



# Alyssa's Admirer (Heartsgate Highlanders #3)

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**Category:** Historical

**Description:** Alyssa has been alone since roommates traveled back in time to meet the men of their dreams. She has the option of contacting the same purple-haired matchmaker to go back in time as well, but she can't seem to find the courage.

When she finally bites the bullet and calls Dr. Lachele, her life will be changed forever, hopefully for the better.

Kendrick McClain hasn't yet found the perfect woman to marry. When an old friend of his mother's comes back in time, he knows this is the chance for him to find true happiness.

Will someone used to doing whatever she wants be able to adjust to life with a medieval man? Or will she beg to go back to where she started from?

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## Page 1

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Alyssa finished her last massage for the day, and escorted Mrs. Chadwick—one of her favorite clients—to the door. “I’ll see you next week!” she called as Mrs. Chadwick headed to her car.

Then Alyssa walked into her empty house and thought about the long weekend ahead. When she’d be alone. Again. Since her friend Holli had gone back in time over a year before, she’d been alone. Staring at the walls.

She pulled the scrunchie out of her hair, and let her dark tresses fall around her shoulders. She only kept it up for work because it got in the way. She’d always preferred to have her hair down. Her mother had once called her a hoyden for going on long walks and keeping her hair in her face.

Alyssa couldn’t imagine a life without long walks into the local parks and even out of town, so she could work through anything troubling her.

She thought for a moment about taking one of her walks, but she realized she’d just be using it to keep from making an important decision, and that wouldn’t work at all.

She still went to Book Club, and there were still a few other members who hadn’t traveled back in time. It sounded downright crazy, and she knew it. Going back in time. But she had the opportunity to do it as well.

Alyssa had never been good at making friends, and she clung to the ones who mattered most—Heather and Holli. But they were both gone now, back in medieval Scotland with their true loves, living together and laughing together. And all Alyssa had was her empty house to remember them by.

She'd had a dress made up, so she could go back as well.

There were tiny pockets sewn all through the dress for her to put things like penicillin and ibuprofen in.

But she hadn't gotten up the courage to make the jump yet.

Four different times she'd put on the dress for book club, all her pockets full of things that would be of a great help to her when she went back in time.

And every time she'd returned home, emptied her pockets, and continued in her day-to-day routine.

She put her face in her hands and took a deep breath.

There was no reason to stay where she was.

New York in 2022 wasn't anything to write home about.

At least they were upstate, where there weren't as many people packed everywhere, but without her friends, she still felt as if she was totally alone.

The next morning was book club again, and though she really wanted to go dressed in her Scottish dress and follow her friends, she also knew she'd chicken out again.

She sat for a moment thinking about it all and then picked up her phone and tapped the button beside Dr. Lachele's picture in all her purple-haired glory.

"This is Dr. Lachele," the cheery voice on the other end of the call said.

"Dr. Lachele, this is Alyssa. I keep going dressed to book club so I can go back to my

soul mate and my friends, but I never have the courage to just do it. Would you come now so I can do it before I lose my courage again?"

Dr. Lachele laughed softly. "I'm on my way, snickerdoodle!"

"Can you come to my house?"

"Just text me the address, and I'll be there!"

"Thank you."

"Anything for you, snookums." Dr. Lachele was always calling people by things that were not their names, but it didn't seem to bother most people.

Alyssa hurried to her bedroom and got dressed in the Scottish dress that she and Holli had made together before her friend had disappeared into the past. She put on her shoes, which were covered by the dress, and thought about how she wanted to word her wish.

She wanted to be precise because there was a lot she was wishing for.

She hurried in Holli's old office, where she'd written her books, and sat at her desk, reaching for a notepad and pen Holli always had at her side.

I wish...

What? Why couldn't she write it out? She was sure she'd gotten the wish perfect when she was upstairs, and she just had to write it.

I wish to travel to my friends and my soul mate.

No, that wouldn't work.

I wish to travel back in time to medieval Scotland to find my soul mate and be with my friends.

She read it over three times before nodding. Perfect.

Alyssa walked into the kitchen and grabbed some snacks she knew her friends would be happy to have. A bag of Dove chocolates, a bag of Cheetos, and a bag of potato chips. She knew the others had taken similar things back and she'd heard nothing negative.

She had filled her pockets with phones. Each one had games and books downloaded on it. And she took three solar chargers. She had no idea if her friends' phones still worked or not. No reason for any of them to go without books.

When she heard the doorbell, she rushed into the foyer of the home she'd grown up in, and opened the door to Dr. Lachele, whose hair seemed to be glinting.

Alyssa looked once more before opening the door wide.

"Thanks for making a house call. I can't seem to do this at the library where everyone else does. "

"It's no problem. Every time I see you, I feel bad because I can see on your face how very alone you've been without your friends." Lachele looked sad. "Come here and give me a boobie bump."

Alyssa didn't have to be told twice. She was a hugger, and she thought the world of Dr. Lachele. "I miss them so much!"

“I know,” Lachele stroked her hair. “Let’s do this before you lose your nerve again.”

“Oh, I forgot Heather’s root beer!”

Lachele laughed. “I think she’d forgive you.”

“You do?” Alyssa frowned. “I’m not so sure.” She ran into the kitchen and got the bottle of Barq’s that was waiting in the refrigerator door. “Let’s do this!”

Alyssa picked up her note she’d written to herself. “I’m just going to read this aloud. It took me forever to figure it out.”

Dr. Lachele read the note and nodded. “That’s perfect for what you want. Now read it aloud, so I can work my magic. Just so you know, everyone always passes out when they go back.”

Alyssa frowned. “What if the wrong man finds me?” she asked.

“It’s never happened. It’s going to be fine. Remember, I do this a lot now.”

“It’s a strange thing to do, you know. No one sends their friends back in time to a different country to find the love meant only for them.” Alyssa still didn’t exactly trust the process, but it was still worth trying to see her friends again.

She read the note aloud and waited. It only took a few moments, and she was tumbling through time, passing out in a bed of grass beside a small lake.

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Kendrick McClain had finished training his brother’s men for the day, and he was taking a leisurely walk around the loch.

He had a cut on his shoulder that his grandfather needed to tend to, but he just wasn't in the mood to go see his grandparents.

He didn't know why, but he felt like he needed to be at the loch.

He was squatting at the edge of the lake, his muscles rippling, when he spotted a lass not very far from him. He walked to her and looked down at her. "Where are ye from, lassie?"

When she didn't respond to him, he shouted for some help. The first people he saw were his twin brother, Bryson, and his wife, Holli. "Bryson, come quickly! This lassie looks hurt!"

Both Bryson and his wife ran toward him, Holli's hand going to cover her mouth as she dissolved into tears.

"Should I get Grandfather?" Bryson asked, unsure of what all his brother had checked with the lass.

"No," his wife answered, staring down at the body. "That's Alyssa."

The brothers had grown up hearing the names Alyssa and Holli. And one day Holli had appeared from the future and a place they called New York. And now here they stood over the Alyssa they'd always heard about.

Bryson slapped his brother on the back. "I think we've found ye a wife!"

Kendrick looked at the woman on the ground and back at his brother. "I didn't make a promise to marry the next woman who came from the future, now, did I?"

Holli went to her knees to look at her friend, straightening her skirt and carefully

trying to see if she was all right.

When Alyssa awoke a moment later, the first thing she saw was her friend. “Holli?”

Holli nodded, wiping a tear from her eye. “Don’t mind the tears. I hear that’s what happens when you’re expecting.”

“How long have you been here?” Alyssa asked, wondering how the time passed in the past as opposed to how it passed in the future. The question was already making her head hurt.

“Only about three months.” Holli took Bryson’s hand so he could help her to her feet. “Come on. Heather and Beth are going to be so excited to see you!”

“I know who Heather is, of course. Who’s Beth?”

“You have to see to believe.” Holli watched as Kendrick pulled her friend to her feet. “Are you dizzy at all?”

Alyssa nodded. “A little.”

Holli nodded. “That’s from the time travel. It’ll dissipate soon.”

Bryson looked at his brother. “Make sure she doesn’t fall.”

“And just how do ye think I should do that?” Kendrick asked.

“Either carry her or offer your arm to lean on.” Bryson had chosen to carry his love when he’d found her.

Kendrick looked at the tiny little girl beside him and he picked her up, cradling her to



his chest.

“Put me down! I’m too heavy.”

Kendrick laughed at that. “I canna even tell I’m carryin’ ye.”

They walked to the keep, and Alyssa looked at Holli. “We’re going into the keep?”

“Yes, we are. My husband is the laird, so it’s perfectly fine.”

As soon as they were inside, Kendrick set Alyssa down in a parlor. Bryson nodded to his brother. “I’ll fetch Mother and Grandmother.”

Alyssa frowned. “I want to see Heather!”

Holli laughed, followed by Bryson and Kendrick. “Have patience, lass,” Kendrick said. “Do ye need some water?” he asked.

Alyssa shook her head. “No thank you. I just need to see my friend.”

It wasn’t ten minutes later that Bryson returned with two older women. It took only a few seconds for Alyssa to recognize the younger one was Heather. “How long have you been here, Heather?”

“Long enough to find the love of my life, have seven sons, and all of those sons to grow into adults.” Heather leaned down and hugged her friend. “You’ve been missed.”

The other woman, someone Alyssa had never met, stepped forward. “I’m from New York City, 2019. I was the first of the women Dr. Lachele sent back in time. My name is Beth, and I married a McClain man, who was the youngest son of the laird’s,

and who could heal people with his touch.”

Alyssa blinked a couple of times, her eyes going to Heather and Holli for confirmation. When both women nodded, she struggled to understand. “How is that even possible?”

Beth shrugged. “There are family tales about how a woman of power married the seventh son of a seventh son. No one know how many seventh sons there were. Each time the seventh son, who had incredibly good luck, would inherit from his father. When he married a woman who could control the weather, all their seventh sons had some sort of power.”

“That’s...crazy!”

“I thought so at first too. But when my youngest son married your friend Heather here, her youngest son had the power to command animals.”

Holli nodded. “Yes, my Bryson can talk to animals and get them to do whatever he wants. It’s cool!”

“You all three believe this?”

“All five of us do,” Kendrick said. “Bryson is the youngest, and my twin brother. He can talk to animals.”

“What does your father do then?” Alyssa asked. No one had mentioned Heather’s husband quite yet.

“He’s what Mother and Grandmother refer to as an empath,” Kendrick said. “He feels others’ emotions.”

“You’re all crazy!” Alyssa said. She’d come back in time to learn her friends had been brain damaged.

An older man stepped into the keep then, going straight to the parlor. “Sorry, it took me a moment. I was healing a babe.” He looked at Alyssa. “Are you hurting anywhere, lass? I find that time travel leaves terrible headaches.”

Alyssa blinked a couple of times. “I do have a headache. Don’t worry, though, I have some Tylenol.”

Heather shook her head, laughing. “If you take Tylenol, your headache will come back in a few hours. Instead, why don’t you let my father-in-law heal you? The headache will truly be gone.”

“You’ve changed, Heather.”

Heather shrugged. “As a massage therapist, I’ve always been open to alternative healing forms.”

“May I?” asked the man standing over her.

Finally, Alyssa nodded, feeling cornered. When his hands covered her forehead, she realized the headache was simply gone. No medicine. The confusion was gone as well. But...what did that mean?

Alyssa looked at Kendrick. “What’s your superpower?”

Kendrick shook his head. “I’m a twin to the youngest, but not the youngest. I have no power.”

“So, you’re normal?” Alyssa asked.

The two other men in the room looked at each other, both chuckling. "I'm not abnormal," Bryson said.

"Uh huh." Alyssa shook her head. "I brought stuff," she said.

"Please tell me you have a device with Candy Crush on it!" Beth said. "I need to play it, and my phone died oh, about sixty years ago, I think."

Alyssa looked at the older woman. "You don't look over sixty."

"I have a husband who heals me from everything. Sometimes even from the aging process, I think." Heather shrugged. "I just know I'm not aging as quickly as most of the women around me are."

Kendrick looked at Alyssa and said, "My grandfather, father, and brother have all married women who have traveled from the past. I am the last unmarried McClain of an age to marry."

"Are you trying to tell me I'm destined to marry you? Really? You must have a better line than that."

Heather burst out laughing. "Don't worry, son, she's always a bit prickly when she doesn't know someone well."

"I can't believe you have sons old enough to marry!"

Heather smiled. "I have five married sons and seventeen grandchildren between them."

"No way!" Alyssa said, staring at Heather. "And Holli is going to have seven sons just like you?"

“Of course,” Beth said. “Anyone who marries the youngest in the family is destined to give birth to seven sons.”

“But I don’t have to have seven kids?” she asked.

Holli shook her head. “Even if you married a McClain, like Kendrick here, you wouldn’t necessarily have seven sons. You could even have daughters.”

“Neither of you have daughters?” Alyssa asked, looking between Beth and Heather.

“No, and we knew we wouldn’t,” Heather said. “I know it sounds strange, but it’s how the family works.”

“I wouldn’t mind having children if there was a chance of girls. And I didn’t have to commit to seven.”

Holli grinned at her. “I went through the same dilemma when I got here, but I knew what it entailed to marry Bryson.”

Alyssa looked at the man in front of her. Was he offering?

## Page 2

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Kendrick realized every eye in the room was focused on him, and he sighed dramatically. “Do you want to marry me, Alyssa?” he asked.

Heather swatted his shoulder. “I’ve talked to you enough about what life will be like in the future. Do it right.”

Kendrick let out a loud groan, but he lowered himself to one knee, and took Alyssa’s hand in his. “Alyssa, will you do me the great honor of marry me?”

Alyssa was frozen as she stared at the top of the head of the man who was kneeling before her.

It would mean she was married to Heather’s son, and Holli’s brother-in-law, which wouldn’t be a bad thing.

But...what if she wasn’t meant to marry him?

Maybe there was another man in the clan who would suit her better.

Holli looked at Alyssa. “By marrying Kendrick, you don’t need to worry about explaining how you magically appeared beside the loch earlier today. He’s a good man, Alyssa.”

Heather nodded. “The best of the best.”

“I thought I was the best of the best!” Bryson said, sounding wounded.

“The best son I have left. Is that better, Bryson?” Heather sighed dramatically.

Alyssa just sat there, frozen, completely unable to move. Everything was happening so fast. She wanted to be with her friends, but was this the way she wanted to do it?

“Why don’t ye walk with me?” Kendrick finally asked. “We’ll talk.”

“That sounds a lot more reasonable than marrying a man I met less than an hour ago and know nothing about.” Alyssa finally found her voice, and she stood up.

“Oh!” She looked at the three other women from her time.

She pulled out a root beer for Heather, Cheetos for Holli, and a phone and charger for Beth.

“I put lots of games on all of them and filled them with books. Do you have a solar charger?”

“Of course,” Beth said, reaching for the phone and hugging it to her.

Her husband looked at it, shaking his head. “I hope it doesn’t have the dreadful game where you pound candies.”

For a moment Alyssa wondered if she was causing marriage trouble by supplying the older woman with a phone. Then Beth said, “I’ll have something to do while you are out healing. It will be good.”

The old man just sighed. “If you say so, dear.”

Alyssa was surprised by how modern everyone spoke, but she realized it made sense with three women from her time having already come back to the same clan.

Kendrick offered Alyssa his arm, and the two of them went to the front door of the keep. “Did you grow up here?” she asked.

He nodded. “Bryson and I both lived in the keep until his marriage to Holli, and then I found a cottage in the village.”

Alyssa made a face. “Doesn’t your father have to die before Bryson takes his place?”

“Not in our family,” Kendrick said. “The youngest always inherits as soon as he marries. I know it’s odd, but this is the way our family has done it for generations. We emigrated here from England several generations ago.”

“You did? How is your family the one who rules the clan then?”

“This is a favorite story of mine.” As he spoke, Alyssa realized he was using a modern American accent, which in some ways made sense.

His mother and grandmother had been New Yorkers.

“When my family moved here many years ago, my great-great-grandfather had a special power. He could make plants grow with just his touch. When we arrived on the land you see, the clan had just lost its leader, and were experiencing a horrible drought. My grandfather was told that the man who was able to make the plants grow could take his place as laird of the clan.”

Alyssa smiled. She was certain the story had been exaggerated a million times, but she liked it. “So, he made the crops grow?”

“First, he went out to the field and spread water from the loch all around the plants. He even asked the men to spread the field wider and plant more. Then when everyone was asleep that night, he walked out, put his hand on the field, and told the plants to



grow. By morning, the crop was ready to be harvested. He was moved into the keep with his wife, and they were the first Laird and Lady McClain.”

She pursed her lips thinking about the story. “And how did they come to the name McClain. The Mc for families is only in Ireland and Scotland from what I’ve read.”

“You are correct. Our family name was simply Lain back in England, and we took on the Mc part to be part of the Scottish clan. Now we are McClains.”

“Does it bother you that you don’t have a power?” she asked.

“Nay. With the power comes the responsibility of leading the clan and fathering seven sons. I would prefer to simply be Kendrick, part of the clan, but not one with much pressure.” Kendrick glanced at her to see her mind working.

His favorite part about the women from the future is they had all been taught to think like men. Conversations were never boring.

“That makes sense to me. I couldn’t marry the youngest brother, and not only because Holli already did. I wouldn’t want to be responsible for birthing seven sons.”

“I see we are of a like mind about this,” Kendrick said. “Are you willing to marry me?”

Alyssa took a deep breath. “I don’t know. I’ve only known you an hour or so.”

“But your friends have known me much longer. One of your friends is my mother. Do you really think she’d have raised a son who would be a bad husband?”

Alyssa smiled. “I know she wouldn’t. I do want to marry, but...how do I know you’re the right man?”

“Because anyone else you marry will ask many questions, you’ll be incapable of answering. I already understand your background and where you came from because my brother and father are married to close friends of yours. I’m the safe option.”

Alyssa stopped walking and looked at him, really seeing him for the first time.

He was a large, strong man, and he had a little dimple at the corner of his mouth that sent her heart fluttering.

His muscles seemed to have muscles, and she knew it wasn’t because he spent all his spare time in a gym lifting weights.

No, he was strong and muscular because work had made him that way.

If only she knew how his kisses felt, she’d be able to answer quickly.

“What do you do? I know you don’t lead the clan...

” She hoped he wasn’t just a wastrel, living out his life with his family name leading the way.

“I am in charge of training the McClain men. Bryson found he was too busy with a need to deal with animals who are predators. I believe it was my grandfather who started the trend of having another member of the family train the men. He needed to so he could deal with healing. Now it is something every generation does. The powers the laird gets are too good to be wasted by a man who is busy training his men.”

Alyssa nodded. It was good to know he worked hard to contribute to his clan. “Will you kiss me?” she asked. “If I know I like your kisses, then I can agree with marrying you. Otherwise, we’ll have to spend months getting to know one another, and that

won't be fun for either of us."

He stepped toward her, cupping her face in his hands.

When his lips lowered onto hers, she didn't know what she was expecting, but it wasn't what happened.

Stars appeared before her closed eyes, and she wanted nothing more than to be close to him.

Never in her life had she enjoyed a man's kisses, but this guy? Wow.

When he raised his head, he saw that her eyes were still closed, and they didn't seem to be in any hurry to open. "I ask again. Will you do me the honor of being my wife?"

Alyssa nodded her head, a smile just barely touching her lips. "I'll marry you." When her eyes opened, he could see the excitement in them, and he realized he'd done a good job kissing her.

"By the time we get back to the keep, I'm certain my mother will have already called for a feast. We share a priest with the Campbell Clan, who are the people of my great-grandmother. She is still with us. Her son keeps her and all the family healthy."

"Heather won't call for the priest without an answer from us, will she?"

Kendrick chuckled. "She's already done it. The ceremony will be soon after we arrive."

Alyssa sighed. "I don't even get to plan my own wedding?"

"Be thankful it is my mother and your friend Holli planning the wedding. It means

you will have Irish Nachos for your wedding feast.”

Alyssa couldn't stop a grin from covering her face. “I guess Heather figured out how to grow the needed plants.”

“She did. I must tell you as we walk. We will live in a plain cottage like the rest of the clan. It will have three rooms. Does that change your mind about marrying me?”

Alyssa shrugged. “I left a six-bedroom house to find my destiny. If I'd wanted it that badly, I'd still be living in it.”

“And so, you would.”

“All right let's go back to the keep and see what they've done to get ready for our wedding,” she said. “I hope you're wrong, and they'll leave at least a bit of it for me, but I doubt it.”

His arm went around her shoulders as he opened the front door of the keep. They walked in to see people bustling every which way.

One of the cooks, stopped and looked Alyssa up and down. “Ye best get above stairs. Lady Heather and Lady McClain are waiting ta dress ye for the wedding.”

Alyssa looked at Kendrick once more. “I'll show you to the master bedroom,” he said. “I'm certain that's where Mother and Holli are waiting.” Kendrick hurried up the stairs with Alyssa trailing behind him.

When he reached the top, he turned left, and knocked on the door there. Heather stuck her head out. “There you are! Wedding's in fifteen, so we need to get you into a McClain kilt.”

Alyssa sighed. “You were supposed to wait for me to make a decision.” Wasn’t it just like Heather and Holli to make the decision for her? She remembered now why she hadn’t missed them for a week or two after they’d left.

Holli shrugged. “No time to argue now.” There was a blue dress in the McClain colors lying across the bed. “Strip to your slip, and we’ll get this on you quick.”

Alyssa realized there was no point fighting the two of them.

She may as well go along, since she had done what they expected of her anyway.

She stripped off the dress that she realized wasn’t at all like what Heather and Holli wore, though she’d been sure she’d had her dress made for the correct time.

Perhaps they knew less about how the medieval Scots had dressed than she’d realized.

Once she was in the plaid of the clan, she went through the pockets of the dress she’d worn. “Where do I put these things?” she asked. “I don’t want anyone to stumble on them accidentally.”

“There’s a trunk under the bed,” Holli said. “All of the future stuff we bring goes there. You can take a phone back to your cottage of course, but you’ll have to keep it hidden yourself.”

“I can do that,” Alyssa said. “You know, after I’ve seen said cottage and figured it all out.”

“It won’t take long,” Heather said. “You and Kendrick are in the cabin beside mine, and we’ll be able to talk more.”

“It’s weird seeing you so much older. I can’t believe I’m marrying your son.”

Heather laughed. “It was even weirder with Holli. Now I’ve been through it once, it seems almost commonplace.”

Alyssa raised an eyebrow at Heather. “Is that so?”

“Not at all!” Heather said. All three women laughed for a moment.

“Tell me about the ceremony,” Alyssa said.

“It’ll be in English because I requested that of the priest,” Holli said. “You just answer where and when you’re supposed to, and then you go home with Kendrick after we throw a huge party.”

“I see.” Alyssa took a deep breath. “Am I doing the right thing?”

“We both wondered that as well,” Heather said. “Trust me. My son will treat you like a queen.”

Alyssa realized she’d followed her friend’s convoluted explanation. “Why did Kendrick have a cut on his shoulder?”

Heather nodded. “It’s the way he trains the men. I wish he wouldn’t be quite so hands on as he trains, but they all tell me it’s the only way to train an army.”

“Don’t you almost wish we’d brought rifles back with us to keep them safe?” Alyssa asked.

“More times than I care to admit to,” Heather said. “Oh, and when Dr. Lachele comes back to see you, you have to send someone for all of us right away.”

“She’s going to come back to see me?” Alyssa asked. “No one told me about that.”

“Well, it happens. It’s pretty cool too.”

Holli narrowed her eyes at her friend. “You know you were brought back just a generation before the Black Death ravaged Europe, right?”

Alyssa groaned. “I left one pandemic to come back to the worst in the history of the world. Sounds like me.”

“Pandemic?” Heather asked.

“I forgot you came back in 2019. Covid-19 was a pandemic starting around February of 2020. It started in China and quickly spread to the rest of the world. So many people have died from this thing. Everyone runs around in a mask.”

Holli sighed. “I left when it was first being reported on. I didn’t realize it got so bad.”

“So bad. They developed a vaccine, but half the world thinks the vaccine is made to put trackers into people’s bodies, so they refuse.

The other half gets the vaccine. So many fights, all because doctors are trying to save people.

” Alyssa sighed dramatically. “I wish everyone could just get along for a while.”

“Never going to happen,” Heather said. “We have the closest thing to peace this clan has ever seen, and we’re keeping it that way.”

“How?” Alyssa asked. “You think you can guarantee peace?”

“I seriously doubt it,” Heather said. “But when people start being killed off by the Black Death, I have a feeling we’ll be the most popular clan around. Having a healer seems to work that way.”

Alyssa shook her head. “There must be better ways to have peace among men. I’m ready to go all out hippy and start protesting all the wars.”

Holli giggled. “Imagine just how the Highlanders would react to a hippy. They would have no idea what to do.”

A knock on the door had them all jumping. “Yes?” Holli called.

“The priest is here. It’s time,” called the voice back.

Alyssa took a deep breath. “I guess I’m going to get married.”



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

Walking down the stairs in the plaid of the clan, Alyssa held her head high. She was marrying a stranger, just as Heather and Holli had done before her. She was marrying her best friend's son, but that best friend was younger than her, and her son appeared older. Oh, it was too much to think about.

She stopped in front of the man she had to assume was the priest, dressed unlike anyone else in the room in a white robe with a belt around his waist. Kendrick turned to her and smiled, and she wondered if she should really be marrying a man who was twice her size.

She said all the right things at the right times, but it felt like she was sludging through mud the entire time. It was all so slow and strange.

When Kendrick was told to kiss her, he held nothing back. Lifting her by her waist and kissing her passionately in front of all the people there. And it seemed as if at least half the clan was there.

After Alyssa was back on her feet, she felt people surrounding her, hugging her, and welcoming her to the clan. The hugs triggered a memory that clan was the old Gaelic word for children. Yes, this was a big happy family.

Beth hugged her tightly. "It's nice to have another one of us around. Thank you for bringing me Candy Crush , even though it upsets my husband."

Alyssa giggled. "I just put a ton of games on all the devices I brought. I knew someone would want to play."

“How many devices did you bring?” Beth asked, her eyes wide.

“No idea. We had a big drawerful. Every time I saw someone give a phone away on Facebook Marketplace, I’d snatch it up. Then I’d delete everything off it and fill it with books and games. I brought my whole collection.”

Beth grinned. “I’m going to have Candy Crush for a long time!”

Alyssa nodded. “You just won’t be able to save your information and transfer it to the next phone.”

“Who cares? It gets so hard after a certain point; I would rather go back and start over.” Beth shrugged. “Seriously, though. Welcome to the family. It’s good to see my grandsons happy.”

“Do you have granddaughters?” Alyssa asked, wanting to know if there was truly any hope for her to have a girl.

“I do. Many of them. And you’ll have as good of a chance as anyone of having girls.”

“Thank you for reassuring me,” Alyssa said. “Do I hide my accent?”

Beth shook her head. “No, half the clan has an American accent at this point. Or should I say, American accent mixed with a Highland brogue.”

“Well, that certainly makes things easier for me. It’s strange to feel like I’m already part of things, even though I’m not. I guess it helps to have other people who have travelled in the same way I have here.”

Beth nodded. “You wouldn’t believe how happy I was to see Heather. And Holli. And now you. Sometimes you just need to speak with a modern woman to be

understood completely.”

“I agree with that. I’m glad there’s a group of four of us now.”

“Your life will be different from ours. We’ve all held the title Lady McClain, and we’ve lived in the keep. Is it going to bother you not being married to the laird? I think that’s what the rest of us wanted.”

Alyssa smiled. “I’m not outgoing enough to be married to the laird of a clan. I’m more the supporting character, rather than a heroine.”

Beth nodded. “We all need those, don’t we?”

“Well, you can be the supporting character in my romance.”

Beth laughed. “Aren’t we always supporting characters in other people’s books?” With a hug, Beth was off, mingling with the clansmen there for the wedding and feast.

Kendrick joined her then, his arm going around Alyssa’s waist automatically. “Did you enjoy your talk with Grandmother?”

“Believe it or not, I did,” Alyssa said. “I think she and I were born in the same year.”

Kendrick frowned. “That makes no sense.”

“Your mother is a year younger than me.” Alyssa watched his face for surprise.

“This time travel thing you all do gets very confusing after a while, doesn’t it?”

“It does! I can’t figure any of it out, and when I try, my head starts hurting again.”

“I guess it’s nothing to worry your pretty little head over, is it?” As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Kendrick took a giant step back. “My mother told me that those are fighting words to a woman from the twenty-first century, so I had to try them!”

Alyssa shook her head. “You’re taking your life into your own hands!”

He chuckled. “Just don’t kill me in my sleep...not before the wedding night at least.”

Alyssa froze. Why hadn’t she thought there would be a wedding night? Too many books with marriages of convenience probably. She needed to get her head on straight.

Heather hurried over then, smiling at Alyssa. “Another of my best friends now married to one of my sons. I do believe I live the strangest life in the entire history of strange lives.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Alyssa saw Kendrick slip out of the way, so she leaned toward Heather. “Kendrick expects a wedding night. Is that weird?”

Heather shook her head. “It’s a pretty natural thing for a man to expect.”

“But...I don’t know him!”

“You will after your wedding night.” Heather grinned at her friend.

“I guess I’ll have to figure this out then, won’t I?”

“Guess you will.”

“No advice for me before I sleep with your son?” Alyssa asked, trying to make

Heather as uncomfortable as she felt.

“No, but you should ask if Beth has advice for you before you sleep with her grandson. She’s better at those things than I am. Of course, she’s been married sixty-five years or so.” Heather shrugged, a smile lingering on her lips.

“How long have you been married now?” Alyssa asked. It was confusing to say the least.

“Thirty-five years. I know it’s weird because I just saw you a year and a half ago in your time, but here, it’s been a lifetime.”

“I wish we’d grown old together,” Alyssa said, feeling sad.

“Are you calling me old?” Heather asked, putting her hands on her hips indignantly.

Holli came over and linked arms with Alyssa. “We’re both calling you old.”

“I’m the youngest out of the three of us!” Heather complained.

“Look in a mirror, old lady,” Alyssa said, finding confidence in having Holli beside her.

“We should get together in the afternoons,” Holli suggested. “Heather, Beth, and I always meet in the parlor to mend or sew or eat or...well, whatever we feel like doing.”

“I like the whatever we feel like doing part of the afternoon,” Alyssa said, smiling. She looked at Holli. “Are you taking notes on everything you see so you can write it all down later?”

Holli laughed. "I'd describe it as someone from the future, not someone from this time. How would that look?"

"No clue!" Alyssa said. "But you'd finally be able to write what you want to write."

"Maybe when the boys are older," Holli said.

Alyssa blinked. "You could do it now, before the first one is born."

Holli shrugged. "Being pregnant has done two things to me. Made me very weepy and very relaxed. I have no desire to do anything but eat and sleep. And grow. I want my baby to grow."

Heather looked at Holli and frowned. "Are you worried about the baby? Do you want me to have Gavin check on you?"

"Nah. I think I'm doing fine. I'm just not...feeling urgent about anything."

Heather smiled. "I was not like that when I was expecting. I was worried about everything. I'd stub my toe and call Gavin to make sure the baby was okay. I'm sure he thought I was crazy."

Beth joined them, obviously hearing the last of what Heather had said. "Oh, he thought you were absolutely insane. But when he tried to heal your head, it didn't work. So, I told him you were just hormonal."

All the women laughed at that. "I hope I'm not like either of you two," Alyssa said. "I just want to be me."

Beth shook her head. "I've been through seven pregnancies.

Between my seven sons, there have been thirty-two pregnancies, and now with grandchildren, I'm pretty sure it's over one hundred.

I lost count a while back. Not one woman acted like herself during her pregnancy. They all changed in some way."

Alyssa stared at the older woman, her jaw dropping. "That's a lot of pregnancies."

Beth nodded. "And my husband was the healer on call for every single one of them," she said, shaking her head.

"What did you do before you came here?" Alyssa asked.

"Me? I was a CPA. Most boring job in the world, but it sure paid the bills. When I came back, I did it in a pair of jeans. Gavin smuggled me into the keep, afraid people would see me." Beth grinned.

"We married, and he was immediately called out to heal. I felt like I'd always be last in his eyes.

That's when he started having one of his brothers train the men, and it's stayed that way. So much easier."

"Kendrick told me that is his job," Alyssa said. "Is it always one of the brothers doing the training?"

"Oh, yes!" Beth said. "The men only accept it because one of the brothers is doing the training and not someone who's not closely related to the laird."

"Wow. I had no idea clans worked that way."

Beth shook her head. "Clans don't work that way. Only this one."

Alyssa nodded. "So, this is an aberration?"

"In so many ways," Beth said. "In this clan, the retired lairds are always helping the new laird find his way. Bryson has only been laird for three months. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather are all still alive, living in this very village. Each one has invaluable advice for Bryson, whether he likes it or not. He's learning to be laird at his ancestors' knees. "

"He likes it," Holli said. "He wouldn't know what to do without their help."

"We'll see if he feels the same when he's the father of seven sons, and the youngest is fifteen years old. By then, all the men wish their fathers would just leave them alone and let them rule the clan."

"I guess we'll eventually find out," Holli said. She absolutely didn't seem worried about it or anything else.

Kendrick came over to them, and pulled Alyssa away from his mother, grandmother, and sister-in-law. "They are all bad influences. Please tell me you'll stay away from them when you can."

Alyssa laughed. "Two of them are my closest friends, and I have a feeling your grandmother will be another close friend. Why would you think they'll be a bad influence?"

His eyes narrowed. "I've heard of women's lib. They all talk about how women have more modern roles in society in the future."

Alyssa smiled. "I'm old fashioned. I just want to raise a family."



“With some girls,” he said, a smile transforming his face.

“Yes, with some girls.”

“Then I hope you have everything you are looking for in life and then some.” He stroked her cheek with his thumb and looked like he wanted to say something else, but he wandered off instead.

During the rest of the feast, Alyssa met Heather’s other sons and their wives. The entire family was in on the secret of them coming from the future, but the rest of the clan knew absolutely nothing. It was fun to meet all the women who asked what women’s work was like where she was from.

“You didn’t ask Holli? Or Heather?”

“You’re like us,” one of them told her. “You aren’t married to the laird or one who will give birth to the future laird. That makes you approachable.”

Alyssa smiled. “Can I tell you a secret?”

All the sisters-in-law crowded in close. “I don’t want to be the laird’s wife. I’m perfectly happy being the wife of one of his brothers.”

Holli joined them in their little circle. “She’s telling the truth. She has always been one who didn’t care to marry a rich man, or a powerful man. She wants instead to marry a normal man who can concentrate on her and their children.”

Alyssa could immediately see on the faces of the sisters-in-law that they weren’t as open with Holli as they would be with her. She found it interesting, but she wasn’t sure why.

“Do you all come to the keep to sew in the afternoons?” Alyssa asked.

“We do on occasion,” Bonnie, one of the sisters-in-law said. “I do love to hear the stories about the future that Heather and Holli tell us.”

“I have some too, of course.”

“Aye, you do, we will all be happy to hear them if you care to tell them.”

“I’d love to tell them. Not just this moment, of course, but when we can be assured no one else will hear.”

“Only members of the family are allowed ta know,” Bonnie said. “I didn’t know until after I’d married Callum. At first, I laughed at him. Nothing that he said made any kind of sense to me. But now...Now I know he was telling the truth.”

“How?” Alyssa asked. What had proved to these women that time travel was a thing, when it had been so hard for modern women to conceive.

Bonnie leaned forward and whispered. “They showed me something they called an iPad. I had never seen anything so perfect, and it had pictures on it. Not the kind that people paint, or children draw. It had exact replicas.” Someone hurried to them, handing a young baby to Bonnie. “Me bairn needs some attention, I see.”

“He’s so sweet!” Alyssa said.

“She is sweet,” Bonnie corrected. “I will take her above stairs to feed her. I canna get used to pulling out my breast in front of people.”

Alyssa laughed. “I have a feeling I’ll have the same problem when my time comes.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

It was much later when Kendrick walked over to Alyssa and whispered into her ear. “I think it’s time for that wedding night we talked about,” he said.

Alyssa felt flushed and nervous all at once. His lips against her ear...well, they did something to her.

As Kendrick led her from the keep, someone called out loudly, “A toast! To Kendrick and Alyssa! May they have beautiful bairns who will honor their clan!”

Everyone raised a glass, and Kendrick turned. “I thank you all for being at my wedding feast. You keep feasting, and Alyssa and I will feast in a different way!”

Alyssa was shocked and embarrassed at his words, but the entire clan had laughed as if it was a perfectly normal thing to say. Her eyes met Heather’s across the crowded room, and Heather gave a nod.

As they left the keep, Alyssa said, “I’m not sure I’m ready for a wedding night.”

“Is that so?” he asked. “Then why did ye marry me?”

“I didn’t feel like I had a choice!” she said. “I felt forced into marriage, and if you don’t understand that, then you don’t understand anything.”

“I’ll not take ye against yer will, lassie, but I think ye need to think on what yer sayin’ ta me.”

His brogue had thickened in a way that sent heat straight to her core. She did love a

Scottish accent. “I...maybe we can go to your cottage and kiss and see where things go from there.” She bit her lip, unsure how he’d react to her suggestion.

He laughed and swung her up into his arms, carrying her toward his cottage. When he strode in, he kicked the door shut, and set her on her feet, kissing her softly at first, and then more firmly as she reacted.

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When Alyssa woke the following morning, Kendrick was lying in bed with her, and the cover was down, around their waists. “I had a wonderful wedding night,” he said softly, kissing her shoulder.

She blushed profusely. “I think I’d like to cover up a little!”

He just laughed. “It’s not like I haven’t seen and felt everything you have.” With a kiss to her lips, he swung his legs out of bed with her, and she peeked at his bottom.

How could a butt look that good when he’d never even spent a minute in a gym?

“What are yer plans for the day, lass?”

She wondered if he’d ever call her by her name but decided he probably wouldn’t. “I was invited to the keep to sew with your family this afternoon.”

“Y’mean with yer two best friends and my grandmother. Stay out of trouble, lass, and have supper waiting for me.”

“Wait...what time will you be back? And how do I know what time it is? The phones don’t tell me anymore. They can’t quite orient themselves, because not only are there no cell towers, but I’ve gone back in time.”

He sighed. “Ask me mother, and she will explain. I have no idea!” With one last kiss, he hurried out of the cottage.

As soon as he was gone, Alyssa sat up, covering herself from her neck down with the plaid they’d slept under the night before. She hadn’t even had a chance to explore the little cottage.

Standing up, still holding the cover, she walked from the small bedroom she had shared with Kendrick to the main room, which seemed to be a kitchen and a sitting room all at once.

The only other room was another small bedroom.

She’d better not have seven kids, because she had no idea where they’d all go!

Still, the cottage was all she and Kendrick needed at that moment. When she looked around for food to cook, there was little. In the books she’d read, they only talked about what the lairds and royalty ate, very seldom mentioning the fare of the common man.

She had much to learn, and she would start it with her sisters-in-law. She dressed, having a terrible time with her plaid, and then left the cottage to see if she could find any of the women, she’d met the night before.

She spotted Bonnie, her baby in a basket, as she stood in the street? Road? She didn’t know what to call it. It was a dirt path through the village, and that explanation would have to work for her brain.

Alyssa hurried over to her new sister-in-law. “I have no idea what I’m supposed to eat!”

Bonnie laughed. “Of course, ye dinna. Come into me cottage, and I’ll show ye an easy way to make oat cakes.”

Following her sister-in-law inside her small cottage, she looked around, seeing that it was much like the one she was sharing with Kendrick.

“Now, I’ll show ye both how to make oatcakes and oatmeal, which will be enough of a lesson for today.

” She pulled out a large glass jar with what looked to be a cork stopper.

Realizing she would have trouble memorizing how to make two different things, Alyssa asked, “Do you mind if I record the conversation?”

“What does that mean?” Bonnie asked.

“Well, it will have your voice on it, telling me how to make the oatcakes and oatmeal. I can play it back later, so I can remember how to do it.” Alyssa looked both ways to be sure no one was looking in the window before pulling out her phone and pushing the record button.

“My name is Alyssa, and I like to use my phone.” Then she played it back for Bonnie. “Like that!”

Bonnie giggled as she heard Alyssa’s voice come back out of the small device. “Oh, aye! I would like to hear my voice come out of that box.”

Alyssa deleted what she’d recorded, and tapped the button again, this time recording what Bonnie was telling her.

The measurement of handfuls didn’t seem very exact to Alyssa and even worse was

when she was told to use a pinch.

Oh well, she'd figure it out for herself after getting the vague measurements from Bonnie.

When Bonnie was finished with her lesson, she sat down with Alyssa, and they ate oat cakes together. "Oh, these are delicious," Alyssa said. "Are oats plentiful?"

"Aye. They are the biggest crop we grow as a clan. Those and potatoes, which I'm told we shouldn't be able to grow yet, but we've had them for my entire lifetime.

The first laird of Clan McClain, after the clan was renamed of course, was said to have the ability to grow anything in a matter of seconds.

I never got to see it happen, as he passed a long time ago, but I would have liked to have seen it. "

"Does it not strike you as odd that the laird of this clan comes from a family who came from England?"

"Nay. We all grew up with the stories, and it seems normal to this clan. Other clans may feel differently, but we dinna blink at it."

"Had you heard the story before you married into the family?"

Bonnie grinned. "The stories are told all through the clan. Though, everyone believes them to be just that, stories. When I married into the family, I found out the truth, and I must say, I was shocked. But now? It seems like it's a normal thing to have your clan run by people with magical powers."

Alyssa grinned. "I see. How often have you seen the powers used?"

“Oh, I see Collum’s grandfather use his all the time.

I was very ill as I carried Anella here, but he healed me over and over until I could keep food in me to grow that tiny bairn.

Anytime anyone in the clan is hurt, they are taken to him.

He hides what he does behind tinctures and salves, but I think I always knew that he was healing with his hands. ”

“Interesting. Do you ever wish Collum had a power? Like Bryson?”

“Nay. Twould keep him from me and our bairn. All the powers are important. I dinna know what I would do if Collum had to run about healing or dealing with any stray animal who comes upon our village.”

“Is that what Bryson does?” Alyssa asked. “Deal with animals?”

“Aye. If there is a wolf in the woods, he will be called to tell it to go away. We don’t want to hunt the wolves, but we don’t want them attacking us either,” Bonnie said.

“He spends much time training with Kendrick and the other men, but he is called away often. If an animal plagues any of our allied clans, he’s sent for. ”

Alyssa ate the last of her oatcake. “Thank you for teaching me and for feeding me,” she said. “I’m going to go to the keep now and see what Holli is up to.”

“You feel comfortable going to the keep alone?” Bonnie asked.

“Don’t you?”



Bonnie slowly shook her head. “I like Holli, but I canna feel comfortable in a place where magic happens all the time.”

“I can understand that,” Alyssa said. “But Holli and Heather are my best friends. I’m not afraid to spend time with them.” She got to her feet.

“Ye should come back in the morn, and I’ll teach ye more cooking.”

“I’d like that a lot!” Alyssa said as she headed toward the door. “Thank you again for helping me today.”

“What else are sisters for?”

Alyssa looked all around her as she walked toward the keep. It seemed odd to her that the family members of the laird would live so simply, but she didn’t mind of course. She wondered how the former lairds felt about their drop-in stations, though.

When she got to the keep, she wasn’t certain if she should walk right in, or knock.

In Julie Garland’s Highland books, the keep was like a meeting place and people were in and out all the time.

But in some of the others she’d read, it wasn’t like that, and people were expected to knock.

She decided to knock, preferring to err on the side of caution.

Holli opened the door and shook her head. “Just come in, silly.”

When Alyssa explained her thought process, Holli laughed. “I guess I lived here right away, and I didn’t have to worry about things like that.”

“I had no idea what I was supposed to do for food. I ended up going to Bonnie’s house, and she taught me to make oatcakes and oatmeal, and she was super excited when I recorded her.

” Alyssa shook her head. “I don’t know exactly how much two handfuls of oats is, but I’m sure going to try to figure it out! Her oatcakes were amazing.”

Holli nodded. “They are. She makes the best oatcakes I’ve eaten here.”

“So, let’s talk potatoes...”

Holli grinned. “Harvest was just in. It’s September, and the leaves will start turning soon. At least they tell me they will. It’s my first year here too, remember.”

“Can we eat baked potatoes for lunch?” Alyssa asked. “And how do you think Kendrick would feel about my baked potato soup.” Alyssa had cooked a good deal more than either of her roommates, and she was excited to start experimenting with the foods that were available.

Holli stood. “I’ll let Cook know you want baked potatoes.”

“You have a cook named Cook?”

Holli giggled. “Wouldn’t that be funny? But no, when she started cooking here when Heather first arrived, everyone quit calling her by her name, and started calling her Cook. She responds to it, and it’s not hard to remember.”

“But doesn’t it dehumanize her?”

Holli tilted her head to one side to think about the question. “I don’t think so. It’s how she introduced herself to me.”

“Okay. If she doesn’t mind, then who am I to throw a fit over it?”

“I’ll be right back. Going to tell her baked potatoes. This clan has now had potatoes for three generations. We don’t trade or share them though, so history shouldn’t change. Even Clan Campbell doesn’t get a share of potatoes.” With that, Holli disappeared behind a door.

When she came back, she had a huge grin on her face.

“Cook said she’d anticipated me, and they’re already baking.

” Holli led the way into the parlor, plopping down on a wooden bench that seemed to double as a sofa.

“I’ve been craving potatoes with little Herbert here, so she’s kind of figured out I need them daily. ”

“Herbert? Tell me you are not going to name that poor baby Herbert.”

“Probably not. But it’s fun to call him that. I think we’re probably going to settle on Finn, but don’t tell Bryson I told you. He’s convinced that if people know the baby’s name before he’s born, it’s bad luck.”

“That’s odd,” Alyssa said. “I’ve never heard that.”

“Yeah, I thought it was weird too. Heather tried to convince all her sons that it wouldn’t happen that way, but apparently, no one believed her.” Holli shrugged. “The clan influence is much too strong when it comes to superstition.”

“I get that. It’s their culture. Of course, their culture is also sort of modern American?” Alyssa shook her head. “Every time I try to figure out this time travel

stuff, my head starts to hurt.”

Holli shrugged. “I’ve quit trying. Being pregnant is good for me.”

“How far along are you?”

“Within the first few days of being here,” Holli responded. “It’s nice having a healer for a grandfather who can just tell you when your child is due.”

“Does he deliver the babies too?”

“Well, yeah! Who else is qualified?”

Alyssa frowned. “Is there no midwife?”

“Not one who can do what Gavin can. Seriously, the man is a walking miracle.” Holli shrugged. “I wouldn’t take a midwife with their archaic childbirth methods if my life depended on it. Nope. Gavin is my man.”

“I’m not sure I’d feel comfortable with a man delivering my baby.” Alyssa realized that she could also be pregnant, but she didn’t think it would happen as quickly for her as it had for Holli. She wasn’t the one who was destined to have seven babies, after all.

“I’m sure someone else could catch the baby and be the one all up in your girly bits if it was that important to you. But you’d still want Gavin there. If anything went wrong with either you or the baby, he could heal you fast.”

“How does the healing work?” Alyssa asked.

“I asked the same thing when I got here,” Holli said. “He takes a bit of the pain onto

himself, and it leaves your body. He is sick for just a moment as his body heals itself from the wound. Pretty cool, huh?"

"I sure think so!" Alyssa said. "Maybe I will have him there when I have babies. If I have babies. What if I can't?"

"Then Gavin will heal you so you can. He's good at what he does."

"What is the clan going to do when he passes away?" Alyssa thought they may be relying too heavily on an old man.

"I guess we'll learn to go to normal healers then. But it won't be easy!"

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

That afternoon was rather fun, with Beth, Heather, and Holli showing Alyssa the proper way to make clothing for Scottish bairns. “We’re sewing for all the beautiful grandbabies Holli is going to give me,” Heather said with a smile.

Holli laughed and patted her still nonexistent baby bump.

“You can’t pretend you’re showing yet, Holli,” Alyssa said, shaking her head.

“I don’t know why not!” Holli frowned at her friend.

“Because no one can tell you’re pregnant.”

Beth shook her head. “I can argue against that. My husband knew immediately.”

“His powers sound almost scary. I knew a kid once who ran around saying everything was OP! He meant that it was overpowered. Is Gavin overpowered?” Alyssa asked.

“Not at all. If he used his powers for evil, maybe I would think so, but he uses them for good and only good.” Beth shrugged.

“There’s a tale in the family about the three sisters who weren’t McClains, but one’s daughter married into the McClains.

The youngest of the three, who is an ancestress of the McClains had the power to heal.

At least according to stories, and seeing what my husband can do, I’m not going to

quibble.

Well, she put her hand on someone who was well, and shriveled them up and they died.

Now story passed down from generation to generation, but I could see it happening. ”

Alyssa felt a shiver run up her spine. “That’s creepy!”

Heather looked at Beth. “I hadn’t heard that one!”

“I think Gavin is the only one who tells it, and I think he may have stopped telling it to people after my reaction to it.” Beth shrugged. “He’s never tried it, and never intends to try it, but I think he could do it. His power can be used for good as well as evil. I’m sure of it.”

“Have any of the McClains ever used their powers for evil?” Alyssa asked, looking between the other three women.

“Not really,” Beth said. “I’ve heard of some mischief they’d get into and even some practical jokes, but no real evil.

” She smiled. “My mother-in-law used to tell me a story about how she’d fallen in love with her husband as a little girl, and they were kept apart because her father didn’t want her marrying a boy with strange powers.

She told them of how he’d saved her life by sticking his hand into the chest of a wolf and removing its heart. Nonsurgically.”

“Wow. But that wasn’t mischief, was it?”

“No, but she thought it was at the time by the way her family reacted. She was a Campbell, daughter of the laird of our neighboring clan. The sweetest woman you’ll ever meet.

She didn’t come for the wedding. She and her husband are both well over a hundred now, and they stay in more often than not.

But Gavin does the job of keeping his parents healthy. ”

“She’s really sweet!” Holli said.

“I can’t wait to meet her,” Alyssa said.

“What’s she like?” Alyssa asked.

“So kind. So loving. Her children come first in everything, and she loves them with all her heart. She didn’t care if she was married to a laird or a pauper. She would do what was best for her family,” Beth said.

Heather nodded. “She was the most welcoming woman. She still is. She just isn’t moving quite as well as she used to.”

“Can Gavin keep people alive indefinitely?” Alyssa asked.

“I believe he can,” Beth said. “He kept his grandparents alive until they were over one hundred and twenty. No one lives that long, especially not in medieval Scotland. Come to think of it, Gillian has to be older than that. Kennan as well, of course.”

“I hope he survives long enough to help out with the plague,” Heather said, shuddering. “I don’t even want to think about how bad that’s going to be.”



“It’s so weird knowing the future,” Alyssa said.

Bryson and Kendrick strode into the keep then, walking straight to the parlor. Bryson put his hand on Holli’s shoulder. “Are you feeling well, my love?”

Holli’s eyes lit up when she looked up at Bryson. “I’m doing well today. Your father has been healing me at night, so I don’t have the terrible morning sickness I did at first.”

“Good. I hate to think of you suffering.”

Kendrick wasn’t nearly as sweet. He took Alyssa’s hand and pulled her to her feet, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her, right there in front of everyone. “I hope you’re enjoying your day, lass.”

Alyssa nodded, still a little embarrassed, but getting over it quickly. “I am. What have you done today?”

“I’m having the men move rocks to build a strong wall around the village. It’s not so much that we need a wall, but we need them to be stronger, and what better way to get strong than to move heavy rocks?”

Bryson shook his head at his brother. “I’m surprised they don’t resent you. That sort of work is awful.”

“They don’t hate me,” Kendrick said. “They all agree we need a wall, if only to keep out raiding parties.”

Alyssa’s eyes widened. She’d read a great deal about the raiding clans of the Highlands. “Does this clan raid others?” she asked.

Heather shook her head. “We do not. We have everything we need. But others come and steal livestock and sometimes crops. We always get our revenge, but we do not take part in reeving.”

Alyssa sighed. “Glad to hear it.” While she understood that it was something that most of the Highland clans did, she didn’t like the idea that they would make enemies that way. It wouldn’t be good to have people constantly trying to steal from them. There were better ways to do things.

Holli looked at Alyssa. “You two are staying for supper, and Beth, you, and Gavin as well. We’re having tacos.”

“Tacos? We can’t have tacos. What would we make them with?” Alyssa asked.

Heather frowned. “I want tacos.”

“Well, of course you’re invited!” Holli said, shaking her head.

“How are we making tacos again?” Alyssa was determined someone would answer her.

“You know how obsessed you three are with Irish nachos?” Beth asked.

“Well, sure,” Alyssa said.

“That’s how I was with tacos. Now we grow corn, tomatoes, peppers, pinto beans... We may be doing things out of time, but in our little corner of Scotland, people don’t really know about it, and we don’t tell.”

“Wait...” Alyssa said. “We can have tacos as well as Irish nachos? I should have come back in time a year ago! That’s amazing.”

Kendrick frowned at her. “Did you come here to reunite with your friends and meet your soulmate or eat?”

Alyssa took too long to answer the question, and Kendrick pulled her back up against him. “You are on thin ice, wife.”

It was the first time he’d called her wife and not lass. She liked it. Leaning back against him, she said, “I guess I came back to be with my friends and marry my soulmate. And eat.” The last two words were much softer, but he heard them.

“Oh, is that so?”

“It is so!” She turned around and faced him. “Kendrick, you must understand that I have a mind of my own. You cannot control it.”

“I have no desire to, lass. I know what a woman of the future is like. My grandfather, father, and twin brother married women of the future as well, remember.” He was grinning at her and she wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him.

Bryson groaned. “Some things are meant to only take place in the bedroom,” he complained.

“Then why did we...” Holli was cut off by his hand over her mouth.

Everyone in the room laughed at that, but Bryson looked down at his wife with a look of long-suffering. “And why did I say I would marry the first lass who appeared from the future? Would someone remind me of that?”

“You thought you could get out of marrying quickly that way,” Kendrick reminded him. “And you found your lass less than an hour later.”

“It seems to always work that way, doesn’t it?” Bryson asked, shaking his head. “Of course, she’s having my first son, who will not be named Herbert as she keeps saying.”

Heather laughed. “Herbert is an awful name, Holli. Why are you tormenting my baby boy?”

Holli shrugged. “He doesn’t want me to say the real name we want to name him, because he worries it’s bad luck. Well, I can say Herbert then.”

“I would really rather you didn’t,” Bryson said.

Holli giggled. “Herrrberrrt.”

Bryson decided to stay silent and not encourage his wife in her silliness. It was probably for the best anyway.

“What kind of tacos are we having?” Alyssa asked.

“Beef. We have had mutton tacos, and pigeon tacos, but mostly we like the beef tacos.” Heather shrugged. “You make do with what you have.”

“Which kind of beef? Steak or ground?” Alyssa hadn’t had a taco in a good long while. She wasn’t sure how she’d existed without them.

“Steak tonight,” Holli said. “We have ground a lot too, but the steak is better. Cook does such a good job on them!”

“Oh, think of a potato with steak taco meat on it.” Alyssa sighed. “I’m making myself hungry.”

Holli shrugged. “We’ll do that later in the week.” She looked at Kendrick. “Do you have food in your home so Alyssa can cook?”

He shrugged. “I’ve always eaten with family.”

“We’ll stock you up before you go home tonight,” Holli said. “We have a great deal more food than we need for the winter.”

Kendrick smiled. “I would like that. Then my wife could cook for me.”

Heather nodded. “She’s the best cook of the three of us. I’ve adapted to cooking for us, but I think Alyssa will be cooking amazing meals in no time.”

“I do believe my wife can do anything. And she’s not always sitting with her face in her phone smashing sweets.”

Beth looked at her grandson. “It’s called Candy Crush . And it’s an amazing game.”

He shook his head. “Only a grandmother would say such a thing.”

When it was time for supper, Bryson was sent for Gavin, and Kendrick was sent for Derek. They all gathered around the table and Gavin prayed over the meal, thanking God for the beautiful women he’d sent back in time to complete his family and for the ability to make tacos.

Beth smiled as she patted Gavin’s arm. “You said that well, dear.”

“I’ve been married to you for a very long time.” He leaned over and kissed her cheek, and Alyssa loved the way they were with each other. It made her feel like this was a family where love continued forever.

The conversation was lively as they ate their supper, corn tortillas, refried beans, and steak, with a tiny bit of cheese. “Why no more cheese than this?” Alyssa asked.

“You have no idea what it takes to make cheese in this time period,” Beth said, shaking her head.

“We’re low on it right now because everyone is involved in the harvest and drying the foods we’ll need for winter.

We’ll have more again soon. All our favorites include cheese as well.

We’re a cheese-eating family. We try not to complain when we get low on it.

So much work goes into it that we’re just happy to have it for the time we do.”

“Oh, I’m sorry for breaking a McClain family rule. I didn’t know.”

“It’s not breaking a rule unless you know about the rule in advance,” Kendrick said. “Right, Grandmother?”

Beth nodded. “I suppose. We won’t put her in the dungeon this time.”

At the look on Alyssa’s face, Heather said, “Don’t worry. Beth is just trying to scare you. We don’t have a dungeon.”

Holli put her hand over her heart and said, “Oh, good. I was so worried for a minute there.”

Bryson shook his head at Holli. “Grandmother is teasing, as usual.”

Holli sighed. “Beth don’t scare me like that! I’m pregnant. It can’t be good for the

baby!”

“Remind me to heal you before we leave tonight,” Gavin said. “I don’t want you losing more nutrients in the morning.”

“Thank you,” Holli said. “It’s great having a healer who is as invested in my pregnancy as I am.”

“You are one of the two most important people to the future of Clan McClain. Of course, we’re all invested in your future, lass.”

“I’m starting to think my name is turning from Alyssa into Lass,” Alyssa said. “Never have I had so many people call me something other than my name.”

“You could go by Lyss,” Heather said, trying to be helpful.

“Not so sure about that one,” Alyssa said, shaking her head. “I am not a big fan of nicknames.”

“Then the rest of us will try not to use them for you,” Gavin said. “I canna control Kendrick though. I believe a man has the right to give his own wife a nickname that suits him.”

“Thank ye, Grandfather,” Kendrick said, his hand going to push a strand of Alyssa’s hair that had fallen from her face.

Alyssa looked at Kendrick. “I suppose that since your grandfather decreed it, you may call me Lass.”

“Dinna think I won’t.” Kendrick said, grinning at her.

“I think we need to go for hard shells next time,” Beth said. “They’re a little harder to make, but I know Cook enjoys the challenge.”

Holli nodded. “I’m all for it. Oh, I wonder if we have the stuff for pizza. I’m craving a pizza.”

The men looked at one another and looked back at Holli. “And what is this pizza?” Gavin asked.

Heather explained. “It’s a large round piece of dough, like a white bread dough, that you add tomato sauce, and meats and cheese onto. Sometimes you put on things like olives or peppers or onions.”

“That sounds like it could be delicious. Is a great deal of cheese needed?” Gavin asked.

“Yes, but any other time of year, we could do it,” Heather said. “Pizza was always one of my favorite food groups.”

“Well, why haven’t we had it yet then?” Derek asked.

“Pizza, tacos, and Irish nachos,” Alyssa said. “Those are the only three things we ever really went out for.”

“And the main things we ate at home,” Holli agreed.

“Do you ever wish you could go back to our time, just to eat?” Alyssa asked.

“Not usually,” Holli said, “but this pregnancy sure has me wishing we could.”

“I’m not sure I’ll ever stop thinking about pizza now,” Alyssa said.



“We’ll do a pizza party in a few months,” Heather said. “Maybe we can ask Dr. Lachele for some modern cheesemaking supplies!”

“How will we power something that big?” Beth asked. She shook her head.

Holli shrugged. “I’d sure be willing to try it!”

“We should. Maybe next week.”

“Or tomorrow...”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

The following morning, Alyssa had ingredients to cook with, but she was also surprisingly chilly.

She thought it didn't get quite that cold in the Highlands, but maybe she'd been reading the wrong things.

She wished she, Heather, and Holli, had made a trip there before they'd come back in time.

It would be fascinating to see the differences between modern-day Scotland and medieval Scotland, where they now lived.

Before Kendrick left, he stoked the fire, and kissed her sweetly. "I'd like to stay in the house tonight," he said. "I haven't had any real time to get to know my beautiful wife."

Alyssa smiled. She'd never been called beautiful before. "I'd like that."

"Good," Kendrick said, dropping a quick kiss on her lips before leaving.

Alyssa found a broom, or what she thought passed as one in medieval Scotland, and she swept the floor. Then she made oatcakes for later. Holli had sent her home with some honey, so she made them slightly sweeter than what Bonnie had recommended.

While the cakes cooled, she walked to Bonnie's cottage. Bonnie was pacing back and forth with the baby in her arms, and Alyssa could hear little Anella crying.

“Is she all right?” Alyssa asked.

Bonnie was upset, and it was obvious. “I dinna know what’s wrong! We must get Gavin.”

Alyssa nodded, remembering that Heather had said they lived next door to one another. She ran all the way to her cottage and looked at the ones on either side of it. She spotted Heather through a window, knocking on the door loudly.

Heather smiled when she saw Alyssa, but her smile quickly faded. “What’s wrong?”

“Something’s wrong with Bonnie’s baby.”

“I’ll get Gavin. You get back over there and help. No idea what it is?”

“None!” Alyssa called her answer over her shoulder as she ran to Bonnie and Collum’s house.

She hurried in the door without knocking and started asking questions. “Is she running fever?”

Bonnie shook her head. “I dinna think so.”

“Her diaper isn’t wet or dirty?”

“Twas the first thing I checked!”

“Is she hungry?” Alyssa knew she was grasping at straws.

“No! We need Gavin.”

“I’m here,” Gavin said as he walked into the room. For a man who had to be ninety, he was awfully spry.

“I dinna know what ta do!”

“I know, lass. It’ll be fine. Lay her on the table.”

Alyssa could see what a struggle it was for the other girl to put her baby down. She looked so tiny on the table, lying there with nothing around her.

Alyssa gripped Bonnie’s hand tightly as Gavin moved his hands over the infant, not touching her, his hands just above her body. After a moment, he said, “Aye, that’s it.” His hands focused on the tiny baby’s stomach. After a moment, she stopped crying.

Bonnie reached for her baby and held her to her chest, tears in her eyes. “What was wrong?”

Gavin sighed. “Her stomach was upset, and it was giving her pain. I’ve healed it, and she should be fine.”

“Thank you, Grandfather,” Bonnie said. “Thank you for helping my bairn.”

“Tis my job as the official healer of Clan McClain.”

After Gavin had left, Alyssa looked at Bonnie. “Your morning has been much too difficult for you to give me more cooking lessons. Could I make something for you while I’m here so you can tend to your baby?”

Bonnie shook her head. “Nay. We were up half the night, and Collum kept telling me it would be all right, but she just wouldn’t stop.”

“I’ll go then. I’ll be back later to see if you need anything.”

Bonnie smiled. “Thank ye. I will be forever grateful for your help.”

Alyssa decided to walk around the lake then. It looked more like a large pond than a lake to her, but everyone referred to it as the loch, so she may as well go along with them.

It was a beautiful stroll, and she enjoyed it immensely.

When she reached the far end of the lake, she saw the men moving the rocks for their wall.

She stood and watched for a moment before a voice behind her said.

“Ye like seeing the men without their shirts?” A hand clapped onto her shoulder, and she immediately went into defensive mode.

Alyssa turned around to see a man who wasn’t wearing the McClain plaid, which was dominantly blue with some green. His was green with blue stripes through it. “Nay. I was looking for my husband,” Alyssa tried her best to sound like a Highlander, but by his face she realized she’d failed miserably.

“Ah, ye must be the new laird’s bride. I heard yer accent was as strange as their mother’s.”

“I’m not. I am married to his brother, Kendrick.” She’d thought at first to say twin brother, but that would have made her more valuable to the man as a prisoner. At least that was her fear.

“Relax, lass. I’m from Clan Campbell, and we are allies, not enemies. I’m here to

speak with me cousin, Bryson. I didn't realize Kendrick had married already. And a beautiful lass at that."

Alyssa looked toward the men, thinking about running toward Kendrick, but she didn't see him there. She felt better when one of the McClain men stood behind her. "Are ye here ta see Bryson?" the man asked.

"Aye. I'm his cousin, Caelan. I've been sent by me laird to discuss trading for some of yer oats."

The McClain man nodded. "I will get him." He nodded to Alyssa. "Come with me please."

Alyssa was happy to follow the man with the same plaid she was wearing. He made her feel much safer than the Campbell who said he was an ally.

He walked straight back to the men who were working on the wall, and Kendrick walked to her. "What are ye doin', lass? Why are ye walkin around with no guard?"

"I just thought it would be a pretty walk. Your cousin, Caelan frightened me though."

Kendrick looked toward the loch, seeing his cousin standing there. "Why is he here?" She could see the anger on his face, and she wondered if she should try to diffuse it before he did something stupid. He was much bigger than his cousin though, and Alyssa wasn't worried for his safety.

"He said he needs to speak to Bryson about trading for some of our oats."

Kendrick took her hand and pulled her along behind him as he found his twin. "Caelan is here to talk to ye about trading for our oats?"

Bryson narrowed his eyes. "Did he say something to frighten you, Alyssa."

"He did, but I'm not sure he meant to." Alyssa felt foolish for being scared by the huge man.

Bryson sighed. "I will chat with him about scaring our ladies."

Kendrick still held her hand, nodding to Collum to take over the training for a bit, and he led her out of the middle of his men and back toward the keep. "Ye canna just wander around, lass. Ye have ta be careful!"

Alyssa realized that his accent got much stronger when he was upset, and she sighed. "I didn't mean to do anything wrong."

"Ah, lass. It isna a bad thing ta do, I just want ye to be safe." He wrapped his arms around her and held her close. "It's me job to keep ye safe, but when I'm working, I canna see ta ye."

"I'm sorry. I'll wait to go on walks when you can go with me."

"A verra sound plan, lass." He sighed. "I'm going ta deliver ye ta the keep. Ye stay there until I fetch ye."

Alyssa nodded. "I will." She was suddenly glad that though his face was very much like Bryson's, they were easily told apart. They must be fraternal twins, not monozygotic.

He left her at the keep with one of his soft kisses that left her wishing for more. When she walked inside, Holli was sitting with her feet up. "Do you think my feet are swelling?" Holli asked. "I know it's a symptom of pregnancy, and I think my feet are swelling."

“They look fine to me,” Alyssa said.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Holli looked at her friend’s face and knew something had happened.

“I walked around the lake, and some jerk cousin of Kendrick’s scared me, and then Kendrick told me I’m not allowed to walk around without him. That’s ridiculous. I’ve walked around without a big man taking care of me half my life, but he thinks I need to be put into a glass cage or something.”

“He’s just trying to take care of you,” Holli replied. “Don’t get upset with him. He’s being protective, and we both know Heather is the one who taught him to be that way.”

“I’m not sure if I’m upset with him or upset with me. He doesn’t want me walking, but I did, and I got scared. I think half of his reaction was because of my fear.”

Holli nodded. “It probably was.” She shook her head. “I need to tell you a story about Beth’s wedding day, and it may help you to understand why he’s being so protective of you.”

“All right...”

“The day Beth and Gavin got married, they realized one of Gavin’s nieces was missing. They looked everywhere for her, and then they found out what had happened. Word had gotten around about his healing power, and she was taken, only to be returned if Gavin would heal their laird.”

Alyssa’s eyes widened. “No way...”

“Oh, yeah. After that, they spread to all their allies that all anyone had to do was ask



for Gavin's help and he would be there.

Everyone thought he was using potions and salves, just like they think now, but they knew they needed and wanted him.

It spread all over the Highlands, and it hasn't happened since, but everyone is always worried it will.

They did it on a night when the clan was vulnerable, during a transfer of power from laird to his youngest son.

"Holli shook her head. "Now, they prefer if no female family members, whether married to a brother or not, and no children, go out without some supervision. I've done it a couple of times, and I know Heather has, but Beth feels strongly about it too.

He was so busy healing his own clansmen and those of other clans, that he truly didn't have time for a marriage or to lead his clan, so that's also when one of the laird's brothers began to train the men. "

"I understand," Alyssa said. "Now I just have to figure out how I'm going to follow the rules. Maybe I can learn to use a bow and arrow."

"Won't work. I promise. It's a rule that must be followed and that's that."

"So, if I want to go to my cottage right now and start supper, I can't?" Alyssa asked.

Holli shook her head. "No, it's more if you go into the woods or around the lake. Why?"

"Kendrick told me not to leave here until he came to fetch me. That feels awfully

extreme to me.”

Holli narrowed her eyes. “That’s not the rule for the general family. Maybe it’s just a rule that Kendrick wants you to follow. Until you get to know the area.”

“I can’t feel like I’m living in a glass cage. Don’t get me wrong, I was really scared earlier. But I still feel like he’s going a bit overboard.”

“I do too,” Holli said. “I’ll see what I can find out from Bryson.”

“Have you heard of their cousin, Caelan?” Alyssa asked.

“I don’t think so. Why?”

“He’s the one who scared me. He’s a Campbell, and he was just creepy. But I know Campbells are our allies, right?”

“They are. I’m going to ask Bryson about it. We’ll have an answer tomorrow.”

“And I’m your captive for the afternoon. What shall we do?”

“Well, there are so many options. We could read, or we could game, or we could sew, or we could eat. Eating always sounds good.” Holli grinned at Alyssa.

“That’s because you’re a pregnant bottomless pit! I hope you’re not always this hungry during your pregnancies.” Alyssa tilted her head to one side. “Do you realize that you’re going to spend over five full years of your life pregnant? You’d better get used to it!”

“No, I never really thought of that. That sounds like forever.”

“It does to me too.” Alyssa sighed. “I went to Bonnie’s for my cooking lesson this morning, and the baby was crying nonstop.

Bonnie was in tears as well, and she sent me to get Gavin.

I don’t know where Gavin and Beth live, of course, so I ran to my cottage, because I remembered Heather said she lived next door.

She ran for Gavin, and I ran back to Bonnie...

” She took a deep breath. “Gavin healed the baby, and she was fine when we left. But then I had no cooking lesson. I offered to cook for Bonnie and Collum, but she told me she just needed to see to her baby, which I can understand. I mean, I’d freak out too if my daughter was crying like that.

So, I didn’t have anything to do until this afternoon, so I decided to go for a walk around the lake... ”

“And ran into a Campbell who was a pain in the butt, and then you had Kendrick scold you for doing something you’d never been told was wrong or why it was wrong. I think I’d be furious if I were you.”

“What good would that do? We need to learn how to deal with one another as a married couple,” Alyssa shook her head. “It would be better if I knew him. We married so fast.”

Holli nodded. “We did too. The same day I arrived.”

“Do you feel like you even know Bryson yet?”

“We’re getting there. I love him, but do I know every detail of his life? Nope.

Heather tells me stories of him as a boy, which helps some. Beth tells the clan's history beautifully. I really do need to write it all down when I'm not having a pregnancy the length of an elephant's."

"You've only been here three months! You haven't been pregnant long!" Alyssa was certain Holli was having way too much fun watching for pregnancy symptoms. "Were you even queasy this morning?"

"No, Gavin healed me before they left last night. Oh, speaking of which, are you and Kendrick staying for supper tonight?"

Alyssa shook her head. "No, he told me this morning that we need to stay in tonight and get to know each other better. I guess it's a good sign when he realizes that we need to take time to do that."

"Of course, it is! I think you two are going to do great together. I kind of half expected you to come here in thirty years and marry my youngest, but I'm glad you're here now. It'll be fun being married to twins..."

"Twins that run a clan. Are you sure about this?"

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

That evening, Kendrick appeared to walk Alyssa home, obviously frustrated by the entire day.

“I want you to not leave the village without a guard from now on,” he said as they walked toward their cottage.

“I’m not trying to control you, but I do need you to be safe.

Walking to other houses in the village is fine.

Even going to the keep is fine, but do not leave the village without me or a man I appoint to take care of you.”

“What about the woods?” she asked. There was a wooded area on the other side of town from the loch. “I think the woods would be beautiful to walk in.”

“I’m sorry, lass. I have to say no. I don’t know what type of man you’ll run into. There are always allies as well as enemies coming to our land so they can get Grandfather to heal someone. I canna risk you that way.”

Alyssa frowned. “I feel like I’m being kept in a cage. I went everywhere on my own in New York. Heather, Holli, and I even went to the city once to see a play.”

“It is more dangerous here.”

“You haven’t been on the streets in New York!” She told him, trying to think of a compromise. “I could carry a bow and arrow.”

“Nay, lass. You will not be safe enough.” Kendrick looked like he hated having to tell her she couldn’t go anywhere, and she could see he was willing to talk about the issue, but he wasn’t bending so far.

“What if I went out with other women, at least three of us, and I made sure I was within yelling distance of the village at all times?” Alyssa was grasping at straws. Being trapped in the village was not something she wanted.

“Nay. If you want to go on a walk, all you must do is let me know, and I will assign one of me men to guard you. It’s as simple as that.”

“I like to be alone,” Alyssa explained. “And I like to take long walks through nature, just looking at everything around me.”

“And I like having me wife alive!”

“What if I promise not to get killed?” She knew the idea was ridiculous, but she also knew she didn’t want a guard.

“Me cousin thought ye were fetching. He said you’re the type of woman clan wars are fought over.” He opened the door to their cottage. “I canna risk ye, lass. Ye are mine now.”

“But what if I want to walk alone?”

“Me guard will follow ten feet behind ye. Does that work for ye?”

“It’s like being quarantined for Covid all over again! Of course, then it was six feet, now I get ten.” Alyssa sat down at the table despondently. “Are you going to set up a guard for me every day? Because I want to walk around and explore.”

“I dinna like the idea of a man being kept from training, but if that’s what it takes, I’ll do it.”

Alyssa sighed dramatically. “How do you know the guard won’t hurt me?”

He stared at her for a moment. “Yer right. You’ll have to only walk with me.”

And Alyssa knew she could never follow his orders. She couldn’t be always caged. “All right.”

“Ye’ll do as I say?” he asked, watching her carefully.

She shrugged, staring at the floor in front of her. “I made oat cakes this morning, but I don’t know how to make anything else yet. I suppose that will have to do for supper.”

“Dinna ye say ye can cook?”

“Sure, I can. With a proper stove, oven, microwave, and all the other things I had with me in the twenty-first century. I know how to make oat cakes and oatmeal over that fire.”

“A man canna live on oats alone! Dinna ye go to yer cooking lesson this morning?”

“I did, but Bonnie’s baby was sick. So, I didn’t get my lesson. I’ve only learned to cook those two things.”

He groaned. “Ye will keep trying ta learn?”

“Sure.” Alyssa didn’t have a lot to say to him, because she now knew she could never stay with him. He was unreasonable. The more they spent time together, the harder it would be to leave him. Though where she’d go, she had no idea.

“Well, then, I will try one of yer oat cakes, and we will go to beg me mother to cook for us.” Kendrick reached for an oat cake and took a big bite of it. “Is this from your first-time making oat cakes?”

“Yes. Are they good?”

“Delicious,” he said, finishing the first and reaching for another. “They are very sweet.”

She noticed his accent was fading as he was less upset. She didn’t want to think about how strong it would be when he realized she was gone.

After his second oat cake, he took her hand and led her to his mother’s cottage next door. “Mother,” he said, kissing her cheek. “Alyssa hasn’t learned how to cook yet...”

Heather opened her door wide. “I’ll have to find someone to work with her on that. I’m not the best cook in the world.” She looked at Alyssa and her eyes narrowed. “Are you okay?”

“I’ve just been told that I’m now a prisoner of the village, so not exactly.”

Heather looked at her son. “A prisoner of the village? How did this come about?” She folded her arms across her chest, all but daring him to tell her what her friend meant.

“She walked around the loch today, and one of the Campbell cousins frightened her. I told her not to leave the village unless she has either a guard or me at her side.” Kendrick said, as if it was all totally reasonable, he didn’t want his wife to leave the village.

Heather took a step closer to the large man and stuck her finger right in the middle of



his chest. “You cannot keep a woman of the twenty-first century confined that way. She will leave, and then you will have to go and find her and bring her back unharmed. I understand your worries, but that is taking things much too far.”

“But ye have always—”

“What I have done to appease your father is not what every woman would do. You will allow her to walk with a female friend, or you will allow her to carry a weapon, once you have trained her in its use. There will be no prisoners in this village!” She stabbed him with her finger multiple times to get her point across.

Alyssa bit her lip to keep from laughing. She had only seen her friend as just that, her friend. Seeing her in mom-mode, getting onto her son who was at least half a foot taller than her and not backing down a single inch was almost comical.

“Mother, it’s not that simple—”

Heather took a step even closer to Kendrick.

“Oh, yes, it is. Ye will not turn your wife into a prisoner. I know you care for her, and I know she cares for you, but this is ridiculous. Teach her to use a knife, or there is the sword all of you boys learned to fight with. Teach her, and you won’t have to worry anymore! ”

Kendrick sighed deeply. “Would you agree to staying in the village until I was able to train you to use a sword?”

Alyssa nodded. “I would be happy to. It’s such a reasonable compromise.” In a way, she felt guilty about siccing his mother on him, but there was no way she was going to stay locked up in the small village with a whole world to explore just outside it.

“We will begin training tomorrow evening,” he told her.

Derek stood in the corner of the room, trying not to grin about the way his son was brought down a peg by his mother.

“What are we cooking tonight, Heather?” Alyssa asked. She would be happy to jump in and help if Heather needed it.

Heather shrugged. “I have some ground beef. I’ll probably throw some potatoes in with it, like sliced into tiny pieces. Add some carrots and some seasoning and call it a meal.”

“Sounds good to me!” Alyssa said. “Why don’t I start with the potatoes. I’ll peel and slice.”

They worked together to make supper, while Kendrick and Derek went for a walk.

As soon as they were out of hearing distance, Derek clapped his son on the shoulder. “Next time you want to make a rule for your wife, talk to me about it first.”

Kendrick shook his head. “Who would have thought Mother would fly off the handle like that when all I was doing was trying to keep her friend safe?”

“I could have told you how that would go. Your mother considers herself a woman of the twenty-first century, even though we are living in 1329. I know it doesn’t make sense, but she’s a woman.”

“Aye,” Kendrick said. “Now I must go home and find a way to tell my wife she may never run to my mother when we disagree again.”

Derek laughed heartily at that. “I don’t believe that’s what you really want, son.”

Kendrick shook his head. “Mother would be angry with me again, wouldn’t she?”

“Oh, aye, she would. She would be furious. Alyssa came here as one of your mother’s best friends.

She didn’t expect to marry her friend’s son, but that’s what’s happened.

She was here for your mother before you.

Aye, she wanted love, but she missed her best friends.

Your wife will seek refuge with someone else in the village or leave the clan territory completely if you tell her not to go anywhere.

You must learn that these women of the future are different than our men who think the world is led only by men.

In the future, women will be ruling some countries even.

At least that’s what Heather and me own mother have told me. ”

“But tis not right for her to run to mother if there’s a problem with me. We will never learn to settle our own disputes!”

Derek nodded. “But there has to be a way to let her know that without telling her she can’t talk to your mother about it.”

Kendrick groaned. “I married the wrong lass, didn’t I? I should never have married Mother’s best friend.”

Derek smiled. “I don’t believe you married the wrong lass. I believed the lass you

married is more complicated than a woman from the village would be. There is nothing wrong with that, but it will take some time to get used to her ways.”

“I can see that now.” Kendrick decided to keep thinking about his dilemma throughout the evening.

By the time they had walked all the way around the village and back to his parent’s cottage, supper was ready, and he perked up a great deal. “This is delicious. You seasoned it better than you did last time,” Kendrick said.

“That would be your wife. I keep telling you she’s a much better cook than I am. I never get the seasoning how I want it, and she does such a good job with it.”

Kendrick smiled at Alyssa. “I look forward to eating a meal you’ve made. The oat cakes were delicious this evening.”

“Thank you. It was my first attempt. I’ve never cooked in a fireplace either.” The whole thing had been a strange experience, but she was thrilled they came out so well.

After supper, Heather and Alyssa did the dishes together as they’d done many times in the past...or rather the future. When they were finished, Kendrick invited Alyssa for a walk.

She nodded, wondering what he was going to say after she talked to his mother about what had happened. She needed to remember not to vent to her friend, because Heather would always butt in, but in that time, well, she’d needed to.

Alyssa hugged Heather. “Thanks for supper and the cooking meat in a fireplace lesson. I bet I could make that meal again.”

“No doubt in my mind!” Heather said.

Kendrick waited for Alyssa, allowing her to precede him out the door.

As soon as they were outside, she turned to him.

“I’m sorry to tell your mother on you. That wasn’t my intention.

I was simply telling my friend how my new husband was forcing me to stay in the village, and she took it from there. ”

Kendrick smiled and nodded. “Thank you. I was trying to figure out how to tell you it isn’t fair to involve my mother, but I wasn’t certain how to bring it up.”

She laughed softly. “Well, I realize my mistake, and I will try to not do it again.”

“I appreciate that.” He started toward the woods, and she walked beside him, gripping his arm as they went along.

“I need to tell you a story about my Grandmother Gillian and these woods.” He quickly recounted the story where his grandparents had played house, and his grandfather had removed a wolf’s heart.

“Someone else told me that same story! I cannot wait to meet your grandmother Gillian.”

“She’s a good person. She does some small healing of her own with tinctures and ointments. Nothing like my grandfather, of course, but she was the healer for the clan before he was born.”

“I think it’s so neat that there have been so many different powers in your family. I

love hearing stories about how they were used.”

“And your family? What stories do you have about your family?” he asked.

She shrugged. “Normal family. I didn’t appreciate my parents enough.

I wasn’t rebellious, but I just didn’t see them as anything special.

They died in a car accident while I was in massage school, so I inherited their house.

It was large, so I invited Heather to live with us, and then she met Holli, and we had a trio of roommates, who did everything together.

” Heather and Holli had somehow replaced having a family.

She didn’t have parents anymore, but she had two sisters.

“And this book club, I’ve heard Mother and Grandmother talk about. What was that like?”

She smiled. “How many books have you seen in your life.”

He shrugged. “Probably fifteen or more,” he said proudly. His parents had an extensive library, unrivaled by anyone else in the clan, or in the families of their allies.

“Well, imagine walking into a room, and there being shelves and shelves and shelves of books. Thousands or more. And then you climb a flight of stairs, and on the second floor, you see the same thing again, with tables all around where you can sit with friends or work on your own. That’s where we held our meetings. ”

“That sounds truly amazing.”

“Come to think of it, it was amazing. Now I can hold hundreds and hundreds of books on those devices I brought back with me. It’s not the same as holding a real book in my hands. I love how books smell and feel. I will hug a special book to my chest when it’s over.”

“And the pounding sweets game?”

“Yes, Candy Crush as well.”

“I don’t know why my grandmother is obsessed with that game.”

“I have never played so I don’t know...”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

The next week went better for Alyssa. She did her cooking lessons in the mornings, spent her afternoons with Beth, Heather, and Holli, and occasionally even Gillian would join.

Alyssa particularly enjoyed talking to Gillian.

And her evenings were spent with a sword in hand, learning how to defend herself.

Her arms were always aching, but she never once complained because she wanted to be allowed out of the village on her own.

She wasn't even certain why it was so important to her, but it was.

It was as if there was an invisible, impenetrable wall around the village that she couldn't get through.

She needed to see what's on the other end.

The sword that had been used for play was just about the right size for her, and she did as she was told throughout the training. She felt like she was ready to wander on her own, but Kendrick still refused.

She often spent time in the mornings beside the keep where no one would get hurt, and she fought with pretend enemies, sometimes using her own shadow to slice at.

Then she would go in the keep, have a lovely lunch with Holli and Heather, and Beth and Gillian when they came, but they weren't as consistent. Her afternoons were



spent making clothing for the baby Holli was carrying.

“I’d let you use the clothes I made for my boys, but after seven of them, they kind of wore out.” Heather sounded apologetic as she said it.

Holli just smiled. “I love doing for my sons. I mean, I’m glad I have help, but I would have regretted it if I hadn’t had time to just sew myself.”

“I wish we had a sewing machine,” Alyssa mumbled under her breath.

Heather grinned. “I believe you knew there would be no modern conveniences when you decided to do this!”

Alyssa shrugged. “But I didn’t think about how truly hard the work would be, now did I?” It really amazed her as she realized how very much, she’d used technology in her everyday life. She missed her washing machine the most.

“Is the cradle you used for the boys anywhere to be found?” Holli asked.

“Yes, it’s in Bryson’s old room. He was the last to use it and we just never moved it out of there. He quit using it more than a year ago, though.”

They all laughed at that. “Considering he’s over six three...” Holli said.

Heather looked at Alyssa. “How are the sword fighting lessons going?”

Alyssa shrugged. “I think I’m getting good enough to go out on my own, but of course, Kendrick disagrees. The man is going to drive me to drink. Where’s the Scotch?”

“Do I need to have another little talk with him?” Heather asked.

“Absolutely not. You need to remember that when I talk to you about our marriage, I’m talking to my best friend, not my mother-in-law. Things are already weird enough, don’t you think?”

Holli nodded. “Yeah, me too. I mean, it’s nice to always have my mother-in-law in my corner, but I know it angers Bryson.”

“But you two should take advantage of the situation!” Heather said, shaking her head. “I sure did with Beth, and we weren’t best friends before I married Derek.”

Alyssa shook her head adamantly. “Absolutely not. I need to learn to talk with my husband and solve our disputes on my own, and not let you do the work for me.”

Holli sighed. “Me too. Though this marriage thing is going to be a lot harder without you.”

Heather grinned. “All right. If that’s how you want to play it.”

“Is tonight Irish nacho night?” Alyssa asked. “I’m already getting hungry. I want a huge plate and I don’t want to share.”

Heather shook her head. “You’re getting as bad as Holli. You’re probably expecting too.”

Alyssa’s eyes widened. “I’ve only been married for about ten days. I’m sure I’m not pregnant yet.”

“You’re a McClain wife. All the men get their wives pregnant quick!” Heather said. “I can’t help but wonder if you really might be. We should get Gavin over here to look at you soon.”

“But...I don’t want my husband’s grandfather to know before he does.”

Holli shrugged. “There’s no other way to know this early. It’s up to you, of course.”

“Well, I don’t want to know that then. Are Beth and Gavin joining us for Irish nachos tonight?

” Alyssa asked, thinking maybe she could get the older man alone and ask him.

She just didn’t want the others to realize how very much she wanted a child.

She wasn’t sure why she didn’t want them to know, but it felt very private to her.

“They went to heal someone. Beth usually goes with Gavin now that she’s not the Lady McClain. Then they don’t have to spend as much time apart.”

“Oh,” Alyssa said, feeling sad. “Do we know how long they’ll be gone?”

Holli and Heather exchanged a look, but neither of them called Alyssa on her strange behavior. “About a week,” Heather said. “The other clan is two days ride from here, and he usually ends up with a whole line of people to be healed once he goes somewhere.”

“What does this clan do without them?” Alyssa asked, genuinely curious.

“They go to Gillian,” Heather said. “She learned about healing from her own mother-in-law. She tried to teach me, but I didn’t have enough interest. Not with Gavin always around.”

“I see.”

Alyssa spent the rest of the afternoon, with her fingers sewing as they were supposed to, but her mind was gone. Thinking about all the places she wanted to explore as soon as Kendrick gave her the okay.

But...why was she listening to him anyway? He was her husband, sure, but she was a modern woman, and the word obey hadn't been in her marriage vows. At least she didn't think it had. The whole day was confusing in her head.

She really wanted to spend some time in the woods. She didn't know why they drew her so strongly, but they really did.

As she daydreamed, the other two talked about different things happening with the clan. "Bonnie says that Anella is doing much better than she was. She hasn't kept her up all night since the day Gavin healed her," Heather said.

"I always forget that she's your grandchild as well," Holli said shaking her head. "I'm so focused on the child I'm carrying that it feels like it should be the only child in our world."

"Still calling him Herbert to annoy Bryson?" Heather asked.

"Well, yeah," Holli said. "He's easily annoyed at times."

"Kendrick was always my troublesome child," Heather said. "He was such an angry little thing. I felt like I was always having to stop him from trying to beat up one of the boys in the village."

Alyssa had tuned back into the conversation. "What would he fight about?"

Heather laughed. "The most common fight he was in was over who had the prettiest mother. Isn't that the sweetest thing?"

Alyssa smiled and nodded. What she wanted more than anything else was a nap, though. “How long until supper?”

Heather and Holli exchanged a look. “About two hours,” Holli said. “I think. I still have some issues with telling time here.”

“Two hours is right. Why?” Heather asked.

Alyssa shook her head. “I’m just really dragging today. I think I’m going to go back to the cottage and take a nap.”

“Use one of the upstairs rooms,” Holli said. “Turn right at the top of the stairs and Kendrick’s old room is the sixth door on the left. I’m sure you’ll feel cozy in there.”

“I think so too,” Heather said. “Go on upstairs.” She looked at Holli. “Are there sheets on the bed?”

Holli nodded. “I keep Kendrick’s made up because sometimes he’s here late, and he’ll crash upstairs, rather than going home to his lonely cottage. Or at least that’s what he did before he married Alyssa, of course.”

“Of course,” Heather said. “Do you want me to show you which room?”

Alyssa shook her head. “I’m sure I’ll be able to find it. Sixth door on the left.”

Heather nodded. “Go sleep. We’ll wake you for supper.”

Holli watched her go with a frown on her face. “Alyssa never naps.”

“No, she doesn’t. I hope Beth and Gavin get home soon. I think there may be something wrong. Probably just pregnant, but it could be anything. I don’t want to

lose my friend.”

“I think Kendrick would be one hundred percent behind you on that,” Holli said.

Alyssa ignored them both as she climbed the stairs and went to the room they’d indicated. She was going to sleep the rest of the day away.

She woke to Kendrick beside the small bed in his childhood bedroom. “Are you all right, lass?”

Alyssa nodded. “I think so. I was just really tired.”

“Come, it’s time for supper.” He helped her up, but he had a look on his face that made her realize he was worried. She wished she knew how to tell him not to worry when the truth was, she was worried herself.

“Irish nacho night?” she asked. It had to be Irish nacho night.

“Aye, and Mother tells me Cook made up another big batch of cheese.”

“Oh, good,” Alyssa smiled slightly. Something was wrong, and she had no idea what it was. She felt unsettled. If she’d been home in New York, she’d have already explored the entire area by foot. It was how she destressed and thought things through. Walking around the village just wasn’t the same.

“Ye look a little sad tonight, lass. What is it that’s bothering you?” Kendrick had a frown on his face as he watched her.

“I’m just being silly,” she said, not even certain how to put her feelings into words.

“Talk to me. I canna help if I dinna know what’s wrong.”

“I just need to be able to explore outside the village, which sounds crazy. Back home, I went to all the parks near our house and walked all through our hometown. Here, I feel like I’m not allowed to do anything and it’s making me feel...oppressed? I’m not even sure if that’s the right word.”

Kendrick sighed. “I’ll take you for a long walk on Sunday.”

She nodded. She didn’t like to walk with people. She preferred to walk alone. But she would agree with him so he wouldn’t worry about her.

Supper was fun that night with just the three couples. They ate the Irish nachos and laughed a great deal. Alyssa felt like she was watching it from outside the circle though. She wasn’t really one of the others.

After supper, Alyssa and Kendrick left immediately, and he detoured around the lake on the way to their cottage. “It’s beautiful at this time of day,” he said.

She nodded, staring off into the distance. She had no idea what was over the hill in front of her, but it was the only thing her mind could concentrate on. What was behind the invisible wall he kept her from going beyond?

“Ye dinna usually nap,” he said. “Are ye feeling sick?”

“Not really. Just tired.” She didn’t know why she felt so off, but she did, and she was going to have to work through it, with or without his blessing.

They walked all around the lake and then back to the cottage. “Do you want to talk about something?” he asked.

She took a deep breath and said what she’d been thinking all day.

“It’s hard for me to know I’m not allowed to leave the village.

I know you think it’s a perfectly reasonable expectation from your wife, but how I work through any problem is to walk.

I’ve walked ten miles while working something out. ”

“And ye need to work something out?” Kendrick looked terrified at the prospect. “I can find ye a guard who will walk a short distance behind you and then ye can walk to yer heart’s content.”

She sighed. “I guess that will have to work, won’t it?

” She knew it wouldn’t be the same. Why had she thought that traveling back in time to a period when women didn’t have rights was a good idea?

Yes, she was content to keep a home and have babies, but she needed to be able to wander to her heart’s content.

“I will have someone here in the morning ta walk with ye.”

“All right.” It wasn’t enough though. It certainly wasn’t what she needed. “Do the McClains have that many enemies?” she asked.

“Nay, but it only takes one to hurt ye, lass.” Kendrick gathered her close, burying his face in her hair. “I dinna want ye ta be unhappy, but I dinna want ye ta be unsafe.”

Her face was buried in his shoulder as she nodded.



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 10:29 am*

When Alyssa was finished cleaning the cottage the next morning, she walked outside, finding the guard who was going to walk with her there. She didn't smile or make eye contact, because she really didn't want him trailing along behind her on her walk, despite what Kendrick wanted.

She walked to Bonnie's cottage and told her she was going for a walk, and she would be missing her cooking lesson that morning. "I probably don't need cooking lessons every morning anymore. I'm figuring things out quickly. Could I still come by and visit most mornings?"

Bonnie nodded, looking excited at the prospect. "Anella and I would love it."

Alyssa raised her hand and turned around walking toward the other end of the village.

She still wanted to explore the woods and what was behind them.

She had her sword strapped to her side, and she was ready to use it if anything happened.

She was determined to pretend the guard wasn't behind her.

She carried a basket on her other side, hoping to find a few berries to pick along the way.

As she walked, she stared at the beauty of the highlands that surrounded her. Many of the flowers were dying off as summer was over and autumn was starting, but autumn was her favorite time of year.

She could see the trees had changed their hues, the gold, orange, and red of autumn perking her up as she continued to walk. She paid no attention to whether the guard was still behind her, and she tried not to think of him.

She stepped into the wooded area, which was mostly pine trees, but there were so many other colors that she didn't mind too much.

She found a tree stump and studied around it, smiling at how it had become entangled in another tree.

This was nature at its finest, before plastic and paper polluted the entire world.

Alyssa paused to fill her basket with all the blackberries she could find. They would be delicious in a crumble, and she was sure she could figure out how to make one with the ingredients at hand. The more she walked, the freer she felt.

She went through the wooded area and beyond, making a huge loop all around the land and around the loch, ending up back on the same road she'd started on. There had been no dangers, and nothing that had frightened her. Surely, she'd be able to go alone now that she'd proven she would stay safe.

Putting her berries on the table, she headed over to the keep for lunch with her friends. It was nice she only had to cook one real meal a day. If she made oatcakes with supper, Kendrick happily ate them for breakfast the next morning.

Her spirits were lifted after the walk, but not as much as she'd hoped for, and she was certain it was because she was constantly thinking about the guard who was following her, no matter how she tried to pretend he didn't exist.

She joined the others, and they had their first trial of pizza for lunch. It was a bacon cheeseburger pizza because Holli told them the idea of mutton on a pizza made her

want to lose everything she'd eat for three months.

Alyssa and Heather both understood and agreed that bacon cheeseburger was a perfectly good pizza to have for their meal.

While they sewed that afternoon, Alyssa talked to her friends about how much she'd enjoyed her walk.

"I went through the woods, and saw the beautiful fall colors, picked some berries, and came back and walked all the way around the lake. I had my sword with me, so I felt as if I was always safe." She paused, frowning.

"Well, I had my sword and a guard who was behind me the entire way. I'm certain if I looked outside, he'd be standing there, waiting to protect me from God knows what."  
"

Holli frowned. "I'm sorry you're not as happy here as Heather and I are. Do you miss home?"

Alyssa shrugged. "I love the Highlands. Kendrick is everything I wanted in a man and even more. I already love him. What I miss is my freedom . I want to be able to fall out of bed in the morning and go for a nice long walk, all around the village and beyond. There are miles between us and Campbell land. Why can't I at least walk in that direction? "

Heather shook her head. "Though they are allies, there are men who may not be the type of nobleman you read about in novels. People are killed at times when leaving the village, though it hasn't happened in a while. And there are animals that could hurt you as well."

Alyssa sighed. "I thought Bryson went after all the animals we don't want close to the

village.”

Holli shrugged. “He does, but he doesn’t always hear about the animals until it’s too late. And at times, it’s hard to find the animals. Bryson and Kendrick were out looking for a wild dog when they found me.”

“But I can protect myself with my handy dandy sword!” Alyssa said, nodding toward the sword which she’d taken off and left lying on a large trunk across the room.

Heather frowned. “Alyssa, you’ve been training with a sword for ten days now. That’s not long enough to be adept, and you know it as well as I do.”

“I just hate feeling like a child who can’t go anywhere without a babysitter.”

“I don’t blame you,” Holli said, “but I’d rather you were alive with a babysitter than dead without one.”

Alyssa groaned. “Not you too! I’m good with this little sword of mine. I decapitated several pieces of grass earlier!”

“Did they put up a fight?” Heather asked, trying to lighten the mood, but Alyssa could tell her friends were still worried about her.

Alyssa worried about them as well. They were happy to live in the small area they’d been put into without being free to roam. She had no idea how they’d convinced themselves it was okay.

As they sewed, Alyssa did her best to keep the conversation light. There was no way she could tell her friends she planned to go for a long walk on her own the following morning. They may tell their husbands, and that would only cause problems. No, she’d rebel on her own.

“Do you know when you’re due?” Alyssa asked.

Holli shrugged. “Six months or so? I don’t know. Gavin is always kind of vague when I ask.”

“I see. Did he tell you when you were due?” Alyssa asked Heather.

Heather shrugged. “Not so much, but he told me every day that I was doing well. When he was here, that is. He gave me this nasty stuff to drink while he was gone to keep me from getting sick, but I gave up drinking it after my first trimester when my stomach had settled. Honestly, the hardest part for me was having all the boys so close together. I had all seven in the space of eight years. Well, two are twins, but that’s still a lot of pregnancies fast.”

When Kendrick arrived at the keep to accompany Alyssa home, he asked how she’d enjoyed her walk that day.

“It would have been better if I had been alone, of course, but it was fine. I picked some berries that I’m going to make into a pie or cobbler later this week.

Oh, maybe I’ll make little pie pockets. Those would be yummy! ”

He grinned, happy that she’d had a good day, even though she still complained of the guard. That was fine with him, as long as she walked with him.

When they got home, she threw several things into a pot and put it all into the fireplace to cook. She’d enjoyed Dutch Oven cooking back in New York, and she saw no reason why she couldn’t apply the same principals to the large pot and lid she had for it.

After putting supper on—which she realized she should have done after their

walk—she sat with him at the table. “How much longer are the men going to be working on that wall?”

He chuckled. “Until I feel they’re strong enough to continue training. I can’t believe how weak some of the men have gotten. We haven’t been to war or a clan skirmish in quite some time, and they’ve all gotten soft.”

She smiled. “Oh, we should have a few berries now,” she said, jumping up and washing the berries in water she’d drawn from the well that morning.

She put them into a bowl, added a little sugar, so they wouldn’t be quite so sour, and mixed it all together, serving them in bowls with spoons.

“Now we have something to eat while we wait on our supper.”

“This would be really good with an oat cake,” he said after his first bite.

Alyssa laughed and got him some oat cakes from across the way. She was determined to act as if she was fine, so she could go for a walk the next morning without him suspecting what she was planning.

“What are your plans for tomorrow?” he asked, casually.

“I’m going to visit with Bonnie in the morning, and I’ll probably spend the afternoon with Holli and Heather again. We’re making progress on the baby clothes Holli needs. Your mother said that all the clothes she had for you and your brothers have worn out.”

He nodded. “There were seven of us. Not many garments would be able to withstand seven people wearing them.”

“This is true.” She yawned. “We tried pizza for lunch, and I think we almost have it perfected. We’ll wait until Beth and Gavin are back before we have it again though. Cook really did a nice job on it.”

“Where all did you go on your walk?” Kendrick asked. His guard had already told him, but he wanted to hear it from her. He was certain she was happier with conversation than with silence.

“Through the woods, around the keep and over the hill on the other side of the keep, and around the loch before I went back to the keep.”

“Did you talk to your guard?”

She shook her head. “No, I was trying to pretend he wasn’t there. I hate having someone walk with me that way.”

He frowned. “But you did get to walk everywhere you wanted to go?”

“Yes, I did.” There was no reason to say more on the matter as far as Alyssa was concerned. She’d have a real walk in the morning. “Little Anella is doing much better after being so sick. I’m so thankful. I really like Bonnie, and I don’t make friends very easily.”

“It seems to me you’re surrounded by friends,” Kendrick said.

Alyssa thought about that for a minute. “Well, I have Heather and Holli, and I think Beth and Bonnie are shaping up to be friends as well. It’s odd when you realize that before I came back in time the only person I felt comfortable talking to was a purple-haired crazy woman.”

He chuckled. “Dr. Lachele?”

She grinned at him. "I guess you have heard of her, haven't you?"

"She's a legend in our family," he said. "She arranged for my grandparents, parents, and my brother to meet."

"And you," she said.

He chuckled. "I hadn't thought of her as the one who made us meet. I like knowing she is the one though." He looked at her for a moment. "What made you decide to follow your friends back in time?"

Alyssa sighed. "It took me forever. I think I went to book club four times dressed and ready to go and chickened out every time. I finally called her and asked her to come over and send me back. I knew if I did it quickly, it would be harder for me to back out."

"You were afraid?"

She laughed. "Wouldn't you be? How would you feel if you knew you were about to travel back in time to marry an unknown person? Wouldn't that frighten you?"

"I don't know. I know I'll never do that because I'm married, so I haven't given it much thought."

By the time supper was ready it was late. "I'm sorry I'm serving supper this late. I don't know what I was thinking."

"I'm happy to have sustenance, and a beautiful wife serving me supper, whether it's early or late."

After putting his plate on the table, she leaned down and kissed his cheek. "You may



just be my favorite husband.”

He laughed. “I’d better be the only one.”

Early the next morning, Alyssa did what she’d told Kendrick she would do.

After cleaning the cottage, she walked to Bonnie’s house and visited for a bit, and then she began her walk.

This time she started in the woods again, but she went out and around the village on the other side, enjoying herself immensely.

As she walked, she thought about how happy she was with Kendrick. Maybe they had different ideas about whether she should go out alone or not, but she loved him. He was a good man. Heather and Holli had been right when they urged her to marry him.

She got back to the village just in time to join Heather and Holli for lunch, though this time her mood was very different than the day before.

It had been all she could do not to sing the song, “Sound of Music,” in her very offkey voice as she walked.

She had spun like Maria Von Trapp a couple of times, though, as she hummed the song to herself.

As they ate their baked potatoes with all the good fixings, Heather told a story about her twin sons.

“They couldn’t have been more than five or six, and they kept trying to go into the loch all summer, even though neither of them had any idea how to swim.

It seems that Bryson had decided if they got into trouble in the water, he would just call the fish to bring them to the surface. ”

“Did it not work that way?” Alyssa asked.

“Thankfully, I never found out. When I pulled them out of the water for the fifth time that summer, I set them down and asked them why they kept getting into danger. Kendrick told me it was always Bryson’s idea, which didn’t sound quite right, but I asked Bryson next.

Bryson told me that his friends the fish were watching him and ready to float him to the surface of the water.

‘Don’t worry, Mama. The fish friends will keep us safe.

’ I wanted to spank them both and make them sit in an inescapable room for hours.

Instead, I held them close and begged them to never do that to me again. ”

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Every morning after that, Alyssa walked wherever she wanted to walk after visiting Bonnie and before having lunch with her friends. She knew she shouldn't be defying her husband, but she just didn't care anymore. She needed walks alone for her mental health, and she was going to get them.

It was over a month later, and the trees were still beautiful when Alyssa saw a stag in the clearing just on the other side of the woods from the village.

She knew stags were dangerous during mating season, which it was, so she quietly walked back toward the woods, turning to keep her eyes on the animal frequently.

Just as she was almost past the woods, she looked over her shoulder to see the stag run at her.

She took her sword from her scabbard, and held it up, knowing she couldn't outrun the creature.

She wanted to cover her head and hide, but she knew she had to stand tall and kill him if she could, though she hated the idea of killing the magnificent creature coming toward her.

The animal was just a few feet away from her, when a man wearing the McClain plaid, pushed her out of the way, and killed the stag with his own sword.

He turned to look at her, as she lay on the ground, trying to decide if she'd really hurt her ankle, or if it had just gotten a little twisted when she fell. When she saw it was the man who Kendrick had asked to guard her, she was immediately furious.

“Why are you following me?”

“I am Murray. Tis me job to be certain ye are safe, lass.”

“Did Kendrick tell you to follow me every day?”

“Aye.” He reached a hand down to help her to her feet, and she wanted to swat it away, but she wasn’t certain she could stand on her own.

Her left ankle buckled when she tried to put weight on it, and Murray caught her before she fell.

He swept her up in his arms and carried her back to the village.

She refused to speak to him as he carried her back, into the keep, and deposited her in the parlor with Holli, who looked at her curiously.

“Are you hurt?”

Alyssa frowned, nodding at her foot. “Someone pushed me down.”

Murray looked like he wanted to throttle her, but instead of doing so, he said, “I’ll get the old laird.”

As soon as he was gone, Holli shook her head. “What did you do?”

Alyssa took a deep breath and confessed to all the walks she’d been taking for well over a month.

“I haven’t had any trouble at all,” she said.

“But then this morning, right after I got out of the woods, there was a stag in the

middle of the field. I turned and went back for cover into the woods, and when I realized the stag was after me, I pulled my sword out and stood my ground.”

Holli looked horrified, but she nodded. “And then?”

“Then that Murray freak comes out of nowhere, and knocks me down, killing the stag with his sword. I was going to do that! And when I fell, thanks to him, I hurt my ankle, and I can’t put any weight on it.”

“Where did he come from?” Holli asked, afraid she already knew the answer.

“He’s been guarding me on every walk I’ve taken, and I’m not super happy about it. Doesn’t Kendrick trust me?”

“I’m not getting in the middle of this one.” Holli shook her head. “Sounds like you both messed up to me.”

Alyssa looked away from her friend as she sat on the silly bench beside her, wishing she could get up and walk back to her cottage. Or hide somewhere. It really didn’t matter at the moment.

Gavin and Beth came into the keep a few minutes later, heading straight for Alyssa. When he frowned at her, Alyssa sighed. “I need time to think!”

“Aye,” Gavin said as he sat on a footstool by her.

He picked up her foot and placed it on one knee, where his hands hovered just above it.

“Tis broken. You could have hurt the bairn! No more walks without a guard!” With his words, he quickly healed her ankle, and she immediately felt relieved of the pain.

After the pain was gone, she thought about what he'd said. "Bairn? I'm ready to push the man in the stupid lake, and you tell me I'm pregnant?"

Alyssa got to her feet and started pacing back and forth in the parlor. "I'm not sure I ever want to see him again." But she wanted the baby with everything inside her, and she could have risked it. She sighed, sitting back down, and forcing her mind to get practical.

When Kendrick walked into the keep mere moments later, she glared at him. "I don't want your guards and I'm raising this baby to be strong and independent!"

Kendrick walked straight to her. "Is she healed?"

"Aye. She is healed." Gavin looked at his grandson and seemed to be fighting a grin.

Kendrick grabbed Alyssa's hand and pulled her to her feet without another word. He dragged her across the village and all the way back to the cottage they shared, ignoring the strange looks coming from all around them. "Ye could have died! And me bairn would have died with you!"

"That's all you care about! I'm your breeder going to make more little McClains! Why did you have Murray following me everywhere? I told you I don't need a guard!"

"Ye do! Ye would have been trampled by that stag if not for Murray!"

"How do you know? You weren't there! I had my sword out, and I was ready!"

"I say ye weren't ready!" Kendrick looked down at her from his greater height, and she could see he was furious with her as well. "The bairn is all right?" he asked.

"Yes, the bairn is fine!" Alyssa tried to breathe for a moment, so frustrated by the

events of the day. “I don’t want to have someone follow me everywhere. It’s ridiculous. The men have better things to do than walk around behind me.”

“I don’t want you hurt. I want you safe. Can’t you see where I’m coming from?” he asked, his voice much calmer.

“I do understand. But I feel caged. Would you put the baby and I in a box and keep us locked away?”

“Of course not.”

“Well, to me, that’s how it feels.”

He scrubbed his hand through his hair and sat down at the table, taking her hand and pulling her into his lap.

“I don’t know what to do anymore. I can’t let you go because I love you too much.

I can’t keep you from walking, because you get sad.

You are angry that I had a guard follow behind you, but I don’t know of anything else that can be done to keep you safe if you insist on walking by yourself every morning.  
”

“I love you too, but I don’t know what to do either!” She stared into his eyes, his beautiful eyes and sank against him. “I need to have some freedom.”

“Aye. I can see you do.” He sat quietly thinking about what to do about their dilemma. He wasn’t about to let her, or the baby go anywhere. No, they were his family, and he already loved them both too much.

Alyssa took a minute to calm down, just resting against this hard-headed man she

loved more than she could express. “I don’t know how to solve this. Maybe if you stationed men at different places around the village, and I could promise not to get so far away I can’t see them?”

“So you wouldn’t have a guard, but you would still be easily saved.” He thought about it for a moment before nodding slowly. “I think we can make that compromise. Can you keep from trying to run away from my guards, though?”

Alyssa nodded. “I don’t want you to worry more, but I can’t stand being told I can’t go somewhere.” She’d had the freedom she wanted most of her life. Heartsgate was a small community, and it had never been dangerous for her to walk to school or stop at the library on her way home.

“Then we are in agreement.” He wrapped his arms around her tightly and just held her close. “Please don’t put yourself in danger again. My heart just can’t stand it.”

“I won’t.” Resting her head on his shoulder, she realized they could make things work. There would be times when she’d have to put her foot down and do things her own way, but they would be few and far between.

“Let me walk you back to the keep. You can have lunch and sewing time with the ladies, and I will get back to watching my men build the wall.”

She nodded. “But you know what this means, don’t you?” she asked.

“What?”

“It means we’re having a baby. A beautiful little girl we will call Belinda.”

“Do you like that name?” he asked.

“I do. Do you?”



He shrugged. "I'm just excited about a bairn. I'm not sure I'm ready to even think of names yet."

She grinned, getting to her feet.

As they walked back to the keep together, each of them happy with the compromise they'd made, Alyssa realized how very empty her life would be without Kendrick in it. She had no idea how she'd managed as long as she had without him.

That afternoon, while she was sewing with her three friends from the future, Alyssa heard her name and instantly looked up. "Dr. Lachele!"

All four women gathered around the purple-haired matchmaker. "How's everything going?"

"Wonderful," Holli said. "I'm expecting my first son."

Dr. Lachele smiled. "I'll come back and check in on you in another year or so. I'm here to check on Alyssa. Something is happening with you, and you haven't been happy."

Alyssa shook her head, smiling. "We worked it all out a little while ago. I'm happy."

Dr. Lachele squealed and wrapped her arms around Alyssa. "That's wonderful!"

Dr. Lachele took a seat there in the parlor as if she came to visit every afternoon. "Beth, are you still happy?"

Beth nodded. "So happy. I've had my seven children and so many grandchildren I've lost count.

My husband is no longer the laird, so I travel with him when he goes to heal people in

other clans, and I just feel like my life is very peaceful.

I'm looking forward to two of my friends here having even more great-grandbabies for me. ”

Dr. Lachele smiled. “I love my grandson. I wish I'd thought to bring a picture of him and all of my munchkins.”

“Munchkins?” Alyssa asked.

“I claim all the kids that come of my matches as my munchkins. I keep pictures of them on a wall in my office. Trust me, there's a whole lot of pictures there.”

“I'm sure,” Holli said, shaking her head. “I wouldn't take pictures of all of the descendants of Beth and Gavin though. I think you would freak out the whole clan, if only with your crazy hair.”

Lachele patted her hair happily. “Heather, how are you? Still happy?”

“So happy,” Heather said. “My Derek doesn't have to lead the clan any longer, and I'm thrilled to have a cottage in the village where I don't have to worry about much except my grandbabies.

Thank you for sending my friends back to me.

It would have been easier if they hadn't ended up being my daughters-in-law, but I guess that just puts a fun twist on things, doesn't it? ”

“I think so,” Lachele said.

“I'm happy too!” Holli said.

“I’m not here to check on you yet, but I’m glad to hear you’re happy. Keep that baby safe. He’s going to be important one day.”

“He’ll be the first of my seven important sons,” Holli agreed.

“More important than you’ll ever know,” Lachele said, turning to focus on Alyssa. “Are you sure you have it all figured out?”

Alyssa nodded. “I’m sure. Kendrick and I are doing well, and we’ve made some compromises so we’ll continue to do well.”

“What do you want from me?” Dr. Lachele asked Alyssa. “I know you brought back plenty of devices and chargers for the whole lot of you, but there must be something you miss that you want to be part of your life here.”

Alyssa looked at her friends, who were all watching her expectantly. “Can you send us pizzas once a month for lunch? We were all just talking about how much we love pizza, and it’s hard to make them exactly like they were at home.”

Dr. Lachele smiled, nodding. “We’ll make it every Monday.

What kinds now?” She pulled out her phone and tapped in everyone’s exact pizza order.

“Well, I’m off then, ladies. I’ve loved working with all four of you.

” She looked at Holli and tapped her on the nose as she stood to go. “I’ll see you in a while.”

Holli just smiled. “I’ll look forward to it.”

“Anything else I can do for any of you?” Dr. Lachele asked.

Beth nodded. “Yes! We need more healers before the Black Plague. Gavin is going to be too overworked without more.”

“I can’t promise, but I’ll see what I can do.” With those last words, Lachele disappeared.

“What’s today?” Alyssa asked.

“Saturday. Why?” Heather asked. Sunday was the only true day off for the men, though the women were still expected to clean and do their work.

“Because we’re having pizza Monday! I hope Dr. Lachele sends us each a large one.”

“Me too!” Holli said. “I wouldn’t say no to three pizzas at the moment.”

They all laughed, excited to have seen Dr. Lachele again.

Heather frowned at Alyssa, her voice turning serious. “Did you and Kendrick really work things out so you’re both satisfied?” she asked.

“We did. It’s all going to be fine. And I guess you were told Kendrick and I are having a baby as well?” Alyssa thought of something, and her gaze narrowed on Beth. “Did he tell you the gender?”

Beth laughed softly. “Now, if he told me that in confidence, do you think I should tell you?”

The next book about the Fabulous McClain Family will be back in the McClain series. Thanks for zigzagging through my connected worlds with me!