

The Ripple Effect

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The Ripple Effect

by [WhiskyNotTea](#)

Summary

Claire had to leave Jamie without a word. Now she goes back to Glasgow with the hope to fix what she has broken.

A modern AU of Jamie and Claire's story inspired by their life in Outlander and Dragonfly in Amber.

Notes

This story was inspired by the prompt "It seemed like a nice neighbourhood to have bad habits in.", given by [@gotham-ruaidh](#) (Gotham's writing workshop).

It seemed like a nice neighbourhood to have bad habits in.

With my phone in hand I walked to the subway exit. Emerging from the underground, lights, car engines and laughter hit my senses.

I heard them talk with their Scottish accent (how I've missed it!) and I could see all the red and white lights that left tiny imprints through my irises. Still, I walked as in a hypnotic state, passing by all the pubs and bars full of people.

It seemed like a nice neighbourhood to have bad habits in.

Take a deep breath, Beauchamp. You're here now and what's done is done.

It's been six months since we last talked. The loneliest six months of my life. It's alright to be alone, I guess, when you still don't know. How are you supposed to see the light, if you've only ever lived in the dark? But from the moment you see the sun and how it spreads all colors around you, you can't really forget. And from the moment you have someone – the one – to share your life with, his absence haunts you forever. Well, if not forever definitely for six months. I couldn't stand this emptiness anymore.

It was like a check box in my bucket list: Live without him – tried and failed. Miserably.

Tapping the Google Maps icon, I typed the address Murtagh had given me.

200m on foot. 200m to think again and rehearse all I was going to say.

I'd repeated everything so many times already that I felt like a child ready to say a poem at the family gathering. But my audience wouldn't be as easy or as encouraging.

Don't forget to explain why, don't cry, don't seem too desperate, and please don't let him pity you.

Loud music came into my ears every time a door opened letting someone in or out the pubs. People seemed happy.

Was Jamie happy too, here? Was I doing a huge mistake coming back?

A tall guy a few meters in front of me was holding a blond girl tight. He wasn't Jamie, that I knew. But what if Jamie had found his own blond girl here?

I bit my lips so hard that I tasted my blood.

He came here to start a new life. Was I already too late?

Would he be willing to share his laughter with me again?

On your doorstep



[picture](#)

The streets of Glasgow never had a chance against rain. It kept falling on them as the sky's utmost attempt to reach the Scottish soil. The drops, ranging from tiny pearls to big and fat watery bubbles, never neglected their duty in keeping the streets dark and wet, glistening under the car lights.

I kept walking with the drizzle moistening my face, the click-clack of my boots' heels echoing against the grey pavement, announcing each step that brought me closer to Jamie.

Checking my phone, the Google Maps app informed me that there were 50m left. In 50m I would have the chance to change my life. Or, at least try.

My heart was banging against my ribcage, my shallow breath releasing small white clouds of fear in the cold atmosphere. I felt panicked and excited, like a child going to school for the first time.

Number 24.

I was here.

My ears were filled with a buzzing sound and my hands were cold and stiff as I moved to ring the bell next to the name "James Fraser".

James. He goes by James now, I thought absentmindedly, and a void filled my heart. I didn't know this person, this James, all I knew was Jamie. My Jamie.

I saw my hand trembling as I ran it on the black printed sterile letters, stumbling on the little square bell at the end of the plastic cover. I wished I could see his hand-writing. I needed to see something of him that reminded me of the man I knew.

This doesn't signify. I'm here and this is why I came. To see him. There is nothing to lose.

Yes, nothing - apart from all my dreams and hopes.

I rang the bell and stood still in front of the speaker, waiting. My throat was so dry I thought I wouldn't be able to utter a word after hearing his deep voice again.

I took a deep breath that never left my lungs and I felt my teeth sinking on the flesh inside my mouth.

That was it.

Only that no one answered. I swallowed with some difficulty and rang again.

Nothing.

A third, more prolonged ringing ended in deafening silence as well.

I felt myself trembling from the tension and the cold.

He wasn't home and for some reason I felt my heart crumble inside.

Why did this hurt so much?

Watching my determination slowly disappear I grasped on the thought of Jamie as if it would be my salvation.

No, I wasn't going to leave.

Setting my jaw, I sat myself down on the cold stone stairs in front of the building. I would wait for him no matter what.

After adjusting my beanie better, I covered myself as best as I could with my coat, my hands two fists surrounded by the cold silk cloth inside my pockets.

Fucking Scotland, always freezing cold, I thought.

And then I remembered.

How we always walked around the city in these cold misty nights, Jamie's arm steady on my shoulders, mine on his waist inside his jacket stealing his warmth. Shared earphones with loud music bringing our heads close together.

Countless times when we hid in the shadows of some dark alley, Jamie bringing my body flush to his and kissing me with all he had. And I, kissing him back with all I was.

My lips tingled in memory and I closed my eyes to prolong the feeling of having him.

Tears were now streaming down my cheeks darkening the little spots on my coat where they faded into nothingness.

I would look like a mess when he'd be back home but I didn't mind. Truth was, I *was* a mess.

And we had promised each other honesty, a long time ago.

Waiting until midnight



The cold was seeping into my body, freezing my thoughts. My heart had stopped its frantic beating with the passing hours but resumed a loud banging every time someone approached the building, reminding me the reason I was there.

People were passing, snuggled in their warm coats with hands holding other hands when they left the warm pockets empty. Happy people, conversing and laughing.

All the wrong people.

I watched the minute hand in my watch, circling, relentlessly acknowledging all numbers and then starting again from the beginning.

It hit the golden number 12 once. And then again.

I was waiting for Jamie for more than two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes. Seven thousand and two hundred seconds. Not that it really mattered, I could wait for him for centuries, if need be.

Time was slipping away like a dark man in the night dragging away with him my hopes, but I stayed there, on Jamie's doorstep, with the light drizzle falling on me.

I was fully soaked and indescribably cold when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Turning my head to see who'd opened the door behind me I encountered two smiley eyes colouring with kindness

a round face. I tried to smile back, only to feel my tear-stricken face protest against the inappropriate move.

“Ye’ll become an ice cube soon, lass, if ye’ll stay out here”, the lady said with a sweet friendly voice. “Come inside, so I can give ye some tea and warm ye up, aye?”

Every Scottish word she said rang into my ears, nearly bringing tears in my eyes. I almost heard Jamie saying to me “Come here, Sassenach, let me warm ye, aye?” I bit my lip to stop the memory. “Oh, I’m fine. Thank you.” I tried to deny the kind offer, as convincingly as I could. She already shook her head disapprovingly.

“Aye, fine. I see. Now come with me so ye can be fine in a warmer place.” She was determined.

“I’m waiting for... someone, you see.” I finished with a gesture at the empty street.

“I canna see anyone out here lass, and since yer someone runs a bit late tonight, it’ll be better to find ye safe and warm, I think. Come on.” With a hand urging me upwards she smiled again and nodded towards the apartment building’s entrance.

“Alright.” I said grabbing my bag as I raised myself, to hear small pops from my spine, protesting for my previous uncomfortable posture. “I guess waiting inside won’t do any harm.”

She tried to convince me to accept her invitation and stay in front of her fireplace until I would be dry and I could feel my limbs again, but after being acquainted with my stubbornness she brought a quilt and a cup of tea next to me at the stairs leading to the first floor.

“I’ll go to sleep now”, she said patting my head as she would do to a grandchild and I felt a warm squeeze in my heart. “If ye need anything, there is a spare key hidden in this pot there”, she showed a brown pot with a huge happy green plant spreading its leaves around.

“Thank you Mrs...” I trailed off, realizing that I didn’t know my saviour’s name.

“FitzGibbons. But ye can call me Mrs Fitz.” She winked at me.

“Thank you, for everything, Mrs Fitz. I’m Claire.”

“Take care Claire. I hope yer someone will be back home soon, lass.” She said and disappeared behind the door.

The quilt around my shoulders and the warm cup bringing my crystalized fingers back to life rejuvenated my strength.

It was almost midnight now. He would be back home at any moment. Angus and Rupert always stayed until closing time, but Jamie usually tried to get back home earlier when he was working the following morning. Or at least he used to do this. Now maybe this *James* had a different routine.

Anyway.

I tried to focus again on the things I would say.

How do we start?

Take a deep breath. Be cool. Say “Hello” “How are you”, the usual stuff. Everything is going to be alright. After all, It’s still Jamie.

I turned my back leaning onto the wall behind me. The now lukewarm tea was resting on my bended knee and I closed my eyes, wiggling my toes in my shoes. Still there, thank God. Thanks to Mrs Fitz, actually.

The sound of a key scratching the lock brought me back to reality. It was like music in my ears. Swallowing hardly, I faced the door again, frightened and excited. This must be him. He’s back.

My breath was shallow and I felt the tea slowly penetrating my jeans, bringing some of its warmth to my skin as I tried to comprehend the image revealed behind the opened door.

Jamie was here, sure enough. Tall and impressive, with his broad muscled chest covering almost all the door’s expanse. The clavicles that I spent whole nights trailing my fingers across were peeking out from the open buttons of his shirt. His red locks turned to a darker auburn by the drizzle outside.

His beautiful slanted eyes were filled with surprise and terror when they locked with mine, a moment before he could readjust his invisible mask to hide all his thoughts.

He never wore this mask with me before.

One muscled arm hanged limp on his side, the keys still clinking – from his previous movement or because his hand trembled, I couldn’t tell.

She was slightly turned towards him, her hand on his abdomen. On the hard-gained six-pack, after spending hours and hours in the gym. *God, the times we argued on that!*

His other arm was around her waist.

I felt a noose slowly but steadily tightening around my throat.

I thought I heard my heart falling on the floor and shattering in pieces as I rose and walked on the broken porcelain of Mrs Fitz’s cup.

With a cold, strangled voice that I couldn't recognize, I heard myself saying "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

And I passed by them and fell into the night, willing to disappear off the face of earth.

Soaked in Bleach



[source](#)

I was walking like a maniac.

Away. I had to go away. As far as possible.

As if the distance worked magic and could delete the memory that still burned behind my closed eyelids, leaving its imprint in my soul forever.

Jamie with another woman in his arms. And not just that... Jamie going home with her.

What a fool I've been! What an absolute moron to come back!

I squeezed my eyes shut with all the strength I still had, trying to forget the last few hours. This was an absolute shipwreck.

So long, Titanic, Claire Beauchamp is coming to claim your place in the worst tragedy list.

I should never come back. What was I thinking? That he'd see me and run to take me into his arms? Like a slow motion, hands wide open, huge smile-with happy tears run? No more romantic Hollywood movies from now on, because apparently my brain was smashed into

pumpkin mash. In life no one promises you a happy-ending. Apart from Murtagh who had given me the address himself!

Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser, you won't come out alive if you end up in my hands.

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It took a minute or two before it dawned on me. The realization of what I dreaded the most, yet I couldn't ignore any longer.

Jamie had moved on. All it took him was six bloody months. Six months to forget *us*.

My feet felt leaden and yet I was almost running.

My breath was hitched and shallow. Tears that I didn't feel leaving my eyes were staining my cheeks, leaving their salty taste on my lips.

I could feel nothing else but my broken heart, dissolved into nothingness in my chest. A hole.

A black hole pulling everything around into its dark center. No light. Not a single sun-stricken hope that could avoid being gravitated in the darkness.

There was no escape. I stood there, watching my whole world become an event horizon that determined the fate of my life.

The event horizon determines the fate of everything that enters it. Everything gets eventually soaked up by the black hole.

The fate of smiles shared under warm blankets, the fate of kisses shared over slices of bread, toasts and coffee on our breakfast table, the fate of hugs shared in front of our living-room window watching the cold Glasgow streets and fogging up the glass with our mingled breaths. The fate of a cry, that would wake us up in the middle of the night, leading to murmured "Your turn" and pokes on our sides. All was lost.

I kept my fast pace and turned to leave this street, this bloody street that mere hours away seemed the best place to be in the world. I knew this was a high stake, from the moment I held the neon green post-it note with his address. I knew we had a lot to talk about. To fight, to regret, to say stupid things that we didn't mean. I wanted a chance to explain myself. I wanted a chance to say I never stopped loving him.

And I still couldn't believe that I'd never get to do that, because he'd already moved on. So bloody fast - and that was a poisonous sting in my heart. Gloomy thoughts flooded every empty nook of my mind and I swallowed back the bile that was rising in my throat.

I focused on the pain and everything around me became a blurred picture, meaningless surroundings painted quickly by a strange hand only to fill in the empty space of the drawing. I stepped in puddles I would usually avoid like the plague, I crossed streets without caring if a car was coming towards me, I didn't even bother to put up my umbrella and remove the soaked locks of my hair that blocked my vision.

It was pouring now.

The same lyrics were repeated in my head at the highest volume.

"Doused in mud, soaked in bleach."

Doused in mud I was, and how I wished to soak in bleach right now!

To remove the blood stains I felt all over my body, to be cleansed, to be new. No feelings, no pain, no terrified blue eyes looking back in mine. Oblivion. Nirvana. The state of freedom from suffering and rebirth.

The fact that I suddenly found a meaning behind Curt Cobain's lyrics wasn't reassuring at all, considering how his life ended.

**

"Please!" I heard a roar coming from somewhere behind me. "Claire!"

His hand was now on my arm, making me turn to face him. He must have called me time and time again.

He stood in front of me, panting, his hair dripping on his face. When I looked at him, he repeated my name, now silently, almost a whisper in his lips.

I swallowed hard and said the only thing I could. "It's alright, Jamie" *No it isn't alright. Nothing is alright.* "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come" *Yeah, be the bigger person.* After removing my arm from his hand, so forcefully that it was painful, I turned to leave again.

“No!” his voice was raw and his hand grabbed me so hard I was sure it would leave bruises behind. “Sassenach!”

“Don’t call me that!” I turned abruptly and almost fell on him. Almost. My words were said with the most venomous tone I’d ever heard myself using, but I wouldn’t have any of that. With my jaw set, I looked straight into his eyes.

Jamie, surprised from my tone, drew his hand back. “OK. Claire.” He caught me tentatively by both shoulders, afraid I would leave again. I felt my blood boiling inside my veins but somehow I stood still, just looking at him. His touch was so light, I could feel the tremble in his hands. “Please... Claire, don’t leave.”

The air was wild, making the rain pelt against our faces, so rigid from the strain that we looked as made of marble. It hit our soaked clothes and raised our wet hair in front of our eyes, in a terrible dance that mirrored the one of my feelings.

Jamie raised a hand to tuck one of the errand curls behind my ear, his fingers grazing slightly my cheek before he withdrew them to leave behind only the ghost of his touch.

Why is he doing this now?

Is this just guilt, for hurting me? For seeing he wasn’t alone?

Did we come to this point, that all he feels for me is pity?

I would have none of this.

The girl



[source](#)

People change. Before coming back, I tried to prepare myself as much as I could, reviewing all the possible scenarios in my mind. Jamie could be different now, for all I knew. Different as a person, different in respect with me. Still, hope is so sly, persistent and expanding as a tiny virus that soon infected most of my alternative universes with hugs and smiles.

I was now standing in front of Jamie, blinded by rejection and despair. I could still feel the remnants of his touch on my cheek and the erratic beating of my heart, but I could see nothing in his face, apart from my own failure. A failure that hit me harder than anything he'd might say.

I'd failed to make him love me as I did, I'd failed to live a life with him that would be stamped on his brain forever. On the other hand, I found that he was far more successful at that.

Now that I knew it was over, our moments were flashing in front of me, colorful, vivid and... lost. The first time he kissed me under the blue-black Scottish sky peppered with stars and every sweet, longing, passionate kiss welcoming me home after a tiring shift at the hospital. The meals he cooked making a mess in our pearl white kitchen while he was swaying to the music in his head. Every lazy Sunday we spent at bed reading or watching movies, with his head on my lap and my fingers lost in his curls, every trip we'd taken with the windows down and the music volume up while driving across the Highlands. Every time I got mad because he'd pulled me closer to him when we were in company and every time he'd said that he didn't realize doing so. Every little moment. Lost.

In the blink of an eye all my sorrow and heartbreak were transformed into a wild and uncontrollable fury, ready to burn everything.

The fire that started burning inside me the moment I saw them together was now ignited again, anger blowing as the wind blew around us.

The shards of my broken heart were sharp enough to wound him and all I could think was to use them against him.

Anything to avoid his pity.

“What do you want, Jamie?” I asked cold sober.

“Claire...” He started saying but trailed off. He reached towards me but stopped midway with the crinkle between his eyebrows deepening.

“You better go back.” I said defiantly, taking a step back myself, to increase the space between us. My move proved to be totally ineffective, because he immediately launched forward.

“I’m not going anywhere unless ye’re coming with me.” He was obviously distressed, his Scottish accent becoming stronger with each passing minute, but his voice was kept low - one could say normal. But I was the one who knew it best and I could hear the tremble in it.

“You better go back.” I repeated, trying to keep my face blank. I felt shielded with a thick layer of ice. No matter how painful it’d feel afterwards, no matter how many ice burns I would count on my body, I wasn’t going to show that now. “Don’t let her wait for you.” My jaw ached from the pressure I used to gnash my teeth. I was looking abstractly somewhere behind him because I couldn’t look at him and see the feelings he had for her. I just couldn’t.

When he didn’t reply or move to go, I instinctively raised my eyes searching his. I wasn’t prepared though, for what I’d find in the familiar blue and it almost broke me. I saw pain. Raw, unconcealed pain. No mask, no attempt to hide. “I’ve taken care of the matter.” He said decisively with a slight nod towards the house.

“Oh, you did, didn’t you? You’ve taken care of the matter!” I repeated sarcastically. “That’s a relief! How nice of you to send her away so you could deal with the psycho ex-girlfriend coming back out of nowhere!”

“Don’t talk like this.”

“You left her there, waiting? Did you even think how she’d felt about that?”

Oh my god. What am I saying? I’m raving mad, for sure. That’s not the bigger person, that’s bloody Mother Teresa.

“What? What?” Jamie repeated, perplexed – not that I blamed him. “Why did you come back, Claire?”

This confrontation was getting worse with each passing minute. I set my jaw and said the same thing again, for the last time. “I should have never come back. I didn’t know, Jamie. I’m sorry I disturbed your life.” I felt nothing, apart from the echoless sound of the words in my body. No rain, no cold, no blue sapphire eyes piercing through me. I had to do this. I had to keep the remnants of dignity I still had.

Jamie’s face instantly changed, mirroring the anger in mine. “So I’m doomed either way now, aren’t I? Either way, I’m mistreating her or you.”

I kept looking at him defiantly. “None of these matters. I’m leaving. You’re free to go on with your life. You already did that, anyway.” I said and made to move again.

“I said NO!” His shout pierced my body as his hand grabbed my arm tightly again. He was shaking with anger. “Ye’re not going anywhere. Not until ye listen to me.”

“Listen to what? How you’re spending your time with new love? Thanks, but no thanks.”

“My... what? Are you mad, woman? What are ye talking about? My love?” He looked incredulous and I could see his loathing in the last two words. But still...

“The girl, goddamn you!” I was shouting as well, feeling each word scratching the surface of my sore throat.

“She’s nothing to me! We went out just once, and it wasna even a date! And then hell broke loose.” He gestured around us and then he shook his head, suddenly deflated from all his anger. With both hands on my arms and his eyes locked with mine, he continued “I dinna love anyone, Claire”. He stopped, took a breath and letting it out he said tenderly “Only you. She’s just a girl Jenny asked me to go out with. She’s from Broch Mordha, Jenny and I know her since she was a child.”

“Jenny asked you, right? And you hastily obliged! How kind of you...” I said with all the sarcastic vibe I had in me, trying not to change my mind after what he’d said. I suddenly felt tired. I wanted just to go back to my hotel room, hide under the duvet and cry myself to sleep. “I know you Jamie. Or, better, I knew you. You’re never going home with a girl on your first date.” I was just stating a fact.

My answer made Jamie furious again. His grip on my arms tightened as he said through gnashed teeth “She lives in the same fucking building Claire. I don’t even like her. I didna want to fuck her.”

“Yet you held her from the waist, pulling her to you.” I almost whispered. It was so low that I didn’t know if he’d listened, but I had no strength anymore. I was trying as hard as I could not to fall on my knees for some while now. Reliving the scene almost killed me.

“She was drunk. She almost fell up the stairs. I HELD HER UPRIGHT.” Jamie shouted in my face.

I had nothing to say. I stood there, focusing on the pain in my arms while I looked into his eyes. I didn’t know what to do next, until I saw the heartbreak in these eyes I knew too well. Jamie’s eyes. *My* Jamie’s eyes.

“When I saw ye, waiting for me on the stairs, the way your face lightened up when ye saw it was me coming home and how...how you crumbled seeing her... Ye teared my guts out, Claire.”

I’d started shivering by then. When he opened his arms, all my resolve melted. “It’s you. It’s always been you. Come here, mo nighean donn.”

I walked in his arms, cold and shaking. I couldn’t fight it anymore and I didn’t want to. The moment I felt his warmth enveloping me through our soaked clothes, I melted into him. I got lost in his arms, feeling exposed and protected and loved. Feeling whole, in a way only Jamie could make me feel.

“Am I all the hell that broke loose?” I murmured in his chest, making him laugh.

“Ye’re trouble, Sassenach. But ye’re *my* trouble and the hell breaks loose only when I see ye leaving. ”

With a smile I snuggled in the arms I longed for during the six longer months of my life. Jamie spread his coat and half-covered me, trying to warm me up.

“Ye’re freezing, Sassenach. Let’s go home, aye?” He whispered in my curls, holding me tight.

But I was already home.

And that moment I realized that I loved him so much, that it would be impossible to finish what I came for. This home would soon be lost. Again.

And that tore *my* guts out.

A criminal always returns to the scene of the crime



[source](#)

I thought I remembered.

I was such a fool, to believe that every time I closed my eyes thinking of him, I could bring him back.

A warm embrace in the dark empty room where I spent my nights. A soft kiss on my forehead in the morning, when I was seconds away from waking up into emptiness. These moments, I thought I'd kept him with me.

Bollocks.

That imaginary had nothing to do with the way I could feel Jamie now. His muscles were strong and hard against my body, his heart creating the most beautiful melody I've ever heard. The melody I was hearing every morning for two years, when I nuzzled against his chest before opening my eyes. The beat that reassured me that the world was in place.

This same rhythm comforted me now, after the last hour's whirlwind of emotions.

He was alive and well, and here – with me.

Jamie engulfed me in a hug the instant he saw me taking a step towards him. He covered me with his coat and with his relief, hiding me from the world. The echoes of our shouts faded away in the misty atmosphere and our anguish and fright of losing each other vaporized, dark masses lost in the fog.

It's you. It's always been you. His words lingered in my mind, bringing with them all the warmth my soul ached for. I could breathe again.

He didn't send me away.

Even though I'd left him, he took me in, a door unlocked waiting for a little push to open again. We had been both hurt, but no ego or anger was sneaking between us. Jamie knew what I craved for and he gave it to me, as he had always done.

He was my shelter, a sanctuary away from the loneliness and fear that pursued me all these past months. With his wet shirt against my cheek, I let the tears flow, quiet sobs shaking my body.

I was myself again. I was accepted and protected. I was loved.

The thought made me hate myself. I was taking so much from him, when I could give nothing in return. I'd come back to find him for myself, because I couldn't bear the empty days anymore.

Everything I was faded away day by day. My face became blank and expressionless, my movements slow and pointless. The ghost of myself was seeing me back from the vintage mirror hanged at my apartment's living room and I didn't mind its glass eyes becoming more removed every morning.

I turned my head to see Jamie, my solid proof that I wasn't there anymore. I was alive again, the pain and hope carving their imprints in my heart. Little knives peeling away the numbness that piled up for six months. I could see it, layer by layer falling on the wet tarmac and I welcomed the hurt, as agonizing as it was, because it brought me back the beauty of feeling.

I took a deep breath and his scent flooded in me, the happiness I'd dreamed of. His musky scent always grounded me. It brought me home.

His hand trailed from my back up to my nape, lost under my wet hair. It slowly moved to cup my face, a thumb erasing the tears running on my cheek. Two fingers settled under my chin, making me look up at him.

"Hi there." He said, with the sweetest smile. "You're back." He whispered. *I missed you*, was hiding in his eyes and I could feel my heart fill up with love.

I could do nothing but nod, and I bit my lip to stop the tears welling up in my eyes again. He planted a tender kiss on my forehead and slowly released me, without any attempt to hide his regret.

We were soaked to the bone and the wind was shooting daggers at our bodies. When I left his arms, I realized we were both shivering.

We walked towards his apartment, holding each other a bit more forcefully than necessary. I couldn't bear being away from him again. The inches felt like miles and I needed to constantly touch him. The rain beat down on us, and Jamie pulled me closer to his body.

How was I supposed to leave, when all I wanted was to be squeezed against his side?

I closed my eyes, unable to deal with the heartbreak that would follow. I had come back to explain everything, but I knew couldn't stay. And as much as I wanted to, I could never ask him to come with me. Before seeing him again, I thought it was a good plan to ask him to follow me. Now that I was here, I could clearly see how lame this idea was. I loved him more than that. Jamie loved Scotland, he loved his job and his family. I couldn't take them all away from him just because my life was a mess.

What kind of love is so egoistical?

I'd promised myself that this time I would do right by him. I wouldn't flee at night, with a hastily scribbled note left on the kitchen table behind me.

Last time I felt like a thief – don't be seen, be quiet, disappear.

And a thief I was, apparently, because I'd taken his heart with me. Only I had forgot mine behind. Every great plan has its own flaws.

I'd come back so I could explain. I would leave with a proper goodbye this time. I might even take a little piece of my heart back, even though I wasn't sure I could part with Jamie's just yet.

Jamie's hand was strong on my waist as we fought our way against the howling wind and a little squeeze brought me out of my reverie. I realized I could barely feel my body parts he wasn't touching.

He hadn't kissed me, and I knew he did that on purpose. He waited for the answers I owed him. He didn't say anything, but I could see it all written in the frown on his face.

We passed by a pub and heard shouts, laughter and celebrations from inside. Turning my head to that direction, I realized it was a rugby game day.

That's why everyone was out for pints tonight!

Without consciously thinking I searched for Jamie's eyes, only to find that he was already looking at me. His face was calmer, and a small smile turned his lips up.

Aye, I remember.

It was two and a half years earlier. At a pub that looked like this, two people that looked like us were sitting one next to the other at the long bar counter.

**

(2.5 years earlier)

Geillis was the only friend I had in Glasgow and she'd made me promise that I would go with her to watch the rugby game, properly, in a pub with tons of beer.

Uncle Lamb had taught me never to break a promise, even though he'd broken a few of his own. He went and had himself killed, for one.

So there I was, watching Scotland Vs England, in a Scottish pub, drinking Scottish beer and being warned not to talk too much or too loudly.

Both things counted as achievements worth writing in my CV.

I was doing well, for the first ten minutes or so. After that, the operation “Incognito English Woman” went to hell.

“Oh no!” All it took was two words for the red-headed Scot sitting on the stool next to mine with his back towards me, to turn 180 degrees and look at me through wide incredulous eyes.

“Ye’re a Sassenach?”

And this is how Dr. Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp lost her life in a pub last night.

I glanced at Geilis for help, but she was already hiding her face in her palms, careful not to touch the painted Scottish flag on her left cheek, her arms shaking with repressed laughter. No help then. Great.

Her best friend couldn’t fathom that the next minutes would be detrimental for Dr. Beauchamp’s life.

Turning to face the huge Scot on my left, I did the only thing I could think at that moment. I shrugged. “I suppose one could say that. Am I in danger?” I asked, while I looked the stranger over.

Oh my. I never thought someone could be that impressive while dressed in casual jeans and a sweater. His sapphire blue eyes locked with mine and a smile formed across his lips, making the eyes look even more slanted and bright.

“No. Not as long as I’m with ye.” He said with a cocked eyebrow and gave me a lopsided smile, making me praise god for the stool that was under my bum because I couldn’t feel my legs anymore. “Better remember though that ye’re English and we’re in Scotland, lass. Dinna be provocative.”

“It was just a great opportunity we missed there. And...” I leaned closer to him, “Between you and me, our boys play much better.” I had no idea whose team was better. I even didn’t feel English until I met him.

He eyed me with his eyebrows shot midway to his forehead and coming even closer to me, he asked “Ye like living on the edge, don’t ye?” His scent filled the air around me.

The coroner stated that this was the first case where the cause of death was a heart bursting.

“Just stating the facts. Objectively.” I said nonchalantly, trying to hide my crazy heartbeat.

“Want a bet? If ye’ll lose, ye’ll give me yer number.” His deep voice made me want to talk to him forever, only to listen the words rolling on his tongue.

“And if you lose?”

“I’ll buy ye a pint.”

And I’m giving you my number, my lad.

Seeing that Geilis had made herself acquainted with Jamie’s friends, I savored every minute talking with this next-stool-God.

England won that night and Jamie bought me a pint. We left the pub together and before saying goodnight I leaned to him, whispering “The Scottish boys were really good tonight.” With that, I handed him my number.

He texted me five minutes later, with a cheeky “All the Scottish boys?”

The next day was our first date.

**

(Now)

When we arrived at his doorstep, I lost my breath again.

Jamie felt it and didn't take his hand off of my waist.

We entered the building and I tried to swallow the terror that had flooded in my heart before leaving this place. It was just thirty minutes ago. Jamie turned the lights on and I searched for the broken pieces of my cup, only to see everything cleaned up. For a moment I thought that I might have imagined all this disaster. Shaking my head, I took a mental note to thank Mrs Fitz the next day.

Jamie grabbed my hand, leading me up the stairs to his apartment.

He unlocked the door and slipped in the darkness, taking me with him.

Here we are, Beauchamp.

Nessie and the Red Phone Booth.



[source](#)

Jamie held my hand tight while he turned the lights on. With a subtle *click!* his life was there, open and bright for me to see it.

I swallowed hard, trying to push the fear back to the pit of my stomach, where it settled for months now. With a breath, I looked around.

It was a studio apartment, furnished only with the basics.

A small kitchen, a narrow dining table, a bed.

Our bed.

That stopped me in my tracks.

The plain solid oak frame supported a thick, half a meter tall bed mattress, which had a mattress on top of it, then a top mattress and finally a toper, what else?

**

(1.5 years earlier)

We were bouncing on different mattresses like school kids for about an hour, trying to decide which one suited us, and erupting in laughter when the kind lady interrupted our shenanigans to ask us if everything was alright.

I could remember my exact words when Jamie exclaimed “This one!” lying on a four-layer bed that would cost us a fortune.

“You’re kidding me. Come on, Jamie, this is ridiculous!” I took his hand and dragged him off the bed.

But he insisted.

So we bought all four layers, filled with natural products; horsehair, cactus fiber and seaweed.

“Yeah, now that I’m thinking about this, I could never sleep on a bed without seaweed in it.” I mentioned sourly still thinking of the bed’s enormous price.

“Ye’re a selkie, that’s why.” Jamie said, wiggling his eyebrows and setting his teeth on my neck to prove his point.

“Horseshit.” I whispered but smiled nonetheless. We would need the bed ASAP if Jamie continued like this. Any bed, if I wanted to be honest.

“Horsehair, Sassenach. If there were horseshit in there, ye would scrunch this wee nose of yours until...” his whisper was lost as he licked across the side of my neck up to my earlobe.

He never admitted it, but I knew this bed was bought for me, because I often had a sore neck after long shifts and nights spent at the hospital. I knew he could sleep on rocks if need to, and he would be happy with it.

**

The image of our bed, covering almost half of the relatively small space of his apartment, filled my heart with dreams I didn’t have the courage to hope for before coming back.

Glancing around I realized that more of the furniture was from our place.

His mother’s armchair was standing next to my uncle’s vintage side table, the last thing I had left from him. And on top of it, the trophies of our first date.

A black ceramic Loch Ness monster ornament, next to a bright red London telephone booth.

**

(2.5 years earlier)

“I have a gift for you.” I announced with a broad grin the moment I saw him outside my apartment building. “Just to remind you who’s always winning around here.” With a cocked eyebrow, indicating who was the aforementioned winner, I handed him the little souvenir, silently praying he wouldn’t be offended.

If only I knew!

“Ye surely know that in Scotland we’re rising when we dinna like our rulers!” He stated with a cunning smile.

Jamie materialized a box from behind his back and gave it to me with a cheeky grin. It was a white box, with a picture of Nessie at the front, and I opened it to find four parts inside – a head, a tale, and two body parts made to look like she was half-emerged in the water. It was beautiful.

“So ye dinna forget where ye are, lass. This is a powerful place, full of mysteries, ye ken.”

That night I learned some of the mysteries hidden in his strong arms and tender lips. And that he liked me as his ruler, but rose nonetheless.

**

The memories were now running their claws against my heart and I could barely keep myself from falling on the floor and sob for all the things I’d left behind. It was a wonder I still had more tears left in me, but it did.

Before I knew it, Jamie's arms were around me, keeping me upright.

"Come here, Sassenach. Let's warm you up." He whispered, and I felt his breath in my ear. I leaned my head towards him, only to be met by thin air. He left me and headed to the wardrobe.

I didn't move an inch while he was searching in his drawers, afraid that if I'd move I would run straight to his hug. He came back with a towel and pile consisting of a hoodie, sweatpants and clean underwear – all huge, and all his.

I was shocked by this offer. Not that I'd never wore his clothes before, just that I didn't expect him to be so... open and giving.

Like I'd never left.

I took the clothes and nodded my thanks. When I raised my eyes to his, I found them filled with care and concern.

This man could break my heart just by snapping his fingers.

"You're all soaked, too. Don't you want to..." He interrupted me before I could continue my offer.

"Dinna fash, Sassenach. You go take a hot shower and I'll change into something dry in the meantime."

I did as I was bid, unable to disagree with him. My wet clothes were clinging on my body, the cold creeping in, and I desperately needed to compose myself before we would talk.

-

Jamie's bathroom was small but the shower was big enough to fit him – which made it quite spacious for me. I shed my clothes on the floor and got in, longing to feel the full pressure of the scalding hot water against my skin.

How I wished he would come in to join me, to wash the pain away and make me his again. To feel his body against mine, giving me the absolution I craved for, as he would my frail body with his strength.

He didn't come, though.

I dried myself and wore his soft clothes, smelling of my favorite conditioner.

My heart melted to the floor, next to my soaked clothes.

Oh, Jamie.

-

I walked to the room to find him sitting in the armchair, with two glasses of whisky on the side table, next to an almost full whisky bottle. He was well prepared.

He chuckled when he saw me, and I took a lame turn around myself to show off the disaster, in all its greatness. The sweatpants were falling off my hips and I used a rubber hair band to somehow keep them up, while the hoodie could easily fit in me and a duplicate of myself at the same time.

I eyed the whisky with a tiny smile on my face. Jamie shrugged. "I figured we would need it."

"I reckon we will." I confirmed, and walked to take my glass.

It was when I leaned in to take my dram that the magic happened. For an instant we forgot ourselves, what had happened, what was going to happen. My hand grazed his arm and the next moment he had grabbed me, pulling me into his lap and kissing me with all he had. Teeth were sinking deep in lips, drawing blood, tongues touched and fought for dominance, out of the need to push the suffering of the past months away. Without realizing how, I found myself straddling him, grinding my body against his, with a hand lost in his hair and the other grasping his tee shirt for dear life. I felt one hand on my scalp, tangled between my wet curls while the other traveled from my thighs up to my butt, until it settled on my waist to pull me closer.

When we came back to ourselves and broke the kiss Jamie held my eyes with his. Our breaths were short and fast, synchronized to let us breath each other in.

It took a while until Jamie averted his eyes. “I’m sorry, Sassenach. I..., I just couldn’t help myself. I shouldn’t have done that.”

I had no words. To feel this man’s passion again, woven seamlessly with his love and care, was the best gift anyone had ever given me. I kissed him in reply, a light flicker of my lips against his and I moved away.

With my whisky in hand, I sat on the edge of the bed and run my fingers on the duvet.

“You kept...” I trailed off. Did I want to mention that?

He gave me a rueful smile and looked absentmindedly at the bed. “Aye, I kept all I could fit in this place.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I knew he prepared himself to talk, so I sipped my drink and waited in silence.

“When you left, Claire, I was lost. I stayed at home for a week, barely sleeping or eating, trying to understand what had just happened. Then Murtagh came, with his grump face – ye know Murtagh – and scolded me for more than an hour. But I couldn’t react to anything he said. I felt like I had no strength anymore, but even if I had, everything was meaningless, anyway.”

I walked to him and sat down on the floor, placing a hand on his thigh, desperately trying to comfort him but still not knowing my boundaries.

“Why, Claire?” He whispered painfully. “Why did you leave like this, why didn’t you return any of my calls?”

I lowered my head, trying to the best way to respond to his questions.

“Anyway,” he continued, “I moved here because Murtagh insisted that living in another place would help. He suggested going back to Lallybroch, but I couldna do that. With Jenny and the kids... I needed to be alone. When I finally agreed to move, he said he would transfer all our

things to a warehouse. But I... I couldn't do it. I couldn't let you go. I couldn't let us go." His fingers trailed on my cheek and then they were gone, as I felt him standing up, trying to keep a distance. I let him go.

Jamie moved to the window and stood there, trying to calm himself down. I'd seen the heartbreak mingling with anger in his eyes before he turned to go away. The muscles of his shoulders were tense underneath with tee shirt and fast, deep breaths were shaking his body.

"Why did you leave?" He hissed, still not looking at me.

"I..." I trailed off. This was the hard part. I gulped audibly, trying to force back the tears and steady my breath. Jamie turned to face me, and I could see the words struggling behind sealed lips, wanting to fly free between us. He pressed his lips tighter, in an attempt to protect his thoughts and hopes. It would be harder for me to shatter them with my explanations if they were never said aloud.

My inability to find words made things worse. His fury took over, dominating all other feelings. When he talked again his voice was palpating with restrained anger.

"Do ye ken how many times I thought about that day, to make sense of it, only to end up more confused and sore? Do ye ken how it feels to return to an empty house when all ye were thinking during the drive home was two whisky eyes you get lost in, and a body completing yours, taking away all the day's weariness? Do ye ken how it feels to replay in yer head every single detail for six months, trying to find any sign of what was amiss, if there was something different the night before when you still felt whole, or during the next morning's breakfast? If that day's goodbye kiss was different than the rest – screaming goodbye forever? And yet, to end up with nothing that can explain your emptiness. Do ye ken how it feels to be left alone with a note in your shaking hands, reading '*It's over - Don't look for me*'?"

"It wasn't easy to leave, either." It was just a whisper that left my lips, but I could see that he'd heard it, because his chest was heaving more with every passing minute.

"Then WHY DID YOU LEAVE, DAMN YOU?" He shouted, his fists shaking as he kept them close to his body with difficulty.

"I HAD TO!" I screamed. Seeing his pain made my pain raw, splinters sinking in the soft surface of my heart.

“You left me behind without any explanation! Do ye ken how it is to live as half a man? To have the ghost of your happiness following you everywhere, a constant reminder of your smashed dreams?”

“Do *I* know? Do *I* know?” I repeated, unable to think of anything else. “OF COURSE I DO! IT WAS THE SAME FOR ME, TOO.”

Jamie opened his mouth ready to reply, but pressed his lips instead and took a step back. Squaring his shoulders, he asked me in a cracked voice, “Why are ye back?”

Letting a breath out, I replied. “I needed to explain.”

“Then do.” He said, his voice cold and removed, insulating himself from what would follow.

“I left to protect you. You and me both.”

The Explanation



[source](#)

If Jamie ever looked like a highland cow, it was at that moment. His hair had dried, falling on his forehead and almost covering his eyes as he moved towards me. His gaze underneath the red locks was angry, wild, and lost, all at the same time.

“Wha, Wha, What?” Jamie blurted out, stopping himself at the last moment as he walked towards me. He was two steps away, hands clenched in fists. “What are ye saying, Claire?”

“I am saying,” I swallowed back the fear and continued, “That I left because I had to, not because I wanted to leave you. You... You should know I would never leave you,” I finished in a trembling voice, pushing the heels of my hands against my eyes to shed away the awful memories.

“Ye had to leave, ye said, to protect me,” Jamie repeated as if in a trance. “Are ye mad woman? Protect me from what? From being too happy?” He grimaced in pain, a hand running through his head.

“Jamie. It’s a long story. Can you please at least sit down?” I wanted him to be as calm as possible, so I could maybe – maybe – eventually get myself together.

He sat on the edge of the bed, his fingers impatiently drumming on his thigh, waiting for me to start explaining.

It was impossible for me to sit. I started pacing back and forth, trying to figure out how to begin.

Four steps from the armchair to the kitchen table, four steps back. A deep breath. Four steps forth. Four steps –

“Will ye talk, woman? Or do ye plan to walk a marathon here in front of me, just for the pleasure of torturing me?” Jamie growled.

I stilled myself with great difficulty and watched him in the eye.

“I came in Scotland five years ago.”

Good. Start from the beginning.

“God, ye’ll tell me the story of yer life now? I ken that!” He said impatiently. Actually, the word impatience was too small to describe Jamie Fraser at that moment.

“Will you let me talk, you bloody Scot?”

He laughed at that, my favorite swear bringing back memories of good times. “Aye, talk, Sassenach.”

Jamie gave me the gift back, and I acknowledged that. *Sassenach*. One word and I found the strength to go on. “When we first met, I told you I had left London because I needed a change. Do you remember?”

He nodded, whispering a “Yes”. His eyes had lost their anger and he looked at me solemnly, his furrowed eyebrows making his effort to understand obvious.

“This was what they advised me to say, Jamie.” I closed my eyes, listening to the wild beating of my heart.

Make him forgive me. Make him understand.

“I wanted to tell you the truth. I’m not good at lying, you know that.”

“But you managed to lie, just fine,” he interrupted me, his voice venomous, poisoning my heart.

“Jamie... When I first met you, I didn’t know you well enough to trust you and... when I got to know you I couldn’t find it in me to tell you.”

I took a deep breath before speaking again. Jamie remained silent, although I could imagine that he was burning inside, listening to me say I didn’t want to share everything with him. Even if this ‘everything’ I kept from him was only pain and anguish. I could hear his racing thoughts, and I couldn’t stand it. I opened my mouth blurting out everything, as fast as I could. I had to make him understand.

“I was afraid, I was so afraid Jamie, I didn’t know if it was over, he’s crazy you know, a maniac really, and then they told me not to tell anyone, I didn’t want to make you a target, so the less you knew the better, I shouldn’t leave traces behind and I was sure this was for our own good, to protect you and then time passed and I kind of forgot it, not really forgot it but I moved on and –”

“Claire!” He stopped me. “I canna understand a word ye’re saying. Who is crazy, why were you afraid, who told ye not to talk to me.” He rose from the bed and came to me, each step bringing him closer and calming him down. When he stood in front of me, he placed both hands tenderly on my arms. “What happened to ye, a nighean?”

“I... I... I left London because...” I could hardly speak, each word grazing painfully my sore throat.

“Yes?” Jamie asked in a soothing voice and I felt the tears welling up in my eyes.

No, don't bloody cry now.

“I had a patient. A nice, kind guy, so young – so bloody young. He had lung cancer. The CT scan and PET showed that we could move to a surgery. We had time, cancer hadn't spread yet.” I knew he didn't need to know all these details, but I was transferred back at the hospital, seeing the light in Alex's eyes again, as I announced that the tumor was amenable to surgery and we would get to it as soon as possible.

“I did the surgery. I couldn't go for a full lobectomy, so I aimed to a wedge resection. Recurrence is more frequent after wedge resection. We decided to follow the surgery up with radioactive iodine brachytherapy. We did well, the results were great, he was getting better. He really did.” I could almost see Alex's smile again in the thought that he'd leave the hospital and he'd have a normal life again. A future that never came to happen.

“Until we found another carcinoma. We did the DNA tests, he had a mutation in a proto-oncogene – one we didn't have any available drug to treat with. Dr. Alexander MacGregor, the medical oncologist – ” My voice broke and I felt one of Jamie's hands trailing up to my face, to erase the tears that were now running free. “Oh, Jamie. MacGregor did his best, we all did our best, but we couldn't save him.” Sobs were wracking my body and Jamie hugged me tight, his lips lost in my hair whispering soothing words in Gaelic. “Alexander Randall was the first patient I lost,” I said, and saw Jamie through the tears in my eyes.

“So ye came here, trying to forget about him?” His voice was soft and kind. Supporting me.

I shook my head. “No. There's more than that. You see, Alex Randall had an older brother.”

The mere thought of this man made me want to run away again. I didn't want to talk about him. I didn't want to remember, or to think of him ever again. But he was there, in every nightmare, in every shadow I saw.

“Jonathan Randall, Black Jack is what everyone called him. He is...” I felt the bile moving up my throat and paused, my lips tightly pressed, taking deep breaths through my nose.

I was with Jamie. I was safe now.

He wasn't safe though, because I had bloody come back.

“Oh God, this is such a terrible mistake. I should shut the fuck up and stay in France. I shouldn't come back.”

“IN FRANCE? Ye were in France?” Jamie exclaimed, but stopped in his tracks when his eyes saw the darkness in my eyes. “Anyway. Ye're wrong. Ye should be here with me and ye did right to come, mo chridhe.”

Oh, how I've missed these two little words leaving his lips, coloring the world around me.

“No, no Jamie. You don't understand. Black Jack, Alex's brother, is mentally unstable, and a gangster nonetheless. When Alex died, he blamed us for his death. He insisted this was our

mistake, that we lied about the surgery and the radiotherapy, that we could have saved him if we wanted to. But we couldn't, Jamie. We couldn't."

"I know, mo ghraidh. I know. Ye did yer best, dinna think of it any longer." Jamie was drawing circles with his fingers on my back, his words strong, reassuring. He believed me.

"Black Jack threatened us repeatedly, after that. We found notes in our mail, phone calls counting down our living days, I even found a knife on a print with the anatomy of the heart once, in my locker at the hospital. 'Picture your heart instead', it read. I don't know how he managed to do that. MacGregor had the same problems, only he had a family and the threats were aiming his family as well. We reported the incidents and sued Randall for harassment and emotional distress. A few months later all threats stopped, and we were informed that he was imprisoned for life, for severe child abuse. Totally irrelevant with our case, but we were safe."

"So? Why did you leave?" Jamie asked, restless.

"Six months ago, Black Jack was paroled, somehow. He has high connections or something, Alex had mentioned that when he was in the hospital. He admired his older brother so much. I don't know how Black Jack managed to be paroled, but he is free again and he, he..."

I felt my heart crumble and my knees went weak. Jamie supported my weight, moving me to the armchair with a strong arm around my waist and knelt down in front of me. He brought his glass of whisky to my lips, and I felt the amber drink's warmth travel down my throat, setting a comforting feeling in my stomach. It lasted a moment and then it was gone, leaving me even more wrecked than before.

"What, Claire? He what?" Jamie asked, taking the glass from my hands before I'd drop it.

"MacGregor is dead," I whispered, with my eyes shut, as if opening them would acknowledge the truth of my words.

I felt the cold seeping in my body as Jamie's hands left me. "WHAT?" He roared. "ARE YE FUCKING CRAZY, CLAIRE?" He was pacing back and forth, both hands covering his face in despair.

Yeah, I shouldn't have come. Now he's mad. Maybe it was better when he didn't know.

I was ready to talk when he looked at me again, his eyes filled with anger and fear. "He is free, he killed yer colleague and ye fucking left?" He ran his hands through his hair so many times, that it looked like a red flame surrounding his face. "Ye were out there, all alone, with this maniac on your tracks? AND YE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO ME? What if he'd found you, Claire? Oh my God, Oh my God..." He was shaking his head in denial, his hands trembling, extended in the empty air between us.

"I couldn't stay here, he would eventually find out about you. Paris seemed a safe choice. It would be perfect, actually, if being without you wasn't so bloody painful." I snorted and gave him a sad smile. "But I had to protect you from him. He is MY problem. And that's why I'll leave again," I said, determined. "I just wanted you to know. I wanted you to know I love you," I finished, trying to find the courage to leave his apartment.

“DID I ASK FOR YER PROTECTION?” Jamie’s voice rang through me, hoarse from shouting. “God, Claire, did I ever tell ye that your problems arena mine as well? Did I ever tell ye that ye dinna mean the world to me? Only thinking that ye might as well be dead now... That ye were in danger and I was sitting here, in my misery, blaming ye for leaving, thinking ye might love someone else... And ye with your stupid notions thinking that ye protect me by being away. What about me, Sassenach?” He came close to me again, breathing hard, trying to tame his fury. He placed a hand on my cheek and said in a surprising low, broken voice, “What if *I* wanted to protect *you*?”

“You couldn’t. You can’t, Jamie. I won’t have your life hanging from a fine line. I’m leaving again.”

“Ye’re not going anywhere,” he hissed through gnashed teeth. When I didn’t reply, he spoke more forcefully. “D’ ye hear me? Ye’re staying here with me.”

“I can’t,” I insisted.

“Do ye still not understand? Ye belong with me, Sassenach, as I belong with ye. No maniac, crazy, psycho will ever change that. We’ll fight him, but we’ll do it together.”

I laughed at that. A bitter, sorrowful laughter. “We can’t. No one can fight him. He’s looking for revenge and his revenge has my face now. I won’t sacrifice your life for no reason.”

“He can take his thirst for revenge and stick it up his butt,” Jamie declared triumphantly, making me laugh again. A real laughter this time, one only he knew how to elicit in my darkest moments. “My life has your face, Claire. And I’m not leaving anyone’s revenge to take it away.”

His voice was low and he leaned forward until his lips found mine, claiming me back from fear and despair. Forcefully stating that I was his and his only.

I let myself be, forgetting everything as he enveloped me in a bear hug – safe, and whole, and loved.

After what felt like minutes but could be hours later, I spoke again. “Jamie, I’m so sorry. I never meant to hurt you, love.” My lips were on his again, the moment I saw that lopsided smile on his face, the one I had fall in love with years ago. The one I was still in love with.

“Aye, I ken that now, Sassenach.” He trailed a finger along my jaw, before it got lost in my hair. “I canna forgive ye though, for putting yerself in danger while leaving me behind, an ignorant fool.”

“You’re not a fool. You never were.”

“Claire,” he said. “Promise me something. No more secrets from now on.”

“Jamie...” I looked him straight in the eye, knowing that I had to rip my heart out and do it like it was a happy dance. “There is no ‘from now on’ for us.” My throat was dry. “I can’t stay,” I said in a strained voice.

“D’ ye think that I will let ye go again?”

I didn’t get to reply, feeling his tongue on my lips again, his need to feel me overwhelming me.

“This has nothing to do with what we think or want, Jamie. This is what we need to do to survive,” I said, once I found my breath again.

“I dinna want to survive without ye. I want to *live* with ye.” His voice was loud and strong, filling the room.

“That’s why I left last time, without telling anything to you. Because you, you stubborn Scot, you wouldn’t let me go if you knew.”

“That’s quite right,” Jamie said, his arms tightening around my waist, pulling me closer to him.

“No, it’s – ” The words were trapped inside my mouth, mingling with his breath as he stopped me with yet another kiss, his own way to say *shut up*. My mind was screaming at me to leave now, while I still could, but my stupid body responded to his as it always did, eager to be one again.

“I need ye. I need to have ye now, Claire.”

I shook my head frantically, knowing that there would be no return after this.

“Yes, yes, yes,” Jamie whispered after each negative shake of mine.

“We shouldn’t – ” I tried to voice my thoughts instead of the ineffective non-verbal negation.

“Shut up,” Jamie mimicked me, his thoughts loud enough to make me laugh.

The next moment I was up in the air and on Jamie’s shoulder, as he carried me to bed.

He got rid of our clothes in mere seconds, leaving me sprawled on the bed, with the cold duvet underneath my naked body and his warmth-emanating frame on top of me. Without wasting more time, he got himself deep inside me with a single thrust, anchoring me to him. His teeth were on my neck, sucking hard, taking toll for all the months of absence, as his soul was whispering to mine, until the only sounds leaving our mouths were whimpers, moans and whispers of each other’s name.

“This is how you protect me, mo ghraidh.” he whispered, thrusting again and again. “Take me inside you and save my soul, as you always did.”

I heard myself calling out his name, as my muscles contracted against his hard length, feeling his release leaving me alive again.

Alive and fearless.

Do you hear me?

*"Because I love you
and I know how to go into love like a full moon"*

(Od. Elytis, "Monogram")



[source](#)

The sunrays attacked my eyelids, rudely invading my dreams that slowly faded away as life crept in.

Jamie and I, in his apartment.

His strong arms around me, constraining and supporting, to make sure that I stayed where I belonged, and I bloody understood that.

The two of us finding each other again.

In my hazy state I snuggled closer to the warm body lying behind me.

Jamie's body.

Sometimes dreams and reality stroll in our life in unison, making the days worth living. Jamie was here, with me, making my world whole again.

Looking at his arm across my stomach I let relief flood through me, as I heaved a sigh and smiled. Yearning to touch him in every possible way, I searched for his hand and intertwined his fingers with mine. His arm tensed immediately and he pulled me closer to him before I heard his deep breath, face lost in my curls.

“Finally.” He whispered, the air leaving his body caressing my ear.

“Finally?” My question was not more than a murmur as I closed my eyes to focus on the sensation of feeling his body against mine after all these months.

“Finally, the world came back to its axis bringing a morning when I can actually breathe again.” His voice was hoarse from sleep, but gratitude had colored each of his words – a ‘thank you’ to the invisible power that brought us together. Maybe it was fate. Maybe it was just our love, more powerful than anything else in our lives.

I understood the feeling because I felt it all too well myself, but as the words lingered in my mind I felt their edges scraping my heart in revenge for all the empty days and endless dark nights I subjected us to. Doubled up with the pain, life pushed our backs urging us to go on, even half and broken as we were. Crippled hearts counting beats, each beat a step away, each beat a wish for oblivion.

One more day and I'll forget.
One more day and I'll be fine.
One more day.

But this day never came.

We couldn't let go. Hundreds of miles away our hearts kept beating only to bring us closer, so we would breathe again.

Thinking of Jamie waking up alone and heartbroken all this time made me bit my lips to stop the tears from running. I failed miserably though, and it was not long before my breath hitched. It was one thing to live with my own despair but another to witness Jamie's.

"Hush, mo ghraidh. It's over now." Jamie's lips were on my neck, leaving tender kisses on each purple bite they created the night before. His arm turned me around, blue eyes boring into mine. "Dinna cry, Sassenach, because I found ye again. Or, ye found me, if we need to be precise."

"I'm sorry, Jamie. I'm so sorry for – "

A finger on my lips stopped me, quickly replaced by two warm lips and a tongue that searched mine. I opened my mouth to him, eager to let our present wash the past and the future off, afraid of what we'd do once sense and duty found their way back to our minds.

Jamie knew. He always knew. Breaking our kiss, he cupped my face sweeping the wetness of my tears with his thumb. "Dinna fret, mo cridhe. There's the two of us now."

I felt my heart settle under the weight of his words, a sacred promise of life. The foolish notion of two lovers that think they can rule the world, even if that makes no sense. They believe it and that's enough. They are enough.

And I believed Jamie.

I closed my eyes and buried a hand in his red locks, while the other traced his strong body. Still naked from last night, Jamie ran his fingers along my thigh before his grasp moved my leg on his hip. His hand came up to my face to cupping just for a moment, before his fingers roamed down my body, pausing on my erect nipples before lightly caressing my stomach. When they entered me, a whimper left my lips and I moved my hips towards his touch, wanting more. I needed him. He moved his fingers inside me as he stroked my clit with his thumb, until my breath was short and I could feel him hard in my hand. My complaint when I felt him removing his fingers lasted only for a moment before he took my hand away from his cock to drive his length slowly inside me. We moved in an unhurried pace, too close to our climaxes from our foreplay, trying to delay them as much as possible. We needed this moment to last, our presence in each other's life to be acknowledged, before we'd lose ourselves. At last, I felt him shudder as he spasmed inside me and I tightened around him, the wave of my orgasm overtaking my senses.

I fell asleep again, lulled by Jamie's heartbeat under my ear, while his fingers were drawing promises of a future on my back.

—

When I woke up later that morning Jamie was still asleep. He rarely slept more than me, making me realize the impact my sudden appearance and last night's madness had on him. I rose carefully, pausing for a moment to run two fingers across his cheek, to see if I'd be rewarded with this beautiful smile. It lasted just one second before it was gone again, but it told me all I wanted to know.

He was happy.

I padded towards the kitchen, thirsty and hungry. Another sign of Jamie's condition last night. Normally Jamie would never let me be with just a glass of whisky, but last night offered no time for trivialities such as food.

Searching for a glass, I found my mug in a kitchen cabinet. It was a white porcelain mug, with Nessie the monster as a handler. I'd bought it during our weekend trip at Loch Ness, almost 2.5 years ago.

—

(2.5 years earlier)

The day that Jamie came in my place, with a grin on his face and a prospectus of "The Original Loch Ness Tour" in his pocket, we were together for less than two months.

"Guess where we'll be in two days from now!" He plopped himself down in a chair and pulled me on his lap.

"At my place?" I guessed, knowing that my answer was 100% wrong and not caring one bit. I didn't care where we'd go, just that we'd go together.

“I’ll take ye to see Nessie, my fairy. Ye have her here on your table but it’d be far better to see the real thing, aye?”

“Ah, so she’s there waiting for us to visit?” I teased him.

“Aye, already talked to her.”

“You can talk to her, can you? Doesn’t that mean you’re a monster yourself?” I cocked an eyebrow before Jamie took me to bed, whispering that he’d show me what kind of monster he was.

That was our first trip together. Apart from hiring our own cruise to sail along the lake, we spent all the weekend in our room, naked. Our plans of walking the routes that ran along the lake and visit Fort William and Inverness, postponed for another time. At least we didn’t book an organized tour - that was a wise choice, indeed.

“We should wear clothes after this, if we want to get out of the room.” I said at some point before taking his lips in mine, feeling him harden against my hip.

“I dinna remember a single time, Sassenach, that clothes stopped us.”

He was right.

Not just for the first two months. During all the time we were together, the wanting never stopped.

—

I sat on the table with my mug – that Jamie kept in his apartment – filled with water, thinking what to do till he’d wake up. There was a book on his bedside table - there always was a book

on his bedside table. It was a while that I hadn't read anything. Each book character, each circumstance, reminded me something of us. And if it didn't, I couldn't stop imagining all the memories we didn't get to create.

On top of the book was a paper, worn from use, folded in two. Intrigued, I opened it to find that it was a poem, in Jamie's writing.

I heard my heart breaking as I read it, tiny little pieces in my chest – a crack for each read word.

*“Such that I have nothing more
Inside the four walls, the ceiling and the floor
Than to scream of you with my voice lashing back at me
To smell of you and see people getting fierce
Because they cannot stand the unfamiliar and the foreign
Because it is too soon, do you hear me?
Too soon in this world, my love,
To speak of you and me.*

*It is too soon in this world, do you hear me?
The beasts haven't been tamed yet, do you hear me?
My spent blood and my sharp (do you hear me?) knife
Like a ram traversing the sky
And breaking the shoots of stars, do you hear me?
It is I, do you hear me?
I love you, do you hear me?
I hold you; I carry you; I put on you
The white bridal dress of Ophelia, do you hear me?
Where do you leave me, where are you going and who (do you hear me?)*

Who Holds your hand over the cataclysms

*There will come a day, do you hear me?
When the vast flat lands and the volcanic lava
Will bury us and the thousand years to follow
Will set us forth like precious stones, do you hear me?
For hardness to mirror itself on them, do you hear me?
—The hardness of the heart of man—
And shower us with a thousand pieces.*

*In the water, one after the other
I count the bitter pebbles I launch, do you hear me?
And time is a great Church, do you hear me?*

*Where sometimes
The images of Saints
Shed real tears, do you hear me?
And high up the bells, do you hear me?
Open a deep passage for me to cross
The angels wait with candles and funeral songs
But I go nowhere, do you hear me?
Either none of us or both of us, do you hear me?*

*And no gardener has ever managed in other times
—After such heavy winter and such north winds (do you hear me?)—
One flower to gather. Only the two of us, do you hear?
In the middle of the sea
And just from the will of love
We raised an entire island, do you hear me?
with coves and capes and flowering precipices*

*Hear, hear,
Who's talking to the waters? Who weeps? Do you hear?
Who searches for the other? Who shouts? Do you hear?*

*It's I who is searching; It's I who is weeping, do you hear?
I love you, I love you, do you hear?"*

By the end of the poem I couldn't stop the sobs that shook my body. I didn't want to wake Jamie up and I ran to I locked myself in the bathroom, falling on the floor with the poem still in my hands.

The pain that I caused.

The emptiness I left behind.

His anguish, same as mine.

They were all there, attacking me through words written years ago but a poet I never heard of. Words that Jamie, my Jamie, wrote down thinking of us.

I panicked when I found out that Randall was free and MacGregor dead. I ran away as soon as possible, as far as possible. I left Jamie behind, convinced that I did the right thing. That he would be safe. He would be alright.

But he wasn't. And I wasn't, either, without him in my life.

And all he did when I came back was to take me into his arms. He never stopped believing in us.

I'd shattered his heart and all he did was to keep the pieces for me to make it whole again.

He took me back, no matter what I'd done, because he was *home*.

But I go nowhere, do you hear me?

Either none of us or both of us, do you hear me?

The black letters were fuzzy in front of my teary eyes, and yet I saw them clearer than ever.

Either none of us or both of us.

--

I was still in the bathroom's floor when I heard Jamie's voice.

"Sassenach?"

I couldn't speak. My throat was sore and I was sure that if I tried uttering a single word it would be cracked, revealing my emotional distress. I swallowed hard and stood up to splash my face with cold water before answering him.

Jamie's voice was louder the second time he called me. By the third time, Sassenach was swiped to Claire and he sounded frantic.

Oh my God. He thinks I left.

I unlocked the bathroom's door and opened it with such force that the handle banged on the wall. The sound made him look at my direction, pausing in his search for clothes and I caught his wild eyes as he realized I was still there.

What would he do? Comb all Glasgow in search of me?

Two strides and he was in front of me, his hands firm on my arms as he asked, "Why didn't ye say a word? Christ, Claire." Without waiting for an answer, he pulled me to him, trapping me in a bear hug, as a father finding his child that got lost in a mall. "Never do that to me again!" He added for good measure, in case I didn't feel as a five-year-old already.

"You silly man!" I laughed. "My clothes are right here! How on earth would I leave the house naked?"

"Aye, I... I didna notice them." Jamie said with a bashful smile. He looked at me then, much calmer, but with a worry lurking behind his serene face. "I wasn't quite successful in convincing ye to stay, last night. Ye – Ye didn't say ye're staying wi' me." His pleading eyes bore deep into mine, one hand running down my arm to find my fingers while the other cupped my face. "Ye were crying." He announced, running his thumb across my cheekbone.

Oh God, I'm crying all the time since I came back.

"No, no. I'm fine. Really." I gave him a broad grin, but I had no chance in misleading Jamie Fraser.

"Are ye no happy, Claire? Do ye still want to leave?" He tried to put a brave front, but I could hear his heart snapping as he voiced his question.

"No!" I exclaimed. "No, Jamie. I am happy. I'm with you. I haven't been that happy in months." My confession, even though truthful, didn't make the frown leave his face.

“Then why are ye crying?”

I raised the hand he didn’t hold, the page thin between my thumb and index finger.

“Ahhh” Relieved, he brought me close to his chest again. Close to his heart. “Dinna fash, Sassenach. Elytis kept me through the pain. Dinna ken if I needed the poem to keep the pain, so I wouldna go on, but I read it every day, thinking of ye, my Sassenach. Trying to make ye hear. I love you, d’ ye hear me?”

My lips found his in reply. “Will you hold my hand over the cataclysm?”

He kissed me back. “Always. *I go nowhere, d’ ye hear me?*”

I nodded and moved, so only an inch would separate my lips from his. “*Either none of us or both of us, do you hear me?*”

We kissed then, promises given and taken with passion and desire, with love and reverence. Jamie led me slowly back to our bed, away from the cataclysms that awaited us. In the same room where his lone screams were lashing back at him, our screams raised in unison, erasing the traces of pain, healing our wounds and promising a future that would find us whole.

Together.

The Boyfriend Blazer



[source](#)

There are mornings that the light flows in the house, undisturbed, effortlessly caressing every surface. No fighting with clouds, no obstruction from curtains. It seems brighter, somehow, stronger, its sole purpose to get into our hearts.

There are mornings that you feel the light through closed eyelids and you smile, because there is a warm chest underneath your cheek rising and falling with every breath. Because his fingers lazily trace the dark planes of your naked back.

There are mornings that the light brings in blue and green and a happiness you considered long lost.

These mornings you can feel nothing but grateful.

**

I didn't notice during the previous night that Jamie's apartment had a floor-to-ceiling window facing a park and the endless sky. Closing my eyes to capture the colors, I breathed him in. He inhaled deeply, nose surrounded by my curls, and placed a kiss on my head.

"Tell me?" He asked, his voice hoarse.

"What?" I almost whispered in response.

"All that I missed."

Cries. Fear. I on the verge of depression.

Endless nights that I couldn't sleep. Whole days that I did nothing but sleeping.

Hiding. Being scared by my own shadow.

A flicker of life in L'Hopital des Agnes, where Louise almost dragged me to.

Feeling life underneath my fingertips again.

Helping, but feeling helpless. Healing, but feeling alone.

Booking the plane ticket to Glasgow on a night after too much wine. One way, although I knew I would eventually return to the miserable life I was meant to live.

Needing him, even though I knew I couldn't have him.

"Not that much." I said with my voice cracking midway.

“Ye’re not good at lying, Sassenach. Ye dinna ken that yet?” A smile on his lips as I turned my head slightly to see him.

Jamie kissed my forehead and held my eyes with his. I’m waiting for an answer, the frown between his eyebrows insisted.

So I gave it to him.

I told him how I left, panicked and alone, seeking safety.

All I did was to book a flight to Paris, pack some clothes and call Louise.

I hadn’t seen Louise for years. It was in my fifth year at the university when she came in London for her Erasmus year. Funny and kind, we ended up hanging out a lot. Drinks after classes, vibrant nights dancing in the darkness of night clubs, quiet days at home dedicated to TV series marathons.

My life changed when she went back to Paris. We were in touch and I promised I would visit, but never did.

Until I had to.

By the time I arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport my eyes were red and puffy from crying. When the airplane’s wheels left the Scottish soil the dam broke and I couldn’t keep anything back. The poor air hostesses came with tissue papers, a glass of wine and a kind smile trying her best to help. But there was no solace I could find, and I knew it. I accepted all three offers and reassured her that I was fine – at least ten times until we landed, all equally unconvincing, I guess.

“I think I want to throw up.” Was my greeting to Louise, who hugged me tight while the sobs raked my body. With an arm around my shoulders for support she picked up my suitcase and led me to her car.

I stayed in her guest room for two weeks doing nothing. Louise tried repeatedly to cheer me up, or at least find out what had happened, but I couldn't talk. The only person I wanted to talk to was miles away, probably angry and heartbroken. My phone was turned off and securely locked somewhere by Louise, to stop any attempt of calling Jamie.

For two weeks my main every day activity was crying. And crying. And crying some more, as I thought of how my whole life and all my dreams had gone to hell.

One night Louise came back from work with a magnum of Cabernet Sauvignon and a family ice cream pack.

"Ice cream and wine is a terrible combination." I observed.

"Well, it's time to teach you a thing or two about wine. You, English, have no idea!" I snorted, but that didn't stop her. "Well, I have to inform you Ms. Beauchamp," she exaggerated a bit with the English pronunciation of my last name, "That Cabernet Sauvignon and coffee ice cream get along very well!"

That night I told Louise everything, about Randall and my escape to Scotland, about Jamie and how love stories meant only to exist in novels sometimes happen in real life. She held me for hours afterwards, softly rocking my body and whispering "Tout ira bien" again and again.

It was during the third month that Louise suggested that I should start working again. I was living from my savings up till that point and I did quiet well. Of course I wasn't spending much mainly because I stayed at Louise's every day, all day long.

I tried walking along the Seine once or twice – only to end up crying and embarrassing myself in front of strangers. I didn't want to go on without him. I didn't want to build new memories that he wouldn't know of.

When Louise was sure I was going headlong into depression, she talked to Mother Hildegard and arranged an interview for me.

I went to the interview without any expectations. Who would hire me in the condition I was? I knew I wouldn't.

But everything was different than I thought it would be. I saw some hope in Mother Hildegard's serenity; I saw some potential in the sick patients grasping at life as hard as possible.

I saw a tiny surface that I could grip, too, to stop my body from crawling.

I was surprised by myself when I heard me volunteering to work at the Hospital.

So I started going there in a daily basis. With time, it brought me back to a semblance of normality. It gave me a purpose.

And that was something. Not enough, but something nonetheless.

I still missed Jamie every minute of the day. Instead of sharing my day with him, every night found me at bed alone, seeking his warmth.

The exact warmth that I felt emanating from his body now, as his fingers brushed away the tears of memories without him.

"It's in the past, mo nighean donn. Ye're here now."

I was.

I had a shelter where I could slip in and hide from the world.

I had him.

"What about you? What did *I* miss?" I asked and my heart crushed under the weight of the things I didn't know; of the man he was during my absence.

"Ah, Sassenach. Ye missed me missing you. Being scolded by Jenny for not trying to move on. Nothing new. I kept going to the office, reading books sent by new authors and finding you behind half of their lines." He stopped, and I crawled over him covering his body with mine. Thigh to thigh, heart to heart, nose to nose. Protecting him from pain.

“I’ll never – ” I started but his lips found mine, stopping me.

“I ken.” He said, and I pursued to banish all remnants of pain still residing in his heart with my kiss. Offering my love, my devotion, my soul for him to keep.

My body was not so spiritual, though. My stomach growled, the sound too loud in the quiet room. Jamie laughed his glorious laughter and rolled us on the bed keeping me secured underneath him. “Let’s feed this whining belly, shall we?” He lightly pressed his lips on my stomach and stood up.

I was cold in bed without him. Searching around, I found the boxer briefs I wore last night and his hoodie. I put them on and headed for the bathroom to pee and wash my face. I had to go back to the hotel and bring my suitcase, but I couldn’t find it in myself to leave him yet. Maybe we could go together, after lunch. With a last glance towards the kitchen and a tunelessly humming Jamie Fraser in his boxer briefs searching for a pan, I closed the bathroom door behind me.

God, I was happy.

I must have missed the doorbell’s ringing, but I heard her voice clearly when I closed the water tap. I froze, water still dripping of my face as I moved to the door. I didn’t need to open it. The apartment was small, and I could hear everything.

“What d’ye mean by leaving me like this last night, Jamie Fraser?” Her voice was almost a shriek.

“I brought ye back home last night, lass. Ye were drunk.” Jamie sounded dumbfounded but collected, as if the shriek was intended to another receiver.

“Oh aye! Ye brought me home and then ye vanished when ye saw her...” She paused, trying to remember my name or find a characterization, I wasn’t sure. “That Sassenach bitch!”

A characterization, then.

“Ye willnae speak of Claire like this!” Jamie rose his imposing voice.

“But she is... She...” The girl got so upset after Jamie’s yell that she couldn’t master her own thoughts. I waited in silence until she exclaimed, “She hurt ye Jamie! Jenny told me everything!”

“What lies between me and Claire doesnae concern ye or my sister, for what it’s worth.”

“But ye canna possibly go back to her! That slut who – ” She didn’t get to finish her sentence.

“I already told ye,” Jamie hissed through clenched teeth, “Ye willnae speak of Claire like this. I willnae tell that again.”

Goosebumps formed all over my body. He was enraged, his accent getting thicker with every passing minute.

“Aye, aye,” She said, her voice dropping almost to a whisper. “But Jamie, ye and I...”

“Ye and I? There is no ‘Ye and I’, Laoghaire!”

Silence followed Jamie’s statement and for some moments all I heard was my own heart’s frantic beating. Trying to figure out what was happening, I was flush against the closed door when Jamie’s surprised voice filled the apartment.

“What d’ye think yer doing, lass? I dinna want to touch ye!”

He dinna want what? What is she doing?

My hand was on the doorknob and I was ready to join this wonderful conversation, when her answer stopped me on my tracks.

“But I saw how ye looked at me last night.”

How did he look at her?

A wave of jealousy rose inside me, ready to swallow me. I almost revealed myself, desperate to see the expression on his face after her revelation. Biting my bottom lip hard, I stopped.

Was he attracted to her?

He had every right to be so, thinking of me gone, but the thought of him enchanted by her stung me to the heart.

“How I looked at ye? I looked at ye praying to God and all the Saints that ye’d stop talking!”

Oh God. Oh dear God, thank you.

I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding as Jamie continued. “D’ye think I care about the new *boyfriend blazer* ye bought or if ye cannae wear yer *key pieces* from last summer?”

I hardly stopped myself from laughing out loud. The man was bored to death – he didn’t lie. I wasn’t even sure he knew what *key pieces* were. Judging from the way he said that, he didn’t.

“But...”

“All night I looked at ye, thinking that we have nothing in common! Nothing at all! I hoped that ye’d get sleepy with more drink. But who’s to take pity on me? The more ye drank, the more ye talked!”

“But I love ye, Jamie. I’ve loved ye since I was sixteen years old and you would come at school with the basketball team. I was there at every game! Ye surely kent I was in love with ye!”

“Lass.” Jamie’s tone was softer. “Twas a mistake that we went out last night. I only did that for Jenny, because she asked me to. I’m not the one for ye to love, Laoghaire. Ye’ll find that man, I promise ye. Ye’re still young, lass.”

This didn’t seem enough to stop her. “But she’s not here. Ye’re alone now. Can I come in? Just to talk?” I could hear the hope in her voice.

Enough is enough. The girl doesn’t want to understand.

“He surely is not alone and you surely can’t come in.” I said in a cold voice, trying for an air of superiority. Since she didn’t listen to Jamie, I had to do the job and send her away.

It was only when I stood in front of her that I realized I had no sweatpants on. Jamie’s hoodie was just as long as needed to give me a semblance of decency, but that was all.

Nevermind. Let the girl get her head around it. I’m back to stay.

Glancing at the huge man next to me, I was relieved to find that at least he got dressed before opening the door.

There’s my lad.

My lad’s arm settled around my waist, bringing me closer to him and demonstrating his opinion of where I belonged. Her light blue eyes lingered on his hand before finding his sapphire blue ones. “Ye canna love her!”

“Oh, aye, I can.” Jamie said as he looked at me and smiled. “In fact, I canna love anyone else but her.” His eyes bored deep into mine, creating one of these moments that we were the only people in the world.

She huffed, exasperated, and left in a flurry of blond hair and red lipstick.

Jamie closed the door behind her and turned to take me in his arms.

“So, a boyfriend blazer is a must-have for this spring, right?” I teased him.

He stared at me through narrow slits. “Verra funny, Sassenach.”

“That makes me mindful, you know. Are boyfriend hoodies in fashion, too or...”

I saw his lopsided smile for just a second before his lips were on mine, his hands finding the hem of the hoodie.

“Definitely not, Sassenach.”

Rehabilitation



[source](#)

Life is the sum of our choices.

Insignificant choices, that change nothing at all. What detergent you'll buy, what conditioner. If your body cream will smell like vanilla or jasmine. If the toilet paper will have imprinted pink daisies or little bears.

Then, there are choices that we think nothing of, but they have the power to change everything. Like going to the pub with Geillis to watch the rugby game between England and Scotland instead of staying at home. Like uttering one single word that brings in front of you the incredulous blue eyes of the redhead Scot sitting on the next stool.

Finally, there are the choices we think over and over again, trying to observe where the balance is tipping, in fear of a mistake – an error of judgment that will bring a burden that's only ours to carry forward. Like choosing to be a surgeon instead of an endocrinologist. Taking humans' lives in your hands instead of prescribing thyroid medications and sleep happily at night.

But some things aren't choices at all. Sometimes, no matter what your brain is screaming, you go with your gut and do the stupidest cleverest thing you've ever done.

I stayed with Jamie.

It wasn't a choice; it was the only way I could fully breathe again. The only way I would get rid of empty gulps of air inserting nothing but hollowness in my chest.

It wasn't that I couldn't survive without him.

I'd might even find another person that could make me laugh. There are no such things as soul mates. But I didn't want that other person, I didn't want to compare him with Jamie. I wanted

Jamie. Because he knew me as I was, and he accepted every little bit of me.

I could survive without him. I'd find a job, I'd have an average life. I'd live as millions of people do, little robots following schedules. I'd find my purpose in work, if I was lucky. I'd be happy from 8pm-10pm when I attended a party. I'd cry for all my lost hopes in disguise while watching a movie. I'd blame the slow cashier in the supermarket for the lost time in my life.

I'd be half of me. I'd focus on my program, never thinking too much.

I came back in Glasgow because I couldn't have that.

It was acceptable up to a point since no one can fully avoid it, but I couldn't think of my whole life being just that. I was tired of hiding.

With Jamie, I dared to be under the spotlight. I could live.

I could wake up in the morning and smile before I'd open my eyes, just because he would be there. Or I wouldn't smile because I'd be tired, or late, or my neck would be sore because of the damn muscles in his arm – but he still would be there.

I could smell his musky scent and feel my world complete. Or I wouldn't feel complete, because he'd have done something stupid and smelling him would only remind me of how mad I was with him.

I could blame myself for the bad things that happened in my life, because he'd be there to support me. Or I wouldn't blame myself and I'd blame him, because he'd be there to take the blame or yell back at me – but he'd be there.

He'd be my companion, my rock and my soft pillow. And I would be his, because life is much more than sunshiny days with fairy dust falling from the trees. Because life is real and we were real, too. Full of flaws and blessings.

We didn't leave his apartment for three days. Jamie took the day off, we turned our phones off and found each other again. We cooked, watched movies, made love and talked. For the past, for the future.

Jamie almost had a heart attack when I told him that Murtagh knew where I was.

"I asked him to keep it a secret! It's not his fault, I'm telling you for the last time!" I exclaimed for what it seemed like the twentieth time.

"He kent it! He saw me losing my mind here and he didn't say a word! A word!" Jamie's face was the same shade of red as the sauce of our spaghetti alla napolitana.

Every time Jamie said "He kent it!" with the same angry and incredulous face, I remembered Ross Geller from 'The Friends' yelling "My sandwich? My sandwich?" scaring the pigeons all

over New York. Seeing that we'd keep the same conversation for an eternity, I took his lips in mine, keeping him silent for a good while.

"I'm here now." I whispered on his lips.

"Mmm. Ye are." He sighed, locking his arms around me. "And I'll kill the man, I'm telling ye, Sassenach."

"You stubborn Scot."

"Yer stubborn Scot?"

"Mine." I said, tenderly biting his bottom lip. Claiming him.

—

Monday night came faster than I wanted to and on Tuesday Jamie left for work with a pout on his face. The apartment felt empty without him but I didn't feel like a stranger in it. It had something of Jamie in every corner, pieces of us that he never let go.

Slipping out of the the armchair's soft cushions, I turned on my phone. I had to call Louise and let her know first that I was fine, and second that I was staying in Scotland.

"Are you sure, ma cherie?" I could hear the concern in her voice.

"Yes, I am. We talked things out with Jamie. I'm moving in Louise!" I was excited, firmly believing that if I could sustain that feeling I'd keep the fear away.

"Then all I can say is that I'm happy for you, Claire. I was afraid you'd remain a ghost for the rest of your life." She paused and I could almost sense her smile. "You want me to talk to Mother Hildegard?"

"No, I'll call her to explain. Can you ship the rest of my clothes, please?" I stupidly batted my eyelashes, even though Louise couldn't see me.

"Oui! I'll do it this afternoon! Although these panties, Claire. You definitely have to buy some new ones, now that you have a man."

"Bye, Louise." I snorted indignantly.

"Love you!" Louise laughed.

"Love you too, hon!" I ended the call and remained there, looking at my phone, the picture of Louise in my contacts smiling back at me. A true friend.

Falling back on my beloved and much missed bed, I took a deep breath.

I was staying.

We were staying in Glasgow.

—

When the plane landed in Glasgow I thought that staying in the UK was not an option. I was so afraid that Randall would find me to take his revenge, that I was sure he'd have means to locate me no matter where I'd be.

Jamie, though, insisted that since Randall had no idea I fled to Scotland all those years ago, there was no chance he'd search for me in Glasgow. And I had to confess that it made sense.

It didn't feel as safe as Paris, but we could build a life in Glasgow. The city where we fell in love. It should be the other way around, Paris being the most romantic city, but love comes as it likes. And It found us in Glasgow.

Jamie's career was going remarkably well. His last year's book proposals were the most profitable in the list of the firm's published books and he was beaming with pride when he announced me that he was the youngest person in the history of the firm suggested to the board for the position of the chief editor.

Of course he would. My man was a genius and had worked hard for it - even harder while I was away, it seemed.

Discussing about my career, we decided that I should contact the hospital to ask if they could accept me back. Not so many chances there, but I would try it anyway.

His apartment was midway from Jamie's office and the hospital. It was smaller than our old one, but we could save money before moving to something bigger. Plus, the view of the park would remind me of the first day I opened my eyes, safe in his arms again.

Wednesday morning, I called Geillis. Her shrill voice entered my ear, almost breaking my drum. It soon became obvious that it would be impossible to make sense of her back to back questions. With her night shift suiting us perfectly, we met at our favorite coffee house to catch up. My come back was far more important than the rest of her morning plans, or so she said.

"Ye're kidding me, Claire." It was one of the rare times Geillis Duncan seemed scared.

"Unfortunately, no. I'm not." I set my jaw, my hands in tight fists as they were every time I spoke of him.

"And the poor lad killed himself?" A scared and compassionate Geillis was something that should be written in Record Guinness Book.

"I'm pretty sure MacGregor would never kill himself. Randall is pure evil, Geillis. He could easily kill someone and make it seem like suicide."

“I see. So ye fled to Paris to save yerself. But why are ye back, Claire?” Her feathery eyebrows were low, almost touching her blonde eyelashes.

“Jamie.” One word was enough. It was my world.

Geillis shook her head, understanding, but I could see a speck of disappointment in her eyes. “Ye were always one to listen to yer heart, Claire.”

“In contrast with you!” I laughed, accepting that we’d never agree on that.

“Oh, dinna fash. I listen to my heart just fine. But it’s never as loud as my mind, aye?” Geillis winked at me, the green eyes full of mischief.

“Aye!” I teased her. “Are you still with Dougal, then?”

“He’s getting divorce.” She announced that, snapping her fingers as if she’d achieved this with some kind of magic.

“WHAT?”

Geillis laughed, a satisfied laughter with a sprinkle of evil. “I’m pregnant, ye ken. And he’s crazy about me, what can I do?” She brushed her red hair back, showing off.

“So you love the man?” I asked with a grimace, afraid of her answer.

“Ah... He’s as good as a man can be, ye ken.” Geillis shrugged, her opinion of men well known.

“So you two are getting married? Jamie told me nothing about this!”

“Oh, no one knows yet. He’s talking to his wife this weekend.” Geillis smiled, a broad grin of satisfaction. “It’s great having ye back, Claire. I had no one to talk to while ye were away. Ye scared us all, ye ken.” She pressed her lips together, green eyes boring into mine. “When Jamie first called me to see if we were together he could barely make sense, uttering mixed words in a raspy voice. It sounded like he was shouting, or crying, I didna ken. I thought that maybe ye found a mysterious lover and eloped wi’ him but ye’d never do it. No to Jamie.”

“Not to Jamie.” I echoed her last words.

“So, ye’re coming back to the hospital?”

“I’m thinking of visiting tomorrow. Talk to Dr. Beaton, see if there is any position I could apply to.”

“We always need more hands, Claire. Especially hands like yers. They didna find anyone to substitute ye, yet. I think Dr. Beaton will be glad to see ye back.”

“If he mysteriously forgets the fact that I left and all I sent was an email, stating that I wanted to quit and that I was in Paris.”

“Ye’re going to be just fine.”

—

It turned out that Geillis was right. I was just fine.

My meeting with the head physician of the hospital went surprisingly well. He was willing to accept me back, seeing as I was one of the most talented surgeons he'd known in his life – his words, not mine. There was a lack of surgeons and as Geillis had already informed me, no one had taken my position. After doing the necessary paperwork, I'd be back in my scrubs in no time.

I was with Jamie again and I had my job back.

That begged for a celebration. And that was exactly what Jamie and I did. We celebrated our happiness at our favorite restaurant, over red wine and a shared paella.

Everything was perfect, until Jamie placed his hand on mine, eyes sparkling, and suggested we'd visit Lallybroch that weekend.

I gulped, averting my eyes from his. "You think so?"

"Aye. Everybody will be there. Ye canna imagine how much taller wee Jamie is, Sassenach! They got him this balance bicycle last month and he canna leave it from his hands! It's a wonder he dinna sleep wi' it!"

My heart softened at the thought of my wee ginger, but his mother's eyes that would pierce through me were another matter altogether.

"What is it, Sassenach?"

"Nothing." I took a huge gulp of my wine, so much that I almost choked myself.

"If ye're trying to die from choking in yer wine, Sassenach, I dinna think that's a wise idea."

"I know."

"Yer face darkened from the moment ye heard about going to Lallybroch. Ye used to love it, Claire." His eyes were sad, without any intention of convincing me that we should go. He was trying to cope with the idea of me hating his home and I knew that even contemplating this was too much for Jamie Fraser.

"Oh no. I still love Lallybroch, Jamie. You know this place will always be in my heart."

"But?"

The bloody man wouldn't help me at all. If he wanted to hear it from me, let him have it.

"Jenny," I whispered.

"Jenny? Since when ye're afraid of my sister, Sassenach?" A tiny smile was lurking behind his lips now, the pain in his eyes gone.

"Since I left you. Jenny will hate me for hurting you, and you very well know it."

“Jenny will understand, if we explain. And we will.” He took my hand in his, engulfing it completely, while his thumb was running across my knuckles.

I nodded, still not quite convinced about how easy it would be to confront the hurricane called Jenny Fraser. Jamie’s lips however, tasting like the wine’s red berries, stole all my thoughts, claiming me back to the security of our little puffy cloud.

We’d be fine.

Or dead. You could never really know with Jenny.

She won't.



[source](#)

Sometimes in life we are our worst selves with the people we love the most. Because they love us back, and that provides security. Because we know that no matter what stupid, shitty things we'll do, they will be there to take us back. With scolds and yells, with tears and hugs.

Lost in that illusion, we rock the solid foundation of our relationships a bit too much. These are the moments that reality comes back, slapping us on the face for our behavior. Reminding us that we should take nothing for granted.

And we consider, for the first time, the possibility of losing what we value the most, forever.

The foundation Jamie and I had built was stable, unbroken. I never doubted that.

The relationship with his family, though, *my* family for almost two years, was another matter altogether. In the prospect of seeing Jenny again I felt like an acrobat in training, walking on the trembling thin line ready to fall head over heels with the tiniest mistake.

The travel to Lallybroch was long and I found myself wishing we could stop at a quiet little village close to a lake, just to be the two of us, enclosed in our secured bubble of love.

But that wouldn't happen. I knew Jamie was excited to share his happiness with his family.

I was back.

Taking a breath, I looked at him shaking his head to the rhythm of the song we were listening to.

I'm in the arch of the church

Between her thumb and her forefinger

I'm a worshipper

A zealot king, cursed, a devotee

Of the heady golden dance she does

She's an uncut drug

Find the vein and the pulse

Chased it and for a minute I was floating dead above myself

The lyrics reverberated around my head, reminding me of the previous week, of how easily Jamie forgave me, how effortlessly he opened his arms for me to creep in.

A zealot king, cursed, a devotee

Of the heady golden dance she does

I took our lives in my hands when I left. Dancing the dance of my choice and having him deal with the consequences.

I closed my eyes inhaling deeply. We were here. *He* was here, driving his Morris Minor, sitting so close to me that with the slightest move of my hand I could touch him.

My hand found his leg just above the knee, drawing circles on the taut muscle of his thigh.

Jamie turned his head and smiled, eyes locked with mine for a moment before they snapped back to the road. The smile lingered on his lips, lightening up his face as he sang the refrain of the song. Words completely out of tune, completely into my heart.

Get out of my heart

She won't, she won't

I saw a glimmer in the dark

And now I know she won't get out of my heart

She won't.

I leaned towards him, placing a soft kiss on the exposed skin of his neck. Warm, soft. Jamie grunted, a sound that always made me lose my mind. Deep, guttural.

I sucked the tender skin and felt the words as they tingled his throat on their way out. "If ye keep doing that, Sassenach, I dinna think we'll ever arrive at Lallybroch. We're either crushing on a tree or I'm stopping the car in the first village with a Bed and Breakfast."

"I'm just as fine with only the bed..." I murmured, my lips almost touching his skin as my fingers started gliding up his thigh inching closer to their target.

Jamie took his hand from the wheel and found mine on his jeans, stopping it before it would be too late. "Give me a few more hours, Sassenach, and I promise ye once we arrive at Lallybroch I'm taking ye to our room as soon as possible."

I bit him in response making his hand squeeze my thigh. "Vixen," he muttered, and I heard the smile hidden in the corner of his lips.

As we moved northern, snowflakes started falling on the windshield. My fingers fidgeted with Jamie's red locks as my palm settled on his warm nape and I sleepily watched the flakes falling on the firs on the side of the road, dressing them in their purity.

I always found myself in awe with the beauty of the Highlands. It was magical.

My heart started beating faster when we passed Broch Mordha, the last village before Lallybroch. The music from the car's speakers covered the popping sound released by the cracking of my knuckles, but Jamie's hand spread wide on my knee, stopping my bouncing leg.

“It’s going to be alright, Sassenach.” His voice was warm, reassuring.

“Mhmm” I swallowed hard, wishing that Jamie’s confidence was enough for both of us. Practicing all my self-restrain, I held my hands together in my lap, legs immobile. Desperate for a distraction, I turned to see out of the window trying to forget the impending reunion, lost in the white serenity of the Scottish countryside. It was impossible.

The gravel’s complaints under the car’s wheels made every muscle in my body tense, giving me the impression that our hostess would be equally disturbed by our arrival.

Jamie parked the car in the yard and look at me, serious. “I love ye, Claire. Ye have nothing to be afraid of, aye?”

Pursing my lips, I shrugged. “We’ll see.”

Jamie didn’t have time to say anything else because two faint knocks were heard from the driver’s door. He opened it just a bit, revealing two slanted blue eyes almost hidden underneath a cinnamon brown beanie that sported the eyes of a bear and two ears on the top.

“Atie Caile!” Young Jamie’s eyes got wide and he grinned broadly.

“Hello, my wee ginger!” I said, feeling a genuine smile matching his settle on my face.

“Eee gigel!” He exclaimed as he climbed on Jamie’s lap and reached for me, both hands in the air.

“Be careful you wee monkey!” Jamie scorned but his namesake’s laughter covered his voice.

“Atie! Come! Bu bike!” Of course. Six months went by and the first thing a two-year-old tells you about, is his new bike. I suddenly wished I had to converse only with two-year-old children in my life.

“You have your own blue bike, right? And you ride it all day long?” I asked, excited.

“Aye! Day oong!”

“Oh how I’ve missed you, my little one!” I said, placing a kiss on his neck that made him giggle.

“Shall we go out now, or we’re to stay in the car till night time?” Jamie asked, pushing me not to avoid the inevitable.

“Come, atie Caile! Bike!”

“Come, atie Caile!” Jamie mimicked his nephew’s voice with a lopsided smile. “We have a bike to show ye, aye?”

“Aye...” I sighed. It was time to face the aftermath of my disappearance, whether I liked it or not. That, and young Jamie’s new bike.

My little boy was hoping up and down before he took my hand and started running towards his bike. I was kneeling next to him, exclaiming how beautiful his shiny bike was, when I heard Jenny's voice. "Ye wee gomerel. Didna I say ye were no to go out because it's snowing? Welcome, brother." She turned to Jamie and hugged him, with her eyes on me. Her voice turned distant and cold. "Claire," she spat with a nod.

That much of a welcome to me. Oh boy, this is going to be a hard weekend.

"Vroom! Vroom!" Little Jamie's voice broke the cold ice that started forming around my heart and I flicked a hand on his beanie's ears.

"We'll go for a ride later, okay wee ginger? Look! It's snowing now." I crouched next to him and held my palm open, seeing the white flakes melt on my skin.

Jamie focused on the snow for a moment, opening his palm to mimic my stance. Pursing his lips in thought, exactly like his mother did, he considered if my excuse was good enough to keep him from riding. Seeing that he wasn't quite convinced, I continued, more determined. "Atie Caile has to go into the house now, and you're to come, too. We don't want you to stay here alone." His little pout disappeared when I kissed his cheek and I stood up, taking his hand as we headed to the door where his mother was standing next to Jamie.

When I stepped on the first stair, Jamie extended his hand. My support, not to ascend the stairs, but to face his furious sister.

"I see yer back, Claire." Her jaw was set, her arms crossed in front of her chest.

"Yes." I swallowed hard, forcing back the lump that formed in my throat. A lump of fear, of forgiveness being denied.

The possibility of not being accepted again hovered heavy above me. Running away might have costed the only family I had during the last two years.

"Come in." Jenny said, taking young Jamie in her arms. My eyes stayed fixed on them until they disappeared in the end of the house's corridor, my feet leaden on the floor.

Jamie kissed me on the forehead and I closed my eyes, inhaling deeply. "I'm here, Sassenach. Ye ken how Jenny is. We're going to bring her around."

"Are we?" I said, now buried in Jamie's hug, feeling the fabric of his coat against my cheek.

"Ye dinna trust in us, now?" Jamie moved so he could see me. With a finger under my chin, he raised my head until my eyes found his. "What got in this wee head of yours Atie Caile?" He asked, feigning confusion.

"At least someone is happy that I'm here."

Jamie kissed the pout on my lips. "Aye, wee Jamie was excited to see ye again, that's for sure." His hand cupped my face, a thump running on my cheekbone. "But no one is more happy than me, Claire. Lallybroch wasna home without ye."

I got lost in his sapphire blue eyes for a moment, thinking *what I did to deserve this man*, and I rose on my tiptoes to feel his lips on mine. “I love you, Jamie Fraser.”

“Are ye two coming?” Jenny’s yell made us both flinch. We simultaneously rolled our eyes as our hands entwined, and entered the manor.

The house I once considered my home.

I was always treated like family at Lallybroch. Jenny had opened her arms to me from the very first time Jamie took me there. I didn’t know how much Jamie talked about me to his sister, but I felt like Jenny knew. She understood what was between me and Jamie. She saw it, as deep and real as it was.

From that time, I always felt at peace when we were at Lallybroch. I was grateful for being accepted in the place Jamie was born and raised, being a part of this family and feeling the ghosts of past Fraser generations in the corners and the portraits, counting me as one of them even if I didn’t share their last name.

But nothing was the same now.

Fresh, fluffy towels were folded on our bed, as if we were in a hotel. It was a silly detail, but I felt like a guest expected to leave soon.

The table was set when we entered the dining room. Ian smiled at us with a nod towards the empty chairs and young Jamie ran to me, trying to climb on the chair next to mine.

“Jamie, come here.” Jenny’s voice was emotionless and it penetrated my skin like cold wind, creeping in my bones.

“No! I want Atie Caille!”

Jenny walked in the room, left the plates she was holding on the table and took Jamie in her arms. “Aye, mo ghraidh, I ken. But we never ken when she’s leaving us again, so ye better come to mom.”

Wee Jamie didn’t have time to react to this, because his older namesake did.

“Claire isn’t leaving.” He stated, voice strong and sober.

“Aye, brother?” Jenny challenged him. “I bet this is exactly what ye’d say to me if I asked ye seven months ago. And yet, we had ye mourning as if she was dead for the last six months. Dinna tell me if she’s leaving or no.”

“I tell ye, Janet, that Claire is staying. And I want her to, do ye hear me?”

“Of course ye want her to, ye clotheid.” Jenny returned, eyes burning. “Ye broke that poor girl’s heart the moment Claire appeared again.”

“I never asked for that date!” Jamie stared hard at his sister, clenching his teeth as he tried not to raise his voice in the presence of his nephew. “Ye did that all by yourself! I never wanted Laoghaire. Never will, either.” His face was red and distorted as he spat the last part out.

“She would never leave you.” Jenny’s voice ran like a dagger through my heart.

She couldn’t forgive me.

“Jenny,” I dared to speak, and Jamie’s fingers pressed mine underneath the table. “I made a mistake. I honestly thought that what I did was for the best. For me, for Jamie...” I felt my voice shaking and I stopped to gather my strength. “I’m back now and I don’t intend on leaving again. I can explain everything if you want me to.”

“Aye, I’m sure ye can, Claire. But dinna lie to me. Ye weren’t here to see Jamie. I was, aye? Dinna tell me ye did it for him.”

“But if you listen to me – ”

Jenny didn’t leave me finish my sentence. “If I listen to you? Can ye tell me, Claire, why ye didn’t call even once, just to let us know that ye’re alive and well? To keep us from worrying? This is what family does, ye ken.” Her bloodshot eyes were fixed on me, daring me to answer her question.

“I... I couldn’t.” All air left my chest and I looked at her, deflated. “I had to keep my distance and stop thinking of what I left back.”

“So ye did that for yerself. Thank ye, Claire. For showing just how much ye care.” She pushed her chair back as she rose and gathered wee Jamie in her arms. “Excuse me, the bairn has to be put in bed. Ye were late and he ate before ye arrived.” With wee Jamie clutched around her like an octopus, she walked to the stairs.

“Dinna fash, Sassenach. She’ll come around.” Jamie’s sweet, low voice felt like a balm, and his lips on my temple helped me find some air again.

“She’s just hurt, Claire.” Ian added with a rueful smile. “She needs time to lick her wounds. Ye were a sister to her, ye surely ken that.”

“Yes,” I said. “I know. She was a sister to me, too.”

“Let’s eat and then we’ll go to the living room and have a dram. Whisky always helps.” Ian’s wink made me see a flicker of hope. “Ye’ll explain everything there.”

We cleaned up the table, finishing everything not long before Jenny came back, with her strict face a little smoothed. Little Jamie did that to people, he was taking the edges away, leaving them a little more round. With a heavy sigh Jenny plopped herself onto the armchair next to Ian.

“Jamie changed a lot. He’s much taller than I remembered.” I tried for a safe, neutral subject.

Silly me.

Jenny's mouth moved into a sarcastic little smile. "This happens if you leave for six months, Claire. Bairns change."

"Oh God!" I murmured as I felt Jamie tensing on the couch next to me.

"Janet," Jamie said in a firm voice and sneaked his arm around my waist. "It's time to shut yer gob and listen."

"Ye came to my house to insult me, brother?" Jenny's mouth was set, her hands gripping tightly the cotton velvet arms of the chair as she slowly found all her edges again.

"We didna come so ye could insult us, either."

"I didna say anything to ye!" She protested, indignant.

"Ye said to Claire, and more than once. Claire and I, we are one, Jenny. Ye ken that." I could see the muscles of his face as he gnashed his teeth, the high cheekbones ready to fight back if she didn't accept his claim on me.

"So ye forget? Everything she did to ye?" Her eyebrows almost touched her hairline.

"No, I didna forget, Janet. I forgave her."

I took a deep breath and placed my hand on Jamie's thigh. Finding strength.

"Jenny." My voice was firm. "I completely understand if you don't want to forgive me. If you want me to leave that house and never come back. But you must know first, and then you can decide what you want to do with me." My voice didn't falter, and one who didn't know me could may believe that it would cost me nothing if she wouldn't take me back. But I knew there was no other way. Jenny was never fond of weakness, and that was a trait we shared.

"Speak then."

I felt my heart racing as I spoke about it again.

Him. The fear. The agony. My broken heart.

Jenny's face didn't change at the beginning, but in the middle of my story tears started rolling down her rosy cheeks and she reached for Ian's hand. Ian, with his big brown eyes accepting me like a warm hug. He was always the most compassionate of the two. His acceptance, together with Jamie's hand on my waist and the sound of his breathing next to me, made me finish the story without crying, for once.

The crackling sound of the wood in the fireplace was all I could hear for a few moments, before Jenny was on me, her arms tight around my shoulders. It was that moment that the dam broke and I started crying in her arms, as I felt her own sobs raking her small but strong frame.

And like that, I got my sister back.

"Ye're a fool." Jenny said. "Ye should say something. We could help, ye ken. This is what family is. You could come here. No one would ever find you here."

“I couldn’t put you all in danger. I may do it even now.”

“We’re safe, Claire. Dinna worry.”

She turned to Jamie, then, with a smile on her lips. “I see ye found yer perfect pair, brother. I dinna ken what we will do wi’ the two o’ ye.”

Jamie kissed his sister on the top of her head and pulled me a little closer to him. “For now Jen, ye’ll let us sleep. It was an exhausting day.”

Jenny nodded as she rose, smiling. “Aye. Goodnight brother.” Turning to me, she hugged me once more, whispering, “Thank ye for coming back, Claire. He was insufferable while ye were away.”

“Come, mo ghraidh?” Jamie extended a hand towards me and I took it, smiling, as I felt the tears drying on my cheeks. “See? All is well.” He whispered, his lips lingering on my forehead before we walked up the stairs, our steps synchronized, our hearts at peace.

At home.

The moment we entered the Laird’s room, I saw the color in his eyes changing in a familiar, tumultuous dark blue. Feeling his lopsided smile disappear when his lips claimed mine, I knew he wasn’t as exhausted as he wanted his sister to believe.

“That was not soon, but it was as soon as possible, mo nighean donn.” He said, as his hand cupped my head, his fingers letting my curls loose from their confines. “As I promised ye.”

I smiled and I stepped backwards towards the bed, pulling him to me. “And what a bed you found us, Mr Fraser.”

“*Our* bed, mo ghraidh.” He whispered, before we fell on the soft mattress, finding and losing ourselves in the same room he’d told me that he loved me for the first time.

In the room I realized that I loved him back, just as much.

And that we could never get out of each other’s heart.

Home



[source](#)

What is happiness?

A snow fight where you can't aim properly because you doubled up with laughter. Building a snowman, frantically searching for a carrot so he can smell the brisk, winter air. Savoring delicious pies until you know that your stomach will revenge you for being greedy – but going on till the last crumble. Drinking whisky, late at night in front of the fireplace, enfolded in two strong arms that can keep all world's pain away.

Happiness isn't a massive celebration or a constant condition. It's like a fine powder, hiding in simple, little moments.

I couldn't think of a better way to spend the weekend in the Highlands.

I couldn't think of a better way to spend my life, but to collect such little, precious moments.

Time, however, knows neither happiness nor sadness. It keeps passing, and Sunday afternoon came without asking for our permission. I found myself feeling nostalgic for what we would leave back at Lallybroch. The bit of ourselves that lived in the Laird's room, in the big manor that held so many people's dreams, in young Jamie's toothy smile.

A few hours before we would depart, Jamie asked me to wear something warm and meet him in the parlor. My frown made his lopsided smile a bit more pronounced, but he didn't bother explaining his plan. Seeing his broad back disappear down the stairs, I turned to find the warmest sweater in my suitcase. If Jamie Fraser asked for something warm, I was more than sure that we would freeze to death in some beautiful place he wanted to show me.

I dressed up like an onion, layers upon layers of clothing, and I went down the stairs to find Jamie waiting in his windcheater, looking at me as if I wore the most impressive red dress.

"What?" I asked, feeling the intensity of his stare.

"Nothing, Sassenach. Ye're just so beautiful, is all." His smile implied much more than that, but I knew better than to ask.

With my hand in his, the warm wool of my gloves rubbing against his as our fingers intertwined, we left the house behind and walked in silence, breathing in the cold air and taking in the serenity of the scenery.

Our boots crashed the fluffy snow that covered the green Highland hills of my memories. It felt like cleansing, creating a new, white canvas for spring to spread her colors on. Closing my eyes, I imagined the mauve of the heather, the purple of the primroses and spear thistles as they picked their little heads above the green grass. Opening them again, I reveled in the calmness around me. Everything was still, apart from the fog on the top of the mountains that swayed lightly to hide the magical creatures living up there and shelter them from the inquiring eyes. I grasped Jamie's hand tighter and I inhaled deeply, feeling my heart quiet down; a pause in time, a moment that lasted forever, enclosing us in it.

Turning my head I saw his fierce red hair against the white surroundings, his deep blue sapphire eyes. My colors.

"Where are we going, love?" I finally asked, looking at him from the corner of my eye. I knew that if I let him, we could go on, walking forever.

"Ye'll see, Sassenach. Be patient, aye?" His lips tugged up infinitesimally, a small move that no one would notice. No one, but me.

We walked for about twenty minutes before ending up at a creek, surrounded by trees, their bare branches covered with snow. Thin, weaker branches were leaning towards the ground, desperate to dislodge their load while the strongest ones were standing proud, tips towards the sky, declaring their superiority towards the games of the seasons. The creek's water ran vividly and rocks were disturbing its flow here and there; big and solid ones that determined its fate, smaller ones that were swallowed under its force.

"It's so beautiful!" I said allured, breathing deeply as I tried to memorize the picture in front of me, to remember it forever.

Jamie moved behind me, enfolding me in his arms and creating a warm, protected niche against the cool breeze that came from the creek. “Aye, ‘tis.” He murmured, and I felt his inhale more than I heard it, his nose buried deep in my curls.

“Twas my favorite place to come here, when I was a lad.” I turned around in his arms, craving to see him, imaging the blue eyes of a little boy thirsty to see the world.

“How come you never showed this place to me before?”

He shrugged, as if the reason wasn’t important. “There is a hidden cave there,” he said, and my eyes followed the imaginary line that started from his index finger. “Up the hill.”

I squeezed my eyes, trying to find the place I was supposed to see. “I can’t see anything.” My frown made him laugh and I felt his breath caressing my face.

“That’s the point, Sassenach. Ye’re not supposed to find it from down here. There is a legend about that cave, ye ken.”

“Mmm,” I nuzzled his neck. “I was sure there would be one. We’re in the Highlands, after all.”

“Oh, aye. Ye ken us, Scots, far too well now. Care to listen?”

“I’m all ears.” I grinned, waiting for my born storyteller to begin.

Imagine of the stories he will tell our children.

“After the battle of Culloden, the Laird Broch Tuarach – he was a Fraser, ye ken – was hiding in this exact cave to avoid the redcoats. He was a wanted man, a renowned rebel, and he had to hide if he was not to be executed. The man stayed hidden during the day and hunted to supply for his family at night. There was a famine too at that time, ye ken.”

“Sounds like he was a gallant man.” I whispered.

“Aye. And he lived alone in that cave, for seven years, Sassenach.”

“Seven years in a cave?” I could feel my own heart ache for his loneliness.

“Aye,” Jamie nodded, a frown carving his face. “He lived like an animal, they say. He lost his wife in the Rising and was alone ever since. The legend says his wife was a fairy, and he coulna love anyone else after loving her.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but I couldn’t. I saw my breath, a mist disappearing in front of me, and I pulled Jamie closer. *I couldn’t love anyone after loving him.*

Standing on the ground this man walked so many years ago, thinking of him alone and heartbroken in that cave for seven years, made me feel even more grateful for Jamie’s solid body against mine. It was a legend, I knew – but in my heart felt it all too real.

Jamie ran his hand on my back, kissing the top of my head. “I canna imagine how he felt. Ye left me only for six months, Sassenach, and I lost my urge to live.”

“Jamie...”

“I need ye to ken, Claire.” He moved slightly, so that we could look into each other’s eyes, but his arms stayed locked around me. Seeing me nodding, he continued. “When ye left... The worst part was that I was still living. I woke up every morning to see yer side of the bed empty. Then I couldn’t see it without ye and I started sleeping on yer side,” he let out a sorrowful snort, “as if it would change anything. I was laughing at jokes and all I could think was if you would laugh, too. I was reading passages that I came to love and I ached to read them to you. I was alive, and it hurt so much. I didna want to be alive without ye.” He removed his gloves and ran his fingers on my cheek, slowly and tenderly, as if he was afraid of breaking me. “I want ye in my life, Claire. I need ye, so much.” He stopped, swallowing hard, his eyes moist with unspent tears, with emotions that were just too much. “There is a poem, ye ken.”

With Jamie Fraser there was always a poem.

“There is?” I asked with raised eyebrows and a smile, trying to lighten up the mood.

“Aye, Sassenach.” Jamie pulled me closer with a smirk, pressing me against him. “There is.” He kissed my forehead, letting his lips settle against my skin for a while. “Tis called ‘Without You’. I dinna like the whole poem overmuch, but the last part...”

He took a deep breath and moved his head a little, to meet my eyes.

“Without you there would be

no landscapes, no stations, no houses

no chipshops, no quiet villages

no seagulls on beaches

no hopscotch on pavements

no night, no morning

there’d be no city, no country

Without you.”

I made to speak, but his finger on my lips stopped me. “There’d be *no home*, without ye, Sassenach. I canna lose ye again. Will...” He paused, his eyes leaving mine for just a second as he looked down at his palm.

There was no box, no velvet package, just a ring waiting for me, glinting against his skin.

“Will ye be my home, forever, Claire?” His blue eyes were boring deep into mine and I felt my heart filling up with love and hope. With the promises of a vibrant future dancing between his words.

“Forever,” I said in a trembling voice, unable to keep the tears from running free. Jamie kissed my tears away, and I could see my happiness lingering on his lips, making them red and shiny. He took my glove off and I felt his shaking hand as he slipped the ring on my finger. It was a beautiful band, set with diamonds in the shape of leaves. And it was just perfect.

Jamie raised my hand to his lips and kissed it reverently.

I saw his tears streaming down his face as the back of his fingers trailed the wet paths on my cheeks before getting lost in my hair to bring me closer. His lips found mine, sweet and salty, and they tasted like smiles and tears. They tasted like life; like home.

“I love ye, Claire.” He whispered on my lips.

“I love you too, Jamie.”

We stayed there, listening to the creek rumbling of lost loves and the wind whistling songs of reunions between the bare branches. Loves like ours, that persevered. Loves that fought and won, even if they ended up less perfect - carrying their scars on their back.

Enfolded in each other’s arms, we were exposed and we were protected.

We were fearless.

We were home.

[Poem by Adrian Henri](#)

And this is Claire’s ring!



[source](#)

A Surprise



[Happy Street - Leonid Afremov](#)

Routine is like the tick tock of the clock. It comes and goes; untouched, unaltered, unnoticed.

The days pass before you have time to realize that another week is over, and the weekend you were waiting for vanishes like thin air before you have enough time to inhale it. Spring comes with its colors and scents giving life to everything around you, but if you close your eyes in the silence you can still listen to children singing the jingle bells while the Christmas lights paint the white wall; blue, red and green – same colors as the flowers that blossom in the gardens around the city.

Time flies, and three months had flipped their wings towards the land of the past before I knew it.

Having found each other again, Jamie and I focused on our careers, determined to prove our worth – Jamie for his promotion and I for my job that was so lavishly offered back to me.

Long meetings and double shifts made our time together scarce. I often came back at home in the early hours of the morning to find Jamie in bed, a book lying on his chest, his table lamp still turned on. Taking a quick shower, I rushed to join him and snuggle against his chest as he shifted on his sleep to take me into his arms in a spoon-like fashion. It was our precious time together. My weariness was slipping away under his soft breath on my neck, under his fingertips where they rested on my stomach, and it was the only part of my day when I felt truly relaxed. It never lasted long enough, though. I'd feel Jamie waking up just before dreams would claim my thoughts, leaving me alone in bed with a soft kiss on my shoulder, his footsteps lulling me back to sleep as he was getting ready for the office.

So I knew exactly when it had happened.

It was the morning after a long, tiring shift.

I entered our apartment to find Jamie in his favorite armchair, lost in the pages of a book with a frown on his face. His skin was pale, his hair color almost lost under dawn's spare light. I shed my scrubs in the silence of the room, the stiff fabric hitting the floor as a declaration of freedom, and I walked towards him in my underwear, my steps soft against the lean wooden floor. Jamie raised his head from the book and his frown was transformed into a smile. He didn't take his eyes away as I got closer, and I could feel his gaze burning me. The book fell on the small table next to him as his arms opened, waiting for me. With my heart's pace speeding up, my hands settled on his strong shoulders, my fingers pressing on the muscles underneath the skin, and I straddled him, knees grazing the back of the armchair. Jamie instantly wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me onto him as he changed his position on the armchair to fit us both.

"What are you doing up so early?" My voice was low, careful not to wake the world for a little longer.

"I woke up two hours ago and ye werena here. I missed seeing yer eyes in the morning light, Sassenach."

"So you found it rational to stay awake just to see my eyes?" I teased him, feeling a smile tugging my lips up.

"Aye," Jamie replied simply, running his fingers on my arm. "I did."

He was sleepless and tired, and I planted two soft kisses on the dark circles under his deep blue eyes. He chuckled and did the same to mine, before his lips trailed on my cheekbones, cheeks, jaw and lips. I kissed him back, tasting love and coffee on his tongue.

"Ye're beautiful." He said, his eyes boring deep into mine as his love and tenderness rooted in my chest.

"I'm a mess." I ran my hands in my curls, only to end up making me look even more disheveled.

"And what a beautiful mess ye are, mo nighean donn." His words where dipped in affection and I felt his worship in the smiling lips that made their way down my neck.

Jamie always made me feel that way. He made me feel enough.

Moving my hands, I cupped his face, wanting to bring his eyes back into mine. “I love you, Jamie.”

“I love ye too, my Sassenach.”

My hands moved to the hem of his T-shirt as I heard the clasp of my bra falling open. Jamie pulled me closer and licked a trail on my skin, from my neck to the tender tip of my nipple. I groaned, arching my back to give him more access, and I felt him harden underneath me, as the air filled with his strong Scottish accent whispering in Gaelic. When he moved his attention to my other nipple I started grinding myself on his hard cock, desperate for more.

The moment his lips left my breast I took his T-shirt and black boxer briefs off, sitting again on top of him. I took him in my hand, stroking him once, then twice, and I guided him inside me with my lace panties still on, a breath leaving us both in unison in the newfound and much missed connection.

We made love, slowly and sensationally, every inch of our bodies touching, tongues crashing and teeth biting lightly cherry lips. Nails traced white lines on the soft skin, and fingers dug into it forcibly, trying to bring the other closer, demanding to be one. Jamie filled my body and my soul, leading me to a place where awareness and oblivion intermingled and his face dominated every other image, blue loving eyes and fiery red hair, leaving me with the feeling that everything in the world was well placed. He spilled himself inside me as I contracted against him, and we stayed linked, unable to let any distance come between us. I could still feel him inside me while his breath quietened and the pulse over his carotid artery stopped beating erratically against my lips. He cradled me in his arms and I placed my hand above his heart, without words, without superfluous declarations.

There was nothing left to be said.

We were frozen in time and space, our heartbeats the only indication we were still alive. We were whole, and we needed nothing more than what we found in each other.

I didn’t know how much time had passed with us linked on the armchair before Jamie carried me to bed. We slept together that morning, after almost a week apart, limbs sprawled weak on the coverlet and hearts beating strong and steady.

Little we knew, back then, that we had just created another heart, that would make both ours beat faster.

But now I knew.

Two pink lines were staring back at me from the pregnancy test on the bathroom’s sink.

Two. Pink. Lines.

I didn’t expect that. With the stress and the long shifts, I was almost sure I could blame the career I’d chosen for missing my period.

But it turned out that I couldn’t.

My hand came to cup my - still flat - belly, my mind travelling to the tiny creature living in there.

My baby. Our baby.

I felt my heart rate increase, and I took my gaze from my stomach to look at the mirror. A smile came to soften my eyes - the brown turning to the golden color Jamie loved - transforming my face with a glow that rose from deep inside me, seeking to be released. I took a deep breath and imagined a soft chubby baby with slanted eyes and a gummy smile. A baby sleeping in my arms.

“Claire Beauchamp,” I murmured to myself, “You’re going to become a mother.”

—

Jamie texted me that he finished earlier that afternoon and I decided to wait for him in front of our apartment’s door.

Sometimes the stars align.

“And where exactly are ye going, Sassenach? I thought ye promised me we’d spend this evening together.” The frown on his face was clear even from where he was standing, ten steps lower than me.

“I did,” I said, smiling.

I wasn’t sure if I even stopped smiling since the moment I saw the result.

“We’re going for a walk, baby.” I descended the stairs that kept us apart and took his hand in mine.

“Can I at least leave these inside?” He raised his hands, his laptop and some envelopes on full display, and I rolled my eyes in response. “Good,” he said and went up the stairs – two at a time – to disappear into our apartment.

He reappeared two minutes later, wearing sneakers, a hoodie, sweatpants, and a broad grin on his face.

“Ready?” I asked, wondering that kind of walk he had in mind. Hiking on a hill, most likely.

You’re not going to have that, Fraser. I’m too happy and too sluggish for hiking today. No more endorphins needed in this body, thank you very much.

“Aye, ready. Where are we heading to?”

“Umm, you know... Around. *Not* hiking.” I emphasized on the last with raised eyebrows and he laughed.

“I know? Around? Do I have to solve a riddle to find our destination, Sassenach?”

“I just want us to walk hand in hand, enjoying the city. Is that too much?” I asked, feigning frustration.

“No, tis not, Sassenach.” He sneaked his arm around me as we stepped on the street, placing a soft kiss between my curls. “Tis a great idea.”

We walked towards the Botanic Gardens, talking about work and the latest news. Once there, we reduced our pace, arms sneaking around shoulders and waist, bringing our bodies closer. We enjoyed a comfortable silence, once we found we could share since our first days together, and our synchronized steps moved us through the paths, eyes filling with the grass’s parakeet green and the stark red, yellow and white of buds that opened thirsty for the sun – sparkles of regeneration to continue an eternal circle of life.

A circle that we now were part of.

How sappy is that, Beauchamp?

Blame the hormones.

As we left the gardens behind, I reveled in the city noises around us. I loved the buzz of the city, this secret companion reminding me that I was never alone. Cars and voices, a laughter and a shout; life.

I stopped in front of a shoe store, staring at the tiny shoes waiting for little feet to fill them.

I’m buying the green ones with the frog, I’m tired of girls wearing shoes with glittery flowers. But the other ones, those with the colorful butterflies, these are girly too, but they are so pretty... Wait a moment. What if the baby isn’t a girl?

“A penny for your thoughts?” Jamie whispered in my curls, his chest level with my back, his arms enveloping me from behind to come and rest on my belly.

As if his body already knew.

“Only a penny? You can do better than that, Fraser.” I said, raising an eyebrow and turning slightly my head to look at him.

“What about a kiss?” He said, and brought his lips to mine, his tongue tracing my bottom lip with mischief.

“Mmm, much better.” I breathed into his lips.

“So?”

“So?”

“You owe me your thoughts now, Sassenach. You have to give me what I paid for.” His eyes drifted off to the little shoes on display in front of us and a beautiful frown adorned his face. “Are you trying to bribe young Jamie with shoes, so you can be his favorite again?”

I couldn't stop the laughter that started from deep in my belly.

You like your da's jokes, don't you baby?

"I am Jamie's favorite already." I stated, the laughter still lingering in my voice.

"Aye, ye are. Both Jamies seem to have a soft spot for this curly Sassenach."

"Love?"

"Aye?"

"Choose a pair. Which one do you like?" I asked, looking to the shop's window again.

"Why?"

"Because we're going to need them soon." I said, and I let my head thump back onto his chest, eyes closed, a grin splitting my face in two.

"What?" I opened my eyes to see the surprise on his face, the wide eyes, the raised eyebrows, the lips trying to form words and failing miserably.

I intertwined my fingers with his as they rested on my stomach, and pressed lightly. "I took a test today." Bright blue eyes shined into mine and I could see the soft skin on their edges crinkle. "We're not just the two of us, now."

"God, Sassenach," he whispered, and I felt his breath rippling on my cheek. "You make me the happiest man on earth!"

He turned me to face him then, and swiped me off my feet, twisting us both in the middle of the sidewalk and laughing loudly as the passers-by looked at us, until all the city colors and lights became swirly traces in an abstract expressionism painting of happiness.

A daughter, a mother.



[source](#)

Women are supposed to have a biological clock.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick- time to have a baby.

I always found this concept of the woman's body functioning as a time bomb rather unsettling. And sexist. Men's bodies grow old as well, but I never saw an ominous future without reproduction hanging low over their heads.

I never felt that clock ticking. I never felt that I *had to* have a baby.

It wasn't that I didn't dream of a family – it was always there, at the back of my mind. Happy voices in a bright background, fairy tales read to serene faces with sleepy eyes and rosy cheeks, loud giggles when fingers found soft skin to tickle. It would eventually happen, somehow. But I never believed that the sole purpose of my existence was to have children. There was so much more to be done.

Now I was a thirty-four-year-old mother-to-be. And with a swift move, the balance of my life had tilted towards one direction, making every thought roll towards the same destination.

My baby.

Our baby.

“Christ! I will be an auntie!” Jenny’s high-pitched voice went right through my brain when I told her the news over the phone. I could hear Ian in the background, explaining to young Jamie why his mother behaved like a loon. It took just a few moments for his cheery voice, louder than his mother’s, to come through the line. “A boy! Atie Caile make boy!”

I ran a hand on my stomach, smiling. “So, I see the baby orders have already begun.”

“Aye, they have. I vote for a girl, Claire, since we’re talking about it. And where is my clotheid brother?” Jenny asked, the elation clear in her voice.

“He’s right here, next to me.” I replied, feeling Jamie’s arm around my waist as he pulled me closer to him in our bed. Bending his head, he placed a soft kiss on my neck and took the phone. The grin on his face as he heard his sister congratulate him was so broad, that I felt my heart squeeze with a bittersweet feeling; happiness and loss. I was grateful for the family we had, but a part of me deeply wished we would have a few more people to share the news with. His parents, mine. Hugs that we’ve lost to soil and thin air, still sorely needed in sorrow and happiness.

We have each other, I thought, and snuggled closer to Jamie, savoring his musky smell, mingled with soap and cinnamon from the apple pie we’d made. His voice reverberated in his chest under my ear and I closed my eyes, dreaming of the same voice calling our baby’s name, tiny socks in my hands and the powdery smell of a newborn in the room. Jamie’s hand moved slowly from my waist to meet mine above my belly, his large fingers intertwining with mine, silently offering protection.

Geillis noticed the difference in me from the first five minutes we spent checking medical charts next day in the hospital.

“D’ye have anything to share, Claire?” She asked, placing her hands on her back, enhancing the effect of her protruding belly.

“Well, I thought I shouldn’t leave you grow huge and become a balloon all alone.” I smirked, leaving the chart on the desk. I felt my heart swell sharing the news, and my hands clasped hers tight.

“I knew yer Scot would take much stronger precautions against you leaving him again!” Geillis winked, smiling broadly. “I mean, the ring is verra beautiful, but with a baby he’s keeping ye

with him forever.” Squeezing my upper arms with both her hands, she pulled me closer for a hug. “Congratulations, Claire. Ye too deserve some happiness.”

After discussing all the details about the pregnancy test, how Jamie reacted to the news, and making plans about our babies that would be born only with four months difference, we moved onto the serious conversation. A good obstetrician. Geillis lived in Glasgow almost all her life, and she knew far more doctors than me. Most of the male doctors though, she knew much better than needed. Nurses and doctors wasn’t a new concept anyway.

Ten minutes later, with a tiny note featuring a few hastily scribbled black numbers in hand, I made an appointment with Geillis’ obstetrician, Dr. Dunsany. Geillis would swear by her doctor - the third one she visited during the first four months of her pregnancy and hopefully, her last one.

I knew, more or less, what the first visit to the doctor included, and I couldn’t wait to confirm the result of the pregnancy test. Apart from being a little anxious on Geillis’ choice of a doctor, I didn’t think about it overmuch.

At least not until the night before the appointment.

‘How I met your mother’ was playing on Netflix and Jamie and I cuddled on the couch, a plaid blanket with the Fraser colors – Jenny’s gift – covering almost all my body and half of Jamie’s who insisted that it was far too hot for this plaid.

I hadn’t realized that my mind started wandering and I had stopped watching the show. The TV colors became moving images without meaning, the actors’ voices a background noise that didn’t reach my ears.

Closing my eyes, I thought of life I cradled inside me.

Until a few days ago, I was a daughter.

Even if I wasn’t a conventional daughter, and all I had from my parents was blurred memories and pictures with dull colors saved in pale colored albums, that didn’t make me feel less of it. I may have never walked into the house after school, to plop myself onto a chair and announce that I’m hungry, waiting for a plate of food to miraculously land in front of me, and I never had anyone to call and ask which detergent is stronger to remove wine stains, but I was still a daughter for a simple reason; I wasn’t yet a mother.

No one’s hunger was my own responsibility. No one’s wine stains depended on me.

Now everything had changed. From the moment I saw that second pink line on the pregnancy test, that daughter had died.

I was to become a mother, and I had no family to share this with. I had no mother to call in the dead of the night, if I didn’t want to scare Jamie with my foolish thoughts. I had no siblings to call and announce that they would become uncles and aunties.

It was the first time the absence of siblings hit me under such a light.

And then a darker thought followed.

Why didn't I have siblings?

I'd spent countless days of my life wishing I would have a sister or a brother. Someone to share my life with, someone to know me and love me without questions. But now it was the first time I wondered about the reason behind this misfortune. I was five years old when my parents died. Most people already have a second child when their first reaches the age of five. My parents didn't.

Why?

Were there any complications when my mother was pregnant with me?

Did she have a miscarriage later? Before?

Would my baby be safe, if I carried the incapability of being a mother in my genes?

I closed my eyes, trying not to panic. My breath became swallow, my throat dry, my eyes wet with unshed tears. I didn't quite nail the 'don't panic' thought.

What would I say to the doctor, once she asked me about the medical history of my family members? That I don't know? That I have nobody to ask? That I have no mom to be by my side during this journey? To tell me stories of her pregnancy, to hold my hand when the final – terrifying – moment of giving birth was to come?

Was I good enough, to become a mother, anyway?

It was the first time in my life that I so desperately wanted to be a daughter. Not to avoid responsibility, but to have a mother smile to me when tears would be all I could see. To have a mother tell me that I would be a great mom, because she just knew it.

I didn't know what mothers do. I didn't even know if I could provide a proper environment for this poppy seed-sized baby to grow.

Jamie's loud laughter startled me and I jerked against him, coming out of my reverie. My jolt and the absence of any trace of smile in my face made Jamie's laughter stop abruptly.

"What is it, Sassenach? D'ye feel uncomfortable? Are ye nauseous again?" He made to stand up and carry me to the bathroom, but I stopped him with a tight grip on his arm. His abrupt moving actually made me nauseous, but that was the least of my problems.

"I'm fine." I said, swallowing back the lump that formed in my throat. "Stay here."

"What is it then?"

"Nothing. I'm perfectly fine." I turned my eyes towards the TV, my gaze unfocused, lost in the bright colors.

"Ye have a perfectly fine frown formed on yer face, Sassenach. And I ken ye well enough to know that when ye say ye're perfectly fine, ye never are. Plus, Barney just threw the girl's leg in

the fire and ye didna laugh!”

“Oh, it was *that* scene.” I said, realizing why Jamie had laughed so hard. I felt a smile slowly forming on my face, even though the muscles moved with effort, my mind asking them to do the impossible. The recollection of Ian’s terrified face, however, was strong enough to overshadow my previous thoughts. I could almost see his reaction that first time we watched the episode, as he glanced at his prosthetic leg, murmuring, ‘Great, more ideas for Jen to threaten me.’

“Aye, that’s the smile I was looking for.” Jamie planted a kiss on my forehead and held me tight. Held *us* tight.

Please, please let that baby be safe. Let me be enough to carry it safely.

“So?”

“So?”

“Ye won’t speak to me, Claire?” His question was painted by a mix of sadness and indignity.

No. I can’t lose you, too, now. You are all I have.

I took a deep breath and searched for his eyes. His blue pools were there, waiting for me, kind and honest. Jamie ran his hands up and down my arms, tracing paths with heartbreaking tenderness and leaving goosebumps behind.

“I’m afraid.” I whispered, as if admitting it loudly would make the monster eating my soul stronger.

“About what, my Sassenach?”

“About the baby. I don’t know, Jamie. I can’t guarantee that everything will be alright. If I –”

“Mo chridhe,” Jamie interrupted me, cupping my face with both hands. I felt his warmth sipping into my skin and his calmness flooding my heart, even before I listened a single word from what he intended to say to reassure me. “No one can do that. D’ye hear me? We canna be sure of anything. But we’ll do our best, for each other, and for the baby.” He paused, somber, his eyes boring deep into mine. “We’ll be the best versions of ourselves, mo ghraidh, and we will hope for the best.”

“But if I –”

“Claire,” Jamie placed his index finger over my mouth. “Ye’re enough. And I love ye. More than anything else. Ye ken that, aye?” He bent his head, replacing his finger with his lips. His kiss was slow and reassuring, settling the waves of fear that threatened to swallow me whole.

“What will I say to the doctor about my family’s medical history? I know nothing.” I was close to breaking into tears the moment I felt the air sneaking between us again, cooling my lips where he warmed them.

“We’ll say that we don’t know, Sassenach. We’ll do as the doctor says and everything will be alright. Whatever comes for us, we’ll handle it together.”

I placed a hand over his heart and he grasped it, fingers interweaving rapidly in their own dance. I felt each steady beat under my hand, pulsing blood into his body, and I snuggled closer to him, his skin hot under my cheek. My heart followed the rhythm set by his, as my lungs inhaled the air he gifted me. Slow, calm, strong. Jamie kissed my forehead, holding me flush to him. “And when the baby comes to our little world,” he whispered between my curls in a dreamy voice, “We’ll learn how to be a family, the three of us, together.”

I closed my eyes and a smile came to tug my lips up. Easy, effortless.

I might not be a daughter anymore, but I finally had a family.

My family.

What's in a name



Jamie was a sweet and thoughtful man, and I loved him for that. I mean, I usually did. But sometimes, it just got ridiculous.

“Are ye sure?” He asked for the millionth time in the last fifteen minutes. His hand was already on the door’s handle and he was looking at me with eyes full of shame and regret. I was understanding at the beginning, started laughing after one point, but at last, I felt exasperated.

“Leave, damnit!” I rolled my eyes and searched for the nearest throw pillow, ready to launch it towards him.

“Okay! I love ye, dinna forget it!” He said, closing the door just in time to avoid the pillow.

He was supposed to be with me on my first appointment with the doctor, but his day off ended abruptly after a phone call from his – panicked – project manager. A writer had serious objections about the frontispiece of his book, starting a fight with Fergus, the art-director, and making Jamie return to the office to avert the crisis.

I knew he felt sorry for leaving me alone, but the truth was that Jamie had given me all I needed the previous night, and I was grateful for that. I could go on now, on my own. At least for one day.

The first appointment went better than expected. Dr. Dunsany was around my age, with kind brown eyes, a messy bun that mirrored mine, and a calm, soothing voice. She confirmed my pregnancy and reassured me that we’d go step by step, and there was no need to stress about my lack of medical history. We would check everything, she said, in time. I felt safe and secure in her office, with the wall behind her leather chair foul of tiny babies’ pictures, with soft hair and lilliputian limbs raised up in the air.

For my second appointment, two weeks later, Jamie announced that his phone would be turned off, and if they needed him they should just wait.

We arrived early and I sank into the black three-cushion-couch in the waiting room. Slightly jolted by Jamie’s weight as he sat next to me, I leaned my head on his shoulder and closed my

eyes, focusing on the feel of our intertwined hands on my thigh. It was so different now that he had come with me. It felt that nothing could hurt us.

My body soon started to tremble, and I opened my eyes to find Jamie's leg bouncing. My gaze trailed up to his face, a frown disturbing my previous calm countenance. Was he anxious about the baby's health? We hadn't talked about the prospect of a high-risk pregnancy, of any abnormality in our baby. I knew that so many things could go wrong, and yet I wasn't brave enough to voice such dark thoughts. It was too early to know, anyway. But did he have the same distressing thoughts as I did?

When my eyes found Jamie's, slightly creased from the soft smile on his face, hope shined back in my heart. He was excited, like a child waiting to get his ice cream after a long walk. His trust in us washed over me, powerful and refreshing, and I smiled back at him, grateful for the man he was, pushing my unreasonable worries aside.

"Mrs Dunsany is ready to see you now," the secretary announced, and we popped out from the couch, smiling giddily.

"Ready to listen to our baby's heart, Sassenach?" Jamie whispered to me and I feared that my heartbeat would be too loud to let the tiny beating of our baby's heart be heard.

"Hello Mrs and Mr Beauchamp," Dr. Dunsany rose from her chair, extending a hand towards me when I walked into her office.

I froze mid-shake, realizing what I had just heard. I'd made the appointment using my name, and apparently the doctor thought that this was my husband's name as well. I glanced back at Jamie with a goofy grimace, unsure of what he'd think, trying to lighten the mood.

Jamie looked like someone had just punched him in the stomach.

Men.

Turning back to the doctor, I corrected her with a forced smile. "Umm, this would be Claire Beauchamp and Jamie Fraser." I looked at her expectantly, asking for solidarity. "Very nice to see you again, Dr. Dunsany."

"Oh, please call me Isobel. Please forgive my mistake, Mr Fraser," she offered her hand to Jamie, who took it in his own, lifeless one. "Please, take a sit."

"Aye," Jamie croaked, and his fingers started drumming on his thigh the moment his ass was on the chair. With his gaze lost somewhere between the Bonsai tree on the corner of the doctor's desk and the papers in front of her, I was sure he wouldn't listen to anything Isobel would say.

That wouldn't do.

When the doctor looked at the papers in front of her, I reached for his hand, taking it into mine. Jamie raised his head to face me then, and I had to stifle a chuckle looking at his expression and thinking of him as 'Jamie Beauchamp'. He didn't seem to share my sentiment, though. In an attempt to bring some sense back to him, I tried my warmest smile, nodding towards the doctor to remind him the reason we were there.

Jamie exhaled loudly, but focused his gaze on Dr. Dunsany, who, after asking me how I was feeling, started to talk about vitamins and exercise.

“Your baby now has the size of a peppercorn and as you very well know, Claire, this period is extremely important in the development of the fetus and majorly affected by exposure to drugs, chemicals, alcohol and infections.”

“Claire works in the hospital,” Jamie interrupted her, all his worries about the ‘Beauchamp’ now forgotten. “Is it safe? Should she stop?”

Isobel gave him a warm smile and reassured him that if I was careful – that resulted in Jamie giving me *the look* – there was no problem in continuing working. She explained to us the heart, brain and spinal development, and how my body changed as it started working for two. Jamie was listening to her fascinated, eyes shining at the thought of the miracle we’d created, while his thumb ran on my knuckles.

“Ready for the ultrasound?” She asked at last, her question eliciting matching grins on our faces.

Jamie stood by my side, gripping my hand tightly. He was so close that I could feel his excitement in every rise and fall of his chest. Our eyes were fixed on the screen, magnetized by the prospect of the two of us merged in one, by the wonder that would appear as a black and white image.

It was there. Infinitesimally small, but it was there. Our baby.

With tears in my eyes, I focused on the sound of my baby’s heart, strong and fast, a rapid-fire “swoosh, swoosh” that made my heart speed up to match each and every beat.

“Do you hear that, love? I asked, squeezing Jamie’s hand as I turned to look at him.

His teary, happy face was the best answer I could ever get. I felt his broad grin against my forehead as he leaned in to kiss me. I inhaled his mucky scent when he breathed, “I love ye.” I found elation in his eyes, when he continued, “Both of ye.” And I tasted the tears that run free down on my cheeks ending up on my curled-up lips, thinking that I was blessed to know the taste of happiness.

—

We left Dr. Dunsany’s office still looking at the picture of the ultrasound, this black and white obscurity of joy. “Are you up for a walk?” I asked him once we were out in the street. I felt that the whole world was happy, even the Scottish sun making one of its rare appearances to celebrate with us.

“Anything my girls want.” Jamie answered, and I turned to look at him, laughing.

“Your girls?” I asked with a cocked eyebrow.

“Aye. Ye and our baby girl, Sassenach.”

“And how are you so damn sure that we have a girl, exactly?”

“My da used to say that when ma was pregnant wi’ Jenny she had that sweetness in her eyes, and a glow.” Looking at me with a shy smile, he continued, “I can see the exact same thing every time my eyes land on ye, Sassenach.”

Overwhelmed by his answer, I blamed the hormones for the tears welling up in my eyes. “Come down here you bloody Scot,” I said and took his lips in mine with the need to saturate his heart with love, just as he did mine.

“I can’t stop hearing her heart, mo ghraidh,” Jamie said when we resumed our walk, and I felt his broad smile sipping into his words.

“Mmm,” I closed my eyes leaning against his solid chest and let him guide me, reveling in the feel of his arm around my shoulders and the sunlight against my skin.

“Twas fast, aye?”

“Aye,” I agreed, opening my eyes again. “It was fast and it’s going to become even faster.”

“Aye, makes sense,” he murmured, and I frowned at him.

“How so?”

“Well, it beats for both of us, aye?”

I stopped abruptly, pulling him back to me.

This man will be the death of me. This huge, redheaded romantic soul.

I cupped his face, losing myself in those blue eyes, and I wished our child would take after him. I kissed him then, raised on tiptoes, thanking my luck that brought him to me, and his stubbornness for staying by my side.

—

It was one of those quiet days, when time passes by lazy and content, allowing us to breathe in every minute, making life tangible and present. Jamie and I cooked together in our small kitchen, listening to Benny Treskow’s *Sunday stroll*, each note woven with the background music of our child’s heart that never left our minds. We ate dinner and drank – *how I envied him for drinking beer*— to the future, and then cuddled on the couch, watching *Narcos* on Netflix.

I was so concentrated on Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel, that I almost didn’t hear Jamie speaking. “What?” I asked absentmindedly, my attention still on the show.

“I said, we delayed the wedding too much.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that ye’re pregnant, Sassenach, and we have hardly spoken about the wedding.”

“That’s not true!” I protested indignantly, turning my head to fully face him. “We agreed that it will be a low-key ceremony, with your family and a few friends, and that we’ll not make a fuss about it. We also said that we’ll get married at Lallybroch, like your parents and your sister did.”

“Aye, we said all that.” Jamie said, running a hand in his hair. “But that’s no’ what I meant. What I’m saying is we have to set a date.”

“Before I become a big round ball, you mean?”

Jamie chuckled, placing a hand on my flat stomach. “I canna wait for ye to become all round and big with my baby.”

“Our baby.” I corrected him and nodded, coming closer with a sly smile before his teeth found my neck.

“A date.” I repeated, nodding in agreement. “Do you want to do that now?” I asked, turning to the TV again, trying to figure out what I’d missed from the episode. We had plenty of time to talk about the wedding. And if I wanted to be honest, I found these conversations ridiculously boring.

“Aye,” Jamie said and pulled me closer to him, his index finger on my chin redirecting my gaze to him. His breath was hot against my lips and I saw his lopsided smile just a moment before he leaned in to kiss me. “I canna wait to call ye Fraser.”

“What?” I asked, leaning back with a grimace. Jamie jerked back too, the dreamy expression on his face disappearing in an instance.

“What?” He repeated.

“Why call me a Fraser? I’m not changing my name, Jamie!”

His eyebrows shot up high on his forehead and he looked at me incredulous and surprised. His mouth stood slightly open while his brain was rummaging in the darkest corners of his head to find a reply.

“Ye’re not?” He asked, unable to find anything better in his confusion.

“No, I’m not.” I answered simply and turned my gaze back to the TV, hoping that the conversation was over.

It wasn’t.

“Are you fucking kidding me, Claire?”

“Do I look like kidding you?”

“The doctor called me Beauchamp today!”

Of course. We never discussed about it and now it was popping up in our conversation, even though it was totally irrelevant. “Jamie,” I started seriously, trying to get the harshness off my voice. “That was an honest mistake. I made the appointment as Claire Beauchamp and Dr. Dunsany just thought —”

“She thought what everybody would think. What is normal.”

“Don’t start with normal,” I growled.

“Come on, Claire! Ye ken my meaning. I was sure that when we’d get married ye’d take my name!”

“You were sure? And why was that? Have we talked about this matter and I just deleted the conversation from my memory?” I was sarcastic – I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t help it. His certainty hit me on all the wrong places, eliciting an anger that wasn’t targeted solely at him but at men in general, and the treatment of women for centuries. Their right to decide even what our name would be.

“We hadna talked, but I assumed...” He mumbled, and then spoke up. “I thought ye’d *want* to be a Fraser!”

“Jamie,” I said, taking a deep breath. “My whole life, I am a Beauchamp. I was raised as a Beauchamp, and I walk on this world with that name for almost thirty-five years. I identify myself with that name.” He stood agape, watching at me as if I’d said the most outrageous thing in the world. With every passing moment I felt losing my control, my blood pounding in my arteries, the vessels restraining the flow with effort. “Women changed their names because they were men’s property. From father to husband. I’m not your property! I’m not changing my name.” I said again, all my attempts to keep calm lost in the torrent of injustice that was overflowing my thoughts.

“So ye deny my name?”

“What kind of bullshit is that now? I just like my last name, Jamie. I don’t deny you.”

“And yet ye do. Ye dinna think being together is important enough to change a tiny detail of your person.”

“A tiny detail?” I asked, outraged. “You think that my name is a tiny detail? I’m a doctor, Jamie. I have publications as Beauchamp. Everybody who has worked with me knows me as Beauchamp. *I* know me as Beauchamp!” Jamie opened his mouth to speak but I stopped him with a raised hand and a loud voice. “I’m not changing my name.” I stated again, feeling my nails leave crescent marks on my palm. “I’m the last of Beauchamps, damn it!”

“I thought we’d be a family.” Jamie said in a low voice, and I felt that he was accusing me for something I hadn’t done. I didn’t ruin our family. “Families have the same last name.” He added, driving me off the edge.

“Then take my last name!” I shouted and rose from the couch, pacing in the room. Jamie breathed deeply - once, twice. His hands were tight fists at each side, his eyes shone from anger and - what I supposed was - betrayal. Shaking his head, he threw on a pair of sweatpants and a tee and moved to the door. My feet got stuck on the cold tiled floor and I stood there, unable to move or think, looking at him.

“I can’t do that now.” He said, putting on his shoes. “I need some air.”

The door banged loud behind him and I closed my eyes, feeling the tears roll down my face. Sinking back into the couch, I cried, thinking of our family already lost. I had never expected such a reaction from Jamie. Thinking of our fight again and again, I finally fell asleep. Jamie hadn’t come back.

—

“Hey...” I opened my eyes in the sound of his whisper, still unsure if he was really there, the room too dark for me to see. “Come, mo nighean donn,” he said, and with a single move he swiped me off the couch, heading towards our room.

He laid me gingerly on our bed without turning the lights on, chastising me for sleeping in the couch.

“You weren’t here,” I said sleepily, as if it was a great excuse.

“Aye, because I’m a fool.”

“Come lie with me?” It wasn’t exactly a question, with my fingers gripping his tee and preventing him from leaving. “What time is it?”

“Late. Tis late, Sassenach,” he replied, lying next to me.

“Where were you?” I rolled to the side, my hand searching his face in the dark in a need to reestablish the lost connection.

“Walking. Running,” he answered, leaning into my touch.

And then, silence. Quiet breaths, slow and normal, echoing the quenched fires in our chests. Love, that conquered all the feelings in the peaceful night, standing victorious on a pile of them, its rebel yell loud and clear. A sigh, followed by a deep breath, one preparing the subject for a battle or for a confession.

But we had given our battle, and we had already tasted the pain and disappointment that rose from the clashes. We’ve seen the blood leaving the cuts and we had both tried for a deeper gash, one who would bring the winner forward.

The winner.

In the nocturnal serenity, we finally saw that there were no winners in such battles, only fear and wounds left to be mended.

“I’m sorry, mo ghraidh,” Jamie whispered, and kissed my palm. “I acted like a fool.”

“You did. A patriarchal ass, to be exact.”

“Aye, I ken. I just couldn’t stop thinking about my parents, my family. We always were ‘The Frasers’. And when Jenny got married, her family became ‘The Murrays’.”

“And? Did that made them more of a family than if they’d be ‘The Fraser-Murrays’?”

Jamie let out a breath and placed a hand on the small of my back, pulling me closer. “No, I guess not. I just wanted to share my name with you, is all. Not to own you. I could never own you just because you’d take my name.”

“I know. I didn’t mean that, Jamie. I know you’d never see me like your property.” I’d known it, even at the moment I’d said it, and yet I’d continued, just because I knew how much I’d hurt

him. Looking for the final hit. “I’m sorry,” I murmured, kissing the tip of his nose.

“Forgiven,” he breathed, kissing my forehead and holding me close. “Forgive me, too?”

“Of course, you fool.” I laughed, searching for his lips in the dark.

“I’ll be honored to be married to you, Mrs Beauchamp. Ye’ll not have my name, and yet, ye’ll be mine. The Beauchamp-Frasers. I like it, even though tis a bit long, aye?”

“Aye,” I agreed and chuckled. “But the mix of our names sounds terrible. ‘The Beauchers’, ‘The Frachamps’, ‘The Brasers’.”

“To braser means to join in French.” He said, gingerly moving his body on top of mine.

“I know. But a braser is a prostitute in Dublin. Were you going to suggest something?”

“And how would you know that, Mrs Beauchamp?” He asked with raised eyebrows.

“Mmm,” I opened my legs and he settled between them. “Are you jealous because for once I know more about languages than you, Fraser?”

“Verra jealous,” he grinned, and took my lips in his.

“I love you,” I whispered when he moved to kiss my neck. “I may always be a Beauchamp, but a Fraser will hold my heart.”

“Oh, that I will, ye heartless creature,” he promised, slowly entering me. “And I’ll never let it go.”

Heather and Rain



The daylight entered the room, dancing between the dust specks before falling heavy on my eyelids, and I pulled the blanket over my head in response. I wiggled my body unconsciously, trying to find Jamie's solid warmth behind me. It was my morning routine – I snuggled up to his body until he'd get up and fix us some coffee. At the beginning of our relationship Jamie had tried more than once to interrupt my routine with other activities, but he finally accepted that sleep really mattered to me. And I was more of a night owl.

Today, however, he ruined my routine by simply disappearing.

I slowly lowered the blanket and opened an eye, then another, taking the room in. Blue and white tapestry, dark wood, old furniture.

Lallybroch, I thought. *The Laird's room*.

I closed my eyes again and rolled over, burying my face in Jamie's pillow, the jasmine of our shampoo mixed with Jenny's 'sea breeze' conditioner taking over my senses. Something scratched my cheek, and I fumbled with a hand to find a note with Jamie's writing.

Can't wait to marry you.

I held the note tightly between my fingers and stared at it with a huge smile on my face. "I love you so damn much, Jamie Fraser." It was just a whisper, but it filled up the room. I wished he was there, to kiss him, to curl up against his body, to show him just how much I loved him, and then to fall asleep again, feeling his warm breath caressing my neck.

But today wasn't just another day. It was our wedding day, and Jamie had been determined to keep the tradition of the bride and the groom not seeing each other before the ceremony. At least I'd managed to convince him to sleep with me the previous night. This was a victory of the Beauchamp stubbornness, against its Fraser rival. Well, the Beauchamp stubbornness and the absence of a bra, if I wanted to be honest.

The shutters of the large window were open, but the light was dim in the room. Reaching for my phone, I was sure my husband-to-be had been up way too early. Phone in hand, I stared at the screen for a long moment, trying to comprehend what the four numbers meant for me.

10:14

First, I had overslept. Second, there was no sunshine coming in the room.

"Just my luck," I murmured, looking towards the window to find a piece of Scotland's famous gloomy sky. A smile spread on my face, nonetheless. No matter what, this was our day.

The old tee-shirt I'd found in one of Jamie's drawers the previous night was thin under my fingers, and my smile turned to a broad grin when I ran my hand on the small swell hidden underneath the loose fabric. "Good morning, love. We're going to marry your dad today. Or, rather, your Da. He's a proper Scot, after all." I chuckled, thinking of Jamie talking to my belly. It was ridiculous and sweet, seeing him lean over the small bump, always starting with the same sentence. "Hello wee one, it's yer Da."

We both had started to talk to my belly, especially after our 13-week ultrasound. Our baby had been 23.1 grams, 3 inches long and ready to listen to every story his parents wanted to share – according to the parents, at least. Dr. Dunsany had informed us that we had five full weeks before our baby would be able to hear sounds, but this hadn't stopped either of us from sharing our dreams with our miracle.

I took Jamie's note in my hand and read it again, my hand spread over our baby.

And today we'd become a family, with vows, signatures, and all.

For our wedding, we'd kept everything simple.

Lallybroch – Jamie's home. The home that protected the lives of his beloved ones and held the spirits of the people he missed. And luckily for us, had a small church, built by Jamie's great-grandfather close to the house.

Jamie's family and a few of our friends – those who knew us, who loved us and had been by our side.

Two simple, silver wedding bands. They were displayed in the window of a jewelry shop we passed by, during one of our afternoon strolls, and the moment we saw them, we knew they were ours.

A bouquet of heather and white roses of Scotland.

A small reception at Lallybroch, with music played by a local band from Inverness.

Jamie in his Fraser's kilt – he wouldn't negotiate it, not that I had any objection.

And finally, a simple, white dress. Jenny had left young Jamie with Ian to come to Edinburgh and help me find it. She had heard on the phone how miserable I'd been, searching through huge balloon gowns all by myself, since her stubborn brother stated that he would only see me in a wedding dress on our wedding day.

"I want to look at you, shining in yer white dress when ye'll walk to me, with a wide smile on yer beautiful face." He'd kissed me then, adding, "Because ye'll be marrying me."

I'd laughed at the clarification, keeping him close with my hands on his arse. "You're not going to be impressed by the dress, it's rather simple, really," I'd said, only to see him shake his head.

"Claire," he'd smiled, wrapping his hands around me. "I'm impressed by ye, even when I see ye in the morning, wi' that loose tee-shirt ye always wear and yer hair all over the place."

"Mmhm." I'd run a hand up his back, placing a soft kiss on his jaw. "Good. There are chances you'll love my dress, then."

"I dinna care about loving yer wee dress, Sassenach. I love ye and that's more than enough."

A soft knock on the door brought me out of my reverie. It was followed by a second, louder one, and the next moment the door handle was lowered only to bounce back into its original position. Another attempt followed the first, fruitless one, and the door swung open. Knowing very well who the intruder was, I smiled and waited in the bed.

The ginger hair he got from his grandma was tousled, his mother's bright blue eyes smiling at me. Poor Ian took with grace all our comments about being distracted when his son was conceived, but the absence of his warm features from his firstborn were too obvious to ignore.

"Atie?" He called me, hoping like a little frog instead of walking to my bed. "Atie? Atie?"

"I'm here, wee ginger," I smiled and propped myself up on the bed. Young Jamie climbed up with a certain difficulty, which a moment later was explained by the half-eaten cookie he held in his hand.

"And where exactly did you find this?" I asked, and the tiny redhead gave me a toothy smile that meant he'd probably stolen it when his mom wasn't looking. "Will you give me some?" I almost hadn't finished my question and the cookie was pushed against my lips.

I took a small bite before taking him in my arms, tickling him until his giggle was so loud I was sure the whole house could hear us.

"Claire! Ye're up? Come have some breakfast, we're in the kitchen." Jenny's voice was barely audible above her son's wild laughter.

When I entered the kitchen with young Jamie still snorting next to me, a delighted Louise fell in my arms.

"Ma cherie!" she said, kissing my cheeks before she hugged me tightly.

“When did you arrive? You should have woken me up!” I exclaimed, but couldn’t stop smiling. Louise was usually miles away but still right there for me.

“Jamie said ye were exhausted and he instructed us to let ye sleep,” Jenny said with a teasing smile that turned sweet when her gaze landed on my belly. “But now that you’re up, we have to feed you and get you ready!”

Geillis arrived thirty minutes later, with four-months-old Hamish in her arms and three bags of baby stuff carried by Dougal behind her. Dougal gave me a hug and “left us ladies to it.” Luckily for us, wee Hamish was an angel, and slept quickly after Geillis fed him.

I’d get ready for my wedding, having my three favorite women with me.

Louise. My oldest friend, the person who remembered me drunk and stupid in London during careless days, the one who had taken me in when I left Jamie, who had supported me when I was nothing more than a shell of myself. The person who had helped me not to lose myself entirely and had shaken me back to reality - with wine, ice cream, and a job.

Geillis. The first friend I’d made in Scotland. The crazy redhead that had taken me to that pub to watch a rugby game next to five hot-tempered Scots – next to the man who would come to be my Scot. The person who made my days brighter with her shameless humor, who made everyday life easier.

Jenny. The sister I never had, a gift I never expected to receive. The person who made Lallybroch a home for me. Fierce, stubborn and strong, Jenny was the rock I knew I could lean into.

Two hours later I was looking at my reflection in the mirror, feeling like princess Aurora with her three godmothers. My hair, my make-up, my dress – they were all perfect.

I had just clasped my mom’s pearl bracelet on my hand, trying to imagine what she’d do if she was there with me, when a thunder drew my attention to the big window. The light drizzle of the morning had become a pouring rain rushing down from the low, grey sky, eager to dampen the dark green grass.

“Ach, just a wee rain,” Jenny said but the frown on her face showed more than she wanted me to see.

“Oui! We have one more hour until the ceremony, it might as well be sunny till then.” She stopped, looking at our concerned faces. “No?”

This cracked the rest of up.

“Louise, dearest,” Geillis started but didn’t continue, just shook her head, still laughing. Hamish was uneasy in his tiny crib, and she put a hand on her breast, feeling it. “Sorry, feeding duty.”

My eyes trailed back to the window. The relentless drops had created a thick screen, covering the rolling hills from our view, but I knew they were there, hiding lakes, streams and rivers, kelpies and faeries. It was mystical, and I couldn’t imagine a better place to marry Jamie.

“Group hug!” Louise said, bringing Geillis and the baby back to us from where she was ready to settle in an armchair.

Our hug was a rather lengthy one, and Hamish was having none of this.

“I love you, guys,” I said once we broke our embrace, tears threatening to ruin my makeup.

“We love you too,” they said in sync, and I couldn’t feel more grateful for my gang of amazing women.

The rain hadn’t stopped. The furniture in the parlor got rearranged to make more space for our reception party, a corner totally emptied to host the musicians. I didn’t know how she did it, but Jenny was everywhere at the same moment, dealing with little problems and arranging the final details, her pale blue dress flowing in her endless movement. Finally, when Murtagh came in the house, she gave me a hearty smile and a big hug. “Remember to have fun, Claire. Just enjoy it.” She winked at me, got her dark blue umbrella and was out of the house.

“Ready, lass?” Murtagh asked, his soft brown eyes a little teary. “Ye’re beautiful, Claire.”

“Thank you, Murtagh,” I said with a genuine smile. “You know I’d never be here without you, right? You trusted me from the beginning.”

“Ye dinna need to thank me. I kent ye wouldna hurt Jamie, lass. First of all, he was half-dead already. Second, I kent ye loved him as much as he did.”

“This is exactly why I need to thank you.”

Murtagh took my hands in his calloused ones, his eyes glinting. “Jamie was always a son to me. Ye became a daughter the first time I saw ye two together, with the wee dolt unable to stop that huge grin from taking over his face. It was the first time I was seeing him like this.”

My sweet, grouchy man. Tears welled up in my eyes thinking how much Murtagh had done for me - for us - and I hugged him tight. “Will you stop now, before I start crying?”

“Aye, let’s go. We have the rain, we dinna want the bride crying too. And yer groom is getting impatient.” He extended an arm, and I linked it with mine.

“Let’s go.”

I walked to Jamie through the downpour, Murtagh holding the biggest umbrella Jenny could find. It was a violet purple, matching with the heather in my bouquet – but I expected nothing less from Jenny.

I didn’t mind the rain or the – coolest than I’d like – breeze. Wild horses wouldn’t stop me from going to him.

My gallant Highlander, clad in the kilt with his family’s colors, a white shirt, and grey vest and suit jacket.

From the moment he’d seen me, a soft smile had settled on the corner of his lips, the cerulean pools in his eyes intent on me. Calling me to him, to drown in their depths and get lost forever.

A kelpie, breathing and alive.

The church was small and warm, the freshly painted walls turning yellow under the soft candlelight. The ceremony started with Father Anselm's voice rising steady and strong above the rain that pelted the windows. Jamie and I vowed to be together, in good times and in bad – with Jamie giving me a meaningful look at that, a kind reminder that I was not allowed to run away ever again. Our voices were stable but our glinting eyes revealed all the love loaded in each word. I felt my heart flutter when I said the Gaelic words Jamie had taught me, taking the traditional Scottish blood vow – only without the blood part. We didn't need a cut above our wrists to be blood of the other's blood. We'd been that, and much more, the day we had decided to stay together.

When the echoes of the Gaelic words quieted, I thought the ceremony was over. Jamie, however, instead of kissing me, took my hand in his with a mischievous and hopeful smile. I felt his pulse racing through his veins, but his voice was low when he spoke again.

“You and I, we're not tied to the ground

Not falling but rising like rolling around

Eyes closed above the rooftops

Eyes closed, we're gonna spin through the stars

Our arms wide as the sky

We gonna ride the blue all the way to the end of the world

To the end of the world

Oh, and when the kids are old enough

We're gonna teach them to fly

You and me together, we could do anything, baby

You and me together”

By the time he was through it, we were both crying.

“Jamie,” I said, squeezing his hands with mine. “I don't have a song to give you, a poem...” I snorted. “I don't even have the right words to tell you, but everything I have, is yours. I love you, now and forever.”

He kissed me then and whispered low, only for me to hear. “You have given be so much already, mo ghraidh, that I need seven lifetimes to pay ye back.”

With hands clasped tight and beaming faces, we walked back into the house to celebrate. The band was already set in the parlor, their songs making hips sway lightly and feet bounce to the rhythm while we were eating. Once we finished with the dessert though, the feet started trotting and the bodies swirling in the parlor, the music taking us well into the night, dancing and laughing, while the Scottish rain played its own music on the windows, waiting for an invitation to our party.

I was sitting in the big armchair with a glass of water when I saw Jamie’s extended hand in front of me.

“I think you owe me a dance, Sassenach,” he said quite convincingly, but I only cocked an eyebrow at him.

“Do I now?”

“Yes, you do. We havena planned a first dance, but your vows got me inspired.”

“But we have already danced...”

I heard the first chords from ‘Everything I am is yours’ and laughed, shaking my head. “You’re incorrigible, Jamie Fraser,” I said, but took his hand nonetheless.

We spun around in the parlor, with snippets of our life together twirling around us. Cameras were snapping in the hands of our guests, determined to commit the moment in memory, oblivious to the immortality of two souls that had the courage to promise everything to each other.

“But I promise I’ll be true

and I’ll promise I’ll be right

sickness and in health

in the darkness and the light

I give you every sight

Everything I am is yours

Everything I am is yours”

That night we made love as a married couple for the first time. We got lost in each other, in our shared future, our heaven and hell. In that world where everyone searches for something, we had found a love worth fighting for. And we would fight for it, for each other, forever.

—

On Sunday morning I woke up to find blood on the stark white sheets Jenny had picked for our bed. And it wasn't a proof of my virginity.

Okay

Chapter Notes

TW! Pregnancy Complications



It's going to be okay.

I had felt nothing alarming during the night. No mother's instinct to wake me up.

It had been the contractions that blew the dreams away, bringing my mind back to reality. And now that I was up, I stayed stunned, looking at the blood, listening to the clear sound of my heart breaking.

I cradled my belly with a hand, in a vain attempt to protect my baby. From what, I wasn't sure. I had no idea what was going on. The only thing I knew, was that I needed the *wee one* to know I was there.

"Jamie," I whispered, so low that I barely heard my voice.

Unable to find the strength to speak louder, I reached back to his side of the bed, until my fingers brushed against his bare thigh. We had both slept in our underwear, the need to feel every inch of the other's body overcoming the cold. My hand trembled when I shook Jamie to wake him. He moved in his sleep, mumbling something that I didn't understand, but continued dreaming.

If only this was a nightmare. A bad dream created by the frightened subconscious of a mother-to-be. I touched my panties and rubbed my fingers, my thumb slipping on my index and middle finger, slick with blood. Real as the blood rushing through my arteries, propelled by my pounding heart.

“Jamie,” I said louder, and together with my voice I found my tears, streams and rivers hidden inside me, finally breaking the dam.

Jamie sprang out of bed, startled, looking at me with his eyes still unfocused. “What? What, Sassenach?”

I opened and closed my mouth repetitively, helpless, my tears drowning all words. I couldn’t speak. Instead, I showed him my hand, and then the bed. Fresh crimson spots in a brownish red background.

I’d always thought red as the colour of passion. When I went to the medical school, I found out it was the colour of pain as well. The pain I could heal.

But this was different. Intense, tearing-your-guts-out pain, that left me broken and inadequate.

“Christ, Claire!” It was a whisper, but it sucked all air from his lungs. I heard the panic in his voice, and then the void. The void leading to abyss.

I licked the tears on my lips and tried to breathe. It wouldn’t do if we both froze with fear.

It’s going to be okay.

I focused on my baby, my tiny human whose ultrasound picture was hanged on our fridge door.

A beautiful, round head. *It’s only one third of the total body now*, Isobel’s voice said, clear in my head.

Tiny arms and legs. *See that? The baby is flexing the right arm now*, Isobel smiled in my memory, *but it’s too early for you to feel it.*

Too early – but I wanted to feel it. I needed to feel that tiny limb moving inside me, to know that my baby was there, that our wee one was hanging on. I ran my hand over my belly and draw soothing circles, trying to soothe both of us.

I’m here. Please, don’t leave me baby.

Jamie had left our bed and was frantically searching the room. I saw him grabbing my wedding dress, setting it down, then staring at me with an empty gaze and making to get it again.

Blood on the wedding dress didn’t sound like a good idea to me, either.

“Under the bed,” I murmured, sure that he was looking for our clothes. The suitcase scraped against the wooden floor and a moment later Jamie was dressing me with the teal dress I had chosen for our upcoming night out in Inverness. Then, he quickly changed my blood-soaked underwear.

I closed my eyes again, my arms wrapped around my belly. “I’m here, I’m here,” I repeated, unable to do anything more. “Mum is right here.”

I was there, but felt completely powerless. Incompetent.

It’s going to be okay.

Jamie got dressed and took me in his arms, frantically calling for his sister. Jenny met us on the stairs, the puzzled expression on her sleepy face lasting only a moment after she saw us.

“What happened?” she asked, and I realized that I couldn’t tell her. I couldn’t voice the words. She must have known, from the look on my face, and she repeated her question, directed it to her brother. “What happened, Jamie?”

I had never heard Jenny terrified. It was strange, not to see her take command, telling us what we needed to do. She usually had a calmness in her voice, making us feel safe, sure that we could handle everything. But there was a first time for everything, and that night was the first time Jenny Fraser had lost her mind.

Jamie announced that we were leaving for the hospital, that I was bleeding; words bubbling out of his mouth without order, creating riddles of fear for his sister to solve.

I couldn’t listen to them.

A little arm here, Isobel’s voice came back in my head, soft and warm.

A little hand, waiting for me to hold it. *Wait for me, baby.*

Call me anytime, Claire. The voice said again, the last thing Isobel had told me.

“Jamie,” I said, cupping his cheek to bring his eyes on mine. “Call Isobel.”

She had asked me repeatedly to call her Isobel, but doctor Dunsany came easier to me. It had taken a lot of contractions and a hemorrhage for her to become Isobel in my mind. The person I trusted with my baby’s life.

It’s going to be okay.

“I’ll call an ambulance,” Jenny announced, finding a part of her composure again, but Jamie shook his head. “I’m taking Claire to Inverness. We can’t wait for the ambulance. Bring me my phone, Jenny.” With that, and without waiting for a reply, he walked us down the stairs.

“Claire,” he said softly, when we reached the hallway. “It’s going to be okay.”

I’m scared, he meant to say. I meant to say the same, but instead, I pressed my body against his and said, “I know.”

His smile was warm, his lips hot when he leaned in to kiss my forehead. He was trying to hide the tears that beaded in the corner of his eyes, and I pretended that I never saw them.

We left Lallybroch a few minutes later, our car’s tires crunching on the gravel as Jamie sped up, announcing our hasty departure and spooking the dogs that slept nearby.

I called Isobel from the car, my trembling hand impeding my scrolling down the contacts. Her voice was soft and steady, and I felt relief washing over me.

We weren’t alone anymore.

Isobel asked questions, I gave the answers. I'd thought it would be the opposite, but I had been wrong.

"Yes, the contractions woke me up."

"Yes, enough blood – a lot more than a few droplets."

"I'm trying not to panic."

"Jamie is with me, we're heading to the hospital."

"Okay, I'll call you the moment I have the results."

Isobel's voice was quiet but strong, and I calmed down while talking to her. I felt safe, as if she was right there, next to me, and she would take care of us. When I hung up, the realization that she was miles away and we were heading towards a hospital where nobody knew me made my breath catch in my throat. The phone fell in my lap and I reached under my dress, apprehensively, to see if I was still bleeding.

Red traces colored my hand, but it wasn't as much as I'd seen at Lallybroch.

I tried again. And again. I kept staring at my bloody hand, until Jamie grabbed it in his own, squeezing it so tight that I thought my bones would snap.

I'm here, he said, without words, and I thought it was ridiculous and beautiful, to have him say to me the same thing I kept repeating to our baby. A bitter smile tugged at the corners of my lips, at the thought of how unfair life was, how it tested us.

Our vows still hung in the air. *For better and for worse*, we'd promised, and life had not afforded us twenty-four hours before testing us.

I looked at my hand, still in Jamie's grip, my blood now smeared on his fingers. Blood of my blood. I'd promised to fight alongside him, the previous night, but I couldn't fathom what the daylight would bring to us.

The morning sun sent stray beams through the clouds above, making the green hills look like a handmade quilt, its stitches neat and clear. I tried to direct my thoughts to the landscape, to the beauty surrounding us. Isobel had instructed me not to go through all the pregnancy complications I remembered from my textbooks, and I looked out from the window trying to banish the words that had stuck in my mind since we left Lallybroch.

Placenta praevia.

I knew it was wrong, I knew it was too early for me to have a placenta previa, but in my distress the thought kept coming back to me. It was an unjust, obsessive attack and yet, subconsciously I opted for it, not to think of other, worse complications that might come to be true.

I squeezed Jamie's hand and he squeezed back.

It's going to be okay.

We were close to Inverness when Jamie spoke, his voice low, his hand still holding mine. “Claire,” he said, and the Scottish lilt in his voice calling my name soothed my aching heart. “I dinna ken what is happening, mo chridhe.” A crack between the syllables, but not enough to stop him. “But I know our wee one is a fighter.” He smiled then, his thump tracing the uneven ground of my knuckles, and added, “Like his mum.”

“And her Da,” I said, and thought I would smile, but I started crying again. His grip on my hand tightened, and I wished I could lean into him for the few minutes we had until we’d reach the hospital. But I didn’t, because I was too scared to move. Too scared of hurting our baby.

Five minutes later, Jamie was crouching next to my car seat at the hospital parking lot. He cupped my face tenderly and looked into my eyes for a long moment. “I love ye, Claire,” he said, as if in a prayer.

“I love you, too.” Pain rippled on his face, as if my words blew against the surface to drive it away. I placed a hand on top of his, on my face. “We’ll make it.”

“We will,” he agreed and scooped me into his arms.

The closer we got to the sterile, grey building the more I felt Jamie’s heart banging against his chest. His strides were long and steady, and his jaw set, but when I searched for his eyes, I found them wild, frantic.

I leaned into him to place a soft kiss just beneath his earlobe.

It’s going to be okay.

The automatic doors of the A&E opened and closed behind us, and I felt Jamie taking a deep breath before speaking. “My wife. She’s pregnant. She’s bleeding.” The words rang surreal in my ears. Too loud, too wrong.

After that, everything went by in a flash. Losing the heat of Jamie’s arms when he reluctantly set me in a wheelchair. Meeting the doctor. Answering the same questions Isobel had asked. Getting ready for the ultrasound.

I held my breath, feeling Jamie next to me, breathing fast enough to ensure an oxygen supply for both of us.

When I heard our baby’s heartbeat, the world stopped. I started sobbing, relieved from the fear that had clenched my heart, feeling Jamie’s soft kiss on my head.

Placenta abruption, six centimeters.

One month bed rest, lots of fluids.

“I’m going to need the fluids,” I said, laughing, and I marveled in how effortless, how wonderful laughing felt. My laughter got interrupted by sobs, and I added, between smiles and tears, “If I keep crying like this.”

Jamie’s laugh was music in my ears, his tight embrace was haven, his kiss was life. Our baby was alive and well, and we would do everything to keep that tiny heart beating.

Jamie hugged me tight, his tears lost in my curls. Stray ones rolled down my neck, painting silver lines, silver linings.

We called Jenny to let her know that everything was okay, and we heard her sigh, as if she had held her breath since we left for the hospital. Then, I called Isobel.

I stayed in the hospital overnight, both me and the baby closely monitored. The next day, I left the hospital in another wheelchair, going home with prescribed strict bed rest until my 20-weeks scan.

It was going to be a difficult month, but we would make it. The three of us.

Bed Rest

Four weeks aren't that long, considering that pregnancy lasts forty-one. When you spend four weeks in bed, though, hours tend to last much longer, expanding in a way physics can't explain.

The first week I had just been grateful that our *wee one* was okay. The doctor in Inverness had said that the baby wasn't stressed, and nothing would change if I followed his orders and stayed in bed. Isobel had agreed, so in bed I lay, determined that I would bring him – or her – into the world safe and sound. I had been so scared, waking up to the contractions and the blood, that during the first week of bed rest I had spent most of my time feeling grateful that my little baby was alive and well, growing and developing in my womb. I would try to imagine my body healing the abruption, my baby doubling up his height during the following weeks in the proper environment.

The second week I spent my days reading about pregnancy and childbirth, breastfeeding and newborns. I had asked Jamie to buy me some books – quite a lot of books – that I found suggested in an online article about pregnancy reading. He arrived with an armload of books, and stacked them on my bedside table, waiting for me to immerse myself in their pages. Jamie would come back from work every afternoon, to find me smiling or frowning at the new information I'd acquired about our *wee one*. Many of the facts were ones I had learned back in medical school, but had forgotten along the way.

"Next week our baby will be able to hear us!" I'd said instead of greeting him one evening, the moment I saw the imposing redhead walking into our bedroom. The excited look on his face told me that he was already planning out songs in his head, and I narrowed my eyes at him, adding, "Don't you even think about it."

Jamie acted affronted, his eyes getting wide, as if he was surprised by my offense. "I was just going to tell the *wee one* how much I love his mam," he said with a mischievous smile and crawled in bed, kissing my forehead before he moved lower to place a soft kiss on my belly. "How are ye, mo chridhe?"

"Good," I said, smiling. "Much better now, that you're here. It gets a little boring, to stay in bed all day."

"A little?" he asked, hoisting up an eyebrow.

"Okay, a lot," I admitted, rolling my eyes. "But now I know that in three weeks the baby will have eyebrows!"

Jamie shook his head at the baby fact of the day, and leaned into me for another kiss. "I love ye, my crazy curly wig," he whispered, running his fingers through my hair in a way that could only make them look worse.

I patted my hair self-consciously, but Jamie took my hand in his to stop me. "Ye look beautiful, Claire."

"I'm not so sure about that."

“Yer opinion is irrelevant. Do ye want to take a shower?”

“I want to take a bath.” I pouted, but stopped complaining when I saw him looking at me with a mirroring pout. “I’m joking, shower sounds great!”

I longed for a bath, or even a shower without sitting on that hideous stool Jamie had bought for me, but every time I complained about the demands of bed rest, an unease settled over him. It made the air around us heavy, and a worrisome pall began to threaten our spirits. Knowing that grumbling would only make things worse, I always opted for a silent smile.

Jamie was scared, terrified. I had been back in my ‘doctor mode’ when we left the hospital in Inverness. Analyze the situation – respond without panicking. Hope for the best outcome and be prepared for the worst. Jamie, in contrast, put on his mask pretending that everything would be okay, while fear was simmering under the surface, making his heart race and his hands clench every time he saw me wince.

I was the one to keep us sane. I was the one to console him, to prove to him that everything would going to be alright. I was that one, for two whole weeks.

The third week, however, I had had enough. After reading my pregnancy books I started binge-watching show after show, lost in universes miles away from mine. It took my mind off the brownish blood and clots I still saw every time I went to the bathroom. Old blood, which was a good sign, as Isobel had confirmed.

Lost in my own reality, Jamie’s overprotective behavior when he came back home made me cranky. My patience had evaporated like a fine mist, but my feelings were still boiling and I was unable to stop them from bursting out. I snapped at him for feeding me as if *I* was the baby, for being so concerned, for asking me how I felt every fifteen minutes. It was tiring and the last thing I needed. It angered me how his every move reminded me of the danger our baby was in. I wanted him gone, and I wanted to be alone to handle the situation as I saw right. But then, when he lay next to me at night, careful not to touch me, I ached to feel his fingers on my skin.

As much as I tried to control myself, my hormones got the better of me.

It was one of those nights, after an argument about the quantity of fluids I was drinking during the day, that I reached out, drawing nonsense patterns on his arm. Jamie made a sound deep in his throat, but didn’t turn to see me.

“Jamie,” I whispered in the darkness, scooting closer to him.

“Aren’t ye mad at me, still?” he asked, not turning to look at me.

“No, I’m not mad at you. It’s just that, sometimes, this gets to be too much. I can’t lay in bed all day and then have you lecturing me on what I should do.”

“I’m not lecturing ye! I’m just saying what the doctor told us to do,” he protested and then added in a much lower voice, “I’m trying to help.”

“Okay, maybe not lecturing. But you’re too concerned to do us any good. You bring tension home, Jamie, when I only want to be peaceful,” I said, hoping that he would understand.

“I bring tension? Christ, Claire! I’m at work all day, thinking about ye, what you’re doing and if everything is alright... And then I come back home and ye go mad because I just asked a few questions about yer day! Ye don’t even reply to my texts anymore!”

“I do!” I argued, feeling he was unfair. I did, that was the truth, just with a delay, because when he texted me in the middle of an episode I rarely paused it to reply to him.

“Ye don’t need me anymore. Ye leave me out of this,” he said, his voice so low that I almost didn’t hear him.

“What? Where is this coming from, now?” I asked, dumbfounded. He was still lying on his back, staring at the ceiling. “Jamie... Look at me.”

He rolled onto his side and his eyes found mine in the dim light, as they had done millions of times, as they would do for the rest of our lives.

“Ye’re here all day, lying in bed to protect our baby and I can do nothing for ye. I dinna have anything to offer ye, to make you feel better.”

“You’re a fool, Jamie Fraser.” I shook my head, but my lips curled up in their own accord. “You do everything for us, how can you not see that?” I ran my thumb along his high cheekbone, and then moved my index finger between his eyebrows, to smooth the deep line I couldn’t see in the darkness, but knew would be there. “You’re always here when I need you. You’re my official chai provider and cuddling pillow!” Jamie chuckled, and I continued, heartened. “Jamie, you do all the house chores. You care for everything while I just lie here, unable to help you. We’re both doing the best we can. But you have to trust me in this. I know what I’m doing and I would never do anything to hurt our baby. You do know that, right?”

“Aye, I do.”

“Will you please stop worrying so much? The only thing you achieve is to make me anxious and I then I snap at you, and everything goes to hell.”

“Ah, Sassenach.” he sighed the name he’d found for me in a way that was only his. “I hadna realized...”

“I know,” I whispered. “Hush now.” My finger dropped on his lips. “It’s okay. We’re all okay.”

I used my hand around his neck as a lever to press my body against him, and brought his mouth on mine. Our kiss was soft and tender at the beginning, but it quickly turned to something more – a thirst, a need that had to be satisfied. It had been so many days with only sweet little pecks and I’ve missed the connection between us, the flame. I got lost in the feeling of his tongue reaching for mine, his soft lips between my teeth... Until he suddenly pulled away. I leaned closer to him, but felt him moving further away, at the end of the bed.

“Hey,” I purred.

“We shouldna, Sassenach.”

“And why the hell not?”

“We should be careful. The doctor said – ”

“The doctor said that we can’t have sex.”

“At all.”

“You know, we were just kissing. And there are still things we can do,” I said with a mischievous smile, running my hand along his jawline and trailing a path on his neck, down on his chest, his abs, and finally, on his half-hard length.

“Claire...” A groan rumbled down in his throat, one I knew all too well, turning my smile into a full grin. “Claire,” he moaned my name again and I took him in my hand, slowly stroking him.

At least one of us could have a fun night.

Jamie cuddled behind me that night, his breath hot and steady against the tender skin of my neck. We fell asleep with my hand on my belly and his on top of mine, keeping everything we loved safe.

During the fourth week of my bed rest we were both more relaxed. We would soon go to Isobel for my next scan and we would find out if the tear had healed. I looked forward to it, being extremely optimistic about the results. Maybe it was the fact that I had no fresh blood for almost three weeks. Maybe it was the hope that the bed rest would end - I was so tired of feeling my arse go numb.

It was during that week that the dreams started. I dreamed of running, faster and faster, farther and farther away. It was always the same trail; the trail at Loch Lomond, our first hike with Jamie almost five years ago. I felt the wind blowing against my face, the dirt uneven under my feet. I felt free and happy, my muscles straining, my lungs expanding with each breath. And then, the path would turn red. A brownish red dirt that filled my vision and broke my heart in a beat. It was blood, all mine, and I would fall down on my knees, curling up with arms wrapped around my belly, trying to protect my baby, while feeling that I lost him.

I would wake up then, terrified, with a cold sweat soaking my pajamas. Trembling hands would run over the sheet, searching for blood; blood that was never there. It always took a long while for Jamie to calm me down, holding me tight in his arms, whispering sweet nothings in my ear.

“Our *wee one* is fine, Sassenach. Ye need to believe in that. All we need is a bit of faith, aye?” he’d say, and continue telling me how much he loved me until I would fall asleep again.

When we arrived at Isobel’s office after my four weeks bed rest, I held Jamie’s hand tight, feeling grateful for his thick, strong bones that wouldn’t break from the pressure I applied.

“Dinna fash, Sassenach,” he whispered before Isobel started the scan, and leaned down to kiss my temple. “Everything is going to be alright.”

I nodded, and started singing, absentmindedly. “Don’t worry, about a thing. Cause every little thing is gonna be alright...”

“Aye,” Jamie chuckled. “This.”

Isobel smiled at us and rubbed the gel on my belly.

Everything did go alright. My body had healed the tear, and I looked up to see happy tears rolling down Jamie's cheeks, dipping in the lines curved by his smile.

Our baby was fine. Safe.

"Didn't I tell ye, Sassenach? Faith," he winked at me.

"Faith," I sighed, nodding.

"So," Isobel's voice claimed my attention again, and I looked at her afraid that there were bad news mingling with the good ones. Her smile was sweet and reassuring. "Do you want to know the baby's sex?"

We looked at each other, tears and smiles alike, and nodded together.

"Yes," we both said a moment later, our voices shaky from emotion.

"It's a girl. You'll have a little girl."

Jamie kissed me, his tears now crashing on mine.

"A baby girl," he whispered.

"Faith," I whispered back. "She's our Faith."

We left Isobel's office with hands clasped tight together, not out of worry, but of happiness. I forced myself to walk slowly as we headed to the car, trying to fight the urge to celebrate. I couldn't stop grinning, though, and a quick look at Jamie showed me that the news had the same effect on him. There was a fiesta in my heart, with music and dancing, with laughter that echoed far into the horizon. A party for my little girl, the healed abruption, the end of my strict bed rest. I would still stay at home, going to the hospital only once a week to check on my patients' progress, but it was different now.

She was safe. I wouldn't lose her.

Catch Me If You Can



I felt Faith moving for the first time on a quiet Tuesday, while I had sank in my favorite armchair, reading my book. It was a fluttering sensation, so faint and gentle that I doubted myself for feeling it altogether. The second time it happened, I was sure. My little girl, like a butterfly, making her presence known.

“Hi love,” I greeted her with a smile curling my lips up. I put a hand on my belly, eager to show her that I knew. That I could feel her.

I spent the whole day waiting for another flutter, now well aware of the new way of communication we had established.

“I felt her today,” I told Jamie at night, placed a soft kiss on his bare chest, and then rested my head against it, resuming my previous position. In the darkness of our bedroom the world stopped, the noise and the endless moving ceased, leaving nothing behind but the two of us. Now the three of us.

“Ye did?” he asked, excited, and rolled me on my back by pulling my shoulder with his strong arm, just so he could set his hand on my belly. “Can I feel her too, d’ye think?”

I groaned my displeasure at him changing my comfortable position, but starting giggling when I saw the enthusiasm on his face. “I think it’s too early,” I said, and saw his smile turn to a pout. “Soon though,” I encouraged him, “She’ll be strong enough to kick against your hand, too.”

“Aye, Sassenach. Soon,” he agreed with a wide grin that a moment later found my forehead in a soft, happy kiss.

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My belly grew bigger and bigger. Four more weeks passed without any bleeding, without scary dreams or ominous surprises. Routine slowly came back into our lives, solid and real, pushing fear and panic aside to dark recesses where they could be easily forgotten.

A fundamental part of survival, human oblivion. To ignore the uncertainty of life, to keep our monsters locked up in dark basements, secured away, so we can feel safe. A pretense of control that we fool ourselves into believing. Our minds leading us out of the morass of harsh realities, lest we succumb to the crushing weight of fear and uncertainty.

Whatever *that* was, I felt grateful to breathe easily, to no longer feel uncertain or frightened when I woke up in the morning.

Everything was under control. I stayed at home – but not in bed – to rest, and I went to the hospital only once a week. Mostly to talk to my patients, check their progress and do paperwork. No surgeries for me and Faith.

Faith, our growing miracle who brought more hope and anticipation into our lives with every passing day.

Jamie and I resumed our search for a new house. I was doing research online and every night after dinner Jamie and I snuggled on the couch with the tablet in hand, choosing the best candidates for Jamie to visit. We had found nothing quite like the future house we had imagined for our family, but we kept being optimistic. And adaptable. I gave up the idea of living in the city center and walking to the hospital. Jamie compromised with a small yard.

We bought a new car. Jamie soon realized his beloved old Morris Minor was not a family car. And it certainly wasn't a car safe enough to ride with a baby. So, to his vast disappointment, Murtagh took the the Minor to Lallybroch where it would stay safely parked, and we bought a brand new family car, that Jamie absolutely despised and I loved to bits. The fact that I could sit comfortably and even stretch my feet, combined with the quiet cabin where we didn't feel every little bump of the road spoke to my heart. I loved our Minor too, because we had traveled all of Scotland with it from the beginning of our relationship, but a new era began now and it had to go.

We had started to discuss Faith's room, the color on the walls and the furniture, when one evening Jamie came home with a little creme shnuggle bath with a pink backrest. The pride drawn on his face was adorable, and on the verge of being hilarious. "For Faith," he explained, as if an explanation was needed. "Look at how wee it is, Sassenach!" he marveled.

I felt tears rolling down my cheeks before I realized I was crying. I swallowed hard, taking the sight in. My giant man, holding a tiny bathtub for our baby. I imagined myself a few months ahead, listening to their laughter from the kitchen, Faith's little voice babbling her elation playing in bubbles with her Da, while Jamie would lather her with no tears shampoo, creating silly hair styles. We needed to buy her a rubber duck, too. Do that da-daughter bonding time right.

Just a few more months.

Staying at home was easier, now that I didn't have to stay in bed all day, but the days I got out to visit the hospital were special to me. It felt good to see my patients' progress, how they responded to drugs or radiotherapy after surgery, if they were in pain and or struggled with the psychological part of getting through cancer therapy. I wanted to be there to lift their spirits, to see human beating cancer time and time again. And in the worst-case scenario, I wanted to be the one who would evaluate an ominous exam, and to give them the chance to listen to the news

from a familiar face they trusted. To let them know that we would do our best. I felt I owed them that. While I was at home, I kept thinking that I was on a mission - to keep Faith safe. In the hospital, however, I felt useful.

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It was a quiet shift at the hospital that Friday evening, but Faith was restless. She wouldn't stop moving and I looked forward to going home, having one of Jamie's great foot massages, and snuggling close to him. The plan was to convince him tell us a story until I fell asleep.

When Jamie texted me that he was waiting outside, I put my coat on, kissed Geillis goodbye, and left the hospital with a smile. Going home. It felt so good, even though Jamie's apartment wasn't our family's home. In truth, I couldn't care less about walls. For me, my home was Jamie. Jamie, and our four-layered (filled with natural products; horsehair, cactus fiber, and seaweed) bed.

It was his eyes that I felt first, fixed on my back. They felt like daggers, slipping into my flesh until they would hit the bone. I kept walking, and stopped only once or twice to check behind me. There was no one on the path.

So strange.

I felt the urge to walk faster, but I stopped myself in time, knowing that brisk walking was off the table.

"When you walk, take your time. Don't rush." I heard Isobel's voice in my head.

And still, I felt the need to run, to escape. I was on the same path I'd walked hundreds of times before, but it felt different. Dangerous. The hospital's lights receded with each step and I was intermittently doused in light and darkness from the parking lights. I felt insecure, in a way I hadn't felt since I was a child. Afraid of the dark – and everything it kept well hidden. I felt irrational, and yet, I couldn't push the feeling away.

Biting my bottom lip, I followed the same pattern of moves I had adopted back when I was a child, going back home through a dark alley: hold my keys between my fingers in a fist, ready to punch any possible attacker in the face, and call someone to calm me down. Back then it was Lamb; now it was Jamie. The moment I heard his voice, I took a deep breath. The moment he heard mine, he held his.

"What's wrong, Sassenach?"

"Nothing... I don't know. Just a feeling –"

"I'm coming," he said and hung up.

I wanted to protest, to say that there was no need, that it was okay just to talk to me, but I felt reassured by the thought that in a few minutes he would walk by my side. Luckily, he knew exactly how to find me, having walked that same path himself hundreds of times.

This bloody huge parking lot. Was it always so big?

When I was a few feet away from Jamie, I turned to look back for one last time, sure that there was nothing to be seen there.

My heart stopped and then sank heavy in my stomach. My knees wobbled, and I found it impossible to take another step. Frozen in place, out in the open air, I thought there wasn't enough oxygen around to keep me conscious.

"Sassenach?" I heard Jamie's voice, realizing that I was scaring him, while his arm came around my waist. I let him hold me, trying to focus on his soft breathing to calm down. "What is it?"

I had seen him, lurking in the shadows, moving towards the same direction I was going, matching my every step. Scared, I looked towards the shadows again. "No, nothing really." I took Jamie's hand and resumed walking. "Let's go home."

Jamie started walking behind me, still confused. I turned my head to tell him to hurry up and I saw the man again, standing next to the front bumper of a van, looking at me with those furious eyes that held only one thing. Hate.

I started walking faster.

"Jamie," I whispered. "Can you walk faster?"

"No I can't, Sassenach. Slow down. Ye arena supposed to walk so fast. Christ, Claire, you're almost running."

"We have to leave," I said, determined, trying to convince him to go without getting into details. I knew my bloody Scot. If he realized that Randall was so close, he would walk straight up to him to take revenge. I wished it would be that easy, but it wasn't. I was almost sure Randall had a knife or a gun, and the last thing I wanted was to see Jamie die a few minutes before I would.

"Claire." Jamie pulled us to a stop. I gripped his hand tighter, trying to pull him forward, but to no avail. "What's happening?" he asked when he saw me glancing towards Randall's direction. He followed my gaze and murmured low, still looking at Randall who was advancing towards us. "Who is he?"

"Randall," I said, and started walking again in an attempt to drag Jamie to our car.

Jamie took an indecisive step towards my direction but then stopped again.

Damn.

His lips were pressed in a thin line and his brow was furrowed. I knew what he was thinking, and I couldn't let that happen.

"Jamie, please..." My trembling voice barely showed my distress, but was enough to make him look at me. He took a step towards Randall and then stopped, indecisive. Seeing that this was my only chance, I pressed so more. "Jamie, take us away from here. Please."

I held my breath, waiting for him to decide. It took him mere seconds to make up his mind, but I felt that I was standing on that spot, looking at Jamie leaning towards Randall's direction for an

eternity. His Adam's apple bobbed on his neck, and I knew that the corded muscles under his shoulders and arms would be taut, ready to attack. A predator spotting his prey.

"Please," I whimpered once again, and his blue eyes turned onto mine. "Get us away."

He bit his lip then, aware that he had to make a choice. With a look that showed he still wasn't sure of his decision, he swooped me up in his arms and started walking towards our car, with long, solid strides. I could see Randall coming closer and whispered in Jamie's ear to go faster. He sped up, and the next moment he was almost running.

When our car was a few feet away, and Jamie unlocked it, I saw Randall stop and turn around, running towards the opposite direction.

"He left," I said, tears rolling down my cheeks. "He left, but he'll come again." I took deep breaths, trying not to panic.

"Bawbag," Jamie muttered and set me down, opening the car door. "Are you okay?" he asked, his voice a mix of concern and something else, something that growled from deep down, bubbling with rage for a lost opportunity.

"I'm okay," I said, trying for a reassuring smile. I entered the car and sat down slowly, caressing my belly with a hand to calm my baby girl down. Jamie knelt next to me, his slanted blue eyes worried. "We're okay," I repeated. "Let's go home."

Jamie kissed me on the forehead and closed the door, before knocking on my window and pointing at the car door lock. I locked the door, buckled my seatbelt, and watched as he walked around to his side, got in, and turned the ignition.

When we left the hospital behind I closed my eyes, cradled my belly with both hands, and started crying quietly.

"I canna believe he found ye. The man is sick. A sick bastard, that's what he is." Jamie's murmurs were deeply unsettling. I had never seen him like this, apart from the night I had come back from France. But there was a relief in his words that night, even in the sharpest ones. Now his fingers were drumming a tattoo against the wheel, a tattoo that beat as hard as my heart. "Did he talk to ye?" he finally asked.

"No, he didn't. I didn't stop, and I didn't talk to him either. I'm sorry, Jamie. I thought that after going to France... After all these months... I thought we would be safe."

Guilt swept through me, making the tears come faster.

Jamie took his eyes from the road for a second to look at me and shook his head disapprovingly. "Never say a word about it again, aye?" he said, squeezing my thigh just above my knee. "Dinna cry, mo chridhe. And never be sorry about being in my life."

"If I had stayed away - " I started, but he interrupted me.

"I love ye with my whole heart, Claire. Do ye not know that? The months ye were away were the worst time of my life."

I leaned into him and placed a soft kiss on his stubbled cheek. "I love you, too," I said, but I couldn't stop thinking about Randall. "Maybe we should go to the police. To report the incident. He was given a restraining order; he can't come that close to me."

"Aye," Jamie agreed, eyes flickering between the road and the rearview mirror. "Let's go to the police station at Haymarket."

The police. This whole madness would be over soon.

We were in front of the Merchiston Tower when Jamie spoke again. "What the – "

"What?"

"That car, behind us. I saw it before, when we left the hospital, but now it's closer," Jamie said, but when he saw the horror in my eyes, he rushed to add, "I'm not sure it's him, though. Maybe it's just a coincidence."

"Coincidence my ass," I hissed, trying to see the car. It was there, a black convertible at a decent distance, but there nonetheless. "Is he following us? Can we lose him?"

Jamie took the turn towards Harrison Park, and we both held our breath for a long moment, waiting. Hoping that it was just a random person following the same route as us. When we saw the car behind us again, a strained breath left Jamie's mouth and a curse left mine.

"What are we doing? Where are we going?" My voice was shaking.

"I'm going towards Longstone. Let's hope we lose him there."

"Why aren't we going to the police?" I asked, paralyzed.

"I dinna ken what will happen if I stop the car. I dinna want to risk it, Sassenach." Jamie didn't turn to look at me this time. His gaze was focused on the street as he sped up. His fingers had stopped their drumming. They were now gripping the steering wheel hard, making his knuckles go white.

My breaths were fast and shallow, and Jamie slowly took a hand from the rough leather to squeeze my thigh again. Before I could reach for his hand, though, he had taken it back. "I'm not letting anything happen to ye, Claire. I promise," he said with a reassuring voice and I turned to look at him. He wasn't calm. He had perfectly adjusted a mask on his face, to hide all his feelings, and that frightened me more than anything else.

"I know, Jamie. I know," I said, not sure about what I actually knew. That we would end up safe and sound at the police station or that Jamie would do everything he could to keep us safe, with a doubtful outcome?

I belatedly realized that the buildings passed by my window much faster than they were supposed to. The speed limit signs shone bright under our headlights.

"Jamie, you're going fifty miles an hour. We're supposed to – "

"I ken," he hissed through clenched teeth. "I canna do much about it right now, can I?"

I clasped my hands in my lap and took deep breaths, wondering if we would end up in a car accident before Randall ever reached us. Turning my head to look through the rear window, I saw his car still there, following us at a close distance.

When Jamie started overtaking the vehicles in our lane, I felt my heart beating hard in my chest. Faith hadn't moved for a while, but now I could feel her, almost as distressed as I was.

But Randall hadn't stopped. When he came closer, Jamie sped up even more. My hands started shaking and my leg bounced on my tiptoes, all the adrenaline that had saturated my nerves seeking an outlet through the muscles.

"Motherfucker," Jamie cursed, "He has a better car than we do. How the hell can he afford an M5?"

The truth was that a car chase hadn't come up as a prerequisite when we bought our family car. *At least we're not driving your Minor*, I thought, but it was as much a joke as it was the truth, so I kept my thought to myself.

"Call the police, Claire. Tell them where we are and what is happening."

I took a deep breath and called, my voice surprisingly calm as I explained our precarious situation to the policeman with the heavy Scottish accent.

"We currently drive on A70," I said, swallowing hard, "Towards Longstone."

"And then we'll head to Saughton," Jamie added hurriedly without looking at me, and I passed the information to the police officer.

"His name is Jonathan Randall." A shiver ran through my body. "I'd pressed charges against him in the past. He is determined to harm me and my husband," I said, my strong voice concealing the loud beating of my heart. "He drives a black BMW M5." I turned to look back, squinting to read Randall's registration plates. "VW... 67 BJS. Hurry," I added in my doctor's voice, the same one that handled an emergency situation in the OR.

I hung up and informed Jamie that the police was coming, while watching pedestrians cursing him for driving so fast in an urban area.

I had no idea where we were going anymore. Jamie was slowing down only when he had to wait before overtaking yet another car, and then sped up abruptly and sharply, jostling us. Randall was after us, always a hair's breadth behind us.

My throat was dry and I tried to talk to Faith to reassure her that everything would be alright, but I found that I couldn't. I started thinking of Alex MacGregor.

What if he had killed himself, because Randall made his everyday life a disaster?

What if he couldn't take the blackmailing and the threats anymore?

What if Randall had no intention of killing me, but only wanted to make my life so miserable that I couldn't take it anymore? Is this murder?

I would never forget how I felt, finding Randall's blackmail in my locker. His notes had sucked the breath out of me, leaving me just a shell of the person I once was. I was always scared, always ready to feel my heart beat for the last time. Back then, I thought I would never find happiness again.

But I had.

I had made a fresh start in Scotland.

I had found Jamie, and with him, I had found love, and hope, and happiness. My oxygen, keeping me alive.

And now, I was on the verge of losing everything again.

I looked at Jamie, and set my hand over his on the steering wheel. "I love you," I whispered and I smiled, my eyes fixed on his face while he overtook the motorcycle in front of us.

The golden skin, covering his high cheekbones. The wide lips, now thin and strained, sucked in, in concentration. The slanted eyes, slightly narrowed as he was focused on the street. I resisted the urge to reach out and run my fingers through his red locks, thinking of the night we met, remembering my first thought when he had leaned into me.

The coroner stated that this was the first case where the cause of death was a heart bursting.

"I love you more than anything else," I repeated, louder. I needed him to know.

"Don't ye dare, Claire," Jamie said, the muscles across his jaw pulled taut. "Don't ye dare start saying goodbye." He didn't look at me, and didn't say anything else. He kept his eyes fixed on the road, his hands clenching the steering wheel for dear life.

I turned my head, listening Jamie puff and huff, frustrated at the old car in front of us going very slow. We used to laugh when we met these slow drivers, betting if they were older than seventy or not. It didn't seem funny now. Randall was close and Jamie couldn't lose speed. He flashed the lights and honked, but it was pointless. I called 999 again, to update the police on our position and ask why it was taking so long to find us.

When Jamie sped up to overtake the old car at the next turn I held my breath, hoping that he wouldn't sorely regret not saying goodbye.

A truck was coming straight towards us from the opposite lane. I was wondering if we had enough time to return to our lane when Randall overtook the car with the old man – it was ridiculous, but I had turned my head, out of curiosity, to look at the driver as I had done a million times before. Randall bumped on us, denting the back of our car. I screamed, and Jamie took his eyes away from the street for a moment to check on me. Just for a moment, to see if I was okay.

Our car crashed on the traffic barrier. I saw Jamie's body jolt as if he was a huge crash dummy and I felt the cry of his name scratching my throat raw before my body hit the airbag. My phone fell from my hand, the police officer still on the line. The loud crash that followed was the last thing I heard before passing out.

Faith

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Major Character Death

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



I opened my eyes to see the two paramedics next to me, and I vaguely realized that I was in an ambulance. The siren was loud, hurried.

I felt dizzy. The pain vibrated through my body, making me want to curl up and cry.

I looked around, searching for Jamie, but he was nowhere to be found. I closed my eyes and thought of his crooked smile, of his slanted eyes full of love.

The image of his body taking the crash's impact flashed in front of my eyes, pushing every happy memory away.

I passed out again.

—

The hospital corridors around me were familiar, but their sterility seeped in my body; cold, hostile, unsafe. I shouldn't be in a hospital. Not again.

The stretcher I lay on was moving fast, so fast that the stuff jogged around it to keep up with me.

I ran a hand over my crotch.

Blood. Fresh, crimson.

Not again. Please, please, not again.

I gripped the hand that grasped the stretcher close to mine. It belonged to a bony and tall nurse, her lips a thin line on her face.

“No,” I pleaded. “Not yet. It’s too soon.”

She gave me a compassionate look and nodded, her eyebrows knit together. “I ken, lass.”

She knew. And yet, I could tell by the look in her eyes that there was nothing she could do. There was nothing *I* could do.

I heard Jamie’s voice in my mind, telling me to have faith. I set my jaw and swallowed hard.

“My husband?” I asked. “He was with me,” I added, tugging at her sleeve when she didn’t turn to look at me.

“He hasna arrived yet,” she said, matter-of-fact. The policeman who called us asked for three ambulances. The other two are still on the way.”

Jamie in an ambulance, away from me. Separated, unable to give solace to each other.

He had to be safe, to come back to me as soon as he could. I needed to grasp his hand and listen to his deep voice keeping the fears at bay. I needed him more than ever, and yet, he wasn’t there.

I started panicking. I was alone, and I couldn’t feel Faith.

“My baby,” I whispered, placing my bloody hands on my belly. “My baby isn’t moving.”

The nurse’s lips had almost disappeared from her pale face, and she looked at me though exhausted eyes, clad in black circles. “We’re taking ye for an ultrasound right now.”

I took a deep breath, and the hospital’s scent invaded my nostrils like an old friend. It seemed to mock me for my failure, for lying on the stretcher instead of running next to it.

The exam room was quiet, dimly lit. The gel on my belly, cold. My side, empty. Jamie was supposed to stand there, by my side, as he had always done.

I fixed my eyes on the screen, waiting.

The black and white recording of the ultrasound had the image of my daughter. Still there, and a bit bigger than I remembered. Curled up, with a tiny fist next to her heart.

Her silent heart.

I clenched my own hands in fists, waiting, hearing my heart beating alone in my body. All alone, waiting for hers.

It couldn't be. The ultrasound machine might be broken, the volume too low.

The time passed, but there was no movement, no sound. The examination room was enfolded in an eerie silence.

A heart in the making, with millions of beats waiting ahead, hushed abruptly. A muscle that didn't contract, leaving stalled blood in her veins and arteries.

"Come on baby," I pleaded, my tears blurring the picture on the monitor. I brushed them furiously away, afraid I would lose the tiny movement that would confirm that my girl was still alive.

A buzzing filled my ears, thousand of wasps around me, their stings painful on my body. And yet, I felt nothing inside. I didn't want to feel, to think. I didn't want to accept the realization that was forced upon me.

This wasn't happening. I had promised to keep her safe. I had told her all would be okay.

The same tired, sympathetic nurse led me to a room, helped me settle on the bed, and administered an IV. Finally, she patted my shoulder with a sorrowful smile. "I'm sorry for your loss," she said.

I looked at her, lost. My loss. It couldn't be.

"Dinna hesitate to ring for help." Her voice was soft and tender, but I felt it coming from miles away. "My name is Crook. Just press the button and I'll come promptly."

I nodded, and instinctively ran a hand on my belly. Still there, still full. As if nothing had happened.

I felt exhausted. With my hand still on my belly, waiting to feel Faith, I succumbed to sleep.

—

I woke up in the darkness, my dream still fresh in my memory. Faith had woken me, kicking like a wee fiend. I turned to tell her Da, but he wasn't there.

Neither was our bedroom. The soft light on the hospital's white walls blew the dream away. Faith hadn't kicked.

I waited in silence, barely breathing so I wouldn't miss her move. But it never came.

My baby was still. My girl's heart had gone quiet. The ultrasound monitor was working properly.

The only thing I heard was my own heart, breaking. A smashing sound, filling the world with tiny pieces that crashed on to the walls and fell on the floor, ensuring that the shards would never be mended again.

A cry left my lungs before I realized it. It was guttural, inhuman. It tore my throat, running through the hospital corridors, trying to find a way out – to the sky. To her.

But she was too far away to listen.

My womb was full, and yet, I was empty. My soul was lost, somewhere between a baby kick and a cry I would never listen to. I could still sense her, curled up, silent, featherlight. And yet, she wasn't there.

I had lost Faith, and with her I lost a part of myself.

Sobs started wracking my body, sobs that I couldn't control, waves of grief crushing upon me, molding my shape, changing me forever.

Mrs Crook came to my room even though I hadn't called for her. She whispered soothing words that I didn't hear and injected something in my IV. I wished it was poison.

With both hands cradling my belly, my dead baby, my dead dreams, I cried until I fell asleep. In my sleep, I dreamed of a redheaded girl, running in a field of barley, golden like her skin, looking at a sky as blue as her eyes.

When I woke up, I had almost forgotten what was real and what not. I was almost sure that I had dreamed of the accident, the blood, Faith's unnervingly silent heart. At that moment, I had convinced myself that all was well, and I looked around, searching for Jamie. That second, that split second, I was happy.

Then I saw Geillis sitting in the chair next to my bed. And I remembered.

"My baby," I whispered, looking desperately at her, and I felt a fresh wave of tears running down my cheeks. "My baby girl," I repeated.

Pain; unending, unforgiving.

Geillis, the always sharp-witted Geillis, had nothing to say. She came to sit on the bed next to me, wrapped her arms around my body, and rocked us both, my Faith and me, equally dead inside.

"Jamie?" I asked in a hoarse voice after a while, and she pulled away to look into my eyes.

"He's okay, he'll be okay," she said with a trembling smile.

"Where is he?"

"In the OR. Hildegard came from our hospital and is operating on his hand," she said, and seeing my distress, she repeated, "He's okay. He'll be okay."

That didn't sound reassuring at the least.

"What has happened?" I asked. "Nobody has told me."

"You crashed on the traffic barrier, but fortunately Jamie had reduced your car's speed, and the impact was minor. Both airbags opened –"

"I know," I interrupted her. "The airbag killed Faith," I said, and my voice cracked. "It's a placenta abruption, right?"

“Yes.” Geillis swallowed hard, trying to stop the tears before leaving her emerald eyes. “Jamie would end up with bruises and light injuries like you – ”

I snorted. *Light injuries*. I had never thought that tearing my heart out would be considered as a light injury.

Geillis looked at me and frowned. “You know what I mean,” she defended herself. “Anyway, Jamie would be okay, if not for the second crash. The car that pursued yours went straight to a head-on collision with the truck.”

“And?”

Why did it take her so long to explain such a simple thing?

“The truck was heavy, thank god, and didn’t move much from the collision’s impact. It’s rear side, however, dented the side of your car. Jamie’s side.” I held my breath, unsure if I wanted her to continue. “Jamie was lucky,” Geillis added hurriedly. “He only got injured on his right side – leg and hand.”

“How bad?” I asked in my doctor’s voice, afraid that if she witnessed my meltdown she would stop sharing the information she had acquired.

“His leg has a deep gash that will leave a mark, but other than that it’s fine. His hand, however, got trapped between the dented door and the steering wheel. We still don’t know if it will ever be fully functional again.”

“His vitals?”

“All fine. Like yours.”

Like mine. Which exactly of my vitals was working fine, I wondered.

“Geillis?” I asked after a while. It was strange that she hadn’t asked any questions. So strange, that it showed how bad things really were.

“Tell me,” she leaned towards me with a smile.

“What happened to the other man? The one who pursued us?”

“He was dead already when they brought him to the hospital. He died at the collision,” she said and frowned, looking at me. “Who was he Claire? What did he want?”

“Randall,” I simply said. “My worst nightmare,” I added, and closed my eyes, wishing the conversation to be over.

Randall was dead. I was finally free. But it was a hard-won freedom, and I didn’t know what to do with it.

A life for a life, I thought, and started crying again.

“Claire,” Geillis said when my sobs quietened. “We need to talk about you.”

“About me?”

“Ye have to give birth, Claire. You can either wait, or we can proceed with the induction today.”

“I want Jamie to be with me,” I said, biting my lip hard to block the tears inside. “I can’t do it without him.”

Geillis nodded, but I saw a shadow lurking in her eyes. “Okay, then. We’ll wait until tomorrow.”

We fell silent, until I spoke again, a few minutes later. “Geillis,” I whispered. “I don’t want to lose her.”

The dam broke again. I cried in her arms until I fell asleep, grateful for finding a way out of reality.

—

The next morning Jenny had taken Geillis’ place next to my bed.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, surprised, when I saw her. It was a long way from Lallybroch.

“Of all the places in the world, Claire, this is the one I should be.”

She had been crying. Her eyes were puffy and red rimmed, the silver trails on her cheeks shining under the daylight. She held my hand, and then took me in a crushing embrace, as if she was trying to force life back inside me.

“Jamie?” I asked.

“He hasna woken up yet. It was a long surgery.”

I nodded. “How did it go? Did they tell you?”

“Aye, they did. The doctor said his hand will never look the same again, but he will be able to use it, eventually.”

“Good,” I breathed, then hesitated. “Jenny, does he know?”

Jenny shook her head. “I dinna think so. Geillis told me he was unconscious when they brought him in, then woke up crying and calling yer name. They gave him sedatives and he fell asleep. He hasna woken after his surgery, so I couldna talk to him.”

“I’ll tell him once he’s awake,” I announced, setting my jaw. “Was I on sedatives too?” I asked as an afterthought.

Jenny gave me a sorrowful smile, one that wordlessly replied to my question. “They doctor said ye have to go into labor,” she said at last.

“No,” I denied, feeling I’d said the same thing one million times. “I’ll do this when Jamie is better. I don’t want to be alone. He is supposed to be there.” My voice broke mid-sentence, and I

stopped Jenny with a raised hand before she could come closer to hug me. Love elicited more feelings than I could handle.

In the afternoon, Mrs Crook came to my room again, rested and ready to start another shift. "Lass," she said, squeezing my hand. "Nothing will change, ken? Tis better to proceed now."

"Why isn't my husband here?" I asked, as if it was her fault that Jamie was away.

"He's on heavy painkillers. He isn't in condition to witness a labour."

"I'll wait," I said, determined. "I'll wait until he's better."

Jenny talked before the nurse could voice her disagreement. "I'll come wi' ye, Claire. Better the wrong Fraser than no Fraser at all, aye?"

"But Jamie would want to be there," I said, crying, as I slowly accepted that he wouldn't be. "He would want to be there no matter what..."

—

I gave birth to my dead daughter, committing in memory every single minute. I carved every single detail of the process on my heart, while wishing the doctor to tear me apart, to break me into pieces so I couldn't feel anymore.

She never cried, and never reached for my breast. I belatedly realized that I didn't have milk to give her yet. But I would have, in a few months. Milk made for her. Useless.

Faith lay in my arms, born and still. A porcelain doll, with my white skin and Jamie's red hair. With ten fingers and ten toes. With faint red eyebrows laid over closed eyes.

And I sang to her. And I called her by her name. And I wished she would be alive. And I lived, and yet I died.

Jenny had brought with her a light green bodysuit with pink elephants. The evening after the birth she gave it to me with tears in her eyes, explaining that she had bought it a few weeks ago, for Faith to leave the hospital with the clothes her auntie gifted her. We dressed Faith together, brushing tears away only to make room for more to come.

Sometime in the night, Jenny told me that Jamie had woken up from his morphine sleep. I took Faith with me in her beautiful outfit, holding her tight against my chest, and walked to his room.

I walked to him, needing him to hold us both. To listen to him whispering soft Gaelic words to our girl, even though she wouldn't listen to his wobbly voice. To share the burden of loss with the only person who could really understand.

His eyes were closed when we entered his room. I walked quietly across the darkness to stand next to his bed, but he felt me before I could talk and opened his eyes.

"Sassenach," he said with a dreamy smile, his eyes darting from me to Faith in my arms.

He looked at me as if I was holding the world in my hands. A second, his own split second, of happiness.

And then, the heartbreak.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “No, no, no. It’s too soon.”

“I know,” I whispered. “I’m sorry, Jamie.” I stood still, cupping Faith’s head, rocking her with my sobs. “This is all my fault. I’m so sorry. She’s not here.”

A growl left his throat, deep and painful, but he patted the bed next to him. I sat down, facing him.

“Never say that again, Claire. Never, d’ye hear me?” Tears rolled down his cheeks, but his voice was sober. I dropped my eyes somewhere between his clavicles, ashamed. “Listen to me,” he said, authoritatively, tilting my chin up so I could see him. “Tis not yer fault. Nobody loved Faith more than ye - more than we did. More than we still do.”

He hugged us both then, and in the silence of the night, we made the perfect picture – if someone was far enough to misinterpret the painful tears with happy ones.

Two heart were beating in that room instead of three. And these two, kept a mournful rhythm, one of loss and powerlessness.

Jamie traced Faith’s face with a finger that seemed gigantic, but the way he did it was so gentle, that I thought his bones would break.

“Mo ghraidh,” he whispered, and I knew that this time he wasn’t calling me. “Hello wee one, it’s yer Da.”

And with that, with the same words he used to greet her when she was alive inside me, Jamie broke the last fragment of my heart that had remained untouched.

We sat awake all night, telling her stories about our family. About what her life would be, if it hadn’t stopped abruptly. About her uncles and grandparents. About her cousin, who had gifted her his little yellow duck to play with, when we would bathe her. About the love that bound us all.

We stayed awake all night, in a tight embrace, wishing the sun never to come out. Wishing that a miracle would happen, and our little family would be whole again.

But the miracle had happened, and we held her in our arms. Ten fingers and ten toes. Two closed eyes, dreaming of a better world.

In the morning, we buried our Faith.

I know most of you (all of you) think that this is cruel. And that's because it really is.

This is a decision I made from the first moment I plotted this story, before I got personally attached to the characters. Did I have second thoughts while writing about Claire's pregnancy and Faith? Of course I did. But the reasoning for my initial decision didn't change.

First, I wanted to write a modern AU of Jamie and Claire's story as we see it in *Outlander*/Dragonfly in Amber, and the impact of Black Jack Randall on their lives is detrimental in these books. So, my decision to follow canon had predestined Faith's future. In canon Jamie and Claire live this death, and carry it with them forever. It makes them who they are. And I wanted this, but I did diverge from canon on a point. I wanted them to mourn their loss together. To hold their baby together.

The second reason is my love for real stories. It's not that I don't love happy endings - I do. But the truth is that approximately 1 in 200 births ends in a stillbirth. It's horrific, but it happens. And these parents without babies keep living, and they go on. I'm not saying that they forget, but they go on. So I wanted to write a story to honor them.

This was the last chapter of this story, but it's not where this journey ends. Next week I will post an Epilogue, in which we will find Jamie and Claire in the future, and see how their story continued.

Thank you all for reading. Truly.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

It feels strange to say goodbye to a story that's in your life (and in your mind) for more than six months. I loved these two and their journey dearly, and I'm leaving them knowing that they'll be alright.

Thank you all, for your support and the love you've showed to this story. It wouldn't be the same writing it without you. ❤️❤️



Life is a wide, calm lake – until the first rain falls.

—

There were three things Alex Randall and I had in common.

We were both English, born in the same year, and we had lost our parents at a young age.

All of them insignificant. Commonalities, shared between thousands of people. Details that would never predict the way our lives intertwined.

A mutation in Alex's DNA brought cancer to his path, and him to mine. The first raindrop on life's serene waters.

It wasn't that exact droplet that had changed everything - it's never the initial drop. It's the ripples it creates. They take their time, expanding across the surface, forming circles that get wider as they go; casting life's shape.

My inability to save Alex - his death. The first undulation, the one that brought Black Jack Randall, thirsty for revenge, after me and Alexander MacGregor. A strong, dangerous ripple, threatening my life, taking me away to Scotland.

A current, that brought me closer to Jamie.

The ripple effect.

MacGregor's suicide, my move to Paris, my return to Scotland.

The decision to stay with Jamie – forever.

A gift – our Faith.

The gift taken back, as unexpectedly as it came. A ripple capsizing our boat, threatening to drown us.

We swam to the surface holding each other's hand, aware of how precarious it would be to get separated, knowing that the currents of sorrow might tear us apart. When we reached safe waters again, when the tears dried and the only thing we could do was to go on, we took stock.

Black Jack Randall's life.

A mangled hand and a scarred leg.

Two shattered hearts that, miraculously, could still love.

A part of our soul, a little angel, forever lost.

Ripples, expanding, oblivious of good and bad. Ripples, disturbing the quietness.

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My life is never quiet. There is always a voice, a cry, a giggle around me.

I'm sitting on the bench at the corner of my herb garden - the one Jamie made for me. It's a simple wooden bench, the top plank of the back a little uneven, but still beautiful. It's on the perfect spot, because sitting here I can see them no matter how far they've gone.

I smile at Bree as she runs towards me, her red hair flying in the wind like flames, her da's blue eyes glinting with happiness.

She stops only a few feet away from me and looks behind her, at Willie. He tries to match his sister's wider strides and fails, stumbling down only to rise again. His curls fall on his forehead, brown, like mine. I search his whisky eyes for tears, but all I can see there is laughter.

"Come on, Willie!" Bree encourages him, but I can sense her exasperation. The little brother is holding her back. She's in a hurry, always in a hurry this one, but when Willie flashes her a wide smile, and all she can do is to smile back at him.

I'm waiting for them, trying not to giggle at first, trying not to chide Willie afterwards, when he steps on my lavender beds.

Bree sees this and walks back to him to take him by the hand. "Be careful of mama's flowers, Willie," she advises, trying to sound old and wise and I feel my giggle tingling my throat, desperate to come out.

It's when they stand in front of me, that I see the wildflowers in their hands. Bree smiles smugly, and says, "This, for you mama." She gives me a bloodroot, it's petals white, beautiful. "This is for Da," she continues, showing me a bur marigold, almost as yellow as the sun in her drawings, matching the stamens of my flower. "This is mine..." She holds a bloodroot for herself, a little smaller than mine. And..." Bree pauses for suspense, turning to her brother.

“This is for Willie,” she continues, and Willie shows me another bur marigold, its roots still attached, evidence of a violent act against it.

“Illie!” he shouts excited, and grins, before extending his other hand towards me, the little chubby fingers holding a daisy tight. “Feif!” he cheers, and I bit my lip to hold back the tears.

But I can’t.

My arms are open and they both rush inside. I press their little bodies against mine, squeezing them, and I close my eyes, feeling the hot tears rolling down my cheeks. Two children in my embrace and the third one in my heart. Always in my heart.

Jamie’s head pops out from the front door a few moments later, his hair ruffled and his face beaming, asking who is ready for pancakes. Before I have time to reply, Bree and Willie hand me the flowers and run to the kitchen.

“Wash your hands first!” I shout, laughing, and brush the tears away before I make my way back to the house, five flowers in hand.

They know, of course they do. They don’t need the pictures in the little purple box to know. Jamie and I rarely open the box that holds our memories from eight years ago.

Me, during my first pregnancy.

The ultrasound pictures.

Faith’s measurements as Mrs Crook had written them down for me and I had memorized them forever - 710 grams, 14 inches.

A tiny lock of her red hair.

A picture of the three of us in Jamie’s bed at the hospital. I’m holding Faith in her oversized bodysuit with the pink elephants and Jamie is holding both of us. Eyes that reveal hours of crying. Lips that still whisper the secrets we need her to know.

Jenny took the picture with trembling hands, silent tears rolling down her cheeks. We wanted to have it. We wanted to have Faith, immortal in time.

We rarely open the box, because we don’t need it to remember. She is always with us.

I fill a glass with water and set the flowers inside while nodding at William, impressed on how well he’s cleaned his hands from the dirt. With a smile, I set the flowers in front of Jamie’s first book. *Faith-tales*. It’s the one he wrote for our little fairy, with all the tales he didn’t have the chance to tell her. It was his way to give her something from him, and it became the beginning of his new career as a writer when we moved to North Carolina.

I turn to go to the table but I stop in my tracks, unable to contain the feeling that floods my soul at the sight of them. This is happiness, I think, and I take a moment to watch them.

Jamie presses his lips tight as he concentrates to pull Bree’s long hair back, securing it away from her food with a blue rubber band, in a way I’m sure she’ll dislike when she’ll look at

herself in the mirror. Willie is licking a honey-covered finger, making sounds of approval. When his little hand finds its way back into the jar in a fist, I realize that my little contemplating moment has come to an end and I have to act. I rush to him, laughing, and I capture the offending hand in mine.

“What do you think you’re doing, Willie the Pooh?” I ask, and he gives me a look that says he knows exactly what he’s doing.

When we all sit around the table, my eyes dart from the three of them, back to the flowers. It feels safe, that Bree and Willie know Faith. It’s a relief, that she’ll live through them when Jamie and I will be gone.

“I tried for teddy bear pancakes,” Jamie says, bringing me out of my reverie, “But the lady on the Youtube video made it seem much easier than it really is. I dinna think I’ve made it right.” He looks at his plate with a frown, and I look at mine, smiling at the undefined shape of my pancakes.

“Mine looks like an alien,” Bree says, mirroring her da’s frown. “And it’s not ‘dinna’, da. It’s ‘don’t’,” she corrects Jamie with her mixed accent, which is neither American, nor Scottish or English. She has taken her wise voice again, but Jamie knows better and tickles her sides until she forgets all about accents.

When Bree’s laughter quiets down, Jamie looks at me and I see the lad I met in the pub years ago. I get lost in his eyes; the sea I’ve dived into, the sky that lifted my wings. A smile curls up my lips, and I see it mirrored on his face, and in that moment, we say it all. Millions of words we’ve already said before, and others, that will dance upon our lips later; hours, months, years later, because we have a lifetime to spend together.

Ripples shook us, but we rode them with our hands always clasped tight and they took us close to the shore. There are always more to come, but we have stable ground to hold onto.

We have each other. We have our family.

We’re strong. Let them come.

The End

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