



Recklessly Mine (The MacTavish Heirs #3)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: She saved my life. Its only fair that I save hers, even if she doesnt want me to.

Arabella

Im losing my hearing, so Ive learned to read lips to help me cope in my soon to be silent world. When I see two men discussing their plan to murder another guest at this event, I have to warn him.

I should have minded my own business.

Logan

This clever wee thing races up to me, all earnest and concerned about my safety. Her huge brown eyes staring up into mine are making me feel things. Filthy things. My family calls me reckless and unhinged, but taking her isnt reckless.

She was mine from the moment I saw her.

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Logan...

It's all about expediency.

This is what my family doesn't understand.

Aye, I could spend days and days going over a plan that should be obvious in the first five fucking minutes of consideration, over-plan, then go in all smooth-like and do the job.

Or...

Punching the fifth guard in the throat, I watch his eyes bug out as he gasps for the air he's never getting back, then snap his neck.

Only five guards? This asshole's mighty over-confident, I think as I cut through the steel door. Aye, I could fuss with the biometric locking system and try to override it with one of the high-tech pieces of shite our hackers use. Instead, I use my fiber laser cutter and create myself a wee door inside the giant one within ninety seconds. One solid kick and the steel plate slams onto the floor with a thunderous boom.

Pity there's no one else to hear it, what with the guards being dead, and all. A giant vault and all its holding is a single file cabinet? Anselm must be over compensating for something . It takes less than one minute to pile all the hard drives into my backpack and one more to fit the plastique onto that truly daft multilayer steel door.

Checking my watch...

I'm still three minutes ahead of schedule, so I look up at the camera in the corner of the room, drop trou and slap my arse as a wee bit of a hello. "Hey, Anselm! Tongue ma' fartbox, ye walloper! Your security is about as much use as a marzipan dildo!"

Then I'm out of the vault, racing through the tunnel and busting out into the prime fresh air of ?bel? Island off the coast of Denmark. My jet ski's waiting for me on the beach and it's a mere ten minutes' ride to my boat anchored offshore.

A giant fucking fist hits me in the back and I go flying as midnight on the island turns as bright as noon.

Shite. It's possible I dinnae leave myself enough time to get off this rock before the remote timer set off the plastique.

Eh. Lesson learned.

Hauling myself up, I note there's a fist-sized length of steel wedged into my bulletproof vest and it's possible my leg is broken. I know the adrenaline flooding my system is holding off most of the pain, but it's gonna kick in and I'll be in a world of hurt if I dinnae hurry to get some treatment. We have a doctor waiting at the jet, fortunate, that.

While I'm hopping down to the beach and starting up my jet ski, my earpiece comes alive, crackling with static and my brother's frantic voice.

"Logan! Logan, ye better be alive goddamnit!"

"I'm fine! I'll see ye back on the mainland. Ye gotta relax, brother. All this worry is gonna give ye grey hair." I'm shouting over the roar of my engine but he must get most of my message, because some choice words are shared.

As I race away from the island, a wide stretch of forest around the vault is blazing away, the sharp scent of pine and smoke traveling across the water with me.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph it’s like ye wanna die.”

My brother Kai finishes shakes his head all sorrowfully. Like he wouldn’t have done the same damn thing.

“I’m alive.”

I nod to the sour-faced doctor patching me up. I was minutes away from inviting her out for a drink when she went all prissy, muttering about, “Irresponsible MacTavishes.” A shame, that. She was a bonnie thing before she got all stern and judgmental on my arse.

“Aye, and barely!” Kai snaps, “That chunk of steel tore through your bullet-proof vest and two inches into your ribcage! And the broken leg?”

“Well, it is a minor break,” the Doc inserts helpfully. “He

will just need a walking boot for three weeks.”

Hmm... I might rethink that drink invitation.

“Thank ye, Dr. Pederson,” Kai says. “The payment is already deposited in your account.”

She leaves in a hurry and I sit up with a groan. “I’m thinking it’s time to stop all the yelling and look through the hard drives. Ye remember the mission, aye?”

“Dinna ye sass me,” he says, though he’s already rooting through my backpack.

“I’m twenty-eight and far too old to characterize my communication as sass,” I say haughtily, knowing my upper crust ‘American Boarding School’ accent is doing his nut in.

“Ah, I hate this,” Kai groans.

“What?” Every one of those fecking hard drives is bulging with Anselm Industries secrets. Bank fraud. Illegal pharmaceutical research and development. New viruses for humans and the internet alike. What’s he crabbit about now?

“Ye got a treasure trove of intel.” My brother’s all sullen, looking like his wee boy Rory in need of a nappie change. “This is grand work, as much as it pains me to say it.”

“Aye, I know,” I offer graciously, getting up with a groan. “Fuel the jet, brother. We’re going home.”

Arabella...

I was fourteen when they finally tested my hearing.

“It’s called Auditory Neuropathy Spectrum Disorder,” the doctor had said, looking down at her iPad. “Your particular form involves the slow degeneration of the auditory nerve. Your ear can detect the sound, but eventually, it will not be able to transmit it to the brain. You’re testing at about 50% accuracy now. This will continue to degrade. This is not a condition that can be improved with assistive technology. A cochlear implant, for instance, wouldn’t help you.”

“How long do I have until I’m completely deaf?” The words wobbled out of my mouth, my whole body shaking.

She smiled at me. No pity, which I appreciated. “Within the next ten years, most likely sooner.”

That was eight years, six months and... twelve days ago.

“You’re doing very well, even with the progressive deterioration of your auditory nerve. Your lip-reading skills are spectacular.”

Dr. Graham’s a good one, always remembering to face me when we talk, which is a blessing. Though I’m thinking it’s not right that a doctor who specializes in hearing issues should have such a quiet, high voice himself. Oh, the irony.

He hands me a prescription. “These drops should help a bit with the dizziness, aye? Be sure to call me if you’re seeing a sudden vestibular change.”

Vestibular... the system responsible for my balance and orienting myself to the world around me. It’s a strange thing, finding that not hearing someone walk by me also means that sometimes, my brain dinnae ‘see’ them, either.

“Is there anything else I can do for ye today, Arabella?”

It’s such a pointless question. Because there’s nothing he can do, and we both know it. I should say something polite though, to set him at ease. “I’m good, doc. Thank ye for the drops.”

Doing his nut in - Scottish slang for pissing someone off

Nappie - a diaper

Crabbit - Scottish slang for cranky

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In which Logan and Arabella have the most appalling “Meet Cute” in history.

Arabella...

“We have less than an hour to kill him.”

“Why such a goddamn hurry? It’s not...” He takes a drink; I canna see the rest of his comment.

“The Boss wants proof of death, too.”

I’m frozen in the middle of the swirling sea of guests around me, a terrified wee island, still perfectly balancing my tray loaded with champagne. People stroll by and take a flute or two off my tray without really noticing me. I canna take my eyes off the two men standing by the stage. The speakers there are sending soothing classical music out into the ballroom, it’s making them confident that no one can hear them.

“Where is the arsehole now?” It’s the first man, a ginger with a full head of flaming red hair and eyes so light that they’re the color of spoiled milk.

“He’s talking to Abercrombie, the big guy with the red bow tie over by the bar.” Killer #2 is a smaller man, dressed in a tuxedo like the rest of the guests but wearing it awkwardly, bunched around the shoulders and short in the sleeves like he murdered someone to steal their suit.

My gaze rapidly darts to the bar. Oh. The gorgeous one, dark hair, towering a head above most of the guests. His teeth flash white in his beard as he grins at the dazed

bartender.

Look at the men, ye eejit!

“...they said he’s scheduled to make an appearance at another party tonight,” Ginger guy says. “We’ll take him on the way...” Someone passes in front of them and I scream inside. “...car up and we’ll take him when he leaves through the side door. The fancy fuck’s Maserati is parked in that lot.”

“We can send the Boss his head. That’s proof.” Smaller guy chuckles. “Ah, he’s heading out.” His badly fitting tuxedo jacket flaps open and I see it. A big fecking gun in a holster.

This is real . This is going to happen.

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In which Arabella finds that no good deed goes unpunished.

Arabella...

I'm ignoring the guests reaching out for a glass of champagne as I plow through them like a trawler through the ocean waves, creating a wake of disgruntled partygoers as I try to reach the man in time.

He's not a hard man to spot, his broad shoulders towering above the rest of the crowd. He's got his hands in his tux pockets, gracefully strolling toward the exit. He occasionally nods as someone greets him, trying to catch him in conversation, but he never stops.

Oh, shite. There's the door. Right there. They're waiting for him, they're gonna-

I slam my nearly full tray into his chest, watching the champagne splash all over his jacket, soaking into his shirt. I can just make out the outline of a tattoo under the wet cotton.

"Oh, my god! Sir, I'm terribly sorry. I can pay to clean your jacket, truly, I feel terrible!"

He's looking down in mild bemusement as I step closer and cringe at the feel of glass crunching under my shoe.

"Lass, it's fine. I was leaving anyway. I'll help ye pick this up." Elegantly hitching up his trousers, he bends his knees, picking up the tray in one enormous hand. My

descent is not as graceful.

“Listen to me!” I hiss, “I saw- I mean, I overheard a conversation between two men here, they were talking about killing ye. They know you’re going out this door and they’re waiting! Ye canna go out there!”

He looks at me, still gathering up the few unbroken champagne flutes as he murmurs, “One’s a ginger, the other a short wee bastard?” He has a gorgeous mouth; full lips, sharp white teeth and he shapes his words so beautifully.

“Aye,” I whisper gratefully. “That’s them.”

Rising, he helps me up with a hand on my elbow and his other effortlessly holding the tray.

“Such a good lass,” he rumbles in my ear, so close that I can feel his lips on my skin and his exceptionally deep voice cuts through the crowd noise. “Thank ye, you’re very brave. Take your tray back to the kitchen and take some deep breaths, aye?” He pulls back and I’m hit with the full force of his stare. Thick lashes, hazel eyes. The flat gaze of a predator. “Go on, now. Dinna ye look back.”

Like an obedient pup with no thought of my own, I do as he says, sailing through the kitchen doors.

“What just happened!” Kevin yells, “Ye dumped the bubbly on a guest? Mrs. MacGregor’s gonna lose her shite!” He takes the tray from me, wide-eyed and looking over my shoulder as if the HMS MacGregor’s gonna come steaming through the doors after me.

Mrs. MacGregor does not like me already. When I dinnae catch something she’d said earlier in the noisy kitchen, Kevin, my catering manager took it upon himself to

explain that I was, “A wee bit hard of hearing, nothing serious, though!”

She dinnae look happy.

“I SEE. YOUR VOICE IS SO NORMAL, I WOULDN’T HAVE KNOWN.”

Always love the shouting, the small, uncomplicated sentences like I’m simple-minded as well as losing my hearing.

But here we are in the kitchen, me in my wet uniform and empty tray and Kevin looks like he’s about to have a stroke.

“I’m sorry! I just tripped on something and-”

“Go tidy yourself up,” he groans, shoving a dish towel in my hand. “There’s a servant’s washroom down the hall.”

This is insane. I am insane. I’m supposed to be hiding in the kitchen, acting like everything is normal.

Nonetheless, I pass the ladies’ room and hoof it out through the service entrance. If I take a quick left around the mansion and I’ll be able to see the exit that man used. He still walked out that way even after I told him they’d be lying in wait for him.

Dinnae be dead. Dinnae be dead, ye reckless bastard!

Hurrying around a trellis groaning under the weight of an enormous rose bush, I steel myself. God, I hope there’s no blood, I’m really bad about blood and I’m gonna vomit if-

There’s nothing.

No dead tuxedoed stranger. No ginger and short guy. Just the elegant street, crowded with parked Mercedes and Range Rovers and the valets sneaking a smoke while the coast is clear.

Did I hallucinate that enormous, gorgeous as shite man? Did I misread those two discussing murder when in fact maybe they were raving over the lobster puffs?

What did I just do?

Feeling foolish and vaguely disappointed and not wanting to examine why, I go back in through the kitchen door. There, I'm punished for dropping the tray on, "A truly VIP guest!" Harris the pastry chef shouts at me for my lack of attention and general clumsiness as I stock dessert platters for the less despised servers to take out.

Joke's on that arsehole. With all the ambient kitchen noise, I dinnae hear a single word.

Five hours later...

Midnight in downtown Glasgow is a madhouse, drunks spilling out of bars, couples making out in dim corners and the never-ending blare of club music. The bass tone is strong enough that it vibrates through my bones as I walk past three different nightclubs and pubs on my way home. It's hard to separate the symphony of shouting, car horns, and the laughter from passing groups, so I have to force my tired self to pay attention as I cross the street and dodge strolling pedestrians.

My feet are killing me.

Even changed into my trainers, every toe is throbbing to its own wee drumbeat. "What sadistic prick makes a woman wear two inch heels when she's carrying trays heavy enough to crush an elephant?" I grumble. Aye, I might be feeling some self-

pity. At least I'm almost home, my flat is just a couple of doors away.

I love my place because it's close to the bus stop and even though the building is shabby and leaning toward decrepit, I can afford my one bedroom. After escaping a tiny house filled with shouting parents, seven brothers and sisters and a TV that was always blaring, I love the comfort of living alone. When I'm exhausted, trying to wade through a dozen different competing voices and sounds is unbearable. At work, I can sort it all out and make sense of everything I hear with help from reading lips, but it takes so much energy.

Someone knocks into my right shoulder and I automatically murmur, "S'cuse me."

Focus, Arabella! I dinnae want to walk into anyone else.

This time, someone hits my left shoulder. Hard. "Ow, watch it!" I snap, right before a greasy hand slams over my mouth. My teeth sink into skin, flooding my mouth with the bitter taste of copper. I violently arch my back, kicking as hard as I can, dropping my backpack and clawing at his hand. It dinnae even make him stumble, he's dragging me toward the alley next to my building.

No no nonono... yell, shriek, make your neighbors hear you!

I pull my teeth out of his skin and scream until my throat vibrates, "MUM! MUM!"

"Feckin' sow!" He yanks my head back painfully and I kick harder. There's a car parked at the end of the alley, the engine's already running. I canna let him get me into it. I'll never leave it alive, I know it.

He's dragging me deeper into the darkness, and one of my trainers' flies loose. I dig my heel into the pavement, trying to slow him down and it lands on a broken bottle. My howl is so enormous that it bounces off the brick wall of my building and echoes

back to me.

“MUM!”

Ah, shite. This brings another man out of the car, hurrying toward us.

“Ye canna handle one wee girl by yourself, feckface?” This one’s pockmarked and he grins, showing a few missing teeth as he grabs my ankles, twisting them until I shriek. “In ye go, hoor.”

A wind blows past me, my legs drop as the bastard is ripped away. There’s a clotted sort of wail, like he’s gargling on his own blood. The one behind with his hand over my mouth jerks violently, dropping me and I see his feet fly up as he’s yanked away.

The gravel in the alley scrapes the hell out of my elbows and hands as I scramble back. Bumping into something soft, I let out a scream when I realize I’m sitting on a dead man, his throat cut clear to the bone and his blood soaking into my jeans.

“Shh... hey lass, hey. You’re okay, come on now, let’s get ye out of here.” The voice, it’s deep and weirdly soothing.

It’s him. The man I tried to save.

He pulls me up, an arm around my waist and his hand cupping my face, giving me a huge grin before his head darts up, eyes narrowing.

“Lottie?” It’s Meera from 1C, barefoot and charging out holding a soup ladle up like a battle ax.

“Hannah, is that you?” Grace from 2F must have run down the stairs, bursting into the street. Lora from 2A is close behind.

Meera spots me first. “Is that blood? Oh, god it’s Arabella! What happened, lass?”

Lights blaze into the alley as neighbors come pouring out of their flats. My mystery man utters a low curse, leans me gently against the brick wall and slips away into the night.

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In which this was not how Arabella was planning to end her evening.

Arabella...

“You’re gonna be mighty gowpin’ tomorrow, but you’ll survive.” Connor is my ambulance technician and clearly not into it for the bedside manner. However, he did a quick and tidy job of stitching the gash in my foot from the broken bottle and examined the road rash on my elbows and knees.

“Thank ye.” I slide awkwardly off the seat in the back of the ambulance and test my foot. I can hobble, at least.

The two very dead bodies and gallons of blood splashed everywhere drew out the whole neighborhood, everyone jostling for a look.

Detective Inspector Christie cut through the crowd earlier to introduce herself and waited for me to get stitched up. Now, she cocks her head, looking me over. “Ye look like something I just cut out of a shark.”

She’s not wrong. The blood on me is congealing and making my shirt stick to my skin, which feels like it’s trying to crawl off my body. I need to peel off the clothes that are about to go into the incinerator and wash all this disgusting stuff off me.

“I was really hoping for a shower and some ice cream tonight,” I say shakily, shoulders twitching against my gore-covered shirt. “I canna say this was part of my plan.”

“Aye, murder and near-dismemberment rarely are,” she agrees, ignoring my involuntary gag. “We need to clear the street and ye need that shower. How about I come up in twenty minutes, then?”

Her partner ambles over to us. He’d been talking to my neighbors, and as expected, no one heard or saw anything until I screamed. “One question,” he asks, “everyone says ye were screaming for your mum. But ye live alone, aye?”

If Detective Christie’s eyes rolled any further back, they’d be lodged in her brain stem. “Here’s your chance to detect, Detective Roy. Do ye see all these women here?” She gestures to my neighbors. Meera set down her soup ladle long enough to put on some shoes and the other women from my building are still standing close. “In a neighborhood like this - no offense, Miss Blair -”

“None taken,” I shrug.

“A woman screams ‘Mum!’ because every soul possessing a set of ovaries is gonna come charging out of the house, even if their wee one is present and accounted for, even if they dinnae have a bairn. It’s a bone-deep instinct,” she lectures him.

My neighbors are nodding approvingly.

“True that...”

“Aye, that’s how it is...”

“Waiting for one of these dossers to charge into battle?” Meera flips her hair back, pointing her soup ladle at a group of men holding lager cans and enjoying the neighborhood drama. “Not likely.”

Detective Roy’s young and I can tell he’s torn between excitement for his first big

murder case and a wee bit of fear of my neighbors.

“I canna believe I worked my arse off all these years to be carrying this lad who still looks like he just stepped out of the Academy.” I dinnae think Detective Christie means for anyone to hear that, but she is still facing me and it’s easy to read her lips. I give her a small smile when she realizes it and she rolls her eyes again.

I canna look at the alley, where the crime scene is buzzing with investigators, and suddenly, everything caves in on me and I’m crying, making tear tracks through the dirt and blood on my face.

“Here now, you’re coming with me.” Meera’s got her arm around my shoulders, leading me toward my flat. She snags my backpack along the way as she hustles me up the stairs. “Ye need a shower. Then food. S... clothes, fuzzy...” She turns to me, looking stricken. “Sorry! I gotta remember to face ye when I’m talking.”

“You’re doing grand.” I’m ashamed I broke down in front of everyone like that. I never cracked when the kids at school gave me shite, talking and laughing behind my back, knowing I usually couldn’t hear them. I’m not gonna do it now.

Once we’re in my flat, she pushes me toward the bathroom. “Throw those clothes out into the bedroom and I’ll bag them up and take them to the bin.”

“No,” I shudder, “the incinerator.”

Meera nods firmly. “Aye. And I’m bringing my smudge stick up. We’re gonna sage the shite out of this place.”

When I emerge from the bathroom, only after I’ve used up all the hot water and plenty of the cold, Detective Christie is waiting for me in a bit of a standoff with my neighbor, who’s balancing a covered dinner plate and a bag of clothes.

“I must speak to Miss Blair alone,” she says firmly.

“And maybe she’s needing some emotional support,” Meera retorts.

I’m standing between them to catch the conversation and finally groan. “Let’s just get this over with, aye? Meera, thank ye. Can we talk tomorrow?”

“Of course,” she says, thrusting the bag of clothes at me. There’s big sweatpants worn soft from many washings and a t-shirt that looks familiar, likely I’d lent it to her at some point. And fuzzy socks. “Are ye sure ye dinnae want to sleep on my couch tonight?”

I want quiet. I need it to be quiet soon so the blaring alarms that keep ping-ponging in my brain will stop. Though one day soon it will be completely silent, and that is terrifying, too.

“I’ll be fine, thank ye, love.”

She presses something into my hand, leaning close enough to nearly bump noses. “Here, take this. It’s my black obsidian arrowhead for protection and clearing negative energies.”

I can feel the tears well up again. Why is this woman kinder to me than my own family? “I could tell ye were about to kick some serious arse with that soup ladle tonight.”

She laughs, giving me a hug before heading for the door, giving Detective Christie a last suspicious glare.

The detective’s examining my tiny living room closely, but not like she’s judging me. My couch may be from the charity shop, but everything is clean and the multi-

colored rag rug I'd braided myself covers all the worn spots on the floor.

Clearing my throat, I ask, "Where's Detective Roy?"

"I tasked him with measuring the blood spray on the pavement." I must be going pale again because her eyes widen. "Ach, that was insensitive. Here, sit down. I know this is your place but can I make ye a cup of tea?" Her gruff tone definitely softens when she's one on one. She has short, sensibly cut brown hair streaked with gray and her blue suit is clearly chosen for comfort and ease of movement.

There's a hot cup of tea in front of me by the time I've pulled on those nice fuzzy socks. I drink it while her cup cools on my little table.

"Hell of a night, aye?" She's watching me keenly and now I'm feeling uncomfortable.

"So bad," I nod fervently. "I just... it was so bad."

"You're a fierce wee thing," she says approvingly, "ye fought two men off. I'm assuming those teeth marks in that bald bastard's hand are from ye? Bit clear to the bone on his thumb.

Nice work, that. "

"Um, did ye find anything in the car?" I ask, "A name from the license plate, maybe?"

"Stolen. No leads there," she says, still watching the play of emotion on my face. "Any idea why those two arsepieces targeted ye?"

Now's the time to tell her about the conversation between those men at the party,

about reading their lips. About my mystery man and how he materialized out of thin air to kill the bastards trying to kidnap me.

I don't say any of that.

"It was so fast," I say, "I've never seen either one of them before." This part is true.

"And the person who managed to kill 'em both within seconds?"

Shuddering, I take another gulp of tea. "The guy in front holding my legs got pulled away and before I could even get my feet under me, he'd taken the man who'd been dragging me backwards as well."

"So it was a man?" She leans forward.

"I dinnae know, whoever it was never said anything. But I canna imagine a woman doing that much damage in seconds." I think about it. "Though that would be brilliant, wouldn't it? With your training, I'm thinking ye could."

She shrugs modestly. "Not that fast, I fear."

The detective is good, I'll give her that. She asks me the same questions in a slightly different way in a bit of a different order until I'm nearly nodding off to sleep.

"I think we're done here, Miss Blair." She tucks her little notepad in her jacket and hands me a card. "I'll be checking in on ye, but if ye think of anything, even if it dinnae seem important, give me a call, aye?"

"Thank you." Following her to the door, a horrible thought occurs to me. "If they're part of a crew or something, would someone else come after me?"

“I’m going to keep a squad car outside for a day or two, step up the rotation of the street police walking by your place.” She smiles, which is actually a little shocking but makes her look very nice. “At this point, I dinnae believe they’re anything other than two arsepieces hoping you’d be a quick snatch and grab. Your mysterious rescuer, though... I’m looking into him a bit more.”

“Oh, okay,” I smile weakly. “Well, goodnight. And thank ye for the tea.”

She’s whistling as she heads down the stairs and I shut my door. And lock it. Then push my chair across the room to wedge it under the handle. I check the locks on every window. Twice.

There are two groups of people who know who I am and where I live. The man who saved my life tonight, and the men who were planning to kill him.

I sit in bed until the sun rises over Glasgow, waiting for something.

I just dinnae know what.

Gowpin’ - Scottish slang for extremely sore

Dosser - Scottish slang for a lazy man

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In which Logan wagers Arabella is a 32C up top, but that's nobody else's business.

Logan...

"The lass has spirit, I knew that when she tried to warn me tonight, those big brown eyes looking up at me, so worried. But holy shite, she's tougher than most of the men who work for me."

I'm perched on top of the building across from the girl's flat and ignoring most of what's coming out of my brother's gob. We've been going at this on the phone for an hour now.

"If you'd messaged me instead of trying to handle it all yourself, I would have sent someone for her," Kai says.

"I should have been there sooner," I admit. "I should have known those gobshites would figure out she'd warned me during that tray episode and go after her. When did they message Anselm? I'd killed them both within minutes after their feeble as feck ambush. In fact, I'm a wee bit insulted that Danish prick dinnae send someone with more experience to take me out."

"It's disrespectful," Kai agrees, which is a rare thing.

"Plenty of time, I thought. Dispose of those two arseholes and swing by her flat to pick her up. I knew Anselm would target her as a potential weakness. Just not that fast. The bastard does hold a grudge, that's certain."

It's my fault she was hurt.

Kai's pulling something up on his iPad. "Arabella Blair. Twenty-four, teaches British Sign Language at the Wallace School for Exceptional Children, server for various catering companies, and lives alone in a bit of a dodgy part of Glasgow. Degenerative hearing loss. The MacTavish hackers can dig up everything from someone's childhood nickname to their underwear size within fifteen minutes," he says approvingly.

I'd wager she's a 32C up top, likely a small on the knickers. But that's none of my brother's business.

"The detective is finally leaving her flat," I say. "What's her name? Is she one of ours?"

"Detective Inspector Christie, I'm told. She's sharp, but unfortunately, not on our payroll," he says. "If she keeps after ye, we'll see if that can be changed."

"Bad enough that I couldn't get Arabella out tonight," I groan. "I dinnae have time for an overzealous detective."

"Looking on the positive parts of tonight, ye locked in Ian Abercrombie's transport agreement at the fundraiser. Job well done."

Grinning, I say, "That hurt ye to say it, dinnae it?"

"Not true!" Kai protested, "I knew ye could do it. You'd get Abercrombie to agree in some unsettling or unorthodox way, but I knew you'd have it done." There's a pause. "Ye know I'm aware you're no feck-up, aye?"

I hum lazily, spotting Arabella's windows through the scope on my sniper rifle. If

anyone comes after her, I'll see the bastard first. "Ye have brought that up in the past, brother."

"Never a feck-up! Reckless, aye. Unhinged? Certainly. Do ye get the job done in a way that makes Mum and Da's hair turn grey? Aye. But ye get it done, every time."

"Well, this time, the retaliation is targeting an innocent, and that is not the MacTavish way," I say grimly. "I'll have to protect her."

"Agreed," Kai says, "we'll relocate her somewhere, her preference. Though I'm thinking Canada where Aunt Aria and Uncle Lachlan can watch over her. Get her set up. Do ye want me to send a couple of men to relieve ye? They'll keep her safe."

Why do I dislike that idea so much?

"I'll stay here for the rest of the night. Let's talk in the morning."

"Night, brother," he says. "Try to avoid gutting anyone else this evening, aye?"

"I make no promises."

I can see Arabella moving through her postage stamp-sized apartment, dragging a chair to put against her door, checking the locks on her windows. I get a glimpse of her frightened face as she's pulling the curtains shut and again, that unfamiliar feeling hits my gut, tightening all my muscles. Guilt. I recognize it now, it just took a while. Guilt is not an emotion I entertain much. She risked her safety to try to save me, and such a clever wee thing. Reading lips is an amazing skill, invaluable.

Would she be interested in working in our organization?

She's pulled the curtains on all her windows shut, but my position on the rooftop and

the excellent scope on my rifle still gives me a view into her bedroom. The moonlight filters over her skin and that mass of black hair, it's thick and when it's down, it tumbles over her shoulders. She's curled up tight like a potato bug, back against the headboard and her arms wrapped tightly around her knees.

The pubs down the street have closed for the night so it's mostly quiet, just a few cars passing by. Every time her head nods toward her knees, I think she's finally asleep, but then she stiffens, looking around her room again.

My poor lass is terrified, and I'm thinking she's clever enough to know that attack was no random snatch and grab, especially when I stepped in. A police car cruises slowly down the street, flicking on the high beam to scan the alley and the street. Good. Detective Christie's got an eye on her, too.

Adjusting my position with a groan, I pull up the hood on my jacket and settle in. Both of us awake and alert, Arabella and I, keeping watch together.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which yet again, we learn that no good deed goes unpunished.

Arabella...

The pounding on my front door dinnae wake me, but the repeated texts from Meera did. Stumbling to the door, I open it to see my aggrieved friend with a covered breakfast plate, wearing leggings and a t-shirt that says “Sorry I’m late. I didn’t want to be here.” This is a phrase she is also not shy about saying out loud.

“Good morning!” she chirps, “Can I come in, then?” Since she’s already through the door and heading for my tiny kitchen, there’s no need for an answer. I lock the door, double-checking it before I head over.

“Oh... ye are too good to me, my friend.” She’s brought crispy bacon, grilled mushrooms and tomatoes, and her specialty, tattie scones. I shove half of one in my mouth, groaning in pleasure. The crisp outside of the scone and the soft, buttery potato center is divine.

“Ye look terrible,” she says, looking me over with a frown.

“Thank ye for your refreshing honesty,” I say sourly.

“Sorry, I meant ye look like ye dinnae sleep a wink. Understandable, but ye canna keep that up.”

“Did ye get the kids off to school?” I ask, going in for a slice of bacon. I’m gobbling breakfast down with all the manners of a farm animal but Meera isn’t the judgmental

type.

“Aye, they’re fine.” She leans against the counter, folding her arms. “I noticed a police car circling the block a few times, looks like that detective is actually concerned for your safety?”

The bacon’s suddenly dry, stuck in my throat and I take a huge gulp of juice to get it down. “It’s nice that she ordered the patrol but we both know they’ll circle ‘round for a couple of days and then it’s back to business as usual.”

Meera gives me The Eye, the look that makes her kids immediately cave and confess everything they might have done wrong for the last six months.

“Why do I feel like there’s more to this story?” she asks, pushing a little basket of muffins toward me.

The muffins are blueberry; she always sprinkles some coarse sugar over the top and it makes them sparkle a bit. It’s easier to think about the visual appeal of her baked goods than the reality of what’s happened to me. Telling Meera about last night could endanger her, too. I dinnae tell Detective Christie the whole truth and I still haven’t parsed out why.

“I haven’t...” I rub my eyes. “I dinnae want to talk about it right now, aye? I’m gonna need some time.”

Here’s why she’s one of my favorite people. She abandons giving me The Eye, and nods slowly. “All right. But I can tell this is twisting ye all up and this is not just about the attack - though that’s terrible enough. Promise me that ye will not try to handle this on your own.”

That opens a whole new terrifying horizon.

Who could I talk to? This is so much bigger than me. This is cloak and dagger shite, planned assassinations, a man who can kill... shite, he probably killed those guys at the fundraiser because I never saw them again and then these two and with a knife and-

“Ach, girl, you’re spiraling, ye should see your expression right now.” Meera’s waving her hands in front of my face. “Have a muffin. Take a moment. You’re making me anxious and when I’m anxious I bake and Connor says he’s gained two stone in the last month and he’s gonna hide my Ooni Spiral mixer if I canna find another way to handle stress.”

Poor Connor. Her husband has been putting on weight recently and morally, I canna contribute to that.

“Please, dinnae worry.” I reach across the counter, squeezing her hand. “Let me... I’ll work it out in my head first, and we’ll talk.” I glance over at my clock on the wall and yelp. “I’m gonna be late for work!”

“I think ye should call in sick,” she protests, “what about your foot?”

“It’s a teaching day, not a catering one, thank god,” I’m already limping to my bedroom. “I can sit down the entire time. Thank you for breakfast!”

It is, apparently, possible to pay too much attention to your surroundings. It’s a miracle I make it to the school without getting run over by a bus or knocked senseless by a delivery bike. Checking behind me every six seconds means I walked into a puzzled businessman and a block later, the corner of an office building.

I know who I’m looking for. That enormously tall, extremely fine-looking man.

Why would he be following ye, ye eejit?

Why was he following me last night, ye numpty?

Grand. I'm arguing with myself. That just screams of emotional stability.

I'm walking down the hall to my classroom when my phone rings. It's Kevin, my catering boss.

"Hey there Arabella..." he's clearing his throat. That's never good. "Look, so... I'm gonna have to let ye go."

"What? Why?"

"Uh, well, bookings have slowed down, so I dinnae need as many servers, and..."

The fury hits me hard, but I swallow it down. "Is this about last night? Did Mrs. MacGregor demand that you fire me?"

"Look, ye know how it is. She's a very important client and she was upset about your lack of professionalism-"

"Wait. Hold up, Kevin. Professionalism?" I look around the hall, trying to keep my voice low. "There's Marcella, who 'accidentally' grabs a hot guy's crotch at nearly every party. And- and Jonah, he dropped a steak knife on that poor woman's hand at the Wetlands Gala. The guest last night wasn't upset, he even helped me pick up the glasses! I've never missed a day of work! I'm always on time!"

I feel like my case is strong, but he's not listening. "Ye must understand that she's a very important client. She hires us all the time, and if she starts complaining to her friends, it could be a real problem."

"I need this job." It bursts out, raw, and embarrassing but I'm not above begging.

“I’m sorry,” he says, “your job performance was unsatisfactory and this isn’t negotiable, I’m sorry. I’ll have your final check for ye when ye drop off your uniforms.”

Ending the call, I limp into the nearest empty classroom, stifling my sobs. I canna get a higher position with better pay here at the school without the full postgraduate teacher’s certification. And I canna afford the postgraduate tuition to get the degree without a second job.

Calling Meera, I search the classroom for some tissues.

“I got fired from my catering job.”

“What the hell?” she snaps. “Why?”

“Kevin told me it was due to spilling a tray of champagne on a guest last night,” I say, forcing my voice not to wobble. No crying.

“One accident? One and that’s all it takes for him to fire a reliable employee?” She snorts loudly. “I’ve seen those clumsy sods you work with waiting tables before. They’ve all dropped a tray or two!”

“Kevin wouldn’t say it, but I think the hostess, Mrs. MacGregor, was put off by my hearing disability,” I admit. “She dinnae want me there.”

“That’s just plain bullshite!” I love Meera for her ability to be fully outraged on the behalf of her friends. It’s deeply comforting.

“I’m used to the overreactions I sometimes get when people realize I’m nearly deaf,” I say, “but they usually give it a few minutes and see I handle everything just fine.”

“Oh, goodness, like this is surely the most shocking thing imaginable and when did people with disabilities really just go gallivanting around in polite society?” I love her sarcasm, too. “Ye must sue Kevin! This is ridiculous!”

“Aye, that,” I sigh. “Mrs. MacGregor definitely took it to the next level last night, shouting in my face and exaggerating her speech, like I’m stupid and not hard of hearing.” I find the tissues and dab at the tears leaking out of my treacherous eyes. “I’m not really mad at Kevin - okay I am, the weak-willed bastard - but I see his point. That woman’s a vengeful cow and he dinnae want to risk his business.”

“It’s still wrong!”

“Thanks for letting me whine a wee bit. It will all work out.”

“Just out of curiosity,” she says, “what was last night’s MacGregor fundraiser for?”

I give a watery chuckle. “The Sense Scotland Foundation. They’re a charity that supports complex communication needs. They donate devices to the school all the time.”

“Agh!” Meera shrieks. “If ye dinnae sue him, I will!”

After a quick cry in the empty room and scrubbing away the evidence, I paste a big smile on my face as I walk into my Juniors Class. These bairns are between five and twelve, and they’re getting so confident with their signing.

How’s everyone today? I sign.

Good!

Grand.

Not so bad.

I got my phone taken away last night.

The surly comment comes from Roger, a twelve-year-old with a perpetually pouty expression and the quickest mind of any bairn in the class.

Though getting him to sit still is about as easy as wrestling a Tasmanian Devil into a sundress.

I'm glad to know, I sign, except for your news, Roger. He gives me a shrug.

So, I thought we'd try something new today, I sign. You've all been moving ahead so fast with the lessons that I think ye deserve a little something extra.

Ah, that's got their attention.

I learned how to read lips back when I started losing my hearing. I want to teach you all a bit. It can definitely come in handy.

Like, if ye wanna be a spy? Roger signs.

Exactly that, I wink. Ye deserve every advantage, aye? Think how handy it would be to get a better idea of what's going on around ye.

The unwelcome vision of reading those arseholes lips last night rises up tauntingly, and I shove it back down. I have a class to teach.

My students are having a wonderful time misreading almost every word out of my mouth, but by lunchtime, everyone's managed to interpret a short sentence.

Just as I'm escorting them into the lunchroom, my phone buzzes. It's Lucy, our secretary in the headmaster's office. "Arabella, ye have a visitor at the front desk."

I've been expecting a delivery for some refurbished iPads for my kids, but not the giant man in a suit, grinning down at me like the devil himself.

"What are ye doing here?"

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Logan redeems himself with charm and takeaway.

Arabella...

“Hello, Miss Blair, I’ve brought ye lunch.” He smiles down at me, looking like a well-groomed businessman versus the knife-wielding wraith I know he truly is. He’s holding an enormous bag of takeaway and opens it to put two of the containers on Lucy’s desk. “A hard-working lass like ye rarely gets to leave your desk for a proper lunch, aye?”

Lucy is forty-seven, stern, and if a pleasant disposition is searching for her, they’ve not yet met. I’ve tried to suck up to her all year with little treats like snacks and a potted plant, and never got her to crack a smile. But with him? Her cheeks are flushed pink and it’s possible she might be giggling.

“Well, thank you, Mr. MacTavish-”

“Please,” he put a hand to his chest, the smarmy bastard, “do call me Logan, and may I call you Lucy?”

“Of course!” She’s beaming. I canna help but feel put out that I’ve been currying her favor for months and he’s got her charmed in less than the two minutes it took me to get to the office.

Then the blood-splashed memories of last night hit me hard, and I grab the doorknob. Death follows this man everywhere. Are my kids in danger? Is he putting the school at risk by being here?

His gaze travels from my white knuckles to my face. “Arabella, sweetheart, I assure ye it’s nothing but lunch.”

Before Lucy can ask any questions, I give him a big, fake smile. “That’s so sweet of you... Logan. Let’s eat outside, there’s a nice bench with some shade on the other side of the school.”

I know everyone in the front office is staring as I not-quite drag him out the door. I canna blame them. A hugely muscled man with the face of a supermodel and a suit that costs more than my year’s salary is going to look as out of place at the Wallace School for Exceptional Children as a Disney princess would be at a sex dungeon.

My smile drops as soon as we’re out of sight. “What are ye doing here!” I smack his shoulder and I’m pretty sure it hurts me more than it does him. “Coming to my school after ye- ye-”

“Decapitated the two men trying to kidnap and murder ye last night?”

“Which was your fault!” I hiss. “What the hell have ye dragged me into?”

“That’s not really fair, lass.” He puts the takeaway bag on the bench and seats himself, smiling at me pleasantly. “Ye did insert yourself, though I am deeply and forever appreciative of your warning.”

The bloody faces of those men in the alley hits me again and I sit down heavily. “Are ye putting my students in danger by being here?”

“No. I understand your concern, though. I thought it was time we talked. And ye dinnae bring anything for lunch today.”

“Are you spying on me?”

“People are peering out the windows, eat your beef and broccoli. I promise I’ll explain if you take a bite.” He hands me a box and the smell is divine as he opens the lid. Sesame, soy sauce, a bit of garlic... “Dig in, sweetheart. Here’s a fork.”

“I love beef and broccoli,” I admit, scooping up the first forkful of crisp broccoli and tangy steak. The salty bite explodes against my taste buds and I groan in pleasure. Damn him, he’s right, I was too stressed to remember to pack anything to eat today.

“I know,” he says amiably, opening a container of Kung Pao chicken.

My chewing slows and I’m not hungry anymore. “Like how ye knew where I lived?”

“Like that, aye. I thought I’d finished off those two at the gala before they reported back to their boss, but someone noticed ye talking to me.”

“So those two last night at my place, they were...” I clutch my fork, sauce dripping off the beef and onto my sweater, “They were there to kill me.”

“Well, kidnap ye to an isolated location and then kill ye.”

Closing the lid on my takeaway, I set it aside and focus on my breathing.

“Hey, sweetheart. Hey now.” Logan puts a finger under my chin lifting it so I have to look at him. “I should have been there sooner. I’m so sorry ye had to go through that. Ye put yourself in danger to save me, and I owe you a debt for life. Aye, they targeted ye because of me, but those two arseholes are a good cautionary tale. No one’s going to go after ye now that you’re under my protection.”

I’m acutely aware of the heat radiating from him, the side yard is chilly and my thigh is pressed close to his. He’s huge, and the substantial feel of him is comforting.

“Tell me why this happened,” I say flatly. I canna let this man’s gorgeousness and soothing words distract me.

“Ye must know I canna tell you much, and that’s for your own safety, sweetheart. The short answer is, a bad man is angry at me for taking something away from him. Something he stole. He was trying to make an example of me.” He chuckles like that is the most hilarious thing in the world. “I made an example of the pricks he sent after ye instead. He’ll not bother ye again.”

He’s looking into my eyes, his hazel gaze is sincere.

And he’s lying to me.

There’s tension in his fingers holding my chin and he’s unnaturally still, like he’s trying to avoid showing any ‘tells.’ It’s an old poker trick.

“What if I say I dinnae believe ye, Logan MacTavish?”

He puts his lips to my ear, it must look like he’s kissing my cheek because Daisy, a student teacher, makes a little “Aww,” face as she stares out her classroom window.

“I will tell ye that if I am not the one looking after ye, a team of my men are. I will not compromise your safety again.”

The lights flash in the school yard, indicating lunchtime is over.

“I must get back to my students.” I rise, trying to stretch some of the tension out of my shoulders. Logan gathers up the rest of our lunch, throwing it in the trash. “A man who cleans up after himself? Now, that is a rare thing.”

“Wait until you see how well I cook,” he says, “and do the dishes. Dinner tonight. My

place or yours?"

"Rather bold thinking I'll say yes."

Logan gives me the most rakish possible grin, the knowing smirk of a man who knows he is irresistible. "I'll text ye after work."

"I dinnae know. You're a lot of trouble."

"This is true," he agrees easily, "but ye can ask me more questions."

"Done."

Laughing, this time he does kiss me on the cheek, and the students streaming back into the school hoot and holler at the sight. "Goodbye for now, Arabella Blair."

He disappears around the corner of the building and I groan. The minute he is out of sight, there's an insistent little nudge at the base of my spine.

Run. Ye should run.

That determined nudge keeps pushing at me as I gather my students from the playground and herd them back to class.

The afternoon is winding down and I'm watching the clock almost as much as my kids when the door opens and a blond man walks in, two more lingering just outside and all wearing school maintenance jumpsuits. The nudge at the base of my spine has turned into a frantic fist, pounding at me to run.

"Miss Blair? I need you to come with me, we require your help outside." The blond man smiles at me, all teeth and leans forward to show an enormous gun, holstered

under his jumpsuit. His back is to my students and he casually scratches his chest near the weapon. “It’s very simple. We don’t want to disturb the students at all, correct?”

Logan was wrong. This isn’t over.

“Ye dinnae- I’m coming. Dinnae hurt them,” I hiss, folding my arms to hide my shaking hands. My classroom is near the back of the school. There’s a janitor’s closet and then the emergency exit. The alarm will go off. Someone will see us.

“Wait.” Roger’s voice is loud and a little hoarse, he dinnae like speaking much because his siblings tease him at home. “You’re building maintenance. What do ye need her for?”

I shake my head sharply, signing, Sweet boy, this is not the time.

“Move your hands again and I’ll start shooting.” The bastard grins. “I’ll start with the pushy little boy.”

“I’m coming!” I hurry toward him, trying to smile at my puzzled students. Roger looks like he’s about to explode out of his seat and I shake my head again.

The door shuts behind us and I sag in relief. It’s only a thin layer of wood between my bairns and these men, but it’s something. The two who’d been hovering grab my arms and hustle me out the back doors. My heart sinks when I realize they must have disabled the alarm, there’s no siren, no lights flashing. No one’s going to know until my students come looking for me.

I can only hope they stay put until we’re gone.

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In which we learn poor Arabella is not just waist-deep in the shite, it's up to her neck and rising .

Logan...

My fist plows into Max's face and he just takes it, flying backward and landing on the floor, splattering the Persian rug with blood.

"Ya lavvy heided bamstick! How the feck did they get past ye?"

"They got her into a maintenance van that was parked behind the school all day," he says, spitting blood on the floor, trying to avoid the expensive rug. "We'd checked it earlier and it had standard repair equipment and tools. The men were nowhere around. They disabled the alarm on the back entrance and stabbed Finlay; he was guarding that exit. They shot Marc as they pulled out of the back lot."

"Motherfucking sons of bitches wankstains!" I shout, running my hands through my hair instead of punching the asshole in the face again.

"I failed ye and the family," Max says grimly. "I submit myself for punishment."

Uncle Cormac's jaw is tight. "This is some sloppy shite. Ye will do dock work until we have time to address this. Dr. Maura says Finlay's gonna pull through, but Marc is dead. Now get out."

I'm pacing the Chieftain's office, Uncle Cormac heads up the clan and runs all the family's legitimate and completely, blatantly, criminal activity. He looks uncannily

like my Da, with dark hair and green eyes, even though my father is four years younger. Today, Uncle Cormac looks every bit his age, groaning and rubbing his forehead.

“Ye know that prick Anselm has her,” I growl. “I canna believe I let her out of my sight.”

“Georges and Xenia managed to track the van via traffic cameras to a private airfield near Uddingston,” he says. “The eejit pilot even filed a legitimate flight plan. They’re landing in Copenhagen. I’m thinking Anselm would want her close so he could draw ye in to kill ye himself, aye?”

“He’ll have her taken to Rolig ?,” I say, rapidly categorizing everything I know about Anselm’s stronghold. He keeps a penthouse in his office building in Copenhagen, a mansion in Switzerland, another in St. Petersburg, as well as a couple more in London and New York.

But he’ll want Arabella where he feels most secure, which is his enormous estate on a private peninsula on the coast of Copenhagen, surrounded by his platoon of soldiers and his fawning entourage.

“He’s a spiteful bastard, so he’d want her in his compound,” I say, wanting with everything in me to punch a hole in the office wall.

Not like I’d be the first.

“My personal jet’s already fueled and ready,” Uncle Cormac says. “Michael, Kai, your Da and twenty of our best people are on their way to the airfield.”

“Your best? Like those wankstains who let Arabella be taken, not knowing what the feck happened until her students raised the alarm?”

Now, I'm seeing the Chieftain of the MacTavish Mafia. The room's temperature seems to drop ten degrees.

"If our clan makes an error, we make it right," he says, his words cold, and clipped. "The lass saved your life. We'll save hers in return. Regardless, you will never speak to your Chieftain like that again."

The air's crackling with tension between us. If he were any other man...

Dipping my head into a nod, I force out, "Aye. My sincere apologies, Chieftain."

He tilts his head toward the door. "Go on with ye. Get the girl back."

Our tech genius Xenia is on the jet already, lounging at the conference table with six laptops spread out around her. Her partner Georges is terrified of my brother Kai after Georges went snooping and put his wife Luna in danger, so he stayed behind at MacTavish International for "additional research."

One of Xenia's minions is setting up three drones with additional heat signature cameras and heavy-duty clips that I know will be holding explosives.

"Heya, Logan," she says cheerfully, "we're gonna kick some fucking ass tonight, huh?" Xenia looks like a rich girl from Connecticut - which she was - until she opens her mouth. Then she's 100% hood rat and I like her all the better for it.

"Ach, I got a metric tonne of targets for ye, lass." I tap on the walnut tabletop with my knuckles. "Thank ye for coming."

"Wouldn't miss it," she chirps, logging onto a site on the dark web. I've seen some strong shite, but even my stomach's turning inside out after seeing these images. Xenia keeps stuffing fish crispies into her mouth and humming as she scrolls through

the site.

“What are ya looking at?” I say, forcing my gut back down my throat. “Does it pertain to the mission or just a wee bit of light reading?”

She narrows her eyes, making me wait until she’s finished off a Monster energy drink. “Oh, I think your mission just expanded, if your father and Chieftain are as angry about this as I am. After you fucked over Anselm by taking all his Bitcoin fraud data and violating his patents on his illegal pharmaceutical research, well, what’s a lad to do?” She spins one of the laptops around to show me the screen.

It looks like the aftermath of a battle, a dozen broken, bloody bodies lying sprawled in tattered sheets or naked. “What the feck has he done?”

“Anselm - and may that fucker die a horrible death - is deep into human organ trafficking,” she says, polishing off her drink and cracking open a new one. “There’s still a shit ton of pharmaceuticals coming out of his labs, but the organ trade... We didn’t know about this until you blew up his other hobbies and side interests. He’s kicked it into high gear.”

“Ye know, I’m already planning on killing him.” I run my hands through my hair, “Now, I’m thinking I’ll take my time.”

She smiles wryly. “Yeah, he deserves it.”

“Xenia, we’re taking off in three minutes, secure your gear, aye?” My Da slaps me on the back with a grin. “Mind joining the rest of us? It sounds like we have a mission to plan that’s getting more complex by the minute.”

“Aye, it is,” I admit. “But extracting Arabella is still my first priority.”

We settle in a big grouping of seats around a low table in the main cabin. Uncle Cormac's jet is a Gulfstream G700, a lavish thing with more teak trim than your average sailboat, huge black leather chairs and its own armory. He did issue a moratorium about cleaning and loading weapons onboard after a couple of "unfortunate episodes" involving my cousins Jack and Wallace.

"And they all think I'm the reckless one?" I murmur. Da raises a brow and I shake my head. "Just thinking."

"Good," he says crisply, "we're going to need all the brainpower on board and back home for this fecking mess."

"I knew Anselm was an impressive piece of shite, but this..." My cousin Michael shakes his head. "How did he get so deep into the organ business without anyone catching on?"

"We were hyper-focused on more pressing matters." Da says. "We sent in Logan six months ago after Anselm stole three patents from our medical research division, and he'd just put his new computer virus up for the highest bidder on the dark web." He gives me an approving smile. "Logan came back with a treasure trove of additional information, including the research and development numbers from a side of his medical division we'd not seen before."

Xenia clicks a remote and the monitor on the wall shows images of happy patients, grinning at the camera like fecking eejits and hovering models in doctor's coats. "This is from one of the brochures his people have been distributing in South America," she says. "They're recruiting subjects for a new 'research study,' supposedly for one of his pharmaceutical trials. What they're really testing for is organ compatibility for specific clients."

"Anselm's running a boutique organ harvesting operation for rich arseholes?" I say.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, he’s outdone himself.”

“He started with the ‘grab and slash’ style some of the cartels used,” Xenia says, looking a little green around the gills. “I have pictures, but you don’t want to see them. Then, he moved up to simply buying them from desperate people in Asia and Europe. It looks like that business model was too expensive for him. One of the key requirements for the applicants for the clinical trials is a lack of family or friends who’d raise a fuss if they disappeared.”

“We need more information,” Da says. “Xenia’s done a masterful job of picking up what she has, but we dinnae have any credible intel on where he’s running these clinical ‘studies.’ Until we do, there’s no stopping him.”

“Oh, I’ll be stopping him,” I say. “Ye storm the compound looking for what ye need and I’ll pick up Anselm after I’ve got Arabella to safety.” Pulling my KA-BAR knife from my boot, I rummage through my jacket to find my whetstone block and begin sharpening it. The stone makes a low, scraping sound as the steel passes over it.

“We’ll do the frontal attack with the drone flyover,” Kai says, “dropping the charges over the-”

Scrrrrrch.

“Over the guard’s building and the IT section Xenia’s located in-”

Scrrrrrch.

Kai glares at me, but we’ve worked together too long for that to be a deterrent.

“Once the tech net over the compound is-”

Scrrrrrch.

“Logan, haud yer wheesht, ye nyaff!”

One more pass with the stone to make sure the blade is sharp enough to cut through bone and I stop, smiling pleasantly. “Ye were saying?”

“Are ye remembering what we’re doing here?” Kai snaps, “The rescue plan?”

“I’m thinking ye dinnae bother to check Xenia’s latest scan,” I say calmly. “Take a look at the 3D topography.” Xenia shoots me a wink, the wee shite. She was gonna let Kai walk through the whole thing before correcting him.

“All right, ye slinky minx,” he sighs, “what did ye uncover?”

She taps the east corner of the island. “See the variation of the shoreline? It’s artificial, there’s a tunnel there. They must use it to offload shit they don’t want to take through the front gate.”

Da’s watching the exchange, running his finger along his lower lip to hide his grin. He finds Kai and me facing off a highly entertaining thing.

Kai shoots me the middle finger and changes the plan, dividing the crew up. “Who do ye want at your back, brother?”

“I might be utilizing some explosive rounds of ammunition in my approach,” I admit. “Best I work alone.”

Even Da lets out a groan at that. “Son, as much as I appreciate your ‘Take no prisoners’ approach, your ma’s gonna kill me if I bring ye back as a charcoal briquette.”

“No faith in your son,” I tsked. “So disappointing.”

It takes the full three hours and twenty minutes to Copenhagen for my pompous arsehole of a brother to make sure “everyone was on the same page,” but finally that shite was over and I wrestled myself into my wetsuit.

“Two island missions in less than six months,” I grunt as Michael zips up the back of my suit.

“Eh, you’ve always been a fish,” he says. “Remember that vacation to Italy where ye snorkeled into the underwater caverns that were absolutely forbidden by our folks and the tide came in?”

“I will always maintain that the rest of ye missed out.” I check my waterproof kit bag and add two Glocks and stuff in more ammunition. “It was fecking beautiful, though that dive mask was more useless than the ‘g’ in lasagna.”

“Ye got out by holding your fecking breath and your sense of touch!” Da says irritably. “Now hush it. I dinnae need the stress of remembering that day.”

Michael and I smile and shrug. Parents.

The two boats we’re using hover just outside the Anselm compound’s radar range in the channel between the mainland and his island.

“Everyone stay sharp, aye?” Kai says. “We’re rescuing an innocent. That comes before gathering intel and ideally, just killing that Danish fuck.”

I’m planning on action items one and three for myself, but no need to argue with my brother right now.

“Ya lavvy heided bamstick!” Scottish slang for “You toilet headed dipshit!”

“Haud yer wheesht, ye nyaff!” - Scottish slang for “Shut the hell up, you idiot!”

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella finds that she's either considered a party trick or a lab rat.

Arabella...

A few hours earlier...

"What am I saying now?"

This fucking guy.

The guard's been mouthing words at me for two hours now, grinning like this is a carny sideshow and I'm even more exciting than the world's tallest man or the bear-faced girl.

When they first put me in this bedroom and chained me to the bed, I was terrified. I obediently repeated the first ten things he'd mouthed at me. Now? I'm just raging.

"What am I saying now?" The guard shakes the chain my ankle's attached to, looking irritable.

Keep your temper, hold your tongue...

"I dinnae need to be looking at your ugly face to know that you're saying, 'Hey, I'm a minging arsehole!' I'm not a fucking party trick." I snap, moving as far away as the length of the chain will allow me. Ach, I have no sense of self-preservation.

His sneering grin turns into something darker and he stalks over to me, fists

tightening. “Dumme t?ve, dumb bitch!” The eejit pauses, head cocked. “Perfect! Though it is deaf and dumb, is it not?”

“Aye, that’s what they called it maybe in the 1950’s,” I manage a sarcastic bit of a laugh, which is probably ill-advised, since I’m the one in chains. “Ye canna even come up with a more creative insult? Put some effort into it.”

“D?v og stum t?ve, deaf and dumb bitch,” he snarls.

His hand is up, ready to hit me and I grab a pillow, like my feather-filled defense is going to stop him.

“Christoffer!” It’s nearly a shout, loud enough for me to hear and it’s from the Head Bastard in Charge, the one who threatened to shoot Roger in my classroom. He’s standing in the doorway, irritably gesturing at the guard - Christoffer, I’m guessing - who was about to punch me, fist still raised. He angrily leaves the room and Head Bastard in Charge stares at me, lips pursed.

“You should shut up,” he says. “They will just kill you sooner.”

Kill...?

“If ye feckers are gonna kill me anyway, I’m not shutting up.”

There’s the stupid bravado and defiance that got me through school when other kids would sneak up behind me and rip off my backpack, or yank at my hair.

He gives me a creepy, flat grin with all his teeth showing and leaves, shutting the door behind him. The wood shakes slightly and I suspect that means he’s locked it. The chain’s too short to reach the door anyway, so it’s not like it matters.

I'm not going to think about what he said. I canna let myself spiral. Drawing my legs up, I wrap my arms around them, rocking slightly. How long did it take yesterday until my students alerted the faculty that I was missing? I think it was yesterday. The head bastard plunged a needle into my arm after they threw me in the back of a maintenance van and I woke up on a helicopter flying to this oceanfront estate. I dinnae know how long it's been but the sun's angle looks like it's early afternoon, around the time I was taken.

The only bright moment I'd had was vomiting everything I'd eaten in the last week all over the guard sitting next to me.

I'm trying not to blame Logan. He dinnae know. And there were three of them. But he said I was safe, damnit!

I think I'm in Norway. Or Denmark?

The little I saw of this monstrously huge house as they hustled me through it looked like a showroom for an insanely high-end version of IKEA, all the blond wood, neutral colors, and textiles. There's a little bookcase in here and the books are all in a language that looks like Danish. Or Swedish. Everything smells of lavender, not the wild, sharp scent of lavender from home but more like a processed, distilled scent piped in because it's supposed to be "relaxing."

Bloody fecking hell.

My knowledge of Scandinavia consists mostly of liking their architecture and appreciating what I thought was a generally chill vibe. There's none of that here. The compound we landed in is a nightmare of sharp, angular lines, all steel and glass. It sticks out from the beautiful forest surrounding it like a boil on my brother's arse.

The few words I could make out from what they've said to each other, sounded

like... Swedish, maybe? I canna tell the difference between the languages, though I remember watching a documentary that stated Norwegian and Swedish sound more similar, and Danish is more distinct from the others.

This is of absolutely no help here in giving me a clue about where they've taken me, and I never saw a sign that gave me any indication of where we landed.

This bedroom is blandly decorated in neutral colors meant to be soothing, but it's the mild nature of it that's scaring me. Bad things shouldn't happen in beige, restful places like this. But that man just told me I'm going to die and there's an unassuming white vase filled with unassuming pale flowers on the bedside table and the disconnect is too much and it makes me feel insane.

My ability to read lips isn't going to be any advantage here. My kidnappers correctly guessed that was how I'd picked up on their colleague's plans to murder Logan.

Logan fecking MacTavish.

The whirlwind of death that swept through my life in the last forty-eight hours. Logan MacTavish, a giant of a man with hazel eyes and a feral grin. I saved his life and then he saved mine right back.

Of course, I wouldn't be in this position if I'd just minded my own business. I'm thinking Logan wouldn't have had the slightest problem with killing those two, with or without my help.

They took me for a reason, but I have no idea what it is. No one has questioned me. They just threw me in here and chained me up. Do they think I know Logan? Like, we're close friends and he would come to rescue me, like he did outside my building?

I dinnae see that happening.

The chain thuds against the pale wood floor as I limp toward the windows. Maybe if I somehow manage to get this shackle off my ankle, I could climb out? The view is spectacular; this must be the front of the house. It's facing the ocean and if I squint, I can see a tiny, rocky island with a lighthouse and then nothing but forest and beachfront on either side of the compound for as far as I can see.

When they were hauling me off the helicopter pad behind the house, I noticed the high rock wall surrounding the compound. Here in front, I see the wall ends with an enormous iron fence leading to the fancy marina. Three yachts are docked there, ranging in size and decadence from "I'm a rich bastard and this boat makes it obvious," to "I'm the wealthiest son of a bitch on the planet and this yacht should make you feel like an ant I'm about to step on."

The sun is setting as the door opens and two new guards come in, pushing some equipment. I've had a CT scan before, and that's what this big white thing on wheels looks like. Three more people follow them, all in white coats. Two are women, who ignore me, conversing quietly with their heads bent close. The third one is a tall, skinny guy with the kind of fake professional smile most doctors seem to have.

"Miss Blair, is it? How are you today?" He's almost shouting at me, speaking very slowly.

"I'm not doing well," I say very deliberately and rather loud, just like he did. "I've been kidnapped and I'm chained to a bed." I hold up my ankle as a visual aid. "I dinnae suppose you'd like to help me get out of here?"

He chuckles like I'd just said the cutest thing.

"We're here to do some tests," he continues. "It will be much easier on you if you cooperate." Thanks to him shouting at me, I can hear that he's speaking English with an American accent. Behind him, the two women are setting up the machine and

pulling out...

Shite. Are those restraints?

“What kind of tests are ye planning on, Doc?” I’m keeping as far away from them as the chain will allow, but the two guards are already heading for me.

“Simple blood tests, nothing to get hysterical about,” he says, all his false affability is gone. “Just sit down and we’ll get started.”

I ponder my options. The guards are going to hold me down if I dinnae do it. But the thought of just letting these feckers take my blood... “Why are ye needing my blood? This canna be standard hostage protocol.”

He nods irritably and the guards are on me, dragging me over to an armchair and slamming me onto it. “Are you going to require the restraints?” He’s leaning close to me and his breath smells like garlic and cigarettes.

“Are ye gonna tell me why you’re taking my blood?”

In seconds, they’ve strapped my arms and legs to the chair, even though I’m thrashing wildly like a hooked trout. One of the women, mouth tight with disapproval, fastens a band around my arm and finds a vein with ruthless efficiency, filling several tubes with my blood. I count twelve vials before I get nauseous and look away.

The eejit doctor’s blathering questions at me. “Do you have a regular cycle?”

“Are ye serious right now?”

“Are you up to date on all your immunizations?” He’s checking off the blood vials as

she hands them to him.

“Feck off.”

“Has anyone in your immediate family suffered heart or renal failure?”

“Feck right off and straight to hell.”

“It will be easier to have them pull her records,” he says to the woman taking my blood. She nods with a reproachful gaze at me, like I’m the problem here.

“One last thing, Miss Blair, and we’ll be done for now.”

For now?

The guards unstrap me and haul me toward the machine. I’m sweating and shaking, digging in my heels as they pull me closer.

The doctor makes a disgusted noise. “Her foot’s bleeding. Enough of this, just sedate her.”

“No!” I try to control my breath, my heart’s thundering in my chest. If they knock me out, they could do anything to me. Maybe they did something to me on the flight here. I canna let this happen. “I can do it. Just make these apes let go of me.”

The doctor’s even more annoyed when he realizes the chain I’m tethered to won’t reach the scanner. This gives me a moment as they search for the key to unlock it.

“A wee bit medieval for such a fancy place,” I stammer. “Are ye afraid of me, then? Thinking I’ll take ye all down?”

“Get on the scanning table and be quiet,” he snaps.

They strap me down again, my wrists, my chest and legs, and the worst, one around my head.

I can do this. This is nothing. I’ve done hard things before. I’m not gonna give them a single fucking whimper.

Sweat is pouring off me and I grit my teeth.

It’ll be over soon. Feck them. I’m not giving them shite.

It dinnae feel quick. It feels like forever, the rapping and knocking sounds inside the chamber are echoing through my poor ears with terrifying clarity. When the bed slides out with a jolt, a sob of relief escapes me.

“See? That wasn’t so bad, now was it?” The doctor’s fake smile and loud, condescending tone is back.

“Ye have a shite bedside manner and I’m questioning the medical college that ever gave ye a degree.” I’m a little proud of myself for getting that out in a calm tone and not the scream that wants to explode from me. Still. If I ever get a chance to punch this bastard in the throat, I’m taking it.

A guard holds my ankle and one of the women examines my heel. She’s facing me so I can read her lips. “She’s popped two stitches on this cut on her heel. I’ll steristrip the wound closed for now.”

For now?

Then, they take their torture chamber and get out, leaving me shaking and sweating

on the fluffy, beige duvet.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we learn the worst host you could possibly have is a Nazi.

Arabella...

I'm watching as blood bloom on the white gauze they'd slapped on my foot when the door opens yet again.

The woman who walks in should be strolling her way through Paris Fashion Week, not my neutral-colored prison. Tall and regal, she has blonde hair in a perfect French twist and glacial blue eyes, which flicker up and down my disheveled self with well-bred distaste.

Aye, I'm wearing a long skirt and a comfortable green sweater, but I'm a school teacher, for feck's sake. When I got dressed yesterday morning, I would have picked something more formal had I known I'd be kidnapped and taken for extensive blood work at some billionaire's compound. Slipping my hands in my pockets, I raise a brow as haughtily as I can.

"Miss Blair, I've been sent to bring you dinner." She looks physically pained to have to say the words.

My left hand closes over something sharp and I nearly yelp before remembering what it is, the obsidian arrowhead Meera gave me for protection. They must have missed it when they drugged me and brought me here. It's small, but it's sharp as hell, and right now, it's all I've got.

She's waiting impatiently and I shrug. "Aye?"

Eyes narrowed, she snaps, “Follow me.”

Sliding my boot back on over my wounded heel, I fight back a grimace and follow her.

My second trip through the mansion would be awe-inspiring if I dinnae hate everyone in this place. Magnificent, enormous modern paintings and sculptures line the soaring hallway as she leads me into a room that’s bigger than your average city block.

It’s all glass.

An enormous glass cube that extends out from the house and over the ocean below. Looking down at the clear floor beneath me and watching the waves crash against the rocks is disorienting, and I have to close my eyes for a second to keep my balance. Heads turn to watch my progress, women with smooth, botoxed faces and men with cold eyes and silk ties.

“Ah, there she is.” The words carry across the room, but I dinnae think it’s for my benefit, I think he just likes the sound of his own voice.

The man could fit any central casting call for Handsome, Blond and Expensively-Suited Scandinavian. He’s smiling, but it’s so unpleasant that I wish he wouldn’t. Gesturing with two fingers, he cocks his head like I should be scampering over to him. My supermodel guard nudges me and I reluctantly allow myself to be pushed forward.

“Come stand next to me, dear. Thank you for fetching her, Astrid.”

She nods politely, “My pleasure.”

The man is smiling, but his eyes are flat and blank, like a lizard’s. “My friends, allow

me to introduce Patient 1518.”

What the actual feck?

“She’s lovely, isn’t she?” Several of the men nod with approving noises. “She is the prime example of the new business model we’re integrating. Young, healthy, and according to her profile, an exceptional donor option. Our screening process is superior because not only do we find the perfect donor, we make certain their health is excellent and the client will receive a pristine genetic match.”

He nods to a large monitor on the wall filled with facts and figures and numbers with an insane number of zeros behind them.

Did my hearing get worse overnight? I could not have heard that correctly.

But I’m looking right at this bastard’s face and he’s even shaping his words well, precisely, like he’s looking forward to my response.

“In the past, even the most deserving of patients found their progress hindered after organ replacement because there was no true way to be certain the donor was the proper match. Basic determinations like blood and tissue type compatibility, physical size... These bare minimum standards don’t protect the patient against inferior genes, poor nutrition, and the lack of information about the donor’s background and breeding.” Anselm pauses for effect.

“We must protect the patient against dirty blood.”

There’s a low murmur of agreement from the crowd as I stare at them, aghast. They’re nodding like everything this bastard is saying is perfectly acceptable.

“We all agree, I’m sure, that the Third Reich were visionaries in many ways when it

came to their genetic research, and I intend to expand our findings based on theirs.”

He dinnae just say that. This freak just praised the Nazi’s sick eugenics research? I’m reading his lips, I’m close enough to hear him. I know what he said.

I just dinnae want to believe that anyone could say such a thing.

“A donor must be more than simply an acceptable organ,” he continues. “They must come from a superior bloodline, DNA that shows a family history of good health and strong intellect. Our research shows that the risk of organ rejection is less when these factors are considered as part of the determination for the right match.

“Of course, confidentiality is key for our clients who require the utmost privacy. The extensive pre-testing and questionnaires we’re using for the ‘research trials’ not only determine an exemplary organ match, but also candidates that no one will look for, should they go missing.” He puts a hand under my chin, lifting it and examining me like I’m a particularly interesting species of rodent. “A person of no consequence.”

“Feck off, ye smirking Nazi prick!” I slap his hand away and I see the monster hiding under his skin suit flare to life. His upper lip curls like a tiger’s, as if he’s desperate to take a bite out of my face.

Astrid, my model-perfect captor, gasps in shock, pushing me away from him. “I’m terribly sorry, Mr. Anselm!”

He pulls his pocket square from his suit jacket and wipes his hand, as if grabbing my chin has somehow soiled him. “Are you certain she’s a teacher?” He looks over to the man I recognize as the doctor who’d taken all my blood this afternoon. “She doesn’t seem to understand the difference between Germany and Denmark.”

“I know the difference, arsehole.” I cut in before the doctor can open his sniveling

mouth. “The German people are aware of their history and horrified by it. You’re a Nazi because you’re a eugenics freak and madly in love with the Third Reich. What the hell is wrong with ye? I’m sure when you’re finally arrested, the Danish government will be just as disgusted by ye as I am.”

“I’m hardly a Nazi, though their intentions were good.” He leans closer, carefully shaping his words again. “You really should keep your mouth closed, Subject 1518. I am fine with cutting out everything we want from you without anesthetic. I have heard the patient’s screams as we’ve harvested their organs, I imagine it is excruciatingly painful.” A convulsive shudder rips through me and he chuckles lightly, smoothing his tie.

“Astrid, put the girl out of our way, but keep her close.” He smiles at me, but I can see the monster inside him pacing again, waiting to be let out of its human cage.

Astrid may be a skinny bitch, but those nails of hers can really dig in. I let her pull me over to the corner of the room before she draws blood with her claws.

“Mr. Anselm, I am needed for that video meeting with the Pan-Pacific investors, I must absent myself.” She’s all things hospitable and demure, that one.

“Of course,” he says, “I’m sure you’re already prepared for the meeting.”

“I’ll instruct your security detail to attend to her.” She doesn’t bother to grace me with another look as she sashays out of the room.

Sitting in my chair in the corner, I look at every face in the crowd, trying to memorize them. I’m going to get out of here, and when I do, I’m going to make sure everyone in law enforcement knows who was at Anselm’s little Aryan Nation soiree tonight.

It takes maybe five minutes for my thoughts to skitter back to what he said to me,

what my brain refused the register at the time.

Patient 1518.

Young, healthy, an excellent donor option.

Oh, sweet Mother Mary and all the Saints. He's really going to harvest my organs.

Tucking my shaking hands under my thighs, I blink rapidly. I count to fifty slowly, then backwards to one. I've been through worse things than-

No.

Actually, this is the worst thing I can imagine.

It dinnae matter. I'm not going to lose it. Sucking in a deep breath, and then coughing it back out, I try to think. What would I tell my kids, my students right now? Keep sharp. Stay focused. There's always another way out.

I learned a long time ago not to depend on other people to save me. But right now, I'm hoping with every fiber of my being that Logan MacTavish is coming to rescue me.

Childishly, I cross my fingers and I hope.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we learn that Logan plans to kill a lot of people and he's totally cool with it.

Logan...

Anselm's helicopter pad and marina were busy all afternoon, dropping off expensively dressed guests. Part of me is torn. What if some of the guests are innocents? The other, more savage part argues that if they're mates with that son of a bitch, they're just as foul.

This fucking compound is going up in flames.

After I find Arabella.

My Nautica SeaScooter is a J-Class, and it can go deeper than the other underwater engines I've tested. Approaching the underwater cavern and breaching it is going to be the riskiest part of this plan for me. Anselm's got an impressively complicated security grid that sets off with any movement bigger than the average mackerel, so I have to dive deeper. Before the rest of MacTavishes wreak havoc on the island, I must get through the cavern first.

Anselm knows we're coming. Kidnapping Arabella was an engraved invitation. I intend to have my lass in hand before the rest of the family launches their assault. Knowing more about the man than I want to, I'm sure he'll be keeping her close.

Even this deep in the water, lights from above slice through the darkness, the compound's security is on high alert. Funny thing though; the guards will clog the most obvious entry points. No one ever looks at the maintenance tunnels, like the one

below the underwater port.

The tunnel plans we'd researched dinnae show all the steel plating that I'm encountering, and cutting through it is slowing me down. By the time I cut through the last piece and pull myself out of the water and onto the machinery deck, I'm behind by ten minutes. Stripping off my wetsuit between two of the huge, humming HVAC systems, I stash it and my scuba gear and pull on the uniform Anselm's guards wear. The prick loves seeing his men strutting around with guns, so no need to hide most of mine. Thoughtful of him.

Last touch, a pair of glasses that lets Xenia see everything in real time and with a much wider range of vision than I have. She sends her confirmation with a subtle click in my earpiece. The true beauty of these glasses is the disruption signal they sent to Anselm's facial recognition software. The likelihood of anyone recognizing me without it is slim.

He'll be on the second floor. The cavernous main room he uses for big meetings is there; an enormous glass box built into the side of the mansion, suspended over the water. The thought of how all that glass breaking will sound puts a grin on my face ye couldn't take off with a shovel.

Exchanging nods with an armed patrol, I climb the back staircase. Unfortunately, the three guards standing sentry at the front of the hall need to go. Stepping up behind the first man and snapping his neck is easy, they're too fecking confident on this level, thinking no one will get past the first line of defense.

Fecking eejits.

The other two guards require some finesse. The thud of their bodies hitting the floor after I shoot them both in the head isn't loud enough to alert anyone, but I waste another ninety seconds dragging the dead guards into an empty room and mopping up

the blood. Leaving any trace for the security cameras to find is a rookie mistake.

Even if I didn't know where Anselm was meeting his group of arseholes, the sound of the excitable chatter echoing off the glass walls of the room would lead me there.

Xenia whispers in my ear, "Anselm's got all the men in there for an after dinner drink. Jesus, that's such a bullshit Victorian tradition. What century does he live in? He's got Arabella seated about three meters behind him. She's not moving. Note her placement on your thermograph. There's about thirty of the investors there, she's the only woman."

"Any problem with me killing them all?" I murmur.

"It's hard to prove how many know about the organ trafficking, but it's a safe bet that everyone does," Xenia whispers. "This is looking more like an investor's pitch. However, he's got two members of the Folketing in there, the Danish Parliament? So you might want to just drive them out like cattle and let us take 'em into custody."

"You're taking all the fun out of this job for me, Xenia. Where are the female guests?"

"They're sitting on the terrace off of the dining room, having sherry or whatever the hell women drink at these things."

"What about security?" I murmur. "I'm counting fifteen between this floor and the first. Who's in the room with Anselm?"

"There are seven undercover guards that I can see, dressed in suits, and loaded up in bulletproof vests. You know he'd want to be always surrounded by his security without making his guests nervous." She lays out their locations in the room and I close my eyes, visualizing it.

“Got it.” I pull the safety on my Dragunov SVD.

“Hey Logan, hold up! Your brother’s team just breached the-”

I pivot and fire seven times.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we learn that people in glass rooms shouldn't throw bullets. I mean, shoot. People in glass rooms shouldn't shoot bullets.

Arabella...

Back when I was little, I could still hear the high whine of the mosquitos in summer when we were playing outside, the piercing sound warning me before they landed on my skin. It's been a long time since I've actually been able to hear something that high-pitched. But the shrill buzz as something passes by me sounds just the same. The guard standing just behind me flies backward and I just catch a spurt of blood out of the corner of my eye before I spin around.

He's lying on the ground, eyes staring blankly up at the translucent ceiling as blood drips from the hole in his forehead. Six more guards are dead in seconds, gore pooling on the pristine glass floor before the stunned guests begin shouting, scrambling away, glasses of brandy dropping in a spray of crystal as they shove against each other, trying to find cover.

A fist grips my ponytail and yanks my head back as I shriek. Anselm pulls me in front of him, wrapping an arm around my waist.

"Looks like the police caught up with ye already." I make some sort of mindless snorting noise, a cross between a giggle and a sob. I'm giddy with relief and it's ridiculous because he's probably going to kill me before I can be rescued.

Anselm's face is pushed against mine, his mouth right next to my ear. The rank scent of the vodka he's been drinking makes me gag. "I will shoot a hole in her head big

enough to put your fist through it if you don't come in with your hands up, MacTavish," he shouts. I freeze as he shoves the muzzle of his gun against my forehead.

At least it will be quick...

My shaking hand taps my leg and I remember it. The arrowhead in my pocket. It's not big, maybe half the size of the palm of my hand. That must be why they missed it when they took me. I know it's sharp as hell, I nearly nicked my thumb on it earlier. It takes agonizing seconds to slip my hand into my pockets, fingers curling around the stone.

"MacTavish, you have five seconds to surrender before I shoot the girl." Anselm must be part lizard. He sounds eerily calm.

Where can I stab him before he shoots me?

Like an avenging angel, in comes Logan MacTavish, mockingly holding his rifle up and setting it on a table with exaggerated care. Still, the men around him are trying to back away, bright enough to know that even unarmed, this man is dangerous.

"A human shield, a wee bit cowardly, dinnae ye think, Anselm? I've heard you're a huge fecking sharg, but to see it..." Logan shakes his head as if he's genuinely disappointed.

To our left, a gout of flame shoots up, nearly as high as this glass cage suspended over the ocean, and I hear something that sounds like low thunder in a storm. It must be huge, though, because the floor rocks under our feet.

"You are insignificant," Anselm says sharply. The gun is no longer pressed against my forehead and he's firing at Logan. Screaming, I whirl and slash my little weapon,

my arrowhead, against his hand holding the gun, the momentum sending the razor sharp stone across his neck and slicing through the side of his face.

Now he's screaming, his hand pressed against the blood spurting from his neck, his eyes wide and uncomprehending that anything could hurt him . The bastard manages to keep hold of the gun and he fires again, trying to aim it at me and hitting a guest in the shoulder as he swings his arm wildly.

I should be brave. I should cut him again, make him drop the gun but my arrowhead is gone, dropped from my nerveless fingers and I'm staring at the river of gore spurting from his throat like a fecking eejit, frozen in place. There's three percussive booms, three more bullets shot from his gun but none of them hit me and then I realize they're not from Anselm's gun, they're from Logan's.

He leaps over a table, knocking two screaming guests aside as he lunges for me, pulling me away from Anselm's body, now sprawled face-down on the glass floor.

There's a spray of blood across his face and bizarrely, it makes his hazel eyes even brighter.

"I got ye, lass."

Logan...

She's pale as a ghost and no surprise because every time I'm around her, I'm killing someone.

Getting my arm under her arse, I scoop her up and say, "Close your eyes now. Dinnae look."

She doesn't close her eyes. She watches as I spray the bleating, howling billionaires

with bullets as I race for the door. There's another explosion, likely Kai's group breaching the front of the mansion and the first crack travels jaggedly through the insanely thick glass wall facing the ocean. I shoot until I'm out of bullets and then I pull my modified Mac-10 from my shoulder holster and fire again, this time at the floor.

"What are you doing?" Arabella gasps, her hands gripping my shirt.

"Get behind me and cover your ears," I shout to make sure she hears me. Clever thing, she does what I ask immediately, no questions, no shrieking.

I place six more explosive rounds into the floor, watching the cracks spider webbing madly through the glass and then two more on either side of the crack buckling the front wall. The huge room shudders, roaring like a fallen beast and then the floor drops loose, taking what's left of the screaming men with it.

Wrapping my arm around Arabella's waist, I take three giant steps back. One more explosive round, right in the center where the wall connects to the roof... It sounds like the shrill screams of a thousand damned souls as the wall falls in three enormous chunks, slamming against the rocks below.

The entire hallway buckles and heaves as the last two walls tear free from the house. One enormous sheet of glass manages to hold its form and cartwheels its way down the front of the mansion, tearing chunks from the stone and steel as it goes. The spray of glass shooting upward is nearly high enough to shoot into the hallway.

It's time to go.

Arabella's safety comes first. With a last, gleeful look, I squeeze her waist.

"We need to run, sweetheart."

Sharg - Scottish slang for a wimp or a coward

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is Yacht Regret and moments of What In The Hell Just Happened?

Logan...

“Did ye really have to blow up all three of them?”

Michael is looking all sorrowful as he watches the remains of Anselm’s yachts burn down to the waterline in the marina.

“I did warn ye I’d be using explosives,” I point out reasonably. “I dinnae want to risk anyone getting off the island.”

“Aye, but the middle one, the Adamas V, that was a beautiful thing. We could have re-outfitted her with a crew of twenty and sent her down to Naples with the-”

“Sorry lads, but we’re done here.” Da checks his G-Shock wristwatch. “Time for us to go. I’ve notified a contact in the DSIS that they should be moving in to collect all the bits and pieces. So they’ll likely be here within the next ten minutes. On the boat with ye.”

I pat Michael’s shoulder as I take Arabella’s hand. “You’ll just have to have your erotic fantasies about the Adamas V on your own time.”

“Feck off,” he says, but not like he really means it.

Arabella’s been silent this entire time. Her face is still pale and her pretty brown eyes are huge, as if she canna accept what she’s seeing.

“Come now, sweetheart,” I squeeze her to make sure she looks up at me. “Let’s get ye off this rock, aye?”

“Oh... That would be good,” she says blankly, as I hustle her around shattered stone and mountains of glass. Kai and another one of our men are keeping watch at the boat, gun up and sweeping the area as I help Arabella in. The black jetboat is a good one for operations like these, low to the water to avoid radar and equipped with an engine big enough to power a 747. I tuck her into a covered corner to keep her away from the ocean spray and we’re off and away from the smoldering ruins, shouting our goodbyes to the blazing compound and “Feck ye right up the arse!” as we tear across the water.

“Did everyone die?”

It’s the first thing Arabella’s said to me since we came ashore and settled into one of the safe houses. There’s four set closely together in the outskirts of Dragør, a little fishing village just outside of Copenhagen.

She’s sitting very properly with her knees together and hands clutching a cup of coffee with a wee bit of whisky added in. Some of the color’s returned to her cheeks and that concerningly wide-eyed stare is gone.

“Ye mean in Anselm’s compound?” I’m itching to get the lass into a hot shower and some proper clothes, but I’m thinking she’s not ready to move just yet.

“Aye.” She takes a slow, careful sip of her drink. “Was the waitstaff, all the guests, were they all... ye know, were they all evil?”

Goddamn, I adore this woman.

“Danish Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, their version of MI6, is combing through

what's left of Anselm's compound. Most of the female guests were separated after dinner, and they likely survived." Tossing back two fingers of whisky, I try to push down my fury. "I promise ye, sweetheart. Anyone who worked for that piece of shite knew exactly what he was doing."

She nods, looking down at her cup. "I have a million questions. Will ye be answering them?"

"Aye, of course," I say gently. "Ye were minding your own business, tried to save my life and ended up in a firefight in Denmark."

"Dinnae ye forget the whole bit with the eugenics-obsessed, organ-stealing Nazi bastard and may he burn in hell," she adds, eyes narrowed. "I canna be sorry he's dead. Though ye scared me half to death when he shot ye. I thought you'd come all that way just to be gunned down."

I tapped my chest, ignoring the two bullet holes in my tactical jacket. "Kevlar vest. It's a new mesh compound our lab has been working on. Lighter weight, moves with the body."

"Good to know. I... still killed him, though. I killed a person."

Michael and three of our loudest arseholes come barreling in, shouting and laughing as she rubs her forehead.

"Shut it!" I shout. They halt, looking all startled.

"Sorry," Michael says, "just blowing off the usual post-mission steam but I'm thinking we can do that next door, aye, lads?"

They tuck a few bottles of whisky under their arms as they leave, but I dinnae mind. I

already hid the good stuff in my room. I want to hold her hands, but she's gripping that coffee mug like a life preserver and I dinnae know if she wants me to touch her right now.

"Ye saved my life. Again. He might have gotten a bullet in my skull before I reached ye. Him bleeding and pinwheeling all over the place gave me the time to pull my gun and shoot him. My bullets killed him. Your... what the hell was that?"

She gives a weak chuckle. "An obsidian arrowhead for protection and clearing negative energies. My friend Meera gave it to me."

I remind myself to send this Meera a million pounds when we get back.

"Remember that ye saved me by cutting that bastard up good. But his death is on me, understand? I know there's questions to be answered, sweetheart. But let's get a shower and a good meal in ye first, aye?"

She nods gratefully. "That would be nice."

Our big talk dinnae come for a while yet.

It's sunrise by the time Arabella's showered and Da and Kai share a meal with us, telling her a bit about the mission.

"Ye came all that way for me?" She's incredulous.

"Ye saved my son," Da says. "I owe ye a debt I canna repay. But if it makes ye feel better, we took away a huge amount of data about Anselm's organ-trafficking business model." He says the last two words with disgust.

"He may be dead," adds Kai, "but his network is huge and we're thinking the major

players are already battling to take over the business.”

“Ye have to stop them.” Arabella’s beautiful when she’s furious, and right now? She’s incandescent, her full lips tight and furious and all that glossy black hair tumbling over her shoulders. She’s wearing a pair of my sweatpants and a t-shirt borrowed from Xenia. I want to take her into my room, peel those pants off her and kiss my way up the thin skin of her inner thighs until I put my mouth on her pink little-

Fecking hell. I push my erection down, crossing my legs before she notices.

“We will,” I manage to sound like a normal human being and not a giant, raging erection with all the blood drained into the lower half of my body. “I promise ye that. Why dinnae ye get some sleep, Bella? We’ll have that talk when ye wake up.”

She looks like she wants to argue, but the minute she opens her mouth to argue, a giant yawn takes over. “I guess you’re right.” She blushes.

Showing her to the room next to mine, I pause in the doorway. “Let me know if ye need extra blankets, or...” Feck, I’m floundering here like a teenage boy.

“Thank ye,” she nods, trying to smile.

“Get some rest.” I turn to leave.

“Logan?”

I look back. The sun’s lighting up her eyes, they’re a deep brown, but the center of her iris around the pupil is golden, I’d not seen that before. Beautiful. “Aye?”

“Are we...” she pushes back her hair, searching for the words. “Are we safe, then?”

Just like that? After... well, after everything?"

Touching her is a mistake, but my hand rises to cup her cheek anyway. "I will always keep ye safe, sweetheart. Ye have my word."

Time to get my horny arse out of there before I lose what's left of my self-control, and I stride out with her little, "Good night..." following me.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there are drinking games and most enthusiastic consent.

Arabella...

When I wake up, the house seems to be quiet. Venturing out of my room and into the big main space, Logan's the only one there, chopping something by the stove. His hair is wet from the shower and he pulls on a shirt as he spots me, an action I note with some regret. His gorgeous, broad shoulders flex and pull with muscle and I want to spend a few hours asking about the wolf tattoo across his back, drawn so vividly that it looks like it's snarling as his muscles flex.

It's not right that one man should be so unreasonably attractive.

"Good morning! Well, evening I guess." He smiles at me, leading me out onto the deck that overlooks the water. There's a few little tables and chairs scattered over the flagstone. "Are ye hungry?"

"It smells wonderful. Where is everyone?"

"Analyzing the data we retrieved. I'll have to introduce ye to Xenia later, she's our tech queen and the very definition of evil genius."

Chuckling politely, I'm irritated by a stab of something in my gut. I have no business feeling jealous of a brilliant woman that Logan seems to admire so much.

Are they dating?

I am an eejit.

As he's plating the food, I notice a bandage on his left hand. "You got hurt! Please tell me that's not a bullet wound."

Logan glances at the bandage and then at me. "Not a bullet wound." His smile is a little strange. Since he dinnae seem inclined to offer any more information, I let it go.

He pulls out a chair for me before bringing our dinner out. As we eat, the sun sends its last rays of red and orange across the water.

"Oh, my god this is good," I moan, devouring my open-faced sandwich. It's a thick bread covered with shrimp and capers and some kind of tasty veggie spread.

"It's called smørrebrød," he says, wolfing down one that looks like it's topped with smoked salmon. "The rye bread makes everything taste grand."

He's got a bottle next to him, a Glengoyne and if my catering knowledge is correct, this is a fifteen-year single malt. "Care to share that fine bottle of whisky?"

Logan raises a brow. "A wee bit of a lass like you, handling the hard stuff?"

The audacity of this man.

"Did ye just give me the, 'Ach, lass, you're too delicate a flower to drink with the manly likes of me?'"

Logan gives me an impertinent grin, bordering on smug and also bordering on me wanting to wallop him across the back of the head with that expensive bottle of Glengoyne.

“It’s science, sweetheart. I outweigh ye by seven stones, most of it muscle. So, aye, I can outdrink ye.”

Slinging my arm across the back of my chair, I eye him thoughtfully. The arrogant bampot already made his way through about an eighth of the bottle. “Looks to me like ye already got yourself a handicap, like in golf, ye know?” I push my glass toward him. “Let’s start from here.”

How can a man be such an arrogant prick and yet so hot that I’m prepared to forgive him for it? “Ye can tap out at any time, Bella, no judgement from here.” He winks, pouring us each two fingers.

“Here’s to drinking ye under the table,” I toast, clinking my glass with his.

Ah, that’s good. The first swallow is wonderful, smooth, and full-bodied. I can never afford an expensive whisky such as this for myself, but every now and then I’m treated to a fancy drink. I taste the lovely notes of vanilla and oak, and something a bit fruity. Running the glass under my nose, I close my eyes and smile. It’s smoky, likely from the use of peat in drying the barley and it even smells warming, just like how it feels going down.

Logan chuckles and drinks half his glass in one go. I watch the strong muscles in his throat work as he swallows and there’s a... tingling. Nothing overwhelming, just me shifting a bit in my seat, wondering what his lips would taste like.

Enough of that! I scold myself.

By our third drink, the bottle’s running low and Logan is describing in explicit detail how to rig a detonator with a wire scavenged from an extension cord and the foil from a gum wrapper.

And it is fecking fascinating.

“So, how did ye determine safe distance from the blast zone?”

“In that case, I was definitely not far enough,” he admitted, filling our glasses. “Broke my shoulder on that go-round but ye should have seen it, the explosion shot out horizontally and it flattened trees around it for half a kilometer.” His grin is rapturous and I can visualize the intensity of it; how powerful it must have been to see what he could do with so little at his disposal.

“I must admit, when I saw that flame shoot up from the ground clear to that glass room back at Anselm’s compound, it was... shite. It was thrilling,” I admit. “I dinnae know if it meant help was coming but watching it roar up to the sky was magnificent.”

“I do believe you’re a bit of a pyromaniac,” he says approvingly. “Now it’s time for ye to confess, sweetheart. You’re no lightweight.” His long, tattooed fingers turn his glass in circles on the wet table as he watches me. “Did ye grow up drinking the good stuff?”

“Hardly,” I laugh, ruining my drinking cred by hiccupping a bit. “At Uni, my boyfriend Ted loved throwing parties. I suspect he might have been single-handedly responsible for the high rate of alcohol poisoning on campus.”

“You’re not together now,” he says with complete certainty. Of course, he would know that. With his clan’s business, I’m certain he can get all kinds of background information on his targets.

Is that what I am, a target? I brush the thought away.

“Well...” This time I pour, handing him his glass. “No. When the party life got too

much for me, too bright, too disorienting, too much of everything, he bowed out. He said being with me was too much work.”

“Ye want me to kill him?” Logan offers. He looks completely serious about it, which is unsettling.

“No, ye ridiculous creature! Ted’s punishment is being him for the rest of his life, which should be shortened considerably by the time the cirrhosis hits. No one’s liver can take a beating like that, not even a proper Scot’s.”

He chuckles a bit, I feel the vibration more than hear it, his knees are pressed against mine now and he’s slouching a bit in his chair. The lanterns around us make a soft light, flickering a bit as a breeze comes across the deck. The moment feels heavier.

“Can I propose something?”

“Aye?” I finish my glass.

“Before we open the second bottle and crown the winner of this competition, I would like to ask ye for something.”

He looks positively devilish in the shadows, his smile flashing white in his beard.

“What are ye asking me for, Logan?”

“Your most enthusiastic consent.”

I howl with laughter, slapping the table and spilling a bit of that very expensive whisky. “You’re a bold one, thinking we’re headed in that direction.” My laughter dies as he takes a drink, hazel eyes narrowed. He never bothered to button the white shirt he pulled on after his shower, the sleeves are rolled up and his forearms thick

with muscle.

Logan MacTavish is a beautiful specimen of the male species. And a dangerous one, especially to what's left of my common sense. He shifts in his seat and my mouth grows dry as I look at his sculpted chest, he has just enough dark hair to make me want to see where it leads to. He smells like good cologne, expensive liquor and bad decisions.

"If, and I mean if we ended up in such a situation," I say haughtily, "ye would have my consent."

He leans forward, bracing his elbows on the table. "I would require your most enthusiastic consent, Arabella."

It's late. I'm tipsy and heading rapidly toward blootered. All my sensible notions are gone and there's nothing but the two of us in the intimate pool of light from the lanterns.

Lifting my glass, I give him a devilish smile of my own. "My very most enthusiastic consent."

Clicking his glass to mine, Logan gave me his rakish pirate grin and we both drank.

Blootered - Scottish slang for extremely drunk

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we learn about Drunk Logic and just how ill-advised that can be.

Arabella...

Ach. Everything hurts so much.

Turning my head, I groan at the lightning flash of pain that shoots through what's left of my brain. I'm almost ready to embrace the sweet release of death versus enduring another moment of the thousand tiny heavy metal drummers trying to hammer their way out of my skull.

Oh, god. My breath. It smells like a hamster crawled in there and chose my tongue as its final resting place.

Wait.

Where the hell am I?

The sheets are a luxuriously soft ivory, and there's so many pillows and a silky feather comforter. It's a hotel room. A high-end one with enormous, floor to ceiling windows which are - thank the good Lord - covered in blackout curtains.

I stretch my foot experimentally and let out a scream when I touch something warm.

A leg. A blazingly hot, thick, hairy leg.

"Ah feck lass," a deep, masculine voice groans. "No screaming, aye? I already got

someone screaming in my head right now and they dinnae need company.”

“What is happening?” I wheeze, trying to sit up and failing utterly. I’m horrified to find that I’m naked under this nice, soft sheet and the voice belongs to...

Logan fucking MacTavish.

He’s naked, too. No sheet covering what is an alarmingly large dick that’s growing harder by the second and... Is that a piercing? A silver curved barbell at the head of his cock and the flesh around it is thick and an angry red.

“Sorry, sweetheart,” he groans, rubbing his eyes. “Ye might need to give me a minute. He’s ready but I’m needing some ibuprofen.”

“Oh, my god!” I drag the sheet with me as I scramble away. “Why are we in this bed? Why are we naked?” A glint of light from the low bedside table lamp reflects off the gigantic fucking diamond weighing down my left hand.

“Why am I wearing a wedding ring?”

“There now, ye will feel better in a moment, let it out.”

“Oh, please go away,” I moan, “this is so humiliating.” Logan’s holding my hair back as I clutch the toilet in the pristine, searingly white bathroom.

He gently wipes my face with a warm washcloth and then puts a cold one on the back of my neck, it feels so good against my horribly sweaty skin. “Try to relax, aye? I got ye.”

“Why...” I rest my head on my arm, “why aren’t ye sick? This is... oh, god!”

It's another ten minutes or so before I can wash my face and brush my teeth and Logan has to hold me up while I do it. I can still smell the fucking whisky oozing out of my pores. Getting me back into bed, he settles some pillows behind me and hands me a glass of water and three ibuprofens.

"Please leave me here to die of shame," I groan.

Even hungover to the point that my blood is 50% alcohol, I can still see that other than his bloodshot eyes, he looks fine. He's pulled on a pair of sleep pants emblazoned with the hotel's logo and he stretches his enormously muscled arms until his joints creak.

"I canna do that." He pulls over a chair and sits next to the bed, examining me with a slight smile. "I believe that's called spousal abandonment."

"How did this happen? We were playing a drinking game with that bottle of Glengoyne and..." I frown, trying to put the broken pieces of my memory back together like a particularly irksome jigsaw puzzle. I pull the hotel robe around me more closely. "I remember the bit about the enthusiastic consent-"

"Most enthusiastic consent," he interrupts.

"But how did we get from there to here?" I hold my left hand up like an accusing visual aid.

"Well, now my feelings are hurt, Mrs. MacTavish. Ye remember the drinking game but not our wedding vows?" He crosses his arms over his thickly muscled chest and impossibly, the sight of his gorgeously sculpted pectorals is making at least part of me - the lower half - sit up and take notice.

"How could we possibly get married?" I ask peevishly, "We're in Denmark, not Las

Vegas!”

“Denmark is sometimes called the Las Vegas of Europe. Ye dinnae have to be a citizen or even stay in the country longer than a day or two. Ye just file the papers and a civil registrar or a priest from the Danish People’s Church can marry ye.”

“It canna be that easy,” I snap, “and when did we decide this was a good idea?”

My disordered memory chooses that moment to reform just enough to remember a room with brightly colored murals and gilded pillars... and an amused, sleepy looking man saying, “I kan nu dele jeres første kys som mand og kone...”

“What did the guy say at the end?”

Logan rubs the back of his head, not looking at all like this is an appalling thing. “He said, ye may now share your first kiss as husband and wife.”

“Ye speak Danish, too?”

“Enough to know the registrar was giving us a proper ceremony.”

“Okay...” My brain feels like it’s rattling around my skull and coherent thought is almost an unbearable challenge. “But how did we go from getting shite-faced to getting married?”

“We were talking about the enthusiastic consent thing. I was kissing ye. Ye had my shirt off and then...”

“And then what?” I ask hoarsely.

He tilts his head and gives me the filthiest possible grin. “We decided to do it right by

getting married first. I thought it would be dirtier if we did it as husband and wife-

“Why would it be dirtier?”

“I canna tell ye what the feck we were thinking but it seemed to make sense last night. Ye know how Drunk Logic works. I called our contact in the DSIS - he owes me a favor, after all - and he called up a registrar and expedited our paperwork.”

“Expedited our paperwork?” I say skeptically.

“It usually takes a week or so.” He shrugs. “But we were in a hurry, so...”

“This canna be happening. You- I- no. This is ridiculous. This is mad behavior! We canna be married!” I’m edging across the bed and contemplating making a break for it. The door to our suite is a fair distance but I could sprint it...

“Hey now, hold on, sweetheart.” He grabs my ankle, pulling me back. “You’re in a state. Give it a minute.”

It’s then that I realize how very sore I am. My center’s throbbing, not in an unbearable way, but clearly indicating my lady bits have seen some considerable action recently.

“We had sex.” I bury my face in my hands.

“Three times,” he supplies helpfully. “On the couch in the main room. This bed. The shower. Almost in the hot tub on the balcony but ye were falling asleep and I was concerned about ye drowning so...” He runs his big toe along my leg and I slap it away.

Ah hell. I can remember it now. Most of it, anyway. Ripping at each other’s clothes

with a satisfying level of urgency and the feel of him inside me, huge and hard, angling his hips and stroking that piercing against my G spot. Me bouncing up and down on him and rubbing my clitoris against...

“Ye have two piercings.”

“Aye.” He grins and leans closer. “Top of my cock and one at the base. Ye seemed very fond of that one when you were grinding that perky little clit of yours over it.”

“That’s enough of that, thank ye. This ring, this diamond, it’s bigger than my head! Where did ye find a ring at... when did we get married?”

“Around two am, I think.” He ruffles his hair and unfairly, it looks even better. “I had a jeweler meet us at the city hall with a few choices.” He holds up his left hand, showing off a thick ebony band. “Ye picked this one for me, ye said it was rugged and manly, like me.”

“This is in no way making me feel better,” I moan. “What do we do now?”

“What do ye mean?”

“Well... I mean...” I’m floundering here. “How do we reverse this?”

Logan frowns. “Why would we do that?”

“Because we met four days ago when someone tried to kill ye and then someone tried to kill me and then there was kidnapping and someone tried to kill both of us and then a rescue, ye remember that? Not exactly a strong foundation for a marriage!”

He chuckles and it’s unsettling. “I have to tell ye, sweetheart, our foundation’s a lot more sound than some of the MacTavish unions, but that’s talk for another time.”

Picking up my limp hand, he squeezes it gently. “Take this first step with me, aye? Be with me. Anselm’s people are still out there. One strike isn’t enough to take them all out, they’re like roaches. I’ll keep ye safe.” A look of self-loathing crosses his face. “I’ll keep ye safe from now on . No more fuckups.”

“Until we’re sure they’re not coming back for revenge?”

Something flashes in his eyes for a moment. Disappointment? Determination? “I ordered some clothes for ye, along with breakfast. It should be here soon. Go take a shower, aye?” That filthy grin is back. “I can join ye, if ye like. Wash your hair...” His gaze is dropping lower and I scramble ungracefully off the bed.

“I’m going to need a moment.”

By the time I emerge from the shower, I feel close to 75% human again. There’s an outfit laid out on the bed, soft leggings and a pink cashmere sweater that feels wonderful against my skin. The suite is a two-story loft with the bedroom overlooking the living area and those enormous windows. Logan is seated on the balcony in the sunshine, drinking coffee and watching something on his phone.

“How do ye feel, Mrs. MacTavish?” He doesn’t miss my flinch.

“Still trying to adjust to this new reality,” I admit. “And I haven’t agreed to the name change. Maybe you could be Mr. Blair.”

The only thing I can manage to keep down is some dry toast and tea, but he’s plowing through an assortment of croissants, fruit, scrambled eggs and ham. The hotel is a massive thing, with Moorish architecture and a spectacular view of downtown Copenhagen. We’re a few blocks away from the water and I can see the rows of tall, colorful houses lining the bank.

“Your family...” Is there a polite way to ask your new husband if he’s from a crime family? Because the easy access to enormous weapons and an endless supply of hard-faced soldiers and relative ease of murdering people seems to indicate that. “You’re Mafia, aren’t ye?”

Brilliant, Arabella. Just blurt that right out there.

He puts down his fork and gives me his full attention. “Aye.”

“You’re not like-”

“Anselm?” His jaw tightens for a moment. “Victor Anselm loved pretending that he was a businessman who specialized in pharmaceutical research and the maritime industry. He got his first billion from his three luxury cruise lines before branching off into Bitcoin fraud, developing deadly viruses and stealing the research of others and pushing his shite out first.

“That’s how we got tangled up with him in the first place. I retrieved some crucial medical research he’d stolen from our pharmaceutical division. I also took several other medical patents and enough information to feck with his financial fraud. It was quite the setback for the bastard.”

“Good.” There’s a savage satisfaction behind the word. I remember being in that CT scanner. How terrified I was, knowing I was going to be cut up into sellable bits and pieces. “So, that’s why he was targeting you specifically?”

“Aye. He thought it would send a message to my clan, the fecking eejit. But once you were involved...” He shook his head. “I should have been there sooner. I should have kept you from being hurt.”

The rank, coppery taste of that man’s blood in my mouth is still painfully vivid, his

nasty breath and the things he and his horrible buddy called me. “Ye did save me. Twice, in fact.”

“Ye never should have been taken.” He’s clenching his fists, his jaw tight with fury, and I squint at the side of his hand.

“Oh, your bandage is gone.” I thought he’d been cut or something during the rescue, but it’s a tattoo; four lines with a fifth crossed over them. “Ye got that tattoo yesterday? Is it a MacTavish thing?”

Logan looks down at the tattoo and his fury seems to drain away. “It’s a me thing.” Before I can ask any more questions, he rises from the table. “If you’re finished, we should get out of here.”

Doing a quick sweep through the suite before we leave, I spot something white, crumpled fabric on the sofa. “What is this?” Holding it up, my face goes up in flames. It’s a dress, ripped down the middle like it was literally torn off. “Oh, sweet Baby Jesus, was I wearing this?”

“Well, not for long.”

He chuckles as I hastily stuff the ruined dress in the garment bag that my new clothes were delivered in. I choose not to think about why my nipples are suddenly insanely hard.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there are so many MacTavishes

Logan...

I think my bonnie new wife handled the morning rather well.

By the time we boarded the MacTavish jet and headed for home, everyone on board had already heard about our marriage. My family are all terrible gossips.

Arabella is looking around, wide-eyed, as I bring her on board, so she jumps a little when our pilot nods her head and smiles. "Welcome aboard, Mrs. MacTavish, and congratulations on your marriage."

"Please call me Arabella," she says instantly, "It's nice to meet ye, Captain...?"

"Ah, my apologies, I'm Captain Elizabeth MacTavish."

"Of course, ye are... I mean, oh, that's... there's a lot of ye then." Arabella smiles uncomfortably, but it turns genuine when Elizabeth laughs and squeezes her hand.

"Married into the family, like you."

"Our captain here comes from a highly decorated career in the Royal Air Force," Da says proudly. "There's no better pilot in our fleet."

"Your fleet?" My bride's looking a little overwhelmed.

Elizabeth leans in, speaking precisely and I'm appreciating her thoughtfulness. "I think you will find that the female relatives will be very happy to tell you all about the clan and its eccentricities. Of which there are many."

"That's enough of that," I say hastily. "We should find our seats." I take Arabella's hand and lead her down the aisle before our pilot can prime her with even more questions that will be difficult for me to answer. There's a smaller seating area near the back of the main cabin with two seats facing another pair and a low table between them. "It's a wee bit quieter here. Though with the MacTavish clan, 'quiet' is a mighty subjective thing."

She sits down, looking all stiff and uncomfortable. It's been a lot, I know, and things are only going to get more complicated once my sister and cousins get involved. She's going to need this flight to settle herself.

I kiss her hand and smooth a blanket over her lap before seating myself next to her. "It can get cold on these private jets. Have ye flown before? I mean, when you weren't being kidnapped?"

"Flying here to Denmark was my first, but since they knocked me out when they took me from the Wallace Academy, it's not one I remember," she says wryly. "I woke up in a helicopter as it was landing in Anselm's compound. This is, apparently, my week for many firsts."

"I intend to make the kidnapping a once-off, but I'm happy to recreate some of the other firsts whenever ye like, such as getting married."

Leaning away from me, she raises a haughty brow. "I think ye can only do the getting married thing once per couple."

Kai and Da join us, taking the seats across from ours. "Not in this family," Da says.

He distracts her as the jet takes off with the story of my Uncle Cameron and Aunt Morana, who have renewed their vows at least a dozen times all over the world. I note that he glosses over the fact that Cameron kidnapped Morana from her intended marriage in Moscow, characterizing it more as a ‘rescue.’

My clan is big on revisionist history.

When the two of them eventually wander off to play poker with some of the team, Arabella relaxes another fraction, looking out the window. “It’s so beautiful up here.” Resting her head against the seat, she smiles when I produce a pillow for her. “You’re being very attentive, Mr. MacTavish. Afraid I’ll lose my nerve and run screaming the second we land?”

“Nah. I’ve got longer legs, Mrs. MacTavish. I’ll just chase ye down.”

Pursing her lips, she says, “I’m not sure about the last name. We could go by MacTavish-Blair.”

“As long as you’re wearing my ring, I dinnae care about the details.”

“Really?” Turning in her seat, my bride eyes me suspiciously. “Ye really dinnae care about something like that? Ye being a big, bad MacTavish?”

“I know who I am.” I take her hand, holding her ring up to eye level. “And this is part of who I am now, being your husband. It’s a thing we take seriously in this clan. So, no. The name is less important than the meaning.”

“This is a lot, Logan,” she says quietly. “A towering, overwhelming metric tonne of things to process.”

“Aye.” I kiss her ring, then each knuckle, then the palm of her hand. “Try to get some

sleep. You're still recovering from drinking your body weight in alcohol." My bride's complexion is turning a noticeable shade of green just from the mention of it. Pulling the shade on the window shut, I kiss her forehead. "Get some rest."

Kai looks up from the poker game and grins as I amble over. "Ye know, brother, even in the historical immediacy of MacTavish weddings, this one was off the charts."

I point a finger at him and my Da. "Neither of ye have a word to say about it. Da, ye holding Mum down on the couch while poor Father Barclay married ye- aye, Uncle Lachlan told me the whole story."

"Of course he did," Da muttered.

"And dragging Luna to the Registrar's office after plucking her off Hell Island, brother? Not your most romantic moment." I'm enjoying Kai's look of irritation until he fires back.

"At least we were sober. And I dinnae have a bevy of women I had to pay off with gifts and jewelry to get 'em to go away. I'm thinking you'll have a lot of explaining to do once all the girls find out you're married and ye take your new bride out in public." Kai smiles happily, obviously picturing it.

"Does Arabella know marriage in the MacTavish clan is for life?" Da asks quietly, glancing over at her sleeping form.

"Again, I'm not the first MacTavish who started off with a wife that thought it was a temporary measure." Rubbing my forehead, I try to control my temper. "And they've all turned out to be happy matches. Ours will be, too."

Arabella's lashes are a thick fan against her cheekbones; her skin is flushed faintly pink as she sleeps. She's curled up against that cashmere blanket like a kitten and I've

never been so jealous of a piece of fabric before.

“I have to be honest,” Michael grins, finishing his drink, “when I heard about your midnight trip to the registrar’s, I swear I heard the clip-clopping of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. You’re the last one of us I pictured settling down.”

“Old man, ye need to trick some innocent creature who has not met ye before and get her to marry ye before she realizes you’re about to become the next Chieftain of the MacTavish Clan.”

“I’m not old,” Michael scowls, “I’m thirty-three, ye arse.”

The truth is, Michael, the oldest son of our Chieftain Uncle Cormac, has been pretending for years that he’s not pining for Sophie. She’s the daughter of his family’s housekeeper and currently away at Uni. It seems mean-spirited to give him shite about it.

Maybe I’ll save that for the next time he tries to take the piss with me.

“Does Mum know yet?” I ask, knowing the news likely spread like wildfire through the clan before I even ravished my bride after the ceremony. Groaning silently, I try to will my unmanageable cock back down. Sporting a stonner in front of my father is unacceptable, even for me.

“Aye, of course.” His blue eyes are twinkling and I can tell he’s fighting a grin. “She’s wanting a face to face meeting as soon as possible.”

“Of course she is,” I groan.

“I was thinking that we could hire an instructor for weekly classes in sign language,” Kai offers.

“It’s a grand idea,” Da agrees. “Do ye know...” his voice drops to a murmur, “how long Arabella has before her hearing is completely gone?”

“Unlike my brother here, I dinnae want to paw through her private medical records. I’ll wait for her to tell me. But the sign language lessons are... thank ye. I appreciate ye wanting to be part of it.”

Kai shrugs. “She’s one of us. Of course we do.”

This is it.

This is why all the other infuriating, exhausting, ridiculous shite my family can come up with means nothing in the face of family loyalty. They’ve accepted Arabella in without a second’s hesitation; the same way we’ve welcomed every shell-shocked MacTavish bride.

My wife will find that her new family makes putting up with all my reckless, impulsive actions more than worth it.

Take the piss - UK slang for intentionally annoying someone.

Stonner - Scottish slang for an erection.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Logan is a high-handed bastard.

Arabella...

I already know my new husband is reckless and impulsive. Deadly. Loves his explosives. Spectacular in bed, at least from the bits and pieces my hungover brain has managed to patch together.

I'm adding high-handed to the list.

"Excuse me?"

Logan is rapidly texting someone as we lounge in the back of the black SUV, one of several that were lined up at the private airfield where we landed. Apparently, the MacTavishes dinnae bother with public transport of any kind.

"Ye moved my things without asking me? That's outrageous! That's disrespectful!"

He has the nerve to look mildly surprised at my anger. "Well... not everything," he allows. "I sent one of our female guards to pack your clothes. I'm not letting any man go through your underwear drawer." He winks and I swear I just want to smack that grin off his face. "But just the essentials for now, aye? Ye can decide how you want to handle the rest."

Looking out the window, I can see we're nowhere near downtown Glasgow and my apartment. The SUV is heading toward Blythwood Hill, the most expensive real estate in the city.

“Why aren’t ye taking me home?”

“I am,” he says as if this is the most logical thing in the world, “our home.”

The car stops at a red light and I open the door and slip out, walking swiftly down the sidewalk.

“Bella, what the feck?” Damn him, with those long legs of his, Logan catches up with me in seconds. “What are ye doing? Remember the very real threat we’re still facing?”

Passers-by are slowing down, enjoying the potential marital spat and when a teenage girl pulls out her phone, I turn away and head into a clothing store.

I am not going to be on a sixteen-year-old’s TikTok FY page today.

Logan, of course, follows me in. To make things as awkward as possible, it’s a lingerie store, and two women folding bras stop at the sight of him.

“Can we help you?” they say in unison.

“Ladies, good afternoon.” He gives his rakish pirate grin and one of the sales ladies knocks a pile of bras off the display, which she dinnae even notice.

“I’m Logan MacTavish, this is my beautiful bride Arabella. Could I trouble ye to lock the front door and give me and my bride a moment to browse?”

I can tell by their awestruck expressions that they know the reputation of the MacTavishes. He pulls out one of those black credit cards, the kind that radiates, “If you have to ask what my credit limit is, you don’t even deserve me,” energy and hands it to the closest one. “Hold onto this for me, aye, darling?”

Smarmy bastard.

“Oh, Sweet Mother Mary and all the Saints you are just- just so-” I’m waving my arms around like I’m trying to fend off a swarm of bees and this man is standing there, charming these women into locking the door with them on the other side.

“We’ll just go get a coffee,” one shouts through the glass.

Such is the power of the MacTavish name.

Pulling me behind a huge display of thongs and thigh-highs, Logan folds his arms, looking at me sternly. “Why did ye run off?”

“Well, we started off last night with a drinking game and ended up married this morning.”

Nodding as if this is all reasonable thus far, he says, “Aye.”

“We’re flying home on your family’s gigantic, almost offensively opulent jet and I find out that ye have sent strangers into my apartment to paw through my private things and just moved me into your place without a single word of discussion.”

He nods again.

“Do ye see where this might seem a wee bit off-putting to me?”

“Where did ye anticipate living?” he asks with a frown, “Is this not the logical next step?”

“We’ve been married for less than-” I check my watch, the only thing I have left that’s mine, “-for less than eighteen hours and ye dinnae think to talk to me about it?”

“Bella...”

“Do not call me that!”

“Why, does anyone else call ye Bella?”

“No, but that’s not the point!” Why does he not seem to understand why I’m angry, the overbearing arse?

A huge grin spreads across his face and his rough, calloused hands land on my waist. “Good. I like that it’s for me only to call ye Bella.”

“I feel like ye might be missing the key points about why I’m raging right now!” I’m trying to stay focused but his easy grin and his giant paws stroking up and down my waist are very distracting. There is also the fact that I am mad, I am yelling, but he is not freaking out. Ted was my only boyfriend, but I remember how defensive and upset he’d get if I ever tried to discuss anything with him. Now, Logan here, he dinnae seem anything but...

Shite, he smells so good.

Like the clean scent of rainwater, because of course it’s drizzling outside. It’s Scotland. He smells like the peppermint soap from the hotel shower and a bit like me, like I’ve been absorbed into him and that’s suddenly so hot that when he pulls my hips against his, grinding his stiff cock against me, I’m not even mad about it.

“We’ll talk about this,” he promises hoarsely, “we’ll make decisions together, but right now, I’m gonna die if I canna get inside ye again.”

My last, dim thought is hoping there aren’t any security cameras in the store before his mouth closes over mine and all rational thought is gone.

“I was gonna go slow,” he says, biting my ear slightly harder than is comfortable, “take my time. Work ye up, make ye come hard first before I put my cock in ye but it’s too late for that.” He shoves his hand inelegantly inside my leggings, two fingers driving up inside me and the heel of his hand rubbing hard against my clitoris. I shriek, but it’s smothered by his mouth, his tongue rolling against mine.

He shoves me against the wall behind a row of potted ferns and a display of corsets before kneeling and yanking my leggings down. I laugh a little wildly as he curses, struggling with the stretchy material and I yelp in alarm when I see his big fists ready to rip them off me.

“Dinnae ye dare! I have nothing else to wear back outside and this selection of transparent lace knickers isn’t gonna work for me!”

Chuckling, he finally yanks them off my legs, leaving my undies hanging around one ankle. He’s stroking his rough palms over the back of my thighs, lifting one of my legs over his shoulder and examining my center with an embarrassing level of thoroughness.

“Feck, this pretty cunt. I thought I’d imagined how sweet ye taste...” My back arches off the wall as he runs the flat of his tongue through my lips with a lewd slurp, then driving it up inside me. His dark head moves against me, feasting on my pussy with a messy, gluttonous pleasure. Impossibly, he’s pulled a condom from his jeans and he is rolling it on while sucking my clit into his mouth, chuckling darkly when my first orgasm rolls over me like a lightning storm.

Instead of standing up, he goes back on his heels and pulls me down, holding his cock in one hand and a fistful of my arse with the other. He thrusts up inside me hard and my head falls back, staring blankly at the ceiling as the slick tip of him pushes higher inside me than I knew was possible.

“I have never,” he continues, “wanted anything more than this.” He’s talking to me with his mouth against mine, the deep bass of his voice rumbling through me. We’re not kissing so much as taking in the breath of each other, his body iron hard and driving fiercely through me, his hands groping my breasts and my arse greedily.

His cock burns.

It burns and hurts as he drives it up inside me, and at first, I’m not sure I can take him but then the pain and the pleasure mix into something else, some arcane, alchemic mix that spreads through me, making my toes point and my back arch.

He bends me further back, arched over his arm, his other hand pushing gently against my heaving stomach. “I can feel myself,” Logan pants, “here.”

I let out a delirious little scream as he presses his hand hard against me. The feel of him inside and outside of me is unimaginable. It’s wild and overwhelming and so fucking sexy and it’s turning me into some kind of lunatic because I wrap my arm around his shoulder and rear up, biting his neck. Logan let out a low, harsh groan and I swear his cock doubles in size.

“Do it again.”

Logan’s fingers grip the back of my hair and push my face against his throat. “Again,” he rasps. His thighs are steel hard as he bounces me on his cock and impossibly, it gets thicker. I’m shaking and there’s a cyclone building inside me, something that sends off sparks of electricity and makes my skin burn and my muscles twitch.

“You’re dripping all over me, Bella,” he growls in my ear, “such a greedy girl, look at this messy pussy. And its mine, isn’t it?” He lightly slaps my clitoris and I’m gone, flying off into madness and wet and heat and nothing could feel better than this. He

growls in my ear and his eyes, they're nearly pitch black, his teeth bared and he comes, swelling inside me, almost unbearably too much.

We freeze, melted into each other in the moment, the aftershocks consume us both until he can finally lift me off him with a groan. His cock is shiny with my slick, there's an embarrassing wet spot on his jeans and I canna bring myself to care.

Logan pulls my knickers back up over the mess dripping from me, settling them firmly against my hips. Smiling up at me, he runs his hand between my legs, soaking the fabric. "I want ye to feel me still in ye with every step ye take, my sweet, filthy bride." He hauls my leggings back on and then rises with a groan, buttoning his jeans.

I should be mortified. The sales ladies are waiting outside, peering through the window, and clutching their coffee cups. They could not have seen us, but what we've been up to is certainly no secret.

To their credit, they're trying not to giggle as I stagger through the door. "Ladies," Logan says, "you're grand at guessing a customer's size correctly, aye?"

"Um, aye," titters one, nervously tucking her hair behind her ear.

"Excellent. Pack up one of everything in my wife's size. I'll send my man in to fetch the clothes and my card." He gallantly kisses their hands as I roll my eyes. But I canna begrudge them.

Logan MacTavish is one hell of a man.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is a tour of the coolest house in Scotland.

Logan...

There's complete silence in the car after Arabella is back in her seat and we're heading to my place. Theo and Hamish, my driver and bodyguard, don't risk a single glance back at us. After firing off a text to Xenia to check for surveillance cameras in the store and wipe any incriminating footage, I take my wife's hand. When I squeeze it, she doesn't squeeze back, but there's the tiniest bit of a grin.

Her smile fades when we turn into the street that ends with four tall, narrow buildings facing each other with a green, park-like space in the center. There's iron gating surrounding the square, and a bristle of security cameras. Mine is the "most annoyingly grandiose," according to my sister Kenna. I love the ancient stone house with a huge clock tower, enormous chimneys, and copper roof tiles.

"Does that clock tower still work?" Arabella's squinting up at it with interest.

"Aye, it used to strike on the hour, every hour until my cousins informed me that they were going to attach C4 to the tower and detonate it the next time I was out of town if I dinnae change it." I pat the weathered corner of the building. "Now it chimes once a day at twelve noon."

Thinking about fucking my bride inside the clock tower instantly makes me hard again. Damnit, I'm gonna develop a medical condition if this shite keeps happening.

"Let me show ye around."

Arabella paused as I opened the front door. “Is it your cousins, then, who live in the other houses? They’re all nestled in too close to be strangers.”

“Ye have a sharp eye. One belongs to my cousin Michael, you met him on the rescue mission. The house across from me is Kai’s, and my cousin Mason owns the other. We all loved the layout of the square, easier to defend, the iron gates and security measures discourage anyone who might want to linger.”

“Ye talk like you’re a commander bracing for an attack on the castle.” She’s frowning, examining the big security panel in the front hall.

“Aye, in a way, we are,” I admit. “It’s a concentration of MacTavishes, combining our security just made sense.”

“MacTavish...” she muses, strolling down the hall. “What is the plural? MacTavishes? MacTavi? Aye, MacTavi. A plethora of MacTavi.”

“Like a rout of wolves?” I ask, catching up so she can read my lips.

“Or a flutter of butterflies,” she says sweetly.

“More like a frenzy of sharks.”

“Ye keep going back to the deadly ones,” she says tauntingly. “Also, it’s a shiver of sharks.”

“That canna be correct.”

“I watch a lot of the Discovery Channel.” She stops at the entry to the great room. “This is... imposing.”

Kai was in and out of town so much that he'd had a decorator design his place. I never liked the idea of someone else shaping my surroundings. The floors throughout the house are a dark, burnished walnut. I'd kept all the old iron-paned gothic windows and took out the second floor over the great room to give it more height. The fireplace is a monstrous thing and demands a ridiculous amount of firewood on chilly nights.

I love it.

"It's big, but it's comfortable." I squeeze her arse. "Like me."

"Oh, ye are so vain," she laughs. "But this is beautiful. The furniture is gigantic, too. Did ye have all this custom-made?"

"I'm 6'5. Everything is too low or I'm always knocking my knees into a table or a chair. It made sense at the time." Watching her try to lean back in one of the big leather armchairs is a wee bit hilarious. The seat is so deep that she looks like a child trying to wiggle into place. "We can always downsize a few pieces."

"Based on the men I've met so far from your family, you're all gigantic creatures, so I suppose your enormously oversized furniture makes sense," she says wryly, standing up.

"Ethan - another cousin - married an American recently. Sloan insists on calling us Scottish Yetis."

"That makes so much sense."

"Come into the kitchen, ye Bessie." Arabella snickers as I scowl down at her. She is unmoved. Apparently, my glare no longer acts as a deterrent with her.

“Mum was insistent that her sons know how to make a few edible meals,” I explain. “The art of sewing on a button and understanding how the dishwasher works. As it turns out, I like to cook.”

“This is ridiculously large for one person, but you’ve kept it homey, somehow.” She runs a hand down the big black and gray granite countertop.

Suddenly, the thought of showing her my bedroom, well, throwing her on my bed and fucking her senseless is taking over my good sense. Seizing her hand and pulling her toward the stairs, I narrate rapidly. “There’s a pantry past the kitchen and a bathroom. Second floor...” I barely give her a chance to glance down the hall. “Gym. Study. Guest bedrooms.”

My bride is laughing breathlessly.

“Third floor. Master bedroom. And... I’ve changed my mind.”

“Changed your mind about what?” She yelps as I throw her over my shoulder and sprint up the last flight of stairs.

“Ye need to see the clock tower.” Throwing open the steel door, I set her down.

“ Oh... Logan. This is magical.”

The huge square space is lit by the clocks in each wall and the ancient mechanisms that keep them moving run along the ceiling. A steel beam runs from the roof to the floor, and I’ve built a four-sided bench to enclose it with cushions and blankets. I keep a wine cooler up here with a bar cart and a space for serving food. I can tell my sister Kenna, who has a key to “water my plants” when I’m out of town, threw a wee bit of a party in my absence. There’s a cluster of empty wine bottles in the trash and someone left a scarf and lipstick on the bench.

Of course, this is the thing that my bride's sharp gaze lands on.

"Will there be much lamentation and wailing now that you're off the market?" Arabella's wearing a sly smile but she's looking at the scarf like she wants to set it on fire. "At least, off the market for now." She adds hastily.

I dinnae like that little addendum at all.

"My sister Kenna has a key to my place and it's looking like she had a girl's night here while I was gone."

She's looking through the glass between the clock numbers on the east wall, and I settle in behind her, pulling her hips against me.

"I've slept with a few women. Well, maybe more than a few." I'm speaking into her ear so she canna ignore me. "But ye are the one I've married. I honor my commitments and the only woman I want..." That goddamn stonner, which had just been going down, is back in full force and I press it against her back, enjoying the quick intake of her breath. "The only woman is you."

"This is mad," she says solemnly. "Really, just completely mad."

"Aye. But I am, too."

The sky's fading from blue to violet with a hint of stars, and finally, she relaxes into me.

"So, about ye knowing how to cook..."

Nuzzling her neck and running my tongue along the thin skin of her throat is making the concept of stopping for dinner a harsh one. But Arabella is mine. Mine to care for.

Which includes dinner.

Ye Bessie - Scottish slang for a sharp-tongued or sassy woman

Stonner - Scottish slang for an erection

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we learn that tenderness and brutality can exist in the same man, almost at the same time.

Arabella...

Logan is as good as his word. The meal he creates far surpasses anything I could pull together.

“How did ye happen to have fresh salmon sitting around in your fridge when ye were off in Denmark killing bad guys and drunk-marrying me?”

He chokes on his next forkful of the chopped kale salad, so it takes him a moment. “Getting drunk-married to ye was the highlight of my weekend, lass. I have an assistant who handles grocery delivery for me. I ordered it this morning on the flight. Do ye like the peppercorn-whisky sauce?”

“Are ye fishing for compliments, then?” Grudgingly, I add, “Aye, it’s delicious and ye know it.”

“I do. I’ve been told I’m an attention whore, so of course I expect ye to lavish compliments upon me.” His look is disconcertingly intent and I dinnae think it’s about the salmon sauce any longer. “But I’m happy to earn those compliments. Feeding ye. Fucking ye, definitely. Buying ye pretty things.”

“About that. Ye need to return all those scanties to the lingerie store.”

“No.” He takes another bite of salmon.

I briefly contemplate stabbing him with my fork and take a deep breath to control my temper. “Are ye remembering how raging I was when ye decided to move my things to your house without asking? Well, debauching me in a lingerie store then buying the place out is the very definition of being an autocratic arse.”

“I’m thinking ye enjoyed being debauched, Bella. As for the lingerie, have a look in the bags, they’re all piled up in the master bedroom. Pick what ye like - I’d love a little fashion show by the way - and we’ll donate anything ye dinnae want to charity.”

“Lower-income women need work outfits and diapers for their kids, Logan! Not crotchless knickers!”

“How do ye know that?” God, this man is infuriating when he gets that reasonable tone going like I’m the irrational one here. “Are ye saying these women dinnae have the right to feel pretty? Have something special just for them?” He tsked at me, hazel eyes gleaming with mischief.

I’m inches away from a scathing retort when his phone rings. He’s not happy about it, frowning at the screen. “Excuse me, I must take this. It might take a while. There’s sticky toffee pudding in the kitchen.” I dinnae bother to ask how he knows I love sticky toffee pudding, because nothing with this man is accidental.

After carrying our dinner plates into the kitchen and tidying up, I’m restless. That whirlwind run-through of the house this afternoon - half of it spent upside down and slung over Logan’s shoulder - wasn’t the most thorough tour.

Starting with the second floor, I still get the masculine feel, even in the guest bedrooms. Dark wood, grey and blue bedding, more of the big handmade furniture. He’s softened the rooms with a lot of plants and some beautiful pictures of the Scottish countryside. The gym is promising; there’s a long series of windows looking out the back and I can see the blue ribbon of the River Clyde close by and a treadmill

to admire the view as you're running like a mouse on the wheel.

Cranking one of the windows open and taking a deep breath, I feel all the scattered bits of my brain come back together. These last three days are beyond understanding, far beyond my ability to process as casually as these MacTavishes do. Regardless of whether I want this or not, I'm a MacTavish, and I'm in deep.

"Are ye sure that's the one?"

The study is on the other side of the gym and that window is open too. Logan must be sitting right next to the window. Even so, the only reason I can catch most of the conversation is thanks to how deep his voice is.

"I watched the security footage. He was the motherfucker who dragged my wife out of her classroom after threatening to shoot one of her bairns."

He's angry, the sound rolls over me like far-off thunder.

"No, ye chain him down at the west warehouse. I'll be there in thirty minutes." He chuckles at something the caller says. "Ye can soften him up a bit, but dinnae ye remove any extremities. I've been looking forward to this."

I'm frozen, staring out at the pretty, pretty view. Just minutes ago, we were talking about pleasantly mundane things such as grocery delivery and the whiskey sauce he'd made for the fish and now he's going to cut off someone's body parts.

They were going to do that to me, I know. And I know exactly what man they're talking about: the blond bastard who threatened my kids, my students. But I dinnae know how to reconcile Logan, my new husband who made me dinner with this darker, terrifying man.

“Ah, there ye are.”

He’s leaning against the doorway, arms folded. “Ye thinking about some weight lifting? It’s leg day for me, so hold off a wee bit and I’ll spot ya.”

Logan’s smile is effortlessly salacious, as if he’d not just talked about chopping someone’s... I dinnae know, do they start with the fingers, or the toes? Is there an order? How can he switch from something so brutal to sexytimes in his gym?

“Hold off? Where are ye going, then?”

His glance moves pointedly from the open window to me again. “I think ye know.”

I take a step back, just one, but his expression darkens, like a shadow over the moon. “I dinnae want ye to hurt people for me, Logan.”

“It’s not just for ye. How many more people will die for their ‘innovative new business model?’ There’s already chatter online about new distribution routes for organ trafficking.”

I sit down abruptly on the weight bench. “And ye think this man has some answers?”

“Aye. He was already gone from the compound by the time we stormed it.”

“I saw him that day, before they did all those tests on me.” The memory of being trapped in that CT machine makes me shudder. “I never got his name. I called him Head Bastard in Charge.”

“I’m thinking he had advance warning that we were close. He skipped out along with a couple of the other key people in the organization. With some... persuasion, he’s gonna be mighty helpful.” He pushes off the doorway, walking toward me slowly as

if giving me another chance to back away. My legs really aren't steady enough to stand up anyway. "This is an ugly part of the MacTavish life. But do ye want more people to be ripped apart for their kidneys, or their liver?"

My hands fly up, palms open and then fingers pressing together as I bring them down again.

Stop!

In my agitation, I'd signed it instead of saying it.

Logan squats down and raises his left hand, curled into a fist. His black wedding ring glints briefly as he puts his hand over his heart and makes a small circular motion.

Sorry.

Then he points to me with his index finger and then a 'thumbs-up.'

Are you okay?

He's been practicing. Somewhere, in between bringing a full-on firefight to Anselm's nightmare compound, marrying me and flying home, he's learned some basic British Sign Language.

One tear slips down my cheek before I pull myself together. Making a fist, I move it up and down like it's nodding.

Yes.

"Eat your dessert, Bella. And dinnae ye dare pretend it's not your favorite." He cups my cheek, kissing me with a surprising level of tenderness. "I'll be back in a few

hours.”

I eat the sticky toffee pudding and dinnae taste a bit of it, staring out the windows in the great room at the other three houses in the square.

What are they all doing? Torturing people? Running drugs? Transporting guns? Just having dinner like normal human beings?

Who gets used to this life?

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Logan and Uncle Lachlan spend some quality bonding time and Arabella is buried under a mountain of lingerie.

Logan...

Four hours later...

We've been working on the man my wife called Head Bastard in Charge, and he's stubborn. Half his fingers gone. Most of his teeth and still nothing useful.

"Are ye thinking there's gonna be a rescue? Ye truly think any of the scum ye worked with will risk themselves by coming to rescue your sorry arse?"

"Stykke lort..." It comes out a bit mushy, his face is a mosaic of red, blues and purples, but his eyes are alight with hate.

"What's that? Ah, ye calling me a piece of shite, aye? I'm not offended. I can see why ye might not be feeling I've got your best interests at heart." Looking over the table of instruments in the corner of the room, I select a power drill. He's a tough bastard, but there's a flare of terror in his eyes when I hold the drill up.

Hamish is yawning politely into his hand. He'd chained Head Bastard in Charge to the metal chair in the center of the concrete room when the Chieftain's men brought him in tonight.

"I know what you're probably thinking, mate. Do we really need the concrete walls, the hooks dangling from the ceiling and the drain under the floor? No, though it's

important to set the stage.” I press down on the drill’s button and the silver bit spins with a screech.

“I can always do the job with whatever tools are at hand,” I hit the button again. “Though there’s nothing like a DeWalt. Good, powerful engine. Ye can drill through anything, really. Shall we put it to the test?”

“He’s a stubborn one.” My Uncle Lachlan joined us during my session with the drill; he’s still in the suit he wore to take my Aunt Aria out to dinner. Taking off his jacket, he rolls up his sleeves. “Good tools, lad. The DeWalt is a solid contender, though I prefer my Makita. I use the diamond head drill bit. Ye can punch a hole through a steel wall with that one.”

Our guest’s eyes roll back and he passes out.

Uncle Lachlan scoffs. “Ye canna have a civil conversation without the wee bastard fainting on ye?” Eyeing my blood covered shirt, he adds, “I’d like to congratulate ye on your marriage. Your Da called to tell us the happy news. She sounds like quite the brave lass. Why don’t ye get cleaned up and go home to her? You’re newlyweds, after all. What did ye get from our guest here?”

“Not much,” I grumble, pulling off my shirt and heading for the big industrial sink. “He says there’s two other key players, and they’re gonna steam ahead like Anselm’s death dinnae even slow them down. I got something about ships and vacations just before ye showed up.”

“Ships and vacations?” Uncle Lachlan eyes the unconscious arsehole. “He could be hallucinating, but it seems a wee bit soon for that. Why don’t ye let me work on him a bit, see if I can jog his memory. I’ll call ye as soon as I get something.”

Once I’ve washed off all the blood, I pull on the t-shirt Hamish gives me and shake

Uncle Lachlan's hand. "Thank ye. Your work is legendary, Uncle. I'm looking forward to the results."

"Off with ye." He's holding one of the scalpels up to the light. "Oh! I picked up an anti-tank rocket launcher, and she's a beauty. We should take a trip up to the lodge and I'll show her in action."

"The FGM-148 Javelin? Just tell me when!" Uncle Lachlan does collect the best toys.

"There's a good lad," he says, putting down the scalpel and picking up some wire cutters. "Go spend some time with your bride."

Arabella...

I pass by those damn lingerie bags four times.

Taking a shower.

Finding some lotion because air travel is apparently hell on dry skin.

Finishing off the rest of the sticky toffee pudding.

Then, pawing through the ridiculously large walk-in closet to find my clothes that were so rudely hijacked from my apartment. My sad little stash was neatly hung up in one little corner, with my knickers and bras folded and put away in one of the mahogany dressers. Pulling on some ratty-looking running shorts and a sweatshirt from Uni, I ponder the pile of glossy gold and black bags and boxes, creating their own mini Mt. Everest on the sofa in the sitting area of the master bedroom.

The sheer flagrancy of the stash offends me. Who buys one of everything in my size in an entire store? I guess I should be grateful that it was a tiny boutique and not the

House of Fraser department store downtown.

I should really get on the treadmill in the gym and try to work off the approximately eighteen thousand calories of dessert I'd just gorged. Maybe try to get some sleep?

The shiny lingerie bags glitter at me.

"Fine. Stop looking at me with your judgy little faces!"

Bras draped over the big leather couch and two armchairs by the time I'm done. Knickers with far too many variations to count cover every inch of Logan's king-sized bed. Lace and satin corsets hang on the top of every door, and the sexy little babydoll nighties and rompers decorate the bathroom counter tops.

Logan's bedroom/sitting area is bigger than my entire apartment and I still haven't figured out where to put all the robes. Satin ones, silk ones, lacy robes and some that are a delicate, weblike material that looks pretty but cling to my skin like spiderwebs.

Ugh.

"Those definitely are going back," I mumble.

I talk to myself all the time. The sound of my voice is important. I need it to sound exactly the way it always did, before I started losing my hearing. I carefully modulate the tone, making sure it varies properly, and that the volume is correct for the conversation. My articulation is precise. It's a point of pride, I guess. Fate and shitty auditory nerves might take my hearing, but I'm keeping my voice.

"How can there be more?"

There's a long, flat box that I missed in the corner, filled to bursting with swimsuits.

“Really? I could lurk in the ocean like a mermaid for the rest of my life and still not need this many!” Bikinis, some scandalous and barely covering my nipples. Others with thong bottoms, leaving my entire arse hanging out. Deep-V one-piece suits that would instantly let a breast pop loose if I took so much as a deep breath.

Hands on hips, pacing the room, I scowl at the explosion of colors and fabrics and horrifyingly high price tags. “It’s not like I haven’t dated rich guys before, but this is unspeakable,” I grumble. “Is this how the one percent really lives?”

It’s close to midnight by the time I finish carefully folding the lingerie back in their little nests of tissue paper and shopping bags. I reluctantly held on to fifteen items that were just too pretty to part with. I’m spiteful enough to want to throw all this back in Logan’s face, just to prove I canna be bought, but... That bra and undie set in midnight blue and the silk robe printed with Japanese cherry blossoms are just so lovely. I’ve never owned anything so beautiful, it almost seems a shame to cover them up.

“Now, what to wear to bed?”

This is a dilemma. That slinky red chemise held together by delicate ribbons definitely sends the wrong message: “I’ll happily have sex with ye, husband for all the goodies.” Wearing what I’ve got on now seems... churlish. Settling for a silver silk cami and short set, I crawl into Logan’s bed.

It is big enough to count as an island, and its paradise . The mattress is an exquisite balance of firm while still letting me sink into it like a cloud. The sheets are Egyptian cotton and I am sure I canna calculate a number high enough to measure the thread count. Oh, these pillows... Big fluffy ones. Square ones. Round ones and a couple that are shaped like wedges. I puzzle over these until I spot some cleverly placed hooks in the bed frame.

Oh . I pile all the sex pillows at the foot of the bed, keeping an innocent-looking rectangular one for sleep.

It dinnae come. Images keep parading through my mind. The glass room collapsing with an almost human scream of distress. Logan shooting all those guards in the time it took me to register the first one down. Oh, god...

The sharp arrowhead between my fingers, sweeping awkwardly across Anselm's hand, slashing a crimson line across his throat. The spray of blood I'd blocked out until now. How did I forget the blood?

The noise he made, a gurgling, glugging sort of sound like he was trying to speak through the ruin I'd made of him. It's the only sound I've ever heard that I wish I could forget. I wish I could unhear it, even with the terror of losing my hearing I almost wish I had been deaf so I wouldn't remember the sound of killing another human being.

Logan tried to protect me by claiming it was his bullet that killed Anselm, but...

It was me.

"Bella, what's wrong?"

Logan's back, and he runs his hands over my arms and shoulders, his face worried. "Are ye hurt?"

"No, I'm okay," I blubber.

"It's hitting ye all at once, aye?" He turns on the bedside table lamp, the soft glow surrounding us. "Vivid, full color like you're watching it on a big screen?"

“How did ye know?” I’m wiping my wet cheeks with the hem of my fancy new chemise.

“We all go through it,” he says, producing a box of tissues from somewhere and wiping my face. “Ye canna be immune to violence unless you’re truly a psychopath. We all find ways to process it.”

“H- h- how do ye handle it?”

“Depends,” he shrugs. “Beat the shite out of a punching bag, go for a run. Sometimes, if it’s sticking with me too long, I go out and get blooterred with my brother and our cousins. Though I hear drinking it all away isn’t a long-term coping mechanism. With you, my bonnie bride? I’m thinking it might help if I brush your hair.”

“What?” My sob comes out as a half chuckle and that’s progress.

Logan’s hazel eyes are warm, and he cups my face like I’m something delicate, kissing me lightly. “I’m gonna put your head on my lap and brush your hair. It’s so long and thick, I’m thinking ye might like that?”

“Um...” I take another tissue from the proffered box. “I remember my ma doing it a few times, when I was younger. But there were too many of us kids for pampering like that. There’s eight of us, if your unnaturally thorough background check dinnae include that.”

He fetches a brush from the bathroom and settles back against the headboard, putting a pillow on his lap. “Lie down, my bride. Let me take care of ye.”

Putting my cheek against the soft cotton, I feel him gently separate my hair, running a brush through the first section. He’s careful, not pulling or yanking on the strands and humming low in his chest.

“The pillow’s here in case my lower half forgets this is a nurturing moment and gets hard. My cock dinnae seem to have any sense of decorum when he’s around ye and I dinnae want him poking a hole in your cheek.”

When I laugh, this time it’s real.

Blooterred - Scottish slang for completely shit-faced.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is nothing better than a little early morning conversation.

Arabella...

I'm dreaming of being at school during recess.

One of the students is swinging a stick, poking me in the back with hard, insistent little nudges until I reach back and smack the stick away.

"Shite! Lass, what's he ever done to deserve this kind of treatment?"

Wide awake, I roll over to see Logan glaring at me, his hand protectively covering his crotch. "I'm sorry! I was dreaming and... sorry. Not intentional, I promise." Covering my hand to stifle a giggle because this is so not the time for that, I pat his chest gently. "And here ye were so nice to me last night."

"You're forgiven," he says, "though I might be sleeping with a pillow between us, ye Jezebel."

This just makes me giggle harder and Logan growls, pouncing on me and kissing me. "I'm glad ye think it's amusing that I'm gonna be walking around with a limp today."

Arching a haughty brow, I retort, "And isn't that what ye did to me back in Stockholm, mister?"

"I canna remember. We should recreate it."

“Well, we’re not shite-faced and there’s no lingerie shop, so there are some key elements missing,” I say teasingly.

Who am I? So light-hearted and feeling warm and safe like the last four days are gone, just a little blip on the radar of life.

He’s smiling down at me and I’m smiling up at him, then suddenly, my hand’s clutching a fistful of his hair, moaning as his lips move over mine. Sliding just the tip of his tongue between the seam of my lips, he traces my teeth, sliding slickly in and out, in and out, and god, do I hope his dick will be doing just the same thing soon. But my new husband has other plans, and with a wink, he throws my legs over his ridiculously broad shoulders and dives for my center.

“Oh! What areyoudoingsweetbabyjesusthat’s-” I can feel his laughter, muffled against my pussy as he licks and sucks along me, driving his tongue up my channel and then along my lips to latch on to my clitoris, sucking with an enthusiasm that sends me into my first orgasm, legs straight and toes pointing as I gasp.

One thick finger, then another slide inside me with care, gently stroking and scissoring up my passage as he praises me in a flatteringly hoarse voice, “Good girl. Now you’re going to give me another one.”

I moan, back arching as he finds that particular spot inside and he scratches very gently, with just the tip of his fingernail and it sends me into a spasm. My fingers spread out over the skin of his back, absently marking the scar tissue and beautiful musculature of his body. “Come here, ye gorgeous bastard,” I wheeze. “I wanna kiss ye some more, aye?”

But as he slides up, I slide down, winking up at him on my way before my mouth latches on to the silky, thick head of his cock, feeling the hard metal of his piercing as it passes over my tongue.

“Oh, shite, sweetheart...” he groans, turning it into a growl that rattles through his chest as I smoothly slide him to the back of my throat, and then down it, not stopping until my nose touches the crisp curls at the base of him and the other barbell, the metal warm like his skin.

Pulling air in through my nose, I sigh happily. Logan is thick. Impressively, perfectly, wonderfully, porn-star worthy, well, way past porn-star worthy thick. He’s throbbing in my mouth and I’m going to make sure the first time he comes is just like how he’d given mine.

Cupping his heavy balls, I gently roll them between my fingers as the thick muscles of his thighs tighten around my shoulders. “Mmmm-hmmm,” I hum helpfully, pulling off his cock, suckling the tip and diving back down again after a giant gasp of air. I can feel his sculpted abdominals heaving against my cheek and I’m gloating.

I want to make Logan feel as overwhelmed as I do. Taking his hand, I press his fingertips against the thin skin of my throat, and he jolts like he’s being electrocuted when he feels the bulge of his cock. His shaft swells impossibly thicker, choking me, slippery with my spit and his come and I love, love the sound of his deep voice growling, “Ohhhh, feck, Bella!” His beautiful body shudders and he comes, spurting down my throat, leaking from my lips, messy and glorious.

“You’re gonna...” he pants, “you’re gonna pay for that.” Rolling me over, he cages my head between his forearms, stroking the hair out of my eyes. “You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve seen in an age.” He says it so sweetly, this man who’s so savage that he could probably tear the hatch off a tank, but now being so delicate that I can barely feel his fingers. “Just how sore are ye from yesterday?”

Wait. He’s still hard?

“Some,” I admit, spreading my thighs invitingly as he slides between them. “I’m sure

ye can make me feel better.”

Logan grins, that rakish pirate grin that promises trouble as he swiftly rolls on a condom.

“Keep your eyes on mine, sweet wife.”

I’ve never been able to look a lover in the eyes before. It seemed too... personal. Too intrusive. But my husband and I stare at each other, mapping each expression and savoring each moan as he slides inside me, painfully slowly, one taunting inch at a time. So different from yesterday’s frenzied coupling against the lingerie store wall. When he’s inside, his hard piercing rubbing tauntingly against the top of me, he groans, dropping his head on my chest.

“Shite, you’re so good... So tight and silky inside,” he whispers in a newly dark tone that makes me shiver. “I’m gonna fuck ye senseless.”

“Oh- okay.” Three syllables, it’s all I can manage as this gorgeous, gigantic man begins moving inside me, agile hips sliding in, then scooping up and back to do it again.

It stings. In the best possible fucking way it stings and that is perfectly fine because his cock is sliding inside me, striking nerve endings like match tips and I am on fire.

He shoves in and out of me greedily, hard, and rough now. I can hear his grunts and groans in my ear, my consciousness spiraling in until the only thing that matters is the sound of his voice and the heat of his cock spreading me, filling me, and when he angles his hips just so, the piercing at the base of his cock slams against my clitoris and I scream. Every muscle turns to granite and I tighten hard enough to hold his cock at a standstill.

“This pussy is clenching me like a fecking fist,” he says, hoarse and guttural. “If ye dinnae loosen up, you’re gonna rip my cock off. But what a way to go...” Stroking calloused fingers along my thighs, he waits until I can breathe, relaxing my legs a bit.

“Now, it’s my turn.” His deep voice vibrates through me, his cock throbbing like a heartbeat. With a mischievous wink, he tightens his grip, sliding his hands under my arse and standing, thick legs planted and bounces me up and down on his slick cock, my thighs and his wet from my finish. Arms and legs wrapped around him like a howler monkey on a palm tree, I gasp and moan my way through another orgasm before his fingers tighten painfully on my arse and he joins me.

Leaning against the wall next to the bed, he’s squishing me between his heaving chest and the expensive grey paint as we catch our breath, laughing together as I feel his heartbeat radiate through me.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which it takes a mere forty-five minutes of post-coital bliss for everything to turn to complete shite. Even for a MacTavish, that might be some kind of a record.

Logan...

It's blissful.

Everything is perfect between us for a full forty-five minutes after I fucked her senseless.

Then, the conversation I've been waiting for.

"I need to borrow your phone," she says.

We're sitting on the deck off the master bedroom, looking out over the city, though we're concealed from view by a series of potted trees and flowering plants. May is still chilly in Glasgow, so I've turned on the fire pit, and she's pushing her toes dangerously close to the flame.

"Ye need a new phone of your own. I tracked the signal on your old one until it disappeared somewhere over the Atlantic, so they likely scanned it and then crushed it."

"Tracking my phone? How did ye- never mind, I dinnae want to know," she sighs, taking a gloomy gulp of her tea. "I have some money saved. I'll get another one."

"Technically, it is my fault that your phone was taken, so it's only fair that I replace

it. We can add in some security features that will be important for your safety.”

Her eyes survey me suspiciously over her mug. “How so?”

“Encrypted data so no one can hack into your messages, the only person who can track ye will be me.”

“I dinnae need anything fancy. I really do need to call Tasgall Scott, he’s the headmaster at the Wallace School and I need to let him know what’s been going on. I’ll be lucky if I dinnae get sacked after disappearing in the middle of the school day and leaving my kids- my students, I mean, alone.” She pushes her tangle of curls back, looking miserable. “The poor bairns must have been so worried when I dinnae come back.”

“We already checked in with Scott after ye were taken. It appears your detective showed up at the school, looking for ye. Also, your neighbor, the one who came tearing out her door with the soup ladle that night?” I chuckle, remembering the woman’s fierceness. “A regular Aife, she was.”

Bella nods approvingly. “Meera is likely her reincarnation. Wait. What do ye mean, ye called the headmaster?”

“We had to let him know why ye disappeared.” I point out.

Rubbing the bridge of her nose, she sighs. “And what did ye tell him?”

“Not the truth, obviously. I had one of the detectives on our payroll call Scott and explain you’d witnessed a robbery and the men panicked and took ye. He was very concerned about your safety and I assured him ye were fine and you’d call him once everything was settled. Then Detective Christie showed up and stirred the goddamn pot. It’s settled now.”

“What the hell does that mean?” She’s gripping her mug like she’s about to throw it at my head.

“What do ye think it means?”

“Because I’ve seen ye ‘settle’ things, Logan. Settle them in a way most people would classify as ‘murder.’”

“I dinnae go around killing law enforcement, woman! I had her supervisor meet with her and explain that your assault case was out of her hands.”

“I canna see that going well,” she says doubtfully.

Grinning, I remember the supervisor’s exhaustion. “It did not. Ah, and I sent in your temporary resignation.”

“Ye what!” Now my bride is up and charging at me. “What do ye mean, ye sent in my resignation! How could ye?”

“Bella... love...” Hauling her onto my lap, I pin her between my arms and legs until she settles, panting furiously. “Through no fault of your own, mind, your students were into a dangerous situation when ye were kidnapped, aye? Are ye willing to put them at risk until we can finish off Anselm’s business partners?”

Sagging against me, she says bitterly, “Ye had no right. That was my responsibility. Do ye know how hard it is to get substitute teachers with the right qualifications for these kids? We’re going into final term exams and...” Pushing me away, she gets up, stalking to the other side of the deck. “I hate you- this. I hate all of this.”

“A pity.” I say coldly. “I must leave. You’ll stay here today. I’ve assigned Hamish as your personal bodyguard. He’s my best.” She follows me through the bedroom and

down the stairs as I shrug on my suit jacket.

“I have things I have to do! People to call. Ye canna just lock me up in here while you’re off doing meetings or murders or whatever it is ye do.”

Furious, I’m fecking furious. I understand why she’s angry. She’s also an ungrateful little Bessie who dinnae seem to understand that I’m trying to keep her alive. Hamish is waiting at the front door in his standard black suit, a single brow raised at my thunderous countenance.

Turning my head so she can see my lips move, I say, “My wife stays here today. Do ye have her phone?”

“Aye, Boss.” He holds up the iPhone box and nods politely as I stalk out the door. “Your uncle has some information to discuss at your earliest convenience.”

“Thank ye. Keep a close eye on Mrs. MacTavish.”

I know Arabella’s still standing in the hall, but I dinnae look back.

Arabella...

Well, that could have gone better.

Hamish clears his throat. “Mrs. MacTavish, I’m Hamish MacDougall, I will be responsible for your personal safety.” He hands me a white box. “Here’s your new phone. The boss wanted ye to have one right away.”

Looking down at the phone, I try to compose myself. “I see. How does this bodyguarding business work, Mr. MacDougall?”

“Please call me Hamish, ma’am.”

“Then call me Arabella, please.”

He looks like I just punched his ticket for a first-class trip to hell. “That would be inappropriate, Mrs. MacTavish. I canna do that.”

“Okay, Mr. MacDougall,” I sigh, “how does this work?”

“Today, I fear the boss has requested ye stay here. Security conditions are unstable with too many unknown variables. I anticipate this should be corrected soon.”

“Do ye know, Mr. MacDougall, that when ye get anxious ye sound like a British butler?”

“Ma’am.”

Oh dear, I’ve offended the man responsible for keeping me alive. Not the best start. Adding to my guilt is the fact that he’s taken great care to stand right in front of me when he speaks, to make sure I can read his lips.

“Sorry, Hamish. I’m a bit off today. I do have a lot of phone calls to make. I’ll uh... just be upstairs for a while, then. Ye dinnae need to be in the room with me or anything, aye?”

He’s trying to hide a smile, I can tell. “No ma’am. I’ll be here if ye need me. Are ye comfortable with me knocking loudly on your door if I need to speak with ye?”

“That’s very thoughtful of ye, Hamish. Thanks.”

Tugging the covers back into place on the bed, I eye the silver cell phone that’s

waiting for me to turn it on.

Hit the start button, it whispers, you know you want to. I'm the iPhone 16 Pro Max. I have a 5x optical zoom camera. The largest display, the longest battery life...

Suddenly the memory of Logan's God-given assets is vividly clear in my mind, the largest, the longest... The persistent soreness south of my waistline is turning into a throbbing at the mere thought of my new husband's dick and what he can do with it.

What the hell is wrong with me? I'm angry with the high-handed bastard. And I'm getting turned on right now?

I have to distract myself before I lose my mind and call him, demanding he come back and attend to "my needs." I was never a sex fiend before. I liked sex, even though my experience was somewhat limited. But with Logan... Size does matter. So does technique, and enthusiasm, and he is gifted with all of those things.

"Take a cold shower, ye pervert," I lecture myself. "Call the school..." A bolt of sorrow pierces my heart but it's time to soldier on. "Then ye can call Meera. She must be so worried."

The cold shower was not at all pleasant, but at least my mind is clear and I can call Headmaster Scott with some composure. It is a mixture of awkward and sad, and we struggle through it.

"I'm disappointed to see you leaving mid-term like this," he says. He has a deep voice so his feelings are made clear, hearing-wise.

"I'm terribly sorry," I stammer. "Maybe... maybe I could tutor my students one on one? Online? I'm happy to do anything I can to make the transition smoother."

“That would be very helpful. Why don’t you contact Lucy and set up a schedule?”

“Aye, Headmaster. I’ll do that right away. Will you please tell my students that I...”
Miss them? I’m so sorry they could have been hurt because of me? “That I have the utmost faith in their abilities and I know they’ll do well on their finals.”

We end the conversation with more polite noises and I notice, with a sinking heart, that he dinnae mention me coming back next year.

I try not to think about why all my old contacts are programmed into this new phone - along with a long list of people all with the last name of MacTavish - and call Meera.

“I want to come over.”

Eyeing Hamish, who’s standing sentinel in the main hall, I shake my head. “I dinnae think we’re getting Girl’s Night. I’m new to this bodyguard business but his eye starts twitching if I’m on one floor and he’s on the other.”

“How do I not know you’re being held under duress?” Meera is Facetiming with me, her eyes narrowed and darting around as if to see if there’s someone behind me, holding a gun to my head.

Turning the phone around, I spin in a circle. “Coast is clear. It’s really me. I’m sorry about all the madness, I know ye have been stressed, aye? Are ye baking?”

“Like ye canna believe,” she agrees, gloomy. “Even the kids are begging me to stop. I’ll tell ya what’s been happening here and then you’ve got a lot of explaining to do.”

So, she tells me about three visits from an increasingly grim Detective Christie, how a man and a woman who “looked like graduates from MI6’s School of Stern Expressions,” moved several boxes out of my flat, smiling pleasantly when she

threatened to call the police.

“The most terrifying thing was realizing that Detective Christie dinnae know where ye were, either,” she finishes, looking a wee bit tearful.

“I’m so sorry. About all of it.” I’m drowning in guilt right now, both for what she’s been through and what I canna tell her. Logan and I agreed on a cover story over dinner last night. I agreed with him that too much knowledge is not a good thing.

“The two men that night? They were there to kill me.” There’s a crashing sound and I wince. “Was that one of your mother’s pottery bowls?”

“Never ye mind. Keep talking.”

“At the fundraiser, I read the lips of two men across the room. They were planning to kill another guest. Logan MacTavish. I hurried over and pretended to spill my tray so I could get close enough to warn him.”

“Oh! I always knew your lip-reading was going to come in handy!” Meera shouts. “I dinnae know whether to feel gleeful or terrified right now. What happened, then?”

“Someone reported back to their boss when the plan failed, and they targeted me. I dinnae know how they found me so fast, but fortunately, uh... So did Logan.”

There’s a short silence as she processes this. “There’s some mighty large gaps in this storyline, my friend.”

“I know,” I agree miserably.

“Is this a dinnae know, canna say situation?”

“That would be it exactly.”

Meera gives a low, slow sigh. The kind she gives her kids when they’ve come home with a note from their teacher and she’s praying for patience. “Tell me what ye can.”

“They took me, the next day at school-”

“But those guys were all carved up!”

“Oh, these were new guys. I know. There’s a lot of bad guys in this story. Thank god, they dinnae hurt my kids, my students.” For me, this is the best part of the story thus far, the only part that matters. I tell her about the kidnapping. I dinnae mention the horrifying human organ trafficking. There’s mention of Logan’s magnificent rescue, the drinking, and...

“Ye are not telling me ye are married to this MacTavish!” She’s pulling at her hair in agitation. “Even I know about the MacTavishes, they’re a crime family, and-”

“Hold off, Meera.” I rub my eyes. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry but we canna discuss that. Here’s the most important part, are ye ready?”

“I dinnae know how the hell to answer that after this odyssey but aye, go ahead.”

“Ye gave me your obsidian arrowhead that night, remember? When ye brought me dinner? I found it in my pocket after I was kidnapped, I must have put it there before I went to school, it made me feel safe.”

“Oh, I’m so glad,” she says happily.

“It saved my life. The bad man, well, the worst bad man had a gun to my head.” Her breath catches and she slaps her hand over her mouth. “I had it in my hand and I- I

cut him pretty badly. He dropped the gun and..." My stomach twists, the image of all that blood is back. "Ye saved my life. That arrowhead was the only weapon I had and it saved me."

Tears are trickling down Meera's face, she's saying something but I canna hear it. Yanking her hand away from her mouth, she gasps, "Sorry! Sorry about that! I'm so happy it helped ye. I'm so proud of ye, so brave, ye were. I canna imagine..." Wiping her face briskly, she says, "Well, what happens now?"

"I'm not sure. Logan, that high-handed bastard, turned in my resignation at the Wallace School. I want to murder him but he's right. There's still a... uh... a situation. I canna risk the safety of the students again. So, I'm here, in this grand house, just..."

She nods wisely. "This Logan needs to make some plans with ye if he values his life. Ye are a nightmare when ye have free time."

I would like to say something biting, but she's unfortunately correct. "I had my whole life laid out. I knew every step I needed to take, going back to Uni for my graduate degree, maybe one day opening my own tutoring company..."

"Marriage is a matter of give and take, but this is not a normal marriage. Though it's no bad thing, being a MacTavish. You're protected against everything but the flu or bad weather."

"Oh, it's temporary," I say confidently. "Once the whole the thing is cleared up, we'll get a divorce."

There's a sharp rap on the open door and Logan is standing there, looking just as chilly as when he'd left.

“Uh, speaking of which, the man himself is home, I’d better go.”

“We will talk soon, and often,” she promises. “Shite! My bread is burning! Bye for now.”

Logan in a suit is just as delicious as Logan in black tactical gear, or Logan naked. But his hazel eyes are cold and it dinnae seem the moment to compliment his attire.

“I’m gonna change and then we’ll talk.”

Watching his broad back as he heads up the stairs, I’m guessing this won’t be a pleasant one.

Aife is a powerful warrior queen from Celtic mythology.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we are introduced to a highly effective method for controlling migraines.

Logan...

“...and then we’ll get divorced.”

Arabella casually telling her friend that there is an expiration date on this union angers me more than it should. It’s not like I’ve shared the “married for life” revelation with her, either.

My temper might not be so short if I’d not just spent hours with Uncle Lachlan and our prisoner. The hostage’s stubbornness would be admirable if not for the fact that every second he’s wasting my fucking time, someone’s getting cut to pieces. This was after meeting with the rest of the recovery team because Kai loves to go over every goddamned move to see how we ‘can improve the next mission.’ Michael is still pouting because I burned all three yachts down to the waterline. Arseholes, every one of them.

By the time I’ve pulled on some grey sweatpants and headed back downstairs, my bride is in the kitchen, stirring something in a pot on the stove.

“I have to tell ye that my culinary accomplishments are not as impressive as yours.” She’s smiling, but when I round the corner of the island, I see that she’s got her toes tucked under the cabinetry. Closer, the strain in her shoulders is obvious.

“Are ye feeling all right?”

“Just a headache.” Bella rubs her forehead. “I get them sometimes and then a touch of vertigo to go with it. The full experience.”

“Ah, so the toes under the cabinet trick helps ye balance? That’s so clever.” Standing behind her, I put my hands on her hips and she leans back - just a bit - as if the extra support is comforting.

“So, I thought I would make us Stovies for dinner. I used to make it for myself when I was teaching.” Her smile slips for a minute, and I know she’s longing for her classroom. “I’d put the lamb and the veggies in a slow cooker pot and it would be ready when I got home. It’s one of my fallback dishes to prove I’m not completely hopeless in the kitchen.”

“I dinnae marry ye for your cooking, lass.” My hands slide down slowly, over the sweet curve of her hips and then back up around her waist. My hand’s itching, wanting to grab her arse. It’s perfect; tight and round, firm but with a nice bounce when I squeeze it. I’m thinking about spanking her arse pink and groan silently as my traitorous cock instantly gets hard.

Always, with this woman.

“So how was your...” Her words die off as my hands slide down again, cupping her arse.

“What remedy do ye use for getting rid of these headaches?” My voice is more of a growl at this point. Bella has a way of reducing me to my most primitive self within seconds.

“Oh, medication when they’re really bad, but I dinnae like how it makes me feel, all clumsy and the like. Lying down in a dark room, sometimes.”

I make a mental note to order her meds tomorrow. “Anything else?”

“It’s very difficult to concentrate with ye looming over me,” she scolds, stirring the pot harder.

My fingers are spreading over the smooth skin of her stomach, pushing up the hem of her t-shirt and reluctantly, I pull them away.

Just as I step back, she blurts out, “Orgasms!”

I didn’t know it was possible for my fecking cock to get harder.

“I mean, I haven’t had a boyfriend in a while so I use my fingers and- Oh, my god I canna believe I just said that to ye!” She drops the wooden spoon, burying her face in her hands.

There’s just enough blood left in my head to reach around and turn off the burner. “What kind of husband would I be if I dinnae help ye with problems like these, aye? Can I carry ye, or does that make the vertigo worse?”

“I’ve never been carried, so I’m not sure.” She’s looking up at me with a mix of lust and shyness and feck if that isn’t pretty. Her cheeks are bright pink and she’s struggling to keep her eyes on mine.

“Let’s find out.” I’m cupping that perfect arse and lifting her as she squeals with surprise, but she still wraps her legs around my waist. “This arse, I could squeeze and spank it all day.” I kiss her, sliding my tongue inside her mouth. She tastes like cranberries and wintergreen. Her pupils flare as I bite down lightly on her bottom lip and it is the hottest fecking thing. Everything about my bride is delicious. Dangerous to my self-control.

Upstairs, there's a bed and a couch in the great room but both are too far so I lay her out on the kitchen island, displayed like a feast. Yanking off my t-shirt, I fold it and put it under her head, spreading her hair out.

My bride's face is flushed and glowing as she watches me push up her shirt, yanking the bra cups down and growling at the sight of her perky nipples. My mouth goes over one, sucking hard and circling the other one with my thumb, then switching breasts and playing with her again. When I take a nipple between my teeth and tug, her stomach muscles contract and she sits up abruptly, her dark curls flying.

I take my mouth off her nipple and push her back down gently. "None of that. Ye lie still and take what I give ye. Lift your hips." She does, instantly and the sight of her green undies with a little silk bow distracts me for a moment before I yank them down, along with her jeans. I lean closer, inhaling deeply as my nose runs along her thigh. "I always think I remember how sweet ye smell and taste but fuuuuck," I groan, "it's even better, this perfect little pussy. Spread those legs wider." Running my knuckles softly up and down her lips, I watch them swell, glistening with moisture already.

"Hard or soft, Bella? Do ye cram your fingers inside?" I slide one inside her cunt as her back arches. "Or do ye circle your clit? Do ye pinch it? Slap it?" I do all three, watching her expression morph from shock to pleasure to a desperate need to come. Pushing another finger inside her, playing with her silky walls, feeling her muscles tighten against me, I chuckle. "I think you're wanting to come, aye? So close." Curling my fingers, I push against all the delicate, sensitive places inside her. "If I just play with your plump wee clit, you're gonna go off like a rocket, aren't you, baby?"

Bella's grabbing my hair with both hands, thighs shaking, little moans coming from her that I dinnae think she's aware of. Desperate, needy little noises and feck I canna take it. Sucking her clit into my mouth as threatened, I bite it, very gently and stroke

it with the tip of my tongue and she wails, so fecking satisfying and yanks on my hair and I dinnae care.

The room's silent, just gasping for breath and her last, faint moan. Raising up on my elbows, I sign, pointing my index finger at her, then circle my hand over my face and draw my fingers to my thumb.

She gives a weak little chuckle. "Ye are beautiful too, Logan. So beautiful."

"Can I ask ye something?"

We took our bowls of Stovie into the great room, lighting a fire and curling up under a blanket on the couch.

"Aye, of course." I hand her a glass of wine.

Her cheeks are still flushed from her orgasm and she hides a grin. "Um... there was a moment, not that I was thinking clearly, but did ye come?"

"Goddamnit lass!" Now I'm the one who's likely turning red. "That was so fecking hot. You turn me back into my component parts. I'm all dick and no brains. So aye, I pushed my cock against the counter and came in my sweatpants like a fecking teenage boy. Ya happy?"

"Kind of." The poor lass's shoulders are shaking; she's trying so hard to hold back a laugh. "I thought so when ye went upstairs to change. I mean, it's flattering. Also, it would be selfish for me to be enjoying something that good all by myself. Thank ye, though. My head feels so much better."

"I did that for science." I point my finger at her sternly, "Dinnae ye forget it."

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is girl talk and excessive energy drinks.

Arabella...

Logan slipped out of bed in the middle of the night, kissing my shoulder before my half-conscious self could ask where he was going. He dinnae send me a text with any information, and I'm not feeling like sending him one because of it.

So, when he wasn't back by mid-morning, I went in search of Hamish. Nothing more humbling than having to ask my bodyguard where my husband is.

"Hey, Hamish. Would ye happen to know the whereabouts of your boss right now?"

He's in another dark suit looking suitably stern and bodyguard-ish. "I must admit that I dinnae know, Mrs. MacTavish, but he did ask me to tell ye that you're having a visitor around noon."

"This dinnae seem like a lifestyle that encourages surprises," I say sourly. Ah, there's the slightest bit of a twinkle in his eye.

"Traditionally ye would be correct, Ma'am."

My mysterious visitor turns out to be Xenia. I'd seen and met her briefly on the jet heading back from Copenhagen, but she seemed buried under a pile of laptops and not really in a mental space for a 'get to know ye' conversation. She looks like she should be at a country club meeting, planning one of the interminable galas I used to work at as a server. She's even wearing a sweater set and pearls.

“Nice to see you again, Arabella. I can call you Arabella, correct?” She holds out her hand to shake mine in a well-bred way.

“Oh, please call me Arabella. Since the insta-wedding with Logan, I’m getting nothing but Mrs. MacTavish this, and Ma’am that.”

“This does not surprise me,” she chuckles, “however, I’m about to make your day so much better.” Hamish and another dark-suited minion are carrying in a pile of boxes, and she leads the way upstairs to one of the guest bedrooms.

Part of me is wrestling with a fierce bout of jealousy. How does she know the layout of my husband’s house so well? And why am I getting so crabbit about it? I’ve been married to the man for... what. Four days?

This is a temporary thing, I remind myself.

It dinnae make me feel any better.

“I’m pretty familiar with all four of these houses in the Square,” she says with a bit of a knowing smile. “My partner Georges and I installed all their security features.”

“I see.” I’m embarrassed to be so transparent.

“So, Logan says you’ll be doing some remote tutoring so you’d need a good system for that. And since you’re starting your postgraduate program next fall, you’ll need a few security upgrades to-”

“I beg your pardon?”

Xenia’s pulling all manner of computer equipment from the pile of boxes, but she continues to face me, rolling her eyes as she speaks. “This comes as a surprise? Jesus

Christ, these men ... I'd like to tell you that this is the first time a MacTavish man has autocratically ordered big life changes for their new wife without her knowledge, but that would be a lie. You did know about the remote tutoring plans for your students at the Wallace School?"

"Aye, that I knew about," I say wryly.

"Well, I noted in your background report that you were intending to return to school for your postgraduate degree in special education?"

"Has everyone in Scotland read every personal detail of my life? Because it's really beginning to feel that way." I feel exposed, extremely uncomfortable and veering towards furious.

I must look unhinged, because she stops everything and nods at Hamish and the other man. "Guys, I've got this. Give us a moment, huh?" Once it's just the two of us, she brushes back the tidy lines of her blonde bob.

"Trust me, I know some seriously weird shit about this family. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but your background is one of the nicest, tidiest lives I've ever had to construct from public and private data. Your extremely detailed report was how Logan got to you in time before those fuckheads murdered you in front of your own apartment house. They must have followed you from the gala, but we got Logan your address in time. I promise you, other than your husband, no one has your full report. I only read it because that's my job. But I'm a vault." She makes the lock and key gesture with a grin.

This makes me laugh, which I suspect was her intention. "Thank ye. Can I help set all this up?"

I almost immediately lose track of what I'm plugging into where, as Xenia rapidly

builds my computer system, but she's patient as she explains all the security features and shows me how the cameras and remote connections work. "I also need to input your information on the biometric scanner here in the house," she says, yawning hugely.

"Can I make ye some coffee?" I offer. "Caffeine is the precious and life-saving source of my very existence."

"Would you happen to have any Celsius or Red Bull? If we were at Kai's place, I know the answer would be 'hell, no!' I'm sure there's nothing in his fridge but kale and chicken breasts, unless his new wife Luna has added some culinary sanity to his life."

"Ach, all that macrobiotic shite? Glad I dinnae marry that MacTavish, then." I make a face. "Let me go check in the pantry."

Xenia is finished with my computer and already hovering by the kitchen by the time I find a six pack of Monster Zero Ultra. "This is the closest thing I could find." I hold it up for her inspection.

"It'll do, and maybe some of those salt and vinegar crisps?"

"Ye know, this is the most normal moment I've had since this whole thing started."

We're in the great room, lying in a rubble of Monster cans, crisps and the ice cream I found in the freezer.

"You're not going to feel normal once that drink gets into your system," she snickers. "I told you not to drink two!"

I eye her curiously. "You're not really what I expected, to be honest."

“Ah.” She sits up, brushing the crisp crumbs off her sweater set. “You thought I’d be covered in tattoos, with purple spiky hair?”

“Well... aye.”

“Appearances should be deceiving,” she says with a wicked little smile. “Why make it easy for the enemy? Though I do have an insane number of piercings.”

“Really?” My gaze instantly darts to her chest.

“Yep. Those...” she points to her nipples, “a couple of dermal piercings at the base of my spine, and then a few on my-”

“Aye, I get it! I feel so boring by comparison.” My thoughts instantly go to Logan’s delightfully effective adornments. “Is there a favorite piercing studio where ye all go? Never mind. Forget I asked!”

Xenia’s laughing uncontrollably and I’m sure my face is on fire. “Well yes, there is. And yes, I know about Logan’s and Kai’s piercings.”

“Logan’s brother has them, too?” I yelp. Kai seemed so stern and serious.

“Oh, yes. Their cousins never stop giving them crap about their piercings. Though I suspect that’s because they all want to get one, but they’re too chicken shit.” She eyes me speculatively. “Have you thought about getting one? I’m telling you, a clit piercing ramps up your orgasms like you can’t believe.”

“I’d rather kickbox a bear,” I blurt.

She’s still howling with laughter when Logan steps into the room, eyeing the desecrated remains of our junk food binge. “I see you’ve made yourself at home,

Xenia.”

“You should be grateful.” Standing up and stretching, she straightens her pearls. “You got home before I could tell her all the insane, reckless things you’ve done through the years, like the time you thought it would be more expedient to blow out the back of the vault at that drug warehouse in Rotterdam instead of dismantling the lockset on the door.”

“We shaved fifteen minutes off the mission, ye Bessie. Now stop weaponizing my past and tell me how the computer setup went.”

Xenia launches into an extremely complicated explanation that ends with inputting my retinal and fingerprint scan into the biometric security system. I have a feeling that she’s lost Logan at some point as his eyes glaze over. When she’s finished, she beams up at him expectantly.

“Your need for praise is radiating off ye like a fever,” he says sourly.

“You did say if I could get this all taken care of within twenty-four hours that you would give it to me.” Xenia holds out her hand, wiggling her fingers expectantly.

With a sigh, Logan heads over to a table in the entry hall and sorts through the keys he keeps in a carved dish. “Here.” He holds out a set. “My Maserati GranCabrio for one month. And aye, a dent in the bumper is still a dent!”

“It just means you’ve used the bumper, like it was intended!” She snatches the keys from him with a grin. “Arabella, it was a pleasure getting to know you, give me a call if you run into any problems with the new setup, okay?”

“It was a grand afternoon,” I agree. “Thank ye so much.”

“I’m off to find Georges before he breaks into NASA’s website again,” she says, waving goodbye. A few moments later, Logan’s expression is deeply pained.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just heard Xenia make her exit. She peeled out of the garage in my Maserati, likely testing the zero to eighty feature,” he groans.

“Sorry.”

“Ye dinnae look sorry. Ye look like ye might be enjoying my suffering. Is that correct, my bride?” He’s stalking me around the center table as I collect the pile of drink cans.

“Not in the slightest,” I say primly, “though perhaps I might be a wee bit more sympathetic if you’d bothered to message me today. Ye know, a little, ‘How’s your day? Did ye sleep well? Xenia’s going to come over and set up a computer system more suited to the National Defense Agency.’ Things like that.”

His hands are already sliding around my waist and it’s very distracting.

“I’m sorry, Bella. There are parts of my work that tend to make it difficult to focus on anything else at the time. I’m not used to checking in with anyone, I see that needs to change.” His big hands are heading toward my arse and my desire to scold him is rapidly disappearing.

“Um... well. Thank ye for the computer system. It’s amazing. It’ll make remote tutoring so easy.”

“Georges installed two study booths at the school.” He’s squeezing my arse, pulling me closer. “They’ll connect to your system here, but they can be utilized for other

teachers as well.”

“That’s...” What the hell was I talking about? “Oh, the booths. That’s nice.” It’s his damn eyes. That hazel, mesmerizing gaze and when he’s intent on something, his entire expression sharpens, like a falcon ready to dive on its prey.

“Xenia, she was- was-” He’s rubbing his rapidly hardening dick against my stomach. “She was telling me about the piercings.”

He pulls back to look at me, an action I note with some regret. “Whose piercings?”

“Her’s. She mentioned that ye use the same piercing studio and that ye and your brother both have... Actually, never mind. I dinnae want to talk about your brother’s piercings.”

“Thank god,” he says fervently. “Neither do I. I do have to tell ye something.”

“Aye?” I follow him into the kitchen, it looks like he brought home takeaway and the scent of fish and chips is divine.

“I have to leave tomorrow. I’m not sure how long this is going to take. A few days at least.” Logan looks so handsome in his tight black t-shirt, his biceps bulging as he dishes out the food. He hands me a plate and I see another mark on the side of his hand, next to the five from before. His skin is red and slightly swollen.

“Are ye going to be safe?” My appetite disappears.

“This is more of a fact-finding mission,” he says cryptically. “Just making certain some intel is correct.”

Looking back down at his hand and the new mark, I notice that even though it looks

like he recently scrubbed his hands, there's traces of red under his fingernails. "Was that intel taken from an unwilling source?"

"Do ye want that answer?"

Do I?

I've already seen and experienced so many terrible things. People that were capable of more evil deeds than I could imagine. But if I'm going to be a MacTavish - even if it's just for a short time - I need to be able to handle this. I've never been one to hide from the truth, and this is not the time to start.

"Aye, I do." I meet his gaze squarely. "I want to know."

"Head Bastard in Charge finally broke. He gave us valuable information about the movements of the other people running the organ trafficking business."

"I see. I dinnae need the details, but..." I swallow hard, trying to push away the thought of how Logan got that blood under his nails. "Do ye think we can stop them now? Can ye catch them?"

"Our chances are much better. They're canny, these bastards, and it's clear they dinnae dispense all the information to anyone in the organization, just bits and pieces, even though that man was close to the top of the food chain. But there's a lot to work with."

"Was..." My fingers tighten on my plate. I've got to be tougher than this. "He was alive, then. Not now."

"Aye. He's gone." He's watching my expression carefully. Lifting his fist, he shows me the six tattoo marks on his hand, including the new one he must have gotten

today.

“Are those marks for people you’ve, ye know, that you’ve killed?”

He chuckles, but not like it’s really funny. “These are for you, my wife. These are the men who hurt ye, who tried to kill ye.”

The two men in the alley...

The two men who kidnapped me...

Anselm.

Head Bastard in Charge.

Sucking in a deep breath, I nod. “I hope ye dinnae need to make any more marks for me, then. But ye saved me. Ye protected me from so much worse. It’s... it means so much. I dinnae expect to feel this.”

He smiles gently, which seems so odd while having this conversation about murder and tattoos. “Do ye want me to go run a nail brush over my hands again? I’m thinking I missed a spot or two.”

For the first time, I take the initiative, going up on tiptoe and kissing him. His mouth is warm and soft, and I take a moment before I pull back. “That is a good idea.”

Crabbit - Scottish slang for cranky or pissy.

Bessie - Scottish slang for a saucy or ill-tempered woman

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella goes back to school and Logan discovers he has a Librarian Kink.

Arabella...

It's been five days since Logan left for parts unknown.

Well, he did narrow it down to 'the Mediterranean,' which gives me precisely nothing to work with.

When his face lights up my phone screen, I jump for it so fast that I'm embarrassing myself but I dinnae care.

"Ye look tired as hell," I blurt. There's the supportive commentary every husband needs. "I mean, ye look like ye could use some extra rest, and..."

He's laughing, but he's got dark circles under his eyes and his well-trimmed beard is growing into something more suited for a mountain man who herds sheep. "I know I look like shite, my pretty wife. Are ye ready for your testing, then?"

"Aye, I think. I've been studying every moment since you've been gone, keeping myself busy." I nervously fluff my hair. "Do I look like a solid and respectable educator of young, impressionable bairns, ye think?" I hold my phone out so he can see my outfit; the pink sweater he bought me in Copenhagen and a black pencil skirt.

"Feck me," he groans. "I dinnae know I had a librarian kink until this very moment." His gaze sharpens and suddenly, he's not looking at all tired. "And what are ye wearing under that skirt?"

“Some of those crotchless knickers ye bought me.”

He’s looking half parts turned on and half parts outraged and I canna help but laugh.

“I’m wearing proper tights, husband.”

“Do ye know, that’s the first time you’ve called me husband?” He runs his hand through his hair, which only seems to make him look even more of a braw lad. “It’s a pity I’m not there to thank ye properly.”

“Aye, I’m thinking we’ve been apart now almost as long as we’ve been together in this unusual arrangement.” I hop on one foot, then the other to get my high heels on. Not too high. I’m going back to the University of Glasgow, not a club.

“Our marriage isn’t an unusual relationship,” he scoffs. “We’re gonna have dinner with Kai and my cousin Ethan. Ye really need to know just how unusual MacTavish marriages can get.”

“That is in no way reassuring, if that was what ye are aiming for.”

He shrugs modestly. “I’m just saying, their beginnings were far more daft than ours. Hamish should be knocking on the door any minute to fetch ye.”

As if on cue, Hamish does.

“Ye either have my bodyguard on the other line or you’re watching me on one of your cameras,” I protest. The subject of security cameras hidden throughout the house came up after Logan left, cheerfully warning me that he intended to watch me undress every night and expected a show.

“Off ye go, lass. You’ll do just grand. And I intend to reward ye thoroughly when I

get home.” With that damn rakish pirate grin of his, Logan signs with his thumbs together and his forefingers bent, tapping his knuckles together, creating a triangle. “I’ve been thinking of that pretty pussy constantly,” he groans. “Especially with my cock inside it.” He thrusts his finger between the thumb and forefinger of his other hand.

I flush bright red, giggling like a schoolgirl. “How did ye manage to learn all the dirty bits in sign language first? You’re terrible.”

“Ah, that’s because I adore all your dirty bits,” he growls, and damn him, I can feel myself getting wet.

“I canna go to testing with wet knickers! Ye must stop this right now!” My stern admonition is not my best because I’m laughing at the same time.

“Ye go on then. Just remember, when I get home, that pretty, pretty pussy is mine.”

Logan signs goodbye and hangs up. Damn him for being so filthy! And I’m the fool who’s loving it.

While I might be a wee bit biased, I think the University of Glasgow is one of the most beautiful places in Scotland. It’s a maze of imposing stone Gothic-style buildings with a profusion of towers and turrets and I think I’d crept into every single one of them during my undergrad years, looking out the tiny, arched windows and pretending I was a princess.

Maybe that’s why I’m so in love with Logan’s clock tower room.

I ponder this realization as I head into the big lecture hall. It’s filled with old-style wooden seats facing a long series of magnificent stained-glass windows. The size is a bit silly, since there’s less than fifty of us starting this particular Master’s program in

fall.

“Arabella!”

“Carol? How are ye?”

She grabs me into a big hug as I find myself issuing a girlish squeal of excitement, a moment that will no doubt make me cringe when I recall it later.

Carol Winchester was one of my first friends here during my undergrad years, quickly learning sign language and politely bulldozing me into a social life on campus until she transferred to Oxford in our junior year. She’s blonde, blue-eyed and always so sweet. She is also the one who introduced me to my drunken ex, Ted, but I canna hold that against her.

“This is so lovely!” She’s mindful, facing me and shaping her words precisely. “I hated that we lost touch with each other.”

“Well, I’m so happy to see ye now. Are ye starting the Master’s program, too?”

We’re both signing and talking and the professor supervising the testing chuckles as she passes us into the hall. “Catch up later, if ye will. Let’s get started.”

Less than a month ago, I was crying in an empty classroom at the Wallace School for getting sacked from my second job. Smiling down at my test form as I open it, I marvel for just a moment at how fast everything can change. And it all started with that impossible, shameless, gorgeous man I married, both of us blasted out of our minds in front of a Danish registrar who was likely moments from laughing his arse off.

Focus. This is important, I scold myself. This is what will support you when we get

divorced.

Suitably chastened, I read the first question.

“...so the best part is the cruise! It’s two weeks long and sails all over the Caribbean and then the Bahamas. It’s amazing. A chance to do something good and get a full princess experience aboard a cruise ship.” Carol gives me an impudent smirk. “It’s a pity that you’re married now, I would have convinced you to come with me.”

We stopped by the campus coffee shop after the examination finished to catch up, Hamish politely sitting at a discreet distance with a mug of tea that he never touches.

Picking up my hand, she moves it so the light catches my ring. “Who is this man and does he have brothers?”

“Two, but one is married and the other is a wee bit young for ye,” I chuckle. Kai and his youngest brother Ewan stopped by the other day to invite me to dinner at their parent’s house on Sunday. It would have been rude to say no, but I’m hoping Logan will be home by then. Facing his entire family on his own sounds like as much fun as a root canal, even if the ones I’ve met already have been kind.

“I don’t know,” she muses. “Perhaps I could be convinced to be a cougar for a ring like that.”

“Tell me more about this study?” I deflect, trying not to picture Carol and Ewan, Logan’s seventeen year old brother, on a date.

Her eyes are sparkling and fingers flying as she signs as well, telling me more. Carol was always the most outgoing and sweetest of our group, and she’s genuinely excited about this study. “I’m AB-negative, and that’s the second rarest blood type in the world. So, the study is examining all the genetic components of the blood type to see

if there's a way to replicate some of the Rh factors to make other blood types compatible."

"That sounds grand, it's wonderful that you can be rewarded for volunteering for something so important." I'm about to tell her about the students at the Wallace School when Hamish clears his throat in a very pointed way.

"Mrs. MacTavish, I'm sorry to disturb, but ye are quite late for an important meeting."

There's no meeting. I canna read his expression, but I've had enough safety admonitions drilled into me by Logan that when it's time to leave, I get moving. "Carol, let's have lunch when ye get back from the cruise. And pictures! Send so many, aye?"

I'm allowed a quick hug before Hamish takes my arm, moving briskly.

"What's going on? Are we in trouble?"

He leans down so I can hear him over the student chatter. "There's unexpected activity around the Square. I've been instructed to take ye to the elder MacTavish home."

"There's a lot of those, which elder MacTavishes are we talking about?" There's a pit forming in my stomach. Unauthorized activity? Is someone hurt?

"Logan's parents, Dougal and Isla." He's moving so quickly that I'm breaking into a half-trot to keep up. "Theo is on campus already; we canna go back to our car. He'll meet us by Professor's Square."

Shite. This is serious enough that he dinnae dare take me back to the armored Range

Rover that Logan designated as mine.

He touches his security earpiece, I only catch a couple of words. “No guns... they... too many... open fire.”

We race around the corner of the building to see Theo driving up onto the lawn. Two more cars are closing in on him and Hamish rips open the door and throws me in with zero finesse, leaping into the front seat.

“Move!” He punches the roof of the car and Theo accelerates, eating up the distance to the exit.

The roar of the engine drowns out everything they’re saying to each other, and I turn around to see the other cars still on our tail. Black SUVs. Does the entire criminal underworld drive the same car?

“Who are they?” I shout.

“Ye haven’t met Lachlan MacTavish yet.” Hamish remembers to raise his voice for me, even while checking his ammo clip and snapping it back into place, and then pulling a shotgun out from under the seat. “He’s your husband’s uncle and known as a bit of a loose cannon.”

Theo snorts so loud even I can hear it.

There’s a MacTavish more unhinged than Logan? Really?

“It appears,” Hamish continues, “that he might have blown up a competitor’s warehouse over by a port on the River Clyde. The competitor is looking for any random MacTavish within reach for immediate retaliation.”

“And we were within reach. How bad is-”

There’s an enormous, thudding sound behind me, with an impact violent enough to push me forward. Wildly looking back, I see the back window is a mosaic of cracked glass, still held together by another layer on the inside.

Hamish turns in his seat, leaning close to me. “Mrs. MacTavish, ye must put your head down and dinnae move a muscle until I say. Do ye understand?” He’s cocking his gun and I dinnae want to be the thing that distracts him so I bend over, tucking my hands under my thighs.

The SUV jolts sideways as Theo takes a sharp turn, the tires slipping slightly, then grabbing again. There’s a shrill screech loud enough for me to hear, even with the higher pitch and glass shatters outside my window.

“They shot out the window of the car next to us,” Hamish roars. “We must get off this street.”

“On it!” Theo shouts back.

The top of my head hits the seat in front of me, my seatbelt snapping me back. I want to yell too, ask if they’d just slammed into the back of our car but I keep quiet.

I’m going to make Logan teach me how to shoot.

The thought is freakishly reassuring and within what must have been just a couple of minutes but felt like hours, maybe days, Hamish gently pats my back,

“Ye can sit up.” He smiles at me, relieved. “Our chase cars just took ‘em out.”

“That’s... wait. That’s it, then?” I look out the cracked window and see one car

slammed into a streetlight, and the other... It's just gone, and another black SUV is following us.

“For now,” Theo says dourly.

Ever the optimist, this one.

Braw lad - Scottish slang for a really hot guy.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is nothing like a car chase and gunfire to bring a family together.

Arabella...

“Arabella, it is so lovely to meet ye.” Isla takes my hand between hers, smiling warmly.

“Thank you for having me, even under such unusual circumstances,” I try to return her smile, but it’s mighty awkward. Hey, Ma, I’m the one who Drunk Married your son, nice to meet ye!

Logan’s mother is stunning , with long black hair and green eyes that are nearly translucent. Between her and his father Dougal, I can see how all their offspring won the genetic lottery.

“Aye, there’s nothing like a car chase and gunfire to bring the family together,” Kai said dryly. From my perch in the kitchen, I can see Dougal on the phone in his office, pacing back and forth in front of the open door, barking instructions every couple of minutes.

“You’ll get used to it.” Kenna is the only daughter and she’s got a grin that spells trouble, a lot like Logan’s. “Luna, Kai’s wife will be here any moment and we will carry ye away from these men and gorge ourselves on sweets and gossip. Ye look like you’re a white wine drinker?”

I’m touched to notice that she takes care, like her mother did, to speak to me directly so I could read their lips. This is something to be grateful for, because there is a lot of

ambient noise, what with all the shouting and threats of retribution.

My phone vibrates aggressively in my pocket and Kenna winks as I pull it out. “That will be Logan and he is most likely beside himself that ye were put in danger. I’ll leave ye to it.” She hands me the glass of wine she just poured and takes off. I gulp a good third of it before hitting the Facetime button.

“Are ye hurt? Love, did they harm ye?”

Ach, Logan’s furious. I’ve not seen him quite like this, eyes narrowed and mouth tight.

“I’m fine, husband. I promise. There might have been some shooting, but I was safe in one of your family’s many armored cars and we got here, just fine. Are ye all right? I dinnae want ye to have a stroke.”

“This cartel is about to meet a swift and violent end to all their European holdings,” he snarls. “Going after the family is strictly forbidden.”

“But... what about the organ traffickers? They did that.”

“That was before I married ye,” he says. “Ye still need personal protection, but threats like these are never supposed to touch family. There’s a strict code, even in the underworld.”

“I hear your Uncle Lachlan blew one of their warehouses to smithereens? Ye can see the smoke from all over the city.”

While Dougal seems upset by his brother’s actions, Logan shrugs it off. “Quickest way to get the bastard’s attention. But now that they’ve broken the code about family, they’ll be hard-pressed to find anyone willing to align with them.”

“It was expedient, then?” I’m trying to look innocent, but he glares at me.

“I see you’ve spoken with my father.”

“Well, no. But there’s been a lot of shouting,” I admit.

“I’m on my way back home,” he says, “I’ll be landing in an hour or so. I know getting thrown into meeting the entire family like this is a wee bit much. Are ye doing okay, then?”

“Everyone has been very kind. Dinnae ye worry about me. Just come home safe, aye?”

Ach, here comes the devilish pirate grin. “I have plans for you, Bella.” Setting his phone down on his seat tray, he signs, Oral sex, for starters. Then when you’re nice and wet, I’m gonna spit on your arse and put my cock in there. He spreads his fingers and thumbs apart, loosely making a circle and then pointing with his index finger.

“Ye just stop that right now!” I’m laughing uncontrollably and praying no one’s seeing this over my shoulder. “What is wrong with ye?”

“Nothing that you bouncing on my cock won’t cure, my pretty wife.”

“Ye must stop it!” I turn my back to the room, whispering into the phone. “You’re really wanting me all turned on at your parents’ house? What’s next, in the confession box at church, you twisted thing?”

Logan actually looks intrigued.

“I’m ending this call before I can never look your parents in the eye again,” I warn.

“If ye must. Please tell Da that I’m sending him the schematics he asked for. They should be downloaded within five minutes.”

“All right.” I’m still watching Logan’s pirate grin. I should be hanging up. But he’s so pretty...

“Are ye sure ye dinnae want more talk about what I’m gonna do to ye when I get home, sweet Bella?”

“Goodbye!” I blurt, face beet red. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph this man is going to kill me.

Cautiously knocking on Dougal’s office door, I jump a little when it swings open. There’s several more of the MacTavishes packed in there, and they’re all holding weapons.

“Ah, Logan wanted me to relay a message? He uh... he said the schematics you’re wanting should be downloading now?” I’m frozen on the threshold, not wanting to startle the men in a room full of guns.

“You’re Logan’s lass, grand to meet ye! I’m Uncle Lachlan.” The man casually puts the two grenades he’s holding in his suit pocket and strides over to me with a grin. “Welcome to the clan.” Lachlan has dark eyes, almost black, but I swear there’s a tiny demonic flame burning in there. He opens his arms for a hug and my eyes bulge.

“Grenades...” I say faintly. “Pocket full of grenades.”

Kenna and Isla are suddenly behind me. Kenna loops her arm with mine, “Let’s go out and sit by the fire, aye?” Her mother smiles at me reassuringly, but she’s already swiftly dismantling an assault rifle and reassembling it and I really do not want to be in this room anymore.

“Sounds grand, thank ye.”

Logan...

I knew my sister would have Arabella well in hand by the time I got to Da and Mum’s place, and she did a fine job. They’re sitting around the outdoor fireplace with Kai’s wife Luna, laughing.

“The fire’s too big? Really?” My wife looks genuinely remorseful.

“You’re definitely perfect for Logan.” Luna taps her glass to Arabella’s. “The pyromaniacal bent leans toward soulmates.”

Admittedly, the blaze is so big that there’s flames shooting out of the stone chimney but who am I to discourage my bride’s love of fire. My parents still live in the big Georgian style mansion they bought in a posh section outside of Glasgow when Mum was pregnant with Kai. Their neighbors know better than to complain about something as minor as a wee bit of a bonfire.

“Oh. Well, we had a fireplace at my parent’s house, a huge thing,” Bella explained. “My pop never allowed us to use more than a stick or two of kindling. ‘Too expensive,’ he said. Look how nice a big, cheerful blaze can be!”

I suspect she is on her second glass because she’s a bit chatty. Crouching in front of her, I cup her cheek. “Sweet wife, I will buy ye an island and we’ll have a proper forest fire for your birthday.”

She jumps out of her seat, letting me haul her up, wrapping her legs around my waist. It’s possible that the car chase this afternoon shook her up more than she knew.

“That was quick! Kenna and Luna were kindly sharing some memories about ye.”

My wife smiles sweetly, but I can tell she's got some ammunition stored up to taunt with me later.

"None of the absolutely worst bits," Kenna assured me, smiling sweetly.

"Hmmm." There's little I can do that intimidates my sister any more, which is a shame because the woman is a menace. "I need to meet with Da and the others. Have ye eaten, sweetheart?"

Luna and Kenna make little "Aww..." noises. Eyeing the empty wine bottles, I say, "I'll have the cook send some food out."

Once I'm in the war room, better known as Da's study, it looks like we're already on our way to a resolution. Adriano Costa, the head of the cartel and owner of the warehouse Uncle Lachlan turned into a crater, is on the big screen monitor.

He dinnae look happy.

"Attacking my men and our warehouse could be considered a declaration of war," he growls.

"Ye brought women and children into one of our ports for human trafficking." Uncle Cormac has my father's seat, and he's radiating fury. "Ye have always known our stance on the Red Trade. They have all been taken to a safe house."

Costa laces his fingers together. "The wrong shipment was sent to the port. I will, of course, discipline the lieutenant responsible for the mistake and have his head delivered to you."

My attention moves the men in the background. Costa is seated outdoors on a terrace, palm trees waving and a profusion of vividly colored flowers, most likely at his estate

outside of Bogotá. There's another group of lounge chairs behind him with five or six men seated there. One of his sons, Marcos, I think, is whispering angrily to another man, one of Costa's chief advisors.

"There is also the matter of your men attacking one of our wives," Uncle Cormac continues. "This is a violation of a long-held agreement between the families."

This news, it seems, Costa had not heard, because his face is turning a mottled red.

"Benicio!"

The advisor stands as if he knows he is going to his doom. "Who ordered the attack on the MacTavish woman?"

Benicio frantically murmurs something to him, and it does not seem to please Costa, who pulls out his gun and shoots the man in the head. Calmly wiping the blood spray off his face with a white linen napkin, Costa nods at Cormac. "We honor the code. Kindly accept my apologies with payment in blood." The old man leans forward with sudden interest. "We could, of course, strengthen the bonds between our families by uniting one of my daughters with one of your sons?"

Michael's standing right behind me and I angle to block him from Costa's view. My cousin's expression of horror is not flattering.

"Lucia, my eldest, is eighteen and a beauty," Costa continues, as if he's not just shot his senior advisor in the face. His son Marcos is ignoring the conversation, still whispering to the others.

"Your suggestion is, of course, an honorable one." Uncle Cormac is smoother than butter on a hot bun when he wants to be. "We must table such a discussion for another time. Our agreement was the use of our ports for a one-time shipment of

weapons only. I am withdrawing the use of the MacTavish ports for this action.”

Ach, the old man’s not liking this answer. “We can add an additional five percent to our agreement with you.”

“Not at this time.” There’s a look my Chieftain gets when things are about to go wrong, a blank look in his eyes that promises retribution and fire and death. Costa is a cunning old bastard, and he knows when to bow out.

“Very well, MacTavish. We will speak again soon.”

“Goodbye,” Uncle Cormac nods, clicking a button and ending the call.

He swivels in his chair to look at the rest of us. “Thoughts?”

I lift my hand. “Chieftain, the call was recorded, aye?”

Xenia is in the corner and she nods, “Of course, we film everything with the Hasselblad H6D. Thirty-two hundred megapixels.” She says it in the same tone most people use when talking about baby kittens.

“Can I bring in Arabella?” I ask. “As ye all know by now, she’s an excellent lip-reader, and I’m mighty curious about what set Costa’s boy off in the background. Her Master’s degree covers the evolution of sign language in the romance languages. She’s trained in British Sign Language as well as ISL and SSL. She learned to speak Italian and Spanish as well to track the evolution of their sign language properly. She’ll be learning French this year.”

“Good lad,” Uncle Cormac nods approvingly. “Bring her in. The rest ye, go get something to eat, talk, and speculate amongst yourselves. Oh, and Dougal?”

Da turns. “Aye, brother?”

“Have your guards keep an eye on the front gate. When that box gets delivered, ye dinnae want it leaking all over the cobblestone.”

My father groans, mumbling something about “having the meeting at Cormac’s place next time” as he leaves.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella impresses the hell out of her in-laws.

Logan...

“You’re really parading me in front of your Chieftain?” Bella is frantically smoothing her hair and straightening that tight pencil skirt and it’s all I can do to not rip it off her with my teeth.

Five fecking days away from this woman was far too long.

“Ye look beautiful, relax.” My hand is sliding lower and she smacks it away.

“This is not an arse-grabbing occasion, ye bampot!”

“Ye must be Arabella, a pleasure to meet ye.” The study door is open and Uncle Cormac is standing there.

She freezes in horror.

“Of course, I already know ye must be a saint if you’re putting up with the likes of my nephew.” Uncle Cormac’s barely suppressed grin tells me he heard our little exchange and from her pained expression, she’s aware of it too.

“Thank ye, Chieftain, your family has been very kind and welcoming to me.” My wife quickly regains her poise and graciously shakes his hand.

“Logan here thought ye might be able to assist us.”

Xenia clicks the recording back on, she's even zoomed in to catch the men in the background more clearly.

"The one in the white suit is Marcos Costa, he's the second son, traditionally, this means he's second in line for his father's position. Adriano Costa runs one of the largest cartels in South America. We intend to end his expansion into Europe," Uncle Cormac explains. "He's involved in the Red Trade and that, we canna allow in our ports."

Arabella looks at me. "The Red Trade?"

"Human trafficking," I explain. "Primarily young women for the sex industry."

"Aye, ye need to burn him and his cartel to the ground," she's instantly vehement and furious. "How can I help?"

"Costa is the one who sent his men after ye as retribution for Lachlan torching his warehouse today and taking the girls to a safe house," Uncle Cormac explains. "The girls are considered valuable cargo, so losing the shipment-" he spits the word like it's poison, "is a fairly expensive loss for Costa."

"I was watching Marcos during the conversation," I explain. "He's an arrogant one, and not known for his caution. Can ye get some sense of what he was saying?"

Arabella's already moving closer to the monitor, effectively dismissing Uncle Cormac and me. Her eyes are narrowed and she's soundlessly moving her lips. "There's three men in this conversation, but the one in the blue suit is doing most of the talking, who is he?"

Xenia and I look at each other. Within the next two minutes in the recording, he will be the man who gets his head blown off by Costa.

“He’s one of Adriano’s top advisors,” Uncle Cormac steps in.

“The advisor is trying to reason with Marcos. ‘It’s not the right time. Ye have to wait until-’” She groans as a guard walks in front of them for a moment. “‘Your father will... never... Your father will never agree to the port change. The overland route to... the client.’ He says it’s too long. Too many... variables.”

She looks at Xenia. “Can ye rewind it? Thirty seconds back.” Uncle Cormac is looking at my bride in admiration and pride swells my chest.

“Marcos is saying something about, ‘just the test run... cargo not important,’ I think? This man is ridiculous. Dinnae he not know ye were using a wide-angle lens? They’re all just blathering on while his Da is doing business?”

“Apparently not,” Xenia snickers. “I will never fail to be amazed at the arrogance and stupidity of men. A conversation like that, out in the open.” She looks at Uncle Cormac and me. “I mean, the arrogance and stupidity of some men. Some.”

We’re at the point in the recording when Benicio is about to be shot. “Sweetheart, I need ye to look away, this is going to be bad.”

She dinnae even take her eyes off the screen, I’ve never seen my wife in hardcore professional mode like this and it’s hot as feck. “I can handle it. Their body language is changing, something’s going to slip, aye? I’ve... I’ve seen death.” Cocking her head, she watches Marcos abruptly lean nose to nose with Benicio, his body tight.

“Marcos is threatening the advisor. He’ll... something... his family? He’ll kill Benicio’s family. See how his body slumps?” She points at the advisor. “He knows he’s going to die. Marcos is putting his hand inside his jacket, so are two of his guards. It looks like he’s ready to kill Benicio to shut him up if his father dinnae do it.”

My wife might be tough, but she staggers back, her hand over her mouth when Adriano takes the shot.

“We can stop love, that’s enough.” I kiss her forehead, the bridge of her nose.

“No, I can do it.” She sucks in a deep breath, closing her eyes for a moment.

“Adriano is focused on ye, Chieftain, trying to butter ye up. He’s not aware of anything going on behind him. Marcos is talking to the third man. He’s saying...” Her face pales. “He’s saying, ‘the next shipment of men and guns will end these... these Scottish fucks. We get their ports and we get...’ Ach, he’s lighting a cigarette! I canna tell...” Her brow furrows for a moment and then she nods. “The other man is saying something about getting MacTavish ports and then owning the UK trade.”

The video cuts off and everyone in the room is staring at my wife with admiration.

“Arabella, that was extraordinary, thank ye, it is an honor to have ye in the family,” Uncle Cormac says warmly. “What you’ve given us here is invaluable.”

“They’re planning on bringing in guns and men to kill ye,” she says doubtfully. “It dinnae feel like a celebratory thing.”

“Sweetheart, it isn’t the first time, and it’ll not be the last.” I slide my arm around her waist, kissing her. “But ye gave us advance warning, and now we know that Marcos is acting behind his father’s back. Treachery can always be exploited.”

I cup her bonnie face, kissing her again. “But your gift! What a thing to watch, my bride. Reading lips is your superpower.”

“Exactly so,” Uncle Cormac agrees, “a true superpower. How much of your receptive communication is based on lip-reading?”

“It’s more like... filling in the blanks,” Bella explains. “Body language plays a huge part, as ye could see. I realized how important it was to me when Covid hit and everyone started wearing masks.”

Rising with a bit of a groan, Uncle Cormac nods toward the door. “Logan, take your bride and her superpowers to dinner and send in your father and Lachlan, aye? Have the guards keep an eye out for Cameron, he should be here any moment.”

Xenia heads out too, marching toward the kitchen and once we’re in the hallway I scoop up my bride, covering her face with kisses. “Wonder Woman? The Black Widow? They’re got nothing on ye, lass.”

“You’re getting carried away.” She laughs as I bounce her in my arms.

“I borrowed something from Kenna.” I pick up a bag I’d left sitting on the table and hand it to her. “I’m gonna miss ye wearing that tight skirt because it outlines your arse so nicely, but go put these on, aye?”

She glances in the bag. “Is there a reason, then?”

Running my hand lightly up her throat, I squeeze, just a bit. “There’s always a reason, baby.”

Arabella...

I’ve put on my borrowed jeans and boots, thank god Kenna is just a shoe size smaller than mine, or these boots would hurt.

Logan’s pulling me through the back of the house and into the garage, where there’s a long row of beautiful cars, like there is in our garage at home. A Ferrari 250 GTO, cherry red. A Bugatti. An Aston Martin in roadster green. Several black SUVs, which

still makes me laugh. Then we round the corner into another section and there it is.

A motorcycle.

Not just a motorcycle. “An Indian Challenger.” I sigh rapturously. “Can I touch it?”

“Feck, this conversation is already making me hard,” he groans. “How do ye know about motorcycles?”

“My oldest brother, Finn. He was a fanatic, ye know how most boys have posters of topless girls in their room? He plastered his room with motorcycle pictures. He liked the Harley-Davidson bikes, but his one true love is the Indian. I was forced to hear more than any one human should know about every Indian brand on the market.”

“Interesting.” Logan leans against the bike, watching me. “So, if I were to say...” His voice drops to a porn star worthy growl, “The PowerPlus 112 delivers 126 horsepower, liquid-cooled, 60-degree V-twin engine with overhead camshafts, how would that make ye feel?”

Drawing in a shaky breath, I ask, “Can ye say overhead camshaft again?”

He laughs boisterously, taking my hand. “Climb on.”

“Logan, no! Dinnae this belong to your Da?”

“It does,” he lightly bites my neck. “That’s why taking it is gonna be so much fun.”

“Isn’t that actually called stealing?” I look longingly at the bike. It’s a matte black and gleams seductively under the low light in this corner of the garage.

“Borrowing, baby. We’re just borrowing it.” He puts a helmet on me, fastens it under

my chin before lifting me lightly onto the seat and swings a leg over, stabilizing the bike and pulling me flush against his back. “Hang on.”

The engine’s roar is so loud that it vibrates through my bones and for once, I’m grateful the helmet masks some of the noise. Logan lets out a genuinely unhinged laugh and revs the engine as we shoot out of the garage, tearing down the long driveway. The guards get the big iron gate open just in time and we slide through the narrow gap and we’re gone, the mansion just a scatter of lights behind us.

Somehow, everything conspires to make my husband even sexier, which I dinnae think was possible; his competent hands handling the throttle, the thick thighs that mine are gripping desperately, the rumble of the engine under me, acting like the world’s most intimidating vibrator.

Everything tears past us in ribbons of light, blares of neon and pools of shadow as we race along the M8 Motorway. Logan finally slows, turning into Port Glasgow. It’s mostly shipyards and old docks, but he pulls into a little beach, surrounded by trees.

With a flourish, my husband pulls out two bottles of Tennent’s Lager from the saddlebags and we tap the bottles together. It’s been a long time since I’ve had a beer, and it’s surprisingly crisp and tasty going down.

“The last time we did this, we ended up getting married,” I warn. We’ve finished the first bottle and he’s already presenting me with another.

“And it was the best Drunk Logic I’ve ever had,” he says, dropping a careless kiss on my shoulder. “The last time I drank a Tennent’s was when I stole a cooler full of them from Kai. He was trying to get Luna to warm up to him after he dragged her down to the Registrar’s office for a quickie wedding.” His smile is fond, reminiscing about the day. “I was there as a witness and possibly to catch Luna if she tried to bolt.”

“That’s sounding mighty familiar, then,” I say dryly.

“So, your brother Finn. Which Indian motorcycle did he end up with?”

“Ach, well. He dinnae get one.” I’m peeling the label off the bottle, looking out on the water. “He got a girl pregnant - Maureen, nice lass - and that was the end of his motorcycle dreams. Their bairn is adorable, Freddie’s his name, he’s five now.”

“Do ye see him much?”

“Once at his christening, I went home for a quick visit. My family is more of a ‘phone call once a year on Christmas’ sort.” I’m looking down at the bottle because I dinnae want to see his eyes. To see if there’s pity there. “Your family is so close, it’s lovely. Mine is... I’m a bit of a disappointment to my folks. There was a lot of finger-pointing when I got my diagnosis. ‘It must have come from your side, Kent! Oh, no, Moria, the weak genes are all from your people.’” I give a little laugh because it’s better to think it’s funny than really sad and terrible.

“So ye did all this on your own, then? Leaving Linlithgow, making your own way through Uni and becoming a teacher?” His voice is warm and deep, I wish I could settle into it like a blanket and wrap it around me.

“Dinnae forget becoming a catering server,” I add, bumping his shoulder.

“How could I forget?” He kisses my shoulder again, pulling the neckline of my shirt down. “I love this little constellation of freckles on your shoulder, love, the shape of a crescent moon.”

“I used to connect the freckles with a pen when I was bored, pretending it was a tattoo.”

“This wee crescent moon is as pretty as ye are.” He traces my freckles with the tip of his tongue and the cool night air hits my skin, making me shiver. “You’re waxing, Arabella MacTavish, my little moon. Growing brighter every night.”

I canna say how it happened, but he’s tearing off my borrowed jeans with a clumsy haste that is unlike him, straddling the bike and lifting me over him.

“Hold my cock,” he grins, pulling out a condom from his pocket.

His thumb is circling my clitoris and suddenly, I am desperately, greedily wet for him. I squeeze his shaft, feeling it throb in my grip. His pupils flare as I help him roll the latex down to the piercing at the base of him. He notches himself inside me and my thighs are shaking. “Slide down, Bella. Ride me.” He nips my crescent-shaped freckles and I do, moaning at the stretch of him as he pushes in inch after thick inch.

“Look at ye, my greedy wife,” he growls in my ear, “fecking yourself on my cock, getting yourself off. Be selfish, baby. Take what ye want.” His hands leave my waist for a moment and I barely notice, sliding up and down on him. “That’s right, ye rub that clit against my piercing, it’s yours. Make your wet little cunt come for me.”

I feel the rumble of the bike starting up and I freeze, my feet backwards on the foot pegs. His booted feet are braced on the ground as he squeezes my breasts, then my arse. “Hang on. We’re going for a ride and I’m not stopping until ye come all over me.”

“Logan!”

My shriek is lost in the roar of the engine as he takes off, our helmets knocking against each other as he kisses me. The dirt road is bumpy and it’s doing all the work, bouncing me up and down on him and the seat vibrating against my arse and we’re probably gonna die and it’s hard to care because the only thing in the world is this

thick, hot muscle inside me and the engine between our legs and we dinnae make it far before I throw back my head, screaming into the night.

I hear him groan, his cock swelling painfully, impossibly wide and he stops the bike and the jolt pushes him deeper inside me.

The wiring for pleasure and pain in my head get crossed and I dinnae know there could possibly be any more room to fit him as he comes, growling and squeezing my arse and slapping it pink and I come again, maybe more than once but all I know is this reckless, unhinged man inside me, arms wrapped around me, his tongue in my mouth and my name on his lips.

Blathering - Scottish slang for chattering.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella meets The Grandparents.

Arabella...

In what I have quickly learned is typical Logan fashion, he saunters into the house a few days later with a dress bag slung over his shoulder and tells me that we'll be going to the symphony.

"When?"

"Tonight," he gives me a kiss on my throat, and I yelp, pulling away before he can turn it into a hickey. I'm wise to his ways now.

"I must admit, I dinnae see ye as the patron of the fine arts type," I say.

"I'm the most high-class bastard you've ever known." He hands me the garment bag and piles a couple of boxes on top of it. "Go make yourself hot as feck. Though with ye, it dinnae take ye much of an effort since you're always the finest woman in the room. I've got a video call with the uncles; I'll be in the study for a while."

"Is this because of the Costa Cartel and may they all burn in hell?" Dread curdles my gut. "Or Anselm's people?"

Logan had told me what he could about his fact-finding trip to the Mediterranean when he returned. The targets he'd been searching for had already disappeared, though he'd rounded up a couple of who he'd called "suppliers."

“What did ye do with them?” I’d asked.

“I made an example out of them.” His face was expressionless, but there was something glowing in his hazel eyes that reminded me a lot of what I’d seen in his Uncle Lachlan’s. Something feral.

Now though, he’s giving me his rakish pirate grin. “The Costas. We have a few ideas. We’re setting up a few surprises that Big Daddy Costa isn’t gonna enjoy.”

“I admire your seamless ability to juggle two monstrous, murderous criminal groups at the same time.” I’m going for sarcastic and not fearful, but there is a bit of both.

“Trust me lass, we’ve juggled far more arseholes at once. Ye just go get ready.” He kisses me and strolls down the hallway, whistling.

We’re supposed to be at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall in less than an hour, and I’m compulsively smoothing down the front of my dress, over and over, certain that I look stupid and terrible and that this is a bad idea.

It was one thing meeting Logan’s family in the comfort of his parent’s home - after a car chase and a shootout when I was too shaken up to have time to worry. The wee detail my husband neglected to mention about tonight until now is that MacTavish International is sponsoring the performance. Now there’s cousins and aunts and uncles and second and third cousins once-removed to face.

This black evening gown is very simple, thank the lord, though I know that simple in this case usually means obscenely expensive. It fits snugly in all the right places and for a strapless dress, it’s surprisingly comfortable, though that long slit in the skirt means I’m gonna have to pay some decisive attention to how I stand up and sit down. One of the boxes held black high heels with the signature red Louboutin soles and I’m leaning heavily against the wall, awkwardly trying to put them on.

“We should stay home. I canna concentrate with ye looking like this.”

Logan’s behind me, reflected in our full length mirror and looking all kinds of braw in his tuxedo. I remember on the night we met he’d been wearing it, and even before finding out he was in danger I’d been surreptitiously looking at him all night. Of course, so was every other woman and probably half the men in that room, so I dinnae feel guilty about it.

Now, though, this man is mine.

At least for now.

Smoothing my hands over his chest, I shake off that thought. “This tuxedo is bespoke, aye? There’s no off the rack suit that fits shoulders like yours.”

He rolls his eyes. “Nothing off the rack seems to fit me. Now you, baby... you’d look bonnie in a potato sack. Now, wearing this? I’m going armed tonight to keep men off ye.”

“Really now? You’d go armed anyway and we both know it. Please dinnae shoot anyone, though. There are few enough people who like classical music. I used to play some of the louder pieces in my classroom for the bairns. They loved Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture .”

“Tonight’s performance is gonna be a lot of fun, then.” He runs his hands down along my waist, thumbs stroking the velvet bodice. “ Berlioz’s Requiem , loud as feck with a big brass section.”

“Oh! I’ve always wanted to hear the Requiem performed before...” my smile drops for a moment but I pin it back on my face, “before I lost my hearing completely. Thank ye, this will be a wonderful night!”

Something flickers in Logan's eyes before he clears his throat. "Did ye open the last box?"

Smoothing down the front of my dress again, I shake my head. "I dinnae think anything else is going to fit in here, husband."

"Close your eyes."

I do, and he slips something cool around my neck.

"Ye can look."

It's a diamond necklace, with a big amber stone set in the center. His long fingers settle the chain over my collarbones so the stone centers just below them. "I saw this necklace in a store window in Milan, and I had to get it. It's the color of your eyes."

"My eyes are brown. Are ye needing glasses already?"

"Not just brown. When the light hits them your eyes glow, golden like this amber. Aye, that's perfect."

He has to lean down - even with me in these skyscraper heels - to put his bearded cheek against mine. Logan is a man reckless enough to set fire to three yachts because the owner "annoyed him," yet attentive enough to find facets in my eye color that look like a priceless stone.

How am I going to let him go when the time comes?

The Glasgow Royal Concert Hall isn't my favorite of the legendary buildings downtown. It's modern, brick, with few embellishments, though the curve of the structure is pretty. It also has a massive lobby where apparently half the city's

population is milling around, holding drinks and showing off their new designer wear or latest expensive watch.

The clamor of everyone talking and laughing is overwhelming, and I squeeze Logan's bicep, closing my eyes.

"Are ye okay, sweetheart? I can take ye to our box right now if ye like." His lips are brushing my ear and I canna help the little shiver that passes through me. He gives me a very light, very quick bite on my neck with a bit of a guttural chuckle.

"I'm grand, I can do it. I just need a moment to filter out some of the noise." I put myself in "server mode," the way I did when I used to work big crowds with my server's tray full of drinks. Focus on who's in front of me. Pay attention to where I am in relation to everyone else so I dinnae bump into anyone... I can do this.

"Ye look so fecking beautiful that I dinnae think I can wait until we get home," Logan growls in my ear. "I might need to find us a quiet coat closet and get ye cock drunk."

"What?" I burst into laughter, which I'm certain was his dastardly plan.

"Ah, there they are, my grandson and his lovely new bride."

My big, bad husband turns to stone.

"It's grand ye could make it, Seanmhair agus Seanair." Logan shakes the hand of a tall gentleman in his seventies with a rough, craggy face and broad shoulders. He's clearly a MacTavish and wearing the kilt to prove it. He has his arm around the most terrifying woman I've encountered in my life, I canna exactly explain why.

She's tiny, shorter than me, with a lean body and silver hair in a perfectly sculpted

French twist and the jade-colored eyes I'd seen on multiple MacTavish men. She's eyeing me in a way that makes me think she's already burrowed deep into my brain and rearranged my ganglia into a pattern more pleasing to her.

“ Grandmother, Grandfather, this is my bonnie bride Arabella Blair MacTavish. Bella, this is Cormac MacTavish Senior and The Lady Elspeth MacTavish, my grandparents.”

It is clear that my enormous spouse, the man who has killed six men just for me and likely dozens more, is terrified of his grandma. If I wasn't so paralyzed by fear right now, I would be finding that adorable.

“It's an honor to meet the couple who created this beautiful and very large family.” I try to gather up any scrap of composure left to me and pray my hand isn't sweating like a beer bottle on a hot day as I shake their hands.

“Delighted, of course.” The Lady Elspeth is facing me directly, as is her husband. She dinnae lean closer, but her words are perfectly and precisely shaped.

Cormac Senior is warmer, and he gives me a conspiratorial wink. “I understand ye have already been of great assistance with a rather persistent itch in my sons' backside, aye?”

“Language!” The Lady Elspeth is scandalized.

“Miss Blair! Miss Blair Miss Blaaaaaiir!”

I can hear those squeals, even above the rest of the crowd. The first wee arms wrap around my waist; it's my student Lina. The rest of my wonderful kids surround me, all scrubbed up in their best with a harried-looking Headmaster Scott behind them.

You're here! All of ye? How? I sign, laughing as I hug them all.

"It's a grand, noisy symphony," Logan says, shaking the Headmaster's hand. "We thought your bairns should be our guests of honor." He insists on being introduced to all twenty of my students, and I sign and speak as I introduce each one.

And this is Roger, I sign proudly, he's always helping me with the younger students and he's picking up lip-reading so quickly! He's wanwitty, this one. Roger grins up at Logan as my husband gravely shakes his hand and I'm thinking I've witnessed the beginning of some hero-worship.

I'm close to tears when I realize that Logan's grandparents have stayed to meet all my students as well. My littles dinnae seem as scared of The Lady Elspeth as I am. "We understand that the Wallace School for Exceptional Children could accommodate a larger student body with some additional funding?" She's speaking to an overwhelmed Headmaster Scott and he nods so quickly that I'm thinking his head's about to fly off. "I'll have my secretary message you for a meeting, then."

"That would be lovely, Mrs. MacTavish!" The poor man looks like he's not sure whether to bow or kiss her hand, but he settles for backing away and nodding some more.

The lobby lights dim discreetly and I give all my kids one last squeeze before they troop gleefully to the very front row in the auditorium, just behind the orchestra pit.

There's a quick moment before Logan escorts me into his family box and I grab him by the lapels, kissing him fiercely. "Thank ye. I just- I dinnae know what to say! What you've done here, I..."

"No crying now," he says, cupping my face in his big, calloused hands. "I have a sister. I know mucking up your night face with the extra bits of mascara and such is a

serious thing.” Pulling out his pocket square, he carefully dabs at my tears. “The most entertaining part of this evening is gonna be watching your students soak it all in.”

Seanmhair agus Seanair - Scottish Gaelic for Grandmother and Grandfather

Wanwitty - Scottish slang for extremely smart or clever.

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In which Logan's past as a Fuckboy comes back to haunt him.

Logan...

I was telling Bella the truth, watching her students gleefully bask in the music is the highlight of the night for me. Unfortunately, it is the only highlight because my past catches up with me by intermission.

"Darling! Where have you been!"

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. It had to be Sheena.

Her arms wrap around my neck like an anaconda as she attempts to kiss me. I'd always liked the fact that she was nearly as tall as I was in her heels, it made quickies in random places easier. But with her mouth chasing mine, I'm regretting the first time I accepted her invitation when she pulled off her knickers in a shadowy corner of my Uncle's Lachlan's sex club. She's wearing a vivid crimson dress that matches her hair, and it looks like it's being held together by a wee bit of thread and a lot of audacity.

"Sheena. How are ye?" I turn my head as her lips graze red lipstick across my cheek, gently wedging my elbow between us. "Have ye met my beautiful wife?"

My beautiful wife had been talking with my sister Kenna and Ethan's wife Sloan, but now all three of them are watching this awkward fecking encounter with the woman I know my sister calls 'Satan in Louboutins.'

“Silly!” Sheena slaps my shoulder. “Wife? A man like ye never settles when there’s so much variety! In fact...” I grasp her wrist as she tries to slide her hand up my chest, “I’d love to leave this colossal bore and go have a drink somewhere.”

My glance darts to Sloan and Kenna, but neither seems interested in helping me out.

“I’m quite serious.” It takes a pivot and a quick shuffle of feet, then I’m next to Bella with my arm around her waist. “This is my lovely bride, Arabella MacTavish.”

“Hello.” Bella’s smile is fixed as she stares at her.

“And sweetheart, this is Sheena Graham.”

Neither of them holds out their hand for a shake, and I’m thinking it’s a good time to show my bride the rooftop gardens. I’m gently pulling her in that direction when Sheena loses it.

“Darling, you’re joking!” Her voice is rising to a pitch that could shatter glass. “Married? Dinnae be ridiculous! Is this a prank?” Her right eye twitches as she glances at my sister. “Kenna, bring me in on the joke, aye?”

“The only joke is your dress, darling. I’m very happy that Arabella is my new sister. The whole family is over the moon about her.” Kenna’s looking like she’s ready to bite into Sheena’s hand, which keeps creeping over to my arm.

Sheena’s face flushes as red as her hair. “What the bloody hell do you-”

“You’ve had too much to drink,” Sloan says crisply. “We are walking away and you should go put yourself back together in the ladies’ room.”

Bella’s silent until we make it to a quiet corner of the garden. “Ex-girlfriend, I take

it?”

“Well, she wasn’t ever Logan’s girlfriend, more of a quick podger-”

“Kenna!” I snap. “Not helpful.”

“Good to know it was never anything serious,” Sloan agrees. “The way she was swinging her lady dick around? She’s used to having her way, isn’t she?”

“I assumed Logan dinnae break free from a monastery just before he met me,” my wife says calmly. “We all have pasts. I’m just happy most of mine live elsewhere.”

“Really?” Kenna’s expression is pure glee. Ach, she really hates me. “Give us some highlights, then. Do ye prefer them blond or dark? Serve the tea, sister!”

Bella’s lips twitch. “Sweetheart, would ye mind getting me another glass of wine?”

“Me too.” Sloan holds out her glass blindly, keeping eye contact with my wife.

“I’ll have a Macallan,” my sister says, turning her back to me.

Kai meets me at the bar. “I do distinctly remember warning ye that your past would catch up, aye? Dinnae ye buy that one enough jewelry to get her to leave ye alone?”

“Not helpful, brother.” I take a quick shot of vodka before collecting the girls’ drinks. “What would be helpful is ye sending in Luna to smooth all this shite over. She likes me.”

His laughter is loud and hearty. “She dinnae really like ye that much. Sending her over would just make it four against one.”

“I know it’s wrong, but I think about punching ye in the throat a lot.” I tap my empty shot glass and the amused bartender refills it for me.

Arabella...

My husband is a handsome bastard. So tall, all those muscles, his sharp cheekbones and rakish pirate grin. It’s a given that any woman would leave heel marks on the entire male cast of Bridgerton just to get within touching distance of Logan.

But having his past displayed so prominently on our first big outing as husband and wife is deflating. And it’s not just that enraged, drunken ginger.

Sloan deftly moves me through the hall as two narrow-eyed women attempt to engage us in conversation. Kenna nobly throws herself on the sword to stay behind and hold them off until we can get back to the rest of the family. My mother-in-law, Isla, is looking at the two embittered girls with an expression that, had it been a physical thing, would have set them on fire.

“My son made many ill-advised decisions in his past,” she says, her fiery gaze turning to me, softening to a smile. “His decision to marry ye redeems all his former mistakes in my eyes. Dougal and I are very happy ye chose to be his better half.” She winks. “In this case, I mean that quite literally.”

We clink our glasses together, and the night feels glorious again.

Maybe I should be upset, yet it’s a wee bit hilarious.

The smell of red wine is strong in the car, because my husband has a full glass of it on his formerly pristine white shirt.

“Is this one of the three I ran into tonight, or did a new one pop up, husband?”

He ignores me. Theo chokes back a laugh as he watches us in the rear-view mirror.

Stalking through the house, Logan peels off his jacket, the stained shirt, leaving a little trail of his bow tie, cufflinks, and shirt studs on his way to the shower in our bathroom.

“When did this happen?” I’m trying to hold my giggles in, but it’s getting mighty difficult. “Ye were getting my coat, and...?”

I’d forgotten it in the box, and Logan ran back to get it for me. When he returned, he was wearing a grim expression and a glass of red wine.

His fingers slide into my hair, gripping it tightly and pulling my head back. “Turn around and I’ll unzip ye, or I’m gonna rip this dress off.”

I spin obediently and he roughly yanks the zipper down. Logan’s mouth is on mine and I’m nearly boneless with the intensity of it, of him. He pushes me back against the tiled shower wall before sliding down to kneel at my feet.

“I’ve been thinking about this,” he says, putting one of my legs over his broad shoulder, thumbs opening my lower lips, stroking along them. “The first time I had my fingers in ye... I kept smelling my fingers on the flight home, remembering the taste of you, so clean. Like flowers.” Then his mouth is on me, his whiskers scratching softly along my thighs, his tongue tracing my folds. My other leg is shaking so he throws that one over his other shoulder, easily balancing me and then...

He slurps, oh, god, he slurps on me like a meal, devouring my pussy like it was a delicacy. Greedy, with little, pleased noises that make me shiver and get wetter still. His hand twists and two fingers slide into me, rough pads of his fingers stroking,

exploring, pressing and stretching me.

“I’m going to make sure you’re ready. Because I’m going to stay inside ye for a long, long time. I’m going to bury my cock in ye because ye are on fire inside...” He groans against my clitoris before sucking it into his mouth and this time I come hard, arching my pelvis and moaning, almost crying with the pleasure of it. The shower, his lips, being back home, here with my husband. The warm water patters like rain down my breasts and into his hair. Rising, he gives me his pirate grin, full lips shining and beard wet. He deliberately licks his lips, pressing each hard, sculpted inch of himself against me, hands still gripping my thighs.

I pull his head down to kiss him, tasting myself on his lips, and grab that giant cock currently pulsing against my stomach, squeezing it and enjoying his groan.

“That time in the lingerie shop? Really getting a look at ye, and not just trying to put all those hazy memories together of our first night. The size of ye, the piercings... A bit intimidating, that.” I hum, running my fingers along his shaft, appreciating the weight and hardness of him, sliding a fingertip over the silky, pierced head and thoughtfully bringing it to my mouth. “Ye taste so good.”

I want to say more, but he cuts me off with a growl and a kiss, hastily rolling on a condom before bending his knees slightly and thrusting into me, making me yelp and grip his lean hips, heels digging into his sculpted arse and feeling the flex and roll of the muscle there.

“So fucking hot,” Logan groans. “God, that’s good. You make me warm again.” His hips slam into me, pushing me back against the tile, my breath hitching. While it dinnae hurt as much as it did on that wild, insane motorcycle ride, I suspect every time with him will feel like this; stretched wide, walls pulled tight against his thickness, feeling every vein and ridge of him thrusting through me.

Feet braced, he cups my arse in those giant hands and bounces me, gaze trained down on the sight of his slick shaft pushing in and out.

“Beautiful,” he says hoarsely. “So soft. I’m gonna be inside of ye every second we can. I’m going to balance ye on my cock and make ye keep me warm for hours. And one day soon, when you’re ready...” His hips are moving impossibly fast and my back is burning from the friction against the tile. “I’m going to fuck a baby into ye. Now that you’re safe. Now that no one can hurt ye, I’m going to make a baby with ye.”

He makes a guttural sound of approval. “Ye just squeezed on me like a fist. Ye like that, aye? I’m going to love seeing ye round, and soft. You’re mine, aren’t ye? Say it. You’re mine.”

Burying my face in the warm space between his neck and shoulder, I suck his wet skin, loving the texture of it. Shrieking when he bounces me especially hard, I gasp, “Aye, I’m yours. I dinnae know how this happened but I can be yours.”

He’s kissing me hard, cock hitting deeper, slower inside me, hips lazily twisting and rubbing against all kinds of soft, sensitive places I dinnae know I had. He feels heavier, thicker now and I know he’s close. Pinning me harder against the shower, my husband, this beautiful, reckless, glorious man arches his hips to push along the front of me, the piercing at the base of his cock rubs insistently, roughly against my clitoris and when he explodes inside me, I do, too. Wet, and warm, and safe. Fused together and shivering a bit.

Podger - Scottish slang for a quickie.

In which there are mimosas, brunch, and bonding.

Arabella...

Sloan, Kenna and Luna, Kai's wife, sweep me away the next morning "for brunch" before I can do more than pull on a pair of shoes. Logan gives me a kiss goodbye, winking as they haul me out the door even though I'm desperately signing, Save me, you arse!

"Logan knows better than to make a fuss, because after last night's debacle, ye need some girl time," Kenna says, squeezing in next to me and slamming the Range Rover's door shut.

"I'm hoping you're not planning on anywhere fancy." While they're all wearing pretty dresses, I'm looking mighty ratty in my jeans and t-shirt. It's one of Logan's and while I look ridiculous in it, it's soft and it smells like him.

We end up at a nice, unpretentious type of eatery by the River Clyde. The girls must be regulars because the hostess dinnae blink an eye at my attire. It's a little place with a few tables crowded together on the flagstone patio. I canna help but notice that we're the only ones out there, aside from four enormous bodyguards, including Hamish, seated in pairs at the tables on either side of us.

"I propose that we order some tasty bites, eat, and talk about nothing in particular until we can get a mimosa into Arabella here," Luna says, eyeing me with a little grin. "Maybe two mimosas. I have to say, I'm very displeased that all the good stuff happens while I'm at home, puking my guts out."

“Are you okay?” She looks healthy. Luna’s beautiful in that unearthly way, with silverish-blond hair and blue eyes. Like a fairy princess. Next to her, I feel sturdy and a wee bit awkward.

I’m fine. Luna signs it, tapping her chest with her index finger and making a thumbs-up with a closed fist.

My cheeks flush and I’m keeping my eyes wide open to keep the tears from spilling out. Only my older brother and one of my sisters ever bothered to learn a bit of sign language, and yet every extended relative in the MacTavish clan has clearly been putting in a lot of study.

I’m just pregnant.

The table erupts in screams and cheers, and Hamish nearly vaults over the table to seize me before he realizes this is a positive development.

“Congratulations!” Kenna leans over to hug her fiercely. “How far along?”

“Four months,” Luna’s laughing helplessly. “I know, I know! Collin has just turned one and I’m pregnant already.”

“Well, the MacTavish genes are strong,” Sloan winks, daintily sipping her mimosa.

“No discussion of my brothers’ or my cousin’s reproductive capacity, if you please,” Kenna makes a gagging motion. “Wait. Does that count as extreme nausea in sign language, Arabella?”

“Um, nausea is more like...” I extend my little fingers, brushing them down my chest and gently patting my stomach. “What you did is a little closer to-”

“Haud yer wheesht!” Now, Kenna’s flushing beet red . “No more sex signing at brunch!”

“Well, you did bring it up,” Sloan says reasonably.

It turns out that it only takes one mimosa to feel comfortable with these women. Sloan and Luna - who are both from the U.S. - are regaling me with what I suspect are highly sanitized versions of their “meet cutes” with their MacTavish men.

“I’m thinking I’m not getting all the details here.”

“Oh yes, little Miss ‘I got kidnapped, got rescued, got shitfaced and then got married in Copenhagen,” Sloan jeers.

“Ye have a point there.” I hold up my hands in defeat, face bright red.

“Backstories aside,” Kenna says, “we wanted ye to have a little time off from the intensity of being Mrs. Logan MacTavish and all the accompanying drama it provides. As ye can see from last night, your man led a full and active life as a fuckboy before finding ye.”

“I think she means fuckboy in the nicest way,” Luna says with a weak smile.

“Oh, he’s my brother. I know he was a fuckboy.” Kenna continues, unperturbed.

“You handled it so well, sister! All the crazy was out in force last night and you stared them all down like a boss,” Sloan says. “I was so impressed, I don’t know if I would have stayed so calm.”

I run my fork through the sauce left from my omelet. “It’s not like I dinnae expect the man to be a virgin when he married me. I mean... look at him.”

“Yeah.”

“Aye.”

“True that.”

“The full assault on our first big night out was a wee bit much.” I run my hand down my face, exhausted just at the thought of it. “Kenna and Sloan were my midfielders, aye? The Raging Ginger bearing down and ye stepped right in. I dinnae even want to know about the other two in the hallway.” I grin suddenly. “Someone threw a glass of wine on him somewhere between him leaving to get my coat and returning to the car. I think the Merlot running down his tux was the classic finish.”

Luna sprays out the mouthful of water she was drinking. “Man, oh man...” She blots her chest with her napkin. “Kai’s told me stories, but the Karma truck just ran Logan down and then drove back and forth a couple of times to make sure the skid marks are nice and clear.”

“What? How did we miss this?” Sloan’s pounding on the table and Kenna’s wheezing, holding her stomach.

“I’m not saying he dinnae deserve it,” Kenna says, “because he did. I can tell ye my brother’s a different man now, I’ve not seen him like this before. So attentive. He used to buy girls flowers and jewelry before he made his escape, but for ye? Everything’s changed.”

“How?”

“Well, he’s the one who arranged for the MacTavish Foundation to sponsor last night, because he knew Berlioz's Requiem was such a loud, resounding symphony. He invited your students and booked out the front row for them.” Sloan smiles,

patting my hand. “Something lovely and thoughtful. Something that a man who cared about you would do.”

I remember him standing at the front desk at the Wallace School, charming Lucy with takeout and asking about my kids. How quickly he’s been learning sign language. Watching him brag about me to the Chieftain of the clan and calling reading lips my superpower.

Last night in the shower...

“Oh, my god. He’s really serious about this marriage thing, isn’t he?”

They all burst into laughter and I canna blame them. That sounded more shocked and appalled than happy. The happiness is there, though, a sweet ember, glowing in my heart.

As we’re leaving the restaurant, flushed and happy and maybe just a bit tipsy, Hamish quickly steps in front of me.

“Relax, ye big lummo. I’m Detective Christie and this is Detective Roy. We’ve been working on Miss Blair’s assault case.”

He reluctantly steps aside to reveal Detective Christie, wearing one of her sensible blue suits and an ironic smile. Her partner’s busy puffing out his chest at the amused clump of bodyguards.

“Girls, give me a moment, would ye?”

It’s clear they’ve all had dealings with the police before, stepping a discreet distance away.

“Ach, it’s Mrs. MacTavish now, isn’t it?” The detective is eyeing me closely. “Was this a planned thing, then?”

“A wee bit spontaneous,” I admit. “But very much wanted.”

“It is unusual,” she says, glancing over at the armored car and the two black SUVs bracketing it. “I canna seem to find any record of ye having dealings with the MacTavish Clan at all... until word of your marriage popped up.”

I know better than to open my mouth. She’s leading this somewhere and I’m not getting in her way.

“Now, you’re not teaching at the Wallace School and ye seem to have dropped out of sight. The Detective Superintendent took your case from me.”

She steps between me and Hamish, leaning in so I can watch her lips as she lowers her voice. “If ye do not wish to be with this family. I can help ye. Not to feed me information of any crime that has been committed and god knows that with the MacTavishes, there’s a case list thicker than the Bible. Just... if ye are there against your will, I can help.”

Again. Another person with no real reason to care about me... yet does.

“I dinnae want ye to think my teary eyes are a sign of distress, Detective,” I sniffle a bit. “I’m grateful to ye for your concern.” Hamish is on his toes, looking over her shoulder at me like an anxious bulldog. “I can tell ye with absolute certainty that I am right where I want to be. That I am safe and in no danger and under no threat.”

Well, from the MacTavishes, anyway...

She blows out a long breath. “Take my card again. Just in case ye ever need to talk,

aye?”

“Of course. And thank ye.”

I’m clutching her card when I slide into my seat in the car.

“Everything okay there?” Luna asks gently.

“Aye.” She’s still standing there, watching us drive away. “Detective Christie is one of the good guys.”

Logan...

After an endless day of planning for the next move against the Costa Cartel, I go in search of my wife.

She’s up in the clock tower, lying on one of the benches and watching the clouds through the skylight.

“There’s my Bella.” I lean over her, kissing her thoroughly. “How was brunch with the girls? I’m sure they shared every despicable thing I’ve ever done.”

“There was some mention of your fuckboy past,” she agrees pleasantly.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph I’ll never live that shite down, will I?”

“Ye have a clean slate with me, husband. What ye did for my kids last night? And your family sponsoring the concert? It was beautiful, and kind. Thank ye for that.” She sits up, leaning against me. It’s a surprisingly warm day for late May and the breeze sliding between the clock faces feels good.

“I’m glad. What have ye been doing up here?”

“Um, putting sounds in my treasure box.”

I pull back, watching her turn all shy on me. “Aye? Tell me more.”

“I dinnae have long before my hearing’s gone. Completely.”

She sounds matter of fact about it, which is fecking killing me. I know it. I sent her medical records to the best ENT specialists in the UK. They all agreed with the original diagnosis.

“So, I started putting memories of sounds in a treasure box in my head. I take them out every now and then, try to recreate them and make sure they’re right.”

“This is brilliant.” I pull her on to my lap so I can watch her expression as she reminisces. “What are some of the sounds you’re keeping close?”

“My favorite song.”

“Which is?”

“Bohemian Rhapsody.”

“Of course,” I nod.

“The sound of the windchimes on the back porch of my parent’s house. Um, the first time I got my students to laugh when I was a student teacher. They can be a wee bit reserved until they know they can count on ye. A starling who used to sing outside my dorm window at Uni. My friend Meera, she’s a terrible singer, but I used to love hearing her serenade her bairns with “The Sky Boat” lullaby at night. That one’s in

the treasure box.”

She’s so beautiful, my wife, her eyes lit gold as she talks and her riot of dark curls moving with the breeze. I lift her hand, kissing it. “What are ye putting in the treasure box tonight? Something from the brunch, then?”

Her pale skin flushes the prettiest shade of pink. “No. I was, um... It’s the sound ye made when ye came in me last night. Your hoarse groan and how ye said, “You’re mine.”

I’m grabbing her by the hips and lifting her to straddle me in seconds. “Would ye like me to recreate it right now? Just to make sure ye have it right?”

Wrapping her arms around me and laughing helplessly, she whispers, “I have a feeling there’s gonna be many opportunities.”

Savoring the smooth feel of her cheek against my lips, her warm wee body, and the sound of her laughter, I squeeze her tight. “As many as ye like, sweet wife.”

Haud yer wheesht! - Scottish slang to say shush!

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Going on a Cruise takes on a horrible new meaning.

Arabella...

“Ye are doing so well, Laura! I’m proud of your progress.”

Laura beams at me, well, a bit to the left of me. She has some vision challenges, too, not that it stops her. She’s a fierce little thing. Her parents are very happy that I could supplement her last few weeks at school with some online tutoring.

“Thank ye, Miss Blair! I promise to write in my workbook at least twice this weekend.”

“I know ye will. We’ll tackle some of those grammar issues next week. Goodbye for now, then.”

“Goodbye!”

My phone’s been buzzing insistently for the last half hour, and I had to put it face down so I wouldn’t be tempted to glance at it during the teaching session. It’s humbling to realize that I struggle just as much as my students do when it comes to our phone addiction.

There are six texts. One from Kenna inviting me to lunch tomorrow. Another from my husband; he ‘thoughtfully’ included a video of him signing every salacious word that British Sign Language has to offer. Learning BSL has just given him yet another way to express his most filthy thoughts about me.

I should be shocked, but the sight of his long, nimble fingers signing, I want to fuck you in the clock tower. Right now... is making the lower half of me sit up and take notice.

The third, fourth, fifth and six texts are from Carol Winchester. She's sent a flurry of photos, posing in front of a cruise ship in a sundress and an enormous hat that nearly eclipses her face. It's a fancy boat- not one of the party cruisers meant for Millennials to get bloated on the high seas at a discount. This sleek beauty could only be meant for millionaires and lucky study participants like my friend. The ship is gleaming white, except for the bow, curving in blue and green lines that look like it's soaring through the waves.

We're boarding now!

Do I look like a Lady of Leisure?

Wait until I show you my cabin.

We're having a seafood buffet tonight. It's been ages since I could afford a good lobster.

Look at the crew member over my shoulder, the dark-haired one. I'm going to lure that man into my cabin at least once on this trip!

I'm laughing until my gaze moves to the left of the braw crew member. The man next to him is tall and skinny, his head slightly turned away but I know him from somewhere.

Why is he so familiar? I guess it dinnae matter, but-

It feels like someone just punched me in the chest.

It's him. The American doctor who questioned me in my room at Anselm's compound, who strapped me down, took all my blood. The doctor who fawned over Anselm when he was expressing his Aryan fantasies at that horrible "investor's meeting."

"No! Nonononono!" I stab frantically at the call icon. It goes straight to voicemail. "Carol, pick up! Pick up pick up pick up! Do NOT get on that boat! Please call me this is important please!" I call again, and again, each time getting nothing but her voice cheerfully urging me to leave a message.

That's why Logan couldn't track the operating location for the organ trafficking ring.

They're taking their victims on a fucking cruise ship.

"Carol's gone. She's on that hell ship and they're going to kill her and take her heart or her liver or-"

"Shh... Bella, keep the heid. I know you're scared, we'll find her. This is good, it is." Logan stops my frantic pacing by wrapping his arms around me and putting me on his lap.

"How is this good?" I'm sobbing. I remember being trapped in the CT scanner, that fucking doctor strapping me down. How Anselm told me they would tear out my organs without any anesthetic. "Carol is one of the sweetest, kindest people I know. She thought she was helping people with this study!"

"I know, I know, love." Logan's rubbing my back, watching Xenia and Georges pull up the texts and pictures from my phone.

"This is good," Xenia's eyes never leave her laptop, so I have to lean in to hear her. "No, this is good, Arabella, I promise. Your phone is top of the line; its location app

is second to none. We already have the island she texted from. The pier the boat was at. Cross-referencing ship's logs... Georges, don't they have to file a log before they leave port?"

"Yeah, but... likely... then the..."

Pulling loose from Logan's grip, I stand between the two hackers so I can read their lips.

"Oh, sorry Arabella. I was telling Xenia that they most likely filed a false log, but we can triangulate location based on departure time and which sailing routes are statistically more likely to be used." Georges' fingers are a blur. "Of course, once I bypass the security features, I can hack into the weather satellite that's in orbit over that part of the ocean and I can locate the ship. Hell, I can get video of everyone on the ship with the cameras on that beauty."

Xenia smiles at me sympathetically. "Hang in there, Arabella. Give us a minute to work and then Logan and Kai can make a plan."

"Wife, come with me, aye?" Logan's pulling on my hand but I dinnae want to move, as if my sheer terror will make Georges and Xenia find the ship's location more quickly. He swings me up in his arms and carries me four flights up to the clock tower. "Look out over the city. Tell me four things ye see."

"Do ye think they just... cut into the victims the minute the ship leaves port? One by one, to avoid panicking the rest, then? It was a mid-size ship so not like a thousand passengers or anything I'm thinking around four hundred. Those rich bastards getting the organs, they must know. They do, it's-"

Logan's mouth fiercely descends on mine, his hand stroking through my hair, tongue sliding along the seam of my lips. He finally pulls back when I sag against him.

“Look, sweetheart. Tell me four things ye can see.”

My heart still feels like it’s trying to pound out of my chest, and I have to grip the railing to keep upright. He stands behind me, a solid, reassuring presence.

“Ah... The flowers in the Square are blooming. Bluebells and daffodils. Three of the guards are playing cards in their cottage on the corner. There’s- there’s an older lady walking her dog on the next street over. He’s wearing a wee bow tie...” Tears are streaming down my face, I dinnae notice until Logan uses his t-shirt to wipe them away.

“Tell me the fourth thing.”

“The guy who’s always lifting weights with his curtains open out onto the street is at it again.”

His voice sharpens. “Where?”

Giving a wet little chuckle, I point at the house. “He’s maybe sixteen, love. Ye have nothing to worry about.” The skinny fella is straining with his nine kilo barbells, but he looks so pleased with himself.

I can feel the rumble in his chest as he laughs, vibrating through my skin, soothing my racing heart. “I know this is terrifying, I canna change that. I can tell ye that this is good news. Ye gave us the break we’ve been looking for. I should have seen it sooner. Fecking Anselm made his original fortune with his cruise ship lines. I’m sure the pieces of shite on his company’s board are all in on this.

“Once we have the ship’s location, we can start a facial recognition scan. When we know who’s on board, that gives us infiltration options, aye? This will move quickly. I promise.”

“Aye, thank ye for talking me down, then.” I tuck my head into the space between his neck and his shoulder. “These people... they must know that their unwilling donors are on the ship with them. What level of depraved do ye have to sink to, to buy in on this?”

Logan shrugs. “People get desperate, as they see their lives coming to an end, they’ll do anything to prolong them, no matter what - or who - it takes to do it.”

Within a few hours, our great room is crowded with MacTavishes.

This is when I witness the true genius of Xenia.

“I managed to pull the manifest for the cruise. We’ve achieved 96% facial recognition for everyone aboard The Zephyr. There’s one hundred and twenty crew members, ninety organ recipients, sixty medical personnel, and sixty-five donors.” She hesitates, glancing at me. “The reason there are less of the donor-victims is because they will be harvesting multiple organs.”

My stomach tries to surge up my throat and I swallow hard.

“Here’s the good news,” Georges continues. “We have successfully isolated ten people between crew members, patients and staff that we can successfully swap out for members of our team.” He clicks through the pictures and talks about wigs, prosthetics, and the like until he stops on a picture of a young couple, much younger than most of the patients.

“Giulia and Mattia Bianchi, Italian multi-millionaires. They’ll be boarding the ship on the next stop in Greece, along with most of the other passengers.”

“You might notice,” Xenia adds, “that she bears a striking resemblance to Arabella.”

She's right. With a blonde wig and some clever makeup, I could definitely-

"Absolutely not." Logan snarls. "My wife is not getting anywhere near that fecking ship."

"Logan, do ye want this mission to succeed?"

I haven't met the man who's speaking, he came in late, though he's clearly a MacTavish. Blond hair and the signature green eyes, square, firm jaw and while everyone else is casually dressed, he's in a navy-blue suit and red tie.

With a little work, he could look remarkably like Mattia Bianchi.

"Obviously, Mason. But ye weren't there in Copenhagen. Arabella was tested like a fecking farm animal and Anselm told her he was going to carve her to pieces. All because she tried to save my life. She's done her fecking part!" Logan is rigid with fury.

"I'd be there with her every second. The couple is known for being inseparable." If Mason is upset by his cousin's rage, he dinnae show it.

The group shifts subtly, discussing other people that can be pulled from the ship and replaced.

"Love, I understand." Taking his hand, clenched in a fist, I unfold each finger, sliding mine between them. "But ye canna keep me from this. Carol's gonna die. A lot of people, likely. I know you'll keep me safe. I dinnae know Mason, but if he is a MacTavish, I'm sure he's up for the job."

He's so beautiful, my husband. Logan's face is cold and hard, sculpted perfection that could have been created by Michelangelo.

“You’ve done your part, Bella. Ye canna...”

We’re huddled in the corner of the room and I hug him tightly. “I have to do this. Ye came bursting into that room and saved me. These people deserve that, too.”

Reluctantly, his arms wrap around me and we stand there, swaying slightly with the low buzz of the room behind us.

Keep the heid - Scottish slang for calm down.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is a plan.

Logan...

On the MacTavish jet, heading to Greece...

“Where did we meet?”

Mason’s voice is calm and fecking relentless. He and Bella have been at this for an hour. The bastard’s a perfectionist, and he insists their story must be seamless. I love my cousin of course, but how a wild card like Uncle Lachlan spawned this one will forever be a mystery. Mason showed up for his first year at Cambridge University in a three-piece suit and a briefcase.

Bloody hell, he likely showed up for his first day of primary school in a suit.

“Dinnae he start doing Uncle Lachlan and Aunt Aria’s taxes when he was twelve?” Kai settles into the seat next to me, offering me a glass of scotch. “Ye look like ye need this.”

“Thanks.”

Arabella shows no sign of slowing down. “When was I diagnosed with kidney failure?”

“Six months ago,” Mason says instantly. “You started dialysis the next week.”

Most of Mason's side of the family is still based in Canada, we've all spent time at the King Syndicate headquarters in Nova Scotia. They sell access to some of the most valuable shipping lanes in the world, but their real power is information. They know all the dirty details about every criminal organization on the planet.

Aunt Aria runs the corporation with an iron fist, and with Uncle Lachlan standing behind her with an unhinged grin and toying with his guns, no one is stupid enough to try to bargain with her. Maybe it's Mason's Canadian half that makes him such a stuffed suit.

"Your hearing challenges won't be an issue." Mason's marking something off on his iPad. "We'll be joined at the hip. I'd like to work on a few signals we can use for situational context if needed. Tell me what you'd use for..."

Bella brightens, launching into an explanation of a few simple signs and I growl, low in my throat, trying to change it into a cough as Kai grins at me.

"The Zephyr's next stop is Kyllini, it's a little port town in Southern Greece. That's where the first team will infiltrate." Kai pulls up the layout of the ship. "Here's the service entrance. Logan, Ethan, Jack, Hamish, and Theo will enter there. Three of your targets have shore leave, they'll be easy to take down. The other two you'll have to overpower on the ship. Catriona, you're coming in as a replacement for the wellness coach-" She snorts inelegantly. "-so, your cover won't be as hard to establish," Kai continues.

Catriona's the oldest daughter of our Chieftain and her area of expertise is poisons. I'd never eat dinner with her if I had annoyed her in any way. I've seen what she can do. It's not pretty.

"Ian and Xenia will be with ye as your assistants," Kai continues. "Ye have a shite tonne of yoga mats to carry onboard with ye."

“I picked ye because you’re pretty Ian, no offense. Your job is going to be distracting passengers and crew while Xenia gets into the system.” Catriona smiles sweetly at Ian. The poor lad’s endured years of the family giving him shite for his cover model looks.

“So, if someone wants a go at my tadger, should I do it?” He’s glaring at Catriona and she laughs evilly.

“Only if it’s one of the feckers in charge of this.”

“Unfortunately, we only know one of them,” Xenia says regretfully. “Dr. Asshole - the one who examined you, Arabella - is a surgeon, Dr. Martin Langell. He seems to be in charge on the medical side and there’s five other surgeons on the boat with an excessive amount of staff, but there’s someone from the old group who’s still running the show. We just don’t know who it is yet.”

“I vote for throwing Dr. Arsehole over the side when we’re back out on the open sea,” I say. “Let’s see how long he can breaststroke before the sharks get hungry.”

“I’m not proud to admit this,” Bella says, “but I’m a hundred percent behind that plan.”

“If we get the chance, I’ll make sure you’re the one who shoves him over, baby.”

She blows me a kiss. “Thank ye husband, I know ye will.”

“Bella, you and Mason will be boarding as the Bianchis. We’re putting a significant amount of weaponry in your luggage, because it won’t be scanned.”

“Just make sure I know which bag is mine,” she smiles nervously. “I dinnae want to be the one to blow a hole in the side of the ship because I picked up a grenade

thinking it was my body wash.”

I’m reminded again how new my bride is to this life. I took a schoolteacher, ripped her out of her world and into mine. But she stepped into place like it was always meant for her.

Six hours later...

Our jet has landed, everyone’s appearances altered and Kai has insisted on going over the plan twice more. For the first time I can remember, I’m glad for it. Nothing can go wrong, not with Bella at risk.

Again.

“What’s that expression, husband?” Bella finds me in the back of the jet, settling on my lap. “Is this your grim and brooding look, then?”

“It’s not too late to pull ye from this mission.”

“I’m going in.” She flutters her eyelashes. “Look what a good job they did on me! I’m the spitting image of Giulia. I hate her for what she’s willing to do to get new kidneys, but... I know she must be telling herself something that makes it right. Maybe Mattia convinced her that he canna live without her?”

“Dinnae make excuses for them, love. It will make it harder to do what ye must. It will make ye soft, prone to mistakes.” I kiss her hands, holding them in mine. “I fecking hate that you’re here.” Her smile slips. “I hate that you’re at risk. But I know ye can do this.”

We get three minutes before Kai starts barking orders. One hundred and eighty seconds to hold my wife in my arms before I send her into danger.

Arabella...

“What is our signal to abort the mission and start shooting our way out?”

I’m beginning to see why Logan might find Mason a wee bit fashin.’ “Two fingers tapped on my left palm and three on the right,” I repeat obediently.

“And if someone attempts to take you for a medical procedure if I’m not there?” Mason is handsome, like all the MacTavish men, but his eyes are chilly and he never seems to smile.

“I carry on weeping and wailing, screaming that I need ye or I canna do it.”

“We should switch to Italian now,” he frowns. “Even in private moments so we don’t slip up. So, again. Cosa fai se il personale medico si avvicina a te e io non ci sono?”

“Piango e insisto perché tu sia lì con me.” I repeat.

As Giulia, I’m dressed in the height of Italian glamour in a Gucci dress so tight that it’s cutting off the circulation in my legs. She’s a bit shorter than I am, thank the lord, so I’m not having to wear sky-high heels. Mason looks effortlessly elegant, he’s wearing his light blue Kiton suit like it’s an everyday thing, though it’s likely that for him, it is. The hardest thing to change out was my wedding ring. Giulia’s is a monstrously huge thing with a half a dozen rubies surrounding the diamond, so I’m wearing a replica.

“Sei pronta, mia amata moglie?” (Are you ready, my lovely wife?) He’s looking deeply into my eyes, but I know he’s making sure I can read his lips.

“Sì, tesoro, certo,” (Yes darling, of course,)

I simmer.

Mason and I approach The Zephyr with a herd of porters hauling our luggage. Despite all our practice, sweat is pouring down my back and beading on my forehead. They're going to catch us. I dinnae look anything like Giulia. It'll be my fault if the mission fails and-

“Stai andando bene, Giulia. Ancora arroganza. (You're doing fine, Giulia. More arrogance.)” Mason whispers in my ear.

Raising my chin, I walk up the gangplank like I own this ship.

Raged - Scottish slang for pissing someone off.

A wee bit fashin' - Scottish slang for someone who's tiresome.

Tadger - Scottish slang for cock.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which we discover just how grotesque human beings can be.

Logan...

By the time we leave port, all ten of our team have infiltrated the ship. Bella and Mason are taking a leisurely walk along the upper deck, the wind is sending strands of her blonde wig into her face and playfully, Mason brushes a bit off her cheek.

When this mission is over, I'm going to beat the shite out of him.

"Easy, lad." Jack's next to me, stacking boxes on a dolly to take to the kitchen. "Ye staring up at them like ye smell of brimstone and you're ready to vaporize his soul isn't winning ye any points on the undercover effort here."

Tearing my gaze away with an effort, I shift the cases of wine I'm carrying. "Aye. Let's get to work."

"Cost ye to say that, dinnae it?"

"Feck off, Jack." His laughter follows me into the storage cooler and I'm starting a list of cousins I'm going to punch in the head when this is done.

Captain Anderson strolls into the cavernous dining room just before dinner service.

"Welcome aboard The Zephyr , honored guests!" He smiles benignly. The sun is setting behind him and the wall of windows overlooking the ocean filters a golden glow over the tables with their pristine linens and elaborate flower arrangements.

The unwitting donors cheer raucously.

“I would like you to raise your glass - of water or juice, of course, no alcohol until the final party,” he chuckles indulgently, “to a toast to each other. Your contributions to medical science will immeasurably benefit those who are ill, allowing them to live much longer, healthier lives. To you, my new friends!”

Jack and I hold our trays, expressionless as these poor souls drink to their own deaths.

While there's separate dining rooms for patients and donors, several of the disgusting old bastards want to dine with the people who are about to die for them. Two recipients in formal evening wear are eating at a table with some rowdy twenty-somethings, who are sporting casual shorts and luridly flowered shirts.

The patients aren't allowed alcohol as part of the “wellness retreat,” but they're still giddy about their free prime rib and lobster, and talking about a trip through the casino later. I fill their water goblets and take their empty plates, swallowing my disgust when one girl kindly pats the arm of the old arsehole seated next to her. “You should come with us, Sidney! It's gonna be so much fun!” She's maybe mid-twenties, American or Canadian with wide, guileless blue eyes and he's grinning at her like he wants to swallow her whole.

“You're so sweet, my dear,” he coos.

I'm killing that fecker first.

The most advantageous identity I can ever adopt undercover is one in the working class. We're essentially invisible, moving around on our endless errands and with the five of us going through the ship, we're getting the intel we need quicker than expected.

Good. Getting Bella out ahead of schedule is the best thing that could happen. I'm fighting every instinct to go storming into her stateroom and carry her away, thrown over my shoulder if necessary.

By eleven that night, Xenia and Catriona put in a request for room service. I'd really like to punch out the two eager waiters who'd caught glimpses of the girls earlier and now they're fighting over who gets to take up the room service cart. Theo keeps baiting them and extending the argument while I wheel the cart into the service elevator.

"Finally!" Catriona rips open the door, "I'm fecking starving. They've stuffed the wee fridge in here with all the boring, healthy shite. Kale chips? What's wrong with these people?" She stuffs a piece of steak in her mouth, groaning in pleasure.

"Perhaps it's because your profile says you're a vegan and a naturopath?" Ian says dryly. While he and my cousin devour their food, I make a plate to take over to Xenia.

"Ye haven't left this spot since ye boarded eight hours ago, have ye?"

"Uh, huh..." Xenia reaches out a hand, groping blindly as her gaze never leaves her laptop. I put a sandwich in her hand and snap a linen napkin onto her lap. "Fancy pants," she laughs.

"I've had a lot of practice with this shite tonight," I say sourly. "One old lass kept dropping her napkin, demanding I get her a new one after I bent over and retrieved them for her."

"How many times did she pinch your arse?" Catriona asks, starting in on her seafood linguine.

“The ancient Jezebel peppered my arse with a bruise or two. Or five. Give me a report, Xenia.”

“Most of the news is good.” She finally leans back, rubbing her eyes. “Thanks to you guys on the crew, we’ve got below deck all mapped out, especially where the guards stay when they’re off duty, they’re being very low key, which is good. Less immediate access to firearms. The Captain’s stateroom was easy to locate, and we have his staff captain, navigator, and the chief engineer’s cabins, too. I’m working on the shift changes for the bridge.”

“That’s brilliant. You are brilliant.”

“I really am,” she agrees modestly.

“What about Bella and Mason? The chances of Dr. Arsehole, ah, Dr. Langell recognizing her is the biggest risk we have on this mission.”

“It’s extremely unlikely he would spot her since she’s been assigned to one of the other surgeons, there’s six of them in all.” She opens another window on her monitor. “A Dr. Alice Williams. Unless he is called in for a consult there would be no reason for them to cross each other’s paths. She’s getting her examination tomorrow early; this will give her and Mason a chance to film the surgical area for me. The security there is tighter than a nun’s ass. I can’t get a clear view of the layout, the security cameras there are on a different system I can’t get into. Yet.”

Xenia pops open a Celsius energy drink and gulps down half the can. “It’s critical that we find out who’s on the surgical roster for tomorrow. It doesn’t look like these sons of bitches intend on taking a relaxing day of pickleball before cutting people open. They’re getting down to business right away.”

“When can you start the system failures?” I ask. Xenia lights up like I’d just given

her the keys and title to my Maserati. In fact, if she pulls this shite off, I'll probably have to.

"Now that I got into the engineering mainframe, I'm going to start with some electrical outage issues in non-essential parts of the boat. Nothing big, nothing to rouse suspicion, just something to keep them busy. By afternoon when I have a better idea of the layout in the medical labs, I can start power outages and system freezes for the surgical equipment. By tomorrow afternoon..." her face lights up with an unholy glee, "I will get control of the navigation systems and the entire bridge, and then, you can kill the captain."

"Finally, some fecking action," Ian says longingly.

"I won't need any of his crew to remote operate the ship." Xenia's plowing through her passionfruit cheesecake like it's about to be taken from her. "I'm going to turn it in a nice, wide, slow circle that won't be immediately noticed. This will make it easier for the chase boats to catch up and board the ship."

"Your Da and Lachlan have a ship's captain and engineer coming with them for backup. I know you hate having Bella on this mission, but she's doing a great job so far. She's already charmed the nurse who stopped by to greet her tonight and get her medical equipment set up in their stateroom. I'll alter the readings from here."

Catriona slings her arm over my shoulder. "Ye gotta loosen up, cousin. It's all going according to plan, aye? Even Kai, who is such a stickler for his mission plans, is happy."

"I'll take the cart back downstairs," I say, "but first..." Flipping up the pristine white cloth covering the trolley, I pull out four handguns and an AR-15.

Ian lights up. "Now, that's what I've been waiting for!"

As a crew member, I have no business on the floor where Bella and Mason's stateroom is. Still. I hover by the service stairs. I could just walk the hall, act like I'm looking for discarded trays...

"God- damnit." I head toward the staff quarters.

Arabella...

Mason's doing another sweep of our cabin, checking for listening devices.

I hold up my notepad. You checked the stateroom when we first boarded. Why again?

He looks at me disapprovingly, taking my pen. The nurse could have brought in a bug with the medical equipment.

Finally satisfied, he nods toward the bed, its dark wood carved to look like you're resting on top of the ocean, like Poseidon. It belongs in a nautical-themed issue of Architectural Digest. "I'll sleep on the couch, why don't you try to get some rest?"

"Well, I'm a lot shorter than you, Mason. I dinnae mind taking the couch."

"I prefer my head where it is, thank you," he says dryly. "Knowing your husband is circling us like a one-winged hawk is distraction enough. If he thinks you are the slightest bit uncomfortable, the man will go nuclear. You may think you're seen him unhinged, but I assure you the reality is much worse."

"You MacTavishes all act like Logan is a madman, but I dinnae agree with ye. He's... competent." I smile, thinking of all the ways he's gotten us out of trouble. "He takes the shortest route in any circumstance and it works."

"Sometimes, his 'shortest route' is stomping right over someone's face. He's clearly

trying to take my father's mantle as the most extra of the MacTavishes."

"I dinnae know about that," I laugh, taking the towel folded to look like a lotus blossom off the bed. "But on the bright side, it means ye can do something else with your life instead of being the one who brings a surface to air missile to Sunday dinner."

"Ah, you have met my father, then." His smile is brief and perfunctory. "Try to get some rest. Tomorrow's plan relies mainly on us."

"Well, that just guaranteed I'll not sleep a wink, thank ye very much." I toss and turn for a long time, looking out the glass doors leading to our balcony. This feels like I'm back in that soothing, bland room in Anselm's hell compound. The gentle swells of the ocean glitter under the moon and it's so beautiful that it's hard to imagine anything bad could ever happen here.

But it will. Beginning tomorrow, if we can't stop it. I think about Carol and hope she's sleeping blissfully, maybe with her cute crew member. Sleeping like nothing but good things are ahead.

The next morning...

"Sei bellissima oggi, amore mio." (You look beautiful today, my love.) Mason kisses the back of my hand over our diced potatoes and seven grain toast. The patient's diet is a grim series of low fat, high-carb alternatives that even the cleverest chef can't make tasty.

"Grazie, tesoro." We're in the patient's dining room. A conversation yesterday with the "cruise director" had been horrifyingly educational.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bianchi, would you prefer to be completely separate from your

donor?” Dressed in a pristine blue suit with her hair in a tidy bun, the cruise director radiated care and concern.

“Non so cosa intendi? Ah, I do not know what you mean?” I really didn’t know.

We were sitting in our stateroom, but she leaned forward as if someone could overhear us. “Some of our guests prefer to never see their donor, they find it...” she put her hand delicately on her chest, “distasteful. Others enjoy getting to know their matches, perhaps just passing them in the hall, or even having dinner together.”

You, lady, are an impressively evil piece of shite. I mean, that takes some real effort.

“That isn’t really necessary, is it, darling?” Mason stepped in for me because I couldn’t stop staring at this pleasant-looking woman who just invited me to have dinner with the person they were going to murder for the kidneys they’d intended to put in my body.

“Non, non,” I smiled weakly.

After breakfast, we strolled along the upper deck, pretending to enjoy the view. “We have an hour before your appointment, my angel.” He raises his voice slightly as the ship’s first officer walks by, greeting us with a wide smile. “Would you like to return to the stateroom, or sit up here and enjoy the sun?”

Just below us on the second deck, I see Logan chatting with one of the older patients, draping a blanket over her lap. He glances up, meets my eye for just a second, but it’s enough.

“I think I’d like to sit here, please.”

Ten minutes later, a tray is proffered in front of me, holding a virgin daiquiri.

“Ma’am, your drink?”

Hearing his deep voice makes something glow in me, like I’m shining from the inside out. “Yes, thank you.”

Logan bends over to hand me the cold glass, contrasting with the warmth of his finger, the barest brush against mine. In a movement so quick that I barely catch it, his finger subtly points to his chest, his palms cross over his heart and then he points to me before he walks away.

I love you.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella learns this undercover agent shite is incredibly stressful.

Arabella...

“Dinnae leave, aye?” I whisper, squeezing my husband’s cousin’s hand until my knuckles are white.

“Not even for a moment,” Mason promises. I can feel the steady beat of his pulse under my fingertips. This terrifying episode isn’t even raising his blood pressure! He’s wearing horn-rimmed glasses that make him look a wee bit like Clark Kent.

The medical clinic situated within the ship could rival the most prestigious surgical floor in any hospital in the world. Everything is new and gleaming and perfect. Peeking into the surgical suite next to this room makes me think there’s advanced technology here that hasn’t made its way into the mainstream medical world yet.

Lighting is muted, with light flowered wallpaper instead of glaring clinical white walls. There’s elegant artwork and soft music being piped through a speaker in the wall. I’m going to have to ask them to turn that off, it’ll impact my ability to hear the doctor’s questions.

I change into a white silk gown in the ensuite bathroom while Mason scrolls through his phone with his feet resting on the bed, looking completely comfortable with the situation. Folding my bra, I hide it under my clothes. I don’t know why, it’s not like Mason or the doctor haven’t ever seen a bra before, but it felt nyaff just leaving it there on top of my Hermes dress.

“Darling,” Mason says, “why don’t you put in your earbuds? They’ll help you relax.”

“Of course, thank you sweetheart.” Putting them in my ears, I hear the subtle click before Xenia speaks softly.

“You both have a flash drive. You’re looking for a specific double USB port, it can be in any of the devices around you, look for something that’s plugged and wired into at least one other device. Once you find it, plug in the flash drive. Your job is to keep the doctor busy while it downloads the data. Once I’ve got it, I can upload a virus. Keep your cool, Arabella. Can you do that?”

“Mm-hmm...” I hum idly, swaying slightly like I’m listening to some elegant, classical piece.

“You’ve got this. Be careful of your movements, Mason’s glasses are recording everything, but I can’t disable the cameras in the room without getting into the system. There’s one over the bed and another in the corner facing the door. Make sure your back is to them if you can get the flash drive plugged in.”

“Buon pomeriggio, Mrs. Bianchi, may I call you Guila?” The doctor is unsettling; she’s a round wee woman with silver hair and a sweet face that should belong to a grandmother, baking cookies for the bairns in the neighborhood.

Instead, she’s planning to cut into some innocent person. Lots of them, and steal their organs along with their life.

“Of course,” I force a smile. “Apologies, doctor. I’m a little nervous.”

“No need to be,” she smiles warmly, patting my hand. Over her shoulder, I see Mason strolling by the medical monitors in the corner. “Please, call me Alice.”

She launches into a detailed review of the renal failure that the real Guila is dealing with, and I'm feeling mighty grateful for Mason's insistence of going over and over our backstories.

"Dr. Williams, I'm sorry to interrupt, but we had a question about your next patient?" A pretty blonde nurse smiles at us apologetically and I could kiss her.

"Excuse me, I'll just be a moment," Alice says, giving me a gentle pat on the arm that makes my flesh crawl. I reach out to Mason, smiling prettily as he takes my hand and leans in, pretending to kiss my cheek.

"Did ye find it?" I whisper.

"One of them. I had trouble getting the flash drive in, so we might have a problem."

"What about the surgical suite? Any of the equipment there should have exactly what we need."

He sits on the bed with me, patting my back as we eye the open door. One of the operating rooms is right across the hall, and it's empty. "It's risky, Arabella."

"Aye, but I'm a spoiled wee princess, remember? If they catch us, I'll carry on and make a fuss about how worried I am."

I'd slipped my flash drive in the pocket of my robe when I'd changed, and my sweaty fingers curl around it as we walk out the door and into the OR. Mason's leaning against the door, arms folded and keeping an eye on the hallway as I tiptoe around.

There.

A large heart-lung machine, to the left of the door. I pretend to look at the display as I

push the flash drive into the port. Sweet Mother Mary and all the Saints, my heart is ready to pound out of my chest. There's a discreet red light on the flash drive; I canna pull it out until it turns green.

Mason wiggles three fingers.

Thirty seconds.

Feck, I wish I hadn't taken out my earbuds! Xenia could give me a countdown, or something. Angling my body, I block the view of the machine from the cameras while looking around the room, wide-eyed like I'm taking it all in. The blindingly sterile equipment and the surgical table is making my stomach churn. Straps dangle along the sides of the bed. It all comes back, how it felt to be immobilized in that scanner at Anselm's compound. Helpless. Terrified.

His fingers move again. Six.

Sixty seconds.

Mason's eyes widen slightly and he nods toward the hall. I canna hear them but Dr. Williams and the nurse must be coming back.

Feck. The light is still blinking red on the flash drive.

Four fingers, tapped hard against his thigh.

Abort.

I canna do that. Not yet. It's not finished, it's not.

Mason makes the signal again, harder.

“This is a sterile space!”

Dr. Williams is back and there’s two huge orderlies standing behind her.

Bursting into tears is hardly an effort.

“I’m sorry! I’m just so scared, Alice. This is all so much and I’m afraid of the pain and what if something goes wr- wr- wrong!” From the corner of my eye, I see the light turn green, I pull the drive out with one hand while I wildly wave the other, trying to channel my inner Italian.

She’s not looking like a kindly grandmother any more. “Do you understand that you have contaminated this OR? We will have to close it and run the sterilization protocol again. This sets back our surgical schedule. You could be impacting the successful outcome of another patient’s surgery.”

I cry harder. “Mi dispiace, I’m sorry!”

Mason takes my shaking hand, squeezing it when he feels the flash drive in my grip. “We are terribly sorry, Dr. Williams,” he says coldly. “My wife has been so frightened of what is to come. I thought showing her the room would comfort her.” He steps around her, pulling me with him, eyeing the muscular orderlies with a contemptuous sniff. They’re both dressed in spotless blue scrubs, but it’s clear what they’re here for.

“We will return to our stateroom,” Mason says. With a haughty flick of his hand, he sneers, “do bill me for the additional cleaning. Come, darling. I’ll help you get dressed.”

“We’re not finished with your examination,” the doctor says sharply.

Like a message from heaven - or more likely, Xenia - the lights flicker overhead and there's a soft chime from the doctor's phone. Checking it with a frown, she nods. "Very well, I'll set up a time this afternoon to go over instructions for tomorrow. Until then, no solid food after three and then clear liquids only."

"Send me the bill for re-sterilizing the room?" I start laughing the minute we're back in the room, "like the twenty-five million euro bill the Bianchis are paying isn't enough?" I'm laughing much harder than the comment deserves, but I'm both shaky and giddy and I sit down abruptly.

"Are you all right?" Mason smiles politely, like he's seen other people do it and understands that it's appropriate for the situation. I remember how rigid he was during my examination, patting my back like touching me was physically painful.

"I dinnae know how ye do this shite all the time." I'm rubbing my stomach, trying to make it settle down. "Do we have to set an appointment to see our 'wellness coach?' We must get these flash drives over to Xenia and Catriona."

"Already done." He's rapidly tapping out a text on his phone. "Go change into something you'd wear to see a wellness coach."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," he shrugs. "Those stretchy pants you girls wear?"

Stifling a chuckle, I say, "I'll go see if Guilia has any Versace leggings in her wardrobe."

A smiling Ian, dressed in a set of white joggers and a t-shirt with The Zephyr's emblem on it, pleasantly escorts us past the guest in the "wellness room" and into the back.

“Well, where are they going?” The woman is frowning petulantly, wearing a big diamond necklace with her lounge pants and a push-up sport bra that’s sending her breasts bulging ominously over the straining spandex top.

Ian flashes her a dazzling smile. “That’s the cryo room, Mrs. Melendez, it’s quite... uncomfortable,” he says in a soothing British accent. “I’ll be back to lead you through those cool-down stretches in one moment. We can take all the time that you need.”

He hustles us through the door as she readjusts her top.

Xenia seizes the flash drives. “Yes! You beautiful bitches, I knew you could do it!” A hundred different images flicker across her three monitors like fireflies. I dinnae understand any of it, but the Evil Genius chortle she’s letting out tells me she knows it’s good.

“Were you behind the power surge in the clinic earlier? If so, ye saved our arses.”

“That would be me,” she smiles maliciously, “I started with a couple of sump pump failures this morning, and when the engineering crew mopped that up, I moved on to random power outages around the ship. They may have put all the medical equipment on a separate backup generator, but the lights are still on the ship’s main grid.”

“Has anyone... They haven’t started operating yet, right? No one’s been...” My throat closes up. What if they’ve already started?

“No, don’t worry, not yet. The data your drive picked up is fucking incredible - all the patient’s names, procedures, schedules, who they’re matched with - we have to isolate today’s operations so we can hide those donors before they come for them.”

“The doctor brought in a couple of the medical orderlies in to loom over us,” I shudder. “Those bastards are built like tanks. They’re not there to handle bedpans.”

Her fingers freeze over her keyboard for a moment.

“What? What’s wrong?”

She turns to look at me, “Your friend Carol is scheduled for this afternoon.”

Naff - Scottish slang for tacky.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which, as always with the MacTavishes, things do not go to plan.

Logan...

“We have to move up the schedule.”

“Why?” Kai’s voice sharpens, “What’s gone off?”

I’m in the lower engine room, using the metal bunker to block the transmission from getting picked up by anyone on the command deck.

“They’re starting the surgeries today, eight of them. Xenia’s going through the data, she got into the medical ward schedules with the information Bella and Mason brought back. They’re already prepping the operating rooms.” I’m gripping the satellite phone hard enough to crack the plastic casing. “One of the first donors is Bella’s friend, Carol. If I canna get the girl out, ya know my wife will go charging down there and try to do it herself.”

This is where my brother is his least irritating self.

“Of course,” he agrees instantly. “Tell Xenia to start the navigation shift, steering the ship in an arc now. I can call in a favor from the Toscano Mafia in Naples to get me the biggest helicopter The Zephyr’s landing pad can handle. We’ll do a top and side attack. How many of the security force can ye take out before ye give the signal for us to board?”

“We’re certain we know of twenty. Xenia can loop the outside cameras and we’ll

shoot ‘em and dump them overboard, no bodies to start a panic. That dinnae account for whoever they’ve got in the medical bay, though. I’m certain they’ve got their most experienced men in there.”

“This is what ye do best,” Kai says, his amusement clear, even through the static on the call. “Ye feck shite up. I’m thinking half the bastards on board will be dead by cocktail hour. Send Ian down to fetch Bella’s friend, tell her it’s for a preoperative massage or some shite. Get her out of her cabin.”

“I’ll do it myself. I’ll take her to Bella and Mason’s stateroom.” Checking my watch, “We’re moving everything up by five hours. I know that’s some serious scrambling on your part. Can ye do it?”

“Ye already know the answer. I’m calling Da and Uncle Lachlan now. Stay sharp, brother.”

“Ye as well.”

By the time I get to Carol’s cabin, she’s already gone.

“Fuuuck!” Xenia runs her hands through her hair, making the tidy bob stick up in every direction. “I’m still trying to break through the systems firewall in the OR. I have all the records but no way no way of knowing where they’ve put her.” Her hands are flying over her keyboard. “Okay, okay, okay... I can halt the water supply in that entire section of the boat. You can’t operate without water, right?”

I’ve never seen Xenia this manic.

“That’s good, that’s grand.” Catriona vigorously massages Xenia’s shoulders. “There’s a lot of medical machinery that’s water-cooled, aye? It’s not just for the medical team to wash up. How long can you delay them before the crew fixes it?”

“An hour, maybe less,” Xenia’s gaze is ping-ponging back and forth between the screens at a dizzying rate. “Maybe by then I can get into the system and shut down the equipment, I can fry some of those fuckers, no problem.” She glances up at me. “You better go kill a bunch of people. There’s no hiding this now. They’re gonna know there’s hostiles on board.”

These crew uniforms are itchy and uncomfortable, but with the dinner jacket on, I can fit in two guns, extra ammo clips and my knife strapped to my calf.

“We divide up, aye?” Ethan, Jack, Hamish, and Theo are crammed in my tiny servant’s cabin, loading up. “Ethan, you’re with me, we hit the command deck. Xenia’s ready to switch the controls to remote operation. We have to take out everyone from the captain to the navigator and disable the cameras.”

“Looking forward to it,” Ethan says, looking a wee bit too happy as he fits his Heckler & Koch in its holster. “It’s been a while since we’ve had a free for all. Makes sense you’re running this circus, cousin.”

“Dinnae worry, I’m not aiming to take your job as clan assassin,” I say dryly. “But I’m glad you’re here.”

“Finder,” he corrects me irritably, “I find things.”

“Aye,” I agree, “and then you kill them. Jack, take Theo and Hamish and start with the guard’s quarters and start shooting from there. Keep an eye out for our mystery arsehole who’s running this show. They’ll likely have a couple of big guys hovering around them.”

I always appreciate when I’m dealing with a load of arrogant arseholes. They canna believe anyone could be a threat to their meticulous fecking plans, and it makes it so much easier to take ‘em out.

“What are you doing here?” Captain Anderson’s standing at the control board, looking at us irritably. “I didn’t order food.”

He’s first.

The shot is clean and true, right through his head and cracking the glass behind him. Ethan’s good as always, he’s already taken out the navigator and ship’s engineer by the time I shoot the deputy captain.

“Excellent. We lock this room down so no one else can get inside and move on to the medical clinic.”

Ethan rolls one of the bodies away from the door with his foot. “Good. I’ve only used two bullets so far. Waste of an afternoon.”

“I’m sure you’ll more than make up for it.”

The sun’s already setting by the time we’ve cleared another floor. There’s a bad moment when one of the unknowing donors catches us throwing a body overboard.

“Dude, what the fuck!”

Ethan slaps his hand over the donor’s mouth, shoving him back into his cabin. “Listen very carefully. You are in danger. We are the good guys and we are here to protect you.”

“Y- you’re not pirates? Because I’ve heard-”

I step in and head-butt him, putting the unconscious man on his bed before we lock him in.

“Really? Ye thought we had time to reason with him?”

“Always the hard way with ye,” Ethan sighs. “Are we sure you’re not Uncle Lachlan’s secret love child?”

“If we had the time, I’d shoot ye for that.” My phone buzzes as we head up the crew stairway to the floor taken over by the medical clinic, squatting malevolently right in the center of the ship.

“Mason? What’s going on, ye should be moving Bella over to-”

“She’s gone.”

I can feel my heart stop. Just a stone in my chest.

Bella...

I dinnae have time to feel betrayal.

Focus, just fecking focus on the next step.

Mason’s phone chimes softly while he’s in the shower. I’m not the one to snoop on people’s phones but it could be an emergency.

It’s from Logan.

They’ve already taken Carol from her cabin. I’m heading up to the med bay with Ethan after we take out the captain.

Do NOT let Bella out of your sight. Keep her in your room, even if you have to handcuff her to the bed.

Do NOT tell her about her friend.

My hand is shaking and I put the phone down gently before I drop it. Carol's in that place. They're going to hurt her.

They're going to kill her.

I'm not completely inept with guns. Logan taught me some basics and took me to the family's shooting range a couple of times. I take one of Mason's pistols that I think I can handle, make sure it's loaded and the safety is on.

The gun is in my beach bag and I'm strolling down the hallway like I'm heading out to the pool for a sunset swim. Logan's going to kill me.

And kill Mason, probably. Though he really shouldn't kill Mason, this isn't his fault.

My steps slow as I approach the clinic's doors. I'm running through the layout in my head. The hardest part will be getting through the reception area. One of those giant orderlies is standing behind the counter with the nurse I'd seen earlier. There are other ways in and out, right? I remember seeing an emergency exit door, just down the hall from my examination room.

I can barge in, point my gun at them and demand Carol. But there's got to be half a dozen of them with guns and then... just me. I can't count on Logan getting here in time. Distract. Distract and redirect. I need a distraction.

Which is why I'm crouching in a medical supply closet down the hall. There are soothing aromatherapy candles, match boxes with The Zephyr's logo on them, massage oils, big bottles of Isopropyl alcohol, stacks of towels...

Big glass bottles of Isopropyl alcohol.

It's not like I have any experience with explosives, no anarchist bent that makes creating a Molotov cocktail a natural for me, but other than throwing my gun at them, this is what I have.

Stuffing a towel into the biggest bottle of the rubbing alcohol, I scurry back to the alcove across the hall from the clinic's entrance. My hands are shaking, and like an eejit it takes me three tries with the matches, watching the flimsy things spark and sputter.

The fourth match catches and I light the towel. The muscles in my back spasm as I hurl the flaming bottle at the big picture window at the entrance. The thick glass bottle smashes right through it, sending streaks of fire spraying across the desk and the furniture in the reception area.

The nurse screams, knocking over her chair and racing into the clinic. The fire alarm blares, red lights flashing and I stare at the blaze for a long second, mesmerized by how fast the flames can spread. A little stunned that it worked.

Move it ya eejit!

The emergency exit. I can handle a bottleneck, they can only get through one at a time and I have a gun. I have to do this.

"Mother Mary, I am sorry to be committing violence on these people, but they are bastards. If ye could keep my hand steady it would be much appreciated." I make the sign of the cross and run.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which the world is fire, water, and guns.

Arabella...

The first three people through the emergency exit are wearing white coats. My hand is on the gun, still hidden in my beach bag. I'm standing to the left in the corner, and they're turning right, so no one notices me until the fourth one, who's pushing a hysterical old woman in a white gown.

"Where the fuck are the donors!" I yell.

"They're coming, you know the emergency protocol is to get the clients out first!"

I'm ready to pull my gun until I realize she's answering me like she thinks I'm one of them. Irritably jerking my head to the right, I snap, "Go on, then!" The next patient's wheeled out and I'm chanting, "Go, go, go!" like I'm in charge.

The fire suppression system finally kicks in. Goddamnit!

Instantly soaking wet, I shove past the next two people, racing down the clinic's hallway. The medical staff are busy covering equipment instead of evacuating, now that they know the fire threat is over. Each examination room is empty. Oh, god is she already in the OR?

There. She's huddled in the corner of a bathroom, wet and shaking. "Carol sweetheart, ye need to come with me now, all right?"

“Who...?” She’s blinking and swaying a bit.

“Did they give ye something? A pill or a shot? Carol it’s me, Arabella.” I rip off my wig and paw at my face, trying to peel the prosthetics off. “See? I’m here. It’s not safe, ye need to come with me, it’s all right.” I’m babbling like an eejit as her expression clears slightly.

“Arabella? Are you in the study, too?”

Nearly sobbing with relief, I grab her hand, pulling her along. “Sure. Aye. Come on now. I’ll take ye somewhere and tell ye all about it.” Her steps are unsteady, those fuckers did give her something. Pulling her arm over my shoulder, I squeeze her waist. “We have to go, please, ye have to hurry.”

“I don’t know what’s going on...” she slurs and we’re limping along like we’re falling behind in a three-legged race and the exit door is right there.

The water’s still streaming from the fire sprinkler heads in the ceiling and getting in my eyes but I dinnae care. We’re through the exit door and no one is shouting, “Hey! Where are you going?”

Dragging her to the closest set of stairs, I shove open the door, the heavy metal thing clanging off the wall and I wince. Aye, I hear that . When I touch the railing, I can feel a vibration. Someone’s running up or running down the stairs. It could be Logan. It could be Dr. Arsehole and his monstrous orderlies.

“Feck feck feck! Up or down?”

Our stateroom is one floor down.

“We’re going down. C’mon Carol, I got ye. We can sit down in a minute, aye? Come

on please.”

Someone might have been shouting my name, but my ears are still ringing from the fire alarm and it’s everything I can do to keep Carol from falling on top of me and rolling us down the stairs so I keep going. I shove my hip against the door’s crash bar on the next landing and we tumble out onto the floor.

“Are ye okay, sweetie? It’s gonna be-”

A fist grips my hair and I scream, clawing at their wrist as they haul me up. It’s another of those over-muscled monsters pretending to be orderlies.

“No fussing over your friend. She’ll be fine right there. It’s time for you to shut up and do as you’re told.” It’s a woman’s voice. The bastard yanks my head back and there she is.

It’s that blonde. That fucking blonde from Anselm’s compound. She still looks perfect and beautiful, her name? Her name was...

“Astrid. Ye fucking bitch.”

We’re in a lift I’ve not seen before. There’s two lifts for public use on the boat, all encased in glass on the outer walls of the ship to show off the view and I hated using them because they reminded me too much of Anselm’s glass box.

The enormous creep’s hand is still fisted in my hair and he’s got a gun pressed to my neck. There’s another bodyguard on the other side of Astrid, speaking urgently into his headset.

“In a way, I really should thank your husband.” The bitch even politely turns her head so I can watch her lips. “Anselm’s obsession with eugenics was a fine sales pitch, but

it was really getting in the way of the volume side of the business.” Her bodyguard whispers in her ear and she nods. “There is always room for the boutique element in any organ harvesting operation, though the MacTavishes have made me rethink that position with this profound waste of time and resources.”

“Ye know he’s already taken control of the boat.” My legs are shaking and I’m pretty sure I’m about to throw up on her expensive gown. She must have been dressing up for dinner, it’s long, reaching to her ankles and very sparkly. “Why don’t ye take your exit plan and move on?” The hand in my hair tightens and I wince. “I mean, every good CEO has a sound exit strategy, aye?”

“Oh, we are,” Astrid says, waiting for her creep to drag me out of the lift before exiting herself. “We both know that your fool of a husband won’t risk your safety, so I’ll be forced to endure your company.”

We’re standing on the top deck of the ship; it’s covered by the helicopter landing pad. There’s an enormous chopper speeding toward the ship from the south, and a smaller one approaching from the west.

Looking over the side, I can see several speed boats pulling up to the ship. Sweet Baby Jesus, that’s a long way down. Vertigo hits me and I sway.

“Don’t shoot her, you idiot!” Astrid scolds at the man holding me. “Jamming the barrel in her neck? Do you want a misfire?”

“Undskyld, frue. Sorry, ma’am.” He moves his gun away from me, more aiming in my general direction and pulls his fingers out of my hair, grabbing my upper arm.

“Give me your headset,” she snaps, yanking it away from him and settling it on her perfect hair. “MacTavish crew, I’m sure one of you is monitoring this line. You have thirty seconds to get Logan MacTavish on this frequency before I start shooting holes

into his wife.”

It’s only seconds before she cocks her head and smiles. “There you are,” she says into the headset’s speaker. “Wave off your helicopter. Mine is going to land and I am taking off with your wife. If you attempt to stop me, you’re going to be a widower. Am I clear?”

I wish I could hear his voice, one last time. He has to know she’s going to kill me once we take off. I groan, watching the bigger helicopter slow its approach, hovering in place. The smaller one picks up speed, and the rotors whip up the wind, sending my hair flying into my mouth and my beach bag banging against my thigh and I feel the weight of the gun.

Like I had the arrowhead.

It dinnae seem likely that I’m getting out of this alive.

But neither is she.

My finger’s on the trigger and I lift my beach bag, shooting through it and the bullet hits the wrong goddamn person, her other bodyguard, who falls off the platform with an almost comical look of surprise. A mosquito buzzes past my ear and the man holding me is down with blood spurting from his neck.

Astrid dinnae even try for the gun. She rips my bag away from me and punches me in the side of my head, knocking me over. I’m face down on the landing pad and she’s on top of me, slamming my head into the ground. Once. Twice. The pain is blinding and I’m thrashing violently, finally getting my arm around her neck and ripping her off me, rolling on top of her, clawing at her face.

She’s a lot better at this. But she’s not tougher.

Slamming her forehead into mine, she drags herself up, heading for the helicopter and I get a fistful of her skirt, pulling as hard as I can, screaming, on my knees and swinging her around by her dress and her hips hit the railing. She topples over it. And she's gone.

There's people around me, all talking and waving their hands. I watch their mouths move as Logan carefully cleans the blood off me. "I think your nose is broken, love."

"Uh-huh."

Losing your hearing completely isn't silence. It's an absence. A void where something should be.

I know I said something. My vocal chords vibrated and my lips moved. But there's nothing else.

He cups my face. "What? What is it? We're gonna get ye treated and X-rays and get everything-"

"It's gone."

His brow furrows. "What's gone, love?"

"My hearing. It's gone. All of it."

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which there is hope, and family.

Logan...

She looks so small, lying there in the hospital bed.

Bella's face is a mosaic of blues and purples, while her nose wasn't broken, she has one hell of a concussion.

I would give everything I have, I would've given my life to have reached her before that bitch landed her first punch. I should have shot Astrid first. But then the bodyguard would have shot Bella and...

"Mr. MacTavish? I'm Dr. Waterstone. Dr. Graham asked me to come in for a consultation for your wife's condition."

"Aye." Rubbing my eyes, I force myself to concentrate. I've been with Bella since we flew home and I brought her to the hospital here in Glasgow. It's been a couple of days, I think. I'm smelling pretty bad, like sweat and blood and gunpowder, but he dinnae seem to notice.

"Let's go out in the hall, I dinnae want to wake her. She hasn't slept much."

His smile is kind and veering toward sympathetic, but it drops when I narrow my eyes and crowd him out into the corridor. Hamish steps over to the doorway, taking my place. We took over most of this floor of the hospital, and the waiting room is cluttered with MacTavishes.

Bella's friend Meera is glaring at me, knitting something with wickedly sharp needles, and explaining to Kenna how to make a proper souffle. The woman is a multi-tasker. Uncle Lachlan is teaching Meera's fourteen-year-old son how to wire a bomb with a hair clip and some string.

Sloan and Luna are talking some kind of baby shite about nurseries. Carol only got a mild sedative on the boat, so she recovered right away and she visits every few hours to check on Bella. My brother refused to leave once we got Bella here, and he's just as smelly as I am. Mason did leave. He returned, though, freshly showered and wearing a three-piece suit.

Mum and Da stand up quickly. They've been waiting with me for the test results. "We're hoping for some good news, Dr. Waterstone." My mother's smile is shaky as she tucks her arm around my waist.

"I've gone through the most recent testing, the MRI, the CT scan, and the auditory brainstem response. First things first, that concussion is nasty. But..." He flips his iPad over, showing us a graph. "I believe, and Dr. Graham agrees, that the hearing occlusion caused by the brain trauma can reverse."

"Her hearing can come back?" I ask hoarsely. "It can- she could- something? Anything?"

"Her condition is irreversible, but you know that. And this concussion will likely hasten the degeneration of the auditory nerve. But I believe that she will still have a few more months, a year at most before there is a complete loss."

"Time for more sounds to put in her treasure box." I mumble, running my hand over my face. I walk away, leaving my parents to talk to the doctor and I go back to Bella. Crawling into bed with her, I watch her beautiful, bruised face until her eyes finally open.

“Hey.” Her voice is the same, sweet, and strong. “How long have ye been lying here, staring at me like a creep?”

I prop myself up on my elbow so she can see me clearly. “I dinnae know, to be honest. How are ye feeling, love?”

She’s watching my lips closely. “I wish I could have heard ye say ‘I love ye’ just once.” Her voice cracks a bit. “But thank ye for signing it.”

“I will say I love ye three hundred and twenty-seven times a day,” I promise. “I would like to hear it from ye as well. If you’re feeling the same way.”

“I love ye. I love, love, and love ye. So much.” Her eyes fill with tears and it’s tearing my fucking heart out. “I wish I could hear it though. Just one time.”

“The doctors say ye might.” I tell her everything Dr. Waterstone explained to us. I ask Da to fetch the doctor back and he tells her as well. There is much examination of test results and graphs and in the end, when she’s exhausted, my mother kisses Bella’s cheek and my father squeezes her hand.

“We’ll see ye back at home,” Mum promises, winking at me. “Though I’m sure this one will be hovering over ye like a ghoul.”

“Nice, Mum. Good imagery.”

She laughs, kissing me goodnight and then it’s just us in Bella’s hospital bed. She dinnae let go of me, even though I’m smelling like a dumpster.

Dr. Waterstone is right. By the time I take Bella home the next day, she’s hearing bits and pieces. Not much. But it is something.

Family trickles in, just a couple of people at a time. Surprisingly, the first person Bella demanded to see was Xenia.

“Tell me ye got those feckers.” Her bruised face is set and angry.

Xenia’s face lights up with an unholy joy. “Oh, girl. Yes. Yes, we did. Not only did I divert all the funds the patients paid for the surgery, I found a back way into the rest of Anselm’s board of directors holdings and drained all their money, too. Those fuckers knew exactly what was happening. And if they didn’t, they should have.”

She glances at me, “The family took a good chunk of the money, which is reasonable and you should see the bonus the Chieftain gave me and Georges!”

“Ye deserve every penny,” I assure her, then drop my head in defeat. “And my Maserati.”

“Yes!” Xenia shouted, then slapped her hand over her mouth in horror. “Oh shit I’m sorry, Arabella. Fuck!”

“No worries, aye? It’s nice to hear anything. Tell me the rest, you evil genius.”

“Okay, so after diverting two hundred million pounds into the MacTavish coffers, I re-routed the rest of the money from Anselm’s assholes into various legitimate organ donation programs and set aside fifty million pounds. I thought you might like to decide whether you want it to go to research for hearing loss or a charity for assistive devices.”

“Dinnae worry about the Wallace School,” I say, “the Lady Elspeth is very interested and has taken it on as her pet project and my God have mercy on your Headmaster’s soul.”

Bella's face is rapturous. "Oh, I have a list. So many places to send that money."

My wife's next visit request is for my Da and Uncle Cormac.

"Lass, ye might have won the prize for the toughest of the MacTavishes, but please dinnae feel like ye have to keep that up," Da says.

"Is there a trophy or a plaque that comes with that?" She looks intrigued.

"I'm sure we can put something together," Da promises. "Perhaps on one of those giant chains of office."

"Chieftain, I wanted to ask-"

"Call me Uncle Cormac, please." He rubs the back of his neck. "I still feel like my Da whenever someone calls me that outside of official duty."

"Thank ye, Uncle Cormac. I wanted to ask ye about the Costa Cartel. Have ye moved against them yet?"

"No. We're tracking their ships in the Atlantic. They'll try storming us at our ports on the coast near Edinburgh, but they dinnae have the manpower. They just dinnae know that yet." His grin is like a shark's, too wide and very alarming.

She pulls out a business card from her bedside table drawer. "I know ye sometimes involve law enforcement, aye?"

Uncle Cormac shrugs. "We try to maintain a good relationship with the local constabulary when it's useful."

"Detective Christie, she was on my assault case. I know ye had her pulled off, and I

understand why. I have to say... she's one of the good ones. She told me that if I wasn't here under my own free will, she'd help me get away. She just wanted me to be safe."

"She is a good one," he agreed.

"I dinnae suppose ye could bring her in on this Costa business? Tip her off, perhaps?" Bella holds out the card hopefully, and with a laugh, Da takes it.

"We could make a phone call or two at the right juncture, brother. Don't ye think?"

"We could," Uncle Cormac agrees. He stands to leave, taking Bella's hand. "Ye have a gift. A superpower, as Logan said. No matter what happens with your hearing, your superpower is very much in place, aye? Ye are important to this family." Her eyes fill with tears and he backs away. "No lass, no tears! Tears are my Kryptonite!"

I see them out as quickly as is polite, and take the stairs back up to the bedroom, two at a time. "I know there's a long line of family waiting to be called for their time with ye, my bride. But I canna take one more fecking visitor."

Grinning, she scoots over, patting the bed invitingly. "What do ye think about turning off our phones and pretending there's no outside world for a while? No murderous cartels. No family - though they are very nice! No clan business, aye?"

"That is an excellent plan, my bride." I pull her onto my lap, resting my chin on her hair, sweet with the scent of jasmine from her shampoo and thankfully, only the barest lingering traces of hospital disinfectant.

"Wait." She holds up her phone. "What does this mean?"

It's from Sloan.

I feel that it's my duty as your sister-in-law to warn you that once you're up and about, The Lady Elspeth will be charging down from Edinburgh to plan your huge wedding at the MacTavish Estate. Rest up. Carbo-load. It's a lot to handle. I mean, A LOT.

"What is this?" The blood drains from Bella's face, leaving her sheet-white. "What is going to happen?"

Rubbing my eyes, I groan. "Ah, feck. The wedding. She's still holding it against me that the family priest didn't marry us the first time."

"I dinnae know if I'm ready for the full MacTavish experience!" She's trying to scoot away from me and I grab her ankle, pulling her back.

"I'm gonna take ye away from here. I dinnae give ye a proper honeymoon, and now's the time. I will tell my grandmother that there is no planning to be done until we're back and ye are ready. This means I will be the first male in my family to stand up to The Lady Elspeth and it is possible I will not survive the encounter. But it will be done. Pick a place that you've always wanted to see, and I'm taking ye there."

"Oh. I like that." She sighs in relief. "There's only one absolute requirement that I have, so ye can pick with that in mind."

"Aye, of course, love."

So serious, my wife, fixing me with a firm glare. "Nowhere near an ocean. Not even close. In fact, not even a lake or a river. The desert. The desert sounds good. How much trouble can we get into in the desert?"

We both laugh, holding each other and feeling the bloody remnants of the last few weeks fade away.

She's right, though. No fecking ocean.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 12:25 am

In which Arabella and Logan create more sounds for her treasure box.

Logan...

“We’ve checked off Tibetan Prayer Hour with the Buddhist monks at the Drepung Monastery. What’s next?”

“I will never forget that moment.” Bella lights up when she brings out her sound memories, like they spark a flame inside her.

Our honeymoon has turned into an extended vacation and no one had a word to say about it after I spoke with my grandmother. It was a conversation I will never forget, no matter how hard I try.

Oddly, Bella wanted to hear the low buzz of the needle as a tattoo artist in Bangladesh added two more marks to the side of my hand, and “Arabella” in script on the left side of my neck. She put her head on my chest, listening with a blissful grin as the amused artist winked at me.

We sat on the sand at Praia do Norte Beach in Nazaré, Portugal to hear the sound of some of the biggest and most powerful waves in the world. Bella’s lips were blue from the wind and spray, but she refused to leave until she was sure she had the sound set deep in her treasure box.

“This might surprise ye, but the next sound I want to put in the box is back in Glasgow.”

“Really?”

She’s smiling at me and it’s hard to decipher, a bit shy, a touch of mischief. “Aye. I canna tell ye until we go home.”

Back in Glasgow...

We’re sitting in the bell tower and it’s mid-morning. It’s a rare day of bright sun and the light of it on my bride’s face is beautiful. She’s piled up all the pillows from our bedroom and from the other guest rooms as well, making a fluffy mountain of them in the middle of the tower.

She’s wearing my favorite tiny pink nightie and a sultry expression, lounging on her pillow throne. “Are ye ready to hear what sound I want?”

Reaching behind my neck, I pull off my shirt. “I have a feeling I’m gonna be naked for this one.”

“Aye.” She bites her lower lip and feck if that dinnae make me instantly hard. This woman’s gonna give me a stroke one day and it’ll be worth it. “I want to feel you. Without a condom. I want to feel your piercings inside me and against me, and I want you to come inside me.”

She’s gonna kill me.

I rip my jeans open. “Where does the sound ye want to keep come into play?”

Bella parts her knees, just enough for me to see she’s not wearing any knickers. “I want us to come together right as the bell chimes at noon. We can be as loud as we like, shout and scream...” Slipping a strap off her shoulder, she lightly pinches her nipple. “And no one will hear a thing. Just the bell ringing at noon.”

Arabella...

Logan checks his watch, then his gaze lifts to mine. “We’ve got eleven minutes, baby. I’m gonna make ye come three times before noon.”

His eyes are black, the pupils blown wide and he looks like a demon come topside to ravish me.

And I’m the one that unleashed him.

I yelp, startled when he drops on top of me, stopping just short of slamming into me with his knees on either side of me and his hands by my head. His lips are on mine, sucking my tongue into his mouth, shoving my legs open with his knee and grinding his dick against me. He’s hard. So hard already, thick and throbbing and my spine arches, wordlessly begging for him.

He pulls back just enough to slap my clitoris with two fingers and I feel the electrical jolt of it all through me. “You’re gonna come for me. Fucking gush all over my cock when I split ye open. I’m gonna get your juices all over me and you’ll lick it off.”

I just barely hold off a shriek as he slaps my clit again. It’s throbbing and sore and I canna understand how, when he slaps it a third time, I can hear how wet he’s made me and when he bites my nipple and shoves two fingers inside me, I detonate.

“There it is, number one. We’re on the clock, baby.”

He licks and bites my nipples, pinning my hands above me and rubbing his dick against me. I can feel the piercing at the tip of my cock brush over my sore clitoris, the metal is shockingly hard and the feel of it without a covering of latex is overwhelmingly good.

“Why did we wait this long?” I moan, “We should have done this right away.”

He pauses, taking my chin and forcing me to look at him. "I was waiting for ye, sweet wife. It is your right to decide."

A particularly brutal press of the piercing makes my thighs slam together against his lean hips and I come again, like ocean waves, like the waves slamming into the sand in Praia do Norte and another orgasm hits before the first one is finished.

His chest is heavy against me, heaving as he growls. "That's three."

I feel the thick, blunt head and that hard piercing slide into me, slowly, pausing when my spasming pussy tightens down and pushing ahead when I relax a bit. Lifting my head, he puts a pillow under it so I can watch. His cock is as gorgeous - and as intimidating - as the rest of him. Each thick inch spreads me wider until the pain melts into something else, something dark and obscene and it's so good...

"Let me- let me lick your cock, I want to," I babble and he just chuckles heartlessly.

"Later. Because we have two minutes left and I'm gonna spend every second fucking you. Spread those fucking thighs, give me all of ye." He pulls back, so slowly, each inch dragging from me until only his pierced tip is inside, and then he slams inside me, harder than ever, rougher.

My feverish focus narrows down to nothing but sensation. The feel of him bare inside me, so hot, almost scalding and wide- I'll never get used to that. The bite and sting along with the liquid pleasure of his thrusts. I dinnae even feel his thumb slide between us until he presses it down, hard, on my clitoris.

"Fifteen seconds, baby," he pants in my ear. "Fifteen seconds..." With a final, brutal thrust we come, both of us, the heat of him spreading through me, filling me and the thunderous clang of the bell above us covers my screams and his shout of triumph.

When it's quiet again, nothing but the sound of our harsh breaths, my beautiful

husband rolls on his back, keeping inside me as I sprawl over his chest.

“So perfect, ye are.” His long fingers run through my hair, loosening the tangles and gently rubbing my scalp. “Was that the sound, love?” He’s still hard inside me, the wet squelch of our finish should be embarrassing but I’m gleeful that I can hear it.

“It was the first part of the sound.” I rest my chin on his pectoral, loving the tender look in his eyes.

“What’s the second part?”

“I...” The swell of emotion almost chokes me. “If we time this right, the second part could be our baby’s newborn cry.”

Finally, he pulls back and smooths my hair. “We should do it again. Just to be sure.”