turned back to Faith whose eyes were slowly blinking as she fought to remain conscious—or fought against the pull of consciousness. But Claire wanted her awake and as alert as possible to better assess her condition.

There was a pitcher with some precious fresh water on a stool in the corner, covered with a bit of cloth to keep bugs from getting at it. It would be lukewarm and stale rather than cool and refreshing but it would have to do; the need to replenish Faith’s fluids rose each time she vomited.
A glass of water and the swallowing that went with it might be more than Faith could manage in her weakened state. Claire took the cloth and evaluated how clean it was (clean enough), then she brought it and the pitcher to Faith’s bedside. Dipping a bit of the fabric into the water, she brought it to Faith’s mouth.

“Can you try to suck on this?” Claire encouraged her.

Faith’s mouth opened a little wider allowing Claire to wedge the bit of cloth between her lips. Faith closed her eyes as she suckled the cloth. The sound reminded Claire of when Brianna was teething and one of the only things that could soothe her was a washcloth that had been moistened and stuck in the freezer. They hadn’t been able to do that with Faith when she was teething (though she hadn’t been as fussy during the process as her sister). For Faith they had rubbed whisky on her gums and Jamie had rocked her while reciting the fairy stories of his childhood.

How many times had Faith been ill as a child? How many times had she needed the care and comfort of her mother and she hadn’t been there for her? Claire took the cloth and soaked it again, watching the muscles in Faith’s throat moving as she sucked and swallowed.

Resting a hand against Faith’s feverish forehead, she closed her eyes and tried to reach inward the way Faith had described. She searched for a thread of anything to grab hold of—something cold. There were no threads to be found but she refused to fail Faith again. She dug deeper. It was like using her bare hands to root out the weeds in the herb garden, stubbing her fingers and breaking her nails on the stones hidden in the soil of her being, trying to find the right root that would lead her to that special power inside herself.

The effort was beginning to give her a headache so she took a break and wet Faith’s cloth again. Every drop of water she could get into her, the better. Faith seemed to be doing everything in slow motion, from breathing to blinking. Claire felt helpless and frustrated. She’d done what she could to quarantine the affected sailors but aside from keeping them clean and cool and trying to get fluids into them, there was little more that could be done for any of them. Faith at least had a room to herself. But it was growing stuffy.

Claire crossed and opened the porthole window, fresher and cooler air bursting through the tight space and stirring her curls. She took another wet cloth and held it near the open window and it’s breeze, then brought it to Faith and laid it over her forehead. She hadn’t had luck summoning that healing power, but this was better than nothing for trying to lower Faith’s body temperature.

“How many times had Faith been ill as a child? How many times had she needed the care and comfort of her mother and she hadn’t been there for her? Claire took the cloth and soaked it again, watching the muscles in Faith’s throat moving as she sucked and swallowed.

Resting a hand against Faith’s feverish forehead, she closed her eyes and tried to reach inward the way Faith had described. She searched for a thread of anything to grab hold of—something cold. There were no threads to be found but she refused to fail Faith again. She dug deeper. It was like using her bare hands to root out the weeds in the herb garden, stubbing her fingers and breaking her nails on the stones hidden in the soil of her being, trying to find the right root that would lead her to that special power inside herself.

The effort was beginning to give her a headache so she took a break and wet Faith’s cloth again. Every drop of water she could get into her, the better. Faith seemed to be doing everything in slow motion, from breathing to blinking. Claire felt helpless and frustrated. She’d done what she could to quarantine the affected sailors but aside from keeping them clean and cool and trying to get fluids into them, there was little more that could be done for any of them. Faith at least had a room to herself. But it was growing stuffy.

“Do you think you can move enough for me to help you strip off your clothes?” she asked quietly.

“Mmm cold,” Faith murmured and a tremor went through her that was nearly a shiver.

“Come on. You’ll be more comfortable without the stays,” Claire insisted gently, maneuvering to help Faith get her feet on the ground and bend to be able to stand. She took most of Faith’s weight on herself, turning Faith around so they were back to front and Claire could reach around and loosen the laces as though she were loosening them on herself. The skirts were easier than the bodice and stays.

Guiding Faith back into the cramped berth in only her shift and stockings, Claire couldn’t help remembering all the times she’d helped Brianna undress and tuck into bed after she’d fallen asleep in the car or on the sofa. The listless, boneless way of moving and manipulating the body as one would a doll was the same. Claire held fast against the familiar wave of guilt—for having left Faith and missed doing that for her for fifteen years, for having left Brianna and missing her for… forever… The tug of the receding wave ebbed and Claire put her hand to Faith’s forehead again, though she knew there was no way the fever could have broken in just a few minutes.
Faith blinked slowly at Claire, the blanket pulled up near her chin. Her breathing sounded thick and
tired. A new memory pushed its way to the surface, calling for her. Lying awake in the dark listening
to the newborn sleeping in a blanket-lined drawer from Mother Hildegarde’s rooms. That same
labored sound as Faith breathed in and then released it.

It was hypnotic then, her own breathing falling into a similar pattern as though the baby were
breathing through her efforts. She had made so many promises during those nights—to Faith, to
God, to anyone who might be listening. She’d promised to forgive Jamie, she’d promised she’d
never let Faith out of her sight, to help as many others as she could if she could only keep her child.

Had she failed or been failed? Was Faith taken from her those two years later because she had failed
to keep a promise? Or had she broken faith by leaving? Was Faith restored to her because she’d
finally fulfilled one of those promises? Or was she only ever going to be allowed to keep one child at
a time?

She put her hand to Faith’s forehead again, squeezed her eyes shut and reached into herself again.
The first threads she found were hot ones—anger and frustration, with the conditions she was
struggling against, the fact that she’d only just gotten Faith back and now Faith was in danger, the
injustice of always having to leave one of her children behind…

It grew more cool the longer she felt her way along it. But it wasn’t a thread. It was the stalk of
something, some plant, poking out of the ground. It bent and snapped between her fingers as she
fumbled for the root of it, fought to keep following the path of the stalk to its source, but the stones
obstructed her efforts to dig. She tried pushing them away but they crowded and caught her
fingertips between them. She took hold of one to hurl it out of the way.

It was cold. Guilt and sorrow, longing and undeservedness. They were cold and heavy.

The cold seeped into her hands.

There was a change in the rhythm of Faith’s breathing that drew Claire’s attention back from the
digging but she could still feel the chill in her hands. Faith was smiling with relief.

“Ye’re doin’ it, Mam,” she murmured, relaxing.

When Faith was resting comfortably, Claire returned to the captain’s quarters where Jamie and
Fergus were attending the other men—thankfully, they were regularly washing their hands in the
diluted alcohol solution Claire instructed them to use. Mostly it was still just cleaning up after the
men, helping them to use the chamber pot, trying to get them to drink some water or broth.

Jamie looked up when she entered, fear draining his face of color and then relief at the sign of
Claire’s reassuring smile bringing the flush back to his cheeks.

“She’s comfortable for now but if one of you would like to go sit with her while she sleeps in case
she needs anything…” Claire suggested.

Before Jamie could open his mouth, Fergus volunteered and had slipped from the room.

“She’s doing much better now,” Claire said quietly, taking a cup with broth from Jamie so she could
tilt it to the patient’s mouth while Jamie supported the man’s head. “She’s still queasy but she kept
down some water and she’s asleep. The fever is…I have it under control.”

Jamie’s brow furrowed so Claire decided to show him. She put a hand to the man’s forehead, still hot
with fever, then closed her eyes and looked inward again. It was easier now to find what she needed,
her hands going cold. The effort was exhausting but after a short time relieving the heat of the fever, Claire opened her eyes and began exploring her way down over the man’s chest and toward his belly. She called on her surgical experience to picture each organ along the way and it was as though she had her latex gloves on again and was before a sedated patient with the body open before her ready for healing.

There were no scalpels and she had to see with a sense she couldn’t describe—it wasn’t seeing really so much as just knowing what was wrong. But when she located anomalies—this poor sailor’s lungs were in rough shape, probably due to his pipe—she had to envision what she wanted to happen, what she knew would need to change to correct the problem, and then impose her will upon it. For the small tumors she sensed, she focused on making them smaller, on redirecting the blood supplies they’d acquired to the tissue that needed it.

As she had while in surgery, her awareness of the world outside of what she was doing drifted away. It was just her, her patient, and the medical challenge before her. When she’d located and fought every troublesome element, she let the outside world creep back into her consciousness.

Jamie was touching her—a hand broad and steady at her back, keeping her from swaying on her feet and stumbling with the rise and fall of the ship. She leaned into him and he took a step closer to brace her as she yielded to the weakness of her drained limbs.

“Ye’re no struck wi’ this yersel’ Sassenach, are ye?” Jamie inquired desperately. “What is it ye’ve done?” He guided her to a chair and eased her into it, taking her hands in his and rubbing to warm them. “Ye’re blue wi’ cold.”

“I’ll be alright. I just need to rest. And get something to eat,” Claire assured him. “Let’s go relieve Fergus. Or better yet, send him to fetch us something for supper.” She started to rise but wobbled enough that Jamie urged her back down.

“I’ll send him. Promise ye’ll stay there for the few minutes I’m gone.” He wasn’t asking for her promise; it was the order of a general expecting to have his orders obeyed. Claire managed to bring her fingers up and execute a weak salute. Jamie rolled his eyes before leaving.

“How are you feeling?” Claire asked her patient, remaining seated but leaning against the edge of the table on which he remained conscious but not entirely aware of his surroundings.

The man took a deep breath and a gentle smile spread across his drained face. “D’ye have somethin’ to wet the ol’ whistle?”

Claire retrieved the cup which still had some broth in it, though it was lukewarm at best. She worried she wouldn’t be able to support his head while holding the cup—not while remaining seated—but the man had just enough strength to lift his head (though he coughed through the first swallow). Going a sip at a time, he drained the broth in the cup before thanking her and settled into a restful doze.

Jamie returned and helped Claire to her feet, watching her carefully as she moved slowly but on steadier legs. They went to Faith’s room where she was still sleeping.

“What was it ye did in there Sassenach? Ye say ye’re no ill but ye’re walkin’ like ye’re drunk off yer arse.”

“Faith showed me how to do it. I’m not sure what it is but I believe it’s what Master Raymond did back in Paris when he healed Faith and I after she came so soon. I don’t know if it has something to do with the fact that I can travel through the stones—Faith never has but she might have the ability
since I do,” Claire rambled, taking some water offered by Jamie and swallowing it quickly. She wished it was colder. “It takes a lot out of you so I have to be careful I don’t overdo it.”

“Is that wha’s happened to Faith?”

“I believe it may be a contributing factor, yes. But I don’t think it’s the only reason.” Claire put her hand to Faith’s forehead. It was still warm but not the blaze of fever that had been there before. “I need to practice more, see just how much it lets me do. I’ll have to be wary of who I try it with, too. Wouldn’t want to stir up controversy with anyone who sees it as some sort of witchcraft.” She meant it to sound like a joke but she couldn’t feel light about the idea and Jamie stared at her, unamused.

“Aye, ye’ll be careful all around from here on. Seein’ Faith like this,” he nodded to her curled form, “is frightenin’ enough. Please, I beg ye, dinnae give me more to worry over than that.”

“I’ll try,” Claire promised, watching Faith sleep and listening to the steady three beats in and two beats out of her breathing.