Between The LInes

by Salomonderiel

Summary

“Your mother – wonderful woman, by the way – thanked me.”

Eggsy continued to play with JB’s ears as he turned to look at Harry. “For what? Helping set the table?” he asked wryly.

Harry shook his head. “No, no. She said she was grateful for what I’d done for you. She seemed under the impression that I was actually responsible for your, well, who you’ve become. She seems under the impression that I’m a good, responsible ‘father figure’ for you.”

Eggsy snorted, and turned back to JB.

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Harry’s alive, shocker. Unfortunately, death wasn't the only thing stopping Harry declaring his undying love to Eggsy. There's a bit more to work through before he can do that.

Notes

So it seems that Kingsman has reversed me back to my fifteen-year-old fangirling emotions, so... apologies if some of this is slightly less sophisticated than my usual fics. Should be good, though.

Everything is beta'd except for the sex scene, because though I am a horrible, horrible friend who makes her evangelical christian friend edit mammoth fics about ships she doesn't ship, the sex scenes are a side of me she DOESN'T need to be tarnished by.

This started, as all my stuff does, as just a few ideas of scene snippets that developed into
something a lot, lot longer... so, sorry about that.

Also, apologies to anyone living in Hackney.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Between The Lines

It was a week after Eggsy had watched the heads of all the rich twats in the world explode like fireworks that Merlin finally called him into the dining room of the tailor shop and told him the buzz.

“Everyone is, obviously, very grateful for what you and Roxy have done, and as such, her replacement of Lancelot has continued unchallenged,” Merlin said, avoiding Eggsy’s eyes and shuffling through the sheets in front of him. The whole table was all but invisible under stacks of files. Apparently, when you take down a nutter and the majority of the world’s leaders, it causes a lot of paperwork. “But, that still leaves the roles of Arthur and Galahad open.”

“What happens when you need a new Arthur?” Eggsy asked, tilting his head slightly as he looked around the room at all the stiff, white men staring down at him from their paintings. “Look through all the old Oxbridge gents and pick one with the best head of white hair, do you?”

Merlin chortled slightly, reaching up with one hand to adjust his glasses. “No, no we elect a Kingsman who we think is best suited for the role. And, as much as I’m sure this will break your heart, you failed your tests so are not eligible to become Arthur.”

Eggsy snorted. Like he’d want the role anyway.

“Howver,” Merlin continued, apparently finding the folder he’d been searching for and raising it with a smile in Eggsy’s direction, “with very little debate and, well, mostly unanimous support, we would like to offer you Galahad’s position in the Kingsman. A good name, big shoes to fill, but I think you’ll do well, yes?”

Eggsy stared impassively back at Merlin, who was smiling hopefully at him. Carefully, precisely, Eggsy uncrossed his legs, adjusted his collars, and leant on the table, just his forearms mind. Gentlemanly, like. “Alright,” he said, nodding. “But on one condition.”

Merlin shrugged. “Depends on the condition, m’afraid.”

Eggsy looked him straight in the eye. “You get rid of that fucking dog test, y’get me?”

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There wasn’t a funeral scheduled.

And yeah, okay, Eggsy might have pinched Dagonet’s diary from the tailor’s desk to double check, not to mention used Merlin’s calendar app on his tablet when he popped to the loo (it had almost been a relief to find that even Merlin had normal human functions like pissing), so when he said there wasn’t a funeral booked for the guy he was damned sure about it.

Three times, Harry had said. When he was born, when he was married, and when he died.
And Eggsy had been going through the newspapers with a fucking toothcomb, and not once had the name Harry Hart appeared.

It was around two weeks in and when he’d just about lost the floor of his new study under newspapers – study, fuck him, what fucked up world where he now had his own study - where he realised it was never going to happen, and when he started to look for the name elsewhere instead.

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“Remind me why I’m helping you again.”

Roxy had asked the same question multiple times in the past half hour. Eggsy smirked. “’Cause you love me and all that, right?” he asked, winking at her.

She just rolled her eyes. “Thankfully, that is absolutely not it.” She tugged down her jacket down nervously, and spun to face Eggsy. “When this inevitably goes, as you say, ‘tits-up’, you are not taking me down with you. I am completely innocent. And, if that doesn’t fly, I am sticking with the argument that I thought you were emotionally compromised and that solid evidence that you were wrong would help you move on. Agreed?”

“Whatever keeps that denial going, babe,” Eggsy said smugly, patting her shoulder affectionately. “Half an hour sweetheart, yeah?”

“You have twenty minutes at most,” Roxy corrected, grinning back at him. “And that’s Lancelot to you, you incorrigible rogue.”

Eggsy dismissed her comment with a wave, reaching forwards to tug her hair out of the neat bun and tousle it slightly. He narrowed his eyes, looking at her, before reaching out and nimbly flicking open the top button on her blouse.

Ignoring her offended gasp of shock, he spun her around, whispered a terribly uncouth motivation into her ear, and shoved her through the door into Merlin’s office.

“Who – oh – Roxy, I – I – uh, how can I be of assistance to you? For you?”

Biting his lip to stop from laughing at Merlin’s stuttering, Eggsy leant against the wall, hands in his pockets and one Oxford shoe hooked around the other, waiting.

It wasn’t long before Roxy was leading Merlin out and down the corridor, with the universal sign for ‘you owe me’ held up behind her back. Knowing that she couldn’t see him, Eggsy still replied in kind, one finger in the air as he backed in to Merlin’s office.

Twenty minutes. And, being the beautiful piece of arse she was, Roxy had distracted Merlin enough that he hadn’t logged out.

And, after a fortnight of searching for his name between the pages of tabloids, Eggsy finally found him.

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The nurses didn’t even blink as he passed. The one he stopped to ask for directions for Harry’s room gave him an answer without asking who he was, or asking if he was allowed to see Harry. All she did was warn him that he was still very tired, and needed rest, so he shouldn’t stay and talk with the patient for too long.
She also told him not to be shocked by the patient’s appearance.

It took a lot of restraint for Eggsy not to respond that Harry could have a fucking wang drawn on his face with sharpie and he wouldn’t have given a shit.

The room was easy to find, really. Most of the rooms were empty, silent; Harry’s was the only one with a steady, strong beeping echoing from it. Pushing the door open as quietly as he could, not letting the hard-soled Oxfords make noise on the tiled floor, Eggsy eased into the room, closing the door just as silently.

Harry was asleep, chest slowly rising and falling, the monitor keeping track of the regular beats of his heart. Half his face was hidden under a bandage; the other half looked gaunt, pale. But Harry was there, and that was the important thing.

Eggsy swore under his breath.

For over an hour he sat in the armchair in the corner of the room, head in his hands, elbows resting on his thighs, eyes fixed on Harry. When the nurses came to check on Harry, they didn’t address him. When Harry finally did stir, his hands clenching and a sigh slipping between his lips, Eggsy was on his feet before he even realised he’d moved.

So much for being silent. The sound of the armchair sliding back caught Harry’s attention, and slowly, so painfully slowly he turned his head until his one remaining eye could see his visitor. “Eggsy,” he said softly.

Eggsy was by his side in a second. “Yeah,” he muttered, hands awkwardly shoved in his pockets. “Yeah, I’m here.”

It looked like Harry was trying to smile, half his mouth hidden beneath his bandage and the other struggling to move. Eggsy had to grit his teeth to not let his emotions show, to not spew out a torrent of hatred towards a man he’d already killed. “Look, you’re in for a right bollocking when you get well enough,” Eggsy promised, “cause you’ve got a lot of fuck-ups to answer for, yeah? But you – you need to get better, yeah? You just get better.”

Harry nodded, his eyes falling closed again.

Nodding to himself, both reassured and scared, Eggsy slunk back to his chair, eyes not leaving the man before him until Merlin came looking for him.

Even then, the other agent only stood by the armchair silently, until Harry came to once more.

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“No one ever actually told you he was dead, you know,” Merlin said, trying to scoop a mushroom off his plate with chopsticks, and failing miserably. “Ah, shite,” he muttered as it fell onto his tie.

“Bullshit,” Eggsy retorted, getting revenge by perfectly grabbing one his own mushrooms and tossing it into his mouth. “I was told they’d done the thing, y’know, the toast thing with the whiskey.”

Roxy laughed, half at Eggsy’s comment, and half at Merlin’s continued failure with chopsticks. He was attempting a kung-po prawn now. “And who told you that, Eggsy, hm?” she asked, eating through the special-fried rice without a single grain hitting either her clothes or the floor. “A reliable source, I trust?”
Cornered, Eggsy conceded, “Okay, it might’ve been the old Arthur who I might’ve killed for being a traitor five minutes later.” The other three people in the room laughed at him, “but it was hardly my fault that no one bothered to correct me!”

“Because you beat them to it, dear Eggsy,” Harry chimed in, voice still unnaturally quiet. “My status was not really cleared from ‘critical’ until the very day you found me. Now, as I was unconscious for the whole thing, I really don’t think I deserve this horrific punishment of you three eating Chinese in my room without letting me have any.”

Merlin shook his head and made noises of annoyance very vehemently. “No, no, uh-uh. We have been put under very specific instructions not to let you eat anything but the stuff the doctors clear for you,” he said, brandishing the chopsticks at Harry.

While everyone else laughed, Eggsy got to his feet, carrying his plate to the side of Harry’s bed. “What’ya want?” he asked, grinning and ignoring Merlin shouted admonishments and Roxy’s raucous laughter.

“Black bean sauce, if you have any.”

Obediently, Eggsy grabbed a piece of the beef. “Open wide,” he said, before carefully placing the chopsticks between Harry’s lips.

“You’re a disobedient piece of shite, Eggsy Unwin!” Merlin yelled across the room. Grinning like a loon, and taking back the chopsticks, Eggsy cheerfully flipped the bird back at him. Roxy sounded like she was about to choke on her chow mein.

“Oh lords, I think that’s the best thing I’ve ever tasted,” Harry muttered, savouring the beef. “Sheer illusion by lack of any real food for a month, I’m sure, but still, thank you.”

“Anytime,” Eggsy said. “Oh, shit – I think I got some sauce on your bandage.”

Harry’s one good eye sparkled mischievously. “Oh, I think I’ll live,” he said, smirking.

Eggsy grinned back at him.

“Hey, Eggsy!” Roxy yelled to him over her shoulder, “Where’s my spoon-feeding?”

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Working with Roxy was second nature now. Touching down in Gatwick, it was second nature for Eggsy to grab both their suitcases from the belt, second nature to pass Roxy hers in exchange for his passport, second nature when they reached his taxi to drive to the nearest Burger King and place the order for two Steakhouse Double meals and strawberry milkshakes.

“One day Merlin’s going to question why it takes us so long to get from the airport to the shop,” Roxy commented, dipping a fry into her milkshake. Eggsy was long past questioning her eating habits.

“Nah, he don’t give a damn,” Eggsy countered, three chips drowning in ketchup shoved in his mouth. “As long as we show up without any bullet-holes in the suits or equip, he’s cool. Speaking of,” he said, brandishing his burger at her, “you should get that ankle checked out. Get it bound properly, like. You hold me back bad enough without a busted foot.”

He just laughed when one of her milkshaked chips went flying past his ear.
Exactly twenty minutes after they sat down it was second nature to head back to the taxi, the route to Kingsman one he could take in his sleep, the face of Dagonet when Roxy limped in one he knew both from other times he’d help her up the steps, and the far more frequent times when she’d carried him in.

“Say hi to him for me,” she said with a grin as Dagonet helped her towards fitting room one, again a phrase that was becoming as familiar as his own name.

On a Friday afternoon, the drive from Kingsman to Harry’s house took precisely thirty-seven minutes. He let himself in, kicked off his shoes, made his way to the kitchen and stuck on the kettle. From upstairs came the shout of, “Could you also bring up the Vietnamese whirls?”

Smiling, Eggsy grabbed the biscuit tin before heading up the stairs.

Harry was sitting up in bed, reading some fiction book about mangoes, glasses perched on the end of his nose and pristine pyjama set looking like it had just come off the hanger. His bandage had been downsized to just a patched taped over his eye, leaving the rest of the damage finally visible. The bullet had scalped most of the left side of his head. His hair had been shaved away for the surgery, and by the looks of the huge, enflamed scar, it was doubtful that all of his hair would ever grow back. A cobweb of red lines and blackened scabs now decorated his skull, but it didn’t detract from Harry’s natural charm.

He looked up as Eggsy entered. “Ah, my boy,” he said, smiling and setting aside his book. “Did you-?”

“Yeah, I brought them guv,” Eggsy said, chucking the biscuits onto the bed and collapsing onto the armchair that had been moved in there on Harry’s instructions after hearing he was confined to bed rest.

“Ah, thank you,” Harry said, picking up the tin with a wry smile, “But I was going to ask about your mission.”

Eggsy snorted, shrugging off his jacket. “Oh, right.” Harry waited patiently as Eggsy loosened his tie, shoved up his sleeves, and finally messed his hair up from the neat comb-over it had been gelled into for the past ten days. “Roxy says hi, by the way.”

“And my best wishes to her as well, of course,” Harry replied politely. “Neither of you are hurt then?”

“Roxy twisted her ankle during the extraction, but don’t think it’s nothing serious,” Eggsy said, slouching, fully prepared for Harry to tell him off.

“That’s good news. I am glad you are safe,” Harry said, opening the tin and taking out a biscuit. “Do you-”

“Nah, just ate,” Eggsy said, waving a hand.

Harry considered him, then lightly brushing the crumbs off his pyjamas. “I must confess to feeling more than a little smug at how remarkable you are proving yourself in the field,” he said, wry grin back in place.

“Keeping Galahad’s reputation up until you can get back in the field, sir,” Eggsy said with a mock salute and just as smug smile.

He knew instantly that he’d said something wrong. For one thing, Harry lowered an only half-eaten
biscuit. “My dear boy,” Harry said, tone serious and looking at Eggsy over his glass with a sad smile, “it is no longer my name. When Merlin gave you Galahad, he gave it to you to keep. And if I may say, I think you’re doing a splendid job with it.”

Eggsy gaped at him. “What? Nah, that’s bullshit, man!” he exclaimed furiously, expecting Harry to agree, or at say it was a joke, or something. “You’ll be up and about in no time! I’m shit compared to you, you should have your job back!”

“You will refrain from calling yourself ‘shit’ again,” Harry said sharply. “And my state of health is not the issue here, though I thoroughly agree that I have been given no permanent damage – aside from my eye, of course, I don’t think I’ll be growing another one any time soon. No, the issue here is that, under chemical influence or not, I did have a rather large role in killing a church full of innocents, their moral codes notwithstanding.” He shrugged, his sad smile back as he looked at Eggsy apologetically. “It creates a bit of a bad image to have a mass-murderer as a Kingsman, you see.”

Eggsy couldn’t believe it. “No, but that’s – that’s preposterous, it’s bullshit, fucking petty bullshit!”

“Personally, yes, I quite agree, but there you are.”

Blinking, mouth hanging open and still half expecting Harry to laugh and say ‘April fools’ or something, Eggsy just stared at him. “But – then, what’s gonna happen to you?”

Harry shrugged again. “I really don’t know, Eggsy. But for God’s sake sit up straight would you, just looking at you is making my back hurt.”

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When Eggsy got home a few hours later, Jamal was playing snakes a ladders with Daisy. Which involved him putting the dice in the toddler’s hand and waiting until she threw it across the room. JB was watching the board, and started barking when Eggsy came in.

“Hey bruv,” Eggsy said, picking JB off the floor when he ran towards him. “Where’s mum?”

“Iceland,” Jamal said, rolling for himself. “Said she was getting tired of all the fancy shit and was desperate for something fucking cheap and microwaveable, yeah? How was the ‘business trip’?” Jamal had known Eggsy for a long fucking time. He didn’t even bother to hide the disbelief of his ‘business trips’ anymore, but he didn’t push the issue. He was a good mate.

“Went as well to be expected,” Eggsy answered, shoving JB under his arm in order to greet Daisy. “Hey you, how’re you doing?”

“She’s beating my arse, is how she’s doing,” Jamal grumbled. “Look, you’d better hope that your trip went well, ‘cause this dude who said he was your boss called, asked you to meet him asap.”

Oh, lords. If it was about Roxy getting hurt, Eggsy was gonna have a fucking fit. It wasn’t his job to defend her from flights of stairs for fuck’s sake. “Scottish accent?” he asked with a sigh, pushing himself to his feet and dropping JB to the floor.

“Yeah.”

“How long ago did he call?”

“I dunno. About three hours ago?”
Eggsy pinched the bridge of his nose, took deep breaths and slowly counted to ten. “Right. I’ll be right back. “

“G’luck bruv.”

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It turned out that Eggsy wasn’t in trouble. Instead, Merlin wanted to talk him through the process of electing the next Arthur.

“All Kingsmen have to vote, but the eventual choice has to be unanimous,” Merlin had said, his normal Scottish drawl even more slurred with exhaustion, before following it up with over an hour’s worth of in-depth detail, including listing all of Arthur’s duties. It was one am before he finally asked if Eggsy had any questions.

“Yeah, just one,” he said, leaning forwards. “What the fuck is happening to Harry?”

Merlin looked back at him sadly. It wasn’t Merlin’s fault, Eggsy knew. He trusted Merlin, knew he had good judgement. “Look, I’m afraid I can’t do anything about Harry’s position, it was the rest of the old Kingsmen that made that decision,” he said, pulling something up on his tablet. “Only the next Arthur will have the authority to allocate Harry a new role. Or fire him, of course, but I’m sure it won’t come to that.” He set down the tablet, and turned to look at Eggsy again. “Now, have you decided who you want to support for Arthur’s position?”

Eggsy nodded. “Yeah, I have. Harry Hart.”

There was a bitter pleasure in making Merlin look surprised. “Look, Eggsy, I get where you’re coming from, but Harry’s not exactly on the table for-”

“I don’t care,” Eggsy cut in. He pushed back his chair and got to his feet. “Harry Hart. Put that name in your little tablet, and pass on the message. I ain’t budging on this.”

After that, he left.

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“It’s a simple collection job, really,” Merlin said through the overhead as the Kingsman-customized helicopter levelled over the small Scottish town. “Drop in, grab the package, and get yourself out. Should be easy, what with Galahad’s expertise with female dignitaries.”

Eggsy grinned, catching Roxy’s eye before she put on the helmet to her HALO suit. “What can I say, posh girls love-”

“A bit of rough, yes, we know,” she sighed. “Just check my parachute, would you?”

Still grinning, Eggsy did as instructed, double and triple checking for her reassurance until Merlin gave them the green light.

“Just remember,” he called, finally attaching his own helmed and backing towards the open door, “If your parachute fails, you’ll hit the ground so fast you won’t even feel anything!”

“That’s very reassuring, thank you!” Roxy yelled back, but he barely heard her. He’d already flung himself out of the chopper, whooping with joy. Gods, he loved chucking himself out of vehicles at great heights.
Roxy landed after him, erring on the side of caution and opening her parachute earlier. Either way, she was still the first one to reach the room with the Ambassador’s daughter. Juggernaut, that woman. The guards hadn’t stood a chance.

“Oh, I do apologise,” she said as she entered the concrete room, holding up her hands as the one remaining guard turned and pointed an automatic at her, throwing him her most disarming smile, “I must have got lost on the way to the lady’s room.”

The guard growled and stepped forwards, giving Eggsy the cue to drop down from the vents and lay the man flat in two sweet, slick moves. Readjusting his cuffs, Eggsy crouched down next to the man. “Did your mother not tell you it’s wrong to punch women?” he asked, shaking his head with disappointment. The man groaned, and Eggsy knocked him out.

Roxy already had the young woman untied, was helping her to her feet. Eggsy re-equipped his pistol and took point, leading them out of the room. “Oi, Merlin,” he said, trusting the man to be listening. “You gonna guide us out of here?”

A voice quickly responded over the earpiece. “You managed to get yourself in there easy enough, Galahad, what’s the difficulty with getting out?”

Someone rounded the corridor. Eggsy took him out. “You ain’t Merlin,” he pointed out, checking the next corridor was clear before beckoning Roxy and the girl forwards.

“No, I am not, well done. He is rather busy flying a helicopter. My name is Harry Hart and I will be your satnav for this evening. This evening only, mind. Afterwards, I expect you to learn how to read and memorise a map. Not something too taxing, I promise you.”

Eggsy looked across to Roxy, who just grinned back at him. “Alright, you sarcastic git, get us to safety.”

“Since you asked so nicely.”

Under Harry’s precise instructions, it took them a lot less time to get out than it took to get in. And sure enough, there was Merlin in the chopper, waiting for them no more than twenty feet from the back door. Eggsy provided covering fire as Roxy helped the woman into the back, before swinging himself in just as Merlin started to take off.

They were safely heading back to HQ when Merlin finally congratulated them. “A job well done, boys and girls,” he said.

“Merlin, what was Harry doing on the line?” Eggsy called back as Roxy comforted the rescued diplomat.

Merlin’s Scottish chuckle crackled through the intercom. “Poor old man was getting restless, thought I’d give him something to do.”

There was a few minutes while Eggsy let his adrenaline slowly work its way out of his system. Roxy had taken off her helmet and was resolutely not looking towards the still open doors. Catching her eye, Eggsy nodded, and got to his feet to pull the door shut. She mouthed a ‘thank you’ back to him.

“Merlin,” Eggsy called again.

“Yes, Galahad?”

“You’re aware of the irony in how this chopper is a Merlin class, right?”
Merlin just sighed.

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“This mean you’re reinstated?”

Harry shook his head, pouring a glass of scotch for himself and Eggsy. “No, not even close. But Merlin conceded that, what with us missing an Arthur, he’s had a bit more on his plate than he can deal with. You should hear him complain about the paperwork, he slips into some truly horrific Scottish slang, it’s ghastly-”

Grinning at the image, Eggsy accepted the offered glass gratefully.

“But anyway, he decided that I could be accepted onto the pay-role as his ‘assistant’, as it were.” Harry took a quick swig. “Makes sense, really, given that I’m not quite ready for field duty and absolutely have the necessary qualifications and experience. And,” he continued, gesturing the room they were sat in, “conveniently, I already have an office at HQ. Really, I’m quite content with the arrangement. Much prefer it to the physiotherapy I’m currently being made to suffer through.”

Silently, Eggsy sipped his drink and let Harry bemoan his physio a bit more. “I picked you,” he blurted out suddenly, cutting into what was, on retrospect, a really rather un-gentlemanly comment on one of Harry’s nurses. “For Arthur, I mean.”

He blushed as Harry stared at him with an uncommon intensity. “I am aware, and grateful,” Harry said eventually, Eggsy still staring awkwardly at his glass. The silence that followed was awkward, but at the same time strangely comforting.

Eventually, Harry said, “I’m thinking of going in for a monocle, you know. After all, glasses when you only have one eye seems like a waste really-”

Laughing at the shock of it, Eggsy pulled the small cushion from behind his back and threw it at Harry. “You fucking better not, you’d look like a complete wanker-”

“Oh, I’m flattered, I’m sure.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

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Though Lancelot and Galahad were, undeniably, the service’s most battle-willing and ready agents, and made a formidable team, sometimes they needed them to take a more…. subtle route to get information.

“The target,” Merlin said, bringing the man’s image up on the screen, “is a man called Ted Banker – low-life middle man, not really our style, but, unfortunately for him, he’s playing the middle man for people we’ve been keeping an eye on, which has brought him onto our radar.”

“All we need is his phone and laptop, and maybe hard-drive,” Harry chimed in. “Phone he presumably keeps on him, laptop will be in his house. He lives in this block of flats, in Islington.” An image of the building appeared alongside the man’s portrait.

Eggsy snorted, clapping his hands and rubbing them together. “Fucking easy. I’ve robbed, like twenty places like that. Not exactly needing a team of special ops, any kid in that estate will get what you need if you pay them a tenner.”
Next to him, Roxy smirked. Merlin cleared his throat. “Be that as it may, we don’t really want to put civilians in the line of fire here. What we need is for you two to tag team – one of you take the flat, the other get close to him, enough to get his phone out of his trouser pocket, if you get my meaning. He often goes to a night club a few streets over, should be easy really.”

Eggsy looked across to Roxy, ambivalent about his role. “Well, since you seem to have prior expertise, estate boy,” she said teasingly. “Do you want to do that?”

It was tempting, familiar, easy. “Nah,” Eggsy said, shaking his head. “A dude looking like that sees a bird like you flirting with him in a bar? He’d smell a rat quicker than you could whip your tits out. ‘Sides, that much product in his hair? I don’t think tits would distract him that much. I’ll do the seducing. You’ll have more fun with the breaking and entering anyway.”

Roxy batted her eyelashes at him. “It’s so good to know that chivalry’s not dead.” Eggsy blew her a kiss, and winked.

“Right, now that’s sorted,” Harry said, shifting his weight in his chair, “let’s discus itinerary.”

On cue, Merlin brought up an array of equipment, discreet and not so. Beautiful an image as it was, Eggsy shook his head again. “You ain’t gonna need anything but a penknife to get into his apartment. And as for me, well,” he smirked, meeting Roxy’s gaze and daring to look across to Harry, who was watching him intently. “I reckon I got the whole package already.”

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“Are you sure you don’t want backup?”

Eggsy almost dropped his earpiece in his Budweiser. “Yeah, I’m fucking sure,” he muttered. “This is my turf, remember? I know how this place works.”

He’d already set eyes on the target. He was in one of the grotty booths with a crony. Eggsy had picked a spot in the bar right in his line of sight, somewhere surrounded by empty stools, making it clear he was here alone.

“Your trousers are falling down.”

Eggsy sighed, rolled his eyes heavenwards even though he knew Harry couldn’t see. “They’re meant to look like that? Now shut up, would you?”

Harry didn’t respond.

Eggsy glanced over his shoulder to look at the mark again, only to see that he was already looking back at him. Turning back to his Budweiser, Eggsy smirked. Piece of fucking cake.

Not a minute later, the guy was sliding into the stool next to him. Eggsy made the pretence of looking across to him, gaze lingering, and licked his lips before wrapping them around the neck of his beer. The guy swallowed audibly. God, he was such a fucking tool.

“Hey,” the mark called, clicking his fingers to get the attention of the barman, and didn’t that just enamour Eggsy to him even more, the wanker, “Another beer for my friend here?”

Harry didn’t respond.

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Fully aware that, mission or not, Eggsy was gonna deck the guy if he had to spend much longer in his company, he boldly turned to face the mark, leaning on the bar, hip cocked, and said, “How’s about we skip the beer and we go somewhere slightly less crowded so I can repay your generosity, in kind yeah?”
Again, a tinny voice echoed in Eggsy’s ear. “Careful, don’t seem too forwards, you don’t want to scare him away.”

But the mark just grinned, and nodded towards the alley entrance. Eggsy threw a smug glance at the security camera in the corner.

Outside, Eggsy let himself be shoved against the, quite frankly, rank alley wall as the guy snogged him with no delicacy or talent whatsoever. He cooperated for about five minutes, before shoving the guy back and saying, “Fifty quid and I’m yours all night, yeah?”

The mark didn’t seem perturbed to find out the guy he’d picked up was a rent boy. Instead, he eagerly reached into the pocket of his ill-fitting, second hand suit and pulled out his wallet, phone with it.

As he scrambled to pull out the right notes, Eggsy rolled his eyes, last shred of patience leaving him. He knocked the guy out in one smooth blow, grabbing the phone and wallet before they hit the floor.

“Galahad!”

Harry sounded personally offended. “What, hoping to see more of my skills in action, guv?” Eggsy muttered on autopilot, freezing almost as soon as the words left his mouth. Gods, there was a time and place to flirt with your boss.

“What? No, I – that was ungentlemanly, Eggsy. And what are you doing now?”

“Making it look like a legit scam,” Eggsy explained. “Happens all the time. Shows how much of a fucking idiot this twat was. And you think he’s part of something big?”

“We’ll soon know, either way. And – what are you doing now?”

“Grabbing his keys, so he doesn’t think anything’s up when he gets home to find his house has been robbed. Tell Lancelot to grab the TV too, if she can.”

Harry sighed into his earpiece. “I’ll relay the message.”

Eggsy grinned, dropping the now empty wallet on the unconscious guy at his feet. “Sides, fifty quid for my services? I’m fucking offended.”

That time, Harry groaned. “Just get back to HQ, Galahad.”

***

Harry strode through the tailor shop, umbrella under his arm and newspaper in his hand. It was a cold day, and all he wanted was a cup of tea, but, as he was learning, when a field agent’s job was over, the work of those in analysis had only just started.

He found them, eventually, in the break-room. A small room, no bigger than a storage room really, with two sofas, a fire, and a few bookshelves. Roxy was reclined on the sofa, feet on Eggsy’s lap as he gamed on a PlayStation Vita. Good to know he was putting his new income to good use.

“Kingsmen,” Harry greeted them upon entering the room – only to be distracted by the two mugs on the small table. “Is that-”

“Black, one sugar, help yourself,” Eggsy said, not looking up from his game.

Grateful, Harry calmly made his way to the other sofa, carefully grabbing the mug on his way. “If
you’ve quite finished, Galahad, we do actually have matters of business to discuss?"

Eggsy smirked. “Sure thing – but it takes a few seconds for these things to save progress. Something I’m sure you don’t understand, granddad.” His eyes flickered to Harry’s, and he smirked. Hidden behind her newspaper, Roxy snorted.

Harry just raised an eyebrow. “Don’t for a second I’m going to let that pass, Galahad,” he said. “Trust me, I know enough about the PS Vita to be able to turn it off if you don’t give me your full attention right now.”

That shut him up. Harry counted to four before Eggsy was lowering the handheld console, looking not quite abashed enough for Harry’s liking.

Clearing his throat and forcing his thoughts back on track, he unrolled the newspaper and handed it to Roxy. “This is tomorrow morning’s edition of The Guardian. We get the final edition before it goes to print, don’t ask why. Recognise the lovely young lady on the cover?”

Eggsy pushed himself forwards, peering at the paper as Roxy held it out. “That’s the bird we saved, yeah? The diplomat’s daughter.”

“Daughter of the Argentinian Ambassador,” Roxy muttered. “This is good news, right? She’s back home safely.”

“Indeed, good news all round. Gods know that we don’t need to aggravate the Argentinians, it’s bad enough that we’ve got a Conservative PM again.” Eggsy grinned at him, Roxy only raised an eyebrow to hide her amusement. “However, Merlin and I believe we still have cause to be concerned. There are some… suspicious connections between her captors and rumours we’ve been catching about a ‘Project Bomb Alleyway’. Connecting the two has Merlin worried, and when Merlin’s worried…”

“We understand,” Roxy cut in. The sudden confusion on Eggsy’s face as he looked between her and Harry made Harry think that, perhaps, not both of them did. But, Eggsy didn’t raise the question, so Harry didn’t explain. “So, what do you want us to do?”

“Be aware of the situation,” Harry said simply. “Until we get something confirmed, there’s not really much we can do. However, if it does turn out to be something, we will have to act fast. Which means you two are on standby until we get to the bottom of this. I have already left a dossier with all the information we currently have on the desk in each of your rooms back at The Mansion. Please read it as soon as you can.”

Roxy nodded, still scanning the newspaper article. “Of course, sir.”

Eggsy nodded, picking his Vita back up. “Sure thing, guv,” he said.

Message conveyed, Harry set the mug of tea back on the table and got to his feet. “You two really need to remember that I’m no longer your superior. Technically, I am below you in Kingsman rankings.”

Eggsy cut in with a vulgar noise of derision. At least Roxy had the decorum to hide her response behind the newspaper.

Staring Eggsy down, Harry continued, “You don’t need to call me ‘sir’, and, quite honestly, I don’t think I ever liked being addressed as ‘guy’.”

“Whatever you say,” Eggsy said. “Granddad.” He looked up from his Vita with a cheeky smile and
bright eyes.

Harry didn’t credit that with a response.

*

“Merlin!”

The technician didn’t even look up as Harry stormed into the room. “And what can I do for you today?”

Harry paced back and forth, before turning to face him. “Do we have any honeypot missions that need completing?”

“Aye, a few, as ever. Why?”

“I want you to allocate Galahad to all of them.”

That made Merlin pause. Setting down his screwdriver, he looked up, peering at Harry over his glasses. “Why? What’s he done this time?”

“Nothing. Nothing.” Harry said, waving a hand. “No, no, nothing serious. I just… well, he seemed so proficient in the last mission, I felt like it would be a shame to waste his assets.”

Merlin considered the suggestion for a second, before shrugging. “Okay, sure. He’s your agent, I suppose. Is that all?”

He waited until Harry nodded a confirmation before picking his screwdriver back up. “Assets’ indeed,” he muttered.

“I heard that.”

“I know.”

*

After receiving his third assignment to seduce a mark for information, Eggsy started to send Harry vicious looks in the corridor, and was particularly brutal with Harry’s china whenever he came round for their now regular evenings of tea and biscuits.

After the fifth honeypot mission, he snapped.

Harry was sat in his office, having traded places Merlin upon request and for his own sanity to deal with the representatives of MI6 and the CIA while Merlin observed Galahad’s progress.

It was towards the end of the meeting that Eggsy barged his way into Harry’s office, and the meeting, wearing nothing other than his glasses and pair of very well fitting boxer-briefs. Harry regained his composure just quick enough to see the rest of his clothes scattered down the corridor before the door shut.

“There, happy now?” Eggsy yelled, throwing his arms wide and glaring down at Harry, who was struggling to keep his face expressionless. “This good, yeah? You want a better angle?” He turned around as if at the end of a catwalk. Stretched to his limits, Harry was unable to resist tilting his head appraisingly. “This good? You got your fill yet?”

Eggsy remained aggressively silent after that, apparently expecting a legitimate response. “I suppose
so,” Harry answered, keeping his voice neutral.

Eggsy slammed his hands down on Harry’s desk, leaning forwards and scowling with honest fury. “Then stop sending me on fucking prostitute assignments!”

With that, he turned and strode from the office, leaving his clothes draped across the floor.

Harry allowed himself the length of time it took for his door to swing shut again before turning to the stunned MI6 and CIA agents. Both of them looked flabbergasted. “My apologies,” he said, shuffling his papers again. “I can assure you that’s not a common occurrence here. Now, about the distribution of RPGs…”

***

“Hey, Harry, can I ask you a question?” Eggsy said, adjusting his glasses and cuffs before knocking on the door.

“Of course.”

“What do you tell your family?”

“… My family?”

Shit? Had he just fucked up? “Yeah, y’know,” Eggsy continued, leaving the unopened door to peer in through the front window. Shadows were moving behind the curtain. “There’s gotta be someone you’ve gotta try and explain all the gunshot wounds an’ shit to. Someone who’s not in the service. So what do you say to them?” He knocked on the door again.

The question seemed to throw Harry. Eggsy started to wish that he’d asked him when he could see his face, rather than rely on his voice over intercom. “Well, there is only my sister now, really,” Harry said suddenly, just as Eggsy had given up expecting an answer. “My father died in service – the army, that is – when I was around your age, and my mother passed a few years back. And Beatrice lives in Scotland, so there’s not much I really have to explain… she just believes, like most people do, that I am a tailor. Why?”

“Eh, I’m starting to think ‘the needle slipped’ isn’t a sufficient excuse when my mum asks why I’ve got a black eye and broken arm,” Eggsy muttered, checking his watch and knocking again. “Just wondering if you had any tips.”

“I’m afraid the only advice I can give there, my dear boy, is ‘don’t get seriously hurt’. Advice I really would rather you followed, by the by. And it looks like the inhabitants are incapable of opening the door. You’d better make sure that they’re all okay.”

Eggsy did so love this bit. Stepping back to check the door, he adjusted his cuffs again absent-mindedly. Then, with one more knock merely for politeness’ sake, he lifted up a leg and, putting all his weight behind it, slammed his foot right next to the lock.

Flying open, the door knocked the first man in the corridor against the wall, stunning him. Eggsy stepped forwards and with one swung fist put him out of action, continuing his swing and crouching to sweep the legs out of the second man, using his upward force to knock the third guy out, neatly clipping his chin. He stepped over the bodies to breach the front room, the one woman in there easily incapacitated by a flying mantelpiece ornament. Two others, brought either up from the basement or down from upstairs, were taken down by Eggsy swinging himself up to wrap his legs around the first man, grabbing the shoulders of the second to make them both hit the ground hard, slamming the second’s head against the door handle on the way down.
“She’s starting to get really nervous about my job,” Eggsy continued, dusting off the shoulder of his jacket as he got to his feet. “My mum, I mean. Where we’re from, if you suddenly turn up in a suit waving a lot of cash about, you didn’t get it through legal means, you get me?”

“I do indeed. Attic or basement?”

“Basement first. Did you see their shite tattoos? These bad boys think old-school.” Eggsy not-so-carefully made his way around the unconscious bodies towards the kitchen, where an already open hatch led down. “Anyway, she, uh, she asked if I wanted to invite some colleagues around for dinner on Sunday. Said she wanted to meet the people I spend time with, y’know, but I know what she’s really scared of.” Powered by both a combination of wanting to show off and waste time, Eggsy held the sides of the ladder with his feet and hands and just slid down.

“Smart woman, your mother. And, of course, I don’t think I’ve met a single person who hasn’t been won over by Roxy. Found anything?”

The basement was filled with crates, all of them marked in Italian. “Got boxes, with foreign labels. That one says ‘cheese’, I know that word, it’s on pizza. Hold on a tick,” Eggsy muttered, going towards the nearest crate. Grabbing a nearby wrench for leverage, he forced the lid up. “And that’s not cheese.”

“No, indeed. Unless they now produce a powdered cheese, like milk. But even then, I suppose, a very solid argument could be made that it’s not really cheese.”

Eggsy rolled his eyes. “No, it’s fucking cocaine,” he said. “Do you want me to fucking test it to see if it’s powdered cheese?”

“No, no, I’ll trust your judgement. Try another crate.”

The next held pills, ecstasy. Others held more coke, more drugs. It was the crates at the back that were most interesting.

“We got bullets, but no guns,” Eggsy said, riffling through the magazines of ammo. “This stuff’d fit pistols, automatics, sniper rifles… nothing worse than SA80, though. Pretty standard for the black market, really. Not the big stuff Merlin’s twisting his pants over.”

“Copy that. Put the chips in with the cargo, and you’re done for the day.”

“Aye aye, sir,” Eggsy replied with a smirk. He withdrew the small plastic bag from his inside breast pocket, sticking the tiny trackers inside three crates – two drugs, one ammo. “But, uh, I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind coming on Sunday?”

“Hm?”

“The dinner my mum wants, Sunday,” Eggsy clarified, climbing up the ladder. “I mean, Roxy’s great an’ all, but she’s not you, sir. I mean, anyone with half a brain could tell from a mile off that you’re as posh – as honest as they come, sir.”

“Sir, is it?” Harry clearly wasn’t bothering to hide his amusement. “You’re really trying to butter me up, aren’t you? Yes, all right. I’ll come.”

“I mean, neither mum nor I can cook for toffee, but between us we should be able to-”

“I said yes, Eggsy. Please don’t encourage me to go back on my word, it’s not something a gentleman really should do.”
Eggsy grinned. “Thanks, Harry.”

“I’m sure the pleasure will be all mine. Now, clear the area and get home, Kingsman.”

“Sir, yes sir!”

***

There wasn’t a strict training schedule for fully-fledged Kingsmen. There was, however, was a heavy layer of judgement and disapproval that followed you wherever you went if you didn’t put an appearance in at the gym at The Mansion at least five times a week. Something that, actually, Eggsy was finding difficult after growing up getting his exercise in the streets, either in self-defence or just a sheer addiction to adrenaline.

But now he had no other choice, he found he liked going in the evening. He liked the quiet, the time to think, to push himself for no other reason than to see how far, how fast he could go. No pressure to be a Kingsman, just him and his own expectations.

So on Thursday evening, it was slightly disappointing to enter the gym and see someone already slogging away on a treadmill.

An emotion that turned right around when Eggsy finally recognised that the man in old, worn tracksuits and baggy army t-shirt was Harry Hart.

Without hesitation, he moved to take the treadmill to his left. Harry didn’t even notice his arrival until he was putting his iPod and water bottle on the display board. The older man’s eyes flickered over to him, and he smirked, not slowing as he reached up to unhook his headphones. “Can I help you?” he asked, sounding only slightly out of breath.

Licking his lips and smirking, Eggsy leant on the armrest, watching Harry run. “You’re meant to be taking it slow, old man.”

Harry snorted, but made no amendments to the speed. “You’d better not follow that up with a comment about me damaging my hips.”

“I’ve got a challenge, old man?” Eggsy declared, whacking on the treadmill, glancing across to see what speed Harry had his treadmill set to. “What’s the stakes?”
“I believe Merlin’s looking for someone to seduce the wife of an American gangster…”

“Oh, you are so *fucked*.”

*

Saturday – because Merlin acts fast and sometimes revenge is best when swift – Eggsy’s sat at his desk, watching surveillance footage of Harry being suave and sharp in his best suit. He was approaching some American woman in one of London’s fanciest cocktail bars.

He should have got popcorn, Eggsy thinks, relaxing in his chair, legs falling open. And yeah, he might have pulled his thigh muscles slightly and promptly collapsed after Harry conceded defeat, but, well.

He had the best seats to a show he’d never like to miss.

***

Harry walked to Eggsy’s, that Sunday. He did, after all, live only two streets over. Besides, it was a good way to remove the excess adrenaline that seemed to be pumping through his system.

He always carried an umbrella anyway.

He arrive at seven pm on the dot, and took a second to check his hair, tie and jacket was in place before ringing the doorbell.

Roxy opened the door.

She was wearing a sweet little cocktail dress, which allayed Harry’s fears that he’d overdressed. Her face split into a smile when she saw him. “Harry!” she said, stepping back to let him in. “I’m glad you could make it – I mean, his mother is lovely, but very… inquisitive. Um. Well, her and Eggsy are in the kitchen, Eggsy’s trying to get his sister to sleep. She’s being very reluctant, apparently. I don’t know, I’m not good with kids.”

It wasn’t normal to hear Roxy babble. Apparently she was just as uncomfortable in domestic situations as Harry could be. It was always comforting to find out you weren’t alone.

“Well, perhaps between us we can get through the evening without being put in too awkward a situation about our work,” Harry muttered conspiratorially, hanging his umbrella up carefully on the coat hooks – right next to one very like his own. He smiled affectionately at the sight of it.

“We should head back before Eggsy starts to think we’ve run away,” Roxy muttered, equally conspiratorially.

Smiling widely now, Harry shook his head. “We are gentlemen, Roxy. We do not run away. We make strategically advisable retreats.” As she laughed, he made his way down the corridor, following the smell of food and haze of steam.

The kitchen/dining room was the second room on the left. A woman in jeans and a cashmere jumper, hair tied up – presumably Eggsy’s mother – was at the stove, focused on the food. Eggsy, however, was walking back and forth with a very young girl in his arms. He was bouncing her up and down as he walked, smiling as he muttered things to her, holding her hand.

The sight made Harry freeze in the doorway.
“Yes, it’s a bit different from the Eggsy that we get to see every day, isn’t it?” Roxy whispered to him as she squeezed past. “It’s almost unnerving, really.”

Harry couldn’t agree with her there.

Not wanting to be called out while still in shock, he forced himself to step forwards, heading straight towards Eggsy. “This must be your sister,” Harry said quietly, coming up beside him as he turned around.

Apparently Eggsy hadn’t heard him come in, too distracted by his sister, because on hearing Harry’s voice he started up, wide-eyed, before slipping into the more familiar wide smile. “Oh, hi!” he said. “Uh, yeah, this is Daisy. I’m trying to get her to doze off, she’s meant to have been in bed well before now. Say hello to Harry, Daisy!”

The child, only slightly too young to understand what was going on, flapped a hand at Harry’s direction by copying Eggsy’s movements. Feeling strangely honoured, Harry waved back. He looked up from the young girl to find Eggsy smiling warmly at him.

“She seems like a very clever girl,” Harry said, keeping eye-contact for longer than felt safe.

Eggsy laughed at that. “Yeah, don’t you dare go thinking about recruiting this little thing. Not for at least another twenty years, ‘kay?”

Harry nodded a promise. He couldn’t take his eyes of the boy in front of him.

Eventually, Eggsy turned to look over his shoulder towards his mum. “Mum! Final guest’s here. This is Harry, my – well, not my boss anymore technically, but still kinda is. Harry, this is my mum, Michelle.”

And suddenly Harry had a face full of a very cheerful, slightly short woman, who was taking his hand and shaking it very enthusiastically. “It’s great to finally put a face to the name!” she said, her accent stronger than Eggsy’s.

“And it is truly a pleasure to meet you, ma’am,” he answered, cupping her hands in his before politely pulling them away. “Can I help you in any way?”

She shook her head. “Nah, I think we’re pretty much done, I mean, I’m not sure, but still. Eggsy, go put Daisy to sleep would’ya? Roxy, dear, go with him, would you? Harry, luv, help us set the table.” She organised everyone and immediately turned to get to work collecting the cutlery. She had an efficiency that Harry could admire.

Both Roxy and Eggsy sent him panicked looks before leaving the room, Eggsy looking like the slightly more concerned of the two. But Harry just tilted his head to the door. He’d survived longer periods of time with more dangerous women. He thought.

Michelle shoved a handful of cutlery into his grasp. “D’you mind? I just got to serve the vegetables up, see,” she said, immediately turning away and grabbing the saucepan full of peas and carrots.

Harry smothered a smile before he could be caught. “Of course not. Happy to help any way I can.”

“Speaking of,” Michelle said, and Harry immediately began to prepare himself for the inquisitive questions Roxy had been talking about. “I really want t’thank you.”

That, however, he had not expected. “Thank me? I’m afraid I don’t follow.”
Michelle rounded on him, carrying two plates with a generous serving of vegetables and Yorkshire pudding. “Well, from what my boy says I get the feeling we wouldn’t be here wi’out you. I gather you’ve done a lot for him.”

“In truth, I did very little, madam,” Harry said. “I merely gave Eggsy an opportunity. It was his perseverance and, if I may, excellence which lead to everything after. I – all of us have a lot of reasons to be grateful for him, not the other way around.”

The smile she tried to hide from him made him think that she believed him to be acting modest. He wasn’t. “I really do have cause to thank you, though,” she continued, setting down the next two plates. The portion sizes didn’t appear to be getting smaller. “I kinda made a few mistakes, after Eggsy’s dad… well… I’m glad he has you. It’s good for him to have a decent father figure, y’know?”

Harry almost dropped the last fork. Setting it down carefully, he spent more time than was really required to ensure it was precisely parallel to the knife. He really wasn’t sure how to respond to a comment like that.

Thankfully, he didn’t have to. “I’m not being silly, am I?” Michelle continued. “I really do recognise you from somewhere. I’ve seen you before.”

Harry looked up, just as Eggsy and Roxy returned, both of them hesitating in the doorway as if judging how safe the room was. “Yes,” he said, his gaze momentarily catching Eggsy’s before looking back at Michelle. “I’m afraid that you have. I was the one who delivered the news about your late husband, and gave Eggsy his medal. Again, it is something I am sincerely sorry for.”

Michelle looked like she didn’t know how to react to the news, but truthfully, very little of Harry cared. He looked back across to Eggsy, who was smiling, his fingers playing with something behind his collar.

As he turned back to Michelle, she seemed to have recovered herself, and was also watching her son and Roxy. “Well, come in you two!” she said, beckoning them as she fetched the last plates. “The gravy’ll go cold.”

*  

After a long and enjoyable meal, after more than merely ‘good’ company, Eggsy’s mother had shooed the men from the room and made Roxy stay to chat, under the pretence of needing Eggsy and Harry to start the fire in the lounge and Roxy to help her tidy up.

“They’ll be there for a solid half-hour if my mum has a say,” Eggsy had explained with a grin as he led Harry to the lounge.

“I’m sure Roxy can survive,” Harry had replied. “I’m told she scored tops marks in her torture endurance training,” he continued teasingly, earning him a light elbow to the ribs.

Now, however, Eggsy had started the fire without needing any of Harry’s help. He had directed Harry to sit on one of the sofas, and had placed himself on the floor to his left, with JB to keep him company. They didn’t really speak, Harry still holding his glass of merlot and Eggsy playing with his pug, but they didn’t really need to. The room was dimly lit and warmed with the fire, and the silence was comfortable enough.

A silence that was dramatically broken when Eggsy touched Harry’s leg lightly to get his attention, and then lifted up JB, who was looking more ridiculous than usual with Eggsy’s glasses perched on
his face. Harry felt he was completely justified in bursting into laughter. Eggsy followed his lead almost immediately after, falling over a bemused JB as he laughed until he cried.

“That is, without a doubt, both the most unprofessional and most approvable use of Kingsman equipment that I have ever seen,” Harry said when he could speak again, lifting up his own glasses to wipe tears from his eyes.

“Yeah, I thought you might find it amusing,” Eggsy said, still grinning like his face was going to split in two. “What made me laugh so much was that he reminded me of Merlin.”

That almost set Harry off again, but he managed to keep some composure. “Oh, lords, please never tell him I laughed at that,” he chuckled.

“No promises,” Eggsy said, with his almost trademarked cheeky grin.

The silence returned, more comfortable than before. Feeling safer than he usually did, Harry said, “Your mother – wonderful woman, by the way – thanked me.”

Eggsy continued to play with JB’s ears as he turned to look at Harry. “For what? Helping set the table?” he asked wryly.

Harry shook his head. “No, no. She said she was grateful for what I’d done for you. She seemed under the impression that I was actually responsible for your, well, who you’ve become.”

He didn’t know how he expected Eggsy to react. But it struck him deep when Eggsy just shrugged, refusing to avoid his gaze. “Well, yeah. I mean, trust me, I know how much hard work I’ve put in to getting this far, fucking effort man. But it’s all ‘cause of you really. I wouldn’t have got half as far if it weren’t for you. Not just because what you’ve taught me, more like… guided me. You can’t pretend you didn’t know that.” The whole time, Eggsy was looking at him with more intensity than Harry could bear, but he could bear the thought of looking away even less.

“No, I guess I can’t, not really,” Harry muttered, absently playing with the stem of his wine glass. “And… you too, Eggsy. I… you too.”

There was a pause, until it all got unbearable, hanging in limbo. Harry looked down at his wine. Smiling wryly at the memory, he said with irony, “She seems under the impression that I’m a good, ah, responsible ‘father figure’ for you.”

Eggsy snorted, and turned back to JB.

He was the one to break the silence, quite a while later. “You stuck with the eye patch, then?” he asked, and for a moment Harry thought he was going to ask if he could put that on JB, too. “I mean, just saying. I think the grey material you’ve got for it tonight looks rather… suave.”

Harry smiled slightly. “I have been asked if I want a prosthetic eye. It’s tempting, but I can’t deny I rather like the drama that comes with having an eye patch. I’ve found the intimidation is both helpful and amusing.”

“Well you could get one of those whited-out prosthetics, or a black one,” Eggsy suggested. “Make you look like a Bond villain, or seer or something. Think it’d look pretty ace.”

Harry nodded, considering the proposition.

After that, they stayed in silence until Roxy and Michelle returned, bringing with them glasses and a bottle of brandy.
“So, the last vote, unsurprisingly, didn’t leave us with a unanimous result,” Merlin said, scanning the page before him before handing it to Eggsy. “So I have to ask you to read this document with the other’s votes and their reasoning, and then to submit your vote again. This way takes a while, but apparently does usually lead to a unanimous vote. I haven’t really been here long enough to see it in action, but I’ve been told it’s effective.”

Eggsy took the paper. Lots of people had voted for Tristan, and Percival. The odd vote for other Kingsmen. No surprise that he was the only one picking Harry. “Yeah, seems bloody stupid to me. Why not just put all of us in a room? Be a lot quicker.”

“Yes, but apparently it, ah, didn’t end well the last time that method was tried,” Merlin said. “Now, of course, if you can look me in the eye and say that you would absolutely not get volatile over this, then I’d be more than happy to try it again-”

Okay, Eggsy had to concede to that. “Fair enough,” he muttered, scanning for Lancelot’s vote. Percival – yeah, made sense. He was a good guy, never turned his nose up at Eggsy, good sense of humour. Apparently a fan of Mumford & Sons. He’d only been on one field mission with the guy so far, but he seemed logical, waited for everyone to leave before he got out.

“So – who’re you voting for?”

Eggsy handed the paper back, and leant back in the chair. “Harry.”

The first time Eggsy stayed the night round Harry’s was a year after he… well, technically he hadn’t died. But for a long time it had bloody well felt like it.

He’d gone round for a drink, something that was becoming more and more common – from a rare post-mission event to a weekly thing. Harry had brought up the anniversary of his near-death and the takedown of Valentine, proposing that they brought out the good stuff to commemorate the occasion.

If, after a few too many and the dredging up of memories of days that Eggsy would rather forget, Eggsy didn’t make any move to leave, then Harry didn’t mention it. Eggsy fell asleep on the couch, and woke up in the spare room.

Harry cooked him scrambled eggs on toast for breakfast.

And it was only a day later when, driving a Aston Martin DB9 that Percival was leaning out off in an attempt to shoot the driver of a stolen armoured truck filled with potentially catastrophic biological hazard materials, Eggsy had first called Harry ‘babes’.

Watching from the monitoring room back in The Mansion, Harry made a comment about taking care of the paint job of the frankly very expensive car. Eggsy had checked his wing mirror, waited for Percival to make the shot and slide back in the car before replying, “Sure thing, babes,” and slamming the DB9 into the side of the truck, knocking it off the road and down the North Yorkshire valley. Leaving the DB9 with a rather substantial scratch along the side.

Back in the control room, Merlin was trying, and failing to hide his laughter behind a series of fake coughs.

“Don’t you say a fucking word,” Harry swore at him. Merlin held his hands up in surrender before moving to alert the clean-up crew that the biohazard materials had been recovered.
It was only logic to type-cast agents to their missions, as it were. Caradoc was known to take most of the missions that involved mass destruction. Flight and rescue was Tristan’s expertise. Quick in-and-out was Lancelot’s usual type. And, honestly, Eggsy was more than happy for the missions that let him be really, really reckless with fast cars, and couldn’t deny that if any of the other agents tried anything in the rough end of any city they’d be dead and in a dumping ground before an hour was out.

Even so, it was nice to have something a bit different. Especially when that ‘something different’ let him have a nice day on the shores of Brittany.

“You know, this really isn’t anything exotic,” Harry muttered next to him, as, for the fourth time that day, Eggsy pointed out the fancy cakes in a patisserie window.

“Yeah, perhaps not for someone who went to Athens and Monte Carlo and shit for holidays as a kid,” Eggsy pointed out. “I was lucky if we got a week at Butlins. So, before things go to shit and we have to bail back to London, let me enjoy it, yeah?”

Harry hummed his consent, umbrella swinging casually in his hands. He made a left turn, and Eggsy followed, completely in step. “Things shouldn’t fall to ‘shit’ if this goes as planned, you know,” Harry pointed out. “Indeed, no one outside should even be aware that anything unusual happened. There’s no reason why we can’t linger for another day or two.”

Stunned, Eggsy looked up at him, the look of childish joy on his face entirely out of place with his immaculate suit and carefully coiffed hair. “You joshing me?” he asked excitedly, eyes shining behind his glasses. “You’re serious, right?”

“Completely,” Harry said. “I mean, it’s the first time I’ve been allowed to leave an office for over a year, not to mention that we haven’t even reached the sea-side yet. There’s a really nice old castle complex that’s been turned into a market-place, it would be a shame not to visit it. You truly have to try the ice-cream stalls they have there.”

“Ice cream? Are gentlemen allowed to have ice-cream while wearing suits?” Eggsy asked, side-eyeing Harry.

“Absolutely. Only after high-level assassinations, however. What number house is it?”

“Uh, 64.”

Harry pulled to a stop outside a beautiful old house, three stories high, the front decorated with intricate paint and carvings. “This is us, then, I believe.”

The only sign that it was anything other than the high-end arts and crafts shops on either side was the heavy curtains on all the new, metal-framed windows, and the small CCTV camera over the door. “I didn’t anticipate it being a terraced house,” Eggsy muttered. “Think we can get in and out with just knives?”

“You can, I’m sure,” Harry said, moving his umbrella from where it was held under his left arm to his right hand. “As for me, I prefer the protection of my old friend here. I’ll follow your lead, Galahad.”

One last exchange of looks, a confirmation that they were both ready, both aware of the plan, before strolling up to the front door.
Someone opened barely seconds after Eggsy knocked. “Bonsoir, Monsieur;” he said, politely inclining his head. “Je suis ici pour voir Jacques Marchand?”

The huge man on the other side of the doorway scanned both of them, muttered French into his radio, before nodding and letting them in.

Two other men were in the spacious hallway, also dressed in loosely fitted, terribly cliché black suits. Eggsy couldn’t resist looking across to see Harry’s look of disappointment.

“Weapons search,” the doorman said brusquely, in broken English. “You two. No weapons in Monsieur Marchand’s office.”

Ah, now, that was unfortunate. Wincing, Eggsy turned, gaze darting from Harry to the two goons behind them, before turning back to face the doorman. “I’m afraid we can’t consent to that,” he said, patronizingly, and pulling his two custom-commissioned knives from the sheaths in the small of his back. “I mean, it’s slightly hard to assassinate someone without weapons, y’get me?”

He and Harry moved completely in time. The umbrella opened as Eggsy darted forwards, slicing the doorman’s neck before the surprise could even reach his face. Bullets slammed into the black material, but not one of them got through. Eggsy spun back, his hands reaching Harry’s shoulders as the other man crouched, ducking and lowering the umbrella to allow Eggsy to vault sideways over him. One of the muscle men had a knife imbedded in his chest, the other, poisoned by the neurotoxin in the tip of Eggsy’s Oxford shoe.

Eggsy landed perfectly between the two bodies. “Think there’ll be more?” he asked, pulling his knife from the body and wiping it on the cheap black suit.

“Undoubtedly,” Harry said, closing his umbrella. “Back room, second floor. Shall we?”

He was offering his arm to Eggsy. Unable to resist, Eggsy took it, grinning.

They didn’t find any more trouble until they reached the landing upstairs. More guys than had been defending the downstairs, and apparently their shock of two men politely climbing the stairs in impeccable suits wasn’t enough to prevent them from shooting.

The umbrella was up before any shots landed. “You got my six?” Eggsy asked, so close to Harry, crouched behind the spread of black material.

Harry smiled at him. “As ever.”

The two rose, back to back and in perfect synchronization, as if the steps were part of some intricate waltz they’d been practising for years. For every step forwards Harry took Eggsy stepped back perfectly, legs almost interlocking. When Harry turned Eggsy followed. He took a pistol from the first man he downed, and started shooting with immaculate precision, no man getting a shot in after the umbrella revealed them to Eggsy.

Jacques Marchand was precisely were intel said he would be. Harry opened the door and Eggsy stepped through, taking just enough time to verify that the man sat there was indeed their target before taking him out with a clean shot to the head.

“Well done, as ever,” Harry muttered.

Eggsy dropped the pistol onto a dead body as they headed down the stairs. “Not too bad yourself,” he replied, grinning. “Do you want to call it in?”
Harry smiled. “Merlin, are you there?”

“Aye, as ever.”

“Galahad has removed the French threat,” Harry said. “We’ll report back to The Mansion in a few days.”

There was a momentary silence on the other end. “Right. A few days. Because there’s so much clean-up to do over there.”

“So much, like, there’s just blood everywhere, it’s horrible, like a zombie B-movie,” Eggsy chimed in, pulling disgusted faces that made it hard for Harry to keep a straight face.

“You must both think I’m a god damn moron. You’d better buy me wine, and I’m taking the days off out of your sick days,” Merlin muttered. “Merlin out.”

Harry finally met Eggsy’s eyes, and the two snorted with laughter. Eggsy slipped his knives back in their sheaths before they stepped outside into the warm afternoon sun, dusting their suits off and shutting the door behind them like nothing was wrong.

*

The two of them watched the sun set from the ramparts of the old castle Harry had mentioned, ice-creams in hand. While Harry had gone for a simple waffle-cone with watermelon, Eggsy’s ice-cream was laden without five scoops of varying colours and flavours, none of them simple.

“If you manage to eat that before someone tells us to get down from here, I’ll be impressed,” Harry pointed out, carefully licking a drop of melted watermelon ice-cream before it reached his fingers.

Eggsy shook his head, taking a mouthful of something neon green. “Nah, they won’t tell us a thing. Act like you belong somewhere, no one will say a word. Learnt that sneaking around places before I met you. ‘Sides,” he continued, using his tongue to lick clean the stickiness of melted ice-cream from between his fingers, rather inelegantly, “I think they’ll be too busy being surprised about how two guys in suits got up here to tell us to get down.”

Harry chuckled. “Perhaps you’re right.”

The sun went down below the level of the sea, leaving the slightest pink blur in the dark-blue sky.

“Any ideas for plans for tomorrow?” Eggsy asked.

“There’s this art museum a few towns over that I’m quite interested in. If that’s alright with you, of course?”

“Yeah. Sounds good.”

***

Even after they returned from Brittany, they were given another day off. Merlin’s hunches weren’t paying off, and anything that was confirmed dangerous was being taken care of, leaving Eggsy and Harry with nothing to do.

Harry took the opportunity to indulge something he didn’t normally do: he wore jeans. Still partnered with a crisp white shirt, of course, and an expensive, cowl-neck cashmere jumper, but, well. It wasn’t often he had confirmed days off.
Yet, as ever, there were still things to be done.

One o’clock in the afternoon found him outside Eggsy’s house, knocking on the door, briefcase held loosely in one hand, the other running through his uncommonly ruffled hair.

Someone he didn’t know opened the door. The young man, roughly Eggsy’s age, looked at him with unveiled suspicion.

“Who’re you?” the man demanded, scanning Harry up and down. “We don’t take no door-to-door salesmen ’round here.”

“I am aware, as I live only a few minutes’ walk that way,” Harry replied dryly. “I’m here for Eggsy.”

The man shrugged. “No can do. He’s asleep. Been away for work for a few days, needs rest.”

“Yes, I was away with him,” Harry added, not lacking amusement. “And I have documents related to our business trip that I need him to look over. So, if I might go leave them in his office, I’ll be in and out in no time.”

For some reason, something he said earned him even deeper scrutiny – before the man’s eyes widened, and he stepped back from the door, beckoning him in frantically. “Aw, shit man, you’re Harry ain’t you? Sorry bruv, you shoulda said!”

Gratified, if a little confused, Harry stepped into the house and closed the door behind him. “You seem to have me at a disadvantage,” he said. “I’m afraid I don’t know who you are.”

“Jamal,” the man answered. “Eggsy asked me to babysit the little one, ’cause his mam’s at work and he was well out of it, said he needed sleep.”

Harry smiled, adjusting his glasses. “And he calls me old,” he said wryly, getting a smile from Jamal. “Do you know if he’s still asleep?”

Jamal shrugged. “Prob’ly? I mean, I know he didn’t get much sleep last night. Mrs Unwin had a right go at him, didn’t like that he’d been gone for three days without saying where, y’know?”

In the expectant pause that followed, Harry realised that Jamal was hoping that Harry would reveal something that Eggsy hadn’t. “If you’ll excuse me, I’m on a schedule,” Harry muttered instead, stepping past Jamal and heading swiftly for the stairs.

Eggsy’s bedroom and study were right next to each other. Harry felt he was excused if he got the two mixed up, pushing open a door to reveal Eggsy curled up in a small corner of a large double bed, buried under his duvet, JB curled up by his back.

Perhaps there wasn’t so much of an excuse for how Harry then entered Eggsy’s room, but he did it anyway. JB woke as he approached, head darting up and making a small noise before relaxing as he recognised Harry. Smiling, Harry reached over to scratch the small dog’s head.

Eggsy stirred very slightly beside him. Stepped back carefully, so not to disturb the sleeping boy, Harry watched him for signs of movement. Slowly, very slowly, very reluctantly, Eggsy’s eyes opened.

“Harry?” he asked groggily, head turning to look up at him. “What’re you…” he yawned, unconsciously burying his face back in the duvet again. “Oh, you’re wearing jeans. M’dreaming…”

He rolled over, JB moving out of the way just in time. Smiling, Harry reached up and ran fingers
lightly through Eggsy’s hair, his touch lingering until he knew Eggsy had drifted off once again.

He dropped the relevant files off on Eggsy’s desk with a post-it note stuck on the pile, detailing what he needed to do. He paused to look in on Eggsy once more before going back downstairs.

He peered into the lounge before leaving, to thank Jamal for letting him in. The man was sat on the floor with Daisy, both of them watching the children’s show on TV intently.

“Yeah, no problem Hazzer,” Jamal muttered, waving him off.

It would be a lie if Harry said he didn’t smile at that.

He locked the door behind him with the house key Eggsy had given him.

***

Roxy rocked up at half six with a six pack and her pyjamas in a rucksack.

“Welcome back the green and pleasant land,” she said teasingly, as Eggsy let her in from the rain. “Good to see you’re okay.”

Eggsy snorted, taking her rucksack from her and hanging it on the coat rack. “Dudes were a white-out, it was nothing,” he said, following her through into the kitchen. “I’ve got a voucher for Dominoes, if you want it?”

Roxy ignored him, putting down the six-pack and spinning to face him, smirk firmly in place. “I wasn’t talking about the mission,” she said, staring him down with an evil grin, “I was talking about the several days that you and Harry were AWOL.”

Eggsy tried to reach for a beer – only to have his hand slapped away. “Hey! We weren’t AWOL, all right, Merlin gave us permission. And we were just sight-seeing.” Pushing her hand firmly away, he grabbed a Stella. “Have you ever seen the Palace of Versailles? That place is fucking mental.”

“Yes, of course I’ve seen Versailles, Eggsy,” Roxy said, rolling her eyes, and taking a Stella of her own. Without prompting she left the kitchen and made her own way to the lounge, flopping back onto a sofa and making JB start. Eggsy trailed after her, slightly bemused. “So,” Roxy continued, pulling off her boots to reveal fluffy pink socks – matching the purple ones Eggsy had on, “does this mean you two are official now?”

“I really have no idea what the fuck you’re going on about,” Eggsy said honestly, heading over to turn on the TV. He picked up the controllers before joining Roxy on the sofa, JB squished comfortably between them.

“You and Harry. Are you official now?”

“What, partners? I dunno, we won’t know who’s partnered with who officially until the next Arthur gets elected. ‘Sides, I think Harry’s more a work-alone kinda agent at heart.”

The look Roxy gave him made him think that he was about to get a controller to the side of the head. “Are you dense?” she asked furiously. “I’m talking about you two together. As in, together together! You’ve only been crushing on him since the first day of training! And now you’ve spent a weekend in France together, sightseeing places like Château de Versaille?”

“Where?” Eggsy asked, feigning confusion. The elbow in his ribs – not at all gentle – hinted that he might be pushing it all a bit too far. Chewing the inside of his cheeks as he thought his answer
through, he felt Roxy watching him intently, waiting for any physical clues he might give away. “Look, I don’t – it’s not really like that, right? There’s not – we don’t work like that. There’s more to it. It’s not a crush, yeah?”

He turned his attention to JB, playing with his ears. It was too much to look at Roxy as she came to the same realisation that he had, several months ago.

“Oh!” she said, the soft exclamation of shock more painful than her teasing. “Oh… I mean… should I have brought wine and Haagen-Dazs instead of beer?”

That was better. Smirking, Eggsy shoved her lightly. “No. Just choose your fucking character, all right?” he said, waving his hand at the screen.

Roxy pulled a face at him, but selected Princess Peach.

Eggsy winced at her selection with exaggerated disappointment, earning him another elbow to the ribs. “All right,” he said, clicking on Yoshi, “d’you know how to play?”

“Contrary to popular belief, Eggsy, private schools do not live outside of society,” Roxy tutted, selecting the Flower Cup before Eggsy could have any input.

“Just feel I should warn you, you are going up against a pro.”

Roxy smirked, and didn’t reply – until she got a perfect boost off the starting line. “Good job,” she said calmly, taking Waluigi out with a perfectly aimed green shell. “It would be embarrassing if I beat you at this as badly as I beat you at everything else.”

Ink smeared across Eggsy’s half of the screen. He swore – between them, JB whined sympathetically.

*  

Merlin came round at seven with a briefcase and a cake tin.

“You look tired,” Harry said as he opened the door. Merlin looked at him in disbelief.

“It’s nice to see you too,” he said defensively, barging his way into the house. “Have you done your paperwork yet?”

“Yes, most of it,” Harry said, following him through to his open-plan kitchen/diner. “I dropped the report of at Eggsy’s this afternoon for him to sign as accurate, but he was still asleep, apparently.”

“Oh?” Merlin asked, chucking the cake tin on the breakfast bar and dumping his briefcase on the table. “You wear him out that much? Didn’t know you had it in you.”

As Merlin sat down and organised himself as if it were his own home, Harry crossed his arms. “I’m not sure I approve of your insinuation there.”

“Ah, you never approve of my insinuations when you’re the butt of the joke,” Merlin mused. “Which ones are your financial records?”

Harry pointed them out for him, and Merlin started to scan through it. “It’s not like that, and you know it.”

Merlin made a non-committal noise. “Y’know, you’re lucky there’s no Arthur,” he muttered, flicking through the finances. “I’d like to see you trying to explain away your three night stay at a five-star…
you only booked one room?”

Harry shrugged, making his way to the cake tine Merlin had put down. “It made sense,” he said, as if that was the only explanation needed. “Ah, bakewell tart?”

“Yeah, Marianne had one left over from her dinner party,” Merlin muttered. “Harry…”

“I’ve already given you the best explanation I can,” Harry said wearily, setting the cake tin back down and leaning against the breakfast bar, meeting Merlin’s confused look with a tired one of his own. “It just made… sense.”

As Merlin continued to stare him down, Harry exploded. “Look, I’m not screwing the boy if that’s what you’re so concerned about!” he yelled.

Merlin raised his hands in surrender. “That’s not what I’m concerned about at all,” he protested. “I wouldn’t be the slightest bit concerned if you were. In fact, it seems like you’re the only one who’s concerned by the thought. What concerns me is that you seem to have no idea what you’re doing.”

Harry forced himself to take a breath. “I know what I’m doing,” he said, quietly. Saying it aloud felt strange.

Merlin nodded, turning back to the finance reports. “Okay then.”

***

“The conference isn’t until roughly this time tomorrow evening,” Harry said, unpacking the surveillance equipment onto the small desk in the corner of the hotel room. “So we have plenty of time to ensure that you have thoroughly learnt all the names and… Eggsy? Eggsy are you alright?”

The other side of the room, his suitcase still packed on the bed, Eggsy was frowning at his phone. “Hm?” he asked, looking up, clearly unaware of what Harry had been talking about.

Setting down the equipment he’d been holding, Harry turned to face Eggsy. “Are you alright?” he asked, frowning with concern. “You look worried. What do you need?”

“Nothing, I don’t need nothing,” Eggsy muttered, pocketing his mobile. “It’s just my mum, she’s a bit… well, she don’t like me going off on business trips so sudden like, especially when I’ve got a history of not coming back in one piece, y’know?”

“Ah.” Harry nodded. “I’m afraid that’s not something I can help with, no,” he said. “But for what it’s worth, I am sorry.”

Eggsy shook his head. “Nah, s’not your fault. Mum says hi, by the way.”

“Send my regards to her, too.”

Eggsy snorted, and willingly pulled his phone out to send the text. Harry continued to set up the surveillance equipment, eventually hearing the sounds of Eggsy finally unzipping his suitcase and starting to hang up the suits he’d brought with him.

“Roxy said something the other day that made me think… are you my permanent, like, I dunno, back-up man now?” Eggsy asked suddenly. “Like the-backup-guy-in-the-van type thing.”

Amused, Harry looked around just in time to see Eggsy collapsing on the very soft, very bouncy double bed, apparently abandoning the rest of the unpacking in favour of enjoying the five-star room.
“I know what you mean, even though I can expressly say that a Kingsman never uses vans when undercover,” he replied. “However, though the role hasn’t been made official, I must say that it is one that I enjoy. I might not have a field name, as such, but I still get to do what I enjoy. And in good company, if I may say,” he said, giving a nod in Eggsy’s direction. Eggsy grinned back.

“Still bullshit that they didn’t let you return as a Kingsman,” Eggsy muttered, staring at the ceiling.

“Ah, yes, about that.” Harry stood up, making his way to his side of the bed. “Merlin says that you still insist on voting for me as Arthur?”

Eggsy grunted in confirmation, not moving as Harry sat down next to him, carefully untying his shoes before lying back on the bed.

“You are aware how much I hate paperwork, yes?” he asked wryly, watching Eggsy out the corner of his eye.

The boy was scowling up at the ceiling. “Yeah, but – it’s unfair, alright? I don’t like it.”

At that, Harry outright laughed. “I know, and really, your need to defend my honour is touching,” he said, only laughing more when Eggsy made a disgruntled noise. “Truly, my dear boy,” Harry said, more seriously, “Though your actions might be misplaced, I am grateful.”

Finally, Eggsy’s scowl slipped away, replaced by a genuine smile. “Yeah yeah, don’t go getting all emotional on me,” he muttered, standing up to get changed into his pyjamas.

Smiling to himself, Harry shook his head, standing up to do the same.

Sleeping together in a bed on missions was becoming second nature now. It was easy to fall asleep to the sound of Eggsy’s soft breathing, to the feel of a body shifting on the other side of the mattress.

Nor was it surprising when, around half eleven, a hand reached out to take his own. Harry held on tight without having to wonder why.

***

Eggsy came back from his latest mission with a cracked ribs, a busted arm and black eye.

Harry hadn’t been with him on that mission. Merlin had said he was needed back at The Mansion, playing the diplomat in lieu of anyone at base that wasn’t Scottish and liable to lose patience at Southerner pansies. Technically he was helping Eggsy, distracting the Argentinian Ambassador while Eggsy scouted out the Consulate, but that was far from reassuring when he watched the footage from the Kingsman glasses.

It wasn’t his fault. Every Kingsman made mistakes, god knows Harry made some terrible ones in his time. It was easy to have too much faith in your own abilities, especially with your first solo mission in a long time. It was easy to believe that a bullet would never actually meet its target.

The problem was that this should have been avoidable. It was unnecessary, and now Eggsy was lying in the hospital wing, waiting to have a bullet removed from his humerus. Harry thought he had done pretty well, waiting this long before rushing down to check on him. One hour and two minutes, to be precise.

Merlin was already in the room as a doctor examined Eggsy’s arm, running through a quick debrief of what he’s found. Eggsy seemed fine, sitting upright, talking clearly, the only signs that he was anything other than fine being the slight red lines of blood trickling down his arm, and the ice pack
pressed to his left eye.

Harry entered as quietly as he could, but of course both Merlin and Eggsy turned to look at him. Smiling, staying silent, Harry just leant against the wall and waited for the two of them to finish.

It took little over half an hour before Eggsy had finished relating everything he’d found – which seemed like fuck all, on reflection. Nothing too suspicious but the discovery of a surveillance system that seemed to have been placed by a third party, and the recovery of which led to the security at the Consulate believing that Eggsy, himself, was an enemy rather than a well-intentioned bystander. Hence the bullet in his bone and black eye.

After having Eggsy sign off on the transcript of his report, Merlin left. Not, however, without a significant look at Harry and the advice, “Tell your boy to stop taking such goddamn unnecessary risks in recon missions, would you?”

Harry nodded at him.

He didn’t move from his place against the wall, however, until the doctor finally retrieved the bullet and dressed the wound. Wordlessly, Harry held out his hand for the medical chart as the doctor left. Only after the door had swung shut did Harry push off from the wall. “Merlin is right, you know,” he said, quickly scanning the chart. “You really do need to stop being so reckless. Your only objective was to scout the place out. The additional surveillance could have been taken care of another time.”

Eggsy shrugged, picking his shirt up and slipping his good arm into a sleeve with little effort. “I got out of there alive, didn’t I?” as if getting shot was no big deal. He struggled with lifting his wounded arm enough to get it through the other sleeve.

Dropping the chart on the end of the bed, Harry stepped closer to hold the shirt up for him. “How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Don’t feel a thing,” Eggsy said cheerfully. “Got me on the good drugs. Well, local anaesthetic, but I really can’t feel anything from my shoulder to my little finger, so it’s bloody good all the same. Arm’s a bit stiff though.”

“Have they given you painkillers to take home?”

“M’not going home.”

Only severe self-control stopped Harry’s mouth falling open. “You’re not?”

Eggsy shook his head. “Can you imagine my mum’s reaction if I show up home with a fucking bullet-hole in my shoulder? She’d go mental. Nah, I’m gonna stay in my quarters here for a few more nights, ’til I can hide it from her easy.” Shirt buttoned up, his right sleeve stained a heartbreaking bright red and left eye painfully bruised, Eggsy grinned suggestively up at Harry like he hadn’t a care in the world. “Unless you’ve an idea of somewhere else I could stay?”

Harry almost gave him the response he knew Eggsy wanted. He was ready to. He wanted to. And his willingness horrified him.

As he hesitated, he saw concern slowly take over Eggsy’s features.

He wanted to say yes so badly. He wanted to say stay with me. He wanted to say you can share my bed.
Instead what he said was, “Well, I’m sure Merlin will be happy you’re somewhere that the doctors can keep an eye on you,” forcing a smile.

He left before he could change his mind, before Eggsy could call him out on his blatant lie.

There had to be boundaries. There had to be.

***

Harry was getting accustomed to the paperwork. Not that he was enjoying, per se, but he was finally able to work it into his daily routine when in The Mansion without having to spend an hour complaining about his lot to Merlin beforehand.

If he procrastinate by making himself roughly twenty cups of tea, then no one was to judge. Besides, the only person who saw, Gawain, was always in the kitchen himself, and always with an apparently endless supply of doughnuts that he was kind enough to share to other people suffering through the less exciting side of their jobs.

Even so, it was more than a relief when Eggsy interrupted his attempts at focusing and his seventh cup of tea.

“Still haven’t mastered the art of knocking, I see,” Harry said, smiling up at him.

Slumping into the chair opposite Harry’s desk, Eggsy shrugged. “You’re just gonna say ‘come in’ anyway,” he pointed out, leaning forwards to snatch the remainder of the strawberry jam doughnut from Harry’s saucer.

“Indeed, please help yourself to my food too,” Harry said wryly, setting his pen down. “Did you just come for anything other than my doughnut?”

Eggsy shook his head. “Nah, just the food,” he said through a full mouth, but he was smiling. “And I thought you might like a break.”

Harry smiled gratefully back at him. “Ah, yes, well, you’re not wrong there,” he said. “Though, really, you could fetch your own doughnut first. Gawain had a whole box of them stashed somewhere in the kitchen.”

Much to Harry’s surprise, Eggsy let out a loud, passionate noise of despair. “I fucking know,” he cried, sliding down the chair in shame. “I’ve been searching for where he keeps the fucking things for weeks now, and I can’t find a single bloody crumb, can I?”

His feet were knocking against Harry’s under the desk now. “Have you tried just asking him?” Harry suggested, unable to pretend that Eggsy’s disgruntlement wasn’t amusing.

Eggsy shot him a scathing look. “C’mon Harry, that’d be cheating.”

As ever, there was nothing wrong when silence fell. Oxfrds lightly resting against the old Adidas trainers, Harry just waited patiently as Eggsy finished his mouthful, watching him with a half-smile.

“Yeah, there is something else, actually,” Eggsy said, licking his fingers clean. “It’s Daisy’s birthday next weekend, and though we’re gonna have a kid’s thing with Thomas the Tank Engine and shit that weekend, mum was thinking of doing something for the adults on the Saturday? Like a big meal thing? She said to extend an invite to you and Roxy.”

“I would be absolutely delighted, as ever,” Harry replied, with an incline of his head to show his
gratitude. “Though perhaps you could slip a word to your mum about not trying to roast broccolis, hm?” he added, trying to get Eggsy to laugh.

It worked, for a short while. Then Eggsy was chewing his lips, trainers absentmindedly knocking against Harry’s oxfords again. “Look, there’s – there’s something else, but it’s big,” he admitted, hands shoved deep in his pockets, nerves causing him to tilt his head down, half-hiding behind the collar of his varsity jacket.

“Of course.” There was no hesitation, never would be.

Eggsy opened his mouth, paused, and looked nervously at Harry. “I was wondering if I could get permission to tell my mum the truth.”

The truth? There were so many things that even Harry didn’t know the truth of right then. “About what?” he asked carefully.

Eggsy gestured around the both of them. “This. All of it. About what it is I actually do. I can’t keep coming home to a mum and baby sister with bullet-holes and broken limbs and stab wounds and not explain, Harry. It’s not fair on her. She’s already lost one of her men to all this, you can’t even imagine what it does to her seeing me looking like this.”

Oh. “I’m afraid that’s not up to me, Eggsy,” Harry said, drawing his feet back, sitting upright, glancing down from Eggsy to the documents littering his desk. “I can’t give you permission for something like that.”

“Bullshit you can’t!” Eggsy exploded. “It’s not like anyone would get pissed at you, it’s not like it’d be a big fucking breach of security! You’ve met her!”

“I’m sorry, but there’s no precedence—”

“Because all you lot with your silver spoons and how-d’you-dos have it in the family, right?” Eggsy cut in, sneering viciously. “Oh it’s fine when you’re in the upper class, fine when you’re Oxbridge, your sister lives in Scotland and Roxy’s parents knows she’s works for the same secret firm her fucking godfather used to work in – my mum works in fucking Morrisons!”

“Eggsy—”

Harry’s laptop beeped, before Merlin’s voice filled the room. “Harry, have you got a minute?” he asked, his voice momentarily creating a silence that left Harry struggling to cope with the unrelenting hatred in Eggsy’s eyes. “I think I’ve fucking finally got something, going to need Galahad and you to follow up for me.”

Harry swallowed. Eggsy looked at him, one eyebrow rose as if saying, Well, deal with it then. “Wonderful news, Merlin, but if you could give us a minute?”

Acquiescing, Merlin didn’t respond. Neither did Eggsy. And gods, but Harry felt so bad about that. About all of this. “It’s really not in my power, Eggsy,” he said weakly. “It’s just not.”

“You were the one who gave her the medal,” Eggsy growled. “You were the one who told her that I now worked for the same agency that got my dad killed. And now you’re saying it’s none of your responsibility? You are shitting me, right?”

Unsure of what to say, of what he was meant to say, Harry just stuttered out, “It’s not – there’s rules that have to be followed.”
It was the wrong thing to say, Harry knew the instant it left his mouth. Eggsy’s anger turned to disbelief and disappointment. If Harry had thought the fury had hurt, it was nothing compared to what it felt like to have Eggsy looking at him like he’d just let him down worse than anyone else before. “Yeah, you and those rules,” Eggsy muttered. “Y’know, when you first met me you said there were exceptions even among the posh snobs, and gods, I was so willing to believe you. But I guess the truth is you’re just as scared of what your peers think of you as the rest of your fucking class. You don’t want to risk a god damn thing for your reputation, and I’m getting real tired of it all.”

Before Harry could try to explain – before he could figure out what he was explaining, what mistake he was trying to get Eggsy to understand – Eggsy pushed the chair back and got to his feet. “And you know what?” he said, as Harry stared up at him, frozen by shock and guilt and fear, “No, I’m not just talking about my mum anymore. Because, unlike some people, I can’t spend whole conversations trying to read between the lines.”

He left.

A few minutes later, Merlin’s voice echoed from Harry’s laptop again. “Uh, Harry?”

Blinking and rubbing the water away from his eyes, Harry forced himself to regain composure. “Yes, yes, sorry. How can I be of assistance?”

On the screen, Merlin was frowning at him. They’d known each other too long for Harry to pretend to himself that Merlin didn’t realise that something was wrong, but he knew Merlin respected him enough not to mention it. “Ideally we’d want Galahad to lead point on this,” Merlin said carefully. It didn’t escape Harry that Merlin had used his codename.

Harry smiled sadly. “Unfortunately, I think that Galahad is, ah, not quite recovered from his last few missions yet. Best to give him a bit more time off, I think.”

Merlin stared at him, long and hard, jaw clenched with concern. When Harry didn’t cave, however, Merlin just nodded. “Alright. If you think you can manage it alone, then I’ll let you decide that for yourself.”

* 

Roxy found Eggsy in the shooting range a few hours later.

“You know, you’re starting to make Percival worried,” she said, leaning against the barrier next to him. “And when Percival gets concerned about someone’s love of firearms, you know that something’s gone terribly wrong.”

Eggsy didn’t reply. He finished firing the cartridge of the pistol into the target, only to set the empty pistol down and pick up the semi-automatic shotgun.

Roxy shifted her weight as the loud ricocheting explosions echoed through the range. “Are we going to talk about it?” she asked between shots.

Five rounds in, Eggsy paused. In front of him, the target was swaying, the lower half held in place by a few weak strands of paper. “I think I fucked up,” he muttered, clicking on the safety and setting the shotgun down. “But at the same time, I don’t. D’you get me?”

“No, not really,” Roxy said honestly. “You might have to be slightly more specific. Is it mission related?”
Eggsy shook his head.

“Family related?”

“No – well, not really.”

Roxy sighed. “Ah, now I think I get it. Fight with Harry, was it?”

Eyes wide, jaw clenched, Eggsy spun to face Roxy. “I swear to god, if you call it a fucking domestic I’ll beat the shit out of you—”

“I won’t!” Roxy protested, holding her hands up. “You’ve already said, it’s not like that, and I believe you.” Fully expecting a snarky, defensive comment in return, Roxy felt concern when Eggsy just remained silent – and worse, avoid her eyes. “…isn’t it?” she asked hesitantly.

“No!” Eggsy yelled, barely waiting for Roxy to finish her question. Spinning around, looking lost, he ran a hand through his hair. “Not anymore it’s not, anyway,” he added quietly. Watching him, watching him look more and more lost and confused, Roxy’s heart started to break for him.

“And that’s not a good thing?” she prompted gently.

Reaching up to hold his head with both hands, fingers digging into his scalp, Eggsy shook his head. “No. No, I – I don’t think it is.” With a sudden burst of anger, Eggsy slammed a fist on the table. “Fuck!” he yelled, making Roxy start, “I fucking – I’m fucking stupid—”

“Hey, hey!” Roxy yelled back at him, grabbing his wrists and forcing him to stand still. “Listen to me,” she demanded, in a voice that Eggsy had yet to disobey. True enough, he stopped trying to break everything around him and stared at her, looking half his age. “Whatever you think you’ve fucked up?” Roxy said, speaking clearly, firmly. “I can promise you, you haven’t fucked up anything that can’t be fixed. That man worships the ground you step on, just as much as you do him, okay?”

It took a while, but eventually Eggsy nodded back. Whether from genuine belief or because he knew it was the only way Roxy would let him go, Roxy couldn’t tell.

Someone’s phone started to ring.

Both of them reached into their pockets, but Roxy’s phone was clear. She looked across to Eggsy – his screen was lit up, showing a picture of him and a friend that – well, that revealed he wasn’t from the same demographic as the rest of Kingsman. The image made Roxy smile.

Eggsy flicked on speakerphone from habit. “Yo, Jamal,” he said, his posture relaxing. “What’s up? I thought you weren’t babysitting today?”

“M’not,” came the tinny response. “Look, bruv, I’m in Hoxton—”

Roxy had never heard the name. Apparently it didn’t mean anything good to Eggsy. Aghast, he cut in before his friend could finish. “What the fuck you doing in Hackney, mate?”

“Visiting a cousin, what the fuck is it to you? Nah, more importantly, what’s your mate Hazza doing here? Bit away from his end of town, isn’t it? He does not look like he should be here, someone’s gonna notice.”

“Hazza?” Roxy mouthed at Eggsy. Eggsy shrugged.
“Hazza? What’re you talking about, bruv? I don’t know a Hazza,” Eggsy asked.

“Yeah you do. Harry, your boss, mate."

Eggsy’s face fell. “Shiiiiit,” he groaned, running a hand through his hair again. “Look, Jamal, I know it’s a lot to ask but can you hold him there? Just – just don’t let him move, a’ight, I’ll come get him. I’ll be, uh, fifteen minutes.”

“What’s going on?”

“Nothing, it’s – well, a lot, but he cannot go asking questions, you get me?”

“Yeah, yeah I get you bruv.”

Eggsy hung up, shoving his phone into his jeans pockets and a standard issue pistol into the small of his back. “Roxy, I need you to tell Merlin I’ve gone to help Harry, and I need you on stand-by for my signal,” he said, grabbing her shoulders and all but pleading with her. “Can you do that?”

Confused, Roxy nodded. “Of course – but what’s-”

“Thanks, Roxy, you’re a fucking godsend,” Eggsy said, pressing a quick peck to her cheek. “I owe you one for this!”

He ran off before she could ask him another word.

*

Twenty minutes later and Eggsy’s heart was thudding in his chest so hard he could’ve counted each individual beat, if it weren’t beating so fast that it was all blurring into one.

He’d thought Harry would stand out, down here. He wasn’t sure whether he should panic or be relieved that he couldn’t see him as clearly as he’d thought.

It ended up being Jamal that saw him first. On the corner of a green and kid’s park notably absent of kids, he saw the figure jumping up and down, desperately trying to get his attention. Swearing a stream of curses under his breath, he pulled in sharply, running across to him.

“Bruv, you good, you good?” he asked, grabbing Jamal’s shoulder and taking in the frantic expression on his friend’s face.

Jamal waved him off. “Yeah, nah I’m good, I’m good, just – seen a few wrong looks, I was gonna drag the both of us out of here if you didn’t show up soon.”

Eggsy nodded, glancing over his shoulder at where Harry was standing in a full suit, a full goddamn suit. “Yeah, I know what you mean,” he muttered. “Here, look, take the keys for the taxi, get outta here, yeah?”

Jamal hesitated, and Eggsy felt a rush of affection for his old friend. “Y’sure? I mean, you and that bloke will probably need it more, it’s not me so much they have a prob’em with-”

“We can handle ourselves. G’out, go,” Eggsy cut in, and this time, Jamal nodded.

Eggsy didn’t wait for the sound of the tires screeching before turning to Harry. The man was passing his umbrella between his hands nervously.

Rightly so.
Teeth pressed painfully together and jaw clenched, Eggsy strode forwards. Furious, god damn furious, he put his hands on Harry’s chest and shoved. “Are you fucking dense?” he yelled, stepping forwards when Harry stumbled back. “Comin’ here without me, without backup, looking like that, asking fucking dumb-as-shit question – how thick can you get?”

It was so gratifying to see Harry flinch, taking a step back. “Eggsy, I-”

“No, you do not get to talk, not right now,” Eggsy bit out, unable to get his thoughts straight but knowing that he didn’t want to hear any of Harry’s misplaced, bullshit honourable excuses right then. His hands clenched in and out of fists as he tried to piece his emotions into something he could verbalise. “Shut up and listen, yeah?”

Harry nodded.

Eggsy nodded, looking around. The park was empty, but that didn’t mean they were alone. But right now, Eggsy didn’t care. “I don’t know how long you’ve been pulling this fucking dumb idea of trying to do shit by yourself, of trying to keep me away from risky shit but it’s got to fucking stop. You listening? You pull a stunt like this again and I am going to beat your ass until you end up in the hospital wing to learn your lesson by fucking route. Say ‘yes, Eggsy’.”

Of course Harry didn’t. “It was – what you said-”

Eggsy wanted to scream. “I fucking know it was from what I fucking said!” he yelled, shoving at Harry’s chest again. And again, the man stumbled back. “I know that you seem to have this shit-thick thought that me being pissed at you means I don’t want to fucking help you, or, gods help us all, do my fucking job. Which only shows how fucked up you are. You really don’t get it, do you?” Eggsy paused, hoping without hope that Harry would have an epiphany. No chance. “Even after this, all this, how pissed I am at you right now,” Eggsy said, speaking slowly, patronizing, waving a finger to indicate their current situation, “You could say ‘jump’ and I wouldn’t even consider waiting to ask ‘how high’, because that’s how fucking gone I am for you.”

He couldn’t risk waiting to see Harry’s reaction. A noise made him look over his shoulder. One corner of the park, two guys in jeans and jackets were watching them. More on the other corner.

“Shiit,” Eggsy muttered. “Look, c’mon, we got to go,” he said, grabbing Harry’s arm and steering him towards the only road that seemed clear. “What are you evening doing here? This where Merlin’s lead led?”

“Yes,” Harry muttered back, letting himself be drawn away without resistance. “The ammunition you put the tracker on, that was connected to the abduction of the Argentinian dignitary’s daughter – he found links with a gang in this area.”

“And you decided just to come here and ask questions?” Eggsy hissed, furious all over again. Gods, he wanted to give the man a black eye himself. “Are you mental?”

“I didn’t see-”

Two more men appeared in the road Eggsy had been planning to escape down. Without missing a step he turned right, scouting for another route to take. Alleyway – risky, but not much choice.

“Look, this ain’t South Hampstead, Harry,” Eggsy muttered, checking over his shoulder to confirm his suspicions. “You say a few wrong words around here and you ain’t getting out of it with a few tricks with an umbrella and well-aimed pint glass.”

“What’re you saying?” Harry asked, the hard edge to his voice telling Eggsy that he was finally taking their situation seriously.
Just in time for the end of the alley to be blocked off. One of the men had a cricket bat.

Eggsy already knew there were three men behind them. Chances were, at least half the guys around them had firearms. “I’m telling you we’re fucked.”

One of the men shouldered his way through the brutes before him. The rolled up sleeves of his jacket showed off an impressive array of tribal tattoos. “Alright, guv?” he asked, his cheerful tone sending warning shivers down Eggsy’s spine. “Look, so, we’ve been hearing that your man there, in the suit, has been askin’ questions ‘bout our business, like.” The man grinned. He was missing teeth. “And, well, our boss don’t like it when men in suits are asking out about our business. You get me?”

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“Fuckin’ told you.”

Harry had to smile at that. It was worth the pain, worth reopening his split lip to see Eggsy smile back. “I am sorry,” Harry said, surprised at how much relief he felt just getting the words out. “Truly, I am very sorry. I thought I could protect you from this.”

Eggsy laughed. “From this?” he said, and, with his hands tied behind his back, gestured to the crumbling, damp-infested basement with his head. “I hate to break it to you, but this shit is the stuff I was dealing with as a kid. As for the rest? It’s my job now, isn’t it?”

As ever, Eggsy’s optimism provided Harry with more comfort than he rightly should feel. “Well, truthfully, I don’t feel any guilt about your current position, that’s entirely your fault,” he said dryly, causing Eggsy to laugh again. “No, I meant – with your mother, Eggsy. You said about how for ‘my lot’, it was a family business. For me, it wasn’t. My mother lost my father in the army, and after that made it bloody clear to me that I wasn’t allowed to follow in his footsteps. When, over thirty years later, I told her about Kingsman – against my supervisor’s orders, by the way – it took her several months before she stopped having a panic attack every time I left the house, several years before she finally accepted it.” To his left, Eggsy remained silent, and from the way Harry was tied to his chair, it was impossible to turn to get a good look of the younger man’s expression. “I didn’t want to cause your family the same stress, my dear boy,” he muttered.

For the few seconds that Eggsy didn’t respond, Harry tried to focus on other things. For starters, how to get out of the situation they were currently stuck in. “Yeah, alright,” Eggsy said eventually, all traces of anger gone from his voice. “Just – perhaps that might’a been something you let me decide, yeah? I know what my mum can handle.”

“Something I came to realise.” Harry turned his head as best he could, trying to see Eggsy. “Hence my apology. Good intentions do not forgive bad actions, as they say.”

Eggsy was looking at him, too. He was smiling. “Nah, I reckon you’re good,” he said softly. It was more of a forgiveness that Harry had expected.

“And about the other thing, that you seem to believe I’m dancing around-”

“You’re gonna do this now?” Eggsy exclaimed, looking across to Harry with wide eyes. “You really are fucking nuts, ain’t you? Did you get hit in the head, or is this all from that time you got shot, because you can’t keep using that as an excuse forever.”

“Nonsense, I can use it for as long as I like,” Harry protested. “And… call it me taking advantage of a captive audience, if you will,” he said wryly. Eggsy shook his head at that, sighing with exasperation –but he couldn’t hide his smile.
“I’m not dancing around the subject,” Harry said firmly. “I’m not hiding what I mean between lines, I’m not. I love you. I do. I don’t think I have it in me to deny it, haven’t, now, for several months. I am completely in love with you, to the extent that, where you’re concerned, I will admit that I can’t think logically. Though I will have to dispose of you if you tell Merlin that I said that,” he muttered as an aside, making Eggsy chuckle. Harry smiled. “It’s a fact that I can’t deny, and wasn’t aware that you thought I was. For that, I am, also sorry.

“But at the same time, I have been holding myself back, and I – well, let me explain it like this. I realised, a few months ago, that the Greeks had the perfect word to describe what we are. What it is, exactly, that we have. You see, it wasn’t uncommon in Ancient Greece for an older man to take on a younger man to educate. They called it pederasty. The older man, the erastes, would teach the younger man, eromenos, about social expectations, teach them about philosophy, culture, all that and, well, more. And when the eromenos grew too old the relationship would break off to avoid social scandal. You see, it was seen as a sign of weakness for a full developed male to be in such a relationship with an older man—”

Here Eggsy started to speak, but Harry wouldn’t let him. “No, if I stop now I’ll never be able to finish, and I owe you an explanation, I really do,” he continued forcibly. “I’ve almost finished. Because there are words for it nowadays, and I’m sure I don’t have to tell you what they are and they carry the same implications of disgrace. The long and short of it is, my dear, dear boy, is that I really can’t do this to you. I can’t. Because, as much as I respect our colleagues and know them to be good men I still know what they would think if it became apparent that we were in a physical relationship. I do not care what they think of me, but I won’t let them think that about you. I love you, I fucking love you, and I can’t fool myself that you don’t love me but that doesn’t change the fact that I remember how you looked, at the age of seven, when you had just been told that your father was dead. It doesn’t change how I am over twenty-five years older than you, over twice your age. Nor does it change that everyone will make some subconscious decision about how you, if you excuse my crass language, ‘shagged’ your way into Kingsman.”

Harry was breathing heavily when he finally came to a close. Beside him, Eggsy was completely silent.

“Okay, I’ve finished, you can talk now,” Harry muttered, when the silence went on for just a bit too long.

Eggsy drew in a deep breath. “When I get untied and we get out of here, you will not be prepared for what I’m gonna do to you,” he said, sounding shaken. “Jeeeeeeeesus.”

Confused, Harry looked across to him. “What, you haven’t already untied yourself?” he asked.

As if on cue, the door to the basement slammed open. “Oh, lords,” Harry groaned.

“Now, here’s the conclusion I’ve come to, after all the information tha’ I gleaned from youse when we was having fun earlier,” said the cheerful, tattooed man, who’d introduced himself as ‘Bites’ when Eggsy and Harry had first been thrown into the basement. “You,” he continued, walking forwards and wagging a finger at Harry, “You look like you’ve got some mileage in you. You, my friend, look like an expert. I don’t recon you’re gonna crack if I ask who you work for. Now, you,” he said, leaning to forwards so his ugly mug was right in Eggsy’s face, “you look like any old kid from round these parts. And, really, I’ve got so much experience in breaking people like youse.”

Harry felt a flash of pride when Eggsy just grinned widely.

“What, some runner boy, are you?” the thug asked. “Some snitch? Hm? What, he promise you a new life? A nice, big house? Or is it simpler than that?” A truly horrid snicker, and the thug asked,
“Is it all for a good shag?”

Casually turning to look at Harry, Eggsy shrugged. “Eh, the shagging’s not bad,” he said calmly, turning back to the brute still right in his face. “But for a good fuck, he’s got nothing on your mum.”

And he grinned his widest, proudest damn grin, like he was a god damn genius.

For a second or two, the thug grinned back, like he was going to go along with it, like it was all a good joke among friends. Then, impressively quickly for a fighter of his calibre, he’d pulled a Swiss army knife from his pocket and imbedded it in Eggsy’s left arm.

Harry didn’t let himself react. Honestly, it wasn’t much to react to. Even Eggsy only winced slightly. “Why’s it always my fucking right arm,” he grunted, turning to look at Harry with exasperation. “Isn’t it? Always my bloody right arm. It had barely healed from last time, as well.”

Harry rolled his arms. “Look, there’s no need for theatrics,” he said calmly to the thug, who was now looking a little flushed and not-so-in-control anymore. “We’re not here from any ‘company’. We’re not here to ‘bust’ you, to use your terminology. I was just checking.”

He looked suspicious, but he bit the line anyway. “Checking what?” he asked.

“Sources,” Harry said, as if it were the most obvious thing. “No point trying to follow up on a potential dealer without seeing how discreet they are first. I mean, that business with the Argentinian girl? Really sloppy.”

Now the rat before them was looking nervous. “How d’you know that we had a hand with the Argentinian bitch?”

Smiling matching half-smiles, Harry and Eggsy exchanged a glance. “Told you, boss,” Eggsy said, shaking his head. “Told you, shoulda gone to that lot down in Peckham. Lot more discreet, the boys down there.”

Bites shook his head. “Peckham? Nah, nah you’d be making a mistake.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Why’s that?”

“Cause we’ve got shit that they down there ain’t even know the name of.”

Gunshots echoed from upstairs. It said something bad about their lifestyles, Harry thought wearily, that he and Eggsy looked far more confused than concerned.

It didn’t last long, however. At the thug’s exponentially longer moment of fear and shock, Harry took the opportunity to slip from his restraints and tackle the guy, knocking him out with two blows - one first punch to break his nose, the other clipping under his chin. He fell backwards, hitting the ground with a heavy thud.

“Really? Two punches?” Eggsy said, staring down at the unconscious lump on the floor. “Bit excessive.”

“Well, he did stab you,” Harry pointed out. “I felt it was necessary.”

Eggsy tried to stifle his smile, but he wasn’t as good at it as Harry was yet. “You are aware, o’course,” he muttered mutinously, still struggling a little with his own restraints, “that not only did we barely get anything out of him – and don’t pretend like you didn’t get that move from The
Avengers – but we now have to get ourselves out of a house overflowing with probably drunk, potentially high, absolutely angry armed nutters?”

“We got enough out of him for now, the rest I’m sure he’ll disclose in a setting of our choosing,” Harry replied, waiting patiently as Eggsy swore at the ropes around his wrist. “Would you like so assistance there, or…”?

He got glared at for that polite offer. “They tied mine tighter than yours,” Eggsy grumbled, but he got himself free and was on his feet only second later anyway. “And that still don’t deal with the issue of all the armed whackjobs at the top of those stairs.”

As if timed, the door to the basement swung open, the sudden noise startling Harry and Eggsy into a defensive stance.

“Look, are you two going to bicker like gentlemen,” Roxy said, machine gun in one hand and an umbrella held out in the other, propping the door open with a foot, “Or are you going to let me rescue your moronic arses?”

It was hard, Harry would admit, to be the better man and keep the smug expression from his face. So he didn’t really try that hard at all, even permitting a smile when Eggsy scowled at him.

“No fucking way you knew that was gonna happen,” Eggsy said, brandishing a finger at Harry. “Shut up and get that fucking umbrella, I got this asshole.”

“I didn’t say a thing.”

“Shut up.”

It turned out that Roxy had brought both Percival and Caradoc with her. Unleashing two Kingsman agents on the South London boys was unfair – five was inhumane. Looking back at the building after they finally stopped having fun and left, Eggsy was sure he could see smoke. Wouldn’t be surprising, with Caradoc.

A helicopter was waiting on the green Eggsy had first found Harry on, one of the smaller choppers in Kingsman’s arsenal. Percival swung himself into the pilot’s seat, Harry climbing in next to him as Caradoc and Roxy helped Eggsy dump the still unconscious thug in the back.

“You were late!” Eggsy yelled at Roxy over the blades, climbing in last and giving Percival a huge thumbs up for a go-ahead.

Roxy whacked his head. “You’re the one who told me to wait for a signal!” she yelled back. “Besides, do you have any idea how hard it is to track an underground, generic mobile phone around here? You’re bloody lucky as it is!”

At that, and to Roxy’s complete surprise, Eggsy started to laugh hysterically.

“Well,” he said later, trying to get his breath back, “You ain’t wrong.”

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“I thought you said you hated paperwork.”

Harry glanced up from the computer screen to see Eggsy leaning against the doorway. “Something about ‘culpability’ and Merlin spreading the pain made me think I should get it done sooner than later,” he explaining, clicking save and resigning himself to not finishing it any time soon after all.
“And I thought you got stabbed. Merlin happy that you’ve left the medical bay so soon?”

Eggsy frowned, looking down at the bandage just visible under the short sleeves of his polo shirt. “Yeah, never understood what the fuss about stab wounds was all about ‘round here,” he muttered, picking at the clean white material. “That amount of times before Kingsman that I got stabbed and just went home to clean it in the kitchen sink… eh, would probably give Merlin an aneurism, if I told him.”

Harry smiled, and decided to forgo mentioning that the very thought might well give him an aneurism as well. Instead, he decided to cut to the chase. “You’re not here to help with the paperwork, are you?” he asked.

Looking not in the slightest bit apologetic, Eggsy shook his head. “Nah, you know why I’m here,” he said, pushing off from the doorframe and pulling the door shut behind him.

It was pointless to try and interject anything – Eggsy had that look on his face – but Harry was never one to give up before trying. “Eggsy, about what I said-”

“Shut your posh gob, aight?” Eggsy said, walking round to Harry’s side of the desk. Less than half a meter away, he leant back against it, crossing his feet and staring down at the ground. “I know for a fact that Merlin will murder your arse if you try and escape before you’ve finished that paperwork, so let’s say this is me taking advantage of a captive audience, yeah? After all, some rude twat interrupted before I could get my word in. Now, being all polite-like, as you taught me, may I proceed?”

Unashamedly amused, Harry leaned back in his chair. It was hard to be scared. He was nervous – he was bloody nervous, he felt the entire course of his life was about to be decided by the boy in front of him, because in senses it was. But he wasn’t scared. If someone had to hold his life in their hands, he was immensely glad it was Eggsy. “You may,” he granted, with a returning polite tilt of his head.

Eggsy nodded, more a sign of him thinking things through than a response to Harry. One of his hands reached up to rub at the back of his neck, and Harry wanted to hold it still. “First off,” Eggsy said eventually, not quite meeting Harry’s eye, “You gotta know that I was listening to everything you said earlier. I was. I heard every word, and I understand where you’re coming from, but you’re so fucking wrong-”

He broke off, wincing. Sighing, he rubbed his face, and again, the temptation to hold his hands still was hard for Harry to resist. “Ah, bollocks, this is all coming out wrong,” Eggsy muttered into his hands. “Okay, starting again,” he said, lowering his hands and staring fixedly straight ahead, “I want you to know that I fucked up earlier, or thought I did, when I stormed out of your office after yelling at you for being a coward about all this.” He paused again, and Harry waited. “I could never think you’re a coward, not about a single fucking thing. I know you’re not hiding behind rules about this. I know that, I do, but – ah, shit, um. I don’t want to push you for more. Because I’m happy. Really, really fucking happy with what we are.”

Suddenly Eggsy was looking at him, straight at him and for a moment, Harry forgot how to breathe. “I’m happy with you,” Eggsy said, again, as if simply saying that phrase was the most amazing thing. “I like what we have. But – and, and this is probably the gayest thing I’ve ever said – I also kinda want to hold your hand. I want to be able to stick my hand in your back pocket. I want fall asleep on your shoulder on long journeys, want to curl up next to you on the sofa and we do some of that already, but we don’t say it. I love you, and I want you to know it, I want Kingsman to know it, I want people we pass in the street to know it. And yeah, Roxy and Merlin and the rest are gonna take the piss but that’s half the fun, knowing that we’re so secure that people feel safe doing that and-”
He was getting more and more energetic as he spoke, hands flying, face animated and eyes shining as he sketched everything he said in the air. As Harry watched, as he listened, as he smiled, he tested the phrase, seeing how it felt to think it, believe it. *Love.*

“-and I’m not gonna deny, I mean, you’ve already probably figured it out, but I kinda want you to fuck me into a mattress and wake up with you the next day to scrambled eggs on toast and GMTV or whatever, but I’m not gonna ask that of you if you don’t want it. I won’t. It’s not important because with or without that I still have you, and, and, and-”

Eggsy came to a stop abruptly, as if his brain had finally caught up with his tongue. Wide-eyed, stunned, looking more nervous than Harry had ever seen him in mission, he looked down at Harry. “I just want you, Harry.”

“My dear boy.” Harry smiled up at him, feeling so grateful, so happy that it hurt, “You really should know by now that you’ve already got me.”

It was as if Eggsy physically couldn’t stay still any longer. Jumping from the desk, breathing heavily, he walked in circles, arms flapping before settling on the back of his head. “Right,” he said, “right, right… I’m not gonna lie I hadn’t actually planned what I would do next if you said that.”

“Really, you’ve been trained better than to be unprepared,” Harry said teasingly, feeling slightly giddy. Eggsy laughed manically at the comment, spinning round to face him.

“I’d like to try kissing you, if that’s alright?” he asked, bouncing on the balls of his feet, the plastic heels of the trainers beating a rhythm on the tiled floor that couldn’t begin to keep up with how fast Harry’s heart was beating. “I mean, if you don’t want to – or just to try it, I mean, no harm in trying, if you don’t think it works, or if you still feel guilty about the age thing then I won’t-”

There was only one logically way to shut him up, really, otherwise gods knew how long he’d go on for. In one swift movement, adrenaline making him move faster than he really knew he could right then, Harry was up and standing in front of Eggsy before the younger man could register the change. He spared a second to brush away a strand of blonde hair that had fallen down onto the awe-struck young man’s face, before lightly tilting his head back and pressing a kiss to his lips.

Eggsy opened up beneath him instantly. A hand clung to his waist, fingers scrunching up the soft cotton of his shirt as the kiss lingered. His lips parted with an audible sigh, and Harry couldn’t resist when Eggsy’s tongue lightly pushed against his lips.

Even in this, there was perfect synchronization. They fit against each other seamlessly, as if they had been hand-crafted as a pair. Harry held him close, a palm lightly resting on the small of Eggsy’s back, the other gently cradling Eggsy’s neck.

When they parted, Eggsy’s fingers dug into his skin, leaning forwards as he chased the soft pressure of Harry’s lips against his. “Don’t-” he breathed, and Harry didn’t go anywhere. He just rest his forehead against the top of Eggsy’s head, enjoying holding the smaller figure in his arms, the comfort of Eggsy’s face pressed against his neck, his breath warm through the material of his collar. Savouring the sensation of kissing him.

When he moved, it was only to press a kiss to Eggsy’s temple. “Eggsy, would you like to come home with me?” he murmured against his skin.

Eggsy answered in kind, his lips shaping the words in the hollow between Harry’s neck and jaw. “*Yes.*”
Harry unlocked his front door with his right hand, his left hand entwined in both of Eggys’s. It had been that way since they’d left the Mansion.

“Are we gonna go through the whole thing of pretending to have drinks?” Eggys asked, his voice just on the edge of uncertainty.

“Only if you want to,” Harry promised, leading Eggys in.

The door shut, and Harry pulled his hand from between Eggys’s to slip his jacket from his shoulders. Unable – no longer having to resist, he kissed at the neck it exposed, lips lingering against the warm skin. Eggys sighed out at the touch, head leaning back. “I don’t want to,” he said softly. “If that’s alright?”

A hand lingering, fingers brushing against the hollow at the base of Eggys’s neck, Harry stepped back, hanging up the jacket. “Then what do you want to do?” he asked, facing him, palm resting against his chest.

Eggys carefully lifted Harry’s hand from his shoulder, pressing his lips against the veins visible on the underside of his wrist. “How much about this kind of thing do you know?” he asked, lips brushing against the sensitive skin. Harry wondered if Eggys could feel his heartbeat from that intimate touch alone.

“I’m fifty-two and hardly inactive,” Harry said, smiling when his comment made Eggys laugh, lips falling back only for him to press his cheek against Harry’s palm. “I wouldn’t exactly call myself inexperienced.”

“So what are you up for?” Eggys asked. He looked up, not lifting his face from Harry’s touch, eyes wide and honest and loving in a way that was humbling.

Struggling to keep his breathing steady, Harry reached up with his other hand, again brushing the tips through the few golden curls on Eggys’s forehead before holding him. “My dear boy,” he said, letting all the love he’d withheld through fear permeate his voice. “My dear, dear man… I am entirely at your disposal.”

Eggys’s eyes fluttered shut and he groaned, leaning once again against Harry’s touch. He reached up, wrapping a hand gently around Harry’s wrist. “Bedroom,” he said, backing up towards the stairs without taking his eyes off Harry. When the older man made to remove his suit jacket, fingers of his free hand tugging at the buttons, Eggys shook his head. “Leave it. C’mon.”

Of course Eggys knew where the bedroom was. He didn’t let Harry go, not once, pushing the door open with his foot. He pulled Harry in, pulled him closer, started working on the buttons of his jacket.

The whole time, Harry couldn’t stop watching him. The focus that the amazing, beautiful man before him was using was breath-taking.

Eggys slipped the jacket from his shoulders, running his hands over the muscles of his arms. He smirked up at Harry as he threw it to the side.

“That’s going to crease,” Harry pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

“I know.” Ignoring it he pulled Harry forwards by his tie until both of them were pressed against the edge of the bed. “I want.”
“Anything,” Harry promised again. He said it again with his lips against Eggsy’s forehead, as if that would make it easier for him to be believed. “Anything.”

He felt Eggsy pulled his tie undone, heard it fall to the side. He felt his shirt get pulled out from his trousers and he had to hold onto Eggsy’s waist to steady himself, fingers playing with the bottom of Eggsy’s top, pulling the material up so he could rest his palms on the firm muscles and warm skin, as warm fingertips brushed against his chest.

Their shirts followed Harry’s jacket. Belts soon after.

He pushed Eggsy down onto the bed to pull off his trainers, leaning forwards to unbutton his jeans, the sound of Eggsy’s groans as he made light work of the button and zipper going straight to his core. Carefully he tugged the denim down, leaving Eggsy in nothing but fitted boxers. Before he could react Eggsy tugged him forwards by his belt-hooks, close enough that his breath was against Harry’s stomach. Again, Harry had to hold on to him to keep himself steady as Eggsy undid his trousers, pushing them down Harry’s thighs.

Unable to see anything, eyes closed and fingers clutching desperately to Eggsy’s skin, the first brushes of fingers over the bulge in his boxers shocked him enough to gasp aloud at the electricity suddenly shooting through him. “Eggsy-!”

Thumbs hooked in his boxers, carefully pulling them down, hot hands pushing them down his legs until he was completely bare. “God, I can’t believe I got this lucky.”

Harry hooked a finger under Eggsy’s chin, tilting his head up. The sight of the flushed cheeks, blown eyes and already mussed hair made whatever clever reply he’d been planning completely slip his mine. “Neither,” he breathed, desperately leaning down to press a kiss to Eggsy, pushing his lips apart and mouth open. Fingers dug into his back, and his grip tightened on Eggsy’s hair.

Somehow they manoeuvred themselves onto the bed, Eggsy staring up at Harry with dark eyes. “I’m yours,” Eggsy told him, their legs locked together, breathing and hearts beating in time.

“And I yours,” Harry promised once again, the words lost in the small space between their lips.

He kept supplies beside his bed. When he slowly, carefully pushed the first finger into Eggsy the younger man’s back arched and he swore, a heated litany that Harry kissed from his mouth. The second finger caused Eggsy to dig his fingers into Harry’s back hard enough to break skin, his face pressed in the space between Harry’s neck and shoulder. His ankle pressed into the small of Harry’s back, and Harry was panting, mouth open, against Eggsy’s chest. Third finger and Eggsy was repeating Harry’s name, over and over, like a prayer.

“Harry… please, Harry. Don’t make me wait any more than I already have.”

The gasp that his love made when Harry finally pushed himself in was enough to make a faithless man belief in heaven. Following the pushes of Eggsy’s heel against his back, the rocking of strong body below him, Harry started to set a pace, pulling back and pushing in, holding Eggsy so close, so hard as if he were the only thing tethering him to the world.

He held him, kissed him, fucked him until he forgot where they were, forgot who they were, forgot any regret about this he’d ever had. But not until he forgot Eggsy’s name. He never forgot that word, muttering it again and again against the sweat-slick skin the felt so hot it would brand him, and he wanted it to.

Eggsy came first. Harry followed him.
Neither of them let go. They held each other close, panting, bodies slick and wet and sticky, hair stuck to their skin, hearts running a thousand miles per hour.

It was a while before Harry pushed himself onto his elbows, staring down at Eggsy, transfixed. He watched as the concern in Eggsy’s expression faded to love, to joy, to laughter. “A good move, yeah?” he asked needlessly, reaching up a hand to smooth back the strands of greying hair that had fallen out of place, smoothing them back against Harry’s head.

With that Harry was laughing too, pulling out and collapsing beside him on the bed. “We should probably clean up,” he sighed, hand reaching up to touch the smile on his face, as if he couldn’t believe it was real.

Eggsy groaned. “Aw, but I don’t want to move. Don’t make me go.”

Harry laughed again. “In the long term – no, you never have to go, not ever.” Indulging himself, he turned his head to see Eggsy already watching him, with an equally soppy expression. “However,” he said, getting leverage and slowly pushing Eggsy from the bed with a foot against his hip, “in a more literal sense, you are disgusting right now and I want you clean before I let you sleep next to me.”

Only pretending to struggle, Eggsy let himself be pushed from the bed. Beaming, he blew Harry a kiss before leaving the room, leaving the door open and wiggling his arse before entering the bathroom.

When he returned, Harry had thrown away the condom, wiped himself down and tidied up their clothes. “You’re a neat freak, you know that?” Eggsy teased, sliding into bed next to him without bothering to put on the pyjama bottoms Harry had deliberately left out for him.

Harry made a non-committal noise, reaching out to pull Eggsy flush against his chest. “Yes. And you’re stuck with little old neat-freak me, you do know that?”

Hiding his smile by pressing it against Harry’s chest, Eggsy snuggled closer. “Yeah, I do,” he said proudly. “Wouldn’t change it for the world.”

*

Eggsy woke up to a plate of scrambled eggs on toast. Smiling, he stretched in the large, warm, empty bed, before pushing himself upright and reaching for the food. “Couldn’t have a lie-in, not even on a Sunday?” he teased, cutting off a corner of the bread and scooping a substantial amount of egg onto it.

At the end of the bed, Harry chuckled. “I will be back, and if you’re still in bed I have a feeling you’ll somehow get me to join you,” he said, carefully knotting his tie – full Windsor, as ever. “I won’t be long,” he promised, coming around to Eggsy’s side of the bed, leaning to press a quick kiss on his forehead as he tucked his shirt in.

“Oh, I see how it is – Loving and leaving them. A bit ungentlemanly for you isn’t it, Harry?” Eggsy asked cheekily. He laughed as Harry shoved his head to the side.

“If you need me, I’ll just be round yours,” he said as if Eggsy hadn’t spoken, carefully lifting his jacket from the hanger. “Though I think you can survive a few hours in my house without causing a national incident.”

Mouth packed with scrambled eggs, Eggsy frowned. “My house?” he echoed through a full mouth. He wiped his mouth on his arm, swallowed, and continued, “Why my house? What’re you
planning?”

Harry smiled enigmatically. Eggsy replied by narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

“I’ll see you later,” Harry said, smiling softly at him before turning to leave the room. Twice he looked back towards the bedroom as he walked down the hallway.

Snuggling back down under the duvet, grinning ridiculously to himself, Eggsy shoveled another forkful into his mouth.

***

Harry was smiling when Michelle Unwin opened the door. He’d been smiling all the way from his house, from leaving Eggsy in his bed. He didn’t think he could stop smiling if he tried.

If Michelle was surprised to see him, she didn’t show it. “Harry,” she said pleasantly. “I’m afraid Eggsy’s not here—”

“I know,” Harry cut in, wondering if a mother could instantly tell that you defiled their child during the night. He suddenly felt rather awkward. “I know where he is, and first off I want you to know that he’s perfectly safe and healthy, I have no doubt you’ll see him later today. No, I came to speak to you, if that’s alright by you.”

If Harry’s arrival was unexpected, that comment was even more so. Stunned, Michelle did that same slightly tilt of the head Harry had seen Eggsy do hundreds of times. “Me? Why’d you wanna talk to me?”

“Because I have been exceedingly remiss in not talking to you about it before,” Harry confessed. “I failed to recognise how much it was your right to know. Mrs, Unwin, it’s about Eggsy’s job…”

***

“You look like you’re about to barf.”

Merlin shot daggers across to Eggsy. Metaphorically, unfortunately. The boy just continued to smile, his head resting against Harry’s shoulder. “I don’t like sitting in the back of these things,” he muttered, keeping his jaw as locked as possible. “There’s a bloody reason I’m usually the pilot.”

Where Roxy patted his shoulder comfortingly, Harry just adjusted his glasses and smiled. The sight was rather unnerving, what with his new white prosthetic eye. “Do you remember when you vomited in that trip over Gibraltar?” he mused innocently. “Truly spectacular, if I may say so. Can’t imagine how long it took to clean up. Never known anyone with motion sickness as bad as yours.”

Merlin groaned, putting his head between his knees. “Who says it’s not your frankly horrific PDAs that have me wanting to upchuck?” he asked viciously.

He should have recognised that for the bad idea it was. Without any further prompting, Eggsy grabbed Harry’s tie and pulled him down for – no, not a snog, something much worse. He smothered Harry’s face with noisy kisses. The other agent only responded by moving his head to allow Eggsy a better angle.

Merlin groaned again. “I hate both of you,” he muttered, the words slurred. Apparently happy with the declaration, Eggsy laughed, bouncing his leg where it was hooked over Harry’s.

Tristan’s voice echoed over the speakers. “T-minus five minutes, guys,” he said. “Might want to start
getting ready.”

Three out of the four in the back got to their feet, pulling the parachutes out from under the seats. “You realise you volunteered to be tech support,” Eggsy pointed out, carefully pulling the parachute on over his suit, Harry absently helping to lift it into position. “I mean, any of us is capable of-

“As if I’d let any of you pieces of shit get your fat grubby fingers on my clipboard,” Merlin grumbled, not looking up from said smartboard, scrolling and – and, apparently, checking his emails.

“T-minus three minutes, Kingsmen.”

Eggsy stepped forwards to check Roxy’s parachute, as he always did. “Oh, good news,” Merlin said suddenly, not sounding quite as grouchy as he had for the rest of the journey. “Paperwork has finally gone through. Isaac’s been officially instated as Arthur, and Harry is taking his place as Percival.”

Harry almost dropped the pistol he was checking. “I’m – excuse me?” he asked, blinking, staring from Merlin to Eggsy.

Smirking, Eggsy shrugged. “Hey, don’t look at me, luv. Roxy suggested. Though… I might have been the one to persuade the rest of the guys it was a good idea.”

“Seemed bloody stupid idea to train a whole new load when we already had someone qualified,” Roxy said simply.

Again, Tristan’s voice echoed through the cargo hold. “Is now a good time to say that Eggsy blackmailed me to consent to the whole thing?”

“Hey, you shut your gob,” Eggsy yelled back, grinning.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll be giving you guys the green light in 30, so, if Lancelot, Galahad and Percival would move towards the doors.”

They did as instructed. As Harry positioned himself by the door, he leant down to whisper in Eggsy’s ear, “How many of them did you actually blackmail?”

“Oh, only about five,” Eggsy said with a completely straight face that split only a second later. “Nah, honestly. All were willing, and agreed we couldn’t find a better Kingsman agent if we tried. You’re already better than the rest of us.”

Harry smiled. “Thank you,” he said, leaning forwards to whisper the words against Eggsy’s temple.

“And… go!”

Harry jumped from the helicopter. Eggsy stepped forwards to go second.

“Wait!” Merlin yelled, holding up a hand. “No, this isn’t going to work. They’re updated their security systems. We’ll have to find another way in.”

The sound of Harry jumping from the helicopter was still whistling through the hold.

Utterly, utterly bemused, Eggsy looked from the door – that Harry had just jumped out of – to Merlin who was already talking to Tristan about turning around, typing away on his modified keyboard. Eggsy blinked at him a few times, mouth hanging open, fully expecting Merlin to say ‘jokes, off you go’. “Are you having a fucking giggle, mate?” he asked with disbelief, when no take-back was forthcoming. “Harry’s already fucking gone!”
Merlin shrugged. “I can send him a message. He’ll understand.”

“This isn’t for the vomit comment he made earlier, is it?” Roxy chimed in, sounding just as stunned as Eggsy.

“No, they really have updated their systems, I wouldn’t be able to get you in,” Merlin said, and shrugged again, as if to say ‘no hard feelings’.

Eggsy fumed for a second, before double-checking his parachute. “I guess we’ll just have to do it the old-fashioned way, then,” he said sarcastically before taking two steps back, and falling backwards out of the helicopter. Not ten seconds later he was followed by the familiar silhouette of Roxy’s fucking gorgeous pant-suit. He laughed, rolling over in the air and making his area as small as possible to try and catch up with Harry.

Left in the helicopter, feeling simultaneously like he was the only sensible one and that he was going to vomit all over the interior of the aircraft, Merlin shook his head, making sure his intercom was on as he muttered, “Fucking disgusting lovesick kamikaze morons.”

“So I guess we’re sticking to plan A?” Tristan asked. Merlin could hear the grin in his voice. Traitor.

He scowled. “Yes. Get us grounded pronto. I have a mainframe to hack and disciplinary actions to file.”

“I thought you said you couldn’t hack their system anymore?”

“What? No, I’m gonna hack our system. Fucking deleting Eggsy and Harry from fucking everything. Bastards.”

*  

The target was on the floor. Decorated military man of twenty years and multiple tours, marine officer, arms expert, and traitor the crown with the sale of over twenty million pounds worth of army-grade weaponry to other countries and subsects of ideological branches within the UK, along with supplying gang warfare.

Above him were two men in suits, covered in blood that belonged to neither of them. One had a bullet hole in his right arm that seemed unable to faze him, the other a solid white eye. “I’m thinking… what’s that paper-cut thing Gawain was going on ‘bout?” the younger one asked.

“Death of a Thousand Cuts,” the older one supplied, looking curiously down at the man by his feet, who was, seemingly, too scared to move. “And it’s generally considered inhumane, these days.”

“Yeah, but you don’t know what it’s like,” the younger one said. The expression on his face was a lot less curious, a lot more furious. “It’s bad enough with kids playing with pen-knives. It’s bastards like these that put guns in kids’ hands and.”

“Yes, but I’m afraid that that form of murder is off the table.”

“Aw, Harry. Not even just an arm? Like, just a few-”

He drew a blade out from the small of his back. It was already covered in blood. The traitor squirmed on the floor, whimpers breaking through the duct-tape covering his mouth. Understandable – he’d seen what the young gentleman had done to his deputy with those knives.

Harry held his umbrella out in front of him, however. “No, Eggsy. We’d get too many questions
from MI6 if they found a form of torture on his body. And we’re hardly in their good books as it is, following your Finland incident.”

Eggsy waggled his eyebrows, smirking. “What if I make it worth your while tonight?” he suggested, angling his body closer, letting his mouth fall slightly open, tongue flicking out.

His advances were affectionately dismissed with a finger lightly brushing the side of his face, leaving a new smudge of someone else’s blood. “Tempting, but still no,” Harry said. “If I may suggest something else?” Eggsy tilted his head, intrigued. “Our direct orders from Isaac – Arthur, rather – were to ‘shoot him dead’. However, Arthur failed to specify where.”

“It’d have to be somewhere fatal,” Eggsy continued, his smile turning into something altogether more lethal as he followed Harry’s train of thought. “But not necessarily immediately so… might I have the honours?”

Harry lowered his umbrella. On the floor, the traitor squirmed as the younger man stared down at him with a feline grin and animal eyes that matched the tailored suit perfectly. “Now,” the man said, leaning forwards and almost purring out the words, “This won’t hurt a bit. Lie back, and think of England, you slimy piece of shit.”

The scream was muffled by the duct-tape, but the two gunshots as the man fired two shotgun shells into his stomach echoed through the room like an explosion. Eventually the reverberations faded, leaving only the sound of whimpers, and two pairs of Oxfords as they walked away, footsteps perfectly in sync.

“Do you think Lancelot’s done with the rest of the tossers in the building yet?”

“Oh, absolutely. Probably finished before we even got started.”

“Ha, yeah. Chinese or Indian?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Tonight. We’ve got Daisy tonight, so I was thinking, get a takeaway…”

“Actually, I’m feeling rather inclined towards Dominoes.”

“Yes, luv. Also, meant to tell you, that DVD you ordered – what was it, Bringing Up Baby? Yeah, that arrived this morning. How’s about we watch that – think it’ll go well with Dominoes?”

“Oh, my love,” Harry muttered, carefully slipping his hand into Eggsy’s as they left the building, stepping over two dead bodies and towards where Tristan and Merlin were waiting in the helicopter. “I think they’ll go together perfectly.”

End Notes

Few veeeeery small things - the book I randomly had Harry reading about mangoes is 'A Case Of Exploding Mangoes', which I heavily recommend to this fandom, it's great and angsty and painful and has really heart-wrenching queer love in it, so. I also really recommend watching Bringing Up Baby, it's the most amazing, funniest movie I've ever seen, starring Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn.
And again. Apologies to people living in Hackney. For how I've presented it, that is, not just 'sorry that you live there'. I'm told that some areas are actually very nice to live in.

Finally, I like to imagine that Jamal looking after Daisy looks a bit like this: http://rafcaptainmarvel.tumblr.com/post/115886459020/blackshole-basically

That's my tumblr. Come say hi!

And thanks for reading!

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