Allied

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/21409048) at http://archiveofourown.org/works/21409048.

Rating:	[General Audiences](#)
Archive Warning:	[Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings](#)
Category:	[F/M](#)
Fandoms:	[Outlander (TV)](#), [Outlander Series - Diana Gabaldon](#), [Outlander & Related Fandoms](#)
Relationship:	[Claire Beauchamp/Jamie Fraser](#)
Characters:	[Claire Beauchamp](#), [Jamie Fraser](#)
Additional Tags:	[WWII](#), [Slow Burn](#), [jamie x claire](#), [40s](#), [France - Freeform](#), [Jamie Fraser - Freeform](#), [Claire Beauchamp - Freeform](#)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-11-12 Completed: 2020-01-30 Words: 56,568 Chapters: 19/19

Allied

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Summary

It's WWII, France is under German occupation. Claire Beauchamp, french by marriage, must house a soldier named James Fraser, Scottish by birth, who finds himself fighting with the enemies.

Things aren't always as they seem and as the war rages on, both Jamie and Claire must fight for what they believe in and ultimately learn to be allies.

Notes

We're back with a new story and we're so excited to finally share it! It's loosely inspired by the book "The Nightingale" by Kristin Hannah (which you should read if you have not, honestly) and we hope you like it.

Thank you for reading <3

Hanging By A Thread

Montoire, France. August 25th, 1939

Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp never expected to live in a tiny French village. After all, an orphan from Oxfordshire, who spent most of her childhood and adolescence travelling around the world with her extravagant uncle, finding herself in a place where everyone knew one another and the highlight of the day was going to the bakery wasn't the idea she had about her future.

Nevertheless, after living in Montoire for the last five years, she called it home. Even if the feeling of it was missing, deep down. It had been the place she spent the longest time in so far. The place where she had friends and a job.

Habits. A husband.

Claire met Jacques six years ago in Paris. She was following along with Uncle Lamb who had been giving lectures about the Middle East at La Sorbonne and Jacques had been one of the students. It all happened very quickly. One morning, they were sharing cigarettes at Café de Flore and the next day, Claire was getting married and moving to Montoire.

While Jacques was a teacher at the local school, she took up the job as the librarian. The first few months had been dreadful. No one seemed to like to read in that goddamn village and the place was a mess. She spent most of her time rearranging books, throwing out old ones and ordering new ones. Slowly, the library became a place where the children came in to spend Saturday mornings, noses buried in books.

That summer had been particularly warm. The air was so thick, it was almost unbearable to sleep at night. There was something going around that worried people. *Talk of conflicts with the germans.* The elderly were scared another war would break in and chaos would ensue. Claire tried to ignore it, along with all the rumours. *One world war had been enough — she hoped, more than she thought.* She refused to think about what might happen if, indeed, another one would suddenly erupt.

She had not known the first one but the stories she heard and read in books had been enough to realise what sort of atrocities were bound to happen. So whenever her mind drifted towards a what if, she quickly brushed it off and got back to her occupations.

On Saturdays, the library always closed at noon. Like every week, Claire made sure the place was tidy, the books in place, before locking up to make her way home. Briefly, she stopped by the bakery to grab some bread and pastries to bring back with her.

"Bonjour madame Morrin," she said kindly, walking inside the bakery. Bored or not, Claire would never get tired of the smell of freshly baked goods whenever she came here.

"Claire," the older lady smiled kindly. "Une baguette and two baba?"

"Yes," Claire smiled in turn, adjusting her hat. *"Merci."*

Life in a small village was pretty much the same for everyone. *Gossips, small talks.* People pretended to care about others' lives, only to go around with stories to entertain the rest. After spending her time in big cities like London and Cairo, it wasn't a mentality Claire particularly appreciated. But Montoire had been the place Jacques grew up in and she knew it meant a lot to him to live here and teach here, just like his father used to do.

"Did you hear about the germans?" Mrs Morrin asked, packing up the pastries. "I think we're about to go through another war, I'm afraid."

Shrugging, Claire took out some money to pay, "I'm sure Maréchal Pétain wouldn't let that happen."

"May God hear you, *ma chère,*" she answered softly, handing her the little bag.

"Don't trouble yourself over uncertainties, madame Morrin," Claire tried to be reassuring and smiled, taking the bag. "The sun is shining and there's no war right now. Why worry over something that will most likely not happen?"

The older lady didn't answer, she simply returned a tight smile. It seemed that the people of Montoire wanted a war simply to get away from the boredom they were feeling in this place. *She almost couldn't blame them.*

Ignoring it, Claire said a quick *'bonne après-midi'* and was off.

She still vividly remembered the day she arrived in Montoire. Everyone had come out to see the stranger arriving. The Englishwoman, they called her for months until finally, it became Claire. When she took the position at the library, she heard the rumours about how she must have seduced Monsieur Legrand for the job. And since Jacques had grown up in this village and was bound to another girl before he left to study in Paris, Claire had been labelled a homewrecker though she had wrecked no home.

It had been a difficult first year and even now, sometimes, she still felt out of place. Though her French was impeccable, if she mispronounced a word she would immediately be corrected. She apparently didn't dress properly for a librarian — wearing trousers and loses shirts she often stole from her husband. Her hair was never tamed nor brushed, instead, the curls were rebellious and had a mind of their own.

Claire was not meek nor obedient, and that, for the women of Montoire, was a sin in itself.

While it had taken time for her to adjust to her life in Montoire, it had taken her no time at all to fall in love with Jacques' childhood home. It was a modest size, but one of the larger homes in the village. It was separated from the other homes, and it always took Claire at least ten minutes to walk into town. There was a small iron fence with a gate that always squeaked when it opened, and a tree in the front with a swing where Jacques used to play as a boy.

The house was a two-story charmer, with a white exterior and pale blue shutters. Claire had prided herself in taking care of the greenery around the house and even growing a garden

outback. Not only was the house positioned over many acres of land, their backyard opened up to a small apple orchard. It was idyllic, and when the sun sets at night, making the house light up with a warm glow, there was nowhere else that Claire would rather be. She never truly had a home until moving here and it was what she'd be stuck with for the rest of her life, the prospect wasn't so bad.

She had only stepped one foot through the front door that the telephone in the kitchen was ringing. Not knowing where her husband was, she hurried to go and pick it up.

"Allô?" She said a bit out of breath, holding the horn between her shoulder and her head.

"Darling lamb, it's your favourite uncle."

She could hear the smile in his voice and it immediately prompted her to smile, just as much. "Uncle Lamb! I wasn't expecting to hear from you for at least another week."

"Oh well, I came back to London earlier than I had planned so I thought, why not call?!"

"I'm happy to hear you," she put the bag on the table and removed her hat while she talked. "How is everything up there?"

"Same old, same old. My office is dusty and I have way too many notes to go through from my trip to Cairo but other than this, I'm marvellous!"

"Well, that's good to hear," she smiled, leaning against the counter. In the garden, she could see Jacques fidgeting with the vegetables. He was wearing a white undershirt and wiped his forehead with a cloth every two minutes. He was tall and broad, with hair almost black and piercing green eyes. She could understand why most women were mad at her from marrying him.

"And in Montoire? I've received your last letter…"

"Go ahead," Claire sighed, leaning against the counter. "Say what you want to say, uncle Lamb."

"Well darling, it seems to me you are terribly bored —"

"I am…sometimes," she admitted. "But what do you expect from living in a little village? I knew what I got myself into when I agreed to follow Jacques here. And in truth, I really love working at the library, so I'm not *that* bored."

"I know you do and I know Jacques is a lovely husband but I'm also convinced you are meant to do more with your life than be a housewife who has a little job on the side, my darling."

"Uncle," she sighed, her eyes glued on her husband. She knew her uncle was right, and yet, she couldn't leave Montoire now. She couldn't leave Jacques. Maybe the grand life she had always imagined for herself was not meant to happen, after all. Maybe she could be fulfilled with less. She always knew the hardest bit in life was realising what you have may not be what you wanted but what circumstances can only give you, in the end.

"I'm sorry," Lamb said softly. "It's none of my business, I shouldn't pry on you this way. I know if you were not happy, you would be back in London already."

"Well, it's been five years. I think I would have come back by now," she reassured him, though she wasn't sure she wasn't trying to reassure herself there.

"Indeed," Quentin agreed. She didn't need to see him to know he was nodding his head while readjusting his round glasses.

"Now," she changed the subject. "When do you plan to go back to Cairo?"

"I don't have a definitive date just yet, I want to come and visit you for a little bit before I set off again!"

"Oh, that would be lovely," the idea alone able to bring another smile to her face. "It's been way too long! And you know you are always welcome to stay here with us."

"I promise I'll make the journey very soon, darling Claire."

She didn't know why, but at that moment, she knew she'd never see her uncle again. It wasn't the way he said it nor something in his voice. Simply a feeling deep in her bones.

"But first, let us pray another war doesn't erupt," he quickly added, his tone slightly changing. "This climate in town is unbearable, I didn't know it had gotten so bad when I was in Egypt."

Briefly, Claire closed her eyes and ignored the drop of sweat going down the back of her neck. "I'm tired of everyone talking about an impending war. That's all everyone talks about here! There won't be another fucking war, I'm sure of it."

Lamb stayed silent for several long seconds before he cleared his throat. He was used to his niece cursing. After all, he had learned her himself. "Who knows what tomorrow will bring? You of all people should know that, Claire."

"Yes, that's exactly why I don't like to think about tomorrow. There's nothing one can do about it."

"Look, I'll come to Montoire soon, alright? I have to go now but I'll write you this week and phone if I have the time."

"Alright, Uncle. Take care and talk to you soon."

"Talk soon, Claire bear," Lamb said softly.

Claire was not able to shake off the feeling of sadness she felt once hanging up on her uncle. Shaking her head of curls, she took a breath and started to prepare some tea. Jacques would be done in the garden soon, she reckoned.

Opening the cupboard to get some mugs, she realised the sugar jar was empty. Not that she needed an excuse to visit her neighbours, she decided this might as well do, anyway.

Gaëlle and Joseph Rosenberg lived in a smaller house down the path from her. They had been the most welcoming people when she had arrived in Montoire and since then, valuable friends she considered to be like family. Joseph was the postman while his wife was a kindergarten teacher. They both grew up in the village and knew Jacques since they were children.

Claire knocked on their bright red door and waited, hearing footsteps approaching. Gaëlle answered the door and smiled when she saw it was Claire. With dark chocolate skin like mousse, her friend was beautiful and had always been so welcoming to her.

"Bonjour, Claire!" Gaëlle kissed her cheek and opened the door wider. "Come in, come in."

"I'm so sorry to disturb you, I just came by to borrow some sugar. It seems we're all out," Claire shrugged as she stepped into the small kitchen. Gaëlle was already opening a cupboard to retrieve a small jar of white sugar.

"It's not a problem, my dear, you can have this jar. I'll get more in town this week." Gaëlle smiled and set the jar in front of Claire. "I was actually planning to stop by soon. I have some news of my own. Won't you sit for a while?"

The two women sat down at the kitchen table, and Claire ran her fingers lightly over the blue and white tablecloth. The sun was shining in the room, heating it up, but the window was opening letting in a welcomed cool breeze.

"Your news?" Claire smiled softly, crossing one leg over the other.

Gaëlle couldn't stop the smile spreading on her lips. "You know that Joseph and I have been trying for quite some time to have a child?"

"Oh, Gaëlle! Are you…?" Claire gasped, reaching for the other woman's hand.

"Oui!" Gaëlle practically squealed. "I am most likely eight or ten weeks along. We are so pleased. Joseph is worried about the timing — with the talk of war and everything, but I told him that babies don't know what time is or war for that matter."

"I'm so happy for you both," she smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. Claire and Jacques had been trying for a baby for years since they first married in fact, but they had not been blessed. "You and Joseph will be wonderful parents to this baby, I know it!"

Gaëlle squeezed her hand tight, understanding that while this news was joyous, it also brought up sad memories for Claire. "It will happen for you one day too, Claire. When the time is right, when you are ready."

"Oh well," Claire sniffed, wiping her nose on the back of her hand. "I should get back to Jacques. He'll be wondering where I am!"

"It was lovely to see you as always," Gaëlle stood up and walked Claire to the front door. "Enjoy the sugar, and if you need anything else, my door is always open, but you know that."

They parted, and Claire made her way back to her own house next door.

"There you are!" Jacques exclaimed as she stepped through the gate. He was smiling slightly, wiping his hands on a towel.

"I saw the pastries in the kitchen and I wondered where you might have gone?"

Claire held up the jar, "We ran out of sugar so I went to get some at Gaëlle's. I wanted to make tea."

"Ah, you and your tea," his smile grew as he pulled her closer. "You can take the girl out of England but you can't take England out of the girl."

"Well if coffee here didn't taste like grass water, I might consider drinking it instead of tea," she made a face.

"I can't fault you," Jacques kissed the tip of her nose and pulled her inside the house.

Following him, Claire hesitated about sharing the baby news with him. She knew he'd be thrilled for their friends but she also was aware how much he wanted to be a father. Unable to give him a child had made her feel inadequate. She didn't want to make him feel this way towards her yet again unless she couldn't help it.

As she prepared the tea, she noticed how unusually silent her husband was being. He smoked his cigarette while sitting at the table, absently glancing out of the window.

"My uncle called earlier," she said nonchalantly, pouring the tea in the cups. "He wants to come to visit soon."

"He should, it's been a while," Jacques smiled softly, looking at her.

Claire smiled in turn, trying to ignore the sudden thickness in the air. Maybe Jacques had a rough week at work and simply worried about his job. It happened often. Without a word, she put the cups on the table and sat down. She poured some milk in her own cup, trying to ignore her husband's eyes on her. All of a sudden, she felt like a shy schoolgirl who was being watched by her crush.

"How was your morning at the library?" He asked, crushing his cigarette into the ashtray. Leaning back, he watched her.

"It was all right, rather calm, actually." She took a sip of tea, burning the tip of her tongue on the boiling liquid. "Which was nice, I could rearrange most of the sections."

"Good," he took her hand, lightly stroking it. "I've cleaned up the vegetable garden and picked up what could be. I think we should preserve what we can for the winter."

"It's barely September and you are already thinking about winter?" She grinned, almost amused. Jacques, contradictory to her, always thought about tomorrow. Prepared for the future while she cruised around life living day by day.

"Well, someone's got to think about it." He remarked, bringing her hand to his lips.

"Mmh," she answered, picking up a cigarette and a box of matches. Slowly, she took a long drag and let the smoke burn down her gullet for a brief moment. When she blew out the smoke, she attentively watched her husband's face.

"What's the matter with you, Jacques? Is something bothering you? Something happened at work?"

Jacques tensed and stood straighter on his chair. He swallowed, almost painfully, it seemed. And whatever passed through his eyes frightened Claire, all of a sudden.

"I've received a letter this morning…" his voice was barely a whisper. So low she wasn't sure she had even heard anything.

"What do you mean, a letter?" Frowning, she racked her brain to find out what it could be. Jacques had no family left, it couldn't be bad news about relatives.

"Just say it for God's sake, you're worrying me."

"They are recruiting men to train in case of a fight with the Germans occurring. I've been, along with most of the men of the village, called into training."

Claire stomach sunk. She was speechless and the sour taste in her mouth gave her a sudden feeling of nausea. "You..you've been drafted?"

Nodding slowly, Jacques' eyes dropped to their linked hands. "I'm afraid so."

"But you're a teacher, you can't just leave the school like this to go fight for a war that will likely not happen —"

"Claire…I'm afraid the war will happen. Otherwise, they wouldn't bother calling men in."

"It's just useless prevention! The Germans won't invade anyone and no one will start a useless fight. It didn't help matters the first time it happened, I'm sure it's not about to happen again."

"I don't have a choice, anyway. War or not, I've been called and I have to show up."

Claire actually felt like she was suddenly suffocating. The heat was unbearable and her husband's common sense seemed to have disappeared. "You can't leave."

The prospect of a war wasn't too joyful but the one of finding herself alone in Montoire, while Jacques would be off somewhere with no guarantee of ever seeing him again was actually worse. She barely knew how to function here. Without him, she had no idea of it at all.

"I'll come back," he got up and pulled her up slowly. Wrapping his arm around her waist, he used his other hand to cup her cheek. "I promise you I'll be back, Claire."

"The war won't happen," she repeated softly, barely a whisper. "It won't."

"Then I'll be back even quicker than planned," he smiled softly, resting his forehead against her.

"What am I going to do here alone?" She whispered, trying to prevent her voice from breaking.

Closing her eyes, Claire did not hear his answer to her question. Deep down, she knew the war would happen. All this time, she had simply tried to convince herself of the contrary — though, she did not know why. As much as she tried to hide it, she was frightened.

Frightened of a future she never wanted to think about.

On September 1st, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland from the west; two days later, France and Britain declared war on Germany and what would be known as World War II began.

For Claire, along millions of others, life would never be the same.

An Unwelcome Guest

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading!

Jacques had been gone for nearly three months. Claire had grown accustomed to sleeping with someone in her bed, and so for the last several months, she had hardly slept well at all. It wasn't only because she missed her husband's presence, it was mostly because she was trying not to imagine the worst happening.

In such a short time, so much had changed already.

Life in the village had shifted too. Some people were afraid, others hopeful. Some had packed up and left for Paris or to foreign countries. Barely any news had come out since the men had left and war had been declared. No matter how many times Claire sat by the radio to grasp the littlest thing.

Food was still plenty but it'd be a matter of time before they would have to start rationing. Listening to what Jacques had suggested before leaving, she gathered all the vegetables from their garden and preserved them for the impending winter.

December would arrive, bringing along the cold and most certainly, the snow. Thankfully, Claire's education with Uncle Lamb had forged her to live in the most uncomfortable situations. And she had a talent for chopping wood like no other.

Most of the men of the village had been drafted, except for the elderly or people like Joe, who had been crippled by a car accident in his youth and carried himself with a cane. Gaëlle was starting to show, the pregnancy going well even in those uncertain times. The baby was the little glimmer of hope in the Rosenberg's household. Being a witness to such a thing helped Claire more than she cared to admit.

When Claire woke up that morning, she felt very cold. The summer had long gone, leaving autumn that seemed gloomy and morose — much like the morale around Montoire. *It rained a lot, the wind never ceased.*

However, that morning, the sky was blue and the sun was shining again.

It was an odd feeling to realise nature didn't care about what was happening in the World. War or not, the sun would come up and shine. No matter how crisp the air might be.

Like every morning, Claire got up, wrapped in a plaid. She made her way down to the kitchen to make some tea and eat a toast. It was the last of her loaf and she made a mental

note to go to the bakery, later that day. She turned on the radio and stared at her garden, watching the yellow of the leaves that used to be a vibrant green.

Her mind was clogged with thoughts of Jacques and what he might be doing. *How he might be feeling?* His last letter had arrived three weeks ago. Hopefully, a new one would arrive soon and ease her worries. *Even so slightly.* She had news of her uncle, who was still in London. Lamb was preparing to leave for Cairo as soon as he could but he proved to be difficult when the British Museum kept asking for his expertise, even during wartime.

Lambert was in high spirits, however, in his last letter. He had gone through one war, this one wasn't scaring him much more, he had said.

The knock that came at the door made her jump slightly, still lost in her thoughts of what tomorrow might bring, it felt like a rude awakening. She quickly let the kettle boiling and went to answer the door to find a smiling Gäelle looking at her.

"Oh hello there," she smiled warmly at the sight of her friend, glowing with life.

"I'm sorry to come in so early," Gaëlle apologized, resting her hand on her burgeoning stomach.

"I was headed to the village and I thought you might want to accompany me? I need some bread for the week."

"Come in a minute," Claire stepped aside to let her in. "I'll get quickly dressed and we can head off! I need bread too."

"Do you want some tea? I was making myself a cuppa." Claire pointed to the kitchen, ignoring the fact she was sleeping in her husband's flannel pyjamas. The look finished by a pair of thick woollen socks uncle Lamb had bought her for Christmas, a couple of years ago.

"Yes, I suppose we're not in a rush," her friend smiled, following her towards the large kitchen.

"It's such a beautiful day outside," Claire remarked, taking the whistling kettle from the stove. She poured some water in the teapot before adding early grey. Briefly, she wondered how much longer she'll be able to get some.

"It is! Bit cold but lovely, nonetheless. It's nice to see the sun," Gäelle smiled absently, sitting down.

"Right," she agreed, pouring the tea in two cups and sitting down at the table. "Careful, it's boiling."

"Thank you," the other woman smiled again, taking the cup carefully. "How are you doing?"

"I should be the one asking you that," Claire smiled, taking a sip of her drink. She burned the tip of her tongue but ignored the slight pain.

"Well, I'm fine, still sick in the morning but fine. I meant…how are you holding up with Jacques gone?"

"Oh," Claire paused, still trying to hide how she was truly feeling.

"It's not very ideal but there's nothing we can do about it except wait. Hopefully, this stupid war will be over soon and Jacques will come in running through the front door."

"Do you think it'll keep going for very long? Nothing seems to be happening, anyway. And Maréchal Pétain keeps reassuring everyone —"

"Exactly." Claire forced a smile, trying to convince herself.

"All talk and no action. It'll be over in a month, I bet. Two, at worse."

"You know…I feel like Joe is almost sad he's not been drafted," Gaëlle admitted, her eyes not meeting Claire's. "He feels like some inadequate man with a cane who can't fight for his own country."

"There's no fight going on, as of right now. He's lucky he's home with you and the baby," Claire smiled softly. *If only Jacques would be home.*

"That's what I remind him every day but you know how men are." She sighed, shaking her head.

Nodding, Claire couldn't prevent the tear from escaping her eyes. Something her friend caught, "Oh Claire, don't. Jacques will be home before you know it." She took her hand and squeezed it in sympathy.

"I'm sorry. Of course, he will," she forced another smile, wiping the tear. "I'll go and get dressed so we can leave."

Getting up, she took her cup with her and disappeared from the kitchen to go upstairs. Unguarded and hidden from her friend, she let the tears roam free as she got dressed. Tears of fear about what was happening. *What would happen?* And all the people that would be lost. No matter how many times Claire tried to convince herself — or others — that the war would be over without a fuss, deep down, she knew it wouldn't be the case.

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"What do you have left, madame Morrin?" Claire inquired, carefully studying the counter of the bakery. It was relatively early so most of the things were still there, though the selection had reduced since the war had started.

"Whatever your heart desires, ma chère."

"Give me two loaves and two pain of chocolat, please," she asked, looking in her purse for some money.

Claire wasn't too worried about this aspect of her life. Finances were relatively fine with her job at the library and her parents' inheritance, safely guarded at the bank. She could go through tough times if though times didn't last ten years.

"Voila," the older lady handed her the bag quickly, taking the money in return.

Since Jacques had left, the little respect the people had gathered for Claire seemed to have evaporated all over again. She knew she was an outsider, someone that truly didn't belong in the small French village, and she couldn't go a day without being reminded of it.

She often wondered what it was that made her say yes to Jacques in the first place. Moving to France and starting a new life with him. Maybe it was because he was the first person to ask her to marry him, to tell her that he loved her. Claire loved her husband, but she couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing — it always had been missing.

Stuffing the wrapped loaves into her bag, she walked out of the shop. She stood outside on the sidewalk, waiting for Gäelle and took a deep breath. From the outside, the village looked unchanged. But when one took a closer look, they would find that small shops had been closed up, along with houses left unoccupied. It was little details like this that Claire would always remember — when everything finally changed for the worse.

Gäelle came out of the bakery a few moments later and the two women fell into stride, walking at a slow pace.

"I wonder how much longer we will actually have enough bread to buy," Claire said absently. "I've heard women in the village talking about rations and how it's just a matter of time."

"I suppose it will happen soon," Gäelle nodded, one hand resting on her stomach. "The butcher's has already cut back. I expect everyone else to as well."

"Then I better savour this pain au chocolat," Claire smiled softly at her friend.

There was something different about the air around them — somehow it felt charged, almost electric. Claire looked up at the sky, but only saw blue and a few white fluffy clouds. There were others on the street walking with them, refugees that had left their towns in search of a better place. The Germans were coming, and Claire only hoped they would leave their quiet village alone.

Claire was about to ask Gäelle about her pregnancy when a loud sound cut her off. She turned her head to the right to see a fountain of dirt in the air.

An explosion.

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!"

"What's going on?" Gäelle gasped and bumped into Claire.

To her left, another bomb dropped and that's when Claire saw them. Planes in the air — *german planes*. All around them, people started running in all directions, looking for safety in a field where nothing could cover them.

"Come!" Clarie grabbed Gäelle's hand and they ran as fast as they could towards a tall tree; it was the only thing nearby that offered any protection. Claire's heart was beating out of her chest and in her ears. Screams filled the air, as did the roaring from the planes above. She knew they probably shouldn't stay in one place, but Gäelle was pregnant and they could only get so far.

The two women crouched down and covered their heads, waiting for the storm to pass. There was a ringing in Claire's ears, and a taste of dirt in her mouth, smoke everywhere. What could have been minutes or hours later, Claire looked up to see what was once a beautiful field of grain, now a burial ground. She thought her vision was deceiving her.

Bodies lay scattered around them, and Claire stood shakily, her knees wobbling as she tried not to vomit. They'd just been bombed, and the smell of death lingered in the air. Claire turned back to Gäelle and helped her to her feet, checking to see if she was okay before walking out beside the dirt road.

She had to take a step back almost immediately or else she would have been hit by a passing car. It honked to get people to move, and then several more cars followed, and then finally tanks.

"Oh God," Gäelle whispered, grabbing her hand. "They've arrived, haven't they?"

"And they've made quite the entrance," Claire said, still shocked by the last several minutes. She felt a sickening feeling in her stomach but did her best to ignore it.

There was a strangled cry behind her, and she turned to see an older gentleman lying on the ground, covered in his own blood. She ran to him, and knelt, grabbing his hand.

"*Monsieur*," Claire said softly and felt for a pulse. It was beating slowly, and the man was very cold. Her eyes trailed down his body, and that's when she saw the wound — his leg had been blown clean off.

"It's going to be okay," she said soothingly and squeezed his hand. "You're going to be okay, help is on the way." She had no idea if help was coming at all, but it felt like the right thing to say to this dying man.

Gäelle stood watching, her arms crossed protectively over her belly and she was crying. Claire knew there was nothing she could do to save this man. She'd never felt more helpless in all her life. If this was how it was going to be — bombs and death and germans taking over — it was then that she realized it was going to be a long bloody war.

Suddenly, the man's grip on her hand loosened and he went slack and the moans left his lips for the last time. Claire wasn't very religious, but she sent up a prayer, crossed her chest and folded the man's hand over his heart. There was no point in trying to move his body because she didn't know what she would do with him. She removed her scarf and covered him with it, trying to bring him one last spur of dignity, given the situation.

Returning to Gäelle, she grabbed her hand, not caring about the blood that now smeared on her clothes. The cars were still coming one after the other and it took everything in Claire not

to run out in front of one — whether to be hit and die or to try and stop them, she didn't know.

The cars came to a halt, as up ahead they had to navigate around a fallen tree. Claire looked at one of the cars and met a pair of bright blue eyes. The blue eyes belonged to a man sitting in the passenger seat, with bright red hair peeking out of his hat. She thought she saw him smile at her before the car began moving again.

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Claire couldn't shake off the feelings of what had happened earlier in the day. She could still smell the smoke clogging at her throat and hear the explosions ringing in her ears. She couldn't remove the image of the lifeless bodies all around her. But most of all, she couldn't shake off the feelings of those blue eyes locking with hers.

The Germans had arrived to occupy the village. From this day forward, nothing would be the same. *It meant the war had truly begun.* With most of the men gone from the village, the German soldiers were going to be free to do as they pleased, knowing the fear they bestowed upon the habitants of Montoire.

Usually, a bath had the power to calm Claire down but tonight, it only seemed to make everything worse. *How much longer will warm water be available? Or water, at all?* How much longer normality — routines and mundane things —would not seem to be forced activities to try and maintain some decency? She was afraid to find out the answers.

Afraid of the unknown. Something she used to relish in. She never wanted to know what tomorrow would bring and now, she was desperate for it. Everyone was expected to go on with their lives as if nothing was happening. To show up at work, make conversations, or simply live.

It was impossible.

Now the prospect of seeing Jacques come home seemed to grow fainter with each passing minute. She wasn't very confident it would improve anytime soon.

Gaëlle had been shaken by the events as they make their way back home and since the explosions, more people from the village had packed up and started to flee towards parts that were not yet occupied. *How long would it last?* Only God knew, and even that, Claire wasn't so sure.

The water started to get cold but Claire couldn't bring herself to get out, just yet. As if staying in the bath had frozen time and she couldn't pretend nothing had changed. *Nothing was happening.* She would have stayed in the water forever if she could have. If it meant whatever was happening outside wasn't real.

But it was.

Deciding to go and write Jacques a letter about the events of the day, Claire got out and dried her body, shivering slightly. She grabbed her bathrobe and put it on, along with the woollen

socks.

She followed the heat down the stairs and grabbed some paper and a pen before sitting at the table, in front of the fireplace. The warmth was a welcome companion as she wrote, trying to articulate her feelings and the horrendous things that happened in the early afternoon. She was almost done with a third page when a knock came at the door.

It was late, and the only person she could think that would come to her at this hour was Gäelle. Claire stood up, tying the robe tight around her body and walked to answer the door. When she opened it, the person standing before her was not her best friend.

"Madame," said a tall man with a thick Scottish accent. "I've been billeted wi' ye. Ye have a verra nice home."

"What?" Was all that Claire could manage and then she looked into his eyes and saw blue.

The same blue from earlier. A blue she found herself drowning in, unable to escape.

His stature should have scared her. His german uniform as well. But the goosebumps erupting all over her skin had nothing to do with fears. Or not as much as she tried to convince herself it did, anyway.

"Captain James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser, madame."

Resistance

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading!

Claire blinked a couple of times, trying to assess the situation. She was in her robe, standing in front of a German officer, in full uniform who was basically taking possession of her house.

Her home

"Madam?" He asked softly, reaching to touch her arm.

At that, Claire hissed and took a step back, pulling at her robe to hide her exposed neck. "Do not touch me."

"I'm verra sorry, madam," the officer bowed his head. "I have been told that this is my new place of residence for the time being. I apologize for any inconvenience."

Claire thought it odd that he would even care that this was putting her out. She had had very little contact with germans in the past, and while not all of them were rude or bad people, the officers were usually cruel with only the worst intentions.

"I'm afraid this is my home and you are not invited to share it, sir." She said firmly, crossing her arms.

The man looked rather uncomfortable at this, his hat tucked under one arm. "Madam, if ye dinna allow me inside, I will have to report this to my commandin' officer. I dinna wish to do this, but I suppose I can sleep out on the grass…" The man turned to leave.

"Wait," Claire cursed herself for doing what she was about to do. The last thing she wanted was more soldiers coming to her house. "You can stay."

"Are ye sure 'tis safe?" The man joked, but Claire didn't laugh. "Ye can place me anywhere. I am no' a man of luxuries, madam."

"You may stay in the bedroom downstairs," Claire said again. "As long as you respect my home and everything inside of it. I'm not afraid of you." She said this confidently, but in reality, she was terrified.

"Well madam," the soldier bowed his head at her and stuck out his hand which Claire did not take. "As I said, I'm officer James Alexander Malcolm MacKenzie Fraser. It's verra pleasant to meet ye."

"I'm Mrs Beauchamp Landau," she watched him before adding, "Claire. But you may not call me that."

Nodding, the officer smiled, "I willna then, madam. Will ye be so kind as to show me the room? 'Tis rather late and I'm afraid I had been on the road for long hours today —"

"I saw you earlier," she stood before him as he tried to step inside. "At the fields, you know…after a couple of bombs were dropped on innocent people who were simply trying to leave the village."

"That was ye," James said, recalling earlier that day. He had a far off look in his eyes. One that notified Claire he wasn't pleased either about what happened earlier.

"I thought ye looked familiar."

"Yes, well I washed off the blood." Claire spat out, anger from the event of earlier reeling. "It was quite an entrance you all made."

James flinched at this but Claire didn't feel sorry for her words at all. There was not an ounce of compassion she had for him or for his fellow men.

"I am sorry ye were caught in that," he said, sounding truly remorseful. "T'wasn't my doin'."

"You can stay here because I don't have a single choice in the matter, officer. But do not think yourself welcome in my home. Is that understood?" Claire stepped aside and let him in.

"Aye, 'tis verra clear, madam," James walked inside, carrying his suitcase. He deposited his hat on the little table by the door — just like Jacques did every time he came home. The sight alone was enough to make Claire go dizzy.

This was her life now.

War and an enemy soldier under her roof, while her husband was off fighting. In all her life, she had never felt so utterly useless as she did just now.

James turned around, looking at her, "Madam? Which was in the room, please?"

"By the kitchen, to your left," she answered faintly, pointing towards his new residence.

"I thank ye kindly." Bowing his head, he watched her for a brief moment that seemed to last forever before he made his way towards the guest room.

Claire shivered and waited until she heard the door closing to hurry up the stairs to her own bedroom and lock the door. She took a deep breath, then another, trying to assess what had just happened.

"Bloody hell," she whispered, sitting on her bed.

The village being occupied was one thing.

Housing a soldier was quite another.

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Claire barely slept that night. Save for some time when her body succumbed to slumber because it needed to and not because she wanted to. Whenever that happened, images of the bombing played in her mind and she'd wake, breathless and sweating. *In panic.* She would eventually calm herself down before remembering who was sleeping downstairs.

It was still dark when she decided to get up — hoping Fraser was still very much asleep so she could enjoy some tea in peace. She had to go and see if Gaëlle and Joe had been blessed with a soldier, too, or if she was alone in her misery. Their house was smaller than hers and slightly less nice, it wouldn't surprise her if no soldier had come knocking on their door.

And in all honesty, for her friends' peace of mind, she hoped none had.

However, before going downstairs, Claire changed from her night robe to some proper clothes. She didn't want Fraser to see her like he had last night. He made her feel uneasy… uncomfortable in her own home as if she did not belong here anymore.

She had never felt like she belonged here but this was even worse than usual.

Claire grabbed a knitted sweater and some tweed pants she liked to wear. She never really bothered with dresses and skirts — *much to the ladies of the village horror* — and she wouldn't start now. She pinned her curls up as properly as one could given such untameable hair and she went downstairs, as quickly as possible. Cursing under her breath every time the wooden floor cracked under her feet.

To her surprise, Fraser was sitting at her dining room table with a steaming cup of coffee and papers spread out before him.

"Good morning, madam," he smiled kindly. "I helped myself to the coffee. There should be enough if ye would like a cup."

Claire desperately wanted coffee and the smell of it was making her mouth water, but she wouldn't accept anything from him — not food, especially not his kindness he was putting on for show.

"I will be leavin' shortly," he said when she didn't reply. "I won't be here at all except to sleep. Some days ye may no' even notice my presence."

"Thank God for that," Claire muttered under her breath. She didn't even want to eat while he was still here. Instead, she grabbed her coat from the hook and headed outside, making sure that the door slammed on her way out.

It would take all of her self control to hold her tongue when she was around Fraser. *There was something about him that drove her absolutely insane.* Perhaps it was his kindness, or whatever attitude he was trying to display. She wasn't here to play his host. He was the one

that had come into her home without invitation and now was drinking her coffee, offering her a cup as if it was his house.

The cold hit her face like a brick wall and made her breath hiss. She didn't expect the temperature to drop so much in a day but then, she remembered it was probably barely six am. Sitting on the bench by the apple tree, she rubbed her hands together to warm them up and waited until she'd see Fraser come out of the house and leave. If she was smart, she'd be able to avoid him most of the time. If she had to start eating in her room for that, she would.

It didn't take very long for Fraser to walk out of the house, dressed as impeccable as he was when he arrived last night. His hat hiding most of the auburn hair on his head.

He gave her a look, their eyes locking for a moment. Goosebumps erupted on her skin — *goosebumps she couldn't attribute to the cold.*

Claire got up as best as she could, feeling her knees wobble. As he tipped his hat, she took her eyes away from his and went inside the house. Seeking warmth and a hiding place from his ocean eyes.

The coffee pot was half full, and as much as she hated wasting such precious coffee, she couldn't bring herself to drink it. Begrudgingly, she took the pot and slowly poured the rest down the sink, watching as it drained.

"You foolish woman," she cursed herself. "Should have just drank it." There was talk in town that soon they wouldn't even have coffee and what little the village had would be going first to the germans.

For the first time, Claire was actually glad she didn't have a child — only because that meant they wouldn't go hungry during this war. It was only herself that would starve if it came to that. She did worry, however, for her friends Joe and Gaëlle and their new baby that would come soon. *How would they manage?*

Claire grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter and went into her bedroom. There was something she needed to do now that Fraser had moved in and could only be done while he was away.

A string of pearls that belonged to her mother — *or so she was told* — was her most precious item of jewellery. Along with a handful of rings, including her wedding ring, Claire took her small jewellery box and walked outside, checking first that no one was around.

In their barn, hidden under a secret door, there was a cellar. Big enough for at least two people, and now for her most valuable belongings. A few of the paintings that had once been on display in the living room were already wrapped up and stored down here. The one gun that Jacques had been insistent on them owning was down here as well in case she ever needed it — *she hoped she didn't.*

Claire sighed and climbed down to put away her jewellery. There once was a time when she would dress up and go out dancing with Jacques, feeling beautiful and loved. Now, the mere

thought of dressing in anything other than every layer she owned to keep warm was unimaginable.

Once everything was hidden and her task complete, Claire went back into her house to get ready for a day at the library. She didn't want to go to the village again but she had no other choice. She had to open and pretend nothing had changed. As if people would come in to get books like any normal day.

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By four in the afternoon, and after a deserted day at the library, Claire decided to lock up and leave.

Barely anyone had bothered coming in and she couldn't blame them. The village was now occupied by the Germans. One couldn't walk freely without being stared at by the soldiers who seemed much more menacing than Fraser. They all tried to be polite, to smile and pretend they were only friendly faces, here to protect the village, but everyone knew it wasn't the case.

Not looking forward to getting home to Fraser, she decided to stop by the little bistro she loved so much. In a previous life, this place had been a happy one. Birthday dinners, Sunday lunches with Jacques. It was the most vibrant place in the village...*until now.*

Now, it was almost empty. Safe for a few young men gathered at the bar who seemed in deep conversation. They all turned to look at her when she stepped in and smiled politely before returning to their quiet conversation.

Louise, the owner was near them, cleaning some plates and whatnot. Her husband too had been drafted along Jacques, they were around the same age and childhood friends.

"Bonjour," Claire said, smiling softly before walking towards her usual table by the window. From there, she could see the main square of the village. A few children playing under their mothers' supervision. And near the fountain, some germans were washing off, as if it was a public bathroom.

Bastards, she mumbled under her breath.

"What can I get you?" Louise appeared by the table, cloth resting on her shoulder. Her accent was thick and her English rather dusty but she always made the effort with Claire.

"Uhm," Claire thought for a second, looking at the blackboard with the suggestions on the wall. "Whatever soup you have and some bread. A glass of wine, please."

"Tout de suite," Louise smiled kindly, both women sharing a look of sadness hidden in their eyes. They were barely done with their twenties that they might soon become widows…all because of a senseless war.

Claire shook off the thought of her husband dying at the front and took a deep breath. *At any moment, the war could be over.* She had to live on this hope in order to get up in the morning.

At any moment, Jacques could be back and the german officer occupying her home would be gone. As quickly as he showed up.

She didn't know what to think of Fraser. He seemed polite enough. Kind, sometimes even, but she wasn't a fool. *He was a soldier.* One of the enemy camp, at that. He didn't seem to protest the boundaries she had imposed but he had only been there for a day, she had to remind herself. She couldn't be vulnerable with him. She couldn't show fears or he would take advantage of it, she was sure of that.

She had to function on auto-pilot: ignoring him as much as possible, hiding at the library if she could and talking to him as little as possible. The rest, she prayed silently, would fall into place and this would end soon.

"Voilà," Louise placed the tray on the table and winked. "Bon appétit!"

"Merci," Claire smiled, warming her hands onto the bowl. She wasn't looking forward to spending a winter engulfed in a war, that was for sure.

Louise touched her shoulder in a friendly gesture and walked away again. Near the bar, the group of men were still talking quietly, glancing around from time to time, as if they were afraid to be heard.

As much as she tried, Claire couldn't recall any of them. After all, Montoire was a small place and everyone knew one another. Plus, most of the younger men had been taken away to fight.

Looking up at them while she ate, one of them locked eyes with her. He seemed to be around her age, dressed in loose-fitting dark clothes and wearing a tweed flat cap. He stopped talking then until she broke contact and looked down at her food.

She heard a stool squeak and then footsteps coming her way. When she looked up, the man in question was looking down at her, an unreadable expression on his face.

"Are you pro-german, madame?" He asked casually, pulling the chair to sit in front of her.

Claire scoffed, "Do I look like I am to you? If so, tell me what it is so I can rectify it."

His lip flicked up, then, and he smiled, "No, you don't. Not really but I'd rather always ask before I start a conversation. You know, in the times we're living and such."

"You are English," she remarked, smiling in turn. It had been too long since she talked to a fellow compatriot.

"I see your sense of observation is quite acute."

"Well, I couldn't miss the accent. After all, it's not every day you meet a British person in Montoire, I would know."

"Indeed," he grinned, leaning back. "My name is Richard Thompson, madam."

"Claire Landau," she held out her hand. "Please to meet you, Richard."

"The pleasure's all mine," he shook her hand vigorously. "Like you said, it's not every day you meet an English person, in Montoire or in France, in general."

"I'd ask what brings you here but I guess the answer is rather simple?" She took a sip of her drink, watching him.

"If you're thinking about the war, you are quite right," he shrugged, glancing out the window towards the german soldiers. "I come all the way from Paris. Well, me and my friends over there," he tilted his head towards the bar.

"You should have stayed in Paris," she said, opening her bag to take out a cigarette. "Smoke?"

He shook his head, "No, thank you."

Watching him, she lit up her cigarette with a match and took a drag, "Really, you should have stayed in Paris. If you came here to find some rest from whatever bullshit is happening there, you came to the wrong place. Germans arrived yesterday and it's not going to bring anything bright in this already grey place."

"I won't be staying too long…" his voice grew quiet. "We'll be off to another village tomorrow morning. Actually, we've been going places to bring awareness of the dangers of the germans."

"That's sweet of you to do but I think most people are already aware —"

"There are rumours in Paris," he cut her off, almost whispering. "Rumors that by the time they'll arrive here, would be too late for people."

Claire frowned, blowing out some smoke. She tried to ignore the shiver running down her spine as he spoke.

"Would you be interested in helping us?"

"To do what, exactly?" She asked, leaning closer.

"Warn people." Richard quickly glanced around before grabbing a folded paper inside his front pocket.

"My guys and I, we do these leaflets," he handed it to her, once unfolded. "Put them around the villages, in mailboxes and such. It's not much but we hope it can help, at least until we find something else to do."

"We'll be gone tomorrow, with hope to be back but while we're off, we need someone to put these things around —"

"You want me to do it?" She whispered, looking around before looking at him. No one could hear them, given the music playing but she couldn't risk anything.

Richard nodded, "If you'd be willing to. You seem like the strong-minded type and not easily afraid. I've watched you walk in here, ignoring all the germans whistling after you, you're a tough one."

Claire shrugged, "I don't know about that. I'm just as afraid as everyone."

"Well, we all are," he smiled, touching her free hand. "But fears should not be stopping us here. Or a whole lot of innocent people are going to die. They're already dying, as we speak."

"I'll do it," she said simply, taking another drag. "Whatever you need me to do, I'll do it. You should know I have a german stationed at my house, however."

"Do you have somewhere to hide the leaflets? We don't have that many, as of right now but we'll be back with more in a couple of weeks, or so."

Claire grabbed her basket and put it on the table, "Put whatever you need in there, I'll hide it."

"Are you sure?" He asked again, looking at her. "If you get caught, I don't know what they'll do to you but I can only imagine."

"I said, put whatever you need in there." She repeated, finishing her cigarette.

If this was a way to be helpful, she'd gladly take it. She was tired of feeling useless. Afraid or not, dangerous or not, she'll do what was needed to help, even in a small way. And if she got caught, what was life compared to hundreds or thousands of others that could be saved.

The Scot

Thank you so much for reading!

Claire returned home with the secret leaflets hidden under a cloth in her basket. She knew it was dangerous, especially with Fraser in her home, but it was a risk she was willing to take. And the adrenaline she was experiencing was all the more welcome, knowing she was finally being useful in this bloody war.

Speaking of the red-headed soldier, he was standing near the gate when she approached her home.

"Bonjour, madam," he smiled, tipping his hat at her. "Can I help you wi' yer wee basket?"

"No, thank you. I can manage on my own," she quickly answered. Her heart beating rapidly as she glanced down and saw a small corner of one of the leaflets sticking out from under the cloth.

"I insist," Fraser said and before she could say no again, his hand was on the basket, taking it from her. She thought he would look inside, but thankfully, he only joined her as she walked up to the house and inside.

"I'll take that back now, to put it in the pantry," Claire forced a smile, trying to get the basket out of his hands as soon as possible. If he found the leaflets, she was done.

"Dinna fash, I can do it for ye," Fraser offered. "I should learn where things go around here if I'm goin' to be helpful."

"You can be helpful by minding your own business and not touching my things, sir. That would be greatly appreciated." Claire took the basket from him and walked away, her ears ringing.

"Madam, I ken you dinna like my presence here but given the circumstances, ye will have to accommodate." He followed her quickly.

"I am accommodating, though I did not really have a choice in the matter now, did I? Like I have told you once, already, I will pretend you do not exist in my home while I try and keep some amount of normality and decency during this trying time." Claire stopped, turning around to look at him. Only then did she realise just how close to her he was. Glancing down at her, their faces were at an obscenely close distance.

"I do not care what you do with your time. I do not care what you do with your life and I certainly do not give a flying fuck about what you think, sir."

"Very well, madam." He said softly, his breath tickling her cheek.

"I, in comparison, do verra much care for ye to know that I mean no disturbance. Whatever ye might think, I'd rather be in my own home and no' far away, wi'tout any idea if I'll ever see my family again."

"That's how war works, sir." She added, before disappearing into the kitchen.

For a moment there, Fraser had shown a fragment of humanity and she had remembered that he wasn't only a soldier. He was a man, with a story who had been swept into this just like everyone else.

For a second, she felt sorry for him.

"Are you married, Captain?" Claire asked him, her curiosity getting the best of her.

"Aye," he smiled softly, walking over to her.

"I married Vivian only two years ago, but I've spent most of that time away from her. I often wonder if she'll even ken who I am when I return… if I return, that is."

"My husband's name is Jacques," Claire replied. She had never wanted to tell him anything personal before, but it felt only right to exchange these details.

"Would you like a bit of cheese?"

"Aye, thank ye kindly," Fraser nodded and took a seat at the dining table while Claire fixed up an assortment of cheese and fruits, carrying the small plate back to join him. He seemed to have forgotten about her basket full of leaflets, which was exactly what she wanted.

"I've noticed that you have a Scottish accent," Claire commented, finding herself unable to stop talking to him.

"But you're fighting with the germans?" She frowned. She found it odd but the shock and anger of having him here had surpassed her will to know, until now.

Jamie took a bite of cheese, nodding, "I was born in Scotland, aye. I lived there for ten years until both of my parents passed, then that's when I moved to Germany. My uncle Dougal lives there ye ken, with his wife Geillis. They were my only relatives left so I had no choice. The accent stuck I suppose."

"And the red hair," Claire pointed. "I haven't seen many germans with hair as bright as yours. It makes you stand out."

"Aye," he chuckled. "Tis usually why I never take my hat off. I'm taller than most men around here, and wi' the accent, I dinna need anythin' else to draw attention to myself.

Believe it or no', Madam, but I dinna want to be here fightin'. I'd much rather be home and safe, I never wanted to be part of the army, I simply followed along wi' my uncle's orders."

Claire looked down at her hands, feeling her heart soften for him at this admission. *Perhaps he wasn't as bad as she first thought.*

"Do you have any children, James?" She called him by his Christian name for the first time and it didn't go unnoticed by the captain.

He had a slight glint in his eyes as he looked at her. "No, we dinna. Tis a bit hard to start any sort of family when yer away from yer wife. I havena seen any bairns around here, so I take ye dinna have any of yer own?"

"No," Claire said softly. "We haven't been so lucky. Although I suppose it's easier now without a child. At least it's only me that will go hungry and cold."

Fraser reached out and placed his hand over hers, making her flinch. "I promise ye willna go hungry, nor starve, as long as I'm here wi' ye. Claire…" her name on his lips sounded strange, but also like he'd been saying it all his life.

"I want to keep ye safe, as much as I'm able to. I ken we've no' gotten off to a great start, but I hope we can at least be friendly."

"Everyone in the village would hate me if I was friendly with the enemy," Claire said and pulled her hand back slowly from his. She didn't want to admit to herself how nice it felt to be touched.

"The looks I would get, the things they would say. I am sorry that you're away from your family, but I cannot go consorting with you."

"Ye dinna have to acknowledge my presence in the village, madam," Fraser replied. "I only ask that we be civil whenever we are both here. It would make it easier for both of us… to have someone we can talk to, aye?"

"I suppose," Claire agreed. "Just don't tell me anything about the war. I want nothing to do with it. I couldn't bear to hear about all the atrocity."

Little did Fraser know, the leaflets in the pantry were telling everyone of the atrocities that the Germans were inflicting, but if he thought Claire was just a weak woman afraid of war, then he would never suspect her.

"I can agree to that," Fraser nodded. "I dinna like to bring work home wi' me anyways. Vivian didn't like me to talk about it either."

"You miss her." Claire didn't ask it as a question. She knew that he missed his wife, just like she missed her husband. This war had torn apart families, no matter what side you fought on.

"I count the days when this mess is over," he said softly and took a bite of cheese. "Perhaps I will return to Scotland once again. Although I barely remember it, if I'm honest. I have memories of my parents, but only vague."

"I don't remember my parents either," Claire felt her throat close up. "They died when I was very young, and I lived with my uncle Lambert ever since. I suppose you can tell by my accent that I am not French. Besides my maiden name and husband, I have no connections here."

"Ye and I are more alike than it seems, Sassenach," Fraser smiled tenderly.

"Both raised by our uncles and now living in a place that we dinna exactly belong."

"Sassenach?" Claire asked, searching her brain for what it could possibly mean.

"Excuse my manners," Fraser sat up a little straighter in the chair. "It's Gaelic for 'english person', or 'outlander'. Ye're an English rose growin' in the French countryside amongst the irises."

Claire's cheeks instantly turned pink at this compliment. Fraser was not at all who she thought he was. Hearing about his upbringing and how it was similar to her own made her rethink everything. He didn't want this war, either.

They had been staring at each other, both unable to break eye contact. His stare was intense — those bright blue eyes that looked into her whisky ones. She would have to be careful around him. Fraser was charming, attractive, and the nights were only growing colder and longer.

Clearing her throat, Claire got up and pretexted an empty glass of water she had to refill. Even with her back turned, she could feel his eyes on her. She pretended it had no effect, however, her wobbling knees and shaky hands had another theory.

"Yer husband is a soldier too?" She heard him asked.

"He's a teacher," she said before taking a sip of water. "Now a soldier but not by choice."

"Lots of those, these days." His voice grew quiet, almost as if he was talking about himself, too.

"Indeed," Claire sat down again, watching him. "Captain, are you and your men here to cause trouble? Montoire is full of women and children who have asked for nothing. You showing up here is frightening everyone — "

"We have been stationed here, we dinna want to cause trouble. We are just following orders and orders are that we occupy the village and keep things in check. Nothin' more."

"But —"

"And none of my men have caused troubles, as far as I'm aware, aye?"

"No," she swallowed the piece of cheese she was chewing. "Not yet, anyway."

"I dinna ask you to believe me if ye dinna want to but I'm askin' ye to trust me," Fraser looked at her, his eyes capturing hers, yet again.

"I'm no' your enemy, Claire. Ye dinna have to be scared of me, or anyone else, as long as I'm wi' ye."

 "Do not make promises you can't keep, sir." She answered faintly, not breaking eye contact.

"Do not underestimate me, madam," his voice had gone lower and suddenly, Claire felt like a warm wave had engulfed her. She was thankful her cardigan hid the goosebumps that erupted all over her arms.

When she didn't answer, Fraser took the last bit of cheese and held it out to her, waiting for Claire to make a move. As if she was a prey.

His prey.

Claire decided that taking the piece of cheese was a better idea than simply biting into him from his fingers. However, when their hands touched, some electric shock went through her veins and given the look he had on his face, she could swear he felt it too.

"Thank you," she quickly ate, avoiding his eyes.

"Where in Germany do you live? Berlin?"

"Aye," he nodded, leaning back. "Have ye ever been?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm in no hurry to visit, either."

"Weel, 'tis very grey. Bit depressin' if you look at the architecture too much," his lip flicked up into a smile.

"Do you like living there?" She asked, suddenly curious about Fraser. It was tempting to know everything about him.

"Do ye like livin' here?" He asked in return, crossing his arms.

"I am not going to answer that but I take it that your answer is the same as mine." Claire got up and cleaned up the table, given they were done eating.

"Do ye mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all," she stood by the sink and gave him a quick glance before gesturing to the counter next to her. "There is an ashtray here."

Fraser took out his pack of cigarettes from his front pocket and patted the other for matches, most likely.

"Do you need matches?" She asked, seeing he wasn't finding any.

"Aye, please." He got up, walking over to her.

Claire quickly wiped her hands on a towel and grabbed the box of matches in one of the drawers. Instinctively, she ignited one and turned to him.

Standing close, she lit his cigarette as he took a drag. The flame burning echoed the one in her stomach.

Scorching.

Fraser blew out some smoke and held the cigarette in front of her mouth. Claire didn't know if he was daring her. *She didn't care.* She closed her mouth on the cigarette and took a drag, her lips touching his fingers. She let the smoke burn her gullet and Fraser burn her insides.

Leaning against the counter, she felt the cold marble against her back and watched him take a drag in turn. Her lips tingling to taste his. Her body gravitating to his, like a magnet.

"Sassenach..." he whispered, brushing a curl, that had escaped her bun, away from her face.

A shriek from outside broke whatever bubble they found themselves into. Immediately, Claire took a step back from him, feeling the heat in her chest.

Gaëlle's voice resonated once more and without another word, Claire hurried outside to see what was happening next door. Leaving Fraser alone in her kitchen. She didn't realise he had been following her until she came to a sudden stop and he bumped into her from behind.

Claire froze, watching a bunch of German soldiers dragging Joe out of his own home, a crying Gäelle on the porch.

"What on earth is happening?!" Claire heard herself say. All the heads turned towards her, one of the soldiers smiling at her. It wasn't a kind smile.

"Captain Randall, what is happenin?" Fraser asked, coming to stand next to Claire.

"This man is under arrest for thievery, Fraser. Nothing to worry yourself over, I got it." The man that was Captain Randall flashed his teeth, his hand firmly planted on the gun on his belt. "Someone will think twice before stealing bread, again."

"Where are you taking him?" Gaëlle asked, through the tears. She was holding onto Joe's hand for dear life while a soldier was holding him in place.

Captain Randall ignored her and motioned to his men to take Joe away immediately, which they did.

"No, please!" Gaëlle cried, almost shouting, "Please, don't take him!"

Claire hurried over to her friend who had fallen onto her knees, watching her husband be taken away from her. God only knew where they were taking him and when he'd be back. If ever.

"Madam," Randall stopped her and smiled. He had the most repulsive look in his eyes and his thick German accent made it seem like he had swallow glass.

"A pleasure to meet you."

Swallowing, she held his gaze and waited until he walked away, joining his men into the vehicle. Once he was out of the way, she reached Gaëlle and kneeled down, wrapping her arms around her helpless friend, "Sssh."

"Where are they taking him?" She sobbed, holding onto Claire for dear life.

"I don't know," Claire said softly, holding her close. "We'll find out and bring him back, I promise you."

As she looked up, her eyes locked with Fraser's and the disgust she had first experienced upon his arrival in her home was back. She cursed herself for letting him fool her so much. Promising they were not here to cause trouble. Promising he was not her enemy.

They were both engulfed in this war but they were not on the same side, at all.

Occupation

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading!

For the past few weeks, Claire had successfully avoided Fraser like a plague. Since Joe's arrestation, she didn't want to have anything to do with the soldier — even if he was living under her roof. Breathing the same air. Sharing the same space.

Driving her mad.

If she was not at the library, she would be at Gaëlle's and when she had to be home, her bedroom became her sanctuary. But since her friend was devastated since Joe had been taken away, she found herself at their house more and more every day.

She woke up very early every day, dressing warmly to bike into town to scatter the leaflets all over the walls and shops' windows. This was driving the germans crazy and she was proud of this little accomplishment. Claire tended to forget this could very much get her in trouble if she was caught but she did not care.

Not anymore, anyway.

She had no news of her husband, no letters. She kept writing to him every week and praying for a response every time she'd walk to the letterbox in front of the house. Nothing came and what used to be time became an abstract concept almost foreign to her. *Hours melted into days and then into weeks.* She tried to keep track but most of the time, she would wake up in the morning and wondered which day it was.

The only solace she found was her position at the library. It was the only way to stay sane, taking care of the books. Rearranging them on the shelves or escaping in a story whenever she could. The library was her own little bubble of peace, where most of the time, she was alone with her thoughts.

Today, however, there was no such peace.

Only one person had come in since she had been there, and she had been behind the counter the entire time, flipping through a book and sipping tea. When the bell rang, announcing someone was entering, the last thing she expected to see was six germans rushing in.

"Excuse me?" she frowned, looking at them.

The soldiers were carrying large boxes and sat them down. They acted like Claire wasn't even there, and ignored her shouts of protestation.

"What exactly do you think you're doing?" She asked again, getting up from her desk.

"We have orders to remove all the books on this list, madame," one officer said, handing her the list in question – one she didn't care to even look at. The other men had already begun to remove books, tossing them aside as if their contents were worthless.

"But, you can't do this! They belong here, and people have the right to read them," Claire walked over to one of the boxes and picked up a book, setting it back on the shelf.

"Are you defying our orders, madame?" The officer close by snapped at her.

"You must let us take these or we will have to arrest you."

"Go ahead, then," Claire shouted and crossed her arms. "Arrest me."

The officer looked her up and down, his eyes lingering on Claire's chest, making her feel very uncomfortable. He looked like he wanted to do more than arrest her, and suddenly Claire wished she had never opened her mouth in the first place.

Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ.

The bell rang again, and Claire looked over to see Fraser standing in the door. He was in his usual uniform, looking less than amused at the scene before him.

"Ah, Fraser," the officer near Claire called. "You've arrived just in time to help us with this one. She's being stubborn. What she needs is a good slap and someone to teach her a lesson."

Claire couldn't speak, she was frozen in place, her eyes locked on Fraser's. His face didn't give any indication as to how or what he was feeling.

"No," Fraser replied firmly, glancing over at the officer, almost ignoring Claire's presence. "I believe yer orders were to remove the books, not harm an innocent woman."

"She was trying to put the books back, sir," the officer replied, rolling his eyes at Claire. "She should learn who's in charge around here!"

Jamie crossed the room and stood in front of Claire. "Ye'll take the books and that's it, officer Freidrich. I'll see ye back at the headquarters."

"Yes, *mein captain*," Freidrich bowed his head solemnly and continued to remove books.

Claire felt helpless and waited there, watching them destroy the library one shelf after the other. They were turned over without care, books were strewn across the room, and the germans left with boxes full of them.

Once they had all gone, Fraser was the only soldier left there. Still silent, he turned around to face her, but she didn't want to meet his eyes.

"Ye should learn when to stay silent, Sassenach or ye'll get yerself killed one of these days," he said seriously. "I ken ye dinna like them… or me, for that matter, but sometimes it's best to do as they say."

"Were you aware this was going to happen?!" She looked at him, shaking her head. "You knew and you said nothing to me, didn't you?"

"Sassenach…" he started but she didn't let him finish.

"Do not call me that!" She pushed past him and went over to her desk, gathering her things.

"I apologize for what happened but I canna disobey orders. I didn't know they would do this until this mornin' or I would have told you."

"Of course," she rolled her eyes, grabbing her coat.

"I swear to ye, Sass—"

"Fuck yourself, Fraser." She spat out, walking out the door.

Jamie stood there for a minute, sighing. Claire knew he couldn't follow her but she did not look forward to finding him at home later. She didn't look forward to being in his presence for as long as she'll have to — however much she knew his presence was the only comforting thing to her in this war.

As she walked through the village, trying to keep anger at bay, she realized all the shops had closed for the day and remembered she forgot her ration card at home when she left early this morning. Cursing herself, she hoped she'd have some food left or dinner tonight would be a cup of tea and a biscuit.

The smell of burning suddenly assaulted her nostrils. Looking around the corner, she saw the very same germans burning all the books they had stolen from her library. She stood there, powerless, angry and overall saddened. Nothing she could do would be enough to stop this without getting herself in trouble. And if it weren't for Fraser, earlier, she didn't know where she would have ended up.

Freidrich was looking at her intently, his arms crossed and his lip flicked up into a disgusting smile, causing a shiver to run down her spine.

"Fucking bastard," she whispered, knowing she was far away enough for them not to hear her.

"Good day, Madam," he said cheerily once she had started walking again. "I look forward to seeing you again!"

She ignored him, just like she ignored the soldiers' catcalling her whenever she was in the village and got on her bike, riding away as quickly as possible.

****

Claire hopped off her bike as soon as she rode through the gates of her home. She was still furious, and she was upset that nothing she did or said would improve the situation. The only thing she could do was continue to hand out leaflets — it didn't feel like much, but helping a little was better than nothing.

She had beat Jamie home, and there was no way of knowing when he would return. The last thing she wanted to do was be around him. Part of her wanted to believe that he was a decent man and that she could trust him. But the larger part of her didn't trust him, and probably never would.

The thought of Gaëlle, pregnant and sitting at home, worried about her husband was enough to bring Claire to tears again. She only hoped that no harm would come to Joe and that he would return home in time for their baby to be born.

Claire heard her stomach rumble and remembered how famished she was. She also remembered the last bits of cheese she kept in the kitchen but knowing Gaëlle was eating for two and didn't dare to show her face in the village, she decided to give her a visit and to bring along little food she had.

Knocking softly, she waited for an answer, looking around. Everything around their houses seemed unchanged. Untouched. No signs of war, nor bombs. It looked like a perfectly ordinary day in Montoire – just like all the days had been before this madness had started.

The door opened slowly, revealing the fearful face of her longtime friend. Once she realized who it was, Gaëlle relaxed and smiled softly, "Claire, bonjour."

"Hello darling," Claire smiled warmly, "I was wondering if you'd like some company and some cheese?"

"I"m not very hungry —"

"You've got to eat, Gaëlle. At least a little bit," Claire watched her. "Can I come in?"

Nodding, the woman opened the door wider and let her in. At least, she had no german soldier stationed at the house, which, even given the circumstances, was a welcome victory. Small but a victory nonetheless.

"You don't have to eat it now but keep it," Claire turned around to face her and handed her the little bag.

"Thank you," Gaëlle accepted it and gave her another half-hearted smile. She looked exhausted and sad. So sad, it broke Claire's heart.

"Of course," she touched her hand reassuringly and smiled.

"Come sit, I just made some tea," her friend offered and led her towards the little kitchen, where they sat many times over the years.

Claire remembered vividly the first time she had come in this house, welcomed by Gaëlle and Joe with open arms and open hearts. They had been the only people in the village accepting

of her and her marriage to Jacques. They were her family and she barely had one.

"How are you?" Gaëlle asked, pouring Claire a cup of tea. The swell of her belly was apparent under her apron and she had the loveliest pregnancy glow, even if the tiredness was written all over her beautiful face.

"I'm okay," Claire sat down, closing her eyes for a moment. She had not realized the headache pressing against her temples since she had left the village. "Germans came into the library to take books out and then burned them on the square."

"Bastards," her friend cursed, putting the mug on the table, "When will they leave us alone?"

"I wish I knew," Claire touched her hand, looking at her. "I know it's easy to say but for your sake and the one of the baby, you cannot be angry all day long, Gaëlle."

"They took my husband away, I don't know if I'll ever see Joe again…" her voice quivered. "How am I to stay sane? I'm pregnant, too. I can't do it," tears were strolling down her cheeks.

"I can't," she said again, her voice breaking.

Getting up, Claire wrapped her arms around her friend and held her close, "I know but Joe wouldn't want to see you like this, you know it."

She felt her nod against her. "I know."

"You have to be strong for Joe and for the baby. I know you feel alone, gosh, so do I…" Claire admitted, looking at her.

"But we have each other, right? No matter what, darling, I'm not abandoning you and the baby. When all of this will be over, and it will, Joe and Jacques will come back to us. I'm sure of it."

"Claire?" she asked softly, looking at her. "I need to ask a favour."

"Anything," she smiled. "Tell me."

"Could you…" she took a breath before continuing. "Could you ask your german about Joe? Maybe he knows something, maybe —"

"Gaëlle," Claire stood straighter. "He's not *my* german. I barely know what to do with him under my roof."

"I know but…please," she almost begged and the sound of her voice almost broke Claire's heart. "I just need to know that Joe is alive somewhere. I know I'm asking you a lot but *please*."

"Fine, I'll try to find out something. I promise," Claire told her, giving her a reassuring smile.

"Thank you," Gaëlle hugged her tightly. "Thank you so much."

"It's alright," Claire said, staring at the sight of her own house, outside the window.

How on earth was she going to ask any info about Joe to Fraser?

She didn't know. She wasn't in a hurry to find out, either. Not after the row they had at the library, earlier.

"You must also promise me that you'll eat the food I brought you," Claire squeezed her friend's hand. "You need to take care of yourself and that little baby of yours."

"I know," Gaëlle nodded. "I will, Claire. Once my stomach stops twisting in knots over Joe. I promise. And you need to stop bringing me food, you have been since Joe was taken away."

******

Later that evening, Claire sat by her own kitchen table, a cigarette at her lips. The radio was softly playing jazz like it has so many times before. *When things were normal.* When the war was only an impossible occurrence that wouldn't shatter her life.

Closing her eyes, she took a long drag and let the smoke burn down her gullet for a moment. It wasn't the most pleasant sensation but at least, it made her forget the hunger building in her stomach. After giving her rations to Gaëlle, she had come home to realize she had barely anything left other than tea and some biscuits. But she decided to keep those for when she'll be really hungry. Right now, she could hold on.

It was almost 8 pm when she heard Fraser's motorcycle stopping in front of the house and she braced herself to have to be polite to him.

Quickly, she smashed the cigarette in the ashtray and got up, tying her curls up into a bun, once more. She refused to have him see her undone. *Untamed*. Like Jacques used to see her.

Claire cleaned up the kitchen table and turned off the radio — before she had the time to go upstairs to hide in her room, Fraser had walked into the house and deposited his hat onto the little table by the door. It was his little habit, now.

"Madam," he said softly, bowing his head to her.

She stood awkwardly by the stairs, not knowing what to tell him or how to answer. She also needed to ask him about Joe but that, also, was a sensitive subject to tackle. His men had taken her friend away. His men might have killed him.

"Madam, I may have some news about your neighbour," he added when she didn't answer.

This information took her by surprise. So much so that for a brief second, she wanted to jump at his neck to him tightly. Only for the fact that she didn't have to ask him, herself.

"Oh," she said faintly, trying not to look too hopeful while, by the same occasion, trying to ignore her turning head. "Do you now?"

Fraser nodded and took a tentative step toward her. "Aye, I do…he was taken away as a prisoner of war and he's now on his way to a work camp in Poland, madam."

"A…work camp?" She swallowed, a shiver running down her spine. "What is that, exactly? Prison?"

"I dinna ken, exactly, madam," he said sincerely, she could tell. "I will try to find more information about him as soon as I can."

"Why?" She heard herself ask before she could stop it.

"Why?" He frowned, coming even closer. His blue eyes still had the same effect on her, she painfully realized. No matter what she tried to do to brush it off, it was there. Like a fire building inside of her. A fire she knew she'd burn herself onto if she came too close. But on the other hand, it was so tempting to touch.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I'm no' yer enemy, Claire. I have told ye that once, already." Fraser reached up to touch her cheek, the words melting into his mouth, making a weird sound to her ears. Her head turned some more, heat engulfed her and after that, everything went black.

And she fainted.

On Dangerous Grounds

Chapter Notes

Claire felt warm — too warm. Her eyes were closed, and she moved her hands to her head, pressing on her temples to alleviate her throbbing headache. She vaguely remembered falling to the ground, but what happened next, she didn't know. *It was all a blur.*

She was lying flat on her back, but the surface beneath her wasn't hard, rather it was soft — *her bed*. Claire slowly opened her eyes to a darkened room, lit only by a few candles scattered around. Something shifted next to her and Claire turned her head to find Jamie plumping a pillow behind her head.

"What are you doing in here?" She tried to sit up quickly, but her she fell back against the pillows, her vision swimming. "You need to get out of my bedroom."

"Ye fainted, Claire," Jamie said, a concerned expression on his face. Looking down, she saw that she was covered in all the blankets they owned, hence how warm she was.

"I didna think t'was right to leave ye lyin' on the floor."

"So you carried me," Claire stated. She didn't know how she felt about Fraser carrying her in his arms. Probably not as bad as she should have felt. "Well… thank you. But you can leave now, I'll be just fine."

Jamie stood by the bed, hesitant to leave, and truthfully Claire didn't want to be on her own. "I'll leave," he nodded.

"But only to go and get ye somethin' to eat. I take it ye havena been eatin' and that's why ye passed out."

Crossing her arms over her chest, Claire only buried herself under the covers, trying not to meet his eye. "Perhaps," she mumbled.

"Dinna move, Sassenach," Fraser said softly and left the room to get her food.

Claire felt a little foolish for fainting in front of Fraser. She didn't want him to see her in a vulnerable state, and she really didn't want him worrying over her like he was now. Capable and independent, Claire didn't particularly enjoy people taking care of her — usually, it was her that took care of others.

She lifted the pile of blankets off her body to let in a little cool air and was relieved to find that she was still in her clothes from earlier. Not that she thought Fraser might take advantage of her in that way, but it was a relief nonetheless.

While Fraser was in the kitchen preparing her food, their earlier conversation returned to her — the one before she passed out.

Joe was in a work camp, some type of prison. Her heart ached with this information, and she felt tears slide down her cheeks as she thought of the moment she would have to tell Gaëlle. There was nothing one could say that could prepare anyone to find out that their husband was sent somewhere he most likely would never return from.

A few minutes later, as Claire was mulling over how long she should wait to tell Gaëlle about Joe, Fraser walked in carrying a tray of food. At the smell of warm soup, Claire's stomach growled. It had been almost two days since she had a proper meal.

"Take it slowly," Fraser said as he sat down the tray over her lap. There was a bit of lightly buttered bread and even a piece of chocolate. "I'm goin' to wait here until ye eat it all though so I know ye have."

Fraser crossed the small room and sat in an armchair in the corner. His eyes were on Claire until she picked up a spoon and dipped it into the bowl, bringing the soup to her lips. It tasted divine, instantly making her feel better.

"What is this?" She asked as she took another bite.

"Potato and leek soup," Fraser replied. "Tis a simple recipe, and doesna take long to make. I dinna remember my mam verra much, but I do remember her cookin'."

Claire swallowed, sighing as it filled her stomach. "Well, it's delicious. I suppose I must thank you for this, and for picking me up from the floor."

Jamie smiled, and sat back in the chair, turning his head to look out the window. There was a light snow falling, one that would cover the ground for weeks. Claire ate slowly, letting the soup restore her. When she had only the chocolate left, she looked over at Fraser to find that his eyes were shut and he was breathing slowly.

Asleep.

She was still furious with the man, but she couldn't help but smile as the chocolate melted on her tongue. Claire felt much better after her meal, and she knew it was late, and there was no way she could get Jamie to his own bed. Instead, she rose and picked up a knitted blanket, draping it carefully over the soldier.

With his eyes shut, Claire thought he looked rather peaceful. She couldn't help but reach out and move a tuft of hair off his forehead. At her touch, Fraser's mouth formed a small smile, one that warmed Claire's heart.

"Oh God," Claire whispered.

With snow falling steadily outside, Claire returned to the warmth of her bed and moved the tray to the side table. Come morning, Fraser would still be there to be angry with, but now she needed sleep.

******

When Claire woke up the next morning, Fraser was gone from the chair. The plaid carefully folded and back on her bed. It was a Sunday, which meant she had no need to go open the library — and with what had happened the day before, she was glad of it.

She still felt slightly queasy and her stomach growled rather loudly. However, she decided to stay in bed a little longer. She had no courage to break the bubble of warmth she found herself wrapped into. The snow had not stopped falling, she could tell, and the windows were full of condensation.

As for Fraser, she could hear him downstairs, in the kitchen.

Claire closed her eyes again and snuggled under her blankets. She had to go tell Gaëlle about Joe but she couldn't bring herself to do it today. Maybe tomorrow, if she found the courage. She knew she couldn't stress her pregnant friend, it was terrible for the baby. And with what had been going on, she was already under a lot of anxiety every day. Knowing her crippled husband was in a labour camp would not ease her worries one bit.

She didn't know how much time passed before she heard a soft knock at her bedroom door. Before she could answer, she heard it opening. When she looked, she found Fraser, a tray in hands and a kind smile on his face.

"Ye are awake," he said simply, walking inside.

"Hello," she answered, sitting up slowly.

The cold slipping under the duvet wasn't a welcome occurrence but the warmth she felt at the sight of the soldier erased her annoyance. Which, upon realisation, made her even more annoyed. With herself, this time.

"I thought some more warm liquids and food would do ye good," Fraser placed the tray in front of her and crossed his arms.

Nodding, Claire wrapped her fingers around a mug of coffee and let the warmth burn her fingers. "Thank you."

"Ye dinna have to thank me, madam," Fraser had taken back his formal tone with her and she didn't know if she was thankful for it or not. She knew the boundaries they had set were not meant to be crossed. Even the slightest familiarity was a dangerous one to have. Fraser made her blood boil — *something no other man had ever been able to do.*

"Where did you get the chocolate?" She asked, looking up at him. Claire almost felt like she tried desperately to find something to rebuke him. "There isn't a single place to find it in the village and it's not on the rations cards."

"We have it around," he said simply, trying to avoid plainly saying the germans had no ration cards, whatsoever.

"I see," Claire took a careful sip of coffee to shut herself up. The last thing she needed right now was to be angry at him enough to throw the mug in question at his face. *She knew who*

he was. She knew what he was. She would accept his help until she'd get better and it would stop there.

"Captain? What you said about Josef Rosenberg yesterday…" She saw him tense and he made a low noise down in his throat. "What is a work camp, exactly?"

"I dinna ken, madam," he said sincerely. "Prisoners work, that's all I ken. As I wanted to tell ye before ye fainted, I will do my best to find out more for ye and yer friend. I —"

"Could you locate my husband?" Her question seemed to have taken him aback. Almost as if, all of a sudden, he remembered she was married. Just like he was.

Truthfully, the question took Claire by surprise, too. She wondered if throwing Jacques at his face was her own way of reinforcing the boundary.

"I can try, aye," he nodded his head. "I canna promise ye anything but I can try."

"He has not sent a letter in weeks, I…" she stopped, taking a breath. "I don't know what to think of it. The last time I heard from him, he was stationed near the Belgian border."

"Ye can write down his regiment and I will try and locate your husband, madam." Fraser sounded so formal, his voice almost didn't seem like his own.

"Thank you," she smiled softly, her eyes locking with his.

"Do ye have other family members she'd like to get in touch wi', perhaps? I can try and help wi' that too."

"I'm afraid not. My uncle is in London, he writes frequently and calls when he can. As for the rest, I don't have any other living relatives so it won't be necessary."

"I'm sorry, I should have remembered...ye told me," Fraser ran his long fingers through his curls, almost embarrassed.

"It's alright, it's gentle enough of you to ask."

"Aye," he smiled softly. "Now eat, Sassenach. Ye need it."

"Can I ask you something else?" She didn't wait for his answer and continued.

"Why are you being so kind to me? I hear the stories about the other soldiers stationed into people's homes...you are not like them."

"I'm no', madam. For one simple reason, this is no' my war. Like I told ye, I'm no' yer enemy. I'm here because I have orders and I dinna really have a choice in the matter. 'Tis as simple as that. We dinna know when it'll be over so If I can do anythin' to make this more pleasant for both of us, I will."

Claire simply nodded, trying to ignore the feeling in her stomach. All she knew was that it wasn't hunger. "Very well, then."

"Now if ye can pardon me, madam, I have to finish some work and ye need more rest," Fraser bowed his head and without another word, left her room, gently closing the door.

She didn't know why but at that moment, she remembered the way Jacques always closed the door rather roughly. And how much it always annoyed her.

******

After a few days in bed, Claire felt like a brand new person. The atmosphere in the village was worsening but there was nothing to be done about this. She was simply glad she could go home and feel slightly at peace, even with Fraser around.

During the next few weeks, they developed a routine. A silent understanding of how to function around one another.

They didn't talk much but they had taken the habit of sitting in front of the fire, both reading their respective books. Sometimes, he would ask about her day but she would never ask about his. She didn't want to know. *She couldn't.* It made her feel like she was like them and this, she refused.

Fraser at home was one thing. Once he stepped out, he turned back into a german soldier she couldn't pretend to be friends with.

Richard had come back to Montoire to bring back more leaflets. He told her tales of Paris and how it had been bombarded a few times before his return. He told her more tales about what the Germans were doing and what they were planning to do. All the things her tongue burned to ask Fraser about it.

The officers knew about the leaflets, tearing them down as soon as their eyes landed on them on the walls of the village. One evening, Fraser had even brought a couple of them home, along with some other works of his.

Claire remembered vividly the panic creeping on her as her eyes landed on the leaflets resting on her kitchen table.

"What's this?" She asked faintly, pointing to the papers scattered around.

"Propaganda against the soldiers," he said simply, not looking up at her. He concentrated on the leaflets, studying them as if he would find who they belonged to.

If only he knew.

"They keep poppin' up around the village and Captain Randall wants to find out who's puttin' them up." He mumbled, almost annoyed with his task.

"I guess Randall wants someone else he can get and throw in a work camp," she answered, turning around to avoid his eyes. She pretended to look for a butter knife.

"It's just paper, what harm does it do?" She continued. "And it's not as if Germans didn't have their own lovely little propaganda to put around."

Fraser sighed, knowing full well what she was talking about. For the past week, anti jew leaflets were popping up everywhere. One morning, Claire even saw one of the soldier putting them up proudly.

"But that's orders, I guess." She added before walking out of the kitchen, leaving Fraser alone. She was well aware that another german soldier would have probably killed her with all the remarks she'd been making since his arrival.

She could swear she heard a sigh, followed by some Gaelic curse she didn't understand.

That morning, like every morning, Claire got up earlier than she'd care to. With the cold weather, it was almost a herculean task to go out and put all the leaflets out but she didn't care. This was her little way to help. And knowing it infuriates the germans made it all even more worth it.

Like every morning, it was still dark and she moved around the house like a ghost, making no noise whatsoever. She dressed warmly, with all the layers she could wear and hid the papers in her coat's pockets.

Opening the front door slowly, she stopped for a brief second to make sure Fraser was nowhere to be found. Given the silence in the house, she was sure he was asleep.

The sun wouldn't be up for another few hours and the village streets were empty. However, Claire was careful when she rode down, knowing the Germans could very well be hiding. Waiting for her — or whoever they thought were responsible for the leaflets.

The rush of adrenaline was like a drug, making her forget how cold she was and how dangerous this was. It was almost peaceful to find herself in the empty streets, quiet and unbothered. *As if no war was going on.*

She rested her bike near the town square fountain and took out the leaflets, which she started to put one by one on the walls. At their usual spots before the Germans would come and rip them away. She heard how people in the village were wondering who was behind this, too. She heard how happy they were to know someone was showing the germans they were not welcome.

The only person who knew was Louise, who always made sure to inform Claire whenever Richard was on his way back or if he had left anything for her. She was sure she'd be doing this too if she had no children to take care of at home.

Whenever Claire did this, it didn't take much more than thirty minutes, an hour at best. Her fingers were burning under her gloves — the cold sneaking in. She warmed her hands all the time, trying not to stop more than necessary to keep her body heating.

She stood by one of the streetlights to put the last leaflets on the wall by the bakery, ripping off the germans propaganda with an utter pleasure before doing so. Abruptly, she stopped as

she heard a noise behind her.

When Claire turned around, she saw the shadow of a man.

A soldier.

She froze, not knowing what to do. If she should run, collapse or simply surrender. All she was aware of was the panic creeping up her neck.

She was in trouble.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Please leave a wee comment, we love to know what you think!

Lost

Thank you so much for reading and following along!

When Claire turned around, she saw the shadow of a man.

A soldier.

She froze, not knowing what to do. If she should run, collapse or simply surrender. All she was aware of was the panic creeping up her neck.

She was in trouble.

The soldier started to walk over to her and without thinking about it, she receded away until she felt the wall stopping her. Claire wasn't particularly catholic but at that moment, she heard herself mumble a prayer.

A prayer that was cut short when she saw the man's face, illuminated by the streetlight.

"Sassenach," Fraser said quietly, "What on earth are ye doin'? Do ye want to be arrested?"

"Did you follow me?" She asked, trying to regain her composure. She was still in trouble but at least, it was Fraser. Not Randall or any other soldier.

"Aye, I heard ye leave the house and I wondered why ye were up in the middle of the night."

"Well, I —"

"Ye're shiverin'," he remarked, coming closer and removing his jacket to put it on her shoulders. His breath was warm on her cheek and his body seemed to radiate heat making her want to keep him close.

"It's rather cold," she said faintly, looking up at him.

Fraser knew exactly what she had been doing and yet, he didn't say a word. He barely even looked at the leaflets she had dropped on the floor during her moment of panic. Nor at the ones who were glued to the walls.

"Come, Sassenach," he took her hand carefully, "I'm bringin' ye home."

Nodding, Claire didn't know what else to do than to follow him back to the house. With the vain hope that no one else had seen them and that he would keep his mouth shut about the whole incident.

As she suspected, the walk was done in complete silence and it wasn't until they reached the house that she realized they had been holding hands throughout it all. Only when the warmth of his skin left hers that she noticed something was missing.

Fraser opened the door for her, letting her in first. The house was lit with a few candles and heat hit her face as soon as she stepped inside. Closely followed by the tall scot who had just closed the door, she could hear the fireplace going.

Claire removed his coat from her shoulders and turned around to look at him. He stood there, watching her in such a way that her knees wobbled. A recurring occurrence, these days.

"Thank you for the coat," she said, handing it back to him.

"Ye're still shiverin'," he remarked once more, taking the coat. Their hands brushing, by the same occasion.

"I'll warm up in a minute," Claire cleared her throat, removing the other layers she was wearing.

"Go sit by the fire, Sassenach. I'll bring ye somethin' to warm ye up," Fraser disappeared quickly into the kitchen before she had time to answer.

Claire let out a breath she didn't know she was holding and went to sit by the leather chair, in front of the fireplace. She could still hear her heart pounding in her ears. *Banging against her ribcage.* She removed her snowy shoes and put them away, trying to warm her toes. She didn't even notice she was still shaking.

Not so much from the cold, she had to admit.

"Here, drink this," Fraser held out a glass of whisky in front of her.

Looking up, Claire took it slowly and sipped it before saying: "Thank you."

"It'll help wi' warmin' ye up, I promise." His tone was stern and as cold as the weather outside, but there was something in his eyes that soothed Claire's worries.

She took another long sip, leaning back in the chair. The liquid indeed helped, burning her gullet and warming her blood. "I should go to bed. We both should."

"Aye," Fraser nodded, still watching her. "I hope ye find the whisky good?"

"Delicious," she admitted, finishing her glass. Putting it on the table, next to her, she got up and felt her head spin. For a brief second, she lost her balance when her knees gave in. But Fraser was there to prevent any fall, wrapping his arm around her waist.

"Careful there," he said softly, holding her in his arms and looking down at her.

Trying to ignore how much thicker the air between them had become, she cleared her throat, "I must have gotten up too quickly."

"Must be that, aye." Fraser brushed off a curl that had escaped her bun, his thumb lingering on her cheek for a tad too long.

"Goodnight, Captain," Claire pulled back, touching her hairdo as if to see if it was all still in place. She had to admit she hated wearing her hair pulled up this way — she felt matronly.

"Goodnight, Sassenach," Fraser watched her walk towards the hall, before stopping her by grabbing her hand.

Claire did not expect such a gesture but she stopped, looking down at their hands before looking at him. *His blue eyes transfixed on her.*

"What ye are doin' is verra brave, Claire." The honesty in his voice almost had her weeping and for the first time since he had come to live at her house, for the first time since Jacques had left and the war had started, Claire felt completely safe.

Fraser brought her hand to his lips and placed a tender kiss on her palm before taking his leave and going back to his bedroom.

****

Ever since her late-night meeting with Fraser on the streets, Claire had been shaken. If the soldier that had caught her hadn't been Jamie, she would probably be in prison now — *or worse.* For the past several weeks, Claire had been extra cautious, only posting the leaflets when she was sure no one was around.

What Claire longed for was someone to really talk to. To share her fears and concerns with. She missed her husband, and she especially missed her uncle Lamb. The only person she still had was Gaëlle, and soon she would welcome her little baby.

Claire had been keeping the news of Joe to herself —unable to find to courage to tell her. She knew the longer she waited, the worse it would be.

Fraser was gone, so Claire bundled up before heading over to Gaëlle's. Her friend opened the door a moment after she knocked.

"Bonjour, darling," Claire kissed Gaëlle's cheek. "You look like you're about to burst!"

"It should be soon," Gaëlle rubbed her belly. "I thought Joe might be back before the birth, but that doesn't seem likely."

Claire was quiet, and she knew Gaëlle could sense something was wrong. "Can we go and sit down?" She asked.

Letting Gaëlle rest, Claire fixed them both tea before sitting down. There was no easy way to deliver the news that she was about to. Claire felt horrible that there was only a minuscule amount of information she could tell her friend.

"Is something wrong, Claire?" Gaëlle asked, taking a sip of her tea and then resting the cup on her belly.

"I've learned some news about Joe," Claire replied solemnly. "Captain Fraser told me something rather upsetting."

"Captain Fraser is it?" Gaëlle looked over her cup at Claire.

"That's his name," Claire was confused. "What else should I call him? The Nazi? He's not like that, Gaëlle."

"You do know what people are saying in town about you and Fraser, right?" Gaëlle asked.

"I've heard things. The same things I've heard since I moved here, anyway." Claire set her cup on the table. "Not very pleasant things, but they aren't true and you know it."

"You need to be careful, dear," Gaëlle said. "I've known you for years and even as your friend, I have to wonder if you are getting too close to your soldier."

Claire certainly didn't come here expecting to hear these things. "That soldier told me news about your husband before I even had to ask. He didn't have to find out anything, but he did because he's not like the rest of them."

At this, Gaëlle leaned forward, her accusatory look wiped clean off her face. "What's happened to Joe?"

Claire grabbed her friend's hand, her throat closing. "He informed me that Joe has been sent to a work camp."

"A work camp?" Gaëlle questioned. "What exactly does this mean? He will come back to me, right?"

"I don't know," Claire sighed. "Captain Fraser doesn't even know. I just wanted to tell you so you don't spend your nights waiting for him to come home —"

"But I always will," Gaëlle said sadly. "I will always listen for his footsteps and hope to see him coming home. Don't you wait for the moment that Jacques will return?"

"Of course," Claire replied, smiling softly.

What she didn't tell her friend was that she truly had stopped expecting to see her husband return to her, and while she missed him very much, there was a piece of her that didn't mourn.

"I suppose I should be grateful to your Captain," Gaëlle sighed.

"He's not mine," Claire said again. But the thought of him being hers didn't disgust her like it should. "But I will tell him about your appreciation."

"Be careful, ma chérie," Gaëlle kissed Claire's hand. "Your captain may not be like the others, but he is still the enemy."

"I know that."

"Don't forget it. Even if he keeps looking at you the way he already does."

"I don't know what you mean, Gaëlle. He may live under my roof, not by my choice, I might add, but that stops there. I hope you of all people won't give in the gossip going around. You're better than this."

"You're right," Gaëlle gave her a sorrowful look. "I just...I'm just so scared to have this baby without Joe and not knowing if I'll ever see him again. I'm sorry I took out my anger on you."

"We're in this together, never forget that," Claire squeezed her hand. "No matter what, I won't let anything happen to you and the baby. I promise."

"I guess it's better to have Fraser on our sides, at least."

"Yes but don't think I trust him and that I'm not careful." She assured her friend.

Claire finished her cup of tea and left Gaëlle to rest for the afternoon. When she returned to her own house, there was a letter pushed under the door that she almost missed. Bending down to pick it up, she saw that it was from England.

It was from someone named Charles Henry, a name she didn't recognize. The light was already beginning to fade and it was rather dark inside, so Claire took the letter outside to the back garden. She opened it and read the words that would change everything.

Dear Claire,

I'm writing to you to share, I'm afraid, some dreadful news. I worked with your Uncle Lambert at the British Museum for the past two years. He spoke often of you and how fondly he cared for you. Unfortunately, there was a bombing last week at the museum, a day that I was not scheduled to be there. Your uncle was inside the building and did not survive the bomb.

The rest of the letter didn't even register for Claire after she read that her uncle had died. Not only had he died, but he'd also been bombed. The letter fell from her hands and Claire braced herself against a nearby tree as the tears began to fall.

The only family she had ever truly known was gone. Taken from her, and she never got a chance to say goodbye. This war had been cruel, but this was too much. Her chest felt tight, and Claire clutched at it, desperate to breathe.

Finally, her knees gave out and she fell to the ground in a heap, the tears flowing freely. She had been so consumed in her grief, that she hadn't heard anyone approach.

"Sassenach?"

Claire turned her head to find Fraser crouched beside her, the letter in his hands. "He's gone," was all that Claire could say.

"I only just heard about the bombings in London," Fraser said, out of breath as if he had run here. "I'm so sorry, Claire. I don't even know what to say to ye."

"Just hold me," Claire heard herself say and then Fraser's arms were around her, comforting her as she wept.

She was all alone in the world.

Her uncle was dead, and her husband might as well too for all she knew. But at this moment, having Fraser's strong arms around her didn't make her feel so alone.

After what could have been minutes or hours, Claire pulled back and Fraser helped her stand to her feet. He handed her the letter, and she tucked it in the pocket of her sweater. For weeks, she would read that letter, feeling her soul being crushed each time.

"Are ye okay, Claire?" He asked softly, his voice barely a whisper.

"I'm just in shock," she answered, still shaken. "I received a letter from him a month ago. I never thought —" she choked on her words, and Jamie took her hand.

"I canna imagine how ye feel —"

"Jamie," Claire looked at him, saying his name for the first time. " This is the price of this bloody war — the ones that we love are either gone or away from us."

Jamie's hand cupped her cheek, wiping away the tears that slowly fell. It might have been cold outside, but the two of them created a cocoon of warmth huddled together.

"Sassenach..." he whispered, his eyes locked with hers.

It was almost magnetic and certainly inevitable. The pull they had been trying to ignore all those months was there. Stronger than ever.

"If ye want to stop, tell me now…"

"No one is asking you to," she looked at him, stroking his bottom lip.

"We —"

"Kiss me." She pleaded before he could finish his sentence.

Jamie leaned down and pressed his lips to Claire's, holding her body against his. Her arms wrapped around his waist inside of his coat. It was like taking a breath of fresh air after years of being trapped underground. The kiss was gentle, tender and soft. It was everything Claire had been thinking about for months.

New Life

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

Claire's heart was racing from the kiss, but there was no telling how quickly her heart sped up at the sound of her name.

"Claire!"

Jamie and Claire broke apart at once, both out of breath, avoiding each other's eyes. Gaëlle was coming towards them from her house, and Claire was afraid of what her friend could have seen.

"Gaëlle, what's wrong?" Claire frowned, pretending that Jamie wasn't anywhere near her.

"I think my waters have broken," Gaëlle said in between breaths, trying to control her panic. "I don't know what to do, I can't do this on my own!"

"You must come inside," Claire went to her friend and took her hand. When she turned back, Jamie was still standing there — not knowing what to do.

"Captain, would you mind fetching a pitcher of cold water and some towels? It looks like Gaëlle will be giving birth rather shortly."

Gaëlle's hand tightened and Claire shot her a look. She knew her friend wouldn't want the soldier helping, but there weren't many options. The two women walked slowly into the house, pausing every few steps as Gaëlle doubled over.

"*Merde*," Gaëlle moaned, squeezing Claire's hand way too hard. "This is going to hurt like hell."

"I'm afraid it will," Claire mumbled, although she had no idea what it would truly feel like. However, from the pained expression on Gaëlle's face, she could imagine it wasn't a walk in the park.

"We'll go into the spare room," Claire guided her friend through the house to find Jamie waiting in the hall with the towels and pitcher she had asked for. He had removed his jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt. He didn't look like a German officer — *all of a sudden, he looked just like Jamie.*

"I dinna want to get in the way, but I want to help if I can," he said quietly, once Claire had helped her friend to lay down.

"This could take a while," she took the towels and the pitcher from his hands and looked at him. "She won't want you in there...as you can understand."

"Aye, of course," Fraser nodded. "But call me if ye need anythin' aye? I'll go and make some water boil too. Anythin' ye or Gaëlle needs, ye tell me."

"Jamie," Claire said softly as he was walking towards the kitchen. She'd never get used to address him by his birth name and yet, it only felt like a natural way to call him. As if his name had been made only for her to say.

The scot stopped and turned around to look at her, piercing blue eyes locked with hers.

"Thank you."

"Dinna thank me and go bring a bairn into the world, Sassenach," Jamie smiled tenderly before disappearing into the kitchen.

Claire watched him and took a long breath before closing the door. She wasn't a nurse, *how on earth was she meant to help her friend give birth?* She was still shaken from the news of Lamb's passing and the kiss that followed...one she actually couldn't stop thinking about. Yet, she had to focus and collect herself, now. She had no other choice but to help Gaëlle and the baby.

A deep groan interrupted the silent prayer she was mumbling under her breath and caused her to turn around. Gaëlle was laying on the bed, clutching her bump with her eyes tightly shut.

"Darling you have to breathe deeply," Claire said softly, walking over the bed.

Putting the pitcher and cloths on the bedside table, she tried to ignore this was the place Fraser spent his nights. Claire ignored his things scattered around. *His clothes. His books. A few photographs on the desk.* All she did was to focus on Gaëlle.

Nodding, her friend took a long breath and opened her eyes to look at her. She was frightened — *rightfully* — and the only thing Claire wished was that Joe would be here.

Joe and a proper midwife.

"It's going to be alright," she smiled softly, putting the damp cloth on her forehead. "Your contractions seem to be far apart so I guess there's still some time before this baby arrives. In the meantime, we'll make sure you relax, yes?"

"It hurts," she answered, leaning back. "I can't do this...I know I can't."

"Of course you can," Claire stroked her hair back. "You can and you will. Think about the baby and Joe, yes? He'll want to meet this wee one once he gets back."

Gaëlle nodded, fighting back tears. "You are right. He...he always wanted a daughter. He said he wanted to see a miniature version of me."

"That sounds like him," Claire smiled, holding her hand.

"He'll come back," Gaëlle whispered, closing her eyes. A tear strolled down her cheek and Claire wiped it away with her thumb.

"He will," she assured her, squeezing her hand. "That's why you need to be strong now, yes? The baby needs you."

"I don't even know what name to choose...we didn't have time to decide before he was taken away."

"You don't have to name the baby right away, darling. You have all the time you need to decide on something. First, you have to give birth to it."

Gaëlle chuckled softly at that, "I guess I can't get out of it now."

"No, I reckon it's a bit late," Claire smiled, handing her a glass of water. "Here, drink this. You need to stay hydrated."

Claire could hear footsteps pacing out in the hallway, and looked back to see Jamie popping his head in the room to check if everything was okay. It was sweet, that he was concerned for a woman he didn't even know. The baby's birth had almost made her forget about their kiss earlier… *almost*.

"You like him, huh?" Gaëlle looked at her, taking a sip of water. "I mean, he is good looking."

"What?" Claire looked at her, phased by the question.

"You like him," she repeated, sitting up slowly. "Or at the very least you find him attractive and the war isn't helping this attraction. So much uncertainty, so many fears. I understand why you'd want to take comfort in him."

"Please, can we not talk about this again? He's not my soldier and I do not find him attractive," Claire lied, getting up. "I can't believe you'd think so low of me."

"It isn't low, Claire. I know you and Jacques. I've been around since you moved here, after you got married. I also never saw you two look at one another the way you and Fraser do."

"Are you hallucinating now?" Claire poured another glass of water and handed it to her. "This is nonsense —"

"You don't have to admit it to me but at least admit it to yourself," Gaëlle shut her eyes and braced herself for another wave of pain. One Claire was glad made her stop talking about her and Fraser.

Claire watched her friend breathe deeply, and while the pain looked excruciating, the outcome would all be worth it. She also thought about the conversation they just had. *Did she like Jamie?* She was attracted to him. But attraction in such uncertain times might not be much more than seeking comfort. She was alone — with him under her roof. As much as she tried to convinced herself of the contrary, whenever he was around, she felt safe.

The safest she had ever felt in her life.

"There's no knowing how much longer," Claire sighed and wiped her own brow on the hem of her shirt. "I'm going to update Jamie, will you be okay?"

"I think so," Gaelle nodded through clenched teeth. "I'll yell if I need you."

Claire left her friend to find Jamie who was standing in the hallway, leaning against the wall. His eyes were shut, and Claire could tell how tired he looked. Then it hit her. They were using his room to deliver the baby.

"I'm sorry about monopolising your room," Claire said as she stood in front of him. "It didn't even occur to me that we'd be putting you out."

"Well,' twas me that first put ye out," he replied. "Tis yer house, after all, ye may do as ye like."

The feeling from earlier returned as she stood close to him, and she felt her body drifting to him.

"You can have my room tonight," she offered. "It could be hours before the baby comes, and the sofa is too small for you."

"Sassenach," he touched her arm softly. "I couldn't take yer room. After the bairn is delivered, ye'll want to sleep in yer own bed."

Claire smiled softly, covering his hand with hers. She could tell how bad he was feeling because of earlier. Of the news of her uncle, of seeing her so vulnerable. Crumbling into his arms to seek comfort. She wondered what he thought about the kiss.

If he thought about it all...

She opened her mouth to say something before she was interrupted.

"Claire!" Gaelle shouted, pulling them out of the moment. Reluctantly, Claire moved her hand out of Jamie's grasp and went back to her friend without another word.

It wasn't until hours later — *well into the night* — that Gaëlle finally felt ready to push. She was already exhausted, and so was Claire. Barely able to see through her blurry eyes. Thankfully, once she started to push, things moved rather quickly.

And in no time, a baby's cry resonated into the room. Bringing with it a new breath of hope in a world of chaos. *New life.*

Claire carefully laid the baby onto Gaëlle's chest, smiling widely, "It's a girl!"

"A girl!" Gaelle cried, holding her baby and staring down at her little face. The sight was precious, and it melted Claire's heart. "Joe will be so happy to meet her."

"Yes, and he will meet her," Claire reassured her friend. "You did a wonderful job, darling. You've got to rest now. I can take her and clean her up, then bring her back to you."

Gaëlle nodded, smiling. She placed a kiss on her daughter's forehead before watching Claire wrap the tiny baby carefully in a blanket. She fell back against the pillows, falling into an easy fast sleep.

"Hello there, little darling," Claire whispered to the baby as she walked out into the hallway. Jamie was still waiting and instantly came to her.

"A girl?" He asked, in awe.

"Yes," Claire smiled, not taking her eyes off the baby. "She's beautiful, isn't she? No name yet, but I reckon she'll have one soon enough."

"Aye," Jamie looked down at the baby, enamoured. Slowly, he looked up to meet her eyes, "She's a beauty, Sassenach."

"I need to clean up this little pumpkin and then I'll bring her back to Gaëlle. Can you make sure she's fine while I do it? I think she might already be asleep."

"Of course," he nodded, touching her arm.

Holding baby Rosenberg was only a little heartbreaking, but it was also a wonder to see new life in the midst of destruction. There was so much loss all around them, that it was rare to feel hope. Granted, it wouldn't be easy for Gaëlle to raise a baby in this war strewn world, but she wouldn't be alone in doing it.

Claire went to the bathroom to clean up the baby, who was surprisingly calm after such a rude awakening into the world. There was truly nothing more precious than counting the tiny ten little toes and fingers.

Once she was all clean, and wrapped in a small knitted blanket, Claire held the baby close against her chest. As she walked back to Gaëlle's room, she saw Jamie standing in the doorway. He heard her steps and looked over at her and the baby.

"It suits ye," he said softly, pointing to the little bundle in her arms.

"Well, thank you" Claire smiled, feeling a small pinch on her heart. "Would you like to hold her?"

Jamie seemed uneasy as he glanced back at Gaëlle sleeping. "Would she be okay wi' me holdin' her bairn?"

"You helped her today," Claire said as she placed the baby into his arms. "She'll be grateful, although she won't admit it."

Jamie was a large man, and seeing a newborn baby in his arms only made him appear bigger. It was also one of the sweetest things Claire had ever seen. He was whispering something in Gaelic, and rubbing his pinky finger over the baby's cheek.

"That suits you as well," Claire returned the compliment in a low voice.

"Bairns are a gift," Jamie said quietly. "They remind us what life is all about, I think."

"I agree," Claire stroked the baby's soft round head. "Especially in such hard times like these. Gaëlle is blessed to have this wee one."

"Gaëlle is still asleep, so why don't ye go and lay down, Sassenach," Jamie said. "I can stay up for a little while longer wi' the bairn and wait til the new mam wakes."

"If you're sure," Claire said and immediately yawned, feeling the exhaustion of helping a woman in labour. "A nice nap might be good. The baby will probably be hungry soon, and come wake me if Gaëlle should need anything."

"Aye," Jamie nodded, his gaze transfixed on the baby who was smiling up at him. "Go and rest, Sassenach."

Claire lingered for a moment before returning to her room. She didn't bother undressing, but climbed under the covers and pulled them up to her neck. As soon as her head hit the pillow, she sighed, feeling all the emotions of the day. In a space of a day, she lost her uncle and welcomed a new baby into the world.

Yet, all these things couldn't take her mind off Jamie and the kiss.

Hours later, with the sun rising slowly in the sky, Claire woke up with a heavyweight around her waist. Turning onto her side, she came face to face with Jamie. It took her a moment to remember that she told him he could sleep in her bed — one of her moments when she didn't use her brain properly, but her heart.

He was fast asleep, a small smile on his lips. One of his arms was wrapped tightly around her waist, and she realized then that they had slept in each other's arms all night long. For the first time all winter, Claire noticed she wasn't freezing but was actually warm — Jamie was a furnace, radiating heat.

Slowly, Claire reached up and pressed her fingers against his cheek. Jamie twitched and tightened his grip on her before his eyes opened.

"Morning, Sassenach," he said with a deep raspy voice.

"Oh," he tensed as he realized the position they were in. "Christ, I'm sorry," he started to move his arm from around her, but Claire grabbed it and held it in place.

"Don't," she whispered, not knowing what came over her. At that, Jamie cupped her cheek, rubbing his thumb over her bottom lip.

"I would like to kiss ye again," he whispered, his eyes locked with hers. "May I?"

"You may," Claire answered, her lips only an inch from his. Her breath tickling his skin.

It didn't take very long for their mouths to crash together once more, his lips warm and the stubble on his cheek scraped against her jaw, sending shockwaves over her body.

They were already entangled, and Claire moved one leg over his waist, pulling herself to sit on top of him. His hands slid along her back, and she could've sworn they were shaking.

His tongue parted her mouth. Claire pressed herself down and began to run her hands up and down his chest. He was wearing all his layers from the night before, but she still managed to feel a hardness between her legs — a sure sign of his own arousal.

"Ye dinna ken how many times I've imagined ye like this, Sassenach," Jamie said, kissing her hard. "God may forgive me for such thoughts, I may no' be strong enough."

"I want you," she admitted and pulled back to look at him. Her fingers brushed his cheek, reaching up to stroke his auburn curls.

Jamie pulled her face to his but instead began to kiss her neck. Claire's hands busied themselves on his chest, reaching to pull off layers. As she slid her hands over his body, her hand unintentionally slipped into one of his pockets, feeling something crinkle.

Claire sat back, and pulled out the object, realizing that it was a picture… of Jamie and his wife. This stopped her in her tracks, and Jamie opened his eyes to see what had happened.

"What's wrong, Claire?" He frowned, stroking a stray curl away from her face.

"We can't," Claire mumbled. She handed him the picture before getting up at once. "We shouldn't be doing this, I'm...I'm awfully sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"Christ," Jamie rubbed his hand over his face. "No, I'm the sorry one, Sassenach."

All along, Claire knew they were both married, and that they shouldn't continue, but she had wanted him desperately. Seeing the picture of his wife only reminded her that this wasn't meant to be.

"I'll go check on Gaëlle," she said as she tried to avoid his gaze. "We can't do that again…"

"I'm sorry...I dinna ken what came over me," Jamie got up slowly, clearing his throat. "I shouldn't have been here in the first place. I will...I willna do it again."

Claire looked down, nodding, "I would appreciate if you wouldn't say a word about this, captain."

"I promise I willna say a word," he assured her, his tone back to the one he used as a military man, and disappeared from her bedroom, softly closing the door behind him.

Claire sat on the bed, realizing the weight pressing swiftly on her chest — like she was suffocating. Touching her face, she winced at the cold feeling of her wedding band against her cheek. Her hands shaking with frustration...and *lust*. The picture had felt like a bucket of ice water thrown on her, she was almost glad it had come up or she knew exactly how things were going to turn out.

At that moment, Claire realized exactly the extent to which James Fraser affected her. For the past five years, she had simply existed here. *As Jacque's wife. The stranger.* She had existed without living properly. She had to morph into a different person to please all these people. So they would accept her into their world but it had no worked. *It would never work.*

He made her feel like a stranger in her own skin and yet she had never felt so much like herself when he was around.

Now, with the war raging on — *the uncertainties, the grief and fears* — she realized if she didn't start to live a little, she might as well end up dead before she had the chance. But she also realized the one person who made her feel truly alive wasn't hers to have.

And never would be.

The List

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Here some Jamie's POV for ya...

Gaëlle had adjusted well with her new baby, although she still hadn't decided on a name. After almost two months, Claire had spent practically every day with her friend. Helping with the baby was also an excuse for her to not be at home whenever Jamie was.

They had barely exchanged more than three words to each other since they had almost gone too far. As much as Claire knew to stop was right, she had thought of that moment every night since.

"How are you, Claire?" Gaëlle asked as she sat in a rocking chair with her baby. "Your mind doesn't seem to be here right now — *or these past couples of weeks.*"

Claire sighed, rubbing her temple, "I just have a lot on my mind. And there are things that I would rather not think about at all."

"Is your captain one of them?" Gaëlle mused. "You've barely spent more than a few hours at your own home."

"I'd much rather be here with you and your little one," Claire smiled softly, touching her friend's hand.

"Jami— I mean, Captain Fraser hasn't been at home much either. Not that I want to see him."

"I think your mind would be much clearer once you stop lying to yourself," Gaëlle said. "You know I don't approve. And I'm not suggesting you do anything about whatever it is that you're feeling, but don't be so hard on yourself, Claire. These times are hard enough."

Claire knew Gaëlle was right — *more than right.* Besides, she couldn't avoid Jamie forever, but she wasn't ready to face him just yet, nor did she trust herself in his presence. The mixture of lust and guilt was a deadly combination floating in her bloodstream.

" I think I'll keep lying to myself just a bit longer," she patted her hand before getting up. "I need to visit the library before I head back home. I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course, dear," Gaëlle waved goodbye, and picked up her baby's hand, making her wave at Claire too.

"You'll have to decide on a name soon, Gaëlle," Claire grinned, stroking the baby's cheek before she walked out of the house.

The library had been deserted since the germans came to retrieve books to burn them. Since then, the sight of it actually broke Claire's heart. This place used to be so full of life — *of children running around to find the next book they'd want to read.* Now, it looked at his it had been abandoned years ago. However changed was the atmosphere, she still liked to come to hide there, her little nook of peace, where no one bothered her.

Where she didn't have to avoid Jamie.

Like every morning, after opening the library, Claire rearranged some sections, removed the dust from the shelves and choose a book to read. It wasn't a big library and she had read most of the books they carried but it didn't matter.

Here, Claire could pretend the war didn't exist. Like when she was a child and would lose herself in a book to forget about her parents' passing. Hours would fly by without her noticing, and today was no exception.

She didn't hear the door open and she didn't hear Jamie walk in. Not until he cleared his throat that she realized he probably had been watching her for a while.

"Oh," she sat up quickly, putting her book down. She brushed the crease off her trousers and touched her hair to make sure it was still very much pined up.

"I thought I might find ye here," he said with his arms folded behind him.

"Captain," she said formally, trying to forget the fact that she knew how his lips tasted like. "What can I do for you?"

He looked uncomfortable as if he was here on some mission that he didn't want to be on. "Well, first, I wanted to see you. I ken ye dinna want to talk about… that evening and what happened but, I needed to make sure that yer okay."

"I'm fine, Captain," Claire replied faintly, feeling anything but.

"Which brings me to why I'm actually here," he said sadly. "I have orders."

"Orders to what? Arrest me?" Claire bit at him unnecessarily.

He shook his head, "No, Claire. I've been asked by my superiors to compile a list of names — Jewish names. I thought ye could help me a bit. Ye would know somethin' like that wouldn't ye?"

"I suppose yes," she nodded, frowning, "But I don't see why you need this? What's going to happen once I make this list for you?"

"I wish I knew but I dinna ken all the specifics myself," he walked over to the counter. "I need names of any Jews in this village. What they do with the names, I canna say. I havena been told."

There was no way to know what would happen to the people on a list like that. As much as she didn't want to help him, or anyone on his side of things, she knew that eventually someone else would come along and ask her to do the same thing — *except they wouldn't be as kind as Fraser.*

"Most of the people here are jews, Captain. I'm not going to start assessing each and every one of them but," Claire grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil to scribble something down. "I'll start with my name. You can just go around and ask other people to sign their names if needed."

"Sassenach dinna start wi' yer nonsense only to anger the soldiers, aye? It isna yer name I asked —"

"You asked for jews, I am one." She looked at him, studying his face. "Through marriage."

"Oh," he blinked, frowning.

"I know you like to forget I am married but nonetheless I am. And with that uniform of yours, I bet the people won't be too reluctant to give away their religion for you and your friends to do what you please with the information."

Jamie sighed, removing his hat. "They are no' my friends, Claire."

"You are on their side, no matter what you believe. Every morning you get up and you put this rag on," she pointed to his uniform. "And every day, you walk around this village along with them. So you might not be *like* them, people are afraid of you just as much as they are afraid of them."

"Are ye afraid of me?" Jamie asked softly, his eyes pleading her.

"No, I'm not afraid of you...but I'm not afraid of them, either."

"Ye verra well should be."

"Is that a threat?" She raised her eyebrows, walking over to him. "I don't care about dying, you know? I'd rather die speaking the truth than losing my dignity because of fears, like some people."

"Claire…" Jamie looked down at her, his body heat radiating against her.

"Do not call me like that." She said out bitterly. Deep down, she was angry at herself for opening up so much to him. For letting him see her vulnerable.

"I'm —" he began but she cut him off.

"You've got my name, your list is started, you can leave now, I'm actually busy."

Nodding, Jamie folded the piece of paper and put it in his front pocket. The same one Claire had found the godforsaken picture that had cut short any fantasy she had about the Scot. The

thought alone sent a shiver down her spine, again. Little did she know he had forgotten to have that picture altogether, the second they had met.

She realized how harsh she was with him but there was no other way to keep her distance. She had to build a wall between them and attacking him on the subject of his occupation was the easiest way to do it. After all, she only spoke the truth, she couldn't be friends with a man who sided with the enemy. A man who was too afraid to go against the things that supposedly were against his principles.

******

Jamie left the library with a heavy heart. Every step he took away from Claire was one too many. Every step he took away from her was one he took away from himself and the man he really was. A man he had forgotten about for far too many years.

He knew whatever reason Randall needed the list for wouldn't be a good one but there was nothing else he could do but obey orders. Claire had said it was only Jewish through her marriage, but his superiors would certainly count that.

He already knew that he would let no harm come to her and that he would do anything — *had done anything, to protect her.*

Claire was the reason why he didn't leave the army, yet. Firstly, he couldn't let her alone in Montoire — at the mercy of the other German soldiers who'd be too happy to take his place in her home. And selfishly, he couldn't leave her. He wasn't strong for that.

As he walked down the street, he saw as he always did, women and their children step back in fear. He wished he could tell them that he didn't want to hurt them, and that he wasn't like the other soldiers. *But he was wearing their uniform, how were they to know?* Claire was right.

Since he moved to Germany at the age of ten, Jamie had always felt like an outcast. Perhaps that's why he felt such a strong connection to Claire. He simply didn't fit in, just like she didn't fit here. Although he tried to adapt to the culture, there was something holding him back. Jamie had grown up with only a few friends, as all the other kids his age thought he was odd with his strange accent.

Even when he married his wife, Vivian, it didn't make him feel like he belonged. She was an escape from his uncle, a way out, even if the marriage had been arranged by Dougal, himself. She was a lovely girl, but he barely knew her and had spent most of their married life away from her. He had never been in love with Vivian and he never would be.

Jamie continued to walk down the street, the small paper with Claire's name written on it in cursive tucked away in his pocket. It felt hot against his chest as if someone could read it through the material of his clothes. He knew he would rip it up and burn it later, but he would have to wait until he was alone.

He still had the arduous task of collecting names ahead of him before he could report back to his superior. There were records of every person that lived in the village at the town hall.

Jamie rolled his eyes as he entered the building, wondering why his superiors didn't just come to check the records himself. But he knew Randall and he was as lazy as he was despicable.

"May I help you?" Said a petite black-haired woman sitting behind a counter.

"Aye," he nodded, and removed his hat. "I need to see the records for every person that lives in this town."

The woman looked at him with wide eyes, hesitating before she reached for a set of keys on the desk. "We keep those records locked away, but I will get them for you in just a moment, monsieur."

While he waited, Jamie nervously tapped two of his fingers against his thigh — a habit he couldn't kick. He wanted to get this over with, and return to Claire. There was more that needed to be spoken between the two of them, if only she would listen.

"Stubborn woman," Jamie said under his breath but smiled at the thought of her. He was intoxicated and he knew it.

A few minutes later, the woman reappeared with a very large box and placed it before Jamie. "This is one of six boxes, I'm afraid. I could only manage the one for now, but let me know when you are ready for the next and I shall get it for you."

"Christ," Jamie sighed as he thought about all the papers he would have to dig through. "Well, thank ye. I'm most grateful to ye. Is there anywhere I can sit while I look through these?"

"Yes, just through that door, there is a room of desks," the woman pointed towards a set of glass french doors and Jamie picked up the heavy box, wondering how the small woman had managed to carry it herself.

"Collect names, he said," Jamie huffed. "It'll be easy, he said. Names, whatever for?"

After forty minutes, Jamie had finally finished combing through the first box. So far, he had written down twenty-seven names. The names of men, women, and children that were of Jewish descent here in this village.

Looking up at the clock, Jamie realized he would most likely miss dinner, leaving Claire to eat on her own. With a desire to return to her, Jamie returned to the woman at the counter and asked for the next box.

He repeated this process over the next two and a half hours, finally reaching the last box. Sure enough, he came across a paper that listed a Claire and Jacques Landau, citing that Jacques was Jewish born, while Claire was Jewish by marriage.

Making sure that no one was around, Jamie folded up the piece of paper and tucked it into his pocket to join the other paper with her name on it. Jamie was sure that he wouldn't be the only one to come and read through these boxes, he didn't want to risk it.

The list now held roughly eighty names, and while most of the men were not currently in the village, at least the women and children were. Hopefully, Captain Randall would be pleased with his work for the evening and let him go home.

"Here's the last one," Jamie said to the woman as he set the box down. "Thank ye for helpin' me, and I'm sorry if ye had to stay late because of me."

The woman looked flustered at this, as if she had never heard a german soldier say the word 'sorry'. "It was not a problem, monsieur. I hope you found what you were looking for, have a good night."

"You too, bonne nuit."

With the list in hand, Jamie stepped outside into the night air and made his way to their headquarters. There was never a quiet moment there, with soldiers rushing in and out at all hours of the day and night.

Jamie took the steps two at a time, feeling his stomach growl. Yes, he hoped Randall would let him return home soon. Speaking of Randall, Jamie could hear his voice on the other side of the door, and for whatever reason, Jamie stopped, listening to what he was saying.

"He should be back with the list of names tonight," Randall said to someone else in the room. "Then we can proceed with making sure no one was left out, then distribute the star patches for them to wear."

"When will the buses arrive for them?" The other man Jamie recognized as Captain Alder asked.

"A few weeks time if we're lucky, a month perhaps," Randall replied. "I need confirmation coming from Berlin on this."

"They shouldn't have any idea what's going on, so we'll catch the swine off guard," Randall said, and Jamie knew exactly what kind of expression he would have on his face now.

"It will be nice to have them out of sight," Alder said. "Finally going to a place they belong to."

Jamie felt like if he waited any longer, someone was bound to walk past and ask what he was doing. He took a deep breath before knocking on the door.

"Come," Randall replied shortly.

"I have the list, sir," Jamie said immediately, saluting the Captain.

"At ease, Captain," Randall flicked his wrist and put out his burning cigarette. "Hand it over, and then you're dismissed for the evening."

Jamie reached into his pocket and pulled out the list of names. As he handed it over, he felt a deep pit in his stomach, as if what he was doing was dangerous. There was no turning back now.

"Why do ye need the list, Captain? I forgot to ask earlier."

"You forgot to ask?" Randall chuckled, his little evil laugh of his. "I'll forget to answer, then, Fraser. You can be off, now. You're not needed here any longer."

"If that is all, I'll be leavin' ye," Jamie saluted once again, swallowing painfully. The more time passed, the more he wanted to punch each and any one of them.

"Captains."

As Jamie left the building, he thought he might be ill. From the sounds of it, the captains were acting as if whoever's names were on that list would be shipped somewhere on a bus in only a matter of days or weeks. To where, he still didn't know. *And for why?* He didn't know, either. As he made his way home, a sense of guilt suddenly took over him. He had to obey orders, he didn't have any choice. But Claire had been right, in doing so, he erased his own dignity simply because he couldn't stand up for what was right.

Jamie didn't want to be part of the army. He didn't want to do what his colleagues were doing and yet, here he was, stuck in a war that wasn't his own.

Now, he just wanted to see Claire. He always felt calm when he laid eyes on her, when he touched her…

It was late, and he was walking alone on the road back to the house. If he wasn't so tired, he would have broken out into a run. Randall had said they would check to make sure no one's name was left off of the list. Jamie's hand reached to touch the folded paper in his pocket — *still there*. There was no telling what Randall would do to Jamie if he found out he had stolen a record.

A light was on in one of the bedrooms as Jamie approached the house. Her bedroom. The very one that they had shared a moment together in bed just weeks ago. A moment he would die to have again.

One of the curtains was still left open and from this distance, Jamie knew she wouldn't be able to see him, so he waited and watched. Claire was wearing all of the layers she owned and was sitting in the chair beside the window. Her wild hair went up in all directions, and Jamie's fingers itched to touch a silky strand.

He knew that he should go in, but just as he took a step forward, he noticed that Claire was wiping her eyes with a cloth — she was crying. For what, he did not know. For the war. Her husband. Maybe even for him.

"Sassenach, dinna weep," Jamie whispered into the night. Before he went inside, he took the papers from his pocket and grabbed his lighter. The flame began slowly on the edge of the paper until it consumed the words, erasing Claire's name. Jamie held the burning pages until he couldn't any longer and let them fall to the ground, waiting until they turned into a pile of ash. He stepped his foot onto them, mixing them with the dirt. *She'd be the first of many he'd save.*

As he approached the house, Claire's candle went out, shrouding the area with darkness. He wanted to tell her what he had overheard from Randall, but it was not news that should be heard before one goes to sleep. He didn't even know what to make of it, himself.

Jamie walked as quietly as he could through the house, pausing outside her door. He heard the bed squeak, knowing that she was turning over onto her side, trying to get comfortable. If he closed his eyes, he could almost feel her body in his arms again.

Leaving that memory behind, Jamie went into his own room, closing the door gently behind him. The uniform came off, tossed over a chair in the corner of the room — he was too tired to properly hang it up. His stomach growled, he also found he had no appetite. Instead, Jamie climbed into bed, wearing only a pair of boxers. He always slept warm, and usually kicked off the covers at night.

Her skin was soft under his fingers as he ran them slowly over the curve of her spine. A small sound came from her lips, and Jamie peered at her through long lashes. Claire smiled at him, running one hand loosely through his curls.

"I don't ever want you to leave me," she said softly, making his heartache. He had spent hours kissing and discovering every inch of her body, but it would never be enough. His hand settled on her arse, squeezing the plump flesh.

"I promise I willna leave ye, Sassenach," Jamie said before kissing her. Then, Claire's hand pressed down on his head, pushing his body down to where she needed him most. The smell of her was intoxicating, and he rested his forehead against her bellybutton.

With a glance upwards, Jamie stuck his tongue out, gripping her thighs as Claire let out a long moan.

Jamie woke with a gasp, as if he had been suffocating. It took a moment for him to realize that he was not actually in Claire's bed, but he was alone in his. His body was drenched in sweat, and as his senses came to, he realized he had a terrible cockstand.

"Christ, Sassenach. What are ye doin' to me?" he whispered to himself and lay back down against the pillows, his mind swirling with images of Claire under his tongue and fingers.

A Warning

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

It had been several days since Jamie had turned in the list to Randall. What he should have been stressing about was what would become of the names. While he was concerned, he found that his dreams told him what he was really preoccupied with.

Claire.

S assenach.

Night after night, he dreamt of her. Her laugh in his ear, her smile against his lips and the touch of her hand on his body. And morning after morning, he would have to face her, wanting to speak with her, while she ignored him. He wanted his dreams to become a reality, but he didn't know how.

Of course, from time to time, Jamie remembered his wife.

And Claire's husband.

At those thoughts, he cursed himself and tried to ignore the sound his heart made whenever it broke a little. *He'd never have Claire the way he wanted.* Whenever the war will end, he'll have to leave to go back to Germany, if he got lucky and didn't get killed before that. Jamie knew Claire had barely any news of her husband, secretly, he tried to find Jacques but nothing came up. He seemed to have vanished, without news of the regiment he was supposed to be in. Either he had died or he would miraculously reappear one day, much to Claire's surprise.

He didn't know the man and he never wished ill on anybody but a selfish part of himself hoped Claire would be his someday. In the short time he had known her, she made him feel so many different things.

Things he had never suspected existed up until now.

Jamie wrote to Vivian whenever she wrote him first. She told tales of life in the countryside, where she was residing with the rest of her family. She hoped for a quick end of the war, she praised the Fürher and, Jamie knew, she secretly hoped the ideologies of such a vile man would take over the world once victory would fall upon them. Vivian came from a rich aristocratic family, and like most of those families, they praised and almost worshipped their

leader. His uncle, too, was part of such a group. But knowing Dougal, Jamie suspected he only came along with the flow for his own profit.

Whatever the outcome of the war, Jamie couldn't keep lying to himself. He couldn't keep playing his uncle's puppet. The marriage had been a sham for Dougal to access aristocracy, now Jamie understood it perfectly. He couldn't stand back while he was associated with such vile people.

He shouldn't have listened to his uncle and enlisted into the army, if only he had known...He should be fighting along with the allies, not against them. He wasn't a german and he never would be.

This wasn't a war he wanted to win alongside Germany. *Quite the contrary.* What he needed to find was a plan — *quickly*.

Jamie stayed in bed more than he usually did, listening to the silence around him, the room still drowning in darkness given the early hours. At some point, he heard the front door opening slowly and knew Claire was back from her daily expeditions. He was in awe of her — and slightly terrified for her safety. If any other soldier would find her putting up the leaflets in the village, she'd be arrested and most likely send to whatever they called work camp. Jamie had no idea what those were — *no idea what was happening there —* since Captain Randall kept his mouth tightly shut on the subject to anyone who was under his orders.

All Jamie knew was that he didn't want Claire to be in danger and these days, the unknown meant danger.

He listened to her footsteps around the house, going from the hall to the kitchen. He listened to the kettle starting to boil on the stove and to the various cupboards opening. She liked her tea black, with a dash of sugar and a hint of milk. She liked her toasts almost burned, with too much butter on them. But the bread was starting to become sparse, along with most of the food supplies in the village, so these days, she only had half a toast to keep the rest for another day.

It killed him to know the people were rationing when most of the food was at the soldiers' headquarters, going to waste. Most days, Jamie smuggled some chocolate and other bits to bring home for Claire, he always put them on the kitchen table for her to see. Sometimes, she didn't touch it and sometimes, she'd take some but mostly to bring to Gaëlle who had even less to eat.

Gaëlle.

Suddenly Jamie remembered seeing her name pass through the records and he remembered scribbling it down onto the papers to give to his superior. At the time, he was so exhausted and his mind too preoccupied with Claire to pay proper attention. Her husband had been taken away after stealing bread from the bakery — though, Josef had done nothing other than responding to a rude german soldier. They knew where he was but didn't know how he was holding on and had no means to contact him, even with Jamie's help. All that Jamie knew

was that he couldn't let Gaëlle and the baby end up in a workcamp, only because of their belief.

He needed to talk to Claire to find a solution. He needed to confess to her what he had done, even if it meant she'd hate him more than she already did. *If that was even possible…*

Since the day at the library, she had not talked to him. She barely looked at him whenever they happen to be in the same room. Something she tried to avoid as much as possible. He used to find something hidden in her eyes, whenever she looked at him — something he had never seen in anyone else's. But now, all he found was indifference, anger, and it killed him.

Jamie didn't bother dressing in his entire uniform. He simply put on some trousers with a white shirt rolled at the sleeves and his suspenders. He put on his slippers and walked out of the bedroom, in search of the lady of the house — *who was in the candlelit kitchen.*

Claire was sitting with her back towards the door, warming herself onto the warm porcelain of her mug. She had a plaid wrapped around her shoulders and her hair was, for once, untied.

Jamie suspected it was whenever she wasn't in his presence and he wished she would be comfortable enough around him to let her curls roam free. Such a beautiful sight. *Curls he wanted to touch —* to run his fingers into. Curls that looked like ribbons of silk.

"Mo nighean donn," he whispered louder than he had thought.

Claire turned around and looked at him, confused.

He always found the same things floating in her whisky eyes: fear, disgust, disappointment. But sometimes, just sometimes, she'd let her guard down and something else was there. Something he didn't know what, but something special. Right now, that's exactly what he found.

Her features weren't harsh, her eyes were sleepy and for a brief moment, she must have forgotten what was happening because she smiled warmly. It only lasted a second before she composed herself.

"Oh, hello," she cleared her throat and took a sip of her drink.

"Hello," was all he managed to say, running his fingers through his hair. He felt like a child, unable to speak. Unable to move.

She disarmed him — *every time.*

"What were you saying there?" Putting her mug onto the table, she watched him intensely.

"Me? Och, nothin'" Jamie brushed it off, avoiding her eyes.

"I thought I heard you mumble something," she frowned, picking up her mug again to take another sip.

"I dinna recall," he walked over to her, very aware of her eyes following him.

"You said," Claire thought for a second, looking up at him. "*Moni done* or something of the sort."

Jamie couldn't help but smile at her terrible pronunciation — one that warmed his heart, nonetheless. "I said: mo nighean donn."

"Is it german?" She asked, getting up and leaning against the counter.

"Nay, 'tis gaelic." He felt his cheeks warming up and he bet they were turning crimson. He was glad the kitchen wasn't very well lit at this early hour.

"And it means…?" Her eyebrows raised in question, her lip flicking up slightly — just slightly, in amusement.

"It means…"Jamie stood in front of her, looking down at her face. For the first time since he had first met her, her curls were down and he couldn't help himself.

"It means my brown-haired lass," he whispered, stroking a stray curl away from her face, tucking it behind her ear.

Claire seemed taken aback by this and pulled the plaid slightly, "Brown is a rather dull colour I always thought."

"No," he smiled tenderly — she had no idea how beautiful she was and that, to him, was a crazy thought altogether.

"Not dull at all. 'Tis like...the water in a burn. The way it ruffles down the rocks. With wee bits of auburn where the sun hits it."

"A real poet, Captain," Claire cleared her throat and pretexted to get her mug to pull away from him. Ignoring him — and how she felt — as best as she could, she put it in the sink and washed it thoroughly.

"Claire," Jamie said and watched her body tense all over. Her back was still turned to him but she stood straighter and he could see her eyes closing briefly.

"I need to talk wi' ye about something important and I need yer help."

Slowly, she turned around to look at him and leaned against the counter, "What is it?"

"'Tis about the list...ye recall the one I asked ye the other day?"

She nodded, crossing her arms. "I do and I'm not helping you getting any names, I already told you that."

"Aye, and 'tis no' what I need from ye...I have names. I went and got the records but —"

"*But*? What is your list needed for, anyway?"

"I dinna ken, per se. I overheard Captain Randall talk about sending people from the list away and —"

"What?!" She walked over to him. "What do you mean? Where?"

"I dinna ken, Claire!" Jamie said sincerely.

"They didn't tell us things, apart from orders. We are meant to obey and no' ask questions. All I ken is that ye need to hide Gaëlle and the bairn. At least until I find out what is up wi' Randall, we canna risk her being sent God knows where."

"Hide them? But…" Claire frowned, "Hide them for how long and where exactly? They'll be searching the houses if they can't find them —"

"I dinna ken but as long as possible...I didn't add yer name to the list and I erased the records of ye and Jacques so no one else would find them but I dinna ken how I missed her name...I'm sorry." The guilt in his voice was palpable and the shame in his eyes was as plain as day. So much so that Claire seemed to soften, at once.

"Well you've told me now," She said softly, touching his arm in passing. "I suppose I could hide her and the baby here..."

"I reckon they'll come and search every house, Sassenach but we have to do somethin'," Jamie cupped her cheeks, looking into her eyes. "Anythin' to help."

"Yes, but where? Where do I hide a woman and her child?" She threw up her hands and sighed.

"Is there a secret place? One no one will think to look?"

He saw Claire's eyes dart towards the front door as she nodded. She knew exactly where to hide Gaëlle and the baby.

"Whatever ye have in mind, ye can hide them there. It willna be easy for them, but it's better than bein' sent somewhere and riskin' their lives."

"Aren't you risking your own life by helping them?" Claire asked. "You could be harmed, Jamie. Killed even."

At the sound of his name on her lips, he took a step towards her. Damn the consequences, he knew what was right. "I'll do what must be done to protect ye three. I canna sit back and watch Gaëlle be taken from her home. I've caused enough trouble, now 'tis time for me to do somethin' about it."

Claire had tears in her eyes, either because of his words or for fear of her friend. Jamie quickly kissed her forehead, savouring the moment before stepping back. "Go to her, grab what you can and meet me back here. We'll figure somethin' out. Together."

"I will," Claire said softly, gazing at him. "Thank you, Jamie."

The Scot watched her raced out the door to the Rosenberg's and silently prayed their plan would work. He couldn't keep staying a silent witness to what the Germans were doing so he'd find little ways to disrupt their plans. Little ways to save lives. He swore a silent oath that he wouldn't let harm nor pain come to Claire and the people she loved. No matter what he risked in the process.

To live without her would be death, anyway.

Checkpoint

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading!

Claire had been hiding Gaëlle and the baby for the last three days. Day and night, they both stayed in the pantry — where Claire brought them food, blankets and candles whenever it was needed. *Where they wouldn't be heard or seen.*

Every time a car drove past the house, Claire's stomach turned. They didn't know when the soldiers would come for Gaëlle, they didn't even know if they'd come at all but they couldn't risk it. Not after what Jamie had heard.

Jamie.

When he wasn't off to try and find out what was going on, he was letting the guilt eat away at him. He didn't say a word but Claire could see it as clear as day. She heard him curse himself at night when he thought her asleep. She heard him pray, sometimes in Gaelic words she couldn't understand. And most of all, she could see the shame floating in his eyes whenever they locked with hers. Jamie was stuck — *one way or another.* All he could do now was help in the smallest ways.

The Germans had started arresting people from the village. Each day, families were ripped apart. *Parents taken away, children left behind to no one but neighbours.* The ones who were not so lucky were taken away from their parents to be sent God only knew where. Chaos and fears had started to slide its way in what used to be the peaceful village of Montoire. And no one knew how to behave. *How to deal with it.*

Some packed and left, in the vain hope of making it to a safe place — *if such a thing still existed.* Others were shot by soldiers before they even had the chance to make their way out of the place.

In only a couple of days, the atmosphere had gone from bad to worse, with no improvement in sight.

"How much longer will I have to stay here?" Gaëlle asked, her patience long lost. She was sitting down on some pillows, her sleeping daughter in her arms. She still had not decided on a name and refused to do so until Joe would be back.

"I don't know," Claire sighed, putting the tray with some tea next to her. "I'm sorry you have to stay in here but there is no other way. The soldiers already came and searched your house, it's only a matter of time before they start looking for you."

Shrugging, her friend ignored the warm beverage and looked up at Claire. "Are you even sure they'll be coming or this is just a farce?"

"A farce? Gaëlle, they've been arresting people left and right for the past few days," Claire tried to keep her voice down as much as possible. Not only for the sake of the sleeping child but also because she didn't know who could be outside and hear them. It was already bad enough not to know when the baby would go and start crying.

"Jamie said —"

"Ah. *Jamie.*" Gaëlle interrupted her.

"He said what, exactly? That they'd be coming for me? Wake up, Claire. They're coming for every single one of us. You won't be spared simply because you've got your loverboy under your roof."

"Gaëlle, I know you are upset but —"

"But what? How do you even know he's worth trusting? What if this is a trap to arrest you and me, at the very same time."

"He wouldn't do that." She said softly, swallowing the lump in her throat. She trusted Jamie, it was something she couldn't help. Deep down, she knew he was a good man, even if she didn't admit it to herself quite yet.

"Actually, you have no idea what he's capable of doing, he's part of their army. What is happening to you, uh? Do you think Jacques would approve of this?"

"Jacques isn't here right now, if you recall. He's not here, nor is Joe. They are not here to protect us so we have to do it ourselves, Gaëlle. If you are not happy, you can go back to your home and pretend the Germans won't be coming for you but at least you can't say I didn't try to help."

Gaëlle sighed and was silent for a moment, her eyes dropping to look at the sleeping baby. The little girl wasn't fussy and rarely cried, which was good given they didn't want to be heard. She looked more and more like Joe, which didn't help how Gaëlle must be feeling about the situation.

"We can't hide here forever...Claire, you know it as much as I do."

"Indeed but you have to stay here as long as possible. At least until we figure something out," Claire kneeled down and took her hand.

"I'm sorry I don't have a better place to hide you both but it's the best I can do right now. The town is becoming a bloodbath, everyone is either running away or being shot. The food rations are becoming more and more scarce...I know you don't like Fraser but if he's our only chance of getting through this, we have to take it. He told me to hide you, he had nothing to gain in such thing, quite the contrary."

Gaëlle squeezed her hand, nodding.

"If any of colleagues learn what he is doing, he'll be the first one killed before any of us. I doubt he'd be risking all of this if he was not, deep down, a good man."

"He is a german, Claire."

"The uniform he wears doesn't mean anything to the man he is. Do you think wearing it is the only factor to the atrocities they are doing? These men are pigs, with or without a piece a garment. I'm not asking you to like him, I'm asking you to trust me."

"But.."

"Do you want to see this little pumpkin grow up?" Claire looked down at the baby before looking up at Gaëlle again. "Do you want to see Joe again and for them both to know one another?"

"I do," her friend answered, holding back tears. "There's nothing I want more."

"I know," she touched her arm in sympathy. "Then you are going to hide here for as long as possible until we find a solution and when we'll find this solution, we'll make sure you both are safe so when this war is over, you'll be reunited with Joe, yes?"

"Yes." A tear escaped Gaëlle's eye and Claire wiped it away slowly.

"This won't be going on forever, it can. But when it'll be over, we'll all still be here, I promise you that."

"Merci, Claire," Gaëlle wrapped her free arm around her and held her close.

For a long moment, she held her tightly, closing her eyes. Silently, she prayed whatever she had just promised to her friend wouldn't simply be vain words of courage in a moment of despair.

"Now, I'll go back up to see what's going on but I'll bring you some broth later on. Along with water and whatever else you'll need for the night." She said softly, looking at Gaëlle with a smile.

"Alright," she nodded, wiping her wet cheeks with her sleeve.

Thankfully, it wasn't cold in the pantry and Jacques had installed a lamp that still worked fairly well.

"Could you get me another book, too?"

"Of course I will." Getting up, Claire smoothed the fabric of her trousers and smiled. Carefully, she made her way out of the pantry, making sure no one was around to see her come out of the garage. It broke her heart to see her best friend hiding in there but there was no other way to protect them right now.

When she got back inside her house, Jamie still wasn't home. He'd been out all morning and afternoon, and to her surprise, she missed him. Mostly, she missed the safety she felt when he

was here. She knew that as long as he was around, no harm would befall her.

Claire steadied herself on the counter for a brief moment, remembering that she hadn't eaten since last night. The broth might be warm, but it was not particularly filling, and Claire's belly ached for a proper meal.

There was no way to know when Jamie would come home, so Claire began to make a fresh batch of broth, cutting vegetables and every ten seconds she would glance out the kitchen window.

After she finished cutting the carrots, she looked out the window and saw a man, who she thought at first might be Jamie, but as he came closer, she realized it was a man she'd before. She assumed he would pass by her house, as the officers lately had been. So when a knock came a moment later, it startled her, making her drop the knife to the floor with a metal clang.

"Jesus H. Roosevelt Christ!"

Her nerves had been shot the past few days, always on edge, waiting for the inevitable.

Claire picked up the knife and set it on the counter before removing her apron to answer the door. It was times like this when Claire really wished Jamie was home.

"Hello," Claire said when she opened the door to the man. She instantly recognized him as the one who had arrested Joe, and she wanted to spit on his shiny shoes, but refrained. His german uniform was immaculate. His hair was slicked back, and his hat was tucked under his arm. The man's eyes were staring at her intensely, and Claire wanted to shrink and hide.

"Madam," he said with a wicked grin, one that made her stomach twist as he looked her up and down. "Won't you invite me in?"

So, it was like that then, was it?

"Yes, of course, Captain, my apologies," Claire bowed her head and opened the door for the officer to enter. Before closing the door, she looked down the street to see if Jamie was anywhere in sight. "Oh Jamie, please," she whispered.

The Captain who went by the name Randall was standing in her kitchen, peering down at the pot of broth that was cooking on the stove. She watched as he stuck a dirty finger in, putting it to his lips to taste.

"Hmm, very good," he licked his lips.

"What can I help you with, Captain?" Claire stood at the other end of the room, not wanting to go near him.

"Oh, I thought I'd stop by," he said while looking around the room, "just to see how things were going with Captain Fraser. You know, I don't want my men behaving badly to their hosts."

"Captain Fraser has been nothing but a gentleman," Claire smiled as politely as she could manage. Her heart was pounding, wishing he would just leave.

"He's a quiet fellow," Randall remarked and then stepped out into the hallway, leaving Claire wondering if she should follow after him.

With a glance to the stove, Claire went into the hallway just in time to see Randall walking into her room.

"Is that all, Captain?" She stood in the doorway.

He was standing by her dresser, and he pulled one drawer open — her undergarments.

"You're married, correct?" He asked, his accent thick.

Claire felt violated as he looked through her things. His hands passing lightly over her belongings. A chill ran down her spine, and it took every ounce of her self control to not look out the window towards Gaëlle's hiding place.

"Yes, my husband is… away," she said, not wanting to get into specifics.

Randall made a grunting sound in his throat, then closed her drawer. Thankfully, he hadn't opened the bottom one, or else he would have discovered a small handgun that belonged to her husband stuffed in a pair of socks. She didn't know how to use it, but she wasn't allowed to have it.

"You're a beautiful woman, Madam," Randall said, taking a step closer to her, so close she could smell the alcohol on his breath. "I could imagine some officers might not behave like a gentleman, as you say," his hand cupped her cheek, and his thumb pressed firmly. "What, with a body like yours, even as starved as you probably are."

"Captain," Claire croaked, trying to get out of his grasp. Just as his hand tightened on her face, the front door opened and closed, making Randall back away, muttering under his breath in german.

"Captain Fraser," Claire said loudly from her room. "We have company."

Jamie stepped around the corner, looking tired, but immediately straightened into a salute whenever he saw Randall.

"At ease," Randall said casually, walking towards him. "I just came to check on things here. See how Mrs Landau was getting on."

"If I'd known ye'd come, I would have been here," Jamie said, then flashed a quick look of sympathy towards Claire.

"Oh no, it was better without you here," Randall patted him roughly on the back. "I should be going. I have a meeting with Captain Alder later tonight. I'm sure I'll see you tomorrow, Fraser."

"Aye, of course, sir," Jamie bowed his head and began to escort Randall towards the door.

Randall turned to Claire, smirking, "It was a pleasure, Madam."

Biting her tongue, Claire simply smiled and waited until Jamie had shut the door to let out a deep sigh.

"Christ," Jamie muttered under his breath. "Sassenach, I'm sorry ye had to be alone wi' him."

"He's rather unpleasant to be alone with," Claire shivered. "I thought I would give away Gaëlle. I don't even really know what he was doing here. Asking if you were being good to me sounds like a poor excuse. He went into my room!"

Jamie seemed alarmed at this, and his brows rose. "Verra odd indeed, Sassenach. I dinna ken why he would come here either. Perhaps to check that ye really are alone and such. I dinna exactly trust the man myself."

"Do you think he'll come back?" Claire asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"He could," Jamie nodded, his lips pressed tightly together. "I hate to suggest this," he ran one hand through his hair, making it stick up. "But I think we should move Gaelle and the bairn. Wi' Randall himself comin' here now, 'tis just a matter of time before they find them."

"Move them where?" Claire asked as she walked into the kitchen to check on the broth. She heard Jamie's footsteps behind her.

"I dinna ken," he replied, following her. "Well…"

"Well, what?"

"I've heard of people escapin' to the free zone," Jamie waved his hand as he talked. "Perhaps we could bring her over there wi' the bairn and then they can make their way to some relatives? I was gone all afternoon to get them these,' he pulled out some papers from the pocket inside his jacket.

"What are those?" Claire frowned, taking them.

"New passports and free passes to go. They'll have new names so they won't be arrested at the checkpoint. 'Tis no' safe to keep them here and they can't go back to the house. There is no' other way."

"I'll have to convince her, Jamie. There is no way she'd abandon the house to go God knows where —"

"He's right." Came from Gaëlle's voice behind them.

Turning around, Claire looked at her and was about to say something but her friend beat her to it.

"We can't stay here and we can't go back home. Joe has some relatives living in America...if we can make our way there by boat or some kind, I think it would be safer. For all of us. "

"America?" Claire frowned, walking over to her. "Gaëlle, that's bloody far."

"I know it is but there is no other way, I have to do this for the baby or she might not even live to be one year old. I have to try." The desperate tone in her voice broke Claire's heart.

"I ken a lad who can get ye to Rouen. From there on, there are ships sailing to America and ye'll be able to be on one but ye'll have to get the papers," Jamie intervene, standing next to Claire.

"I got what I could from the house before we came to hide here, I don't need anything else to go. When do we leave?" Gaëlle asked, looking at them both.

"No' until nightfall, it would be too dangerous but even then...we might no' be back here at all."

Claire looked at him before turning to Gaëlle, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"I will write them a letter and I'll ask you to post it, alright? I might not even make it there but like I said, I have to try it. If not for me, for the baby. And Joe...he will join us when this is over, I know he will."

Claire wrapped her arms around her and held her tightly, looking at Jamie, "We'll get you there safely."

"Aye, we will." He assured them both. "I'll go make some calls to arrange everythin'."

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While Jamie was busy making the proper arrangements, Claire and Gaëlle sat by the fire in the living room. It was risky to have her out in the open like this, but Claire didn't want to spend what could be the last moments with her friend in hiding.

The two were quiet, holding hands tightly as they waited. What they were all about to embark on was a dangerous journey — for Gaëlle and her child, it was beyond dangerous, they could die.

"I want you to know Claire," Gaelle said, squeezing her friend's fingers. "I've always appreciated your friendship, and I don't know what I would do without you. You were like a sister to me."

"Please, don't talk as if we'll never see each other again," Claire sniffed and wiped at a tear under her eye. "I don't think I can bear it."

The likelihood of them seeing one another was very slim, but strange things happened every day.

"I love you, Gaëlle," Claire said through her tears. "You were so kind to me when I moved here, I'll never forget it. You're one of the truest friends I have ever had. I'll miss you and your little one more than you'll ever know."

Her friend let go of her hand to better cradle her sleeping daughter. "Speaking of this little one," she smiled warmly. "I think I've decided on a name. I would prefer if Joe was here, but… I think he would approve."

"Oh, what did you name her?"

"Claire Josephine Rosenberg," Gaëlle said proudly, her own eyes filling with tears. "She needs a strong name, coming from a strong woman."

At a loss for words, Claire reached out at stroked baby Claire's soft cheek. "Claire," she whispered. "Thank you Gaëlle."

"There are lots of tears I see," Jamie said upon entering the room, smiling softly.

"Oh well," Claire wiped at her eyes. "Gaëlle just named her baby after me, so it's to be expected!"

"Ye named the bairn Claire?" Jamie asked, kneeling down beside Gaëlle's chair. "Tis a good name after all. Sorcha, 'tis means light in Gaelic."

"I did," she smiled proudly. "It's the least I can do for a dear friend who is risking everything."

Claire caught his eye and smiled softly.

"And you too, Captain," Gaëlle said and touched his arm. "I must thank you for what you're doing for my family. I know now that Claire is in good hands."

A deep crimson spread over Jamie's fair cheeks. "Of course. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. I'd do anythin' for claire."

"Is it almost time to go?" Claire asked him, ignoring his last sentence.

"Aye," Jamie said, taking a look outside and the dark night. "I'll take them in my car, and Sassenach… ye should stay here. It's past curfew and if someone were to come and find the house empty at this time of night —"

"Christ," Claire sighed, looking at him. "You're right. I have to stay here. I don't like it one bit, but I must."

From there, things moved along quickly as they made sure that Gaëlle had the proper documents. Claire had packed her a small bag with a bit of food, and a change of clothes for her. She had gone over to her house earlier to retrieve a few clothing items of baby Claire's.

The two friends parted bittersweetly, after a long embrace. Not knowing what the future held.

Claire watched them drive away, praying that everything would go as planned and went back to the fire to wait for Jamie's return.

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After driving quietly for twenty minutes, Jamie told Gaelle that they were close. He couldn't stop his hand from shaking, and he knew that this was a risk, but he had to be brave for Claire.

"You like her don't you?" Gaelle asked Jamie as they began to slow.

"Excuse me?" He frowned, briefly looking at her.

"You heard me," Gaelle smirked. "You like Claire, maybe even more than like, actually."

"Well," he struggled to find the right words. "I'll no' deny that I enjoy Claire's company, aye. She's an extraordinary lass."

"Hmph," Gaelle chuckled. "If my opinion means anything to you… she likes you too. She looks at you in a peculiar way. I can't explain it but I've never seen anything like it before."

Those words warmed Jamie's heart, and he hadn't realized that he'd been longing to hear them.

"Thank ye for tellin' me," Jamie smiled at her. "I'll keep it just between us."

"Or perhaps you shouldn't," Gaelle shrugged and pulled baby Claire close to her chest. "It's times like this that we realize what is really important, Captain. And that we can't waste a moment to be with the ones we love — the ones we want to be with."

The car came to a stop, and Jamie turned off the engine.

"Ye've given me a great deal to think about," Jamie said softly so as not to wake the baby. "I wish that I could take ye further, and see ye safe."

"We'll be just fine," Gaëlle assured him and waited as Jamie came around to open her door. "Don't wait around for me. Claire will be worried sick if she doesn't see you come back, and she'll need you too."

"Aye," he nodded, smiling. "Gaëlle?"

"Yes, Captain?" She looked at him, her eyes softening.

"Would ye mind it if I gave ye a farewell hug?"

"Not at all," she smiled and he wrapped his arms around her, careful not to squish baby Claire.

"Be safe and godspeed."

It was nearly pitch black outside, and they had stopped on the road that led to a nearby checkpoint. Jamie didn't want to be seen and risk Gaëlle even further. He stood by the car, watching as her figure disappeared.

She had told him not to wait, but he needed to at least make sure she got through the checkpoint. He walked quietly into the trees, searching for any sight of her. He didn't want to go back to Claire and tell her he didn't know if she had made it to the first stop. *He had to be sure.*

It was quite far away, but he saw her as well as two others approach the checkpoint. Jamie held his breath, waiting. Gaëlle was waved through and Jamie let out a small sound of a cheer. To his left, a branch snapped and before he realized what was happening, he heard a shot fired.

"Who goes there!" Someone shouted angrily in German, but Jamie was already running back to the car, not daring to slow down.

He fumbled with the handle of the door and practically threw himself in, turning the key forcefully and slammed on the gas.

It was too dark to see if whoever had yelled had come onto the road, but he wasn't going to wait and find out.

Jamie grunted, and as the adrenaline began to fade, he felt a throbbing on his thigh. He touched his leg, and when he pulled his hand up to his face, it was covered in blood.

Bullet Wound

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading!

Claire had been pacing the house for hours, now, ignoring the ache in her body and the knot in her stomach. All she did was silently pray that Gaëlle and the baby made it past the checkpoint and that Jamie was on his way back here.

Her worries grew with each passing minute she didn't see him come back and even a cigarette couldn't calm her down. She knew he would take some time but the checkpoint wasn't that far and this was getting ridiculous. It was the middle of the night, she was crawling with sleep and the faint idea of not seeing Jamie again was starting to haunt her more than she cared to admit.

Everyone was gone.

This man — *this stranger* — was all she had left, she painfully realized. He was her only anchor in this war. In a village, she did her best to convince herself not to leave without looking back.

To leave to go where, anyway? This was the only home she has ever known. The only place she was familiar with. She was grieving for her uncle, her husband. All the things she had known before. All the people she'd never see again. She wasn't too sure she was actually processing any of it but there was no other way than to get up in the morning and try to function.

She was sitting by the fire when she finally heard the sound of a car parked outside. It was still dark but she recognized the way Jamie closed the door like he did every day whenever he came home.

Claire rushed to the hall and opened the door quickly. She remarked that he was alone, which hopefully meant Gaëlle had been able to pass through the checkpoint. But before she could ask him about any of it, she realized Jamie was clutching at his leg, painfully trying to walk toward her. Then, she saw the blood. Covering his clothes, his hands. *Dripping*.

"Good Lord," she hurried over to him. "What on earth happened to you?"

"Keep yer voice down, Sassenach," he said through gritted teeth and closed his eyes for a brief second.

"You are bleeding," she remarked quietly, as if he was not aware of such a fact, and wrapped her arm around his waist. As best as she could, given he was a giant, she helped him toward

the house and then towards the nearest lying surface.

"You've been shot!" She exclaimed, looking properly at his wound now that he was laying down.

"Aye, thank ye for making me aware of it," he opened one eye to look at her. He was shivering, yet, drops of sweat were streaming down his forehead.

"Jamie, I'm going to need to give this a look and most likely remove a bullet," she watched him, wondering how on earth she was going to do such a thing. Thankfully, during her years of travel with her uncle, she had been known to be his nurse whenever he injured himself — *which was often.*

"I think we should move you over to a bed and then I'll see what I can do."

Nodding, Jamie closed his eyes again, "Aye, give me a moment."

"Of course," she carefully reached for his hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze — his palm warm against hers. "Jamie…"

"Gaëlle and the bairn," he started, taking a long breath. Claire braced herself for whatever he was about to say next.

"They went through the checkpoint," he finished, his words bringing along a sentiment of relief. The journey was far from being a safe one but knowing they went through was already something. For the rest, Claire could only pray.

"Oh, good," she let out a breath and didn't realize she was still holding onto his hand for dear life.

"I dinna ken what happened after that, I was hiding to see them through and I heard a gunshot. Then I felt it in my leg and started to go back to the car as fast as I could. I dinna ken how I even made it back."

"Sssh," she said softly, touching his cheek. She tried to calm him, sensing how agitated he was.

"You'll tell me in time, alright? Right now, I'll make sure you don't lose a leg. I'll ask you one more effort to go to your bed and soon you'll be resting."

Jamie looked at her, one of his fist clutching the fabric of his trousers. With his good leg, he balanced himself and got up as best as he could. Claire quickly wrapped his arm around one of her shoulders and helped him towards his bedroom. Together, they took slow steps. *One by one.* Ignoring his blood dripping onto the wooden floor of the hall. She didn't know how she'd be able to clean that off but it was the last of her worries, right now.

As Claire helped him onto the bed, she found herself sweating from the effort. While she had been waiting for him to return, the last thing she expected was for him to come back with a bullet in his leg.

Upon closer inspection of the wound, she truly wondered how he had made it back here in a conscious state with the amount of blood he had lost.

"I'm afraid I'll have to cut these trousers, and they're soaked with blood anyways," she shrugged helplessly.

"Do whatever ye need, Sassenach," he bit down on his bottom lip as he leaned against the pillows. "Just promise me ye'll save the leg?"

The wound wasn't very deep, even as she looked now, she could see the bullet. Of course, he would be worried about losing his leg — any able-bodied man would be concerned.

Claire squeezed his hand, reassuring him. "You won't lose it, I promise you."

"I'm going to get the scissors and I'll bring you back something to bite on for the pain," she said as she turned to the kitchen.

"There's a bottle of whisky I hid in the pantry behind the potatoes, would ye fetch it?" He looked at her sheepishly.

"Of course, Jamie," she couldn't help but smile, wondering what else he had hidden here.

Her first aid kit was in the bathroom, so she retrieved that first as well as a towel that she knew would be thrown away after tonight. Claire's hands were shaking slightly as she went to retrieve the scissors and whisky. She prayed silently that whoever had shot Jamie, hadn't got a clear look at his car or else they would trace him back here. A shot german soldier wasn't a good look.

"The whisky is the only alcohol in the house, so I'll need to use a bit to disinfect the wound," Claire said to Jamie as she set it beside him on the table. "But you can have a good dram now before we get started."

"Thank ye, mo nighean donn," Jamie said softly and grabbed the bottle, twisting the cap off and downed a big gulp.

"Scots," Claire chuckled at the sight.

"I was weaned on the stuff, ye ken?" He laughed at her observation and then winced as she touched his leg. "Never liked these pants anyways."

With the scissors in hand, Claire carefully began to cut his trousers above his wound. This left his thigh and calf completely bare, and with a blush, she realized this was the most of him she'd ever seen. Not that she hadn't touched him more intimately before — she shook her head to clear that thought away.

Thankfully, the blood had slowed, which was a good sign. Glancing up at his face, Jamie looked rather pale still, and his lips were mumbling something that sounded like a prayer. His hands were still cradling the whisky bottle like a newborn, and Claire gently slid it out of his grasp.

"This is going to hurt," she warned him, and then slowly trickled the liquid over the wound and he grunted, writhing in the bed.

"Agh! Christ Almighty!"

"It's almost over," she placed the towel over the wound briefly to wipe up some of the blood. "Now comes the nasty part."

"Sassenach?" his hand was on her arm, surprisingly with a tight grip.

"Yes, Jamie?"

His eyelids were droopy, and she couldn't tell if that was because of the pain or because of the amount of whisky he had gulped down a moment before.

"I must ask ye somethin' before ye go on," he slurred.

She nodded, becoming slightly amused at his inebriated state. "Go on, then."

"Would ye kiss a dyin' man, Claire? I dinna want to die without feelin' yer lips on mine one last time," his hand was warm on her skin.

Who was she to deny a man's last wish? She knew he wasn't going to die, he was going to have a limp and a sore leg for a while, but death was not knocking on his door tonight. Yet, she couldn't help herself.

"Of course you may, Captain," she smiled softly. "You've been very brave."

Claire leaned over the bed and gazed down at him. Jamie had a sort of dreamy expression on his face, half mixed with pain. He probably wouldn't even remember this come morning. Laying her hand gently on his cheek, she placed a gentle kiss on his lips, tasting the whisky. It was hard to pull back, much harder than she wanted to admit, but the smell of blood in the air compelled her to stop.

"Feeling better?" She asked, smoothing his damp hair out of his eyes.

"Much, aye," he smiled gently, looking like a small boy. It was good that he was probably about to pass out because she didn't want him to be awake for the next part.

"Here goes nothing," Claire said to herself and picked up a small knife to make an incision to open the wound. She took a deep breath and cut, watching as more blood flow, but it was slow. The wound was just as she'd seen earlier, right near the surface. Now that she had made the incision, she picked up a pair of tweezers, and with one last look at Jamie, set to work.

His body twitched under her fingers, and he began to make small sounds of discomfort.

"I know, I know," she said softly.

The bullet was slick with blood, making it difficult to pick up. She didn't want to root around in his flesh, so she abandoned the tweezers on the towel and stuck two fingers into his thigh.

Jamie's body jolted at that, but he was still only half-conscious. Claire bit her tongue and finally got her fingers around the bullet and pulled it out. It was a small wee thing, and she set it aside, intending to clean it off and give it to him as a consolation prize.

Her hand was now covered in his blood, which made her stomach lurch. She wiped her hand on the towel and then grabbed a clean cloth to place over his wound to soak up more blood before she cleaned it again and bandaged it.

She looked at him, and happily realized that he was breathing slowly and deeply — a good sign. Now, the only she had to worry about was him catching an infection, but she would be by his side monitoring the wound.

For the first time since he had come in, she allowed herself to feel happy about Gaëlle and baby Claire. She just prayed that Joe would find them one day.

Claire sat by the bed and took a sip of whisky from the bottle. She couldn't get her eyes off Fraser. Watching his chest rise up and down with each breath. He was peacefully asleep, slightly smiling. The sight altogether warming her heart as much as the whisky warmed her bones.

Leaning back, she closed her eyes after a moment and let herself fall into a deep slumber she had been fighting for the last hours. Her lips still tingling with the need to kiss Jamie again.

Claire had no idea how much time passed before she woke again — her back aching with the sleeping position she had adopted on the chair. The sun had come up, casting a warm glow inside the room and a chill had taken residence since the fire had gone off.

The first thing she did was to look at Jamie — still very much out of it, sleeping. He was still smiling, even more than he had been when he first fell asleep, and she smiled absently. Getting up, she covered him with a plaid, careful not to wake him up. She walked towards the fireplace and put some logs in to start another fire.

"Sassenach," she heard from behind her, the voice low and croaky. It sounded nothing like Jamie, but more like a little boy in pain.

"I'm here," she answered, walking over the bed with a soft smile.

Jamie watched her through half-closed eyes and smiled, "Hello."

"Hello," she smiled, sitting on the bed next to him. Before she realized what she was doing, her hand cupped his cheek, his skin warm.

"Am I dead, Sassenach?" He asked softly, touching her hand. "Is this heaven?"

"I'm afraid this isn't heaven, Jamie," her thumb stroked his cheek. "Nor that you have died, soldier."

"Ye're here, 'tmust mean 'tis heaven," he said softly, almost in a whisper, and brought her hand to his lips to kiss her palm.

"I will get you a tea and something to eat. You must be famished," Claire got up reluctantly, ignoring whatever he had just said. After all, he was most likely still in a haze.

"Aye, and a wee bit sore all over," his hand went first to his head, as he squinted his eyes shut.

"Yes," Claire chuckled. "That'll be the whisky. Just rest, Jamie."

When Claire came back with the tray holding a mug of tea and some toasts, Jamie had sat himself up and leaned against the headboard. His glance was turned towards the window, making him seem in deep reflection.

"I've got this for you," she said softly, announcing herself.

Jamie turned his head to look at her and smiled softly, "Ah, thank ye."

"Of course," she placed the tray onto the bed and turned around to leave.

Quickly, Jamie grabbed her hand — which prompted her to look at him. "Nay, stay a wee bit wi' me, Sassenach."

"You should rest —"

"I'm restin', I just want some company."

Nodding, Claire obliged him and sat down by the bed again, watching him. "Do you feel your leg?"

"Aye, hurts like shite," he made a face before taking a sip of tea.

"That's good," she smiled, watching him. "It's better to feel it hurt than not feel anything at all."

"I figured, aye." His lip flicked up into a grin.

"Thank you for what you did, Jamie. I don't know how I'll ever repay that but I want you to know I'm very grateful. Not only for how much you helped Gaëlle but also for taking my name off the list. I probably wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for you."

"Ye saved my leg, Sassenach. I think we're even," he took her hand carefully.

"There is nothin' I can do to help, I'm just tryin' to find little ways when I can. If I had known what that list meant, I wouldn't have gathered names to give to those pigs."

"You obeyed orders. If you hadn't, you wouldn't have been here to protect me and to help Gaëlle. No matter what, I hope you know I'm grateful." Claire squeezed his hand, looking at him. "I'm glad you are the soldier who was billeted with me."

"So am I," he smiled.

"Oh!" She turned to grab something off the bedside table and held it out to him. "The bullet, now yours to keep."

"Ahhh, the pesky wee bastard," he took it between his thumb and forefinger, holding it up to his face. "To think such a small bitty thing could cause so much pain."

If only he knew how much pain she'd been in since he arrived. Her heart ached to touch him and to have him hold her. He was far from a small bitty thing, in fact, he was all-encompassing, and if he asked her to kiss him again, she wasn't so sure she would be able to stop.

"Incredible isn't it?"

"Ye ken that I dinna remember much of last night," Jamie looked at her suddenly. "Hardly remember the pain, but did ye by chance have yer wee fingers… in my leg at one point?"

"Of all the things you remember," Claire laughed. "Yes, the tweezers weren't doing the job so I thought my fingers would get it done and *voila*!"

He squirmed a bit on the bed, "Tis verra strange to think about ye havin' yer fingers in my flesh, but I barely recall it…" his thumb rubbed against his bottom lip and she wondered if he was thinking about their kiss like she was. "I suppose I should be glad the bullet didna land in my arse!"

"I wouldn't have put my hands in the flesh there," she grinned.

 "Not unless you'd asked," she blurted.

Jamie made a choking sound at that, his eyes widening. "I'll keep that in mind," he smirked.

"Would ye mind puttin' a dollop of whisky in this?" He held up his cup of tea. "Just to ease the pain, ye ken?"

"Sure," she picked up the bottle. "It doesn't matter that it's only eight in the morning," she winked and poured a little into her own cup. "You'll need to stay in bed for a few more days, perhaps a week before you feel able to put weight on it. Will your superiors be looking for you?"

"Aye," he sighed at that. "I expect they will. I hate to ask ye…"

"Would you like me to deliver a letter to Randall?" She read his thoughts.

"Somethin' vague," he nodded. "I've come down wi' a sickness and need rest, somethin' of the sort so they willna come here."

"All right," Claire got up, finishing her drink in one go. "I have to go out to get this week's rations, anyway. I'll deliver the news on the same occasion."

Before he had time to answer, Claire was already on her way out of the bedroom but she stopped suddenly when he called her.

"Sassenach?"

"Yes?" She turned to look at him.

"Ye look beautiful in the morning," he smiled tenderly.

Hiding

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading! This will be the last chapter for a little while but we'll hopefully be back in the new year with the rest of the story. In the meantime, have a lovely Holiday time, we hope you enjoy this one <3

Like all wounds, Jamie's leg had healed with time.

Time, however, seemed to have faded into a blurry haze as the war raged on. Every day was a variation of the same. *Ration queues, arrestations, curfew.* It was a routine, known by heart by the inhabitants of Montoire. The germans owned the place, no matter how long it was going to last. As of right now, people had no other choice but to accept the fatality.

Either that or they'd be sent away to work camps or shot on the spot, two practices the officers seemed to enjoy quite a bit.

Randall had closed the library two months ago. Along with the school and the local theatre. Most of the buildings were now occupied by his officers — to work, to live, to do whatever they pleased. They also took occupation inside the abandoned houses. Whoever fled or had been sent away had been stripped of their belongings and their homes, without a say in the matter.

Claire was seething but she did her best not to say a word. *She couldn't.* She knew if she rebelled against one of them, she'd be gone in a second. Even with Jamie's protection. She found out how he had not much to say against his superior who, unlike the scot, was far from being a kind man. Randall wanted power and blood. He was a man who'd crush anyone or anything standing in his way.

She was not easily scared of people but there was something about J.W. Randall that frightened her. *She knew he was a man capable of anything.* She was aware of it even before she had seen him whipping people inside cramped buses to be sent away to the camps. He had no mercy for men, even less for children and regarded women as worthless objects — only there to either distract him or be at his mercy. Thankfully, Claire had Jamie under her roof, and as long as he'd be there, Randall wouldn't bother her.

Since he had been shot and Gaëlle's departure, a bond had emerged between the two. She would be lying if she didn't admit something had been there since the moment they met but she had always kept boundaries and refused to see him as anything else but an enemy. But now, she liked his company. She liked knowing he'd come back home at certain hours or that he'd be at the breakfast table whenever she'd wake up in the morning.

She felt safe.

As if whatever raged outside the walls of her home couldn't affect her if Jamie was around. He always reassured her. Might it be about whatever food would be on the table for their meals or when another week passed without news of Jacques. He was a shoulder to cry on and a hand to hold onto when bombings woke her up during the night.

Jamie, on the other hand, was conflicted about his position. He didn't want to be with the German army but he had no other choice. Rebelling against them would have him sent to a work camp immediately. Leaving Claire alone and unsafe, at the mercy of Randall and his men. He heard the way they talked about her, whenever he was at headquarters, but he never once told her about the things they said. Nor how much he had wanted to shoot them all, whenever he heard them.

As of now, Jamie had to continue to pretend his pledge to the germans, for his safety and, most importantly, for Claire's. Being on their side also gave him insight into what was going on and the small ways he could make a difference.

Like every day, Claire stood for hours in line to get the slightest bit of food she could manage. She didn't want Jamie to bring food from the Germans, no matter how much he could be able to get. By principle, if the other people of the village had to starve, so would she. However, sometimes, Jamie would sneak some chocolate under her bedroom door and she'd accept it without much resistance.

Today, she managed to get a dry loaf of bread and cheese. It wouldn't be enough to sustain the week but she still had some preserved vegetables in the pantry and she was tired of standing in line anyway. Tired of having to listen to the germans on the town square who, that very morning, had arrested another load of Jewish people to send away.

Walking home, Claire pondered about the weather. Summer was in full bloom, which was a welcome distraction from the horrendous winters they had been through. No more freezing at night, no more exploding pipes nor wearing all the items of clothing she owned. She traded the warm layers for her white cotton shirt and navy linen trousers who let the soft breeze through to give her skin a welcome refreshment under the blazing sun.

It was almost too good of a day to think about the War unless she truly had to. It had been relatively calm these past few days — *no bombings*. Which, not only she was glad because of the noise but also because they were starting to run out of things to destroy.

Something Claire should have learned by now was that, no matter how the day had started, the war would always catch up with her. This time, by the sight of a little boy. Alone and crying by the edge of the main road. She recognized him to be Jane and Lilian Abelman's son. He used to come often by the library with his parents — a time that now seemed miles away from their reality.

Claire went to him, looking around to see if anyone was nearby.

"David?" She said softly, kneeling next to the little boy and gently touching his arm. "David."

Through tears and sobs, the little boy looked up at her. Relieved to see a familiar face, "Madame Claire."

"Where are your parents, David?" She stroked his head softly and reached into her bag for a hankie.

"They were taken away," he cried. "On a big bus, and maman told me to run away, so I did."

Claire looked around quickly before looking at him again. She knew they couldn't stay here. The Germans were most likely looking for him, already.

"Come, sweetheart. Let me bring you home, all right? There's some chocolate for you," she smiled softly, getting up with him in her arms.

"I want maman," he sniffed, holding onto her for dear life.

"Your maman is not here right now, darling. But let me take care of you, yes?" Claire looked at him, smiling tenderly. She had no idea how she would explain to a six-year-old he might not see his parents again. All she knew was that she couldn't leave him out here alone. *She needed to hide him.*

Nodding, David closed his eyes and buried his head into the crook of her neck. A position he didn't change until they arrived at Claire's house. Jamie wouldn't usually be home at that time of the day but his car was parked in front and she sincerely hoped he was alone.

As soon as she opened the door, she listened for any indication some other people might be in the house but it was relatively quiet. Safe for the radio in the kitchen — something meaning that Jamie was most likely working at the table.

"Sassenach, ye're ba —" Jamie stopped in his tracks, out of the kitchen, at the sight of Claire and the little boy in her arms.

"Sshh," she said softly, holding David. "He's fallen asleep."

Claire walked into the living room and laid the little boy onto the sofa before covering him with a plaid. If he was asleep, he wasn't scared and for that, she was glad. She could feel Jamie's glance on her and she tried her best to ignore it.

"Sassenach," he whispered, walking over to her. This time, he was looking at the sleepyhead on the sofa. "What are ye doin'? Who's the lad?"

Without a word, she grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the living room and into the hall. "I found him alone and crying by the road, Jamie. His parents...I believe they were taken away by Randall earlier."

Jamie's expression shifted from a confused one to one of anger. If Claire couldn't stand Randall, it was nothing next to what Jamie felt about his superior. "Christ, I…"

"I couldn't leave him out there."

"Of course no'," Jamie sighed, looking at her. "I thought they were done deporting jews. I even managed to remove the last list of names, yesterday. I dinna ken how —"

"Jamie," she stropped him, touching his arm. "I know what you are doing and I know you're putting yourself in a lot of danger but you can't blame yourself every time those pigs deport people. You are not in charge of this and you can't do more without jeopardizing yourself."

"I ken but I canna stand by and let this happen, Sassenach. I've done it for too long now. Do you ken how much it kills me? How much it eats me from the inside? And now this poor lad, along wi' so many others are being left alone." The guilt in his eyes broke her heart. He seemed as helpless as the little boy in the next room. And all she wanted was to gather him in her arms and never let him go.

"He's lucky he escaped, not many others will be able to say the same thing, Jamie. We don't know where they're being sent but I don't believe we'll see them back anytime soon," she watched him, ignoring the shiver running down her spine. The rumours about the work camps were frightening enough — she was often scared to imagine what really went on.

"What we can do, for now, is to keep David here and protect him. Hide him for as long as possible, just like we did with Gaëlle."

"Aye but no' forever, ye ken 'tis dangerous."

"Of course, I do. Everything is dangerous now, anyway. If that means saving a life or two, it's worth it. We'll find a solution." She smiled softly, which bode the Scot to smile in return.

She knew though that she couldn't hide David where Gaëlle had hid, that was no place for a little boy, who was already frightened. He would stay with her in her room, and hopefully, she would not need to leave the house before they found a permanent solution.

"I will fix him something to eat for when he wakes up, that is if he even feels up to eating," Claire looked longingly at the little boy.

"I brought home food," Jamie said. "I ken ye dinna want it, but please let him have it. Let it be put to good use, Sassenach."

The battle inside of her to not accept anything from the germans was hard whenever she thought about the stale piece of bread and old cheese in her basket. For David, she would keep him well fed, possibly more well-fed than he had been in months. She noticed how skinny everyone looked in the village these days, their clothes hanging off their bodies. If people did not die from their religious beliefs, they would by simple starvation.

"He can have it," she said softly, looking at Jamie. "He needs it and he needs another name."

"What?" Jamie frowned.

"He needs another name so Randall can't trace him back, wherever he'll end up. I know his family, his parents were his only relative in the village and I have no idea how to find the rest

of them. If anything, we need to give him a new name and bring him to Mother Hildegarde at the orphanage."

"Ye think he'd be safe?"

"With a new name, yes. There wouldn't be any proof he's the Abelman's child and if we keep a record of who he really is, I'm sure he can be traced back to his relatives once this ends."

"Aye, ye're probably right. I can try and get him some new identity papers but it might take a few days."

"Just like you did for Gaëlle," she couldn't help but smile at that. His willingness to help warmed her heart. So much so that she could almost kiss him. *She refrained.*

Nodding, Jamie smiled in return. "I will get the lad the papers and then we'll make sure he's safe. I promise ye," he took her hand, their lips coming dangerously closer in a slow motion.

"Madame Claire?" The little boy called from the other room, breaking the spell by the same occasion.

"Madame Claire," Jamie repeated, smiling even more. "Suits ye."

"Stop it," she grinned, hitting his arm playfully before disappearing into the living room.

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"What's your name?" Claire asked, kneeling in front of David.

He had been hiding at her house for the past few days while Jamie made sure he got new documents. Quickly, they both realized the little boy was quite intelligent for his age. He understood the situation and most likely that his parents were not coming back anytime soon.

"Thomas," he said proudly, smiling. "Thomas Bisset."

"Indeed," Claire smiled, stroking his cheek.

"Whoever asks you can't know your real name, yes? Remember we talked about this."

"Oui," he nodded, watching her. "Not until maman and papa are back."

"Exactly," Claire gathered him into her arms and held him close. "I'll come and visit you every week, alright?"

"Yes," David held her tightly, closing his eyes.

"But Mother Hildegarde is a sweetheart and you'll be safe here. No germans, I promise you."

David pulled back to look at her, his little green eyes shining with unshed tears. Bravely, he nodded, "I will be brave, Madame Claire. Strong like a soldier."

"You are so brave already, sweetheart," Claire booped his nose, smiling before she got up. She had to be the brave one here because it seemed a six years old was stronger than her.

"Madame Claire?" David looked up.

"Yes?"

"Will you be back for me if maman and papa don't?" He raised his pinky, waiting for her promise.

"I will," Claire smiled, wrapping her pinky around his. She looked up to see Mother Hildegarde waiting at the gate.

"Now go, sweetheart."

David turned to look at Mother Hildegarde before looking at Claire again. Quickly, he hugged her legs and ran towards the gate.

Mother Hildegarde took his little hand and looked at Claire with a kind smile. She didn't need words to reassure Claire that the little boy would be safe. *Him and the many Jewish children she and Jamie would go on to rescue during the war.*

Claire waved at David and waited until they both went inside the orphanage before starting to bike back home. *Her heart heavy but relieved.*

Whenever she arrived back home, her skin was covered in a light sheen of sweat from pedalling hard and fast. It was hard to leave David there, but it was the best possible solution in the circumstances.

Jamie's car was in the drive, which lifted her spirits — she didn't want to be alone just now.

Music drifted to her ears as she opened the front door. She was quiet as she listened to Jamie humming off-key. Simple moments like this made her forget the hell that was around her and often made her wonder what life with Jamie would be like.

"Sassenach," Jamie smiled as she walked into the living area. "Did David, I mean, Thomas get settled okay?"

"I think so," Claire nodded. "He didn't want me to leave, and he asked if I would come back for him if his parents didn't return. It nearly broke my heart."

Jamie stood up from the table and came to her, hesitating before wrapping both arms around her. He held her close to him, and she pressed her ear against his chest, listening to the steady thrum of his heart. One of his hands stroked the back of her head as he spoke soft words of Gaelic she didn't understand.

"He'll be better off there than at the work camp," Jamie whispered against her hair. "Ye've done a good thing for the lad, Sassenach. Ye've given him a chance."

"I wish I could do more," Claire said to his chest, realizing they were slowly swaying to the music.

Here in his arms, the rest of the world seemed to melt away. As if there was no war, no death or destruction. For this moment, Claire allowed herself to focus on his breath on the top of her head, and the feeling of his strong arms on her body.

For nearly two years they had been doing this sort of dance — always close, but never close *enough*. Claire looked up at him, and saw the same look of longing in his eyes that matched hers.

"I need you," she whispered, so quiet she didn't know if he heard her. "I need this."

His arms tightened around her, and his eyes widened before turning a very dark shade of blue, like the depths of the oceans. One hand came to cup her cheek, as the other slid to her waist.

"Say it again, Sassenach," he whispered, a breath away from her lips.

Be brave.

"Make love to me," Claire kissed him roughly, pushing him back against the wall.

And then, all the boundaries crumbled away — like dust floating in the air, around them.

Abandon

Aaaand we're back! Thank you so much for your patience as we worked on the last few chapters of this story. We hope you do like them!

For nearly two years they had been doing this sort of dance — always close, but never close *enough*. Claire looked up at him and saw the same look of longing in his eyes that matched her own.

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"Say it again, Sassenach," he whispered, a breath away from her lips.

Be brave.

"Make love to me," Claire kissed him roughly and pushed him back against the wall.

He hit the wall with a thud, knocking him out of breath. "For a wee Sassenach lassie, ye sure are strong," he smiled, sliding both his hands to grip her waist.

"Stronger than you?" Claire smirked as she stood on the tips of her toes to kiss him, a hunger building inside of her.

"No' a chance," Jamie whispered as his hands caressed her sides before lifting her legs to wrap around his waist. He began to walk carefully towards her bedroom, and he nearly tripped as Claire began to nibble on his ear.

"Christ, Sassenach," Jamie groaned. "I dinna want to drop ye are yer arse."

That earned a chuckle from Claire who bit down harder. His hands were large and strong on her back as he held her against him. But it wasn't enough — for so long she had pictured this moment, the feeling of his skin on hers. They had almost slept together, *once.*

This time nothing — no one — was stopping them.

Instead of throwing her back on the mattress like she wanted him to do, Jamie manoeuvred around the small room and sat down on the bed. Her legs straddled him, and she looked into his eyes, her fingers playing with the soft curls at the nape of his neck.

"Do ye want this, Claire?" He asked, his voice gentle, but there was also a fierceness as if he was waiting for her signal and all at once he would claim her.

"I don't think I've ever wanted anything as much as I want you in all my life," Claire kissed his lips gently, trying to convey exactly how she felt.

"I tried to fight it…"

"So did I," Jamie brushed a frizzy curl behind her ear. "And then I thought that ye didna want me, how could ye want me? With everythin' that I've done —"

Claire cupped his cheek, making sure that he was looking into her eyes. "It is not who you are, Jamie. You've saved lives, you've saved my friends. You protected me, Jamie. How could I not want you?"

A single tear formed at the edge of his eye and as it began to fall, Claire leaned in and pressed a kiss to his cheek. As much as she had tried to fight it — they both had — what was the point now? The war had no end in sight, and human touch was just as important as water or air in times like these.

"Then kiss me, a nighean," Jamie's hands pressed her closer. "And once ye do, promise ye'll never stop."

She crushed her lips against his, wanting to cry at the needy sound that arose out of his chest. His hands began to pull at her shirt, untucking it from her trousers and as his fingers brushed her bare skin, she shivered. Gooseflesh rippled over her body as his hands began to slide up her shirt.

Before he could continue, Claire pulled back and climbed off his lap, leaving him reaching out for her.

Claire began to unbutton her shirt, one button at a time, enjoying Jamie's eyes on her. A smirk forming on her lips as he seemed to squirm on the bed. It had been years since she had felt beautiful, and standing here before Jamie, she felt beyond beautiful, she felt sexy and desired. As the last button came undone, she let the shirt slide down her arms.

Her hands moved down to her trousers, and Jamie shifted on the bed, as did his eyes as they followed her movements. A deep blush rose into her cheeks as she noticed a pronounced bulge in his own trousers.

"Yer killin' me, Sassenach," Jamie sighed, biting his bottom lip.

"Then you'd better keep watching, my lad," Claire unbuttoned her trousers, and stepped out of them, leaving her in her panties and bra.

"Come here," Jamie said, his voice thick.

She debated refusing and prolonging his torture, but she needed him. Claire climbed onto the bed between his legs, looking down at him. His mouth landed on her stomach, kissing all the way up to her mouth.

Squeezing his cheeks between her hand, she kissed him roughly before pushing him to lay flat. "It's your turn, soldier," she said and reached for the zipper of his trousers.

"I'll help ye," Jamie chuckled and began to unbutton his shirt. After shifting around, they managed to pull his trousers off, and Claire fell on top of him, increasingly aware of their skin touching.

Without a word, Jamie unhooked her bra. Claire leaned up and slid it down her arms, watching his eyes grow wide. She would never forget the look on his face —the tender look of a man in love.

"Ye are the most beautiful woman, Claire," Jamie settled his hands on her waist, his fingers worrying the material of her panties. "I dinna ken what I've done to deserve ye. To be near ye is like bein' in heaven."

"Oh stop," Claire blushed and leaned her head down onto his shoulder, simply breathing him in.

Jamie placed a kiss to her bare shoulder, and then pressed her down onto the bed as he loomed above her. For the first time, Claire noticed the few freckles that dotted his chest alongside the dark auburn hair. She ran her hand slowly from his neck to his stomach, watching as he shuddered.

Her hand slid further, making him gasp as she cupped him. Jamie pressed his hips against her, making her feel exactly what she was doing to him.

"Can ye bear it if I'm rough wi' ye, a nighean donn?"

"Can you?" She asked, squeezing him.

They quickly removed the only barriers remaining between their bodies. As Jamie lined himself up between her legs, Claire looked down to see his hand pumped his cock twice before sliding it along her entrance.

Giving him a slight nod, she braced herself, and when he buried himself deep inside of her, a loud moan left her lips. Never before had she felt so whole and complete, not only physically, but emotionally.

Jamie pulled back until just the tip was inside of her, and then pushed forward, hitting a place she didn't even know was there. He unleashed all the power that he'd been containing since the day he'd met her. All the unspoken feelings and words could finally be shared.

Claire's hands slid down his back, resting firmly on his arse, begging for more. He leaned down and kissed her roughly. One of his hands reached up and found her breast, squeezing almost — but not quite — painfully.

"Oh God," Claire moaned, arching her body.

A deep laugh came from Jamie, sending vibrations all over her body. Claire used all her strength to roll them over, sighing as she sank back down on his cock.

"Perhaps ye are stronger than me," Jamie smirked, and grabbed both of her hands. She began to roll her hips slowly. His eyes didn't know where to focus — her beautiful face, her breasts, between her legs.

Claire began to set the rhythm, enjoying being in control. There was hardly anything in her life she had control over these days. But Jamie seemed happy to be under her power, and quite literally under her body.

One of his hands slid from hers to grip her arse, helping her ride him. Jamie leaned up, dodged her kiss and settled his lips around her soft pink nipple. Claire moaned and settled a hand in his curls. He sucked hard, her nipple pebbling against his tongue until he switched to the other one, giving it the same attention she craved.

"Jamie!" Claire cried out, and rolled her hips harder, feeling her body begin to tremble.

"I'm here," he kissed her neck, holding her. "I'm here, Sassenach. Let go."

Her thighs clenched, and her belly felt tight and hot. Jamie thrust upwards, all while squeezing her arse. Seconds later, as she pressed her lips to his, she came, seeing black spots behind her eyelids.

Jamie followed her, spilling inside of her before laying flat on the bed and bringing her to rest on his chest, both of their chests still heaving. His fingertips danced on her back, tapping a meaningless rhythm.

"Let's do that again," Claire sighed, giggling into his chest.

"Lass," Jamie paused, moving his hand to rest comfortably on her bottom. "I clearly dinna have the endurance that ye do, so if ye may allow me to catch my breath."

"Oh fine," Claire kissed his jaw. "But only because you asked so nicely."

They readjusted, pushing pillows under Jamie's head and Claire settled against him under his arm. After all this time, she now knew what she'd been missing out on. Fuck the bloody war, and fuck the germans. Time nor space nor bombs could keep her away from Jamie now.

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The morning light came through the blind, bringing with it a warm glow. Claire felt warm, even if her body was barely covered by the cotton sheets. As she stirred, she felt the heat against her back and two strong arms wrapped protectively around her waist. Her body spooned by Jamie's, like two shapes made to fit perfectly together.

Her limbs ached pleasantly and the weight pressing over her chest seemed to have finally evaporated as images of the previous night replayed in her mind. Over and over again. She didn't feel pain, she didn't feel any guilt, either.

She felt...at peace.

And for the first time since moving to Montoire, seven years ago, she felt like her old self. *Unapologetic and free.* Recklessness wasn't something to be proud of, but it had been part of her from a young age. It felt liberating to go back to it, even briefly. *It wouldn't stop the war. It wouldn't stop dangers.* But it felt good.

She felt Jamie stir next to her before his lips stamped the back of her neck. Eyes still closed, she smiled — feeling the sleepiness rooted behind her eyelids. The boldness of the day before was slowly slipping away to leave space for shyness as she finally opened her eyes to realise the scot was carefully observing her — a tender smile plastered on his gorgeous face.

"Hello," she said softly, whisky eyes meeting blue.

"Mornin', mo nighean donn," Jamie answered, hoarse voice and all. He reached to stroke a stray curl away from her face. Finally, after all this time, she finally let him see her without her curls pinned strictly away in a tight bun.

Claire couldn't help the crimson colour her cheeks took, at that moment. She didn't know if she'd go in for a kiss or if she should get up and run away. His ocean eyes were full of sleep and his auburn curls went into a million different directions. He looked like a cherub, fallen from the sky. She would have hated her sappiness of the thought if she wasn't busy staring at him. So much so that she didn't even realise he was staring at her, just as much.

Cupping his cheeks, she pulled him closer to capture his lips with hers. His hands turned her body to face him, and their legs became intertwined. There was no telling where she began and he ended.

"I like the way ye look in the morning, a nighean," Jamie said as he brushed back curls from her face. "Sleepy wee eyes and yer body is so warm."

"Says the man who is radiating heat like a fireplace," Claire chuckled and pressed the back of her hand against his cheek.

"I haven't slept that well in… God, I guess it's been years!" She stretched her arms up above her head. Jamie grabbed her wrists and rolled his body on top of hers.

"I never want to leave this bed wi' ye, Sassenach," Jamie said softly as he looked down at her. "I feel safe here, like nothin' bad will ever happen."

"Oh, Jamie," Claire replied and cupped his cheek. "It will be alright."

They were scared. *How could they not be?* War was raging around them, and with every passing day, there was no end in sight. People that Claire had known for years were suddenly gone without a trace. She had no way of knowing if Gaelle and the baby Claire had actually made it safely to America. Jamie was her only friend now… *her only protection.*

"Just be with me here then," she whispered and he leaned down, kissing her gently.

A moment later, he was home between her thighs, moving slowly, as if he wanted to savour the moment. Claire wrapped her leg around his waist, her hands gliding over his back.

Together they moved as one, hoping that they could shield themselves from the harsh world around them, if only for this one moment.

"As long as I am wi' ye, Claire…" Jamie whispered against her ear, "no harm shall come to ye."

Claire let go of her fears and gave into Jamie again and again.

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At some point, both of their stomachs began to growl, and so they dressed and went in search of something to eat. Claire found half a loaf of bread and a few slices of cheese from the day before — it would have to do. But they made the most of it and gathered around the fireplace to enjoy their measly spread.

"Do you really think that Gaëlle and the baby are going to be all right?" Claire asked as she took a sip of water.

Jamie nodded, his eyes looking down at his leg as he remembered that night he watched them get away. "Aye, I do. I canna allow myself to think that they didna make it."

"I just hope that Joe will find them one day," Claire sniffed. "I have to hope that all of this wasn't for nothing."

Jamie reached over and took her hand, rubbing her fingers softly. "Trust me, it wasn't for nothing. Everything that ye've done to try and help people hasna been for nothin'."

"Everything that *we've* done," Claire smiled, cupping his cheek.

"I keep believin' all of this, this war, happened for a reason...for me to make my way here and meet ye, Sassenach."

"It happened for a reason," she agreed, resting her forehead against him. Neither of them added anything more. They both knew they were all they had left in the world.

They finished up the bread and cheese and Claire began to do her daily chores. Jamie's leg still bothered him, and so he had taken to short walks around the house. On his third turn around the house, he spotted a man coming towards the house. He stopped and waited for the man to come closer and he realized it was a messenger.

"Is this the house of Landau?" The messenger asked, trying not to stare at Jamie.

"Aye, it is," Jamie nodded. "Can I help ye, lad?"

The messenger reached into his satchel and pulled out a letter. "I have a letter for Madame Landau."

"I can give it to her, thank ye," Jamie said and quickly glanced at the letter, noticing the return address was from Germany.

There was only one reason that Claire would be receiving a letter from Germany — *Jacques*.

"Good day, sir," the messenger quickly grabbed his bike and left, at once.

Jamie held the letter tighter than he intended, the paper seemed to be burning against his fingers. If the letter was indeed about Jacques, it could only be two things: either he was alive, giving her news. Either he was dead.

The captain didn't know which want he wanted it to be.

For a brief second, he contemplated opening it to read but he simply couldn't. All he had to do was go back inside the house to bring it to Claire. And with a heavy heart, he did just that.

He found her in the kitchen, sitting at the table while she knitted something. He didn't want to disturb her peace — shatter the small feeling of happiness that was surrounding her. Images of their night together washed over him like a wave, suffocating him. He knew she was never his to have and yet.

Yet, he had hoped.

Jamie had hoped that the facade, the personna that built itself when he was in Germany would finally disappear. He felt it go awat when he was around her but the circumstances were not what they were supposed to be. A war was raging, which prompted her to seek comfort in his arms — and he couldn't blame her. But once this nonsense would be done, she'd go back to be Madame Landau, forgetting him.

"Ah, there you are," she smiled, looking up at him. She put her knitting work onto the table and got up.

"Oh, aye," he managed a smile, walking over to her. "I, uh...this arrived for ye."

Claire looked at the letter in his hand and frowned for a moment. Taking it, she took no time in opening it to take it out the envelope. Her eyes scanned the writing quickly over and over again. He saw so many things passing through her eyes and he noticed her hands had started to shake.

Then, she finally brought herself to look up at him.

"Jacques…" she croaked out. Though he didn't know if it was from happiness or devastation.

"He's alive."

Threats

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

"He's alive?" Jamie asked, feeling his heart sink. He felt horrible for feeling upset that her husband was alive, and of course, he didn't wish the man harm, but he wanted Claire all to himself. He had a taste of it...*How could he ever go back from that?*

"What else does it say? Where is he?"

"He's…" Claire choked on the words. "It says that he is a prisoner of war."

"May I see it?" Jamie reached his hand out for the letter, taking it from her shaky hands. It was short, stating simply that Jacques Landau was a prisoner of war and was being held in Poland. The letter was dated five months ago, and Jamie wondered why it had taken so long to reach the house.

Claire handed him the letter, her eyes never leaving the piece of paper. "He might as well be dead by now."

"There is no' way to ken so, Sassenach. I can take it back to the headquarters and try to find out about the place he's held out. Hopefully, we can find some info, aye?" He looked at her, lifting her chin.

She nodded slowly, her eyes locked with his. He didn't want to find any info, and he wasn't too sure she did, either. But he couldn't help himself. Deep down, he knew Claire wanted answers.

"No matter what I find about Jacques, I hope ye ken I'm no' sorry about what happened between us, Claire." He spoke softly, almost not recognizing his own voice.

"I wanted ye more than I ever wanted anything in my life. I dinna ken what will happen to us tomorrow or the day after. I dinna ken what will happen when the war is over but I ken that what is between us is no' usual. And I ken ye know it too."

"Jamie, I —"

"Nay," he touched her lip with his index finger, resting his forehead against hers.

"Dinna say anything now. Ye'll say it in time."

"I'm yours if ye want me and if ye dinna, 'tis all the same in my heart. I willna belong to anyone else, I never did and I never will. Just dinna take a decision now, no' when yer heart is heavy and yer thoughts are so loud ye canna hear yerself think."

With so many thoughts swimming in her head, Claire didn't know how to answer Jamie. Especially not now with the thought of her husband captured as a prisoner. She was aware that what she felt for Jamie was unlike anything she had ever felt before and she only wished that she could hold onto the happiness she had found the night before with him.

Again, she was reminded of how much this war had taken from her. The bittersweet taste of near happiness now stuck in her mouth.

Just as she wrapped her arms around him and leaned her head against his chest, they were startled as the sirens sounded.

"Good Lord, not again," Claire jumped, looking up.

"We have to get into the shelter," Jamie grabbed her hand, pulling her through the house until they reached the small hidden door that led into the shelter built between the walls. It was already stocked with a blanket and pillow, as well as a few candles. There was no way of knowing how long the bombing would last, all they could do was hide.

"Did you know this would be happening?" Claire asked as she sat back against the wall, waiting for Jamie to shut the door.

"No, 'tis most likely the English trying to bomb some Germans to take the village back," he shook his head, sighing.

"Dinna fash, I ken they dinna intend to bomb the houses."

With shaky hands, Claire grabbed the boxes of matches and struck it, lighting the first candle. It illuminated the small space, and Jamie came to sit beside Claire, sliding his arms around her.

"With hope, we willna be here long," he kissed her temple, pulling her close.

After an hour of sitting in near darkness, Claire began to grow restless. The sirens kept ringing but no bomb had been dropped.

Yet.

"I wish they would turn off that bloody siren," Claire sighed against him. "It's bad enough that we have to wait, not knowing if at any moment we could die but that goddamn sound is the worst part."

Jamie took both of her hands, squeezing them. "Sassenach, ye're drivin' yerself mad wi' worry. I ken there isna much I can do, but I can try and distract ye at least."

"Distract me how?" She faced him, interested.

"I have some ideas," Jamie smiled tenderly. The space was small, so small that he couldn't fully lay down, but if he sat against the wall, his legs just barely touched the other side. Moving his hands to her waist, Jamie settled Claire onto his lap.

"Only if ye want me to, of course," he cupped her cheeks, watching her in the candlelight

"Oh," Claire laughed, his favourite sound he didn't hear nearly enough. "I'd like that very much, yes."

"Did ye have somethin' else in mind? We could be dyin' at any moment, " he squeezed her thighs, making her squirm.

"No," she rubbed her nose against his, trying to drown out the sound of the sirens. The candle was still burning, casting a glow onto his face.

"But if we died making love… then that would be one hell of a way to go."

Jamie chuckled at that, and then sighed blissfully as Claire kissed him gently. His hands slid under her skirt, feeling the warmth of her flesh. He would never tire of touching her skin, hearing the sounds that came out of her mouth as he touched her most sensitive place.

His fingers stroked her, and he watched her face — her eyes flutter shut, and her mouth open. Claire's hands gripped his shoulders as he pushed two long fingers inside of her, and Jamie bit down on his bottom lip as she began to move her hips. His thumb pressed down on her clit, moving in slow circles.

Her breath was speeding up, and he could have watched her like this for hours, but he also wanted — *needed* — to feel her on his cock.

Jamie reluctantly slid his fingers out, and Claire began to protest, but he shushed her with his mouth. He lifted up to pull his trousers and briefs down until his throbbing cock was free. It was Claire this time that took him in her wee hand and stroked him. He leaned his head against her shoulder, biting down on her skin.

"Jamie," Claire sighed, parting her thighs wider as she sank down on him. Once he was rooted inside of her, the world fell away and it was as if the sirens weren't there. The only thing that mattered at that moment was the two of them.

Rocking her hips against him, Claire began a steady rhythm. Jamie settled his hands on her hips, every now and then taking hold of her arse. She wanted so badly to be pushed to the ground and for him to ram into her, but the space was limiting. So instead, he would have to be satisfied with watching as Claire fell apart on top of him — feeling her thighs clench and unclench.

"*Christ*...Sassenach."

Just as he cried out and felt his own orgasm racing through his body, Claire fell against him as the first candle went out, covering them in darkness.

Claire's heart was beating rapidly, and as she pressed her ear against Jamie's chest, she could hear his heartbeat matched her own. There was something peaceful about lying in the dark with Jamie. And she wondered if they decided to stay in the shelter if anyone would find them. Maybe they could just run away together.

That wonderful thought was wiped away as the house shook slightly, a signal that a bomb had dropped nearby.

"I'm afraid," Claire whispered, her hands finding Jamie's.

"Dinna be afraid, Sassenach, 'tis the two of us now," he rubbed her back softly, holding her close.

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The next couple of weeks happened without another bombing. Though rumours of the allied approaching the village were going around, not much else happened.

Routine took back up, as it always did. *Rations. Curfews. Arrestations.*

Claire was lost in her thoughts most of the time — the letter about Jacques was on her mind. Jamie could tell she was lost, not knowing what to think or what to do. But he could simply be there for her whenever she reached out for him. Which happened a lot, these days. They even started to share a room.

Neither of them too happy to sleep alone at night, anymore.

Jamie had spent the last couple of days trying to find information about the place Jacques was being held at or even if he was still there. He found next to nothing — much to his frustrations and relief. It was a topic he didn't discuss with her but it hung in the air between them, nonetheless.

He had also decided she'd be in need of some self-defence lessons.

A war was raging and something could happen to him. If it did, he wanted to be sure she could take care of herself against the other Germans who lusted after her. He had carved the knife himself, just like his father used to do in Scotland, and it wasn't very big. Actually, it could fit in the palm of his hand. But it was effective, and that was all that mattered to Jamie.

Sgnian Dubh, hidden dagger. Sharp, tiny, deadly. Just like her.

He taught her how to hide it and where exactly she'd have to strike to make sure whoever attacked her wouldn't try it twice. The grip was perfectly suited for her hand, too. And she made sure to hide it in her sock so nobody would see it.

Knowing she had a dagger and a knowledge on how to use it made it easier for him to leave her alone at the house when he had to be on duty. He still didn't know what to do about his position but he needed to find a solution quickly. Right now, all he could do was lead the

Jewish children safely to the orphanage, with new names and new papers, whenever he and Claire could. Which was more and more, these days.

Jamie didn't like to leave her alone but he had not much of a choice. He was still on duty, still pretending to be part of the German army, which meant he had to make the rounds during the day. He counted the seconds, the minutes the hours, and prayed Claire was fine. Then, he'd hop on his motorcycle and hurry back to the house — his heart always pounding against his chest. Then, he'd see her and he would relax at once. *Relief engulfing him.*

However, today, when Jamie approached the house, relief was nowhere in sight. All he could see was Randall on the porch, waiting at the door for an answer. It seemed as if he had just arrived.

"Ah, Fraser," his superior said at once, looking at him. He spoke quickly and in german, "Is madame Landau not home? I've been here for a few minutes."

"She must be, she probably simply didn't hear," he answered formally and opened the door for him. Jamie didn't know why Randall was here but it didn't bode well.

Randall shot him a look before walking inside the house first, quickly followed by Jamie. The house was quiet, without a single indication as to where Claire must be. Secretly, the scot was thankful she was nowhere in sight. She was probably at the orphanage.

"Madame Landau might still be in town gettin' rations," he quickly said, following Randall with his eyes. His superior was too busy taking another good look of the place to bother looking at him. He walked for a minute, touching things, picking up pictures and putting them back.

"This is a very nice house," he finally said. "The nicest one I've seen so far...I should have chosen this one to reside at."

"Aye, 'tis a good house," Jamie nodded, feeling his insides clench. "I'm verra thankful ye billeted me here."

"I'm sure you are, Fraser," Randall looked at him, then, and smirked. The sight alone repulsed him. "I'm sure madame Landau's presence made it all even more pleasurable for you."

"Claire has been the kindest host, aye" He answered, biting the inside of his cheek.

"And to look at, too," Randall added, his smirk growing. Slowly, his superior made his way towards him.

"You know, Fraser, people in the village like to say a few things about you and Claire Landau. But it seems that her reputation preceded our arrival. She likes to get around."

Jamie stayed silent, trying to tame the anger rising up.

"Of course, those are only rumours but most of them usually have foundations. Right?"

"'Tis none of my business what she does or who she does it with, *mein captain.* She has been the most agreeable to me and that's all that matters. Makes things easier to feel welcome, after all."

Randall laughed then, "I'm sure she makes you feel very welcome, yes. I'm also very sure she knows exactly how to manipulate you into doing whatever she wants. While everyone else has fled, been arrested or starved, she is perfectly fine. I know you've been bringing food here, Fraser. I know you're probably protecting her in a way you shouldn't be —"

"I'm no', sir," Jamie said firmly. Thank goodness he could lie rather well and his face didn't give him away like Claire's.

"I don't blame you, I'd do anything for a piece of that too. But I'm afraid your little infatuation must be stopped before it goes too far. This is why I've billeted you to another house in the village. Far more convenient for you, too. It's near the headquarters."

"Pardon me?" Jamie frowned as if he was not understanding what Randall was saying.

This couldn't be happening.

"Pack your things, you're moving out," Randall said firmly. His intonation and rank not leaving much of a choice to the Scot.

"Surely ye can't just move me?" Jamie began to protest.

"That's exactly what I can do, Fraser," Randall looked him up and down.

"You'll be billetted with a woman and her children closer to town, they're expecting you tonight."

Tonight? Would Jamie even have a chance to say goodbye to Claire?

"If I'm to leave this house, then who will stay here?" Jamie asked, but from the look in Randall's eyes, he already knew the answer to that question.

"I will, of course," Randall's lip flicked up into a tiny evil grin.

"You've made it seem so agreeable, and I think I shall get along with Mrs Landau quite nicely. To be quite honest, I'm sure of it."

Jamie felt sick to his stomach, a shiver running down his spine. He clenched his hands into fists at his side, the knuckles turning white. Not only was he leaving Claire, but he was leaving her with a man so vile it made his blood boil. He didn't trust Randall alone with her, and he certainly wasn't going to hope he didn't touch her.

He would leave… but he wouldn't be going to stay in the village. It was time for Jamie to hide.

Guests

Claire would never forget the chill that ran down her spine whenever she returned home to find Jamie gone. His belongings were not in his room, and there wasn't even a note to say where he'd gone. It was almost like he'd never been there at all.

What was worse was that Captain Randall had replaced Jamie.

His gaze on her was unsettling as she went about her daily chores. She knew it was only a matter of days before Randall tried to make a pass at her. As she knelt down in the garden to collect herbs, she felt the cool metal of the *Sgnian Dubh* against her calf, reassuring her.

Thankfully, Randall was gone this morning — off to work. So, Claire finally had a moment to catch her breath. Her lips trembled as she walked back into the house, her apron full of vegetables and herbs. She missed Jamie terribly — not just his comforting presence, but the touch of his hands on hers, the taste of his lips and the solidness of his arms around her as she fell asleep.

Turning on the sink to scrub the vegetables, Claire wiped away her tears. A noise from the pantry startled her, and it was most likely a bag of potatoes falling to the ground. She went to inspect the noise but screamed whenever she saw two feet.

"Sassenach!" Jamie jumped out and covered her mouth with his hand. "Shhh, 'tis just me!"

Claire stopped screaming but immediately began to cry and shake as she wrapped her arms around him. "Oh God, Jamie," she cried.

"I thought you were dead!"

"Nah," he stroked her head. "No' dead yet, Sassenach. Randall moved me to another house in the village. But I've been waitin' to come back to hide here so I could talk to ye alone. I didna ken it would take three days before Randall left ye alone."

"I've been so scared," Claire sniffed and pulled back to look up at him. "There was no explanation for your disappearance. No warning, nothing. I just came home and he was there. He barely explained anything to me."

"I wanted to wait to tell ye where I was goin', but Randall made it clear that I was to leave right away. I shouldna be here," Jamie cupped her cheek.

"But I canna bear to leave ye alone wi' him in this house, tis' no' safe."

"I know it's not," Claire sighed and squeezed his hands. "Please don't leave."

"Ye still have the wee knife I gave ye?" His thumb stroked her bottom lip.

"Of course," Claire nodded, once again feeling the coolness on her calf. "But I hope I won't have to use it. Jamie… what will you do now?"

He paused, looking over Claire's head and out the window. There were really only two options now. Jamie could go to the other house in the village and try and explain where he'd been for the last several days, or he could continue to hide and try and protect Claire. His instincts told him that he needed to stay with her and that Randall was not to be trusted.

"I'll hide, Sassenach. Just like Gaëlle did wi' the bairn and if Randall finds me, I'll kill him. I'm no' lettin' ye alone here wi' him, no' if I can help it."

Claire looked up at him, clearly frightened. However, she knew there was not another option. Knowing he was around was better than nothing, "I'd rather not have you kill a man, Jamie, even one as evil as Randall but you're right you can't stay in here, he might find you. Come."

She led him through the house and to the small hidden shelter that they had hidden in during the bombings weeks ago. It was small, and Jamie wouldn't be able to come out for hours, or God forbid days. But at least, Randall had searched the house when he arrived and found nothing, so he wouldn't find him, now.

"How long has Randall been gone?" Jamie asked as he pressed Claire up against the hidden door.

"Only a couple of hours," Claire said. "He probably won't return until later tonight," she said as she moved her hands to Jamie's shirt.

"So we're alone," Jamie whispered as he lifted Claire and wrapped her legs around his waist.

"Alone," Claire said softly and kissed him roughly.

For days she'd been craving his touch and now that she had it, she was lit on fire. His hands pushed up her dress and moved her panties aside.

"I love you, Claire," Jamie stared into her eyes. It was the first time he allowed himself to say the words out loud, but he'd felt it from the moment he'd seen her — *his Sassenach.*

A single tear fell down Claire's cheek, a relief to know she'd have the chance to say it back. "I love you too, Jamie."

With a single thrust, Jamie was home. Claire's back pressed against the wall, and she crashed her lips against Jamie's. His hands held her up, squeezing her arse. It was rushed, and Claire wished that they could lie in each other's arms for hours, not worrying about a thing, but that might never happen again.

Their lovemaking was always risk and promise — for if he held her life in his hands when he lay with her, she held his soul, and knew it.

Claire's legs unwrapped from Jamie's waist, and she sighed, not wanting it to end. She slid her fingers into Jamie's hair at the back of his head. "I love you," she said again.

"I've been wantin' to say that to ye for years," Jamie smiled tenderly, cupping her cheeks. "Since the first moment I saw ye, I knew."

"Even then?" Claire grinned, recalling their first meeting.

"Aye," Jamie nodded and kissed the tip of her nose.

"When I saw yer curly wig and how stubborn ye were, I knew that I'd love ye for the rest of my life."

"And hopefully we will be together for the rest of our lives," Claire said softly. "We just have to get through this bloody war."

"We will get through it," he kissed the tip of her nose. "And when it'll be all over, I'll take ye to Scotland, Sassenach and I'll build us a wee home, where ye can grow a garden."

"Promise me," she cupped his cheeks, eyes locking with his.

"I promise," he smiled, sealing their lips. "I promise ye, Claire, 'tis war will become a memory one day, and nothin' else. And one day, we'll be verra old, ye and I, tellin' the story to our grandchildren."

"You are a very optimistic person, Captain Fraser," she smiled, stroking his cheek.

"Like I told ye once before, I ken now that whatever happened to me all my life was only for one reason alone, and' twas to make my way here to ye. I'll do it all over again for ye," he rested his forehead against hers.

"I hate that you have to be stuffed up in this tiny little room for hours on end," Claire sighed, stroking his fuzzy chin. "With no windows, and only a candle for light."

Jamie shrugged his shoulders, already anticipating the aching in his back from being cooped up in there. "I'll try and get out during the night and come to yer bed," he kissed the back of her neck gently.

"So ye willan have to sleep alone."

"Is that safe? What if Randall… what if he sees you in the hall?"

"I can hear everything from in there," he pointed to the room. "I'll ken when Randall goes to his room, and I'll make sure to return to the shelter before he wakes. I sleep ill wi'out ye by my side, a nighean."

Claire could admit to herself that she would feel much safer if Jamie came to her at night. But she feared what would happen if Jamie was caught. Her head told her one thing, while her heart told her another.

"If you think it's safe," Claire touched his cheek. "Then I'll try and stay up until you come to my room but do come only if you are sure he won't hear you."

They gathered a few bits of food and a jug of water to put into the room with Jamie. There was no telling when Randall would actually return back to the house, and so Jamie kissed Claire goodbye and slipped into the darkness of the shelter to wait until the night.

Claire returned to the kitchen to continue scrubbing and washing the vegetables she'd brought in. Her mind kept drifting to Jamie hiding in the shelter. She prayed that Randall wouldn't hear Jamie, and she was worried what the other soldiers thought of his disappearance since he hadn't shown up at his other billet.

He was a deserter now. Abandoned his post, and if caught would most likely be killed.

It took all of Claire's will power to continue with her daily chores, keeping her fears at bay. Randall would return soon, and she knew she would need all her strength to get through the evening.

Usually, the sound of the door opening brought Claire a lot of peace. It meant that Jamie was coming back home — and even if she didn't like to have him around, at first, it quickly became something she got used to. But now, the door opening meant Randall.

That was enough to send a shiver down her spine.

He was acting like a complete gentleman, yet, something in his eyes told Claire how much of a facade he was putting up. She knew he was waiting for the right moment to strike her. All the while talking with a distinct air that meant if she raised her voice, he'd make her pay for it.

"Madame," Randall said, walking into the kitchen. She didn't need to look at him to know the little evil smile plastered all over his disgusting face. He was aware she was afraid of him and that wasn't good.

"Captain," she said softly, not taking her eyes off her task.

"How have you been today?" His thick German accent was far from charming and the way he touched her arm almost made her wince. She didn't notice how hard she was scrubbing the vegetables.

"Very well, thank you." She answered briefly, bringing the vegetables over the table to avoid his touch.

Randall turned around and leaned against the counter, his eyes glued on her. He lit up a cigarette, "Are you not going to ask me about my day? That isn't very polite."

Claire took a breath, drying her hands on a towel, "How was your day, Captain? Lots of arrestation today? People starving? Tell me all about it."

"I have to admit I do enjoy your insolence, madam," he blew out some smoke, not moving. "It is quite entertaining, I understand why Fraser liked to be staying here."

Biting the inside of her cheek, she ignored the mention of Jamie. She knew all too well how her face could give her away — and she had too many things to hide to even think about letting Randall see something was bothering her.

"I wouldn't say he liked it." She heard herself mumble.

"Any man would be crazy not to enjoy your company, madam," Randall smirked. "I, for one, do enjoy it very much."

She managed to smile in return, trying to control herself not to spit at his face.

"About Fraser," he said, taking another drag from the cigarette, "Any idea where he might have gone? Never showed up at his new assigned residence nor at the offices since."

"He didn't?" Claire pretended some surprise, raising her eyebrows. Then, she frowned, "How odd of him. Are you sure he's quite alright?"

"No, actually, I'm not. But it's quite curious, I don't see what reasons he would have to disappear in such a way —"

"That is indeed worrying, Captain. I don't see where else he would have gone."

"He seemed rather upset not to be able to stay here," Randall walked over to her slowly, finishing his cigarette before he stopped in front of her.

"Not that I can blame him, either." His eyes travelled up and down her body in an uneasy manner. It was unsettling and disgusting.

Any other man would have gotten a slap out of such behaviour. Yet, Claire couldn't do or say anything. She had to stay quiet and ignore this all, for her own safety. He was standing awfully close to her, his body almost touching her. Overall, she wanted to crawl out of her skin.

Clearing her throat, Claire took a step back but felt the counter against her leg. She couldn't go very far. "Dinner should be ready in an hour. Does that sound all right for you, Captain?"

"Oh yes," he nodded, licking his lips. "Just perfect."

"Then I should get going," she managed to extract herself from him but only for a brief second.

Quickly, Randall had grabbed her hand and pulled her back, "Where are you running to? I wasn't quite finished with you."

Before she had time to say or do something, he continued.

"You know, Claire, I could make you a very happy woman."

She blinked, looking at him. She felt the terror rise and she didn't know what to say. "Excuse me?"

"I could cover you in fur and diamonds, take you back to Berlin and we'd be happy together, you and I," His eyes shone with something that wasn't kindness. His index finger started to trace the lines of her face, her nose, her lips…

"Once this war ends, once Germany wins, you'll even be able to become a very rich lady if you marry me."

"I'm already married, Sir," was all she managed to say. Her mind was running with things to do. She needed to find something. To do something…Running away wouldn't be enough.

Randall's laugh, then, would be a sound she'd never forget. It was cold and evil, "My dear, I don't believe you're going to see your husband back home anytime soon. And even then, I can make sure he doesn't come through the front door. You don't deserve this sort of life, you know? You're meant to be a Lady, to have servants and maids, to live in a castle not this…" he looked around, disgusted.

"I never wanted to be a lady, Captain," she managed a smile. "I am sure you'll be able to find a very suitable girl who'll be thrilled to follow you to Germany to live in a castle."

"That's not quite a girl I want," he cupped her chin, his hand cold against her skin. His fingers were digging into her cheeks as he lifted her face up. His eyes had darkened, staring right into hers, while the expression of his face frightened her.

"Not a girl, at all."

Claire swallowed, trying to move away from his grasp. Much to her surprise, he released her and smiled again.

"Now go and make dinner, I have some work to attend to."

As he walked away and up the stairs to his room, Claire shivered. She didn't know how long she could live under the same roof as that vile man. It had only been a few days, but already she was desperate to run away. And she knew it was only a matter of time until he became more insistent.

At least dinner tonight would be simple, as opposed to last night when Randall invited other captains and soldiers to dine with them. She'd spent all night in the kitchen and returned to her room with just a sliver of bread and fruit. Randall had come home with meat from town, and Claire began to prepare it. It had been months since she had tasted meat, and her mouth began to water as the smell filled the kitchen.

Claire could hear the Captain's footsteps pacing above her. He would come down soon for his meal, and Claire hoped that he would take his food in his room to continue his work. She wondered if she could start poison his food little by little…

"No, you foolish woman," Claire muttered to herself. As much as it would satisfy her to kill the Captain, she didn't know if she had the guts. All it would take, however, was a few poisonous mushrooms to do the trick, that is if she could find them. *But what would she do if he discovered she was trying to kill him?* Something Claire didn't want to imagine.

Just as she thought, Randall came down moments later to retrieve his dinner but didn't sit at the dining table.

"As much as I would love your company tonight, Madam," the Captain said. "I have a lot of business to attend to. Eat however much you'd like," he waved at the food on the stove. Randall turned, his plate in hand and went back to his room.

There was plenty of food left on the stove, and it saddened Claire's heart that so many in the village went without food for days, and here she had more than enough. But it went against everything she stood for to eat the food from the Germans. Jamie had been the exception.

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Jamie sat silent after he heard Randall return home. He didn't dare make a sound lest he be caught. The sound of Claire's voice drifted to him through the walls, and he wanted to burst out of the room and be there for her. To hold her hand and take her away from this place. There was truly nothing left for either of them here, and Jamie held onto this thought as he dozed off to sleep after nibbling on a piece of bread.

There was no light in the small space, and therefore no way for Jamie to be sure of the time. He awoke sometime later to the sound of footsteps above him, but he wasn't sure if it was Randall going to his room for the evening or the Captain coming down to eat dinner.

So he waited.

Jamie's own breath sounded incredibly loud to his ears, and he was beginning to get a cramp in his leg. Footsteps passed the hidden door, and the Scot dared not make a sound. It could very well be Claire, and it was then that he wished they made up some sort of secret knocking signal.

The door to Claire's room closed, and he sighed. She would be changing her clothes and getting into bed. It wouldn't be long before he left the small room and joined her. Yes, it was stupid to think he could leave his hiding spot to be with Claire while Randall slept in the room above them, but it was a risk he was willing to take.

A loud crash came from upstairs, and then a sound that Jamie would never forget. Her scream echoed through the house. Without a second thought, he busted out of the shelter and ran to Claire's room. The gruesome sight he saw when he opened the door would haunt him for the rest of his days.

Goodbyes

Thank you so much for reading!

Warning: there is a depiction of violence at the beginning of this chapter. If any of it is triggering for you, please don't read it.

Alone at dinner was Claire's idea of peace, these days.

Either she'd have to entertain Randall's soldiers, trying to avoid wandering hands and their salacious remarks, all the while keeping a brave face and acting like their maid. Or she'd have to share the dinner table with Randall, alone, which made it actually worse.

She ate quickly, hoping the german wouldn't change his mind and join her. Her mind wandered to Jamie, again. So far he was safe in the shelter and Randall didn't seem to suspect anything. But he had questions about where he had ended up and it would only be a matter of time until he'd start pressuring Claire for the answers.

Her only solace was to know Jamie would be joining her, later. Being in his arms was the safest feeling in the world. She also couldn't shake what Randall had told her earlier...and his proposal.

It wasn't a question, and she knew it.

As Claire climbed into bed, she sighed. It wouldn't be long before Jamie would sneak out of his shelter and join her. The very thought of Randall catching Jamie here terrified her, but she also couldn't stand the thought of sleeping alone. Knowing she had the little knife Jamie gave her under her pillow, helped slightly.

Her eyes were heavy as she thought about the events of the past few weeks. She shivered under the covers, not from the cold, but because she could still feel Randall's hands on her. The wicked gleam in his eye made her stomach twist into knots. Her mind raced with thoughts of telling Randall exactly what she thought of him — he was a coward and a pig that deserved nothing but to rot in hell.

Claire shifted onto her side, pulling the covers up to her neck. She wanted to wait until Jamie came to join her, but she was so exhausted. Her eyes fluttered shut and within moments, she had fallen into a deep sleep.

In her dreams, she felt strong arms around her, protecting her, and Gaelic words of love whispered into her ear. The hands drifted along her side, caressing her skin, and Claire turned

to face the man they belonged to. Waking from a deep sleep, Claire opened her eyes, expecting to see Jamie next to her, but it wasn't Jamie.

It was Randall.

Jumping back, Claire hit her head on the wall, and tried to get out of the bed as quickly as she could.

"Don't even think about running, Madam," Randall grinned and grabbed her ankles.

His grip was strong and he was pushing away the covers and spreading her legs. He was going to rape her if Claire didn't think fast. Suddenly, it was as if the world was in slow motion. Randall loomed over her, the heavyweight of his body pressing her into the mattress made it hard for her to breathe. She tried not to think about his hand moving up and up her thigh as she reached under her pillow and grabbed the small knife.

She screamed as she plunged the knife deep into his back, just as Jamie had shown her. Claire watched the shocked cross his face as Randall realized what had just happened.

"What the — ?" He groaned and his body grew stiff. The light left his eyes, and with one last breath, he collapsed on top of her.

Just then, the door to her room crashed open and Jamie appeared, his eyes wide and terror plastered all over his face.

"Jesus," he muttered as he took in the sight of Randall's lifeless body on top of Claire — her hand still gripping the knife in his back.

"J-Jamie," Claire was trembling as the shock began to set in. She had just killed a man —a very bad man, but she had taken a life, nonetheless. She felt sick.

"Let go of the knife, Sassenach," Jamie touched her hand softly and one by one, she removed her fingers as Jamie lifted Randall's body. She crawled out from under him and stood up, her knees nearly knocking together.

"He's dead?" Claire asked, but she knew he was — she felt the life leave his body. She heard his kidney puncture under her blade.

"Aye," Jamie confirmed, nodding. Thankfully there wasn't that much blood, and most of it was on Randall's shirt and some on the bed cover.

"Claire?" Jamie was now standing in front of her, his face clearly concerned. "Are ye okay, Sassenach? Ye're tremblin'."

Looking down at her hands, she saw they had blood on them and that is when she began to cry. Tears rolled down her cheeks, but she made no sound. Jamie wrapped his arms tightly around her, burying her head against his chest so she didn't have to see Randall's body.

"Shhh," Jamie stroked her back softly, whispering into her hair.

"He canna hurt ye any more, he canna hurt anyone anymore, he's gone. Ye had to do it, Sassenach or else he woulda raped ye, and God kens what I woulda done to the man."

It had all happened so fast. Claire had woken up to hands on her body and assumed it was Jamie — *had even expected it to be Jamie.* The fear that coursed through her body once she realized it was Randall and what was about to happen was unlike anything she'd ever felt.

"I wish 'twas me that killed him, a nighean," Jamie kissed the top of her head. "So that ye dinna have to ken what it feels like to have a man's life on your conscious. But I'm here now, and ye dinna have to face it alone."

"The body," Claire managed to get out, pulling away from Jamie to look at the bed. *What were they doing to do now?* This somehow made everything worse and more dangerous for the two of them.

"I'll take care of it," Jamie ran his hand back through his curls, making them stick up. "Go and wash yerself, Sassenach. We certainly canna have anyone find him like this. Even though twas self defense, ye'd likely be killed if someone found a German Captain dead in yer house."

"Fuck," Claire cursed and shut her eyes tight. "What have I done, Jamie?"

"What ye had to do...He was an evil man, Claire!" He pointed to the bed. "I willna let ye trouble yerself over him for a second longer. His body will rot in the ground, and not a soul on earth will miss him. I told ye that I would protect ye, and I shall."

"How am I going to explain his disappearance? The second he won't show up at the offices, soldiers will show up here to investigate."

"Nay, they willna. Randall didn't switch the addresses, Sassenach. No one but me ken he was billeted here now."

"They do...they came to dinner yesterday, he invited a few of them."

"Well then, ye'll only say Randall left in the morning to go to work and didn't come back. Ye were no' much worried because it wasn't the first time he didn't come home in the evening. If they dinna believe ye and try anythin' on ye, I'll kill them all."

Claire was still shivering, not much making sense of what he was saying. He was probably right and yet...she was terrified.

"And then, I'll take ye away from here," he took her hand, bringing it to his lips. "Away from this place and this war, Claire. 'Tis time we leave France and go find somewhere safer to be."

Slowly, she looked up at him. Her mind was hazy, she barely understood. "What?"

"Let me sort this mess out and then I'll explain to ye, aye? We canna keep Randall's body here for much longer and there are only a few hours until the sun rises, I have to be quick."

She nodded, still shaking, "I'll...I'll go wash off."

"Will ye be alright?" He cupped her cheek. "At least for a wee bit while I'm away? I promise I'll be back. I dinna wish to leave ye but I must."

"Go...I'll be fine, I'll calm down." She said half convinced. She didn't have a choice, anyway. She'd have to live with what she had just did for the rest of her life, however long it might be. She might as well get used to it.

Slowly, Jamie closed the distance between them and captured her lips with his.

It was a tender kiss, one she'd never forget.

The rest happened in slow motion. Her eyes followed Jamie around the room as he was taking care of Randall, covering him with a plaid and bringing him out. Claire didn't move for what seemed like long minutes. She heard his footsteps around the house, most likely gathering some things, and then she heard the front door.

Only when she heard the car that she finally got up and ran towards the bathroom to throw up. Her head was spinning and she felt like she was almost about to faint.

She killed a man.

She killed a nazi.

This war had been a nightmare and it only seemed to get worse. All she wanted was to wake up and realise it had all been just a bad dream but that would also mean she had never met Jamie and that was too painful to think about.

Claire washed her mouth, scrubbed her hands free of Randall's blood and changed her clothing. She threw the sheets away, along with her nightgown and went downstairs. All she could do now was to wait for Jamie to come back.

Hope and pray he would.

It wasn't until the sun was peeking through the windows, that Jamie came home, covered in sweat and dirt.

"Thank God," Claire ran to him, squeezing him as tight as she could. "I was so worried something would happen."

"I'm alright," Jamie melted into her, wrapping his arms around her.

"We're alright now, Sassenach. They willna be findin' Randall anytime soon."

"We need to get you out of those clothes," Claire said as she shut the door behind them.

"Aye," Jamie agreed. "And then we should leave."

"Leave now?" Claire stopped in the hall. "France, you mean?"

"Aye, leave France to go to Scotland," he said, a small smile on his lips.

"Home. A fresh start for the both of us. Now is the time to do that — wi' the Germans starting to leave the country, now is our chance. Everything is in chaos!"

"But I can't leave," Claire shook her head, the notion suddenly insane to her.

"What do ye mean 'ye can't'?" Jamie asked, confusion spreading over his face. "Of course ye can!"

"No," Claire shut her eyes. "The children at the orphanage. I can't just leave them, especially now that the Germans are leaving. The war could be over any day now, I can feel things are changing. We're the only people knowing their real names, once this is over, they'll need us."

"I can't hide in yer house forever, a nighean," Jamie sighed and squeezed her hands. "As much as I'd like to, it isna safe for me to stay. If the allies find me, I'd be taken away as a German soldier, no matter if I deserted or no', it makes no' difference to them."

"So you must go," Claire said what she didn't want to. Jamie couldn't stay in France, especially not now with Randall dead at her hands. "Without me."

He cupped her cheek, "I dinna want to leave any more than ye want to stay, but ye're right, the war will come to an end. And then, one day soon, I'll come back for ye, Sassenach." Jamie pressed his lips against hers.

They both knew the unanswered question of Jacques' state hung heavily in the air between them. Jamie couldn't ask her to leave without an answer and he knew she wanted to be sure her husband wouldn't show up here one day, to find the home empty and her things gone.

He couldn't ask it of her and he didn't — no matter he had wanted to.

"I promise," he added, kissing her again.

"I just have to see the children safe, you understand?" She whispered, cupping his cheeks. She wasn't sure who she was trying to convince here: *him or herself?*

Jamie nodded, "Aye, Sassenach. Ye've a kind heart, and ye're a good woman. Ye wouldna stay if ye didna think it the right thing to do. And besides, tis no' forever."

She nodded in turn, resting her forehead against his and tears streaming down her face.

"Can I at least say goodbye to ye properly?" He stroked her hair back, his eyes locked with hers. "I just want to hold ye, Sassenach. Hold ye for as long as I can before I have to leave."

"You can stay and hide for a few more days, right?" She asked, desperately looking at him. "You don't have to leave right away…"

"Nay, I dinna need to," he smiled softly, cupping her cheeks. "I havena been to Scotland for many years, it can wait a few more days, a nighean."

"Good," she smiled in turn, trying to keep a brave face. In a few days, she'd have to rip her heart off her chest and learn to live without it. The prospect wasn't too appealing.

"How are ye feelin'? Tell me the truth," he brought her to sit onto the sofa before sitting close to her and gathering her in his arms.

"I feel…" she took a second, she didn't know the answer herself, "I feel shaken, still but a bit better. I'm glad he's not here anymore. I'm glad it's just you and me."

****

Three days later, Jamie and Claire rose before the sun. It was imperative that Jamie wasn't seen by anyone. They had spent nearly every minute in each other's arms, afraid of the moment when they would have to say goodbye. It was a wonder no German soldier had shown up at her house to ask about Randall, just yet.

"I don't think I can let you go," Claire whispered against Jamie's chest.

"I dinna want to either," Jamie rubbed her back. "This isna a farewell, Sassenach, only a goodbye. I'll be back soon for ye, and then we can start our lives together."

"Together," she repeated softly, looking at him.

Hand in hand, they walked outside the house that sheltered them for so many years since the war had started. The house where they had known one another. Fought and loved so fiercely. It was the middle of the night, and the rest of France was still asleep.

"I'll see you soon then," Claire whispered, cupping his cheek.

"Ye'll be careful while I'm away, aye?" Jamie cocked a brow, smiling softly. "We've made it this far, we can do this too."

"I'll try my best," she chuckled, tears streaming down her face.

They were both stalling, neither of them wanting to part. There was truly no way of knowing how long it would be until they would see each other, that is if they saw each other ever again.

"I love you, Jamie," Claire said, *maybe for the last time.*

His lips trembled, "Ye're tearin' my guts out, Claire. I canna bear to leave ye like this."

Claire wiped under her eyes. "Would it help you to go if I turned and didn't watch you leave?"

"No," Jamie couldn't help but smile through the tears. "But I wouldna mind lookin' back and see that fine plump arse of yers as I go," he laughed as he squeezed said arse.

"You foolish man," Claire sniffed but managed to laugh. "We could stand like this for days before you leave. It's time to rip off the bandage, I'm afraid."

"I love ye, Sassenach. Hold on to this for me," he leaned down and kissed her gently for a long time. Then he took one step back and then another, finally releasing her hands.

"Be safe, soldier."

Vision blurring, she watched him disappeared in the distance until she couldn't see him anymore. Then, she heard the last piece of heart break — it was a small, clean sound, like the snapping of a flower's stem.

The war had taken too much away from her but this was too much for her to bear.

Letting Go

Chapter Notes

Since Jamie departed, time had seemed to slow down. Claire couldn't tell how many weeks — *months* — had passed since he had left Montoire. She didn't care, either. She simply felt hollow and wanted to go back in time so she'd leave with him.

The war was fading…

Paris had been liberated and it was only a matter of time until the last Germans would depart Montoire. *Flee*. Things would go back to the way there were before this started…or try to, anyway. Half of the people of the village had perished and the ones who remained were wounded for the rest of their lives. Wounded by grief, loss and what they saw during the last years.

And Claire, she was alone. *Utterly and completely alone.* Loneliness used to be a companion when she was a child. Now, it was a burden. She didn't want to be here — even less without anyone. No Gaëlle, no Lamb, no Jamie…

Jamie.

The name like a dagger piercing her heart every time she dared whisper it under her breath. She didn't know if he had even made it to Scotland alive. She couldn't bring herself to think otherwise. It took too much strength she didn't have.

It had been four months…maybe five since he had gone. Since she had killed Randall. That thought haunted her at night, too. No matter what an evil man he had been, killing him would haunt her as long as she'd live. Sometimes, she could still hear the noise he made when the dagger punctured his kidney.

The only relief she had was at the orphanage. She spent her days there, taking care of the children, along with sister Hildegarde. But then, she'd go home in the evenings, with the fear of finding other german soldiers at her door, and the nightmares would start all over again. And at night, she'd stay awake, thinking about all the things she didn't tell Jamie.

All the things she might never have the chance to tell him.

Most of the shops still remained closed, and Claire longed for her library where she would lose hours reading books. She longed for normalcy, but after this war, things would never be normal — everyone and everything was changed.

One of the few good things that had happened in the past few months was that there was more food now that most of the Germans had left. But Claire ate every meal alone, wondering if she would ever share a table with Jamie again.

That thought was enough to have her cry, again. It happened more and more often, these days. Out of the blue, tears would start to flow and wouldn't stop. It was normal, she thought. She couldn't do much to prevent them, anyway. She also felt terribly tired. No matter how long she slept, she'd wake up with heavy eyes and an aching body. Malnutrition surely wasn't helping. No one knew when ration cards would stop being a thing. There was not much one could do about it.

Things were the same, that morning.

Claire stirred in bed — *the one in the room downstairs.* Where Jamie had slept for many nights. She had not been able to sleep in her own room since what happened with Randall. She would never be able to sleep there, again.

She lied in bed, swearing she was able to smell Jamie's cologne in the room. And like every morning, she would dwell on that detail and closed her eyes again. Trying to grasp images of him. *Of them, together*. Trying to hear his voice, his laugh. But no matter what she did, she wasn't able to conjure it. As if he had never existed other than in her mind. As if, he had been a vision all along.

When finally, she decided to get up, she put on her robe and caught her sight in the mirror. She looked…worse for wear. She was thinner, paler, with bags under her eyes. She was eaten away by grief and sadness. She was exhausted from all those years of war. She went and made some tea in the kitchen, functioning on autopilot. Each noise she heard made her heart leap. Each time, she thought Jamie was at the door. *Each time, he wasn't.*

However, that morning, as Claire sat by the fireplace, she heard a knock at the door. Instinctively, she rose from her chair and fidgeted with her hair, to fix them on her way to the hall. She opened the door quite quickly, her heart hammering against her chest.

"Ja…" she stopped at the sight in front of her, blinking. It was rather a shock.

"Jacques."

The man in front of her looked nothing like her husband the last time she saw him. He looked thin — *too thin.* His hair was shaved and his eyes looked too big for his face. But there were still the vivid green colour she had known. His cheeks were hollow and the clothes on his back seemed way too big for him. He used to be tall and broad, muscular too. Now, he looked like a scared little boy. It broke the last piece of her heart to see him like this. She had thought him dead and even if he wasn't, he pretty much looked it.

"Claire," he said in a low voice. He didn't seem to have enough strength to talk loud enough.

"I thought you were —"

"Dead?" He managed to say, his throat looking strained as if the simple word hurt to speak.

Claire couldn't find the words to say how she felt. *Was she relieved?* Certainly, but she was no longer Claire Landau, and the man before her was not the man she married all those years ago.

"The camp was liberated a few weeks ago," Jacques said, and then it occurred to Claire to let him inside the house that they once shared so she stepped aside. However, he didn't walk in just yet. He simply wrapped his arms around her and held her as tightly as his strength permitted it.

Slowly, Claire hugged him back, gasping as she felt how thin he was under his clothes. He felt as fragile as her heart was, and with the wrong movement, he would break.

"You need to come inside and lay down," Claire began to walk with Jacques to the living room. She wondered if the house looked different to him it did to her, and it no longer felt like a home.

"I thought I would never see you again, Jacques," Claire said as she sat down opposite him.

"I wrote to you," he said softly, holding her hand. "I wrote to you many times but none of the letters went through. The Germans took them and burned them right away. I was captured, along with some other men, when we crossed the Belgian borders."

"You don't have to tell me all of this right now," she touched his cheek gently before getting up. She could feel he was starting a fever. "You will go and lay down, you need to sleep."

Nodding silently, Jacques didn't protest and simply laid down on the sofa. His eyes closed instantly. He was shivering, so Claire covered him with a plaid. She couldn't think about what he must have been through — she could imagine and that alone made a shiver run down her spine. She didn't even comprehend how he made it home in such a state.

She threw some logs into the fireplace before sitting on the chair to watch him. The man in front of her was a stranger — both in looks and character. This war had changed them both, him even more so than her, she was sure. She didn't know what to do, how to process it nor how to deal with it. All she knew was that he needed to heal before any decisions would be made.

There was no way of knowing how long he would sleep — this was probably the most comfortable he had been in years. Claire sighed and went to the kitchen to fix him a broth, as his stomach might not be able to handle solid foods yet.

Now more than ever, she wished that she could write to Jamie and tell him about Jacques return. But, he had given her no address as he was unsure where he would end up, or what would be left at all.

Claire told herself that once Jacques was feeling better, she would tell him about Jamie. There was no point in hiding it, and she certainly couldn't go back to the way things were before. Hopefully, he would understand, but she didn't want to break his heart either.

Once Claire had the broth on the stove, she fetched another plaid from her room and brought it out to lay on Jacques. He had an innocent and peaceful look on his face, one that made her heart clench. He must have gone through such horrors.

It was a good hours later that Jacques finally stirred, looking around the place. He seemed in a dazed and confused as to where he was.

"Claire?" he croaked out, rubbing his eyes.

"I'm here," she touched his hand and smiled softly. With her other hand, she took a glass of water she had prepared for him.

"Drink this," she helped him up slowly, presenting the glass to him.

Jacques drank slowly, though he was thirsty and looked at her gratefully. "Merci."

"Are you feeling a bit better?" She touched his cheek, he was still rather warm.

Nodding, Jacques leaned back against the pillows and closed his eyes, "A bit. It's nice to sleep on a soft surface."

"I'm sure," Claire smiled softly. "Once you finish that glass, I can get you some broth to eat if you're hungry."

There was tension between them. Neither really knew what to say, or how to act around the other. What could one say after years of not seeing your spouse, separated by a bloody war?

"That would be lovely, Claire," Jacques smiled. "I used to dream of your cooking."

"But I'm a horrible cook," Claire laughed softly.

"Imagining your food filled my belly more times than I can count," he laughed, and then it turned into a deep cough. "We would go days, sometimes weeks without much of anything to eat. So, whatever you prepare, I will eat happily."

Claire dropped her head, and a fear tears fell down her cheeks. "I'm so happy that you're alive, truly, Jacques." Emotions overcame her and more tears flowed, and her chest felt tight.

"I had given up ever laying my eyes on your again, *ma chérie*," Jacques grabbed her hand, his voice soft and full of realisation.

"But I can see that we are different people. I am not who I once was," his head dropped back on the sofa.

"Jacques…" Claire knew the longer she waited to tell him about Jamie, the harder it would be. "You were gone for a very long time."

"And you thought I was dead," he looked up at her. "Claire… you are a woman who loves with her whole heart. From the moment I returned, I knew that I no longer held your heart."

Claire wiped away her tears and squeezed his hand. "I will always love you, always. But, you're right — my heart belongs to another. His name is Jamie and he was billeted here during the war."

"A German?" Jacques asked, shock crossing his face.

"He was part of the German army but he wasn't a German. Not really," Claire nodded. "But he's from Scotland, and he's different. He didn't want to fight and do all of the horrible things his fellow soldiers were ordered to do. Together we rescued children and found them a place in the orphanage."

Jacques relaxed at her words. "He certainly doesn't sound like any of the German soldiers I was acquainted with. Is he… is he still here?"

"No," Claire shook her head, and folded her hands back in her lap. "Something happened a few months ago and he had to return to Scotland. It was no longer safe for him here. But, Jacques… he will return one day, he promised me, and I plan to go with him."

"Why didn't you leave with him?"

"I couldn't…I had to stay for the children at the orphanage and in case you would come back. I got your letter, I knew you might be alive. I owed you to be here when you returned, to give you an explanation. And now, here you are."

"Here I am, yes."

"I don't know what you went through but I've heard things, I can guess. I refuse to leave you alone in such a state, Jacques. I don't know if Jamie will ever come back, I don't even know if he made it to Scotland at all, all I can do is pray he did. But you were my husband before this started and you would probably still be if the war didn't happen and I hadn't met Jamie, I can't possibly abandon you now."

Jacques closed his eyes for a moment, his breath slowing down. She could have spared him the details about Jamie, she could have waited that his health would degrade even more and he'd go peacefully, without ever knowing that his wife fell in love with another man. But their marriage had always been honest and rooted in trust — she couldn't lie to him.

"You know…I didn't intend to fall in love with him. Actually, I fought against it. I thought he was like them all and telling myself he was made it easier to ignore what I was feeling for him but then, he showed me he wasn't like that at all. He protected me, he helped Gaëlle and the baby escape. Without him, I'd probably be dead by now."

"Claire," he said softly, taking her hand. "I'm very grateful he protected you. I never thought I'd be coming home, at all. To be fair, I don't think I'll have much time to stay here, either, but I'm glad you are here now. No matter what happened, I am so very glad."

"I did love you, you know?" She stroked his cheek slowly. "So very much."

"I know," he smiled tenderly, touching her hand. "I never thought you'd even take a look at me when we first met…When you agreed to marry me, I knew it must have been a dream. And it was…the most wonderful dream but one must wake up sometimes."

"I was desperately looking for a home and you gave it to me. Without asking anything in return, Jacques. You only wanted to love me and make me happy."

"Did I make you happy?" His eyes sought hers and they locked together.

"You did," she said sincerely.

"But you don't belong here," he added, squeezing her hand softly.

"I always knew you didn't but selfishly, I thought I'd ignore it and keep you with me. You were never meant to live in a little small-minded village, Claire. I made the mistake of thinking I could change you but if this war taught me anything, it is how much that wasn't possible. If you had been in London, you would have become a combat nurse or worked at the intelligence offices."

"Well, I'm not quite sure about that. I'm not very brave, you know."

"You are the bravest person I have ever met, ma chérie," his voice grew tired and he could barely hold onto her hand but he tried. Tears were strolling down his cheeks — and hers.

"Just answer this one question," Jacques sniffed. "Are you happy, Claire? With Jamie? I want to know that you will be happy."

Claire was happy despite the worry she felt constantly about Jamie and his whereabouts. She felt Jacques' hand move over her stomach, where a small bump could be seen underneath the many layers she wore. It had taken quite a while for Claire to realize that she was pregnant, as her periods had been sporadic throughout the war and she always assumed she wasn't able to conceive. It was bittersweet — carrying a miracle child, but alone and separated from its father. No matter what, she took great comfort knowing she'll never be alone, again.

"I'm extremely happy, Jacques," she cried. His eyes followed her hand and settled on her stomach. "I wish that I could have given you the family you always wanted."

"This Jamie is one lucky man," Jacques smiled and touched her stomach. "He'll come back for you, I have no doubt about that."

"Can I ask you one last thing?"

She nodded, waiting for his question.

"Would you mind giving me one last kiss? *Un bisou d'adieu*."

Smiling, Claire shook her head and cupped his cheeks. Slowly, she kissed his forehead, the tip of his nose and then, his lips.

Jacques wrapped his frail arms around her and held her close for a long time. His body slowly drifting away as his weak heartbeat slower and slower.

A few days after making it home, Jacques Landau breathed his last breath, surrounded by the woman he had loved the most in his life. He left the earth to finally find peace, after years of torment. He never had the chance to tell her what he went through but years later, as testimony started to come out, she had known and she had ached for him.

Prayed for him.

Epilogue - "Boston"

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who followed this story from the beginning or jumped in after awhile. We hope you'll love this epilogue!

5 Years Later

Claire dreamt about the war again. It happened less and less often, these days, but sometimes, the nightmares still gripped her out of the blue. She'd recall the bombs, the screams, the blood. She'd recall the people she lost and the ones she didn't know the fate of.

Only just sometimes, she'd dream of Jamie.

Each time, she barely heard his voice or his laugh. She would see him smile in his sleep or she'd feel his arms around her. Other times, she recalled their first meeting — how afraid she had been to find a German officer at her door. One time or two, the images of the last time she'd seen him flood her memory and, whenever that happened, it was worse than all the atrocities she had seen during the five long years of war.

Claire woke at once, sweaty and breathless. She didn't recall what was in her nightmare this time, only some loud sounds and atrocious smell of teared up flesh. She shivered and got up immediately in the dark.

She remembered she wasn't in France. She was safe, in Boston. The thought coming back to her and settling her upset mind. She took a breath, then another, and walked towards the window.

Outside, the street was quiet and dark. It was the middle of the night, no one was about to be walking around a snowy city at such an early — *or late* — hours.

She felt her heart slow down as she calmed and she closed her eyes for a brief moment. Suddenly, the taste of Jamie's lips came back to her and she touched her own in an absent gesture. She didn't know how long she stood there, eyes closed, before she felt two strong arms wrap gently around her waist.

"Canna sleep?" He sighed, his voice scratchy.

"Just another bad dream," Claire touched his arms. "You should go back to bed, I'll join you soon."

"Nah, Sassenach," Jamie kissed her neck, holding her close. "I dinna sleep well when yer no' by my side."

Claire turned to face him, and looked up at her husband. Behind him, she could see the sleeping body of their daughter, Eleanor, and relaxed in his arms. After a bad dream, it took her time to remember that everything was truly okay. Everything had been more than okay for some time now. Ever since that day that Jamie returned to Montoire.

The sun was hidden behind the clouds, and Claire did her best to sit on the ground. Her belly was growing by the day, and therefore made it difficult to move. She looked at the flowers that were starting to grow on Jacques grave. He'd been gone for three months, and she missed him every day.

She missed the dead. All of her friends and neighbours she had once talked with about books and children. She missed her uncle Lamb and the adventures he would tell her about. But more than the ones she had lost, she missed the one man she longed for.

"Sassenach," a voice said behind her making her jump.

When Claire turned and looked up, she couldn't believe her eyes. He must be a dream. The next thing she remembered was blacking out and waking up in her bed, but she had no idea how she'd gotten there.

"Och, thank Christ," Jamie said softly, and she felt a wet cloth on her forehead.

Her eyes flew open, and she grabbed his hand. "Are you really here or am I hallucinating again?"

"Ye've been hallucinating, a nighean?" He stroked her cheek, smiling tenderly.

"Once or twice," Claire shut her eyes, afraid to open them again and that Jamie would have disappeared.

She heard sniffling and opened her eyes to find Jamie crying, his hand now settling on her stomach.

"A wee bairn," he whispered, his smile growing. "I thought maybe ye had a pillow under your dress or ye'd just been eating well. But now I see."

That made Claire laugh, and it was then that she realized she hadn't laughed she Jamie had last been there. She moved her hand over his and squeezed. "It's yours in case you were wondering. I wanted to write to you — I did write to you, but I had no idea where you were, or if you were even alive."

"I'm alive, Claire," Jamie leaned down and kissed her belly. "We're both alive, and ye can finally come home wi' me."

Those words were all that Claire had thought about for the last several months. Now, Jamie was back and they could finally start their lives together and put this bloody war behind them. But there was one thing standing in the way of that.

"I would prefer not to give birth while we're travelling," Claire chuckled and sat up slowly in the bed. "I don't want to have a whole Mary and Joseph 'no room in the inn' situation."

"Dinna fash, we'll wait for the bairn," Jamie agreed, kissing her forehead. "And I'll be here for ye, and take care of ye. I'll never leave ye again, Sassenach. Not for as long as I live."

"I won't ever let you leave again," she took his hand again. "I was so afraid you wouldn't come back...so afraid I wouldn't see you again."

"I promised ye I'd be back, Sassenach," he brought her hand to his lips. "I never make a promise lightly."

"I'm very glad, soldier," she smiled, a tear escaping her eyes.

"I promised ye something else...Remember I promise ye I'd find us a home, aye?"

She nodded as he brushed her tear away.

"When I got back to Scotland, I met wi' an old friend of my parents. His name's Murtagh. He and his wife took me in for a bit and helped me figure a few things out. One of the houses in the village is free and awaitin' us."

"I can't wait for you to show it to me," her smile grew, her heart feeling lighter. If her leg didn't hurt from fainting, she would have thought she'd been dreaming.

"We'll be happy, a nighean, I ken we will," Jamie moved closer to her and carefully gathered her into his arms.

"We will," Claire closed her eyes and held him close.

Only a few weeks after Jamie's return, Claire had gone into labour. It had been a difficult birth, but Jamie had been by her side the entire time, along with Mother Hildegarde. Their beautiful daughter came into the world crying, her head covered in bright red fuzz — a Fraser through and through.

For the next several weeks, Claire's body had recovered as they waited to go home to Scotland. In that time, they had visited the orphanage and realized there was something else they needed to do before they could leave.

"I fell asleep so soon after we got in last night," Claire asked, stroking his chin. "Did the children get to sleep okay?"

"Aye," Jamie nodded and looked over at the other bed with their sleeping children.

"Eleanor demanded three stories, and David asked to read the last one. He's got to be the best big brother. Most twelve year old boys dinna care about their wee sisters."

Most of the children in the orphanage remained orphans after the war, and rarely were children lucky to find a family that would take them in. But David had a special place in Claire and Jamie's hearts and they simply couldn't abandon him. So when they left France for Scotland, they left as a family of four.

"We're very lucky," she smiled, resting her head against his chest. "They both adored being on the plane. It was very sweet to witness. I'm glad we decided to come to Boston for Christmas, I came here once with my uncle and I loved it."

"Aye, they'll enjoy it. David already canna stop talkin' about going to the museum tomorrow." Jamie kissed her head, stroking her curls back.

"Let's go back to bed," she said softly, looking up at him, before kissing his lips. "We have a very busy day ahead, later."

Jamie nodded and lead her back to the bed. As they settle back under the sheets, he moved a few times, trying to settle.

"Is it your leg, again?" She asked, moving closer to him. Her hand reached under the cover to settle on his previously injured limb. It had been years but it still bothered him, sometimes.

"Dinna fash, 'tis just wi' the cold," he kissed the tip of her nose, "I'm lucky to even have a leg to feel some ache," he grinned.

"I may or may not take a bit of credit for that fact," she smirked, snuggling against him.

"Take all the credit, a nighean," Jamie held her close. "Ye did save my leg, after all. Wi' yer wee fingers digging into my flesh to remove a bullet. How could I no' marry ye after that?"

"Is that the only reason why you married me?" She concealed a giggle by hiding her face in the crook of his neck.

"Nay," he whispered, stroking her back. "But I might have taken advantage of my pain to get a kiss out of ye."

"Oh yes, I knew that," she looked at him, grinning. "I knew that perfectly well, you drama queen."

"Ye canna blame me for tryin'," he kissed her lips tenderly, his voice still low not to wake the children. "I'd do it again if I had to."

"Do you think we should tell the children about the war? I mean, not now but one day…" she looked briefly at the sleeping kids and smiled. "Obviously David is more aware of it all but I think he blocked out a big part of it, not that I can blame him."

"One day, Sassenach, one of them will ask how we met," he kissed her temple. "I dinna think we should hide how we ended up together. 'Tis only a beautiful tale, after all. Happy ending and all."

"The happiest ending we could ask for, certainly," Claire kissed him and sighed happily, drifting off to sleep in the safety of Jamie's arms.

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"Oh, maman, papa, look!" David made wide eyes, pointing at the dinosaur skeleton standing in the middle of the museum. He had been fascinated by natural history for a little while now and the look on his face was very satisfactory to his parents.

Claire smiled, holding his hand, "It's huge, isn't it?"

"Marvelous," David smiled, his eyes glued to it.

Jamie stood next to them, holding a sleepy Eleanor in his arms. "A big lad, this one."

"It's a tyrannosaurus, papa," David said, a matter of factly, adjusting his glasses. "Like the one in the book I got for my birthday."

"T-rex," Eleanor said, yawning.

"Yes," The little boy agreed, smiling. "I showed you this morning the picture, Eli."

Nodding, she rested her head onto Jamie's shoulder and smiled at her brother. "Twas prettier in the book."

Claire smirked, looking at Jamie who was equally amused at this exchange.

"Why don't we go get some hot chocolate before we continue the visit?" She proposed, both of the children agreeing cheerfully at the idea.

The little family was making their way towards the café when Claire heard her name being called rather loudly. Followed by the giggle of a little girl, running around.

"Claire!" Gaëlle called again, hurrying towards her daughter. "I told you not to let go of my hand, *ma chérie.*"

Claire blinked, staring at her friend and her little girl. She didn't quite look like she used to, in France, but she had not changed that much either.

"Gaëlle?" She said softly, hesitating. It had been more than seven years now.

"My God," Gaëlle gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. A man stepped behind her and as Claire squinted, she realized that it was Joe who was very much alive.

The two women ran towards each other and crashed together, wrapping their arms tight around the other. Two friends separated by war and an ocean, back together again.

"I never thought I'd see you again, Gaëlle!"

"Neither did I," Gaëlle cried and hugged her friend tight.

Jamie and Joe saw their reunion and came to join them, all the children standing close by and wondering what was happening.

"Gaëlle, you remember Jamie?" Claire hooked her arm through Jamie's.

"How could I forget?" She smiled and hugged Jamie tightly. "He saved our lives. We wouldn't be here without him."

"Och, dinna fash," Jamie's face flushed red. He would probably never know the true impact he had made on Gaëlle and Joe's lives.

"Is this your little girl?" Claire looked at the child that was peering behind Gaëlle's leg.

"The very one that you helped deliver," Gaëlle stroked her daughter's head. "Claire, meet Claire," she said to her daughter.

"Hello," the little girl said shyly.

Joe crouched down beside his daughter, "This woman here helped your mama, and that's why we named you Claire ma chérie."

"Really?" Young Claire smiled up at Claire.

"Oui," Gaëlle smiled warmly. "And these are your children I presume?"

"Aye," Jamie shifted Eleanor in his arms. "This young man here is David, ye might remember him from the village?"

"Oh," Gaëlle said softly, her chin trembling as she no doubt remembered the little boy who had lost his mother.

"And this is Eleanor," Jamie kissed his daughter's cheek, smiling proudly.

"That's mama's middle name!" Young Claire said.

Claire locked eyes with Gaëlle and it was as if the two women were back in France, talking over a cup of tea. The war had taken many things away from both of them, but it had also given them strength and the courage they needed to live their lives.

"Would ye like to join us for a cup of hot chocolate?" Jamie offered to Gaëlle and her family.

"Sure," she nodded, wrapping her arm around Claire's shoulder.

"It sounds like we have a lot of catching up to do!"

The end.

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