Summary

“Eggsy, I really don’t think-“ Merlin began, and stopped, because at that very moment, Eggsy walked right into a lamp post.

Across the street, at a sidewalk corner cafe, reading a paper, sandwich part-eaten on a plate, sleek, long legs crossed neatly under the table, was Harry Hart.

Notes

Amnesia fic is actually one of my fav kinks, because I am a weird person. Prompt:

“When Eggsy says “Harry’s dead,” Arthur corrects him with “Galahad is dead.” So what if Arthur made a deal with Valentine: Instead of killing Harry, Valentine would shoot him with a hefty dose of amnesia dart and then keep him safe.

While Eggsy is getting victory!anal with Tilde, Merlin finds a very battered and disorientated Harry who has no clue what’s happened or who Merlin is. Wanting what’s best for his old friend, Merlin sets Harry up with a new job/flat/life and lets him go live it. Merlin checks (or has Roxy check) in occasionally, but for the most part he lets Harry enjoy civilian life unmolested. It all works out very well, until Eggsy stumbles into a coffee shop/book store/library in a remote town and sees a very familiar man on his lunch break, reading John le Carre. Eggsy is, understandably, pissed off.”
When I decided to watch Kingsman it was a last minute decision as something to watch on Valentine's (hah) Day with the bf, and I totally did not expect to be bumrushed into a new fandom. :o Oh man.

Note: Using an imaginary town, because it's easier

See the end of the work for more notes.
There was only one bespoke tailor shop in the town of Starling, bloody Cornwall, and of course it was bloody closed during the lunch hour.

Eggsy stared sourly at the nondescript door, the shop itself tucked away in one of the tiny laneways, right behind housing that looked as though it had been plucked right off a Game of Thrones set. Starling was one of the coastal towns, not as big as St Agnes, but not a one-street deal, either: it had restaurants, a post office, neat little lines of residential houses with sloping roofs… all picture perfect for the tourists, looking like a snapshot right out of ye Olde Medieval Times, if you ignored the tourysty gimracky shops and the gawkers in surfer gear. Starling managed to be quaint, but not quite, in Eggsy’s opinion, entirely functional if tourism was removed from the equation… but at least it had a tailor.

No shop name on the door: apparently, whoever it was who owned the shop seemed to think it acceptable to just print the words ‘Tailor’ in silver over the glass, and ‘Bespoke’ on the bottom: no opening hours, nothing. Eggsy was briefly tempted to break in, steal a pair of cufflinks, then leave the cash next to the register, but good manners persevered, because his mum had been persistent that way, and he sighed, turning on his heel, picking irritably at his flapping sleeves. Maybe it was one of those hipster joints, and the owner would turn out to be a slim, behatted skinny young man in pinstripe with trousers cut high enough to show patterned socks.

God damn terrorists. Who the hell hid out in Cornwall, anyway? What happened to all the terrorists with Caribbean island retreats, or undersea headquarters? At least Valentine had a mountain fastness full of underlings, in the middle of snowy nowhere - that was right proper where villain behaviour was concerned, in Eggsy’s admittedly short experience with people of the villain kind.

Eggsy shoved his hands into his tailored pockets, ignoring the familiar, whispery posh voice in the back of his mind that gently chided him for damaging the seam, and sauntered down the street, trying not to drag his heels.

In his ear, Merlin said, “Eggsy, surely there are more important concerns right now than cufflinks.”

“M’sleeves don’t feel right and this is your fault anyway, aye?” Eggsy muttered. “What with making the little buggers single use.”

“Yes, because having a miniaturised defibrillator that can be contained within cufflinks isn’t in itself already a minor miracle,” Merlin grumbled, sounding a little hurt. “One also has to find a way to make it rechargeable. If I had a penny for each time one of you bloody agents went ‘All right, this gadget is great, but it could be better’, I’ll be richer than the Queen by now-”

“Just sayin’. I need new cufflinks. Won’t have been a mo’. If the soddin’ bastard who owned the shop had been in.”

“But the mission-“

“The guy’s gone to ground and we all know he’ll probably pop up again later. He ain’t going nowhere. Google says there’s no other tailor in bloody ages from here. Man’s probably just out grabbing a sandwich. Or woman,” Eggsy added, because Lancelot had started being very firm about gender-neutral everything, possibly as a sort of pushback against being the only female Kingsman
knight. “It’s a tiny little town. I bet they’re just ‘round the corner.”

“Eggsy, I really don’t think-“ Merlin began, and stopped, because at that very moment, Eggsy walked right into a lamp post.

Across the street, at a sidewalk corner cafe, reading a paper, sandwich part-eaten on a plate, sleek, long legs crossed neatly under the table, was Harry Hart.

Harry had always looked a little older without the Kingsman-issue black spectacles, but other than that, he was as impeccable as ever, in a three-piece dove-gray suit, this time, a little lavender square in his suit pocket, elegant fingers frozen in the middle of turning a page, and he glanced up sharply as Eggsy swore and fell over, quick as ever on his feet as he folded the newspaper, left it on the chair, and crossed the street briskly to Eggsy’s side.

“Dear me. Are you quite all right?” Harry extended a hand, but Eggsy batted it aside, scrambling to his feet, wide-eyed. Even the voice was… it was definitely Harry, with his cut-glass accent, so neat and crisp that it’d have had given a BBC announcer tears of joy.

“Oh my fucking God. How the hell?”

Harry blinked at him. “Pardon me?”

And Eggsy was ready to punch him, punch that blank, mildly curious stare right off Harry fucking Hart’s handsome face, because God but the sodding bastard had been alive all this while, when Eggsy had buried him, mourned him, honoured him, tried to move on, and Harry still had the balls to act like he didn’t… recognise… Eggsy…

“Eggsy,” Merlin’s voice cracked like a whip in Eggsy’s ear, the way he’d never heard it, and Eggsy flinched violently. “Listen to me. Harry. Has. Amnesia. Because of Valentine. And. Don’t. Try to jog his memory. God knows what damage that’ll do. I’m still analysing the dart. Understand?”

Eggsy took in a deep, stuttered breath, then another, and because, fine, he had learned something about being a gentleman all this while, he forced a smile. “Sorry. Wasn’t looking where I was going. Got a bit of a knock and a scare.”

“Of course,” Harry said, raising an eyebrow, just a fraction, the way he always did whenever Eggsy said something weird, as though Harry was carefully scrubbing off the old memory banks. It used to make Eggsy grin. Now, seeing it only gave him another jolt of vertigo.

“You should be careful. The streets hereabouts can be a little slippery.”

“Um. Sure.” Eggsy briefly, very briefly considered beating a quick retreat, but fascination and horror and disbelief alike had rooted him to the spot. “Er. What’re you doing here?” he blurted out, because, Merlin, amnesia darts and Valentine aside, Eggsy’s mouth sometimes had a mind of its own, particularly after a mild concussion.

In his ear, Merlin let out a loud and exaggerated sigh, but Harry tipped his head a fraction, studying Eggsy more closely. Hastily, Eggsy added, “I mean, you’re in a… that’s a nice suit, pretty sharp, not really a Starling sort of deal.”

“Ah,” Harry smiled faintly. “I could say the same. Savile Row, I presume, for the cut of yours? The material’s a little unusual: I can’t say that I’ve seen the like before.”

“Um. Yeah. My tailor’s uh. Pretty good.”
“But you’re missing a pair of cufflinks.”

“Yeah,” Eggsy said, and tried not to instinctively raise his voice: in the earpiece, Merlin was breathing slowly, which was usually, in Eggsy’s now varied experience, indicative of Merlin counting very slowly from one to ten. Considering that when Merlin reached ‘nine’, he usually started limbering up with his custom automatic, Adeline, Eggsy added, hastily, “Erm, I probably should get going.”

“Nonsense. Your attire is incomplete,” Harry said, a little reproachfully, which turned Eggsy on the defensive.

“They got, ah, broken. By accident. Was trying to buy a new pair, but the tailor up the road is closed. So.”

“Eggsy,” Merlin growled, probably already at eleven or higher, and it took Eggsy a moment to finally put two and two together, even as Harry smiled self-deprecatingly.

“You’ve caught the tailor at his lunch break, I’m afraid. But if you’re willing to have a cup of coffee with me, I’m sure that we can sort something out. I’m very pleased to meet a young man who knows his suits. Harry Hart,” Harry said, extending his hand, and Eggsy shook it limply, vertigo shaking through him all over again.

“I’m, um. Pleased to meet you. But. I actually, um. Really. Have to go.” Eggsy tried, he really did, but what that ended up doing was getting Harry to pack up his sandwich, take a final sip of his tea, and insist on walking Eggsy back up to the shop, Eggsy murmuring increasingly weak protests. Because… damn, but Wrath of Merlin or not… Eggsy had missed Harry, even this version of Harry, who looked oddly unfinished, like a part-copy of Kingsman-Harry. They were nearly back at the shop when Eggsy finally cottoned on to what was missing: this Harry didn’t have the coiled, carefully groomed calm to him, the sleek, elegant killer’s confidence.

This Harry was relaxed, graceful still, and so very composed, but he was… he no longer walked like a panther, Eggsy thought, as though the world was rearranging itself around him: this Harry was… normal. A civilian.

Unnerved all over again, Eggsy hesitated when Harry unlocked the door and held it open, stared until Harry said mildly, “After you, sir,” and it was the sir that did it, Eggsy would later tell Merlin, said as it was in Harry Hart’s voice, because Eggsy was only human and he had Limits.

There.

The shop was small, no off-the-rack suits for sale, though a large oak set of wide drawers displayed arrays of neatly ironed shirts, ties, and cufflinks, set over rich maroon carpeting, with an oil painting of a hunting hound framed up behind the mahogany cashier’s counter, next to a closed door that presumably led to the backroom storage and the upper levels of the shop. Tall windows facing the street let in warm shafts of natural light, painting over a little potted fern, sitting on the counter next to a locked wooden cashbox and a little steel cardholder with a stack of white namecards. A partly open door next to the oak drawers led into some sort of fitting room, with a tailor’s dummy, three angled mirrors, and a chair set to a side that still had a roll of measuring tape coiled on its cushioned seat.

While Harry’s back was turned, inspecting the cufflinks, Eggsy took a sneaky photo on his phone, and sent it over Snapchat to Roxy, with an ‘omfg’ tacked on for good measure. He was expecting her to call instantly, but all he got was a decided suspicious radio silence, and given that Eggsy was fairly sure that Roxy was on break right now and not busy, that was really fucking dodgy.
While Eggsy was still glowering at his phone, Harry pulled out a black velvet tray from a high
drawer, and set a few cufflinks in a row. “Perhaps one of these?”

“Um sure,” Eggsy said distractedly, because Roxy had chosen that moment to send him a Snapchat
of her shrugging, seemingly curled in her living room with her poodle peering at her phone screen
over her shoulder.

Which could only mean one thing. Eggsy was the last one in the know.

Again.

“One sec.”

He turned his back on Harry, taking a Snapchat of himself mouthing “Traitor” and sent it back, then
he shoved his phone into his pocket and forced another smile, even as, in his ear, Merlin muttered
something about ‘young people’ and ‘puerile messaging apps’ that ‘contributed to the death of proper
spelling’. “Sorry. My sister.”

“Take your time.”

Eggsy made a show of looking the cufflinks over instead of staring straight out at the scar punched
over Harry’s left brow, a puckered dip of scar tissue, like someone had taken a pen to Harry’s
smooth, pale skin, and all of a sudden Eggsy was angry all over again. God. Valentine had died too
quickly.

Harry noticed him trying not to stare, naturally, and his smile grew a little wry. “Souvenir of a
misadventure.”

“Really?” Eggsy asked, before he could help himself.

“Oh God, Eggsy,” Merlin muttered.

“Damnedest thing,” Harry said, but didn’t elaborate, looking back down at the cufflinks. “Perhaps
the green ones, to match your lovely eyes?”

“Ah,” Eggsy said, very intelligibly, because Harry Hart was maybe flirting. With him. And he
wasn’t sure whether to bolt, or stay and watch all the known world burn down. He probably even
blushed at that point, because Eggsy had never had any self-control when it came to Harry, be it
upending his entire life, taking a beating from his stepfather or being tied to a track, listening to a
train rushing over.

And because Eggsy was finally, finally, more or less allowed to stare, he now noticed what else had
felt wrong about Harry, this Harry. Harry Hart had been right-handed. This Harry was favouring his
left hand, his right already tucked away, back in his coat pocket.

“The green ones it is,” Eggsy said, just to buy time, then asked, “D’you do your own tailoring?”

“Sadly,” Harry said, as he ambled over to the cashbox and the card machine, the only piece of
modern technology visible in the elegant room, “I have an assistant who helps me with that. But I do
all my own sourcing, and help clients decide on cuts and makes, of course.”

“I wouldn’t mind getting fitted for something sometime. You look like you’d probably do great
work,” Eggsy said, watching Harry’s hands keenly as he handed over his Kingsman credit card. And
there - there it was. A faint, almost imperceptible tremor, in Harry’s gun hand.
Valentine had died too quickly.

“Call in whenever you like to make an appointment.” Harry placed the cufflinks in a velvet pouch, packaged that in a neat little black box with a silver ribbon, and handed that over with the receipt, his credit card and a namecard. “It’ll be my pleasure.”

There was a faint little emphasis on pleasure, and yes, that flicker: Harry was checking Eggsy out. Harry was checking Eggsy out. “Sure,” Eggsy said, or squeaked, to be more accurate, and fled, before he did something absolutely stupid, like maybe ask Harry out, or go down on his knees, or—

Yeah. He was so fucked.

II.

After twelve Snapchats, Roxy finally deigned to call back. “You’re an arsehole,” she said briskly, because they were friends like that.

“You knew about this, didn’t you? Oh my fucking God.” Eggsy had holed up in his rented room, shoes kicked off, suit on a coathanger, tie undone, sprawled across the bed with a whisky on the rocks held against his temple. “You and fucking Merlin. Wait. I didn’t mean to say it that way. Or did I? Are you and Merlin—“

“You’re an arsehole,” Roxy repeated, though she sounded amused this time. “No, we’re not, and even if we were, it’s none of your business. I just do some odd jobs for him now and then.”

“Like checking in on Harry Hart?”

“Look,” Roxy said firmly, “Merlin thinks Harry’s in a bit of a delicate position right now, mentally. It’s not just the dart, see? He did go postal on a whole church of people before he got shot in the head with that dart.”

“Delicate how?”

“I’m just saying,” Roxy said dryly, “That maybe, just maybe, it’s kinder this way. Leave Harry as he is, instead of trying to ‘jog his memory’. Didn’t you see his hand?”

Eggsy closed his eyes. “Yeah. What the hell?”

“Merlin thinks it might be nerve damage. Or brain damage, even. From whatever was in the dart. You really think it’ll be… kind? To have Harry come back? Knowing all that he’d done? Knowing he’d never shoot a gun right again?”

“I’m sure he feels good with both hands,” Eggsy said, and groaned, rubbing his cheek against the pillow as he realized what he’d just said. “I mea—“

“Well damn,” Roxy said calmly, “When Merlin said you had a Thing for Harry I told him that he was pulling my leg.”

“Shut up.”

“Whatever your problem is,” Roxy continued blandly, “Talk to Merlin, not me. It wasn’t my idea to keep it all a big secret.”

“You could’ve told me,” Eggsy said, still resentful, still feeling betrayed, irrational as that was. If Merlin had told Roxy to keep this a secret, then it wouldn’t have been her secret to give. “We’re
friends, aye?"

“We’re Kingsmen,” Roxy corrected, though her voice turned a shade gentler. “Eggsy. You’ve known Harry, what, a few months? Merlin’s known the man for years. I don’t think this is easy for him either. Just saying.”

“Thanks. Now I’m feeling guilty on top of feeling pissed.”

“Don’t mention it,” Roxy said tartly, and hung up.

Eggsy glared at the ceiling of his hotel room, following the faint hairline cracks in the plaster, for all of five minutes before Merlin said, into his ear, “You’re an idiot.”

“Thanks, Merlin, you know your words always mean the world t’me.”

“I was going to tell you eventually,” Merlin said, a little resentfully. “When Harry recovers.”

“And what if he doesn’t?”

“Then he isn’t Harry,” Merlin said, and amended, “Not exactly. Not the one you knew, anyway.”

“People don’t change just like that.”

“Also,” Merlin added. “You’re in Cornwall for a mission. Or have you forgotten about that too?”

“I’m still looking, aite? Relax. Nobody builds a supervillain base in Cornwall. I bet he’s just lying low in one of the towns. I’ll do the rounds and he’ll show up sooner or later. Or pop back up over in London. I mean, he wants to gas the Tube, aye? Can’t do that from Cornwall. Probably.”

“Maybe I should have put Lancelot on this matter,” Merlin grumbled, forever bitchy when things didn’t go his way, and Eggsy grinned to himself for a moment before he sobered up.

“Is whatever was done to his nerves… or brain… permanent?”

“I don’t know. We’re still sequencing the formula in the dart. I’ve been sifting through Valentine’s databases, but it’s slow work, what with everything being so deeply encrypted.”

“Can I help?”

“Just do your job,” Merlin said testily. “I said I’ve been working on it.”

“I mean,” Eggsy said stubbornly, “I bet you’ve been having Roxy check on Harry, aye? So seeing people he used to know obviously don’t hurt none. And look. You obviously met him, right? Where was that?” Eggsy asked, curious. “Did you pick him up in Kentucky or summat?”

“In the mountain, actually,” Merlin said briskly. “I let out the other hostages while you were getting acquainted with the Princess. Harry was one of them - disoriented and… he didn’t even know his own name. He was frightened,” Merlin continued, slowly. “I’ve never seen him frightened before. Up until then.”

“You… could’ve told me.” Eggsy muttered, guilty all over again.

“Had my reasons,” Merlin said shortly. “Besides, I think it’s better for Harry to be where he is right now. He’s made his share of enemies. If everyone thinks he’s dead, he’ll be all the safer for it. Gives him time to recover. And besides, Lancelot says Harry seems content with his current life.”
“Probably because he thinks it’s all that he’s ever known,” Eggsy retorted, because up until he had gone over to Kingsman, he had been more or less content with the life he had known. Sure, it’d had its downsides, but it had its ups, too: there was his mum, there was his little sister, and he had his friends. He’d always thought it could’ve been worse, and he’d been fine with that.

He could never go back to that life now. Not after Kingsman.

“Just let it lie, Galahad,” Merlin said firmly, then hesitated and added, “Or, if you really must interfere… don’t utterly fuck it up.”

“Your faith in me is… really awesome as always, thanks.”
Harry Hart always started off the day with a cup of tea, Earl Grey, water carefully boiled to the perfect temperature, leaves steeping in the pot for five minutes, a spot of milk, no sugar. The tea set was perhaps a little extravagant: paper-thin Noritake bone china, white, with just the faintest edging of gold, elegant the way only workmanship out of Japan could be elegant, and when the empty cup was set back down on its saucer, it would make a delicate, whispering chime.

The upper room of the tailor shop was just as bright and airy as the shop itself, looking out over the sleepy cobblestoned street. Life was slow in Starling, even during the peak tourist periods, and that suited Harry. Perhaps a small Cornish town was not the best place to open a bespoke shop, but he did have a surprisingly steady clientele, and more importantly, a very comfortable living off an oddly healthy set of life savings.

Breakfast was toast and a soft boiled egg, and as he washed and dried the dishes in the kitchenette of his flat, Harry glanced at the pristine surface of the fridge, clear of any magnets or notices, then back over the neat little flat, with its elegant furniture, antique oak, not modern, a Persian rug by the old fireplace, wood paneling on the floor, and another painting above the stone mantelpiece, oil, of a horse, poised on a field as if to spring forward, a chestnut thoroughbred.

_The sport of Kings_, Harry thought, and frowned, as a little ache grew, in his temple. He rubbed the heel of his palm against his head until it faded, as was his habit now, then went to get changed out of his dressing gown. Crisp blue shirt, today, sky blue, nothing too bright, and a pinstripe black suit, a bit of a modern blade cut, with extra fabric in the shoulder and armscye, and an elegantly nipped waist.

Harry opened shop, turning around the copperplate ‘Closed’ sign, and picked up the newspaper and letters that had been fed through the letter slot in the morning, sorting through them as he ambled over to the counter. Rates notices went on the counter, advertising in the trash, and Harry tipped up the silver lid of his laptop, sifting through his email for the day.

A notice from Amelia, his assistant, reminding him that she was due to take a holiday cruise with her mum in a week. Junk mail, that Harry deleted. And, rather curiously, an email from Emrys, the solemn, tall man in the crisp black suit whom Harry had met in the… during the Incident.

_Dear Harry,_

_Hope you’re keeping well. How’s business?_  
_I saw this advertised online and thought you might be interested - it’s a historical Toscani retrospective in the Philadelphia Museum of the Arts. Airfare’s quite reasonable right now and I have a friend who has a place up for rent on airbnb [here](https://www.airbnb.com). Have heard great reviews! Suggest you try it._  
_Best regards_  
_Emrys_

Harry looked up the exhibit, rubbing absently at his jaw, then looked up the room for rent, just to be polite, and then wrote a quick response, thanking Emrys for the link and saying that he would think about it. He paid the bills, filed them away, and opened the day’s newspaper, scanning an eye over the headlines.

_MYSTERY CONTINUES_, cried the headline of the Times. No progress had yet been made on the
mass murders of the heads of state only two months ago, an incident that had not only shocked the world but had caused the global economy to teeter precariously on the brink of collapse. Hasty elections had sprung up, along with Doomsday Cults and more conspiracy theories.

Harry shuddered, and turned a page. The gruesome mass murders had coincided with his abrupt loss of memory and resurface in a strange concrete cell, fully furnished, within a mountain, and he didn’t doubt that it was connected, somehow, for all of Emrys’ earnest explanations. But what could a tailor do, faced with a mystery as wide as the world itself?

Swallowing a sigh, Harry read the front page of the paper, very carefully, then the second page, and when he reached the third, the bell at the door tinkled gently.

It was the young man from yesterday. Mister E. Galath, according to his credit card, and as neatly put together as he was before, today in a charcoal chalk stripe, slim lapels, still made with the strange material, high armholes for a modern fit, tapered over a naturally narrow waist. It looked good on Mister Galath, with his razor-sharp white collar, but then again, Harry suspected that a great deal likely looked good on the pretty young thing.

“Hello again,” Galath said, with a charming little smile, and there it was, that curious look in his eyes, not quite wariness, not quite disappointment. It reminded Harry of what Emrys had looked like, when Harry had asked Emrys for his name, forgotten a friend, his own name, his life, and now that he’d had his morning cup of tea, some of the young man’s strange behaviour from yesterday started to make a little more sense.

“Good morning,” Harry said, with a smile he didn’t have to force, and got up from the counter. “Can I help you?”

“I’ve got a bit of time,” Galath said, his voice a charming mix of roguish brogue and affected Queen’s English. “Was wondering if you were free for that fitting.”

“Of course,” Harry said, pleased enough for it to show, for he’d been thinking about this all of yesterday, when Galath had run off from his shop: thinking about how… pleasant it would be, to shape something worthy of this beautiful young man. “This way, Mister Galath.” At the young man’s blink, Harry added, “I read it off your card.”

“Oh. Oh that.” Galath’s soft mouth tipped up into a wry smile, and at that, Harry decided to make a little leap of logic.

“Unless… what did I call you before?” At Galath’s blink of surprise, Harry explained, “Two months ago I had some sort of… accident, and lost my memory. It’s a little startling to old friends. Isn’t it?”

“Oh,” Galath breathed, and Harry hadn’t been prepared for this: joy blossomed through Galath like a tide, touched pink to his cheeks and pulled his mouth wide in an unselfconsciously brilliant smile, his lovely green eyes behind his black-framed glasses crinkling with sheer pleasure; even his poise straightened up, like a flower turning to the sun.

If Harry hadn’t already been attracted to this strange young man, he would be now, and… perhaps there was something else Harry should be reading between the lines, from how Galath was primed, like a puppy radiant at a scrap of praise. Harry had known Galath before. They were, at the very least, friends.

“Did I guess correctly?” Harry asked anyway, because he was in all things a gentleman, and gentlemen do not presume.
“Well um. Sure! Yeah. Sure. I mean, you know a friend of mine, too. Erm.” Galath hesitated, almost as though checking his memory, tilting his head a fraction. “Skinny bloke, name of Em… Emrys?”

Galath stumbled over the pronunciation, which was strange for a self-proclaimed friend, but Harry nodded. “And his niece, Roxanne.”

“Yep. Me and Roxanne, we’re great buds.”

“Roxanne and I,” Harry corrected, almost automatically, then he coughed when Galath blinked. “My apologies. Force of habit.”

“No, it’s just… oh man,” Galath said, with a rueful grin. “I’ve kinda even missed that about you. Sorry if I’m coming over as a bit of a creep or something.”

“Are you in the business as well?” Harry asked curiously, as he picked up the roll of measuring tape from the chair, studying Galath as he shrugged off his suit jacket and then hung it up neatly in the rack rather than plonking it over a chair.

Galath looked a little hunted for a moment, then he laughed. “Oh. You mean tailoring. Kind of. I’m sort of more in sales,” he explained, and grinned cheekily at Harry, and Harry could believe that. This gorgeous young man could probably sell ice to the eskimos.

“Then your company’s lucky to have you,” Harry murmured, and wet his lips as the first touch he pressed against Galath’s arm, with the tape, rubbed over a lean muscle definition under the fine material of the shirt that only an athlete of some sort could dream of. He couldn’t help but allow his hands to linger, as he measured arms, shoulders, waist and hips, standing perhaps a touch too close to be polite.

“You should tell that to my boss,” Galath quipped, a little breathlessly, the pink in his cheeks already turning rosy, but otherwise still so composed, and it was tempting to push, to rub his palm down the inseam of Galath’s sharply pressed, tailored trousers, to take longer than he truly needed… but that would be… crass.

And so Harry made his measurements, took his notes, asked the usual questions about cut, fitting, materials and preference, all the while trying not to stare as Galath pulled his suit back on with the proper degree of care, the proper smooth, fluid tug and pull. Someone had polished this young man, trained him, maybe even dressed him, and for a moment, Harry was a little envious.

“Strange that a salesman might be interested in getting a suit made by a rival,” Harry ventured, when Galath seemed in no hurry to step out of the fitting room. It was a small room, made all the smaller like this, and from the way Galath smiled, a little rueful again, a little secretive, it felt like Harry was giving the answers to a set of questions that he couldn’t read, and that irked him a little.

“We weren’t quite that.” Galath said, somewhat glibly. “And there’s no harm in doing a bit of research here and there.”

“How did we meet?” Harry asked, genuinely curious now, and smiled ruefully himself, when Galath narrowed his eyes slightly. “Some days it’s a little upsetting, knowing that I’ve reached my age and had all of the years before two months ago wiped clean away. I don’t even remember my parents,” Harry said, a little wistfully, “Or my siblings, anyone of the sort.”

Galath’s expression softened, guarded as his eyes had become, and he reached over, his palm warmed as he patted Harry’s elbow. “Well. We kinda met when I was having a bad turn, and you were the reason why Emrys took me on. He’s my boss,” Galath added, unnecessarily, and now the
picture got a little clearer around the edges. “I was a messed up kid before you helped me out. So. I ’preciate it. And if you don’t mind the company, I’ll come by now and then, see how you’re holding up.”

“I’ll love the company,” Harry said, even as he felt a touch disappointed, now. For the sentiment was gratefulness, perhaps, nothing more, and for a moment he felt a little disoriented, an ache pressing again at his temple. “Are you in Starling for business?”

“Could say that. I’m meant to look up a contact, but he’s dropped off the grid. So I’m still hanging about.”

“Perhaps I could help. Starling’s a small town. Everyone knows everyone.” That had been a strange thing: for all that everyone in Starling had clearly been familiar with the tailor shop that bore no name, Harry himself was obviously new to the townsfolk. Perhaps he had always been somewhat reclusive: after all, Harry liked no part of the touristy slant of most of the town.

“Nah. I’m good. But thanks for the offer.” As though realizing he had forgotten, Galath dropped his hand, blushing a little. “I’ll see you around, aye?”

“How long are you going to be in town?”

“Dunno. Could be a day more, could be longer.”

“Perhaps we could catch up over dinner,” Harry suggested. “There’s a good place near the coast, an old pub with a decent steak and pudding. The Armistice.”

“Sure. ‘ow about seven?” Galath was looking thrown all over again.

“Seven will be fine. See you then, Mister Galath.”

“Ah,” Galath actually flinched. “Actually, you should call me ‘Eggsy’.” He watched Harry closely as he said it, but Harry merely blinked at him. What a strange name.

“Eggsy,” he repeated, in a murmur. “Until tonight, then.”

Business was slow, which made the day drag on interminably. Harry spent it reading the paper, and when he was done, reading more news online. America, it seemed, had decided to go with an accelerated election cycle, with only a month for stumping and speeches, no debates, no extended mudslinging.

At present, it looked as though the election would come down to Hillary Clinton vs Rand Paul. Harry read opinion pieces on the American election for a while more, until it all got too depressing, then he flicked back to the articles discussing the ‘global hysteria’ of two months ago. It seemed that the mass psychosis had been possibly caused by ‘unintentional radiation’ from the new SIM cards distributed by the late Richmond Valentine had varying consequences. In a way, as Emrys had mentioned, Harry had been lucky that amnesia was the only thing Harry had suffered after his own episode.

Harry stared grimly at the screen, resting his cheek on his palm. He remembered the horrifically bloody corridors that he had passed, tugged along in a daze by Emrys as they were pulled over to the hangars, the bodies, by God. It had looked like apocalypse itself. They’d fetched Roxanne in Emrys’ plane - that Emrys had such a thing scaled Harry’s original impression of Emrys from ‘strange valet’ to ‘eccentric billionaire’, and Emrys had given him a whisky to calm his nerves.
He’d gone to sleep, and woken up back in his shop, with Roxanne puttering around earnestly, dusting and cleaning with an awkward smile, and then she had explained, rather haltingly, what had happened, and had turned the telly on, which was about when Harry finally understood that the world had collectively, for a few hours, gone to hell. Including Harry himself.

At five, Harry closed shop, and took a short shower, changing into a fresh shirt and a somewhat more casual suit, a storm gray, trim number with side vents, short and double-breasted. No tie. After a second, he unbuttoned two off the throat, and eyed his reflection in the mirror, wondering again if he was giving in to presumption.

Harry closed his eyes for a moment, touching two fingers to his ribs, where a strange ridged scar ran along his right, from his kidneys up to his lungs. It was but one of several on his skin that he couldn’t explain, most of them old and faint, strange white scars marked on his body that could not be explained. The freshest was the mark on his brow, which had come along with cuts that had now healed, as though he had been wearing a set of spectacles that had shattered on some sort of impact. He’d been lucky to keep his eye, Emrys had said.

Taking in another slow breath, Harry straightened his cuffs, threaded through a set of cufflinks, chose a pair of black oxfords, so as not to look too overdressed, and set off out of the shop.

Around him, Starling was closing up for the night: the bakery had long packed away its tables and seats, the green-grocer already in the midst of carrying in her crates of fruits. The wiry old lady raised her eyebrows as Harry came within sight, then grinned as he hastily walked over to give her a hand. This made Harry a few minutes late for dinner, and he found Eggsy at one of the two seat tables, propped against a window. The sea was quiet tonight, the waves slow, the sea itself like a pane of dark glass, and Eggsy glanced up from it to grin at Harry as he took a seat.

“So what’s good here?” Eggsy asked.

“The chef does a good steak and pudding, as I’ve mentioned,” Harry said, with a nod at the chalkboard menu, set prominently beside the large beer casks behind the long wooden counter. “And they stock Trappist beer for the right connoisseur.”

“Fancy craft beer? Wouldn’t have thunk it,” Eggsy said, making a show of looking around the old pub, with its large fireplace, and the stuffed deer’s head. “Must be the tourist money.”

“Old Stafford’s a bit of a beer fanatic,” Harry noted, and they started with a bottle of Trappist, each, then a Mikkeller Mexas Ranger, if only because Eggsy hadn’t tried a herb beer, and alcohol was good for the nerves, good for presumptions.

“Yeah, Emrys isn’t too bad,” Eggsy said expansively, after they’d downed the Ranger and went on to a Beersel Morning, the steaks sizzling and hot and medium rare. “Bit of an old woman at times, but he’s cool. He nags,” Eggsy explained, when Harry arched an eyebrow.

“A difficult boss?”

“Kinda. He expects a lot. But I wouldn’t change this job for the world.”

“You do seem to love working in sales.”

Eggsy blinked rapidly for a moment, then he grinned cheekily. “Oh yeah. Closing deals, going places, getting my foot into the door. It’s all fast moving. Pretty explosive.”

“I suppose so, if you’re working for a corporate empire.”
“As corporate as they come,” Eggsy said, and laughed, as though he’d said a joke. Harry smiled politely, because Eggsy’s cheeks were ruddy again from the beers, and perhaps he was one of those young men who loved to talk when a little soused.

“All that travelling - how does your family take it?”

“Me mum? Oh, she and me sis are good. Living with me in a nice house back in London, off me pay.” Eggsy’s face softened a little as he said this. “Bloody finally. My stepdad was a bit of an arsehole, all round. I was so chuffed to get this job: meant mum no longer had to deal with him and his shit.”

“I’m glad to hear it. That’s admirable of you, supporting your family single-handedly at your age.”

“Me? Naw. She’s had a hard life, mum. Did her best. It’s only right that it’s my turn now,” Eggsy disagreed, about to polish off the last of his steak, then he hesitated, and put a hand into his suit. “Sorry. Mind if I take this call?”

“Be my guest.”

Eggsy slipped out of the pub, then returned afterwards flustered and apologetic. “Hey, I’ve got to go. Sorry to skip out on you like this, but something’s come up. Business, hey?”

“Not at all,” Harry raised his glass. “Thanks for keeping an old man company.”

Something strange twisted across Eggsy’s face, at that, a sentiment that Harry could not quite parse, then to his surprise, Eggsy reached over to grab the hand he had pressed on the table. His right hand, the broken one.

“You’re not old. Wait. Maybe you are. A bit. But not that much,” Eggsy amended, and wrinkled his nose. “I probably shouldn’t have had that last beer. But. Sorry for ruining dinner, I’ll get the tab-“

“Eggsy-”

“-and you can get the next one, next time, Maybe.” Eggsy said, all in a rush, so very hopeful, and this had perhaps been a date, of sorts, Harry realized. Damn Emrys and his business.

“All right,” Harry said softly, and squeezed Eggsy’s hand, as much as he could with a palm that was now too stiff to fully clench up, and Eggsy grinned, patted his knuckles, sped over to the counter to pay up, then peeled off into the evening, checking his phone repeatedly.

Left to himself, Harry turned his right hand palm up, watching the tips of his fingers, as they shook a little in the air, wracked with little tremors, then he pulled the hand out of sight on his lap, and ordered another beer as reality settled back into place in Eggsy’s wake.

He was an old man and a cripple, at least twice Eggsy’s age, by the looks of it. He couldn’t even remember how they had met.

“You’re a fool, Harry Hart,” Harry muttered to himself, and glanced out towards the sea, where the foam broke over and over again on the dark shore. He felt the now-familiar ache worming up in his skull, but he pressed the cold glass briefly against his temple, and closed his eyes to wait it out.
“Your taste in code names really sucks,” Eggsy told Merlin, because he had done a quick bit of wiki on his phone during the brisk walk he’d had to make to sober up. “‘Galath’? ‘Emrys’? How bloody obvious d’you want to be?”


“Ooh,” Eggsy said grumpily, “Do I ever.”

He had expected Merlin to become Arthur, or perhaps one of the other non-exploded Kingsmen (no one had exploded, apparently, other than Gawain), but it turned out that ‘Arthur’ was rarely promoted out of the ranks of Kingsmen, who, Merlin had explained patiently, hardly ever actually made it to retirement age.

That was an uncomfortable thought for Eggsy to parse at that time, but what the hell.

‘Arthur’ was actually what passed as CEO, boss, chief accountant, and the champion agent herder of Kingsman Inc, all at once, because someone who wasn’t picked out of the army/navy/MI6 had to have a good mind for business, contracts, clients, details and all that. Being a great Kingsman did not, Merlin droned on, mean that one would be a great Arthur - quite the opposite, usually.

Which meant, long and boring Merlin explanations aside, that the new Arthur was a woman, old enough to be someone’s granny, if said granny was a sharp-eyed, stone-cold old biddy with lips forever pursed in disapproval, an acid tongue and a temper that usually sat around ‘bad’ and turned to ‘worse’ if anyone gave her any lip. The new Arthur reminded Eggsy rather depressingly of his primary school headmistress, and he was forever vaguely convinced in the back of his mind that he had perhaps done Something Wrong, whenever talking to her, and was soon going to be In For It.

“Now, I’ve known the current Arthur for some time—“

“-you know everyone-“

“-and she’ll be a great Arthur, so-“

“-you’re probably sucking up ‘cos she can see this feed if she wants to-“

Merlin started to take a few slow breaths, but he grit out, after four exhales, “Take the next left turn.”

“Righto.”

“Also,” Merlin added, “Arthur isn’t checking on this feed right now, because someone, and I’m not naming names here, decided to blunder right into a pet project of mine involving someone best left alone.”

“Wow. You’re keeping secrets from Mumsy. So bad.”

Merlin groaned. “You are an incredibly annoying young man.”
“’ey, I could’ve been given the Rio mission instead of it going to Tristan. Just saying,” Eggsy said, though he took another sharp turn in the Range Rover on the rocky farm road. He’d hoped for an Aston Martin, maybe a tricked up version with rocket launchers, but asking for one had only earned him a severe talking to from Merlin about ‘budgets’ and ‘ridiculous movie prop toys’, sadly enough.

“Maybe once you’ve learned how to carry out a mission instead of gawking at the sights like a tourist.”

“That was just once! And it was a giant plastic dinosaur!”

“I rest my case,” Merlin said solemnly, then added, “Take the next right.”

“Whoever built these roads has got t’have been a fucking tosser at SimCity,” Eggsy grumbled, as he obeyed. “Merlin, stop stressing. Harry’s fine. Sure, he don’t remember anything, but he’s okay. Like you said. He seems happy with what he’s doing and all. He’s just… well…”


“Funny how he thought you’re the boss of Marks and Spencer or something,” Eggsy said innocently.

“How else was I to explain away having a private jet?”

“’Hi’, Eggsy intoned, ‘My name’s Am-Ris, and I’m sorta like Q in the James Bond movies—’”

“Very funny,” Merlin growled, and added, “Though actually, the old James Bond films did have some interesting ideas.”

“Y’mean, like the inflatable ‘phone booth trap?”

“No… nevermind. You agents,” Merlin said, in the same tone that people usually used to refer to roaches, and Eggsy smirked.

“Y’know,” Eggsy said, as the car squealed around another turn, “Harry’s still Harry. He’s still got the same habits. He remembers how to make a suit, obviously - though I don’t remember that being part of my training—“

“Courtesy of the previous, previous Arthur,” Merlin interrupted. “He was very into ah, ‘continuity’. All agents also had to pick up the tailor’s trade, do shifts in the shop as well as missions.”

“Bet that was popular.”

“You’d be surprised. Harry found it restful, actually.”

“Anyway,” Eggsy said, “He obviously remembers that. And he’s still got his funny habits. Correcting my English… posh beer, even the way he looks at someone, like he’s memorising the details. I bet he’s got a bone china tea set right upstairs in his flat, even.”

“Your point being?”

“Maybe whatever Harry got shot with isn’t an amnesia dart. Maybe it’s just blocking out bits of his memory. It didn’t erase everything.”

“And you’re suddenly a neurosurgeon, are you?” Merlin said, a little sharply. “The human brain’s a delicate thing. God knows what the dart did - or was meant to do. It’s nothing like the relatively rudimentary one Kingsman uses. Like I said, I’m still sequencing the information, and Valentine’s
databases are a challenge to navigate. The security he had is quite impressive."

“All I was gonna say is,” Eggsy said defensively, as he swerved again to take a narrow slope up, “Is maybe, just maybe, slowly reintroducing Harry to stuff that he knows isn’t that bad. I mean, what harm can it do?”

“You’re talking about the consequences of a product made by a man whose microchips could blow up people’s heads?”

“… True. You got a point there. But I mean. Surely. Harry’s got family, maybe? Or maybe he’s got other friends who ain’t us. Other Kingsman or… or normal people, maybe. I don’t know if it’s fair to cut him out of everyone’s lives.”

“Eggsy,” Merlin said patiently, “Harry’s an orphan and a single child. As to his friends - all his friends are in Kingsman: he was absorbed in the organisation to a degree that was, shall we say, a little unprecedented even for one of the Knights. It’s probably why he was the only Kingsman whom Arthur actively sought to get rid of.”

“That’s… kinda sad, actually.”

“How about you save the sympathy for another time and apply yourself to the mission at hand?” Merlin shot back, and Eggsy sighed theatrically as he parked the car at the top of the bluff and got out, loading his pistols.

“Aye aye, boss.”

Datamining net traffic out of Cornwall had led Merlin to this spot, apparently, top of a cliff in the middle of buttfuck nowhere, even for Cornwall. Eggsy grimaced a little as the wind started to bite, even through his suit, and looked around to give Merlin a better view of the situation.

From where he stood, Starling was a little dotted fan of lights, near the coast, the sea a dark swash under a cloudy sky. No stars tonight, and only a pale slip of a moon. The grass up here was grayish and dead, with only a few hopeful trees still clinging to the chalky soil. Eggsy hunched against the wind, squinting, and spotted the strangely misshapen rock behind a wreath of windblasted shrubbery even as Merlin said, “There. Right ahead.”

Nodding slowly, Eggsy approached with pistol drawn, muzzle pointing towards the ground. Still, he’d had to walk around it twice before he finally saw the faint, hairline crack in the rock, visible only via a handy short-range sonar scanner, built into the black glasses. Merlin grumbled quietly to himself for a moment, then there was a hollow, rumbling click, and a panel slid back, revealing a dark maw that led downwards, steel rungs bolted into a dead drop of rock.

At Eggsy’s sigh, Merlin said, a little snidely, “What? Here’s your villain’s headquarters.”

“In fucking Cornwall?” Eggsy protested.

“You talk about it as though it’s the arse end of the world,” Merlin said reprovingly. “Now down you get. And try not to get shot. The paperwork for that kind of thing is very upsetting to file.”

“As if you’re the one doing it,” Eggsy muttered, and started to climb, gun shoved back into his shoulder holster, under his suit.

IV.

For a possible Secret Villain Base, it was nowhere near as lavish as Valentine’s had been, what with
its hundreds of minions, stone jail cells, party room, biometric security and such. Which was
disappointing. The shaft led down into an old tunnel - probably some sort of ancient air raid shelter,
and through into a bigger room of some sort.

It was pitch dark, and although the glasses switched to zero light vision, all it did was give him some
fuzzy outlines of furniture and a vague hint of where the walls were.

“Be on your guard,” Merlin said into his ear. “We’ve no idea who might be waiting for you here,
or-“

With a triumphant hum, Eggsy found the light switch on the wall, and pressed it.

Above him, lights banked on, with a loud thrumming ripple of thunks that echoed loudly in the
chamber and beyond, drenching the space in sharp fluorescent light.

“… Nevermind,” Merlin groaned. “Suddenly, I’m reminded exactly why the previous Arthur was so
averse to young blood.”

“What,” Eggsy retorted, “I’m alone here, innit? Infrared said so. Y’want me to trip and fall flat on me
face just for kicks?”

Sulkily, Merlin didn’t answer. The rectangular concrete room that Eggsy turned out to be standing in
was as big as an indoor basketball court, and it was mostly empty, save for a few dusty old foldable
chairs and tables likely right out the WWII era, which was sort of depressing. Eggsy started to walk
towards the tunnel he could see at the far end of the room, only to stop sharply at the sound of
whirring, under his feet, a grinding sound at his back making him turn, pistol raised. Behind him, a
stone wall slid closed, shutting him in the room, and as he looked back, the tunnel at the far end was
also closing up.

“Ah… Merlin?”

“Working on it,” Merlin said, clipped. “You have enough air for now, don’t panic.”

At the word ‘panic’, a stone disc started to rise out from the centre of the room, as wide as Eggsy
was tall, and as it rose, higher and higher, Eggsy saw that it capped off some sort of metal cylinder,
glossy and silvery. No cover in the room. Eggsy crouched, ready to sprint, and the cylinder slid away
into itself, folding away like metal leaves of paper.

Behind it was a tiger.

A fucking tiger.

“Don’t. Make a sound.” Merlin said, as Eggsy stared, wide-eyed.

Eggsy had seen tigers before, but this one was frigging huge, as big as a fucking bear, fluffy and
larger than life. It snorted as it padded out of the metal cage, its huge soup-dish paws making no
sound at all on the ground, and even as Eggsy started to raise his gun, Merlin hissed into his ear,
“Eggsy. That’s a Siberian Tiger. It’s a very, very endangered animal. Don’t you dare shoot it.”

“I’m going to be a really fucking endangered human very soon, Merlin,” Eggsy hissed back.

“The pen in your pocket has a tranquiliser function now. Suggest you use it.”

“Oh aye? A pen against a fucking tiger?”
“Think of it this way,” Merlin said, as the tiger shook itself out and stared curiously at Eggsy, growling softly, “Only a few moments ago I think you were bemoaning the fact that Cornwall was less interesting than Rio.”

Bastard.

“If that thing scratches me on a bulletproof suit-” Eggsy began hopefully.

“Your suit’s designed to stop bullets, not the claws of a two hundred kilo predator.”

“You’re so helpful, thanks.”

“Don’t shoot it!” Merlin yelped, as the tiger started to gather itself into a pounce, which, in Eggsy’s opinion, showed such a great deal of care towards a fellow human being and colleague, in his opinion.

Swearing under his breath, Eggsy hastily holstered his gun and dove aside, barely avoiding being swiped by the tiger - seriously, a fucking tiger? What was next, a shark tank? The cat snarled, skidding to a halt on the concrete floor, but instead of pouncing again, it started to circle him, a huge pink tongue licking its nose.

Toying with him.

Great.

Eggsy slowly drew out his pen, and nearly fumbled it when Merlin said, pleasantly, “Just turn the pen cap clockwise until you hear a ‘beep’ sound.”

Slowly, even as Eggsy started to back away from the big cat, he turned the pen. No beep sound. “Uhh. I might have a defective version. Maybe if I-“

“Just keep turning the damned pen. Don’t you dare shoot that animal. There are only about four hundred to five hundred of them left in the wild. According to National Geographic.”

“Well, there’s only one ‘a me,” Eggsy growled, but he kept turning the pen cap. “Wait. Did you know that outright, or are you googling the tiger instead of working on the fucking security? Seriously, Merlin-“

He yelped, again scuttling to the side, as the tiger bounded over, and this time hissed as his trouser leg got torn wide open. A bright line of pain scoured down his leg - thank fuck it wasn't more than a bad scratch - and he was running for the cage thing, skidding around as the tiger growled and lunged over, nearly dropping the pen as he scrambled up the ridged metal doors and up onto the top of the stone disc.

Below him, the tiger sniffed, as though contemptuously, and licked its lips again, circling the stone disc. Eggsy tried another turn. Nothing.

“Merlin…”

“I’m almost done with this security system. Almost. Why don’t you try that pen again?”

“I am so done with your shit,” Eggsy growled, but this time, when he turned the pen cap viciously, there was a faint beep. “Fucking finally!”

“All right, now you just need to jab the tiger with the pen. Preferably somewhere where you won’t
give it lasting damage. Maybe the back of its neck?”

“You come here and jab a tiger with a pen in the back of its fucking neck!”

“Honestly, Eggsy,” Merlin said, sounding a trifle hurt again, “Put yourself in that creature’s shoes. It’s probably been kept in inhumane conditions under that stone floor until you set off that trap. It might have died. It’s probably starving.”

“Thank you so much for reminding me,” Eggsy grit out, even as he glared down at the tiger in question.

“…and it’s not its fault that it’s in this situation—”

“Merlin,” Eggsy said finally, “You are an awesome tech guy, but other than that, you’re an arsehole.” Carefully timing his leap, he jumped.

The tiger moved, such that an attempt to land on its back in a cool way backfired. Eggsy rolled with the fall, brought up his arms to protect his face against a heavy swipe, and gritting his teeth against the pain, twisted up, tossed the cap aside, and jabbed the tiger with the pen nib.

He backed off hastily, even as the tiger shook itself, snorting, but otherwise showed no indication of falling asleep. Great.

“Merlin…”

“Well, the dose in the pen was meant to work against a person, not a tiger,” Merlin said, as Eggsy backed off slowly, trouser leg and suit sleeves in ribbons, dripping blood onto the ground that was probably catnip to a huge starved tiger. “So you might have to wait a bit.”

“That’s… totally awesome, thanks.”

The tiger gathered itself up for another pounce and leaped, even as Eggsy tried again to dive aside, this time too slowly-

…and a huge furry weight landed on him, knocking him flat to the ground, but otherwise, nothing. The tiger made a snuffling sound in its sleep, even as Eggsy gingerly prodded it.

“I thought tranquilised animals just walked funny for a sec then fell over nicely!”

“Different sort of tranquiliser. Meant to be fast acting. See,” Merlin said, though he did sound relieved. “It all worked out fine.”

“Sometimes,” Eggsy said, with great dignity, as he wormed his way out from under the huge animal, “I hate you so much. Can you sort the tiger out?”

“I’ve notified the appropriate authorities. And… here we go.” The tunnel doors reopened. “I’m in the system. The signal we got is coming from the far door.”

“Course it is,” Eggsy said grumpily, “And I bet the bugger ain’t here no more for me to punch inna dick.”

“Terrorism happens to be a unisex activity.”

“Not you too.”

Eggsy turned out to be right. The far tunnel led to a small room, once home to a laptop, an internet
port, and power cables, all now burned to a crisp. It hadn’t been recent, either, and Eggsy suspected that the time of fire probably coincided to be maybe a minute or so after they had traced the signal here.

“Someone set a tiger out there to eat whoever it was who came sniffing after him,” Eggsy guessed.


Eggsy ignored the sarcasm. “Hard disc’s fried. So’s everything else. Guess this was a bit of a wasted trip.”

“I wouldn’t call it that. We rescued a tiger, after all.” Merlin hesitated. “I’ll try and trace the tiger’s point of origin. Those things don’t just appear out of nowhere. Poor thing.”

“I’m all right too, thanks for asking.”

“How’re you holding up?” Merlin asked dryly.

“Fine. Probably need a tetanus shot and stitches. But I’m good for now.” Eggsy rolled his eyes, and trudged out of the room. On the way out, he took a quick Snapchat of the tiger, and sent it to Roxy.

He got a call back on his climb up and out of the Secret Tiger Trap Base. “What the fuck, Eggsy,” Roxy said sharply, “Did you kill that animal? That’s a Siberian, isn’t it? There’re only four hundred of them left in the wild!”

“You guys all suck.”

Chapter End Notes

Arthur - Dame Judi Dench
Lancelot - Roxy
Galahad - Eggsy
Percival
Hector
Tristan
Gawain - Being replaced
Bors
Bedivere
Kay
Chapter 4

3.0.

It was half a week before Harry ran into Eggsy again, and this time by chance: he had taken a longer walk than he usually did, during his lunch break, as it was a slow Friday, and Eggsy had been right up at the docks, sitting on one of the weather-bleached wooden benches on the stone wharf, a half-eaten pack of fish and chips in his lap, tossing chips to eager seagulls. He had attracted a flock of them, perched on the edge of the wharf, crowding around his black patent oxfords, waddling about with their brightly webbed feet.

Harry slowed down for a moment, uncertain. Eggsy hadn’t seen him, and for a moment Harry was tempted to walk on, to ignore this new and impossible manifestation of temptation in his life, but the moment passed, with avarice and courtesy winning out. Harry walked over, the crowd of seagulls scattering away, squawking reproachfully as he came close, and Eggsy glanced up, a broad grin lighting up his pretty face when he recognised Harry.

“‘ey, Harry! How’s things?”

“Fair,” Harry said, gratified by Eggsy’s reaction, as he sat down beside Eggsy at arm’s length, not too far to seem distant, not too close to presume. “Your business in Cornwall is not yet resolved?”

“There was a bit of a cock up. Wires got crossed, people got pissed off, things got delayed. You know how that goes,” Eggsy shrugged nonchalantly, clearly not in the least perturbed by the setback.

Eggsy was dressed down today, in a chestnut brown, brushed wool checked blazer, worn over pressed charcoal flannel trousers, no tie, and a crisp, pale pink shirt, unbuttoned to show off the elegant line of his throat. Harry wondered if it was Emrys who dressed Eggsy up, who had fitted out this pretty young thing like a young dandy, and again, felt a touch envious.

“Sorry to hear that,” Harry said, perhaps insincerely, for Eggsy grinned sleekly at him, and tossed another chip to his squawking seagull fans. His movements were stiff, Harry noted, as though- “Are you well?”

Eggsy blinked at him, and Harry motioned at his arms. Startled, Eggsy tilted his head, studying Harry carefully. “How’d you know about that?”

“Your hands are stiff.” Harry mimed the movements. “You’ve clearly suffered some sort of injury.” The thought of that was oddly upsetting, far more than it should be: after all, Eggsy was still effectively a stranger-

“Ah,” Eggsy seemed to relax. “Well, you’ve got a good eye still and no mistake. I got into a bit of a fight with a kitty.”

“A… cat?”

“Aye, a mean old thing,” Eggsy smirked, as though at a private joke. “Got a bit mauled, me. Cat got off scot-free, the bastard. But I’m all right. Thanks for asking,” he said, with an emphasis on thanks, again with that playful amusement that Harry couldn’t quite parse. “I ‘preciate the obvious concern. Makes the world feel right again.”

Unable to ascertain whether Eggsy was perhaps being sardonic, Harry said, instead, “Sales seems rather fraught with danger.”
“Oh, you have no idea,” Eggsy said, and grinned impishly. “Fancy seeing you here, though. Bit out of your way, innit? Good view, though? You circle around to here often?”

“No particularly,” Harry admitted. “But it’s been a slow day, and it’s a fine afternoon for a walk.”

“That it is. I’m gonna miss all this back in London.”

Disappointment tasted leaden in Harry’s mouth. “You’re returning to London?”

“Aye, sooner or later. Got to check on me mum and sis. Got friends keeping an eye on them, but I like to show my face ‘round the house now and then. You should move over to London,” Eggsy said casually, his grin widening. “I mean, can’t say there’s a lot of clientele for your kinda work over here. No offence.”

“Not at all. I do like the quiet.” Harry hadn’t ever really thought about going to London, but now that Eggsy had brought it up, he supposed it was possible. He had enough savings to rent a shop somewhere nice - not quite Savile Row or Oxford Street, but it was doable. “Some days are quiet, but I do have good clients.”

“S’pose you would,” Eggsy said, with another cheeky grin. “Charmer as you are.”

Harry arched an eyebrow: ‘charmer’ wasn’t something he would’ve attributed to himself - and Eggsy laughed, edging over, seemingly unconsciously, and Harry dropped his eyes, wetting his lips. Another chip got tossed to the squawking cloud of seagulls, and out of a lack of anything to say, Harry murmured, “I wouldn’t encourage them.”

“Aye, I know. They be pests and whatnot,” Eggsy tossed over another chip. “I like them, actually. The way they’d do whatever it takes to survive. They could’a done and gone endangered like some o’ the other birds, but they’ve thrived instead.”

“Like rats,” Harry said, though he smiled faintly.

“Aye. Some o’ us just learn to make do,” Eggsy said, and Harry wondered for a moment if Eggsy was being anecdotal, whether this was a conversation that they’d had before, and he frowned a little, his headache cropping up. Eggsy tilted his head, abruptly going from relaxed to alert, like a primed hunting bird. “Something up?”

“It’s a trifle. I get headaches now and then,” Harry added, though he hadn’t meant to, but it was difficult to ignore Eggsy’s wide-eyed look of concern.

“Really? Like when?”

“It’s random. And a trifle, as I said.”

“Maybe you should get it checked,” Eggsy said worriedly. “Can’t be a good thing if it’s recurring, aye?”

“… So I gather this is new to me,” Harry noted, though he had suspected as much. More side-effects other than a lost memory, then.


He seemed upset, and Harry was moved to say, reassuringly, “I didn’t see any aspirin about the house when Emrys returned me here. So I presume it’s a lingering side-effect.”
“From two months back,” Eggsy said softly, and frowned at his hands, jaw clenching. “Man. Y’know, Emrys can be a great guy. But he’s also a dick. I mean, I find out about you only when I run into you on the street? How fucked up is that?”

Harry blinked, startled by the vehemence in Eggsy’s tone, and said carefully, “You seem to think that I was… dead. But the majority of people during the, ah, mass hysteria, particularly in countries with saner gun laws, did not perish.”

“Yeah. Well. Yours was kinda a special case,” Eggsy said, a little evasively. “I mean. You ended up somewhere else altogether.”

“That’s right,” Harry murmured, and this time the jab of pain at his temple was sharp enough that he winced.

Instantly, Eggsy had a hand on his wrist, and the back of his other palm was pressed over Harry’s forehead. “Hey,” Eggsy said softly. “Maybe you should take it easy. I mean. You survived. That’s good enough, right?”

Eggsy was almost flush against Harry now, so close that he could smell his cologne, something faint and vaguely spicy and so, so familiar that this time, Harry felt dizzy and disoriented, blinking owlishly, trying to slow his breathing.

“Hey,” Eggsy said, alarmed now. “You’re going a bit green around the gills. C’mon. Lemme walk you back. Easy does it.”

“I’m fine,” Harry protested, but Eggsy seemed genuinely anxious, all the way until he had let them both into his shop; at which point Eggsy insisted that he head upstairs to rest, fussed over him for a bit, then tinkered around in the small kitchen, setting the pot to boil.

“There’s no need for all this fuss,” Harry tried another protest, but Eggsy stubbornly set his jaw, stalking over to the armchair, and rested his palms against the cushioned arms, right up within all civilised notions of personal space, and Jesus but he was gorgeous, those wide green eyes, that soft mouth set into a pout.

“I don’t think you’re still all that right from two months back. Lemme make it up to you, yeah?”

“Make it up to me? What for?” Harry tried not to stare at Eggsy’s mouth, but it was difficult.

“For…” Eggsy hesitated, then said, “For not being around.”

“You didn’t know,” Harry began, then he narrowed his eyes a little when Eggsy seemed to start to protest, and lifted his hand, tipping down Eggsy’s chin. A gentleman did not presume, but this was perhaps… moving away from courtesy into wilful blindness, the way Eggsy blinked rapidly for a moment, then flushed pink.

“Uhm. Harry-“

“Were we…?” Harry asked softly, because he was in all things polite, as easy as it would be to lean over for a taste; it felt, for another disorienting moment, as though Harry had perhaps known Eggsy all of his life.
Eggsy let out a shaky laugh. “Nope. It wasn’t like that.”

“Ah,” Harry said, smiling to hide his disappointment, and dropped his hand. “Then I apologise.”

“Hey,” Eggsy began, then let out another laugh, “Look, I was… that doesn’t mean I… oh, fuck explaining,” he muttered, pulled off his black spectacles, dumping them on the coffee table, and kissed Harry full on the mouth.

It was a nervous kiss, angled badly, and Harry pressed a finger under Eggsy’s chin, tilting him up, fitting them together, a tentative press of lips until Eggsy moaned and climbed onto Harry’s lap, long limbs everywhere, hands clenched in Harry’s lapels, and now their kisses were filthy things, demanding and wet and laced with gasps and moans, loud in the orderly space of Harry’s beautifully arranged flat and all the more obscene.

They kissed and kissed until the kettle startled to whistle, and in that jarring noise sanity returned, for a moment, with Harry far too aware of how inappropriate this was, with his memory incomplete and this gorgeous boy still a stranger to him, half his age. His hands hesitated where they had come to rest on Eggsy’s narrow hips, and Harry pulled in a shaky breath, then another, as excuses stuttered to nothing in his throat.

Eggsy, his mouth kiss-swollen, his eyes bright with mirth and joy and his body arched towards Harry, like a hound straining towards its master - this vision was a temptation against which even a gentleman’s manners could be broken. He startled a little when Eggsy brushed a kiss against his forehead. “One sec,” Eggsy said, climbing off, heading over to the kettle, and Harry tried not to squirm where he sat, his cock hard against his thigh.

“Earl gray,” Eggsy said, checking the cupboard and finding the tin. “Five minutes, bit of sugar, spot of milk.”

“Precisely,” Harry said, with a slight smile, a spark of relief threading into his tone. If they had not been… seeing each other, then they had to have been close to it, if Eggsy knew even this detail about Harry’s life.

“And… hah, I knew it. Noritake again, eh? You and your love of fine things.” Bone china clinked together on the countertop, the tea left to steep. “Expecting anyone else in here for the day?”

“Not usually.”

“I’ll close up, then. You just take it easy,” Eggsy said breezily, and clattered back downstairs, taking the steps two at a time with the energy of youth. Harry closed his eyes as he heard the lock turn, composing himself and cooling his blood, listening to the faint clatter as the sign was reversed to ‘Closed’, and then Eggsy was calling up, “What d’you want me to do about the cashbox?”

“Leave it there,” Harry instructed, and Eggsy was back upstairs, not even out of breath, checking on the tea, then serving it, a cup for Harry, angled for his left hand, and a cup for himself, as he curled over the other armchair, a deliciously boyish mischief in his eyes as he tipped up his little finger, taking an exaggerated little sip from the cup.

“Did you get this imported out of Sri Lanka as well?”

“I’m trying an American blend, actually. Harney & Sons.”

“American? Pssh,” Eggsy said, though he smirked as he did so, and for a moment, affected an accent right out of Downton Abbey. “I do think that’s the sound of our standards dropping.”
The laugh curled out of Harry with a warm huff, and Eggsy winked, looking even younger without his spectacles. His eyes seemed to focus fine without them: Eggsy wasn’t shortsighted at all, then. Perhaps the black spectacles were some sort of cosmetic affectation.

Eggsy saw Harry’s glance, and oddly enough, actually reached over, placing the spectacles face down on the table. Then he set his teacup and saucer next to the black frames, took the finished cup and saucer from Harry, and set that down too. Suddenly unsure, Harry rested his hands on the arms of the chair, wondering whether to get to his feet, but then Eggsy settled down before him, on his knees, crinkling the line of his trousers against the flooring, and the boy had the gall to laugh when Harry frowned at the fabric.

“Aye, I know,” Eggsy teased, “But gimme this, all right? Been thinking of it for a while.”

And with that, he reached over, entwined his fingers in Harry’s pale blue tie, and tugged him over.

Harry had tried to get them both to the bedroom, but Eggsy had kissed him again when they had passed the low couch and somehow they ended up sprawled on it instead, suits pulled off with nowhere near the level of care that the jackets deserved. Harry had managed some halfhearted protest before Eggsy had demanded another greedy kiss, and even the cufflinks had gone tinkling onto the floor, next to their kicked off shoes, unforgivable in any other context.

It was hard to concentrate, with Eggsy’s little bitten off gasps, hot against his ear, long legs bracketing Harry’s hips, hands rucked into Harry’s hair, all this escalating rather too quickly for propriety’s sake, but Harry was all too keenly aware now that every moment like this was precious; the gorgeous boy in his arms, after all, belonged to London.

“C’mon,” Eggsy growled, struggling with the small buttons on Harry’s throat, even as Harry pushed up Eggsy’s sleeves - and hesitated. Eggsy’s wrists up to his elbows were swathed with bandages.

“What on earth were you doing to the poor animal?” Harry asked skeptically, as Eggsy froze up, then the boy started to laugh.

“Really a cat?” Harry asked skeptically, as Eggsy froze up, then the boy started to laugh.

“No a cat. Serious. Looks worse than it is. Only had to get a few stitches.”

“Stitches?”

“Yeah, yeah. Pretty minor,” Eggsy tugged pointedly at Harry’s tie again, the knot only partly undone. “C’mon. Don’t get distracted.”

“Does it hurt?”

This time, Eggsy rolled his eyes. “It’s gonna hurt way more if you don’t get your cock out in the next fifteen seconds.”

“I’m being serious, Eggsy.”

“Well, so’m I,” Eggsy shot back, though he groaned and leaned back against the couch, folding his arms over his chest and pouting again. “If I’d known you were gonna make this sort’a fuss, I would’a kept me shirt on.”

“What on earth were you doing to the poor animal?” Harry asked, though he nudged a kiss up over Eggsy’s jaw, then further up, when Eggsy finally tugged the knot of Harry’s tie free, and entwined the fingers of his hand with either end of the tie, smiling devilishly. Eggsy rode up the thigh that Harry thrust between his legs with an eager little whine, and for one disorienting moment Harry
wondered whether this was real after all, or another side effect, even as his right hand shook a little from where it was pressed into the pillows beside Eggsy’s shoulder, even as Eggsy dragged him down to push his tongue demandingly into Harry’s mouth.

They ended up grinding against each other, finesse blown to the winds, especially when Eggsy got his teeth into Harry’s lower lip and tugged, hard enough to sting, Harry’s arousal achingly uncomfortable in his trousers, but the restless race of their hands over each other had long given up with buttons and zips, desperate whines twisted with stuttered groans, until Eggsy abruptly bucked up with a cry that he buried against Harry’s shoulder, the indent of his teeth a pressure obvious even through the fabric. Harry gasped, hands clenched on the leather of the couch, dazed as Eggsy breathed shallowly for a moment then slipped off, onto his knees, fumbling buttons and zips until he drew Harry out from his boxers, chuckling breathlessly when Harry snapped his hips up into Eggsy’s grip with a strangled whine.

“C’mon,” Eggsy purred, his voice broken and hoarse, licking his damnable lips with his tongue, “Give it t’me.” And he spat on his hand, drawing a tight fist, this time, over Harry’s cock, using a little too much force and that was enough, more than enough; Harry was coming and it was all over Eggsy’s elegant hands, his pert nose, his reddened parted lips, his flushed cheeks and the pale arch of his bared throat.

“So?” Harry breathed, slumped and panting against the back of the couch, probably utterly disheveled, but Eggsy merely smirked at him and started to lick his fingers clean, all tiny little dainty laps, like a cat and a bowl of cream, and if Harry were twenty years younger, he probably would’ve gotten hard again, just at the look of it.

“Can your shower fit two?” Eggsy asked, with mock innocence.

“Very likely. But I’m no longer a young man,” Harry cautioned, when Eggsy started to get to his feet.

“Well, I am,” Eggsy said with a smug little grin, the cheeky thing, and made a show of sucking his index finger clean. “And you’ve still got your fingers, eh?”

“… What an excellent proposition.”

“Ain’t that right.”
Eggsy had woken up in the morning expecting perhaps another round of sex, maybe two, if he was lucky and Harry was in the mood. He hadn’t expected, as it were, to get shot three times in the back.

The morning had started well, in Harry’s bed. Harry’s bedroom was tidy, neat, and small, with a single bed that had been a touch too cozy for two, even with Eggsy half-curled over Harry, but he had woken up with Harry’s morning wood rubbing against his hip, which had been a plus, sunlight streaming in over the narrow window to light up Harry’s adorably sleep-mussed hair.

Harry had let out one of those incredibly hot little gasps when Eggsy had shot him a lazy smirk and ducked under the covers, sucking Harry’s cock into his mouth and groaning as it hit the back of his throat. Eggsy had no gag reflex and he let Harry know it, enjoying the weight of Harry’s cock on his tongue with a noisy groan, nails digging at Harry’s hips until Harry got with the program and started to buck into his mouth, his gasps growing louder, more urgent, hotter.

Eggsy swallowed when Harry spent himself, drinking down the flush of hot, bitter fluid, enjoying the shaky fingers threading through Eggsy’s hair, knees pressed desperately against Eggsy’s shoulders, and he had let the cock out of his mouth with a reluctant little pop, chuckling as Harry had dragged him up, jacking Eggsy off between one rough kiss and the next.

And maybe, just maybe, Eggsy had felt a little bad about all this, all the pretence and little lies; though then again, he had told himself, it wasn’t as though Harry had decided to fuck Eggsy because he thought Eggsy was some sort of salesman. Eggsy had eyes, thank you very much, and it’d been bloody obvious that Harry had checked him out first, in the tailor shop… and maybe the non-amnesia Harry would’a done the same, if they’d met in different non-jail-related circumstances.

Harry’s habits had all remained the same, pre and post amnesia dart. Stood to reason that his preferences would’a too, aye?

Or so Eggsy would tell himself, especially like this, in bed with Harry, chin tipped up, Harry mouthing soft kisses over his throat. Like this, grinning and giggling like a schoolboy in the cramped shower, later, Harry’s little frown as Eggsy pulled on his day-old shirt and blazer. Breakfast over Harry’s kitchenette counter had been intimate, knees pressed together, standing with their elbows propped over the counter top and sharing dippy soft boiled eggs and soldiers that Harry had whipped up - which was of course when it had all gone to hell, this being Eggsy’s life.

Eggsy had been so caught up with enjoying the moment that he hadn’t heard the intruder come through the door, or even up the stairs. The first bullet had punched him forward, hard against the counter; Eggsy remembered Harry jerking back, wide-eyed with shock, and the second and third bullets had hit him as he had fallen, each like solid kicks to his back but no more damage than that, thank God for the bulletproof blazer. Still, he had banged his head good on the marble counter top on the way down, and that’d been it, dazed, unconsciousness creeping in despite his desperate attempts to get up, just in time to see the gunman’s shoes, polished oxblood loafers edging into his vision, then he was out like a light.

He woke up on the couch, Lancelot frowning at him, and as Eggsy sat up sharply, a wave of dizziness very nearly pulled nausea in after the equation.

“My God, you suck,” Roxy said, because she was compassionate and all, and Eggsy looked wildly
over to the kitchen, which was spotless. “I cleaned up after you,” Roxy added. “What with your blood all over the place. Also did the compress on your forehead and the rest of the first aid. You’re fine, no stitches needed, just got a bit of a bad knock.”

“Harry? Where’s Harry?”

“He’s gone. Kidnapped.” Roxy handed over Eggsy’s glasses, which he put on, still dizzy. “Merlin thinks that it’s very likely the same person who owned the tiger trap base. Probably left you for dead. Didn’t check the body, lucky for you.”

“Kidnapped? What for?”

“That’s the kicker,” Roxy sat down beside Eggsy. “When you’re ready, Arthur wants to do a conference call.”

“Arthur?”

“Are you all right,” Roxy peered at Eggsy’s eyes curiously, “Or are you just going to parrot everything I say right now?”

Eggsy took in a deep, strangled breath, then checked his collar, straightened up his blazer, and sat up, pushing away his irritation, his fear, his worry. “Okay. I’m good to go.”

There was a flicker in his range of sight, as Roxy also tipped her head up, then the greenish holographic vision of Arthur appeared, standing in Harry’s neat little living room, next to one of the antique armchairs, hands crossed over her back. Merlin also appeared, beside her, looking considerably chastened.


“Kidnapper’s cleared out. Interviewed the neighbours, no one noticed them go. It’s a sleepy part of town and it was early in the day. A traffic cam placed them heading out north, in a Range Rover, at the legal speed limit.” Lancelot said briskly. “But surveillance lost them once they headed off the main roads.”

Arthur nodded curtly. “And Galahad?”

“I didn’t see the bastard coming,” Eggsy said flatly, because a gentleman did not lose his damn temper before a woman, no matter how tempting it was.

“Quite so.” Arthur glowered at Merlin. “Someday, I’ll be quite interesting in learning precisely what else Merlin might be hiding from me by way of pet projects. But what’s done is done. Merlin, your report?”

“Thanks to a certain person placing his glasses facedown on the table,” Merlin said neutrally, “We didn’t, ah, have visual on the attack. I’ve had to use voice print tech to ID the culprit: Jason Phillips, late of the Marines, forty-one years old, heir to the Phillips empire-“

“Shavers?” Eggsy cut in, in disbelief.

“Quite so,” Merlin looked mildly annoyed at the interruption. “What’s of note is… About thirteen years ago or so, Jason was Harry’s nomination for the role of Bedivere. He dropped out of the running at third position, and opted to leave Kingsman to run his family business.”

“Has this Jason Phillips had any contact with Harry Hart prior to the Valentine Incident?” Arthur
asked, frowning.

“Not that I’m aware.”

“Why did Hart pick Phillips for the position?”

“I gather he looked up a list of marines and picked the valedictorian from the officer school. It wasn’t a personal decision, and up until his most recent candidate, it’s what Harry Hart has always done when asked to nominate a replacement.” Merlin pointedly didn’t look at Eggsy. “As far as Kingsman was concerned at the time, it parted with Jason Phillips on the usual confidential terms, and that was that.”

Arthur sniffed. “Obviously that wasn’t the case. Now. Are we sure that he’s the Cornwall suspect?”

“I’m still going through his records. But Jason is the sole shareholder of a shell company with export operations in Siberia, where he could have acquired the tiger.”

“Tenuous.” Arthur scowled. “Until you’ve acquired actual proof, it’s safer to treat the situation as separate. As such-”

“-Wait a minute-” Eggsy objected.

Arthur ignored him. “-Galahad will continue to investigate the Cornwall suspect. While Lancelot is now assigned to Jason Phillips.”

“Hold on,” Eggsy snapped. “Look. I want to switch. For fuck’s sake.”

“You’re personally involved,” Arthur shot back. “Compromised.”

“Lancelot knew Harry too!”

“Lancelot,” Arthur said coldly, “Did not fraternise with the asset in question, Galahad. Dismissed. Merlin will advise the both of you further.”

Arthur’s hologram flickered out, and Merlin coughed as Eggsy grit his teeth. “She’s got a point,” Merlin suggested. “It’s a serious matter.”


“Unless you think that I’m not up to the job?” Roxy asked evenly.

Eggsy nearly squeaked as he said hastily, “No, no of course not-“

“Then don’t worry,” Roxy growled, though her expression softened a little. “Look. I’ll kick Phillips in the balls for you when I get him, OK? I’ll send you a Snapchat of it, even.”

“He’s gonna be dangerous,” Eggsy said worriedly, “If he made it that far through Kingsman training and-“

“And I was top of our class,” Roxy reminded Eggsy calmly. “I’ll be fine. You do what you’re doing, and I’ll do what I’m doing. Clear?”


with the tiger and all. It’s like one of those old James Bond films. We’ve got Q, a James Bond, and a Bond Girl.”

“You’re not really a Bond Girl,” Eggsy said doubtfully, and Roxy rolled her eyes.

“Obviously. I’m James Bond, and I’m going after the Bond Girl.” She grinned at Eggsy’s glower. “Who knows. Maybe you’d catch the terrorist in time, and you can tag along as a sidekick.”

“I’ll send you a list of Phillips’ known properties in Cornwall,” Merlin said, tapping away on his iPad. “Suggest you investigate those first, Lancelot.”

“Will do. Good luck, Eggsy.”

“Good hunting,” Eggsy said, envious as Roxy uncurled from the couch and clattered down the stairs. “This is fucked,” he muttered, when he heard the door open as Roxy let herself out. “Why now, after all this time? If this Jason guy’s got some beef with Harry?”

Merlin pursed his lips. “That’s for Lancelot to find out.”

“Maybe I was followed. From the Tiger Trap Base.”

“Perhaps. But that’s a link that we’ve yet to ascertain. It could be that this is some sort of feint, to try and throw you off the main mission.” Merlin lifted a shoulder into a shrug. “Arthur did the right thing by not reassigning you.”

“I know. I know. So. Where next?”

“If you’re well enough to keep going, I’ve been tracing the transportation of the tiger, and I think it passed through a holding zone about twenty miles inland. It’s not much,” Merlin admitted apologetically, “But it’s where I would start.”

“Owned by Phillips?” Eggsy asked, a little hopefully.

“Sorry to disappoint.”

“Right, then.” Gritting his teeth, Eggsy pushed himself to his feet. His head still hurt, as did the no doubt impressive bruises on his back, and the souvenirs from his close encounter with giant wildlife, but at least the dizziness was gone. “Gonna go kick some tiger kidnapper ass. Maybe we could get some brownie points from PETA.”

“Actually,” Merlin said briskly, “Arthur would prefer this to actually be a stealth job. In case you aggravate the matter and accelerate the possible terrorism event.”

“… She has such a way of squeezing all the fun out of life.”

VI.

Eggsy worried over Harry all of the drive to the holding zone, up until Merlin sighed and said, “I wouldn’t doubt Lancelot’s capacity.”

“It’s not that, Merlin. It’s just… did Harry even fight back?”

“How should I know?” Merlin asked testily. “But no, it doesn’t seem so. He’s still alive. That’s something.”

“I don’t get why this Jason guy-“
“It’s not your mission, Eggsy,” Merlin cut in sharply. “Let me remind you that the current Arthur, as it was, happened to be a little doubtful about you being raised to the Galahad rank despite technically failing the entrance exam to the Lancelot role, as it were.”

“But I saved the world!”

“It counted in your favour - barely. That, and Arthur didn’t want to have you running loose as well as having to get me and one other Kingsman running new entrance exams for two roles. There’s a reason for that final test,” Merlin continued, as Eggsy started to protest. “Sometimes, particularly in the field, sentiment can be deadly. The knights of Kingsman are killers, Eggsy. Units. If you lose sight of that, if you start to disobey orders, then you’re not only no longer useful, you’d be dangerous.”

“I get that,” Eggsy said miserably, because he did, really.

Rebelling, becoming a loose cannon, doing his own thing? This wasn’t that kind of story, sadly. His months in Kingsman had instilled in Eggsy a sense of pride in his job, a sense of discipline. Every Kingsman knight knew precisely how dangerous they were, knew the aberration that they were compared to normal society. Although killing people was not necessarily key to every mission, it was something they had to do if needed… and regret could be a poisonous thing.

“Who’s handling Lancelot?” Eggsy asked, when Merlin said nothing.

“Other people in the Merlin capacity, of course. I don’t watch all the agents all at once,” Merlin said dryly, “Though I do pitch in if things get difficult.”

“I dunno. You seem to pitch in for me all the time.”

“That’s because…” Merlin hesitated. “Well. That’s because Arthur still has some doubts about you. Like I’ve said. She thinks you need to be watched for a bit. It didn’t help,” he added dryly, “That you were so rude to her when you first met.”

“I wasn’t being rude! I tried to be friendly!”

“That was probably the problem.”

“… Thanks, Merlin. So nice to know that I’m the only Kingsman who needs babysitting.”

“She’ll trust you again sooner or later,” Merlin said vaguely. “If it’s much comfort, having to ‘pitch in’ on the newest agents has always been part of the Merlin role. Especially when said agents happen to be impulsive young men, shall we say.”

“That’s sexist!”

“It’s a necessity born of experience,” Merlin said, because fine, Eggsy would, maybe, a little, concede that Roxy was kind of more mature than he was, and the girls in their group had certainly been far more mature than the rest of the class, but he would never, ever admit that to her.

“Merlin,” Eggsy said, frowning at the road, “If it turns out that… that Harry’s in trouble ‘cos I brought it to his door… I’m sorry.”

“‘You were right, Merlin’,” Merlin prompted.

“Fine. You were right. You told me so.”
“It’s something all young agents have to learn eventually,” Merlin noted generously. “You’ll all pick up enemies because of what you do for a living. In London, our agents have the capacity to watch and keep your families safe. Out of London, you’re going to have to be more careful.”

“I thought I was,” Eggsy said grumpily, but he should’ve known. Walking through Starling as he’d done, with Harry? That had been bloody fucking obvious. He hadn’t blended in at all, the way he should’ve. He’d been arrogant and felt invulnerable and now, maybe, Harry was paying for it.

Merlin sighed when Eggsy slammed the heel of his palm against the steering wheel. “Lessons learned,” Merlin said briskly. “But now you have a job on hand. So. Do your job.”

“You’re so awesome at pep talks.”

“I know. Early on in my career,” Merlin added absently, “I made the current Tristan cry once. He’s never really forgiven me for it.”

“Wow. Do I want to know why?”

“Not particularly. Also, I suggest you hide the car in that patch of woods up ahead and proceed on foot. It’s open fields from here to the holding zone, and you’re rather noticeable in the Rover.”

Hiding the car took a few minutes, kitting up in a new suit took longer. Eggsy tucked spare pistols into his waistband, more ammo into his suit pockets, holstered his favourite gun, and hesitated for a dizzy moment as he had to thread through his cufflinks. Green bloody cufflinks. He heard Harry’s voice for a moment, low and flirtatious, telling him that the cufflinks matched his eyes, then Eggsy let out another shaky breath, and limbered up.

“It’s still the afternoon,” Eggsy said, because he hadn’t been unconscious for that long after all. “I’m going to be bloody obvious walking up there through all that flat ground.”

“In about one point eight minutes there’ll be a delivery truck passing the road close to your position,” Merlin retorted briskly. “I suggest you find a way to hitch a ride.”

“Could’ve said that earlier!” Eggsy jogged hastily over to the woods closer to the pitted asphalt road, taking care to stay as hidden as he could behind the pale trunks.

“You bloody agents, always bitching about something or other,” Merlin grumbled, but said nothing more.

Eggsy could see the truck approaching, white, with some sort of circular blue logo on its flanks, and at the last possible moment, as the truck was trundling past, he darted out and hauled himself up onto the back, digging his fingers into the handles, glad for the little metal step under the bulk of the truck.

Lockpicks made short work of the door, and Eggsy opened it just enough to haul himself in, closing up behind himself. Thankfully, there was just enough space, and as his glasses switched to no light vision, Eggsy got a sinking feeling.

The truck was three quarters full of cardboard boxes, all about knee high and battened down, to prevent them all from shifting around and possibly damaging the contents. All of them were emblazoned over the top and flanks with a very familiar ‘V’ logo.

“Well fuck,” Eggsy said slowly. “I definitely fucking killed the guy.”

“You killed the head of the organisation,” Merlin sounded as though he was typing frantically. “It’s not as easy to kill the organisation itself.”
“I thought it was going into voluntary administration!”

“I’m looking into it again,” Merlin said, his voice clipped. “Stay hidden. And be careful.”

Easier said than done. Eggsy carefully cut little holes into the sides of the truck, and set little wireless cameras into them, to give Merlin an external view of the truck, then he got a small knife out, and cut into one of the boxes.

He had been expecting to see more of the SIM cards, or phones, or something similar, but instead, all that the box contained were odd metal plates, slightly curved, with a strange, supple consistency. Opening another box at random revealed the same thing, and Eggsy frowned, buried the opened boxes under others, strapped it all down again, and waited for the show to start, knife back up his sleeve, pistol in hand.

Merlin had been right. Like it or not, Eggsy had a job to do. He could only hope that Harry could wait.
Merlin’s predecessor had always told him that Arthur may sit at the head of the Round Table, but Merlin was the true power behind the throne, a sentiment that Merlin had believed for the first few years of service until reality rudely shattered the sentiment. Sometimes, Merlin still wondered what the old man had been smoking.

Kingsman was an organisation with far too much money for simplicity, and in actual fact, while Arthur was the power on the throne, there were also shareholders, from the estates of the families whose patriarchs had once founded Kingsman. There were clients. There were the field agents, most of them self-assured bordering on arrogant. And then, there was the Finance Department. The Merlin department in truth factored only somewhere in between, and definitely below Finance.

One of Merlin’s most valued minions had gotten very adept at luring the CFO away with sushi and promises of streamlined initiatives, thankfully, leaving Merlin free this afternoon to babysit Galahad as well as check in occasionally on all the other Kingsmen currently on field duties. After the Valentine fiasco, agent feeds now went directly to the Ops Room, which was really a well-ventilated chamber full of supercomputers, servers, and lines of handlers in headsets assigned to agents, and while the current Merlin always occupied pride of place at the main array, technically, Merlin knew that to most Kingsmen, there was no real mental distinction between their usual handler and the actual Merlin.

Not that he minded. Unlike the Round Table, the title of ‘Merlin’ was rather more of an organisation rather than a position, in practice. Which suited Merlin fine. On one of his screens, as Galahad snuck out of the delivery truck and ducked hastily behind a high, stacked row of boxes, Merlin absently signed off on a new initiative for an EMP pen and flicked through yet another hopeful proposal from Engineering for a car with rocket launchers (Disapproved).

Transferring the Galahad feed to his iPad, Merlin got up from his work station and wandered over to look over the shoulder of one of his minions. Nyneve - not her real name - was one of the youngest of the minions, and unlike many of the older minions, who chose to take after Merlin and the other Kingsmen by way of dress, she was dressed for work in a colourful red and white banded frock, with polka dotted kitten heels and bright pink hair cut short over her shoulders, thick enough to almost hide her headphones.

At present, she had the Lancelot feed on one screen - Roxy was still driving - Google Maps on another screen, and a scrolling list of Phillips properties on the last. “Almost there,” Nyneve said absently. “Got to take the next bridge across then take the second right. Jacked a sat feed,” Nyneve added, noticing Merlin. “No sign of the ‘Rover. Bet he changed cars. S’what I would’a done.”

“Just keep looking,” Roxy said firmly. “If he’s keeping to the local speed limits, he’s got to still be in Cornwall. And I can’t imagine Harry Hart sitting still and allowing himself to be quietly kidnapped. Even the way he is now.”

“Could’ve been tranquilised and then hog tied in the boot. S’what I would’a done.” Nyneve said blandly, yet again indicating to Merlin how, in different circumstances, this petite Hispanic girl with a love of flower print dresses might have turned out to be a formidable supervillainess. He nodded at her, checked the Galahad feed, on which Galahad was still stealing over carefully towards the closest foreman’s office - and walked on to the next minion.
Tristan was still in Rio, by the looks of it, talking to a mark in some sort of touristy bar, while his rake-thin handler, Oberon, sifted through the mark’s financial history, looking for anomalies that could be used for blackmail. Merlin moved on to the next handler, then the next, until he was back at his desk. Hardly anything had actually burned down, if one discounted the fish factory that Hector had just set fire to as a distraction, and so far, Percival seemed to be doing fine whipping the candidates for Gawain’s position into shape.

Transferring the Galahad feed back to a screen, Merlin settled down at his desk and nibbled at his sushi lunch. Galahad had just slotted one of Merlin’s transcievers into the nearest computer, and even as Merlin forwarded the feed to a free minion to decrypt and log, he scanned the information as it rolled up on his screen.

“Got it,” Merlin said, and Galahad unplugged the transciever, sneaking out of the foreman’s office through a window and hastily hiding behind a forklift truck as some people in white courier uniforms scrolled past. On one screen, a helpful minion had just forwarded information about RPN Couriers, likely sourced from Google, company registers, and maybe Wikipedia before heading into proper datamining. “RPN was purchased by Valentine over a year ago. Apparently because it was easier and more efficient to own a courier service outright than use another company to deliver all his tech.”

“Okay. So this is Valentine’s shizz.”

Merlin grimaced. He would never, ever get used to Eggsy’s patois. “Effectively. Although the parent company is undergoing voluntary administration, it seems that RPN hasn’t yet been affected. Business as usual.”

“Transporting funny metal plate things?”

“Titanium alloys,” Merlin corrected, because the glasses were good for more than just low light feeds and visual linkups. “I’m still looking into what that’s for,” he added, because some hapless minions had just been assigned to work that task as a priority until they had either cracked it or died of exhaustion, whatever came first.

The minion who had lured the CFO away returned, and at Merlin’s curious tilt of his head, offered a thumbs up, and scuttled back to Software, where the codemonkeys resided in their ventilated little cave, creating the algorithms that allowed the rest of the Merlin Department to actually acquire the information that all the Kingsmen knights tended to take for fucking granted.

Agents.

“Whatever it is, can’t be good,” Eggsy said, skulking from one forklift truck to another. “Can’t you find out? Got to be pretty obvious from the records, innit?”

Quietly, Merlin squeezed a stress ball on his desk. He usually went through one of those every few months. Since Eggsy had been promoted to Galahad, he was going through one every few weeks. “It’s a work in progress.”

“Right, right. I’m getting a move on. No need to get your knickers inna twist. Want me to check on another one of them packages? Won’t be hard to cut a hole into one’a these.” Eggsy was behind another stack of boxes.

“Focus on the mission. Cutting holes in the packaging’s going to make it very obvious that someone’s been through the area looking for info. The building plans indicate that there’s a manager’s office, two levels up and at three o’clock.”
“This is so Assassin’s Creed,” Eggsy said, as he climbed up a small tower of cardboard boxes, nimble and deft. “Nobody really looks up.”

“There was an absolutely functional fire escape just a few metres away from your previous position, but sure, feel free to try and break your neck.” Young agents.

“What’s the fun o’ that?” Eggsy had made the short, noiseless leap to a mezzanine catwalk, and was swarming up pipework to the next level. This was one reason why Harry Hart had always preferred to nominate Marines, a trend that hadn’t technically been broken where Eggsy was concerned. *Per Mare, Per Terram.*

Merlin finished a sushi roll without really registering the filling as Eggsy made it up to the third level, sneaking up noiselessly behind a security patrol and ducking quietly into a service room when the patrol turned about. It was nice to see that the brash young man actually *did* understand the concept of stealth.

“Y’know,” Eggsy said softly, “If you had people watching my family and Roxy’s and stuff in London, why didn’t you just put Harry in London?”

“Because you’re not the only nosy Kingsman around, and the others would’ve gotten wind of it,” Merlin said absently. “Another patrol coming to your left.”

“Is that a bad thing?” Eggsy had pulled himself nimbly up, snug against piping and metal struts, waiting as another patrol passed him by, all toting semiautomatic rifles. “For a courier company, this place is armed to the fucking *teeth.*”

“This level of security isn’t reflected on their books. Something’s definitely fishy.” On another screen, Merlin started to run traces on the faces of the security guards who had just walked past.

“Any hint of tigers on their books? Or is that too easy?”

“If only life were that simple, Galahad.” The trace pinged a quick match, bringing up profiles with photographs and affiliates. “Huh. Security’s a mercenary crew, hired out of Somalia. Judging from the visas and the last known travel routes, they’ve all been in Cornwall for three months.”

“So… since before the Incident. Why didn’t their heads explode?”

“They’re not technically Valentine’s men. I guess he didn’t want to take his entire initiative in-house. Whatever this part of it is.”

Merlin acknowledged a ping on one of his screens, which brought up the Bors feed. Bors was in some sort of privately owned gulag, trying to retrieve an a Kremlin critic, and seemed to be stuck, unruffled as the veteran agent seemed, judging from his heart rate and the way he was calmly reloading his pistol. Merlin studied the feed for a moment, traced his recommended route on it for the assigned minion, and dropped the feed.

“If only villains did cool shit, like building a giant moon laser,” Eggsy said wistfully, as he crept over to the manager’s office. “I mean, bombing tube stations? That’s *so* been done.”

Merlin rolled his eyes. “I’ll be sure to let the next supervillain in on your recommendations, Galahad.” Ian Fleming had a *lot* to answer for.

The manager’s office hadn’t yielded any special gems, other than a printout tucked under the
keyboard of the desk computer with a list of transit warehouses that didn’t match the list that was actually on file. Merlin watched as Eggsy slipped past all the slumped forms, sleeping gas having done its trick, and brought up Lancelot’s feed.

Roxy was flipping through a pile of brochures and receipts in some sort of safehouse, laying them out neatly on the table such that her feed could film and catalogue them. Some were receipts for takeout food, dated recently, others were grocery lists, fuel scripts and more. “They didn’t come through here,” Roxy was saying. “But it looks like Phillips stopped by on his way to Starling. There’s a fridge in here with milk that’s still good.”

“Hey Merlin,” Eggsy said, as he made his way out, “How’s Lancelot going?”

“Fine.” Merlin frowned at the screen. “You’re going to have the same visibility problems if you just walk out as you are.”

“Nup. I’m going to grab a uniform and one o’ their bikes, actually. Check out the next warehouse.”

“Grab an ID as well if you can,” Merlin advised, and spent the next ten minutes feeding a false ID into the RPN servers, with Eggsy’s ‘employee’ photo and cover data, all while Eggsy pulled a courier jacket and baggy trousers over his suit and tugged on a helmet, swinging on to one of the RPN delivery bikes. “All right. You’re cleared to go,” he said, and felt a little ping of satisfaction as the gate and sentry block waved Eggsy through after a scan of his ID.

No ‘thank you’ from Galahad, naturally, but Merlin was used to agents and their casual disregard of all the attention that the Merlin department paid to life in general. Even Harry.

Thinking of Harry made Merlin look back over Lancelot’s feed. She was striding out of Phillip’s safehouse, getting back into her red Mazda sports car, flashy but not too flashy. “Next big town is Newquay, but he probably won’t stop there. Too touristy,” Lancelot was saying. “Wherever he’s taking Harry—”

“Maybe he’ll cross the Bristol Channel. Or get into a helicopter and head inland. S’what I would’a done,” said Nyneve. “Tranquilisers only last so long.”

“If this is some sort of revenge kidnapping,” Lancelot said out aloud, as she sped off back towards the highway, “Then we should work out the motive. What was the second last stage? Where Phillips dropped out?”

“Same as it is now,” Nyneve said, and as Merlin watched, she double checked the Kingsman records. “That deal with the train tracks and the oncoming train.”

“I can kinda see how that might have affected someone forever more,” Lancelot said dryly. “Some of the receipts in that safehouse were for prescription medication.”

“But to wait this long to strike back?”

“Maybe he just never could find Harry until now,” Lancelot said doubtfully, even as Merlin sent Nyneve a note to start looking through Phillips’ travel records.

Back on the Galahad feed, Eggsy was alone again, speeding down the road out of the warehouse. Checking hijacked infrared satnav feeds showed considerably more activity in the facility near Shortlansend, and Merlin fed the GPS directions straight to Eggsy’s spectacle feed. “Might want to get some food as well, the next time you see a fuel stop,” Merlin added, because sometimes young agents liked to keep going on and on until they collapsed, instead of pacing themselves out the way veterans would.
“Yes, mother. Y’know,” Eggsy said thoughtfully, “Maybe you could invent like… y’know Willy Wonka? He made these chewing gum that would fill you up like a real dinner.”

Merlin rolled his eyes. “Kingsman supplements exist.”

“You mean those pills that look like roach eggs? No thanks.”

Quietly, Merlin squeezed his stress ball again, and brought up Bors’ feed. A random security patrol meant that Bors had lost the element of surprise: but then again, Kingsmen agents tended to shine when said element was lost, and Bors was merrily mowing through scores of gulag security. Merlin watched the mayhem for a while, then switched over to Percival’s feed, just in time to watch one of the candidates have a temper tantrum over the fake no-parachute jump stage.

Kids nowadays. They didn’t make candidates like they used to.

“Hey, Merlin,” Eggsy piped up, and Merlin closed the Percival feed. “How long’ve you been friends with Harry?”

“That’s confidential.”

“Aww, c’mon. Did you start at Kingsman first, or him?”

“I did, actually. I was a candidate for the Hector position, a long time ago. The then-Merlin decided to keep me on when I dropped out.”

“Whoa. Do you guys usually keep everyone who tries out?”

“If we can, certainly.” Although Merlin had gathered that staying on in the Merlin department, for a knight candidate, had been fairly unusual.

“Well, you’re damned good with your rifle,” Eggsy said approvingly, and despite himself, Merlin smiled.

Eggsy had a relentlessly sunny nature that had endeared itself to Roxy and to a number of the other minions, and Merlin could see, perhaps, why someone like Eggsy would have been entirely Harry Hart’s ‘type’. He’d been vaguely surprised that Harry hadn’t made a move earlier, though Merlin had been somewhat convinced that had Harry not had the Church incident, quite likely, relations with Eggsy would have started upon his immediate return to his house.

After all - not that Eggsy needed to know this as yet - Eggsy had been the only guest, to Merlin’s knowledge, ever invited by Harry to that house, with its trophy room of framed newspaper front pages, and that ridiculously sentimental stuffed dog. Harry had loved that house. Most of the other Kingsmen simply lived out of safehouses, usually a string of them around England for variety and habit, but Harry had, as always, had to be different. If a man’s house was his castle, that house was Harry’s stronghold.

And Eggsy had been invited.

“When did you drop out?” Eggsy asked. “Or is that confidential?”

“It’s confidential.”

“Were you really pissed off at the time?”

“A little.”
“Well, I can tell you I was seriously pissed off when I was told to shoot me dog,” Eggsy said conversationally. “So it could be why this Phillips guy is still so mad after all this time.”

“Keep your mind on the mission, Galahad.” Merlin checked Google maps. “There’s a travel stop twenty minutes ahead. Suggest you get some food and water.”

“Yes’m.”

Merlin sighed, and checked on Bors, who was already walking confidently through the cell blocks, unchallenged. Tristan was tailing the mark, Percival was still shouting at the Gawain candidates, and Hector was in a getaway car. Bedivere and Kay were still asleep. Merlin typed up a quick update, emailed it to Arthur, and looked back on Lancelot, who was still driving. So far, so good.

One of the younger Software minions had recently likened Merlin’s job to something like a really high stakes spy version of Five Nights at Freddy’s, after which Merlin had downloaded the game when he had gone home, had nightmares, and had quietly sabotaged Software’s coffeemaker for the next two days, just because.

“Did you use to be Harry’s handler?” Eggsy asked then, and this, ultimately, was probably why Eggsy had made Galahad. It wasn’t so much the boy’s sheer bullheaded tenaciousness, or his natural talent at mayhem. Eggsy was intelligent and perceptive, and paired it with a certain sort of streetwise cunning. He had, after all, killed the previous Arthur, something which Merlin knew still vaguely unnerved the new one.

“For a time.”

“Then you became Merlin…?”

“In a sense.”

“Man. We’re in this together, right? What’s with all the secrets?”

“Harry was… is… a very private person, Eggsy,” Merlin said absently, checking on the Bors feed again. “He didn’t even like having guests over when he was off duty.”

“… But he drove me over to his house and… oh,” Eggsy breathed, even as Merlin realized he had slipped up. “I… what happened to that house, anyway?”

“It’s being maintained. Just in case.”

“That’s good,” Eggsy said, a little shakily, and Merlin grudgingly warmed up to the boy a little more. For good or ill, Eggsy was infatuated with Harry Hart: whether it was a boy’s hero worship or more was perhaps still yet to be ascertained, but it had been obvious enough that Eggsy was a fiercely loyal young man, a good trait for an agent, whatever Arthur might say. “He really should live there, y’know. Don’t think it was quite right, stashing him over in bloody Cornwall.”

“There’s nothing wrong with Cornwall. I thought the background might be just familiar enough to be comforting, and not entirely disorienting.”

“Harry’s from Cornwall?” Eggsy let out a startled laugh. “Well, I bloody never.”

“It is my sincere hope that when you reach Harry’s age, you’d become just as polished,” Merlin said dryly, “Though I admit that I’m not holding my breath.”

“Aww, that’s so sweet. I lub you too, Merlin.”
Merlin squeezed his stress ball again, gritting his teeth, and brought up the Bors feed, where someone was now being punched in the face. This made Merlin feel slightly better about life and his job all over again. “Just stay focused, Galahad.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Happy Labour Day public holiday (in Melbourne!) Here’s a two chapter update. :)

VII.

The Secret Off-The-Books Courier Base was more like it.

Firstly, it was huge. Far bigger than the holding zone and Starling combined, like several football fields connected end to end. There was even a frigging airfield. Two hangars sat next to it, one with the roller door up, a cargo plane in the middle of being loaded, and there seemed to be a central processing block behind three security checks. Secondly, it had been built around and within the ruins of a motherfucking castle. Some of the old, craggy gray watchtowers were manned by sentries and searchlights, even. Thirdly, the place was swarming with guards, in a rather familiar-looking Valentine-style white semi-hazmat get up.

“How the hell?” Eggsy whispered. “How the fuck does this kinda shit get approved in Cornwall? Isn’t that thing heritage? It’s a fucking private military base! Right there! Hasn’t anyone noticed?”

“It’s private property,” Merlin supplied, after a moment’s pause. “This entire block of land was purchased by Valentine a year ago.”

“Including the frigging castle?”

“With a caveat not to tear it down. Which he seems to have honoured to the letter of the law. If you look closely, there are protective struts and sheeting around some of the stonework. And having private security isn’t actually illegal.”

“I thought he was an eco-terrorist,” Eggsy hissed. “Why the fuck was Valentine transporting tigers around?”

“Because he was… a crazy person?” Merlin snapped. “We don’t have the data to guess. Just get in there, try not to die, and try to figure out what the hell is going on. Or connect me to a computer. They’re running stuff off some sort of private cloud. I need to be plugged in.”

“Yeah, yeah. Is my pass gonna work on those guys?”

“You’re going to find out very shortly,” Merlin said blandly, because he was an asshole, and Eggsy scowled, took a Snapchat of the Super Secret Courier Base for Roxy, and got a frowny face Snapchat selfie of Roxy in return, next to a helipad behind a tidy little coastal cottage, the white painted ‘H’ recently hidden by brush - and then presumably partly uncovered by Roxy.

A helipad. Eggsy looked back over at the runway, suddenly hopeful, and there, at the hangar- he focused the scope from the glasses, and saw a small red helicopter with a strange diamond pattern on its flank.

“Merlin?”
“That’s Phillips’, all right, judging from social media. I’ll send your location to Lancelot.”

“I’m not gonna need backup.”

“Well, you’re getting it regardless. And you have a primary mission.”

 Fuck the primary mission, Eggsy thought, then felt a little guilty for thinking so, and ducked off the cliff where he was hiding. Presumably, Merlin had relayed the information to Roxy, because he got a phone call as he worked his way down to where he had hidden his bike.

“I’m on my way,” Roxy said briskly. “Don’t fuck this up.”

“I’m the one with the employee pass and the Disguise,” Eggsy shot back.

“Exactly. Don’t burn the place down or set off the alarm or something, OK? Be there soon.” Roxy hung up.

“You heard her,” Merlin said, unhelpfully.

“I totally saved the world only two months ago.”

“Not by yourself,” Merlin pointed out cruelly, and went silent as Eggsy started up his bike and rode it towards the first checkpoint.

As Eggsy was waved through, heading for the second checkpoint, Merlin murmured, “Oh, and Eggsy? This place is heritage. So try not to damage any of the stonework by setting off explosives or getting into a firefight, all right?”

“What are we, the fucking National Trust?” Eggsy growled, queuing up behind a Jeep to get to the next checkpoint. To either side, high electrified fences surrounded a killzone devoid of brush or any sort of cover, watched over by spotlights and towers.

The sentries checked his pass against a computer, then motioned him to move aside from the queue. Something was wrong. Eggsy made a show of looking irritable, though, as though he was just a normal courier getting caught up in unexpected bureaucracy. “Now what’s this about, eh?” he whined. “I’m gonna be late as it is, guys. C’mon. I’ve still got places to be after this. Got to pull an all-nighter.”

“Routine check,” one of the sentries said. “We’ll watch your bike here, and it won’t take longer than fifteen minutes. Could you come with me please?”

“Just go along for now,” Merlin murmured into his ear. “If only because you’re going to get sniped if you try and make a break for it now. Lancelot is on her way.”

Eggsy did not need rescuing, thank you very much. He nodded, however, and made another show of sighing, as he got off the delivery bike, trudging behind the sentry as they headed towards the guardhouse.

“Now just stay calm,” Merlin continued. “This base is running on a different server. That’s probably why your pass got you through the first checkpoint but not the second one.”

The guardhouse looked like some sort of outhouse, a white box of a building, single-storey, that vaguely resembled the temporary housing that usually sprung up around buildings under construction, all corrugated metal sides. Maybe it was temp. Other than the castle, everything here looked somewhat prefabricated.
“I don’t usually come out so far north,” Eggsy said conversationally, making a pretence of being young, inexperienced, and overawed by the huge base. “This place is frigging big, innit?”

“That it is,” the guard said, without slowing down. “What were you delivering?”

“How should I know? I’m not that curious. I get a package that tells me to head somewhere and I go there. Ain’t usually this much fuss. I got it in me pocket. Just meant to pass it over to your mail guy and I’ll be off.”

The guard shrugged. “Mixups aren’t uncommon, but we’ve still got to be careful. Especially after what happened two months ago. We’ve had to segregate systems, as you know.”

“Yeah. Hello, all the new cock ups,” Eggsy said, with affected glumness, watching for security cameras. The Kingsman glasses helpfully located a handful, as well as traced out their moving vision arcs, and as Eggsy was escorted into the guardroom, he noted immediately that a) he was in a blind spot, and b) there was no one else in the guard room.

Instantly, he stepped smartly behind the guard, angling an arm under his neck and jerking up, holding firm through the gargling and choking until the guy went limp. Eggsy dragged the unconscious body over to the toilets, stashed him in a cubicle, then, as a happy afterthought, removed the guy’s white hazmat guard uniform, and stripped off his own courier gear. Zipping up the hazmat uniform and taking the pass, he shoved his courier gear into a supply cabinet full of brooms, gave the guard a shot from his thankfully fully functional tranquiliser pen for good measure, closed the cubicle door, and used the nib to flick the little sign from ‘VACANT’ to ‘OCCUPIED’, locking it.

“Pretty sure I told you to stay calm,” Merlin said dryly.

“I am calm. Y’see me freaking out? Also,” Eggsy added, as he toted the guard’s shiny M16, “Now I have a machine gun. Ho, ho, ho,” he intoned, in his best imitation of Bruce Willis’ gravelly drawl.

“I think young and impressionable Kingsmen agents should just stop watching films altogether,” Merlin grumbled. “The guardhouse should have a computer. Give me access.”

The guardhouse did in fact have a computer, as well as an underground section full of bunks. “Hm. Decryption’s going to take time,” Merlin said briskly, after Eggsy plugged the transciever into the back of the CPU. “Leave the transciever plugged in: I’ll wipe it once we’re done. This server’s on a whole new level. I’ve got the building plans, though. Suggest you get a move on. That guard’s colleagues are going to check in on him soon. And possibly raise the alarm.”

“So maybe you could nudge in some code telling them how-“ Eggsy checked his new pass, “Sergeant Crispin here was called into the base for further orders, eh?”

“You agents, always thinking that we wave a hand here and magic happens,” Merlin retorted, though Eggsy could hear him typing frantically.

“Ain’t that why you’re called ‘Merlin’?”

Merlin muttered something undoubtedly rude under his breath. “Just head down to where the bunks are. There’s a service door that leads to some sort of elevator.”

Just before his cell phone reception went to nil, Eggsy sent Roxy a Snapchat selfie of his get up, and then tucked his phone into his pocket, even as the service elevator shook and groaned all around him. “I s’pose this is why all these peeps survived. No coverage when you go all the way down.”

“It’s not a good sign,” Merlin replied, the reception for the glasses feed growing a little staticky but
otherwise still audible. “If Valentine subdivided his operations like this.”

“Maybe we’re facing the backup plan,” Eggsy perked up. “Evil Supervillain World Domination Plans, Take Two. With tigers. Maybe a shark tank.”

“Considering the devastation that was dealt previously to the world economy, its leadership, the people—’

“Yeah, yeah,” Eggsy cut in impatiently, before Merlin could complete utterly raining on Eggsy’s parade. “I’m not getting excited or anything,” he lied, “I just thought that might be what’s going on around here.”

“Right,” Merlin said slowly, then his voice turned clipped again. “Careful. You’re going to emerge into a service tunnel. It leads out to some sort of… big underground floor, about a kilometre long. It’s not marked on the map I have. I don’t yet have a visual on where you are.”

“Is it hard? Hacking into security feeds? I mean, spy movies do it all’a time, yeah?” Eggsy asked cheekily, and grinned to himself when Merlin let out another deep sigh. Someday, maybe, Eggsy was going to be mature about his job. But until then… well. Life was short. And what was the point of being in a super secret international spy organisation unless you got to enjoy it?

VIII.

“Hey Merlin,” Eggsy whispered, as he snuck out from the service elevator and into the maintenance corridor, “Can we get music in my feed?”

“… Why?”

“Might help the mood, y’know?”

“And… distract you from the mission at hand?”

“S’long as it ain’t that loud?”

“…Fine.” There was a pause, then to Eggsy’s horror, the peppy track to ‘Call Me Maybe’ started to play.

“You’re fucking with me!”

“A stupid question deserves a stupid answer,” Merlin said calmly, even as Jepsen cheerfully gave out her personal information and exhorted some boy to call her despite being total strangers. “Besides, isn’t this kind of music part of your age group?”

“Okay. Please stop now. Sorry I asked.”

“Don’t mention it.” The music cut off, then Merlin added, “When Bors was younger, he tried to get the Merlin department to play Imperial March on loop whenever he was out on a mission.”

“And…?”

“And now he has a permanent knife scar down his back that just misses his spinal chord.”

“Point taken.” No joy then.

Mood ruined, Eggsy slunk through the service tunnel, grabbing a clipboard from the desk next to the elevator exit as he did so. A misspent childhood had long shown him that the best way to blend in
where a lot of people were involved were to dress the part, hold a clipboard and look busy, and when Eggsy let himself out of the maintenance tunnel, he took on the hunched, harassed look of a man on a mission who was out of time.

As he had hoped, no one gave him a second glance: not the occasional hurrying technician, not even other security. Eggsy pretended to make a note on the clipboard as he surveyed the gigantic room from the catwalk where he stood, to give Merlin a better look. At the far end, huge machines seemed to be stamping away at metal sheeting, creating parts - possibly the same parts that Eggsy had found in the truck. Other machines were busy churning out bits and pieces: Eggsy recognised microchips, strange glass tubes, and mechanical parts, all assembled by machines. The ground floor was swarming with techs, but most of them seemed to be busying around on QC duties and nothing else.

“Sooo…” Eggsy murmured, under his breath.

“Still working on it. Keep moving along.”

It took Eggsy a while to walk past the production floor, and into the next room, which overlooked yet another gigantic production floor. This one was different, though. Plastic sheeting shielded the walkway from the floor itself, and everyone within the room seemed to be wearing actual hazmat suits. A quick glance indicated that the two ground floor entrances to this particular floor had mini quarantine sterilisation rooms set before them. Most of the floor was taken up by ranks upon ranks of fridges, within which were racks and racks of test tubes, but what really caught Eggsy’s attention were the three huge glass cylinders set against the wall directly opposite him, each big enough to hold a standing man with his arms stretched out to any side.

In the first tube, a man wearing some sort of prison gear was curled on the ground, and Eggsy had a moment of vertigo before his glasses assured him that it wasn’t Harry. In the second tube there was another man, except… Christ… the man’s skin was all deformed, as though bony, porous white and orange protrusions were starting to push through from within, his skull caved apart, and he was twisted against the glass, tendrils and branches and spikes and large, coral-like fans jutting out from his neck. In the third tube, there was only a rich leafy profusion, as though someone had stuffed a random selection of jungle plants into a huge terrarium, rather cool, if one ignored the faintest hint of a deformed foot, tucked in the corner under a vine.

“Holy fucking mother of God,” Eggsy murmured, wide-eyed. “You seeing this?”

“Unfortunately yes.” Even Merlin’s voice sounded a little shaky. “My God. Is that… that seems to be some sort of mutated strain of the Cordyceps fungi…”


“Judging from how inert the specimens are in the first and second jar, I doubt it. Keep moving,” Merlin urged him. “I’m beginning to think that I understand what is going on here.”

“Oh shit. D’you think they’re going to gas Harry with spores?”

“Don’t break your cover,” Merlin said tightly, after a moment’s hesitation. “But… all right. All right. I’m going to open a line to Arthur with a brief.”

Well, fucking finally. Even if the old biddy was probably going to be backseat driving.

“Maybe they were planning on gassing the tube with something cooler… I mean… worse… than
“Your enthusiasm for your job is commendable,” Merlin said dryly. “Standing by,” he added, which was Merlin-speak for Arthur being paged in.

“I’m about to alert MI5,” Arthur said, her voice clipped. “Because we don’t have the resources to handle this sort of matter. Get what information you can on these experiments. The scale, the known targets, any more facilities like these.”

“Begging your pardon, ma’am,” Eggsy cut in, because he could do polite if he had to, “But Harry might be in there somewhere.”

“And Lancelot is on her way. I don’t intend to leave any man behind, Galahad,” Arthur’s voice was as cold as ever. “But I’m all too aware that Kingsman has default stewardship of eight million people in the city where we are based, and that’s a duty greater than the life of a single person.”

Eggsy grit his teeth, his hand clenching tight over the edge of his clipboard. “I hear you. Ma’am.”

“And for God’s sake don’t set the alarm off,” Arthur said, which was of course the moment when the alarm was set off.

“They probably found the guard you left in the toilet,” Merlin supplied helpfully, as the klaxon roared through the facility and sent the scientists below scurrying about in confusion.

“Thanks so much for the insight,” Eggsy growled, and pretended to scurry around with the other security, tramping briskly along the catwalk, away from the laboratory and through another tunnel, wide-mouthed and leading up an incline, possibly angling back up to ground level. The next room looked like a right proper military base, with guards assembling into neat ranks to be briefed before a platform. Beyond that were a handful of fighter jets, APCs, jeeps with gunnery seats, and even a fucking tank.

“Arthur, you might want to tell MI5 to come in mob-handed,” Eggsy whispered, as he jogged along with the other guards to line up. “Also, Merlin, I kinda need a bit of help here.”

“Inputing another identity into the server right now,” Merlin grit out, as Eggsy lined up with the others into neat white hazmat soldier squares. Supervisors were going down the lines, scanning everyone’s IDs.

“Any moment now, Merlin.”

“I swear…” Merlin trailed off, typing furiously, and Eggsy watched as the soldier with the scanner came closer, and closer. He nodded briskly as his lanyard was picked up, tensing up, ready to bolt, then Merlin barked, “There!” even as the scanner went over the lanyard. An orange light pinged up, and the supervisor studied his screen for a second, then moved on, even as Eggsy slowly breathed out.

“Cutting it close there, weren’t we?” Eggsy murmured.

“You bloody fucking agents,” Merlin replied, though he was breathing hard.

Even as the supervisors continued sweeping through the crowd, a man ambled up onto the stage, dressed in a neat pinstripe black suit, a crisp white shirt, a skinny black tie… and rather familiar oxblood loafers…

“Stand by, Galahad,” Arthur’s voice cracked in his ear, and Eggsy nearly flinched, belatedly realized
that he had taken a step forward, and settled back at attention, guiltily.

Jason Phillips looked younger than his age, handsome and suntanned, dark hair shaved close to his head, his grin broad and charismatic, his gray eyes crinkling with good humour. He looked, Eggsy thought sourly, rather precisely like what a Kingsman agent would look like, minus the black umbrella and the glasses.

“Good evening everyone!” Jason even had a hearty speaking voice, projecting well over the large space. “And welcome again to Valentine’s Final Vision. As you all know, Stage One was cruelly foiled, two months ago, by a secret organisation that Valentine was trying his best, in his last days, to uncover. He approached me for help, in the final week, when he had an answer, and I told him all that I knew.”

“There’s a mercenary organisation operating right out of London,” Jason added, “For profit, with no ties to any organisation or NGO. They were behind the murder of scores upon scores of your brothers and sisters two months ago. They are behind the deaths of dozens of world leaders and luminaries, from the late US President, to the British Prime Minister… all inspirational, visionary people.”

“I’m glad to announce today,” Jason added, “That we have long since identified this organisation, for now we are finally poised to retaliate. Kingsman, they call themselves.” There was a mutter of anger that rippled through the crowd. “And I know of Kingsman. For once, when I was but a boy, I was ‘picked’ to join their ranks. Brainwashed. And very nearly killed, in the process. Many of my class did not survive. All of us merely young boys - and girls.”

“The late, great Valentine has given me the chance to make this right. To not only uphold his vision, but to wipe this mercenary group off the face of the earth.” Jason raised his hands, as a roar of approval rose from the guards before him. “Peace, my brothers and sisters, peace. Death is too good for the Kingsmen. We have better plans for them than that.”

And, to Eggsy’s horror, Jason checked his phone, then looked straight out over the ranks of guards and at him, and smiled. “As you’ll soon find out… Galahad. Seize him.”
Roxy was a third generation Kingsman, currently the only Kingsman knight who could claim to be so; her grandfather had been one of the original knights, more or less passing on the Percival position to her father when he had died in the line of duty.

Now that cronyism was Not Quite Done, however, Roxy had been totally willing to prove herself through the Lancelot entrance exam, proud of it, just as she was proud of her younger sister Katie, currently undergoing the Gawain trial. Which was perhaps rather awkward, considering their father was running it, but so far, there wasn’t any question of preference, and besides, Katie hadn’t been nominated to the trial by Percival or by Roxy. The fact that Katie had been Eggsy’s nomination under Roxy’s suggestion was… not quite that important, really.

Just before she prepared to cut her way into the Shortlansend facility, Roxy dutifully sent her baby sister a quick Snapchat, congratulating her on passing the parachute stage, and got a thumbs-up Snapchat in response. No message from her father, which wasn’t a surprise. Even if Percival was privy to her current mission, their family had long understood the difference between what was personal and what was business.

The little circuit rerouter clips and wiring from Kingsman worked perfectly, giving her a null zone on the wiring that she could cut and worm through, then it was a matter of ducking and running quietly over the kill zone, trusting to her specially made Kingsman suit to keep her out of the infrared sight and at the same apparent temperature as the ground, dodging away from the occasional passing spotlight.

She cut through the second electrified fence, even as, in her ear, Nyneve said, “Stand by, Lancelot.”

“It’s my hope,” Arthur said, sounding tired, “That you’re about to do better than the boys, Lancelot.”

“Yes sir,” Roxy said, and smiled to herself, for when she had been awarded the title of Lancelot, all that Percival had said to her about the achievement had been a very offhand, ‘I never once doubted it’.

“We still have the subdermal tracker on Galahad active. You should be able to track his position from the feed. Your first task is to ascertain whether it will be feasible to free Galahad, and possibly Harry Hart. The priority is however Galahad’s original mission, which is to gain a complete understanding of Jason Phillip’s initiative.”

“Yes, sir.”

“If you can terminate Jason Phillips, that’s an optimal outcome, but not a necessary one.”

“Yes, sir.”

There was a faint murmur, then Merlin said, “I’m taking over from Nyn for now. Lancelot, the previous server that we cloned from the guardroom thanks to Galahad was terminated before a full decrypted copy could be made. You have to find another server-connected computer, preferably within the main complex here.” Merlin sent her a small mini map in her feed, with a narrow, long
room on the third basement highlighted. “It’s my belief judging from how the power is routed that this is the server room. We’ll need to jack in from there, do a quick bit of datamining, and feed in a virus from Software.”

“Understood.”

“If it’ll be easier to do it after freeing Galahad, then do so. But it’s up to your initiative.”

Roxy could hear the worry in Merlin’s voice, even as she cut through the last electrified fence, stealing over the darkened courtyard, zig-zagging between pools of light. “If the priority’s the data, then I’ll get to the server room first.”

“All right,” Merlin said, a little uncomfortably. “Stay safe.”

“How did Galahad get caught?”

“There’s a subroutine in their code. Probably acting like a sort of digital watermark. I must have missed it in the rush,” Merlin said, sounding a touch frustrated. “The facsimile of the security pass was good enough to get Galahad through basic security, but when he stole the guard’s pass and the intrusion was noticed…”

No stealing passes, then. “All right.”

“Or he might know about the glasses,” Nyn suggested. “Or maybe something else is wrong. I mean, the arsehole knew Galahad’s code name, yeah?”

Also possible. “I’ll keep that in mind,” Roxy noted. Stay hidden, stay out of sight, no disguises. Check. Thanks very much, Eggsy.

The base was in lockdown, but Merlin had enough access to basic security to get a door open for her. It was through central ventilation, the wide shafts just about large enough for Roxy to worm through from the main maintenance chamber, and she quietly pulled up the grille behind her as she crawled through the shafts. The air whistling through the vents was chilly, as though the entire base was being carefully cooled to a certain temperature, and Roxy managed to work her way down towards the third level, trusting to Merlin’s directions as he picked her a path through the vents.

“This bit looks like a cell block,” Roxy heard Nyn say in the background. “Close to the trash disposal, near enough to the lab that they won’t have to faff around wheeling specimens - or bodies - too far. Lots’a cube rooms with a double locked sentry post as the only way out of the nick. S’what I would’a done.”

There was a pause, then Merlin said, very dryly, “Slight change of direction, Roxy?”

“If it’s on the way, sir.”

“Very well. Next intersection, go left and up instead of right.”

Annoyingly enough, the vents above the cell block area flattened out, too narrow for Roxy to fit down, but she did have the latest kit out of Kingsman, all folded down into her right suit pocket, and she assembled it quickly in the dark from memory. It was a tiny battery powered robotic car with tiny crablike claws, roughly inspired by lego technic, which had probably given someone in Engineering transports of joy during the creative process, or so Roxy had gathered from Nyn’s dry description of the toy. She gave it her spare gun, spare earpiece and as an afterthought, her cufflinks as well, all magnetised to its back, and waited until it started up, whirring into life, connecting to the Kingsman nav satellite.
It sped off down the narrow vents, presumably towards Eggsy, and Roxy backtracked to the intersection, heading right and down. She had almost made it to the next level when her visual feed was sectioned off into the little car’s showing it looking down a small square grille into a cell.

Within it was Eggsy, looking bruised but otherwise mostly unhurt, his face purpling down his left cheek, minus his suit and glasses, shirt rumpled and bloody, his hair matted from a reopened wound. He was sitting on a bunk, and audio fed in, even as the car sped over to the next vent, and looked down.

Harry looked as though he had fared better, as upsetting as it was, all over again, to see the self-assured man whom Percival had once introduced to Roxy as the ‘very best of Kingsman’ look so anxious and disoriented. Roxy grit her teeth, and crawled faster, clenching her hands, again wishing, not for the first time, that she had been the one to kill Valentine.

“Are you MI6?” Harry was asking, his voice a little tinny through the little car’s miniature speakers.

“MI6 doesn’t deal with domestic matters,” Eggsy said glibly, sounding frustrated. “Harry… look. I don’t… it doesn’t matter what I do for a living, all right?”

“My God, you told me that you were a salesman,” Harry said, anger in his voice. “You lied to me! Did you truly know me before I lost my memory?”

Ah well. This conversation was probably coming sooner or later. Roxy shook her head slowly as she curled herself around a drop and carefully propped herself down, shoulders against the wall, feet against the other in the dark.

“I did!” Eggsy protested.

“And that… that man who kidnapped me…” In the overhead feed, Harry was stalking in a circle, rubbing at his temple, as if trying to stave off an ache in his skull. “I think… I think I’ve seen him before, from somewhere. Who was he? He knew my name. He laughed when I said I didn’t know his.”

“Hey,” Eggsy said worriedly, “Take it easy, Harry. Sit down.”

The car had whirred back to Eggsy’s vent, and was industriously unscrewing the grille. As Roxy let herself down onto the vent in the third level down, it pulled the grille aside and knocked a claw lightly against the lip in a brisk code.

To Eggsy’s credit, he didn’t instantly look up, instead continuing to say, “Sit down, Harry. Please. And calm down, aite? It’s nearly nine o’clock up top.”

“What?” Harry asked, confused, even as the car’s vision turned upside down, trundling upside down over the ceiling into the room in the direction advised with magnetic traction. It approached the small security camera in the corner of the room and jacked in, accessing the camera feed circuit. After a moment more, as Merlin grunted with satisfaction in Roxy’s ear, the little car’s camera showed the gun, cufflinks and earpiece being tossed to Eggsy.

Eggsy put the earpiece in first, and grinned sharply. “Well, I’ll be fucking damned.”

“Thank Lancelot for helping you out of this particular cock up, Galahad,” Merlin said briskly, presumably into both their feeds.

“Good show, guys. And might I say, it’s a bloody pleasure to hear your voice again, Merlin.”
“Nyn will take over now,” Merlin said to Roxy, and after a moment, Nyn’s voice cut back in.

“Miss me, doll?”

“Did I ever,” Roxy said, and grinned to herself. In Kingsman, the girls had to stick together, sometimes.

“Take the first left and keep going for fifteen metres. You’re almost in the server room. Merlin will get Galahad to make a big show of breaking out.”

“Going to be hard,” Roxy said thoughtfully, “Especially if Harry’s still the way he is.”

“That’s not your problem,” Nyn said briskly. “Now chop chop. Your distraction’s about to get rolling. When all those boys start waving their dicks around, you’d better already be in the server room, just saying.”

“Guns’, you mean. Waving their ‘guns’ around.”

“Do I?”

The server room floor had skeletal security, which Roxy presumed meant that Eggsy’s distraction was going well. She had shut off the feed from the little bot, and was sneaking through a sterile room filled with cases upon cases of servers, avoiding the patrols. Selecting the closest computer at hand, she plugged her transceiver into the CPU, then waited for further instructions as Nyn started accessing the data.

“All right,” Nyn said finally, “We’ve got the motherlode. Get out now-“

“Hey! What are you doing down here?” Someone began to shout, but Roxy was already whirling around, thumbing the safety on her Browning 9mm, sighting and shooting all at once. The Browning’s recoil was light, even as she sighted and fired, again, then a third time, downing all three members of the security patrol before they could even bring up their M16s.

“Better start running,” Nyn advised, unflappable as ever. “Back up the vents.”

Roxy smiled to herself, even as she uncocked the gun, holstered it, then lithely climbed back up and pulled the grille up after her. “Not going to advise me to start wading through all that security?”

“Girl, you and I both know that you don’t have a dick you need to get hard like that,” Nyn said blandly, even as in the far background, Roxy was fairly sure she heard Merlin start choking. “Take the second right, then left.”

Roxy made it quietly all the way back up the central ventilation block and out, and as she was starting to head for the electrified fence, a tank smashed through a hangar wall, because, of course.

“Boys and their dicks,” Nyn said dryly, even as the tank did a fair approximation of a three point turn and fired a shell into the exit it had just made in the building. With a deep sigh, Roxy aimed up, firing, and as the sniper from the closest watchtower fell out of his perch, she was reloading even as she was running towards the tank, swinging behind it and climbing up nimbly. The hatch opened up obligingly as she got close, and Roxy pulled it shut after her as she shimmied down, a sniper bullet pinged off the hatch as it closed.

Within the stiflingly hot interior of the tank, Eggsy was laughing like a bloody maniac at the
controls, while Harry was sitting with his back and shoulders pressed flat against the side of the crowded chamber, pale as a sheet and wide-eyed with shock.

“Good evening, Mister Hart,” Roxy greeted him anyway, to be polite, and pulled herself into the gunnery seat, pulling on the spare set of headphones that Eggsy slung over. A few carefully aimed shots took care of the watchtowers on their way out as they ran over the fencing at the checkpoints, and a shot behind them blew their halfhearted pursuit sky high.

Somehow, they were making their getaway in a tank. And it was working. Roxy found herself grinning into the sights, firing a final warning shot into the base, and as they rolled away heavily into the night, all she could hear was Nyneve laughing and laughing and laughing with delight into her ear.

They slowed down eventually, in an open field, when Merlin said into both their feeds, “Stand by for extraction. And get out of that bloody thing.”

“That’s us,” Eggsy said soothingly to Harry. “C’mon. Let’s get out. It’s rather hot in here, innit?”

“You…” Harry was blinking slowly at the both of them. “Eggsy, you killed all those people on the way up here and-“ He went limp as Roxy stepped over, twisted her pen cap, and jabbed him with the tranquiliser nib of her pen. As Harry slumped over, Eggsy scowled at her.

“What the hell did you do that for?”

“I don’t think we’re really equipped to deal with hysteria right now,” Roxy shot back. “Now are you going to help me carry him out of here or what?”

Grumbling, Eggsy obeyed, and between the both of them, they somehow managed to haul Harry’s weight out of the tank and out into the cool night air, just in time to watch the grass kick up. Above, a chopper was carefully starting to land.

It was a small bird, a sleek black ‘copter emblazoned on its flanks with the Kingsman symbol, and the pilot was none other than Percival. He strode out when the blades had stopped, tossing Roxy the keys with a faint nod, his forever cool, even stare passing over Harry’s slumped body without even pausing.

“I gather that I’m taking over from here,” Percival said mildly. “Coordinating the MI5 response. The two of you are due back in London along with your cargo.”

“Yeah, right,” Eggsy said, and yelped as, without even changing her expression, Roxy stepped back and trod heavily on his foot.

“Acknowledged,” Roxy said, and hid her smile as her father nodded again at her, the gesture the only sign of his pride, and he trotted off over to the tank, climbing up and in.

Eggsy settled Harry into the back of the helicopter and strapped him in, then hesitated before getting into the front. “You want to fly, or me?”

“Are you all right to fly?” Roxy asked, and she did like this about Eggsy. Even if it had been her father here, and not Eggsy, like most of the other male agents, he would have instantly just settled into the pilot’s seat.

“Dunno. If you’re up to it, feel free. They knocked me around good.” Eggsy admitted, and at Roxy’s nod, he strapped himself into the co-pilot’s seat. “Thanks,” he added, when they took off, and Cornwall was growing further and further away beneath them. “For the save.”
“Don’t mention it.”

“Would’ve been nice if you could stay on and raze the base,” Eggsy added casually. “Rather than them shunting it to one of the older folk.”

“My mission’s complete,” Roxy shrugged, because her familial ties to Percival was still more or less no one’s business. “I got Merlin into the servers and helped get you and Harry out.”

“Well. I ‘preciate the save.” Eggsy was swallowing an aspirin, dry, and he did look banged up: Roxy reminded herself that Eggsy was operating on a mild concussion, a beating, bruising from being shot through the suit, and scratches from going toe to toe with a tiger only a short time back.

“How’s Harry holding up?”

“He can follow instructions. But he’s clearly pissed off about it all,” Eggsy said glumly. “I dunno how to break it all to him, really. He gets this headaches,” Eggsy added earnestly. “When he’s trying to remember something.”

“The way I see it,” Roxy said calmly, “It’s all Merlin’s fault.” At Nyn’s startled burp of laughter in her ear, Roxy clarified, “After all, he decided to spin the lie in the first place, and hide it all from Arthur. Kingsman has its own hospices for recovering agents and staff. Harry could’ve gone to one of them.”

“I can kinda see why Merlin did it,” Eggsy said defensively, forever loyal to a fault. “But yeah. When Harry wakes up, he’s gonna be so pissed. And the way he looked at me… like he couldn’t trust me no more…” Eggsy trailed away, and looked out of the ‘copter, his jaw working. “You can give it to me. The lecture.”

“What lecture?” Roxy asked, as she set course to London.

“‘Bout how I shouldn’t have slept with him under false pretences and all that.”

“All right, you shouldn’t have done that,” Roxy said absently, “But you’re also, what, twenty-five?”

“You’re twenty-four!”

“You’re young,” Roxy ignored Eggsy, “And you’ve been stupidly in lust with Harry Hart since the first time I met the both of you, according to Merlin. So I’m not surprised it happened, all right? Considering the feeling was obviously mutual and Nyn was running a pot in the Merlin organisation about who was going to snap first.”

“What,” Eggsy blinked, even as Nyn muttered “Traitor,” into Roxy’s ear.

“That aside,” Merlin said, cutting into both their feeds hastily, “Drop off Harry in the infirmary on your way in, then head through to the shop. Arthur wants to see the both of you.”

“Ooh,” Eggsy said glumly. “I think we’re in for it now.”

“You’re in for it,” Roxy corrected, though she smirked a little as she said so.

“That’s so… supportive of you, thanks.”

Chapter End Notes
Note on timing: It takes an hour and a bit to fly from London to Newquay, Cornwall. Which is about less than the time it took between Eggsy finding out about the lab (Percival finishing up with the Gawain candidates and being sent as backup), all the way to Roxy getting to the base, breaking in, getting through to the server room, and getting back out again.
IX.

Eggsy hadn’t wanted to leave Harry alone in the infirmary, but Roxy had glowered at him pointedly, and as such, he’d slunk out at her heels, following her through the private tube and to the Savile Row shop.

Arthur was already seated, at the head of the Round Table, typing at a laptop, the previous Arthur’s silver tray of whisky and glasses nowhere to be seen. In person, the new Arthur was diminutive, shorter even than Roxy, her cap of silver hair cut boyishly short, and she wore a gray blazer over a black work dress rather than powerdressing, but as she glanced up at them, yet again Eggsy felt as though he was being pinned right to the walls.

“Take a seat, the both of you,” Arthur said briskly, and Eggsy sat down obligingly in the Galahad seat, to Arthur’s right hand, even as Roxy circled over to the Lancelot chair. “No, there’s no need for that,” Arthur added. “Sit here.”

Roxy settled down at Arthur’s left hand, looking bright-eyed and attentive, fresh faced, as though she’d only just woken up, instead of having been awake for over twenty-four hours, much of it spent haring around Cornwall and Super Secret Evil Bases. In Eggsy’s case, however, the aspirin was starting to wear off, and he was just about beginning to hurt all over: the only reason why he wasn’t slouching was because it hurt to lean back against anything; he was fighting off yawns and it was a struggle to concentrate.

“You look like shit,” Arthur told Eggsy bluntly, and he grinned, even though it also hurt to grin.

“Yes’m.”

“As far as I’m concerned,” Arthur added, “Galahad, your assigned mission was botched from the start. You haven’t applied yourself with even remotely the necessary degree of care and concern required of a Kingsman agent. Being a Kingsman and a knight is a calling, Galahad: it is not meant to be fun. From the moment you are given a task, I expect you, and any other Kingsman, to make it their top priority in life until it is accomplished. However,” Arthur added, when Eggsy started to protest, “Merlin has noted that you are young, and there were perhaps mitigating circumstances.”

“So,” Eggsy blinked owlishly. “We’re cool?”

Arthur sighed. “No, Galahad, we are not ‘cool’, and frankly, were we not currently shorthanded in London, I would have been quite in favour of suspending you without pay for two months as a punishment. As it is, circumstances have conspired to give you the chance to redeem yourself.”

“Um. Sure. Thanks?” Eggsy hazarded uncertainly. When Arthur arched her eyebrows, he added hastily, “I mean, I’m sorry, and I’m gonna do my best, ma’am.”

“That’s better,” Arthur said dryly. “If anything, however, your conduct so far has proved to me that you do have a certain natural raw talent at wetwork which I suppose will be formidable when polished.”

“Err. Thanks.”
“Lancelot,” Arthur turned to Roxy, “Exemplary work, as usual.”

“Thank you sir.” Roxy inclined her head.

“However,” Arthur added, “Although I do appreciate the concept of loyalty, and I understand that, under the circumstances left to Kingsman by the last Arthur, you have both yet to trust me, do note that I will not be pleased should Kingsman-related secrets such as Harry Hart’s condition be kept from me in the future.”

Roxy actually looked slightly chastened. “Yes, sir.”

“The problem we have right now is this,” Arthur said, consulting her screen. “Percival is handling the situation in Cornwall due to his ties with MI5. All the other Kingsmen agents are currently occupied with tasks around the globe. That leaves the two of you.”

“That’s plenty,” Eggsy said confidently, then swallowed hard when both Roxy and Arthur glowered at him. “Um, I mean. Sorry. Carry on. Ma’am. I’ll… shut up now.”

“There could be one other facility producing these mutated spores en-mass, there could be a dozen. More notably, Jason Phillips is still at large.”

“According to Merlin, there are all those other holding facilities that weren’t listed in the server,” Roxy suggested. “We could start with those.”

“Lancelot will be investigating the other facilities.” Arthur said curtly. “Since she seems to understand the concept of stealth more readily than Galahad. As to you, Galahad,” Arthur said, studying him critically, “Once you’re actually presentable in public, you’ll be attending a job interview at Phillips Inc.”

“What,” Eggsy blinked. “But I’ve already been made! Name an’ all!”

“Merlin assures me that that will not be an issue.”

“Righto then,” Eggsy said doubtfully.

“That doesn’t sound like ‘Thank you sir, I will do my best’,,” Arthur said dryly.

“Well, I’ll do me best,” Eggsy said, “But if me cover gets blown, which I’m thinking is a right possibility, I think that’s gonna count unfairly against me record.”

“Not where you’re getting assigned,” Arthur said cryptically, and smiled thinly. “Lancelot, you’re dismissed. Return to Merlin, he will brief you on your next task, after which I suggest you get some rest while heading to your next destination. Galahad, a word?”

Roxy actually shot Eggsy a sympathetic look before she scurried out of the room, and Eggsy forced an awkward, pained smile, trying to fight the urge to sit on his hands like a naughty schoolboy.

“Umm, yes’m.”

“About Harry Hart.”

Eggsy flinched. “Look, I’m really sorry about it all-“

“By your estimation,” Arthur continued, as though Eggsy hadn’t spoken, “Is Harry Hart now effectively a civilian, or is he possibly still even remotely the asset he used to be?”
“Ah,” Eggsy blinked, then hesitated. “This ain’t gonna be a thing about how he’s lost his memory but now knows too much, aite?”

“Not in the least. As far as Kingsman is concerned, Harry Hart was an exemplary agent, one to whom the world owes its thanks several times over. If all he is now is a civilian, he deserves an honourable discharge.”

“Why’re you asking for my opinion when you think I’m compromised?”

“Because,” Arthur said dryly, “Whether I like it or not, you are a Kingsman and a Knight, and I do value your opinion. What was he like on the way out of the base?”

“… pretty much like any other civilian,” Eggsy admitted reluctantly. “He didn’t lose his shit, but I think he was coming pretty close to it. Just like anyone who ain’t in the know would’a been.”

“And in your opinion,” Arthur continued, “Is the damage that has been done to Harry Hart… reversible?”

“I dunno,” Eggsy conceded honestly. “I’ll like to tell you that I’m absolutely sure that it is. But the way I see it… it’s kinda like there’s something straight out missing. Maybe it’s the dart, maybe it’s worse. He kinda killed that entire church full’a people. That’s got t’haunt anyone.”

“Sadly,” Arthur said wearily, “You’ve been trained to be a killer, Galahad, and I note that you have a remarkable talent at it. Similarly, when you reach Harry Hart’s age, with that many years invested into Kingsman… you could quite easily kill that many people and still sleep well at night. Any knights with psychological qualms about mass murder will long have burned out by Harry’s age. But regardless of age, none of you knights are ordinary in the least. That’s always been part of the challenge of being Arthur.”

“It’s kinda a bit late to go ‘Whoops, sorry, you didn’t see nothing’ now, innit?” Eggsy asked, wondering where this was all going. “I mean, he did kinda see me and Rox… err… Lancelot hijack a tank.”

“Yes, I do wonder who is to blame for that remarkable lack of subtlety,” Arthur said dryly. “But there are measures that can be made, and perhaps Harry Hart can be retired to his own property in London and watched. Especially now that his retirement is no longer a secret within Kingsman itself. Unless there are side effects that would persuade me otherwise?”

“He kinda has these headaches sometimes,” Eggsy said uncomfortably. “Like when he tries to remember something that he can’t. I’m not sure if his house’s any good place for him to be. Think baby steps still need t’be made. Kinda.”

“For good or ill,” Arthur said crisply, “You’ve already, perhaps inadvertently, exposed him quite unabashedly to the core essence of a Kingsman’s life. But I will leave his ultimate fate to you and to Merlin to decide.”


“Just… try not to be caught by surprise the way you were in the tailor shop again,” Arthur said, turning back to her laptop. “Even for a junior Kingsman, that was profoundly embarrassing.”

“Ahh. Yes’m.”

X.
In the end, Merlin and Eggsy elected to have Harry wake up in the infirmary rather than have him moved and wake up in yet another unfamiliar house, because, as Merlin rather sourly noted, the cat was not only out of the bag, it had driven out of it in a fucking tank.

Eggsy had brought J.B. along, because Kingsman did dog deliveries and pugs had a remarkable way of defusing tension just by staring at everyone with an air of mild astonishment, and had set the dog on Harry’s bed, ignoring the evil eye now and then that he got from the nurses. He had been given a salve for his bruises that smelled militantly of chamomile, but it had done wonders for the discolouration and swelling, and quite likely, in an hour or so when he could knock off and head home, he wouldn’t quite freak his mum out.

Harry was still asleep, and stable: he’d been checked out by the docs and apparently he hadn’t suffered any injuries or anything at Phillips’ hands other than minor bruising, possibly from being hog-tied and stuffed into the boot of a car. Dressed in his white hospital nightshirt, it felt for a disorienting moment as though time had wound all the way back to the start, and Eggsy was a recruit again, checking in on Harry as he slept off the effects of the explosion that had killed the old Professor.

J.B. puttered around, looking puzzled but hopeful for treats, and overbalanced onto his furry arse in surprise when Harry groaned in his sleep and started to wake up. His eyes were unfocused as Eggsy helped him sit up, his hands trembling, up until Eggsy helped him drink some water, then Harry was frowning at him, narrow-eyed, before startling and looking sharply down at J.B. when the pug nudged his hand hopefully, still looking for treats.

“Sorry,” Eggsy said. Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to bring the dog around after all. “He’s kinda greedy.”

Harry petted J.B. awkwardly on the head, and the pug let out the weirdly snorting, snuffling sound that all pugs made whenever they were getting excited. To Eggsy’s relief, this brought out a faint, wry smile on Harry’s face, even as Harry leaned back against the pillows and closed his eyes for a moment, and after some hesitation, Eggsy sat down on the edge of his bed.

“You look like shit,” Harry said, without opening his eyes, and a burp of laughter wormed its way out of Eggsy before he could stop it.

“I know. I been told.”

“What happened?” Harry ran a hand over his face. “I feel like I’ve been run over by a truck.”

“Uh. That was ah, Rox, I mean, well, you’ve met her already, Roxanne, she just gave you something for your nerves.”

“Whatever it was, it was probably illegal.”

“Maybe?” Eggsy hazarded, because he was never entirely sure whether even half the things that were Kingsman standard issue were remotely legal by any meaning of the word.

“Was your…” Harry hesitated for a moment. “Is your name even really ‘Eggsy’?”

“Um. Yeah. S’my real name. Sorry.”

“So something was real, then.”

Eggsy grit his teeth, willing himself to have patience, even as J.B. let out an awkward blarp and looked worriedly over at its master. “Okay, look. Firstly. I know this is all fucked up and it’s a mess.
But I did know you from before, you did help me out of a bad way, and—"

“And what was I?” Harry cut in, narrow-eyed and suspicious again, hurtful as it was to see. “What are you, and Roxanne, and Emrys?”

“… Remember when you woke up in that mountain?” Eggsy asked, carefully, studying Harry for any sign of a headache.

“Yes?”

“Ever wondered how you ended up in there, among all the other prisoners who were, well, pretty famous people, all up? I mean, there were some Princes and Princesses in there, and the Dalai Lama, even.”

“… Yes?”

This wasn’t going to be easy then. “Okay. You thought I was MI6, yeah? Actually, you’re kinda right. And. Before the um, mass hysteria thing. You were an agent too. Kind of like. My mentor.”

No flinch, not even a little wince. Harry merely seemed to mull this over, staring at his hands, rubbing his fingertips over the calluses. Finally, he said, “That explains the scars. On my skin.”

“Wow,” Eggsy said, fascinated despite himself, “You are totally taking this way better than I thought you would.”

“Oh my God, Eggsy,” Merlin said, into his ear.

“I’m not the one who chickened out of actually being here when Harry woke up,” Eggsy shot back, though he touched his fingers to his ear just to show Harry that he was speaking to an earpiece.

“That was Emrys, I presume?”

“Umm. ‘Merlin’, yeah. You guys really are friends, by the way. He used to be your handler. And er. I think what happened was. You were getting these headaches, you couldn’t remember anything, and you were pretty spooked. So you spooked Merlin out too, when he found you inna mountain, and he decided to stash you somewhere safe for a bit, until you either got over it or he figured out what had been done to you. Then I um. Kinda fell face first into it and ruined everything. So. Sorry?”

Harry stared at Eggsy for a very long moment, then he blew out a long, unsteady sigh, and rubbed a hand over his face again. “This is all rather hard to take in.”

“I… s’pose so. Um. I can go.” Eggsy reluctantly gathered up J.B., which, utterly oblivious to the tension of the moment, let out another blarp and a wheeze.

“Please tell me that’s not my dog.”

“Hey,” Eggsy said, irked despite everything, “There’s nothin’ wrong with pugs, aite?”

Harry smiled at that, even if it was faint and a little wry. “So. I was your mentor?”

“Um. Yeah. You, well, you kinda knew my late dad. Thought you were doing him a favour by helping me out. Y’know,” Eggsy said, working on low sleep and warming to his topic, “At the start, I was really inclined to just hate your guts. The way you talked, the way you looked at me, like you were judging me… My father died in this outfit, back when I was a kid. You tried to make it better,
but my mum was proud then, and she would’na have nothing of it.”

“It kinda sucks,” Eggsy said, when Harry said nothing, “When you realize at eleven years old that when your mum says she’s ‘already eaten’ and you can have her share, she’s actually lying just so you can go to bed a little less hungry. That kind of thing. Unlike her, I didn’t blame you for it. But at the start, it was really fucking hard not to.”

“But you turned out to be a really awesome person,” Eggsy continued, even as J.B. squirmed in his grasp. “And you pushed me into something that’s changed my life. I mean, you actually made me want to change my life, to do better. I’m in a way better place now ‘cos of you. So. Thanks. And I’m sorry if you think I should’a… if you think we shouldn’t have… and maybe I’m a bit of an arsehole after all, and… Okay,” Eggsy added. “You can shout at me now. Because the silent treatment is kinda freaking me out here.”

“I think that the person you remember when you look at me,” Harry lifted his gun hand pointedly, waiting until another tremor shook his fingers before he set it back down and continued speaking, “Is no longer there, Eggsy. I don’t remember him. Or anyone.”

“Some time ago,” Eggsy said stubbornly, “You used t’tell me. ‘Manners maketh man’. Sure, that’s kinda about how people act and talk and choose the right spoon or whatever. But it told me also that it’s not about who you used to be. It’s about who you are, inside. And to me? I don’t think you’ve ever really changed. Maybe you’d get better. Maybe you won’t. Maybe I’m really young and dumb and don’t get the difference. But you’re still Harry fucking Hart to me. And I didn’t wanna treat you like a stranger or something.”

“I think that you mean well,” Harry said slowly. “But effectively, the way I am now… I’ve only known you for two days, if at all, and all this has been… rather confronting.”

Eggsy knew a dismissal when he heard one. “Okay,” he said softly. “Maybe you should take it easy. Imma head off, then.”

“Yes,” Harry said, and rubbed the heel of his hand briefly against his temple, gritting his teeth before he added, “I think that would be for the best.”

Eggsy slunk off, and if this was really along the lines of films like My Fair Lady and such, maybe there would’ve been dramatics and tears. As it was, he just let out a sigh when he closed the door to the ward, and lifted J.B. to eye level. “Yeah,” he told the pug softly, as it stared guilelessly at him. “I know I fucked up.”

J.B. let out a blarp sound, as though agreeing, and Eggsy set it down, clipping the leash to its harness. Then he sighed, checked his reflection in the ward window to see how much the bruising had gone down, and went home to face his mum.

Chapter End Notes

Re: those people expecting an outburst/angst chapter: Sorry guys. :3 I personally don't think that a British gentleman does tears and drama etc. Stiff upper lip, don't 'cherknew.
Merlin had not, in fact, ‘chickened out’ of hanging about until Harry woke up: he had been very busy at the time, thank you very much Eggsy, what with being linked up to Percival and overseeing the clean up. Working with government always took a hell of a lot of poncing around, and naturally by the time MI5 had gotten its shit together and gone in mob-handed, explosives had taken care of a lot of the evidence and Jason Phillips was Missing in Action.

Listening to the current Arthur tell off the PM and then bully him into signing off on a new Kingsman retainer was pretty cathartic, admittedly, after which Merlin had done a final round of checks on all active agents and passed out on the couch in the Merlin department’s rec room.

When he woke up, pizza boxes and deformed cans of Red Bull had been strewn around him on the floor and the coffee table, vaguely on first impression rather like offerings set up around a sleeping God. In Merlin’s experience within the department, however, this was just a sign of another all-nighter, and he washed up, poured coffee down his throat, sent the first hapless minion that he saw out to buy something suitably greasy and stomach-churningly wrong to wake himself up the rest of the way, and trudged off to the Ops room.

The day shift was starting up again as he prowled around the room. Kay was in a helicopter, en route to investigate a tax haven under false pretences. Bedivere was gliding through a nightclub, looking for his mark. Percival was back at the base, about to rudely wake up the Gawain recruits with a team bonding exercise involving an erupting volcano. Hector was in the middle of plugging a transciever into the back of a CPU. Bors and Tristan were asleep.

Lancelot was on her way to Scotland, of all places, possibly indicative of a twisted sense of supervillain humour, and Merlin slouched into his seat, read through his emails, and saw that sometime in the night, Harry had insisted on being discharged, and had been deposited at his London house by Percival.

Knowing the taciturn Percival, this had likely been done without any ceremony whatsoever, and Merlin groaned, rubbed at his eyes, and accepted the suitably greasy, stomach-churningly wrong Sausage McMuffin from the minion with a leaden sense of doom. In the end, he loaded the Galahad feed onto his iPad - Galahad was still prepping for his ‘interview’, anyway - and took a company car out to Harry’s house, because of pesky sentiments like guilt and conscience and all that, and because the position of Merlin came with perks, such as being able to faff off at the start of the work day if he really wanted to.

Harry greeted him at the doorway with a raised eyebrow but thankfully no physical violence, and invited him in politely, though there was a wary tension to him as he stepped aside. Harry was wearing slippers and his maroon dressing gown, and looked tired and old, with none of the elegant vitality that Merlin was used to.

Tea was brewed, because that was what the English gentleman did whenever faced with an awkward situation, and Merlin sat down in the drawing room with Harry, each to an armchair and the glass antique coffee table as a DMZ between them, having Darjeeling with a slice of lemon and biscuits.

“Roxanne isn’t actually your niece,” Harry began by saying.
“That’s right.”

“She’s Percival’s daughter, though. Apparently… espionage-for-hire runs in her family.”

“Also right.” Merlin said, a little surprised that Percival had actually volunteered this bit of information. Maybe depositing Harry at home hadn’t been done with Percival’s usual utter lack of tact after all.

“Seems his youngest daughter is doing well in the ‘Gawain’ trials?”

“Kate’s very good.” Merlin agreed, wondering where this was all going, studying Harry’s neutral expression for some sort of hint - then he realized what Percival had been getting at. By pretending that Harry as he was now was no different than the Harry that Percival was used to… perhaps this was how a tiger still wanted to be treated, when its teeth and claws had been pulled. Perhaps by trying to be kind, all Merlin had done was to be cruel.

Maybe something of this showed in Merlin’s face: Harry sighed. “I do think that you tried to make the best of a bad situation on the fly. But I’m not sure if all the lies were truly necessary,” which in Merlin’s long and varied experience where Harry Hart was concerned, was usually Harry’s normal approach to rebuking someone. Outright anger and blunt reproach seemed to be a purely for-Eggsy sort of enterprise. “Percival… explained the situation.”

“I wanted to buy some time,” Merlin admitted quietly. “Because I felt as though I couldn’t really trust anyone any longer, when I found you. I wouldn’t even have let Roxy - Roxanne - in on the matter if it hadn’t been necessary.”

“And Eggsy?”

“I didn’t think that you would’ve appreciated having him see what you had become,” Merlin said slowly. “Had you come back to yourself afterwards. You’ve always had a hell of a lot of pride.”

“That hasn’t changed,” Harry said, with a wry pull to his mouth that Merlin couldn’t quite parse. “What Eggsy said… I was his mentor?”

The words ‘and nothing more’ hung unsaid and heavy in the air, and Merlin grimaced, and tried not to check his iPad. “Rather than hear it from me… all Kingsmen have a… video feed. I can show you how to access your files from your laptop. On the condition that if you feel any sort of… pain at all, or discomfort, that you stop. Your current situation was artificially induced. I’m still sequencing the information.”

“Somehow,” Harry murmured, rubbing at his temple, “I have this impression that you only say something like that when you actually have no idea what a solution might be.”

“It’s all still being researched,” Merlin said, a little stiffly.

“Tell me. What happened?”

“The amnesia dart that you were shot with had a variant of Valentine’s nanotech fluid,” Merlin said uncomfortably. “As far as I could tell, it was made purely to cause a very specific sort of synaptic damage to your long term memory banks. Valentine had done a lot of research into brain mapping and cognitive science, at a level far beyond anyone else. I don’t know if the specific damage that was done to you just only happened to wipe your memory, and, ah, cause the disability in your right hand, or if it’s, ah, a happy coincidence that nothing… worse happened.”

“So… my headaches are a… lingering side effect? Is the ‘nanotech fluid’ still…”
“It’s been flushed out by your systems,” Merlin assured him.

“But the damage’s been done.”

“As you say.”

“And possibly irreversible.”

“I don’t know,” Merlin admitted, trying not to squirm. “I’m still having people look into it. Sadly, I don’t think this is going to be that kind of story where something happens and it all comes back to you. I was afraid of worsening the damage, actually.”

“I see,” Harry said neutrally, in a monotone, which was perhaps worse than how lost he had sounded, when Merlin had first found him in the mountain. “This is all still… rather difficult to believe.”

“I know,” Merlin agreed.

“Why didn’t Valentine just kill me?” Harry asked then, still as neutral as ever, and Merlin had himself been wondering about this, all this while. Had it been some last minute sort of sentiment from the late Arthur, or even from the late Valentine? Curiosity, perhaps? Or was Harry just the first test subject for a dart that would’ve eventually also done for all the rest of the mountain prisoners?

“I’m not sure,” Merlin said finally. “And actually, if you wanted to just… return to Cornwall, and have this all just be a bad chapter in your new life, that’s all up in the open.”

Harry didn’t even hesitate. It had never been in Harry’s nature to walk away from anything difficult, after all. “I don’t think so. Show me these files.”

Merlin was secretly glad that he had quietly quarantined all the rather more… objectionable footage elsewhere, as he nodded and led Harry up to his study. The framed newspaper headlines were still up, spotlessly clean, though Harry’s face showed no recognition as he glanced over at them.

Harry’s computer linked up to the Kingsman servers without a hitch, and Merlin showed Harry his password and his footage archives. “Remember,” Merlin warned. “Since we still don’t really know the extent of the, ah, damage… if you start feeling any sort of pain at all-“

“I know,” Harry said briskly, with a glance over the files. “Thank you.”

“I’m sorry,” Merlin said, because for all his good intentions, perhaps he had approached it all wrongly after all, and Harry let out another sigh.

“You did what you thought was the right thing. I understand that. And the… damage. Was not your fault.”

“Call in if you need help,” Merlin offered, wondering whether saying so was crass, but Harry nodded slowly, and Merlin decided to beat a retreat, unsettled all over again and wondering whether he should post a tighter watch on Harry Hart. Or something.

On the way out, back to the company car, Galahad said, oblivious to Merlin’s current location, “Hey, Merlin?”

Merlin took in a slow breath, then made himself all business again as he patched himself in to Galahad’s feed. The young agent had been sitting at a laptop, studying an information packet from the Merlin department about Phillips Inc. “Yes?”
“So… what’s this job interview that I’m going for actually about? Am I gonna have to pretend to be an office drone? Or part of security? Or maybe some sort’a new manager?”

“You’re going to be Phillips Inc’s newest janitor, actually,” Merlin said distractedly. “Don’t fail the interview, please.”

“What.”

“Kingsman isn’t all about dressing up nicely and shooting the bad guys,” Merlin said, perhaps a little smugly, because Eggsy growled and muttered something rude under his breath.

“Why are we even doing this? I mean, we’ve got Jason bloody Phillips on tape mouthing off!”

“We were trespassing on private property under false pretenses, and by the time we get it all through the legal channels he’ll likely have carried out his plans…? Also,” Merlin added, a little testily, “We still haven’t been able to find him. What with all the chaos and the mess that happened in Cornwall, he got clean away, remember? And MI5 only found a bombed out shelter.”

“Umm. Yeah.” Eggsy had the decency to cough. “Ah. But why did I just have to memorise a set of A’level scores, me fake schooling, and the history of the Phillips company?”

“Because people ask rather more out of even their service staff nowadays, obviously. Now get going. We don’t want to be late, do we?”

“I hate you guys,” Eggsy said feelingly, and when Merlin said nothing in response, he added. “Uh… Merlin. You all right there? Did you sleep at all last night or what? Cos you sound a wee bit out of sorts. Don’t push yourself so hard.”

“I’m fine,” Merlin said, glancing out of the window as the company car pulled away from Harry’s house. “Concentrate on the mission, Galahad. And for God’s sake, don’t bring along any guns.”

“Aww man.”

Sushi had been ordered for everyone by the time Merlin returned to the Ops room, because the only danger it tended to pose to computers was wayward packets of soy sauce, and Merlin nibbled at his roll and fed the Galahad feed back to his computer. Galahad was in the middle of his interview, playing the part of an earnest unemployed young man eager for a new start to the hilt, and although Merlin thought it was a little too over the top, clearly Galahad’s puppy-like smile was doing wonders for the Phillips HR lady.

Since nothing looked like it was about to explode, Merlin brought up the Lancelot feed. She was crouched over one of the portable Kingsman-issue all-terrain motorbikes, speeding towards the next high activity off-the-books base, all the while discussing the latest Walking Dead episode with Nyneve.

Percival was flying the plane that was taking the Gawain recruits out towards the volcano, Bedivere was chatting up his mark: a Japanese businessman with ties to the Yakuza, and Hector, Kingsman’s resident pyromaniac, was in the middle of looking longingly at certain cleaning agents in a supply closet that Merlin knew from long experience could combine quite readily into an explosion.

Hastily, Merlin checked the update on the Hector mission, noted that an explosion would only be pure gratification at this point, and patched himself into the Hector feed. “No, Hector.”
There was a sigh, and Hector moved on. Kay was still in a helicopter, and the remaining two agents were still asleep. Satisfied, Merlin looked back at the Galahad feed, where Eggsy was already shaking hands with the HR lady, and being invited rather breathlessly to tour the premises.


Though if it turned out that Phillips was in fact in London, had there been no mutant spore bombs at stake, that would’ve just made things simpler. In a straight out, drag-down fight, Eggsy was pretty exceptional.

Eggsy waited until HR lady was distracted by a phone call before murmuring, “Y’know, I kinda have a feeling that this premises tour is gonna end up in her private office.”

“Well, try not to fraternise until you actually have the job, all right?” Merlin said dryly. “We do need you to start work at Phillips Inc as soon as possible.”

“I get that, Merlin. Hey, have you checked on Harry yet?”

“He’s fine,” Merlin said, just as the HR lady bustled back, all smiles. The tour, thankfully, was just of the service areas, the admin levels and an introduction to the janitorial staff’s day shift, and as Merlin watched, Eggsy somehow managed to talk HR lady into agreeing to start him on tonight’s night shift, talk her out of giving him a ‘private tour’, but still flatter her enough that she gave him her number.

“Not bad,” Merlin told Eggsy, when Eggsy sauntered out of Phillips Inc into the afternoon sunshine.

“Is that Merlin-speak for ‘Yes, Eggsy, you’re freaking awesome’?”

“No,” Merlin said dryly. “You’re going to be on the night shift, which means you should probably head home and have some rest.”

“Something I should prep for? We gonna be stealing stuff?”

“Actually, I think you’re going to be in for a whole night of emptying bins and wiping down bathrooms,” Merlin said briskly.

“What.”

“Kingsman isn’t all about dressing up nicely and-“

“I mean what for?” Eggsy whined.

“I’m going to be putting you on the roster for cleaning the executive floors,” Merlin relented. “I need some data stolen from Jason’s office.”

“I could turn back and break in there right now-“

“And get caught all over again?”

“Aww, c’mon…”

“Jason knew who you were, Eggsy,” Merlin said firmly. “Until we ascertain why, it’s best to play it safe. I don’t want to risk them reworking all the decryption on their servers yet again. It’s not just about getting rid of Jason. It’s finding out whether the labs that Roxy and such are checking out are the only ones.”
He hated it when supervillains had back-up plans. The transceiver that Roxy had plugged into the main server room had given Merlin only a snapshot of the on-site server before it had all been destroyed, and annoyingly enough, Phillips had upped the ante on his decryption everywhere else. Which meant that the information they had was likely dated, and they were starting from scratch again. Joy.

“Y’know what I think?” Eggsy grumbled, as he pretended to flag down a cab, but actually got into a company car, “I think it’s bleeding obvious, innit. ‘ow he knew who I was. The previous Arthur and Gawain went over to the Dark Side. Obviously they gave Valentine and friends the scoop on the rest of us.”

True. “There are other things at stake.”

“Unless you think you’ve been reverse hacked? Like in Skyfall?”

Merlin grit his teeth, and reached for his stress ball. Mentions of Skyfall and it’s pseudo-hacker ‘Q’ branch was a blacklisted topic within the Merlin department. Not that Eggsy knew. Or cared. “I’ve already triple checked our systems. We’re tight.”

“Pretty sure it’s just a combination of cock ups how I got ID’d,” Eggsy said cheerfully, looking briefly out into traffic. “So don’t worry about it. I’ll get your info for you maybe tonight. No problems. So seriously. How’s Harry?”

“What do you think? He’s resentful and disoriented all over again.”

“But no increasingly bad headaches?”

“Not that I can tell. We did a few scans when he was out. There’s nothing obviously untoward about his brain. I think the damage might’ve stabilised.”

Eggsy mulled this over, for a long time, then asked, just as the cab was about to turn into the new estate where he lived with his mum, “How…” He cleared his throat, and asked in a softer voice, “How long before I can go and see him?”

“You might want to maybe wait,” Merlin said uncomfortably, “Until you’ve saved the world all over again.”

“Hah!” Eggsy’s thin smile was briefly caught by the car window’s reflection. “Okay. I getcha.”

“Eggsy, look,” Merlin said quietly, “This situation that Harry’s in is not of your design.”


“Get some rest, Eggsy. I’ve arranged for a present for your mum in the car, might help you explain what you were doing while on leave,” Merlin advised, but watched anyway, as Eggsy got out of the car at his doorstep with the box left for him in the company car and pretended to surprise his mum with a box of cupcakes from Hummingbird Bakery.

“You shouldn’t have, and on your day off,” Michelle Unwin bustled around, even as Merlin noted the difference between the glowing, brilliantly smiling lady in the pale yellow frock and his vague memory of the tired, broken-down woman he had seen through Eggsy’s spectacles when he had gone to rescue his mum.

“Naw. I know these are your favourite,” Eggsy disagreed, kissed his mum on the cheek like a good boy, and wandered through the open plan Kensington terrace house, taking the stairs two at a time
up to Daisy’s room, at which point Merlin shut the Galahad feed down and checked back on the other agents, finishing his sushi lunch.

He spent an hour in the gym and returned to his desk, desultorily doing paperwork and emails, then went home, if only to remind his cats that he was still alive, checked their auto feeder and water, set his alarm, and took a nap, covered in cats.

By the time Merlin returned to Kingsman for the night shift, yawning, Percival’s class was down to the last four candidates, Lancelot had just blown up a moorland facility, Bedivere had assassinated his mark and was in the process of making it look like a drug overdose, Bors was questioning the Kremlin critic, Tristan was dressing up for the day, and Kay and Hector were asleep. Merlin drank more coffee as he signed off/rejected more plans from Engineering, studied the latest Finance report, wrote an email update to Arthur, and finally settled down to the Galahad feed.

Eggsy was already on his way to Phillips Inc. “Hey Merlin,” he said, as he got out of the company car ‘cab’. “Y’know, I’ve always wondered what you do all day. When you’re not being a handler, I mean.”

“Do tell.”

“All that business flying the plane into the mountain was a once off, yeah? Roxy told me that you guys actually stay in a basement in Kingsman most of the time, coding stuff on computers.”

Merlin glanced back over the ops room, where his minions were doing their part in ensuring that the world as everyone knew it didn’t implode. “Quite so.”

“Hmm,” Eggsy said, and adjusted his glasses. “Sounds pretty boring t’mee. Sorry to hear it.”

“You have no idea, Galahad,” Merlin said dryly. He wouldn’t give up his job for any kind of money in the world. “Now remember. Tonight, you’re prioritising stealth over results. If you don’t have the chance to nip into the exec offices, there’s always tomorrow night.”
Chapter 11

XI.

At the end of the janitorial night shift, Eggsy wondered why more janitors weren’t documented going absolutely postal now and then. Also, people were gross. That was all he was going to say about it.

On his way out for the night, it didn’t help that Roxy sent him a quick Snapchat selfie of herself, posed dramatically before a vast stretch of Scottish moorlands, lit by the night sky, grinning like a loon from ear to ear. Scowling, Eggsy sent back the Skyfall/Scotland meme instead, and got a smug little mouthed ‘How’s work?’ Snapchat in response. He sent back an eyeroll, and snuck home, where thankfully his mum was asleep, changed, showered several times, and went to sleep.

All his mum knew of his latest gig was that he had to work late some nights, and had to travel for work sometimes. Somedays, Eggsy wished he could come clean to his mum about what he did - he’d managed to explain away that little dust up in the pub with Dean by hinting at old Marine training - and brave the freak out and all the disbelief. Tonight wasn’t really one of those days.

He slept through breakfast and awoke near lunch, yawning and staring at the bathroom mirror as he scrubbed his teeth. The bruising had mostly gone down now, thanks to the Kingsman salve, with only a faint discolouration to show for it, though it was all still rather tender. Eggsy did already feel slightly less like a human piñata, admittedly: Kingsman’s health services were pretty top notch. The tiger scars were going to be interesting, and permanent, but the stitches could come out soon, and he’d been good so far at hiding the bandages.

At least his mum hadn’t freaked the fuck out when she had first seen the bruises. Eggsy had spun a sheepish story about slipping on a waxed floor, falling down steps and getting a day off when he had first come home, and he hadn’t copped anything more than an impressive scolding about having to watch his step.

Because Eggsy was home, his mum had made a proper lunch, and possibly gone overboard in the process as usual: home-made lasagne, egg and lettuce salad, even some apple pie. Daisy liked the pie, though being a baby and all, by the time Eggsy had had second helpings of the lasagne and a token helping of the salad and had gotten on to the pie, she had managed to spread her portion of said pie over the table and part of the floor. To J.B.’s blarping delight.

J.B. was going to get so fat because of Daisy it wasn’t even funny. Even with all the enforced walks and jogging he did with Eggsy.

“Another long day at work tonight?” Michelle Unwin asked, as Eggsy helped her with the dishes.

“Probably,” Eggsy said apologetically.

“Don’t let them work you too hard,” Michelle advised, and ruffled his hair affectionately, even as Eggsy pretended to duck and weave away from her. “I’ve got my book club in an hour with the other mums at Emmy’s, and it’s going to be a sort of pot luck high tea. Are you going to be home for dinner?”

“Think not. Don’t wait up for me,” Eggsy advised, checked the time, and nipped upstairs to change. There wasn’t actually much to do in Kingsman for him right now other than wait for the night shift to start, which was probably why Arthur had arranged to have Eggsy assist the tailor at the Savile
Row shop. Something that was seemingly inspired by the whole not-quite-fake tailor!Harry fiasco in Cornwall, apparently.

Or maybe it was just more punishment. Even on Savile Row, working retail could be such a bitch.

After two nights of technically working the exec floor but not actually working Jason Phillips’ floor, Eggsy was, to his irritation, settling into a rather unfortunate routine. Do the night shift, all the while trying to sneak off while under the beady-eyed watch of the senior janitorial staff. Go home and crash. Wake up late, have lunch at home, head in to Kingsman, and work the afternoon shift at Savile Row. Rinse, repeat.

All while everyone else who wasn’t on a mission/was finishing up a mission got transitioned into locating and getting rid of the remaining warehouses, Eggsy should add. Which was originally Eggsy’s mission, Eggsy should add. After getting a Snapchat selfie from Roxy out of Budapest, Eggsy tried petitioning Merlin for a change of scene, but Merlin had merely told him to focus on the mission.

Eggsy was starting to hate that phrase.

A week in, Eggsy was trying to look attentive while advising a young Japanese tourist on an appropriate shirt for her husband - while not actually having said husband’s shirt size, preferences, or anything in particular - in a mixture of broken English and Google Translate when Harry Hart walked into the shop, at which point Eggsy’s brain, as was per normal, promptly derailed itself.

Harry was in a storm gray suit, probably some sort of wool blend, a sleekly fit double-breasted cut with black buttons that hugged Harry’s narrow hips, cut very close to fit. A maroon tie over a snow-white shirt and a cream silk pocket square completed the smoking hot picture, and although it was still disorienting to see Harry without a pair of Kingsman glasses, Eggsy found himself grinning like an idiot anyway, when Harry recognised him and inclined his head in greeting.

"Anou... sumimasen," the Japanese lady said politely, and Eggsy snapped out of his daze, flushing a little as he bent his head back over Google Translate.

"Er… kare no… ude wa… dono…"

“Something the matter?” Harry asked, suddenly at Eggsy’s elbow, and the world felt kicked off kilter all over again; Eggsy could smell Harry’s faint cologne, almost feel the solid, comforting heat of his presence and… yeah. So fucked.

“Mio-san here is trying to buy a shirt for her husband,” Eggsy explained. “But she doesn’t have his size and I don’t really get what he likes out of shirts either. We’re figuring it out.”

“Ah, I see.” To Eggsy’s complete surprise, Harry promptly started talking to the young lady in perfect, crisp Japanese, while she visibly lit up with relief, and at the end, while she paid, having bought also a set of cufflinks and an extra shirt, they seemed to be talking in rapid-fire Japanese like old friends.

Which.

Was totally hot. Eggsy had not realized that Harry could actually get more hot than he already was. Clearly, the world was going to end soon.

Eggsy had worked odd jobs before, so managing the cashbox and the credit card machine went off without a hitch, and it seemed mildly surreal, watching Harry send off the young lady, chatting all the way to the door, Harry smiling gently, the tourist actually giggling at times. Eggsy was still
blinking when Harry came back to the counter.

“What on earth were you saying to her?” Harry asked, with a faint little curl to his mouth, amused, and for a moment Eggsy wondered, with a swell of hope, whether Harry had finally remembered, if everything was all right again.

“Er well, she couldn’t speak much English, so I thought maybe I would try Google translate, see? Though I probably got it all wrong. Wow. How many languages can you speak?”

“I don’t actually know.” Harry hesitated. “I just knew right at that moment that I could speak Japanese. Possibly even read it.”

Reality slammed back in place, and Eggsy had to duck his head to hide his disappointment. “Oh. Um.” He took in a slow breath. “So er. What are you doing here?” Smooth, Eggsy, real smooth.

“I have a meeting with ‘Arthur’.” Harry checked his watch. “Still a little early.”

“Oh. Right. Sure.” Eggsy blinked, and pressed the button signalling Marcus to come out from the back room. “I’ll show you through.”

“Do you work the shop on top of… doing what you do?” Harry asked delicately, as he followed Eggsy through into the back room.

“Not usually.” Eggsy pulled a face. “I’m pretty sure I’m being punished, actually. I mean, Roxy’s in Budapest right now. But I don’t mind. It’s better than getting suspended for two months with no pay, or whatever Arthur wanted to do to me at first. I don’t really have much in the way of savings yet, that would’ve been hard.” At Harry’s raised eyebrow, Eggsy added defensively, “I don’t want me mum to have to work, aite? After what she’s been through. And getting another job just for two months just to cover the bills would’a been tough.”

“Ah.” Harry blinked. “Of course.”

“Well, here we are,” Eggsy said, outside the Round Table room, a little uncomfortable now, from the way Harry was studying him so closely. “Umm. Something on my face?”

“No, no. My thanks,” Harry said, then hesitated. “Eggsy. When does your shift end?”

Was Harry actually… “Umm. Pretty soon, actually. ‘Bout half an hour?” Eggsy said, and tried not to sound hopeful, he really did, but probably failed. Harry was maybe going to ask him out. Maybe. “I got to get an early dinner,” Eggsy added reluctantly. “Got other Kingsman business at night.”

“If you don’t mind having company,” Harry said tentatively, “Perhaps we should talk.”

Eggsy minding Harry’s company? In which universe? Thankfully, Eggsy didn’t actually blurt that out, but he nodded instead and actually managed some degree of composure. “Sure. I’ll wait for you down in the shop.”

Thankfully, there were no other customers for the rest of his shift, because Eggsy probably would not have paid them the least amount of attention, and when Harry re-emerged, forty minutes later, with an arched eyebrow and a brisk, “Shall we?” Eggsy had never closed up a shop so quickly in his life.

They went to an understated Italian place a short walk away, one that Roxy tended to pick whenever it was her turn to choose a lunch spot, and Harry stared at the signage for a long moment, up until Eggsy asked, “Er, if you’d rather go someplace else-“
“No. I think,” Harry said, after a moment’s pause. “This place will be fine.”

It was not only ‘fine’ - as it turned out, the maitre’d knew Harry, greeting him with a cheerful ‘Ah, Mister Hart!’ and showing them to a window seat for two without being asked. Harry hid his disorientation well, as he studied the menu, and when the maitre’d asked if Harry wanted ‘his usual’, Eggsy had to swallow the sudden and irrational urge to punch the friendly old man.

“So sorry about that,” Eggsy said, when they had ordered and the menu was cleared. “I didn’t realize. I mean. I come here a lot with Roxy. And I’ve kinda… well, we’re usually here at lunch, so maybe that’s why we’ve never seen you here.”

“Not a problem,” Harry said, though there was a faintly hunted look to him as he surveyed the restaurant slowly, as though studying some sort of painting, his stare sliding over the neat tables with their white tablecloths, the not-quite-antique gray cushioned chairs, the plush maroon carpeting, the mahogany fittings, the floor-to-ceiling trellis with all the wine bottles. On hindsight, it was probably pretty bloody obviously a Harry Hart sort of place. Stupid Eggsy.

“So, um.” It was probably best to get things over with rather than have his hopes up, and Eggsy braced himself. “What did you want to talk about?”

“Arthur intends to retain me on the staff as a ‘consultant’,” Harry said, which wasn’t what Eggsy had expected him to start with. “Though I suspect it’s simply her way of retiring me gently with a pension.”

“Umm. Okay.”

“I said that I would think about it,” Harry said, looking pensive. “I don’t actually need the money.”

“Oh,” Eggsy said, unable to hide his disappointment, and when Harry arched an eyebrow, Eggsy said, “Umm well. I mean. It’s up to you. There’s stuff that you could do in Kingsman.”

“Such as?”

Now Eggsy was rather out of his depth. “Maybe handle recruits? Or clients? Stuff,” Eggsy said, rather lamely, and was glad for once that the lights in the restaurant were dim, because he was probably red-faced again.

“Arthur certainly proposed all that and more.” Harry said, which made Eggsy feel slightly better about the shit his mouth said when his brain wasn’t entirely in the running. “But I’ll need to think about it. It’s strange, going into a place where strangers know you, and treat you like some sort of invalid.”

“And that’s not even going into what Kingsman even is, I guess,” Eggsy said slowly. “I can’t imagine how weird all this has to be to you.”

“And knowing that, you still-“

“I’m sorry, all right? I’m sorry,” Eggsy said fiercely.

“Are you really?” Harry shot back, and they sat in an uncomfortable silence until the appetisers arrived, bruschetta to share and a side of salad. Eggsy had water, instead of wine, but Harry nodded when the maitre’d poured him an inch of red, then presented him with a bottle as Harry sniffed, swirled the wine, and had a taste.

“Merlin gave me access to my old video feeds,” Harry said, which resulted in Eggsy nearly choking
on a mouthful of bruschetta. “Though I suspect it wasn’t all of it.”

“Some of it is probably pretty damn confidential,” Eggsy said hastily.

“Considering that much of it was PG13 at best, I think it’s certainly been edited.”

Oh good. No church scene. “Umm. Right.”

“But I did recruit you for Kingsman,” Harry added, picking at his slice of bruschetta. “And I think that even lacking the full context, I don’t regret that. You’re a fine young man. As to the rest,” Harry continued, as Eggsy stared, “I suppose the ‘Pretty Woman’ comment was rather telling.”

“Haven’t watched it yet,” Eggsy said blankly, wondering what Harry was trying to get at.

“People use each other all the time,” Harry said, a non-sequitur of Eggsy had ever heard one. “I suppose what I’m trying to say is. With age comes perspective, and one tends to be more patient with unfortunate circumstances, particularly those not born of malice…” Harry trailed off, possibly because Eggsy was starting to look more and more puzzled. “I accept your apology, Eggsy,” Harry said dryly.

“Oh! Oh. Great.” Way to say something intelligent, Eggsy. He mentally kicked himself.

“And I recognise that I was also complicit in the… situation.”

“Well,” Eggsy coughed. “Could say I didn’t exactly go for a full an’ frank disclosure there.”

The bruschetta was cleared, and the mains served: crab linguini for Harry, and a prawn cappellacci for Eggsy. “Never gonna get used to this,” Eggsy said cheerfully, as he dug in. “Eating posh.”

Harry looked as though he was about to say something but swallowed it, and finally said, “Eggsy. If you ever do… get in trouble with Arthur again, and need help—“

“I don’t intend to get into trouble with her again, she’s frigging scary,” Eggsy said, then blinked as Harry’s words actually fully registered. “Uh thanks. But no thanks. I mean. You’ve already done a lot for me. I might be a dumb kid, but I’m not that dumb.”

“All right,” Harry said delicately, and changed the subject.

They talked generally about what Eggsy had done over the last couple of months in Kingsman, about what he’d had to do to break away from his stepfather and get his mum full custody of his half sister, and it was nice, this, Harry’s full attention, the gentle, warm intensity of it, just like Eggsy remembered. He was almost disappointed when dessert was served, and if Eggsy wasn’t working on a schedule, he probably would’ve tried to draw out slowly going through the tiramisu, just to enjoy the moment.

Harry paid, despite Eggsy’s attempt to grab the bill or go halves, and on the way out into the crisp night air, Harry said idly, “What are you getting up to this weekend?”

“Was gonna catch up with some friends and go to the skate park at Southbank,” Eggsy said, because he wasn’t the sort of toser who moved up in life and then forgot everyone else, then he cottoned on belatedly to why Harry might be asking. “You got something in mind?” Eggsy added, because he definitely was the sort of toser who would ditch his friends if a certain silver fox was asking, just saying.

“Have you been to the theatre?” Harry asked, and clarified, “The West End?”
“…No?” Eggsy wrinkled his nose. “Isn’t that people dancing around on stage in funny costumes and singing about everything? Tickets cost a mint!”

“In essence,” Harry said dryly, with a wry curl to his mouth. “I suppose a benefit of my current predicament is I actually do know whether I liked a certain show or not, but I no longer remember the show in question.”

“But you remember ‘Pretty Woman’?”

“Not particularly, but enough to understand the… context of my remark, unintended or otherwise.” Harry hesitated again. “If you wouldn’t mind keeping me company, the Phantom of the Opera is showing at Her Majesty’s Theatre.”

“It’s been there since… before I was born, innit?” Eggsy vaguely remembered his mum mentioning something of the sort. “I mean. Sure. Let’s go,” he agreed enthusiastically, because Eggsy would have quite willingly attended a dramatic reading of the bloody phone book if Harry was there.

“I’ll arrange for the tickets and let you know.” Harry tucked his hands into his pockets. “Good luck on your matter tonight.”

“Thanks for dinner,” Eggsy said, because he did know his manners, and Harry smiled.

“It was my pleasure, Eggsy.”
Valentine *had* loved his mountain bases. Roxy paused for a moment, to send a Snapchat selfie of herself to Eggsy, with the distant, majestic, snowy rise of the Grossglockner behind her, smirked when she received an eyeroll Snapchat in response, and tucked her phone back into her parka. She *did* feel a little sorry for Eggsy, but then again, jobs were jobs, and Eggsy *was* working undercover.

Not every Kingsman job was flashy or high profile: it was usually meant to be the opposite, and sometimes, Roxy wondered whether Eggsy had truly understood the import of the room in Harry Hart’s house that was full of framed front pages, none of which contained a hint of the momentous mission accomplished only the day before. Such things were a common source of pride for Kingsman agents: her father had such a room as well, as did her grandfather; someday, Roxy also intended to start her own collection of the only sort of trophies that a true Kingsman could keep.

As Roxy made her way quietly down from the vantage point, Katie sent her another thumbs-up Snapchat, hugging her Alaskan Malamute puppy as she did so. Roxy sent a Snapchat of a broad grin in response, and hoped quietly that Katie wouldn’t fail the last trial. Neither Roxy nor Percival had told Katie of the nature of it, of course… but well. Sentiment had no place in Kingsman.

“Gonna hit the sentry line soon,” Nyn said into her ear. “You ready?”

“I’m always ready.”

If this was a James Bond film, Roxy probably would have gone over to the base on skis, or a parachute, something that would have tripped all the motion sensors and infrared sensors. Instead, Roxy had to do it sensibly, sniping out high-mounted sensor towers with Kingsman-issue disruptors, then sprinting hastily across the rocky slopes, Nyn counting carefully in her ear as she went.

Nyn had made it to ‘thirty-four’ by the time Roxy was pressed against the snow bank that covered the walled-in entrance to an old mine shaft, the spine of old rails still slippery under her boots. This Valentine base had been built off the back of an old iron ore mine, abandoned after the decline of metal mining in Austria. The frequency mine quietly shook the piled stone entrance apart, and Roxy stepped through, picking her way lightly over the stone and brick.

“Air’s good,” Nyn said, as her glasses switched to zero-light vision. Roxy followed the old track as it wound inwards, passing under dusty support struts and brackets that still held the carcasses of old lamps. She drew her Browning, kept it primed with its muzzle pointed at the ground as she walked quietly along, wary of traps.

Valentine’s base technically started a couple hundred feet up, and judging from the plans lifted off Cornwall’s server, had been cut into the stone rather than using most of the existing mining structures, rather like his main bunker/base. This base of operations was older, built a decade or more ago, when Valentine hadn’t yet conceived his plans of mass destruction, and Kingsman probably would’ve passed it over if it hadn’t a) been on Roxy’s way back to London and if b) a friend of a friend of Bedivere’s in the BVT hadn’t mentioned offhandedly that a local had reported seeing several cargo planes flying through recently, all seemingly one-way.

“Y’know,” Nyn said, as Roxy hesitated for a moment before a fork in the corridor, “Could be that them cargo planes were carrying nothin’ but old recalled stock.”
“Four per day, just carrying in stock?”

“Yeah. Huge product recall and stuff happened, remember?”

“To dump it in Austria?”

“To dump it in his very first manky little base, maybe,” Nyn said, though she didn’t sound very enthusiastic. “I mean. Sure, it’s fucking weird. But I thought we were looking for shit being moved out of everywhere else and towards London, not the other way round.”

“Only if we keep assuming that London is the target.”

“Yeah. If it was me, I would leave enough tidbits to have all them Kingsman agents haring about dead ends, and gas the heck outta ‘nother subway. Like New York’s.”

Silently, Roxy thanked the Lord and any related deities that Nyn had been handpicked out of MI6’s Control staff not by Valentine but by Merlin.

“New York wouldn’t sit well with the revenge scheme. Jason Phillips wants revenge on Kingsman. Kingsman’s not in New York.”

“We’re also not in the tube,” Nyn pointed out. “The way I’d do it is. Gas New York. Then either pin it on Kingsman or dob us in as the Big Bad who provoked it all, so on, so on, many people become plant monsters, the PM shuts Kingsman down, we all become angry unemployed people-“

“… Nyn. You are a scary person.”

“I know. That’s probably why Merlin keeps trying to pay me so much.”

“How’re we going on tracking Phillips down?” Roxy asked, as she climbed up an ancient, rusting service ladder, Browning holstered for now, careful to check her grip with each pull.

“Nothing yet. He hasn’t been back in town, ‘far as Galahad can find out. Think he’s finally cottoned on to why he was shunted in as a janitor,” Nyn said dryly. “When a building like that has long-term dedicated service staff? They have all the goss.”

“Merlin could’ve told Galahad that from the start.”

“What for?” Nyn said, with a little chuckle. “I think it was ‘bout time the role of Galahad lost a bit of its sparkle. Boys got to take their jobs seriously. Though,” Nyn added absently, “Merlin told me that other than your dad, for the other boys it usually took years for them to settle down.”

“Really? Even Harry Hart?” Service staff weren’t the only ones with all the ‘goss’.

“Even that one. Merlin’s got stories about all off them,” Nyn said brightly. “The shit I could tell you about Harry Hart.”

“That’s all confidential, Nyneve,” Merlin’s voice cut into Roxy’s feed for a moment, and Roxy grinned to herself, even as she pulled herself up onto another floor, as dark and as dusty as the one below.

“Hey, us in Merlin got to get some fun out of all the late nights we pull,” Nyn said, though she laughed. “All right. You’re in the start of the living quarters. See that bit, to your right… yeah, bit more… yeah, that bit?”

“What about it?”
“Get a bit of light on it.”

Roxy found herself looking curiously at a small corner office, its metal door rusted open. Within was an ancient, boxy computer terminal, a huge and dusty CPU, and a desk which still had a half-open notebook and an old mug.

“Kinda looks a little bit like the office in *Five Nights At Freddy’s*, innit?” Nyn asked, and sniggered, even as in the background, Roxy heard some sort of muffled outburst from Merlin. “Sorry, doll. Keep going. Just wanted to get that out of me system for a bit.”

“What was that about?” Roxy switched off her pocket light and started walking through the long chamber, cut into what had probably been an old cavern and shored up.

It had rusted rows of double-storey bunks, probably for miners to take a rest break if they wanted to, and tables to another side, probably for breaks. The mine was pretty far from the nearest town: maybe sometimes the miners slept over in it instead of heading home after the day’s shift. Roxy couldn’t quite imagine a more claustrophobic existence.

“Eh, it’s a game. *Five Nights at Freddy’s,*” Nyn clarified, when Roxy didn’t answer. “Pretty popular horror game. The boss tried it and freaked himself out, s’all. We’ve been ribbing him about it for weeks.”

“It takes place in a mine?”

“Nah. In a pizza shop at night.”

“And that’s… frightening?” Sometimes, Roxy would never understand people.

“Jump scares can be pretty scary. ‘Specially in the dark. I mean. You’re kinda alone in the dark right now. In a big old abandoned place. No lights.”

“I also have… two Brownings, a hand grenade, cufflinks tasers, poisonous shoe blades, two knives, and a tranquiliser pen,” Roxy pointed out. “And you guys.”

“Aww. Aren’t you nice.”

“Credit where credit’s due.” Roxy said, because the position of Merlin had existed from the foundation of Kingsman, and because one of the only pieces of advice that her solemn grandfather had ever apparently left to Roxy’s father was to ‘stay on the Merlin’s good books’.

Considering that technically, Eggsy would never have saved the world but for Merlin’s intervention with the head chips, Roxy knew that this was sound advice. “This is a bit more Tomb Raider than a pizza shop,” she offered.

“Girl, you’re way cooler than Lara Croft.” Nyn said confidently. “Why’d you even watch Tomb Raider? Didn’t think that was your kind of thing.”

“Movie nights at Kingsman in my recruit class,” Roxy explained dryly. “The number of girls dwindled to just me pretty fast. And all the guys like to watch a certain sort of film when it was their turn to pick.”

“Uh huh. What’d you pick?”

“*Mean Girls,*” Roxy admitted, “Although that was meant as a joke. Not that it really worked: Eggsy and a couple of the other guys got really into it. Second go, I went with *You’ve Got Mail* and *The
Proposal. After that, I think most of the guys got the hint. Tomb Raider wasn’t that bad, actually. Compared to some of the other stuff that they picked.”

“My condolences. Sounds like living in a frat house for months.”

“Sort of,” Roxy said, though she smiled to herself. Annoying as some of the other Lancelot recruits had been, she wouldn’t have traded her time in the ‘most dangerous job interview in the world’ for anything.

d.

For a base that had recently received a great deal of cargo plane traffic, Valentine’s old Austrian base felt like it was actually in the progress of powering down and packing up. The service floor that Roxy emerged onto was dark, with not even the emergency lights working, and parts of it were submerged to ankle-height, a consequence of leaking pipes that hadn’t been maintained. Unlike the mining tunnels, which had just smelled of old earth and rotting wood, the service floor smelled musky, all stagnant water, rust, and stale air.

“Air’s good,” Nyn murmured, as Roxy dusted herself off; the tunnel down to the old mine had been only haphazardly bricked in - she’d been able to pull the brick wall apart with a few sharp knocks of her knife hilt.

Sliding the knife back into the little leather sheath strapped to her calf, Roxy looked left and right, alertly, then stepped fastidiously around the edge of the rusty puddle and waited for directions.

“Left,” Nyn said, after a pause, and Roxy walked on silent feet down the corridor, pausing only when she came up to a box set on the wall. Low light vision couldn’t quite make out the look of it, and Roxy flicked out her pocket flash light, the dimmed down light flicking over the wall.

It was a circuit breaker, the switches all still flipped to ‘ON’ in the box, behind the cloudy glass. Pursing her lips, Roxy flicked the flashlight off, and tucked it away, her hands tightening again on her Browning for comfort, as she stole quietly around the pipes that ran along the wall to her left, bolted down, each as thick as her thigh.

“They been out of power for a while,” Nyn said, her voice hushed. “I got a bad feeling about this. Want me to switch with Merlin?”

“I don’t see why that’s necessary,” Roxy murmured, growing all too aware of the sound of every breath that she made, soft and controlled as they were, aware for a claustrophobic moment of the weight of all the rock above her.

Then the moment passed, and she straightened up, and kept going. It took fifteen minutes for Roxy to traverse the piped corridors, trusting Nyn to pick a path for her through, until she came to what looked like a lift shaft… and a slumped body against it.

Nyn’s breath caught briefly in her throat, then she exhaled. “No life signs.”

Roxy nodded, and flicked on her pocket light again.

She had seen death during the Lancelot trial process, and dealt death in the months after, but there was something profoundly unsettling about the corpse before her. She couldn’t tell, offhand, whether it was a man or a woman, still fully dressed in a yellow hazmat suit, the visor splashed with blood. A pistol lay a few inches away from an open, lifeless hand to the body’s right.

“Judging from the gun residue and the blood splatter, he killed himself,” Nyn said briskly, and Roxy
had never been so thankful for Nyn’s utter lack of squeamishness. “Glove up and get the hat off, would you?”

Roxy clenched her teeth over her pocket light, peeled the all-purpose gloves from her inner right suit pocket, pulled them on, and tugged off the hazmat helm, wrinkling her nose at the stench. The dead man’s brains had been splattered all over the helm and the neck of the suit down, what remained of his face frozen in horror. She tried not to breathe in too deeply.

“Right, then,” Nyn said thoughtfully. “Think this was maybe done only a day ago.”

“Around when there were no more sightings of the cargo planes.”

“Aye, that’s the kicker. Think you probably should see if one of those lockers to your right has a spare hazmat suit.”

“Spores?” Roxy asked, for she had watched Eggsy’s filmed footage of the Cornwall lab on her way out to Scotland.

“Hope not. Though,” Nyn brightened up, “Maybe these fuckers had a wee bit of an accident. I’ll call that karma, that is.”

The lockers did have a spare hazmat suit, even if it was at least two sizes too big and awkward to move about in, and hot, but Roxy instantly felt better about things as she secured the sleeves over her slimmer Kingsman gloves, managed to tie down the pocket light to her left wrist, just in case, and stepped back over to the lift.

Attempts to pry it open failed, at which point Nyn had her circle back through the piped corridor to a side door which had an emergency stairway up. Roxy felt clumsy and far too bloody loud in her new get up, and her hair was already starting to stick to her scalp, but she kept her breathing slow and even as she took the narrow steps up as quietly and as carefully as she could. When she got to the first door, Roxy opened it as slowly and as gently as she could, and nudged it open.

Infrared picked up an oddly mottled pattern of heat signatures, scattered at strangely random spots across a chamber that looked as thought it was going to be as large as the pipe room by floor size. “Engineering section,” Nyn murmured into her ear. “What the hell are those readings?”

“People,” Merlin said, and his voice nearly startled Roxy into flinching. “My God. They were all people.”

The plants, Roxy recalled. The final tube with all the leaves. As she stared at the heat patterns, numbed with horror, she heard Nyn say, tightly, “Standing by.”

“That’s unusual,” Arthur said, in her usual brisk voice, when she was patched in. “I didn’t think that this facility was set up as a laboratory from the plans.”

“Neither did I,” Merlin agreed. “It was more of a storage base of some sort. An actual transit location.”

“Maybe the planes moved whatever they had to,” Nyn suggested, “And then Phillips decided to test run his spores through the vents and get rid of the witnesses. Maybe the Lift Guy killed himself outa guilt. What? Sounds logical.”

“Sadly,” Arthur said dryly, “I think it does. And I’ll like to know precisely what sort of vector was used to get the spores through the air ventilation. And perhaps some evidence to correlate Nyneve’s conclusions. In the meantime, I’ll alert Bedivere’s secondhand contact in the BVT,”
Roxy found the ‘vector’ after a grim hour’s search - a series of fire extinguishers, empty now, lined up next to the main vents. A further search of the huge hangar floors found it crowded with cargo planes - but nowhere near enough to justify the witness’ opinion that the planes had only flown in, and not out. Some crates still lay open in the cargo hold of a plane that Roxy picked at random to investigate, full of fire extinguisher shells, and the air caught in the illumination of her pocket light was alive with faintly drifting, deadly golden motes.

Around the cargo planes were more and more bodies: hangar staff, pilots and others, all still where they had fallen, with only plants to mark their passing. For a moment, Roxy thought it odd that the plants were alive and blooming like this, in the dark, then she shivered. Of course. They were still feeding on their hosts.

“I’ll say it took only a day for the spores to metasize like that. It’s either accelerated, or the three samples we saw in the Cornish lab were, ah, ‘planted’ on the same day, hours apart.” Merlin said distantly, still sounding shocked. “My God.”

“Look at the logos on the planes,” Nyn said. “Express Postal Network. That’s not one of the Phillips or…” There were faint sounds of typing, “Valentine subsidiaries. Wasn’t mentioned anywhere in the payload we got before out of the servers, neither.”

“Check the flight registers,” Arthur snapped. “If there are any at all in the air right now, I want to know where they are.”

“Roger that.” More typing, then it was Merlin who said, “Ah fuck. One landed in Heathrow hours ago.”

“Send Percival to intercept it. And patch me through to Galahad. His brief’s changed. I need the information off the Phillips servers tonight. We must find Jason Phillips.”
Chapter 13

XII.

Some lady who worked in the forty-second floor had been having the same... stomach... problems for a bloody week. Seriously. Either the lady should be registered as a bioweapon, or an actual bioweapon was slowly being constructed in the women's bathroom.

The only good thing about the Bioweapon Bathroom was that the senior cleaners usually left him to it. Well. Good and bad. The bad part was having to do chemical disposal by himself. The good part was being able to patch in to Merlin, so as to remind himself that this wasn’t some sort of surreal nightmarish alternative reality where Eggsy was really a janitor.

“Hey Merlin,” Eggsy said, when the bomb was defused and sanitised and the whole bathroom, including Eggsy, smelled rather eye-wateringly of industrial-grade disinfectant. “You been all quiet tonight.”

There was a long pause, then to Eggsy’s surprise, Merlin said, “Standing by.”

“Galahad,” Arthur sounded weary again. “Unfortunately, the time frame of your mission has just changed. You must get into the Phillips servers tonight. As you’re aware, the data we acquired earlier from the Cornwall facility indicates that Jason Phillips uses a private cloud, accessible only through a physical server in his office.”

“Got that much,” Eggsy agreed, narrowing his eyes. “Is the arsehole back in town or something? Hiding somewhere?”

“Quite likely.”
“Alright. Just to make sure, I don’t need t’be employed here anymore after I get the info?”

“No,” Arthur sounded faintly amused, because she was clearly evil. “But the restrictions on preserving your cover stands. We don’t intend to escalate the matter as it is now.”

Well damn. Eggsy looked thoughtfully around the bathroom. “Eh Merlin, ‘ow long is it gonna take for you to copy out those servers?”

“Not long. The decryption can take place on my end.”

“All right.” Eggsy grinned, very slowly. “I watched this Bruce Willis film some time back-“

“-oh, here we go-“

“And he kinda set a room on fire with cleaning liquids and things. Is that really possible?”

There was a long moment of silence, then Merlin let out a deep sigh. “Stand by. I’m going to patch
Hector in.”

A lifetime of growing up with a series of increasingly dodgy characters meant that Eggsy was long inured to eccentricity, but after ten minutes, Hector was starting to freak him out. He had also just learned more about explosives in said ten minutes than over all the months of Kingsman training. Thankfully, Merlin deigned to cut Hector off in the middle of an earnest exposition of exactly what you could do to spectacularly implode a microwave, and Eggsy waited in the aft stairwell for the fire alarm to go off.

“Sure you won’t run into anyone else in here?” Merlin asked again.

“Yup. By this time o’ night,” Eggsy checked his phone, “Susie’s over the other side of the building, Matty and Frieda are having a smoko down below, and Jessie’s probably snacking on the fortieth floor.”

“Good work.”

“What?” Eggsy asked, puzzled. “That was just me keeping me eyes and ears open over the week. Nothing to it.”

“Someday,” Merlin said, sounding amused, “Attention to detail like that could save your life. Kingsman is more than just wetwork, Eggsy.”

“Right,” Eggsy blinked owlishly. “Also. Er. Is Arthur listening in right now?”

“No. Why?”

“Didn’t wanna say this while she was patched in, but… is Hector really a Kingsman agent?”

“A very decorated one, yes,” Merlin said, though he sounded amused. “Veteran agents tend to have hobbies to cope with the stresses of their usual life. Not all of them legal.”

“What did Harry like to do?” Eggsy asked, without thinking.

Merlin, however, didn’t even hesitate. “He likes museums.”

“Really? That’s it?” Eggsy noted, disappointed somehow.

“He liked breaking in after opening hours and avoiding or disabling all the security, just so he could look at everything ‘in peace’, Merlin said dryly. “He always re-enabled all the security on his way out, of course.”

“Of course,” Eggsy echoed, blinking, because somehow that was just incredibly cute and somewhat insane and incredibly nerdy all at once.

“I think he’s broken into the Louvre over twenty times,” Merlin recalled, and caught himself short when there was a sudden, muffled sound of an explosion, and the fire alarm started to ring. “All right, Galahad.”

“Time to rock and roll,” Eggsy said, with a grin, because scoldings by Arthur and lessons about taking his life seriously aside, he did love his job.

Taking the steps two at a time, Eggsy made it up to the top floor without even getting out of breath. In the stairwell, the shrill of the fire alarm was muted, and Merlin’s voice was still clear enough as he said, “Emergency services are on their way. I’ll cut the bell once everyone in the building’s
evacuated outside; the fire seems already contained by the sprinkler system, so far. That gives you half an hour."

“Plenty.”

“To get into Jason’s office, plug in the transciever, wait for the upload and then get back down?”

“Oh, I got a story for that,” Eggsy shrugged. “I bet you not everyone bothered to walk all the way down, ’specially the admin staff. People set off fire alarms all the time. Service staff would go, ’cos anything for a fun break, aye? But I’m new, and young, so I’ll just keep at cleaning and make a show of it when everyone’s back.”

“Sounds good…”

“I don’t always break out of a mission in a tank, Merlin.”

“Probably because there isn’t actually one at hand.” Merlin shot back, and Eggsy had to, all right, maybe concede that point. Driving a tank was cool, okay? But yeah. Fine. Eggsy had been learning. He wasn’t that dumb a kid.

The top executive floor was locked, but a quick scan of his service pass flicked the door open, and Merlin hadn’t even had to do any coding on the fly. Eggsy sidled in, wishing that he’d brought something more than just a boot knife and the usual Kingsman utility pack today, and hesitated as low light vision picked up a spiderweb of laser tripwires in the gloom of the office.

“How the hell does this place get cleaned?” Eggsy whispered. “A fucking Roomba?”

“Who usually has this floor?”

“Susie, but given how she’s usually done real fast, maybe she just wipes down the door or something.”

“Or lets loose a Roomba,” Merlin noted dryly, because Eggsy was now vaguely aware of a faint, whirring sound from the side of the room, where a little flat vacuuming disc was industriously circling about the office.

“Who does the bins and stuff?” Eggsy began, then he hesitated. “So that’s why they’ve got that funny pole and clamp thing! She pulls the damned bin over to her and then pushes it back!”

“Non-living objects don’t set off the laser,” Merlin concluded.

“Surely there’s a way to turn it off from over here,” Eggsy said, looking around.

The view of London-at-night gave enough light that he didn’t really need the low light vision on his glasses. Jason Phillips’ office took up an entire floor, a lavish testament to trust fund money and dubious taste. Lush plants dotted the room at intervals, and there was even a huge slender fish tank, suspended from the ceiling by metal struts, within which colourful fish darted around corals.

Eggsy’s target, a sleek Mac, sat on the far end of the floor at the edge of a huge rosewood desk, after contours of couches, a small collection of weird little trophy things and cups on little plinths, suspended paintings, and an empty secretary desk, with said bin in question. No visible bin at Jason’s desk. Maybe he had some sort of private roomba, or maybe the secretary brought the bin out to her desk before she left.

Whatever it was, the paranoia obvious in the room perhaps justified Eggsy just having spent a week
or so undercover washing the bathrooms. But still.

“Y’know,” Eggsy murmured, “Maybe we should’a just broke into here from day one of us finding out that Jason was a nutcase.”

“I told you-“

“Wait,” Eggsy hesitated suspiciously. “Or did you guys think that maybe this place was a dud after all?”

Merlin actually let out a chuckle. It was a little one, but it made Eggsy scowl. “Wow, you right bastards.”

“Something needed to keep you occupied in London. Also,” Merlin added, “I know you’ve learned quite a bit about the mark just from the service staff gossip.”

“Yeah.” Susie’s cousin Em apparently had the contract to clean Jason’s penthouse apartment, and Jason hadn’t been home since Cornwall. Or anywhere to be seen. “Why’d you need me here in London?”

“Just in case,” Merlin said. “It wasn’t my call. Can we discuss the specifics afterwards? Time’s ticking.”

“Well,” Eggsy said helplessly, “Unless my suit has some sort of disguise function, the computer’s way over there, and I can kinda only move along this strip along the wall… ah.”

“You have a solution?”

“Say. These pressure cups in the kit I got from Kingsman. Can they really, really hold my weight over glass?”

One carefully removed square of glass, a very brisk cross wind, and a great deal of cursing after, Eggsy was gingerly mincing his way along the outside of the full-length glass window that curved around Jason Phillips’ office, pressure cups attacked to his hands and feet.


“Of course I’m bloody well looking down,” Eggsy called back gleefully over the wind. “I’m Spiderman!”

“… I forgot for a moment whom I was talking to.”

Eggsy could feel Merlin’s eyeroll all the way from here, but he smirked anyway, and kept moving. Thankfully, Kingsman-issue stuff were all top notch: no accidental dramatic slips, no sudden sharp drops. Eggsy made it all around the bend of glass to the section behind Phillips’ desk, and used the glass cutter to cut up another rectangular section. He pushed it in, allowing it to fall quietly on the thick carpet, then pulled himself into the office behind it.

No laser beams behind the desk. Eggsy allowed himself a moment of smugness, and pulled out the transciever from the pack - and hesitated.

“Uhh. Where’s the CPU?”

“It’s a Mac,” Merlin said, very dryly. “The USB ports are on the back of the screen. Surely you’ve seen a Mac before.”
“Seen one, never tried one.” Eggsy groped around the back and plugged in the transciever. “All good?”

“You have to turn it on.”

Eggsy pressed random buttons on the wireless keyboard for a moment, until Merlin said, even more dryly, “The ‘on’ button is also on the back of the monitor, Eggsy.”

“You’re never going to let me live this down, are you?” It took a few seconds more determined groping before the monitor flickered on, and proceeded to ask for a password.

“No need for that,” Merlin said briskly. “Now just-“

Eggsy never did hear the rest of Merlin’s statement. He had been studying the rather cool-looking wireless mouse, which was probably what saved his life - as he turned to lift it up, a red laser sighting danced up over his wrist.

With a yelp, Eggsy dived under the desk even as a shot whistled past him and shattered the Mac, judging from Merlin’s startled swearing. “It was a fucking trap!” Eggsy snapped, even as another shot slammed into the stuffing of the high leather office chair that he hastily hooked before him.

“You don’t say!”

“There’s probably only so many times you can do the server trick until everyone else cottons on!”

“Eggsy,” Merlin said, with great dignity, “There are a number of armed gentlemen in balaclavas and kevlar vests coming out into the room from the exit to your right. If you do happen to survive this, I’ll personally apologise to you, all right?”

“You do that,” Eggsy grit out, and drew his knife. At least the security beams were gone.

Pulling the closest, small potted plant towards him, he uncurled from under the desk and slung it at the closest guard, then made a run for the wall, getting a foot up and leaping high, even as the sniper from the opposite building got a shot in, bullet whistling past and gouging a pockmark into one of the paintings. Landing with his knees on the back of the stunned guard, Eggsy brought up his hand sharply against the guard’s neck, cutting his throat, throwing the knife in an overarm toss on recovery to take out the next guard, then on his downward arc, grabbed the guard’s Uzi and rolled, firing from the hip as he came up.

Eggsy dodged forward, grabbing the first casualty as he crumpled, bracing the weight of the body against himself and starting to rush forward, firing as he went, bullets stitching into the corpse’s vest as a shield, one down, then two, and then he was close enough to the last to shove the body into the guard, tangling him up, and getting close to jam the muzzle of his Uzi under the guard’s chin and fire a kill shot.

Eight guards down. Easy.

And they had come out from some sort of guard room/armoury, weapons still set neatly in black cases against the wall, including, to Eggsy’s delight, a rocket launcher.

“Eggsy…” Merlin cautioned.

“Aww please. I hate snipers.”

“No, Eggsy.”
“Fine, fine.” Eggsy grumbled, and hunted around until he found an M4 carbine, good enough for his purposes. He set up on the guardroom’s desk, sighted down the M68 CCO, and found the bastard through infrared, sneaking around still on the opposite building floor. Well within 500 metres. Easy shot, though Eggsy had to admit he probably got lucky with the crosswinds.

Sniper downed, Eggsy rose up cautiously from behind the guard desk. “So… now what? Computer’s busted.”

“I pulled a part copy of the files. The computer’s linked to a remote access server that just services this floor. It, and one other access point.”

“Secretary’s?” Somewhere below, the fire alarm was switched off.

“No. I think it’s a phone. Rather close to you, actually.” Merlin hesitated. “Check the guards.”

Eggsy did so, patting down each body, one by one, until he came to the one he had tossed the knife at. Still coughing, but bleeding out, and as he pulled the balaclava off…

“Well, I’ll fucking be damned,” Eggsy breathed.

It was Jason Phillips.

Jason didn’t even seem to recognise him, instead coughing and gurgling as Eggsy stared down at him, mouth pulled wide in a bloody, toothy grin. “Got you,” he was murmuring thickly, over and over, while coughing and coughing blood over his vest. “Got to restore the world. Got you.”

The thrown knife had got him in the throat, along the side, but clearly not deeply enough. Eggsy scowled. Posing as his own security? No wonder they couldn't find the bastard. “Who the fuck d’you think you are, eh? Messing with Kingsman? With Harry? Thought you could get away with it?”

Jason, however, was already gone, drowning in blood, and the last Eggsy heard from him was a murmured, “… a young man… with potential-“

Eggsy froze, blinking and wide-eyed, almost missing Merlin’s sharp, “Eggsy, the phone.”

It still took him a moment to respond, however, patting down Jason’s pockets, until he took a sleek orange Samsung out of an inner vest pocket. In a daze, he entered in a passcode that Merlin read out to him, and then linked the phone via Bluetooth to his own phone as instructed, and set the phone down on the carpet.

“Merlin…”

“Yes, it’s something Harry says to the recruits he selects as candidates,” Merlin said crisply. “All of them. But,” Merlin added dryly, “If you think Harry’s also formed a similar attachment to all of them, you’re mistaken.”

“Still,” Eggsy murmured, because he thought, perhaps, that he understood Jason Phillips now. In a different world, Eggsy could quite easily have been Jason, catastrophically failing out of Kingsman, out of an experience of a lifetime, left with lasting health problems that needed medicating, perhaps PTSD. He could quite easily have fiercely blamed Harry for it, for worship turned just as easily on a knife’s edge to hatred. On the track, with an onrushing train, Eggsy had not cared about what he had to lose. In a different world, how easily might something have snapped instead.

He stared at the body as it bled out and Jason stopped twitching, all the way until Merlin said,
“Done,” then on impulse, Eggsy leaned down, and closed Jason’s eyes.

“So,” Eggsy said, as he took the sleek Sig P320 and a pack of ammo from Jason’s shoulder holster, because although he might be a little sympathetic, he wasn’t exactly above robbing the dead when low on weaponry. “Where next?”

“Still decrypting, but I think you should probably try and find a way to get out of where you are without drawing attention. You’re covered in blood and look like some sort of axe murderer,” Merlin said absently.

“Got me suit on under it. Bit of a change of clothes over here and I can nip out as a different person.” Eggsy started to pull off his janitor’s baggy gear, glad that the button up, loose jacket had been large enough to conceal his suit without making it look too obvious. Unfortunately, he was wearing sneakers instead of the Kingsman oxfords, which looked a little odd with the suit on, but hopefully no one looked down on his way out-

As he was pulling off the horrible yellow trousers, four messages pinged in quick succession on Jason’s phone. Eggsy bent to take a look, and fear shot up in a cold shock up his spine.

“Merlin-“

“I see it,” Merlin said tensely.

Each message read ‘Package Confirmed - On the Way’, with an address named under the first line. The first was the Kingsman shop on Savile Row. The second was the actual location of the Kingsman base in London. The third was Waterloo station. And the fourth was Harry’s house.
Harry was woken up very rudely by the insistent sound of the phone ringing. When he grumbled to himself and rolled over, pulling a pillow over his head - unless the world was ending, whomsoever was so crass to ring at such an ungodly hour in the morning could wait - the fire alarm went off, then the television switched loudly on, and as such, Harry found himself pulling on his dressing gown, stumbling out of his bedroom and down the steps to the hall, to where the telephone was.

The television and the fire alarm switched off when he fumbled the receiver from its socket and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Hello?”

“Harry, this is Merlin.” Merlin’s voice had a nervous tension to it, an urgency that seemed to pull at an old, wired-down impulse within Harry: he felt himself growing alert. Awake. “Listen to me. In your basement, under the third step of the staircase, there’s a small packet. Get the glasses and earpiece from it and put them on. Now, please.”

“What-“

“Please, Harry. Just do it, all right?”

Confused, and a little irritated, Harry hung up, and jogged over to the door leading down to the basement, still yawning. Some determined groping under the dusty stairs yielded a supple leather packet, which contained not only a pair of black spectacles - identical to Eggsy’s - but also a small little remote, like a car fob.

He put on the glasses and the earpiece, and flinched violently when Merlin’s voice sounded, right in his ear, clear and crisp, as though he was standing next to Harry himself. “All right. Good. Close the basement door, then keep going.”

“What’s happening?” Harry demanded, exasperated now.

“In short? Quite likely, a number of people are coming to kill you. Along with the rest of your neighborhood. They don’t exactly care about collateral damage. Now move please.”

Harry froze, for a moment, then without a further word, he walked up the steps, closed the door, and headed back down. “Are you sending people here? Or the police?”

“We’re… a little short staffed right now. The police won’t get to you in time, and they’re not exactly equipped to deal with this situation. Keep going. Right,” Merlin said, when Harry was past the dusty cloth-covered old furniture and picture frames. “Press your thumb to the fob.”

Harry did so, and to his surprise, a small blue scan ran across his thumb, then there was a faint grinding sound, and the wall slid across and away into a hidden recess. Fluorescent lights banked on in the room that was revealed, a long stone chamber of a room, and as Harry edged into it, the wall closed behind him.

Racks upon racks of guns were strapped to the walls. Pistols, semi-automatics, rifles, even some sort of minigun, ugly and evil-looking. “Those are just the trophies,” Merlin said, “Keep going.”

“Trophies?”
“Collecting front pages of the Sun? Really?” Merlin noted dryly. “Didn’t you think that was rather odd? It was a bit of a friendly little jab against the Percival family, I think - you always did have a strange sense of humour,” Merlin added, as Harry walked rather dazedly past rows upon rows of weaponry.

“The Percival family?”

“They collect front pages of the Times after a big job. Sign of a job well done or something, for their exploit not to be on the pages. But the Sun? You could probably save the PM from drowning in broad daylight in the Thames and it wouldn’t feature unless a supermodel had a wardrobe malfunction on the way.”

“And so I collected… guns?”

“From your missions. Not all of them. Ah, here we are.”

Harry found himself looking at some sort of odd… workbench. Tools had been rolled neatly into a pouch, that sat on one end of the bench, and there was some sort of cast, a mould or a press of sorts, a scale, neat containers of gunpowder, funnels… Harry took in a long, shuddering breath, and Merlin said, his voice gentle, “Do you know what all that is?”

“It’s mine, isn’t it?” Harry murmured, tracing his fingers wonderingly along the edge of the workbench, the names of his tools leaping into his mind, just like a foreign language had, in the Kingsman shop, slotting into place only when put front and centre. “Bore cleaners… copper solvents… that’s my… did I make my own bullets?”

“You were a bit of a control freak. Said it’s easier to calibrate the load in a jacket of choice. You used to get into these hour-long disagreements with Lanc… ah, the previous Lancelot about moly coating and the right type of cleaning rod.”

More shadows from a life that Harry didn’t remember. He touched his fingers to the press, and felt a brief, dizzy spell of vertigo, then Harry grit his teeth again, and looked around. He found a few loaded magazines, kept neatly in a case on a shelf, and then the rifle, mounted in a cabinet. It was an ugly thing, long and sleek and black, and as Harry slowly opened the case, Merlin said, “It’s an AS50 semi-automatic-“

“I know,” Harry said, and there was another jolt of vertigo, as he lifted the rifle from its bracket. It was lighter than he had expected it to be, for a moment - then Harry remembered, dimly, that he had acquired this very deadly piece of craftsmanship because of its titanium frame; because it could be disassembled within minutes, and because, if necessary, it could be serviced without tools. He closed his eyes for a moment, breathing in, then he took a few of the magazines, stuffed them into the pockets of his dressing gown, and jogged down the rest of the long corridor.

“Leads to the house across the street,” Merlin said. “You own it as well, by the way. More or less for this very purpose.”

“Sounds like I was a very paranoid person.”

“With good reason, it seems.” Merlin hesitated. “I’m monitoring traffic. You probably have enough time to put on your kit.”

Harry began to ask, then stopped himself as he noted, at the end of the other cases of weapons, a discreet little wardrobe. Ah, well. Wiped memory or not, Harry had always felt better in a suit. The magazines went into a briefcase sitting at the bottom of the wardrobe, which already held a P226 and
spare ammo, then Harry buttoned up a pinstripe charcoal suit over a pale blue shirt, adjusted his cufflinks, and picked up the briefcase and his rifle. No time for a tie, likely.

The fob opened the other door, as well, and Harry stepped out into a seemingly identical basement, the lights flicking on as he took the steps briskly up. This house wasn’t furnished, its front door bricked up, and as Harry hesitated for a moment, Merlin said, “The exit’s at the back.”

“Somehow,” Harry said wryly, “I don’t think that you made me walk through that basement out of sheer necessity.”

“It’s a different sort of necessity,” Merlin said apologetically. “Like I mentioned. We’re short-staffed. Law enforcement’s not equipped to deal with this. And. Frankly. You could go, if you want.”

“I don’t remember how to shoot a gun, let alone a gun like this.”

“I’ll be driving.”

“My right hand-“

“You’re fine with either hand.”

Harry took in another, slow breath, then he took the stairs up, instead, heading to the second floor, then up to the attic. In another life, he had set this up as a roost: there was even a rope ladder, scrolled up neatly beside a closed window at the back, while the window facing the front of the street was narrow, and set close to the floor, with a mat beside it, and a pair of binoculars. Faint scarring on the wooden floor indicated that at some point in time, Harry had taken the rifle up here, if only to calibrate the sights, and despite himself, he shuddered. For a moment, it felt as though Harry was walking over his own grave.

The bipod sat neatly into the faint scars on the ground, and the barrel slotted through the window. Harry rested the stock against his shoulder, sighting down the scope, then he loaded the first box magazine, each motion as practiced and near subconscious as putting the kettle on, as knowing how long to steep his tea. It didn’t even feel odd resting a finger from his left hand on the trigger, his right elbow braced on the ground.

“When you have to line up a sight,” Merlin said, his voice gentle, inexorable, “Take a deep breath and hold it. Now look to your right.”

There was a small gray van driving down towards the street where Harry’s house was, and through the scope, Harry noted that oddly enough, the driver and his passenger were both wearing full hazmat suits.

“OK,” Merlin said. “First shot’s a cold-bore. You’ll probably miss, so don’t panic. The wind’s a bit of a bitch, and the target’s moving. Just take the shot the best you can. I’ve got eyes on the ground, I’ll calibrate the next shot as we go.”

Harry sucked in a slow breath, pushing away his uncertainty, the cold knot of fear and doubt, held it, sighted down the scope, and fired. The rifle bucked against him, but his body had already automatically braced for the recoil, and the spent bullet tinkled on the ground. Even as he let his breath out, Merlin said crisply, “Right, I’ve got it. You have four more shots, by the way. Keep the sight as steady as you can. Follow the van. To the left. Bit higher - now!”

The rifle kicked again, and this time, the van abruptly veered to the side, as though swerving to avoid something, and smashed into a lamp post.
This time, Harry didn’t need a spotter. As the man in the front passenger seat stumbled out, dazed, Harry aimed for centre mass and fired twice, the first punching the man back against the van, the second going through his chest. He fired his last shot through the passenger window, then reloaded, breathing out, and then back in, as the back door of the van opened, people in hazmat suits spilling out.

“Don’t fire into the back of the van,” Merlin cautioned, and Harry was barely listening, all muscle memory as he sighted again and pulled the trigger, the rifle kicking against his shoulder again and again, reloading only once more, until the four men who had come out of the van were dead or dying.

“All clear. The police will take over from here,” Merlin said crisply. “Head to the back of the house. I’ve sent a car.”

“Not back into the basement?” Harry asked, his tone wry and only a little shaky, as he got up from the mat and picked up the briefcase of spare magazines.

“Like I said, we’re a little bit short staffed.” Merlin said apologetically. “And I’m suddenly no longer sure if retirement actually suited you after all, old friend.”

Harry took in another slow breath, then he smiled thinly. He hadn’t felt joy when he had killed those men. But the weight of the rifle in his hands felt like the return of a piece of the puzzle that he had never thought he would miss, the smell of cordite sharp and welcome, perhaps a fitting coda to a week spent watching the recorded memories of a life that Harry had thought completely lost to him.

He knew this rifle, intricately; knew even the bullets, all of which he had cast by hand; and it felt, for the first time, as though he had had the life that Percival had sketched, that Merlin referred to, that the videos had shown. Even the doubt he had felt was now fading.

“Yes. I suppose it really didn’t.”

6.0.

“What’s the situation?” Harry asked, seated in the back of the automated car, reloading his rifle, then slotting it into the lightweight travel golf bag that had been waiting for him on the floor of the car, zipping up.

“Jason Phillips escalated the situation.” Quickly, Merlin explained what had happened - Roxy’s discovery of the planes and the deadly ‘clean up’ in Austria, Eggsy’s firefight in Phillips Inc. “Percival’s on Waterloo, the two Gawain candidates are on base, and Galaha- ah, Eggsy- is on his way to the shop.”

Galahad. Harry felt a twinge of pain at the name, frowning, but as he stared out of the window into the street, it passed. “Waterloo’s going to be a nightmare.”

“Probably. We have a feeling that the Waterloo package’s probably delayed to time with the rush hour, though. Gives Percival a bit of breathing space.”

“What about you?”

“Holding up well so far,” Merlin said briskly. “They threw most of their weight against this old house. Outer perimeter’s been breached, but we’ve managed to keep them there for now.”

“What was in the back of the van?”
“Bioweapon of sorts.” Merlin hesitated. “One moment. I have to patch in to Percival.”

Harry watched the streets as the car took another precise turn, dodging traffic and a few angrily honking cars, speeding towards Savile Row. He felt an odd sense of calm, particularly given how he had just killed six men within the space of fifteen minutes. Alert. The world seemed as though it was finally, after all this while, coming sharply into focus, and although his memory still felt like a punctured sieve, Harry felt like he was only now beginning to find stable footing.

“Back,” Merlin said, when the car came to a stop outside Queensberry House, on Old Burlington Street. “Ah hell,” Merlin added, as Harry heard the sudden staccato of gunshots, one street away. “Better hurry.”

Fully suited up, with the golf bag in one hand and the briefcase in the other, Harry probably looked like a businessman arriving early from some sort of out-of-town golf trip, and as he walked briskly up to the elegant facade of the building, the glass doors unlocked before him.

“Head left. There’s an emergency stairwell that’ll get you up to the roof.”

Security again unlocked itself the moment Harry drew close, and Harry started up the stairs. “What’s the situation?”

“Eggsy’s pinned down in a firefight outside Kingsman. Percival’s still working Waterloo. The base just lost the second perimeter.” There was a long pause, punctuated by the faint sound of a gun being loaded in the background, then, “The door up top’s unlocked. Unfortunately, I’m going to have to leave you to it. If… all goes well, the ground floor doors will unlock for you on your way out.”

“I… see. Good luck,” Harry offered, and found that he meant it wholeheartedly.

“And to you, Harry,” Merlin said, and went silent.

The sound of gunshots was growing intermittent as Harry emerged on the roof of the building and jogged to the edge. The roof felt vaguely familiar to him, just like the Italian restaurant had, just like his London house was, and Harry looked around for a moment before he found it - a small folding chair and a mat, wrapped up in weatherproof sheeting and hidden against a vent, out of sight from the street.

He took the chair, unfolding it, trying not to look at the street as he unzipped the golf bag and drew out his rifle, propping the bipod on the stone balustrade, the stock against his shoulder, and sighted down.

The Kingsman shop was across the street from his vantage point, and to his right, ducked behind a car, Eggsy was reloading a pistol. Somewhat incongruously, a black umbrella lay beside him, pockmarked with a large hole, probably from some sort of high caliber bullet, and Eggsy was bleeding from a scrape down his cheek and a shallow scalp wound, his sharp white collar half-soaked a bright red.

Harry swallowed his temper and checked down along the street. Also pinned behind cars were men in hazmat suits, from two vans this time; further down the street, blocked from Eggsy by a van, two men were hauling fire extinguishers out of the back of a gray van.

Frowning, Harry aimed, and took in a breath, holding it. The first cold shot struck the asphalt, making the two men startle, but Harry had already adjusted his sights, trusting to muscle memory, and the men were soon slumping over, centre mass over their bright suits spotting with blood. Chaos erupted on the intruders’ side as Harry kept pulling the trigger, even though he only managed to hit
one man in the leg, until his magazine was empty, then he had to duck back out of sight to reload as
a stray shot grazed too close, gouging a furrow in the balustrade.

When Harry cautiously sighted down his rifle again, he was just in time to watch Eggsy clean up.
The young agent had taken advantage of the confusion Harry had sowed to bull forward, nimble and
quick and so, so beautifully deadly, already the last man standing. Harry ducked out of sight again as
Eggsy glanced up at the roof, closing his eyes briefly, then he got up and started for the stairwell.

It was worth all the tension and stress of the last hour to watch Eggsy’s jaw drop, when Harry
walked out of the Savile Row street level exit.

“Holy fuck. You’re the sniper?”

“Old habits die hard.” Harry shrugged, then stiffened up as Eggsy stepped over and hugged him
tightly, laughter bubbling up within him, pressed against Harry. “Eggsy. I’m not as yet-“

“Yeah. I kinda guessed. You always seemed like more of a hands on sort’a guy if you could help it.
Fuck. I thought for a while there… I was so worried. I knew some of them were coming for you. I
would’a gone to help you if I could rather than here, but Merlin said he would deal with it and I had
to trust him-“

“And you made the right decision,” Harry said gently, as Eggsy pressed his cheek against Harry’s
shoulder. “I would’ve been offended had you chosen otherwise.”

“S’pose you would’ve been.” Eggsy pulled away, openly reluctant, flushed under his bloodied skin.
“God. You’re awesome. I don’t even. I mean. You don’t even remember all this and you still…
saved your own arse and then mine. Wow.”

Harry smiled faintly, gratified by the enthusiastic praise despite himself, and in his ear, Arthur said
dryly, “If you’ve quite finished, Galahad, the Kingsman base is still in a spot of trouble at present.”

“Yeah. I’m on my way.” Eggsy hesitated, glancing at Harry. “Um. Not much space for a sniper over
in the base, I’m ‘fraid. You got anything smaller?”

“That I do.”

“Huh.” Eggsy grinned then, heart-stoppingly beautiful, all mayhem and violence and mischief. “In
that case. Wanna come with?”
Chapter 15

Merlin.

The Merlin department hadn’t actually needed to be rescued, thanks very much, and most of the injuries actually came from Engineering’s over-enthusiastic use of ‘side projects’, half of which Merlin hadn’t actually seen, most of which Merlin probably would’ve veto’ed in the field.

They had dug the two Gawain candidates out from the dorm rooms where they’d been holed up in the firefight, and cleared through to the second perimeter, made it to Maintenance in time to stop the base from being gassed, and then had to head down to Transit to dig Eggsy and Harry out from their own entrenched firefight with more intruders.

After which point, as the Gawain candidates and Eggsy had high-fived, Merlin had herded all of his minions back to the Department and to their jobs, because the Ops room didn’t run itself and everyone in the Merlin department knew that if left alone, agents couldn’t find their arses with their hands even if they tried.

By the time the situation was over, including the fiasco in Waterloo, Merlin was exhausted, and a little grumpy as he was summoned to the debrief, which was being held at the Round Table. The other knights patched in, except for Percival, and some of them looked curiously over at Harry, who was standing behind the Galahad chair, his good hand pressed over the top, having refused Eggsy’s repeated invitations to take the seat instead.

“… the eco-terrorist cell was located in Waterloo and disposed of,” Merlin concluded. “Percival is still on the scene. And thanks to Lancelot’s work in Austria, all of the Valentine bases that we know of are now accounted for. Kingsman is secure - for now - but we have yet to investigate how widespread the leak was from the previous Arthur.”

“So the previous Arthur was the leak?” Hector asked.

“And the previous Gawain,” Merlin added grimly. “They burned all your covers and our bases. Thankfully, it appears that this list was not further disseminated - but we’re still investigating.”

“Good riddance to bad rubbish then,” Bors said, with an approving nod at Eggsy, who grinned. Nyn had done an exemplary job of patching up Eggsy, all the while with the both of them chatting with Roxy as she flew back towards London, and save for his bloodstained collar and the compress on his head, he looked fairly put together again.

“We’ve arranged for much of the rest of the information and evidence to be turned over to MI5,” Arthur said briskly.

“What in the world was Phillips thinking?” Bors said, shaking his head. “Human plants? Fungus bombs?”

“Something about,” Merlin checked his notes, “Replanting the earth while also reducing the general population, I do believe. Valentine had nascent plans to conduct the, ah, gassing on a large scale, but he concluded ultimately that the resources required were too great, and decided on using SIM cards instead. Phillips revived his second plan after Valentine’s death, though with the main intention of conducting his personal vendetta against us.”

“What the hell was up with that business about the tiger?” Eggsy demanded.
“Seems it was all part and parcel of a cloning program for repopulating the world’s endangered species. It was stalled a year or so ago when Valentine decided to commit all his resources to the cards, but some remnants were left.”

“Terrorists nowadays,” Kay said, and there was a general consensus of nodding around the Round Table, even as Merlin saw that Eggsy’s face had grown carefully pinched, as though swallowing laughter.

“Good work, everyone,” Arthur said, probably also sensing the imminent outburst. “Dismissed.”

“May I add,” Bedivere said, from the end of the table, “It’s a pleasure to see you again, Harry.”

Merlin glanced at Harry, but Harry merely smiled. “I’m still rather out of sorts, I’m afraid.”

“You’re alive,” Kay said briskly. “Good enough for me.” There were a few nods around the table, even from Tristan, a knight whom Merlin knew had had his differences with Harry, often quite pointedly.

Harry looked surprised, blinking, and after the knights signed off, Arthur opened up her laptop. “The weeks ahead are going to require a great deal of introspection,” she said briskly. “The security breach that just occurred was unforgivable. We’re going to have to conduct a thorough security audit on Kingsman.”

“Of course,” Merlin said, flicking through his iPad. “I’ll start the procedures.”

“And… what are the casualties, Merlin?”

“From Kingsman? Ah… we’ve lost twelve personnel. Ten from gunfire, all of them security, two Engineering from a misuse of a modified sort of grenade launcher which I certainly had not approved for testing in the field.” Merlin scowled briefly. “We also have thirteen injured, two critically.”

Arthur exhaled. “Keep me updated on their progress. But as such. It seems that we’re rather short-handed after all, Hart.”

“So it would seem,” Harry hesitated for a moment. “I suppose I wouldn’t mind pitching in, at least until Kingsman is back on its feet.”

“Don’t say that,” Eggsy protested, though he was grinning again. “She might make you the tea lady or something.”

“I do happen to make a mean cup of tea,” Harry noted, straight-faced, and Arthur actually smiled, even if it was thin and sharp.

“Don’t tempt me.”

Eggsy.

Eggsy hadn’t expected much out of the Phantom of the Opera. He liked musicals all right, he supposed, but he’d heard about the plot and wasn’t really sold on how weirdly dramatic it all was. Still, since it was maybe sort of a date, with Harry Hart, Eggsy didn’t particularly give a damn, the theatre was nice and posh, and although the box seats weren’t as private as Eggsy would’ve liked, at least he was about to spend an entire evening with Harry.

They had a pre-theatre dinner close by, somewhere French and also posh, not that Eggsy could remember very much about the dinner at all. Harry had shown up in black tie to pick Eggsy up from
his house, in an elegant black napped herringbone suit, the hint of Kingsman-issue cufflinks under the sleeve, a pale pink pocket square, and a silk black bow tie. A bow tie. But the clincher had been the gloves, supple black leather under the stark white line of his sleeves. Eggsy was fairly sure that he had died and gone to heaven.

It turned out that Phantom was… actually pretty awesome, as weirdly dramatic as it was, though Eggsy still wasn’t quite sure about some of the salient plot points. “If my mirror started talking to me,” he murmured to Harry, during a scene change, “I would’ve freaked the fuck out.”

“Eggsy, please,” Harry said dryly, though he patted Eggsy’s knee absenthly, with his gloved hand, and thank fuck that the theatre was dim, because Eggsy had gone from zero to achingly hard in a blink.

He had managed to calm down by the intermission, and when Harry asked him what he had thought of the show so far, Eggsy actually managed a semi-intelligent, “The Phantom’s pretty good. The singer, that is. Even if the character’s kinda a bit of a creeper.”

Harry arched an eyebrow. “It’s meant to be a tragic three-way love story.”

“I thought you didn’t remember how it went.”

“I read the programme,” Harry pointed out, and oh yes. The bloody programme.

“I still think you could’a saved some quid and skimmed it off Wikipedia if you really wanted,” Eggsy groused, because bloody hell, but that shiny flyer thing had been fucking expensive. It should be illegal. “Love story my ass. Man’s a stalker. I seen it before,” Eggsy said, warming to his topic. “My mate’s sis was being stalked by some creeper who would follow her around whenever she walked home from school and would’na take ‘no’ for an answer.”

“Oh? Did you alert the police?”

“Nah. Out where we lived? Would’ve have mattered sod all.” Eggsy grinned. “Me and the brother just went and kicked seven living shits out of him. And when he came back with friends, we kicked the shit out of them too. Before I ever even joined up with Kingsman, so don’t get tetchy about it.”

“And so the cycle of violence perpetrates itself,” Harry said, though he smiled faintly as he said it.

“Anyway, I hope Mr Masked Stalker dies,” Eggsy said, just to see Harry frown at him in mild reproach.

As it turned out, the Phantom didn’t die, despite kidnapping, random acts of vandalism and various dramatic shenanigans, and on the way out, Eggsy supposed that he had enjoyed it after all, and thanked Harry for asking him along. “Though I still wanna pay for my ticket,” Eggsy reminded Harry.

“No doubt,” Harry said, which wasn’t exactly Harry-speak for ‘yes’.

“Well then, at least let me buy you a drink,” Eggsy said, trying to sound suave but probably sounding a little desperate instead, and when Harry hesitated for a moment but agreed, they wound up in a wine bar, a touch too posh for Eggsy’s blood, usually, but it was nice and dim and they had a quiet table off the side.

They drew a few looks, like this, the way they hadn’t really in the theatre, and as though guessing at Eggsy’s train of thought, Harry murmured, “At the theatre we probably could’ve passed as father and son. Not here, however.”
“What’s wrong with passing as a sugar daddy and his sweet young thing?” Eggsy smirked, but Harry’s composure seemed unbreakable, as usual: he merely sighed.

“Eggsy, I don’t wish to give you the wrong impression.”

“’Bout what?” Eggsy asked, with a sudden sinking feeling; it felt like cold water had just been splashed all over him.

“You’re a very handsome young man,” Harry said delicately, and God but his attention was like a drug, as always. “But I am old enough to be your father.”

“Are you gonna tell me that it’s ‘just not done’?” Eggsy asked, blinking. “Because that’s so ten years ago.”

“I wasn’t going to,” Harry said gently. “But I don’t believe that falling headfirst into matters is going to improve the matter. As tempting as it might be.”

Tempting. Harry said it was tempting. Eggsy began to smile, slowly at first, but then he probably ended up grinning like a puppy, even when the wine arrived, and he watched Harry go through all the motions of sniffing and sipping and nodding at the waiter to pour them both a glass each. Eggsy just sipped, because he was going to be damned if he had to posh it up just for the look of it.

“I know you’re judging me,” Eggsy told Harry.

“Maybe a little,” Harry admitted, though he smiled, this time a trifle indulgently. “Didn’t this feature into part of your Kingsman education?”

“Well yeah. If I got to, I can make it look good.” Eggsy said, and performed the part, just to prove it, every posh little swirl and flick of the wrist, though he playfully pressed his tongue to the rim of the glass after sipping, and yeah, there it was. Harry’s eyes were darkening.

“Eggsy.”

“The thing is,” Eggsy said, as evenly as he could, “I know you think I’m probably some dumb kid who can’t keep his hands to himself. And okay. Maybe that’s more than half right, ‘specially where you’re concerned. But if you wanna, well, just be friends, while life settles down, sure, y’know.”

“I think you shouldn’t set your heart on an old man,” Harry said, so very seriously, and Eggsy nearly choked on his next sip of wine.

“Wow Harry. Seriously. Sometimes I think you live in a separate world in your head, one where you’re not, even right now, the hottest guy in the room. Seriously.”

“I beg to differ,” Harry said, flicking his eyes pointedly up and down Eggsy, and Eggsy shot him a look of mock innocence.

“Same way you think that you maybe shouldn’t give a dumb kid a second chance?” Eggsy said offhandedly, or tried to - he probably didn’t sound anywhere casual enough for it to be a joke, and he sucked in a soft breath as Harry reached over the table, and rubbed the leather-clad pads of his left hand lightly over the knuckles of Eggsy’s right.

“Give me some time.” Harry said softly. “To get… used to this life. To learn about you, all over again, this time without presumptions. Then we’ll see.”

“Well sure,” Eggsy said, perhaps too quickly, because he had rather thought Harry would end up
being old-fashioned about it all, and had been dreading the worst. “I can wait. Are you… coming back to Kingsman?”

“I still haven’t decided. Why?”

“Cos if you’re gonna do the thing where you stay away from me and stuff.”

“That’s not what I intend to do.” It was Harry’s turn to look a little puzzled. “I merely said that I would prefer not to leap straight into what transpired that day yet again.”

“So…” Eggsy said, tilting his head, hope brimming over, enough that his voice hitched a little, “You’re actually saying… You wanna date first, but don’t wanna move past second base until you’re kinda sure of things. Is that it?”

“… Suddenly, I have a feeling that the generation gap between us is causing a persistent, if intermittent communication breakdown,” Harry said dryly. “But essentially, yes.”

“Oh. Oh.” Eggsy was definitely grinning foolishly now, but he didn’t give a fuck if anyone else saw it. “Well. Fuck yes.”

Harry’s gloved hand squeezed Eggsy’s, then he picked up his wine glass and took a sip. “Next week, if you’re free, I wouldn’t mind your company to a showing of Les Misérables.”

“Sure thing.” Eggsy frowned. “Isn’t that the one ‘bout the guy who goes to jail for nineteen years cos he stole some bread? That’s fucked up.”

“… As always, you’re full of surprises, Eggsy.”

Roxy.

Roxy really didn’t see what was so frightening about Five Nights at Freddy’s. It was, as far as she could tell, a matter of logical precision, calculation, situational awareness and timing, and playing it in an all dark room didn’t exactly add to the suspense.

As such, when Eggsy’s mum opened the door all of a sudden during the Fourth Night, and said, “Eggsy, would you and Roxy like a cuppa cocoa-“ and Eggsy let out a shriek and fell off his chair, Roxy merely glanced up and said, politely, “Yes thank you, Mrs Unwin.”

“Good lord, what are the two of you up to?” Michelle Unwin said, surprised, and behind her, rather unsurprisingly, Harry came briskly up the steps, peering into the room as Eggsy self-consciously righted his chair and got up.

“We’re playing a video game,” Roxy explained, as deadpan as ever. “I was told that it would be frightening.”

“It is bloody fucking scary.” Eggsy said. “You’re not human, Roxy.”

“Eggsy, that’s not a nice thing to say,” Michelle said, even as Harry noted, “I don’t believe you should use that sort of language before your mother.”

“Ah, pardon me,” Harry added, and Michelle smiled at him. Apparently that had been a bit of a surprise, or so Eggsy had said: he’d fully expected his mum to ‘freak out’ when he had brought Harry home, but apparently the freaking out was minimal and his mum had been more or less on board. Despite clearly recognising Harry from long before.
“I’ll get two cups of cocoa then,” Michelle said, and went back downstairs, even as Harry stepped into the room, as graceful as ever, his expression going a little soft as he got to Eggsy’s side, his hand a touch too possessive to be entirely proper as it rested lightly over Eggsy’s shoulder.

Then again, maybe Michelle taking it all fairly well had been a given. Harry and Eggsy were obviously very close to becoming attached at the hip, or so the word ran in the Merlin department, and it was, Roxy decided, pretty cute.

Katie had thought so as well, now in her role as the new Gawain, and as she was the latest, youngest Kingsman, she was the one tasked the most often to assist Harry in his newly created position of Blaise, overseeing security, training, and the administration of the Kingsman base, freeing up Arthur to work on client management. The arrangement hadn’t been without its hiccups, but it was, so far, settling in fairly well.

“Jesus fuck!” Eggsy flinched, because thanks to the distraction, Roxy’s character was now dead on screen.

“Ah well,” Roxy said, then added, “Nyn, this doesn’t count. There was an interruption.”

“Guess you can try again,” Nyn said into her ear, and presumably Eggsy’s as well. “But you’re doing good, doll. You didn’t even scream once.’

“Did you?”

“Nope.”

“Hm,” Harry was looking at the screen, “Is this what was upsetting Merlin so much?”

“He’s a sensitive soul,” Nyn said, and sniggered.

“Someday,” Eggsy said slowly, to Nyn, “You an’ Roxy are gonna take over the world.”

“Maybe.” Roxy almost started up a new game, but hesitated instead, and made a show of asking conscientiously. “Maybe Harry would like to have a go?”

“Now this I got to see,” Nyn said gleefully. Roxy smiled to herself, even as she got up from the seat. Sometimes, girls just had to stick together.

Harry.

Harry had suffered the blindfold with patience, and the car trip, and the confusing, somewhat disorienting walk over cobblestones to a flat surface, steps, a walk, more steps, and a longer walk, all the while listening to Eggsy’s soothing, “Almost there, we doing good, almost there,” until he was guessing now, reaching for an echo of an old memory, but Harry had given his word not to peek, and so he waited, all the way until they finally came to a stop.

“Here we are,” Eggsy said, hushed, and the blindfold was untied and pulled away.

Harry took in a soft breath, a reverent one. After all, he was standing before something that had defied time itself, that transcended beauty and genius. Before him, the Mona Lisa smiled her inscrutable, secretive smile.

“Oh,” Harry whispered, for sound seemed suddenly crass in the chamber which housed this small painting, in Paris’ vast cathedral to everything that was exquisite in the world; and only at night did the Louvre get the respectful silence that it deserved.
“It’s kinda a lot smaller than I thought it would be,” Eggsy said, with a faint, mischievous smile.

“How did you even manage to-“

“’ere now, there’s no call to be insulting,” Eggsy said, though he chuckled when Harry started to protest. “Naw. Okay. Maybe I did have some help, and probably have’ta buy Merlin a drink in the future. But hey. It’s our anniversary.”

“I… see.”

“… you all right? You’re starting to go all-“ Eggsy’s words were muffled into a squeak as Harry abruptly pulled him over, with an arm around the small of his back, over the tapered fit of his sleek charcoal suit, all hand-finished wool; nimble fingers curled quickly over Harry’s shoulders as Eggsy leaned up into the kiss, enthusiastic as always, the sound of it perhaps a trifle obscene, where they were. But if the Louvre was a cathedral to all things beautiful; well, Eggsy like this was beautiful, warm and pliant in Harry’s arms, his eyes bright with mischief and his mouth curled into a cheeky little smile.

“So,” Eggsy murmured, stroking Harry’s shoulders. “I’m thinking that you like my present.”

“Most assuredly.”

“I haven’t done a proper tour of this place,” Eggsy said, “Though I hear it’ll actually take days to finish up, so maybe we see what we can and then do a round two some other day. Since all this is new to you all over again.”

“I never figured you for an art lover.”

“Well,” Eggsy looked Harry archly over, “The art that I’m into is kinda more specialised.”

Still, Eggsy was pleasant company, as Harry took a slow tour of the Denon Wing, Eggsy’s hand curled in the crook of Harry’s arm, silent, instead of providing the stream of irreverent commentary that Harry had expected. “You’re being very quiet,” Harry told Eggsy, as they paused before La belle jardinière, with its exquisite contrast of light and dark.

“Mm,” Eggsy squeezed Harry’s arm lightly. “I do kinda want you to enjoy this.”

“And why,” Harry inquired, “Would I enjoy all this any more with you silent?”

For while perhaps beauty was what had first drawn Harry as he was now to Eggsy - the year had taught him more, and now physical beauty was the least of why he was drawn to this boy beside him, so much like a gift made flesh, especially when Eggsy smiled like this, joyous and earnest, as though the whole arc of his own personal universe slanted naturally towards Harry.

“Right then,” Eggsy said brightly, “I s’pose I’ve been wondering why all these old timey paintings have so many people without their knickers on.”

“It’s called an appreciation of the human body, Eggsy.”

“This painting here has a kid without his kit on. Just saying. They even painted his dick.”

Harry pulled a face. “It’s not meant to be erotic,” he said, mildly scandalised, despite considerable exposure to date to Eggsy and his tendency to say the completely unexpected. Eggsy laughed, and allowed himself to be tugged along, and the time to leave came all too soon. Eggsy was apologetic, up until Harry kissed him for it, then he was grinning and smug again as they let themselves out.
“Merlin will take care of the security,” Eggsy said, when Harry ventured a question about access. “C’mon. Let’s head back.”

“More surprises?” Harry inquired, as they crossed the grounds towards their car.

“Nah, nothing this grand up the rest of me sleeve,” Eggsy admitted, “But we still have the rest of the night for you to show me how much you liked my present,” he added, and winked saucily as Harry took in a breath and quickened his step.

Harry’s apartment was in the Latin Quarter, between Notre Dame, la Sorbonne and the Pantheon, thankfully relatively close by. The moment the door was closed behind them, Eggsy was tugging off Harry’s tie, his mouth hungry against his, and they somehow stumbled out of their shoes, glasses discarded on the shoe cabinet, jackets left draped on the couch on the second floor, ties and belts and socks on the stair up to the loft, and it was only Eggsy who could do this to Harry, with just a touch and a kiss.

Eggsy tumbled back onto the bed with a laugh, unbuttoning his shirt and tossing it off onto the wooden floor, then shoving off his trousers and briefs all at once and- Harry quite possibly stopped breathing right then. Eggsy had been wearing a black plug, the naughty boy, nestled between pert cheeks, strapped on, and seeing Harry’s stunned stare, Eggsy merely wriggled his arse shamelessly and winked salaciously, cock already hard against his belly.

“Thought we might save some time,” Eggsy said lazily, and he had taken his time in the shower before they had headed out to Maison Blanche for dinner; God, this boy had sat through dinner like this, then walked with him through the Louvre and- “You sure you’re all right there?”

“My God. You’re perfect,” Harry breathed, and Eggsy blushed, though he leaned back on his elbows and licked his kiss-reddened lips, watching as Harry shed the rest of his clothes with fumbling urgency and climbed onto the bed to kiss him, to taste his maddening young lover, all until Eggsy pushed at his shoulders and whimpered prettily and gasped, “C’mon, Harry.”

“I think it would be remiss to devote any less attention to my second present of the night than I did to my first,” Harry replied, and got his teeth around the tender lobe of Eggsy’s ear, tugging lightly until he heard a whine, and Eggsy rubbed his cock pointedly up against Harry’s thigh, arms curling around his neck.

“C’mon,” Eggsy urged. “I need you inside me. Been thinking about it all night. Need you to fuck me now.”

Harry ignored him, pinning Eggsy down with his palms against Eggsy’s shoulders, and kissed him instead, all until Eggsy had stopped babbling and squirming, taking his time, and when Eggsy was finally, dazedly pliant, Harry kissed his way down, revelling in the velvety taste of Eggsy’s skin, salty with sweat, in the tremble of his flanks as Harry pressed his tongue playfully into Eggsy’s navel. Eggsy’s elegant hands were curled in Harry’s hair, restless, his thighs rubbing against Harry’s shoulders and spread wide, breaths in a staccato that climbed in an urgent tempo. When Harry took a first, thorough taste of Eggsy’s cock with the flat of his tongue, Eggsy bit out a stifled cry and leaked a wet drop of come over his belly.

Slicking up his fingers with spit, Harry pushed himself up, grasping Eggsy’s straining cock and stroking roughly, watching how readily Eggsy bucked into his grip, fingers digging into the bed, trembling and arching up and finally coming with a shout, as Harry got his fingers between Eggsy’s thighs and pushed lightly at the plug, making a mess over Harry’s fingers.

“You beautiful boy,” Harry murmured, and he was so hard now that it hurt. Eggsy smirked at him,
dazed but still so smug, and pulled Harry’s soiled hand up to his mouth, to lick the fingers clean, all teasing little laps of his tongue, the hot brushes of his shallow breaths so very intimate over Harry’s palm.

When Eggsy was done, he rolled over, onto his arms and knees, ignoring the hand that Harry had pressed on his hip to still him. “You do me harder like this,” Eggsy said, with one of his smug little grins over his shoulder, and… yes. That was about all that Harry’s self-control could take for the night.

The plug was tossed onto the bed, the discreet little tube grabbed hastily from the side drawer and used up, then Harry’s next breath hissed out behind clenched teeth as he lined himself up and sank in, Eggsy’s body opening up pliantly for him, sweetly tight and hot and so, so good, perfect with Eggsy bowed like this against him, hands clenched, gasping a litany of “Oh God, oh God, Jesus fuck,” as Harry pressed deeper, hands tight on Eggsy’s hips, filling him up until he could go no further.

Eggsy was hard again, though Harry only gave him a few teasing strokes until Eggsy was squirming against Harry impatiently, with a bitten off, “Fuck, Harry, c’mon, please,” that he obliged, pulling back then driving back in, groaning when Eggsy clenched up and made the slick pressure around Harry’s cock deliciously gritty. Experience found the perfect angle quickly, and the bed groaned and creaked beneath them as Harry drew back then drove back in, dragging Eggsy onto his cock with each brutal thrust.

Eggsy had braced himself against the headboard, trying to push his knees wider, wailing each time Harry nailed his sweet spot, so disheveled with his flush blossoming past his shoulders. When Harry started to draw close, he tried to get his left hand under Eggsy, but his fingers only managed to brush Eggsy’s cock before Eggsy was coming all in a rush, with a shout that would’ve woken the unfortunate neighbours.

“Your turn,” Eggsy said breathlessly, and Harry found their positions flipped, his shoulders shoved down against the bed as Eggsy smirked at him and sank back down, groaning as he was filled again, the wet sound of it loud even through their gasps. The view from this angle was breathtaking, with Eggsy arched against him, open-mouthed, riding him so hard that there was a brief and alarming groaning sound from the bed beneath them, then Harry was holding Eggsy close, his hips snapping up as he came so hard his vision went a little black around the edges.

Eggsy didn’t bother getting off him, grinning impishly instead, so very pleased with himself, as Harry stroked sweaty thighs slowly, wonderingly, forever incredulous that this gorgeous boy was his. “Gonna be feeling that for a week, I think.”

“Pity.”

“Why so?”

“We’re heading back to London tomorrow. Back to work?”

“Oh, that,” Eggsy said dismissively, and smirked again. “That’s why this is going to be awesome,” he disagreed, and laughed when Harry gasped and struggled up to kiss him, with the loft window at Eggsy’s shoulder, night already slowly ebbing richly into the dawn, over the most beautiful city in the world.

Eggsy seemed to sense Harry’s sentiment, pressing a playful little kiss up over Harry’s nose, then saying, his accent atrocious, “Je t’aime.”
“Je t’aime,” Harry corrected, with the right intonation, if with the same warmth, and Eggsy laughed again, trying to pull back, though he stopped when Harry stroked the fingers of his left hand up the nape of Eggsy’s neck. Eggsy’s hands skated for a moment over Harry’s shoulders, then he picked up Harry’s right hand, rubbing crippled fingers between his palms, and together, they watched the sun come up.

End Notes

Final notes: I'm aware that in real life, the shaver brand is Philips with one 'l'. But this is fic. XD Purposes of separation and all that.

This is I think the first fandom where my first fic in it has been met with so many readers I remember from previous fandoms. Thanks so much for your support over the years, guys. And for everyone new to my stuff - thanks for reading, hope you try the rest. :3

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