Manners Maketh Love A Difficult Process

by anarchycox

Summary

Tequila is determined to get a promotion to be head distiller of Statesman Whiskey but is a little rough around the edges for the job. The solution two weeks of gentlemanly training in England. Too bad the teacher is this fussy, uptight guy Harry with long legs and gorgeous eyes.

Eggsy won a contest that he thought would give cash and somehow ended up at this become a gentleman course in the bloody country, but he can steal some stuff if that bald sexy as hell bloke don't distract him too much.

Harry finds a man in denim on denim attractive; he assumes he had a stroke and hopes the next will kill him.

Merlin is trying to figure out how to mix flirtation and larceny, it is harder than expected.

A story about finding love when you really don't intend to - because isn't that always the way of it.
Okay I loved loved loved writing this story that is part feels, part drawing room comedy, and a few other things thrown in. Goddamn am I grateful for having had pemberley-press do the incredible art for this project and be a cheerleader and sounding board for the whole process. My eternal thanks to willbakefordean for the beta on this story.
“Well that was interesting,” Ginger said as she slid onto the stool next to him. “And memorable. Very, very memorable.”

Tequila finished his bourbon. “I didn’t know who she was. She just said she needed to wake her husband up a little. Didn’t see nothing wrong with -”

“With dirty dancing with the very young wife of a member of the board of directors,” Ginger filled in. “Which caused a screaming fight, including knocking a tray over, and another member of the board falling on their ass from sliding on shrimp cocktail, at which point you made a tasteless joke to try to make everyone laugh.”

“And that worked great didn’t it?” Tequila said. He hunched over a little. “How mad is Champ?”

“This was a charity auction, Tequila,” Ginger said. “And two of the deepest pockets walked out before the auction could take place.”

“Shit,” Tequila muttered. He would make bids on stuff to make sure money was brought in, but he definitely didn’t have the money some of the board members had. “So Champ is pissed.”

“Really pissed,” Ginger agreed. “Tequila, you serious about the job for Head Distiller?”

“I am,” he replied. “I want it Ginger. I would be great at it.”

“At parts of it. But some of it is schmoozing, and playing certain parts, not just making the bourbon. You have to sell the product and yourself. And if you want Champ to think you are a serious contender, you need to do better.”

“He told me to apply for the job!” Tequila protested.

“And you might be working your way out of it,” she answered back. “You know Champ prefers to promote from in house, but you…just think about how you can make up for this mess, and quick.” Ginger gave him a hug and went to join Champ.

Tequila watched Champ make a speech and somehow spin the incident in a way that had everyone in stitches. He couldn’t even be mad at Champ for calling him a rodeo clown. He deserved it; he let Champ and the company down. Shit. He bid on a few of the items and was the proud owner of some sort of vintage science posters that he thought were ugly as sin, but the 10k he dropped at least made Champ not hurt him too much with the goodbye slap. He went home to his small house and poured himself a drink and sipped it in the shower.

He had done right. The woman had asked him and he wanted to help her out. He made it clear to her he wasn’t the sort to help anyone cheat but she just wanted her husband’s attention. She actually liked the old guy. He wasn’t that old, Tequila thought, in his 50s, but still the woman deserved her husband to realize she wasn’t just his arm candy. Only it all backfired. And what was worse, Tequila couldn’t figure out how he could have handled the situation differently. He had only had to meet board of director sorts a couple of times. And he realized that if he got the head distiller job he’d have to do a lot more of this make nice kind of crap.

Well damn, he shouldn’t have used that etiquette book for kindling, but reading, especially that sort of stuff, was so damn hard for him.
Maybe there was a book on tape he could find. Or some youtube videos. Youtube videos would be great.

Tequila went over to his computer and typed ‘how to be classy’ into the youtube search bar. It had a couple options but nothing that fit. He changed it to gentleman and clicked on something called ‘The Gentleman’s Experience’. An old guy sat in his office and talked about a two week retreat where men of distinction would teach manners, and etiquette, and everything a person needed to know to deal with the upper echelons of society. Tequila texted Ginger, *hey look into something called the gentleman’s experience run by a guy named Chester King.*

He watched the other video the man had up and had to admit the place looked fancy as a derby hat. Those rich British guys knew all about how to handle this sort of stuff, it might be a good idea. Tequila’s phone buzzed.

**It costs, but it looks really good. Champ would be impressed you took initiative like this. He remembers how much you bitched about school.**

*How much is costs?*

Tequila’s whistled low when Ginger gave him the price for the platinum package, he could buy a used truck for that. But it could be the difference between getting the job or not. And Tequila felt sick at how he had embarrassed Champ at the party.

*Can you book me?*

30 minutes later Tequila had a platinum package, flights, and hotel booked. Ginger worked fast. Christ he hoped his passport was up to date.

Looked like he was flying to merry old England.

“Tally ho,” Tequila said softly to his empty house.

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“No fucking way,” Eggsy said. “You’re fucking playing me yeah?”

“Look!” Michelle said. She held out the letter to him. “Take it, they wouldn’t have sent a letter if you didn’t win.” She shoved it at him. “Certified, had to sign for it and everything.”

Eggsy’s hands shook a little. It had been a stupid thing, a writing contest, creative non-fiction, whatever the fuck that was, but he wrote about his dad, about the loss of a dad and what it does to a little boy. He had written it as a lark, and because they were offering a mystery prize that was the equivalent of 5,000 pounds to the winning story. That would cover a lot of bills and food. It took him a few hours to write it, and send it off and it had been months and never heard nothing so figured it came to nothing, like most everything he did.

But this letter suggested maybe otherwise.

“Maybe has a cheque in there, treat you to nice dinner, Mum,” Eggsy opened the envelope and saw the word congratulations. He cursed. “Shit, Mum! I won?” He read a little bit more. “Oh…no I didn’t.”

“Why all this fuss if you lost?” Michelle huffed and went to grab herself a beer. “Shitty build up to say you suck.”
“Wait...no, jesus why can’t these people say what they mean,” Eggsy replied reading a little bit more. “Shit! I did win!”

“Cash?” Michelle asked trying to see the letter and hug her son at the same time.


Michelle picked up the brochure as Eggsy kept reading. She snorted. “Is this a joke then?” She flipped it to show him the front. “Gentleman’s school?”

Eggsy began to read out loud. “Congratulations Mr. Gary Unwin, on your remarkable story. Blah blah blah, emotive, gripping, a rawness to technique that enhances the grief blah blah blah,” Eggsy looked at his mum. “Think that means I was crap with comma usage or something.” She laughed. “We are pleased to say that you have won the contest against some pretty stiff competition. Bet that means uni boys, and your story will be published, yeah yeah get to what I won ya wordy bastards...” Eggsy skimmed a little more. “Right here we go. Mister Unwin it is our pleasure to award you prize of an all expenses two week trip to The Gentleman’s Experience.”

“That sounds like a cathouse,” Michelle pointed out.

“Fuck if it doesn’t,” he agreed. “That match the brochure?”

Michelle nodded.

Eggsy skimmed again. “So I won a two week stay in the fucking middle of nowhere where I get to take classes on how to be a bloody gentlemen? How is that a prize?” He frowned. “Classes, fucking homework? This isn’t a prize, it’s —”

“Can we exchange it for cash?” Michelle asked. “The 5 thousand the contest suggested?”

“Nope,” Eggsy read. “And can’t send anyone else,” Eggsy groaned. “Bloody hell, wish I had never entered the contest. Apparently shoulda read the fine print a bit more.”

“The estate looks pretty. All Jane Austen and shit,” Michelle said, pointing to some pictures in the brochure. “Says you leave the experience with a chit for a bespoke outfit. That’s worth a lot. You know the value of this might be more than the 5k cash.”

“Suit ain’t gonna pay for lights,” Eggsy said.

“Still a bit of a vacation innit?” Michelle countered. “A little time away?”

“I’ll probably get hay fever and drown in a pond,” Eggsy muttered.

“Well, at least you’ll know the proper thing to say as you do it, so you don’t insult your betters.”

“I’m going to the pub,” he grabbed his coat.

“Not a proper goodbye, not how a gentleman would farewell a lady is it?”

Eggsy laughed a little. “Let me know when you find a gentleman or lady around here, yeah Mum?”

“Sure, I’m having tea with a baroness next week aren’t I?” Michelle laughed a bit. It wasn’t what they wanted, but her son was going to be a published writer, and she was letting everyone know that. She picked up her phone to call Charlene, who had bragged about her kid winning that trivia contest. See how smug she was after hearing about Eggsy.
Eggsy shook his head and went to the pub where he was laughed at for a solid twenty minutes by his mate. Unfortunately Poodle overheard and the next day Dean gave orders. Steal as much as you can, not like this sort will notice. Come back with a bunch of good stuff to fence, or don’t come back at all. Eggsy nodded, Dean knew damn well Eggsy wouldn’t leave Daisy, no matter what. And a place like in the brochure, Dean was right, they wouldn’t notice a few missing bits and bobs of silver. And he was damn good at casing a joint. He didn’t want to be a gentleman anyways, those sorts were always arses.

“No,” Merlin refused to look at Harry. “Not again.”

“Don’t make me do this without you,” Harry begged. He moved around the work room and sat in what was generally acknowledged as Harry’s chair across from Merlin’s worktable. “I’ll owe you.”

“Ye owe me, what…200 quid, tickets to Arsenal, a suit, a kilt, and my fucking Lord of the Rings dvds,” Merlin pointed out. “What can you offer me to make me go deal with the misery that is your uncle? He is ghastly.”

“Exactly, you can’t leave me to suffer alone,” Harry pleaded. He watched Merlin work on the clock. “Please, please, please, please, help me with this crop. There are only four students this time.”

Merlin’s hands were steady as he moved 300 year old gears. “I hate the gentleman classes.”

“So do I,” Harry answered quickly. A swift and easily told lie.

Merlin looked up from his work. “No ye don’t, ye love doing this.” Merlin had been able to tell when Harry was lying for twenty years.

Harry sighed a little. “Okay, yes I do, though not the way Uncle Chester runs it.” He stood up and started to walk around and touch some of Merlin’s tools and had a cleaning cloth thrown at his head. “Manners are becoming a lost art in the sea of dick pics and formal track suits,” Harry shuddered. “Do you know a man came in and asked what snapback would go with the suit I was making for him? A snapback Merlin, with a gorgeous double breasted Navy with chalk line.”

Merlin ignored Harry as the man rambled on about what an affront to God himself it had been and worked to restore the clock. He had been at it for a week and thought he finally had it right. He moved cogs about with tweezers and pressed at pieces with his gloved hands. He could feel that something was just a little off, a gear would have trouble catching at first without a little grip to move it forward. He stood up, reached out lightening fast and plucked a few hairs from Harry’s head and returned to his chair. Merlin slid them into the clock. There, that would be perfect, he thought. He closed it all up and wound the back piece. He smiled when after a moments hesitation the piece worked. “Excellent.” Merlin took off his work glasses and put on his everyday ones. He looked at Harry who was actually silent. It happened so seldom, that Merlin savoured the extra twenty-five seconds of quiet.

“Ow?” Harry said.

“I’ve seen ye pluck stray eyebrow hairs, that didn’t hurt,” Merlin dismissed. “It’s beautiful.”

“My hair is, yes, you were always jealous of it,” Harry adjusted the line of his jacket.

“No, I was jealous the men sinking their hands into it. Ye always pulled the pretty boys.”

“Like attracts like. Though the thugs you pulled always had an interesting air about them.” Harry
smiled. “I will pay you.”

“I don’t need money, there is no money on the planet that can get me to deal with your uncle and the prats who spend thousands of pounds for you to yell at them about what fork to use.”

“Oh come on, you love yelling at them too,” Harry said. “You have expressed your joy in making them cry.” He leaned on Merlin’s work table just to drive the man spare. He hated having his work table touched. Harry was much more reasonable about his work station at his shop. He had never stabbed anyone like Merlin had.

“I made one cry, Harry, one.” Merlin set the clock aside and stood up to stretch. He also shoved Harry away from the table, but not so hard he’d crash into a wall and topple one of the dozen bins of gears and screws. He put away his tools carefully, in their exact spot. Harry didn’t make fun of that, he was the same way with his threads. “Come on, buy me lunch.”

“I have a fitting in an hour,” Harry protested, mostly for form’s sake. His clients all knew he was never on time, they considered it a part of his charm.

“So it will be a quick lunch,” Merlin shrugged and grabbed his jumper and slid it on over his head. “I’ll let you convince me to help you out.”

Harry smiled a little, he knew from the beginning that Merlin would assist him with The Gentleman’s Experience. He always did, no matter how much he hated Chester - he liked Harry that much. The two had been friends for 30 years, they were family in the end. “I don’t have your Lord of the Rings dvds you know.” Harry poked his head through to let the clerk know they were going out. Merlin never remembered details like that. They cut through the alley behind the shop to go to their favourite noodle place.

“You don’t?” Merlin paused. “I was sure I lent them to you.” He frowned, trying to remember.

“No you showed up at my house at 11pm and said the Hobbit movies were so dreadful they managed to even kill your boner for Faramir and handed them to me and told me to remove them from this earth.”

“Aragorn, I have a boner for Aragorn,” Merlin said.

“No, you want people to think that, but you like the sensitive soldier best,” Harry smiled.

“Shut up,” Merlin muttered. “Or we will talk about your affection for Gimli.”

“He is a soldier of incredible renown and loyal!” Harry protested.

“Sure, sure,” Merlin agreed. They bickered about it the whole lunch before returning to their businesses across the street from each other. A week later they drove out to the country estate to get ready for the students of The Gentleman’s Experience.
Eggsy hitched his old duffel bag on his shoulder and looked around. The train station was small and he had been right, outside London was freaky, it was too many trees just around, not in a park. He bet they were evil trees. He was supposed to be picked up at 1pm on the dot, because a gentleman was not kept waiting or whatever crap the brochure had said. He wondered how many people were going to be at this thing, and how much he’d actually have to participate. Eggsy had downloaded a bunch of books onto his phone and figured reading time was the only good thing that would come out of these two weeks. He had a horrific thought about what the wifi would be like out here, but dismissed it. This was a business thing, they’d have decent reception. He kicked the mostly empty suitcase at his feet a bit, the one Dean wanted him to fill. He had been forced to watch like 50 hours of Antiques Roadshow before leaving to help him guess what he should nick. He wasn’t stealing no chamberpot, no matter what that girl said on the telly. They were never worth 500 quid.

“Well, hey there, can you direct me?” a man asked.

Eggsy looked at him and laughed. “Yeah bruv, America’s back that way.” The guy was actually wearing a cowboy hat. Eggsy hadn’t seen them outside a movie and some bad Halloween costumes.

“Thank you kindly, but I’m supposed to be in England,” he replied. “Here for The Gentleman’s Experience. Apparently I need to be a bit more cultured and polite in order to get that promotion I’ve been eyeing. Found this place and my friend thought it seemed right nice and a good idea. Think she’s living…what’s the word…vicariously through me. Expects me to meet, that guy, you know the ones the booky girls all go for?”

“Mr. Darcy?” Eggsy asked. Americans always loved Mr. Darcy. He had learned a couple of his speeches to pull at the bar and had it actually worked once or twice.

“Yeah that one. Figure I meet that sort of fella, I’ll hog tie him and bring him back to Ginger as a birthday gift.” The man held out his hand. “I’m Tequila.”

“Sure, you are,” Eggsy said and he shook. “Eggsy.”

Tequila grinned. “Now look at that, two fellas with ridiculous nicknames that they can never shake and have just sort of gotten used to.”

“Mine’s from my dad, who died fighting in Afghanistan, how about you?” Eggsy asked crossing his arms and glaring at the brash man.

Tequila tipped his hat a little bit. “Meant no offense, apologies Eggsy. Mine’s from my daddy too, only mine is because that’s what got my mama knocked up, a bottle of tequila and a Jimmy Buffet concert.”

“Getting why you might need some polishing up for that job there,” Eggsy said.

“Why are you here?” Tequila asked. The man moved his luggage about and there were four pieces in total. That would have cost a fortune to cross the ocean, but Eggsy guessed that Tequila had money. Had to, to do this bullshit.

“Won a contest, didn’t read close enough that it was 5k in prizes, not cash.”

“The classes sound impressive. King, the man who runs this place has some titles, I think?” Tequila asked. “That’s mighty fine.”
“Christ, bruv, first thing you got to learn is half the fuckers in the country came came some sort of bullshit title or connections or somefing. Don’t make them better than us, just makes them inbred and wankers.” Eggsy shrugged, “Trust me, this is just a desperate cash grab, taking advantage of schlubs like us. It’s a con, but at least it ain’t my cash.”

Tequila grinned. “Well, later I’ll raise a glass to you for not getting conned. And one for me for falling all that fancy accent stuff.”

Eggsy grinned. “To me bruv, you’re the one with the fancy accent.” He frowned a bit, “You drink to a lot?” He loved a pint or two but with Dean and his gang, Eggsy had learned to be wary of hard drinkers.

“Have to live up to the name somehow. Think they have a decent bar out at that fancy ass house?”

“Yeah,” Eggsy said. “One thing you can always count on is these arses have a good bar.” He watched Tequila.

“Then we are solid. Good company and good booze and we’re all set.” Tequila gave another hat tip to Eggsy. He wasn’t as clueless about how to read people as Ginger thought he was and could see he had made Eggsy a little nervous and wanted him not to be. Tequila could tell when people were good folks, and Eggsy seemed like good folks. “But don’t you worry none, I’m not one for getting drunk. You work at a distillery you learn pretty quick, not to imbibe too much.”

Eggsy laughed a little, relieved, “Yeah, you ain’t so bad.” He heard a car and whistled. “Okay maybe this trip is looking up. Look at that.”

“Cars, not my thing,” Tequila said. It looked old, and fancy. Shiny. Black. That was all he had.

“Rolls, vintage,” Eggsy said. “Probably worth like 100,000 pounds. They aren’t dicking around with this.”

“Shouldn’t be at the cost,” Tequila replied. He definitely had paid more than five thousand.

“Still don’t get how this was a prize,” Eggsy said. “Not with what it sounds like.” He shut up though when the driver opened the door for them. He didn’t like just leaving his bags to be dealt with, but it would be weird if he fussed. Tequila settled in beside him and offered a small flask. “Fuck yeah,” Eggsy said and took a slug. He winced. “Bloody hell.”

“Statesmen,” Tequila said. “Who I work for. Best Bourbon you’ll ever drink.”

“Right,” Eggsy said. “Strong, I think, is what you meant.”

The driver went through the village and out into the country. It was beautiful, Eggsy guessed, but the lack of buildings was disconcerting. “At least you’d see the zombies coming.”

“Yeah, but you run out of food if you aren’t stocked. Too much travelling. In a city, sure more population to worry about, but more resources too,” Tequila said. He looked around. “It’s a different green from back home.”

“This much space is creepy,” Eggsy muttered.

“Used to space,” Tequila said. “Used to big houses, but they don’t look like that.”

The house was large, vast really, and definitely good to have some of the stuff Dean wanted him to bring back. There was an old man waiting for them at the foot of the giant staircase. They stepped
out of the car and the old man smiled at them. “Hello, welcome to the Gentleman’s Experience. I’m your host, Chester King. Let’s go to my office, shall we, to talk about what is going to happen. Our other guests arrived yesterday and I am sure we are eager to get going.”

“Eagerly eager,” Eggsy said with a smile. His broadened when King’s fell a bit. Tequila made sure not to laugh too much.

“Right this way then,” Chester said. Chester took them up the imposing steps in a giant hallway. Eggsy made a noise. “Impressive isn’t it?” Chester smiled and gave a rundown on the history of the building as they walked to the office. Tequila was lapping it up and Eggsy was good at pretending to listen. Paintings too hard to fence, vases too big, this area of the place was a bust. They were taken to an incredibly fussy office, where Chester sat behind an enormous desk.

“Now, Mr. Russell,” Chester began.

“Tequila, please,” he said with a smile.

Eggsy enjoyed the look of horror that came across the old man’s face. He scanned the room, he definitely wanted to lift something off the man, he’d do it even if Dean hadn’t ordered. The desk had a half dozen pens on it. He bet they weren’t from the pence shop.

“Tequila,” Chester said and almost choked on the word. “You have paid for the platinum package and you will receive hands on one on one training from our best instructor, the best room we have, and a selection of parting gifts, to help you attain the gentlemanly stature that I am sure is just trying to break through that rough exterior.”

Eggsy made a small noise at the way Chester said rough. Tequila wouldn’t get it, but Eggsy did. He had no idea why he felt protective of the big dumb American, he looked like he knew how to take care of himself, but still. No way should King be insulting a guy who spent as much as Tequila would have.

“Well thank you kindly, Mama always said we Southerners got our manners from the British,” Tequila replied and Chester smiled.

Eggsy wondered why Chester couldn’t notice the man was insulting him. He was liking Tequila more and more.

“And, Mr. Ulwin,” Chester said, dropping even the fake smile.

“Unwin, sir, but Eggsy is just fine.” Eggsy made his smile extra wide and gave a wink. He heard Tequila snort a little at that.

“Yes, our contest winner,” Chester managed to put all the sneer on the words and none on his face.

“Yeah, bruv. Sorry you got stuck with me, and not some MFA from Oxford.”

“Well, I am sure that you understand, your experience will not be quite the same as…Tequila’s is, but I trust we will manage to get you to not slurp your soup too much by the end of this.”

“Now that wasn’t very polite was it?” Tequila started to lean forward and Eggsy just kicked the guy’s ankle. Eggsy was used to it.

“Thanks, King, know down at the estate, that’s gonna be a real handy skill.”

“Let me show you to your rooms.” Chester stood and as they walked out of the room, Eggsy nicked
a pen. Tequila gave him a look but thankfully didn’t say anything.

They took forever to walk up to the guest rooms. Chester flung open a door to a three bedroom suite. “Mr. Russell, your quarters for your stay, you will share a butler with Mr. Heskith and Ms. Morton, but he is available 24/7 for any needs you have.”

“Damn,” Tequila said looking around the room. It was beautiful to be sure, but a little…fussy for his tastes. He would have to take a bunch of photos for Ginger, she’d love it. The bed at least was long enough for him, and did look mighty inviting. And his luggage was already there. “Thank you. Guess you’ll be down the hall Eggy?”

“We have appropriate quarters one floor up for Eggy,” Chester said.

Eggy rolled his eyes behind the man’s back. Tequila nodded. “See you soon, Eggy.”

Eggy gave him a salute and followed Chester up a level and wished he was surprised when it was a single room that looked like it had been servant’s quarters once. He was sure Chester was standing there waiting for him to be insulted but he wouldn’t give the guy the satisfaction. “Thanks, bruv. Looks great.” And to be fair it was bigger than his room at the flat, and not filled with some of Dean’s ill gotten goods. The window even had a view. Of all the creepy nothingness they were surrounded by.

“Drinks will be in the south drawing room, at 6pm,” Chester said and left Eggy alone.

Eggy unpacked his bags and sat on the bed, it was pretty comfy. Perhaps this experience would only mostly suck, instead of wholly suck.

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“Merlin, drinks are in 30 minutes,” Harry said. He sighed when he saw Merlin.

“So?” Merlin asked, the guts of some machine around him on the ground. He had a streak of grease on his cheek.

“I am the one who is fashionably late, remember?” Harry shook his head. “This is just you being annoying because you like making Uncle Chester frown.”

“Added benefit, but the cook does need her toaster oven.” Merlin grabbed his screwdriver. “How big is the group this time again?”

“Four,” Harry said, as if Merlin didn’t remember. The man liked to be difficult. He down on a chair and checked his phone, answering a quick email. “This is one of the platinum exclusive experiences,” he added.

Merlin glared at him, “Those are the worst, why didn’t ye tell me that beforehand?”

“Because you would have spent the week bitching. And besides one of the people is Roxy, you like Roxy.”

Merlin shrugged and then grinned. “Ah, there is the problem.” He worked quickly and soon was putting the machine back together. “Isn’t this Roxy’s fourth time here?”

“Fifth, wonder who she punched this time,” Harry said. “Charlie Heskith, hmmm.”

“Berk?”

Merlin stood when he was finished his work and began to strip down to find clean clothes. Harry sighed his eternal Merlin sigh, and went over and cleaned his cheek. “What is your uncle doing allowing in a contest winner? Seems against type,” Merlin said.

“Publicity, is my bet,” Harry replied. He went to the wardrobe and picked out some clothes for Merlin. “These trousers are looking a little worn. You need to come to the shop, let me make you some new clothes.”

“I have them just broken in,” Merlin said and took them from Harry before Harry could decide to bin them.

“You have lost weight.” Harry couldn’t stop himself and fussed at the waistband. “You are coming in.”

Merlin mussed up Harry’s hair just to annoy him and then finished getting dressed. “That’s three, Harry.”

“Three?” Harry was distracted looking at the break of Merlin’s trousers.

“Three guests.”

“Oh, yes. James Russell from America is the fourth. Paid for the super deluxe mega package.”

“Which means ye will be having a lot of one on one time with him.” Merlin grinned, “Last time you had one of those, I had to stop ye from drowning the man in the soup tureen.”

Harry shuddered. “He couldn’t hold his gin, and said blimey all the time.”

“And yet we keep doing this,” Merlin pointed out. “We can always tell him no. You can always tell him no.”

“You know I can’t,” Harry said quietly.

Merlin gave him a hug. “I know.” He picked up the toaster oven. “Let’s take this to the cook and then to the drinks.”

“Promise to be nice?” Harry asked as they left the room.

“To you, always,” Merlin said. “I’m insulted ye would even ask that.”

“To Uncle Chester?”

“I will be a perfect gentleman,” Merlin agreed. “And not stab him with needle nose pliers.”

“That wouldn’t be a good stabbing tool, anyways,” Harry said.

“I know, it would hurt a lot.” Merlin handed the toaster oven over to the kitchen staff and they wound their way through the building to the south drawing room.

“And the guests?” Harry reminded him. “We have to be the epitome of gentleman, lead by example. People learn just as much from how we act as what we teach, you know.” Harry opened the door and froze. “Oh dear god, that is denim on denim. No,” he said appalled.
Merlin nudged him into the room when Harry seemed to have been turned into stone. “Gentlemanly conduct, remember?” Merlin whispered. Everyone in the room was staring at them.

Harry nodded and straightened up. “Good evening everyone,” he said. “I’m Harry Hart and I will be your primary instructor for this experience. This is Hamish Conall.”


Roxy nodded to him and then winked. “Hey, Mer. Harry.”

“Charlie Heskith,” the one man said and moved forward to shake their hands. “A pleasure.”

“Indeed,” Harry agreed. He found his eye being drawn back to the cowboy. He honestly didn’t think Americans actually dressed like that. It had to be a put on. “I look forward to getting to know you.” He couldn’t stop himself and looked at the cowboy. “It is not generally considered polite to wear a hat in the drawing room. Especially one as…robust as that,” he said. Harry ignored the smug look on Charlie’s face. “Mr. Russell, just a suggestion.”

Tequila quickly took off the hat. “Sorry, sir.”

“Harry, please,” Harry said and went to shake the man’s hand. Perhaps they would get off to a decent start after all.

“Tequila.”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “I am afraid we don’t have any Tequila in stock. And I know that you were asking for a drink, and not in any way suggesting that Tequila is your name.”

“I’m pretty sure that is my name, Harry.” Tequila tried to pour on some charm. “Even King called me it. Though I think it puckered him good to do so.”

“Yes, well, Uncle Chester can do as he wishes,” Harry said. “As can I. And I will not call anyone a beverage. And definitely not that devastating attempt at liquor.”

“Well then, guess you aren’t calling me anything, because the only other thing I answer to is Jimmy, and that is only if my Granny is calling.”

“James, it is a pleasure to meet you,” Harry said firmly.

Tequila gave him a dark look. “Wouldn’t think it very gentlemanly to ignore a man’s preferred name, now is it?”

“And do you request that those you meet during work call you Tequila?” Harry pressed. “Is that the image that you present to the world or just your friends?” Harry looked at him. “Nicknames are a fine thing, but you have to think how others perceive you. Who is Tequila to an outsider and who is James? What does one name get you that the other does not?”

“Either gets him the drink he asked for,” Eggsy said moving into the fray. “Here you go, Tequila. Hey bruv, Eggsy.” Eggsy held out his hand and Harry shook it. “Going to shit on my name too?”

“Excuse us,” Merlin said to the two guests and dragged Harry over to the small bar. He was not gentle. “What is wrong with you?”

“Tequila cannot be his name. It is all a put on,” Harry hissed back. “Seeing what we’ll believe, if we’ll buy into all that cliche.” He waved a hand. “It is a joke of some sort.”
Merlin went behind the bar and made Harry a martini. “Harry, come on.” He mixed the drink, heavy on the gin, light on everything else. “Have a drink and play nice.” He poured himself a scotch.

“He has cowboy boots on,” Harry could have wept. Cowboy boots in the drawing room. It hurt his soul.

“Means the riding lessons will go well,” Merlin said and nudged the drink forward a little more. “Behave, Harry, or Chester will make your life hell.” Merlin gave him a pointed look. “Which means my life becomes hell. Sort yourself.” Merlin looked at the guests and frowned. “That Eggsy one is casing the place.”

Harry looked over. “He is admiring the antiques.”

“Casing.”

“Stereotyping much?” Harry asked. “Just because he is in…whatever that is called, doesn’t mean he’s a chav.”

Merlin gave him a look. He damn well knew the difference between admiration and trying to see if it would be worth money fenced.

“I play nice and you play nice,” Harry said.

Merlin poured himself a second scotch, and a second martini for Harry. “I vote we kill Chester. That would solve him owning 51% of the tailor shop.”

“Come on, I need to apologize,” Harry said.

Unfortunately Chester arrived and began to pontificate about being a gentleman and Harry didn’t have a chance and had to endure glares from both Tequila and Eggsy through the whole dinner.
“Ginger, I hate you,” Tequila said after she had said hello.

“Pretty sure, you are supposed to say ‘Hello, Ginger, how are you doing this evening,’” she replied.

Tequila could hear her tv. “Are you watching something Englandy?”

“No,” she lied.

“Trust me, these people ain’t like your movies.” Tequila sat on the bed and took off the boots. “Ginger, they are jerks.”

“Were you a jerk first?”

“Hey, I’m many things, but never a jerk.” Tequila put the phone on speaker and started to strip down. “The guy who owns this place was mean to my new best friend, just because he won a contest, which seems really cutting off your nose to spite your face, because he would have offered the contest package in the first place.”

“New best friend?”

“Eggsy, he’s alright,” Tequila said down to his underwear. He shouted so that he could keep talking to Ginger while he took a leak in the ensuite. “And the man who’s teaching the classes? He flat out said he wouldn’t call me Tequila. Insulted me.”

“Tequila, are you peeing?”

“No ma’am,” he said quickly. He didn’t flush it would give him away, he would just have to remember it later. “Just walking about. Had to sit for a two hour dinner. Apparently these people ‘diiine.’” Tequila stretched out on the bed. “Ginger, why couldn’t you just buy me an etiquette book?” He waited for her to huff.

“I did,” she huffed. “You used it for kindling and toilet paper on that camping trip.”

“Yeah,” he smiled a little. “I want that job. I’m the right person for it. You know it, hell Champ knows it.”

“He does, Tequila, but you also know that you get bored at meetings, and tend not to present very… corporate. You go to, what, a meeting every other week right now? You get that job try more like at least 5 a week.”

“I get bored because they are all dumb as posts,” Tequila argued. “If they just listened to me -”

“Tequila, the job of head distiller is a huge one,” she interrupted.

“I have a degree in chemistry, and an MBA, and have worked my way up with the company since I was leading tours when I was 21,” he argued. Dammit, no one knew Statesmen better than him, except maybe Champ.

“And you’ve made men cry when they haven’t properly appreciated the tasting sample, told the marketing VP that their toupee was our missing mop, and shall we talk about the stripping video that I cannot get off of youtube no matter how many lawsuits I threaten?”
“My abs cannot be contained,” Tequila joked but Ginger didn’t laugh. “Ging.”

“Jimmy,” she said quietly. He paused, she only called him that when she was dead serious. “Stop sabotaging yourself. You are perfect for this job, and the only thing stopping you is you.” There was a pause. “Champ has a few resumes on his desk.”

“Like hell he does,” Tequila said. He sat up. “Ginger, can’t you hide them?”

“He’s not looking until you are back. Don’t waste your money and fuck about. Learn some stuff, come back and show that you can do this. And get some sleep, it is late there.”

“Sure. Night Ginger,” Tequila said. He hung up and tossed his phone onto the night table. He scrubbed his hands over his face and swore. He knew, sort of, that a lot was riding on this trip, picking up some polish, but he didn’t realize how much. He thought the job was his, but if Champ had other resumes, that meant he expected Tequila to cock this up or not even try. And why wouldn’t he? Tequila was always ready with a crude joke, and to put on a show. It worked well when he was a labourer at the distillery, but he had spent over a decade working his way up and then it had been a point of pride to be raw, in the face of people who thought they were better than him, when he probably had more education and experience than them.

Only person who always treated him as a complete equal was Ginger and she was the smartest person ever. And she wanted him to succeed. He just didn’t know if this would be what would do it, not with the stuck up men running the show.

There was a knock on his door and Tequila looked down at his boxers. He checked the wardrobe and was relieved when there was a robe. He threw it on and answered the door. It was that butler they had been assigned. Shit he couldn’t remember the man’s name. “Hey,” Tequila said.

“A letter, sir,” he said and held up a silver plate.

Tequila looked at the envelope that said James Russell in fancy lettering on the front. “Thanks, man.” He picked up the letter. “Uh, do I tip you?”

“No, sir,” he said. “I am at your service.”

“Well thanks -” Tequila rubbed his neck. “Sorry. I forgot your name.”

“More likely, Mr. King didn’t provide it. Percival sir, good evening.”

“Thanks, Percy,” Tequila said. He closed the door and went to the chair.

The envelope felt heavy, the paper had a texture. It had an actual wax seal on the back. He took a photo and sent it to Ginger who sent back a swooning gif. For the first time in his life he didn’t tear an envelope open, but did it carefully.

Tequila,

I owe you my heartfelt apologies for the way I spoke to you and treated you during drinks this evening.

I wish I had an excuse such as tired from travel, or a touch of indigestion, but all I can say is that my personal manners fell short of the respect that should have been afforded you.
I do hope that you will accept my apology, and attend to the classes well.

Despite my behaviour tonight, I promise I do know how to be a gentleman and to teach exquisite manners and comportment.

Sincere in my regrets,

Harrison Sidney Hart

Okay, Tequila was impressed. That shit was not written with Bic, you could just tell it had been done with a fancy pen and this paper was the thickest he had ever felt. It was impressive. Sure the guy was just sucking up so Tequila didn’t take a walk, but hey, a man sucks up like that, you gotta give him a second chance. He couldn’t figure out what to do with it, it would have felt crappy to just throw it out. Instead he slid it into the pocket of his suitcase and put a podcast on with headphones and settled into the bed.

Tomorrow was looking a little better than he had expected after the way the evening went.

Eggsy wandered about the second floor, he was pretty sure he had the whole thing to himself. That was okay by him though. He had never had this much privacy in his life before, always shared a wall with someone, or a room before he left the marines. And it was good for checking things out, not being noticed while he did his job. If they kept this floor this empty, it was likely it would take them a very long time to notice anything was missing. And the longer the better, less likely to pin it on him. Eggsy heard a noise and spun around ready to punch. And he realized it was an owl flying by a window.

Fuck it was quiet.

There was just this absence of noise, a void of sound, and that was a freaky thing. Honestly, he was pretty sure the quiet was going to keep him up. He tried a couple doors and they were locked, but no big deal. He could break in another night, this was mostly about getting the lay of the land.

“Hello?” he called out, curious if there would be any response. Nothing. Good.
Sure, maybe another person around would have been nice, a little extra noise. But quiet was fine, good. This wasn’t a horror movie setting at all.

“Should be in a nightgown with one of them things,” he muttered. “Candelabra,” he remembered after a minute. The next door he tried opened and he slid into the room. He closed the door after himself quietly (not that anyone would hear) and flicked on the light.

And saw a man asleep in a bed.

Bugger.

He turned off the light and stayed still for a moment, hoping that the man was a really deep sleeper.

“Harry, what the fuck do ye want?” the man asked.

It was the other guy from the dinner, the one in the jumper. Bald, hot as fuck. Kept staring at Eggsy like he expected Eggsy to steal the silver. Which sure Eggsy was thinking about, but he’d be more subtle than steal it at the damn meal.

Eggsy opened the door and thought maybe he could just go, but the man turned on the lamp and put his glasses on.

“Mr. Unwin,” Merlin said. He sat up a little, sheet falling to his hips.

“Fucking hell, bruv,” Eggsy stared. He really did not expect to see what he was looking at.

“What?” Merlin looked around, expecting there to be something wrong.

“That,” Eggsy pointed at his shoulders.

“Oh, right, the gears,” Merlin shrugged. “I forget they are there.”

“Right you just forget about that much ink, like you do,” Eggsy said. He looked at them, he wanted to go over and trace the details with his fingers. “You into steampunk or some shit?”

“I repair watches and clocks for a living, old automatons, the like.”

“So you made yourself sort of look like one.”

“Well we are all 30 and stupid once upon a time,” Merlin answered. “Now that we are done with that, mind telling me why you broke into my room?”

“Not breaking in if the door isn’t locked,” Eggsy said. “And what are you doing up here anyways, figured this was where King put the people he hated.”

“It is,” Merlin smiled a little and Eggsy had to laugh at that. “Also, I had the room beside Harry, and he sleep talks an annoying amount. I expected this floor to be empty and decided to set up camp.”

“Yeah, well, King had to dump me somewhere. So guess we share this floor?” Eggsy smiled. That was just brilliant. Asshole King was ruining all of Eggsy’s plans and not even knowing it. “And...I’ll just go find my room. Busy day tomorrow, all those wonderful things the two of you will teach us. Go posh crap.” Eggsy figured he should shut up and go. “So...goodnight.”

“Too quiet or casing the place?” Merlin asked. He was giving that intense stare he had had at the dinner. Eggsy both liked and feared it.
“Hmmm?” Eggsy made a vague noise.

“Well there are two options why you ended up in my room at midnight,” Merlin crossed his arms and looked at Eggsy, like he was a specimen on a slide. “One, ye are used to London, and a crowded corner of it at that.”

“All of London’s crowded,” Eggsy replied. He was going to have to think fast with this one. Luckily he was good at thinking on his toes.

“There are small pockets of quiet, but still ye are used to a lot more noise than out here and perhaps that is what kept you awake. Or, ye are looking around for some stuff to grab before ye leave. Which is it?”

“Or, I got a bit turned around in the dark looking for the bog,” Eggsy said. “Unlocked door, figured I’d finally be able to take a piss and then go to bed.”

“Other side of the hall, two more doors down,” Merlin said. He settled himself back down into the bed. “And Mr. Unwin?”

“Yeah?” Eggsy stayed very still, the man’s voice was calm and low and just a little scary.

“Anything worth stealing on this floor is in the other wing. Here, you’ll find a few knick knacks worth a couple hundred pounds. Mostly fakes. In fact it should be interesting watching you try to figure out what is real and what is a replica. Chester has sold a lot off to pay the heating bills.” Merlin turned his back to Eggsy and snuggled into his blankets. Eggsy stared at the tattoos that went halfway down his back for a minute before fleeing.

Shit. He didn’t think of that. Like hell he could tell the difference between a real and a copy on this old shit.

Never mind the fact the guy had him figured out at least a little. Meant he’d probably be watching. Under other circumstances he’d not mind so much that particular guy watching him, but here, not good at all. He went back to his room and called home.

“What’s the word?” Dean asked.

“Hard to say, yeah?” Eggsy said. “Lots of old shit, but I can’t tell what’s worth anything. And what if some of this crap is just replicas? I ain’t going to be able to tell.”

“Poodle knows his shit on this stuff. Take some photos and send them,” Dean answered. “He’s run enough insurance scams to be able to spot any sort of fake, no matter how good.”

“Think of one of the blokes here might be onto me.”

“So distract him,” Dean said. “Bet the old geezers they have teaching you how to drink your tea, would love the smiles of a young bit of rough.”

“Fuck off,” Eggsy said. He wondered how much it would freak Chester King out to know he said rough the exact same way Dean did. He bet a lot.

“No, Eggsy. You bring home a good haul, or you are out. Not even getting dear daddy’s photo from your room. Not stepping foot in the flat unless you have at least 5k of stuff to fence.”

“5?” Eggsy tried not to shout. “You said 2!”
“Changed my mind,” Dean said. “You were supposed to win 5 large, so now you gonna bring home five large. Talk to you later, got to go make your mum feel real good. Bring it all home Eggsy. Or else.”

Eggsy cursed long and hard after Dean hung up. Fuck this was all just balls. He had to do it, because no way wasn’t he going to see Daisy again. He’d figure a way to get the suitcase full. He just had no idea how he would get enough that would equal that kind of money. Or how he’d get it past that guy, Merlin. Jesus everyone here had really fucked up nicknames. Eggsy also had a hunch that those abs and shoulders weren’t just for show. He was screwed.

The owl hooted again and Eggsy jumped.

He fucking hated the quiet. It was another two hours before he managed to fall asleep.
“Oh god,” Eggsy groaned. “Did not get enough sleep.” He stifled a yawn behind his hand.

“You ever even met a baby? They sleep for shit. I swear I was so sleep deprived when Daisy was 2 months old, I had a full conversation with Pooh Bear on the socio political climate of India in the 1970s.” Eggsy went to the table and got himself some more coffee. “In French too. I do not speak French, bruv.”

Tequila laughed. “You have a kid?”

“Little sister,” he said. “Mum’s second marriage so she’s a lot younger than me.” Eggsy whipped out his phone and showed Tequila a few photos.

“Well, now, isn’t she a peach?” Tequila smiled. “Nice.”

“Thanks. So what do you think will happen today? Quiz to see where are manners are at? Make sure we don’t piss in the sink, don’t call a prince your majesty?”

“Why is that bad?” Tequila asked, seemed like your majesty would be a good thing. He looked at the food. The webpage had mentioned full English and he hadn’t understood that at all. “What’s that?” he pointed at something that looked like egg.

“‘Toad in the hole,’” Eggsy said and grabbed two and then some tomato. “Egg cooked in the middle of the toast. Comfort breakfast at least. And majesty is only for kings and queens.”

“Huh,” Tequila answered and filled his plate. He had done weirder than tomato at breakfast. “Think we’ll get time off? Wouldn’t mind exploring the grounds around here.” It did look gorgeous out there.

“Christ I hope so,” Eggsy said. “Don’t care about trees and flowers, but will go mental if I can’t run a little.” They sat down together at the dining room table, several seats away from Charlie.

“Gentlemen, did you pass a pleasant evening?” Chester asked as he moved around the room, making his presence felt.

“Sure, bruv,” Eggsy lied.

“That room, sir, is a real delight,” Tequila replied. “Dreamt of sweet things on that soft bed.”

“Excellent. Well, I will be busy with other affairs today, but please my door is always open,” Chester said, clearly to Tequila before leaving them.

They both just rolled their eyes and ate their breakfast before heading to the library. “Mother fucker,” Eggsy said when they reached the room. “Right, spending all my spare time in here.”

“Like books?” Tequila asked. “Me, reading is work.”

“Colour me shocked,” the other man in the class said, coming up behind them. “You look like the scholarly sort.”

Eggsy didn’t think just put himself in front of Tequila, even though Tequila had several inches and a
couple stone on Eggsy. “Oi fuck off, reading or not doesn’t make the measure of a bloke.”

“It certainly helps,” Charlie countered. “But I am sure there is some Dan Brown drivel on the shelves for you to mouth along to. Maybe even a comic book or something.”

Eggsy started to move forward but Tequila put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. “Hey it’s all cool. I need to catch up on my Family Circus anyways.”

Charlie sneered and went over to the couch to take a seat.

“Wanker,” Eggsy muttered.

“Ignore him,” Roxy suggested. “He’s just annoyed because he thinks he’s above this, but he showed up in a gossip rag and his family sent him here.”

Eggsy smirked a little. “Wot about you then?”

“Ah, well, fifth time here?” she said and shrugged.

“Ma’am?” Tequila looked at her. “Are they that bad at teaching?”

“Oh, no they really know their stuff. The butler, Percival? He’s my uncle gives us a chance to hang out together. Plus, I have a habit of punching men who grab my arse and I have a lawyer who is really good and I get sent here instead of anger management.”

“Marry me,” Eggsy joked.

“Sorry, already engaged,” Roxy grinned. “And she’s another reason I’m here. Her parents are titled up the wazoo and need to brush up the manners before I go see them again to plan the wedding.”

“Well, congratulations to you ma’am,” Tequila said.

“Roxy, please.”

The door opened and Harry and Merlin arrived. Harry looked impeccable in a suit, Merlin tidy in his jumper, though the look was a bit ruined by the coffee mug the size of his head clutched in his hands.

“Good morning, everyone,” Harry said. He went over and leaned against the big desk at one side of the room. “Welcome to the Gentleman’s Experience.”

Merlin groaned. “I thought we weren’t actually calling it that. Sounds like a fucking stripper bar.”

“That’s what I said,” Eggsy agreed. He smiled a little when Merlin toasted him with the mug.

“Be that as it may, it is what the brochure says,” Harry pointed out. “Now then we have two weeks to teach you the basics of civility.”

Charlie laughed. “You might just get the American to remember to scrape his boots off at the door.”

Harry gave him a steady look. “Mr. Heskith. Manners maketh man. Do you know what that means?” Charlie went quiet under the force of that stare. “No? Well then let me explain it to you.” Harry straightened up and adjusted his coat. Eggsy watched him carefully. That sort of face spelled trouble and the other guy was almost smirking. “It means, Mr. Heskith, that right now I consider you to have the poorest manners of the group.”

“No?” Charlie commented. Tequila enjoyed how ugly the sneer and
flush made the man.

“Are you under the impression that I care?” Harry countered.

“Oh, snap,” Tequila whispered to Eggsy.

“Tequila, do you think making asides to your compatriot is the height of manners?” Harry asked giving Tequila that dead eye stare.

“No, sir,” Tequila answered quickly. He felt his cheeks heat. It was almost like being back in the tenth grade again. He had a crush on his 10th grade history teacher, he remembered.

“Oh, snap, indeed,” Harry said.

“Jesus, Harry, never say that again,” Merlin chimed in and then sipped some coffee. Eggsy choked on his breath when he saw the raised fingers on the bottom of the mug.

“Birth does not mean you are better than anyone else, it just means you were luckier,” Harry said. “Manners, consideration, care in appearance, care in action, these are the hallmarks of a true gentleman.”

“Gentleman is a very specific title,” Charlie huffed.

“Once perhaps, but now it means both more and less,” Harry countered. “The days of being a gentleman and a gentleman’s daughter and that being equal are not as entrenched.”

“Pride and Prejudice,” Tequila said too loudly in the quiet room. “With the old bitch.”

“Well, aren’t you surprising,” Harry said. He crossed his arms and leaned a little more on the desk and looked at Tequila. It was a better look today, a western cut white shirt, the denim that didn't fit as well as it could, an absurd belt buckle and the boots. He wore it well, well enough that it wasn't sort of weird prank or put on. He honestly seemed to be an American cowboy.

“You have no idea,” Tequila answered and winked, just to see what would happen. He smirked a little when it made the guy pause. He was actually pretty cute, for such a fussy man, Tequila realized.

Merlin coughed a bit to get Harry to focus, he well remembered Harry's thing for Gary Cooper when he had been younger. “Anyone can learn to be a gentleman. Everyone should strive to be a gentleman,” Harry said quite in earnest. He truly believe it.

“Yeah, the filth will really like it when they are treating me like rubbish and I mind my pleases and thank yous,” Eggsy joked.

“They do actually,” Merlin added, having enough coffee in his system to start properly participating in the morning's class.

“How do you know that?”

“He knows a little bit about everything,” Harry commented. They cleaned up when they played trivia games to the extent that three different pubs had them banned from quiz night.
“Sure,” Eggsy said and tried to stare Merlin down. He utterly failed. The man didn’t really seem like a copper, but you never could tell. But then again, no way would a member of the filth take their time off to teach gentleman shite. He relaxed just a bit.

“Now then, this morning we will start as a group, but later will split into partners, and there will be individual training for some of you,” Harry was careful to not look at Eggsy. Chester had been very clear on how to treat the lad and what benefits of the experience he was to get. Harry refused to treat him as dismissively as was suggested though; it would be ungentlemanly. “We will work on how to address people and make small talk.”

“Why do we need two teachers for that?” Tequila asked.

“Extra person for different small talk, and -”

“And they role play and it is hilarious,” Roxy chimed in.

Eggsy blinked and paused before realizing that she didn’t mean that sort of role play. He looked at Tequila who also had a dumbfounded look on his face. “You just thought something dirty too, didn’t you?”

“A gentleman wouldn’t say if he did,” Tequila whispered back.

“Gentleman please discuss how big you think my dick is another time?” Harry suggested. “And that actually allows me to make a good point. Always assume that you can be heard. You don’t know at a function who is standing beside you, or who has excellent hearing. Gossip is a dreadful habit and if you must engage in it, please do so in your car, or the privacy of your home.”

“Yes, sir,” Eggsy and Tequila said in unison.

“Good,” Harry gave them a small smile. “And besides, I dislike role play in the bedroom. If I am interested enough to bed you, I want to bed you.”

Eggsy snorted and shoulder bumped Tequila expecting him to laugh, but Tequila had just ducked his head. Interesting.

“Right, then, since Harry is feeling sassy this morning, looks like I will be good manners man today,” Merlin grumbled and looked pained at the idea. He put his coffee cup down and stood up and smoothed his sweater over his stomach. The layers did not disguise how smooth that stomach was. He cleared his throat and then smiled. An actual engaging and friendly smile and it transformed his face. He walked over to Eggsy and held out his hand. “Good morning, Hamish Conall, thank god the commute wasn’t too bad this morning, right?”

Eggsy stayed seated, his jaw dropped. “Uh…yeah, hey?”

Merlin stepped back and the cheerful smile slid off his face and his natural resting murder face appeared. “Now then, what should ye have done in that moment?”

“Shook your hand?” Eggsy guessed.

“And stood,” Harry said. “Let us show you.” Harry went over and sat in a chair and pretended to read on his phone. Merlin sighed and then put the friendly face back on.

“Good morning, Hamish Conall, appalling traffic wasn’t it? Was afraid I would be late,” Merlin said and held out his hand.
Harry pocketed his phone and stood. “I was stuck for 20 minutes at a standstill. Harry Hart, a pleasure. Are you with Conall and Sons?”

Merlin nodded. “I am, indeed. Have you worked with our company before? Know my father?”

“I’m with Kingsman Tailors,” Harry explained. “You know, I’m rather surprised we haven’t run into each other before, our shops being across from each other. Fancy that, meeting here.”

“Life is funny that way,” Merlin agreed. “If you will excuse me, I have to go get the welcome packet. But we’ll talk later at break time?”

“It would be a pleasure,” Harry replied. Merlin walked back over to his coffee and took a few sips and slumped in a chair. Even a couple minutes of fake cheerful always felt so draining. “As you see, friendly but professional,” Harry explained. “Small talk is almost a dance. You provide a back and forth, allow the other person to provide information that you work off of.” Harry moved back to lean against the desk. “When you are greeted, if you are sitting - stand. A handshake should be only a few seconds and it isn’t a competition of grip, you aren’t going to impress anyone if you strong arm them. And if they do it to you, don’t respond in kind.”

“That dog don’t hunt, Harry. My neck of the woods, that seems weak,” Tequila said. He thought of handshakes he had done making deals standing by the whisky barrels, in fields, and in offices with wannabes. Handshakes that were practically arm wrestling matches. “Guy gives you the grip, you give it back or they think they have the upper hand.”

“Do they?” Harry asked. “Approach me like the men you are talking about.”

Tequila stood up and rolled his shoulders a bit. He put on his best shit eating grin, and moved towards Harry trying to make himself look and feel even bigger than he was. “Hey there, Tequila Russell. I’m guessing you’re my 3 o’clock meeting. Great to meet ya.” He watched as Harry straightened and had that same small smile he had during his little demonstration with Merlin.

“Harry Hart, and I assure you the pleasure is all mine,” Harry said. Tequila held out his hand and they shook and Tequila squeezed far too tight and waited for Harry to put some oomph in his half of the shake. Instead Harry’s grip stayed firm, but his smile changed just a little. It was a small quirk of lip, like he was trying to hold back a laugh instead of being genially. His brow went up a little, as if he was asking if Tequila was done yet. He never went limp or backed away, but in the tiniest changes of expression showed how little he was impressed by the display. Tequila felt oddly deflated and let go. “I do look forward to the meeting, I’ve heard many excellent things about you and your company,” Harry said kindly and Tequila nodded. Tequila wasn’t sure what to do now, he jammed his hands in his pockets. “How do you feel?” Harry asked clearly now done with the moment.

Tequila shrugged and went back to beside Eggsy. “Feels like you somehow showed me up, but would never be able to explain it to anyone.”

“There are many ways to put people in their place that do not involve fisticuffs or pathetic displays of strength or power.”

“Christ Harry, don’t say fisticuffs you sound like my great aunt Bernice,” Merlin grumbled.

“I have met Bernice and she sounds like a woman who drank a bottle of scotch and smoked two packs of fags a day. And she never once said fisticuffs, in fact I have heard her say ‘be careful boy-o unlessen ye want me to grab a stool to stand on ta give ye a Glasgow kiss’ in an appalling and incredibly fake highland accent considering she mostly spent her life in Yorkshire.”
“Living in England doesn’t make us any less Scottish,” Merlin said.

“Oh do not start with that,” Harry replied.

“And you two are our gentleman teachers,” Charlie sneered at them. “This is a waste of money.”

“How dumb are you, this is all a put on,” Roxy said. “They are alternating between gentleman and morons to take the measure of us.”

“Exactly so,” Harry agreed. “All four of you with your posture and facial expressions revealed a great deal of yourself to us.”

“Mind yourself in new circumstances,” Merlin suggested. “Give less of yourself away. Charlie showed disdain, Roxy impatience because she has seen similar from us before. Tequila ye showed confusion, and Eggsy,” Merlin looked at him. “Ye showed confusion, exasperation, and a whole lot of don’t give a fuck.”

Eggsy had to laugh at that, it was pretty on point with what he was feeling. “Yeah, okay. So show me how to be then, if you are so good at it.”

“We would be delighted,” Harry replied and began their first lessons in earnest.
They had a couple free hours and Tequila decided to go for a wander. He had noticed some stables out his window that morning and wanted to check it out. He ambled down to them taking a few photos of the landscape to send to Ginger. He was thinking that if he got the promotion he’d send her to England as a combo birthday/Christmas gift. He reached the stables and the smell of hay and horses made him happy. He went in, pleased to see the excellent repair the area was in. The Statesmen kept a few horses on hand and he loved hanging out with them in his spare time.

“Well, hello there, little lady,” he said when a horse popped their head out. He rubbed her nose and laughed when she nuzzled him. “Yeah, you are a happy one aren’t you. Where’s your snacks?” he asked and looked around. Tequila went down the hall and found some apples. He pulled out his jack knife and cut them up. Tequila put it on his hand and fed the horse. He gave her an extra pat and checked out a few of the other horses, there were half a dozen in total.

“Sir, would you like to go for a ride?” That butler, Percival, had appeared out of nowhere.

“Quiet much?” Tequila asked, bit startled but trying to play cool.

“A good butler does seem to magically appear,” he answered. “You are welcome to ride.”

“Maybe later,” Tequila said. “Have more small talk lessons this afternoon.”

“Sir, if I may, do you know the trick with small talk?” Percival moved closer to Tequila. He stopped one stall away and smiled when a horse reached his head out for a pat.

“Grin and bear it?” Tequila asked. He had two slices left and passed them to Percival.

“There is that,” he agreed. Percival fed the apple to the horse and turned to Tequila. “But also this. Don’t think of it as a means to an end. Everyone does and their boredom shows. Think of it as getting vital mission as a secret spy.”

Tequila laughed. “What?”

“Asking a person about their pet? You learn their habits so that you can break into their home and know how to deal with the creature without harm. They talk about murderous traffic, it creates a pattern of movement for if an assassin had to track them. Make it a game,” he suggested.

“That’s actually a great idea, Percy,” Tequila said. “Why are you butling and not teaching?”

“Because butling is my job sir, and one I am quite good at. Though, I will be adding in occasionally to the lessons,” Percival said. “Enjoy your classes, and do feel free to use the stables on your down time.” He began to leave.

“Hey, Percy? What do you know about Harry?” Tequila asked. He was real curious about the older man. He had been funny and knowledgeable during their morning session, with freaky good posture. Tequila figured by the end of this he’d pay hard cash to see Harry just slump for a minute. He had even kept his back straight when leaning on a desk for fuck's sake.

“A great deal, actually,” Percival had a wicked grin for a man who was supposed to be playing stoic. “Might I recommend a little…small talk to get to know him?”

“Wait, are you two?” Tequila paused. “You know.”
“No, we are not ‘you know’,” Percival replied.

Tequila planned to ignore how that made him want to smile. “Cool,” he said casually.

“Isn’t it?” Percival gave him a nod. “Good day, sir.”

Tequila decided to hang out with the horses a little bit longer. In here it sort of smelled like home and it was nice.

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Eggsy wasn’t casing the joint. He was just walking around admiring all the old shit. And taking some photos to send back home. Lots of people loved this kind of stuff. He paused in front of the ugliest painted portrait he had ever seen and had to take a photo, because jesus fuck that thing was hideous. He sent it to Jamal, because if his eyeballs had to suffer, so did his mate’s.

“Impressive work, isn’t it? A fine example of 19th Century realism,” Chester said, coming down the hall. “I would imagine most of the items in this house are impressive to you.”

“Meh, bruv, museums have free days, I seen some impressive shit,” Eggsy found himself thickening his dialect around Chester more, the man just annoyed him. He wanted to nick stuff just on principle.

“Are you finding your room comfortable?” Chester smiled. “If not, we have some space off the kitchens that you would be welcome to.”

Like Eggsy hadn’t watched enough Upstairs, Downstairs to know that was an insult. “Nah, real good in the room you gave me, it has a brilliant view. Plus having a whole floor to just me and Merlin, well I like the quiet.”

“Ah, Hamish moved up there did he?” Chester made a face. “Well, Harry always has made interesting choices in people.”

Eggsy felt his back go up. “Merlin seems like a fine teacher.” He didn't, he seemed like a grumpy bastard with intense eyes, but he hated Chester a lot more and would automatically defend anyone the geezer seemed ready to make a comment about.

“He is a good foil to show what not to do against my nephew’s impeccable manners,” Chester answered. “A do not, for Harry’s do.”

“Harry, the guy who made a dick joke in our first class?” Eggsy looked at him. The old guy was crazy. “That Harry, who insulted the guy who is probably paying the most for this training? That Harry?” Eggsy tried not to smirk too much at the look of horror on Chester’s face. But maybe a little smirk fell out.

“Excuse me,” Chester said and hurried away from Eggsy. Eggsy would have felt bad about maybe getting Harry in a spot of trouble, but frankly being rid of Chester outweighed that problem. Only later it seemed that Chester had his revenge and the afternoon small talk session was only for the paying clients. Harry looked pained as he said it and the guilt did settle in on Eggsy, just a little bit, but he smiled and waved it off. He wandered around the estate and found a few more things that had potential to be taken without notice. And then he opened a door to a drawing room and saw the piano. It was a pretty little thing. Eggsy went in and sat down. He touched a few keys gently. Yeah, it was a good machine, and in tune. He started to play a little. Eggsy wasn’t great at the piano, didn’t have enough time or access to an instrument to practice, but he could play a couple songs.

Songs that his grandmother had loved, she had been the one to teach him how to play a little. His
fingers stumbled a bit but on his second try they smoothed out a bit. He began to sing along to the old Dusty Springfield number. His gran played those albums endlessly and god she had been so happy when he would sing along. She had died a few months after his dad, but he always remembered the songs. Eggsey played a couple more, happy to have his fingers moving.

“Sir,” Percival said from the door, and Eggsey was startled.

Eggsy spun on the bench. “Hey, um -”

“Percival, sir, I am the butler assigned to the other guests.”

“Right, one of those platinum privileges I am not allowed access to,” Eggsey rolled his eyes. “Well, what can I help you with?”

“Mr. King was complaining about the noise,” he said.

“Well Mr. King can shove off,” Eggsey countered.

“Sir, if you would follow me, please,” Percival said and Eggsey reluctantly got up. They went up up to Eggsey’s floor but in the opposite direction of Eggsey’s room. Percival opened a door. “I think this room might suit you?”

“Holy shit,” Eggsey said. It was a full music room, guitars, a stupid gorgeous piano, even a set of drums. There were old rock posters on the walls and he could tell some soundproofing had been put in.

“Mr. Hart was in a band in his youth, his parents indulged him. Mr. King tends to forget everything that is on this level,” Percival smiled a bit.

“Hey you and Harry are -”

“Friends,” Percival said. “Though sir, if I may, I think someone else already has their eye on Mr. Hart,” he said delicately.

“Don’t worry, I saw Tequila staring at his arse, won’t step on that,” Eggsey said easily.

“Merlin is also currently single and I do believe I caught you staring at his ‘arse’.”

“When?” Eggsey said. “This is like my first time meeting you.”

“A good butler sees all but is seldom noticed,” Percival smiled. “Plus I’m not really here, I’m a matchmaking ghost.” He gave Eggsey a small bow and left the room. Eggsey snorted at that. The people at Gentleman’s school were a lot weirder than he expected. Lot less gentlemanly. It didn’t suck as much as he thought it would. And shit that was an original Beatles concert flyer. That was worth a couple hundred quid easy. He took some photos and sent them to Dean and then settled in to play for a couple more hours until the matchmaking ghost butler said he should dress for dinner.

For Eggsey that meant a pullover and jeans without holes. But he’d go in head up, because no way was he giving that wanker Charlie the satisfaction of thinking Eggsey hated that his clothes didn’t match. Plus maybe Tequila would be all cowboyed up and Eggsey liked watching Harry try not to freak out at it.

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“Who the fuck needs that many forks?” Eggsey asked staring at the table.
“Jesus on a cracker, imagine having to wash all that,” Tequila said. “That’d be three loads in the dishwasher easy.”

“It all has to be done by hand,” Merlin commented. “The silverware, is in fact silver.” Merlin gave Eggsy a bland look. Eggsy returned it with a smile. He couldn’t figure out if Merlin was just commenting, or baiting him. But still if this stuff was silver might be worth nicking. “King does so love this set, keeps an eye on it,” Merlin added with another of those stares. "The staff polish it quarterly." Fuck, Eggsy thought, what was the man playing at? But at least Eggsy knew not to touch the damn forks except to eat.

“Seen this in the Princess Diaries,” Eggsy said without thinking. “You going to tie me to a chair with an Hermes scarf?”

“Shit, I love that movie, watch it with my nieces all the time,” Tequila said. He and Eggsy exchanged high fives.

“I would have thought that Pretty Woman was a better match for you, Eggsy,” Charlie said. He tried to give an innocent smile and it just made him look constipated.

Tequila glared and took a couple steps forward. “All due respect to Ms. Julia Roberts’s work, not my favourite, and I am not sure that I like the implications that you are putting into that sentence,” he said.

“I’m just talking about movies, like you,” Charlie's innocent look, became more smarmy the longer he spoke. “Small talk, like our lessons. Oh right, Eggsy you missed a bunch of those. Sorry you aren’t up to dinner conversation yet.”

“I think I can keep up,” Eggsy said, as thought that Dean's apologies after he punched Eggsy were more sincere. He gave a polite smile. “Besides never actually seen Pretty Woman, so if you are trying to call me a rent boy, meh, weak insult.” He moved over. “Roxy, allow me to escort you to the table.” He held out his hand and they brushed by Charlie, and Eggsy lifted his wallet. He held Roxy’s chair and she smiled at him.

“Lovely, Eggsy,” Harry said. He gestured to everyone. “Please take a seat. And no Hermes scarves will be brought out.”

“Because ye find them gaudy,” Merlin said. He walked around the table and passed by Eggsy and lifted the wallet off of Eggsy and dropped it to the ground to pick it up again. “Oh Charlie ye seem to have dropped your wallet.”

“Huh,” Charlie said bemused, “don’t know how that could have happened, but thank you Merlin.”

Merlin nodded and sat down and ignored Eggsy’s scowl. Stealing Charlie’s wallet was not the smartest no matter how the wanker deserved it. And yes after twenty four hours, Merlin knew Charlie was a wanker, hell he knew that after ten minutes.

Harry ignored everything he had noticed out of the corner of his eye. It was often far better to ignore whatever it was that Merlin was doing. “Now then, this is a full service table. It is not very common, but I figured showing the worst it can be was a good place to start.” Percival entered the room. “And Percival will act as our server for tonight, no one knows table etiquette as well as him.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hart,” Percival said. He gave Eggsy a small wink and Eggsy tried not to snort. Guess he wasn’t much of a ghost then. Bit of a pity, really, a ghost butler would have really made this experience a lot more fun. “Now what glass is for what beverage?” Percival asked the room at
Roxy smiled at her uncle, he had taught her all this at tea parties when she was 4. She pointed and rhymed them all off easily. He gave her a pleased smile. “Water will be poured first,” he said and went around the table. Harry talked through the experience explaining the reasons and history for it all. Charlie clearly wasn’t paying attention, figuring he knew all this. Roxy loved table service, because of watching her uncle, he was so smooth and practiced at all, loving the order of it. Percival was chiming in with stories and occasionally correcting Harry. It was clearly something they had done numerous times.

Eggsy was a little overwhelmed by everything on the table. It seemed like so much waste. And of everything he had seen in the last couple of days, it was the thing that highlighted how much he shouldn’t be here. “Excuse me,” he said abruptly and stood. He walked quickly out of the room.

Tequila was ready to get up and follow, he was already getting attached to Eggsy, but Merlin stood. “I know all this, Tequila, I’ll check on the lad.” Merlin saw Charlie open his mouth. “If ye say a single snide thing in this moment, I will make ye choke on the words,” he warned. Charlie clacked his mouth shut, teeth making a harsh noise. Merlin got up and left. He couldn’t see Eggsy and started to search for the lad. He checked about, starting at the bottom and working his way up. He was a little surprised when he found Eggsy in Harry’s old music room after about forty minutes of searching. It was a room he hadn’t even gone into for at least a decade, since before the place had become Chester’s. “God, I can’t believe this hasn’t changed any.” He stared about in awe.

“It’s a great room,” Eggsy said. He sat on the piano bench and looked around not really seeing anything.

Merlin leaned on a stool. “We spent so many hours in here, sure we would be the next great punk band.”

Merlin reached over and grabbed a guitar from the wall. It was a Jag and he did a quick riff and sang a little Elvis Costello.

“Not the punkest ever,” Eggsy pointed out. Merlin grinned and sang a little of Anarchy in the UK. “Okay, fair enough. Did you have a safety pin through your ear?”

“No,” Merlin laughed. “But a couple of the tattoos are covering up some old and horrific things. And Harry had a faux hawk. These days I actually like country music best,” he said and put the guitar back. He shook his head a little, to push the fond memories away. He’d unpack them later, now he needed to focus on the lad.

“So you and Harry have known each other since the dawn of time then,” Eggsy said.

“His family were my hosts during a summer school program when we were 16,” Merlin explained. “Back then this house was mostly used by his family. When his parents passed, it went to King.”

“Shoulda gone to him,” Eggsy said.

“The upperclass rules of ownership and whatnot are incredibly complex. And Harry didn’t necessarily want the estate. King was hungry for it, and it was nae worth the fight. And King left Harry’s spaces alone. And we get to visit whenever King runs these classes.” Merlin shrugged.
“Harry not fighting this allowed him to expand his shop.” Merlin didn't mention King's hand in that, it wasn't of consequence at the moment.

“You hate the guy, you could always say no,” Eggsy pointed out.

“And if your best friend asked your aid, Eggsy, what would you say?”

“That it is theirs,” Eggsy admitted. He understood loyalty.

“Harry feels he has to do these classes. He likes the teaching itself, but deplores the way King runs it. But if he tells King no, King is well within his rights to demand Harry pack up whatever is his, and never return. King also due to some lovely hoops and contracts owns the lion share of Harry’s tailor shop. Harry says no, King could call some loans due. Familial and societal expectations weigh heavily on some, especially if ye add a scoop of blackmail to it.” Merlin looked at Eggsy. “I think you understand well the weight a man can carry when it comes to family.”

“Might do,” Eggsy said. Shit, Harry and he had a lot in common aside from the vastly different tax brackets.

“Why did ye run from the table?” Merlin asked, curious, and a little sympathetic. "It is a lot to take in? Just a little overwhelmed?"

“It’s so…rich,” Eggsy said finally. “I don’t belong here, I know that. And King makes damn sure I know that. Not exactly 12 piece settings at no dinner on the estate. Four different glasses and all that. Can see the point of some of the small talk lessons, that’s sort of useful. But that shit, the dinnerware crap, ain’t ever going to be useful for me. And fucking Charlie,” Eggsy shrugged and began to play the piano a little bit.

“Any knowledge to be gained, should be gained,” Merlin said.


“And,” Merlin repeated, making it sound like a full sentence.

“And,” Eggsy said. “You ever been stuck? Like so stuck you aren’t sure how to get out?”

“Once or twice, though I think it was less than what ye are facing.”

Eggsy nodded. “You and Harry and that butler? Are all pretty solid folk. You ain’t high and mighty, like I expected.” And that made what Eggsy had to do a little bit harder.

Merlin stood up and went over to Eggsy and got in his face. “Nothing that is Harry’s. If ye do, I will end you.”

“Don’t know what you mean,” Eggsy felt his breath hitch at that face so close to his.

“We can keep dancing around this, that suits me fine. But I tell ye again. Nothing that is Harry’s.” Merlin straightened up. “Are ye returning to the lesson?”

“Nah, think I’ll stay here,” Eggsy answered a little shakily.

“I’ll let the kitchen know to keep a plate for ye, should you get hungry later.” Merlin left him be. The lad was clearly thinking too many thoughts and needed time to process them all.

When Eggsy got the text from Dean saying to steal the Beatles flyer, he didn’t answer. He could find
something else. He would find something else. Eggsy sighed and decided to go have a shower. He always thought best in water. And if he thought about Merlin while he was in there, well that was his to know and Merlin never to find out.
“Good morning, is everyone well caffeinated and rested?” Harry asked cheerfully. This was one of his favourite lessons and he had moved it up on the schedule because why not? He ignored Merlin’s grumbles beside him. The man hated this lesson and could have slept in but he didn’t. Because he always stayed at Harry’s side.

“You seem too cheery,” Eggsy said. “Like really cheery.”

Merlin looked at him. “Ye are right to be scared,” he said and hugged his coffee cup. “I hate today.” He glared at them all in case they thought of touching the mug. He needed the extra today to survive.

“To be fair, you hate any day where you aren’t fixing something,” Harry pointed out.

“I am best with my hands, this lesson does nae involve hands,” Merlin snapped back. He went and sat in a chair and glared at the window like it had done him a great disservice.

Eggsy couldn’t help but wonder just how good the man was with his hands.

“Well, Harry, cherry is a mighty fine look on you,” Tequila said with a smile. The man was practically bouncing. Tequila liked the way Harry’s smile grew a little more.

“Thank you, Tequila. That…shirt, well the colours suit you well,” Harry said. His smile dimmed, that had been a pathetic return compliment. But he didn’t want to seem too enthusiastic about the cowboy. Tequila intrigued him, but it was a poor environment to express so. He caught the what the fuck look Merlin gave him and gave a return I don’t even know face. Merlin just rolled his eyes and drank his coffee.

Roxy grinned. “Wait, are we moving up walking?” Oh god, this was going to be fun.

“We are!” Harry said and clapped his hands together. “Walking, posture, how to sit, we are learning it all.”

“Yeah, Harry, pretty sure I know how to sit,” Eggsy said. He sat down and then got up and back down. “See? Flat surface, an arse, away we go.”

Charlie sneered. “There is an order to sitting. A delicacy.”

“Pretty sure Eggsy did say that,” Tequila offered. “Flat surface, plunk your ass down, that is two things in order. And he didn't break the surface so seemed delicate enough to me.”

Charlie opened his mouth, but Harry cut him off before he could be more of a wanker. “To the main gallery,” Harry said and left them to follow. Merlin waited for them all to go and brought up the rear. “Now then, who watches Top Model?” None of them raised their hands. “Really?” Harry asked surprised. "None of you have ever watched any iteration of Top Model, ever? In a hotel room, at a salon, anywhere?” Harry looked at them. Merlin raised his hand and Harry flapped his own in response, “Oh you don’t count, you watch it, because I make you watch it.”

Tequila stared at him. “You want America’s Next Top Model?”

“Well mostly Britain’s but I have watched some Tyra. Look I’m smizing,” Harry said. He stared at Tequila, who just stared back. “Smiling with my eyes, a gaze that evokes happiness. No one?” He sighed. "What is the world coming to?"
Roxy finally put her hand up. “After listening to you go on, I’ve watched a little.”

Eggsy nodded. “Fine, maybe watched a little with my mum.”

Charlie shook his head. “I don’t ruin my mind with reality trash.”

Harry just gave him a look.

Tequila shrugged. “Seen memes and stuff? But no never watched it.”

“Well there is always an episode that focuses and giving the girls runway lessons and some are good and some are bad and everyone stomps around,” Harry explained. He walked halfway down the hall and returned to them doing a fairly good impression of a hard runway walk. “Now walk like that in real life and people will think you are mad.” Everyone in the room nodded in agreement. “But a few of the ideas of a runway walk aren’t bad ones.” Harry moved back down the hallway. “Back straight, shoulders down, head up and to quote Charlize Theron just think murder and start walking.” Harry did it and the room felt charged with energy as he walked towards them. “That is your notice me or I will stab you walk. Now the four of you go down a bit and try it.” Harry made a shooing motion and stood beside Merlin.

“Peacock,” Merlin muttered.

“Oh hush,” Harry said. “Oh dear, Charlie is attempting fierce and just looks constipated,” he whispered to his friend.

Merlin hid his laugh in his coffee cup, "It is a common look for him. I'll tell cook to sneak him more fibre."

All four made it back to them. “Roxy, not bad, but you lead with your breasts not your head.” Harry pointed vaguely at her chest.

“Funny thing, Harry, they kind of go first,” she answered and Tequila snorted a little bit and she winked at him.

“With the way you were thrusting, they do,” Harry countered. “That was a ploy meant for a plunging neckline at a party, not command a room at a conference or such and you know it.” Roxy gave a conceding nod. “Charlie, you were trying to straighten your spine by sucking in. You have a perfectly acceptable body, shortening your breath by pulling your abs tight helps no one.” Charlie bristled at perfectly acceptable but he had been sucking in so he couldn’t actually say anything. “Eggsy…I…well…” Harry didn’t know how quite to say it.

“When Harry said think murder he meant more long range assassination and less baseball bat in barbed wire,” Merlin filled in helpfully for his friend. He took the last sip of the coffee and mourned that his cup was empty.

“I didn’t look that bad,” Eggsy had to protest.

“Yes, you did,” Merlin and Harry said at the same time.

“Hey Tequila sucked too!” Eggsy said.

“I didn’t. I walked straight,” Tequila replied.

“May I touch you?” Harry asked.
“Sure,” Tequila said easily. He had never had problems with people in his space. He was very still though as Harry ran his hand up Tequila’s spine. The man’s hands were warm even through his shirt.

“Let me guess, growing up you had a growth spurt before your friends,” Harry said. He put his hands on Tequila’s shoulders.

“Yeah, shot up four inches in one summer,” Tequila said. “How’d you know?”

“Eggsy rolls his shoulders in, to get ready for a fight. He’s expecting a blow. You roll yours in a bit, to hide your height. You walk with a straight enough spine, but your shoulders just a little stooped because a long time ago, you became used to trying to downplay your height.” Harry pulled back and down a bit. “Being tall isn’t a fault.” His hands lingered a moment longer than they should have but brief enough that he doubted that Tequila noticed. “There you go,” he said and stepped back. “Eggsy?”

Eggsy shook his head quickly, he didn’t like people behind him, touching him. He looked at Tequila and altered his posture a bit. “How’s that?”

Harry nodded, impressed at how Eggsy copied it so quickly. “Good, everyone do your walk again.” They went down and came back. Harry was pleased. “Excellent.” He gave some more individual tips and had them do it again and again offering variations on attitude depending on the circumstances. He paused though, “Roxy, I thought we agreed you needed practice in high heels. Your fiancee’s family requires them at formal events.”

Roxy made a face and made an even deeper one when she saw her uncle walking down the hall carrying a tray that had several pairs of high heels on them. “Ugh, come on Harry, always feel like I’m going to break a leg.”

“Because you think you can stomp when you should glide. Think Ginger Rogers,” he said, uncaring. "This is an important skill that you need to learn. And learn well."

“Yeah, like you could do it,” she muttered.

“I can,” Harry said. Percival stopped beside him and indeed two pairs a pump and a spike heel were way too large for Roxy. Harry held the two large pairs up. “Merlin?”

“Ye know I want the fucking pumps. That buggered ankle never healed enough for spikes,” Merlin said and grabbed the silver pumps. “And ye know I look dreadful in silver.
“My apologies,” Harry said unapologetically.

“No fucking way,” Eggsy said watching the two men put on the heels.

“What you’ve never worn heels?” Tequila asked. “Thought it was like a basic thing all guys around the world did in frats.”

“We don’t do ‘frats’,” Charlie said. “And I somehow doubt our Eggsy has graced the halls of higher education.”

“You’re right. Got decent A levels, but joined up with the marines,” Eggsy said.
Tequila looked at him. “Where’d you serve?” He had some uncles and cousins who were military men.

“Mum got pregnant and really sick. I had to leave to help her out. The same crap that Princess Shinylocks has, the so sick you end up in hospital.”

“Eggsy, she is married to second in line for the throne,” Roxy chided.

“Oh fuck all the royal family that ain’t Anne,” Eggsy said. It was his turn to be stared at. “Wot? She’s a stone cold military bitch, she’s awesome.”

“King George, the Queen’s father was supposed to be a good man,” Harry said. “My grandfather met him a few times, during the war.”

“Fuck I miss the queen mum,” Merlin said. “She was so fucking drunk.” He made a quick sign of the cross and then stood. “Right, let’s get this over with.” He straightened his spine, pulled back his shoulders and started to walk. He walked down a good few metres and then turned and came back. “As much as I hate this, and believe me I hate this, Harry is correct in this instance. Having a few different ways to walk is a good thing. It can get people out of your way, it can get you seen, it can make ye disappear. And if ye can walk in fucking heels you can do anything.”

Harry nodded and walked easily in the spiked heels. “Remember Roxy, you walk too much on the front of your foot. Let the heel touch and then press forward with the ball. Use the ball of your foot not as a weight but a spring. A well made shoe, even with an absurd heel like this, will not fail you.”

Roxy sighed as her uncle nudged her. She put on a three inch heel. She then followed in Harry’s footsteps, both men calling out suggestions. She walked three lengths before it was smooth. She ended up in front of Merlin. “Can we?”

“First, I will escort ye to Harry, and then yes,” Merlin said. He held out his elbow. “When ye offer a lass your arm, it isn’t because you doubt her ability to walk, it is because you are acting as basically a walking coat rack. Your job is to help her be noticed. This time don’t think murder as ye walk, but
instead think pride, honour, that such a creature would deign ye worthy of the touch of her hand.”
Roxy smiled at him and they walked down to Harry as if they were in tux and ball gown and not
borrowed heels and trousers. Harry said a few things after they arrived by his side and then Roxy
nodded to her uncle. Percival pulled his phone out of his pocket and with a couple flicks of his
thumb a song played through tinny through the tiny speaker.

“It’s a mother fucking walk off!” Roxy shouted and stomped down the hallway flinging her hair at
Eggsy before turning and walking back.
Merlin was next and Eggsy stared as he came down, long legs just eating up the floor as they went.
He stopped and did three fluid and quick poses before he headed back. Fucking hell he had a perfect
ass swaying in the pumps.

It was Harry’s turn next and of course somehow the man had an utterly perfect runway walk. When
he reached the end he gave them an incredibly happy smile and even tossed a wink to Tequila before
switching his face to a smolder and heading back. The three then all walked back together and then
took a bow. Eggsy and Tequila clapped and whistled and Charlie huffed.

“How exactly was that me getting my money’s worth?” Charlie asked.

“You mean your father’s money’s worth,” Roxy whispered as she stepped out of her shoes. Her
uncle gave her a fond but exasperated look.

Harry sat and put his own shoes back on. “Mr. Heskith, it is disappointing that you can’t see the
lessons hidden inside the lessons. Trust me there was a larger point to the frivolity. I hope that you
will figure it out before the end.” Harry stood. “Now back to the drawing room so we can work on
seated posture. And Mr. Unwin? This is where we break out the Hermes scarves, although I will be
using Burberry.” Harry smiled at him.

“Sure, bruv,” Eggsy agreed. A couple days but he could tell that Harry was a horrible tease. He
laughed a little as they walked. He was not laughing 20 minutes later. “Bruv!”

“I have to say I’m tied tighter than a calf at the rodeo,” Tequila said. He tried to move and couldn’t.

“Well you both slump dreadfully,” Harry said calmly.

“At least your ankles aren’t tied,” Roxy said. “Really uncomfortable.”

“Tilde’s family deplore women who cross their legs,” Harry said. “How you are sitting right now is
the correct stance.”

“Who the fuck hates that?” Eggsy asked. “Shit, Rox, you might want to think about getting away
from the nutjobs. Who are they?”

Roxy sighed. “The King and Queen of Sweden?”

“Goddamn,” Tequila said. “You’re going to be royalty?”

“No,” Roxy said swiftly. “It’s…complicated.” She sighed and tried to relax into the position a little
more.

“This is humiliating,” Charlie’s lap was tied to the chair.

“You shift too much as you sit,” Merlin commented. “Ye are restless, sit still and we’ll free you.”
There was a knock. “Ah, tea.” Merlin got up and took the tray from Percival who grinned at all the
trussed up students. Merlin shooed him away and he and Harry settled in with a nice cuppa while the others struggled with their bonds.

“Now while you try to slip your knots, let me talk about the changes in sitting and what it can convey to people that have occurred over the last fifty years. It is really quite fascinating,” Harry said and began the lecture.
“Hey Ginger,” Tequila said. “Do you think I walk funny?” He could hear chewing, looked at his watch and did the math. “Aww shoot darlin’, this is your lunch break isn’t it?”

“No it’s fine, just about done and my meeting with Champ isn’t for another thirty,” she answered. “And walk funny?”

“Today we had posture and whatchacallit, comportment,” Tequila said after a pause. “And the guy, the instructor, said I walk like I’m trying to make myself smaller, hide myself a bit. That’s b.s. though, right?”

“Well…”

“Nu-uh, come on Ging, I always make myself stand out,” Tequila protested.

“No, not until you start talking to someone, or dancing. You need interaction to stand out. Otherwise you like to not be noticed,” she explained. “And you do slump, jesus the manspread when you sit is insane.”

“Balls need room, Ginger,” Tequila answered.

“Not that much room,” she snapped back. “At Champ’s meeting table, think about how you sit and compare it to how they would have taught you today.”

“Aw, crap, Harry was right to tie me to the chair,” Tequila realized.

“You were tied up?” Ginger tried not to laugh too much. “What sort of gentleman school is this?”

“It certainly ain’t what the webpage said. Or what the old guy who owns it wants it to be. Think our teachers are rebelling a bit. I think it might be the butler’s fault - he seems quietly sneaky.”

“The butler did it?” Ginger giggled. “Oh I wish I was there.”

“I’ll send you some photos, vid if I can. How’s that situation with the one pump?”

“All sorted, you were right about the problem. Thing is working great again.”

“Good,” Tequila said.

“More classes today?” she asked. He could hear her gathering up her files.

“Yeah, more small talk stuff,” Tequila replied. “But we have tomorrow morning off and then the afternoon is dance class. That I’m actually looking forward to. Say hi to Champ, and make sure to play up everything I’ve been learning here?”

“Will do, bye hun.”

Tequila hung up and walked over to his window and looked out. The skies were getting grey, he hoped it would pass and he’d get some riding time in tomorrow morning during their off time. But if not, he bet he could get Eggsy to play cards with him.
“Mum!” Eggsy said, relieved he finally got a hold of her. “Been murder getting you to answer your phone.”

“Eggsy, you’ve been gone 3 days,” Michelle said. “You didn’t go on a three month sea voyage. Been busy, you know I had Megan’s hen party.”

“Right, right,” he said. “How’s Daisy? She’d love all the space to roam out here.”

“She’s good, missing you fierce,” Michelle replied. “Are you having fun?”

“It’s…yeah. Yeah, I kind of am,” Eggsy admitted. “The guys teaching are actually pretty fun and the ancient arsehole who owns the place is scarce. And two of the three people I’m here with are pretty chill.”

“Oh, I’m so glad,” Michelle said. “Dean was even hoping you were having a good time.”

Eggsy tensed. “Really?”

“Yeah, he’s been in a good mood,” Michelle said cheerfully. “That this would be an enriching experience for you. That he was sure you’d come home with all sorts of shine on you.”

Eggsy cursed in his head. “Yeah Mum, plenty of shine. Can you put Daisy on?”

“Sure!” Michelle held the phone up to Daisy who babbled and said a couple words in it.

“Love you, Daisy,” Eggsy said.

“She loves you so too,” Michelle said. “And so do I, send me some more photos, yeah?”


Eggsy threw his phone onto the bed and kicked at the frame bit. Looked like tomorrow morning when they were off, he was going to check those rooms in the other wing, see if they had anything. He really wished he wasn’t growing to like Harry and Merlin as much as he did. The only thing saving it was that King was a prick who deserved what he got. He kicked the frame a few more times and decided to go see if Tequila wanted to hang out. There was a clap of thunder and he groaned. A storm fit the moment a little too well.
Eggsy looked around the ballroom. It was like from a movie and had nothing worth stealing. He leaned against the wall and watched Harry drag in a record player. No, not a record player. “Is that a phonograph?” Eggsy asked.

“Close. A gramophone. A phonograph plays the cylinders, a gramophone will play records,” Harry said. “Merlin did a wonderful job restoring this. And I find it amusing.” He opened the hutch beneath and began to flip through records. “Today we have dance class.”

“You going to break out the heels again?” Tequila asked. “Do you dance in them as well as you walk?” he gently teased.

“Of course, if you can do something, do it well,” Harry said.

“No, I’m shite at dancing in them,” Merlin said. “Walking easy, too many different steps in dancing.”

“How do you guys even know how to do that?” Eggsy was curious. “Uni, like Tequila?”

“No,” Merlin said quickly and glared at Harry.

“Right, there’s a story here,” Eggsy said and looked at the two men. “Spill.”

“There is nae a story,” Merlin said.

“Yup, there’s a story here, and we’d be mighty appreciative of hearing it,” Tequila said. He looked at Harry and licked his lips. “Real appreciative,” Tequila whispered.

Merlin could see Harry cracking and moved to block his vision of Tequila. “Harry,” he warned.

“That Aunt Bernice of Merlin’s we mentioned, she used to pay us to stretch out her shoes for her. She had large feet and we would go over and sit around her house in her heels and break in her shoes for her,” Harry explained. He ignored Merlin’s glare. “What? We made 300 quid that summer just for stomping about in heels.”

“Okay, but when was this?” Eggsy pressed. “Because sounds like you were kids, how can you still do it?”

“Harry likes to do ABBA contests in full gear, which means ridiculous platforms,” Merlin ratted out. “I just have insane muscle memory.”

“And we have drunk walk offs during the finales of top model and project runway,” Harry added just to spite his friend. He realized that a solid 30% of their friendship was spite. That seemed like a reasonable amount.

“Bastard,” Merlin said.

Tequila and Eggsy tried to control their laughter and failed miserably.

“Yes, yes, it is all very amusing,” Merlin said, his face suggesting he found it anything but. “But back to the task at hand, can the two of ye dance?”

“Yeah, I can dance fine,” Eggsy said.
“Me, too,” Tequila agreed. “Made some mighty fine money dancing in college, in fact. The naked kind,” he added and enjoyed the way Harry’s fingers stilled on the records. More and more he was enjoying making Harry a little bit flustered. “And where’s Roxy and Charlie?”

“Roxy, has been through our dance classes several times, and we know that she doesn’t need any further education. She’d be here just to laugh at you two, so we kicked her out.” Merlin explained.

“And the wanker?” Eggsy asked.

“Mr. Heskith, we know for a fact is capable of dancing, it is the only thing manners wise that he is capable of,” Harry said.

“Harry, isn’t that near gossip?” Eggsy teased. “Should you be saying that?”

“Not when it is a fact,” Harry muttered. He and Merlin were really hating Charlie and being less than circumspect about it. It was Eggsy and Tequila’s favourite thing. “Now then first off, we need to see how well you can dance. I will put on a variety of music and you can show me what you have.” He took the records from Merlin and Merlin pulled his phone out.

Eggsy grinned as some club music came on and he and Tequila shrugged and started to dance.

“Just dance, you two,” Harry said. He sat on the floor and watched them. “As the old saying goes, dance like no one is watching.”

“Or, one particular person is watching,” Merlin suggested. He was leaning against the wall near where Harry was seated.

Eggsy gave Merlin a look that suggested Merlin was absolutely the one person he wanted watching. He even winked. Merlin just shook his head. Eggsy started to properly let go and so did Tequila. They moved around the ballroom having fun. Tequila was a far better dancer than Eggsy, but Eggsy felt he was holding his own. The music shifted, faster harder, and Eggsy kept up for the most part just bopping around and watching Tequila, and wondering if he somehow made his skeleton liquid. When the music switched to country, Eggsy held up his hands and said “I’m out,” he went and sat on the floor next to Harry.

Tequila grinned and moved into the line dance that went with the song, used to an audience when he was on the dance floor. The music shifted a little. “What none of you know how to Texas two-step?” he asked, figuring he knew the answer. It was nice to have one up on their teachers.

Merlin tossed his phone to Harry, who caught it only a small fumble. “I do,” Merlin said. He went over to Tequila and let him take the lead. Tequila laughed expecting it to be a put on, but then Merlin began to match all his steps. He had never two stepped with someone the same height as him, but it was sort of fun. Harry switched it to a slow song and Tequila paused when Merlin slid closer into his arms. “Problem?”

Tequila shook his head and held Merlin carefully and they swayed.

Harry turned off the music. “I trust your slow skills are similar to Tequila’s Eggsy?” Eggsy nodded and frowned at Tequila.

Tequila mouthed what to Eggsy and Eggsy just made a face at him. Tequila and Merlin had looked real good on the dance floor together, fit well together. He didn’t like that. And he really didn’t like that he didn’t like it.

Merlin moved over beside Harry and they argued about which record to put on. “It is my turn to
lead, it is my pick.”

“Ugh, fine,” Harry said and groaned when Merlin picked Cole Porter. “His songs are -”

“No worse than your Rodgers and Hart obsession,” Merlin said. “Be thankful I didn’t put on Shall We Dance.” He grinned. “Oh right, you love that song.”

“Just shut up and dance with me,” Harry said. And his obsession with Rogers and Hart had nothing to do with him getting to pretend that he was Hart. He just enjoyed their music.

Merlin gave Harry a slight bow and Harry returned it and then they were off spinning around the room.

Eggsy whistled. “Shit, imagine if they were in tuxes.”

“It’s like one of those old black and white movies,” Tequila said.

They were moving about the ballroom with this grace and dignity and somehow looking sexy as fuck. Merlin spun Harry out and brought him back gently. When the song changed on the gramophone, they changed lead and dance step seamlessly. As he lead, Harry called out the steps he was doing, explaining how they were moving and rambling about the importance of knowing the basics of ballroom dancing. That just a few simple steps would make an incredible impression. Harry and Merlin danced for two more songs switching lead back and forth and on another actually separated and even did a little bit of a soft shoe that had Tequila and Eggsy in stitches. When the record ended they returned to the two men and gave a deep bow. Harry went to flip the record.

Merlin stood in front of Eggsy and held out a hand. “May I have this dance?”

“Not sure I know how to follow,” Eggsy admitted. “I don’t like moving backwards much.”

“In this lad, ye can lead.” Merlin stood there waiting patiently.

“Won’t I look foolish, bit shorter than you, if you hadn’t noticed,” Eggsy said.

“I’ve noticed a great deal about ye, Eggsy, probably more than ye want me to have seen. Now come on, show me how well ye move.” Eggsy stood up and went to Merlin. He let Merlin adjust his hands a bit and took a tentative step forward. “Good,” Merlin said, “Now ye just have to guide me. This is a four count waltz. So spinnin’ box step and ye are solid.”

“Pretty sure you are the solid one,” Eggsy said, able to feel the strength in Merlin under the jumper.

Merlin didn’t say anything to that, just counted off for Eggsy.

Tequila stood and went to Harry. “How about it, sir?” He looked over and caught Eggsy stepping on Merlin, and Merlin not caring a bit. “Promise your toes are safe with me.”

“I am aware, think you can dance without adding too much flare?” Harry asked.

“I think I can manage sedate,” Tequila replied and pulled Harry onto the dance floor. He winked though, and held Harry just a little closer than was called for. “You know what song I always liked? Cheek to Cheek.” He took a chance and moved Harry even closer.

Harry gave him a withering look. “A gentleman leaves a respectable distance between himself and his partner.”

“Not a gentleman yet. Still got a week and a half before that,” Tequila said but he let Harry step back
just a little and they moved around the ballroom, falling into a steady rhythm together. One thing Tequila had always picked up easily was dancing.

It was clear as the music played, that all the men forgot it was a class and were simply enjoying dancing together, occasionally switching partners, including Tequila and Eggsy grinding on each other just to exasperate Harry and Merlin but in turn being shocked when Harry pulled Merlin into an incredibly sexy tango.

“Show me that,” Tequila said immediately. He always wanted to learn new things on the dance floor.

“Let me lead then,” Harry said. Tequila nodded and this time Harry pulled Tequila in tightly. “Now, here, here we can be just a little ungentlemanly.” He leaned in, lips millimeters from Tequila’s neck, before beginning to move them about the room. It was clear after a couple of minutes that Harry had completely forgotten the existence of Merlin and Eggsy.

“Want to learn that lad?” Merlin asked.

“Eh,” Eggsy shrugged. They looked fucking brilliant, but it didn’t seem like something he wanted to learn. He liked to groove sure, but more chill stuff than what they were doing.

“Want to learn to shoot billiards?” Merlin asked. He didn’t need to stick around to watch Harry get his flirt on.

Eggsy grinned at him. “I know how to shoot pool.”

“10 pounds says I run the table on ye,” Merlin replied. “The billiards room, should be of particular interest to ye, lots of small things, easily missed.” He gave Eggsy a look. “Just so ye know.”

Eggsy stared back. “Let’s just deal with me leaving you in a weeping puddle on the ground after I run the table,” Eggsy said after a minute.

“We shall see,” was all Merlin said as he escorted Eggsy out.

Harry kept Tequila close and moving about the ballroom and did his best to not get hard when Tequila wrapped his leg around him. Eventually he dipped the man and was relieved when they didn’t fall over. He stood them up and a little apart and gave Tequila a small bow. “Merlin, sorry about that, we should continue with the foxtrot.” The words echoed in the room.

“Sir, think we’ve been abandoned,” Tequila said. “Can I interest you in another dance?”

“I should check in with my uncle,” Harry answered, though he looked like he just wanted to dance forever. “And you seem to have grasped the steps quite easily. You really are a tremendous dancer.”

Tequila grinned at him. “You really should go on youtube, search cowboy dancer in mexico 2012.” He winked and Harry and whistled as he left the ballroom.

Harry tidied up the records and then met with Chester who ranted at Harry for improper behaviour and favouritism. He kept himself busy and didn’t look up the video until well after dinner. In the privacy of his room.

He finally looked it up, telling himself that it would help his training of Tequila to watch it. It would be okay.

Harry watched the video.
He was not okay. He was incredibly far from okay.

There was no okay left in the world. He needed to find something that would make it okay.
“Harry, no,” Merlin said sternly.

“Do you think it is still good?” Harry asked staring at the contents of the ancient mint tin. After he had seen those videos of Tequila dancing, he had immediately begun to head for alcohol and then he had a vague memory. He had run to the old music room and almost barreled over Merlin in his haste. Merlin knew that meant nothing good, and oh look he was right.

“Do I still think it is good?” Merlin stared at him in shock. “Harry! That cannabis is at a bare minimum 25 years old! Found in an old guitar case. No it is nae good anymore,” Merlin snatched the tin away.

“I didn’t see or smell mold,” Harry said thoughtfully. “I vote we try it.”

“I am not hauling your 52 year old arse to the A&E because of a bad reaction to ancient drugs,” Merlin held fast to the tin. “We have lovely gin and scotch, if you want an altered state, we can drink ourselves stupid. Which by the way, isn’t very professional considering WE ARE HERE TO TEACH GENTLEMAN CLASSES.” Harry had lost his goddamn mind, which sure Merlin had always expected, but he thought that they had a few more years.

Harry pulled his phone out of his pocket and loaded up a video. He showed it to Merlin and waited until the end. “I am flirting with a man who wears denim on denim unironically, is named after the worst alcohol on the planet and has a youtube video like that. Tell me, Hamish, what of all that suggests that a bottle of gin will solve my woes?”

Merlin rewatched the video. Twice. “Give me a fucking hour and meet me by the pond. Raid the fridge, I remember what ye get like. And if I get fucking arrested, you bail me out.” He stalked out of the music room and Harry went down to the kitchens where Percival was reading in his pajamas.

“Ummm…” Harry began.

Percival just gave him a bland stare. “I’m not even here,” was all he said. Harry nodded and quickly put together a bunch of food. “Bag in that cupboard,” Percival pointed. “And crisps are two over.”

Harry packed it all up and ran away. It was worse than his mother finding his lad magazines and Percival was his damn friend. Though it didn’t help that said friend was clearly laughing at him behind that neutral face. Harry went out to the rock by the pond where he and Merlin had spent so much time over the years. He settled in and waited; Merlin would bring something or other. And worst case they had that tin. It was doubtful it would kill them. He sighed a bit. He shouldn’t have danced like that with Tequila. It put thoughts in his head. Wants.

Harry hated wanting something. Someone. It made him an idiot. And wanting this, him, was an especially bad idea. He was never one for vacation flings and all he wanted was to have Tequila bend him over and fuck him hard. That or just watch the man dance. For hours. Ideally in the nude. God, he was a lecherous old man. He groaned in frustration and want.

“Save those noises for your American hooligan,” Merlin said as he came up and sat next to Harry. “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

“Meaning?”

“You still buy drugs from the same pub in town,” Merlin answered. “Inflation on a dime bag was
“When was the last time we bought weed?” Harry wondered. “And how the hell are you remembering how to roll a spliff?”

“I have dexterous fingers, and that ridiculous muscle memory,” Merlin answered and licked the paper. He handed it to Harry. “Remember that you are a moron on cannabis, Harry.”

“And you giggle,” he replied and lit the paper. He breathed in and promptly choked. “I don’t remember it tasting like this.” He passed it to Merlin and grabbed the bottle of water he brought along. “Oh lord, we used to do that?”

Merlin’s breath in was a little easier, but he occasionally still snuck a cigarette, which Harry hadn’t done for a decade. “Sweeter than I remember.” They passed it back and forth and lay on the ground and stared up at the sky.

“We’re old, Merlin,” Harry said.

“We are,” Merlin agreed. “Old as the stars, younger than the sky.”

“Always hit you faster,” Harry commented. He reached up and traced patterns of the stars. “I should make a suit of stars. It would shine prettily. Like Tequila’s belt buckle.”

“That thing could flag down a space ship,” Merlin said and a giggle burst out before he could stop it.

“Why is it so big, Hamish?” Harry asked. “Are American jeans so heavy that they need a strong clasp to keep them up? Is it some sort of Illuminati code?” Harry looked at Merlin. “Am I supposed to see ancient secrets in there?”

“That’s what you are staring at the buckle? Those jeans barely hide which way he dresses.”

Harry swatted at him. “My doofus cowboy. You have your estate thug.” Harry paused. “What exactly is going on with you two anyways? He is both scared of you and wants to chew your arse.”

“Chew my arse?”

“Chew, lick, fuck, I don’t know. He just stares a lot. But then he freaks out.”

“Oh that,” Merlin waved a hand airily. He got distracted by his fingers for a couple of minutes. “He’s planning to steal a whole bunch of shit from King. Made sure though he won’t touch your stuff! Because I love you Harry.” Merlin smiled. “I love you Harry Beary.”

“I love you too, Hamish Bamish,” Harry said. “Wait…he’s stealing from Uncle Chester?”

“Hmmm, probably iffen he can figure out what is real and not a replacement fake.” Merlin giggled. “Chester has so many fakes in there now. He’s so bad with money.”

“I should care. He is planning to commit a crime and all I can think of is Tequila’s abs. They are glorious to lick I am betting.” Harry looked around. “More?”

“No, not with how long it’s been for us,” Merlin said. “Eggsy’s body is brilliant too, more compact and his neck isn’t too big for his head.”

“Tequila’s neck isn’t too big! Large yes but not terribly disproportionate,” Harry glowered at him. “And he is educated, you can tell under all that hick charm, yours what does he have?”
“He has other talents,” Merlin said haughtily.

Harry looked in that moment all of 16. “Have you sampled his other talents yet?”

“No,” Merlin said sadly. “We flirt and then I say something and he misconstrues and runs.”

“What are you saying?” Harry asked. “You are horrible at saying things.”

“I know that,” Merlin pouted and dug into the bag and cheered when he found the crisps. “I keep giving him advice on what to steal, but it seems to make it worse.”

Harry reached for some crisps. “Wait…are you trying to court him by helping him commit larceny?”

“Is that bad?” Merlin asked.

“I don’t think it is good,” Harry answered. He pulled out the phone and watched the video again. “He’s soooo dreamy, and his accent is adorable. Actually why aren’t you crushing on him? Country boy, you live for that shit in those songs you listen to.” Harry’s eyes widen in horror. “Oh god, I’ve given you ideas. I’m not switching. I don’t want a thug who wants to steal my great grandfather’s silverware. And he’s short.”

“He isn’t short, we’re just freakishly tall. With stupid insect legs. Harry, why was I cursed with insect legs?”

“I don’t know. But no switching crushes. This isn’t Liam and Susan.”

“Jesus Harry, that was when we were 20,” Merlin said. “And I don’t want to switch. Besides yours has a couple arrests too, you know.”

Harry gasped dramatically. “My true love has a past? Did he fight a duel?”

“I don’t know,” Merlin muttered. “I just know there are a couple minor arrests in his history, I can tell, it’s a superpower. Mostly he is an upright citizen, though. That’s what my spidey sense tells me.”

“Oh,” Harry moped. “A duel could have been wicked.”

Merlin began to giggle so much he fell over. “You said wicked.”

“I want to be bad,” Harry whined. He flopped down and cuddled Merlin. “I want to just once not be the good son, the good tailor, the good teacher. I want to be naughty. He looks like he could do naughty.”

“I know mine can,” Merlin said. “I just need a new tactic to seduce him.”

“He can steal some of the antiques in the north drawing room, I always hated those,” Harry offered. “Consider them a dowry.”

“Thank you Harry,” Merlin said. “Do you think that the belt buckle Tequila wears is code for how big his dick is? That makes more sense than Illuminatti.”

“I want him to have a big dick,” Harry said. “They grow everything bigger in America, don’t they?”

“I don’t know. And I don’t care, you know I don’t like to be drilled like how you do,” Merlin said. “Fuck though, have ye looked at Eggsy’s thighs? Thiccccckkkkkkk.”

“Hmmmmm,” Harry said. “I want to swim.”
“The pond will be gross and cold,” Merlin said.

“I don’t care we should swim,” Harry said. It was the most brilliant idea ever. He sat up and began to strip.

“We’re going to drown, die naked, and bloated, and no one will fuck us.” Merlin complained but began to take off his clothes as well.

“Merlin, you just suggested someone would fuck your corpse, so long as it wasn’t too water logged.” Harry looked at him in horror. “Is this a kink I didn’t know about?”

“No,” Merlin rolled his eyes and his whole head with it. “I meant that I don’t want to drown before I’ve had Eggsy in my bed.”

“You said corpse fucking.”

“TEQUILA. YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO SHOUT OUT TEQUILA YES HARDER FUCK ME PLEASE TEQUILA!” Merlin shouted and then dove into the water. “Fuck that is vile.”


Merlin stopped him from dying. “If you die, I will be annoyed with you.”

“Merlin, I can’t say Tequila in bed,” Harry pushed his wet hair back. “I just can’t.”

“Pet names?” Merlin suggested. “And not like saying how do ye like to be fucked, Eggsy sounds amazing.” Merlin grinned. “But it is a fuck ton better than Tequila.” Harry pushed Merlin under the water and soon they were splashing around and making a racket. Eventually they got out of the water shivering and realized they didn’t have any towels.

“I have a tea towel?” Harry pulled out from the bag.

“That barely will clean my knob!”

“You aren’t that well hung,” Harry muttered.

“More than you got,” Merlin countered.

“Yes well, I’m not bald,” Harry said. He used the small towel to dry his hair. Merlin sat back down on the grass, comfortable enough nude aside from the bit of chill. He rolled another spliff. “One last hit?”

Harry sat beside him and took it in, not choking this time. “Merlin?”

“Hmm?”

“He’s really attractive.”

“So is Eggsy.”

“And funny.”

“Mine’s more mouthy than funny.”
“We are so fucked.” Harry frowned. “Four days. You and I never fall for people like this. Why are we falling like this?”

“Your mother’s fault,” Merlin said after a moment.

“It is not Mother’s fault that we are naked and high and sad about boys!” Harry was scandalized. He looked to the heavens. “It isn’t your fault Mum. Also, I know you watch out for us, but please I really hope you aren’t watching right now.”

Merlin waved at the sky. “Hey Mrs. Hart, you and Aunt Bernice raising a little hell up there?”

“That’s blasphemous!” Harry shouted.

“When you aren’t high, you are going to remember you are fucking agnostic,” Merlin said.

Harry groaned and just repeated, “we are so fucked.”

“Point of fact, we aren’t fucked. That’s why we’re out here reliving our youth.” Merlin pinched off the spliff. “You’re the gentleman, what do we do?”

Harry sighed sadly. “Nothing.”

“Bollocks to that.”

“They have to come to us, Merlin, or we’ll feel like we abused their trust in us as gentleman.”

“Ugh,” Merlin said. He put on his pants and his sweater and picked up the rest. “I’m going in and having a good wank while the high lasts. You coming?”

“Thought I’d stay out a little longer,” Harry answered.

“No more swims, Harry, not alone. You’d die,” Merlin giggled a bit. “No, you are too dumb to be left alone outside. Come on.”

“Finnnne, Mummy,” Harry groused and packed up his stuff.

“It’s your mother’s fault, because she taught us to never settle for less than the person who was right for us,” Merlin said as they walked. “Her stupid true love lectures about just knowing, cupid, destiny, all that settled into our dna a little too much.”

“We don’t love them,” Harry protested. “Four days. We just want to see their junk.”

“Oh Harry, bet whatever those two are carrying, it is nae junk.”

They stumbled, giggling, into the estate and made it to their own rooms and collapsed, Harry to keep practicing saying Tequila sexily and Merlin to have that wank.
Chapter 10

The next day all four were back in the main drawing room that they were using for classes and Eggsy was relieved to see no scarves hanging about waiting to tie them up. He did notice though that Harry’s suit was a just bit more dapper and Merlin was in theory wearing the same sort of stuff he had been but there was an extra crispness to it.

Tequila wondered how trousers could make Harry’s legs seem even longer. He certainly was not thinking about how they could wrap around him. He adjusted how he was sitting and Eggsy kicked his ankle and smirked. Tequila made sure that Harry wasn’t looking and stuck his tongue out at Eggsy. Roxy snorted and Charlie rolled his eyes. Tequila figured at some point, they’d have to get stuck back there with how often Charlie did it.

“Now then, today, we need to talk about clothing,” Harry said looking at all four of them. “While one shouldn’t judge a person on their clothing choices -”

Merlin choked on the air he was trying to breathe. “How can ye even say that with a straight face?” he asked when he had his breath back.

“He’s got a point,” Tequila said and smiled a bit. “Pretty sure you hate everything I’ve worn since we’ve been here.”

“Yeah, me too,” Eggsy agreed.

“I know you dislike my clothes,” Roxy added.

“I am sure Harry can find no fault with my clothes,” Charlie smiled, smug.

“I am sure that Harry can,” Merlin smiled back and it was not a comforting smile.

“I am sure that I can as well,” Harry said. Eggsy and Tequila grinned and settled in to watch. “You have changed your manner of dress just slightly since the first day. I think the reasons are two fold. One, to impress me, a small way to suck up, dressing in a suit, like myself. Only the suit is cut poorly. You think it makes your shoulders look broader but the padding is distracting.” Harry pointed at it, “And more than trying to appeal to me, you are trying to intimidate Tequila and Eggsy with their denim and ‘trackies’,” Harry made a face. “Yes, I think their clothing is appalling, but that doesn’t mean I am going to try to bully them with my own wardrobe.”

“You are in a suit that if you hadn’t made it yourself, it would cost over 1,000 pounds,” Charlie pointed out. “What is that, if not intimidation?”

“Does Harry act like he’s in fancy dress when he’s wearing the suit?” Merlin countered. “Does he look like he’s playing?”

“He looks like he was born in it,” Tequila said. “He wears it as casually as a freshman wears pajamas to their 8:30 class.”
Harry was thrown off track. “Students don’t do that, do they?” His voice horrified, his face appalled.

Tequila laughed at him just a little. He shouldn’t find shock that damn cute. “I know I did,” he grinned. “Was right comfy. Sort of like how you look.” There was something in his voice, admiration, maybe even affection.

Harry shook the image off, and the way he wanted to react to Tequila's tone. “As I had been saying, a person shouldn’t be judged based on their clothing, but we all do it. I certainly do, everyone in the room does.” Merlin raised his hand in protest. “Okay, Merlin doesn’t, but that is because he only notices what people wear in terms of are they naked - yes or no.”

“Yeah, sure,” Eggsy said. “Like you didn’t judge me on my clothes when you met me,” he challenged Merlin.

Harry walked over and gently took Merlin’s glasses off and put them on the table. He covers the man’s eyes. “What colour suit am I wearing today?”

“How the fuck would I know that?” Merlin replied. “Black?”

“Midnight,” Eggsy said.

“So black,” Merlin grumbled. He didn't like having his eyes covered and Harry was the only person in his life who would invade his space like that.

“Nah, Black black and midnight are different,” Eggsy said. “Midnight little more matte, innit?.” He couldn’t understand why Harry was looking at him like that. “What?”

“We will talk later,” was all Harry said. “Now Merlin what is Eggsy wearing?” Merlin didn’t say anything just crossed his arms. “Tequila? Roxy? And did you know my suit was black or did you guess?”

“I guessed,” Merlin muttered after a moment. “You generally wear three colours in your suits, I had a 33% chance of being right. And I am guessing that Tequila is in denim, and Eggsy in his gym clothes.”

Harry uncovered Merlin’s eyes. “Look,” he said and counted to five and covered them again. “And what colours were they wearing?”

Merlin yanked one of Harry’s fingers back until the man let go. He smiled. “Red,” he said. “Tequila is wearing red.” Eggsy opened his mouth. “Do not lad,” Merlin warned. “Whatever variation ye are going to say it is red.”

“Green,” Eggsy said. “He’s wearing a green plaid shirt.”

“Merlin is a wee bit colour blind,” Harry explained. “It is why he also doesn’t notice clothing much.” Harry looked at Eggsy. “He judged you on your posture and accent, and the way you used your words. Clothes would have been well down the list.”

“Can we move this on from me? I don’t need these classes,” Merlin said. “Talk to them about clothes. I look fine.”

“Because I have taken care of your clothing since 1992,” Harry muttered. “But this raises a good point. Why don’t I put him in suits?”

“I’d choke ye with the cufflinks,” Merlin said immediately.
“Because he’d choke you with the cufflinks,” Roxy agreed.

Charlie just shrugged and frowned. He hated how often here he didn’t know the right answers. And he was pissed Harry had noticed the extra padding in his shoulders.

“Because he’d look like a gangster,” Eggsy joked. He didn’t think it would be a bad look on Merlin, but he really liked the soft sweaters.

But Tequila got it after a moment. “Because he wouldn’t be happy,” he said slowly, thoughtfully. “He wouldn’t be comfortable. And he’s a fixer right? Fixes things. Can’t do a lot of work in a suit.”

Harry smiled at him, pleased as punch. “Exactly. Merlin needs to have mobility for his work, and to look professional but more casual. Jumpers and trousers is a look he feels comfortable in and matches his work. It isn’t about ‘dress for the job you want’ or whatever cliches people in power say. It is about what you are, what armor you want to protect you.”

“Armor?” Tequila asked.

“Your good old country boy look isn’t armor?” Harry asked. “You don’t wear that to hide your intellect? To surprise people?”

“Intelect?” Charlie laughed at that statement.


“First put on denim that fits you,” Harry countered quickly.

“Levi’s ain’t never steered me wrong before,” Tequila said. He ran his hands over his thighs, the jeans were just perfectly broken in.

“You are an in between size aren’t you?” Harry replied and waited for Tequila’s nod. “And because you are proud of your body you go the size down because wear will stretch the waistband just enough and you know you get looks at the way it hugs your arse.”

“You been looking, sir?”

Harry gave him the faintest smile. “I always notice everything about a person’s wardrobe. Go a size up and get them tailored.”

“Who tailors their bloody jeans?” Eggsy chimed in. That seemed like a massive waste of money to him, it were just some denim. Everyone wore them either too long or skinny or something.

“I do,” Roxy said. “Hemmed, waistband adjusted. 50-100 quid for decent work and I always look fantastic.”

“If you look at a celebrity on the telly and wish you looked that good in a t-shirt and denim, I promise you it has all been altered,” Harry said. “Tequila, buy your Levi’s a size up, get them tailored and wear them with a dress shirt, not western cut, but a properly fit dress shirt, and the waistcoat from a suit. You retain some of your own style, but look more professional.”

“Can I keep the belt buckle?” Tequila asked. He knew Harry really hated the thing, but was
interested in how much Harry wanted him to bend his style.

Harry shuddered a little bit. “The buckle or the boots.”

Tequila nodded. It seemed like a decent compromise to him. He remembered that he was to get some clothes out of this deal and thought about Harry sizing him for a shirt. He could definitely get behind that.

“Yeah and what about me?” Eggsy challenged. “What should I wear?”

“I’m pretty sure Mcdonalds provides a uniform,” Charlie said. Eggsy flipped him off and was ready to say something but Merlin stood. Everyone in the room froze.

“Ye should know, Mr. Heskith, I am in charge of the next major lesson. And when I am disappointed in a student, I have a more…hands on approach than Harry for expressing said disappointment.” Merlin tilted his head a little, “It really isn’t a good idea to disappoint me.”


“Yeah, thanks,” Eggsy said, still a little terrified of the look on Merlin’s face. It was also his turn to squirm a little in his chair and Tequila shot him a smug look at that. Eggsy tried to flip him off subtly but Tequila didn’t quite get it, used to a one and not two finger salute.

Harry made sure the group couldn’t see him give Merlin the most deadpan stare in history. Merlin had cried for hours after the precisely one fight they had gotten into as youths. “Now, let’s talk about shoes,” Harry said. He noticed that Eggsy was the one paying the most attention to the clothing talk. Interesting. A couple hours later they dismissed for lunch and Eggsy was gone. Harry would have to seek him out later. He wanted to talk to the lad.
“Those are horses,” Eggsy said.

“Oh, well spotted,” Charlie replied. He ducked his head when Merlin glared at him.

“Aye, Eggsy they are,” Merlin agreed. He went to the pen and with a small grunt had himself up and seated perfectly in a second. The horse made a noise and Eggsy jumped a little. Merlin gave a soft whistle and the horse began to move. “I teach only a couple things here, mostly it is up to Harry and even Percival like with the tableware explanations, but I do teach a couple lessons and riding is one of them. Now who here knows how to ride?” He moved his horse in circles and Eggsy watched Merlin and not the horse. Tequila, Roxy, and Charlie all raised their hands. “What I thought. Eggsy do ye fear them?”

“They don’t exactly invite counsel boys to Ascot do they?” Eggsy said. He looked at the horses. “But they are gorgeous.” He thought they were. Probably. These all seemed like horsey people and saying that was probably the right thing to do.

“I can help you out Eggsy,” Tequila said. He went over to one of the horses gave it a few gentle strokes. “Been riding since before I could walk.” When he figured the horse had the measure of him, he swung himself up in the saddle and almost tipped off the other side. “What the hell?” He settled himself but it was incredibly uncomfortable. “Seriously, what the hell?”

Merlin laughed at his reaction just a little. “Ye are in England, Tequila, means English saddle, nae western.”

“It sits you so up,” Tequila said. He wiggled a little to try to get comfortable. He made a noise and the horse started moving. He worked her in a figure 8 in the pen while everyone watched. “Well, I’ll
never like it as much as my saddle back home, but feels real good to have a beast between my legs again.” He said it on purpose to get a reaction. Merlin gave his unimpressed face, Charlie sneered, and Roxy and Eggsy both giggled. Tequila circled the horse around the pen a couple times and then got down. “Real easy girl here, Eggsy.”

Eggsy opened his mouth and caught the look from Merlin. “Too obvious a joke?” he asked and Merlin nodded. “Right then. Why exactly do I have to learn to ride a horse?”

“Because horses are the mark of a gentleman,” Charlie said haughtily. He got himself up on a horse, not as smoothly as Tequila or Merlin but still showed experience. “Because it is a noble sport, and one where you make connections and -”

“And because four days in and I am fucking bored out of my head, but cannae teach you my proper lessons until next week after Harry has drummed the basics into your heads,” Merlin said, cutting off whatever bullshit Charlie was going to spew. “I wanted to be outdoors so we call this a lesson. And Charlie be kinder to your horse’s mouth. Don’t pull so much.” Merlin went over and began to lecture Charlie.

Eggsy sort of loved Merlin. And he was real curious what Merlin’s proper lessons were going to be about. He bet it was going to be interesting.

“Ma’am, do you need some help up, I don’t see a stepping block,” Tequila said to Roxy.

“No, there isn’t is there,” Roxy agreed. She whistled and one of the horses trotted over. She did a hand gesture and the horse knelt down. Roxy slid onto the saddle and gave a whistle and the horse got up. She smiled down at them.

“Damn,” Tequila said. “That’s all sorts of impressive.”

“I generally ride a lot when not in the classes here. This horse and I have bonded,” Roxy said easily. Then she laughed a bit. “I admit I didn’t think it would work. Shit,” she grinned. “Hey Merlin, did you see?”

“I did lass, and it was most impressive.” Merlin called back. He told Charlie to ride around the pen a little bit and moved his horse a little closer.

“And it means you owe me? Remember?” Roxy said.

“I will buy you a bottle of your favourite drink,” he agreed.

“No, no, that wasn’t the bet. And a gentleman would never not follow through on a bet now would he?” Roxy asked. She even batted her eyelashes. Eggsy was real curious what could make her look so gleeful and Merlin vaguely nauseous.

“A gentleman would have never made that bet in the first place, especially when they have a woman such as Tilde waiting for them at home,” Merlin countered.

“Who do you think came up with the idea?” Roxy snapped back. She pulled out her phone and hit facetime and soon Tilde was there. “Babe! I got the horse to do the thing,” Roxy said happily. Eggsy couldn’t see Tilde from where he was, but Roxy lit up like a fire cracker at seeing her fiancee. “You want it?” Eggsy guessed Tilde responded affirmatively and Roxy made a come hither gesture to Merlin.

“Lord save from my friends,” Merlin muttered but he rode over. He put on a smoldering look and thickened his dialect into a full over the top brogue. “Lass, I love ye and iffen ye can see your way to
give yer heart to an old man such as me, I swear by the heaven’s above, I will do naught with my
days but make ye the happiest lass in all of Christendom.”

“Oh, Lord Conall, my heart has been yours since the day you kidnapped me from my wicked
English baron father;” Roxy said in a prim and breathless voice.

“What in the fuck?” Eggsy asked. His eyes popped when Merlin cupped Roxy’s face and kissed her
deerly and thoroughly. They could all hear Tilde’s cheer through the phone’s speakers. Merlin
turned bright red and let Roxy go. He moved his legs and his horse was off like a shot, in his
embarrassment forgetting that he was teaching a class.

Roxy made kissy faces at her phone and hung up and moved her horse back over to the boys. “Well
that was perfect,” she was both smug and satisfied.

“Wait, what the fuck was that?” Eggsy asked.

“Tilde’s favourite book is this really shitty romance book called something like The English Rose
and the Scottish Thorn, or I don’t know whatever they call that romance crap.” Roxy shrugged. “I
read true crime. Anyways she loves it and after I had shown her a bunch of photos of Merlin and
Harry she swooned. So my last refresher class Merlin and I made a bet about the horses. I won he
acted out the big ending of the book with me for Tilde’s spank bank. He won, I had to buy this
stupid expensive scotch for him.” Roxy grinned. “I always win. Oh and Eggsy? He kisses like the
best dream you can imagine. Just saying.” She whistled and her horse went flying after Merlin’s.

Tequila looked at Eggsy. “You okay?” the guy had a funny look on his face. The closest he could
explain it as was cranky arousal.

“Yeah, bruv,” Eggsy said after a minute. He was annoyed at seeing Merlin kiss someone else
but…”That was hot as hell right?”

“Yup,” Tequila agreed. “Now it did seem to cost us our instructor, so want me to teach you how to
ride?”

Eggsy shrugged. “Why not? Have to kill some time somehow right?” He looked at the horse. “Is it
pretty? I can’t tell.”

“It is a fine looking horse,” Tequila said. “Now the first step is letting her get to know you a little.”

Eventually Merlin returned, flushed from his hard ride and looking fucking gorgeous to Eggsy’s
annoyance. He apologized profusely to the students and took over for Tequila, not that there was
much to do anymore. He let them enjoy the horses and then said it was time for clean up. Charlie
immediately looked for a servant to hand the reigns to. “Sorry, Charlie, but a gentleman understands
that he takes care of those around him, and that includes animals. Ye will bed down your horse
properly and take care of all your tack.”

Tequila smiled at Charlie. “Shouldn’t be too hard right, if you ride as much as you say.”

Charlie grit his teeth. “My father is going to hear about my shoddy treatment. I am sure he will be
displeased considering the money he is spending.”

“Aye,” Merlin said sympathetically. “I would be displeased with ye as a son as well, but we all rise
to meet the challenges the good lord above sets before us.” Merlin guided his horse to the stables.

Eggsy buried his face in his horse’s neck to hide his laughter. Shit that was just the coldest thing he
had ever heard. His horse made a noise and he jumped back a little. It had been fun, but riding
definitely wasn’t of interest to him. He lead his horse back to the stables, following Merlin.

“Eggsy, I can help you,” Tequila offered, eternally helpful.

Eggsy kicked him. “Thanks but after how he bailed on me, figure Merlin should right?” He glared a little. “Only fair innit?”

“Oh, right right,” Tequila said swiftly and went to take care of his own horse.

Merlin moved over to Eggsy and showed him how to remove the saddle and Eggsy was sure the older man was crowding him a little more than was necessary. But maybe he backed a couple times into Merlin, pressed against the man. They finished up Eggsy’s horse and they were the only two left.

“I could wait, while you do yours?” Eggsy offered, casually.

“Nothing of value to steal in here, lad, not easily anyways,” Merlin said. He started to unbuckle the saddle.

“Sure, I'll just go then,” Eggsy said, deflated. Why else would he want to be here, anything else, any thoughts he had were stupid.

Merlin wouldn’t look at him. “Would ye like to hear about the first time Harry and I raced each other?”

Eggsy stopped and turned. “Is it an embarrassing story?”

“For Harry, it is,” Merlin agreed.

“Sure, why not?” He leaned against the wall and watched Merlin work and tell the tale. It was nice. He could listen to Merlin for hours. He wished there was a way he could listen to the man for hours, days. But that was a foolish dream and the reality was he should find something to grab. Because that is who he was.

Merlin finally looked up from his work and realized that Eggsy had disappeared.
Chapter 12

It was a good and sweet horse, and Tequila was grateful. The English saddle had him sitting all funny, he couldn’t sink in as much as he could back home, but still it felt nice to be riding. After their riding lesson, Merlin had said they were free to come to the stables and ride in their off time. Tequila took him at his word on that and since they had the need day mostly free until cocktail time, he thought he would ride. Well, he had free time, Charlie was having some private lessons. Tequila was grateful to be away from that guy and on such a pretty horse. He still wasn’t quite sure why riding was in the gentleman training, except perhaps it was as Merlin said, that Merlin just liked doing it. Which hey, fair enough. Tequila rode the horse around the back of the property and thought he spied a pond. That would be a nice walk for the horse. He whistled tunelessly as he went, feeling perfectly at peace for the first time since arriving. Nothing like a ride to help a man think.

He also needed some more time away from Harry. That man was confusing him in all sorts of ways. Tequila didn’t know what was going on with the guy. They were flirting, he was sure of it. Hell they should have been coming in their clothes after that dance. And Harry gave him these looks like he wanted to eat Tequila up, but then nothing. No follow through. He sort of thought he’d get a note from that butler that Harry would like Tequila to come to his room. A proper sex engraved invitation. But no, just looks and more stuffy lectures. I mean sure the stuffy lectures were why they were all there, but still, Harry was hiding behind them. Tequila really wanted to kiss the man whenever he went super prim.

He was becoming mighty obsessed with the man’s lips as he talked.

Tequila heard a splash and made a clicking noise moving the horse a little quicker to the pond, it had been too loud for a duck. He went over and stared. It was a real nice spot, meant for a picnic, and a snuggle with the right person. And that right person was swimming in the pond. Tequila had no problems watching Harry. The man was swimming about mostly diving in and bobbing up. He was…actually Tequila couldn’t figure out what he was doing. He moved the horse a little closer and when Harry popped up again he leaned forward in the saddle. “Not the swimming I’m used to seeing in America. Something you Brits do?” he asked.

Harry looked over and there was Tequila on a horse, with his cowboy hat on. Harry forgot to tread and sank down into the water. He came up flailing and spluttering a moment later. “Yes, it’s actually the latest fashion in swimming,” Harry said aiming for dignified though there was no dignity to be found.
“You have pond scum in your hair,” Tequila pointed out.

“Right,” Harry nodded and went back under and was clearly swimming. Tequila backed the horse up and Harry came out of the water.

“Is swimming in your clothes the fashion here too?” Tequila asked.

“Well, I didn’t bring a bathing costume with me,” Harry said. He stood there dripping, white dress shirt clinging to him, and Tequila could see he wasn’t wearing an undershirt. He couldn’t stop staring at the way Harry’s nipples had pebbled.

“So you didn’t strip to your boxers like anyone else would?” Tequila said.

“The naked swimming the other night with Merlin suggested that clothes would be a better option this time,” Harry answered unthinkingly.

Tequila sat up straight in his saddle. “Right, well, I’ll just be going.”

“Why?” Harry was confused.

“I ain’t no thief,” Tequila said sharply, furious at Harry, furious at himself for finding Harry so fucking hot all wet and fussy and almost perfect.

“Glad one of you isn’t,” Harry muttered. “But I fail to understand why you are leaving mid conversation.”

Tequila glared at him. “Because, Mr. Hart, you aren’t the gentleman I thought you were.”

Harry’s spine snapped straight. “Because I went swimming in my clothes? I thought I saw the ring. And dove in, unthinking.”

“No because, you are flirting with me while in a relationship,” Tequila replied, his lips thin and his jaw tight to stop himself from shouting.

“I’m not in a relationship. Who would I be in a relationship with?” Harry was confused now and looked around like a mysterious boyfriend might pop out of the bushes. He hadn’t been in a relationship in four years, that was rather a part of his problems - he had forgotten to how to relationship.

“Merlin? The guy you swam naked with?” Tequila said.

“Merlin?” Harry actually gagged a little bit. There was honest to god bile in his mouth. He stared up at Tequila, repulsion written all over his face. “Oh do get down off the horse it is difficult to look at you.” Tequila swung down and moved to stand right in front of Harry. “I am single, Tequila,” Harry said firmly.

“But you and he….”

“Got a wee bit happy and I thought it a good idea to swim and he didn’t want me to drown. We shared a dorm in university, Tequila. Seeing each other naked is not…we don’t think of each other that way. We never have.” Harry said. He moved a little closer to Tequila. “Why do you look so relieved?”

“Just didn’t want to think you were a jerk, sir,” Tequila said swiftly. Harry then stepped away and Tequila didn’t like that. “And.”
Harry stilled. “And?”

“I’m happy as a pig in shit, that you aren’t with Merlin. You look real good wet, sir.” Tequila gave his hat a tip and got back on the horse. “Ya,” he said and the horse bolted towards the stables.

Harry looked real good wet. Shit, he needed to talk to Ginger. This was getting confusing. Maybe Harry wasn’t the only one hesitating. He just needed to figure out why.
Ginger was reading some files at home when the phone rang. “Hello,” she said, not really paying attention. Champ needed some new contracts worked up for the local farmers and he always wanted some insane clauses in them that she needed to make sound less crazy.

“Hey, Ging, can you do me a favour?”

“I’m not a registered barrister in England,” she answered immediately. “But I probably know someone who knows someone. D&D?” She waited and he didn’t respond. “Tequila, what were you arrested for?” More silence. “Tequila did you kill one of your teachers?” She put the contract down and grabbed her laptop ready to do some fast research.

“Never mind,” he said and hung up.

“Shit,” she said and stared at her phone. She realized that Tequila had called from his own number. That meant not jail. She was the worst friend ever. “Shit, shit, shit,” she groaned and called him back. He didn’t pick up and she cursed more. She called a few more times and he still wouldn’t pick up. Tequila never gave her the cold shoulder. She honestly thought the human golden retriever was incapable of giving the cold shoulder.

_I’m sorry_, she texted. She sent along a selfie with a sad face.

Finally her phone rang again. “Tequila,” she said. “I’m so sorry. Sorry, sorry, super sorry,” she added quickly in case he decided to hang up.

“You can do a better sad face than that” he said.

“I’m so sorry, I was reading these new Champ contracts that he wants written up and wasn’t paying super close attention,” she explained, “It was automatic.”

Tequila was silent. “Why?”

“Why what?” she asked.

“Why was it automatic, Ginger? When was the last time I ended up in the drunk tank?” Tequila’s words were hard, biting. And sad. The sad came through under the anger.

She paused and thought about it. “Oh.”

“Yeah. 6 years, at least,” he said, frustrated. “And the last arrest was for beating the shit out of a guy who was harassing one of our tour guides.” Tequila grit his teeth. “Nice to know though, that even you don’t take me seriously. Not really.” It hurt so much, he knew he was a joke to a bunch of the people at Statesman, that they made fun of him a bit. But not Ginger, he thought, never her.

“Tequila,” she pleaded. “I am sorry.” Ginger could feel her eyes filling with tears, upset with how she was treating her friend, how she had secretly thought of him.

“Shit, maybe Harry is right. Maybe the name does have to go,” he said. “If even you can’t see how hard I’ve worked the last few years, Champ sure as hell won’t.” Tequila began to pace. “Fuck, Champ is never going to take my application seriously is he?”

Ginger cursed herself for making Tequila doubt himself like that. “He is, I swear,” she said. “He is
holding off on interviews even though HR wants him to start. He wants you, he's told me so.” She paused. “Tequila,” she began. She cleared her throat. “Jimmy, you called for a favour.”

Tequila was quiet for a bit and she prayed he wouldn’t hang up. “Yeah, do your google fu and look up Harry Hart for me?” he eventually asked.

“And you can’t google?” she asked even as she pulled her laptop back in front of herself. “Harry Hart?”

“Harrison Sidney Hart is his full name,” Tequila said. “And you know how long it would take me to read anything. Easier for you to sum up.”

“I know. You do know how much you’ll have to read for the job though, right?” Ginger pointed out.

“Yeah, I’ll do it when I have to,” he said. “Might go back to the specialist, look into those suggestions they gave.”

Ginger wiggled in her chair thrilled at that. “Okay, here we go…” She was quiet. “Oh my.”

“What? Secret serial killer?”

“He’s really handsome,” she said. “Look at that. Oh that tux fits him like a dream.” She sighed. “You get to stare at him for hours, everyday? Lucky.”

“He’s a tailor right?” Tequila asked. “I mean he said he was, but like how big a deal is he?”

“Owns his own shop,” she answered clicking on a webpage. “With an unnamed co-owner. Kingsman Tailors.” She looked at some of the pictures, quickly scanned some of the print. “Been in business about 89 years, he has been the co-owner and head tailor for 20.” She clicked a bit. “Beckham has shopped there. A bunch of actors, some people with titles. He has a degree in fashion design, did work at a few different fashion houses, before settling in at Kingsman. His little signature is he stitches in a K with a circle somewhere on every piece he makes. Often in a different spot. That’s sort of cute.”

“He’s sort of cute,” Tequila said.

“Jimmy,” Ginger said, very careful not to use the name Tequila. “Are you hot for teacher?”

“Shut up,” he said. “But any gossip about him?”

Ginger poked about some more, clicking various articles. “Rumours about him and some antique restorer, Hamish, but nothing ever concrete. Some pictures of him with famous people who have bought his suits. But nothing really of consequence.”

“He and Merlin aren’t together. They bicker like siblings.” Tequila dismissed it, thankful for what Harry had told him, and wondering how he could have even thought of them as a couple. “That’s the other guy doing the classes, the antique dude. He hasn’t taught much, mostly a foil for Harry. He gave a riding lesson and said his stuff mostly happens next week. Maybe I’ll learn how to fix a clock.”

“Well, from what I can see, if you are looking for some vacation fun, you aren’t climbing anyone’s fences,” Ginger said. “Also, maybe before you come home, buy some clothes from the man. His work is gorgeous, and you could use a couple good suits, if you get the job.”
“When I get the job, Ging,” Tequila said.

“I believe in you, Jimmy,” she answered.

“Do you?”

Her heart hurt that she put that doubt into his voice. “I really do, sweetie. I promise.”

“Thanks, Ging. Hey could you maybe get word around, to call me Jimmy when I get back?” he asked. “And I’m supposed to get some free clothes out of this shindig, but might see about getting a few more things too.”

“Definitely,” she agreed. “And that sounds like a good plan. Take care, keep me in the loop.”

“Will do, bye sugar,” Tequila said and hung up. He thought about how Ginger reacted. He decided to buckle down more on the classes here, take it as seriously as possible. He wanted to change things when he got back home.

And it was nice to have confirmation that Harry was single. He might turn the charm on a little bit more during the cocktail lesson tonight. But for now he’d go to the library maybe see if he could find something to read. He needed to practice.

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“Oi, Jamal,” Eggsy said into his phone. “How’s it going?” He was a little bored and couldn’t find anyone to bug, it seemed everyone was busy. He had seen King, but not like he was going to hang out with that man anytime soon. He didn’t even bother casing any place, just sort of wandered aimlessly, too many thoughts rolling around in his head.

“Allright, you learning how to address your betters?” Jamal joked. “They got you all gented up?”

“Not yet,” Eggsy said.

“How horrible is it?” Jamal could be heard moving about. “God, how large are the sticks lodged up those posh arses?”

“The bloke who runs the place, huge asshole. But the guys teaching the classes ain’t so bad. And shit you not Jamal, there is a cowboy here. An honest to god, American cowboy.”

“Wot, like John Wayne?” Jamal asked. “Pull the other one.”

“Swear down, his name is Tequila and he has the hat and the buckle and everything,” Eggsy said.

“Fuck off, no way.”

“Seriously mate, even heard him say that dog don’t hunt or some shit like that. But he’s solid. Like me, the other two here for the classes are posh and just apparently need to posh it up even more.” Eggsy flopped on his bed. “It’s boring, but not as boring as I thought.”

“That’s something,” Jamal said. He was quiet for a bit. “Hey, mate?”

Eggsy did not like that tone. “Yeah?”

“Dean’s been in a mood,” Jamal’s words weigh heavy.

“Yeah,” Jamal reassured him. “Your ma took Daisy to her sister’s to give her and Dean ‘alone’ time while you were gone too.”

“How high has Mum gotten?” Eggsy asked. Jamal was silent; there were a thousand words in that silence. “Shit. And Dean is feeling all powerful innit he?”

“He’s talking a lot about you taking your proper place when you get back,” Jamal sighed. “Said this is your test. Whether you can deliver. He has doubts. Already talking about how you’ll be on the streets and spreading word that no one is to help you when it happens.”

Eggsy nodded to himself. “Mum trying to stop it at all?”

“Says to go easy on you,” Jamal offered. “But -”

“But she’s trying to survive too,” Eggsy finished. “Right, well no worries mate, I got this covered.”

“Don’t care wot Dean says, you always got a place with me, yeah?” Jamal said. “Swear down.”

Eggsy smiled a bit. “Thanks, mate.” He hung up and decided to immediately go for a walk, this time with a purpose. He wound his way through the estate until he found rooms that had furniture covered in sheets. He moved carefully not wanting to disturb too much and grabbed a few things. Eggsy hurried back to his room. And of course ran into Merlin. Fuck the guy had a nose for when Eggsy was up to shit. “Hey, bruv,” Eggsy smiled. “Room was a little bare, wanted it all pretty like Tequila’s.”

“The ashtray is worthless, the little box is a replica. But the small vase is authentic Lalique. Worth 400 pounds,” Merlin said.

Eggsy had to pause. “For this tiny thing?” He looked at the delicate lines, the swirls of colour. It was beautiful sure, but he had been hoping it was worth 100, 400 was good.

“Aye, insane isn’t it?” Merlin gave him a look. “And think there is another one in the house worth triple that,” Merlin said. “Not that you care, you are just about the aesthetics for your room.”

“Riiiight,” Eggsy said. “Are you with the filth?”

“Nae, though I have consulted on some cases where things needed authentication,” Merlin said. “Why do you need to talk to an officer?” Merlin was sincere in the question.

“Fuck no!” Eggsy said. He carefully put the stuff on a side table. “Room look good enough anyways, who needs clutter right?” Eggsy walked away, aiming for casual, but he could feel Merlin staring at him. Shit, he wished he could figure the guy out, because right now he had no idea what to do about him. But he had a lead. Girly vase thingies were worth a fuckton of money. He just had to find the right one.
Eggsy had given on finding another vase and decided to go to the library. He settled in and was sitting all curled up in a chair, reading Agatha Christie. He did love this room. Tequila had been in there first but had flopped near Eggsy once Eggsy had hunkered down. Tequila was on the ground a book covering his face. Eggsy wondered if he had fallen asleep. He started to read aloud a little bit, because Christie was just so great spoken out, all those sharp words and clear details and he saw Tequila shift a little. He read a couple more pages. “You want me to go on?”

“Sure,” Tequila said. “Forgot my audible password and Ging is in meetings and not answering to tell me what it is.”

“Password recovery?”

“It goes to an email Ginger has access to because I always forget passwords,” Tequila said. “I was in the middle of a good book too.”

“What one?” Eggsy asked, curious what Tequila would find good.

“Checking out Margaret Atwood a little bit. Ginger really likes that show, the ladies walking around in red, so listening to some of hers.”

“Too depressing for me, sticking with the classics here.”

“That’s Christie you’re reading right?” Tequila asked.

“Yup,” Eggsy said and read a few more pages.

They heard the door open and Merlin came in. “Eggsy, Harry would like to see ye for a private lesson. He is one floor up, third door on the left.”

Tequila sat up and frowned a little at that. Eggsy was just confused. “Thought King said no private stuff for me.”

“Well, King doesn’t have to know about it,” Merlin grinned, thoroughly pleased they were getting one over on the old bastard. “And meeting ye privately is of desperate importance to Harry.”

Eggsy looked at Tequila who was very very still. “Nah, I am good here. Any lesson that Harry wants to give me, he can give my mate Tequila too.” He was not getting in the middle of that.

Merlin looked between them. “Of course, but Harry didn’t think that Tequila would be interested in this lesson. And I was going to give Tequila one of his platinum package private sessions with me now, before tonight’s cocktail socializing lesson.”

“Sure…” Eggsy got up slowly, still looking at Tequila. Tequila was trying not to look upset that Harry all of a sudden wanted private time with Eggsy, because that would be a crazy thing to be upset about.

Merlin was slow on the uptake, but not that slow. “It is honestly a lesson, and nothing untoward. Harry and I do nae switch affections or play about and I rather thought our flirtations were clear.” He stopped the smile from breaking out on his face at the way Tequila relaxed but Eggsy just looked confused.
“Our flirtations?” Eggsy asked. “No one’s been flirting with me.” He shivered at the look that Merlin gave him. “Have they?” He looked at Tequila for help who whistled and looked out the window.

“Right, I’ll just go see what Harry wants.” Eggsy hurried out of the room, confused and sure he just really fucked something up but he could not figure out what. Sure he had been staring at Merlin a lot. And spending time alone with him, but Merlin hadn’t flirted. He just gave that intense I will murder you all look, or the weird help stealing stuff. Eggsy felt an idea poking at the back of his mind that maybe that was flirting for the older man, but that would be insane. Larceny wasn’t romance. Probably. Huh, he thought as he jogged upstairs.

“So, Merlin what’s the lesson, more dancing? More riding, because have to say, pretty sure I know how to ride a fierce and strong creature,” Tequila joked. He cut off the laugh when Merlin just stared at him. It was a different intense look than what he gave Eggsy. That stare wanted to consume Eggsy, this stare was more I am assessing you and finding you wanting sort of stare. Merlin walked over and sat behind the desk in the library. Tequila swallowed, the guy was intimidating. “Merlin? What’s the lesson?”

Merlin spun in the chair and reached over and plucked a book of the shelf and tossed it to Tequila. “Read me three paragraphs aloud. Any three. Now,” he ordered.

Tequila looked at him and looked down at the book. “I can read. Charlie is just an asshole.”

“Good. Then read,” Merlin said. He leaned back in the chair and raised a brow. “Now,” he repeated.

Tequila opened the book and rested his finger mid page. He wouldn’t sweat, he read slowly, carefully and only stumbled once. He glared at Merlin. “So what was that supposed to teach me?”

“Nothing, but I needed to learn a little bit about ye.”

“And what did you learn?” Tequila challenged.

“James Russell, also known as Tequila. Distiller for Statesman, looking to be head distiller for the company. A degree in chemistry and an MBA as well. I googled you,” Merlin said. “And not found in that search, was that ye are dyslexic.”

Tequila went over and put the book on the table and gave him a nod. “Nice talking to you, Merlin.” He started to walk out of the room sure the man was judging him.

“Ye will have to make presentations and speeches. Read reports. A lot of paperwork.” Merlin began to play with a paperweight. “Want to learn some tricks?”

Tequila paused. “I have tricks. Tricks got me through school.”

Merlin stood up. “I am really good at memorizing things. Photographic memories are bullshit, but you can train yourself to remember a great deal. I take apart a great many machines and can put them back together because the image in my head of what I’ve done. I have memorized twenty minutes speeches. Would ye like to learn?”

Tequila thought of everything Champ had to do for the job and he thought about what he had seen the former head distiller do, from mucking out barrels to reading crop and marketing reports. “How is this a gentleman’s lesson?”

“Because the gentleman before me wants to learn,” Merlin said.

“I’m lots of things, ain’t no gentleman by your standards.”
“Harry sees potential in you. That and your arse,” Merlin grinned. “So let us talk about how ye will handle the work that will be put on your table.”

Tequila sat down. “Okay, then. Let’s get this going.” Tequila would think about that off hand comment about Harry checking him out later. He had told Ginger he was thinking about going back to the specialists; maybe Merlin was the better option.

Harry had several boards set up in the room he had taken over. He had thought about using the room they had been using for instruction, but the fact of the matter was that Chester was likely to look for him there, and he didn’t want his uncle noticing this. The man wouldn’t approve of what Harry was thinking of doing and since the man had controlling ownership of the shop, he could say no. But if he got Eggsy entrenched into the shop, Chester was unlikely to bitch about it. Harry stared at the boards and a paced a little.

“Harry?” Eggsy asked a little nervous as he poked his head through the door.

“Eggsy, excellent, though of course a gentleman always knocks on a closed door,” Harry said turning to him. “Care for a private lesson?”

“Only knock when casing a place,” Eggsy said unthinkingly. He winced and waited for Harry to react, but the man just gave him a bland stare. Eggsy decided to just forge ahead. “King made it pretty clear, not supposed to be anything special for me.” Eggsy stuffed his hands in his pockets. “You going to get in trouble?”

“He can try, but technically this is my break time, as it is yours. We are just two men having a conversation.” Harry smiled a little. “You have an incredible eye.”

“Last I checked I had two of them.” Eggsy felt out of sorts. He had a feeling, in the pit of his stomach that this was an important moment. He had had that feeling a few times before. Sometimes it was good, sometimes not, but it always changed things.

Harry moved beside one of his displays. “How many different shades of black do you see on the board?” Harry asked.

“It’s all black innit?” Eggsy asked. “Really look.”

Eggsy sighed and looked. “Six different shades there.”

“Excellent,” Harry said. “Come over to this board.”

“What’s going on Harry?” Eggsy asked. “What I am learning here?”

“Nothing at the moment. I am the one learning right now.” Harry gestured, “On this board, pair up the colours.”

“How you want them organized?” Eggsy stared at the mix, there were a couple plaids, some neutral solids, a few bolder things.

“Pair them to look good together.” Harry stepped back. “Take your time, make 6 matches.” there were about 17 swatches for Eggsy to choose from. “Don’t think what I want. Just think what you
Eggsy nodded and moved the swatches around. He would settle and then shake his head and move them about again. Finally he had six sets and the leftovers thrown on the table. “There?”

“Interesting,” Harry said. “You actually used the orange.”

“Sure,” Eggsy said. “It’s great.”

“It’s bold,” Harry commented.

Eggsy crossed his arms. “What’s wrong with bold?” Harry had told him to make the choices he wanted and he had done so. If Harry didn’t like that, he could just fuck right off.

“Not a damn thing,” Harry said and grinned at Eggsy, very pleased. “Walk me through your choices.”

Eggsy started slowly but realized that Harry wasn’t judging him, but honestly listening. They talked and occasionally argued about the matches and it was lively and sincere and Eggsy realized Harry was passionate about this. He wasn’t used to being listened to. Sure his mates listened to him but that were different. This was someone actually listening to his opinion that wasn’t footie or pints or which girl was prettiest at the bar that night. He realized that Harry was honestly treating him like an equal and it floored him. Thirty minutes had passed and they finally quieted, Eggsy agreeing with one of Harry’s changes.

Harry’s expression was fond, hopeful. “Do you want to learn?” he asked Eggsy.

“Learn what? The colour wheel?”

“To become a dresser, a stylist?”

“A wot?” Eggsy drew a blank.

“A dresser. People come into the shop not just to have me make them suits, trousers, shirts. Sometimes they need advice. What to buy in terms of ties, socks, casual wear. They have no idea what looks good or what goes together. You could tell them what looks good.”

“That’s not a real job,” Eggsy said. “Not outside reality tv buy the mum not mum jeans shows.”

“It is actually a real job, though it never involves humiliating our clients. People would pay you a great deal of money to tell them what to wear, how to present themselves. You would create portfolios, looks for some very important people.”

Eggsy looked down at his track suit. “Oh yeah, people would listen to me.”

“They would,” Harry replied. “I see a young man with a great deal of potential. You are mouthy and sarcastic, but charming, and easily make conversation and can put people at ease. Look how you are with Tequila. And as much as I deplore track suits in general, all your clothes suit your colouring and fit well. Let me guess, your friends ask you what to wear when they go out on a date, don’t they?”

“Sure, you help a bruv out,” Eggsy dismissed. “Not like you make a job out of it. My gran dyed hair in the kitchen, had all these colour wheels and shit, we played matching games. It was silly. You don’t make a career of a game your gran made up so you didn’t keel over from boredom.”

“You do if I say you can. I say we can get my clients to pay you a minimum of 50 pounds an hour to
shop for them, outfit them beyond the suits I create.” Harry smiled sharply, “Interested?”

Desperately, Eggsy thought. That was the type of money he could only dream of, and working with Harry? That could be all sorts of cool. “Yeah…maybe?” Eggsy said casually. “What would I need to do?”

“Pass a few more tests for me first. One of which is dressing Merlin. A task I would happily hand over to someone else. Tell me Mr. Unwin what would you like to see him in?”

“Starkers,” Eggsy said without thinking. Oh god, he and Merlin had been flirting the last few days, he realized.

Harry nodded a bit. “Perhaps we think about trousers and jumpers?”

“Yes,” Eggsy groaned. He was messed up if he was turned on by resting murder face and help committing grand larceny.

“No, I’ll leave that to Merlin. My interests lay elsewhere.”

“Want to get Tequila out of that belt buckle do you?” Eggsy grinned at him.

“That is another excellent place to start. As you were there, you know I’ve already made suggestions for Tequila’s wardrobe. What else do you think should be done?”

“I dunno.”

“Yes. You do, or you will with some guidance. Let’s begin.” Harry sat down with a notebook and Eggsy sat with him and they built a wardrobe plan for Tequila for over an hour and Eggsy made finger guns at Harry when Harry asked him to keep the plans secret. He knew when a bloke was planning a surprise. He never ruined people’s surprises.

Eggsy stood up. “You’d actually trust me in your shop?” Eggsy asked. He damn well knew that Merlin would have told Harry his suspicions.

Harry looked at Eggsy with a small, soft smile on his face. “Eggsy, the gentleman that will be leaving here in just over a week is absolutely a man I would trust in my shop. Go shower and change, cocktail lessons aren’t too far away, and I have to prep.”

Eggsy gave him a nod and headed on out. When he got back to his room, on his night table was that Lalique vase and a couple other things that hadn’t been there before that he was sure weren’t fakes. He stared at the stuff and the hopeful feeling he had left Harry with, crashed at his feet. He touched the vase, wanting to leave it there, put it out in the hall.

He wrapped the items up carefully and put them in his bag.
Chapter 15

Percival was setting up the bar to Harry’s specifications. The man was incredibly particular about his bar set up and Percival lined up the glasses and bottles, checked the ice, gave the surface another wipe. He nodded pleased with the look. There was a knock on the door. “Come in,” he said. He smiled at the man. “Hello, Tequila,” he said. “You dressed up.”

Tequila fussed with his tie a little. “Well, cocktails, right? Seemed worth a bit more gussying up.” It was just a nicer shirt, with tie, and his best jeans, but it was the most he had done since arriving. He had even styled his hair a bit. “You mixing up the cocktails, Percy?”

Percival felt his lips twitch and bit back the smirk. “I will assist yes. Harry has very specific… opinions on certain drinks. I will offer different opinions.”

“Can you hook me up?” Tequila asked as he moved closer to the bar. “Don’t suppose I can get away with just a beer tonight.”

“I am afraid that beer is not on the menu for this evening,” Percival said. “But if a gentleman were to find himself down in the kitchens later, the cook has a few bottles of Harp in the fridge that all are welcome to.” He let a small smile slip. “As for hooking you up, I think you are moving forward just fine on your own with Harry, but if it helps his bedroom is on the same floor as yours down the other end of the hall, the second door after the three paneled window.”

Tequila just stared at him. “I did mean just a drink.”

“Of course, sir, my apologies,” Percival said with a genteel tip of his head. “Hang out with Harry enough you do become quite brazen at times. One might even dare say cheeky.”

Tequila snorted a bit. “I like you Percy. God it must suck working for King.”

“I am temporary help,” Percival said.

“Wait…really?” Tequila was surprised.

“Hmmm,” Percival said. He checked on a few things. “He doesn’t like the expense and hires from a butler service.”

“But Roxy said she came here to spend time with you,” Tequila was confused.

“I am friends with Harry and Merlin and we are all busy men. I take the job, we have time to be together. I get some time with my niece. And Chester pays a fortune to my company to have the founder’s services,” Percival leaned in. “I charge him 10% more than other people.” Percival winked.

“Y’all are a weird bunch.”

“Yes and no,” Percival said. He looked to the door. “Harry, one of your students arrived before you. Tsk, tsk.”

“You had it well in hand I am sure,” Harry said. He was fussing with his shirt cuff a little bit and then looked up. “Tequila,” he said. He tilted his head a little. “You look…”

Tequila smoothed his tie down. “Silly by your standards I bet.”

“You look very handsome,” Harry said. “The skinny tie works.”
“Yeah?” Tequila shouldn’t be so damn pleased by that. “How the fuck long are your legs?” he blurted out, staring at the plaid that seemed to go on forever. Also he realized it was a lot ballsier look that he would have expected Harry to wear, the blue velvet jacket, the plaid slacks. “Damn, Harry,” Tequila said.

Harry felt a little heat rise to his cheeks at that. “You are too kind,” he said and went over to the bar to check the set up.

“Peacock,” Percival coughed.

Harry elbowed him subtly. Merlin arrived shortly thereafter, after having made the exotic change in dress from a green jumper to a black one. “I put out a suit for you,” Harry said, in his Merlin is an exasperating friend and I will not throttle him voice.

“You did?” Merlin looked around the room, like he expected to see a suit.

“On your bed?” Harry said.

“Oh, right, I found this old -”

“No,” Harry said swiftly. “No finishing that sentence. Because that means travesties to my work and I don’t have any gin in me yet.”

Eggsy and Roxy were in next, Roxy in a classic little black dress, and Eggsy in a black and gold track suit. Charlie was the last to arrive and a navy suit, this one perfectly tailored. Harry smiled at them all. “Excellent, you all dressed up for this.”

“You told us too,” Roxy pointed out.

“Indeed,” Harry agreed. “A gentleman needs to be handle cocktail hour from two different aspects. One, they should be able to make a handful of basic cocktails, and two, they need to be able to make cocktail hour small talk, and drink carefully. A gentleman never becomes intoxicated during cocktail hour. And yes, cocktail hour at a party should be an hour, though it can go to ninety minutes.” He nodded and Percival put trays up on the bar, one for each student. Harry moved behind the bar with him. “Now, who would like to learn how to make a martini?”

“Hell yes,” Eggsy said and moved forward. He picked the tray on the end and looked at everything on it. Poked about at the different objects. The others all lined up in front of a tray. Merlin went around the bar, poured himself a scotch and went to sit down.

“Now there are several variations on the martini and some are just horrifying cocktails that have nothing to do with a martini,” Harry said. He put some ice in a martini glass and gestured everyone following suit. Tequila did it with his fingers instead of the tongs and licked the wet off the fingers staring at Harry the whole time. Percival had to nudge Harry to keep him going. “Yes, well,” Harry coughed. “Really a martini should only be a couple ingredients. And not at all made like a Bond movie. If you make a martini with vodka, you will murder my soul.” Harry explained how to make a martini and they all followed suit and then when it was done took a sip.

“Harry, wasn’t this just a fancy arse way to pour a glass of gin?” Eggsy asked. “Aren’t we actually supposed to put some of the vermouth in?”

“You are,” Percival said firmly. Merlin snorted in his corner and Harry looked affronted. “Let us begin again.” Percival took them through an alternate martini and then talked about a couple other simple cocktails. They practiced for about 30 minutes only taking small sips of their drinks. “Now then, let me guess your poison and I will make you a cocktail so that you may work on the
socializing aspect.” Percival looked at the four students. “Roxy, a sidecar. Charlie, a dirty martini. Eggys…a gimlet. And Tequila -”

“Please don’t say tequila unrise,” Tequila begged.

“A rob roy,” Percival replied. He mixed up the drinks for everyone and poured Merlin another scotch and Harry more gin. He pulled out a bottle of water for himself and stepped back a little, removing himself from focus.

“Move about with your drink,” Harry said. “Tonight we are a small group to practice. Talk to each other.” Harry smiled. “Cocktail conversation should never be political. It makes for poor digestion at the end of the hour. Likewise unless it is specifically a work cocktail party, avoid too many job details. Talk of inane things, a book you read recently, your thoughts on Adele’s latest album, whether the Cursed Child was worth all the hype. A museum exhibit you are excited about. And if none of this interests you, just ask questions of the person you are with. People do love to talk about themselves. Let them.”

Harry moved over to Charlie and they talked about a West End play for a few minute before he continued to move about the room and talk about making small talk. He made his way to Merlin in the corner. “A good host makes sure everyone is occupied. If someone sits in the corner and plays on their phone you are doing a poor job.” All the eyes in the room went to Merlin.

He didn’t look up from his phone. “Asshole, Arsenal is playing tonight and I had tickets. Let me read my highlights and then I’ll make small talk.”

Harry huffed loudly and Merlin just flipped him off. “And if you have a guest who is a boor, well feel free to water down their drink.” Everyone laughed and Harry made sure to work the room, talking to everyone, making them talk to each other, occasionally throwing tidbits out. “Two cocktails is sufficient. Especially if you plan to have wine with dinner.” He went over to the bar and Percival made him a drink and looked at Tequila and Harry and then back again. Harry frowned. “Stop it,” he whispered.

“Stop what? I just am the butler,” Percival commented.

“I will show Roxy those photos from the fancy dress party three years ago,” Harry warned. Percival mimed zipping his mouth shut. But Harry went over to Tequila. “Tequila, how are you doing?”

“Right as rain, Harry. Right as rain.” Tequila grinned at him. “You know, I can’t help but admire that painting,” he said and pointed his cocktail at it. “A Turner?”

“Well spotted,” Harry said. “You like Turner?”

“Not to my taste, dated an art major in university for a time, some of it stuck,” Tequila said. “I’m going to have a little time in London. Perhaps there is a museum that you could recommend to me?” Tequila looked Harry up and down slowly. “I like elegant things, that have a bit of boldness to them. Finding that appealing more and more to me.”

Harry took a sip of his drink. “I can think of a couple options, though they may not be as bold as you like.”

“Oh, how so?” Tequila shifted himself a little bit and it blocked out the others from Harry’s sight lines.

“There are…the museums would like to be bold but worry that the cost of admission might make things difficult.” Harry cursed himself. He was dreadful with metaphors. “Museums can’t really go to
you can they? You have to go to them.”

Tequila nodded. “And do the museums want to be gone to?” his voice was low, husky.

Harry felt himself leaning into the younger man. He swallowed and decided to leap. “They very much want to be gone to,” he said. “Indeed they would desperately await your arrival.” He would have leaned forward even more but Charlie was now beside them getting a second cocktail.

“Well thank you, sir, that was a mighty enlightening analysis of Turner’s work. I do appreciate the insight,” Tequila said and left Harry to go talk to Roxy. Harry put down his cocktail and took a few breaths. He waved off Percival’s concern when the man looked ready to approach.

“Now then, everyone, I think it is time for us to proceed to dinner. Let’s see how much you remember from the silverware lesson,” Harry said. “And Merlin no phone at the table.”

“But the score is bloody tied,” Merlin snarled.

“Jesus, Harry, have a heart,” Eggsy said, huddled close to Merlin where they were watching the game on Merlin’s phone, Eggsy peering over Merlin's shoulder keeping them close.

Harry snapped his finger and Merlin turned it off and handed it to Harry. “Good,” Harry said. “Eggsy do I have to confiscate yours as well?”

“No,” Eggsy said. “I just need to…go take a p…I need to be excused for a minute.” He gave Merlin a pointed look.

“Aye,” Merlin agreed swiftly. “Scotch went right through me, got to take a leak.” They both hurried out of the room, Eggsy already pulling up the match on his phone.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose. “Charlie, please escort Roxy to the dining room.” Charlie nodded and held out his arm. Roxy took it with a very polite smile.

“Going to escort me, sir?” Tequila asked.

“No, but I will walk with you?” Harry replied.

“That sounds good to me,” Tequila agreed and the two left the room.

Percival cleaned up the cocktail ware and then went to make sure that Harry and Merlin’s room were stocked with necessary supplies. He hoped the dams would break soon, the sexual tension was getting thick and rather ridiculous.
“Tequila,” Harry said when he answered the knock at his door. “Problem?” He would not let his eyes drift to the strip of skin on Tequila’s chest. He had hoped that Tequila would stop by his room before he realized that he had never told Tequila which room was his. When it past 10pm he figured that nothing was happening and that they really had been talking about museums.

“You really hate calling me that, don’t you?” Tequila leaned against his door frame. “You like really hate it.”

“It is appalling,” Harry answered. “It is a nickname from university that should have been shed long ago.”

“Lot older than that, my Daddy gave it to me,” Tequila replied. “But thinking you may be right.”

“Really?” Harry was a little surprised at both details.

“Maybe we could talk about that?” Tequila held up a decanter and a couple glasses he had liberated from the bar a little bit ago. “I could really use your input, teach.”

“No,” Harry said shortly. His hand tightened on his door knob before he forced his fingers to relax. Tequila froze. He was sure he had been right about the heat about them, that they had been flirting. They had been pretty heavy during that cocktail hour and then during dinner they didn’t stop staring at each other. After, Eggsy had made a crack about them needing to fuck it out of their system. Like he was one to talk with whatever weird thing he had going on with Merlin and whatever had happened after cocktails and the 30 minutes it took them to come back to the dinner table. And Harry watched him, Tequila was sure of it, had felt that gaze on him for days. Tequila was sure they were on the same page here.

But a gentleman understood what no meant. Tequila didn’t need any lessons on that.

“Sorry to bother you, sir,” Tequila said and straightened up.

“Harry,” Harry said and put a hand on Tequila’s arm. “Not ‘teach’ or sir, or anything else. Harry or you can walk away. You’ve used it occasionally. It is all you use here, now.”

“Because you don’t like role play,” Tequila joked.

“In or out?” Harry asked and moved to the side to make room for Tequila.

“In, definitely in.” Tequila stepped into the room and looked around. “This doesn’t look like a guest space.”

“No, this is my room.” Harry looked around it. “Uncle Chester has messed with the house a great deal, but wants me here for the classes enough that he knows better than to touch my space.” Harry didn’t say that Chester wanted to play on Harry’s nostalgia and attachment. Too much Chester talk right now would ruin the mood anyways.

“It’s a nice space. The butterflies are...interesting.” Tequila went to the small table beside the chair and poured them both a drink. He held out his glass. “To gentlemanly behaviour.”

Harry clinked his carefully but smiled. “Oh I don’t think we are too worried about being gentlemen
right now, are we?”

Tequila smiled a bit. “Figured you the sort who asked about a safe word every five seconds.”

“One, I don’t do that sort of play much at all and definitely not on a first fuck, and two, if it makes you feel better I will be very polite when I ask you to put your dick in my ass.” Harry took a sip of the port that Tequila had brought up. He enjoyed the way that the man flustered at that. He was in his thirties, a little younger than what Harry usually enjoyed, but he had a sharp wit under all that surface dumb as a post country bumpkin attitude. And lord almighty the man was built. All in all it would be a nice diversion for them both. “Unless of course that is not your preference. But I will say, I am in the mood to be fucked so, if that doesn’t interest you, I am afraid we are looking at blow jobs. I have no gag reflex if that helps your decision any.”

“Fuck you move fast,” Tequila was a little stunned. “I thought you’d be all uptight and we’d have to dance a little more around this. Make that small talk we’ve been practicing.”

“If you like,” Harry agreed. He put his drink down and began to strip out of his clothes. He had switched from the blue velvet jacket to a cardigan and removed his tie. So he stripped off the cardigan and then his shirt. Slowly, putting on a bit of a show. “Are you enjoying the estate?”

Tequila drank half his glass and winced at the sweet after dinner drink. It was vile. “Yeah, the horses are nice,” he said. Harry was fit, not perfect but in really good shape for his age. Tequila had done just enough classes to keep that thought to himself. He looked at the dip in Harry’s sternum. He wanted to press his fingers against it. Instead he put the glass down and took off his own shirt. “I admit, I didn’t exactly come prepared. I was kicked out of boy scouts.”

“Jimmy,” Tequila suggested. He wanted Harry to think of him seriously, and he would never do it calling him Tequila.

“James,” Harry said. “You would look so very delightful in a three piece suit.”

“Figured that would make me look like I was playing dress up.” Tequila liked the patterns that Harry was drawing on his stomach. His jeans were starting to get tight.

“No, for fancy dress, I would put you in very little. Perhaps a centurion,” Harry mused. “But a navy…no grey three piece, a bit of a nub in the texture, one of Merlin’s pocket watches for an affectation. Really you must let me outfit you before you leave England.”

Tequila almost made a comment about how he had paid for that, but knew that would get him kicked out in an instant and he wouldn’t regain this chance again. “That really get you off?” Tequila asked instead. He ran his fingers through Harry’s hair, the low light catching the very few greys and making them shine.

“No, but the idea of you in your pants, in front of a large mirror and me with a measuring tape, does
immensely please me,” Harry said.

“I’m in my pants right now,” Tequila pointed out.

Harry leaned in and kissed his stomach. His hands undid the absurd belt buckle Tequila had on and slowly popped each hole of the button flies open. He slid his hands around the waistband and pushed the denim down. They were tight enough, Harry had to work them over hips and ass until they were mid thigh and fell on their own. “No, now you are in your pants.”

“Both speaking English, but so many differences.” Tequila toed off his shoes and stepped out of the jeans.

“Almost wish you had your cowboy hat right now,” Harry muttered.

“Well, I’ll be happy to oblige you next time,” Tequila said. He paused. “Assuming there is a next time.”

“You are here for just over another week. I do intend to shag you a great deal while you are available to me,” Harry said. “If that is amenable to your desires, of course.”

“See, gentleman,” Tequila teased. He bit his tongue when Harry yanked his boxers down and slid to the his knees. Harry had Tequila’s barely hard cock in his mouth on his next breath. Harry sank down on Tequila’s cock and pulled back. He gripped Tequila’s thighs with his fingers and worked Tequila until the man was hard. It took hardly any time. “Fuck, Harry.” he whispered. He had had blow jobs before, but this was different. Jesus this was different. He bent a little and put his arms under Harry and pulled him up and picked him up, throwing him on the bed.

Harry undid his own small and tasteful belt buckle and found his hands swatted away. “James,” he said.

“Let me unwrap the pretty English package,” Tequila said and pulled Harry’s plaid trousers off. He tossed them off the bed and saw Harry’s face. If he were to think about it, he’d say that’s when it changed from vacation fuck to something else entirely, when Harry looked pained at his trousers lying on the floor. Tequila got off the bed, picked up the trousers and lay them carefully over the back of a chair. “Better?”

“Yes, thank you, James, for reminding me that I am an old fussbudget.” Harry put an arm over his eyes. It had been going so well. He wish he didn’t care about his clothes, like Merlin. But he had spent a few hours on those trousers and they made him look good. He felt the bed dip and was a bit surprised. He refused to look though. He felt a gentle kiss on his lips.

“My boss is an old fussbudget. You are one classy sumbitch,” Tequila said. He kissed Harry again, on the lips and then the arm that covered his eyes. He decided to satisfy his earlier desire and pressed his fingers into that dip in Harry’s chest. He then dropped a kiss there as well. “You smell nice.”

“A gentleman is only odorous after hard labour, or his time in the gym, both of which should be solved as quickly as possible with a shower.” Harry sighed. “I really am horrible at dirty talk.”

Tequila laughed against his chest a little bit. “Think it is charming.”

“Well thank you.” Harry finally moved his arm. “You are quite attractive you know.”

“Been said a time or two.” Tequila nuzzled that spot. He could so easily grow obsessed with that spot. “But you have all that class and manner about you and are beautiful. Surprised you aren’t taken.”
“Well, at this moment I am taken. Or at least, I’m hoping I will be soon?” Harry looked at him. Waited.

“Yeah,” Tequila agreed. He hadn’t done this a lot, had spent a lot more time in bed with women than men, but it wasn’t his first rodeo. It was almost a shame. Harry seemed like the sort to make a first time amazing. “Lube?”

Harry reached to the table and pulled out a bottle and a condom. He passed them to Tequila. “Do you want to, or me?”

Tequila paused and thought. The show of Harry opening himself up would be a mighty fine sight, but he also wanted to touch the man. “I’ll do it,” Tequila finally decided. He slid Harry’s briefs off and looked at the man. He was half hard, it was nice as dicks went. He pushed Harry’s legs open a little bit more and moved the lube closer. He wrapped his fingers around Harry. His skin looked so tan against Harry’s paleness. He slid his hand up and down a little until Harry was all the way hard and moving on the bed, restless. Tequila slicked up a finger and pressed it against Harry. He watched Harry arch to him, trying to get him to push into him. “Fuck you really do like this don’t you?”

“I very much do, and you have very fingers that should feel good inside me, thick, blunt tips,” Harry was almost purring the words.

“Let’s find out,” Tequila answered and pushed a finger in just a little bit. It was always so different from girls, the feel of it, it took him a minute to adjust to it as well. He slide his finger all the way in. Harry cursed and he smiled at that. There was something awesome about the proper man swearing like that. He wondered just how much he could get Harry to say. He moved the finger in and out a little and decided to show Harry that his sucking cock skills weren’t too shabby either. He began to lick at Harry’s cock as he pushed a second finger in. Harry couldn’t stay still on the bed, and Tequila was enjoying the way he was writhing. He worked Harry open, grazed at his prostate and couldn’t deep throat but could do a credible job. He pulled off of Harry’s cock. “How you doing?”

“More,” was all Harry said and Tequila added more lube and pushed a third finger in. He was prepping the guy as fast as he reasonably could because goddamn did he want to properly be in that heat. He pulled his fingers out of Harry and sat up. He reached for the condom and gave himself a quick few strokes to get him back to all the way hard. He made sure it was a bit of a show, enjoying the intensity of Harry’s stare.

“We’ll have to have you fuck my face before you leave,” Harry said staring at him. “I want to choke on that thick cock of yours.”

“You sure you ain’t good at dirty talk?” Tequila said hoarsely, incredibly turned on by the idea. He opened the condom and rolled it on.

“On the contrary, I am deplorable at dirty talk, but I am excellent as stating facts.” Harry tugged Tequila close and kissed him hard. “And the fact is, I want your dick in me whichever way I can get it.”

“Right,” Tequila bit at his throat a little bit and moved Harry’s hips to a slightly better angle. He lined himself up and pushed carefully into Harry. He always worried a little about doing this, terrified he’d hurt his partner. But Harry gave a little huff and wrapped his legs around Tequila and pulled in hard, pushing the man all the way into him.

“Not my first cricket match, Tequila,” Harry said.

“Wait, that’s what you say over here?” Tequila looked down at him in shock.
“No, now fuck me cowboy.”

“You got it Harry,” Tequila agreed and began to push in and out of Harry. It was a little awkward at first, he wasn’t much used to doing this in a comfortable bed, but he got himself settled and found himself sinking into Harry just a little more. The way Harry was reacting, he figured meant he had found a good angle. He moved his hips and just watched the man. “You’re gorgeous,” Tequila whispered.

“You are stupidly fit,” Harry answered and pushed his hips up to meet Tequila’s thrusts. “And you have a lovely smile.”

“My smile is what you are focused on right now?” Tequila asked as he slammed in deep.

“Well, I can see it right now, and it is frightfully beautiful.” Harry moaned the last word. “But yes, I will be quiet about your attractiveness and focus on the rogering happening.” Harry closed his eyes and let himself sink into the sensations coursing through him.

“You said rogering,” Tequila laughed breathlessly. “Fuck, man, you are great.” He kissed Harry finding the man incredibly adorable. They were silent then except for moans and breathless curses, and an occasional little bit of direction from Harry. Tequila kept them close, liking the feel of it, the kissing and all possible skin touching each other. He picked up the pace a little bit and could feel that pressure building in his spine. “Harry, you close?”

Harry nodded, eyes still closed. He put his hand between them and began to stroke himself and Tequila lifted himself up in a push up to be able to watch. And fuck watching those long fingers stroke that dick was enough to tip Tequila over and a couple more thrusts of his hips, he went rigid coming. Harry was only a little bit behind him.

“Harry,” Tequila whispered.

“James,” Harry replied and finally opened his eyes. He realized that Tequila was holding himself up easily in a push up and had been doing so for a few minutes. “How doesn’t that hurt?”

“I work out a lot,” Tequila said. “Moving bourbon barrels is good exercise.” He lowered himself slowly resting on Harry and giving him several small kisses. He pulled out of the man and took the condom off. “Uh…”

“Rubbish bin by the chair,” Harry said.

“Thanks,” Tequila got up and threw it away. He turned back and stared at Harry. He was so different than the guys Tequila had been with in the past. No way was he more than a way to pass time for a week for Harry. Not that Tequila wanted more than that from Harry anyways. “I should probably go, right?”

“James, a gentleman cuddles for at least fifteen minutes before disappearing back to his room,” Harry said. He grabbed a tissue from the night table and cleaned himself up a little. Tequila came over and grabbed them to also throw out. “Now please return to prove to me that my lessons aren’t completely in vain.” Harry shifted over to make room on the bed.

Tequila went back and pressed another kiss to that dip in Harry’s chest. They snuggled until Harry drifted off and Tequila got quietly dressed and went back to his room.
“Harry, good,” Chester said, finding Harry in the kitchen chatting with Percival. “We need to have a meeting. My office, please,” he said and left.

Percival gave Harry a look. “You look too happy,” he said. “He’s going to cause trouble.”

“We always have a meeting one week into the classes,” Harry dismissed.

“One week isn’t until tomorrow, and you look like you got laid,” Percival replied.

“To you, who know what sex is yes, to him? He wouldn’t remember what that looks like,” Harry said. But he took a few deep breaths and tamped down the happy feelings he was having. “Better?”

Percival nodded. “You know, Harry, you might need to rethink things, if the family you have left causes you to bury your feelings like this. He should be happy for you.”

“Over a fling?” Harry said. He ignored the look Percival gave him. “I have to do this.”

“You think you have to, it doesn’t mean you do,” he said quietly. A bell on the wall rang. “Charlie summons me.” He gave Harry’s shoulder a squeeze and the two men parted. Harry walked slowly to his uncle’s office. It had once been in father’s but there was little left of that man. Chester filled the space thoroughly and with no where near as much class as his father had.

“Uncle Chester, time for the weekly meeting?” Harry asked. “Little early, but I am happy to touch base with you.”

“I have some concerns about how this session is going,” Chester said. “Please, Harry take a seat.”

Harry sat and they just watched each other for a moment. Harry would not be the one to break first.
Chester smiled. “Mr. Heskith doesn’t quite feel like his is getting his money’s worth.”

“Well, he does seem determined to not listen to us,” Harry commented. “He is more interested in scoring points off our contest winner than actually bettering himself.”

“He paid the full platinum package, Harry and should be receiving all those benefits,” Chester said. “You are paying more attention to the others.”

“Two of whom paid equal amounts to Mr. Heskith, and another who is a contest winner and can provide excellent publicity.” Harry looked at him. “I assume that is why you offered up the prize, for how good it makes you look.”

“One of the owners of the magazine is an old friend. I owed him, this covered my debt.”

“That’s why you dislike Eggsy so much,” Harry realized. “You never do like to make good,” there was an edge in his voice.

“Are you suggesting that I haven’t made good for you?” Chester leaned back in his chair.

“I have the money to buy 10% of the store from you. I have for over a year,” Harry said. “And you won’t even talk about it.”

“You should use the money to update the furnishing in the store, how much do I interfere really? A silent partner.”

“A silent partner who owns enough to veto the major changes I have wanted to make. Who owns
enough that when you ‘ask’ me to do these classes I don’t feel like I can say no.” Harry looked at him. “I love teaching these classes, but I hate that you have it so that I can’t feel like I’m choosing to be here, in my home.”

“My home,” Chester said softly. “Be nicer to Charlie, and cooler to the American and the chav.” Chester picked up his phone. “That will be all, thank you Harry.”

“Mother would be so disappointed in you,” Harry said as he stood.

“Well, it’s a good thing she can’t see me then.” Chester smiled.

Harry walked out and made his way down to the pond. He didn’t have long to wait until Merlin and Percival were flanking him. Merlin wrapped an arm around his shoulder. “I could kill him,” Merlin said. “I think I could do it.”

“When I had to put my dog down, you sobbed for days,” Harry pointed out. “My dog, not even yours.”

“I was there the day ye adopted Mr. Pickle. And he had an old soul in that tiny body. Your uncle sold his a long time ago. I could stab him with a screwdriver.”

“Ice pick,” Percival said. “If it worked for Sharon Stone in that rather icky film, I could pull it off.”

Harry laughed a little. And then laughed some more. “Oh god, I shagged a cowboy, and my uncle is a cliched villain, all he is missing is a twirling mustache.” Harry couldn’t stop laughing. He lost his breath and it just wouldn’t end. “Who the fuck am I right now?”

“Our friend,” Merlin said. “An incredible tailor, and a gentleman to his core.

“We have to be nicer to Charlie and meaner to Eggsy.”

“I love ye Harry, but that I cannae do,” Merlin said.

“I know,” Harry said. “You are falling for the thug.”

“And you the American,” Merlin answered back.

“God bless being single and loving it,” Percival said. “Hang your uncle, Harry. Charlie is just whining because he isn’t the centre of the world. You aren’t worse to him than any other ass who has come through the program.” Percival smiled. “Besides if he did so poorly at learning in week one, think how fun week two is going to be.” Percival’s grin was wicked.

Merlin grinned back. “Aye, this should be a fun week.”

Harry nodded and thought about how Tequila had felt against him. The man’s skin was so warm, so firm. Fuck his uncle. The worst that he could do was ruin Harry’s future, and at this moment, he couldn’t bring himself to care. He stood up and wiped the grass from his trousers. “We have work to do,” he said. The three men went back into the house. Merlin and Percival exchanged a look behind Harry’s back, an unspoken promise to protect Harry from Chester’s machinations.

Percival was switching the man’s tea from English to Irish breakfast. Merlin was pointing out to Eggsy a few more things that Chester needed to be relieved of.

Harry just wanted to go see Tequila, see if the man regretted the night before. He really hoped not. He wanted a repeat and soon.
Harry stood behind Charlie. “Arms up please,” he said. Charlie raised his arms and Harry adjusted them. He measured and made notations. “Now then what are you looking for?” Harry asked.

Charlie smiled a little. “A blazer,” he offered and described exactly what he wanted. It would look dreadful on him.

“If I may suggest,” Harry began.

“No, this is what I want and I want you to make it look good,” Charlie smirked at him.

“Only a child seeks pathetic revenge like this. A gentleman never cuts off his nose to spite his face,” Harry looked at him and put the measuring tape down. “You really are a fool.”

“I thought King was going to have a talk with you,” Charlie said. He was frowning, displeased.

“He did. Apparently I am supposed to be nice to you,” Harry replied. “But I will not stand here and have you make me a deliberate insult to my career by creating the blazer you are asking for.” Harry gave him a dead eye stare. “Do not be cheap and craven.”

“Like the other guests here?” Charlie sneered.

“Run away, little boy,” Harry said. “You won’t win a battle of wit and word today. A blazer that will look good on you will be prepared, because a gentleman honours his craft and his commitments. Your desire to sabotage yourself needs to stop. You can be better than this.”

Charlie paused ready to fire back an insult but he couldn’t. Harry was looking at him with pity and that wasn’t something he was used to. He honestly could not figure out how to respond to the man in that moment. “I like grey,” he said out of nowhere.

“I have a beautiful grey tweed in the shop that would look wonderful on you,” Harry agreed. “Now I think we are done here. Next lesson is at three today.”

“Yes sir,” Charlie said. He left the room still confused.

Harry made a few notes in his book. Tequila was going to be arriving next. Chester having made it clear Eggsey was not to be measured for bespoke that he was allowed into the shop after the experience to buy off the rack and have it adjusted. Harry figured it was easier to agree and then do what he wanted once he had Eggsey in the shop, especially if the boy came to work for him. He also didn’t measure Roxy. That one angered him. He kept pushing that they should outfit her, but Chester always muttered about the tradition of the shop and that Roxy was handed over to a women’s shop for her luxury item. It was bullshit. Harry could picture the suit he wanted to put Roxy in. She would look amazing. He had the blue fabric sitting on the shelf in his workroom. But no, he wasn’t allowed. At least he would get to measure Tequila shortly. That was enough to make him smile.

“Hey, sir, ready for you to do your thing,” Tequila said after he came into the room. He had decided to have some fun and came only in his jeans.

“Excellent. I have been looking forward to your abs,” Harry said staring at the shirtless man. “To measuring you. I have been looking forward to outfitting you,” Harry corrected. It didn’t sell as well as he would have liked because he couldn’t stop staring at Tequila’s chest. Tequila turned and closed the door.

“It lock Harry?” Tequila asked.
Harry nodded and went over and took the key from the table and turned it in the lock. “A gentleman understands that sometimes people like privacy for certain things.”

Tequila stared at Harry. “Privacy is a real good thing,” he agreed. “Measuring needs a lot of privacy.” His eyes were locked on Harry’s lips.

“Yes well, measuring tape,” Harry said and he didn’t move even a little bit.

Tequila gave him a slow smile. “How do you want me Harry?”

“Begging,” Harry answered unthinkingly.

“Thank fuck that it wasn’t a one off.” Tequila laughed a little bit and pulled Harry into a kiss.

“No fucking in the east parlour,” Harry said when they pulled apart. “Mother did her embroidery in here. And I haven’t any lube.”

Tequila loosened Harry’s tie. “Lots we can do Harry, without lube.” He undid the top button and kissed Harry’s neck. “As amazing as your ass is, don’t need in it all the time.”

Harry hissed a little and then moaned. He had a rather sensitive neck and it almost hurt until it didn’t. “More,” he said.

“Thought you wanted me to be the one begging,” Tequila whispered before sucking and nibbling at Harry’s neck more.

“You’ve distracted me,” Harry answered but he began to touch Tequila, gently at first before scraping his nails down the man’s back, pleased when Tequila shuddered. He moved them a bit until they were against a wall and away from the door that would have rattled against their weight. “How do you even have a body like this?” Harry asked. He leaned away a little to touch the abs as Tequila rested against the wall. He traced the muscle lines a bit and dipped his hands into the waistband of Tequila’s jeans. “I would like to point out if you had bought the size up, they would have slid just a little, exposed your hip bones a bit more. It would be quite a sight.”

Tequila couldn’t stop the fond smile that spread over his face. “Harry, you could also see the hip bones if you undid the buttons there a bit.”

“True. And thank you for leaving the dinner plate off, it does make it easier.”

“Trust me Harry, my belt buckles aren’t that big, much bigger at home,” Tequila said and began to work at Harry’s shirt buttons. He stopped though when Harry stopped. Tequila wondered if someone was coming, but he couldn’t hear anything. “Harry?” he asked. The man looked sick and Tequila realized what he had done. “Oh baby, no.”

“There are not bigger belt buckles. You do not own bigger belt buckles,” Harry said his voice a plea. “Tell me there aren’t bigger buckles,” he begged. He grabbed his phone and went to the search engine. “You are lying, I know you are just making fun of me.” He typed in cowboy belt buckles and hit images. Tequila watched his eyes widen and his mouth drop. The poor man. Poor fussy Harry. “You do not own anything like this do you?” Harry’s eyes flicked between Tequila and his phone in increasingly frantic.

Tequila forgot about Harry’s shirt buttons and unzipped his trouser fly and slid his hand into the gap. “Come back to the fun stuff, Harry,” Tequila said. He palmed Harry’s soft cock, rubbed him slowly. “Focus on me. No belt buckle here, just skin wanting your touch, baby.” Tequila took the phone gently from Harry and tossed into the chair that was near them. “Isn’t this better?” He kept his hand
moving in Harry’s trousers and leaned forward to kiss at his neck.

Harry moaned. “What belt buckles?” he asked and went back to undoing the button’s of Tequila’s fly. He opened it up as much as he could and pushed his hand in. “A gentleman always wears pants you know,” Harry said when he found only skin and not underwear. “I was going to have you strip down to measure your inseam.”

“I know,” Tequila said. “Why do you think I skipped them?”

Harry lifted Tequila’s cock out of the opening and began to slowly stroke. He moved his head away from Tequila’s mouth and rested his head on the man’s shoulder as Tequila leaned against the wall. He watched his fingers glide over Tequila’s skin, which was just a little darker than his own. He watched as Tequila grew fully hard and his breath began to quicken a bit. He changed his grip a little, tightened it and smiled when Tequila cursed.

“Want to touch you too, Harry,” Tequila said. Harry’s change of stance had forced his hand to drop away.

“Busy,” Harry said and wouldn’t move. Tequila grabbed Harry’s hips and pulled the man tight against him, forcing his head up. Tequila kissed Harry, deeply, thoroughly and moved his hips so that his cock was rubbing against the fabric of Harry’s trousers. It was a little rough but also so good. Harry put his hands against the wall on either side of Tequila and met his movements. “Fuck,” Harry said. “Haven’t rubbed off like this since I was twenty.” He bit Tequila’s neck.

Tequila groaned and pushed against Harry more. “Fun, isn’t it, baby?”

“Why baby?” Harry asked as he met the push with one of his own. He could feel his cock leaking a bit inside his pants but didn’t bother pulling it all the way out, he was really enjoying the way the bit of constraint felt. It would be better perhaps if they could palm their cocks together, but this felt raw, immediate in a way nothing had felt for a long time. He liked the dream that Tequila was so hungry for him that he couldn’t wait, couldn’t think now that they were rutting against each other.

“Why not?” Tequila replied and threw his head back against the wall, banging it hard. He was almost on tiptoe pressing against Harry. “Getting close,” he said and his hips began to rut against Harry even faster. “Fuck, Harry, you turn me so fucking on in your perfect clothes.”

Harry didn’t say anything, just pressed them as close as they could get trapping Tequila’s cock tight between their bodies. Harry took one hand off the wall and slid it down and into the small space between wall and skin that Tequila’s movements created. He scraped his nails over Tequila’s ass and once more bit at his neck. All the sensation was too much for Tequila and he arched against Harry and the come went all over Harry’s clothes. Harry rutted against Tequila a little bit more until he felt the pressure build in his spine. He cursed and for the time in a few decades made a mess in his pants. The men leaned into each other panting, laughing a little at the absurdity of it all.

Eventually Harry took a couple steps back and looked down at himself. “Well, I don’t think a pocket square is going to fix this,” he said.

Tequila started to giggle at that. Harry had just sounded so prim, forlorn, and smug all at the same time. No one else he knew could convey so much in a sentence like Harry did. “Yeah, you’re a sight and a half.” Tequila pushed his dick back into his jeans and did it up. “How we getting you upstairs?”

“I would imagine by walking.” Harry said. He zipped up his trousers and straightened his shoulders. “We are adults we can handle any embarrassment.” He went over and opened the door and when he
went to walk out, he kicked something. His shoulders slumped in relief at the pile of clothes there. He pulled them into the room and handed Tequila the ones that were for him and put his on the chair and began stripping down.

““You got a clothes fairy?” Tequila joked as he changed.

“There was no note cursing me out, so my guess is Percival and not Merlin,” he answered. He set himself to rights in the new wardrobe and then looked at Tequila. He stared at the younger man until Tequila felt restless under the gaze.

“What?” Tequila asked shifting his shoulders a bit.

“You really are quite a handsome man, James,” Harry said.

“You’re like from a painting or a picture or something Harry,” Tequila replied. “Type of thing I always wondered how do people who look like that exist.”

“Well, aren’t we a pair?” Harry went over to his table. “We really should get some measurements though.”

Tequila started to go over but there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” Harry called after making sure he and Tequila were tidy. They were still a little flushed but nothing too out of line.

Merlin popped his head in. “Harry, phone call from the shop.”

Harry looked at his phone and saw the light blinking. They must have called while he and Tequila were occupied. “Forgive me James, but if they are calling the estate it must be of some consequence. We’ll do your measurements later?”

“Sure, Harry,” Tequila said easily. “See you at the three o’clock class then.” He scooted by Merlin, not quite able to meet the man’s knowing gaze.

Merlin gave Harry a look. Harry looked back.

“Individual lube packets. Carry them in your pocket, no one will notice,” was all Merlin said. “Call your assistant.”

Harry flipped him off and grabbed his phone to listen to the messages as he walked to a house phone. He made a mental note though to do a run into town to check for the supply Merlin suggested. He didn’t want to be caught unawares again, no matter how good the time in the parlour had been.
“Excellent, Roxy,” Harry said. The whole room clapped politely after Roxy did her five minute speech on how to change a car tire. “Everyone thoughts?”

“How’d you make it sound a little slutty?” Eggsy asked curious. “Because changing a tire, shouldn’t ever sound sexy.”

“Luggggnuts,” Roxy drew out the word and then laughed. “Wasn’t really trying? I dunno.”

Merlin did though. He went and stood beside Roxy. “It wasn’t her words, Eggsy it was how she held her body, used her voice. She did tease with that use of lug nut, but she would lick her lips on certain words, draw them out a little.” Merlin stood straight and leaned forward a bit. “Stand like this, and ye want your audience to lean into engage, be active.” He then relaxed his posture just a little bit and leaned back. “And here you are seeming more open, drawing them in like you have a secret to tell. My classes later in the week will be about how to change just little things about how ye stand, how ye hold yourself, to change how people feel and think.” He nudged Roxy a little and she smiled. They both went to sit down.

“Tequila or Eggsy?” Harry asked.

“Or me,” Charlie said. He stood without waiting and moved to the front. Tequila watched Harry pinch the bridge of his nose and tried to be subtle about touching the small of the man’s back where they sat on the same sofa. He felt Harry lean into the touch for a second before moving forward again. Tequila pulled his hand back and hoped it was enough comfort. Charlie stood at the front and looked like every corporate villain in an 80s movie. He talked for five minutes about how to greet royalty. Harry was doing his best not to react at all. At the end of the time Charlie stood there, and waited for his applause. Harry waited just a second before clapping and everyone followed suit.

“You clearly know your information well,” Harry said diplomatically. “How do you think you did?”


“Ye do speak well,” Merlin agreed. “But the story your words were telling and your body was telling were completely different.”

Charlie looked down at himself and then at the room. “I don’t understand,” he had to say.

“Anyone want to take a stab?” Harry asked.

Eggsy shrugged. “He didn’t want us to learn, he just wanted us to listen.”

“Expand,” Merlin said.

“The crossed arms, closed him off yeah?” Eggsy said. “Not slagging on you - you do know your shit, but you were just about showing off that you knew it. You didn’t care if we absorbed it on not. Roxy wanted us to feel like we could change a tire. You just wanted us to be impressed.”

“An excellent reading,” Harry said. Merlin again got up and went over. He held his hands up and Charlie eventually nodded. He adjusted Charlie’s stance.

“There, still authoritative, but more open,” Merlin said. “Knowledge is good, but never forget how you are conveying it.”
Charlie looked at him. “Thanks,” he said, for the first time being sincere. They went and sat down.

Eggsy and Tequila did a quick rock, paper, and scissors and Eggsy went up next. He at first couldn’t think of what he could teach in five minutes that wasn’t filthy or illegal. He then smiled a bit. “How to make a proper bottle for a baby.” He began to talk, slowly and then eventually got going and soon his five minutes were up. Everyone clapped and Harry sort of nodded.

“Let me guess, I need to change how I talk?” Eggsy said and stuck out his jaw a little waited for the expected critique.

“A little. The tone of your words is of no consequence,” Harry replied.

“But the slang can be a little much,” Roxy agreed. “You don’t need to speak BBC, but using proper words for items is better in a public speech.”


“He’s right,” Merlin said and moved to Eggsy. “Pointing, gesturing for impact is good, but hands flying about too much distracts your listeners.” He adjusted how Eggsy stood a little. “And ye are not a literature professor trying to get freshmen to think you are hip. Don’t lean against a desk.” Everyone laughed at that and then it was Tequila’s turn.

Tequila got up there and spoke about how to tell if a whisky was as aged as the bottle said it was. Everyone clapped at the end.

“Anyone?” Harry asked. Everyone shook their head. “And you see the advantage of going last. Good work, listening to your peers and us and applying it all as you went up there.”

Tequila grinned. “Yeah? I tend to screw up speeches.”

“Ye did well,” Merlin agreed. “Your posture was open but clearly in charge. You moved your hands well but nae too much. It was well thought through.” He knew that the work he and Tequila had done privately had likely also helped this experience, but still, the American had done very well.

“This was a very productive morning,” Harry said. “We’ll break for lunch and then Eggsy, I am afraid the afternoon class is for platinum packages only.”

Eggsy shrugged. He didn’t mind the free time. There were still a few rooms to case. “Sure, bruv.”

“Go enjoy what the estate has to offer,” Harry suggested and everyone moved out, Tequila last in the line. Harry snagged his arm and smiled at him. “James, it really was well done. It was a pleasure to listen to you talk.”

Tequila grinned and pulled Harry to him. “Yeah?”

“Indeed,” Harry agreed and pulled Tequila into a kiss.

When they broke apart, Tequila nuzzled him and whispered. “Want to hear just how good I can talk? About some mighty interesting topics too?”

“Oh yes,” Harry replied. “We have an hour and a half.”

“That you will be using some of with me,” Chester said from the doorway. Harry immediately stepped away from Tequila and straightened his suit jacket. “We need to talk about the party for the last night, Harry,” Chester said. “The caterer wants to change some things.”
“Of course,” Harry said. He nodded to Tequila. “If you’ll excuse me,” he said politely. He mouthed the words *tonight, my room* and then went to follow his uncle.

Tequila sighed and went to find some food and bother Eggsy. He could wait a few hours to kiss Harry again. He wasn’t getting addicted to the guy or anything. A wait was no big deal. He stared at his watch, and sighed at the 9 or so hours it would be until he and Harry would be alone.

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Tequila watched Harry. The man had drifted off after sex and didn’t even wake up when Tequila had cleaned them up a bit. He thought about leaving, but it felt wrong to sneak out when Harry was asleep. He wasn’t going to stay the night, but he didn’t want to leave without saying goodbye. He looked at the older man, the guy really was gorgeous. His experience with guys in their 50s was that they didn’t look like this. He snapped a photo for himself. Sure it was a little creeper of him, but the guy was smiling in his sleep and whatever product was in his hair was losing its hold and soft waves were starting to appear. There wasn’t as much grey as was to be expected at man Harry’s age.

“You vain peacock,” Tequila whispered. “Bet you dye your hair.”

Harry’s sleep smile dropped as he rolled over and sought warmth. Tequila brought him in for a cuddle and Harry clung. “A gentleman does not dye his hair,” Harry said sleepily.

“Heard that did you?” Tequila kissed his head.

“Hmmmm. A man might perhaps do a slight tint to his hair, if he finds that it suits better than his grey,” Harry said primly.

“Scared if you pluck them, you’ll end up as bald as Merlin?” Tequila teased.

“Shut up, it is a reasonable concern,” Harry muttered and pinched at Tequila’s ribs. “And this is certainly not appropriate pillow talk post excellent shagging.”

“You fell asleep and missed me reciting poetry,” Tequila commented.

Harry stared at him. “Really?”

“No, I do know a couple, used mostly to impress girls, a couple things I’ve quoted when leading tours of the distillery. None would sound super impressive right now.”

“Well, then, quiet cuddling is more than acceptable,” Harry suggested. “You may be the big spoon.” He turned and snuggled himself into Tequila’s arms.

Tequila obligingly wrapped his arms around Harry and he linked their fingers. He really liked how long Harry’s fingers were. And it made him think of a thing. “The ring.”

“I’m sorry?” Harry asked.

“You jumped into the pond in your clothes because you thought you saw the ring. What ring?” Tequila asked. Harry was very still and quiet. He wondered if the man had fallen back asleep but his breath was too uneven for that. “Sorry, never mind,” Tequila said. It was probably too personal a question for a one week fuck to ask.

“My father’s signet ring,” Harry said finally. “He died. And I was mad and I threw it into the pond. And then I was even more mad at myself. That ring had been in the family for four generations. And I just tossed it into the murk and mud like it didn’t matter. Four years, I’ve been trying to find it. And
if I see something shiny I end up jumping in like an idiot. This time it was a gum wrapper.” Harry
laughed at himself. “Being a gentleman doesn’t mean I am not also a fool.”

Tequila kissed his head. “You seem pretty great to me.”

“Thank you, James,” Harry said.

Tequila could tell by the tone that it was time for him to leave. He kissed Harry again and got up and
through on his jeans and bundled the rest of his clothes up. “Night, Harry,” he said.

“Sweet dreams, James,” Harry answered.

Tequila nodded and left. He knew they would be a lot sweeter if he stayed, but he also knew when
he wasn’t wanted.
“Thought we had dance class nailed,” Eggsy said as he and Tequila walked to the ballroom.

“Haven’t you figured it out?” Tequila asked.

“Clearly not,” Eggsy said. He paused and stared. “Shit that’s Lalique. How I been missing that fucker?”

“You like vases? Didn’t seem like your sort of thing,” Tequila was a little surprised.

“Oh the girl who does that shit on Antiques Roadshow is really cute,” Eggsy said. “Watched with my mum a couple times.” Point of fact the person who did that stuff was 65 and had a unibrow. But not like Tequila knew that. He made a mental note to come back for it. “So anyways tell me what’s going on.”

“Week one was all the knowledge, this week we are learning to apply it. Bet it is more than the four of us in there today.”

“Bet you’re bummed you won’t get to grab Harry as much this time. Just how good did that dance class end up?” Eggsy teased. “Full on Dirty Dancing?”

“I’m more a Footloose kind of guy,” Tequila said. He opened the door and it wasn’t just Harry and Merlin. It was them, Charlie, Roxy, Percival and a few other people Tequila didn’t recognize.

“Holy Shit,” Eggsy said.

“What? They famous or something?” Tequila asked.

“That’s like half a dozen of the professional dancers from Strictly Come Dancing,” Eggsy hissed. He looked at Tequila’s blank face. “You guys call it Dancing with the Stars.” Eggsy stared at them milling about, talking with Harry. “How crass would it be to get selfies and maybe some autographs?”

“Wait to the end of class and bet it would be fine,” Tequila said. To him they just looked like people, but he could tell Eggsy was excited. He mostly just watched Harry. “Looks like we are getting going,” he said.

Harry moved himself a little forward and addressed the room. “We’ve had some dance classes but those were in small numbers. Now we want you to practice the steps you learned and moving about a more crowded dance floor. We want to work on when to blend in, how to avoid crashing into people and when to showboat just a little bit.” Harry looked at Tequila. “A very little bit,” he stressed.

Tequila just gave him a wink and undid another shirt button.

Harry introduced the new people and talked a little bit more but really it was a class that would go better in practice than theory. Harry went over and put some music on. He then held out a hand to one of the dancers brought in and gave a small bow and was off dancing. Merlin did a same to one of the men and they were off too. Tequila just shrugged and went up to a woman in a red dress. “Ma’am, it would be my pleasure.” She smiled and soon they were on the dance floor. On a spin he saw Eggsy still standing on the sidelines and he pointed at another woman. Eggsy got himself into gear.
He was pleased that he only stammered a little. He counted as they waltzed and tried not to look down too much. He stepped on her toes. “Shit, sorry,” he said.

She smiled at him. “It’s okay,” she said. “Want to know a secret to it?”

“Dear god, yes,” Eggsy said.

“Pretend every partner is the one you really want to be with,” she said. “Picture the one you love and you’ll practically float.”

Eggsy couldn’t tell her there was no one to picture. “Thanks,” he said and managed not to step on her again.

The dance floor was busy and he found it difficult to track people. Too many at his back, moving out of the corner of his eye. He took a break and leaned against a wall. Percival came beside him.

“Would you like to foxtrot?” Percival asked.

“Nope,” Eggsy said.

“Good, I hate it,” Percival said and leaned with him. “I can do all this, but honestly, I hate dancing. Too many people, too much touching.”

“Thank you,” Eggsy agreed. “Like, I like a dance floor well enough, but this is just too much… waists,” he finished lamely. “Let me grind.”

“Hmm,” Percival agreed and Eggsy blinked at that.

“You like to party?” Eggsy asked.

“I like less formal dancing, yes,” Percival said. “I don’t always butle.”

“You got a wild streak?”

“Quite,” Percival smiled a little like it was all a grand joke. “But I do like watching it. The limbs, the hips. The feet moving together perfectly. It is a beautiful view.”

“Yeah,” Eggsy said staring at Merlin who was spun out and brought back. He wasn’t wearing a jumper and tie today, just a dress shirt. The man he was dancing with kept spinning him and bringing him back and Merlin was just laughing at it all. But then there was a stumble and Merlin lost a couple of buttons. “Mother fucker is ripped,” Eggsy said seeing some chest. “Fucking hell.”

“Merlin works out a great deal,” Percival said casually. “To balance out how much he sits hunched over at his desk. Boxing, cross fit, all sorts of stuff.”


Percival smiled a little bit. “I think I’ll see to refreshments for everyone.”

“Sure. Great. Wait...shit...how do I gentlemanly cut in?” Eggsy looked to Percival for help.

“You tap the other dancer on the shoulder and say ‘forgive me, but I would like to cut in.’ They should bow out and you hope the person you want to partner with doesn’t walk off the dance floor.”

“Right.” Eggsy squared his shoulders and worked through the group and repeated what Percival had told him. And then he had Merlin in his arms. Or he was in Merlin’s arms. He couldn’t figure out who would lead. He hadn’t figured that out in 9 days yet, which one of them was leading the other.
The song slowed a little and they swayed with style. Eggsy couldn’t stop staring at the decent bit of chest he was seeing.

“You saw it before, Eggsy,” Merlin said. “Eyes up.”

Eggsy looked up at Merlin. “Yeah but kind of got distracted by the ink. Didn’t realize how fit you were. Like really fit.”

“I try,” Merlin said.

“You try is good,” Eggsy said. “Boxing?”

“Hmmm,” Merlin agreed and moved Eggsy around the room. He was definitely the one leading.

“I do parkour, jump on shit and run,” Eggsy said.

“That’s why your thighs are so thick?” Merlin asked. He then blushed a little. “Forgive me.”

“Noticing me that much are you?” Eggsy licked his lips. “Think I rather like you noticing me. Bet your legs are fucking fantastic.”

The song ended and Merlin stepped back. “Thank ye for the dance, Eggsy,” he said and bowed. He then moved through the people and was asking Roxy to dance. Eggsy decided he was good on dance lessons. He left the ballroom and nicked the vase on the way.

He really, really wanted to see the rest of Merlin and was sure that he’d think of a way to do so.

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“Right, sorry forgot this wasn’t the bog,” Eggsy said as he slammed open Merlin’s door. “You’re naked.” He stopped and stared. He wanted to surprise the guy, but didn’t expect full naked.

Merlin gave Eggsy his most unimpressed look. “Yes, that tends to happen in one’s bedchamber. The being naked as one changes their clothes. And that excuse would have worked better if ye waited until the door was all the way open.”

“How do your legs hold you up?” Eggsy asked staring at Merlin’s calves.

“Excuse me?” Merlin said. He put his hands on his hips not bothering to cover up.

“Look at them,” Eggsy pointed. Merlin looked down and then back up. Eggsy tilted his head.

“Seriously, those are really skinny legs.”

“My dick is right there and ye are focused on my legs, which, by the by, I am aware I have the legs of a stick insect. Harry offered to buy me implants for my 30th birthday, to fill the calves out.”

“Like tits?”

“Like tits,” Merlin agreed.

“Do they even do that?” Eggsy couldn’t stop staring at his legs.

Merlin sighed. “No, Eggsy, they don’t.” He shifted a bit and Eggsy just kept staring at his calves. “Really?” Merlin asked. “Ye stage a fake oopsy to get into my room, I’m naked, and you are going to just stare at my legs. Right then.” He went around the bed to the drawers and pulled out boxers and a pair of red striped socks. He put the pants on and then sat to put the socks on.
“But your shoulders and biceps are thick and fit. And look at your stomach. How are your legs so sticky? Stick like? Stickified?” Eggsy was dumbfounded.

“I am very aware that they are a turn off, Eggsy, now I do need to finish getting dressed. Unless you want to continue to call me ugly?”

“You’re not ugly, you know you are stupid sexy,” Eggsy looked at his face - finally. “They just weren’t what I expected with having seen your shoulders and arms and stuff.” Eggsy paused. “Awwww, son of a bitch, I came in here to seduce you and didn’t even pay attention to your knob. I mean it seemed nice, but got distracted. Take the pants off and let me take a better look.”

Merlin blinked. “I cannæe even begin to unpack all of that,” he said.

“Oh just unpack your junk,” Eggsy snapped back.

“No, we are expected for dinner soon enough,” Merlin pointed out.

“Got enough time to blow you,” Eggsy went over and sank onto his knees in front of Merlin. He leaned forward but was stopped by Merlin’s hands. “What?”

“No,” Merlin said softly.

Eggsy froze. “But you like me,” he said. He looked up in horror, “don’t you?” He got up ready to run, that had been too vulnerable, too needy. And he was chill and cool and didn’t need anybody. “Well, your loss,” he shrugged. He started to walk away but Merlin grabbed his hand. Eggsy froze. He stared down at Merlin.

Merlin didn’t look up, didn’t say anything, just turned Eggsy’s hand and ran his thumb over the wrist pulse point. He pressed down and lifted his finger watching the skin rise and fall. He did this a few times and he seemed to raise the vein just a bit. Eggsy couldn’t understand why Merlin was doing it. All he could do was watch. Merlin brought the wrist to his lips and then sucked on that sensitive pulse point hard. Eggsy moaned and wondered why he was feeling something so simple in his fucking knees.

Merlin moved his mouth away and smiled at the red mark, pleased that he had marked Eggsy. He guided the lad to his door and pushed him out into the hall. Eggsy went easily still too stunned by the feelings that that had drawn out of him. He leans into Eggsy’s ear. “Just because it would be wrong to fuck ye right now, should nae suggest that I do not want you. That I wish we were done here so that I could take ye to my flat and pin you to my bed and slowly strip of your track suit, press my mouth against every soft spot, every pulse point. Oh I want to scrape my teeth on ye, mark ye. Are your thighs as fit as I have guessed? I want ye to squeeze my cock between them, I want to fuck your thighs and pull you off, leave you just a mess of come all over your lap.” Merlin took a small nip at Eggsy’s ear. “And me closing this door in your face right now should not suggest that I don’t like ye. Because Eggsy, I very much do.”

Merlin stepped back, pushed Eggsy a little and closed the door firmly in Eggsy’s face.

Eggsy stood there hard as nails and unable to move for a couple minutes. He unfroze when he heard Merlin moan and say his name. Oh god, Merlin was wanking just a few feet away. And he would know Eggsy was still there listening. Eggsy kicked the door. “You bastard, we could be shagging!” The only response he got was another muffled moan. Eggsy hurried down the hall to his own room and when he had the door closed, he pulled out his dick and moved his hand hard and fast. He was coming in just a few minutes and when he caught his breath, he remembered he was expected at dinner soon. He changed his clothes and hurried down the hall. It was only at the table when he
looked at the perfectly composed Merlin making small talk with Roxy that he remembered that Merlin had said he that he liked Eggsy. Whatever else they had going on, whatever it was, Merlin liked him.
“Hey Ging,” Tequila said when she answered.

“What’s up?” she asked. “How’s it going, only a few days left really.”

“I know,” Tequila said. “Just had a question. Think it would affect me getting the job if I extended my stay in England a few extra days?”

“Are the classes not going well?” Ginger sat up a little more. “Are you thinking of doing a little more work?”

“No, been learning tons,” Tequila answered swiftly. “Lots of good things to apply at work. Even if I don’t get the promotion, dead useful stuff. Merlin’s even been helping me with some reading tricks. I just…I still haven’t been measured for my clothes and a few other things could use some brushing up. How much is my work piling up?”

“Your team is doing well but there are somethings that need your attention,” Ginger said. “And you are on the books for the job interview two days after you get back. He wanted to give you time for the jet lag but the job needs to get filled pretty quick, hun.” She was quiet for a bit. “Jimmy, I can maybe get you some wiggle room -”

“But it wouldn’t look good,” Tequila filled in for her. “It would look like I’m delaying, like I’m scared.”

“Yeah,” she answered. “I get the impulse to play tourist a little bit, but you can always go back in a few months for a proper vacation right?”

“Right,” Tequila said easily. “Tower of London will still be there.”

“That is the reason you wanted to stay, just have a little break in between the classes and returning to the real world, isn’t it, Jimmy?”

“Totally,” he answered. “You know me.”

“Okay,” she said slowly. Something was up but she wouldn’t press right now. It would come up eventually. And he really couldn’t delay this interview. “You take care and I’ll see you in just a few more days.”

“Bye, Ging,” Tequila said and hung up. It was silly to want to extend his stay. Especially when he and Harry didn’t talk about it at all. He left Harry’s room every night. And hell that was only four nights anyways. The best sex of his life, sure but that didn’t mean anything. Just meant they had good chemistry. It didn’t matter that Harry had sweet smiles and long legs and was just the fussiest man he had ever met.

Tequila didn’t like fussy.

He certainly wasn’t developing strong feelings about fussy. He was going to go out for a ride. That would sort his mind out a bit.

He prepped a horse and was on a slow ramble. He was heading down to the pond and heard a splash. Harry had jumped in again. He decided to take the horse in another direction so he didn’t go over there and distract himself with wet Harry. He occupied his mind with thoughts of what sort of
questions Champ might ask in the interview. He eventually returned the horse to the stables and went into the estate to clean up before the next lesson. Harry had mentioned that they all needed a little more work on their small talk.

Eggsy wasn’t allowed in the small talk refresher which was fine. He was up in his room and looked at the bag half full. It was starting to look like a good haul. He felt a weird pleasure and disgust whenever he looked at it. He dialed a number. “Hey, Dean,” he said.

“Muggsy, how’s it going?” Dean sounded happy. Either he was flush from the bookie or drunk. “You learning lots?”

“Yeah, lots,” he said. “Dean…”

“Now I know you aren’t calling with any problems. He isn’t, is he Daisy?” Dean said and Eggsy could hear her babbling. “You want to talk to your brother, let him hear your voice? Remind him what he could be missing?”

“Dean -” Eggsy wanted to stop him but then Daisy was babbling away and trying to say his name and he talked to her and told her how much he loved her and couldn’t wait to snuggle her all up.

“Good girl,” Dean said, sounding smug. “Oi! Michelle she’s wet.” Eggsy could hear his mum and waited. Eventually Dean was there again. “So no problems right?”

“No problems,” Eggsy agreed. “Just wondering if your guys said anything was better or worse for them. Like is it better I bring one sort of stuff or a variety?”

“Thinking smart there boy,” Dean said. “A variety, don’t want to flood the market none. Good boy. Looking forward to see you soon, Muggsy.”

“Sure, you too, Dean,” he answered and hung up. He had been planning to ask if maybe he could bring a little less, just a little, but he knew it wasn’t worth it. He put the bag carefully in the closet and went to the music room and banged out some songs on the piano. He could feel someone at the door. “Merlin if that is you, you need to fuck off right now. I just can’t.” Eggsy went back to playing and when he looked out of the corner of his eye no one was there.

Good.

Great.

Just great.
Merlin sat on Harry’s bed and worked on the man’s watch. It was an ancient finickity thing, but Harry loved it dearly, so Merlin kept it working. “Your room smells like sex,” he said.

“I opened the window and changed the sheets,” Harry protested. He took a whiff, there was nothing. “You are just being a shit.”

“Hmmm.” Merlin used the tiniest screw driver ever to make some adjustments. “Have you asked him to stay on, a little longer?”

“No of course not,” Harry said. “He wouldn’t want to.”

“How do ye know that?” Merlin countered. “You could try talking to him?”

“And how much have you properly talked to Eggsy?” Harry shot back. Merlin didn’t say anything and Harry nodded. “We know what they want from us, and we live within those parameters.”

“They are stupid parameters,” Merlin said. He snapped the back onto the watch. “Is Charlie being less of a berk?”

“No,” Harry said. “Well, yes, he is paying attention and insulting the others less, but it is all for show. He doesn’t mean it. When he leaves he’ll go back to who he is. You can only change so much. We just hope a little bit of it seeps on in.” Harry sighed. “He leaves every night.”

“Ask him to stay,” Merlin said, like it was easy.

“Chester already has caught us out once and expressed displeasure. If he were to find James in my room, I don’t want to deal with that fallout.” Harry shook his head, “I hate it, but it makes sense.”
“Fuck Chester,” Merlin said and then they both winced at the thought of Chester getting any, ever. “Harry are ye infatuated?”

“Very much,” Harry admitted. “But it is difficult to do anything about it right now, here.”

Merlin went over and knelt in front of his friend. “Aye. I cannae have mine while we are stealing stuff. It would be so wrong.”

“But you want.”

“I yearn,” Merlin said. “I am infatuated as well.” He slid the watch into Harry's pocket. “We are expected.”

“You know, once the larceny is done, Eggsy will be in London. You could look him up? It wouldn’t even be hard,” Harry lit up a bit. “Not if he takes the job with me. You could just happen by, to see me about the new trousers you desperately need and things could…evolve from there.”

“Aye, perhaps,” Merlin said warming to that idea. “And ye could get Tequila’s information. Maybe talk?”

Harry nodded. “I could,” he agreed.

They looked at each other. They both knew there was something wrong, something that wouldn’t make it that easy. Themselves, their circumstances, just something. Their smiles faded a little and they leaned into each other. “I have to meet Chester, more plans for the party. And you have your be a meanie class to teach,” Harry said.

“Harry,” Merlin started and then stopped. “What?”

“Were we not meant for love?” Merlin finally asked.

Harry punched him. “Of course you were. You just like need to like a thug that likes you back. And you have that. Now come along.” They left the room and Merlin decided not to mention how Harry deflected about himself there. Maybe they needed to get high again. They seemed to sort it out a little bit better when they were incapable of getting in their own way. But for now at least he could try to scare Charlie a little. That would be fun.
“Where’s Harry?” Tequila asked when he walked into the drawing room.

“He is nae needed for this lesson,” Merlin said and smiled. Tequila felt the hair on his arm stand up and he clenched his fists. Merlin’s smile became a little more natural. “Good,” he said looking at Tequila’s hands. “Very good.”

“I don’t get it,” Tequila said. The room was still empty other than them. “You getting ready to do the shovel talk?” He was still tense and couldn't even explain why, but something about Merlin was putting him on edge.

“Nae,” Merlin replied. “Have a seat Tequila, the others will be along directly.”

Eggsy strolled in and so did Charlie. They both looked for Harry and he wasn’t there. They sat down and waited. Roxy was the last in and when she saw Merlin alone at the front she squealed. “Intimidation day!” She bounced as she went to sit.

Merlin smiled. “Aye, lass.”

Eggsy looked at Merlin. “Intimidation day?”

Merlin let the smile fall off his face and settled into his resting murder face. And then all he did was straighten his posture a bit and tilt his head. Charlie shivered a bit, Tequila got ready to fight again and Roxy kept bouncing. The look just made Eggsy hungry. “A gentleman can convey anger without screaming or punching.” He gave a cold smile and was pleased when three of the four swallowed audibly. “Disappointment writ large in tiny movements.”

“That’s disturbing,” Eggsy said watching Merlin’s face. “And sort of cool.”

“The key is knowing who to use it on,” Merlin said. “Ye don’t break it out always. What sort of circumstances?”

“Poor service at a restaurant,” Charlie suggested. Merlin gave him a look of disgust. “What, they should know when they are in the wrong.”

“Charlie,” Roxy said and just sighed. “How often do you get poor service in places? A lot right? Consider that the problem isn’t the service, it is you.”

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“Bruv, waitress can sniff out a problem guy who will tip for shit from a mile away. And come on how much would you tip even if the service was great?” Charlie was quiet. “Don’t be a dick to people who bring you food,” Eggsy said. “Don’t want no secret sauce in there.”

Tequila snorted a little. “So never in people you have power over?” he asked Merlin.

“Not quite,” Merlin said. “You might have to do it if say you know a worker isn’t performing to their task and need a bit of a wake up call. Someone trying to lie to ye, it can very.” Merlin shrugged. “I’ve used it on the people who work on the front of my store a couple of times, when they have truly screwed up. The trick is when only necessary.” He looked to Eggsy. “Eggsy role play?”

“Sure,” Eggsy agreed and stood up. “Wot you need?”
“Employee who thinks they’ve been getting the shit end of the stick?” Merlin suggested.

“Yeah, I can do that,” Eggsy replied. He thought of the way he and Merlin had been circling each other and Merlin setting all the rules without letting Eggsy know what they were. He rolled his shoulders a bit and glared at Merlin. “Excuse me sir? But what the hell? Why does Charlie get all the good shifts, and I get fuck all. I’m stuck sweeping up the crap left by everyone during the day and you don’t even fucking notice?” Eggsy sneered. “You hate me or somfing?”

Merlin straightened and did the head tilt thing. “No no, ye don’t talk to me like that. You have a problem come and whisper it in my ear,” he said voice a little lower and he gestured to his ear. Eggsy watched the flick of the hand and thought of hits. No way was he getting closer.

“Nah, sir, sorry,” Eggsy said and felt himself back down. “Just maybe a little more variety in the schedule?”

Merlin nodded, “I will certainly think about it, provided ye actually start to treat our clients well. Ye have the shift ye do because of the dismissive attitude to the people who come in to browse.” He smiled all friendly all of a sudden. “Work with me Eggsy, and we’ll improve your circumstances.”

“Thanks,” Eggsy said and smiled back automatically. He then blinked. “Shit Merlin,” he said.

“You made him practically ruin his drawers and then had him eating out of your hand,” Tequila said. “I get that promotion, I’m going to need that skill.” He leaned forward. “Thought Harry knew his stuff with that handshake trick. You are even better.”

“Thank you, Tequila,” Merlin said not taking his eyes off Eggsy. His tongue peeked out just a little bit and his face was conveying something else entirely. They kept staring at each other until Roxy coughed ‘fuck already’ Merlin gave her a deadly stare and she quickly looked out the window.

Eggsy went back and flopped into a chair but when Merlin gave him a look, he sat up properly.

“Now, let’s get to work. Pair up and try to freak each other out,” Merlin said. “Eggsy and Charlie, Tequila and Roxy. I’ll come around and help.”

Merlin moved around the group, changing postures, suggesting ways to hold themselves. “Think old hollywood. Be Joan Crawford staring down people fearlessly, coldly.” His hands lingered on Eggsy and he was the one to whisper in Eggsy’s ear. Eggsy shivered and leaned into him but then Merlin was gone to one of the others.

Forget being pinched by the filth for larceny, if he and Merlin didn’t get sorted soon, they’d be hauling him in for fucking murdering the man.

Eggsy was sick of it. He knew he and Merlin had heat and want and all this tension between them and if it didn’t cracked soon, he was sure they were going to combust. And after Merlin’s real lessons today? Jesus fucking Christ on a cracker he wanted that man to pin him down and make him do all sorts of stuff.

But the man had started locking his door, the bastard.

It was midnight and Eggsy couldn’t sleep. He got out of bed and put a pair of pants on. They had the whole floor to themselves, but he figured with his luck King would decide it was the perfect night to go for a wander. Eggsy was hitting that spare storage room up here, checking a few more crates for things to lift. He had found a couple things he thought were worth something. Only maybe not, since
they had disappeared from his room and been replaced with other things. He wasn’t impressed that Merlin knew how to pick locks.

So...off to crime.

And he wasn’t going to stop at Merlin’s door and knock and beg to suck the guy’s knob while wrapping his hands around those freaky stick legs. He wanted to leave hickeys all over those bony knees. What the fuck was wrong with him? As he walked down the hall to go steal stuff, not to talk to Merlin, he got angrier. Because actually? Fuck Merlin for not fucking him. He knew Eggsy was gagging for it, and he was pretty sure Merlin wanted it too after those damn wrist kisses and the way he looked at Eggsy in class today.

The bastard was an annoying tease. Maybe. Because this was just all a bullshit game. It had to be. Maybe Merlin got off on being a dick. He was a dick with his dick. They could be shagging like bunnies, like Harry and Tequila and then everyone goes their way in three days no big deal.

Nobody had feelings or was attached or nothing.

Whatever, it was all bullshit.

He was going to steal stuff. The ten minutes pacing in front of Merlin’s door was stopping right now.

After he gave the asshole a piece of his mind.

He banged on Merlin’s door. “You fucking tosser!” he shouted. He could hear Merlin walking to the door and heard the lock turn. He could always hear a lock turn. “No, don’t open the door,” he said quickly. “Keep it locked.” He had lost his fucking mind.

“Generally when someone knocks and curses ye out, they want to actually talk to you,” Merlin said through the wood.

“I know, I know,” Eggsy said. He leaned his forehead against the wood. “Why are you so confusing?” he asked.

“I’m rather straightforward,” Merlin said.

“Like fuck you are.” Eggsy banged his head against the door. “You want me.” Merlin was quiet. “Tell me the fucking truth, Merlin. You want me.”
“Like the air I breathe,” Merlin said after a bit more of the heavy quiet that lay between them.

“I want you too,” Eggsy said. “But you won’t throw me down on that giant bed of yours will you? No matter that I want it too.” Merlin was quiet. “Yeah, didn’t think you’d answer that. Because telling me why, would ruin your fun.” Eggsy slapped his fist against the door.

“Trust me lad, this is nae fun for me,” Merlin offered.

“We could be having fun in there right now. Harry’s having fun, it ain’t against his gentlemanly rules. Why is it against yours?”

“Harry and I are different people, in different circumstances,” Merlin said. “Just go down a floor the third room on the left. There is a display cabinet, take anything in there. Worth a good bit and no one notices it.”

“Fuck you, Merlin. Wot are you even playing at?” Eggsy said.

“I wish to Christ I knew Eggsy.”

They are both quiet but know that neither is moving away.

“Do you know, I love sucking cock?” Eggsy said.

“Do ye now?” Merlin replied.

Eggsy could hear the amusement through the door and he just snapped a little. Wanted to torture the man, like how he had been tortured the last several days. “Yeah, I do. I like the feel of a dick in my mouth, on my tongue. That weight? The pressure of it, I love it. And my favourite is to start with a soft cock. I fucking love that softness in my mouth as I work it, as my tongue, my lips, my breath makes it hard. Goddamn do I love how it fills my mouth until I’m gagging, choking and then I really get to work. Would you fill my mouth Merlin? Would it hurt, stretch my lips you growing in my
mouth?” Eggsy was absurdly pleased by the way Merlin’s body thunked against the door. “Yeah, you like the sound of that? I have difficulties deep throating, but I like it. Takes a couple goes for me to really get going on it, but I love the challenge and the sounds a man makes above me when I get used to it and work him over hard. Do you know how hard I get sucking cock?” Eggsy palmed the front of his pants. “I mean hell, I'm getting hard out here just talking about it.”

“Fuck, lad,” Merlin said.

“Would you put your hands in my hair, fuck my face? Say filthy things? Do it well enough I could probably come untouched all over your feet and you could order me to lick it all up and I would.” Merlin groaned and Eggsy smiled. He pulled the waistband of his pants down and began to tug on his cock. “You like being in charge? Want to hold me down, fuck me? I’m down for that. I like the burn, like the rush of pain and pleasure. Fuck it would feel good to wear the bruises you put on me.” Eggsy groaned at the thought. “You touching yourself Merlin? You getting off on the idea of me on my knees or me on my back, maybe tied to your bed?” He could hear Merlin moving a bit but there was no answer. “Yeah, I bet you are. But you know what? Wouldn't be all me giving to you. Sometimes I’d want to take. Just take and take.”

“I don’t like to be fucked,” Merlin said through the door. He almost sounded apologetic. And hungry. He was sounding a bit wrecked.

Good.

Eggsy wanted him all the way wrecked.

“Oh don’t worry, I wouldn’t fuck you. But maybe you’d be the one tied to the bed. Because you are a tactile man, your job all about your fingers. Ohhh, no. Hands tied behind your back On your knees sucking my cock, rimming me. Wouldn’t even look at you, be playing on my phone, but if you wanted to fuck me - I’d make you work for it. Goddamn would I make you work for it. Make you work me loose with your tongue, I’d get to come at least twice before I let you in me. Advantage of me being half your age bruv, quick recovery period. Leave you bound and begging while I recover. Eventually let you put that long cock in me, when I’m so loose and soft and tired from all the orgasms you’ve already given me. I’d be overstimulated and you’d have to go so slow when you are so hungry for me.” He heard Merlin moan and curse and would have felt smug but it was getting so hard to think. He touched the slit of his cock the wet that was coming out. “You like that idea don’t you?”

“Aye.” Merlin agreed. “Eggsy, ye are killing me.”

“Good,” Eggsy snarled. His strokes on his own skin became harder, rougher, so close to pain, so close to perfect. “We’d hurt each other in the best fucking ways, Merlin. I want you to hurt me so much. Because it would be such a good pain. And I want to bite you, lick you, want to leave marks all over your shoulders and those stupid skinny legs of yours. Cover every inch of you with me, so that under those jumpers there is the scent of me all over you. I want to make you think about me all fucking day like you have me doing.” Eggsy moaned and tightened his grip even more. “What do you fucking want Merlin?”

“To watch your face as you come, screaming my name,” Merlin said. His breath was haggard, his voice aching.

Eggsy pulled a few more strokes and shouted Merlin's name against the wood. He could hear Merlin finish himself off. They were both quiet, just a few centimetres apart. “Well I screamed your name,” Eggsy said. “Too bad you couldn’t see my face.” He looked at the door and the floor, the come sliding down the wood. He laughed a bit. “And I ain’t cleaning that up. Night bruv,” he said and
pulled his pants back up. He walked back down to his room, bone deep exhausted.

He heard Merlin open his door and stopped just a metre away from his own door. He wouldn’t turn around. He wouldn’t he was stronger than that.

Eggsy felt his body start to twist.

“Don’t,” Merlin said. “Don’t turn lad, you’ll hate yourself if ye do.” Eggsy planted his feet and clenched his fists. “My legs aren’t stupid,” Merlin said. It wasn’t at all what he meant to say. He meant to explain, to sort them out. They were both hurting and needed to talk. And instead, he said that.

Eggsy started to laugh. Great heaving gulps. “You…that’s…oh my god…” He couldn’t stop the giggles. “You fucking…” He walked to his door and opened it. “Your legs are absolutely stupid, weird skinny things,” he shouted down the hall.

“You’re the one who wants to kiss them, so ye are the stupid one,” Merlin shouted back. “You’ve made me a moron!” he added because the sexiest moment of his life had just become a farce.

“Trust me, that feeling is mutual,” Eggsy yelled and closed his door. He collapsed on his bed still giggling.

Damn the man for making him feel so many things. They really had to figure out what they were on about before the situation drove them completely spare.

Merlin cleaned up Eggsy’s mess and went into his room and grabbed a piece of paper and for no reason he could explain drew a series of stick figures in various sexual positions and went and slid it under Eggsy’s door with the caption what stick legs can do.

He heard Eggsy’s giggles resume and went back to his room. He lay down on his bed and tried to figure out what to do about them. He only had a few more days to figure it out and he didn’t know if he could.
Chapter 22

There were no classes the last day, because that night was the party, the chance for the students to demonstrate that they had taken in everything that they had been taught. Harry spent the day fussing about the party, hovering as Percival made sure everything went off without a hitch. Harry was going to fuss with the candlesticks and Percival put him in a headlock and moved him to his room.

“They can’t fail, you know, this isn’t a real school. Tequila will do well,” Percival said as he opened Harry’s door and deposited him in his room. “Now make yourself pretty for your young man, and stay out of my way.” Percival closed the door behind himself and headed back to the kitchens. He saw Merlin stealing an ashtray and shook his head. “Jesus man, at least be subtle.”

Merlin flushed and hurried back upstairs.

“And an actual suit!” he shouted after the man. Percival kept moving along, he really wasn’t paid enough for this. Especially when Chester cornered him for 30 minutes to complain about the expense for such a small group of students. He smiled and nodded and thought about stabbing the man until Chester left him be. Percival went about his work, because in the end he knew he was good and he wanted this to be perfect for his friends.

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“Harry?” Tequila knocked at his door. “You got a minute?”

Harry opened the door. He was in his trousers and his shirt was open, letting Tequila see that hollow sternum spot he loved. “A minute,” Harry said. “We really don’t have time to -”

Tequila laughed a little. “I know that.” He held up the four ties he had, “Which one works for tonight?”

Harry stared at them. “That’s…you have a bolo tie in there,” he said. He blinked and it didn’t disappear. “That is an actual bolo tie.”

“Yeah?” Tequila grinned. God he had known that would wind Harry up.

“Are you an oil baron from the 1930s?” Harry said. “How is a man as beautiful as you so incapable of seeing what is horrible aesthetically?” Harry gestured and Tequila went into the room. Harry went to his closet and hummed a little to himself. He pulled out two ties and held them up to Tequila. He moved them back and forth a little and nodded. “There. A slimmer black one with work with that shirt. It does fit you decently, and the white with red piping is attractive.” Harry slide the tie around Tequila’s neck and tied a half windsor. “A full would look lovely on you, but too much if you aren’t wearing a blazer.”

“Sure, Harry,” Tequila said. “Your one finger is crooked,” he noticed.


“You’re lovely,” Tequila replied. “There going to be dancing at this shindig?”

“It is not unreasonable to think as the evening winds on, some dancing might occur,” Harry said.

“Save the last dance for me?” Tequila leaned in and kissed Harry. “Don’t worry, sir, been paying close attention to you. Real close, I have this in the bag.”
Harry nodded. “I need to finish getting ready. I’ll see you downstairs.”

Tequila gave him another small kiss and left the room. Harry took a few deep breaths and finished getting ready. This was just like the other parties they had done. No big deal. It wasn’t any different. It was just the first time he was going to ask to stay in contact afterwards. Barely different at all.

“Vous look weird,” Eggsy said to Merlin as they met in the hallway to go down to the party.

“Ye look like a waiter,” Merlin replied.

“Didn’t say weird was bad,” Eggsy muttered.

“The red tie is a little much,” Merlin said and decided to go back into his room.

“Your tie is green,” Eggsy said.

Merlin looked down. “Ah, it would be wouldn’t it?” He shrugged. “Never can remember that.”

“How do you drive?” Eggsy asked a little curious.

“I don’t,” Merlin said. “I mean I could, I’ve passed the tests and no how. Might mix up the colours but they are the same order on the standards. But I find it easier to just take the tube. Plus parking is murder.” He looked at Eggsy. “Ye look good. Do you want a tie?”

“Nope,” Eggsy said. “I’m good like this.” Hang anyone who made a comment.

“You are,” Merlin agreed. They head downstairs. “Has the experience been bad?”

“Nah, been…interesting. Not what I expected.”

“Things seldom are,” Merlin said. He opened the door and there were people milling about. It was a mix a few from the local village, some friends from London, a few former students. “Fake smile lad,” he said.

“Thought you said, those are to easy to see through, and that if you can’t find a corner of sincerity inside you, then aim for an open but neutral face,” Eggsy said.

“Ye’ve been listening to me,” Merlin was a little surprised.

“Even single word,” Eggsy said. He leaned in and whispered. “Every goddamn moan and call of my name in the night, I’ve heard Merlin. Have you heard me?” Eggsy leaned back away and winked at him. He put on a sincere fake smile and went into the room to mingle.

Percival came over and handed Merlin a scotch. “I can’t even,” he said.

Merlin looked at him. “I just can’t.”

Percival sighed and gave his shoulder a squeeze. “Go mingle, and try.” He shooed the man along and circled with more drinks.

Harry wasn’t the last to arrive, he was sure Chester was saving that so he could make an entrance and a little speech, but he was among the last and went into the room and observed the crowd a little bit. Roxy was mingling easily, knowing some of the people and having a natural charm. Eggsy was sort of bulldozing his way through the room, but it read more like excited puppy than asshole and
when he stopped to engage, people were drawn to him. Charlie found a group he could hold court with and wouldn’t budge from there for all the money in the world. He wasn’t a failure per se, but he certainly wasn’t a success.

And Tequila was chatting earnestly with a woman, who was hanging on his every word. Harry went over to the bar and Percival poured him a martini. “They are doing well. Roxy smoothed her edges, yet again, Charlie is Charlie and the two students that actually mattered to you are doing well,” Percival said. He raised his glass of tonic water in salute. “Go on.”

Harry started to move towards Tequila when Chester made his entrance.

“Welcome, welcome to our end of session party,” Chester said. “I am so proud of our students and how much they’ve learned here. Why our one student, a contest winner from an estate, has done so well, he blends into this high brow gathering perfectly. You would never know he doesn’t belong at all,” Chester gave a small chuckle and the room politely laughed. Eggsy palmed something that looked like gold off the table next to him. He felt Merlin move next to him and his pocket was empty. He glared at the man but then something else was in there. Merlin winked and Eggsy knew it would be at least double the value of what he had first taken. He tuned out King and just watched Merlin, who’s face had settled past its resting murder look and into honest dislike. Christ, Merlin must really adore Harry to be around someone he clearly hated so much. Eggsy reached out and touched the small of Merlin’s back. He left his hand there when Merlin gave him just the smallest nod.

Chester finished up and the party resumed. Harry moved easily and impeccably through the crowd, stopping to talk to Charlie on the way. It was grating but no less than he expected. He smiled at Roxy who winked at him, and then he was at the small group around Tequila. Tequila nodded to him and kept going with the Kentucky Derby story he was telling that was drawing sincere laughter from the crowd. He was doing quite well. And he looked incredible. Harry smiled at him and then continued on. The cocktail hour was a success.

Dinner went smoothly, Eggsy mixed up his glasses a bit, and Tequila a fork, but otherwise the table conversation went smoothly and cheerfully. Harry was seated at Chester’s right hand and could feel his uncle’s gaze bore into him every time he responded to Tequila or praised Eggsy. He ignored the old man, though it was hard.

Then it was the ballroom to dance. Harry moved about with a good many people at the party and smiled when Roxy ended up in his arms. “Hello, dear girl. And how did this session stack up in comparison to others?”

“Oh?” Harry spun her out and brought her back, eyes drifting to where Tequila was showboating just a little. The perfect amount really.

“You were a bit more passionate than usual, but also more distracted,” she said. She raised her hand and moved his chin so he was looking at her again. “Love is a good look on your Harry,” she said.

“You are thinking of yourself. Tilde has made you glow. I do hope I am invited to the wedding.”

“You will be,” she promised. “I don’t get it, but I have seen Tequila leave your room very late or very early depending on how you look at it.”

“And?” Harry felt tension seep into his shoulders.
“And, you should let yourself be happy. Like Merlin,” she said.

That surprised Harry and he looked around the room and saw Merlin quietly slide something up his sleeve. “He’s happy?”

“He’s something, anyways,” she said. “You know, I’ve always dreamed of you cutting me a suit, not getting that gift card, but you.”

“I’ve dreamed of dressing you too, but the primary owner of the shop has made his views clear.”

“One day,” Roxy said.

“One day,” Harry replied. The song ended and he kissed her hand. “You honour me.”

“You are too kind,” she said. She drifted away and Eggsy ended up in front of him.

“Dance, Eggsy?” Harry asked.

“Sure,” Eggsy shrugged and they were moving about.

“I do hope that when you are settled back in London, you’ll come by the shop,” Harry said as he guided Eggsy around the floor. “I do think that we would work well together.”

“I dunno, Harry,” Eggsy said. He thought of everything he had packed in the bag. It wasn’t full and he knew it wasn’t what Dean wanted, but he hoped it was enough. And he knew he wasn’t going to put it all back before he left. “Don’t think you want my sort in there.”

“I want you in there, helping me over charge idiots like Charlie, making them beg for you to dress them stylishly.”

“You’re mental you know, thinking it could work,” Eggsy said.

“It could. I promise it could,” Harry said. He felt eyes on the back of him and turned them a bit. Chester shook his head at Harry a little and Harry gave him a polite smile. “Do consider it, Eggsy. And remember the shop is quite near Merlin,” he added as enticement.

“I’ll think about it,” Eggsy agreed and they broke apart when the song ended. Eggsy decided it was enough partying and headed out figuring everyone was well occupied that it was a good chance for finding a few last things.

Harry moved about the party and could feel it winding down. He ended up in front of Tequila. “You wanted the last dance,” he said.

“I did,” Tequila agreed and they began to sway to the slow song. “So, teach, how’d I do tonight?”

“Perfectly,” Harry assured him. “Your boss would be a fool not to give you that promotion. You just shine, James.”

Tequila’s smile was bashful, earnest. “Really?”

“Really. You showed a remarkable adaptation to all our lessons. Your personality isn’t stifled in anyway, but you show more care and awareness than you had the first couple of days. You have done well.” Harry wanted to say more, but it was simply too public a moment for him to be comfortable.

“Thanks, Harry,” Tequila grinned at him and leaned a little too close. “Say, maybe -” He frowned
when he was tapped on his shoulder. Tequila gave Chester the barest of polite looks.

“My apologies, Tequila,” Chester made a face at saying it. It was different from Harry’s. With Harry
the objection to the name was because he had thought right from the beginning that Tequila was
better than it. For Chester it was clear he thought it was exactly who Tequila was. “But I do need to
steal Harry away.”

“I can wait, perhaps a night cap, Harry?” Tequila suggested.

Harry looked ready to agree, but Chester shook his head sadly. “Our business will take a while. He’ll
see you tomorrow though, I am sure for goodbyes before you head back to America.”

“But -” Tequila wanted to point out that he still had to receive the clothes that he had bought for, but
the glacial look on Chester’s face, and the pleading one on Harry’s had him quiet. “Thank you for a
lovely evening,” he said to them both and went to his room. He changed and crawled into bed. He
could tell it wasn’t a night to sneak into Harry’s room. It took him a very long time to fall asleep.

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Harry and Chester stared at each other across the desk.

“Harry, I think it is important that we take this moment to talk about the future of the tailor shop, and
the disgrace you are debating bringing unto this family.” Chester smiled.

Harry felt his heart freeze over.

*****************************************************

Eggsy woke up in the middle of the night, sure he had heard his door close. He turned on the lamp
and realized his closet was open. And the bag with the goods for Dean had moved. He went and
picked it up and it was heavier than before. He opened it and it was full. Likely more than what
Dean had asked for.

He stared at the bag.

He eventually opened his wallet and stared at the little stick finger drawings he had put inside it for
safe keeping. He had time to change his mind. Change his life.

Eggsy closed his wallet and put it back in his trousers.

He zipped up the bag. He wasn’t going to change nothing, not with seeing Daisy on the line.
Nothing ever changed for his sort, not really.

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Merlin went and checked on Harry’s room. The man wasn’t in there. He checked a couple other
places and then went outside and down to the pond. Harry was on a blanket and staring up at the
sky. Merlin lay beside him.

They didn’t say a word, but Harry gripped his hand tight when Merlin reached out.
“Roxy and Charlie have both been picked up,” Percival told Merlin and Harry. “I am to drive Tequila and Eggsy to the train station in twenty minutes. They are packing very slowly,” he said.

Merlin swallowed. “I already helped Eggsy pack,” he said. He had filled the bag for Eggsy last night when he was sleeping. Things he knew Chester wouldn’t notice missing, things Chester didn’t know the value of. Things that would help whatever situation it was that Eggsy was in. “That’s all he wants from me.”

Percival sighed. “No it isn’t, but right now there will be no convincing you otherwise. Go ahead, die on your own sword, see if I care.” Merlin smiled at that, knowing how much Percival cared. “Harry, you’ll be smarter than Merlin. You’ve always been more emotionally in tune than him.”

Harry curled into a ball and rest his head on his knees. Merlin hugged him and Percival sat and rubbed his leg. “Too difficult to say goodbye?” Percival asked quietly. “A gentleman would do it anyways.”

Harry buried his face in tighter. He said something they couldn’t hear. Merlin nudged his head up. “A gentleman wouldn’t do what I did,” he said.

Percival looked at Merlin who just mouthed Chester. It was enough and he could get the full story later. “Take care of him,” he said to Merlin who nodded. “I’ll see them off and return and take care of you both.” Percival got up and left the room quietly.

He went up to Eggsy first since he was furthest. “Mr. Unwin, may I help you at all?” he asked, standing at the open door. Eggsy was just sitting there, ready to go and staring daggers at one of his bags. “Mr. Unwin?”

“Thanks, I’m good.” Eggsy picked up the two bags. “Guess Harry and Merlin are waiting downstairs?”

Percival shook his head. “They are currently occupied on business. I express goodbyes and well wishes on their behalf.”

Eggsy just stared at him. “I knew none of it were real.” He started to shoulder past Percival.

“I assure you, it was...is, all real,” Percival said. “They are busy, truly busy. But Harry will want you to come by the shop, talk about that job he offered you.”

“Whatever,” Eggsy said. He again looked at the bag. “Percival?”

“Yes, Mr. Unwin?”

“They’re real gentleman aren’t they?”

“They do try,” Percival said.

“So, bet they’ll say goodbye before we leave.” Eggsy was clearly trying to convince himself.

Percival didn’t answer that. “I have to collect Tequila. I will meet you out front.”

“Sure, but they’ll be there,” Eggsy decided. He went down the hall.
Percival wanted to kick his friends, hard, but he had a feeling that would be kicking while they were already down. He went down a floor and knocked on Tequila’s door. “Mr. Russell, are you ready to depart?”

Tequila opened the door and looked at Percival. He seemed to read the man a lot better than Eggsy had. He didn’t ask about Harry. He didn’t need to. “You know Percy, you were the best gentleman here.”

“I thank you for the compliment, Mr. Russell. You were more gentleman than you realized and it was a pleasure to watch that be drawn out of you. May I carry a couple of your bags?” He looked at the small pile.

“I can manage,” Tequila said.

“Allow me to do my job, sir,” Percival replied and picked up a couple bags. They walked down the hall and Tequila paused a little in front of Harry’s door. He shook his head and kept walking. “Mr. Russell…”

“Yeah, Percy?”

“He feels,” was what Percival managed to say.

“Sorry, Percy, but that dog just don’t hunt,” Tequila said. “Because if he did, you wouldn’t be the one saying that. He would.”

They went outside and watched Eggsy’s shoulders slump when Harry and Merlin weren’t with them. Percival put the bags in the boot and held the door for them. He looked up at the house, at the right window but couldn’t see either man.

Everyone was hurting and for today at least, he couldn’t fix it. All he could do was finish his job. He drove them to the train station.

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Tequila and Eggsy were at the train station, a little confused and a lot numb. “So that’s it then?” Tequila asked to no one really. “All just done now?” He was angry and sad. “I’m angry.”

Eggsy looked at him. “I don’t know what that means.”

Tequila sighed. “I don’t either.” He looked at the oncoming train. “My flight isn’t until tomorrow night, I have a room booked in London but fuck if I know what to do now.” He rubbed a hand over his heart. It hurt. It had a Hart shaped hole in it. Which was stupid because it was just a vacation shag. No way was he going into the shop in London to see about the clothes he was supposed to get. He clued in that Harry had never actually measured him like he had seen in movies. Maybe Harry figured it wasn’t worth dressing Tequila up after all.

Eggsy looked down the lane to the way they had been. He thought of the suitcase full of antiques that he had found this morning. He hadn’t packed it that full. A full suitcase and no goodbye. Right then. “Hey, I don’t want to go home tonight, they don’t know exactly when to expect me. Can I crash in your room with you?”

“Hell yeah. Pajama party,” Tequila said excitedly. It would be a good distraction.

Eggsy laughed at him, but just a little bit. He honestly kinda loved the guy. They got on the train and rode back to the city. They were both quiet and lost in their own thoughts, about the two weeks and
the men they left behind. When they pulled in, Eggsy was ready to take them to the tube but Tequila was not carrying all that luggage on public transport and got them a taxi. They rode to the hotel and it was one of the posh ones. “Shit, Tequila, you staying here?”

“Yup. Told Ginger I wanted something nice, she found this place for me.” Tequila paid the cab and Eggsy stared as a doorman collected all their luggage. Tequila went to the front desk and was a perfect mix of southern charm and the lessons that Harry had taught them. Soon they had a room key and were headed up. Tequila opened the door and they stepped into the suite.

“Your fucking hotel room for one night is bigger than my flat at the estate that has 3 adults and a toddler in it.” Eggsy laughed at the opulence of the place. “Tequila are you rich?”

“No,” Tequila said and paused. “I mean…I don’t think? I could check my portfolio, but mostly comfortable enough to have a few luxuries.”

“Portfolio. You have a portfolio.”

“When I got my MBA, Champ gave me stock in Statesman. And the company lawyer, my friend Ging? She plays the stock market as a hobby. I give her all my money to muck with. Never steered me wrong. Got a couple million. That’s not really rich these days is it?”

“It really fucking is,” Eggsy said. He looked at Tequila. “So what did you plan with your night in London?”

“Jack the Ripper tour, just wander?”

“Right. Come on then.” Eggsy said and walked out of the room and Tequila followed. “We’ll do a couple quick touristy things and then some actual fun.” Eggsy took him to Picadilly Circus and then the London Eye. Tequila snapped a bunch of photos but his heart wasn’t really in it. The man looked like the saddest lost puppy ever. Eggsy figured he didn’t look much different. “Right I know one more perfect spot for us.”

“Yeah?” Tequila asked.

“Yeah.” 45 minutes later, they were at the Black Prince. “Real authentic pub, mate. Not the sort near your hotel that is all cliche and fake. The real deal.”

Tequila looked at the wall of booze behind the bar. “Well, now, that is a right nice sight there.”

“Thought it might be. Wanna get shit faced and moan about idiot men?”

“Eggsy, you are the smartest man I know.” Tequila gave a quick scan of the bar. “I’ll grab the table, you grab us whatever.” Tequila went and sat and looked around the pub. It had a lived in look, nice bit of grime, and wear. He liked it. He was a little tired of all the fancy that he had been surrounded with the last couple of weeks. It really wasn’t to his tastes in the end. Eggsy came back with a couple pints and a couple shot glasses. “Bourbon?”

“They had to dust the bottle off a bit, but yeah. Not as good as your stuff, but it should do the trick.”

Tequila knocked back the bourbon and winced. It was old and been in the sun too much, which was impressive considering the grime on the windows. “So, Eggsy, you feel like a gentleman now?” he asked.

Eggsy drank his own shot and then a few sips of beer. “Fuck no,” he answered. “But…some of the stuff we learned was pretty cool.” He was quiet for a minute. “Harry offered me a job.”

“It’s…complicated,” Eggsy said finally. “It sounded kind of fun, but not sure Dean will go for it. Though him even letting me in the flat depends anyways.”

“Depends on what?” Tequila asked. They had both finished their pints and he went to get them two more. “Eggsy? Talk to me.”

“Nothing. So tell me about all the skype sex you and Harry are planning,” Eggsy said. “You guys were not quiet, like you thought.”

Tequila knocked back half his beer. “Yeah, he didn’t say anything about us still talking.”

“No way were you just a vacation shag for Mister Harry I was born in a suit Hart.” Eggsy shook his head. “Not for nuthin, I know a good bit about posh fuckers who like the poor boy fuck on a weekend, stole plenty of their wallets. You were not that for Harry.”

Tequila stared at his drink. “He didn’t say anything.” He looked at Eggsy. “What about you and Merlin, how was that?”

Eggsy said. “Don’t know. We didn’t shag.”

Tequila choked on his beer. “No way, not the way you two were looking at each other. I’m surprised your clothes didn’t burst into flames they way he stared.”

“I tried, believe me, dropped to my knees and everything and walked away saying I didn’t owe him.” Eggsy sneered. “Like I thought I owed him.” Eggsy paused. “I mean I owe him, but I wasn’t…I didn’t want him to fuck me because of that…he would have known that, right?”

“I have no idea,” Tequila said. “More beer will make it clear.”

“Yeah it will,” he agreed. Eggsy got them another round and Tequila was clearly thinking deep thoughts. “Well?” Eggsy asked when he sat down.

“So no sex with Merlin.”

“Noppppe,” Eggsy nodded. He took a sip of beer that drained half the glass.

“So sucking dick?” Tequila said wanting his friend to have something. And the way they had been around each other was electric. They had to have fooled around. Eggsy shook his head. “Hand jobs. Come on, the way you were looking at each other you had to have a least played the horny flute a bit.”

“What the fuck?” Eggsy said.

“Sorry, something my Uncle Willie used to say.” Tequila blushed a little.

“Uncle Willie, really.” Eggsy took a sip of beer. “Was he creepy Uncle Willie?”

“No, he taught me algebra and how to fish.” Tequila paused. “The taxidermy was a little creepy but you get used to it. Huh…maybe that’s why Harry’s butterfly thing didn’t bug me.”

“What BUTTERFLY THING?” Eggsy shouted and everyone in the bar turned to look. “Oh mind your own, Gordon,” he said to the barkeep. He leaned into Tequila. “Did Harry have a kink thing for butterflies? How does that even work?”
Tequila was bright red and fussing with a coaster. “No, he just had a bunch of butterflies mounted. And shut up, Eggsy. As in pinned and framed, nothing filthy.”

Eggsy let that go, but was curious. “Was Harry kinky at all?”

“One week of vacation fucking, no really enough time to know that about a man,” Tequila said.

“So, no,” Eggsy answered. “Christ I bet Merlin’s kinky. That man is so coiled, bet he just fucking lets go in bed.” Eggsy dropped his head onto the dirty table. “I got 3 kisses that melted my brain, pushed out the door and then listened to him saying my name when he wanked one night.” He wasn’t telling Tequila about the night they both wanked.

“So not asexual,” Tequila said. He thought about it as he finished his pint and then went to get them another round. They definitely needed another round. He also grabbed a couple bags of crisps in scary sounding flavours, perfect with the drinks. He put them all on the table and they ate the crisps and drank a little more. “Harry wouldn’t come to me. I had to go to him. Did you try that at all?”

“Well I burst into his room, found him naked, stared at his dick and said ‘yeah you need to put that in me right now’ does that count?” Eggsy asked. “Although I did sort of ruin it by talking a lot about how freakishly skinny his legs are. He looks like an insect, Tequila. Like I don’t know how they hold those abs and shoulders up. They shouldn’t!” Eggsy waved his arms about. “But offered all sorts of filthy things once I was able to focus.”

“Yeah, that counts. And he didn’t bite.”

“Have you seen his crooked teeth? I want him to bite me so bad. Why won’t he eat me up Tequila? I’m tasty!” Eggsy moaned.

Tequila had a legendary ability to drink so he was just feeling warm and happy, and Eggsy was clearly a little farther along. But he was a good friend and grabbed Eggsy’s hand and licked. “Taste okay,” he agreed. “He didn’t say anything about why he wouldn’t?”

Eggsy shrugged. “Sure, but he were wrong.”

“Explain.”

“Said it would be wrong to fuck while we were doing what we were doing. Position of power is nae a good place to shag from.” Eggsy did a horrible copy of Merlin’s accent. “I mean didn’t phrase it like that perfectly but you get the gist.”

“They weren’t real teachers,” Tequila said. “I mean I think that is why Harry wanted me to come to him. But you know it doesn’t really count, they weren’t grading us.”

“No, he meant the larceny,” Eggsy answered without thinking.

Tequila pushed his drink a little bit away. He gave Eggsy a very cold look. “Eggsy what do you mean? And you better not have done anything to upset Harry. I would not take kindly to that.” Tequila remembered something. “I mean stealing Chester’s pen that first day is one thing, but I know you didn’t take more than that.”

Eggsy giggled a little. “That sounded real intimidating bruv. Good job paying attention to Merlin’s class.”

“I mean it, Eggsy, what did you do?”
“He better have done what I asked him for,” Dean said, managing to do that villain thing where they pop up at exactly the wrong, or in this case, right time. Poodle and Rottie were with him and he loomed over the table. “Because otherwise, he’s in a good bit of trouble. Got all his stuff packed up, so tell me Eggsy, did you do as I ask?”

“Sir, Eggsy and I are enjoying a drink, how about you move it along,” Tequila suggested. He waited for Eggsy to mouth off, but when he looked over, Eggsy looked scared. “Eggsy? We need to go?”

“Got a knight in shining armor while you were gone?” Dean asked. The other guys laughed and Tequila gripped his glass tightly, ready to throw it. He knew how to handle himself in a bar brawl. “He know that you are garbage and a shitty little pissant who probably didn’t even do as he was told?”

“I did,” Eggsy said. “Just don’t exactly have it with me.”

“Bet you cocked it up anyways, only brought fakes,” Dean sneered. “Boys go home and throw his stuff in the street.”

“Swear down, Dean, all the stuff I snagged was legit,” Eggsy said. “Just let me go get it.”

“You got one hour,” Dean said. He moved to the side to let Eggsy out of the booth. Tequila watched one of the goons trip him. He followed Eggsy out walking backwards, not trusting the men at all.

When they were outside, Eggsy threw up in the gutter. Tequila held him and rubbed his back.

“Eggsy, who was that?”

Eggsy wiped his mouth. “Stepdad. I had to steal a bunch of shit from the estate or he was going to kick me out.”

“And Merlin helped you,” Tequila realized.

“Yeah, and that it was nothing Harry cared about,” Eggsy agreed. He started to move fast to the underground station. “Shit we gotta move. He means it too, an hour is all we got.”

“Eggsy, if the choices are moving out or committing a crime, it seems like a pretty easy choice,” Tequila said, his legs long enough to easily keep up with Eggsy who was almost jogging.

“Yeah?” Eggsy turned and glared at Tequila and tried to poke him in the chest and missed. “Might be easy for mister two million quid ain’t rich. But it ain’t just kicked out, it’s kicked out with my head kicked in. It’s kicked out, that if I ever step foot in a three kilometre radius of the estate, his boys will go at me with lead pipes. It’s never seeing my Mum again unless we go full spy. It means that when she’s high or drunk, or busy being Dean’s arm candy my sister, my not even three years old sister is left high and dry to go hungry, to cry, to be scared.” Eggsy burped and leaned over to throw up more of the beer. “It ain’t about me Tequila. If it was I’d tell him to shove off. And never go back. But I have to keep them safe.”

“Merlin helped you grab stuff of value,” Tequila put it all together. Eggsy nodded and just couldn’t go forward. “That’s why he wouldn’t fuck you. He was scared you were offering out of payment. Did he even know why you were doing it?”

“No. Think he could he could tell it was need, not want, but never said I need this ugly vase if I ever want to see my perfect little sister again. And I wanted to fuck him because I was falling in love with his grumpy, colour blind, perfect Scottish ass!” Eggsy yelled. “And if I had over the goods to Dean, then I don’t ever get to look him in the eye, no matter that he were the one helping me.”
“You love him?” Tequila asked.

“I could love him,” Eggsy said. “I want…it doesn’t matter what I want.”

“It does to me,” Tequila said. He leaned against the wall and put an arm around Eggsy. “We became mates right?”

“Yeah, we’re friends,” Eggsy agreed. He leaned into Tequila, fuck the cowboy ran warm. And cozy. Tequila was all sorts of cozy.

“Then tell me what you want,” Tequila said. “Tell me what you’d wish for. Pretend I’m like your animal friend and you’re a Disney princess.”

Eggsy laughed a little. “I want out,” he admitted. “I want the job and training that Harry offered me. I want to go into Merlin’s shop and eat a take away lunch with him. I want a tiny, shitty flat, with thin walls and bad plumbing, but it’s mine yeah? Alone. I want to be able to have my own fucking life, but still be able to check on Mum and babysit Daisy. But who gets what they fucking dream of? Because if I had the stuff over to Dean, I never can face Harry and Merlin, and if I don’t I end up in A&E and with nuthin.”

Tequila nodded. “You do, tonight.”

“Huh?”

“Tonight I’m making you that damn dress and you are going to the ball.” Tequila stated and walked back to the Black Prince.

It took Eggsy a moment to follow him. “I don’t get it.”

“You’re a decent guy Eggsy, and you just need a damn break. And I’m good at breaking things,” Tequila said. He opened the door to the bar and walked over and grabbed Poodle’s head and slammed it into the bar, knocking him cold.

“What the fuck?” Dean and Eggsy both yelled.

“Do I have your attention?” Tequila asked. He dodged the hit from Rottie and smashed him in the face with a pint glass. “I said, do I have your attention?”

Dean looked at him. “Yeah, I’m listening.”

“Good. Hey, I’m Tequila. I’m Eggsy’s friend,” Tequila held out his hand. Right now, with this man, he had no interest in being called Jimmy.

Dean blinked but then shook. “Tequila.”

“That’s right. So, Eggsy isn’t going to hand over the antiques to you.”

“Well that’s a bit of a problem innit?” Dean glowered. “He owes me.”

“No, he don’t.” Tequila slipped off his watch. “Vintage Rolex, should get a decent sum from that. And that is my guarantee.”

“For what?” Dean sneered. “Eggsy you got yourself a rich American. You know you can find them prettier and younger on Smith Street.”

Tequila looked at Eggsy who looked sick and just shook his head. “Right, guessin’ you aren’t the
sort that my grandmam talked about when she said us southerners got our manners from the British. Now Eggsy will move out and not work for you, and get to see his Mum and Daisy every other weekend without your interference.”

“Making a lot of demands for one watch,” Dean pointed out.

“And when I get back home I will transfer 20 shares of Statesman stock into your name,” Tequila said. “That will bring in a minimum of 10k a year to you.”

“Eggsy could bring in more than that running for me.”

“Yeah but then you have to feed him, deal with lots of variables. This is guaranteed money,” Tequila said. “You let him live at the flat until one week after the transfer is complete, without touching a hair on his head. Easy money, easiest you’ll ever make.”

Dean looked at him, weighed him and couldn’t find anything but sincerity on the man’s face. “Done,” he agreed. He didn't see how he lost out on the deal, and getting rid of Eggsy was just as good as using him.

Tequila held out his hand again. “Pleasure doing business with you. We’ll just be on our way then.”

Tequila hauled the stunned Eggsy out of the bar.

He kept them moving for a block before Eggsy pulled him into a hug that involved him clinging like a monkey. “Glad I lift those barrels,” Tequila muttered.

“What the fuck did your crazy yank arse do?”

“Don’t ever call me a yank,” Tequila said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Eggsy said. “How the fuck am I supposed to pay you back?”

“Take care of Harry?” Tequila asked softly.

“Oh shit, you fell in love too,” Eggsy said.

“Got me a heart as big as all outdoors, Ging alway said, just waiting for the right person to build a fence around it,” Tequila said. “Guess Harry’s the fence.”

“You should tell him,” Eggsy said.

“No,” Tequila said. “A gentleman doesn’t put that sort of burden on another person, not if they can carry the weight.”

“He’d be proud of you,” Eggsy said. “That you’ve taken all the classes to heart.”

Tequila hailed them a taxi. “I hope so.”

“Love’s a fucking kick in the ass,” Eggsy said getting in.

“It is,” the driver agreed.

Tequila laughed and gave the name of the hotel. When they were back in the room, Tequila went into his luggage and poured out a bit of bourbon for the two of them. They raised their glasses to each other and drank.

Tequila was looking glum and Eggsy was confused by what the man had done for him. “Wanna tell
me what Harry’s knob was like?” was the only thing he could think to say.

Tequila burst into giggles. “How is that gentlemanly?”

“How is that gentlemanly?”

“Tonight who cares? Think you did enough gentlemanly shit, helping me out like that.”

“Just promise me, you’ll do happy after ever stuff,” Tequila said.

“I will,” Eggsy promised. “So the sex, how was it?”

“Pretty damn great,” Tequila said and told Eggsy far more than Harry would be comfortable with.
Chapter 24

Champ frowned at Tequila. “Son, you heard me right?” He looked at Ginger who stood a little behind Tequila and held her hands up helplessly. “Tequila?”

“Jimmy,” he said finally. “Call me Jimmy, please.”

“Sure, Jimmy,” Champ said. “Might take a little to remember, but I’ll do it. But Jimmy, you did hear me right? The job is yours. Head distiller for Statesman bourbon. Congratulations.” He held out his hand and after a minute Tequila shook it.

“I won’t let you down, sir,” Tequila said sincerely. “I’m going to give this my all.”

“You can start that tomorrow,” Champ smiled at him. “Tonight should be about celebrating. Go out to a bar, find a girl and make her smile, son.” Champ watched Tequila flinch at that. “Jimmy, there something you need to talk about?”

“No, sir, nothing that will affect the job,” Tequila reassured. He stood up. “I think I’ll go do that celebrating you suggest.” He walked out of the office.

Champ looked at Ginger. “You got a clue what’s going on in that boy’s head?”

Ginger held her file folders. “Some,” she said. “Champ, I think our boy has gone and fallen in love.”

Champ laughed and waited for a punch line. Ginger just stared at him. “You done?” she asked after a minute.

“Wait, really?” Champ made a frowny thinky face. “Well I’ll be.”

“I’ll go out with him, see what I can do,” Ginger promised. “You made the right call picking him.”

“Of course I did, I’m never wrong about people,” Champ said.

Ginger rolled her eyes and went to follow Tequila.

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They were at a shitty bar not too far from the distillery. Ginger had changed into jeans and a tank top and Tequila was still in his work clothes. “You look good, you know. I like the new look.”

“Thanks. Harry suggested it. I was supposed to get some clothes as a part of the platinum package, but…” Tequila swirled the bourbon in his glass. “But I took my flight out.”

Ginger frowned and looked at her phone. “They were supposed to take your measurements during the second week so that they could be sent to the shop so that the last day you had where you were in London, you could have tried it on and then they were to alter and mail it to you. You didn’t go to the fitting?”

“I didn’t get measured at all,” Tequila said.

“Oh I am lodging a complaint,” Ginger said and began to make a note on her phone.

Tequila pulled it gently from her hand. “It’s okay. We were busy with other things.”

“Was the other things the reason I had to transfer those stocks to Dean Baker?” she asked.
Tequila smiled. “Nah that was to help my new ‘mate’ out,” he tried to say mate like how Eggsy did and it was horrible. “My new bruv,” was even worse. He pulled out his phone and scrolled a little and showed her a couple photos of he and Eggsy goofing off, Merlin glowering in the background. “He’s a good guy, just needed a break,” Tequila said. “He said when he gets the money together he’s gonna visit. Gonna show him a real good time.”

“How good a time? Did you and he?” Ginger asked. She was a little surprised, she hadn’t gotten the vibe and he was into Eggsy. That it was Harry he was interested in.

“Nah, hoping that since I helped Eggsy get himself sorted that he and Merlin might have a shot. Really, I played cupid there in a roundabout way.” Tequila smiled to himself. He and Eggsy had exchanged a few texts and Eggsy was psyching himself up to go see Merlin. Tequila knew he didn’t have to fret, Merlin was crazy sunk on Eggsy and now that the larceny wasn’t sitting there between them no way they didn’t work it out. Eggsy was going to be so happy. Tequila wanted his friend to be happy.

“Last time you held a bow and arrow was for that naked calendar shoot.”

“You bought 5 copies.”

“Can’t be proven.” Ginger went to hand Tequila back his phone and her finger slipped over the screen and she saw a photo of a handsome middle aged man sleeping. It was a gorgeous photo and taken up close. “That’s Hart of Kingsman tailors.”

“Yeah,” Tequila took the phone and looked at the picture. “That’s Harry.” His smile was soft and sad. He knocked back the rest of the whisky and looked around the bar. “So who looks good in here tonight?”

“No one,” she said. She had seen that photo and no way was she letting him do anything stupid tonight. She knew Tequila would not be able to cope with a random fuck that night.

“Well that’s not true, you are as always a perfect picture,” Tequila said.

“Thanks, but that isn’t happening,” Ginger said. “Tell me about him, Tequila.”

“Not much to tell, just one of those flings.” Tequila looked at his empty glass. “He’s fussy and vain, and what’s the word Eggsy used? Posh, he was super posh. Could cover him in pig shit and he’d somehow be smelling like roses.”

“Stuck up then,” she said.

“No, he jumped in a pond in one of his custom suits because he maybe thought he saw something he lost. He offered Eggsy a guy from the wrong side of their tracks a job, and he and Merlin, god you get them going and it was like those British shows where people insult each other at a mile a minute.” Tequila laughed a bit. “He wrote me a formal letter of apology and he could dance.”

“You do love dancers,” she said quietly. Tequila didn’t say anything. “Jimmy…did you love him?”

Tequila gave her a smile that broke her heart in its sadness. “Nah, Ginger you know me. Just a vacation fuck. Man like that would never want more than that from me.”

“Is that what he said?”

“He didn’t even say goodbye. How about another drink?” Tequila asked. He was up at the bar before she could say no. Ginger looked at him and figured he could crash in her spare room tonight.
Broken hearts always needed company.

Merlin was grateful that when he settled back into his store, that he had a fussy job to do. He and Harry were fools for letting their young men walk away, no matter that they had their reasons. Good ones, sensible ones, except when you pictured their smirk, their face, their thick thick thighs.

Okay that one was him, Harry was currently abs obsessed.

Still he had Harry sobered up and back at work. Work would be good for him, busy was good. And fuck Chester for giving Harry an ultimatum like that. He had called Percival and they were meeting tomorrow to see if they couldn’t fix this somehow. Merlin had money, Percival had money, they could make Chester go away. They would get Harry sorted because Harry deserved to be happy. Harry was so sad about Tequila, it hurt Merlin. Merlin tried not to think about Eggsy. He should have said goodbye. But he had known if he had that he’d try to whisk the boy away, away from whatever trouble it was that had him stealing from King. But it wasn’t his place. And really he knew he had been useful for the lad. He couldn’t have really liked Merlin.

Merlin looked at the set of soldiers on his desk. He picked up the first wind up toy and winced at the noise it made when he tried to turn the key. The second one, the key didn’t move at all, and the third got the soldier moving but two steps and it was done. He would start with that one first. He put on a Loretta Lynn album and lay out his very fine work tools. He gave the toy a gentle wipe down with a linen cloth and then used a q-tip to clean out smaller places. It was an hour before he was satisfied that the problem wasn’t outer grime and dust. He slowly worked the toy open, occasionally humming along with the music. He could vaguely hear his clerk dealing with a customer but ignored it. He ignored it when he heard footsteps enter his work room. They sat on Harry’s chair but the way the weight settled, he knew it wasn’t Harry. He still didn’t look up though. They could wait, this was delicate business.

Besides he could tell from the cologne that it was Eggsy.

Eventually though he had the machine open and parts carefully placed on his work mat and he looked up.

“Watching you work is beautiful,” Eggsy says softly. “Fuck if I had seen that at the estate, wouldn’t have ever let you go. You handle people with that much care?”

“When they want to be handled that way yes,” Merlin said. He took off the glasses that magnified and put his regular set back on. “Is that what you would want?”

“Wouldn’t mind it,” Eggsy said. “But sometimes would want you to use those muscles to throw me down too.”

Merlin leaned back in his chair. “Would ye now?”

“Yeah?” Eggsy asked.

“Is that all you want?” Merlin stared at him.

“No. And I think I get it now,” Eggsy said. He picked up a duffel bag. “It’s empty.”

Merlin frowned. “Is this a metaphor for your emotional baggage?”

Eggsy laughed at that. “No, you idiot. I returned everything to Harry. Didn’t give a lick of it to Dean.
Not one piece.” He stared at Merlin. “You get me?”

Merlin tilted his head. “Ye…Harry and I wouldn’t have minded.”

“I realized I did. I just couldn’t see a way around it.”

“Eggsy, are you safe?” Merlin leaned forward. “I can -”

“No!” Eggsy said quickly. “Not you. I mean I do get it now. You didn’t want us to shag while you were worried it was payment. And I…as equal footing as we can be right?” Merlin nodded. “Tequila helped me out. The big stupid softee jerk, got me my freedom from the thugs. And I took the job Harry offered me. He’s letting me sleep in his workroom for right now.”

“Harry is also a big softee jerk,” Merlin said.

“And you aren’t? Stealing from a friend, to help out a stranger?”

“It was more from his uncle, a man I despise,” Merlin pointed out.


Merlin was lost. He looked at the gears and cogs and tools on his table. He couldn’t easily think of an answer and started to work again. He figured Eggsy would leave, but the lad didn’t. He just sat and waited. Merlin found where one tiny tooth had broken. He swung his chair around and found a part that would replace it well. He put the toy back together, made sure it was well oiled. Merlin turned the key in its back and watched as the soldier walked across the length of his table. He looked at Eggsy and was surprised at the respect and affection in the lad’s eyes. “Because I saw a broken thing. A beautiful and broken thing, and I wanted it to be whole. That’s all I ever want, is for things to be whole and functioning. I have to fix broken things.”

“People ain’t your watches and other stuff. I don’t need you to fix me,” Eggsy said. “Working on fixing myself.” He came around the desk and Merlin pushed his chair back and Eggsy settled onto his lap. “I get my first paycheque on Friday. Wanna go out?”

Merlin ran a finger over Eggsy’s jawline. “No,” he said softly. He watched the hurt swim into Eggsy’s eyes and how he started to close himself off. “I would like to stay in. You could bring takeaway to my place? Stay the night? Despite whatever horrid things Harry has said about my flat, it is nae that bad. Better than a cot in a backroom.”

“Spending the night on a first date? Does that seem very gentlemanly?” Eggsy teased. He gasped when Merlin’s teeth bit at his neck and moaned at the way Merlin sucked on his pulse point.

“I was always shite at being a gentleman,” Merlin said. “I am sure ye could tell how much I was faking it.”

“Yeah, a gentleman doesn’t commit larceny.”

“We will really have to leave that out of our ‘how did you meet’ story,” Merlin said.

“I think it is pretty charming,” Eggsy countered. He leaned his forehead against Merlin’s.

“Downright romantic, knight in shining armor sort of shit.”

“Let me finishing working on these little red soldiers and I’ll show you romance,” Merlin growled.

“They’re green,” Eggsy said. He kissed Merlin. “Harry’s expecting me back. I get to learn about
shoes.”

“I like your winged trainers.”

Eggsy kissed him again. “Definitely putting out on that first date.”

Merlin gave his arse a swat and pushed Eggsy off of his lap. “Go back to your job, and I’ll see you on Friday.”

Eggsy went and grabbed his bag. “Would it be okay sometimes, if we had lunch together?”

“No food in my workroom,” Merlin said immediately. He then smiled. “But I have an alcove just back there that has a table.”

Eggsy gave him a small salute and headed out.

Merlin put on some bouncier music and smiled the whole afternoon while working on the other soldiers.
“Hey Jimmy,” Ginger said when he answered the phone. “I ordered way too much Chinese, wanna come over and help me eat it? We can watch Footloose,” she offered. She knew he loved that damn movie.

“Pretty tired, Ging,” Tequila said. He stared into his mostly empty fridge. “Got plenty to eat in here.”

“No, I understand,” she replied. “I mean I have interesting information about Harry Hart, but yeah that doesn’t really matter. Enjoy your evening, Jimmy,” Ginger hung up and was curious which would arrive first, Tequila or the food.

They arrived at the same time. Tequila paid for the food, waving away Ginger’s protests and brought the bags in. He rooted around and found a container of hot and sour soup and then a box of orange beef, a couple of his favourites. She had definitely been planning this. He grabbed them cutlery and took everything to her kitchen table and plunked himself down. “Why do you think I still care about Harry?” he asked. He dipped into the soup while Ginger opened her prawns. “It’s been four months.”

“And you’ve moped for four months,” she pointed out.

“I haven’t,” Tequila protested. “I’ve been…adjusting to the new job.”

“Right,” Ginger said. “Busy, not moping.”

“Exactly.” Tequila finished his soup and moved onto the beef. “I don’t care about Harry.”

“Of course not,” Ginger ate some more prawns. They finished the meal in silence and Ginger poured them both a bourbon and they went to the living room.

“Put on the movie,” Tequila said. “That’s why I’m here, to see Kevin Bacon shake it.”

“Only reason?” Ginger asked. She put the article she printed off on the table and turned the tv on.

Tequila looked down at the pages on the coffee table. It was an article printed from The London Times. It had a headline of ‘New Cut for an Old Store’. There was a picture of the window front of Kingsman, Harry standing there looking stoic in a grey suit and Eggsy beside him grinning in jeans, winged trainers and a blazer clearly cut by Harry. They both looked good. But he wasn’t going to read it. He didn’t care. He certainly didn't care about the second photo of Harry smiling just a little and sitting on his desk.
Ginger sat curled up on the couch and waited. They watched Kevin Bacon have trouble adjusting to
the new small town and she hugged a pillow. She watched out of the corner of her eyes as Tequila
started to stare at the print off more than the movie. “It’s an interesting article,” she said.

His eyes snapped back up to the movie. “That’s good,” he said. “I suppose it is mostly about Eggsy’s
job.”

“That and the shop being under new ownership,” she said.

Tequila couldn’t figure out where to look, the movie, the article or Ginger. “Harry owns the shop.”

“Nope, watching the movie,” he said and crossed his arms and slumped down.

Ginger nodded and just happened to slip on her reading glasses. “Mr. Harry Hart has always been a
respected tailor, but in the last couple months things have changed at Kingsman Tailors. New co-
owners, the arrival of the brash and charismatic Mr Unwin as personal stylist, and a new flair to what
had previously been exquisite but traditional suits.”

“Eggsy would like brash and charismatic,” Tequila said. He paused the movie. “Oh just give me that,” he said and Ginger handed over the page.

Tequila read slowly, carefully not wanting to miss a word.

Mr. Harry Hart has always been a respected tailor, but in the last couple months things have changed at Kingsman Tailors. New co-owners, the arrival of the brash and charismatic Mr Unwin as personal stylist, and a new flair to what had previously been exquisite but traditional suits. It isn’t a dramatic change but amid the black and greys, there is a spark of blue plaid, a satsuma orange smoking jacket. And in the last month there is a hint of an American western look appearing, the window display having a pair of cowboy boots paired with a navy suit, a cowboy print on the walls and a Statesman bourbon vintage ad framed behind Mr. Hart’s table. The shop always elegant, has a splash of the eclectic which is drawing in a younger crowd.

“I’ve always had a small penchant for the absurd, a desire to mix the traditional and the bold, but before I was stymied by my partner,” Harry explained. “I stand behind everything I have ever made, and continue to make classic suits that a gentleman can wear for years, but now I have the chance to explore a little more.”

Included in that exploration is that Kingsman Tailors now makes suits for women as well.

“Women want to be powerful too,” Mr. Unwin explained. “And not like those terrifying 80s power suits,” he joked. “But a woman wants an impeccable suit and should be able to get it.”

“It has been a joy and challenge to cut suits for women as well,” Harry said. His fingers move quickly as we talk, cutting fabric while barely even looking, so sure of his trade after decades of work. “I hired part time help with experience in women’s clothes and have been learning as much as I can. And now we offer a more full experience with Mr. Unwin helping. If you come in for a suit, you can leave with multiple looks in hand. He has a keen eye. I am grateful to have him as part of the shop.”

Mr. Unwin appears startled by the praise as he stands in a corner sorting ties, matching them to a rich blue shirt. “Working with Harry’s the best thing that happened to me. Met at those gentleman classes he used to teach. Actually you might want to know, we’re going to be doing a youtube channel for the shop, tips on how to dress and act, the stuff Harry’s brilliant at. Everyone should be able to take advantage of his knowledge, even if they can’t swing the cost of a bespoke suit.” Mr Unwin is all charm and smiles that pull you in. You can spend several extra hundred pounds because of that smile and not regret it for a second. “Remind me to give you the name of the channel to put in your article. First video is going up today in fact.”

We chat more about the changes in the store and one of the new co-owners arrives, though not for business but to take Mr. Unwin for lunch and Harry smiles at them fondly. “I am surrounded by happy people,” he said eyes full of warmth. “My friends are in love, I am reinvigorated with my work, a man can’t ask for much more in life.”

It is a perfect opening and I ask about Mr. Hart’s personal life, he is a handsome man and in certain circles there is always gossip about him. His smile dims a little. “I am focused on my work at the moment.” I quickly shift the discussion away, the sadness in him at that, is uncomfortable and his friends close ranks a little bit. I finish by asking about the new bits of Americana in the shop and Mr. Hart positively lights up. “I recently fell in love with a western aesthetic. The last group of students at the Gentleman classes, there was a cowboy. He had a great deal of charm and wit, and I admit that I grew intrigued by the possibility of mixing English sensibility with that American aesthetic. I
think...I think that if they had a chance they could work incredibly well together.” Mr. Hart’s eyes grow distant, remembering something. “They fit together more than I ever thought they would.” He gave me a wink. “Now, can I talk you into a waistcoat? A black plaid under that jacket would add an incredible pop to your look.”

Kingsman Tailors is open Tuesday-Sunday 10am-7:30pm
Kingsmantailors.co.uk
Kingsmantailors.youtube.com

Tequila put the page back on the table and picked up his drink. He turned on the movie and watched without really seeing it. Ginger scooted over and hugged him, not quite sure what he was feeling. They finish the movie in silence and Ginger turned the t.v. off.

“Hey, Ging,” Tequila finally said.

“Yeah, sweetie,” she sat up to properly look at him.

“Know it isn’t exactly my job, more marketing or distribution, but read the reports our sales in England aren’t great, not really making in roads.”

“No we aren’t, it makes Champ grumble something fierce,” she lied. He didn’t give a fuck about the European market.

“Thinking, maybe someone should go to London,” he said casually. “Light a fire under our distributor?”

“You know, that’s not a bad idea,” Ginger agreed. “I think the lack of personal touch has definitely been hurting the company. I would imagine it would take you at least a week to take the meetings and get the lay of the land.”

“Yup, and my team can cover for that long, everything is barreled and resting right now, was going to be mostly paperwork for the next week.” Tequila nodded. “And while I’m there, think I need some new clothes. Just a couple things to fill out my wardrobe.”

“Not a bad idea,” Ginger smiled at him and kissed his cheek. “Want me to book a flight and hotel for you?”

“You’re the best, you know,” Tequila said.

“I love happy endings, big soppy epic ones,” she replied.

Tequila hugged her. He couldn’t guarantee it, but dammit he was going to try for one.
“Hello?” Eggsy said. He was walking across the road to the shop, he didn’t have a client until this afternoon, but he and Harry were going to talk window displays. They had been getting even more people in since the article in the Times and they wanted to really make the window pop.

“Hey Eggy,” Tequila said. “You got a minute?”

“Yeah, bruv, what’s up?” Eggsy asked. “How’s Kentucky?”

“I assume fine, was when I left it yesterday.”

“At the New York office? Bunch of meetings?” Eggsy stopped outside Kingsman and leaned against the wall.

“Had some meetings, yeah, but not New York.”

“Okay, I’ll bite. Where were the meetings at?” Eggsy knew Tequila was trying to set him up and figured he’d follow down the road.

“Uh…according to my google maps about 15 kilometers away from you?”

“What the fuck?” Eggsy quickly looked through the store window and could see Harry fussing at the front table. He hurried down the block, like somehow Harry would hear this through glass and brick. “You’re in London? Why are you in London?”

“My friend Ginger found the article,” Tequila said.

“Oh.” Eggsy circled around a couple blocks and went in through the back door of Merlin’s shop.

Merlin looked up in confusion. He looked at his watch. “Bit early for a booty call,” he said. He then shrugged. “Right, well, I can fit a shag in. Nothing actually due today, was just going to fiddle.” He stood up ready to follow Eggsy.

Eggsy rolled his eyes. “No. Tequila is in London.” He pointed at his phone and then hit speaker. “Wot the fuck are you doing here mate?”

“I go by Jimmy now, if that’s all the same Eggy,” Tequila said.

“Sure, I can do that,” Eggsy agreed. “Harry always calls you James, so -” Eggsy cut himself off. He gave a helpless shrug when Merlin glared at him.

“Harry talks about me?” Tequila asked. “Like how much?”


“Oh. No of course,” Tequila said. “It was a stupid idea anyways.”

“What was a stupid idea?” Eggsy asked. “Because Merlin is stone cold lying. Harry talks about you on the regular.”

“Eggsy!” Merlin hissed. “That is breaking his confidence that he’s in love with the cowboy.” Eggsy just gave him a look and Merlin clued into what he had said. “Ah, bugger.”
“So in the article, when it mentions his enjoyment of the western aesthetic… is that me?” Tequila asked.

Merlin and Eggsy stared at each other and eventually Merlin nodded.

“Yes, Jimmy. Harry’s nuts over you. But figured he had cocked it up too much to go after you. We all tried but he said he couldn’t. He has about 20 apology letters to you in his desk.” Eggsy said. “He is nuts for you, mate. Just figured you deserved better than him.”

“Better than Harry?” Tequila sounded shocked.

“Ye have to understand, he felt he didn’t behave the gentleman for you,” Merlin added. “And that you deserve someone who would. Right from the beginning. I had to deal with a drug fueled night where he decided he was going to hell just because he couldn’t manage to say Tequila seductively. That he was horrible for hating that nickname.”

Tequila didn’t say anything.

“Mate… you are still owed a fitting at the tailor’s, yeah? Could book you a secret appointment?” Eggsy suggested. He thought that actually sounded pretty great. All romantic movie and stuff. Harry would look at the appointment book and then look up and see Tequila and music would swell and it would be brilliant.

“How do you two feel about committing a couple crimes?” Tequila asked.

“I’m good to go,” Eggsy answered immediately.

“It depends,” Merlin was a little more cautious.

“Hey! You were willing to commit grand larceny for me.”

“Yes well, I rather wanted to get in your pants,” Merlin pointed out.

“It’s for Harry. What wouldn’t you do for Harry?” Eggsy asked in return.

“Wear chiffon. Eat shrimp. Grow my hair long. Shag him.” Merlin said after a minute. “Other than those, pretty much anything is on the table.”

“I need to get onto the big estate,” Tequila said. “I need to go to the pond.”

“Minor trespassing?” Eggsy sighed. “Not even a fun crime. Right. Where you at so we can get this going?” Tequila told them his hotel name. “See you in a bit.” Eggsy hung up. He took off his blazer and started a fake hacking fit. “Haven’t had to skiv off in a while, but should be able to convince Harry I’m sick. Get the car.”

Merlin nodded and went to get the car. This should prove interesting indeed.

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Merlin drove them to the back of the estate, and parked behind the stables. “Right, ye said the pond. Guessing your big romantic gesture is trying to find the ring?” He had thrown on a suit, hoping that if they were noticed he would be mistaken for visiting Chester for a meeting.
Tequila grinned. “You know it.”

“What ring?” Eggsy asked.

“Harry’s father’s signet ring. He lost it in the pond a few years ago, has been trying to find it,” Merlin explained. “More than once he’s jumped into that pond in his clothes thinking that he found it.” They all walked to the pond and Merlin looked at it. “We’ve both tried, but it is small and we just figured it was lost.”

Tequila opened the bag he had with him. “The trick is, you two were always thinking small.” He put three small submarines into the water and tapped at the tablet that came with them. “Cameras and metal detectors that work in water. Even has a claw to grab stuff.” He sat on the ground. “It will take a while but more likely to work than just dive in.”

Merlin was a little impressed at it. “Let me see.”

“No, you can take it all apart after,” Eggsy said. “Let the toys do their job first. Besides shouldn’t you go to the estate and steal some of the stuff Harry didn’t clear out before the bastard Chester kicked him out?”

Merlin’s eyes gleamed. “Excellent idea, my darling.” He kissed Eggsy and headed up to the house.

Eggsy sat down beside Tequila and watched the screen with him. Even with the lights on the submarine it was hard to see anything in the pond, it was so murky. “So,” he said.

“So,” Tequila answered. They were quiet again for a while, waiting for the other to say something. “How’s the job going?” Tequila asked.

“Good,” Eggsy said. “Real good. I get to convince rich fuckers to buy what I tell them. They spend a fortune on clothes and then pay me too. Like the greatest con ever.”

“Going to move to Hollywood? Become stylist to the stars?” Tequila teased.

“No, never leaving Harry,” Eggsy said easily. “Guy gave me a chance and not skipping out on that. Plus work across the street from Merlin. And Percival is a few blocks away. It’s a good deal.” Eggsy looked at Tequila. “And I have it all because of you.”
“Everything going okay there? No trouble?”

“Dean sometimes drunk calls and screams at me. Daisy has spent the night a couple times with me and Merlin,” Eggsy shrugged a little. “Look at that,” he pointed.

Tequila moved about the controls, but it was a bottle the submarine found. He set them to keep looking.

“He came by the shop once, Dean did,” Eggsy said casually. “Shoulda seen Harry.”

“Did he put in practice Merlin’s lessons for gentlemanly intimidation?” Tequila joked. He couldn’t picture Harry facing off with that asshole he had met.

“Uh…sort of?” Eggsy gave a half laugh. “He asked Dean to leave the shop and Dean talked a bunch of shit and said make me. Harry threw his pattern weight, drilled Dean right in the eye and then held this tiny knife he uses to rip out seams to him and said that if he ever came by the shop again Harry would stab him and then call the filth. Dean left.”

“Fuck,” Tequila said in shock.

“Harry had a panic attack after Dean left and we had to close the shop the rest of the day, but couldn’t fucking believe it, mate, in the moment he was fearless.”

“He’s got a loyal heart,” Tequila said.

“Harry’s not so much as gone out for coffee with someone since you left,” Eggsy said.

Tequila looked at his little screen. “Don’t suppose you know why he didn’t actually say goodbye to me?” he asked.

“Yeah, I do, but I don’t know if -” Eggsy bit his lip.

“Eggsy, I need to know,” Tequila said. “Because yeah I’m doing all this, but if it is a shit reason…”

“Chester basically said he’d close up the shop if Harry took up with you, shamed the family with an American idiot.” Eggsy sighed. “Harry’s worked so long for that shop and listening to family is so ingrained in his set that he fell into line without thinking.” Eggsy looked at the water. “Only when he got back to London he didn’t go into work for three days and just watched western movies and drank an obscene amount of Statesman from what Merlin said. He and Percival cleaned the guy up and he admitted that he was completely sunk on you, but figured there was no way he could ever make up for choosing his business over you.”

Tequila nodded. “I can get that. Can’t hold it against the man, when I spent how much trying to get some polish to get a job.”

“That’s going well?” Eggsy asked.

“Yeah, I love it.” Tequila grinned at him. “It is stupid amount of work, but it makes me happy.”

“You think about how it will work if you two get together? Kind of an ocean between you,” Eggsy pointed out.

“A bit. Guessing lots of watching each other jerk off on Skype,” Tequila said. “Air miles. We’ll figure it out if we want to.”

“And you want to,” Eggsy said.

“Shit,” Eggsy answered. “Think it does.” Tequila started to carefully move the submarine closer when they heard a shout.

Merlin was running with several frames of butterflies in his arms. “Chester said he’s calling the cops!” he shouted. His suit had tricked no one. He should have also grabbed a wig from somewhere.

“Fuck,” Eggsy said and went to help his boyfriend who looked ready to drop stuff.

Tequila looked at his robots, and the pond. “Well, here we go,” he said. He hit a button which caused the one submarine to light up as much as possible and he dove into the water. He swam to the spot and then dove down. He felt through the silt and dirt and plants at the bottom of the pond. He was about to have to go up for air when his fingers closed around something. He pushed up and opened his hand. It was a ring. “No fucking way,” he said. He looked over and realized the old man was headed to the pond. “Shit,” he cursed and swam out. He abandoned the 10 thousand dollar equipment without a thought and booked it to the car which Merlin had running. He jumped, soaking wet into the back seat. “Got it!” he shouted.

Merlin just gunned it and drove them away from the estate. He went into town and pulled up in front of a couple shops. “We’ll buy ye some towels.”

Tequila was shivering now that the adrenaline was starting to fail. “Maybe something a little more than that?”

Eggsy looked at the row of shops. “Charity shop,” he said and hopped out of the car. Merlin followed and went into a store and came back with a couple of towels. Tequila got out and Merlin handed him one and used the other to clean up the car.

“Ye will be good to Harry, or Percival and I will make your life hell. No clock will ever tell ye the right time again,” Merlin said without looking at him.

Tequila smiled a bit at that. “I would imagine that Ginger will probably threaten Harry at some point.”

Merlin nodded. “It is tradition.” He stood up. “Oh good lord, will ye just start stripping down? Ye are gross and cold.”

“Out here in the open?” Tequila stared at him in surprise.

“I’ve seen your youtube videos,” Merlin said.

Tequila nodded and took his shirt off and dried off. He then wrapped the towel around his waist and then eased his jeans off. He held the towel carefully, it didn’t really go all the way around. They stood there by the car, in awkward silence, Tequila almost naked.

“Found the only clothes that would fit you!” Eggsy said running over. It was a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. With pink stripes and flowers. “Sorry mate, swear down all they had.”

Tequila didn’t care what it looked like, he just wanted to not be mostly naked in a parking lot. He got dressed and Eggsy snorted a little. “Well you’ll be dry for the drive back to London. We’ll go to your hotel, get you dressed all nice and then -”

“No, not waiting any longer, we’re going straight to Harry,” Tequila said. “He needs this ring back.”

“True love doesn’t care about really shitty sweatshirts,” Merlin said. Plus he really wanted to see Harry’s face when his first view of the man he was besotted with was in that sweatshirt. He was a small petty man sometimes. And an asshole. It was why he and Eggsy were so perfect together, in a different universe they were probably secret spies or criminal masterminds or some such.

“I just want to see Harry,” Tequila said.

“Fine,” Eggsy said. “Let’s go then make some happy ever after happen.”

They all got back into the car and headed to London.

Harry was cutting fabric. He loved it. Too many tailors rushed the cutting to get to the sewing but he loved watching his cutter or his shears go through the fabric. It was making puzzle pieces that would eventually make a gorgeous whole. The pieces he was cutting were petite, a tuxedo for Roxy. She wanted a traditional tux but was allowing himself the indulge that the lining was going to be a rich red.

He was cutting the sleeves when he heard the door. He was currently alone in the shop and put down his tools to go see who it was. He hoped Eggsy hadn’t come back, the poor boy had looked dreadful, that cough had been painful sounding.

He was already talking as he walked out of the back. “Hello, welcome to Kingsm -” Harry stumbled when he saw Tequila. “Dear god,” Harry said. He closed his eyes and opened them again. “I’m hallucinating the most appalling hoodie I have ever seen in my life. How did my brain even imagine that?”

“Hi, Harry,” Tequila said. “Eggsy said I should go back to my hotel room and change, but I couldn’t wait any longer to see you.”

“I could have waited another twenty minutes,” Harry muttered.

Tequila burst out laughing. “I fucking love you, Harry.”

“Because when I see you I insult your clothing?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Tequila moved closer into the shop. “Because you are absolutely awful at being gentlemanly when faced with certain fashion choices, but then feel like shit.” Tequila took a few steps closer. “Because you tried practicing saying Tequila in bed. Because of the way you dance. And the way you smile. And how much you hate your reading glasses. And the way you saw potential in Eggsy.” He was just a few feet away from Harry. “And the way despite the clothes and the nickname, the way you saw potential in me.” He held out his hand. “Thought this might be better than flowers.”

Harry stared at his father’s signet ring. It still had a little mud on it, and was a bit tarnished but it was the ring. It looked so small on Tequila’s palm. He swallowed thickly. “As an adult, all told I have done six things that I deeply regret and wish I could take back. Throwing my father’s ring away was number two on that list.” Harry kept staring at the ring. “I was so mad at him for dying and then so ashamed at myself for being mad and throwing that away. I rather thought it was lost forever.” He still wouldn’t take the ring. “Thank you James,” he whispered.

Tequila waited but still he wasn’t picking it up. “Harry, it is a piece of metal. It isn’t your whole relationship with your father.” He took Harry’s hand and tried to figure out where to put it.
“A gentleman wears a signet ring on his pinkie,” Harry said. Tequila held Harry’s hand and gently slid it on. It snagged on the knuckle but then went all the way on.

“It suits you,” Tequila said.

“That sweatshirt does not suit you. At all,” Harry said.

“Only thing at the second hand shop that fit me,” Tequila explained. “Needed dry clothes.”

“You jumped into the pond in your clothes,” Harry said, surprised. “I thought one was supposed to strip to their pants to do that.”

“Yeah well, we weren’t exactly invited and I had to get it quick. Merlin nicked some of your butterflies too. Don’t think your uncle was pleased.” Tequila was smiling but it fell off his face. “Harry?”

“Not saying goodbye to you was number three,” Harry whispered.

“It was a couple weeks, Harry,” Tequila said. “Ain’t no one expected to completely change their lives for a couple weeks.” Though it was clear they both wanted to.

“James?” Harry asked.

Tequila was in Harry’s space. “Yeah, Harry?”

“Goodbye.”

Tequila froze, felt his heart shatter. He opened his mouth ready to beg, to plead, to joke and walk away. But he looked at Harry. He saw Harry’s eyes were a little wet and his smile was trembling. And he thought about what he knew about Harry and he understood. “Goodbye, Harry. Thanks for everything you taught me.”

“I do hope that the lessons will prove to be beneficial to you,” Harry said earnestly.

“They were. They are,” Tequila said. “The pleasure was all mine, sir.”

They stared at each other and Tequila waited. Harry’s smile grew. “Hello, James. It is wonderful to see you. I have clothes for you, you know. The promised ones.”

“Hi, Harry,” Tequila answered. “I really missed you and apparently I was a mopey bastard the last few months.” He paused. “Wait…but you never measured me.”

“I had touched every inch of you James. My fingers memorized your shoulders. Might need a few more tweaks than some other pieces but I had the imprint of you enough in my mind to make you some clothes. When I wasn’t busy with the shop, I was making you clothes and I am given to understand that I was ‘an insufferable baby who needs to fly to America and fix it already’” Harry looked at Tequila. “I never would have. I would have hidden and nurtured a broken heart until I was quite bitter.”

“A gentleman is never bitter,” Tequila said.

“Didn’t you learn that I talk a good game, but am rather a horrid gentleman?” Harry asked.

“I don’t kn-” Tequila couldn’t finished the sentence because Harry’s mouth was on his, pressing hard. It was a deep kiss, Harry pouring everything he had been feeling into it. Tequila opened his mouth and Harry pressed his tongue in and the kiss was becoming too sloppy and intense for the late
afternoon inside his shop. They were made abundantly aware of this when they heard banging on the
glass and yelling and cheering.

Harry broke away from Tequila and looked at his friends who were going nuts out front. Eggsy was
the one banging on the glass and the way Merlin was yelling you’d think Arsenal had won the cup.
Harry blushed a little. “I’m sorry,” he began but couldn’t say more because Tequila brought him in
for an even harder kiss. Eventually they had to come up for air.

“Guess you have some work to do,” Tequila said.

“No he don’t,” Eggsy said, having come into the shop. “No appointments and it looks like an
emergency cropped up. Scoot. I’ll close up.”

“Eggsy,” Harry said.

“Go ride your cowboy,” Eggsy winked and gave them finger guns. “Get all rode hard and put away
wet, or whatever people say.”

“Yee-haw, is what people say,” Tequila said. “I’m staying at this boutique place in Notting Hill.
Love that Hugh Grant movie shit.”

Harry smiled at him. “My place is a little closer.”

“Wanna show me?” Tequila asked.

“I very much do,” Harry agreed. “Eggsy can you call my appointments tomorrow and extend my
regrets?” He didn’t wait for an answer just tugged Tequila to the door and they were gone.

Eggsy made some phone calls and shut up the shop. He went across the street where Merlin was
Merlin looked at Eggsy seriously, solemnly. “Lad, I have to confess something.”

Eggsy grinned at him. Merlin’s ‘serious’ confessions were always amazing. “Go on then.”

“I like stealing things from Chester. And he has a flat here in town. Harry’s mother’s pearls are in it. He loves those pearls.”

“How about we get a pint and plan our descent into villainy. I’ll make sure we are dressed great and you can crack the safes.” Eggsy held out a hand and Merlin took it. “One day, they’ll make a movie of our exploits.”

“I love ye, lad.”

Eggsy kissed him. “Cheers to larceny and happily ever after.” They walked to the pub and planned a caper as they went.

At Harry’s townhouse, Tequila was ridden quite hard indeed.
“Is Harry having an aneurysm?” Eggsy asked watching the man.

“I can’t tell,” Merlin admitted. He was rather pleased with his jeans and western shirt, and Eggsy looked amazing as well. Tequila looked like how he had when they first met him. And Harry had been forced not to wear a suit. He was in fact in jeans and a western cut shirt as well. And a cowboy hat.

“I have died and this is hell,” Harry whispered. “I didn’t think hell would be this smelly.” He looked at Tequila. “Whatever I did to make you stop loving me, I most certainly apologize.”

Tequila kissed his cheek. “You are so dramatic.”

“The derby. I have made suits for people to go to the Kentucky Derby. Why couldn’t we go to that?” Harry whimpered. “That man is wearing a black hat with tan boots, Tequila.”

“Those are probably his most broken in pieces, leave him alone.” Tequila gripped Harry’s hand tight so the man could not chase after the guy to correct his wardrobe. “You try to fix any clothes here, you’ll get punched.”

“He’s right, Harry,” Ginger said coming up to the group.

“You too?” Harry protested, looking at her clothes.

“Sure, can’t wear my lawyer gear when I’m in there,” she said pointing back to the stadium.

“She’s riding in an amateur competition, barrel racing,” Tequila explained.

“Can I go see all the horses?” Merlin asked immediately.

“Happy to show you,” Ginger said.

Merlin gave Eggsy a quick look. “Oh go on then, I’ll keep Harry from dying.” Eggsy waved Merlin off and Ginger and he hurried to the stables. “Harry, how about we get you a beer and maybe a footlong?”

“Footlong what?” Harry asked in fear.

“Footlong hotdog,” Eggsy said biting his lip to stop from laughing.

“Right, I am returning home. Enjoy your day,” Harry went to leave. He could not cope.

Tequila kicked Eggsy and then stepped in front of Harry. “You don’t have to eat a footlong hotdog, baby,” he said quickly. He cupped Harry’s face and kissed him again. “Promise, baby, this is just supposed to be fun.”

“People are sweaty and smelly and wearing clothes that don’t fit. Merlin is going to run away to join a country and western band, Eggsy is going to steal belt buckles all damn day.”

“Oi! Haven’t stole nothing in like a month,” Eggsy said. “Three,” he realized. “Shit, I might be getting rusty.” He and Merlin would have to plan a Chester assault again soon.

“Eggsy, go buy yourself some sort of food on a stick, and choke on the stick,” Tequila suggested.
“I’ll just go get us seats,” Eggsy said. “Probably bleachers Harry. Packed in with people, wonder what it smells like in there.”

Tequila had to restrain Harry from running. He was going to kill Eggsy later. He waited for Eggsy to disappear in the crowd. “Come on now Harry, it isn’t that bad.” He winced when a man walked by and spit tobacco into a garbage can. “I know this is outside your comfort zone. But I went to see that Arthur Miller play with you and that was outside my comfort zone.”

“You like musicals for the dance breaks,” Harry agreed. His shoulders started to relax.

“Lots of attractive men here, Harry,” Tequila whispered. “Going to be doing fancy riding. Some shirts might even get torn in the process.” He looped his fingers into Harry’s belt loops. “Come on, it isn’t so scary is it?”

“It is terrifying, James,” Harry smiled at him. “But I can endure.”

“If you hate it, we can leave after a couple events.”

“Like when we left the opera,” Harry said.

“If I want people screaming at me in German for several hours, I’ll watch an old war movie,” Tequila said. He kissed Harry again. “Promise if you are good, I’ll have a real nice reward for you later.”

“This is seeming like an excellent event.” Harry gave Tequila another kiss and they went to find Eggsy.

Harry had to admit he was having a good time, but soon enough the cheap beer got to him. “I need the loo,” he whispered to Tequila.

Tequila paled a little bit. “There are some bathrooms down the south door there, they’ll have pretty long lines. Or if you go back the way we came in there was a row of portajohns.”

The whole of the group froze at the thought of Harry using a portable toilet.

Harry gave everyone a gentlemanly nod and left. No one commented when he was gone for a while, figuring he had chosen to stand in the longer line. But after 45 minutes Tequila was a little worried. He checked his pockets. “Well he didn’t steal the keys and run.”

Merlin laughed a little. “I taught him to hotwire when we were 20.”

Eggsy pouted. “We could have been all The Italian Job and you haven’t let us?”

“Stolen cars harder to fence,” Merlin said. Eggsy nodded in agreement. Ginger just rolled her eyes at how they loved to pretend they were criminals. She had seen Merlin freak out when a girl gave him too much change and get back in a line to return the 50 cents.

“Going on a Harry hunt,” Tequila said. “Wish me luck.”

They all said something, and Tequila made his way down the stands. He checked by the bathroom line but didn’t see Harry and sort of started walking to the stands, in case Harry had decided to get some food. He couldn’t find Harry and that was worrying because the man rather stood out in a crowd. He circled the arena and saw a small crowd in a corner. He went over, and then stopped and started to laugh. He had to actually brace his hands on his knees he was laughing so hard.
“Now really, why are you wearing this shade of green?” Harry asked the man standing in front of him. “You think it compliments your gorgeous hazel eyes, but really it detracts from it. Arms properly up.”

“Yes, sir,” The poor cowboy said and put up his arms. Harry measured and made a note in the little notebook he always carried.

“And your pants are too long,” Harry continued. “I am betting you spent a fortune on those boots, and then you hide them with poorly hemmed jeans. Spend twenty dollars at one of those one hour laundry places so they take your pants up a half inch. And red. A dark almost blood red is the colour you want.”

“I told him that!” A woman shouted.

Harry smiled at her. “My good woman, you are lovely, though perhaps one less piece of turquoise jewelry? It is the classic rule of thumb, stop before you leave the house and remove one piece of jewelry. Let your statement piece make a statement.” He made a couple more notes and then ripped the paper out and gave it to the woman. “When you go shopping, this is the size he actually needs. And I’ve written down a couple shops in the area that I find have excellent garments and will do a little on site tailoring.”

“But the shirt is going to just get torn up and dirty in the field,” the man protested.

“And your fiancee never gets taken out dancing?” Harry replied. “A gentleman realizes that some clothes are for work and some are for play.”

“Hey, that’s where I know you from. You do those gentleman videos on youtube!” One of the people in the crowd called out.

Harry blushed a little. “You’ve seen those? We have had some success with that series.”

“Learned how to order wine in a restaurant, crazy impressed my girl’s folks,” a guy said. “Right. Do me next.”

Harry shooed the first man away and beckoned this new one closer. He sighed. “How much polyester is in that shirt?”

The guy scratched his neck a little. “Uh….”

“Right,” Harry picked up his measuring tape. “Let us talk about cotton and how no iron wash and wear shirts are a sign that the end times are nigh.” Tequila moved closer and when Harry saw him, Harry gave him a blinding smile. “Rodeos are quite lovely, James. Meeting all sorts of interesting people.”

“Of course you are,” Tequila said. “You good here?”

“I am. Go see the ponies jump over stuff.” Harry waved him away. Tequila gave him a deep kiss and the crowd cheered.

“You have fun now, Harry,” Tequila said.

“Will do,” Harry kissed Tequila cheek and started measuring the person he who was in front of him. Tequila started to walk away. “Love you!” Harry called after him.

Tequila dipped his hat a little to Harry. “Love you too, Harry.”
He heard Harry start to complain about belt buckles as he left. He couldn’t wait until they were home that night. He had bought a buckle instead of engagement ring to give Harry. Just to watch the man be overjoyed and appalled at the same time. It was his favourite look on Harry. He went back to the stands and they all looked at him. “Harry is Harrying,” he said as he sat down. They all nodded in understanding.

Harry looked at the group in front of him and smiled. “Now then, let us talk about how a gentleman doesn’t make a scene in public.”

“You were just kissing your boyfriend and shouting that you loved him,” a woman pointed out.

“Yes, but I also have an engagement ring in my pocket. Did you see me give it to him in front of you? Do you see me dropping to a knee as someone says something over the loudspeaker? A gentleman never puts their partner in an awkward position like that.” Harry explained. He patted his pocket. “Tonight, alone, will be soon enough.”

“Why are you even talking about it then?”

Harry smiled. “Because I am rather excited. A gentleman should of course try to control their emotions in a public venue, but sometimes, just sometimes, a little bit of giddiness is allowed through.” Harry looked at them all. “Now, let’s talk plaid shirts.”

That night Harry’s face was exactly what Tequila had hoped for when he saw the buckle.

Tequila wore Harry’s ring the next day into work.

Merlin and Eggsy figured stealing Tequila’s car totally counted as grand theft auto. It didn’t matter that they were going to return it a few hours later.

Harry refused to wear the belt buckle. He had it framed and put on the wall in his shop, to see whenever he and Tequila weren’t together.

Eight months later he and Tequila wore matching rings, Tequila’s said from my gentleman on the inside and Harry’s said from my cowboy.

Merlin and Eggsy stole Chester’s wallet at the wedding.
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