

Excerpt: Rogue of the Lowlands

*Glasgow, 1817*

The bane of Annie Ferguson's existence, at least for the past two weeks, walked through the breakfast room door of her mother's boarding house. She tried to ignore the Highlander, which wasn't easy to do.

"Has anyone ever mentioned that ye are as prickly as a thistle, lass?" Niall MacDonald asked as he pulled out a chair next to her.

Annie gave him her best no-nonsense look. "Did I ever mention that ye are in a *thorn* in my side?"

Niall grinned amiably, his smoky grey eyes crinkling a bit at the corners. "Aye, ye might have a time or two."

A time or two. More likely a time or two every hour of the waking day for the past two weeks which was precisely how long he'd been following her around. "If ye would stop hounding me—"

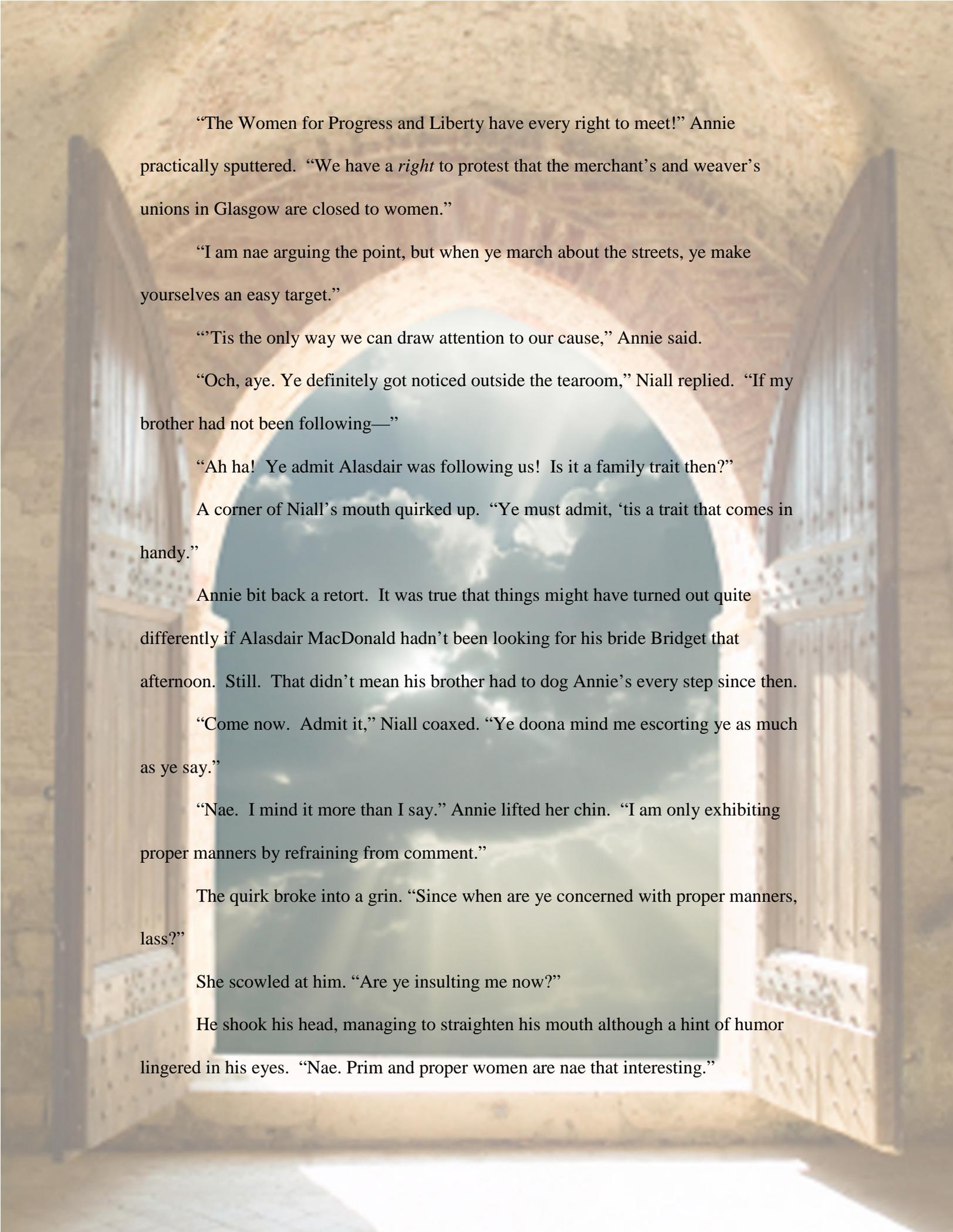
"*Escorting* ye, lass," Niall said. "'Tis a bit of difference."

She managed to keep from rolling her eyes. Just barely. "Whatever ye call it, I doona need someone hanging on to my apron strings."

He raised a brow. "I doona think I have ever seen ye sport such a garment."

Annie shook her head in frustration. "Ye ken very well what I mean. Ever since the incident at the tearoom, ye have nae left me in peace."

"Incident? Ye and my sister-by-marriage were accosted by men meaning to abduct ye because they are angry about that club of yours—"



“The Women for Progress and Liberty have every right to meet!” Annie practically sputtered. “We have a *right* to protest that the merchant’s and weaver’s unions in Glasgow are closed to women.”

“I am nae arguing the point, but when ye march about the streets, ye make yourselves an easy target.”

“Tis the only way we can draw attention to our cause,” Annie said.

“Och, aye. Ye definitely got noticed outside the tearoom,” Niall replied. “If my brother had not been following—”

“Ah ha! Ye admit Alasdair was following us! Is it a family trait then?”

A corner of Niall’s mouth quirked up. “Ye must admit, ‘tis a trait that comes in handy.”

Annie bit back a retort. It was true that things might have turned out quite differently if Alasdair MacDonald hadn’t been looking for his bride Bridget that afternoon. Still. That didn’t mean his brother had to dog Annie’s every step since then.

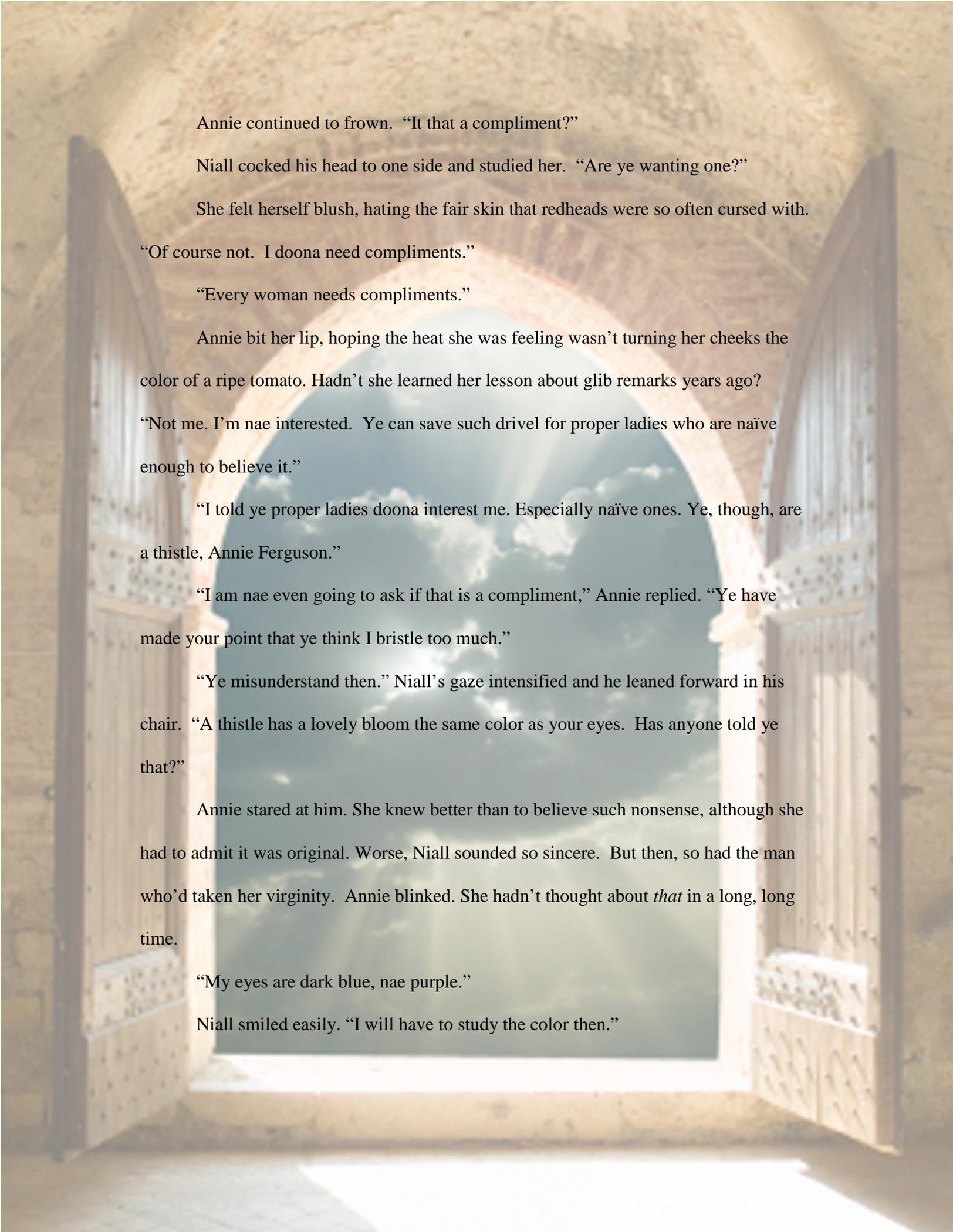
“Come now. Admit it,” Niall coaxed. “Ye doona mind me escorting ye as much as ye say.”

“Nae. I mind it more than I say.” Annie lifted her chin. “I am only exhibiting proper manners by refraining from comment.”

The quirk broke into a grin. “Since when are ye concerned with proper manners, lass?”

She scowled at him. “Are ye insulting me now?”

He shook his head, managing to straighten his mouth although a hint of humor lingered in his eyes. “Nae. Prim and proper women are nae that interesting.”

Annie continued to frown. “It that a compliment?”

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Niall cocked his head to one side and studied her. “Are ye wanting one?”

She felt herself blush, hating the fair skin that redheads were so often cursed with.

“Of course not. I doona need compliments.”

“Every woman needs compliments.”

Annie bit her lip, hoping the heat she was feeling wasn’t turning her cheeks the color of a ripe tomato. Hadn’t she learned her lesson about glib remarks years ago?

“Not me. I’m nae interested. Ye can save such drivel for proper ladies who are naïve enough to believe it.”

“I told ye proper ladies doona interest me. Especially naïve ones. Ye, though, are a thistle, Annie Ferguson.”

“I am nae even going to ask if that is a compliment,” Annie replied. “Ye have made your point that ye think I bristle too much.”

“Ye misunderstand then.” Niall’s gaze intensified and he leaned forward in his chair. “A thistle has a lovely bloom the same color as your eyes. Has anyone told ye that?”

Annie stared at him. She knew better than to believe such nonsense, although she had to admit it was original. Worse, Niall sounded so sincere. But then, so had the man who’d taken her virginity. Annie blinked. She hadn’t thought about *that* in a long, long time.

“My eyes are dark blue, nae purple.”

Niall smiled easily. “I will have to study the color then.”

